

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Finding Community in the Midst of Chaos: The Social Construction of Calgary's Mission  
Area

By

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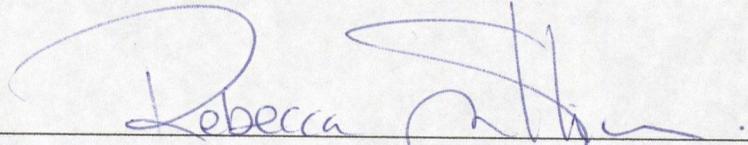
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Finding Community in the Midst of Chaos: The Social Construction of Calgary's Mission Area" submitted by Michelle Margeret Coyne in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication Studies.



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## **Abstract**

This thesis studies one inner city Calgary neighbourhood, Mission, using an autoethnographic approach. Theoretical understandings of gentrification from multiple disciplines are drawn upon to provide context to the neighbourhood and explain developmental processes. Rooted in subcultural and spatial studies, outlined here is the way local renters adapt to ongoing processes of gentrification in order to maintain a symbolic sense of identity and community within the area. Major themes addressed include how identity is linked by residents to the community, how this identity is used to resist dominant cultural assumptions of Calgary and how movement through space is used as a visual, symbolic method of claiming ownership. In addition, this movement through space is discussed as a means of enacting community identity and embodying dissent to dominant ideologies. Developed is a discussion of how local residents respond to and counteract developmental processes over which they have no control.

## Acknowledgements

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The complexity of **community** thus relates to the difficult interaction between the tendencies originally distinguished in the historical development: on the one hand the sense of direct common concern; on the other hand the materialization of various forms of common organization, which may or may not adequately express this. **Community** can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships. What is most important, perhaps, is that unlike all other terms of social organization (*state, nation, society, etc.*) it seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term.

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(Raymond Williams,

The nature of community, as discussed by Raymond Williams, is complex and in many ways hard to nail down. Beyond the warmly persuasive meaning of community lies the challenge of identifying how a given community functions and exists. While many scholars and non-scholars alike have discussed and debated the nature of community, this sense of belonging, of existing communally, in some way, affects all our lives. For myself, community is very much determined by the neighbourhood I live in, Mission, Calgary, and I take here a study of this community as a direct common concern. For many residents of Mission, one defining social factor contributing to their community identity is the constantly changing nature of the physical neighbourhood. As buildings are torn down and condominium complexes built to replace them, this changing landscape unavoidably affects the nature of the physical area and, subsequently, its inhabitants.

Yet, this neighbourhood, through social construction, remains somewhat constant. Residents and business owners who choose to stay, despite rising costs and constant construction, constitute a community that remains meaningful and consistently evolves to

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accommodate local physical and economic changes beyond individual control. This thesis seeks to uncover first, why and how this community identity is socially constructed, and second to create a picture of the community, the area through the eyes of those most devoted to it. Clearly, I am one of these members of the community. For the greater part of my life, I have lived within a twenty-block radius of my current residence and the importance of the neighbourhood has found its way into my professional, as well as personal work. The thesis you are reading is in many ways a result of my fondness for my area and my identity as a long-term resident. I use the term identity to make clear that my role in this neighbourhood is not anonymous or simply convenient, but I, like the residents I have spoken to in the course of this research, define myself partially through choosing to make my home in the area.

Many scholars from disciplines as diverse as geography, sociology, philosophy, and urban studies, among others, have questioned the nature of the city and urban space. One area of interest to these studies has been the process of gentrification, focused on identifying the patterns of people moving in and out of an area and the economic reasons and effects of this process on local residents. What is missing in so many of these studies, which I will discuss in more detail in a future chapter, is the human experience of this process. Simply put, how does it feel to be in a vulnerable position in a neighbourhood going through heavy development? How does an individual deal with constant spatial change yet continue to maintain their neighbourhood and community identity?

As is evident from the proliferation of theorizing about urban space over the last century, the physical space we live in not only defines us, but we likewise define it.

Whether it is in specific living spaces that we design, or the larger urban spaces we use, the importance of space in our lives cannot be denied. What I seek to uncover here is the specific way the spatial reality of an urban neighbourhood interacts with local residents allowing them to create personal, and shared, meaning. Specifically, the case of Mission needs to be interrogated in order to understand not only why this neighbourhood continues to have an affect on the people who live here, and those who choose to visit, but also to understand why people stay. Rationally, it seems like an odd choice to remain in a physical space that has become threatening and difficult to live in due to the ongoing physical changes and upheaval resulting from the demolition/construction cycle. Yet, people do stay and maintain a strong allegiance to a community they cannot really control. This study therefore aims to address these issues through a communications approach rooted in subcultural studies and spatial philosophies to understand the techniques and means with which citizens construct a social meaning of their neighbourhood in response to a constantly changing physical environment.

During the research process, local residents, living in rental property have been consulted on their experiences in, and understandings of, the Mission community for the purpose of uncovering the role that social constructions of the physical space have on continued community membership. This study uncovers the symbolic and discursive techniques that these residents use to claim the physical place of their neighbourhood as their own. These symbolic techniques of course include words, as is evident from the use of interviews with participants, but also the less obviously accessible means of claiming space through use. It will become clearer that this use is in fact the symbolic

communication tool employed most successfully in maintaining the nature and emotional content of the neighbourhood.

Clearly, this study is also influenced and facilitated by my own personal identity within the neighbourhood. My identity as resident and participant in the community does not allow me to avoid speaking to my personal experience in addressing the research questions at the core of this study. This is not to say that all research is not personal, but rather that the use of an autoethnography allows me to access knowledge and understanding of the topic in a way other methods of investigation could not. Simply put, if it were not for my own identity being wrapped up in the neighbourhood, I would not be doing this work and feel that the personal experience I bring also allows me to contribute a unique and specific understanding to this thesis. While I could do this study without directly commenting on my life, to do so would limit my ability to identify the problems at the heart of the question, but also be unethical in the fact that objectivity, in any way, is not possible. So rather than attempt to take myself out of the research question, the only way to truly be honest is to be overtly involved.

In this interest, a brief outline of my own research development is necessary. Prior to beginning this project, I had obviously been personally interested in the changes occurring in Calgary's downtown neighbourhood, Mission. The area has been subject to developmental investment, demolition of local landmarks and significant condominium construction, and the impact of this on the local community became a question that I felt needed and deserved an answer. Ultimately, my original goal was to understand a) how this process could be explained and b) why local activism was so limited in response to the changes. In pursuit of these answers, the general literature on gentrification was

accessed and it became clear that the questions I had asked and the scholarship I looked to for answers was not sufficient to illuminate the phenomenon I was really interested in. My interest was not specifically with gentrification, but rather about space and how ownership of public spaces is claimed, rather than bought. The result, for now, is this exploration which sets up a theoretical framework that will allow future research to explore the whys and how's of community identity construction and how that is influenced by, and also influences, urban changes generally recognized as gentrification.

Chapter 2 will detail my methodological framework and outline the way in which an autoethnographic study has been utilized for this research. By discussing the general use of this method of study it becomes possible to understand both the framing techniques I employed in speaking with residents and how I have gone about drawing analytic conclusions from interviews with local participants. In addition, the benefits and drawbacks of this method of research are discussed and an introduction to my participants included.

Chapter 3 will discuss the way gentrification has generally been treated by scholars from geography, sociology and critical or cultural studies. This introductory survey will provide context to the economic conditions that have resulted in the current state of Mission, among many other North American inner city neighbourhoods. However, this thesis does not attempt to understand why and how gentrification occurs, but rather to understand the human aspect of this process. As will be outlined in the literature review chapter, the economic or social reasoning of this process is deeply imbedded in the situation that exists within Mission, but this is not the sole purpose of this thesis. Rather, by understanding the way that gentrification occurs, according to the

theorists outlined in this chapter, it is possible to identify the gap left for a study such as mine. The concept and reality of gentrification limits the ways in which this community can express itself and plays into the common concerns of my participants. By understanding this scholarship first, it becomes possible to build a more individually focused theoretical construct that understands not only gentrification, but also how a community that has gone through, and is still going through gentrification can express itself and construct its own identity.

Building on this preliminary understanding of gentrification as a basis for understanding how Mission relates to larger economic realities, it is then possible to begin understanding a social and economic process from a specific set of voices living within it. Chapter 4 will outline this theoretical construct and focus on understanding spatial existence through subcultural theory and, what I have termed, spatial philosophy. These areas can then be used to address the specific experience of the participants in this study and how they go about their daily lives and continuously construct their sense of community in an ever-changing physical environment.

Chapter 5 assesses first the subculture of Mission and how it functions in the larger Calgary context. Separated into four sections, issues of physical space, both explicit and implicit uses of the Mission space and resident understandings of it will be outlined. This understanding will also lead to a complex picture of the community and discuss the symbolic methods used by residents to define and co-construct meaning in this neighbourhood. Further, discussions of public space and people moving in space will be included to uncover the larger group dynamics and movement in space that allows

for residents and visitors to understand Mission as an emblematic example of an inner city neighbourhood, rather than simply a space to reside within.

Chapter 6 will summarize the findings of this research and outline some of the further questions that have been raised by this process. These questions will provide an opportunity to interrogate both this study and the directions with which it can be taken by future scholarship.

### **Limitations and Boundaries to this Study**

... an analysis can obscure as much as it can illuminate... When discussing a city – which consists of not merely the physical environment but also social, symbolic, and even personal aspects – one should always remember that one deals with abstractions, representations, ideal types, slices of the city. The selections that are made in these representations cannot be neutral or functional; they are political and personal.

(Dijkstra, 5)

Dijkstra's comment demonstrates the challenges of any theoretical and research approach to a given city space. Here, while I would ideally be able to tell the entire story of Mission, that project is too expansive and complicated to complete in a study of this length. Instead, this thesis explicates a specific temporal understanding of Mission through the eyes and words of a set group of people. Issues dealing with diverse gender, sexual and racial identities are not explored in as much detail as I would have liked in the interest of pursuing an understanding of the community group represented here as a whole. The way my participants move through, use and socially construct their space is of utmost importance and this focus in some ways blurs the lines between contributing identities. As well, the partial invisibility of racial, sexual and gender identities also tells its own story about the community. It was not simply my framing questions that

removed these issues from the study, but in many ways residents did not see, specifically gender, as playing a role in their community.

Further, this study has a unique relationship to traditional studies of urban spaces across the borders of academic discipline. It is necessary to move beyond purely communication scholarship in order to understand city space, however this thesis is a communication study. Therefore, while planning documents and practices, for example, are of course important to the development of urban space and the subsequent experience of it, these practices and assumptions are very much outside the boundaries of this study. In many ways, the importance of privileging the voices of my participants has precluded the use of planning theories simply because they invariably do not represent personal lives and instead become an approximation of human experience. As well, critical geography and sociology studies have been consulted, but my research focus has been on making use of theory in these areas that share the concerns of communication studies on shared meaning making and human experience. By focusing on the spatial philosophies multiple disciplines draw upon and using a subcultural framework I have the opportunity to understand distinct communicative practices that occur in daily life.

In addition, gentrification itself is rooted in an assumption that broad economic and class differences exist for the persons who are either displaced, or fill the role of displacer. However, the economic reality of Mission is one that does not represent these massive class differences and the presumption of economic disadvantage. While the focus of much gentrification research is on displacement of low-income earners, minority groups and the economic impacts of uneven development, my participants do not represent those groups. The nature of the neighbourhood and its gentrified history has

already rendered extreme low-income earners incapable of living in the area. So, the people I spoke to, and about, do not face such an extreme economic disadvantage, but rather maintain access to the neighbourhood.

The choice of an autoethnographic approach to the topic also raises a limitation in the selection of participants. While being completely aware, and in fact celebrating, that my experience and identity has shaded every aspect of this study, I have also been careful to try to find participants who do not necessarily resemble me. However, despite my original concern and efforts, I have discovered those that were drawn to my study and responded to my calls for participants are like me. In many ways, those of us who are deeply involved and committed to the neighbourhood share a specific approach to our small world that allows this thesis to draw conclusions regarding how we go about making and claiming this neighbourhood as our own. This commonality, in the end, is beneficial and has resulted in my ability to see that the community functions as a subculture rooted in local residents sharing common concerns regarding the neighbourhood and community.

### **Mission: A Short History and Social Context**

Mission is an inner city neighbourhood in Calgary, Alberta that was populated before Calgary had a large enough population for city designation. While the actual area of the neighbourhood is designated over a roughly twenty-block radius, its popularity and local shopping and restaurants make it a destination area for people from all over Calgary. It is bordered by the shopping streets of 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue, to the North and 4<sup>th</sup> Street to the West and the Elbow River to the East and South. To the West of 4<sup>th</sup> Street is

Mission's companion neighbourhood, Cliff-Bungalow, with which a common community association is shared. The relationship between the two communities is close and the proximity and small size of both neighbourhoods has led to the necessity of understanding them as linked in order to provide support and protection for the area. However, Cliff-Bungalow has suffered far less from development pressures than Mission and while some construction has occurred to the west, new development continues to be focused on the Mission side of 4<sup>th</sup> Street.

Mission's prime location and growing number of high-end condominiums has also made it an increasingly popular neighbourhood evident through the rising population, property taxes and property costs. While traditionally a primarily rental area (still maintaining a 79% rental rate according to the May/June 2004 community newsletter), the growing popularity of the area, the proliferation of construction and development and increasing costs are driving lower income residents out at faster and faster rates. In fact, at the time of writing, no less than seven buildings (including condo complexes, high rise rental locations and a replacement for the historic St. Mary's School<sup>1</sup>) are under construction in the neighbourhood's small geographical area. This does not include the many that are planned for the near future, but rather developments in the active construction stage.

In addition to this general outline of the area, a discussion of one local coffee shop is necessary. The Planet, originally The Roasterie, has existed on 4<sup>th</sup> Street between 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue for the last 15 years. As a local independent shop, it has provided a

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<sup>1</sup> St. Mary's School was one of the historic buildings in the area dating back to 1905 and it was under heavy local protest that the original was torn down with the reasoning of the cost of retrofitting the school for current use was more costly than rebuilding. The Catholic School Board promised to rebuild the building very much like the original, but that is yet to be seen.

social opportunity and shared community space during that time and in fact, its importance to my participants is mentioned numerous times during this study. The shop is fronted by glass windows that face 4<sup>th</sup> Street and provides inside seating for approximately forty people. As well, the Planet has provided exhibition space for a number of artists throughout its history and currently a sampling of a local photographer's work dominates the walls inside. These photographs primarily represent city areas, with a focus on the people and physical spaces in Mission.

Historically, Mission was known as Rouleauville and settled by French-Catholic missionaries<sup>2</sup> in 1875, and officially named in 1884 for two brothers, Charles and Edward Rouleau, due to their influence in the local missionary community. The location was chosen in response to the use of First Nations people of the area for hunting and travelling, making it ideal for the goals of early settlers. The area is still physically influenced by this early Catholic missionary history as the original church, parish hall, hospital and convent (all built between 1875 and 1905) still stand. In addition, during this time, the arrival of the CPR brought with it heavy settlement of company employees in Cliff-Bungalow.

In 1907, Rouleauville and Cliff Bungalow were both annexed by the City of Calgary and the east section re-named Mission, obviously recognizing the areas early history. This time period also saw a tremendous building boom in both areas as the population increased and a strong economy encouraged development at an increased rate. However, as with all booms in Calgary, this one came to a close in the late teens and the building of single-family homes slowed down, as new construction became focused on

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<sup>2</sup> This missionary history is well documented in the work of Ness and the Cliff-Bungalow-Mission community website (<http://www.cliffbungalowmission.ca/>).

tenement buildings<sup>3</sup>. However, over the next hundred years, the area went through a series of subsequent building booms that are now evident in the wide variety of building stock in the area.

The most recent of building booms is occurring now and this traditional housing stock is increasingly torn down and replaced with new condominium complexes. Despite being one of the city's oldest neighbourhoods, the area is challenged by the Alberta Historical Act<sup>4</sup> to make a claim to heritage status. The triad focus of heritage planning is a combination of architectural and historical significance and building context. As it stands, a historically working class neighbourhood does not garner the same importance as more impressive mansions and government buildings. This is changing as heritage designation rules are reconsidered at the federal, provincial and municipal levels, however these changes may occur too late to protect Mission's older buildings. This paired with the importance of owner cooperation in designating heritage buildings provides challenges to preservationists as they not only have to prove the value of the building itself, but must also ensure that the building owner will support designation.

Beyond this, the local community board is deeply involved in finding other ways to ensure that the area is protected and local concerns considered. While Mission and Cliff Bungalow share a community board, the Mission Area Redevelopment Plan (ARP) was brought up for review four years ago and has been under ongoing revisions since. Cliff Bungalow, however, has had an ARP for far longer and has benefited from the protection it provides and construction has subsequently been focused on the Mission

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<sup>3</sup> According to Melnyk, the dangers of apartment living were of utmost concern for municipal powers. The ideal of single-family dwellings was linked with a perception that renters were more likely to be criminal and the existence of apartment buildings would prove the moral undoing of the city.

<sup>4</sup> More information regarding Alberta Heritage Resources and Designation is available at [http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/preserving/heritage/Site\\_Map/index.asp](http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/preserving/heritage/Site_Map/index.asp)

side of 4<sup>th</sup> Street. Combined with this local context, is a city environment that is deeply invested in supporting ongoing construction and development.

Calgary has long based its identity in the big business and corporate head quarters that have dominated local economic market forces. Calgary and Alberta are both well known as conservative and the focus on development results in more corporate space while ignoring cultural or social concerns. Paired with this is a lack of provincial spending on social issues and services that have increasingly, since Ralph Klein entered office in the early 1990s, separated the haves and the have-nots. Linked to this is an immense amount of sprawl that has resulted in much local concern over the damaging effects of constant growth. Despite the ample space for urban sprawl that Alberta has, new initiatives have come into play focusing on increasing density in the inner city. There are obvious drawbacks to this as the inner city as a whole has been subject to mass development and the quality of life issues that go with it, plus increased pressure on local infrastructures. The road system is not designed for heavy traffic and with more people and their cars moving into the area, added to the already high numbers of suburban commuters, the city increasingly faces concerns over local roadways.

Beyond these pressures are of course social environments that are constantly changing and require residents to address and adapt to new socio-cultural realities at increasing rates. In the fall of 2004, as this thesis is being completed, the Mission-Cliff Bungalow Community Association has held two meetings focused on construction and quality of life. The first meeting, advertised with the title "Construction Blues" (September 20, 2004), brought local residents together to speak about their various concerns. The concerns raised focused on noise, sidewalk closure, inconsiderate

developers and crime occurring in buildings slated for demolition and unsupervised construction sites, but perceptibly avoided discussion of the need for community and social life protections. As well, those who attended were almost exclusively local property owners and these concerns, while also effecting renters, do not cover the wide variety of social changes that will be the unavoidable result of gentrification in the area.

The second meeting was a debate of aldermanic candidates (October 6, 2004) that again focused on construction and quality of life and the issues raised were much the same as the “Construction Blues” meeting. Clearly still missing was attention to how people can protect their social communities, in addition to their physical space, beyond the bureaucratic frameworks in place. It also leads to the unique perspective held by renters who clearly do not feel that local bureaucracy is accessible, or suits their needs. This study will then look at how these renters are dealing with the changes occurring in the neighbourhood and the tactics they employ to protect their way of life that are not dependent on political power.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

### Outline of Autoethnographic Methods

The process of encountering the city theoretically is treated less as a foreign expedition requiring contact with the exotic, and more as a method of making the familiar strange.

(Blum, 46)

Blum's comment on the study of cities in many ways expresses the challenges I have faced and the subsequent framing techniques I have used in this thesis. The work here is rooted in an autoethnographic methodological approach that seeks to understand the experience of human beings through their own words and actions. As is clear from the introduction, I have a longstanding history in Mission and it is through this history that both the research question and my own awareness of the community has developed. Due to my dual role as researcher and community member, it was clear that this must be accounted for in the way this study was approached. While ethnographies are common in subcultural research, which this study is theoretically informed by, my history necessities taking this methodological approach one-step further. The use of an autoethnography allows me to not only privilege the experiences of my participants, but to also understand that my subsequent analysis is coloured by my own history.

This subjectivity, however, is not a drawback of the study and as Ellis and Berger (2002) point out:

Instead of insisting on a rigid separation of researcher and respondent, they [autoethnographers] have construed the interview as an active relationship

occurring in a context permeated by issues of power, emotionality, and interpersonal process. (851)

By being involved in our research subject and with our participants, deeper understandings of the cultural realities studied become possible. Instead of removing subjectivity from the process of research, it is beneficial to consider and incorporate the ways in which we determine, and are determined by, our research. The role of the researcher is then to be a part of the research and to let go of an academic conceit of objectivity. Instead, the researcher is encouraged to interpret and contribute to the research through a process of active meaning making with participants. Further:

Some writers now advocate that researchers interview peers with whom they have already established relationships... [and] make use of the everyday situations in which they are involved. (853)

This use of peers and everyday situations is beneficial in research, particularly of city spaces in that it allows the researcher to access knowledge that is traditionally ignored in other methodologies approaches.

