The Politics of Resistance: Restaurant Gentrification and the Fight for Space

by

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BA, Simon Fraser University, 2007

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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Urban redevelopment in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, British Columbia, marginalizes low-income residents and threatens them with displacement. Site visits and an analysis of discourse suggest that gentrification and the establishment of new restaurants in the area have also contributed to a commodification of poverty. The impacts of restaurant gentrification provoke resistance, and the opening of a new restaurant accused of inviting voyeurism and objectifying neighbourhood residents has resulted in an indefinite picket out front. Interviews show that picketers are endeavouring both to stop gentrification and to win social housing and needed services for the area, while also attempting to create social, economic, and political change at a larger scale. The picket draws attention to the effects of restaurant gentrification on the neighbourhood and the disproportionate influence of the state apparatus on the Downtown Eastside, yet also seeks to preserve a heterotopic space as an alternative to a neoliberal urbanism.

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Chapter 1:

The Context of Political Action in Vancouver

1.1 Political Spaces

On February 1, 2013, an upscale new restaurant called PiDGiN opened in the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood of Vancouver, British Columbia. The restaurant rapidly gained a reputation for its high-end fusion cuisine that combines Asian and West Coast flavours, for its extensive bar menu, and for the protests that have occurred in front of its windows since it opened. Anti-gentrification protests and rallies have taken place outside the restaurant with surprising regularity, and a picket line has formed on the sidewalk in front of PiDGiN six nights a week since the restaurant's opening. The picket draws activists from across the city, come to protest gentrification in the Downtown Eastside. They draw attention to the need for social housing in the area, as well as to the displacement, the objectification, and the marginalization experienced in the Downtown Eastside as a result of gentrification. The protest has garnered significant local attention, in part because it is so unusual; observers have asked, why protest a restaurant? If the protesters wish to combat poverty and marginalization, why not take the protest to the government? Why PiDGiN?

The Downtown Eastside has become a focal point for activism in Vancouver because of the important role of the neighbourhood in mirroring, and thereby making visible, the neoliberal urbanism that is otherwise largely normalized in the city. Gentrification and the incursion of capital into residential neighbourhoods across Vancouver have played an important role in rewriting the landscape and in redeveloping the city into a collection of spaces conducive to the production of capital. Mitchell (1996) has documented interwoven and mutually reinforcing changes in landscape and ideology

that have occurred within Vancouver as investors and land developers have pursued an agenda of normalization, where gentrification and urban redevelopment are cast as inevitable. The changing landscape of residential neighbourhoods has been the catalyst for significant backlash in local politics (see Mitchell, 1993, 1996, 1997; Blomley, 1997, 2004); however, debate has been muted by strategies that justify urban redevelopment, casting it as the unavoidable outcome of market forces (Mitchell, 1996, 1997). The appearance of inevitability accorded to gentrification and urban redevelopment has been the result of calculated activity aimed at altering dominant understandings of the role of capital in the city, through an interaction between political institutions, economic actors, and inherited spatial landscapes associated with neoliberal urbanism (Peck et al., 2009; 2013). Neoliberalism, as a relatively coherent ideological system, has been attributed to interconnected and mutually reinforcing intellectual, bureaucratic, and political projects, which together work to normalize market-centred socio-economic policies and political authority (Mudge, 2008). At the level of the urban, Keil (2002, p. 587) draws attention to the "combination of political-economic restructuring and new technologies of power, which ultimately results in an active re-regulation of the urban everyday". In Vancouver, intentional projects to present urban redevelopment as the inevitable outcome of market forces, and to re-regulate the urban everyday by rewriting landscape and ideology, help make neoliberal urbanism appear natural – simple common sense.

Despite the trend towards the normalization of neoliberal urbanism in Vancouver, the Downtown Eastside appears an entirely different type of space from those that comprise the rest of the city. It is a space of poverty and marginalization, something other than the image of a world-class city fostered and deployed to attract transnational capital

(Surborg et al, 2008). As an 'other' space within Vancouver, the Downtown Eastside can be seen as what Foucault (1986) terms a heterotopia. Such spaces are real places, existing in every civilization, where "the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted"; they function as "a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live" (p. 24). As a site of marginality, transgression, and resistance, the Downtown Eastside is a place that contests the entirety of the city. The space calls itself into question, casting suspicion on the reasons for its very existence, while also calling into question the city in which such a place would exist. There is no universal form of heterotopia, yet Foucault suggests that the myriad form of heterotopic spaces can largely be classed into two main categories: the heterotopia of crisis and the heterotopia of deviation. This latter sort has become intrinsic to ordering modern society; they allow society to be divested of disorder, as the spaces "in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed" (p. 25). Foucault names prisons and mental hospitals among the classic examples of a heterotopia of deviation, for they allow the formal removal of deviant elements, although Hetherington (1997) proposes that the highly ordered spaces created in these institutions have, in fact, become the utopic spaces of modernity: prisons, mental hospitals, and other carceral institutions embody the ideals of a well ordered society associated with modernity. For Hetherington, the processes of social ordering that take place within and through these spaces create them not as heterotopic spaces, but rather as a deferred utopia. However, the confluence of marginality and resistance in the Downtown Eastside ensures that, while the neighbourhood plays an important role in social ordering within Vancouver (see Fischer

et al., 2004), it remains a disorderly place. More importantly, it remains a heterotopic place – not because of the disorder in the area, nor simply for reasons of the localization of resistance, but also because it is other to the neoliberal urbanism that has largely taken hold in other neighbourhoods throughout the city and because it mirrors it in an uncomfortable way; the Downtown Eastside reflects the city, representing and contesting it, and at once inverting and attempting to subvert this neoliberal urban landscape.

As the landscape of Vancouver is re-written by capital and by the political interests of different economic actors, the politics of resistance have had to shift in order to deal with the fundamentally intertwined nature of the state and the market. The political engagement of activists and social movements represent an understanding of political action that holds it as inseparable from action aimed at creating change in the realms of economy or society. Magnusson (1996) argues that the state system creates a sort of vortex for political action, taking it unto its own realm and thereby attempting to place politics outside of economy and society. However, he observes, "There is a disjuncture between the political spaces that are being claimed democratically and the ones that are being offered to people as sites for public participation" (p. 9). Urban spaces are important sites of political action, yet in their role both as social and as economic spaces as the city is increasingly transformed into a site for the reproduction of capital (Smith, 2002), these are not the spaces offered up for politics. Nevertheless, these are spaces in which politics take place.

The idea of politics inherited from Aristotle refers to that which pertains to the affairs of the polity; following from genealogical research tracing back to Classical Greek thought, Isin (2002, p. 1) observes that "citizenship has expressed a right to being

political, a right to constitute oneself as an agent to govern and be governed, deliberate with others, and enjoin determining the fate of the polity to which one belong." Attempts by the state apparatus to capture politics have changed hegemonic conceptions of citizenship; formal citizenship grants a right to vote, upon achievement of the age of majority, as well as to stand for office. Members of the polity nevertheless continue to express themselves politically, engaging in deliberate action directed at influencing individuals and society, and in altering relations of power and conditions of social existence. In doing so, they either find or constitute avenues through which to influence the affairs of the polity; following Magnusson (1996, p. 9-10), we can search for politics in "movements that take people out of their daily routines and away from their ordinary conceptions of themselves as passive subjects. These movements involve people in active citizenship and thus lay claim to a political space that may or may not conform to the spaces allowed by the existing system of government." These are the spaces in which people attempt to influence the arrangements of everyday life.

If neoliberal urbanism involves the re-regulation of everyday urban life, then of course we will see challenges to the dominant order in urban spaces. These challenges are often localized, though, and manifest unevenly across urban spaces. In Vancouver, at the moment, we can see resistance to urban redevelopment taking place across the city, as people protest the changes to their neighbourhoods and the incursion of capital into residential landscapes. Planned redevelopment projects in neighbourhoods like Arbutus Ridge, Marpole, and the West End have garnered significant opposition from affected residents; one of the things that makes activism in the Downtown Eastside appear unique, aside from the intensity of the movement and the ferocity of the opposition, is the self-

consciousness with which the protesters state their opposition to neoliberal urbanism. The picket in front of PiDGiN is not simply an attempt to protest a restaurant, nor to protest the gentrification of a marginalized neighbourhood; the protesters wish to rewrite the urban order, and, through the Downtown Eastside, to affect the organization of the affairs of the polity as a whole. The Downtown Eastside represents a crack in the neoliberal landscape, and the visibility of PiDGiN draws attention to this crack, inviting people to look into the mirror through which the rest of the city is visible.

1.2 Confusing Politics

Although the Downtown Eastside may provide a useful mirror, a heterotopic space in which politics can take place, the politics themselves appear somewhat confused. This is far from a localized phenomenon, though; while the state remains the naturalized target of political action, it does not always appear the natural target. Viewing neoliberalism as "both a political discourse about the nature of rule and a set of practices that facilitate the governing of individuals from a distance" (2000, p. 6), Larner observes the shifting frameworks of policy, ideology, and governmentality that privilege the market as a site for social and economic organization. The re-regulation of the urban everyday has seen a proliferation of sources of government, and in urban spaces, actors including different for-profit and non-profit corporations, charities and other non-governmental organizations (regularly in receipt of government funding), and even

restaurants and cafés have taken on – or are expected to take on – roles once associated with and ascribed to the state apparatus (Mahon, 2008).[1]

In Vancouver, political movements that share similar goals often identify very different targets for their actions. When the strategies of rule associated with neoliberal urbanism, as well as the sources of domination that have become increasingly important with the re-regulation of the urban everyday, are made visible, any number of the disparate organizations that exist at multiple scales seem like logical targets of political action; nevertheless, the state vortex remains in place, making the state appear at once as the enemy that must be fought and the only authority with the power to transcend the domination and the inequalities that exist in urban spaces (see Magnusson, 1996). Should the personal be politicized, or should a utopist future be sought through a transcendent higher power – an apparatus that can order society while regulating and limiting these sources of domination? Without any agreement on these matters, political actions can appear to be fairly confused, particularly from the perspective of outsiders – and, indeed, contemporary politics are regularly confused.[2] These confusing politics allow legitimate

[1] Under a prior variety of policy regime that Mahon (2008) identifies as social liberalism, the state took responsibility for ensuring certain 'basic needs', such as food, housing, and health care, were met through different socio-economic assistance programmes. Charities, non-governmental organisations, and both for-profit and non-profit corporations increasingly share these roles with government agencies. Moreover, restaurants and cafés in Vancouver, and particularly in neighbourhoods viewed as being insufficiently integrated into the market (see Cummings, 2002), are currently viewed as drivers of employment creation and regularly expected to provide skills training, tasks that Mahon notes have at other points been ascribed to the state (following a more Keynesian economic approach).

[2] The appearance of confusion, however, also stems from a lack of context; media reports on the protest are rarely in-depth, giving only a surface analysis of protests and political action. While this can be attributed to the exigencies of media reporting on complex issues, some activists feel this is an intentional tactic used to marginalize legitimate protest by failing to accurately portray the context and target of political action.

protest to be dismissed as the naïve idealism of those who simply fail to understand how the world works. The protests in front of PiDGiN have generated significant publicity, much of it negative; at first glance, picketing a restaurant when one wants social housing, or even when one wants the state to prevent urban redevelopment that contributes to marginalization and objectification, does not appear a logical course of action. Moreover, if the urban is to be politicized, why pick on a single restaurateur? The choice of target for political action certainly appears confusing, but any attempt to understand the picket must place it in the wider context that understands the re-regulation of the urban everyday in the Downtown Eastside, and that interrogates how the protesters in the area view the relationship between a restaurant and the social, economic, and political forces that both contribute to the inequalities in the area and result in the subjection of the already marginalized.

1.3 Visibility and Resistance

The Downtown Eastside has long been an important site for struggles against dominant society. The deep poverty and high rates of drug addiction in the Downtown Eastside have been identified as an outcome of the structural violence perpetrated upon residents of the neighbourhood by the state apparatus and by social institutions; understandably, the Downtown Eastside has become an important site of activism, community organising, and political resistance (Boyd et al., 2009). Jiwani and Young (2006) claim that the neighbourhood has been intentionally created as a zone where bodies, particularly those of sex workers, are demarcated as degenerate and made unwanted elements of society, yet also as one that can be frequented with impunity by

respectable (male) society. In her analysis of police responses to missing women, each of them sex workers demarcated as degenerate for being of the Downtown Eastside, Pratt (2005, p. 1058) argues that the Downtown Eastside is a space of exception, where the legal abandonment of women by the state authorities calls into question from within "the completeness of the territorialisation of the nation-state." At the same time, as a space of exception, the Downtown Eastside has been the site of challenges to the dominant legal regime; opposition to government policies around drug use resulted in the establishment of InSite, Canada's first safe injection site, in the neighbourhood (Boyd, 2013).

Encroaching gentrification and urban development have led to protests challenging not only specific political agendas, but also the institution of private property in the Downtown Eastside and the very legitimacy of the capitalist order (Blomley, 1998; 2008). Political resistance to the Vancouver 2010 Olympics also centred on the Downtown Eastside, the site of a tent village that drew attention to the uncritical embrace of transnational capitalism and urban development, while also highlighting socio-economic polarization and police repression (Boykoff, 2011). The anti-Olympic movement also provided a focal point for resistance to settler colonial erasure of Indigenous nations and their claim to the land, as witnessed in the 'No Olympics on Stolen Native Land' movement (O'Bonsawin, 2010); the Downtown Eastside, as a neighbourhood whose population has been disproportionally affected by the destructive legacy of colonialism, was at the heart of such protest. The Downtown Eastside has become one of the most important sites of political action in Vancouver; however, gentrification in the neighbourhood has seen a proliferation of zones of exclusion, where the poor and marginalized are kept away due to private control of space, socio-economic

exclusion, and increased policing. Given the importance of the Downtown Eastside as a site of social organization and political action, these zones of exclusion threaten political action in the Downtown Eastside, as well as endangering the ability of the most marginalized to participate in the politics that take place in their own neighbourhood.

The concentration of poverty in the Downtown Eastside may have made it into a common site of protest, yet both the tactics and the target of resistance make the picket in front of PiDGiN a relatively unusual political action for even this neighbourhood. Restaurants are not among the normal places that people look to find politics, and nor are they the particularly common targets of political action. Nevertheless, understanding the neoliberalization of the urban as entailing the re-regulation of everyday life highlights the fact that restaurants are important for the way they shape the subjectivity of diners and, in the Downtown Eastside, for the role they play in the objectification of neighbourhood residents. The Downtown Eastside is often used metonymically for urban poverty, positioned as a dead zone within the city, yet this particular construction is increasingly deployed to draw consumers to the area. The new and revitalized restaurants, cafés, and bars in the neighbourhood have begun to draw consumers from throughout the city, who experience the Downtown Eastside from the perspective of outsiders. The Downtown Eastside is not only represented as an other space, but it is also represented as a place in which other people live (Sommers, 1998; England, 2004). The residents of the Downtown Eastside, as this other, have been blamed for the deterioration of the neighbourhood and its perception as an urban blight – yet it has conversely now become an advertising feature for the restaurants, cafés, and bars that are currently contributing to

gentrification in the area.[3] As such, the current form of gentrification has shifted from one marked by the relatively straightforward displacement of local residents to a much more complex moment in which the identities of low-income and marginalized residents are being commodified even while the residents themselves are spatially managed and controlled, their bodies highlighted even as their communities may still be displaced.