The challenge, of course, is how to analyse this information in order to make it meaningful research. As Walsh (1999) comments:

...the focus of analysis turns much more to seeing culture as a system of *signs*...The ethnographer then finds a whole web of cultural structures, knowledge and meanings which are knotted and superimposed on to one another and which constitute a densely layered **cultural script**. (219)

The use of participant words and experiences to merge into a cultural script allows for a denser, more nuanced presentation of cultural meaning within the study. Nick Trujillo

(1998) understands the words and stories of his family as "...*texts* to be interpreted." (445) Trujillo's search for the meaning of his deceased grandmother is therefore accessible through the stories that are told about her. Also at play is the use of internal meaning making within a cultural group (in his case, the family) to construct a fuller meaning of one life.

This approach lends validity to the words of participants and provides a meaning that cannot necessarily be elicited otherwise. As well, the taking up of ethnographic techniques and making them personal removes the inaccurate assumption of objectivity from this research. My goal is to understand a social process from and with people invested themselves, rather than to arbitrarily designate a factual truth system. As Tierney (1998) notes, "...who we are and how we relate to those with whom we work circumscribes our daily research interactions..." (4) and it is therefore impossible to remove the researcher from the process. Instead of this attempt, then, autoethnographers are invested in ensuring that their daily interactions are a part of the research and seen as a way to illuminate human life.

While most autoethnographies focus on deeply personal issues (including illness, death and social suffering), this study differs. The topic of community is deeply personal, both to my participants and myself; however, our suffering cannot be compared to the experience of serious illness, for example. Despite this, the meaning that can be garnered from the social experience of gentrification and city life is pertinent to the way in which everyday people live their lives. The interest, then, is to ensure that the social meaning of the mundane becomes clear through the techniques of inquiry introduced by autoethnographies.

Further to this acceptance of, and importance placed on, the researcher's experience comes the challenge of, and opportunity for, praxis. My interest in this topic also brings forth the issue of politics and personal interest in a given research topic. I became interested in studying Mission four years ago when I was evicted from my apartment because the owners were planning to build a condominium unit on the property. My helplessness in the process was clear to me and I began a personal journey of questioning why the next place I chose to live was two blocks away. The construction pressures on Mission were clear even then and I was constantly aware that my new apartment could just as easily be transformed into condominiums and I could again lose my home. In addition, the increasing popularity of Mission ensured that rental rates were not stable and I consistently faced the fact that my landlords were within their rights to increase my rent, according to market rate, at their own discretion.

Despite these factors, I still live within the neighbourhood and it became clear as I thought abstractly about the issue, that other residents were in a position similar to mine. We live daily with instability and have apparently learned to ignore these issues for reasons I did not originally understand. It is this question that led to the study you are reading and also frames the methods I have made use of. I feel, like many autoethnographers, that my personal position in the community will allow me to understand the social process on a deeper level.

However, autoethnography has also received numerous challenges based on the unique use of the personal in its writing style and the level of subjectivity involved. By writing in personal, narrative styles, autoethnographies have a challenging relationship to academic writing. Viewed as too personal and too subjective, this style of writing is

often not accepted by academic journals preventing publishing opportunities. However, autoethnographies are published and it is worth noting that invariably, studies of urban cultures are personal. As scholars, we focus on the areas close to us and while not all studies of cities are overtly personal, it is clear that these concerns are shared among urban scholars. Cities are studied because a scholar lives in them and seeks to understand not only the city, but also their role within it. This focus on the local and the personal is most obvious through the work of Jane Jacobs and Edward Soja, but continues to be a driving force in all studies of city cultures.

However, the external pressure to abide by academic writing standards and objectivity on autoethnographers is accepted and incorporated into the methodological framework. As Ellis (1999) points out:

The truth is that we can never capture experience. Narrative is always a story about the past, and that's really all field notes are: one selective story about what happened written from a particular point of view at a particular point in time for a particular purpose. (673)

This has informed my treatment of this study and my focus is less about finding the 'truth' and more to speak about a specific community, at a specific time through the voices of a set group of people.

## **Current Project: An Overview of Research Participants**

My first attempts to recruit participants through signs posted at local businesses met with no success and it was through speaking about my research socially I was able to access people who wished to take part. The result was a snowball sample as participants were available through various social interactions within the neighbourhood and other local residents subsequently became interested in my research. In fact, half of my participants volunteered to take part in the study, although in the interest of broadening the kind of participants I had, I did suggest the opportunity, in certain cases, however the decision to take part or not was always left to the potential participant.

This of course, leads to the methodological challenge of bias from the beginning of the study. The people I interviewed represent those that I came into contact with and had a long enough conversation to speak about my own work. That is to say that this research must be understood through the distinct way my own social relationships in the area function. The benefit of this access is that the volunteer aspect of the research has also ensured that those participants I spoke to are both interested and invested in the research I am doing. This also provided the opportunity to speak to people who are, at some level, political about the neighbourhood and are involved in, and concerned with, their community. The limitations I placed on participation were only that participants be renters in the community, as my research concern focuses on understanding how this economic identity affects perceptions of, and involvement in, the Mission community. This however has led to other limitations in the research that include race and gender.

Issues of confidentiality have greatly influenced this study and the themes it deals with. Due to the interconnected nature of Mission it has been necessary to change certain

demographic information in order to protect the identification of my participants. A person knowledgeable about the community and who partakes socially may have heard or could have guessed at the identity of my participants, but these issues are beyond my control as participants were (and are) free to speak about their involvement. Beyond this, I have made distinct choices to attempt to avoid identification of comments directly with a specific person. One of the ways I have done this that in some ways hinders the research is to avoid any discussion of race. Although some of my participants are not white, the nature of the community as predominantly Caucasian has made it impossible for me to comment on these issues without identifying participants. I have chosen to deal with this by not identifying these participants according to race, and to leave any critical analysis of race issues to another study. This is not to say that race is not an issue in the neighbourhood, it is, but rather that my need to protect the identities of my participants overrides in-depth discussions of these issues.

Further, issues of gender are also missing in this analysis. The people I spoke to are balanced in terms of gender, but my own questions and respondent's stories did not lead to a useful amount of information regarding gender relationships in the area. This is not to say that space is not gendered, but rather that this specific study is looking at the experience as a whole for all participants and specific concerns regarding gender did not come up. It is also interesting to note that while the role of being a man or a woman in the community were never raised by participants, issues of sexuality were. Why this occurred, I can only guess, but it is my impression that issues of gender are seen as less important than issues of sexuality in the community. It may also be that the perception of

the community as equalitarian and liberal by community members has led to a presumption that gender is not a concern.

Beyond these limitations, the participants I spoke to are also internally diverse as a group and although they are all part of the same social network, they are also unique in their occupations, ages and sexualities. While the intent of this study is not to produce a random, objective sample of the community, my participants in many ways represent the diversity of the community. It is also important to note that I am introducing my participants according to the information they volunteered when asked for their demographic identities. Everyone did not mention explicitly their sexuality, so I have only commented on these identities when participants themselves brought them up. Those that did identify their sexualities were most often gay, lesbian or queer and their sexuality was introduced as a key factor in their relationship to the community.

Kathy, who is in her early-thirties moved to Mission from another city because she had family living in the area. She has lived in many cities in Western Canada and the United States, but has decided to settle in Calgary for the last few years. She is an artist by trade and her work is inspired by local architecture.

Carl, in his mid-thirties, has lived in Mission for twelve years. He works as a writer and is also involved in one of the Mission-Cliff Bungalow community association committees. He grew up in a suburban area of Calgary and moved into Mission from his parent's home in his mid-twenties.

Charlie is in his early twenties and has lived in Mission for the last two to three years. A student at the University of Calgary, he has also worked in various local businesses prior to and during the time he has lived in the area. Prior to moving to

Mission, he lived in a Calgary suburban neighbourhood with his family. He also identified himself during the interview as queer.

Raymond is a performer in his thirties and has been a resident of Mission on and off from his early childhood. He lived in a suburban neighbourhood during his teens and returned to the inner city fifteen years ago and has subsequently lived in various buildings and sections of the inner city including, and surrounding, Mission. He identified himself during the interview as heterosexual.

Stacy, a performer, is in her late teens and has lived in Mission on and off for the last four years. As a child, she also lived in various inner city areas with her family and has subsequently rented in these areas on her own. She also defines herself as a member of the lesbian community.

Jack, who identifies as gay, is a student in his mid-twenties, and is also an anomaly in this study, in that he does not live in the Mission area. I came into contact with him through various social networks and his sheer interest in taking part is the reason his words are included here. His perspective also provides a means of understanding the community not simply through those who live here, but through someone who spends much of his time in the community and has developed a strong allegiance with it. However, the focus of the study is on renters in Mission, and these stories will be privileged during the analysis.

All of my participants are people that I run into socially on a regular basis, but I have restricted my analysis to stories told to me during in-depth, tape-recorded interviews averaging in length between an hour and an hour and a half. This focus on in-depth interviews has given me the opportunity to explore issues of community and

neighbourhood space at length with each of them and to privilege the stories they told in a way not accessible through a larger sample size and shorter meeting time. While I had a list of guiding interview questions, the interviews were open ended and both participants and myself were free to expand and explore on the ideas that each individual discussed during our conversation.

The list of guiding questions is included as Appendix A, but it will be clear that not all of the questions asked have reached the analysis stage. Questions of community membership and experience were accessed through the use of indirect questions designed to ensure that participants had the freedom to explore the unique nature of their experiences. As well, in the interest of building an understanding of spatial issues, questions regarding representations in, and of, the neighbourhood were discussed as well as specific questions regarding the space of the community. It became clear during the interview processes that discussing more abstract spatial issues directly was far more challenging than discussing space in context.

After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed, coded and analysed according to emerging themes. Finally, a semiotic analysis has also been employed to understand the spatial relationships between community members and neighbourhood space. This section of the analysis builds upon the interview information gathered and is based on my personal observations of social behaviour and movement in the neighbourhood.

The process of observing human behaviour is of course not foreign to ethnographies and autoethnographies, but it is important to note that this section of the analysis is my understanding of the area and may not represent how other residents would

respond. The specific style of semiotic analysis utilized is deeply informed by the work of subcultural theorists from the Birmingham School. By evoking the style of inquiry introduced by Dick Hebdige it is possible to understand the cultural methods used spatially that are not necessarily self-evident to participants or other residents. In addition, this semiotic section of the study allows the incorporation of spatial philosophies in an attempt to make the more abstract theories of Lefebvre, Harvey, de Certeau and Blum, among others, represent a real space and a real experience.

## Chapter 3: Literature Review

### Early Understandings of Gentrification

**gen·tri·fi·ca·tion:** the process of renewal and rebuilding accompanying the influx of middle-class or affluent people into deteriorating areas that often displaces earlier usually poorer residents.

(Merriam  
Webster)

Definitions, by their nature provide the most basic account of an issue and can only inadequately be used as an explanation for a social process. However, the above definition of gentrification does provide an access point to unpack and interrogate lived experience beyond a dictionary. In fact, as I will outline, much of the theory surrounding the concept of gentrification has rested on expanding this definition and theorizing the why's and how's of the process. Simply, what are the causes, what is the economic result and who are the people necessarily displaced from their previous lifestyle and living area. What I plan to outline here is a review of the kinds of theories that have arisen regarding gentrification and begin to identify some of the concerns not served, or examined, by these scholars. As well, by drawing from studies across the disciplinary boundaries of geography, urban studies, sociology and cultural studies, this thesis can offer a new direction and a new understanding of gentrification that privileges the experience of residents themselves.

Finally, by incorporating a diversity of disciplinary focus, I am also able to open the research topic of gentrification to include issues of how community identity is constructed, contested and understood by Mission residents. As will become clear, the focus of gentrification studies on identifying reasons for the process only serves to provide inhuman frameworks that dwell in broad economic and cultural forces and do not

adequately increase our understanding of human experience. Basing this research in communication studies provides a way out of this concern in order to identify that a specific kind of communication process develops in response to external forces allowing residents to continue to make meaning with the physical space they inhabit.

The review of this literature further provides context for the economic and social process experienced by Mission prior to and during the time of study. Instead of removing the personal experience from larger developmental forces, it is necessary to link this process with changes occurring in many cities of the Western world. Not all of the theories covered here define the process in Mission, but rather they complicate the definition of gentrification and how it occurs. Later in the thesis, it will become clear that human experiences of gentrification are not well served by this body of theory, but it rather presents an understanding of the way in which studies of a common process have consistently developed in response to changes in economic, social and cultural markets and realities.

Gentrification is not a new process, rather geography and sociology scholars first identified the general process in the 1980's<sup>1</sup> when it became evident that a new kind of urbanity had been developing in many of the major cities of the Western world<sup>2</sup>. The majority of early studies<sup>3</sup> reviewed for this chapter focused on the economic reasons for this process and related the re-emergence of the (downtown) core as valuable living space

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<sup>1</sup> Nelson identifies that this term was borrowed from the British scholars Hamnett and Williams (4)

<sup>2</sup> In addition, Smith (1996) notes that gentrification, as a development process, follows the economic cycles that are at the heart of capitalist economies. Identifying the boom and bust cycles that push uneven urban development, his work identifies that while modern gentrification came about in the 1970s, the process itself is deeply entrenched in modern society.

<sup>3</sup> Smith; Williams; Beauregard; Cybriwsky et. al.; Hamnett, et. al. and Marcuse, all provided specific studies of urban centres that helped provide an understanding of various approaches and understandings of early gentrification studies.

to larger urban movements that had businesses moving back into the downtown cores from the previously less expensive suburban business centres.<sup>4</sup> As a result, young urbanites were (and are) drawn to living areas that are both close to work centres and offer a lifestyle of easy access to shopping, restaurants and entertainment. Clearly, the focus of this understanding is on economics, with lifestyle issues and concerns taking a back seat to a well documented and obviously shifting urban economy.

Within this assumption of economic importance, a dichotomy has emerged that oversimplifies gentrification to ignore the complexity of human experience. The closest these early explorations came to examining human experience was in a focus on the displacement of lower income residents from their inner city neighbourhoods. Williams and Smith (1986) noted that in gentrification situations, displaced persons are forced to move into areas that are more expensive and less safe than their previous communities. While the political possibilities of this analysis could lead to a far more qualitative analysis, these studies fall short by using demographics and unfortunately, attempt to use quantitative data to assess how people feel, respond and (attempt to) resist incoming gentrifiers. The challenge of using demographic studies is also examined by Nelson (1988) who recognizes that:

...lags in the availability of census data on small areas, combined with the unavailability between censuses of data on changes in population and their characteristics within cities or smaller areas, mean that it is hard to determine *what* is happening, let alone *why*. (6)

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<sup>4</sup> This emergence of the suburb as a viable area for business development is documented in Stanwick's work on New Urbanism.

In response, Nelson suggests analysing gentrification through population trends in order to create a larger understanding of inner city movement.

However, Williams and Smith's focus on economics is clear through their assessment that "the continuing development of a new international division of labour will be the major determinant, at the regional scale, of urban restructuring" (208) and therefore limit future studies to discussions of capital at the expense of considerations of the human agents who choose to live in these gentrified/ing areas. By validating their research through demographics and relegating gentrification to a simplified version of class struggle, this theoretical construct is automatically reductionary and thorny for qualitative studies. In the interest of addressing the limitations of their approach, Williams and Smith comment on the difficulties of generalizing understandings by asserting that this understanding of gentrification "remains a tendency" (217) and generalizability is reduced by a number of contributing factors. Although they introduce this obstacle, they see this limitation as a result of the diversity of different cities, not in their own focus on economics and policy. While it is true that different cities require specific understandings, this mitigation fails to address that human experience requires a far more complicated and nuanced theoretical base.

In contrast to this approach, Beauregard (1986) sees gentrification as a complex and chaotic process that is, in many ways, indefinable because of its diversity. In fact, he criticizes existing studies because "...no attempt is made to address the diverse nature of gentrification." (39) Instead of continuing this oversight, Beauregard suggests that theories of gentrification must not "...misrepresent empirical regularities as causal explanations." (39) Rather, gentrification must be understood as a chaotic process that

results from the convergence of specific economic and social forces. While this introduction to thinking more complexly about gentrification allows for more complicated theoretical understandings, Beauregard's ideas about why gentrification occurs unfortunately remain superficial. As examples of the complicated factors at play, he identifies the convenience of being close to work, investment opportunities, decisions not to have children and the lower prices found (at the time) with urban centre properties. While his incorporation of these factors is a step above a pure demographic, economic study, he still avoids dealing with the complicated relationship between space and community and the meaning people imbed in that connection.

Simply put, Beauregard's evaluation assumes that the choice to live in a specific neighbourhood can be defined through a short list of factors that ignore the equally, if not more, important role of a specific community. Despite the fact that this list of contributing factors is important and, indeed, proves logical through examinations of the longer term process of large scale gentrification, missing is the diversity of human action and that other reasons for mass social movement could (and do) exist on the individual level. As well, the applicability of a theory developed in the early 1980s to the world of 2004 is limited. Downtown living is no longer the inexpensive investment opportunity it once was and in fact inner city land increasingly sells at a premium and often suburban areas are more reasonably priced for homebuyers. After thirty odd years of gentrifying in major cities, development is an unavoidable social fact and the increased pricing opportunities to inner city developers has made many downtown cores economically elite and increasingly only available to higher income ranges.

However, Smith's "Gentrification, the Frontier, and the Restructuring of Urban Space" (1986) seeks to answer this lack of focus on social factors by directly addressing the appeal of the inner city for the middle class. Smith's metaphor for gentrification draws on the specific characteristics of North American culture and claims that the inner city has become a new frontier for the middle classes to pioneer by understanding inner urban areas as the New Wild West. Specifically, "contemporary urban-frontier imagery implicitly treats the present inner-city population as a natural element of their physical surroundings [and the] urban working class is seen as less than social", implying that pre-gentrification residents are easily displaced without moral concern on the part of middle class interlopers. Clearly, Smith develops a beginning consideration of the experiences of poorer residents, but no mention is made of why early gentrifiers choose to live next door to these 'urban savages'. Gentrification cannot be assessed as a faceless process and working class residents do not cease to exist the moment middle class residents move in. The question raised is then while the middle class may wish to ignore those they displace, the actual social experience for both sides of the gentrification coin is far more complicated.

Such a simplistic understanding renders the real people involved in city living as merely pawns to adventure or inexpensive housing. The goal of this type of research needs to be pushed forward to complicate theoretical assessments in a way that does not seek to avoid the contradictory and, in some ways, frustrating aspects of social life. Instead, it would make sense that early gentrifiers are drawn not only to the physical area, but also to the community that exists prior to a middle class influx. The frontier metaphor also provides some difficulty when considering contemporary situations where

gentrification, as an urban process, has evolved with social, cultural and economic changes and the inner city no longer holds the mystique of the unknown in the same way it once did. Instead, urban living has become increasingly popular and the dangers of inner city living implied by the frontier metaphor no longer holds the same currency.

However, this metaphor does provide a useful framework within which to begin to understand the complex social draw that can be found at the centre of gentrification processes. While this metaphor is obviously questionable for the reasons stated, it still remains pertinent to an understanding of North American cities. For the specific experience of Calgary residents, pioneering can be used to interpret both the historical reality of the city<sup>5</sup> and the actual experience of the developer/renovator. The frontier experience may not hold a direct link to Smith's ideas, but the process of moving into an area, struggling for building permits and leaving a permanent mark on the landscape can be understood as akin to pioneering in a modern construct. While the danger of the inner city may no longer be as prolific as Smith describes, a strong history of frontiers in North America clearly links urban movements with a specific cultural history.<sup>6</sup>

It is also interesting to consider the way that Smith (1996) later develops this metaphor by drawing extensively from advertisements of 1980s New York that use this frontier imagery to sell new condominium developments. What is most fascinating in this later work is the way in which development advertising has evolved and the means with which developers evidently use specific cultural motifs to appeal to potential

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<sup>5</sup> Not only was Calgary still a pioneer town one hundred years ago, the popularity and municipal focus on the Stampede speaks to a city that is deeply imbedded in pioneering, cowboy culture. With the proximity of the Stampede grounds, this cultural history inherently affects the community's growth and personality.

<sup>6</sup> Further, the changes in development and urban cultures reflect a shift from a gentrification that is individually focussed, with owners directly taking control of renovating homes, to developers taking over the role of gentrifier through producing adequate and acceptable properties for higher income residents.

homebuyers. In contemporary Mission, Calgary, developers still sell a lifestyle, but not through frontier mythologies. Rather, Mission developers focus on the amenities of the area, its proximity to downtown and finally, and most fascinatingly, the reputation of the neighbourhood itself. As a complex on 22<sup>nd</sup> Avenue SW has explicitly stated, Mission is “an area that’s talked about”. Moving away from the frontier mythology speaks to a clear change in the nature and reputation of inner city neighbourhoods. They are now imbued with a ‘cool’ factor that takes on the same level of importance in advertisements as convenience and market forces. This issue will become clearer when discussing the specific theoretical framework of this thesis and also expressed in the words of my own research participants. Clearly, what we can learn from Smith’s own conceptual development, and from other spatial theorists, is that meaning is imbedded in physical space itself and the metaphors socially constructed to describe inner city areas both create and respond to a shared mentality among urban dwellers and developers.