PiDGiN provides a particularly clear example of the commodification of poverty in the Downtown Eastside; however, this is not the only reason the picket has drawn supporters from throughout Vancouver. Many of the people standing upon the picket line are not only protesting the restaurant, but also gentrification in the Downtown Eastside and the redevelopment of a neighbourhood that remains a holdout, a space of exception to the hegemony of neoliberal urbanism. As such, the Downtown Eastside is a space where people can come to protest the dominant ideology that is rewriting the city as a whole, yet it only serves this purpose because it is a place where the dominant ideology is made so blatantly visible. PiDGiN provides a locus for the protest of this ideology, because it highlights the changing landscape and ideology of the neighbourhood, but the neighbourhood itself is what mirrors the rest of the city. Understanding the Downtown Eastside as a heterotopic space, the protesters appear not only to be fighting the incursion of trendy restaurants and hipster diners into the neighbourhood, but also to be attempting to safeguard an alternative to what has become of Vancouver.

[3] This phenomenon will be explored in depth in Chapter 2.

1.4 Research Methodology

The research presented here builds on a few different foundations; much of it began out of a project looking at political movements around urban food security. While conducting research on this subject in Vancouver, I became aware that many activists considered restaurant gentrification in the Downtown Eastside to be one of the greatest threats to food security in that area. This was not a great surprise; older, largely low-cost restaurants had been going out of business for some time, and the influx of significantly more expensive new restaurants was not helping to replace the lost dining establishments for low-income residents. However, another strand in my research involved understanding the discourses being deployed to alter ideologies and to normalize different phenomena, and as I began to dig into restaurant gentrification, I became interested in the way that the presence of low-income and marginalized residents was being used and even commodified in the area. Initially, my research did not focus on the Downtown Eastside, but my own concerns over this trend and its seeming importance to the politics of the area led me to do an in-depth analysis of the politics of poverty in spaces of consumption at the same time as continuing my other research.[4] When PiDGiN opened and the protests in front of it began, I was already deeply engaged in the topic, yet still surprised by the tactic. The picket highlighted many of the important political tensions in the area, while also illustrating some of the shifts occurring in what Castells (1983) refers to as urban social movements. Nevertheless, the challenge remained to

[4] I benefitted from already having ethical approval for this research in my capacity as a research associate at the University of the Fraser Valley. The preliminary research into political movements around urban food security was conducted under ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Board at the University of Victoria; the interviews with protesters picketing PiDGiN were conducted under ethical approval from the University of the Fraser Valley Research Ethics Board.

explain what was going on, particularly given how confusing the politics appeared. The picket, however, provided a lens through which to understand both the changing landscape and ideologies in the Downtown Eastside, as the shifting politics of resistance to these changes. Thus, what follows is an attempt not only to understand the picket, but also to make sense of a changing political space.

Understanding urban redevelopment as a process that involves interlinked restructuring of both landscape and ideology, and understanding neoliberal urbanism as entailing the active re-regulation of the urban everyday, I begin by exploring the effects of restaurant gentrification on the social and economic situation in the Downtown Eastside. The picket is in front of a single restaurant, yet the protest targets the much larger phenomenon of gentrification and redevelopment in the area; in Chapter 2, I map the gentrification of restaurants, cafés, and pubs in the Downtown Eastside in order to better illustrate the phenomenon being opposed. Considering the decade prior to PiDGiN's opening, I also provide an interpretive analysis of some of the changes to both the real and imagined spaces of the Downtown Eastside associated with restaurant gentrification. As PiDGiN opened at the beginning of 2013, I identify the new and revitalized restaurants and other spaces of consumption that opened in the Downtown Eastside from the beginning of 2003 through the end of 2012. To understand the effects of these spaces of consumption on the urban fabric of the Downtown Eastside, I employ a mixed-method approach involving site visits, direct observation, and an analysis of discourse. I analysed advertisements, media representations, and other primary documents, and made multiple visits to each in order to understand the sites and their surroundings as both real and imagined spaces. These spaces of consumption were

studied in the context of neighbourhood level change over this ten-year period, considering how spaces of consumption interact with and contribute to such changes.[5]

The primary documents I consider include those from newspaper articles, magazine features, and online documents. The online documents included food-related blogs and blogs about Vancouver; I analysed each of the most important food-related blogs in the Vancouver area (Newman, 2012), considering only posts that addressed restaurants in the Downtown Eastside. In addition, I analysed customer reviews of each restaurant on Yelp and Urbanspoon.[6] By selecting only the two most important restaurant review websites, I was able to locate and analyse all of the reviews for each of the spaces of consumption in the Downtown Eastside. Using each of these blog posts and customer reviews, combined with newspaper articles and magazine features on spaces of consumption in the Downtown Eastside and with print reviews of restaurants in local publications from 2003 to 2012 (inclusive), I focused on the way that the spaces of consumption were discussed in relation to the neighbourhood, and how the neighbourhood and its residents were discursively constructed. I also conducted site visits; I walked each street of the neighbourhood at different times of day, and then

[5] The interviews that I conducted around food security activities helped provide a background to this research, and made me aware of some of the tensions in this area. One of these interviews is explicitly discussed in Chapter 2; however, many more are somewhat invisible yet invaluable for the context they offered in making sense of this data.

[6] In a study of the use of blog posts and other online data in qualitative research, Hookway (2008) has observed that the anonymity afforded by the Internet can negatively impact the trustworthiness of accounts presented as factual, but can also be of benefit to the researchers. For this part of my research, online sources were used only to understand how reviewers position restaurants and how patrons position their identities and their reasons for patronising restaurants, making blog posts and customer reviews on Yelp and Urbanspoon a useful and reliable data source.

visited each restaurant, café, and bar to engage in direct observation (see Patton, 2002).[7] In order to estimate gentrification, I analysed the price points of menu items in relation to comparable items at other restaurants, both in the neighbourhood as a whole and in the immediate vicinity, as well as price changes over time. However, as restaurant menu items, particularly between restaurants that serve dissimilar cuisines, can never be considered entirely comparable, any estimation of gentrifying effects on the neighbourhood had to be undertaken holistically and consider factors aside from price. During site visits to the restaurants, cafés, bars, and other spaces of consumption, I considered their buildings and décor, particularly in relation to how they fit into their surrounding landscape and in comparison to other spaces in the neighbourhood, as well as differences in restaurant clientele and in neighbourhood perceptions of the spaces. Although a holistic estimation may suffer from subjectivity, it is also more likely to be accurate than an estimation based solely on price point. As well as mapping real spaces in the Downtown Eastside, I used textual data, as part of my analysis of discourse, to understand how restaurants were changing the imagined space of the neighbourhood and how changing discourses shape the subjectivities of consumers and their impacts on neighbourhood residents (Bacchi, 2005).[8]

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[7] As well as mapping the restaurants, I used City of Vancouver licensing data to determine what year each had opened (any that were closed, revitalized, and then reopened were newly licensed). I then confirmed these dates against online registries. Following site visits to each restaurant, café, and pub in the Downtown Eastside, I visited all of the restaurants once, and all that had been opened since the beginning of 2003 a second time at a different time of day (always during a regular mealtime, either lunch or dinner).

[8] I analysed the discursive construction of spaces in, and residents of, the Downtown Eastside in these texts, while also employing the analysis of discourse tradition that Bacchi (2005, p. 199) outlines, employing her political theoretical analytic focus which holds as its goal "to identify, within a text, institutionally supported and culturally

Both restaurant gentrification and its concomitant discourses have garnered significant opposition from residents and activists in the Downtown Eastside; thus, in Chapter 3, I explore this resistance through the picket in front of PiDGiN. In order to understand why a single restaurant has become such a focal point for political action in the city, I conducted unstructured interviews with protesters, engaged in participant-observation, and analysed primary documents. The central element of this research was unstructured interviews with three of the protesters, selected through purposive sampling. Each of the protesters I interviewed were regulars on the picket line, and although the picket had no official leadership, they each undertook essential organizational activities and helped to facilitate the inclusion of other protesters. Importantly, while they were committed to fighting gentrification in the Downtown Eastside, they were not from the neighbourhood and were not personally living in poverty or facing the marginalization that many community residents deal with; my goal was to understand political resistance in the area as well as the reasons this restaurant drew protesters from all over the city, yet to do so without further exploiting residents of what is one of the most over-researched neighbourhoods in Canada. I also joined the protesters on the picket line some evenings, in order to understand both how the protesters presented themselves and how the restaurant management, members of the Vancouver Police Department, and pedestrians and other passers-by responded to the protesters.

In addition to this primary research, I analysed both textual documents and a panel discussion that took place at a public event; these were carefully selected to give insight into the views of different protesters. Although I read all of the news coverage,

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influenced interpretive and conceptual schemas (discourses) that produce particular understandings of issues and events."

both print and online, of the protest that I could locate and used this background to inform my understanding of the wider processes at work, my textual analysis included that from only one source: coverage in The Mainlander. The Mainlander is an online publication aimed at providing progressive coverage of municipal politics in Vancouver, with an additional stated goal of supporting progressive social movements (Mainlander Writing Society, 2012). Importantly, many of the writers for The Mainlander are also regular picketers; any coverage of the protest is then taken to represent the view of the author of the particular post. None of the authors speak on behalf of the protest as a whole, but because the specific authors providing coverage of the picket are themselves protesters, their writing can be taken as their own views of the protest. Both the information in these primary textual documents and gathered in unstructured interviews was supplemented by a transcript of a public panel discussion of the PiDGiN protests as a direct action tactic, facilitated by two of the *de facto* picket organizers as part of the Rent Assembly held May 24-26, 2013, in Vancouver. I attended this public panel discussion in person, and created a transcript of the panellists' statements, excluding all comments from any audience members. Analysing these transcripts, I considered them as being representative only of the views of the panellists in their roles as individual picketers.

As activists and protesters fight the transformation of the Downtown Eastside and the objectification and commodification of residents of the area, the politics of resistance are beginning to shift in response to the impacts of diners, as well as restaurants, on the neighbourhood. However, considering the changing responses to gentrification, the role of the Downtown Eastside as a heterotopic space also becomes apparent. The protesters who are fighting displacement, marginalization, and objectification are also attempting to

change the city as a whole – and to change the much larger society – through their involvement in this particular space. Importantly, the two chapters that follow can both be read as entirely stand-alone explorations; although the processes discussed in the two chapters are intrinsically connected, the two explorations can also each be taken up on their own and connected to other processes taking place within Vancouver and at many other scales.

Chapter 2:

Restaurant Gentrification and Urban Redevelopment in the Downtown Eastside

2.1 Gentrification and the Downtown Eastside

Once the most important retail and entertainment district in Vancouver, the Downtown Eastside was historically central to capitalist and imperial expansion in British Columbia; the Hastings Sawmill and the Canadian Pacific Railway yards served as a draw to both industry and labour, the single room occupancy (SRO) hotels provided temporary housing to migrant labourers, and the stores, restaurants, and bars formed the city's downtown core. However, as the era of the migrant worker drew to a close and jobs within the primary resource industries began to decline, the downtown core shifted west as aging and unemployed labourers began to settle permanently in the neighbourhood (Blomley, 2004). Their presence contributed to an association between the Downtown Eastside and a damaged, derelict masculinity that was linked to the deterioration of the landscape and employed to justify attempts at urban renewal; contesting this representation, activists and community organizations have recast the area as an old working class neighbourhood, marginalized under a globalized capitalist system yet filled with character and history (Sommers, 1998). Recasting the Downtown Eastside as an old, working class neighbourhood has helped activists to highlight the role of capitalism in economic and social marginalization, but gentrification and capitalist development continue to encroach upon the neighbourhood. Although proponents note the positive effects of urban renewal, including upgrades to neglected housing stock, improved liveability associated with a refashioned built environment, increased community safety (Atkinson, 2003, 2004), and, in Vancouver, focus on the environment and on sustainable development (Dale & Newman, 2009), community members regard gentrification as an

invasion: as Blomley (1997, p. 189) notes, it is "class warfare, and the extermination and erasure of the marginalised."

Smith (2002) has identified gentrification as a global urban strategy, a neoliberal urbanism that represents a shift in the role of the city to one of capital production rather than social reproduction. A classic understanding of gentrification holds that lower or working class residents of an undervalued neighbourhood, usually in a state of disinvestment and perhaps even decay, are displaced by middle or upper class newcomers to the neighbourhood (Smith, 1996). The first wave of gentrifiers are usually assumed to be artists attracted to sites of authenticity, counter-cultural activists attracted to anti-poverty movements, and others who have higher social capital than pre-existing residents even if they have only marginal economic capital; the increased social capital of the neighbourhood helps to make it trendy, and thus attractive to urban dwellers from middle class backgrounds (Ley, 2003). The process of gentrification also involves changing patterns of consumption (Lees, 1994; Bridge & Dowling, 2001); in a study of the gentrification of retail spaces, Bridge & Dowling (2001) emphasize that consumption practices, particularly those involving food and cuisine, help to shape both the identities of gentrifiers and the character of the city. Gentrification is often packaged as urban regeneration, relying on discourses promoting the value of social mixing, yet ultimately results in income polarization, localized inequality, and social exclusion (Smith, 2002; Walks & Maaranen, 2008). Increased cultural value of the neighbourhood, and social capital of residents, results in the displacement and social exclusion of lower and working class residents; in some cases, only those renting space in social housing projects may be able to afford to remain (Wyly & Hammel, 2004, 2005; Newman & Wyly, 2006). Keil

(2009, p. 241) observes that gentrification and neoliberal urbanism are perpetuated by "the public hegemony of creative economics and cultural politics"; Peck (2005) notes that these creative city strategies, intended to attract what is in effect a global gentrifying class, entail a commodification of cultural artefacts, including tolerance itself.

The Downtown Eastside exhibits many of the features of a neighbourhood suitable for gentrification: it is close to the downtown core of Vancouver, filled with commercial heritage buildings and other highly coveted historic brick edifices, and a site of depressed land values. Despite its ideal location, though, the Downtown Eastside has experienced both the lowest levels of social change and the most profound political resistance to encroaching gentrification (Ley & Dobson, 2008). The gentrification that has occurred spurred widespread protest and contributed to the development of an anti-gentrification movement in the neighbourhood, including a squat in the historic Woodward's Building during which marginalized community residents laid claim to the building as the common property of the poor (Blomley, 2008). Ley & Dobson (2008, p. 2481) argue, "deep poverty, street crime, vigorous political mobilisation and public policy have slowed gentrification substantially." While policies in Vancouver have promoted urban renewal and the investment of private capital, bylaws have been passed to protect the low-cost SRO rentals of the Downtown Eastside and collaborative agreements between public and private actors have been initiated to foster a socially inclusive form of urban development in the neighbourhood (Mason, 2007). The protection of low cost housing has contributed to a situation that Wyly and Hammel (1999) have likened to islands of decay in seas of renewal; considering the inner city

areas in New York, they note that despite popular rhetoric promoting the value of social diversity, distressed public housing impedes the progress of gentrification.