Beyond the frontier imagery of Smith’s work, it is also necessary to see a more global<sup>7</sup> connection in gentrification. Uneven development is another area that Smith draws on and in fact, some of the literature on gentrification also deals with the British experience. As a global phenomenon, it is clear that somewhat similar experiences have, and are, occurring world wide, but these experiences are also varied and directly linked to specific cultures. As is clear from Hamnett and Randolph’s (1986) work, England had undergone through its own gentrification process that rendered rental property obsolete in London’s inner city. Their analysis focuses a great deal on the financial factors that

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<sup>7</sup> While I use the term global, it is clear that this is a study focused on the western world. While the experience of gentrification and competition for housing is clearly not relegated solely to North America and the UK, it is necessary to clarify the boundaries of this study as focused on the experience of the Western world.

created a market where sold property garnered more profit than rental and subsequently also speaks to the shifting nature of London society. Helping to push the sale of flats was an emerging urban middle class with higher disposable income and no children, as well as an increase in foreign ownership. While this assessment is similar to Beauregard's list of factors, by incorporating examinations of landlord tenant law, changing markets and the general social upheaval of London at the time, Hamnett and Randolph take Beauregard's chaos and complexity theory to the next level. In fact, the importance of understanding multiple factors became, in many ways, the focus of later gentrification studies.

A single metaphor or factor is not sufficient to explain gentrification, but those provided by early theories are useful in creating a fuller understanding of complex processes and their influence on current studies of gentrification. Mentioned earlier was the influence of economics on studies of urban change that, while insufficient, remain important in clarifying the effect of investment and financial gain on gentrification processes. Despite the damaging effects to working class lives, middle class buyers have discovered that investing in a gentrifying area is not only economically practical, but their entrance into older, more run down areas also provides the income to maintain historical buildings and areas in a way that lower income earners cannot. Simply put, higher income gentrifiers rescue a number of areas that are falling into disrepair and provide the opportunity to renovate and preserve older architecture and spaces<sup>8</sup>. Traditionally, as Hamnett and Randolph discuss in their review of the British condofication experience,

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<sup>8</sup> The clearest example of this factor in gentrification is noticeable in Cybriwsky, Ley and Western's (1986) study of Society Hill in Philadelphia. At issue was the emergence of a historic area that had long been populated by significantly low-income persons and a heavy influence of illegal activity. In response, the history of the area was sold by the city and middle class persons moved in and renovated the areas according to incredibly strict guidelines aimed to preserve the history of the area.

gentrification is also an effective solution for rental property that is no longer economically viable. Discussing the value gap as a determining factor, it is clear that for London landlords, the cost of upkeep with controlled rents made selling off flats as condos the most efficient and effective response to regain their financial investment.

Gentrification theorists do not always discuss economics in these ways and Wiewel and Nyden (1991) introduce new factors into gentrification studies. Instead of focusing on the displaced persons who suffer at the hands of gentrifiers, they seek to explore communities that actively oppose gentrification. In fact:

Instead of viewing the social and physical structure of the city as a product of “natural” ecological forces, an increasing number of urban scholars and planners have argued that the city has been shaped by a collection of interest groups or a “growth coalition” that views the city as a place that can be used to enhance their personal or institutional well-being. (2)

Their approach is then to uncover alternatives to the growth coalition and focus their attention on methods with which scholarly resistance can be employed to improve inner city conditions.

This early work in gentrification studies, while useful as a guidebook to the history of gentrification, provides challenges for the situation in Mission. While these economic processes have resulted in the situation currently being experienced in Calgary, issues of displacement would be overstated within this theoretical framework. Mission is no longer a low-income neighbourhood and while the concept of gentrification is useful in understanding and framing the social context, Mission renters cannot be compared to heavily economically disadvantaged populations.



## Social Complexity At Play in Gentrification

It should be clear from the discussion thus far that early approaches to gentrification are insufficient to understand the complex human processes at play. However, this is not to say that no examinations dealing specifically with gentrification processes ignore social aspects of the experience. Well known, and deeply influential, as an urban theorist, Jane Jacobs, dealt with the concept of gentrification far before the term was in common usage. Her work in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961/1992) explored the spatial experience of late 1950s New York and sought to understand the link between community experience and urban design. Her work still informs current planning and urban design practices, particularly with her analysis of the benefit mixed income levels brings to any community. In addition, and of particular concern to this study, she suggests that studies of cities need to become more holistic in their analysis in order to truly understand the meanings of urban space. Specifically:

Cities, again like the life sciences, do not exhibit *one* problem in organized complexity, which if understood explains all. They can be analyzed into many such problems or segments which, as in the case of the life sciences, are also related with one another. The variables are many, but they are not helter-skelter; they are “interrelated into an organic whole.” (433)

This analysis and prescription for future work in urban analysis, while predating the scholarship I have thus far discussed, does provide an alternative to breaking down complex processes into a simplistic list of cause and effect. It is further evident that Jacobs’ understanding of economic, social and spatial diversity serves as a counterpoint to less complicated analysis. While economics do play an obvious and unavoidable role

in urban growth and change, to ignore other factors removes an understanding of human creativity and cultural meaning making.

One of the levels of diversity Jacobs' discussed pertinent to gentrification is that of aging buildings. Inner city neighbourhoods that do experience gentrification are abundant in housing stock that, because of age, is lower priced and available for either renovation or redevelopment. However, "[I]f a city area has only new buildings, the enterprises that can exist there are automatically limited to those that can support the high costs of new construction." (187) What we can learn from Jacobs is that markets are dependent on a freedom of choice not only from residents, but also for business owners. The comment brings to the surface the importance of affordability to providing choice in urban neighbourhoods and situations. If lower income businesses can maintain themselves in an area, lower income residents can also afford to shop there.

Sharon Zukin (1991)<sup>9</sup> explores gentrification and urban change from a postmodern construct that seeks to fill the gap left by earlier gentrification theorists. Zukin's text focuses on bringing together varied studies of urbanity through a closer examination of how urban space defines human experience. Most specifically, she notes that "...place expresses how a spatially connected group of people mediate the demands of cultural identity, state power and capital accumulation..." (13) This approach to urban space not only considers the importance of place to the people who live in it, but also how studies of place can uncover larger social practices. The cultural tales that space and place tell link issues of power between specific people and classes to how these conflicts play out in a literal and tactile way.

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<sup>9</sup> Zukin's earlier work also examined the cultural process that resulted in loft living becoming an increasingly profitable and desirable lifestyle in 1970s New York.

Despite including larger social issues, Zukin continues to focus heavily on the importance of capital and class struggle in studies of cities, but mitigates this focus with a continued concern for the cultural factors at play. In fact, she notes that "...downtown [is a] site of paradoxical struggle between economic and cultural values..." (180) and identifies the varied needs and intentions distinct classes have for their space. The gentrifier and displaced person experience the process of gentrification differently and these social roles necessarily result from the unique qualities specific to a neighbourhood experience. In addition, Zukin supposes that "[G]entrification is an effort to appropriate downtown's centrality – and also, by consuming it, to enhance its economic and cultural value." (186)

However, limiting gentrification to an appropriation of urban centrality brings the process back to a discussion of simplified factors and continues to ignore the community that already exists in an area prior to an influx of gentrifiers. Simply put, in an advanced stage of gentrification, when central living is already deemed important, more complex reasoning of the personal aspect of the process must be developed. The restructuring of a given neighbourhood from cultural community to investment opportunity challenges the ability for all residents involved to be satisfied. Instead, the needs of lower income persons to maintain their community and the need of gentrifiers to remake that community remain, implicitly, at the centre of gentrification processes. However, based on this consideration of the struggle over physical and symbolic space, we can learn from Zukin's example that the use of demographics and numerical studies do not adequately assess the human aspect of urban change.

Clearly it is necessary to develop frameworks to account for the community ideal that gentrifiers either covet or try to invent during their participation in urban processes. In the same way that economic discussions ignore the personal ramifications of gentrification, any singular focus prevents the development of a holistic theory of gentrification. It is unwise to limit the motives of gentrifiers to investment purposes or the pull of downtown convenience. Rather, consideration of the community needs of gentrifiers and recognition of their specific cultural and spatial concerns must be included to develop a fuller understanding of urban change. Closer attention must be paid to why downtown areas, despite being presumably less safe and far more expensive, have proven to be so popular among the middle class.

Smith partially identifies the complex social issues at play when identifying that the emergence and popularity of the urban singles lifestyle (1996, 30) and its role in gentrification. This idea would benefit from further exploration in order to assess how much of this emerging popularity can be linked to early gentrifiers popularizing a lifestyle, as opposed to the appeal of diverse pre-gentrification communities. It should be clear from the discussion so far, that there is room in gentrification studies to explore how notions of community and the draw of certain community identities also factor into urban change. However, it would be erroneous to relegate the pre-gentrification residents as 'authentic', or true owners of a space as implied by the focus on displacement in gentrification studies. Gentrification cannot only be understood as the displacement of a homogenous lower class or minority community, but rather as a complex expression of changing demographics and spatial landscapes. The nature of a community is constantly

changing and evolving so presuming that an authentic community existed prior to gentrification ignores social evolutions.

Some of these questions are dealt with in Jon Caulfield's (1994) study of Toronto's gentrification experience and the diversity of the gentrifiers discussed. In seeking to uncover the complicated issues at play, Caulfield provides an excellent framework for assessing gentrification as a complicated process that resists a single causal argument for why diverse people are drawn to a given area. Caulfield also explores the significant drawbacks to the theoretical explanations gentrification studies have traditionally focused on. Most useful is his discussion of phase arguments put forward by theorists seeking to define gentrification's evolution through stages.

The strength of stage-typologizing is its basic logic, sensing that in some important way the diverse elements of middle-class resettlement of older inner city neighbourhoods hang together as a unified process. But in its particulars, because it seeks to describe specific patterns said to occur in specific neighbourhoods... (126)

Clearly, the challenge lies in how a scholar can generalize gentrification processes across different city landscapes. The nature of any social process, particularly when dealing with gentrification, is unique and the multiple contributing factors involved hinder the possibility of generalizing findings. Undoubtedly, a new approach to the process could provide an opportunity to rectify some of the challenges the existing theory poses for a communication study. Hopefully, by understanding gentrification studies, but finding a theoretical framework in more specifically communication focused social theory, the experience of gentrification in Mission can be understood in a way that previous studies

of neighbourhoods have been found lacking. The focus of gentrification studies on older American cities, or areas significantly older in style and age than Calgary limit the direct applicability of certain approaches of existing studies.

Missing thus far in this discussion, and frankly not investigated to its full potential in this thesis, is the role of alternative lifestyles in gentrification. Specifically, Anne-Marie Bouthillette's (1994) work explores the direct link between the 'gay male lifestyle' and gentrification processes. In fact, "...unlike most other marginalized groups, homosexual men are in a position to reshape not only the landscape they inhabit, but also influence the social, political and economic systems which govern it." (66) Going on to examine why gay men were drawn to first Church-Wellesley and later Cabbagetown, Bouthillette explores a traditionally ignored group in geography studies.

By merging discussions of lifestyle, market forces and cultural realities affecting marginalized persons, this analysis provides an example of a gentrification study that seeks to merge complex human factors. The role of alternative lifestyles in gentrification and city spaces is worth further exploration simply because it prevents a scholar from unintentionally depending on dialectic analysis based on suburban versus urban or lower versus middle class.

Similarly, providing an examination from the margins is Nicholas Blomley's (2004) study of Vancouver's Lower East Side. Blomley examines the politics of ownership and how local homeless populations, arguably the most marginalized group in urban spaces, have mounted a movement against gentrification. While not necessarily useful for all cities, particularly those that do not exhibit such acute levels of mobilization, his analysis provides ample opportunity to see what those with limited

political power are able to achieve. Blomley's analysis also raises the question of why groups with more political power do not achieve the same level of change. While inner city communities in much of North America appear dependent on the bureaucratic systems in place to attempt to defend their physical space, the homeless population in Vancouver was able to reclaim a Woodward's slated for development through a protest of governmental decisions that had not considered their needs.

Beyond this, Blomley also enacts a bridging of the imagined spaces of cities and their political realities. In fact, he points out that "... landscape, like property, is a site for a struggle that is simultaneously material and representational." (55) The general framework developed specifies that space can never be reduced to simplicity and multiple layers of understanding are necessary to even attempt to build an adequate study of a neighbourhood. Specifically, in relevance to gentrification, Blomley also points out that at risk in gentrifying neighbourhoods is not only a resident or physical space, but:

The landscapes of collective property, then, are threatened by "social mix." Landscapes can be represented and used in the "wrong" way. For those moving into the neighbourhood will not only contribute to the material displacement of many residents. It is feared that they will also facilitate their cultural dispossession in an "eviction of memory". (101)

From this perspective, it is possible to begin to understand that at risk in a gentrification process are the cultural memories that are imbedded in an uninterrupted community understanding.

Castells much earlier work focused on activist movements in Mission, San Francisco and the local community's success at resisting external pressures on the

community space. Among detailed analysis of the specific local experience, he also points out that:

A major issue underlying community mobilization in the Mission was poverty. The struggle for economic well-being was the driving force behind the residents' motivations. (174)

This of course can be linked to Blomley's work and it becomes clear that extreme differences in economic levels encourage activist movement. As will be discussed later, in many ways residents must have a lot to lose prior to undertaking activist methods to protect their way of life.

The struggle between ownership and habitation clearly plays an important role in gentrification and this struggle also implies the difficulty of determining who owns, and therefore controls, space. Katrina Nylund (2001) notes that recent urban theory has shifted focus to bring in understandings of abstract notions of physical space as active and changeable. Primarily, awareness has grown that the empirical studies favoured by traditional urban theory are not adequate to understand the unique experience of urban living. By incorporating new kinds of theory, research can develop clearer understandings of gentrification and urban change. Nylund notes that:

Generally speaking, this means that the new urban theory questions the conception that reality can be described by means of a set of objective facts and argues that the prevailing perception of reality is to a high degree influenced by our mode of understanding and interpreting these facts. In other words, our actions should not be viewed as immediate reactions to simple registrations of

events; more likely we react to and perceive as 'real' those parts of reality that correspond to our perception of the world. (221)

Evident is the importance of understanding how different sections of the population, be they developers, city planners, long term residents (renters and owners), landlords, the homeless or gentrifiers (new and old), address this problem of community social construction.

If an area is to be adequately studied, it is necessary to incorporate the different meaning space has across identity boundaries and class in order to understand the continued draw of the area (evident from the continued desirability of inner city areas to those who rent or buy in new condo developments) that has led to a distinct struggle over the place known as Mission. However, the scope of this kind of study also raises concerns regarding the limited availability of the time and resources to examine all of these aspects of city life.

While it would be ideal to focus on multiple identities and layers of social involvement, specific focus is required to ensure that the group studied receives the detailed attention it deserves. Finally, this understanding of how space is constructed and subsequently constructs human experience can lend insight into the human aspect of gentrification. Namely, how does the continued change in environment affect how residents and users can construct their community identity? Further, if this community identity continues to mean something different for different groups of residents, is there hope that Mission can maintain its unique identity, or will the community be lost in the struggle over space?

## Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework

### Culture in Space

The challenges of previous treatments of gentrification, specifically, and urban practices in general, laid out in the last chapter align with a concern for accommodating personal voices. However, it is not sufficient to understand any social phenomenon simply through theory or generalizations, but rather there needs to be room to incorporate specific experiences and perspectives to test the theory and broaden an academic understanding of the daily experience of residents in one specific area.

City spaces have proven to be both contentious and heavily studied by theorists across disciplines and of interest to these various scholars is both the physical reality of space and the representational or constructed space as imagined by various subcultures of urban dwellers. Here, my interest is examining Mission, through the theoretical construct of subcultural theories and spatial philosophies of city spaces. In the interest of doing this, it is necessary to merge various academic approaches in order to broaden the theoretical and realistic studies of physical spaces.

In my literature review, I looked at the various ways different disciplines have dealt with the issue of gentrification, broadly looking at displacement and construction as both a social and an economic reality. As I pointed out in the last chapter, to simply look at the process of gentrification through economic markets ignores the personal reality of people living in a given space. Instead of limiting the theory, therefore, to an economic analysis, it is imperative to also understand this process through the social construction that is a result. Residents do not remain idle as their neighbourhood is destroyed, improved or changed (depending on specific points of view), but rather create

complicated social and discursive practices to negotiate a continued role in their neighbourhood. In this conception, it is therefore necessary to understand the experience and the theory in a more specific way that uses tools from across the broad theoretical frames that have previously been used to understand city spaces and experiences.

While the focus of this study is in subcultural theory, it is also important to understand the relationship between subcultural and cultural studies. As Marchant (2003) points out, subcultural theory has traditionally avoided dealing with macro-politics and:

...by emphasizing cultural 'micro-politics', what had previously been considered ordinary politics (the political field, or 'macro-politics') was increasingly being pushed out of focus. As a consequence, macro-political questions seem to remain largely neglected today. (83)

However, it is my contention that while it is possible to identify subcultures that do act on micro and macro political levels, not all subcultures function in this way. In the case of Mission, action is in many ways relegated to resistance, but this can be countered by embarking on an analysis that incorporates understandings, to a certain extent, of macro-politics. Therefore, while subcultural theory is clearly framed as distinct, I feel it is a part of the overall project that cultural studies has undertaken. Specifically:

...in virtually all traditions of cultural studies, its practitioners see cultural studies not simply as a chronicle of cultural change but as an intervention in it, and see themselves not simply as scholars providing an account but as politically engaged participants. (Nelson et al., 5)

The political focus of cultural studies must necessarily be drawn upon to understand this community, and my own perspective, as a part of larger cultural and political forces. In

this interest, I frame subcultural studies as a part of the cultural studies<sup>1</sup> concern and seek to merge these related, but segmented, theoretical concerns.

The use of subcultural theory allows me to understand my neighbours through acts of resistance and shared meaning making that are not dependent on a physical reality, but rather through the claiming of space emotionally and discursively. The concept of subcultures has been researched and refined over the last century and has become a useful tool for various scholars in understanding the human need to create a shared experience. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, the scholars studying subcultures have yet to decide upon one shared definition of subcultures, but rather a shared set of assumptions. Generally, subcultures are seen as a group response to dominant culture and a shared group understanding based on class, neighbourhood, fashion style, or recreational activities. Specific to subcultural theory is the focus on resistance against dominant culture through social acts. In the case of residents of Mission, the broad discursive and social practices that create the Mission subculture also serve to provide a response to the practices of a dominant culture, specific to Calgary, that focuses on business and profit making rather than the reality of personal lives.

### **The Chicago School: Urban Cultures as Subcultures**

Subcultural theory is generally understood as rooted in the Chicago and Birmingham Schools of thought (Gelder & Thornton, 1997; Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003). In the 1990s these bodies of theory were further conceptualized with the emergence of post-subcultural studies aimed at understanding subcultures beyond the

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<sup>1</sup> Cultural studies of urban spaces have not explicitly been drawn upon in this theoretical construct. While clearly many cultural studies of the city have been undertaken, due to the specific role of gentrification in the subculture under discussion, the findings of these cultural scholars have not proven effective to this understanding.

heroic resistance that became so popular in the Birmingham School through the work of Hall, Hebdige, Cohen and Clarke et. al., among others. The Chicago School's subcultural studies, based in sociology, focused on urban spaces, but determined them according to deviancy, a theoretical issue later dealt with by the Birmingham school. This focus on deviancy creates a problematic issue that automatically assumes that the true definition of subculture lies in the law, rather than in social practice. However, the usefulness of this body of theory is the way that studies of cities evolved through the process of understanding citizens.

Robert E. Park (1916/1952) first broached the subject of studying the urban landscape as a means of understanding changes in the larger culture. He conceived of using anthropological/sociological methods to study the cultures of civilized man in order to uncover the nature of urban life. Park was concerned with the nature of the neighbourhood and the increasing importance of secondary relationships – or social pressures – in maintaining social and political control of subordinate classes by dominant classes. In addition, Park's obvious concern with the changing moral landscape of the city was conceived as a direct result of urbanization. The connection he made between urbanization and moral decline is clear when he asserts that:

We must then accept these 'moral regions' and the more or less eccentric and exceptional people who inhabit them, in a sense, at least, as part of the natural, if not the normal, life of a city. (51)

This moralizing tendency, common among early Chicago School theorists, obviously pre-frames subcultures as necessarily deviant in a way no longer effective, however Park's

work introduces the concept that in order to understand city life, the experience of specific sections of the population must be incorporated.

Milton M. Gordon (1947/1978) built upon Park's work by drawing on a scientific approach to refine the definition of specific subcultures. Rather than seeing subcultures as separate from dominant culture, Gordon envisioned subcultures as the smallest unit of national culture and focused on the importance of integrating these segments into the larger cultural realm. Gordon was also specifically critical of the sociologists who preceded him for not defining the cultures they sought to study. He pointed to the:

...occasional reference to 'urban culture', or 'rural culture', or 'the culture of the middle class', but these references have seemed to represent sporadic resting-places of semantic convenience rather than any systematic application of the term to well-defined social situations. (97)

Gordon's conception of separating factors such as "... ethnic group, social class, region, occupation, religion, and urban or rural residence" (99) as building blocks for various sections of the population is a critical first step to understanding the specificity of experience for different groups. Although an important introduction of specificity, this conception requires further refinement and consideration of how different factors of class, race, gender and sexuality result in different relationships to the nation and dominant cultural ideals. Gordon introduces, but does not develop the different cultural values placed on the social factors he identifies and seems content to assume that these factors can be scientifically documented and understood. Unfortunately, also resulting from this essentialism is the assumption, for example, that:

...lower-class white Protestants in one medium-sized New England city would presumably belong to the same sub-culture as lower-class white Protestants in another medium-sized New England community hundreds of miles away... (100)

Clearly, the cohesiveness assumed within these identities ignores the importance of difference within classifying groups and Gordon argues that further study is required to determine whether identical identities in separate locations result in similar experiences. It becomes necessary, then, to ensure that assumptions are not made on the part of the scholar and that demographic information does not over determine similarities.

Albert K. Cohen (1955/1997) attempted to work through the limitations of Gordon's ideas and examined how different segments of the population have different relationships and levels of power to dominant culture. Instead of focusing on factors contributing to building a subculture, Cohen conceives that "...all human action...is an ongoing series of efforts to solve problems..." (44). Rather than constructing subcultures through Gordon's arbitrary groups, Cohen worked the other way and recognized that frames of reference provide a unique set of problems that a subculture needs, and attempts, to resolve. By introducing this idea, Cohen provided a cohesive thread for subcultures that reached beyond arbitrary social factors to the importance of the relationship between dominant, and sub, cultures.

Most importantly, Cohen deals directly with the ways that "The hostility of the 'out-group'...serve to protect the 'in-group' from mixed feelings about its way of life." (53) This insight added a nuance to the understanding of subcultures that directly implicates dominant culture as a factor in the development and continued existence of subcultures. Also important in this conception is the way that subcultures are dependent

upon their relationship to dominant culture in order to continue as a group. This may also offer insight into why so many subcultures remain relatively stable and their solutions rarely result in changing cultural structures. Any change in dominant cultural structures would also change the nature of the subculture and in fact, may result in dissolving the subcultural group conception.

John Irwin (1970/1997) presented an attempt to reconcile the different approaches to subcultures that had developed after Park's original conception. The discussion opens with a critique of Gordon's theory of populations and points out that:

The division into cultural units is somewhat arbitrary... since the variables applied do not necessarily relate to other subsystems. These are not necessarily subcultures which are attached to particular social structures or are recognized by anyone except the social scientist applying these variables. (66)

This criticism is worth noting because it becomes increasingly clear that this presumption by researchers and their frameworks is unavoidable in studies of cultures. The choice to study a specific group constructs that group according to the scholar's theoretical background and subsequently constrains the research. In this thesis, this challenge is somewhat rectified as the use of subcultural theory resulted from participant responses and a level of internal definition by the subculture itself. Rather than identifying Mission residents as a subculture beforehand, interviews and further study made it clear that the neighbourhood claims an identity of subculture and of resistance internally.

Irwin also made clear that culture is fluid and in the case of youth slang as being representative of a subculture, he saw "... concrete evidence of this emerging trend is the appearance of several folk metaphors which refer to styles of life as things" (67) and this

emergence of subcultural specific terminology was seen as allowing greater choice in, and access to, subcultural membership than before. Ultimately, he understood that subculture and dominant culture do not exist in isolation and the trends, ideals and lifestyles of one necessarily affect the other. Rather than limiting subcultures to a response to dominant culture, Irwin argued that subcultures could change the way that larger cultures work. This obviously contradicts Albert K. Cohen's ideas and Irwin never explores that subcultures are dependent on dominant cultures in order to develop the ramifications of his argument.

Between the two conceptions is a nuance of understanding that lends itself easily to the study at hand. Culture is both mutable and dependent on its local situation and other cultural realms it draws upon determining that any study must provide a framework for understanding this complex relationship. Clearly, Mission cannot be seen in isolation from the rest of Calgary, or Canada, or the world, but must be understood in larger contexts as specific and the ideas and perspectives of its citizens respected. Through this balance of approaches, clearly at play in early subcultural theory as a whole, we can seek to find meaning in everyday experience and begin to uncover some of the ways that spatial sharing in Mission has created a local culture that can best be understood as a subculture.

### **The Birmingham School: Symbolic Resistance**

Although the Chicago School branch of subcultural theories are useful through the focus on urban cultures and the way it has provided ample frameworks to understand them, the Birmingham School, rooted in scholarship from the Centre for Contemporary

Cultural Studies (CCCS), provided a basis for understanding people in a less abstract, theoretical way. In fact, this school of thought came under fire for becoming too involved in the subcultures studied and 'going native', so to speak, with their conclusions. Despite this shift in focus, the Birmingham School is also indebted to the work developed by their American counterparts, particularly through the reconstruction of solution (as A.K. Cohen introduced) to resistance. This theoretical shift in many ways was purely semantic and resulted more from the influence of hegemonic understandings of culture rooted in the reworking of Gramsci by Williams, Hoggart and Hall than a clean break from the Chicago studies. The way that solution was discussed by A.K. Cohen depended on not changing the system, whereas hegemonic resistance restructures this response to a negotiated subordinate position. As well, the Birmingham studies moved beyond early assumptions of deviance to more specific understandings of youth, working class identities as expressed through fashion and internal meaning making that provided the opportunity to resist incorporation both within specific parent (working class) cultures and Britain's dominant culture. This dual level of broader cultural realities complicated methods of resistance available as youth were forced to first deal with avoiding the direct culture of their parents and the larger cultural forces that determined their role in society based on class.

Birmingham studies of the working class owe much of their theoretical framework to Phil Cohen (1972). He set the groundwork for later studies by examining the structural changes of working class life resulting from the introduction of housing projects. Specifically, the removal of communal areas and the creation of homes designed for nuclear families took the place of the neighbourhood shops, pubs and

interconnectedness that the working class traditionally depended upon. In addition to introducing a new concept of subcultures and how spatial changes transformed the lives of working class residents, Cohen examined that:

...the latent function of subculture is...to express and resolve, albeit 'magically', the contradictions which remain hidden or unresolved in the parent culture. (94)

This study introduced not only the importance of spatial change in examining subcultures, but also subcultural responses to a dominant culture actively invested in the subordination of working class communities and identities. The social and the spatial are interconnected and require subcultural members to create meanings between the two processes that, paired with economic realities, can be seen to build an ongoing evolution of human reality.

These new conceptions of subcultures were solidified with the release of *Resistance Through Rituals* (Clarke, et al., 1972/2002). The introduction to the volume builds on the conceptions Phil Cohen brought in and also understands, that although subcultures are understood, broadly as responses, solutions or resistances to dominant culture, these are not effective in any real way.

The problematic of a subordinate class experience can be 'lived through', negotiated or resisted; but it cannot be *resolved* at that level or by those means. There is no 'subcultural career' for the working-class lad, no 'solution' in the subcultural milieu, for problems posed by the key structuring experiences of the class. (47)

Clearly, the focus is on youth cultures and class structure, however, the topic of study does not necessarily limit the theory exclusively to these aspects of subcultures. While

the Birmingham interest was clearly in youth cultures, their findings do not depend, necessarily, on youth. In fact, it can be argued that the association with youth as necessarily subcultural and the assertion that there is no subcultural career ignores how older individuals continue to negotiate their position within dominant culture throughout their adult lives.

However, beyond this, it remains that working within the social, economic and cultural systems of dominant culture necessitates that no real change is affected. Symbolic resistance is in and of itself inactive and citizens who choose to engage with dominant culture through these means can be seen to be responding in the most effective way given their limited political power. Renter residents living through a gentrification process are not given access to structures of power simply because they do not have the economic resources to buy into the market. Instead, they must remain in a system of discursive and symbolic response that does not change the system, but rather provides techniques within which they can maintain emotional control and subcultural membership of their area. In this way, the work of the Birmingham School and its focus on symbolic acts relates directly to the experience of Mission's residents as they engage, symbolically, with structures of dominance.

Dick Hebdige (1979/2002) built upon the framework of resistance and incorporated semiotic studies as a means of uncovering methods of symbolic resistance used by spectacular, or obvious, subcultures. He used semiotics to explain style as resistance and through this was able to describe the negotiated reality of the subcultural members he discussed. While the subculture I study is not visible in this sense, existence on the street and participation in the public aspects of Mission allows participants to

make their existence spectacular. Public behaviour can be understood through semiotic methods as participants regularly engage in expressing their physical dismissal of dominant cultural ideals through public behaviour.

However, Hebdige came under heavy criticism for his willingness to glorify the symbolic meanings of the spectacular subcultures he researched. A frequent, and fair, criticism was that Hebdige's use of semiotics to read symbolism disregarded intent and instead created meaning where it may not have existed. This criticism was partially expected and Hebdige pre-emptively argued that members may not be consciously aware of their own symbolic meanings, but this meaning making was pertinent to the subcultural experience. Assuming that all actions must be conscious dismisses symbolic activity and challenge the idea that only overtly political actions are effective methods of resistance and therefore worthy of study. Rather, by understanding resistance both through the words and experiences of participants and how resistance is expressed through action, a fuller picture of subcultural experience can be built.

Hebdige (1983/1997) himself seems to have been influenced by the criticism of his earlier study and shifted his focus later in his career. He went on to invoke Foucault's concept of power and resistance in order to refine his theories of subcultures. Furthering the importance of historical specificity, he argued that the spectacular nature of youth subcultures were a result of the recognition of an emerging troubled youth class in British history. Hebdige points out that:

Unlike the powerful who opt for anonymity, these people [subculture members] make a pretty picture, make a 'spectacle' of themselves, respond to surveillance as if they were expecting it, as if it were perfectly natural. (398)

While Hebdige was discussing media representations as a method of defining spectacular subcultures, it is also pertinent to understand the link to use of public areas. The Mission subculture is rooted in claiming public spaces through which symbolic claims of resistance are enacted and as Hebdige explains, this response to surveillance helps demarcate the subcultural member from dominant assumptions. In addition, Hebdige argued that:

...the politics of youth culture is a politics of gesture, symbol, and metaphor, that it deals in the currency of signs and that the subcultural response is, thus, always essentially ambiguous. (403)

While again focusing on youth, this idea can be linked to the methods with which those with limited access to power structures can engage with their world. Important here is his response to challenges that semiotic studies could not reveal the actuality of subcultures. By balancing the use of ethnographic and semiotic studies, it is possible to create one reading of a subculture, but accepting that every member of a subculture may not recognize specific interpretations. However, these interpretations may in fact prove sound and it is only through the attention to visual details studied through semiotics that symbolic actions can be brought to the surface.

Early Birmingham theorists also came under fire for their focus on male youth cultures and a response from McRobbie and Garber (1975/2002) argued for the need to incorporate issues of gender into subcultural studies. While this challenge has been rectified by later work, the need to incorporate contributing identities to a specific subculture is clear. The incorporation of mitigating factors into subcultural membership

introduced a means of understanding the importance of gender, race, religion and sexuality (among others) to subcultural membership.

The specific way that girls could partake in subcultures was explored further by McRobbie (1989/1997) when she discussed the way that the ragmarket offered a safe space for girls to participate as subcultural members despite restrictions placed on their access to public participation. Beyond this safe space allowed for girls on the street, McRobbie also pointed out the role of commodity in spectacular subcultures as enacted through the ragmarket. Although previously the Birmingham theorists had ignored the role of commodities in spectacular subcultures, McRobbie identified the importance of shopping for the raw materials used to create subcultural fashion. Although it was rarely noted, spectacular subcultures were not independent of purchased goods and a certain level of economic commitment was (and is) needed to ensure membership. This is of course related to the need to be visible on the street, or the subcultural 'market place' in order to maintain the public role of resistance.

A further challenge to the Birmingham School pertinent here is the use of historical explanations for emerging subcultures. As Stanley Cohen (1980/1997) pointed out, early attempts at historization were oversimplified to ensure a cause and effect relationship. Specifically:

...the connections sound plausible. But in each case, a single and one-directional historical trend is picked out – commercialization, repression, bourgeoisification, destruction of community, erosion of leisure values – and then projected on to a present which...is much more complicated, contradictory or ambiguous. (153)

In the interest of understanding this challenge, it is important to note that the Mission subculture is explored through its current relationship with the neighbourhood and any attempts to find root causes for this emergence are left to another scholar whose historical methods could explore this. Finally, Cohen's challenge to the Birmingham School is also pertinent to the use of subcultural theory in this thesis. Specifically, the problem lay in:

*...starting with groups who are already card-carrying members of a subculture and then working backwards to uncover their class base. If the procedure is reversed and one starts from the class base, rather than the cultural responses, it becomes obvious that an identical location generates a very wide range of responses and modes of accommodations. (161)*

Unfortunately, subcultural studies are plagued with the concern of over simplifying subcultural experience and membership. In this thesis, the presumption is not that all members of the Mission subculture share a class identity, but rather that through residence in the community, a subcultural identity has been developed. In this way, members can take part in resisting changes they cannot control and further, by engaging with similar people, avoid incorporation into Calgary's dominant culture. However, it must also be noted that not all residents of Mission would necessarily understand themselves as members of a subculture. In fact, the diverse nature of the community guarantees that multiple levels of identity would be exposed if every resident of the area were asked. The nature of the subculture is in many ways linked to being a renter and therefore requiring a means with which to claim power within the gentrification process.

Beyond these challenges to Birmingham School theorists, certain subcultural studies have focused on what Gelder (1997) summarizes as the importance of understanding “subcultures as being *in place*, firmly connected to a particular location.” (315) This focus on place speaks to the importance of understanding a subculture as joined spatially and bound within a specific place. “Subcultural identity can cohere in this way; by identifying with a place... participants can lay claim to a sense of belonging, even exclusivity.” (315) Gelder quickly identifies, though, that subcultures are not dependent on space, but rather shared space can serve as a means of drawing groups together. Clearly, this provides a unique understanding of space as not inanimate, but rather constructed and socially active in providing a backdrop and location for community identification.

Wendy Fonarow takes up this idea of subcultural experiences in space by examining how independent music shows are understood and organized by participants. The concept that shared rules determine how space is understood and claimed is incredibly significant to building a conception of the construction of community space. Clearly, the users do not own the club at which a show is given, but through their organization of that space, they can subtly claim squatter’s rights. Attendants at these shows symbolically divide the space according to subcultural rules and where and how the area can be moved through is determined by this set of unspoken, but shared regulations.

Erving Goffman also rooted his analysis in the creative means with which non-owners are able to claim physical space as their own. Specifically, he explores how patients in a mental hospital make use of their space in order to claim limited ownership

and resist the meanings imposed on them. This study adds to an understanding of space by incorporating issues of power. As Gelder notes in reference to Goffman's work "...there are zones of distinction *inside* the asylum, too – personal, carved-out territories in the midst of socially sanctioned space." (1997, 317) Simply put, regardless of ownership, users of a space find ways of constructing their own identity and inserting it onto a spatial reality within which they have limited control.

This limited control can also apply to how urban communities are constructed, not only by the people who hold land titles, but by the participants who make sense of the public spaces that include parks, retail outlets, sidewalks and even rental property, to a certain extent. While not technically a public space, rental property becomes a contested site within gentrifying communities based on concepts of ownership versus use. As gentrification pressures increase, renters become aware that they no longer have security and stability in their homes and must instead accept that their building may be the next slated for development. In the face of this tension, residents (users) must therefore find ways to claim ownership through use. The symbolic nature of use also requires that space be in some ways abstracted in order to ensure that the deeper symbolic levels of activity can be brought to the surface.

### **Post-Subcultural Theory: Current Debates and Changing Methods**

Clearly, the use of early subcultural studies is only partially effective in understanding the Mission community. However, a direct overlay of these theories to the specific, local experience is not possible. Mission does not represent deviancy, youth, or spectacular (in the traditional sense) subcultures; it is rather the use of techniques that

makes this body of study so useful. While I share the assumption that the Mission subculture is at its root symbolically resistant, incorporation of post-subcultural studies are also useful. While these studies continue to focus on youth cultures, their emergence contests the assumption of the heroic nature of early working-class subcultures and the presumption that parent and dominant cultures are necessarily homogenous (Weinzierl and Muggleton, 2003). However, I contend that although resistance is not necessarily heroic, it is still a continuing human reaction to situations within which individuals have limited power. The role of resistance ensures the continued ability of subcultural members to take part in a community that provides emotional support to their continued avoidance of dominant cultural assumptions. In addition, the use of subcultural studies in geography in the 1990s has invoked to importance of spatial specificity into post-subcultural understandings. Smith (1998), Massey (1998) and Beitbart (1998) for example, look specifically to the way disenfranchised placed youth cultures resist dominant cultural forces to allow personal identities to supersede these dominant assumptions.

As Weinzierl and Muggleton point out, post-subcultural theory seeks to:

Retheorize and reconceptualize youth (sub)cultural phenomena on the shifting social terrain of the new millennium, where global mainstreams and local substreams rearticulate and restructure in complex and uneven ways to produce new, hybrid cultural constellations. (3)

They go on to identify that three subsections of post-subcultural theories have begun to develop and identify specifically the use of Bourdieu's conceptions of capital and taste as

one of these areas. Through this subsection, Mission can be more fully understood as a subculture that defines itself partially through the concept of 'cool'.

This sense of 'cool' is described through Sarah Thornton's reworking of Bourdieu to introduce the concept of subcultural capital. As an extension of cultural capital, she posits that:

Subcultural ideologies are a means by which youth imagine their own and other social groups, assert their distinctive character and affirm that they are not anonymous members of an undifferentiated mass. (201)

The power of belonging comes from *not* belonging to larger, dominant culture and the means of symbolic resistance that constituting a subculture results in. In fact, the clubs that her subculture dwell in, similar to Fonarow's earlier work, become a space that is constituted by the members themselves and I argue this concept is equally useful for understanding the residents of Mission.

Finally, membership offers a further way of conceiving subcultural capital. If membership constitutes a level of cool, a currency of belonging, the further danger is in the way this belonging can be accommodated or appropriated by dominant cultures. In fact, "...the problem for *underground subcultures* is a popularization by a gushing *up* to the mainstream..." (208) which can explain the cultural means within which gentrification occurs. Instead of understanding the process of belonging in this neighbourhood solely through economics, we can begin to clarify why gentrification has been occurring at such an exponential rate. Simply put, the neighbourhood is 'cool', it draws people in because of its reputation and the symbolic capital it promises. Therefore, the process that Mission is going through is one of negotiation between longer-term

residents, newer residents, local businesses and the physical environment with a larger cultural assumption that to live here is to also belong to a club of sorts. As we will see in more detail in the analysis chapter, this cultural assumption and desire for membership is at play with lower income residents in how they constitute their continued right to symbolic ownership of the neighbourhood in resistance to 'outsiders'.

However, I would argue that the theoretical structuring of subcultural theory into distinct schools limits the way in which subcultures themselves can be understood. Unfortunately, the way that theorists have structured the Chicago School, Birmingham School and Post-Subcultural approaches not only limits the ability to incorporate theory from across these distinctions, but also dictates the kinds of subcultures that can be studied. This thesis instead resists this presumption and it becomes possible to see resistance and meaning making in groups beyond those that have traditionally been deemed subcultures due to youth, deviance or fashion. Membership of the Mission subculture depends on living in the right area and the decision to engage with that area socially, rendering previous methods of subcultural identification inadequate. But, the social need to claim identity and physical space has invoked similar processes to these other subcultures studied.

As well, the need to make meaning through people's words and experiences has resulted in the necessary use of not only subcultural theory, but also subcultural approaches to academic study. The merging of ethnography and semiotic analysis used by Hebdige, can be applied to this study with its merging of autoethnography and interview techniques to understand a shared meaning that exists between residents of this area. However, instead of coming in from the outside of a subculture and assigning

meaning, it is possible to understand this community through actions as well as their own experiences.

The use of subcultural presumptions from the three schools of thought has provided a framework for how a specific community can understand and express itself. The use of the Chicago School makes clear that the experience of citizens of a city helps define the identity of the city. Instead of viewing urban spaces as simply meaningless, cultural experience provides a way of understanding this framework. The addition of concepts of hegemonic resistance introduced by the Birmingham School refines early theories and further focuses the importance of individual experience and the multiple levels of cultural identity incorporated within the cityscape. Finally, post-subcultural studies have furthered cultural expression as seen through the eyes of the subcultural member and continue to challenge how resistance can be understood as not necessarily heroic, but rather a coping method for subcultural members.

Internally, a subculture not only provides a place for resistance of dominant assumptions, but also provides subcultural capital that members use to reinforce their privileged role. Finally, these perceptions of the subculture and their importance is rooted in identity invested in membership and the way that being a part of a subculture provides the occasion to align with others who share dissident beliefs. Despite the existence of spatial studies in post-subcultural theory, it is necessary at this point to incorporate spatial philosophies that attempt to explain the larger functioning of urban areas. This merging of the bodies of theory provides a more abstract notion of physical space that adds to the subcultural framework by broadening the view of the city. Finally, these spatial philosophies focus on the way that human beings make sense of and socially

construct the areas they live in. It will become clear that limited power is accessible though the practice of neighbourhood space and this practice also defines specific city areas through use, rather than physical reality.