Wilson (2004) has pointed to the fundamental importance of the symbolic value of space to gentrification and to neoliberal urbanism. Discourse promoting urban regeneration requires urban spaces that have been socially constructed as marginal or substandard; stigmatized neighbourhoods are the imagined spaces ripe for gentrification. At the same time, urban neoliberalism relies upon spaces as cultural products: "Histories assigned to neighborhoods are elaborately choreographed, ethnicities in strategic communities romanticized and commodified" (p. 774). The symbolic values accorded to spaces are based upon their value to capital accumulation (Weber, 2002). Keil (2002, p. 596) notes that the advance of neoliberal ideologies redefines "the perceived, conceived, and lived spaces" of the city. Soja (1996) has suggested that, in addition to objective material space, places are comprised both of how they are represented as imagined space and of how they are experienced as real space. Creative city strategies and policies to enhance the exchange-value of places privilege imagined spaces over the ways that spaces are embodied as real for their inhabitants (Collis et al., 2010). However, an overly deterministic view of the neoliberal reconstitution of imagined spaces conceals the struggles waged over the symbolic meaning of space; in the Downtown Eastside, activists and community organizations have challenged social constructions of the neighbourhood (Sommers, 1998; also see Fraser, 2004). As well as symbolic associations with poverty and injection drug use, high rates of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases have contributed to stigmatization of the area as an unhealthy and tainted space, and as a place of moral culpability that should be feared (Woolford, 2001). Although this hegemonic

view of the Downtown Eastside is challenged with counter-discourses emanating from the stigmatized populations of the area, they are also challenged by discourses from the business community that emphasize history, resilience, creativity, architecture of the area, and even the cobble-stone streets of Gastown.

2.2 Emerging Spaces of Consumption

There are different, and constantly redefined, definitions of the Downtown Eastside; both the current terrain and the historical geography of this neighbourhood are subject to debate. The City of Vancouver defines a territory as the Downtown Eastside for planning and administration purposes, which it subsequently divides into eight separate sub-areas (Fig. 1). The eight sub-areas, like the Downtown Eastside itself, has been "produced in part through successive rounds of capital investment and disinvestment" (Blomley, 2004, p. 33), as well as through racial segregation, discourses of otherness, and public policy (Anderson, 1991; Blomley, 2004). As an imagined space, the Downtown Eastside is regularly used as a synecdoche for the Oppenheimer neighbourhood (Fig. 1), and either Oppenheimer Park or the intersection of Main and Hastings may be considered its symbolic core. In part, the differentiation of neighbourhoods has occurred as sections of what has historically been considered part of the Downtown Eastside have been carved off and transformed into middle class neighbourhoods and into thriving entertainment districts. Gastown, for example, has become an important tourist destination known for its restaurants and nightlife, and its old warehouses and factories have been redeveloped into upscale lofts. A study by Smith (2003) found that the gentrification of Gastown, and resulting displacement of

marginalized residents, had concentrated poverty in the rest of the Downtown Eastside, contributing to economic polarization.

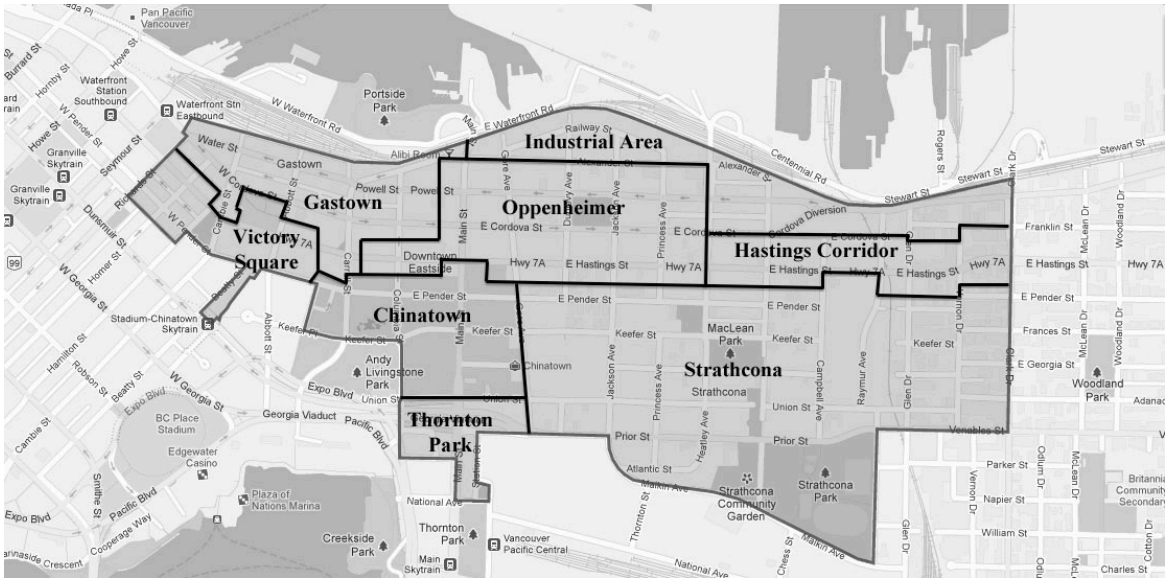

Figure 1: Map of the Downtown Eastside (Adapted from City of Vancouver, 2012).

Spaces of consumption play an important role in gentrification and in the transformation of cities into sites of capital production; under neoliberal urbanism, participating in the urban lifestyle involves conspicuous consumption of material and cultural commodities (Zukin, 1995). As Zukin (1998, p. 825) notes, "Attention to lifestyles has given rise to new, highly visible consumption spaces, such as *nouvelle cuisine* restaurants, boutiques, art galleries, and coffee bars." The penetration of restaurants, pubs, and trendy cafés – even affordable ones – into marginalized neighbourhoods are much more than simply generators of capital; as sites of cultural consumption, they play into global strategies of competitive urbanism (see Smith, 1996; Keil, 2002; Peck & Tickell, 2002). These restaurants, pubs, and cafés also function as an intrinsic component of the cultural economy: they are places where both the nutritional

and the symbolic content of food and drink are simultaneously consumed and communicated in public spaces (Bell & Valentine, 1997).

Gentrification and the transformation of different sub-areas of the Downtown Eastside are shifting what Soja (1980) refers to as the socio-spatial dialectic, or the way that space is produced through social relations while also contributing to the shaping of social relations. The Downtown Eastside has long been a place of deviance within Vancouver, yet as upscale restaurants and trendy pubs move into the neighbourhood, consumers are altering the spatiality of residents. Proudfoot and McCann (2008) highlight the role of street level bureaucrats making geographically and temporally uneven decisions to exercise or limit discretion and to negotiate constraints in Vancouver, influenced by the character and the populations of different neighbourhoods as well as by policy and urban development priorities. In a field that is often complaint-driven, new business interests and shifting priorities invariably change how infractions are handled. With increasing commercial gentrification of the Downtown Eastside, four new business improvement associations have been founded to advance the interests of the different businesses owners and entrepreneurs in the area. The Gastown, Chinatown, Hastings Crossing, and Strathcona Business Improvement Associations all work, often against efforts of marginalized residents and anti-gentrification activists, to shape the symbolic meanings of their areas and to commodify culture and emphasize creativity. As the business improvement association for the core of the Downtown Eastside presents its constituency, "Hastings Crossing BIA is a business community where innovation is exemplified, where creativity is currency, and where the humanness of enterprise brings with it an authenticity and grittiness that makes our area undeniably genuine" (Hastings

Crossing BIA, 2012). Pointing out the high concentration of artists, knowledge workers, and creative services in the Downtown Eastside, the Hastings Crossing Business Improvement Association (2012) also rightly notes that its area is home to "some of the city's coolest restaurants".

2.3 The Commodification of Poverty

In the current context of competition between cities, spaces of consumption are strategically important to driving urban regeneration and the production of capital (Bell, 2007). Restaurants, pubs, and trendy cafés are encouraged, as they are assumed to attract the 'creative class', the creative sector workers believed to drive economic development in post-industrial cities (Slater, 2006; Krätke, 2010). At the same time, authenticity is also commodified; new spaces of consumption move into historic working class or ethnic neighbourhoods in a manner of what Zukin (2010, p. 4) calls "domestication by cappuccino, with wilder places getting an aesthetic upgrading by the opening of a Starbucks or another new coffee bar." A diverse city, in which the spaces of consumption can be found in interesting neighbourhoods, is seen to draw creative pioneers and adventurous gentrifiers looking for authentic urban experiences (Florida, 2002, 2005); these themed and scripted neighbourhoods are "indicative of a new urban economy which has its roots in tourism, sports, culture, and entertainment" (Hannigan, 1998, p. 2). The marginalized yet historic working class neighbourhood – not unlike some of the scripted representations of the Downtown Eastside (Sommers, 1998) – can be recast as a theme, an idealized authentic working class space filled with cultural value and tourist potential, yet this authenticity then becomes a means of displacement (Zukin, 2010).

Elsewhere in Vancouver, the influx of restaurants and cafés into immigrant and working class neighbourhoods, such as the Commercial Drive area, has resulted in significant and rather straightforward displacement, yet gentrification in the Downtown Eastside has taken a much more complex form. The actions of the state apparatus[9] have been conflicted and seemingly ambivalent; moves to raise height limits on new developments have been framed as an opportunity to change the neighbourhood for the better by bringing in new residents, while fears over the loss of affordable housing and a socialization framing have been successfully deployed to pressure the municipal government into purchasing SRO housing in the area in order to prevent conversion to condominiums and other, more profitable, market housing (Liu & Blomley, 2013). Although significant urban redevelopment has been allowed in the Downtown Eastside, resulting in displacement from the neighbourhood, a Single Room Accommodation (SRA) By-law passed in 2003 regulates the conversion and demolition of SRO hotels in the area and mandates the replacement of any units lost (Mason, 2007). A subset of the low-income housing in the area has been protected in an effort to reduce the displacement of residents and the homelessness that often results (Blomley, 2004), yet the municipal

[9] Both the idea of the 'state' and that of the 'state apparatus' are open to multiple interpretations and somewhat conflicting definitions. For the purposes of this thesis, I have chosen to use both of these terms in the way I believe most closely mirrors their usage by the protesters with whom I spoke. To understand the role of the state in society, Midgal (2001) differentiates between the image and the practices of a state. For Midgal, the image creates the perception of the state as a coherent, controlling territorial organization; the image of the state and the practices of the multiple parts that comprise it "can be overlapping and reinforcing, or contradictory and mutually destructive" (p. 16). From this perspective, the municipality can be subsumed in the image of the state and thus perceived as being a part of the state apparatus (as, in Vancouver, it is understood by the protesters), yet can also be potentially in conflict with the coherence of the state; although perceived as part of the state apparatus, it contains within it the possibility of threatening the unity of the image of the state through its practices.

government has nevertheless approved a series of redevelopment projects that benefit businesses in the area even as they destroy the spaces used to build community. As such, supposedly authentic spaces are being eliminated, yet many of the residents who once used these spaces remain.

The dominant discourses surrounding the Downtown Eastside prominently feature ideas of bleak, impoverished lives (Liu & Blomley, 2013), and the search for authenticity in a rapidly gentrifying – and in some areas, completely redeveloped – neighbourhood is akin to a form of poverty tourism. Spaces of food and drink consumption are an increasingly important aspect of tourism; not only is the cuisine of a place itself important to the marketing of tourist destinations, but so too are the restaurants, cafés, pubs, and other spaces in which such cuisine is consumed (Sparks et al. 2003; Long, 2004). Richards (2002) notes that the globalization of cuisine has contributed to an increasing dissociation of food and place, yet tourists can satisfy their cravings for 'authentic' culinary experiences by eating in spaces shared by locals. The new and revitalized restaurants in the Downtown Eastside draw urban dwellers looking for a chance to eat with locals and to experience local foodways, including participating in the social, cultural, and economic aspects of food consumption. Although travelling within the city to consume different types of food is normal practice for urban dwellers, travelling for the purpose of sharing spaces of consumption with othered residents of the city and of participating in the foodways of a marginalized neighbourhood is what transforms this normalized urban experience into poverty tourism. The tourism analogy has been used elsewhere to describe a form of voyeuristic encounter that takes place in the Downtown Eastside: Robertson (2007, p. 546), for example, notes a form of "misery tourism" in

which people visit the area solely to see its infamous poverty. The voyeuristic gaze of outsiders to the community has been remarked and decried, although this gaze is more regularly mediated through television and news portrayal rather than direct visits to the neighbourhood (Culhane, 2003).

Dining in spaces associated with marginalized local residents is more than simple voyeurism; poverty tourism becomes a more apt analogy because tourism relies on the encounter. Tourism is all about encounters (Crouch et al., 2001): encounters with people, with places, and with cultures, mediated through the tourist gaze (Urry, 1990). In particular, the encounters associated with tourism help form cultural competencies that contribute both to identity formation and to social capital (Cloke & Perkins, 2002; Cohen, 1973; Munt, 1994). Encounters with 'authentic' locals are intrinsic to this mode of identity formation (Gibson, 2010). However, at the same time as tourists want glimpses into other cultures, they require it at a safe distance that pushes social and psychological competencies only so far (Robinson, 2001). Comfortable encounters with othered locals can be arranged and carefully managed through contact with those employed as service sector workers and other labourers in the cultural economy, as well as with those who can afford to be fellow consumers in the space (Gibson, 2008, 2010). In the Downtown Eastside, the protections for low-income housing ensures that gentrification does not entirely displace the othered poor; as a result, 'social mix' becomes both a selling point for those looking for the authenticity that Zukin (2010) describes and a coordinated strategy of approving urban redevelopment that brings wealthier residents into the neighbourhood. Increasing social mix is the new gentrification – although in a recent editorial, former City of Vancouver chief planner Brent Toderian (2013) argued in favour

of replacing the term gentrification with 'shared neighbourhoods' as a descriptor of this different path being pursued in Vancouver. While the policing and control of the poor and marginalized in a rapidly upscaling area presents new challenges for the state apparatus, many private-sector businesses are increasingly engaging in the commodification of poverty. Encounters with the impoverished other, as a generic figure that cannot easily be removed from the area, can be commodified in the same way as authenticity; while this deviates from a classic model of gentrification as simple displacement, the securitization of the city entails exclusion and control of the other.

The seeming ambivalence towards the obdurate presence of low-income and marginalized residents of the Downtown Eastside appears, at first glance, somewhat at odds to the determination with which political elites in Vancouver are pursuing the 'creative class'. Contrary to conventional understandings, though, Wilson and Keil (2008) have suggested that the poor are the true creative class. Not only are those who live in deep poverty forced to come up with highly creative strategies to survive in expensive yet socially neglected urban areas, but their role in filling low-wage jobs, often in the service sector, allows the economy of competitive cities to be built upon a pool of vulnerable and easily exploited labourers. Pointing out the intrinsic class bias in dominant conceptions of the creative economy (as in Florida, 2002, 2005), Wilson and Keil (2008, p. 841) argue that "Cultivating this true creative class and replenishing their creativity … would require that public policy keep the poor mired in poverty and spatially managed and controlled." This is an ominous argument, particularly when considering the commodification of poverty in the Downtown Eastside: if it is understood to rely on encounters with authentic, and implicitly poor, residents, then there must continue to be

poor residents. Privileging the desires of more affluent urban dwellers for authentic encounters relies upon a marginalized population that can be exploited not only for their labour, but also for their value to encounters. Dining in the Downtown Eastside can be turned into encounters with 'authentic' residents who shares spaces of consumption, or are employed as inexpensive labour in the production and presentation of food within these spaces of consumption. So long as they are managed and sufficiently controlled so as to not push social and psychological boundaries too far, the poor can be used as a cultural product that can be commodified in the advertisement of a form of poverty tourism, and to drive the very same process of gentrification that risks displacing and excluding the poor.

2.4 Restaurant Gentrification

The presence of new and revitalized restaurants in the Downtown Eastside plays an important role in the re-regulation of everyday urban life for neighbourhood residents, who are suddenly subject to the gaze of diners from outside of the area. However, they also play an important role in altering the landscape of the Downtown Eastside, and in doing so change both the real and the imagined spaces of the neighbourhood. Of the restaurants, cafés, pubs, and other spaces of food and drink consumption in the Downtown Eastside, just over 66% of those in business at the end of 2012 had been opened (or closed and then reopened in a revitalized form) within the previous ten years (see Table 1). Some older (and usually relatively affordable) restaurants went out of business during this time period, while other restaurants have moved into the area in their place. However, the net number of restaurants, cafés, and pubs has also increased. The

Downtown Eastside is increasingly becoming a dining destinations, and spaces of food and drink consumption are now among the central features of the landscape that was once known almost solely for SRO hotels and desperate poverty.

	Restaurants	Cafés and bakeries	Pubs and bars	Total
Gastown	42 (54)	11 (13)	8 (10)	61 (77)
Oppenheimer	10 (16)	4 (5)	1 (8)	15 (29)
Hastings Corridor	2 (4)		0 (1)	2 (5)
Strathcona	1 (2)	0 (1)		1 (3)
Chinatown	14 (34)	5 (8)	5 (6)	24 (48)
Thornton Park	2 (3)	0 (2)	1 (3)	3 (8)
Victory Square	17 (19)	3 (4)	1 (2)	21 (25)
Industrial Lands	3 (3)	2 (2)	1 (1)	6 (6)
Total	91 (135)	25 (35)	17 (31)	133 (201)

Table 1: New and revitalized restaurants, cafés, and pubs in the Downtown Eastside, opened 2003-2012 (Total restaurants, cafés, and pubs).

It is important to note that not all of these new and revitalized spaces of consumption contribute to the commercial gentrification of the area; some of these establishments are relatively affordable and fit into a pre-gentrified neighbourhood. Business turnover exists within any commercial area, and some of the restaurants, cafés, and pubs in the area have taken taking over vacant commercial spaces without significantly altering the neighbourhood. However, the majority of new and revitalized restaurants in the neighbourhood represent an upscaling of cuisine and of spaces of

consumption; they serve more affluent urban dwellers than those who patronize older restaurants, and charge higher prices. The rapid influx of restaurants and the culinary gentrification in the neighbourhood, more pronounced in some of regions than in others, has had a pronounced effect on the surrounding space, altering the way that different streets and sub-areas within the Downtown Eastside are perceived.

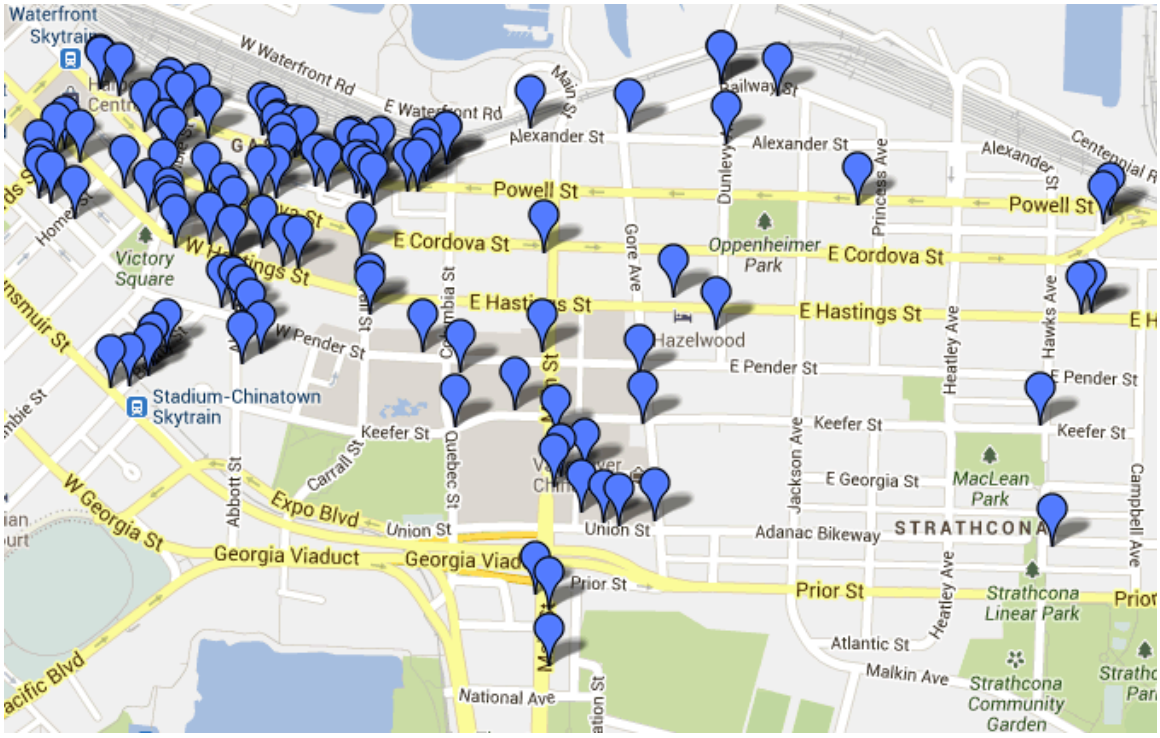

Figure 2: Restaurant gentrification in the Downtown Eastside, 2003-2012 (© Google 2013).

Gastown is the oldest neighbourhood in Vancouver, and one of significant value to the cultural economy; cobblestone streets, a steam-powered clock, and a statue of Gassy Jack serve as local landmarks and tourist draws. These features emphasize the history of the area, yet they also belie the carefully scripted nature of the area's identity: the cobblestones are replicas, installed in 1974 and 1975, and the steam-powered clock was built in 1977 to be a tourist attraction. The most gentrified area of the Downtown

Eastside (see Fig. 2), Gastown has become a mix of fine dining, upscale boutique retail, nightclubs, and souvenir shops. The majority of storefront commercial space is used by business that contribute to the gentrification of the neighbourhood. Over 79% of all restaurants, cafés, and pubs in Gastown have been opened or reopened in the previous ten years (see Table 1), and even many of the older spaces of consumption have been updated to better fit into the neighbourhood. Gastown is now home to famous and award-winning restaurants, and has rapidly gained a reputation for being among most important dining neighbourhoods in Vancouver. The gentrification of Gastown has been widely decried by activists for contributing to social exclusion in the area and increasing the concentration of low-income and marginalized populations, who have been pushed further east within the Downtown Eastside, yet commercial gentrification is also pushing east. The western blocks of the Industrial Lands, bordering Gastown, have been transformed into the trendy micro-neighbourhood of Railtown. Centred on Railway Street and home to significant industrial activity and historic factory buildings, the culinary penetration into the neighbourhood is advancing, marked by trendy restaurants and coffee shops as well as by the upscale tasting room of the city's only urban winery. As well as Railtown, gentrification in Gastown has pushed south into Victory Square; centred on the cenotaph in Victory Square Park, this area forms the outer margins of Vancouver's business and financial district. The restaurants and cafés in this area, situated between – and blurring the boundaries of – Gastown and the downtown core, draw patrons from the nearby office towers and university campus.

The advancing frontier of gentrification is pushing into the westernmost part of the Oppenheimer area, moving block-by-block east from Gastown. The poorest area of

the Downtown Eastside, the streets and open spaces of Oppenheimer are sites of highly visible homelessness, poverty, and survival sex work. The open-air drug market at the corner of Main and Hastings creates a busy and often vibrant urban space, and line-ups in front of United We Can, a social enterprise offering cash for scavenged items that can be reused or recycled, stretch down the street. Juxtaposed against this poverty are the few trendy cafés serving expensive lattés along the western edge of the Oppenheimer area. These, as well as new restaurants that have generated significant media attention and critic praise, draw customers further east, beyond Gastown and the current borders of Vancouver's dining and entertainment core. The pedestrians in this region are representative of the city's extreme income polarization, as a site where the privileged share spaces with the most marginalized. While gentrification in the western part of Oppenheimer is very evident, the centre and eastern parts of the area remain largely ungentrified. Nevertheless, throughout Oppenheimer and the Hastings Corridor immediately to the east, there are small pockets of commercial gentrification. New restaurants have opened in Oppenheimer and the Hastings Corridor that attract a clientele with higher cultural capital, and usually higher income, than the clientele of other spaces of consumption in the neighbourhood.

Gentrification in the Downtown Eastside must be understood within the larger context of Vancouver, regularly named the most unaffordable city in North America. High land values and often-exorbitant rents make Vancouver a particularly challenging place to open a restaurant, particularly by independent entrepreneurs and restaurateurs without either significant financial capital or the support of a celebrity chef. The depressed land values and relatively low rents in the Downtown Eastside make it one of

the few places in Vancouver where it is possible for independent restaurants to make a profit while also pushing culinary boundaries. In one case, a restaurant located elsewhere in East Vancouver, on the ground floor of an industrial-zoned building, was forced to relocate after gentrification of its neighbourhood raised the value of the space and rendered the renewal of the lease completely unaffordable. While it was pushed out of its original location as a victim of gentrification, with its relocation it nevertheless contributes to the gentrification of the Oppenheimer area. As establishments catering to low-income residents have gone out of business, they are replaced with businesses catering to a more affluent demographic. The artists, musicians, and students attracted to some of these restaurants, as well the hipster and punk populations that are difficult to define yet increasingly present in the area, increase the attractiveness and the desirability of the neighbourhood to other gentrifying forces. East of Oppenheimer, industrial streets are also being taken over by trendy restaurants and cafés; the few spaces of consumption open in the Hastings Corridor area represent the cutting edge of Vancouver's evolving culinary culture. If gentrification is understood as an invasion, it is one occurring from multiple directions.

Chinatown has experienced significant residential gentrification in recent years. While the incursion of residential gentrification into Strathcona and other areas east of Chinatown has been relatively moderate, Gastown remains the only other area of the Downtown Eastside in which as many upscale condos and lofts have been built as have been in Chinatown. These new residential developments, with names like Ginger and East, capitalize on the history and the cultural value of area. This history and culture is kept alive through the Chinese grocers, butchers, herbalists, and tea and ginseng stores

that line the streets, as well as through the restaurants and bakeries. However, the area is increasingly also notable for its trendy new cafés, bars, and restaurants, pushing north into the neighbourhood from the Thornton Park area and Main Street Skytrain Station. These independent, avant-garde establishments, including an upscale oyster bar and a café that doubles as an art gallery, have received heavy promotion from blog posts, social media recommendations, and glowing restaurant reviews. These restaurants have recently, and very rapidly, transformed what was positioned as, to borrow language from one critic, a culinary dead zone. While some of the new restaurants in Chinatown replace prior commercial tenants without markedly remaking the neighbourhood, along Union Street in the blocks to the north, the spaces of consumption have become significantly more upscale.

Although there are very few commercial spaces in Thornton Park, the landscape of the Thornton Park area is markedly variegated. Old, ungentrified bars sit next to new, upscale restaurants and entertainment venues. Land values in the area remain relatively depressed, yet the proximity to the Main Street Skytrain Station makes the central corridor of Thornton Park highly accessible. The few gentrified restaurants and bars also cater to clientele from Strathcona, a neighbourhood of shifting demographics. A predominantly residential area, bordering industrial lands on the east and south, Strathcona offers little opportunity for commercial gentrification: there are very few commercial spaces in Strathcona. The businesses that do exist cater to the high proportion of artists and students in the area, which is rapidly becoming a trendy place to live, yet there are only three restaurant/cafés in Strathcona. La Casa Gelato, open since 1982 and

at its current location since 1994, is a major draw for tourists and locals alike, but otherwise Strathcona is not an important dining district in Vancouver.

2.5 Spaces of Commodification

Gentrification and emerging spaces of consumption have transformed the Downtown Eastside, changing both real and imagined spaces. Pressure from Gastown and the west in particular, but also from Railtown to the north and Chinatown to the south, have contribute to social exclusion and resulted in an increased concentration of low-income and marginalized individuals in progressively smaller parts of the neighbourhood. The presence of trendy new restaurants in these areas, notably in Hastings Corridor and Oppenheimer, forewarns of further incursions. However, this concentration has not resulted in a straightforward case of displacement; poverty is visible on even the most gentrified blocks. Although these parts of the neighbourhood have been cleaned up enough to make them relatively safe, they have not been entirely dispossessed of the populations that give the neighbourhood its famous gritty edge.

One magazine article provides an explanation for the emergence of Gastown as Vancouver's sexiest new neighbourhood; adventurous young chefs and restaurateurs were opening daring new establishments in the neighbourhood, and "The patina of danger (real or imagined) amplified its attractiveness" (Morrison, 2010). Newspaper articles and magazine features began to highlight the burgeoning restaurant district, and every one of them spoke of the danger, the violence, the drug abuse, and the criminality that marked the neighbourhood (for example Knight, 2003; Mackie, 2004, 2008; Cernetig, 2006; Good, 2008; Morrison, 2008a, 2008b; Stainsby, 2011). Some gushed

over the bravery and the foresight of those opening restaurants, cafés, and bars in the area, while other authors recounted their own adventures at these new spaces of consumption. Discussing the opening of Salt Tasting Room, an innovative establishment and one of the earliest of the most recent wave of upscale restaurants to open, the previously cited magazine article described its location "in Blood Alley, where stolen goods are fenced, rats scuttle, and drugs are bought, shot, and smoked" (Morrison, 2010). The restaurant reviews provided a voyeuristic glance into the Downtown Eastside, yet with a newfound attitude of excitement not mirrored in most reporting on the neighbourhood. The poverty and the drug use visible in the streets only heightened the interest of the popular media in these spaces of consumption. This interest is reflected in the discourses deployed by the patrons of these establishments.

As food blogging has become increasingly common, a trend towards 'adventure dining' in urban areas has begun to emerge. In Vancouver, the Downtown Eastside has become a popular site for this activity. Self-proclaimed adventure diners, reflecting trends in blog posts, restaurant reviews, and culinary-themed reality television shows, visit restaurants and other spaces of consumption in the area and trade advice online about good places to visit for adventure or in pursuit of the 'authentic' Downtown Eastside experience. Old, established diners that serve affordable food and are frequented by low-income community members have become the main destinations for this form of poverty tourism, and the history of cafés and restaurants has become an important selling point. In an entry about the excitement at one of the oldest diners in the Downtown Eastside, a blogger described, "Good service, good food, great sleazy and desperate atmosphere, and absolutely outstanding eavesdropping" (Raincoaster, 2006, para. 3). In online reviews on

Yelp and Urbanspoon, patrons recommended the diner for its history and for the adventures one could encounter by eating there. As a reviewer on Urbanspoon (2012, review on March 12, 2012) positioned it, “Food is cheap and not the highlight of this joint - you are here for the adventure.” In addition to old diners, online discussions increasingly revolve around what are categorized as dive bars. In such bars, adventure diners seek out the seedy; in the same way that history and danger are positively associated with the restaurants and cafés of the Downtown Eastside, bloggers and online reviewers celebrate the seediness of dive bars.

As well as food bloggers and adventure diners, artists and musicians have begun patronising such spaces of consumption. Bars that used to be the sole domain of retired wage labourers and the marginalized poor are increasingly used to stage punk/rock shows and other live performances, drawing in people with higher levels of social capital. This has resulted in a certain level of unintended displacement, as certain bars have become havens for long-time community residents who wish not to share spaces with, to borrow a descriptive phrase from one patron, ‘over-educated young people’. In a Yelp (2012, review on December 9, 2008) review of a Downtown Eastside bar, one person complained, “The hot new thing in Vancouver is dive bars, with the poverty-stricken elderly alcoholics losing their seedy drinking holes to a rising new generation of hip youngsters. For one reason or another, they seek out cheap liquor in run down areas, and take over filthy locations by playing ironic music and inviting all of their friends on Facebook. What used to be a scary and depressing series of bars near Main and Hastings is slowly developing into regular hangouts for overdressed students who love the novelty of poverty.” However, he claimed that this particular bar remained one of the few places

exclusive to the neighbourhood's older residents. Regarding the bar, he stated, "This place is perhaps the most exclusive of all the dingy bars on Hastings, in that anyone who looks like they might have been remotely spoiled as children are not welcome by any of the regulars."