### **Spatial Philosophy**

Subcultural studies have the benefit of understanding community membership as constituted in a specific physical location. However, a study of space also requires a consideration of first, abstract notions of physical space and second, how these abstract notions can be understood. To begin with, the use of Henri Lefebvre's (1974/1996) ground breaking theories allows the opportunity to begin to build an understanding of space that is rooted in understanding the importance of physical space as different from representational, or constructed space.

Lefebvre<sup>2</sup> theorizes that the physical world can actually be understood through three spatial types and he discriminates between the perceived, conceived and lived aspects of physical space. The perceived is understood as the 'real space', that which can be seen to exist in reality regardless of residents or users, conceived space is the, primarily verbal, system with which space is communicated and the lived space is how residents and users make sense of the space they reside within.

By understanding physical space in such a way, it is then possible to see that architecture, neighbourhoods, demolition and new construction interact across these lines in order to make sense to, and be made sense of by, neighbourhood users. In the case of

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<sup>2</sup> Lefebvre's ideas have been taken up by scholars from multiple disciplines dealing with city environments. Kevin Lynch, the well-known planner, is renowned for using concepts of lived and conceived space in order to create a more citizen friendly planned city. While not within the confines of this thesis, his ideas have proved revolutionary for city planning practices.

gentrification it also becomes possible to further make sense of the communication methods that are being used to continue to (de)construct neighbourhood communities. The perceived space of a gentrifying community can be seen to be the reinvigoration of the community, the improvements made by new owners and, in cases of demolition, the new buildings being constructed. This space is that which seems to be of interest to urban planners, traditional studies of gentrification and newer residents. The conceived space then becomes the extension of how these processes are discussed and how they are transmitted to other people. Through personal discussion and shared discourses, the nature of the community is produced as related to, but separate from, a physical reality. These discourses also become the myths of gentrification as those taking on the various roles within the process find ways of determining how they view gentrification and what it means. This includes, of course, the dialectic of improvement versus destruction of a given neighbourhood and how the process is discursively made comprehensible.

Finally, the lived space is that which has been traditionally ignored by urban scholars and becomes the interest of a new understanding of gentrification and allows for exploration of both effects and reasons for gentrifying certain neighbourhoods. For the residents being displaced, the lived experience of gentrification is a removal of power over their space as the constant barrage of construction and demolition ensures spatial change over which they have no control. For those that remain in a gentrified area, the lived space involves a continuous process of social construction that must occur in order for residents to maintain a sense of community identity.

As Lefebvre points out “[h]umanity, which is to say social practice, creates works and produces things” (71) leading to the assumption that everything we do as humans and

in communities results in the world around us. Rather than existing independently, we construct, socially and collaboratively, a world that is understandable and recognizable.

Complicating this is his notion that the:

...rationality of space...is not the outcome of a quality or property of human action in general, or human labour as such, of 'man', or of social organization ...it is itself the origin and source – not distantly, but immediately, or rather inherently – of the rationality of activity; an origin which is concealed by, yet at the same time implicit in, the inevitable empiricism of those who use their hands and tools, who adjust and combine their gestures and direct their energies as a function of specific tasks. (71)

The construction of space therefore becomes something different than products – it is related to, reflects and implies our understanding of space and does not exist independently of these acts. “[Social] space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships.” (73) The challenge to applying this idea to personal experiences is to understand that while this dialectic exists, it is not apparent in the everyday world. The theory we use is not necessarily the experience we have and instead the deconstruction of space can lead to the challenging array of fallacies that depend too heavily on assuming the theory represents reality, rather than as a tool to understand it.

A further way of expanding the practice of space is through the work of de Certeau (1984/1998). Taking on some of Lefebvre's ideas, de Certeau creates an understanding of city spaces that is directly linked to the symbolic constructions of everyday activities. When discussing specifically the relation between everyday

activities of city dwellers and the City, he points out how the planned city and the used city become entirely different things. Focusing on the diversity and the fluidity of city meanings, he points to the city being, in many ways, unreadable to dwellers themselves and the need to:

...locate the practices that are foreign to the “geometrical” or “geographical” space of visual, panoptic, or theoretical constructions. These practices of space refer to a specific form of *operations* (“ways of operating”), to “another spatiality” (“anthropological,” poetic and mythic experience of space), and to an *opaque and blind* mobility characteristic of the bustling city. A *migrational*, or metaphorical, city thus slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city.

(93)

At this point, it is also important to note that while de Certeau’s project is groundbreaking and of utmost importance to anyone studying city cultures, my basic assumption in this project is the belief that citizens do read their city, they understand it in many ways not touched on by theory. What is useful is his incorporation of both Lefebvre and Foucault, to understand the different power relations expressed daily in the city and the need to understand that position does dictate the way any person can understand the many levels of the spatiality that surrounds them.

Meaning is not set and in fact:

The language of power is in itself “urbanizing,” but the city is left prey to contradictory movements that counter-balance and combine themselves outside the reach of panoptic power. (95)

It is clear that room is left for human action and resistance in both the theoretical, thoughtless way, but also in the intent of a subcultural approach. The central tenant of de Certeau's work is that despite the intentions of the physical, or planned city, use constructs meanings beyond physical restrictions. His repeated reference to panopticism also plays into the way in which cities are designed to enforce and control citizens and, in response, this power is inherently contested daily.

Also useful in de Certeau's work is his concept of space and place:

*A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements...Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities... In short, space is a practiced place... an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place... (117)*

Therefore the act of using a specific area, a place, is what makes up the socially constructed space. Clearly the difference becomes what actually exists physically and the meaning that can be constructed in order to understand that physical place. These terms also help clarify the way I will discuss space and place in the analysis section. While other theorists use space as an undetermined term for both the physical and the constructed, for my discussion, de Certeau's terminology will be employed to distinguish between the physical place and the socially constructed space of Mission.

It then becomes possible to begin to understand city places through culture, rather than physicality or economics. In addition, what also becomes problematic, but useful, is postmodern discussions of time and space. While my interest here is specifically on

cultures and human experiences, the use of postmodernism to define physical space, specifically through architecture is not what I seek to invoke. These are useful discussions and a study of architecture specifically could broaden the understanding of how people use physical spaces. However, in order to abide by the constraints that come from the length allowed for a thesis, it is important to save those discussions for another project. So, instead, the use of postmodernism will be solely discussed in how it relates to time-space compressions and the complimentary breakdown of time and space distinctions.

As David Harvey (1989) makes clear, “Finite time resources and the ‘friction of distance’ (measured in time or cost taken to overcome it) constrain daily movement.” (211) We are all defined by the specifics of time, the specifics of physical space, but these constraints, while defining the tools with which we can move through our lives and daily worlds, do not restrict the human capacity to construct with these tools to change the details. Instead of the same result coming from the daily lives of individuals living in the same physical area, symbolic constructions provide the unique and specific cultural identity from physical realities. Spatial theorists, while sometimes disagreeing on the theory of space, also recognize the creativity of human life required to live within the physical systems dominating our world.

Power is negotiated, and although physical places may attempt to dictate the rules, they do not dictate the outcome. While cities are commonly understood in economic terms, it is also possible to seek an understanding that exists beyond and as an extension of economic practices. Urban space is of course a market, but as Bourdieu so helpfully points out, economic capital is not the only capital at play in any city. His concept of

social capital, as outlined in *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993/2000), focuses on how the:

...fields of cultural production are universes of belief which can only function in so far as they succeed in simultaneously producing products and the need for those products through practices which are the denial of the ordinary practices of the 'economy', the struggles which take place within them are ultimate conflicts involving the whole relation to the 'economy'. (103)

Here, Bourdieu, in many ways similar to the work of Sharon Zukin, seeks to uncover the symbolic and cultural nature of the city through its production of cultural goods. While he focuses on theatres specifically<sup>3</sup>, his ideas can be expanded to the modification of local cultures. Gentrification is based on not only complicated buying and selling of property, but also on the selling of a lifestyle, one that is imbedded in city cultures around the world.

Clearly, the nature of art and culture (in the production sense) are deeply important to the nature of any city, but it is also important to consider the myth of the inner city, which becomes itself a product to be sold and consumed. It is clear, as will be outlined in my analysis of Mission, the nature of community is deeply tied to the city market place and in fact the notion of community is tied to larger economic, social and cultural practices in the city. Bourdieu argues that cultural products:

Because they are based on a relation to culture which is necessarily also a relation to the 'economy' and the market, institutions producing and marketing cultural goods, whether in painting, literature, theatre or cinema, tend to be organized into

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<sup>3</sup> Zukin focuses as well on artistic and cultural capital, but seeks to understand the tourism nature of culture as expressed in New York City.

structurally and functionally homologous systems which also stand in a relation of structural homology with the field of the fractions of the dominant class... (105)

Again, I argue that this is not only the nature of production, but also the nature of Mission's sense of community. It is not solely based on the actual people, or the economic realities, but rather takes on the notion of myth in understanding the importance of the 'community', more than the actual residents and local culture. This is of course not to only say that a specific community has a distinct flavour or personality, but rather that in order to understand urban space and gentrification processes, it is necessary to also realize that these ideals of urban living are for sale and do not only exist in and of themselves. In addition, the homologous nature of the systems Bourdieu discusses provides an access point to understand that complicated methods of lifestyle for sale are related to the needs shared by dominant classes. Those with power do not necessarily seek to live in an anonymous city and this concept could explain, in a small way, why certain neighbourhoods become so contested. The diverse, imagined community that gentrifying inner city communities promise are not only attractive to, and heavily defended by, lower income earners, but rather merge across economic boundaries to evoke symbolic, social desires among diverse people.

Alan Blum (2002) seeks to merge the cultural and philosophical to explicate how the city functions and how it is understood. Useful is his discussion of the challenges of discussing the city as market or commodity:

...if the city is treated as a good, it can be expected to be differentiated in the ways goods are discriminated from one another... consumption as a logic suggests that the cities come to be rendered comparable in terms of an abstract model that

is artificially designed (GNP, lifestyle indexes) to relinquish any real difference.

Though the cities might “differ” in their respective relations to the model (their positions or “rank”), the finding always buries the question of the difference between being and appearance, that is, of the difference between such a difference and a real difference. (27)

The challenge then becomes how one can understand the dual nature of the city as both a market and a socio-cultural product. The layers of how a city can be understood then forces consideration of multiplicity as a way to determine the activity and meaning found in city space.

One of the most useful methods Blum suggests of understanding city space is through the concept of “scenes” and how they function as social determinants of behaviour. These scenes are based on vague connections made by those who take part in the single’s scene, the bar scene and so on. This concept can be understood as similar to a subculture in that both methods of belonging are rooted in structuring place in order to express specific needs. In addition, “...scene suggests an element of secrecy or, at least, of differential access to what it celebrates.” (167) The scene can then be understood through subcultural capital as a method of structuring the city in such a way that methods of interacting with place become focused on building smaller subcultures of belonging.

Finally, scenes are about being seen in the city through an embodied role. To be seen is to be apparent through the body and its interaction with the space it inhabits and subsequently make it meaningful and understandable. Instead of becoming disconnected, then, the city can be understood as a space within which bodies collide and make sense of each other. This idea can be expanded by Fiske’s proposition that “...the mundane body

[is] the synecdochal embodiment of the social order, and therefore of the social differences within that order.” (163) If place can be understood through the social construction specified for it by users, then the resulting space also inscribes the body. Being in space is a process of understanding the space and allowing residents to become, symbolically, linked to the area they live in through their active participation. This meaning, however, must also be linked to the way in which urban culture is made meaningful on broader, less personal levels.

Castells (2002) points out:

...*urban culture*, in the anthropological sense of the term; that is to say, a certain system of values, norms and social relations possessing a historical specificity and its own logic of organization and transformation. (35)

His concern is to make clear that city culture is not exclusively linked to spatial form, but rather the social relationships imbedded in it broadly define our sense of urban cultures, often discussed as part of the dialectic of the urban/rural. In addition, he challenges the way in which urban cultures have traditionally been linked to capitalist activity. By focussing on a comparison between communist Soviet cities and the similarities to capitalist environments, he concludes that market economies do not dictate specific urban cultures (41). However, he also points out that despite these similarities across economic markets, ecological determinations are not enough on which to base a shared concept of urban culture. Instead, he uses this idea as proof that what does exist is an urban myth that helps create these realities.

...”urban culture”, as it is presented, is neither a concept nor a theory. It is, strictly speaking, a myth, since it recounts, ideologically, the history of the human

species. Consequently, the writings on “urban society” which are based directly on this myth, provide the key-words of an ideology of modernity, assimilated, in an ethnocentric way, to the social forms of liberal capitalism. (42)

Therefore, Castells makes clear that specificity of local cultures must be incorporated in order to ensure that the specific urban culture is interrogated beyond shared theoretical myths of being.

This introduces the need to understand how these myths are transmitted, not only to scholars, but also to residents of a given urban community. My concern is how people use urban myths to make sense of their own urban communities, rather than the long history of modernist thinkers of space. One method of understanding the transmission of myths is Appadurai’s concepts of ‘scapes’. These ‘scapes’ are the mythologized landscapes of shared understandings of urban communities and also the methods with which these global assumptions are transmitted. Of utmost importance here is the concept that:

...mediascapes...provide (especially in their television, film and cassette forms) large and complex repertoires of images, narratives and ‘ethnoscapes’ to viewers throughout the world, in which the world of commodities and the world of ‘news’ and politics are profoundly mixed. (299)

These mediascapes are therefore the media landscape created by global imaging of city spaces that allow viewers around the world to create an understanding of cities they may never have visited. In addition, the presumption is that this specific landscape does not provide a ‘real’ view of these areas, but rather “...scripts can be formed of imagined lives...” (299) not dependent on first hand experience.

Urban space and communities, while specific, are also indebted to ongoing myths created on global levels to create shared meaning. This meaning may partially be based in reality; however, it clearly goes beyond this. Instead of being able to solidify one common understanding of any space, community identities, local cultural meanings and links to global media representations and myths come together to allow people to socially construct a further representation of their spatial environment.

### **Conclusions: Merging the Subcultural and the Spatial**

If subcultural theory provides the means with which to understand a community, spatial philosophies provide a framework for understanding the space that contains, and is created by, that subculture. Here, Mission residents are described as a subculture based on the way their identity is linked with residence in the community and the ongoing symbolic acts invoked to resist the gentrification forces that make it difficult to stay. In addition, as will be clear in the analysis chapter, Mission, as a community, provides an opportunity for some residents to make a physical and symbolic meaning outside of the dominant assumptions of Calgary's culture. In addition to this, the community, or subculture, of Mission becomes a contributing identity for members as it offers a way of engaging with a larger social network to publicly align with other residents in the community in response, and in dissent, to dominant assumptions and forces.

This subcultural approach is paired with the spatial philosophies of place as practised and necessarily socially constructed by those who make use of a given area. Lefebvre's introduction of conceived space and its subsequent refinement by de Certeau provides an understanding that practice and use of a specific place defines the space that

results. Instead of remaining as a static environment, the area of a neighbourhood is conceived of as partially structured by a social meaning that is co-produced among users. Harvey's assessment of the postmodern nature of time and physical space is built upon the theory of practice, then, to understand that within this practice are specific notions of time and physical space that constrain the tools that human users have access to. As well, the creativity of human life provides an opportunity to use physical space to negotiate power with dominant assumptions and cultures and to think of physical space as a product of human action. In addition, the postmodern condition requires that we think more specifically about the meaning imbedded in our use of physical spaces to express human, emotional needs.

The methods with which we examine our physical spaces, in the broad history of urban studies and assessments, are complex and require that certain perspectives be privileged over others. Specifically, I cannot hope to uncover every social meaning that Mission embodies, but rather the shared sense created by the Mission subcultural users I spoke with. The concept of 'scenes' as linked with subcultural capital provides a critical method with which to uncover the importance that the public places of Mission have for local residents. It can also not be ignored that the meanings evoked of the place are not internally separate and distinct, but rather linked and indebted to larger myths of the urbane.

This consideration of the myth of the urban has been incorporated to ensure that the link is clear between local conceptions of Mission and emblematic urban communities from other areas of the world. One of the methods of transmission of these emblematic spaces is then found in the concept of mediascapes that share simulations of

the world's most popular urban spaces to local Mission users. In this way, Mission residents can link their local experience with those outside of Calgary. Instead of being relegated to automatic membership and alignment with dominant cultural assumptions of the city, residents of Mission can access global myths with which to explain their own personal identities and politics. These issues will become clearer in the analysis chapter as I seek to use these theoretical frameworks to examine the way in which Mission can be seen as a subculture, the methods of resistance employed and the way that the neighbourhood is opposed symbolically to Calgary as a whole through an alignment with urban cultures from larger cities.

## Chapter 5: Analysis

As discussed in the previous chapter, my community participants can be identified as a subculture that provides shared meaning making and resistance in response to both the local process of gentrification and a dominant Calgary culture that supports ongoing development. This perspective, as I have referred to, developed from the comments made by participants and subsequently, I have chosen to focus this analysis through this identity creation and understanding. This identity is also linked and expressed through the symbolic actions that participants use to make sense of, and take part in, the physical reality of the community. My choice to focus on identity creation and resistance is also directly linked to the gentrification process currently at play in the neighbourhood and the personal experiences and responses this process has evoked from community participants.

Through the incorporation of a subcultural approach it becomes possible to uncover this human response and community construction that allows for individuals to cope with development issues beyond their control. As well, interest has been placed on the way in which this subcultural understanding of the community interacts and socially constructs the neighbourhood place in the interest of embodying the personal politics and desires for the community expressed by participants.

As I laid out in chapter two, participants were contacted through a snowball sample rooted in my own social relationships within the community. All participants came into contact with my research through discussion with me in local community social gatherings and half of the participants requested to be a part of the research. The other three participants were asked if they would be interested in taking part in the

research due to their expressed interest in community issues and gentrification concerns, however I always ensured that participants were free to take part or not. The resulting in-depth interviews were transcribed and will be quoted below to first describe and then analyse the nature of the Mission subculture, the methods of resistance invoked and the symbolic levels of meaning making that residents instil in the physical area of the neighbourhood.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Street Hipsters: Defining a Subculture through Shared Place and Meaning making**

Subcultural theory and research, as discussed in the last chapter, is deeply rooted in explicating youth and/or deviance through stylistic and behavioural practices. In the case of Mission, this focus is neither appropriate, nor useful, however, subcultural symbolic acts of resistance, social coping and meaning making through a subcultural social network are central to my participants' community experience. Through this analysis it will become clear that the residents of Mission I am discussing see themselves as a subculture even if the nature of their subcultural identity is somewhat contrary to the general usages of the theory. In addition to gender, sexual and racial identities, membership within the Mission community becomes a touchstone with which residents understand their relationship to the neighbourhood and their neighbours. Mission is not a place where they, or I, merely live, but provides a guiding understanding to the way in which people can move through the rest of their world.

Kathy, an artist in her mid-thirties, expressed this sense of identity explicitly when she commented that "...living in Mission is a big part of your identity..." and through

this the stereotypical anonymous nature of urban communities is avoided<sup>1</sup>. In fact, she goes on to say that living in Mission “...creates commonality between people, it creates an instant common characteristic between you and I... that guy and that guy...”.

The framing of the community becomes one of drawing people together and Kathy focuses on the fact that by residing in the same area, diverse persons are automatically granted a commonality. Behind this comment, it is evident that a bond develops through a shared social construction of the neighbourhood place. In addition, it is possible to begin to recognize the deeply meaningful role the neighbourhood and community has taken on. Rather than simply being a place to live, residence is also singularly significant enough to symbolically determine a commonality. Instead of remaining a fact of geography, choosing to live within Mission’s borders takes on a personal and shared meaning that allows Kathy to presume that other residents in the area can instantly join her local social network.

The nature of the community as rooted in commonality and connections also explains how people come to know the area and thus move to it themselves. As Carl, a writer in his mid-thirties outlined, he was unaware of the area until a close friend had moved into the neighbourhood:

...[b]ecause, I didn’t even actually know where Mission was. I’d heard the name Mission, you know, just you hear the names of neighbourhoods, but I didn’t even know what it was until uh a good friend of mine moved into that building that I subsequently ended up following her about a year later. Because I became

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<sup>1</sup> As examined by Karp et. al. (1991), the nature of urban space is essentially anonymous. Instead of seeing the social aspects of the market, for example, they focused thier examination of urban space on the use of local businesses as a replacement, rather than an addition to, social lives of local residents.

familiar with the building, with the area so when it was time for me to move out from my parent's place... uhm it seemed like a good place to go.

For Carl, access to the community, and in fact the building he chose to live in was available through a previous social connection. The community then became a place where he entered because someone else found it first. By understanding this method of accessing the neighbourhood, it is also clear that residents serve a gatekeeper function when introducing friends to the community. Without being introduced to the neighbourhood, Carl may not have moved into the area simply because he didn't know it existed and perhaps would have continued to live in his parent's community far longer. Beyond this gatekeeper role, Carl's previous lack of knowledge of the area is also pertinent to this discussion. It raises the question of whether this has really changed. In the Calgary sea of suburbia and massive sprawl, I frequently run into people who don't know Mission, and often don't know the shopping district of 4<sup>th</sup> Street.