Although self-proclaimed adventure diners tend to frequent older restaurants and bars, or affordable locales with a certain edge – either 'gritty' or 'ethnic' – that places them appropriately outside of the mainstream, newer restaurants are beginning to capitalize upon this trend. While the majority of new spaces of consumption in the Downtown Eastside are involved in a rather straightforward form of commercial gentrification that contributes to social exclusion and the displacement of the poor, an emerging category of restaurants and cafés are employing the presence of poor or marginalized community members to draw customers from elsewhere in Vancouver. While these new and revitalized spaces of consumption are contributing to the gentrification of the neighbourhood, they also employ discourses that rely on the imagined spaces of an ungentrified Downtown Eastside. Retro diners and other establishments that capitalize on the working class origins of the neighbourhood, such as the revitalized Save On Meats (see Fig. 3), are embedded in the imagined space of the Downtown Eastside as much as the real. They deploy imagery associated with the history and working-class identity of the neighbourhood, while also highlighting their employment of marginalized locals dealing with issues of poverty or recovery from addiction. Dining at such establishments presents an opportunity for a chance encounter with the other: an equally important advertising point is the mixed-income clientele. The aforementioned diner offers low-cost food, such as a heavily subsidized breakfast

sandwich and a grilled cheese sandwich of orange cheddar on white wonder bread that complements the retro-pastiche décor. At the same time, for customers with means, it offers a form of gentrified cuisine, such as salad with quinoa and goat cheese, at prices that put such dishes outside the reach of low-income residents of the Downtown Eastside. The two different price points ensure that there can be a mixed income clientele, yet also that it is a clientele that dines on two very different cuisines. The opportunity to eat in a space shared by marginalized customers and in a restaurant that provides employment to people with barriers is implicit in the discourses deployed to position such restaurants – although anti-gentrification activists point out that the most marginalized local residents continue to eat at any of the establishments in the neighbourhood that serve food that is cheaper still.

Figure 3: The iconic sign for Save On Meats, a restaurant that opened in the Oppenheimer area in 1957. Two years after closing in 2009, it was re-opened by different management as a newly gentrified retro diner.

The spaces of consumption located in the Downtown Eastside are not always embedded in the imagined spaces of the neighbourhood, but those that are include reference to the people who are resident in the area. Outside of Chinatown and Strathcona, and beyond the other Chinese restaurants in the Downtown Eastside, neighbourhood residents are portrayed in a rather monolithic manner as poverty-stricken and exceptional to normal society; this construction of residents positions them as needing external support, and allows restaurants to situate themselves in the league of outside supporters. As such, discourses promoting many of the restaurants and cafés in the area highlight their roles in providing jobs to residents, as well as their importance to economic development and their engagement in activities that will bring the neighbourhood into the fold of the market; the social enterprises in the area include this as an explicit goal, but other restaurants have adopted the language associated with community economic development principles (see Cummings, 2002) in statements of social responsibility. Customers are invited to dine in a marginalized neighbourhood, which is constructed as a way to support this community. Thus, not only does this provide an opportunity for a carefully managed encounter with the other, it allows for different interpretations of this encounter; customers may interpret it as an adventurous meeting with the dangerous other, or as charitable encounter in which they are supporting the poor and marginalized other. On the other hand, the invisibility of the neighbourhood and its residents underscores the fact that the encounter with the other is not always of supreme importance to diners.

Relatively few of the restaurants contributing to the gentrification of the Downtown Eastside employed the discourses associated with the commodification of

poverty, yet the way that customers perceived their patronage of restaurants did not necessarily reflect the ways in which the restaurants positioned themselves. During one site visit to a restaurant on Hastings Street in the Oppenheimer area, one customer described the restaurant's surroundings as a warzone. Despite general recognition that the neighbourhood was widely considered unsafe and undesirable, a common discursive tactic employed by patrons held that people who were afraid or unwilling to venture to the restaurant were not 'cool' enough to eat there, and simply not the right type of clientele for the restaurant. Neither advertisements promoting the restaurants nor discourses employed by the restaurant management associated the restaurant with the imagined space of the Downtown Eastside; instead, the restaurant advertised itself as a place for rock & roll, for food that could accommodate vegan, vegetarian, and gluten-free diets, and for cheap alcohol. It positioned itself as an alternative establishment, complete with tattoo art on the walls, catering to artists and performers. However, the restaurant is never described as being in the Downtown Eastside, and the management has instead worked to embed it within a more generic 'East Van'. While the advertisements for the restaurant do not engage in any of the discourses that surround the commodification of poverty, some patrons nevertheless employ proof of their willingness to traverse the most marginalized streets of Vancouver to help build social capital and to demonstrate belonging among the creative and counter-cultural clientele.

2.6 Social Welfare and Community Economic Development

Although gentrification is deeply associated with displacement of low-income neighbourhood residents, increased protections for low-income housing in the Downtown

Eastside prevent some of this expected displacement, as well as the complete removal of visible poverty and marginalization; as such, current movements towards urban redevelopment have to be adapted to contend with the presence of marginalization – a movement that currently includes efforts to commodify these apparently undesirable features in an appeal to more privileged urban dwellers. However, just as the presence of a low-income population that is protected by displacement by government policy is being harnessed to serve the interests of capital production, the transformation of the city into a site for the production of capital is being integrated into policy relating to the socio-economic security net for low-income populations in the area. Among the most important methods by which poverty in the Downtown Eastside is being addressed is that of community economic development, based on a framework that promotes market-based approaches to urban poverty, environmental degradation, social exclusion, and other issues that can be considered negative outcomes of capitalist expansion. The underlying theoretical assumption holds that localized areas of poverty, inequality, and social exclusion are the direct result of neighbourhoods failing to sufficiently integrate into the market economy; according to community economic development paradigms, local enterprises with high levels of community engagement can strengthen neighbourhood market integration while also meeting social goals (Cummings, 2002). Market integration is constructed as a way to further the goal of achieving full employment; neighbourhood residents should then be able to find their social-economic welfare in the market, thus having employment income. As an alternative to entitlement programmes and to socio-economic benefits based on a citizenship principle, this community economic development approach has been widely endorsed by neoliberal policymakers (Cummings,

2002; Mahon, 2008). In the Downtown Eastside, both for-profit and non-profit social enterprises are promoted as a response to local unemployment and, when they take the form of restaurants and cafés, to neighbourhood food insecurity (Mason, 2007).

While conducting this research, I spoke with the manager of a social enterprise that attempts to address unemployment and food insecurity by selling low-cost, healthy meals, prepared by individuals who have difficulty finding other employment. Emphasising the importance of local entrepreneurship in the creation of opportunities for market participation, she explained to me, "Our primary mission is employment for people with barriers from the Downtown Eastside. And also community nutrition." The organization to which she belongs presents market integration as an alternative to state intervention, which is framed as inefficient in addressing urban issues. Promoting market participation, she suggested that a community economic development approach could help support a goal of full employment, adding,

> If we can reform the food system using a community economic development approach, part of the goal is to also make it more sustainable in the long term as well. So if you're doing things efficiently and strategically there's less need for more money to do things poorly, it's like, do things better and maybe even actually make enough money to actually make things work without all that need for that extra donation and public funding and all those kind of things.[10]

While this particular social enterprise is a non-profit organization dedicated to serving the low-income residents of the Downtown Eastside, a number of for-profit social enterprises that have opened since have begun using many of the same discourses while catering to a much more affluent market. The discourses that promote these social enterprises simultaneously reframe the role of restaurants in the neighbourhood; creating jobs and

[10] Interview on October 17, 2012.

providing training for those who are constructed as 'otherwise unemployable' or as 'people with barriers to employment' reframes relations of production from those reliant upon the exploitation of labour to those in which businesses are providing a community service by hiring local residents. This discourse provides a justification for further restaurant gentrification; the language of job creation has become a central feature of advertising campaigns for new and revitalized restaurants and other spaces of consumption in the Downtown Eastside.

The response to restaurant gentrification in the Downtown Eastside has been mixed. While some view the employment created by these businesses as beneficial to, and necessary for, community members, others argue that these businesses compound marginalization in the area by constructing socio-economic welfare as a goal that should be pursued without recourse to public funding. This debate was reinvigorated by the recent launch sandwich token programme at Save On Meats, wherein people can purchase tokens from the restaurant to distribute to panhandlers and to the homeless, rather than giving them money. Activists decried both the paternalism and the blatant mistrust of the poor, as the press releases constructed low-income Downtown Eastside residents as being both irresponsible with money and untrustworthy in their motivations – the owner of the restaurant was seen to add insult to injury when he suggested that police officers buy and distribute these tokens on their rounds. Although the state apparatus is far from universally popular in the Downtown Eastside, many activists in the area view market integration and social welfare tied to full employment as a poor substitute for entitlement programmes and a state-based socio-economic safety net. At the same time, discourses conflating the market activities of restaurants, cafés, and other local businesses

with both benevolent endeavours and with socio-economic welfare programming serve to call into question the distinction between private enterprise and political apparatus.

2.7 Ground for Resistance

The popular construction of the Downtown Eastside as an undesirable place to visit and as a desperately miserable place to live largely revolves around the way residents of the neighbourhood are described and positioned. It seems perverse that these same residents are now beginning to be deployed as an advertising feature for restaurants and other spaces of consumption in the neighbourhood. Low-income and marginalized residents can find employment opportunities at some of these establishments, yet when they do so, they regularly become elements of promotional and public relations campaigns. The opportunity to dine in spaces shared by low-income and marginalized patrons has become a selling point, as restaurateurs and business owners seek to take advantage of the increasing commodification of poverty. As food-related blogs and 'adventure dining' have begun to catch on, eating at restaurants in the Downtown Eastside is increasingly a project that builds credibility and social capital for intrepid urban dwellers. Nevertheless, the way that the identities of low-income and marginalized residents are deployed to further business interests in promoting an edgy, alternative dining destination differs from the way that corporations, both for-profit and non-profit, are used to contribute to the socio-economic welfare of these same residents. In this latter case, the market is normalized as the logical, or at least the most efficient and sustainable, form of socio-economic security net.

These trends in the Downtown Eastside are rife with potential conflict, and provide grounds for resistance. Unsurprisingly, the changing terrain of this contested landscape has resulted in pushback from residents and activists in the area. However, the conflicting role of businesses, most notably restaurants, in both commodifying and objectifying low-income and marginalized residents and in being the increasingly normalized site of socio-economic welfare (writ broadly enough to include activities ranging from the provision of meals to the creation of employment) have helped to influence the site of political action. In the next chapter, I turn to some of the pushback against marginalization, commodification, and objectification, as well as some of the confusing politics that have resulted from the changing roles of the state apparatus and the restaurants, cafés, and pubs in the Downtown Eastside. Increasing conflict over the changing spaces, and the shifting landscape and ideologies in the area, have contributed to innovative and unusual forms of political resistance; in Chapter 3, I discuss this resistance by focussing on the response to a single restaurant – a restaurant seen as both a 'breaking point' in the ongoing gentrification of the Downtown Eastside and as a symbol of the larger conflicts in the area.

Chapter 3:

The Politics of Resistance

3.1 Gentrification and Governance in the Downtown Eastside

The restaurant gentrification that has occurred in the Downtown Eastside has been important to forging a path for other gentrification, helping to open up the area to additional businesses and commercial gentrification as well as to making the area an appealing site for condo development. New restaurants that have opened in areas as yet untouched by other gentrification, including the industrial areas of the Downtown Eastside, give restaurant gentrification the appearance of a vanguard. Although these new establishments have opened throughout the Downtown Eastside, most of the gentrification has been progressing slowly in a block-by-block claiming of the land. With each gentrified block, the concentration and depth of poverty in the rest of the Downtown Eastside, most notably the Oppenheimer area, has grown (Smith, 2003).

The incursion both of restaurants and of diners into the neighbourhood has had effects beyond gentrification and displacement; the profound redevelopment of the area has altered social relations within it. Differences of class and race between residents of the neighbourhood and customers of the new businesses located within it reproduce hierarchical relations, and the circulation of these gentrifying consumers within a neighbourhood known as a space of deviance puts residents on display. The Downtown Eastside is not quite the panoptic ideal; the heavy police presence, as well as that of other local authorities, is still the primary machinery for disciplining residents and punishing infractions. However, the stark socio-economic inequality in the space creates a subject-object dynamic that lends itself to a disciplinary gaze; marginalized residents know that, at any time, they may be subject to both the gaze and the judgement of outsiders. This

judgement can be understood as a mechanism of discipline of the sort described by Foucault (1977, p. 184-185), which "manifests the subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected." Whether witnessing deviance is believed to excite or horrify, the perception of being watched is enough to impact the comfort of neighbourhood residents, particularly those whose very identities are already perceived as deviant for reason of class, race, ability, or other visible marker of socio-economic status. They may not actually be under surveillance, but simply knowing (or believing) themselves to be within the field of visibility inscribes within them the power relations of the community at large. Thus, when the streets in front of the Woodward's Building became uncomfortable for some community residents, they escaped this perceived voyeurism by moving east. The police presence was no less profound in Pigeon Park than in front of the Woodward's Building, yet the surveillance was, for a time, less.

As gentrification has moved east, following the path taken by the refugees from Gastown and from the urban redevelopment occurring in the Downtown Eastside, opposition to the perceived vanguard of gentrification has grown. This opposition is not directed solely at any one element of urban redevelopment, but rather the myriad and ephemeral effects of neoliberal urbanism; residents and activists oppose displacement and the destruction of affordable housing, the perceived voyeurism of restaurants and their clientele, and the increased socio-economic disparity wrought by urban redevelopment – as well as the symbols that different protesters individually associate with a repressive, neoliberal, settler colonial state. These diverse fronts of resistance combine with demands for the enactment of positive rights and for their inscription on the landscape to make the

Downtown Eastside an important space for political action against urban redevelopment. Despite the diversity in the different threads of protest, the establishment of a single restaurant in the Downtown Eastside managed to tie them together.