However, no resident of the community would admit to this and instead we maintain a shared sense of this community as the one to live in, regardless of what 'they' think. This issue will be discussed further later in this chapter, but relevant now, is how this secrecy draws the subculture together. Knowing the neighbourhood and having moved into it creates a connection that serves to exclude those who are perceived as not recognizing the great place that the neighbourhood is. In addition, when 'outsiders' are unaware of the neighbourhood the reaction is not to presume that the community is less important, but rather those who are not aware of how special the area is are somehow missing out.

However, the neighbourhood is also personally marketed by the same residents who benefit from an imagined status garnered from knowledge of the area. After being introduced to the area, Carl points out how he was able to provide an introductory service to other friends of his:

...not only have a lot of my friends ended up subsequently moving into the neighbourhood themselves, but those who don't live here when we get together, they almost invariably come here...

The ideal of the community as both a place to live and to visit is expressed through the socializing/visiting aspect introduced here. As with most neighbourhoods, particularly those based heavily on interconnections, building on pre-existing acquaintanceships and friendships is required to create larger social networks. This shared understanding also allows residents to feel that they are a part of a culture in some ways disconnected from the rest of the city. The role of interconnectedness, the process of knowing people, creates the sense of community and lends an air of authority to those who recognize and take part in it.

Charlie, a student in his early twenties, commented on the role local businesses and social environments have in attaining membership in the community. He was in a similar situation to Carl in not knowing about the neighbourhood prior to being employed in the area. Through his employment he was able to access and understand the community. Specifically:

...basically, the Planet was my in to the community, cause I already worked in the neighbourhood, for like a year before, before I started at the Planet and the Planet I, tends to function as a fairly large social hub for a lot of, some people ... and I

know that working there helped me just get to know a lot of different sort of people and give me, give me a lot of exposure to the people who were in the neighbourhood...

The need to be a part of not only the community as a resident, but also to partake in local socializing is clear. While for some participants, neighbours become a social focus for their understanding of the community, as McRobbie pointed out it is clear that membership is also on one level purchased<sup>2</sup>. By choosing to access local businesses, the opportunities exist to visually and obviously see and be seen by other residents, invoking Blum's concept of the 'scene'. Clearly, it is possible to live in the area without hanging out at local establishments, but to be a part of the subculture, to be part of the 'scene' is to purchase locally in order to socialize with other residents. However, the use of the market to create a shared environment also allows local residents to claim, and create, a space beyond their own homes. The unique role that public areas takes on in the community will be dealt with a little later on in the chapter, but for now, it is important to note that public space becomes shared areas where residents can enact the community networks of Mission visibly.

On the other side, it is not only through local establishments that connections are made. Working on two levels, neighbours that are directly accessible and persons you may meet on the street come under slightly different definitions. The access that a resident has to immediate neighbours is slightly different than those who do not live in the same building. However, it is often the merging of the two types of associations that allow for closer relationships. As Stacey, a performer in her early twenties, points out,

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<sup>2</sup> One of the challenges of this line of inquiry exists in the fact that being a resident of the community is purchased. However, because living expenses are a basic requirement, the role of income invested in renting seems less pertinent than income invested in socializing.

her next-door neighbour has become a close friend because they reside in the same building. She is careful to point out that she and her neighbour have very little in common and is seemingly surprised that they have become so close, yet sees this experience as emblematic of the subculture of Mission. Rather than being based on personality types or lifestyles, the commonality is based on a less self-evident quality. As she put it, "...I know my neighbour, I know my neighbour so well that she came over and hung out last night...and we can just like and we're very different, we're totally different...", yet despite this difference, their shared space and relationship to the larger community allows them to form a strong social bond. In addition, the public methods of communication among residents, the commonality that Kathy spoke to, is represented within a specific apartment building. Approachability and an assumption of an open door policy to neighbours facilitates Stacey and her neighbour developing a friendship in a way that reinforces the subcultural politics.

For Charlie, this commonality was a new experience that contrasted to his childhood in the suburbs. As he understands it:

...because a lot of people don't grow up in this neighbourhood and usually tend to grow up wherever else they may have ended up growing up, but I know that in some ways this community is very special in that you do tend to know your neighbours and stuff like that, but I know I grew up in the suburbs and you just never really understand that, you know, that the place that you live should also be a community where you know people and you actually enjoy spending time there.

The importance placed on enjoying spending time in your neighbourhood provides another opportunity to understand that the community space takes on a unique role to the

people who take part in it. All participants were clear that Mission offered something special, something separate from the rest of the city. In addition, by placing such importance on the community experience, residents claim a role for the neighbourhood and understand it in a shared way. Instead of being an unrecognized or invisible place, Mission becomes a facilitator for residents who wish to take part in the community network and social life. As well, Charlie's use of the words 'ended up growing up' delineates suburban existence against Mission existence. To grow up somewhere is not a personal choice and instead the choice of parents or childhood caregivers, but residence in Mission is an autonomous decision, one that provides membership and belonging.

This creates a new dimension to the traditional understanding of subcultures as a response, first to parent cultures and then to dominant culture, although in this case the two are presented as synonymous. For Mission, the strong history of residents moving in from the suburbs when they reach adulthood presents an option to youth. Therefore, the suburban culture chosen by their parents and so clearly privileged by the city as a whole, presents a symbolic problem to be solved. This solution is found through being a part of a community that is obviously and symbolically framed against suburban experience and seen to offer an alternative to the perceived lack of suburban neighbourhoods. In addition, the option provides residents the occasion to, symbolically and realistically, reject the politically and culturally dominant suburban lifestyle.

Stacy also expressed this community connection when she outlined a story of a friend of hers:

My friend calls us the 4<sup>th</sup> Street Hipsters because uhm you know I mean I uhm I live alone and that means that I'd I mean I spend a lot of time at home or alone or

whatever but I uhm when I do venture out I all I have to do is literally walk down the block and there are friendly faces and really good people and uhm there's I mean I go to the you know the video store...and [the] people...they're cool and I know the people there...I know the people that work at the Planet so I spend a lot of time at the coffee shop, even though you know its not its sort of interesting cause its not really where I would choose to be otherwise, you know I mean if I think about the coffee shop itself...its not so comfortable and I don't get free coffee there, not anymore. And so I'm like why does that have more of an appeal that going down or across the street to Starbucks or down the street to Second Cup or I mean anywhere else cause there are lots of coffee shops around and I choose to go there because...its like a community centre and that's that's what I need. That's what I need without yeah I don't have you know have family and I...live alone and so I need a place to go where there are people and the sense of family....I like the idea that people look after each other. I really feel safe in Mission for sure.

Underlying her words is the sense that living in this community supplants the need for a family and creates a bond between the people who live in the area. The importance of this experience is clear and it is evident that by claiming the community as a replacement for family speaks to the role this fills in Stacy's life. As well, the comment she makes early on in the quote points to the nature of living in the community. Her friend's acknowledgement of the 4<sup>th</sup> Street Hipster lies in the mythology that has arisen about the neighbourhood as a unique and unparalleled neighbourhood in the city available to those who recognize it. In addition, this statement signifies for Stacy the way that the Mission

subculture exists for her and how her lifestyle choices come to determine the definition of the 4<sup>th</sup> Street Hipster. She presents this identity as rooted in local businesses and the way she can interact with the area she inhabits. Her choice to live in the area is based on finding likeminded individuals that can fulfill her personal needs. Her friend's comment also links to the outside knowledge of the neighbourhood and community. Jack, a student in his mid-twenties who resides outside of Mission, also expresses his awareness of this mythology and how it led to his desire to take part in my research. He may not live in the neighbourhood, but recognizes a subculture he wishes to be a part of.

Finally, the 4<sup>th</sup> Street Hipster also speaks to the subcultural capital at play and Stacy expresses this 'cool' aspect of the neighbourhood. In addition to this familial relationship with others in the area, knowing people provides a brand for community membership. She 'hangs out' not only where she knows people, but also where the people are 'cool' and this provides a social experience that adds to her life. The nature of belonging comes from being a part of something not only internally recognized by local residents, but seen as a state of being that extends beyond the borders of the neighbourhood to be externally recognized. The definition of the subculture also serves to separate this one inner city neighbourhood from the rest. Instead of all inner city places being equal, 'cool' exists in Mission and signifies a difference in this area from those surrounding it.

It is also important to note that it is not sufficient to understand physical areas as something that surrounds us as is made clear through the spatial philosophies I am drawing on. Place defines and is drawn on to create meaning, both internally and externally. The merging of these two bodies of theory in action creates a means to

uncover not only why these residents stay in the neighbourhood, but also how. It should be evident by this point that to live in Mission is to live with a constant onslaught of construction that symbolically and realistically provides a physical threat to the well being of residents. The existence of development communicates the changing nature of the economics of the area and subsequently represents the very real possibility that there may not be a place for lower income residents, including my participants and myself, in the near future.

Of importance, and often mentioned is the unique way that Mission residents construct their social environments. Knowing your neighbours becomes a sign of not only why Mission is special, but is also an emotional technique to living singly in a modern world. As Kathy points out:

Yeah, we all [herself and her neighbours] know like each others names and uhm just last night, you know, went out with a couple of my neighbours, we went and watched some jazz. They've gotten me like art uhm new clients, I paint them a couple paintings...

Not only do Kathy's neighbours provide a social opportunity that expands beyond their homes, but they also contribute to her professional success. Functioning on a level of interdependence, her comment speaks to the nature of a community that not only provides an opportunity for social expression, but also facilitates professional development. The colloquial term 'its who you know' is enacted in social connections that consequently support other aspects of her life. We can learn from this the necessity of creating a community that is not only sustainable and interconnected, but deals in many aspects of life in order to not separate diverse levels of identity and need.

Further, Kathy also notes specifically the importance of being involved with the local community as a means of increasing the sales of her artwork. Specifically:

Nothing's done anything for me like the Planet...its just been amazing...I sell prints off the walls all the time and I also get requests of commissions and then I get a lot of further requests from those commissions, like I've done to a lot of work just going out on the street...

It cannot be said that something specifically about the Planet makes it a uniquely successful environment to sell art, it is rather the way the Planet interacts with the community that allows it to become such a profitable exhibition place. The people who frequent the Planet are not just buying coffee, but buying their relationship to the community. Ironically, in contrast to the corner boys or street cultures studied by early Birmingham scholars, this participation is dependent on purchasing power. While it is not necessary to buy a coffee to hang out, it is necessary to at least presume that participation will require at least a couple of dollars. However, the consistent comments from participants that the Planet serves as a community centre expresses the ideal of a local business that draws people in and functions as a space beyond the home that can bring people into contact and provide a meeting place. In a similar way, Kathy also points out how she also garners work when she paints on the street. This painting often takes place on 4<sup>th</sup> Street and interacts with the public street life to bring requests in the same way that the Planet has.

When discussing the nature of Mission and the kind of community that has been constructed, Raymond, a performer in his mid-thirties, uses a story to explicate the odd nature of the community:

Paradoxically, it really creates, its created a small town feel. Uhm...in the sense that – two days ago I'm having a coffee, at the Planet. I'm standing outside, I'm having a cigarette, and somebody says, a woman walks up and says Hey...I used to work with you...Listen I'm doing a film for the super 8 film festival, the \$100 film festival, can you come and hold a camera...I don't know her, but she feels comfortable enough, uhm having seen me around, in saying would you mind doing this. That's what I like – you're not going to get that in the suburbs.

The nature of being able to comfortably approach relative strangers based on loose social or professional acquaintances is couched in terms that counter the way the rest of the city, particularly the suburbs, is seen to function. Rather than limiting encounters, the nature of the community forces people to know each other, to be social and subsequently approachable, thus maintaining a sense of community that goes beyond merely living in the same geographical area. Further, Raymond did not know this woman from the neighbourhood, but rather had worked with her. Interestingly, he uses an encounter that while placed in Mission is not really a social result of the community, however he views this exchange as possible because it occurred in the neighbourhood.

Charlie also commented on the unique nature of the community:

...I tend to believe that no matter where you live there will be good people, so uhm I think for me it was facilitated in this neighbourhood not necessarily because – because the people I know like living in this neighbourhood and are attracted to it for the same reasons that I am, so perhaps those people are special ... this neighbourhood and meeting them was definitely special to me ... Its very unlikely I would have met them anywhere else...

For Charlie, the role the neighbourhood holds is slightly confused as he looks first to meeting great people everywhere, but concludes by focusing on the role the community played in the great people he has met. For him, the neighbourhood has facilitated an opportunity to come into contact with others like him. The process then becomes one of finding those who interact with the community in the same way he does in order to ensure a communal understanding. Charlie also recognizes that his experience of the community is determined by the way he understands it. Residing in Mission is not enough to join this subculture, but rather the shared understanding of the community is what draws residents together.

Beyond the unique link that is created, Raymond also speaks to the importance of having the opportunity to be social:

...for me its a real its ahh – if I don't get a chance to be social in any other way its important for me to be able to hang out and see people and be social. And there's a certain – for everybody, there's a certain mental health aspect to it...I don't think people realize how important it is to just be able to walk down the street and go I recognize that person, I just..Hi. Not even hi sometimes, just a little wave.

That's really important...that cuts down on feeling isolated.

In the same way that Kathy expressed the need to have an opportunity to know people, to socialize, Raymond points to the importance of maintaining a social atmosphere that prevents isolation as a result of living singly<sup>3</sup>. Being a part of the community provides a link between residents and a subjective and personal opportunity to live in an area that

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<sup>3</sup> This comment is also interesting in the fact that almost all of my participants lived alone. This was not the intention of the study, but raises questions about the way people construct their homes in Mission. Clearly, a preference for living alone is expressed and these choices could be interrogated in a further study to explore why this would be preferred and the links this has to the nature of the community.

does not necessarily have to function on such a social level. Then again, this is also a choice that the people I have come into contact with have made. It would be possible to maintain relationships external to the community and choose not participate locally, but this involvement defines a resident as a member of the subculture through the work required.

Charlie's experience highlighted the kind of work that must be done in order to participate:

I know it took a while for me to adjust to the differences and sort of the familiarity and you know getting comfortable with that... most of it was just that I wasn't used to it because yeah, because for the most part, you don't, I didn't really know anyone beyond my family [as a child], you know there's school and stuff, but its not quite the same thing, so yeah... just being unused to the whole feeling of that.

What is fascinating in this comment is also that I asked during the interview if he saw this as a specific skill set and the response was resoundingly negative. Instead of it being a skill set to master, the community dynamic is something to get used to which in some ways brings it to a level of expectation that does not reside in a lifestyle choice, but rather how one should behave within this community. The differences between the suburban and Mission experience is then perceived as rooted in making an effort to be a part of the community. While it would make intuitive sense that this would be an easy adjustment, based on the sociality of human beings, clearly it is not something that can be assumed. In order to enter into the subculture, members are required to shift their social behaviour

in order to adapt to the rules of membership through social engagement with other residents. Charlie made this clear when he commented that:

...just living in the neighbourhood if you don't, if you're not actually out on the streets meeting people and talking to people, you don't, you can't build your community that way...that level of building and sort of participating [in the community]...

To merely reside is not enough and engaging on a daily and active basis is clearly necessary.

Further to this engagement is a strong understanding that being a part of the community aids in furthering personal experience and advancement. As Stacy claimed "...its like this feeling that if I need anything, I can I mean its there, its around, its available and people will help you get there..." This comment, beyond highlighting the convenience of the neighbourhood, also speaks to the way the community functions as a support system. A shared perspective and privileging of the interconnectedness of the community is clear and members both benefit from, and provide support to, the whole.

The clear social network and sense of shared meaning I have been discussing thus far provides a framework for residents to enact their resistance and dissent to the dominant assumptions of Calgary's culture. In addition to providing necessary social mechanisms of behaviour and belonging, the subculture also provides an opportunity to share in the construction of a community that is distinct and separate from the rest of the city. It is this root that has so much in common with dominant assumptions of subcultural theories. As Cohen introduced and the Birmingham school refined, citizens

who fall outside of the boundaries of dominant culture engage in complicated symbolic practices from which they can create social meanings more appropriate to their lives.

### **Working Through Resistance: Methods and Techniques that Make Calgary Liveable**

In the context of a dominant culture that is conservative and supports development and the suburban preference, those who do not agree with this ideological framework are often left with only symbolic means of resistance to avoid incorporation. One of the methods of mitigating large-scale assumptions is obviously the personal sense of community that has been developed. Thus, by residents conceiving of themselves as a subculture, and through my own theoretical framework, it is possible to uncover the methods of community creation developed through both real and symbolic resistance.

The merging of identity and space was made clear by Jack's comment that:

Mission...sort of enables different...types of people living in the area and there's almost this...sense that this is Mission right, you know, I live in Mission, I like Mission...no one in [the suburbs] would identify themselves so much with the community.

His own community identity is slightly different in that he, at the time of the interview, was not residing in Mission. Instead, he used socializing in the area as a way to opt out of the suburban neighbourhood he lived in and claim an identity through visiting elsewhere. Clearly, Mission is unique in the way that residents are able to draw personal meanings from the space they live in and share with others. Another key role of Mission in developing an alternative to suburban life is that, as a community, the diversity of the

neighbourhood is highlighted. Specifically, residents are seen as diverse, but sharing a common sensibility that allows them to coexist in a meaningful, productive way. Stacy described the type of people she knew in the area as:

I like that there's a population that I think's a lot more...very socially and environmentally conscious...people that are political, but not in the same kind of bureaucrat...kind of way, people that are young, but when I go places, I talk to people, it doesn't seem to matter who I am and who I represent or who they are and who they represent, we're like, we can be totally unlike people that are sitting on the same bench, drinking coffee whatever and talking about the things that are important to us and there's...a lot of freedom that I feel.

The meaning and bonding that is created through this is not limited to specific shared qualities, but rather a shared understanding that diversity should be celebrated, and as we will see, broadcast as a vitally important quality of this neighbourhood. Stacy also speaks to the freedom she feels and this can be related to the necessity of having a space where, through denial and rejection of Calgary's dominant culture, being politically and socially conscious is both assumed and celebrated. Of course this political and social conscience is also presumed as liberal and these personal politics can be expressed and shared in Mission in contrast to the overwhelming conservatism of the city<sup>4</sup>.

What is also fascinating is the nature of the community being, at its base, framed through difference. Instead of focusing on the specific means that residents can find common ground, it is through diversity that a strong community is formed. These residents solidify their community through a celebration of difference and a shared

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<sup>4</sup> However, this is not to say that all residents of Mission are liberal. In fact, a further line of inquiry would explicate the social methods of containment for those residents who do express conservative views.

approach to the neighbourhood in a way that is constructed as contrary to the rest of the city. Instead of seeing Mission as disconnected from Calgary as a whole, the implication is that in Mission, Calgary's dominant culture of suburbia and conservatism is problematized and found lacking when building strong social networks. As well, by focusing on this delineation from the rest of the city, Mission residents define themselves against Calgary and find meaning and importance in existing outside the boundaries that larger cultural practices seem to require. Finally, Mission's oasis quality results in a devotion to the neighbourhood that is both explicitly and implicitly contrasted to a suburban ideal.

This devotion repeatedly came up during interviews while my participants and I co-created a semblance of what makes Mission special. The opportunity to co-create meaning also provides a useful means of understanding why Mission residents conceive of themselves as being a part of something, part of a subculture. Throughout all of the interviews, residents were clear on why they lived in the neighbourhood and why they continue to do so. However, the specifics of why are in many ways abstract and increasingly difficult to explain or uncover. The experience of living in this community is not one that resides wholly in the intellect, but relates to what Kathy called the 'ethereal' nature of Mission. Once membership is attained, it is clear that residents are able to form strong attachments to both the community itself and the geographical area it inhabits. In fact, Stacy, in response to a direct question of life in other areas of the city, responded "why would I want to live anywhere else?"

The benefits of the neighbourhood are multifaceted and Stacy could have been referring to convenience of location, availability of resources or the unique combination

of river and urban environments. However, it is also clear that beyond these physical characteristics, Mission is an opportunity to opt-out of Calgary and Alberta's dominant cultures of corporatization, suburbia and conservative thinking. Residents who disagree with these dominant assumptions are given the opportunity to refute a culture that they cannot change and therefore gain power through their symbolic actions. By living in an area that is symbolically constructed to embody everything that the city in general is perceived to reject, people in Mission can create a refuge for their politics, their sexual identities and provide an alternative challenge to the presiding dominant culture of the city.

However, no neighbourhood is perfect and the benefit of heavy development is the opportunity to enact changes that can be beneficial to those residents who cannot benefit from added condominiums. When asked what could make the neighbourhood better, many residents spoke of the need to have more locally focused businesses available. One of the major suggestions was a bakery, speaking again to a presumed nature of urban places that provides everything you could possibly need in your daily life right at your fingertips. Yet, the limited local population contradicts this expressed need. With approximately five thousand people in Mission-Cliff Bungalow, area businesses cannot depend solely on local residents to draw their profits and keep them in business.

This conflict between local community and market needs of businesses also explains the distinction between the community and developers. As a market, Mission cannot be expected to provide profit exclusively, so it becomes necessary to change the nature of the neighbourhood to incorporate much higher incomes. As Stacy put it "Someone that can afford to live in a \$600,000 condo in my neighbourhood?" Clearly,

the draw of the new high end stores, condos and restaurants that are moving in are not intended for lower income renter residents. A challenge is being made from both sides as businesses implicitly provide fewer goods and services for lower income residents, local by-laws prevent the availability of inexpensive entertainment and, in response, residents begin to take stronger, more obvious symbolic actions to protect their space.