3.2 PiDGiN

When PiDGiN, an upscale restaurant in the Oppenheimer neighbourhood located across the street from Pigeon Park on Carrall Street at Hastings, opened at the beginning of 2013, it immediately became a rallying point for resistance. Viewed as a provocation by neighbourhood residents, this restaurant embodied both gentrification and voyeurism in the Downtown Eastside. Upon its opening protesters set up in front of its window, and a picket was soon established on the sidewalk in front of the restaurant. The call out to join this picket, scheduled to last indefinitely, was reminiscent of a call to the barricades; PiDGiN was to be the site of full-scale resistance to the onslaught of gentrification and to the redevelopment of the Downtown Eastside. One activist explained simply, "it's so symbolically important, like if you don't understand gentrification from looking at PiDGiN, then you can't understand gentrification as far as I'm concerned."[11]

PiDGiN was noted both for its name and also for the wall of glass windows that gave an unobstructed view of the entirety of Pigeon Park. For neighbourhood residents, Pigeon Park serves as a gathering point where locals, particularly Indigenous people, congregate, and where an open air market held Sundays has been organized by grassroots community groups since 2010; however, outside the neighbourhood, Pigeon Park is largely viewed as a space of deviance, poverty, and drug use. It is most often represented

[11] Interview on May 10, 2013.

to city dwellers through the medium of television and film, which England (2004) argues helps to construct a moral gaze on the space that transforms it into a site of deviance, addiction, and criminality. The establishment of a restaurant that looks directly out at Pigeon Park allows diners to see the area outside of the lens imposed by filmmakers, and to experience the space without the distancing effects associated with the medium. However, the wall of glass windows nevertheless create an inside/outside dichotomy between the diners in PiDGiN and the Downtown Eastside residents who use Pigeon Park, allowing them to experience the space on a much more intimate level, unmediated by the moral gaze of others – yet the gaze which is now applied is far more reminiscent of a disciplinary gaze arising from unequal power relations between the subject and the object (Foucault, 1977). The restaurant itself was viewed as a provocation; the voyeuristic window on marginalization, combined with a restaurant whose very name was perceived as an invitation to come view the poor, reinforced the way that the restaurant was engaged in the commodification of poverty and the objectification of drug use, and became a breaking point for resistance to gentrification. Both the displacement of residents as a result of gentrification and this voyeuristic view of impoverished bodies are being protested simultaneously; PiDGiN is an important tactical site in the fight against the imposition of a neoliberal ideology upon the landscape of the Downtown Eastside, but the protests are equally a result of residents and activists being quite simply fed up.

Figure 4: PiDGiN. The lower two-thirds of the window are now etched a translucent white, yet when the restaurant first opened, these windows provided an unobstructed view of Pigeon Park.

Protesters established a picket line in front of PiDGiN, exhorting patrons and would-be patrons not to cross; those who did were subject to the objectifying gaze of picketers. While drawing attention to the perceived voyeurism of the restaurant clientele, the protesters turned the gaze upon the diners. Inviting low income and marginalized residents of the Downtown Eastside to engage in the sort of actions normally associated with a form of poverty tourism and the commodification of marginalized bodies, the picketers set up a viewing booth with signs emblazoned with the words, “See the Rich! 5¢”. Passers-by were invited to look in the windows and view the wealthy; in order to facilitate a closer view, flashlights were shone on the faces of diners. This tactic quickly garnered media attention, and was positioned as a form of violence by the detractors, yet

the protesters maintained that the gaze they turned upon restaurant patrons was no less violent than the exploitative gaze fixed upon the marginalized local residents who use Pigeon Park.

Members of the Vancouver Police Department confiscated the viewing booth and its provocative signage on March 9, 2013. However, long before the seizure of this fixture of the protests, the management of PiDGiN had already frosted over the lower two-thirds of the windows looking out onto Pigeon Park. When the windows were initially papered, activists regarded this as a temporary victory; the translucent white layer etched upon the glass rendered the victory permanent. The restaurant was still understood by activists as inviting consumers to come and view the poor, and as exploiting the identities of the marginalized in advertisements that highlighted the jobs created for Downtown Eastside residents washing dishes and cleaning the restaurant. The confiscation of the viewing booth by police officers was viewed as an illegitimate exercise of state authority, yet was also taken as confirmation that the tactic was unsettling to wealthy restaurant patrons and to the more privileged consumers coming into the neighbourhood. At the same time, the scope of the protests widened, drawing attention to additional outcomes of gentrification and to the negative effects of urban redevelopment writ large upon low-income residents of the Downtown Eastside. The diverse voices of community residents and activists agitating for positive rights and making claims for socio-economic obligations against the state were incorporated into the protests, implicating the state as well as the restaurant and its customers.

Restaurant gentrification in the Downtown Eastside is a threat to local food security; the low-cost diners and cafés that cater to local residents are slowly being

replaced with more upscale and significantly less affordable culinary options. As well as their detrimental effects on the ability of low-income residents to access food, though, these restaurants are being derided for creating exclusive spaces that are inaccessible to neighbourhood residents. The high price point of gentrified cuisine touched off two different strands of protest, which took place simultaneously on the picket line. Drawing attention to the intertwined problems of urban hunger and of the lack of affordable housing in the Downtown Eastside, a man who wished to be identified only as Homeless Dave went on a hunger strike, supported by the picketers. On his fast, he consumed only juice from Happy Planet Juice Company, co-founded by Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson. His choice of brand not only implicated the mayor in the protest, but also drew attention to the intertwined interests of business leaders and of political representatives in Vancouver, further complicating the idealized separation of economics from politics. While he used his hunger strike to emphasize the role of economic inequality in food insecurity, he also agitated for social housing by using his own identity as someone who had formerly been a homeless Downtown Eastside resident to underscore problems of homelessness and to galvanize activism around the loss of affordable housing in the area. His hunger strike lasted for a total of 36 days before he was forced to end for health reasons.

As Homeless Dave became an important figure in the protests, so too did a giant papier-mâché pickle. The first item on the menu at PiDGiN, and the least expensive menu item, was a plate of pickles for six dollars. This appetizer seemed all the more absurd when contrasted against the poverty surrounding the restaurant, and thus became a central element of the picket. The papier-mâché prop was used to start conversations around

affordability, exclusivity, and blatant gentrification with passers-by; as one protester explained, "we used to tell people they have a six-dollar pickle on the menu and they'd freak out. Like, the people down here can't even afford a two-dollar slice of pizza, let alone a six-dollar pickle, and I guess the absurdity kind of sinks in."[12] The prominence of an outsized pickle lent the protest an even more satirical element, emphasized when protesters passed around the lyrics to "Saltydarity for Pickle" (sung to the tune of "Solidarity Forever"). The interest generated by the pickle helped to frame the PiDGiN menu on the picketers' terms; in response, the restaurant management lowered the cost of the plate of pickles to only five dollars. Although this appetizer was no less unaffordable to residents of the Downtown Eastside at this new, marginally lower price point, the menu change was nevertheless welcomed as a small victory. The picket was not only placing pressure on the restaurant owners, it was successfully highlighting the effects of gentrification on the surrounding neighbourhood and satirizing the claim that urban redevelopment was beneficial to low-income community residents.

The picket in front of PiDGiN marked a new form of resistance to urban redevelopment in the Downtown Eastside, the first time such a tactic had been used. The neighbourhood is well known as a site of resistance, in part because of the regularity of protests in the area; this new tactic of picketing a specific restaurant represented a shift, yet not a break. The protesters targeted each patron, and each would-be patron, of the restaurant, telling them about the impacts of restaurant gentrification on this low-income community and asking them not to go in. Those who crossed the picket line were

[12] Interview on May 9, 2013.

subjected to efforts to shame them, as each was implicated, on an individual level, in gentrification, displacement, and marginalization. As one picketer commented,

> It was like, the first while was a really visceral experience. It was, like it was clear to everyone that was there, both the picketers and the diners, that some taboo was being broken, and this was a type of interaction that shouldn't, or wouldn't, or even couldn't be happening. … some people were shocked. A lot of people were shocked, and it was a shocking experience to be there.[13]

Targeting the individual customers was clearly a taboo, and in some cases was represented in the media as a form of violence (for example, CBC News, 2013; see also The Gastown Gazette, 2013). Protesters were accused of restricting the mobility of customers and their ability to access certain urban spaces, which was, of course, exactly what they were attempting to do. At the most immediate level, the picket had two goals: to affect the bodies of diners and would-be diners, and through these bodies, to affect the restaurant.

Although the picketers never physically restrained customers, by implicating them on a direct, interpersonal level with displacement and marginalization in the Downtown Eastside, they attempted to convince them not to enter. If they dined at the restaurant anyway, they were subject to shaming. By publicly inscribing the identity of gentrifier, of bourgeois oppressor, onto the bodies of customers,[14] they picketers further hoped to deter would-be diners from coming to the restaurants. As the picket took place six days a week

[13] Interview on April 30, 2013.

[14] Foucault (1977, p. 104) suggests that modernist social ordering is achieved through "a whole technology of representation", in which deviant and criminal behaviour is deterred through the inscription of shame upon the body of the criminal through a series of object-signs, visible to those who would contemplate the same crime. The picketers, here, are concerned with the visibility of deviant bodies to customers from PiDGiN, and are thus attempting to use these technologies of representation to inscribe shame upon the bodies of the privileged, as a deterrent to those who would consider dining at the restaurant yet whose vanity would make them fearful of being the object of ridicule or shame.

and was extensively covered in the media, potential customers could expect to be subjected to this public shaming should they choose to dine at PiDGiN. As such, the picketers affected the bodies of all who might become customers by inscribing the shameful identity of gentrifier onto the bodies of the actual customers. Through these bodies they could affect the restaurant; its continued operation requires customers, and the income they generate. Hampering business is an effort to drive PiDGiN from Pigeon Park, to reclaim the space, and to halt the progress of neighbourhood redevelopment. This tactic is also believed to serve as a deterrent to potential new restaurant gentrification in the neighbourhood. As one picketer observed,

> a lot of people spend a lot of time, especially people in power, people in business, people that are running a restaurant or that want to run a restaurant who are genuinely concerned with, not with us, so much, but with our effect on all those invisible potential customers who just may not come downtown to dine.[15]

3.3 Seeing the State in Urban Redevelopment

The picket has garnered significant press within Vancouver, much of it negative – many supporters of the restaurant have raised questions as to why the protests are targeting a single business, an independent restaurant, rather than City Hall. However, while restaurants in the area are positioned as being entirely distinct from the state apparatus, the picket is serving to draw attention to what they claim is a false dichotomy between business and state. The state has securitized the city, and particularly this neighbourhood, which picketers argue is for the primary purpose "of making businesses

[15] Interview on April 30, 2013.

feel safe."[16] Moreover, many picketers see the state claiming the neighbourhood through the process of opening it up to capital, both by approving redevelopment projects and making businesses interests into the referent objects of securitizing discourses aimed at local residents and communities (see Raco, 2003; Coaffee & Rogers, 2008); the advancing front of gentrification is then understood as aligning with the goals of City Hall. Considering the restaurants in the area as being intrinsically bound up with the state apparatus, then, instead of being entirely distinct entities, leads the protesters to an explicitly Marxist analysis: the interests of the state are the same as those of the capitalist classes, and the capitalist classes are apparently interested in Downtown Eastside restaurants. As protests in front of City Hall and petitions directed at the Mayor and Council have not been effective, the picketers have now chosen to target businesses and their customers directly.

One of the (initially unintended) effects of the picket has been to make the state blatantly visible in the Downtown Eastside. The state has perhaps always been more visible in the Downtown Eastside than elsewhere in the city, yet in a process that Peck and Tickell (2002) have identified as the complementary movements toward 'roll-back' and 'roll-out' neoliberalization, most elements of the City of Vancouver budget have been cut while the policing budget has increased. As always, the increased police budget has had spatially uneven effects (Eby, 2009; Small et al., 2012). This was highlighted in a report released by Pivot Legal Society a month into the protest, illustrating that almost 95% of all tickets given out for by-law offences were issued in the Downtown Eastside (King, 2013). These tickets included by-law infringements such as street vending and

[16] Interview on April 30, 2013.

jaywalking; after the picket in front of PiDGiN was established, picketers began receiving jaywalking tickets whenever they crossed illegally anywhere near the restaurant. For many of the picketers not from the area, this was their first experience with police harassment; one regular protester had initially only come down to the picket at the request of a friend, but observed of the police response, "the series of things that began to happen to us was so bizarre and so alienating that I was basically stuck with it."[17] The zealous by-law enforcement in front of PiDGiN supported the contention that the state was making the area secure for businesses and for the investment of private capital. One picketer stated,

> I strongly believe that the over-policing of the Downtown Eastside is a tactic used by municipal governments to assure business that it will be taken care of, to assure customers that they are safe, and to assure future condo owners that they will not be harmed by the current residents. … So, one of the ways that the picket works is in undermining that project.[18]

Undermining the project of making the Downtown Eastside safe for business involves explicitly challenging the financial viability of the businesses, but, as a corollary outcome of this protest, also involves raising the profile of the state in urban redevelopment projects.

When asked about the choice of PiDGiN for the picket site, protesters highlighted the seeming voyeurism of the "overwhelmingly wealthy, white clientele", as well as the way the restaurant seemed to invite poverty tourism and the surveillance of the poor. However, one protester also noted,

> the timing of its opening coincided with a number of cuts to key programmes in the Downtown Eastside, not least of which was Rainier

[17] Interview on April 30, 2013.
[18] Interview on April 30, 2013.

> Women's Centre, sort of like a holistic rehabilitation programme, but there were a number of cuts that all came down the pipe right at the end of 2012 and then right at the beginning of 2013 this restaurant opened and it was just, it was really a breaking point for a number of people.[19]

Government funding cuts may not appear directly related to the opening of a restaurant, but the perceived association between restaurants and the state apparatus is made apparent in the reaction to the cuts. The protest, then, was not just about a single restaurant or even about gentrification writ large. It was also about protecting the Downtown Eastside as a space and ensuring that this space continued to support marginalized residents. Urban redevelopment in the Downtown Eastside is not understood as *mere* gentrification and displacement; it is an attack on the space specifically, a space that is associated with poverty and marginalization, but also with providing a supportive and caring community to residents.

3.4 The Fight for the Downtown Eastside

On the 14th day of Homeless Dave's hunger strike, he and a group of supporters left PiDGiN for City Hall, presenting a list of demands designed to protect the low-income residents of the Downtown Eastside. He demanded 100% social housing at the former site of the Pantages Theatre on East Hastings Street where the Sequel 138 condo development is scheduled, 100% social housing at the former site of the police station (known colloquially as the cop shop) on Main Street at Cordova Street, and the designation of the Downtown Eastside as a 'social justice zone'. The idea of a 'social justice zone' appears somewhat unclear; when spoken of by Homeless Dave, and when alluded to by the rest of the protesters, it is often a nebulous concept. All of the activists

[19] Interview on April 30, 2013.

who endorse this idea acknowledge the multi-faceted nature of social justice; however, many of the activists in the Downtown Eastside have proposed practical steps to operationalize the idea of a 'social justice zone', arguing for increased social housing development in the area and protection of existing social housing stock. Moreover, they claim that only 100% social housing development should be allowed in the Oppenheimer neighbourhood, that any development in Thornton Park and the Hastings Corridor should be 70% social housing, and that development in the rest of the Downtown Eastside should include at least 20% social housing (similar schema call for a baseline of 30% social housing in the remainder of the Downtown Eastside, while otherwise offering substantively the same proposal). Other activists have a less defined idea of what a 'social justice zone' should entail, yet lend their full support to the values and the assumptions underlying this idea. Their overarching goal is to ensure that no resident is displaced from the community, and that all are afforded the shelter, services, and social supports they require.

Figure 5: One visualization of what a social justice zone might look like, as painted by housing activists and presented to the Downtown Eastside Local Area Planning Process (Photograph adapted from The Mainlander, used with permission of the photographer).

The goals of the picket were not the same as the goals articulated by Homeless Dave, although most protesters supported his petition as individuals and the picket collectively provided a platform for him to make his case. Each of the picketers and activists agree that working towards social justice in the area requires ensuring that residents have affordable and secure housing. However, social housing was not

necessarily the very top priority of all picketers; one protester observed that social housing comes with its own set of problems, adding,

> I support, like, social housing, but some of the problem is that you need to revise the laws surrounding them, because tenants of social housing don't, a lot of the time, have the same rights as tenants of market units. … I support it, but it's only one thing in a series of many things that need to change.[20]

As well as fighting for social housing, some protesters also chose to highlight the need to defend InSite, to protect sex workers, and to increase programmes that support women, Indigenous people, and other marginalized local residents. The picket, however, is not a formal organization and does not have official spokespeople; the demands of the picket are those principles articulated during the protests and inscribed upon the placards, the actions, and the bodies of the picketers. The stated goals of the picket are, as another protester put simply, "No homes, no peace. The Downtown Eastside is closed for business."[21]

The impetus to rewrite the Downtown Eastside as a 'social justice zone' can perhaps be understood as an effort to protect a space of exception, an alternative to the neoliberal urbanism that has been nearly universalized throughout the rest of Vancouver. The Downtown Eastside acts as a mirror, held up to the city. Looking at the Downtown Eastside one sees not only the neighbourhood, but also the rest of the city in contrast. The normalization of neoliberal urbanism has rendered it nearly invisible, until it is almost like the city air or the pipes that deliver water, except when it is viewed through the mirror that is the Downtown Eastside. The juxtaposition that Foucault (1986) observed in the mirror exerts a sort of counteraction on the position of the viewer; these heterotopic

[20] Interview on May 9, 2013.
[21] Interview on April 30, 2013.

spaces exist in relation to other spaces, at once making these spaces suspicious and inverting the relations mirrored within them. Creating a 'social justice zone' that protects the Downtown Eastside from redevelopment would also safeguard it as a mirror to neoliberal urbanism, allowing it to play a role in creating a right to the city both for area residents and for people who wish to resist no matter where in the city they live.

3.5 Creating Politics

Standing on the picket line, the most common objections hurled at individual protesters related to them not being from the neighbourhood. Of course, many of the picketers do live in the Downtown Eastside, and still others are former residents of the area; one of the picket's *de facto* organizers claimed, "In general, it's about half/half Downtown Eastside residents and allies."[22] More than anything else, though, the accusation that many picketers hail from outside the Downtown Eastside appeared to be the most damning condemnation in the eyes of the picket's opponents. However, picketers have identified this discourse as a tactic of divide-and-rule; this estimation is shared equally by picketers who live in the neighbourhood and those from other areas of the city. The tactic of divide-and-rule was perhaps made most apparent in the discourses deployed in media coverage of Homeless Dave's hunger strike; although Homeless Dave was forthright about the fact that he had formerly been a homeless resident of the Downtown Eastside before finally being offered a social housing unit in a different neighbourhood, certain of his opponents broadcast this fact as though it was either an admission or a revelation they had uncovered. In some media outlets he was referred to as

[22] Panel on May 25, 2013.

"formerly homeless Dave", and one passer-by, explaining to the rest of the picketers why they should not rally behind Homeless Dave's cause, shouted to the crowd, "He doesn't even live in the neighbourhood!" The fact that he had previously been a resident of the Downtown Eastside for decades was not enough to grant him standing according to discourses suggesting that only neighbourhood residents could speak about gentrification, poverty, and other issues affecting the neighbourhood.

Many of the picketers explicitly understand this inside/outside dichotomy as a discourse that once made sense for the neighbourhood, but does so no longer. The construction of inside/outside privileges people who can afford to purchase condos in the area, at the same time as it is deployed as a tactic to marginalize the voices of people like Homeless Dave who have been displaced by the area. Moreover, this discourse reconstructs space in a different way than many activists, for whom home address is a pale reflection of spatiality, understand it. As one picketer explained,

> I feel it's a little bit odd to take this approach that, you live in this postal code, therefore, you're the only one who can comment on these issues, where, for what it's worth, I could buy a condo in this area and then I could claim to be part of the community. I feel as though it's more important to look at the values, and the things we share, and even the ways we understand the world, and so, although I live a 25-minute walk from here and, sure, I have a different relationship to this space because I am more privileged and I don't live in an SRO and I may hang out at Spartacus and stuff but that's not the same as, you know, living down here. But nonetheless, I think our relationships to space are more complex than, this is where I live, this is where I work. We have spaces we move through.[23]

This space is one that the activist exists both in and through; it has become a political space where she is at once an insider and an outsider, yet is also the space through which she can affect the other spaces of the city.

[23] Interview on May 9, 2013.

Protesters conceive the heterotopic nature of the Downtown Eastside as being of value and importance to the entire city; the Downtown Eastside is a space where counter-hegemonic discourses can take hold, and from there can emanate outward. One picketer, who specifically asked to be acknowledged as an able-bodied white male with a university education and the privilege to be able to choose to support the picket, explained,

> It's simple to say that the Downtown Eastside is where the action is, but I do see the value of what's occurred in the Downtown Eastside recently, in the last decade or so, especially around InSite, which I think is a breakthrough facility which has the possibility of transforming how we understand drug addiction in this country and is beginning to make the case against prohibition and for a more caring society, and a less policed society, and I also see this particular, these particular acts of gentrification as a direct assault on that by governments which do not want this programme to continue. InSite exists because of a series of judicial decisions and its current existence is not guaranteed but has been legally protected, but there are ways of getting rid of it, and one way of getting rid of it is surrounding it by condos and high end restaurants and pushing all of its clientele outside of Vancouver into Surrey, or Burnaby, or Richmond.[24]

For this picketer, opposing gentrification and displacement in the Downtown Eastside was both about protecting the people who live in the area and defending both the possibility and the right to use this heterotopic neighbourhood to affect change outside of this particular space. He suggested that the counter-hegemonic discourses being promoted in and through the Downtown Eastside have the potential to change Vancouver, to change Canada, and to influence society at large, yet that this can only happen if the space in and through which they are articulated is protected. Inverting the dominant view of the Downtown Eastside as a place that must be helped and transformed

[24] Interview on April 30, 2013.

both by the state and by the citizens of Vancouver, the picket draws attention to the ability of the Downtown Eastside to transform society for those living outside the area.

In a study of urban policy mobilities, McCann (2008, 2011) illustrates how the political struggles over drug policy in Vancouver, particularly those centring on InSite and the Downtown Eastside, were influenced by drug policy and politics in other cities and debated in terms of international points of reference. However, the lessons of InSite and the experiences of harm reduction policies in Vancouver themselves influence debates elsewhere, transforming Vancouver into a point of reference in political struggles over drug policy in other cities. The role that cities play as nodes in the flow of globally mobile urban policies transform local policymaking into an increasingly globalized process, albeit one highly influenced by territorial specificities and by uneven networks of flows (McCann & Ward, 2010). As such, local mobilization and community organising can have political influence beyond any borders or boundaries; rarely is change simply scaled up, but it is mobilized, mutated, and re-localized (Peck & Theodore, 2010). The heterotopic spaces of Vancouver can potentially influence urban rights well beyond any one city; political action in the Downtown Eastside, and the policy changes affected by this activism, take place within the context of an increasingly globalized urban politics (see Magnusson & Shaw, 2003).

While the Downtown Eastside, as a site of counter-hegemonic discourses, is positioned as a space for the transformation of society, it is also a space where activists see an opportunity to affect their own lives and neighbourhoods. One activist argued for rent control to help stem the displacement being caused by gentrification in the

Downtown Eastside, yet when speaking of the dearth of affordable housing in Vancouver, noted,

> A lot of the things that can be implemented to help out folks here will also help out me in the long run. Like, rent control on a unit-by-unit basis would be amazing, right, like so, I don't really believe change comes top down, but like bottom up, and so if people's situation improves here, then my situation will improve.[25]

The Downtown Eastside is not the only place in Vancouver affected by poverty, gentrification, and socio-economic exclusion – far from it – yet as a site of political mobilization, responses to poverty in this neighbourhood can be used as a basis to impact the entire city. Another protester stated, "I think we should be organizing across the city in different ways," yet that the Downtown Eastside was the only place in the city where real action was happening (echoing the language of the picketer concerned with InSite). He further noted, "…people are already there. I think you have to go where the action is. And the fact that it was pissing people off, to me, is a sign of success. If you're not pissing people off, you're doing something wrong, I think."[26]

The concern with 'pissing people off' represents a particular understanding of meaningful political action, one that can be read as opposition to the intentionally contained politics that are associated with a state-centric approach (Magnusson, 1996). An important part of element of the picket in front of PiDGiN is the struggle with, for, and against the state; the protesters have differing views on the role of government, but none believe that politics must necessarily be directed at the state apparatus. The state is viewed as an obstacle to political change; as one picketer explained, "A lot of people in the community, and across Vancouver, have come to a point where they no longer

[25] Interview on May 9, 2013.
[26] Interview on May 10, 2013.

believe that City Hall is interested in the Downtown Eastside."[27] Each of the protesters expressed a decidedly negative view of the municipal government, citing the urban redevelopment that was ongoing in the area despite clear opposition. The consultation processes had fostered even more resentment, leading local residents to complain that they were being asked for input and then having their views ignored. Referring to another redevelopment project, another picketer stated, "I went to the public hearing for that and stuff, you know, for council, and they just don't – you can say what you want, and they don't care, they don't listen."[28]

The mistrust both in the state apparatus and in formalized processes of political participation led protesters to find alternatives to political action aimed at the government; as one explained of her involvement with the picket,

> …in the past, they've tried to deal with the government and it doesn't really go anywhere, and the government makes promises and then breaks them, and as far as I'm concerned, as a person, I can go and talk to these officials, or I can actually go and directly intervene. To me it feels more immediate; I can see the effects I'm having, I know what's going on, and in some ways I feel like that's what they don't want you to do, because that's probably more effective than talking to the government. It's just a strategy that makes sense to me, like, businesses are part of the gentrification process, especially ones like that, and so picketing it, I mean, you're fighting the gentrifiers head on.[29]

Fighting gentrification involved taking a view of urban governance that implicated citizens and economic actors as well as the state apparatus, affecting political change outside of the normal avenues created to contain urban politics. This was seen as both more effective and more meaningful; one picketer explained that his involvement was not only about fighting gentrification, but also about creating spaces for real politics:

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[27] Interview on April 30, 2013.
[28] Interview on May 10, 2013.
[29] Interview on May 9, 2013.

> It's part of being out there and discovering what it is to transform space, too, and so, being there is part of the transformation of society, I think. And it helps us to connect with each other. It's a way of politicising – it's a way of community politicization. Politicising the culture, because the mainstream constantly takes us away from a deeper kind of politics, it's a very surface kind of politics. The standard discourse is, it hides what's really going on. The only way we're going to discover what's really going on is in the street, and in encounters with each other that make us confront our blindnesses, right?[30]

Importantly, cultural politicization requires spaces for different politics. The homogenization of the city, taking place as the dominant ideology is written upon a diverse and variegated landscape, is understood as part of the process of creating a mainstream politics that picketers argue privileges business interests and the capitalist classes. Anti-gentrification activism is not only about fighting the exclusion, displacement, and objectification of Downtown Eastside residents, it is also about preserving an alternative politics; as one protester stated, "To me, it's not just about gentrification, it's systemic."[31]

The heterotopic spaces that Foucault describes are outside of the hegemonic norm, other than the hegemonic spaces of the city. As such, the heterotopia provides not only an alternative, but also an escape from the hegemonic system of norms that governs society – although such escape may be forbidden, based on the particular restrictions on access to the heterotopic space in question. Within the somewhat contained space of the Downtown Eastside, politics are not contained; although political action is both influenced and guided by the vortex created by the state, the politics of the neighbourhood are so intrinsically bound up with and dependent upon social and economic relations that they mirror back to this vortex. The violence perpetrated by the

[30] Interview on May 10, 2013.
[31] Interview on May 10, 2013.

state apparatus upon the residents of the neighbourhood, as well as the artificial distinction between profit and politics, rendered the paleness of contained politics visible in the juxtaposition created by this mirror effect. In short, 'the system' becomes visible. As one protester explained, when discussing his reasons for coming to the Downtown Eastside to picket PiDGiN,

> I mean, you see the stuff that's happening in the city, and everywhere, and it's just like, what do you do, right? I mean, I was involved with Occupy before and, I don't know, you see how these things keep coming down, like, just the whole process. For me, it's a lot about the system, money, power. Making the entire cityscape inaccessible for everybody, basically, except for those with cash, right? And PiDGiN, I guess, is an obvious example of that. I mean, at first, yeah, I just started showing up, and then I kept going.[32]

PiDGiN was chosen because protesters feel it may be the most blatant example of the domination of space, particularly, in this case, space that had been appropriated by different groups for other types of politics and of social relations. The domination of an alternative sort of space, a space of alternative politics, highlights the role of money and power in constructing a system in which group interests are subordinate to the interests of 'those with cash.'

Urban redevelopment in the Downtown Eastside would allow the neighbourhood to be opened up for the production of capital, making it look much more like the rest of the city in form and in function. In the process, this counter-hegemonic space, a space that was initially created by the state through disinvestment and abandonment combined with the effects of segregation and the use of space for social ordering, would be retaken for 'normal' society; it would no longer be the space of exception left largely outside of and apart from the realm of hegemonic urban governance. That is not to say that the

[32] Interview on May 10, 2013.

Downtown Eastside is or was ever free from governance by the state apparatus – the heavy police presence alone belies that myth – but simply that it has functioned as an exception to neoliberal urbanism. Although state authorities were present, both the investment and the production of private capital were largely absent, allowing the neighbourhood to develop – and to be diverted – as a counter-hegemonic space. The challenge that falls to activists and social movements in the Downtown Eastside is how to fight injustices without transforming the neighbourhood into a hegemonic space, and while fighting the incursion of hegemonic norms into the space, in order to retain it as something other to the neoliberal city. In the current context, a common response to poverty and marginalization present is the idea that job creation is a remedy,[33] and that full employment amounting to "the total mobilization of labour power" (Marcuse, 1998, p. 82)[34] is a panacea – importantly, one designed to further contribute to the greatness of the competitive city. Full employment would, in theory, also mitigate the need for social housing, expanding the base of renters participating in the for-profit housing market. However, addressing poverty and unemployment in this manner merely substitutes one injustice for another; activists point to the low wages offered by restaurants such as PiDGiN and in the other jobs created in the neighbourhood as a result of gentrification. Minimum wage and employment that leaves people below the poverty line, it seems, is considered good enough for the Downtown Eastside; in a different neighbourhood,

[33] Job creation and efforts toward full employment are among the explicit ideals of the economic and social development approach that has largely been positioned as a solution to localized poverty in the Vancouver Agreement, as well as in other government policy relating to the Downtown Eastside (Mason, 2007).
[34] One of the picketers used this quote; I am grateful to him for sharing this insight with me.

poverty wages would be capitalist exploitation of labour rather than discursively constructed as charity offered by well-meaning business owners.

According to the PiDGiN website (2013), "Upon opening we have employed 2 DTES residents, local recycling, window washing, Blue Shell for linens and interior cleaning and will continue to hire within the neighbourhood wherever we can." This is part of the restaurant's commitment to social responsibility, a central tenet of their social justice initiatives. However, protesters also view this commitment as a discursive tactic deployed to attract diners to the neighbourhood, and as an important component of PiDGiN's advertising campaign. The employment created for local residents were jobs washing dishes, viewed by the picketers as more exploitative than emancipatory; they see such jobs as nothing more than a publicity stunt to downplay the damage to the neighbourhood caused by the restaurant. If the relationship of the state apparatus to the residents of the Downtown Eastside is viewed as one of violence, then so too must be the relations of production and of the capitalist accumulation of wealth in the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, the neoliberal governmentality that normalizes these relations renders a space of exception to this hegemonic norm problematic; rewriting the Downtown Eastside as a social justice zone is not only an attempt to temper the violence of the state, but also to do so without forcing the violent norms of capitalist relations of production onto those who are already disproportionately harmed by them, and who would be disproportionately exploited. This ideology becomes visible in conversation with the politics of the picket in front of PiDGiN; as one picketer observed,

> It's been interesting, you learn how to, you start to pick up on the common themes or the common excuses people have, how they rationalize eating there, like, oh, he's providing jobs, or you should get a job, lots to do with jobs. It's quite intense. Like people, actually, at

> this point, most of the people you have going there, because of all the news coverage, I would call them ideological eaters. Like, they're eating there because they sincerely believe that the way to fix the Downtown Eastside is to move wealthier people in, which is totally backwards in my mind, and also way too flattering to rich people.[35]

3.6 Access and Exclusion

The struggle to preserve the Downtown Eastside as a counter-hegemonic space involves a fight to transform it into a supportive and accessible community for those who are marginalized within the neoliberal city, yet creating such a space requires that the Downtown Eastside not be accessible to all. If the area is understood as a heterotopic space, it then cannot be viewed as the common property of urban dwellers; as Foucault (1986, p. 26) notes, "Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place." The Downtown Eastside has long constituted a place where low-income people, and particularly those dealing with mental illnesses, substance addictions, and the legacy of the residential school system in Canada, have been spatially segregated. Although residents enjoy the formal freedom of movement, the private control of public space, combined with spatially uneven policing and social service provision, have contributed to both the intentional creation of the neighbourhood as an other space and the spatial management of the people within it.