One of the key methods my participants engage in is through sheer devotion and participation in the area. While recreational participation, in some cultural cases, cannot be read as a form of resistance, in this case it does. Claiming the neighbourhood involves being a part of it and creating a sense of community among the residents of the area. This devotion is also expressed through the need to reject the cultural assumptions seen to define the rest of the city. Residents frame their understanding of the community through contrast to the rest of the city, particularly the suburbs. As I stated earlier, my participants spent at least part of their childhoods in the suburbs and see Mission as a means of avoiding incorporation into dominant assumptions of what the suburbs has come to mean to them.

For Carl, this difference is expressed through the social networks he found in Mission:

Because to walk down the streets sometimes, you know every third person you see on the sidewalk. And its hey, hey, hey, how ya doin? Which in the twenty-five years of growing up in the suburbs, I never found. You didn't know who your neighbours were beyond you know two houses on either side of your house and then everybody else was essentially a stranger.

Carl's concern with knowing his neighbours and finding a social network to be a part of is implicit in this statement. This familiarity is something that he places importance on and by speaking of not finding this experience in the suburbs he clearly indicates the predominance the network has in his life. As well, the nature of Mission is contrary to his childhood experience and has offered him a way to avoid the anonymity he sees as emblematic of the suburban neighbourhood he grew up in. In a larger sense, his framing of Mission in this way also provides an option beyond the life his parents chose.

Stacy expands this idea by commenting on the unique nature of Mission and the role it plays for local residents:

...how its maintained, or the social structure...that I don't know that the suburbs have any for. There are a couple neighbourhoods that cater to that...I feel like Mission is just slightly more maybe industrial cause there's so many ... independent businesses ...

Again, Mission is valued and defined against a suburban lifestyle and the nature of the community, including residents and local businesses, allows for a varied experience of city life that Stacy sees as unique in the city. Stacy also finds meaning in her own participation in the community:

...especially to be from somewhere else [be a traveller], there's such an appeal to uh to come and be able to be a member of the community and to be aware of the the repercussions of your being a part of it, because everybody's so I mean its I mean probably very reactive, but I don't know, its very close knit, and I mean I wouldn't know, I mean if I lived on my dad's street, I wouldn't know if there was a you know, an Australian girl that started working at the uhh...you know, gas

station. And I probably wouldn't know anything about her and I wouldn't know to talk to her or hear any of her stories or she'd probably be you know it'd be like our business relationship...

Stacy clearly sees her relationship to the community as determined by the nature of Mission itself. Her awareness of other residents and travellers exists because she does not live in the suburbs and her relationship with local service staff can be infused with meaning, rather than the automatic anonymity assumed of a business relationship.

Charlie adds to this denial of suburban values by commenting on the way the neighbourhood functions as an alternative to Calgary as a whole:

...the different people in the neighbourhood uhm uhm so you know there are the middle class you know the probably the property owners and then there are the people who rent and the people who, some of the people who are transient and some of the people who desperately, especially with like escalating rents try to stay in the neighbourhood cause uhm you know its not a cheap neighbourhood to live in and certainly not one of the cheapest in Calgary, but I know a lot of people who choose to to stay in the neighbourhood. And perhaps its because this neighbourhood does tend to collect people, not like me, but people who are marginalized in some way or another...

Mission becomes a safe space for those who do not fit into dominant norms to reside. Again, under this statement is the implication that Mission becomes an oasis for those who choose not to agree with Calgary's dominant value system. It is also interesting that Charlie uses the term 'collect', rendering the community as distinct from the rest of

Calgary. For those who cannot find a community elsewhere, Mission becomes a repository for alternative lifestyles and behaviour that are elsewhere denied.

This role in the city is also linked to a theme of safety raised by almost all of my participants. Stacy pointed out that:

...there are people [in Mission] who uh in they're own way or whatever, they really, really care. And they care enough that they want to keep each other safe...

She also went on to comment that:

...I think that we're conscious of that [other people's safety] and we don't wanna... and we keep an eye out... if there was a sketchy looking something goin' down over there or whatever....so everybody's like we have to stop this from happening, this is not ok... people do not turn a blind eye...

While Mission is clearly understood as a place that resists incorporation into the dominant city ideals, Mission and its residents also protect those who live within it. This safety was linked with sexuality and repeatedly participants commented on how alternative sexualities can be safely and securely expressed in the area.

Charlie commented on the unique security Mission offered him in Calgary:

Well, it offers a level of safety that you really can't feel in almost any other place in this city and I know specifically because...hmm one of the very, very few and I'd be hesitant sort of I can't really think of any other communities, I can think of some ok ones, but probably one of the best neighbourhoods just to, at least for me to feel safe, because I know that if I'm doing something that I feel is you know perfectly ok, or at least should be perfectly ok, I don't have to worry about necessarily being attacked or on like a physical or emotional personal, whatever

level and I know that I can behave as I would like to be and as I am and sort of you know without having to worry as much...

For Charlie, then, Mission becomes the only community in Calgary within which he can be a sexual being without fear of recrimination or outright violence. The openness within the community and the high number of 'gay friendly' establishments ensure that all residents can feel safe and secure within their community.

From Jack's perspective:

...there're clearly gay friendly establishments as well and uhm so I presume that there's a fairly larger gay and lesbian population as well and I also think that Mission is the only community where I've walked through and actually seen gay and lesbian couples like showing affection on the street...

Therefore, the ability to interact through multiple levels becomes clearer and those who have alternative sexualities are uniquely able to express themselves in Mission. Clearly, safety, both emotional and physical, is something that can be felt in Mission in ways it is not felt in other areas of the city<sup>5</sup>. Both a gay friendly environment and a close-knit community ensure that residents feel secure and confident that there would be help available were it needed. Again, these social realities are also constructed in contrast to the larger Calgary environment and provide methods with which residents can find an alternative to the rest of the city.

However, the continued safety and security experienced in Mission is not guaranteed and changing demographics and costs of the area could erase this role. In order for Mission to continue to serve as a safe space to enact alternative politics, social

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<sup>5</sup> As a side note, Mission is not generally acknowledged as the 'gay area' in Calgary. The Beltline and Inglewood are more often touted in the media and within the queer circles I have come into contact with as holding the highest draw for gays and lesbians.

behaviour and lifestyles, the social changes resulting from new developments must be challenged. Raymond points out that:

... for people who are complaining I think, you know what – get in the game. If you don't like the way the neighbourhood is changing, the strategy is not to move out of the neighbourhood and say I can't take it anymore and there's condos going up everywhere and blah blah blah. You know what, get in the game, spend a couple years working saving your money and say you know what I like it so much, I'm going to stay in the neighbourhood. I'm going to buy the condo. How come the middle management and the guys who work in the banks and the oil companies and everything else get to uh take what used to be my apartment? You know, there's no sense moving to uh Vic Park, Marda Loop uh Bankview, places like that cause that's where some of those people are going and saying oh it used to be a good neighbourhood. Forget it, stay. Stay...you want it to be a good neighbourhood... stay.

The focus here is on the ability to own property as opposed to occupying a place, where the goal becomes to buy a condo in the future, but on-going presence is seen to make a difference. Implicit in this comment is the assumption that by remaining in the neighbourhood, change, or defence, is somehow enacted. This relates to the aspect of space as claimed through use, rather than necessarily through ownership. Further, this use links back to embodiment in space as influenced by Fiske. It is through being a body in space, regardless of the typical mundane focus on this, that power can be garnered. Simply moving through a place and being a part of it allows local residents to ensure that the community they also embody is enacted. However, Raymond is also clear that power

comes through ownership. Somehow, owning property allows residents to have a say in the neighbourhood which renting is not seen to represent. The role of ownership in power is self-evident and also explains why the renters I spoke to engage in symbolic acts of resistance. To be a renter is to feel that your voice does not matter and alternative means of denying the system must be enacted.

As Kathy replied when I asked about an ARP meeting she had attended shortly before our meeting:

... there was a strong sense of there's no hope for us, because a lot of people are rentals and you just don't feel like you have much say in things as a renter. You just don't feel you have the same weight behind ya, you can't stop something from happening to where you live. Where, exactly where you live, like the top of the house you're occupying, you have no say over what happens to it...

This feeling of impotence in many ways explains why the currency of symbolic resistance is so strong. In the case of the renters I spoke to and likely others that I did not, direct political action is viewed as inaccessible and therefore not an option. The question then becomes how these people could feel empowered enough to use the political tools available or to begin thinking of alternative methods of enacting change in their own homes.

When I questioned Kathy about the way she saw her own artwork and the possible political actions it could enact, she responded:

...as far as the actual political ability to change things or stop things or I don't, I can't imagine it is because that wheel is so huge, its so crushing, that the most an artist can hope for I think is just to express. Like to report. I mean that's always

been the historical base of art in the world has been taking things down, not necessarily change...

However, despite her experience in not enacting change and clearly accepting the wheel of development, her work also provides a symbolic role that, if not equally effective, does provide a response to dominant development. As she put it:

...when I'm out there painting a building, people look at that building often for the first time, they don't realize, and this is where its political, as a political voice, that all those buildings that I'm drawing do you realize that they're gonna change and do you realize that that means this neighbourhood's gonna change. Just buildings can change a neighbourhood...

While this comment clearly enacts the theme of symbolic resistance I have been discussing, it also goes a step further. Her artwork becomes an opportunity for other people to recognize aspects of the place they inhabit that they had not recognized before. It speaks to a more general human relationship to space that has it invisible in reality and only recognizable when reproduced. Raymond also commented on the invisibility of place when he spoke about graffiti in the area:

And how they [graffiti artists] feel about the aesthetics of the space and they're also physically marking uhm spaces that have some context to them. Uhm...you know if you're downtown and you look up and see a tag on a rooftop patio and you have to think how the hell did that guy get up there all of a sudden you see this big tag on a space that you wouldn't have noticed otherwise.

Within this concept of physical place then becomes a further challenge for enacting change. If a place itself is invisible except when mitigating factors force

awareness, changes become harder to recognize. The focus of local movements on construction frustrations lead to a conflict between what people recognize as important to protest and that which is accepted because it is not seen. Noise, road closures, sidewalk disruptions and massive cranes are impossible to ignore and similar to artistic practices bring awareness through chaos.

### **Being Global: Making a Small-Town into a Big City**

Many of my participants' responses introduced an interesting conundrum for this study. At the same time that participants compared Mission to larger cities, namely New York, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, these larger cities were also discussed as a representation of ideal urban living. In response to my question of what makes Mission a great community, Raymond explained:

...its got a reasonable population density...which is important if you want a certain degree of interaction...if you're if you're trying to develop...if you're trying to develop things like arts communities...even business communities or even a sense of community...you need ... a few places where there's a certain amount of density, where there's a certain amount of friction. If you look at a place like...New York – New York generates a whole bunch of stuff, in part because there's that friction. The guy who's a millionaire has to take the subway ... with the kid who boosted his stereo last night... and that friction generates a certain number of ideas...if you lower the population density...that friction doesn't happen and you don't have those ideas happening and people can pocket themselves and really think, ok, this is the way the world is.

At play is a desire to bring into Mission the same level of friction and density that cities like New York are presumed to have in abundance. Behind this comment is an implicit support of future development based on its ability to bring further density and the subsequent cultural response of friction into Calgary's downtown. This implicit understanding also serves as a way of coping with the development machine that is unavoidable. Instead of viewing development change as necessarily threatening and to be avoided, development can instead be seen as an opportunity to increase the community identity claimed by my participants. Also underlying this understanding of course, is the need to compare cityscapes. Raymond did not at first compare Mission to other areas of Calgary, or Calgary as a whole, although he did later, but rather used an emblematic cityscape to define his own, and consequently how Mission could improve. This symbolic comparison was not unique to Raymond's understanding, but rather became a shared symbolic method for describing Mission. For example, Carl was supportive of more development because it would allow the area to increase its density. As he put it:

I personally ... want to see for Calgary more truly urban spaces. More truly urban communities of the sort that a lot of people admire when they go to a London or a Paris or a Montreal or a Toronto, New York what have you. There's room in this city you know of the x number of sprawling suburban communities I think we can afford to have four or five or six you know truly urban, inner city communities that offer that density and that richness of architecture and people energy and commercial and retail and all those things that we sort of associate with those kind of communities that we see in movies that are set in New York and such.

What is also fascinating about Carl's comment is his reference to filmic representations of New York. Not only is the emblematic nature of other 'truly urban' communities his reason for supporting increased density, but also, this ideal is at least partially developed through a representation of a real place. The goal then becomes to not only be like New York, but to be like New York as it is represented on film. This of course can be understood through the mediascape that has been drawn upon in order to create a personal understanding of city areas. It is through the proliferation of specific kinds of urban communities in films that Carl is able to partially construct his own ideal urban environment.

In many ways, this understanding of urban places creates a dimension to the social construction of Mission as related to and affected by media representations and travel to other, larger cities. Evidently, Carl is not interested in the downsides of New York, or other similar urban centres. The noise, crowds and crime also associated with large urban centres are not mentioned because as an ideal urban space, these downsides are not pertinent to his discussion. Rather, his view of Mission's development can be based on the perfection of media representations that do not focus on the downsides of heavy density and instead romanticize urban living.

Another way that these cities become emblematic is in the association of Mission with these ideal locations. It is not only that my participants see elements of this ideal urban experience in Mission, but also that they choose to live in Mission because it speaks to specific elements idealized in other cities. Stacy spoke specifically of the need to be surrounded by a bohemian atmosphere in order to live happily. As an artist herself,

she spoke of the need to be in an environment that supported this lifestyle. Specifically, she mentioned performers she admired:

I've ... been to New York and I've spent time there. In the Village and Chelsea and Manhattan – all over ... I mean like what is it that makes those neighbourhoods great? ... when I think of musicians that I adore, poets that I think are... Like Leonard Cohen, he lived in Montreal, he lived in the Chelsea Motel... all these places that have this great history and it makes a big difference to be an artist and to live somewhere that ... I think just by its... its not like its supernatural, it's [Mission] a community that's so far ahead... It's the closest thing to a bohemian neighbourhood that a city like Calgary has.

Clearly, not only is Mission connected to emblematic cities through the language and comparisons that residents use, but also represents a refuge from Calgary itself. In a city that is not large enough to be comparable to Montreal or New York, and also has an economic and political climate resistant to an active art, or bohemian, community, Mission comes to represent an opportunity for resistance. By choosing to live here, Stacy can invoke the places she has been that speak to a lifestyle she would like to live, but cannot necessarily enact completely in Calgary. It is also interesting how Stacy speaks to this need in her comment. At certain points in the interview, it became clear that she was having trouble putting words to what she felt and was trying to express. The connection she is making to New York is not obvious, but rather it comes from a rambling comment that seeks to understand not only Calgary's role in the world, but in her life. In addition, Stacy notes:

When I go other places, and I find things I love there, like I love Montreal through and through... there are so many things I love there. New York City I really really liked, and to be able to go places like that and to come back and look around and to be able to see that in the place that I live. ... in a smaller scale for sure, but there is so much that we are so lucky to have.

There is then something in this community that residents understand on a global scale and does not exist independently of that level of comprehension. In some ways it is also evident that those similarities lend an authority and pride to local residents. In a city that most recognize as growing, even adolescent, claiming a link to emblematic urban centres provides an opportunity to escape the small city curse. As Raymond put it:

I think Mission is actually one of those neighbourhoods that's going to become a bit of a test... in the sense that I really I really think that Calgary is, in a number of ways, its at a crux ... its almost like a teenage city in a sense...

This understanding of the city as developing, rather than completely developed, also helps explain why my participants were so interested in ongoing comparison to larger cities. As Calgary grows, it will become necessary to learn lessons from larger cities to aid in growing pains. However, Calgary is not yet a big city and in many ways this is seen as part of the problem. Again, to quote Raymond:

...it [Calgary] has a conundrum right now in that it wants desperately to be considered a big city, a major city, an important city. But, number one that's not something that you generate ... it's not a mantra that you can chant long enough and hope that people catch. It's something that is given to you from outside.

While Calgary remains a smaller city, its growing wealth, size and market importance has created a duplicitous identity. One that is changing and Raymond expresses quite clearly the need to be taken seriously, to play in the big league. As well, Raymond defines the city as a problem that needs to be identified and solved through the process of evolution. Instead of seeing the city as what it is now, the myth of progress is enacted to ensure that the community of Mission serves as a leading edge example of where the city wants to go and how it can get there. At the same time, of course, the residents I spoke to are trying to understand their neighbourhood and community through imitation of other spaces. Stacey notes that in order to truly become the urban framework she hopes for:

...it is a process of aging, but I think that the people who are responsible for...  
facilitating that. There has to be a population that chooses to stay...

If we take Benedict Anderson's conception that nations are defined by a choice to be a part of the nation and bring it down to a smaller scale, obviously the residents of Mission are choosing to be a part of an urbane ideal; an idealistic community where you know your shopkeepers, live in close proximity to other people and align yourself with a larger urban understanding. Instead of existing on its own, it is clear that the community developed in Mission is related to global understandings of city spaces. Ironically, this emblematic notion of cities is not necessarily based in reality. As was clear earlier, these notions of intimacy are not necessarily urban, but rather a story of urbanity, that while existing, is also socially constructed.

This also creates a greater understanding of Harvey's discussion of cities as post-modern. Urban place, while internally conflicted and based on shifting spatial definitions, is also relying on a further depletion of time and physical space boundaries.

The social construction of Mission is not only internally regulated, but also depends on an imagined relationship with other urban spaces that are more frequently represented in media and social histories as meaningful. This meaning is used to not only make sense of our specific area but also to create an association with more respected urban centres. By basing an understanding of our own community through those that are world renowned for being great urban environments, Mission is given a special honour in Calgary's landscape and offers an escape for residents who don't feel that Calgary as a whole represents their identity.

As Stacey put it "I don't know anyone who doesn't know why they live in Mission" and clearly residents engage in personal storytelling in order to create a meaningful experience and understanding of their community and how it relates to their lives. When discussing his socializing in Mission, Carl also inadvertently spoke to the reprieve offered by Mission when he noted that:

More often than not... my circle of friends comes down here to my place and we will go to the Mortal Coil. Which was kinda cool in that it was actually in my building. I mean, you know for Calgary, that's a pretty urban thing to be able to say that you can walk downstairs and go to a bar.

While there are other neighbourhoods in Calgary that offer above storefront apartments, important to note is the distinction between this experience and Calgary as a whole. Carl views this ability as a unique experience in Calgary and a way of understanding Mission as both a part of, and separate from, the less attractive qualities of the city as a whole.

The need to understand Mission as both a part of and separate from was an ongoing theme of my participants' responses. However, although in the last section, this

was discussed as a method of resisting the dominant culture of Calgary, it also links to larger cultural constructions. The residents I spoke with are able to travel to, or at least view, other cities through mass media representations and use these representations to understand their own lives. At the same time that comments on the true urbanity of Mission were made, comments regarding the small town nature of the community were highlighted. Clearly, Mission cannot, in reality, have it both ways, but through the use of emblematic spaces, residents can exist in seemingly contrary understandings of the neighbourhood. Instead of being restricted to a duality of rural or urban, by basing understandings and social constructions of the local area on imagined spaces, the best of both worlds can be co-opted and enjoyed. This can also be linked to the internal contradiction implied by the resistance to, and encouragement of, future development. Ideally the ongoing development practices of the area could provide the ideal urban space residents hope for, but at the same time these practices increasingly push long-term residents to new neighbourhoods.

Beyond this contradiction, the mythology of the inner city does not only exist for residents. Part of the presiding culture of Calgary is a cultural focus on private transportation and a road system and geographic size that paired with a lacking public transit system challenges those of us who cannot afford, or choose not, to drive. In response, the Mission experience of being close to everything removes the requirement for private transportation and attempts to facilitate a pedestrian environment. As Carl put it:

I find sometimes I get into my car and I haven't gotten into my car in five days or something like that. You know, I look back on it and go holy cow, I haven't

driven anywhere since last Saturday or something, because there's just no need for it... So there's that great pedestrian uh environment...

In a city well known for being obsessed with its cars, the experience of being able to be a pedestrian provides an obvious, physical manifestation of the political and social differences of Mission to dominant Calgary assumptions.

This focus on a pedestrian environment is not only of internal importance, but also becomes a shared city mythology of inner city life. One of the challenges currently being launched against city council's treatment of developers in this area is that parking requirements are often overlooked based on the assumption that everyone who lives here, walks<sup>6</sup>. However, this does not mean that parking is not necessary or that local residents do not own cars. They may not drive them as often, but still need to store them somewhere and the ongoing presumption ignores that while an area may offer a perfect opportunity to not drive, it is still a choice not necessarily made by everyone. Beyond that, the assumption by city council that everyone in Mission walks is also a part of the mythology that has developed around inner city neighbourhoods. While it is obvious that people in Mission do own cars,<sup>7</sup> social constructions of the neighbourhood has removed reality and instead creates a shared assumption that to live in Mission is to forgo car ownership.

This, of course, raises the question of why this assumption remains so strong. Despite indisputable statistics and an obvious amount of car ownership (finding street parking is challenging and residential roads are typically lined with cars), pedestrian

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<sup>6</sup> This issue came up at a recent municipal debate between aldermanic candidates for Ward 8, which includes Mission.

<sup>7</sup> At the same election debate, one of the candidates commented on the fact that four times the amount of street parking permits are issued to residents of this neighbourhood than there are available street parking spaces.

focus becomes a requirement of the inner city. This is not to say that many residents do not have cars, in fact I don't have one, but rather that this neighbourhood has uniquely been presumed to fulfil a certain kind of local mythology that is based more on how the neighbourhood should be, than how it is.

By examining meaning behind this irony of urban mythology and the local definition of Mission as both a small town and an inner city ideal is the fact that all places are imagined and Lefebvre's ideas about the triad of spatial meaning becomes increasingly clear. Rural and urban, inner city and suburban, are all real locations, but imagined and made meaningful through complex levels of social construction. However, because types of space are also imagined, they can exist in the same physical reality at the same time. The levels of imagined space then do become a process of merging difference in a way that mitigates the downsides and distinction of varying experiences and instead allows them to coexist. Unfortunately, the dependence on imagined spaces also limits areas for ongoing challenges to dominant planning presumptions. If residents can collaborate to create meaning that suits their purposes, they may find their lack of political action results in a neighbourhood that changes so much that opportunities for imagining spaces are eliminated.

### **Moving through Mission: The Indefinable Nature of Space**

The nature of imagined space also requires that consideration be given to the abstracted ways that residents can move through space and use this movement to further their community intent. At issue in Mission and the subcultural identities of local residents, is the nature of time spent in space. Postmodern theories have been rooted in

determining the link between time and space and the way postmodern life has learned to privilege space over time as the key component to overcome. However, time *in* space is also pertinent to personal experiences within the city. As Stacey notes:

But I'll be walking down the same street every day, five times a day, whatever, for a year [the length of her current lease]. And, so I'm gonna, you know, that means that my awareness of where I live will grow and that means that I, I mean, I'm gonna, if I make a contribution to the community, then I'm going to be able to see that first hand, and I'm gonna be able to see that long term, for sure...

Time spent in space then becomes a way of knowing the space, familiarizing oneself with the nature of the environment. Instead of merely becoming invisible, space becomes clearer through experience. The links between space and social action and behaviour should be clear by now, but missing is an understanding of the resulting social reality that stems from time in space. Instead of finding a way to make these concepts co-exist, or to privilege one over the other, this combination of the two provides a deeper understanding of both. To be able to walk through the same spaces for a longer period of time sensitizes both personal involvement and understanding that Stacey sees as allowing her to increase her contribution to the community. Her comment also points to the nature of her experience of Mission's spatial reality – knowledge is defined through history and the repetition of seeing space as it changes and develops allows her to understand the neighbourhood on a deeper level.

Communities are dependent both upon shared space and a shared history. Personal histories provide an opportunity for residents to know Mission better. By walking the same streets and acknowledging subcultural membership's role in creating a

larger history, residents collaborate in an ongoing, growing history. I once had a conversation with a friend in the neighbourhood and mentioned the Mid-Nighter. What is now called the Super Drug Mart, was once known as the Mid-Nighter because it was, at the time, unique in being open until Midnight. This unique role has changed, but my own personal history in the neighbourhood holds onto that memory. This kind of knowledge allows residents to claim more subcultural capital based on a personal memory that recognizes them to other residents. Being aware of the history of the neighbourhood provides an opportunity to understand the changing nature of the area and therefore bond through this shared memory with others.

However, these personal histories are not clear cut and do not necessarily relate to a real history of the area. The level of transient renters in the area has created a social reality that does not always recognize the true history of the space. Of perfect example is the strong Catholic presence and history in the area. Holding one of the largest Catholic complexes in the city, with St. Mary's Cathedral, two schools, a convent and the original missionary hospital (now used as private retail, rental and medical space) is not enacted in daily life. Although I have strong connections with many residents in the area, I know no one who attends the church or understands the missionary history of the area. Instead, history becomes, in many cases, what a single person can remember from their time spent in the area. This also challenges any possibility for activist movements to preserve the area. The focus becomes what can be seen daily and remembered from time spent in the area as opposed to viewing the neighbourhood in a hundred year historical context. If history is almost entirely personal and shared through individual memory, it is not possible to truly understand the way that the neighbourhood has changed spatially

because it is only the changes that have taken place during recent memory that are focused on.

The process of storytelling is also at play here. Space is made to make sense by telling stories and engaging in creating the mythology of the community that is deeply rooted in spatial change. Beyond this storytelling and the indefinable characteristics of space, existence in space works on a deeper level as well. The challenge with interviews, or storytelling, however, is the limiting nature our own words have in creating boundaries to our own understandings. Beyond this, people in space in Mission enact daily rejections of Calgary culture in the way they move and act in their neighbourhood. One of the most obvious areas of contradiction is the social construction and use of public areas. Mission has a number of sidewalk patios, a focus on a pedestrian shopping street and wider sidewalk spaces.

Part of the social network I have discussed in this chapter is available through walking on the streets. Kathy pointed out that in order to maintain the social aspects of the community, “I guess its kind of keeping that in mind keeping readily accessible people and businesses and making people run into each other...”. By privileging public experiences, residents are forced to deal with one another and it is through this that the community is able to continue. Beyond the comparisons to the suburbs and the focus on the social aspects of the neighbourhood, Mission is also an example of how public space comes to be used, unconsciously, as a symbolic statement of dissent.

Charlie takes this one step further by commenting that “...basically, at this point, I tend to treat a great deal of the restaurants as just like and other social spaces as an extension of my living room...” Ownership, in this case, is again defined not through

bureaucratic details, but rather through occupation. Charlie is free to treat the entire neighbourhood as his own personal space because it functions in a communal way, rather than as a secured place. The comments made earlier regarding the importance of presence become even more meaningful here. The social aspects of the community are taken to a visual statement and presumption that precludes a definition of shared spaces as anything but communal.

Carl points out how public space is incorporated by discussing directly the Planet's social community:

One of the things that I really miss sometimes particularly in the winter, is that in here, inside the Planet, I mean people still kind of chat with each other, when they know each other, but you're a little bit more, sort of you know segregated by your tables, in a way. So, I mean, I'm not really going to be overhearing these guys'es conversation or taking part in it. But, in the summer, sitting out on those benches, if you've got nothing else to do, you can just go there maybe ostensibly to read a book or something, but really, you're just sit there and you'll be involved in a conversation in no time flat. It's just this communal thing...

The public space of the benches, while not designed<sup>8</sup> to adequately encourage public behaviour, is claimed as such. These benches run along the entire front of the Planet and are set in two forward facing rows. In design, they really only allow for small groups of two or three to speak, but their proximity and use by customers or passers-by is uniquely public. It is not uncommon to see large groups of people spread out onto the sidewalk

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<sup>8</sup> Christopher Alexander's work is pertinent to mention here. He is well known for attempting to create planning practices that engage with the multiple ways people use places in order to design better cities. Underlying his arguments, while presuming that planning can occur, is a presumption that places are always used creatively to account for multiple opportunities for smaller segments of an area and its residents to interact.

beyond the benches in order to engage in conversation. Symbolically, this behaviour also claims the sidewalk space for those who take part. The street becomes a space not only for walking, but for socializing and taking a symbolic stand against a city very much set against true public spaces.

Few other areas of the city have this opportunity for public speaking and interaction regardless of previous social connections. Visually, the action of taking over the sidewalk also lays claim through presence and makes a clear statement that this is my space and I choose to claim it. Again, being bodies in space provides a symbolic opportunity to enact social and community ideals through the body. People become part of a process of claiming the spaces and sending a clear message that this portion of the sidewalk is public and not to be enforced as simply a walking space. It is also interesting that this one space becomes, above others, employed for shared meaning making. As I mentioned earlier, the Planet interacts with the subculture I have been speaking about as a community centre in a way that none of the other local businesses do. The coffee shop becomes a public facilitator for a social space that becomes a meeting ground for those who walk by, for those who need social interaction and for those who, perhaps unconsciously, need to embody their ownership of the neighbourhood. The sidewalk becomes a merging of community ideals and social needs where residents can act in a public way contrary to the planned design of the area.

## **Conclusions**

The issue of design versus use is in many ways at the root of the community experience in Mission, and the theoretical approach I have taken here. While

gentrification is clearly the context of this community, the reaction to gentrification is also a reaction to Calgary's dominant ideologies. Development has become a process on which residents can focus their spatial attention and begin to recognize the separation between Mission and the city in a way that could not be possible without demolition and construction making the space recognizable. However, presumptions of the power relationships between renters and owners, developers and residents have ensured that an activist movement is unlikely. There is simply not enough to lose for local residents to force active responses. The issue in Mission is not as much about money as comfort and it is for these reasons that the Mission experience is deeply engaged in symbolic activities over actual activist movements.

Instead of engaging with more activist methods of response, my participants have clearly invoked the concept of subculture in order to ensure that their identity in the community is clear. By finding commonalities with other residents and speaking about the community as a part of personal identity, the neighbourhood becomes a space constructed to express political differences from Calgary's dominant assumptions. In addition, the approach I have taken here to examine the nature of community within Mission further questions the traditional use of subcultural theories. While the focus on youth and/or deviance has not proven effective, the methods of resistance and identity formation are obviously shared by the Mission residents I spoke to. The symbolic techniques laid out here also identify how human beings are capable of using physical place to express and incorporate their personal politics and identities.

Finally, the symbolic understandings residents find of the Mission community are clearly linked to more abstract notions of urban places. Instead of being understood

locally and specifically, global notions of the urban are incorporated in order to make the spatial meaningful. While it is clear that these meanings hold personal currency and represent how residents see their area, they are also rooted in the myth of the urban. Cities therefore are neither totally real nor totally constructed; meaning is invented by invoking mythical concepts of urban space into the local realities that can be seen on a daily basis.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

Unlike Rome, New York has never learned the art of growing old by playing on all its pasts. Its present invents itself, from hour to hour, in the act of throwing away its previous accomplishments and challenging the future. A city composed of paroxysmal places in monumental relief. The spectator can read in it a universe that is constantly exploding.

(de Certeau, 91)

Although very different from the New York experience, Calgary also forces its spectators and residents to consistently remake meaning in the face of constant change. While it is clear that each city exists in a unique universe, it is also impossible to avoid the connections between them. The more globalized the Western economy becomes, the more likely that even more similarities in the social constructions of city space will be found. These globalized and imagined communities provide a new method of analysis that may allow us to begin to understand the increasingly complex nature of city communities and experiences.

In this thesis, I have used the local space of my community as a means of interrogating how meaning is made in the face of development issues that cannot be realistically resisted. The subculture that is so evident in Mission's local culture has provided a means with which local residents can continue to find meaning in their local environment, but also provides a theoretical approach that furthers gentrification studies. Instead of seeing gentrification as faceless or only experienced by the disadvantaged, it is a process that increasingly interacts with the daily experience of people across political, class and identity boundaries. However, this development process is also not transparent and in some ways becomes a way that local residents can recognize their community area as real and changing. The response to these changes offers personal opportunities to

engage with dominant cultures and presumed realities to produce symbolic identities shared among residents.

This study also provides an opportunity for subcultural studies. It should be clear that the ongoing focus on youth or obvious subcultures limits our ability to understand the methods with which adults continue to engage with and against dominant cultural assumptions. Instead of presuming that subcultures must therefore be based in a presumption of youth it is worth further investigation to examine how the techniques learned in the teenage (and twenties) years continue to provide an opportunity to resist and reconstitute dominant presumptions. In addition, as some subcultural theorists have undertaken, less obvious subcultures require further investigation. Taking on the post-subcultural cause and beginning to complicate our notions of subculture and the role it has taken on in society could continue to reveal underground or unrecognizable communities daily contesting and negotiating their role in society.

It is also valuable to continue to explore symbolic resistance techniques and the continued currency that subcultural identities have in daily use. Clearly, as a coping mechanism, community life is valuable to local residents and they find personal meaning in the process. This raises the question, however, of what this means to those outside the subcultural community. At the same time that Mission is obviously constructed and enjoyed as a safe space, what does this safe space mean to Calgary as a whole? The other side of the experience is the opportunity to view Mission as a solution for Calgary's dominant ideologies. By continuing to have inner city, bohemian communities, this ideological framework is not directly contested and activist dissent is mitigated to allow conservative and corporate assumptions to continue on unfettered. Moving this concept

forward would require further study, but would prove worthwhile to both subcultural and urban studies.

Beyond the nature of subcultures and how they may be studied in the future, physical place itself needs to be interrogated and understood through the bodies of theory discussed here, and elsewhere. It is not necessary to treat every placed culture as necessarily subcultural, but the ongoing investigation of the daily spaces we move through can build deeper understandings of our daily lives. Spatial theorists have long built an assumption that the space we walk through is constituted by our presence and is an unavoidable influence on our social experiences. There is room within studies of space, particularly those rooted in communications to explore how we partake in discussions and active social constructions to create personal meanings. If one of the purposes of studying human communications is to uncover how we construct our realities, the neighbourhoods we live in must be incorporated.

This focus has most recently been undertaken by the well-known project, the Culture of Cities, with Canadian investigators from the University of Toronto and McGill University. Blum's work, cited in this thesis, came from this collaborative study and presents a guideline for cultural and communication studies to begin to uncover the experienced lives of city cultures. As a part of this ongoing, developing investigation it will hopefully become possible to examine and discover urban cultures in more detailed ways.

This thesis has hopefully provided an opportunity to uncover the experience of residents in Mission, on the one hand deeply influenced by the state of our neighbourhood and pursuing an ongoing collective process of producing meaning. The

challenge of course becomes what this can mean in the long run and outside the neighbourhood boundaries. The development process is at a point where it is unstoppable and drastic changes of the community place are guaranteed. However, despite this unavoidable future, residents must face the here and now in order to move into the future and change will not be accessible through purely symbolic means.

In the introduction, I discussed the local movement of forcing bureaucrats to deal with issues of quality of life in Mission, but this study has moved past that. In this community, what is our strength may also prove to be our downfall. The diversity of the area brings life and experiences to residents that may not exist otherwise. On the other hand, focusing on the personal effects of construction and urban change may also serve to ignore what we're really losing. By engaging in symbolic activities of resistance, local renters are satisfying a deeply personal need for control through the only means they recognize as available. On the other side, the owners who seek to use the system to improve their personal quality of life ignore that the system is not necessarily built to protect them.

The development machine is rooted in making a lot of money for a small number of people and while recent studies have looked at how heritage designation in fact protects local property values<sup>1</sup> in the long term, Calgary remains in an ongoing process of tearing down the old. It may be that the reworking of Calgary's heritage planning system and bringing in more focus to anti-sprawl issues will eventually protect older neighbourhoods, Mission will likely be lost. Or perhaps, the social constructions of local

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to the New York City Independent Business Office's The Effect of Historic Districts on Residential Property Values (September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2003) available at <http://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/pubtopicindex.html#housing> for a detailed analysis of market values and historical neighbourhoods.

residents may continue to make the community into one within which we can all remain. Beyond this concern, the picture of Mission is not complete yet complete.

Missing in this analysis is a questioning of race, which would require a different framework than I have set up. What are the issues that are specific to those of non-white descent? How do they engage with dominant and subcultural levels of experience to make their lives and their place meaningful? In addition, how does gender interact with the specific experience of gentrification in the community? Are reactions to, and concerns with, developmental processes specifically gendered? Further, how do different age and marginalized groups deal with the process of gentrification? Finally, how has the increased income in the area changed the experience of local homeless residents and their access to public places? These of course are preliminary questions that I do not have an answer for, but do provide perspective on what future projects could achieve.

In reality, these are questions of local concern and may never be asked by anyone but myself and other local residents. But, how do these concerns link to larger social practices and behaviours outside of the local context? Clearly, this study has offered an opportunity to make my space strange and serve as an entry point into cultural analysis of the city. The reclaiming of early 20<sup>th</sup> Century studies of the city as relevant to the present situation allows us to understand on the one hand where we come from, and on the other where we may be going. Implied in this thesis has been an overt avoidance of discussing planning issues, but at this point it is worth noting that planning is obviously linked to the issues I have discussed. Decisions made at a bureaucratic level dictate how we can engage with our community and the ongoing challenges that occur to our continued subcultural membership and expression. I have noted the work of Lynch and Alexander

in urban planning and their shared concerns with human creativity in place and accommodating these notions into planning practice. Their interest in human conduct in place is linked to the New Urbanist movement, which seeks to change planning practices in order to mimic 'organically' designed cities in contemporary planning practices. This movement could benefit from more studies such as my own that directly document the way in which human beings deny planned usage to express their own identities. It also proves problematic in that the New Urbanist still believes in planning a city and implicit is the assumption that you could design a perfect urban area. The challenge becomes how do scholars from disciplines that hold such contrary ideas about culture begin to learn from one another? Mission has clearly resisted any attempts at a planned reality, but my participants still hope for the ideals that New Urbanism offers. Is there a way for the planned and the subcultural, both in real cities and academic treatments of them to coexist?

In addition to the possibility that specific studies of urban cultures have for planning practices is the actual concept of gentrification. While in this study I have raised issues of this process as a method of understanding the development environment of Mission, I have also commented on alternatives to previous discussions of the process. These discussions, however, have been limited and not developed in the way they deserve. By taking on some of the ideas I have raised and also introduced by other scholars, namely that of selling a lifestyle, further investigations of gentrification would be possible through a more cultural, personal slant. It would be worth exploring how the ideas introduced here could help broaden future studies of gentrification to incorporate complicated examinations of the symbolic meanings created not only by local residents,

but also incoming home owners who likely partake in similar methods of meaning making in their new communities.

Thus far, the Mission community has been explored in the context of a number of different theoretical and methodological frameworks in order to provide an understanding of this time in history. It is clear as well, that my choices in research tools have developed a very specific understanding of the community. While I feel that an autoethnographic study of Mission as a subculture has brought out specific, important concepts and concerns, more work could be done. If the scale of a Master's thesis allowed, speaking to more residents would obviously provide a deeper, more nuanced perspective of the area. In addition, speaking to owners in addition to renters would provide a new perspective on the effect rising property tax, personal property damage and development pressure has for different members of the community. However, by undertaking a small-scale study, personal words and stories have taken on more meaning. This research has dealt specifically with explicating a deep understanding of specific lives in order to see how they interact with their community.

It would also be worth considering a more detailed analysis of space usage and how that interacts with community social construction. Touched on in the analysis section of this study was a concern with how movement in space determines identity and enacts community ideals. These processes require further study and the way people move in space to make meaning could be developed further. Spatial issues continue to be contentious and challenging, but the growing focus in numerous disciplines clarifies the importance of understanding the space that surrounds us. Particularly for communication studies, an ongoing consideration of physical place provides the opportunity to increase

our knowledge and understanding of how the physicality that surrounds us necessarily defines us. The study of the everyday experiences of people also provides the opportunity to understand the mundane and begin to uncover everyday experiences and practices in unique, specific ways. Ultimately, any consideration of the city is partial and it is only through continuously building scholarship in the area that answers can be found. But, the concern then becomes, considering the constant change that defines cities, how do we find an answer when the question is always changing?

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## Appendix A

### Outline of Guiding Questions

1. How long have you lived in Mission? How many times have you moved?
2. For business owners: What has been your experience of the Mission area and doing business here?
3. How would you envision a 'perfect' Mission? How do you see Mission now?
4. Where do you hang out? Do you socialize in Mission?
5. Why do you live in Mission? Tell me about your experiences of the area.
6. How do you feel about Van Horn's photographs? (Copies will be provided if participants have not seen them)
7. Have you seen the graffiti that has popped up on various building in the area? What are your impressions of this graffiti? What does it mean to how you see Mission?
8. How do you feel about the construction and demolition in the area?



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**CERTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS REVIEW**

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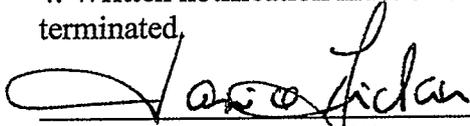
This is to certify that the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board at the University of Calgary has examined the following research proposal and found the proposed research involving human subjects to be in accordance with University of Calgary Guidelines and the Tri-Council Policy Statement on "*Ethical Conduct in Research Using Human Subjects*". This form and accompanying letter constitute the Certification of Institutional Ethics Review.

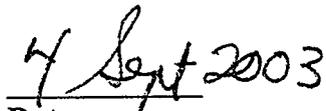
File no: **CE101-3673**  
Applicant(s): **Michelle Margeret Coyne**  
Department: **Communication & Culture, Faculty of**  
Project Title: **Finding Community in the Midst of Chaos: The Social**  
**Construction of Calgary's Mission Area**  
Sponsor (if applicable):

**Restrictions:**

**This Certification is subject to the following conditions:**

1. Approval is granted only for the project and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modifications to the authorized protocol must be submitted to the Chair, Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board for approval.
3. A progress report must be submitted 12 months from the date of this Certification, and should provide the expected completion date for the project.
4. Written notification must be sent to the Board when the project is complete or terminated.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Janice Dickin, Ph.D, LLB,**  
**Chair**  
**Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board**

  
**Date:**

**Distribution:** (1) Applicant, (2) Supervisor (if applicable), (3) Chair, Department/Faculty Research Ethics Committee, (4) Sponsor, (5) Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (6) Research Services.