Residents of the Downtown Eastside face a certain amount of ghettoization stemming from their lack of economic access to other spaces in Vancouver; displacement from this still relatively affordable neighbourhood in most cases amounts to displacement

[35] Interview on May 9, 2013.

from the municipality entirely. Those who are forced out of the neighbourhood are regularly pushed out to Surrey or beyond, both a fear and a reality that has been enshrined in the lyrics to "Saltydarity for Pickle".[36] The high cost of land in the urban core of Vancouver, the policy focus on developing the city into a financial, management, and creative centre of an emerging world city, and attitudes commonly associated with NIMBY-ism among urban residents have all contributed to newer social housing developments being far removed from the downtown areas of the city (Hutton, 2011). However, the activists picketing PiDGiN are regularly accused of creating an exclusionary space, akin to a gated community for the poor; their opposition to urban redevelopment and to the rewriting of the landscape through the investment of capital has also been associated with NIMBY attitudes. Attempts to prevent diners from entering PiDGiN, as well as antagonism towards condominium construction and purchase and to other gentrifying businesses and their customers, are constructed as attempts to limit urban dwellers' freedom of mobility and to exclude new residents from moving to the Downtown Eastside.

While picketers perceive the NIMBY label attached to their protests as being somewhat ironic, they are nonetheless attempting to determine the specific system of opening and closing that allows access to the neighbourhood; this system is meant to be penetrable, yet also exclusionary. It is not people or groups that are to be excluded, but rather ideologies. At the same time that the picketers, by creating solidarity across geographic divisions, are challenging the inside/outside dichotomy associated with discourses of neighbourhood residence and the tactics of divide-and-rule these discourses

[36] "Is there aught we hold in common with the greedy parasite,/Who would push us out to Surrey and would crush us with his might?"

facilitate, they are also challenging the ideologies that are introduced to the neighbourhood both through bodies and through the investment of capital. Given the dominance of the ideologies the picketers wish to exclude, creating the Downtown Eastside as something other than a public space is necessary in order to preserve it as a counter-hegemonic space and as a mirror that can be held up to the neoliberal city.

The picketers with whom I spoke all shun the dominance of capital, both for the ability that people with capital have to rewrite the landscape of the city and for the limits that market dominance places upon the spatiality of neighbourhood residents. However, they also shun the people who would commodify poverty, whether these people view the poor from a distance through the wall of glass that used to look out onto Pigeon Park or share spaces with the poor at Save On Meats. This commodification of poverty transforms the Downtown Eastside into a panoptic space; the bodies that engage in voyeurism and that transform marginalized residents into objects through the deployment of the disciplinary gaze become the subjects of protest. Despite this attempted exclusion, non-residents with higher income than locals are welcomed when they join the protesters on the picket lines, so long as they too fight the encroachment of the dominant ideology on this other space. Those who would enter the Downtown Eastside for adventure or for encounter with the poor, though, face the same vigorous opposition with which business owners must contend. One picketer noted that a major reason so many people came together to protest this restaurant was, simply, that "Downtown Eastside residents don't like being treated like zoo animals."[37] Another noted of the people coming into the neighbourhood, "One thing that isn't actually getting articulated very much is, I do think

[37] Panel on May 25, 2013.

there's a very racist element to the gentrification that's happening." Pointing out that the newcomers to the neighbourhood are mostly white people of European descent who are attempting to dominate space associated with Indigenous and other non-white communities and to commodify the encounters with these othered people, she added,

> Sometimes I wonder if you started calling the people who are moving into the area and going to these restaurants a bunch of racists, if that would have an effect. People don't seem to understand racism unless someone comes riding in on a horse with a hood.[38]

Nevertheless, she and each of the other picketers with whom I spoke acknowledged that the majority of the people standing on the picket line were themselves white. Working to exclude these people from moving into the Downtown Eastside was not simply an attempt to exclude white bodies, but rather a rejection of the systemic racism embedded in the hegemonic mode of capitalist relations.

Despite serving as counter-hegemonic spaces, neither the picket in front of PiDGiN nor the Downtown Eastside as a neighbourhood can be identified as belonging to an alternate ideology. Indeed, the protesters described tensions between socialists and anarchists, and even among those that shared ideological viewpoints, there were different perceptions of tactics; individual picketers, for example, disagreed as to whether they should be attempting to foster interaction between the protesters and the restaurant customers or should be protecting their space exclusively for marginalized viewpoints by refusing to engage with any people who were reiterating dominant discourses. Nevertheless, the picketers did not need to share the same viewpoints; they could successfully construct solidarity around their opposition to dominant ideologies while retaining their different views. Importantly, the picket line and the neighbourhood as a

[38] Interview on May 9, 2013.

whole were seen as spaces where solidarity could be built, outside of and against the 'system'. While critics of the protests argued that the picketers did not have a coherent message, this lack of consensus was also a strength. The picket became a place of opposition to the dominant ideology, yet one that allowed difference; those who opposed hegemonic norms did not have to bow to a coherent system of counter-hegemonic norms in order to join the protests. As such, picketers engage in processes of building solidarity and of creating collective strategies while retaining a sort of productive agonism, in the vein of Laclau and Mouffe (2001).[39] The articulation of counter-hegemonic discourses on the picket line itself constructs the system of opening and closing that Foucault (1986) suggests is necessary to heterotopic spaces; articulation, then, allows the production of an inside and an outside. The inside/outside produced through the articulation of counter-hegemonic discourses is different from the geographically bound dichotomies of either a ghetto or a gated community – the same dichotomies used as a tactic of divide-and-rule.

Across the street from the picket line, the locals who congregate in Pigeon Park are predominantly Indigenous; the picket line, meanwhile, is largely white. Each of the protesters with whom I spoke was aware of, and sensitive to, this fact, and fearful of usurping the voices of the disproportionately non-white residents who were most profoundly affected by gentrification. However, they saw PiDGiN as a white space encroaching upon the Indigenous space that had been carved out across the street and controlling it through the creation of a panoptic landscape; as such, the white picketers

[39] Laclau and Mouffe (2001; see also Mouffe, 2000) counterpose agonistic politics against politics that require the achievement of consensus, arguing that consensus-based politics necessarily either exclude or repress difference. They find politics in antagonism, and democracy in agonistic spaces where differences can be confronted and where solidarity and collective action can be achieved *without* reconciliation.

who were protesting this white space were doing so as an act of opposing the hegemonic culture that privileged themselves and their bodies while subjecting and objectifying the Indigenous people across the street. At the same time, they were also aware that the marginalized were actively excluded from taking part in the picket, pointing out to me the "privilege surrounding being able to picket."[40]

One picketer expressed her discomfort with the way that picketers who looked as though they were from the neighbourhood, usually because they were perceived as non-white, were disproportionately targeted for harassment by police officers, adding

> it's also strange too, being at the picket, a lot of the picketers are white Europeans, and because the strategy is so forward and aggressive, and a lot of the people in the neighbourhood can't participate in the same way, because, like, based on how the cops treat people in this neighbourhood, that would be putting them in a lot more danger. So, the picket's good, but there have to be other ways of resisting in the neighbourhood.[41]

Another picketer explained,

> One of the criticisms of the picket, which I don't think is valid in the least, is that we are not sufficiently representative of the Downtown Eastside residents, I mean, there are a number of Downtown Eastside residents that are very active, but it is a – putting yourself on the picket line is an extremely vulnerable position to take. You're putting yourself in the public eye; you're putting yourself in a position where you're being directly monitored by the police, both on and off the picket. It is a tactic which necessarily excludes the participation of a lot of the local residents who are already extremely vulnerable, have a history of being targeted and harassed by the police, and simply can't be seen. So there's a huge invisible group of protesters, not totally invisible, but another reason why the picket as a space is great because people can pass by and affirm their support without being seen as being associated with it. So, there's a huge amount of Downtown Eastside residents that are in that exact position. There's been hundreds and hundreds that have passed by the picket to congratulate us, to thank us, to bless us, and then leave because they can't be seen there because it's simply too

[40] Interview on April 30, 2013.
[41] Interview on May 9, 2013.

> dangerous a space. It's a problem with the picket because we do need points of participation that are safer, but we're not the only people in town. We're not the only action. So, it's not a criticism I consider valid. It's hard for people at the picket, observers of the picket, especially media observers or diners, it doesn't even enter their mind that there's a large group of invisible supporters, but they are necessarily invisible.[42]

By putting their bodies in front of PiDGiN in place of those who could not, the picketers could attempt to serve as proxies for those who were necessarily invisible. However, heavy and uneven policing in the Downtown Eastside create the area as a political space only for those who feel safe participating in political action in the first place; as a site of counter-hegemonic discourses, the place 'where the action is', it is a space where a 'deeper kind of politics' can be created – yet the mechanisms of discipline at work in the Downtown Eastside work to exclude the already marginalized from these politics.

As a mirror on the hegemonic neoliberal urbanism that is so normalized throughout Vancouver, the Downtown Eastside is a space where those who would challenge this hegemony can come together and create politics – the kind of politics not allowed in the spaces offered up by the state for political action. However, while the specificities of this other space make the distinctions between economy, society, and politics appear artificial, and allow for the creation of a politics that addresses the entwined apparatus of the state and the market, vulnerable people nevertheless excluded from political action through processes by which subjected bodies are rendered excludable. Politics in the Downtown Eastside are clearly important to the transformation of city and society, but the question still remains whose space it is. Who gets to participate in these politics? By safeguarding this other space as an alternative to neoliberal urbanism, as an exception that can be read as a heterotopic space, the picketers

[42] Interview on April 30, 2013.

in front of PiDGiN and other activists in the area can at once fight the injustices in the area and make visible the otherwise dominant ideologies that are otherwise normalized, yet are implicated in creating the injustices in the Downtown Eastside. However, while the Downtown Eastside is important as a political space, the inequalities of access to these politics compare with the inequalities of social citizenship. The residents who are objectified and subjected have a far more difficult time accessing the politics in spaces that are being claimed in the streets and outside the state apparatus – although these spaces are necessary to an alternate politics, they do not provide a solution to containment, nor an answer to the limitations that have been placed upon political engagement.

Conclusion

The protests in front of PiDGiN are a response to the injustices in the Downtown Eastside, and to the violence perpetrated on the people resident. The violence and oppression that low-income and marginalized residents experience in the area can be traced to multiple sources, from the seeming abandonment of the people by the state to the commodification of poverty by some business owners in the area and the poverty tourism that objectifies and subjects the othered residents. As such, any attempt to respond to injustice and to oppression can identify multiple possible targets for political action – and, clearly, they do. While the picket is a response, it is clearly not an answer; however, as only one political action in an already very politicized neighbourhood, it helps to draw attention to the intertwined nature of the state and the market, and attempts to hold responsible the people who participate in the commodification of poverty and who, even unintentionally, participate in the re-regulation of urban life for residents in the area. Whether it is successful as a political action remains to be seen, yet the myriad goals include drawing attention to the marginalization and objectification of local residents associated with restaurant gentrification, as well as problematising the artificial distinctions between politics, economy, and society – these goals, it seems, are being facilitated even if social housing is not built and restaurant gentrification continues to occur. The media attention surrounding the PiDGiN picket, much of it negative, casts doubt on the effects of the protest; the concerns of activists and residents are not necessarily represented in the media, while their opposition to a single restaurant is. Nevertheless, the protests have galvanized opposition in the area and become an important rallying point for those who would oppose neoliberal urban redevelopment, not

only for the Downtown Eastside, but also for the city as a whole and as a means of changing the much larger society.

The picket in front of PiDGiN, and, more broadly, the responses to the commodification of poverty and the ongoing redevelopment of the Downtown Eastside result from residents and activists being fed up with what they perceive as ongoing failures of political action aimed at the state. However, as the protesters fight to keep the Downtown Eastside as something other to hegemonic society and to the neoliberal landscape of Vancouver, the picket in front of PiDGiN highlights how other spaces, heterotopic spaces, make visible what might otherwise be normal. In doing so, spaces like the Downtown Eastside become focal points for political action both centred on these spaces and working through these spaces to affect change well beyond. These spaces do not themselves change politics, but they serve as spaces in and through which political mobilization can be used to alter both the landscape and the ideology of surrounding urban spaces. The visibility of injustice in the Downtown Eastside perverts what has been normalized in other landscapes; not only do such spaces of injustice motivate political action, the deviant and transgressive qualities of heterotopic spaces helps to foster a different sort of politics. Nevertheless, despite resistance to gentrification and urban redevelopment, the incursion of capital into the area continues unabated. New restaurants are planned for the area, as are new condominiums and other projects that are rewriting the landscape. The picket as a method of resistance to neoliberal urbanism has not (at least yet) proven effective in slowing urban redevelopment, although it has forcibly drawn attention to the role of spaces of consumption in the re-regulation of the urban

everyday for residents of the Downtown Eastside, as well as for diners who come from outside the neighbourhood.

As I finish writing this thesis, another protest has just begun: a picket has been established in front of Cuchillo, a brand new restaurant that has opened some three blocks from PiDGiN. East of this current frontier, Cuchillo is even deeper into the Oppenheimer area, appearing to be among yet another new vanguard in the encroaching restaurant gentrification. An upscale Latin American restaurant, located on the ground floor of an SRO hotel that houses some of the poorest residents of the Downtown Eastside, Cuchillo caters to young, hip, and relatively wealthy urban-dwellers as its target market. Meanwhile, anti-gentrification activists are loudly decrying the restaurant for serving fourteen-dollar tacos on the ground floor of an SRO, and for inviting diners to experience the excitement and adventure of eating in the 'dangerous' Downtown Eastside when they enjoy tapas and cocktails (and, of course, tacos). The protesters have pledged to set up a picket line, exactly the same as the picket line in front of PiDGiN. This tactic, confusing as it may seem, has caught on, clearly resonating with activists and residents in the neighbourhood. The role that restaurants like Cuchillo, and PiDGiN, and even Save On Meats play in re-regulating urban life for the residents of the Downtown Eastside, and in altering the landscapes of both the real and imagined spaces in this neighbourhood, make them a target for political action aimed at contesting neoliberal urban governance; moreover, the role of the Downtown Eastside as a heterotopic space that renders this governance visible continues to draw protesters and picket lines aimed at changing much more than restaurant menus. Picketing gentrifying restaurants is a single response to a specific moment in politics and in governance, and is a response that can only be

understood as an attempt to draw attention to this moment and show it for what it is to those who experience it.

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