

Unsettling public space: property and the politics of home in Vancouver

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
University of Oxford
Hilary Term, 2025

i. Abstract

The central motivation of this thesis is to explore the relationship between the settler-colonial city, homelessness, and public space in Vancouver, Canada. By tracing the historic and contemporary tensions over two public spaces in the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood, the thesis aims to understand how they have been implicated within – and thus serve as a lens through which to understand – the evolution of the settler-city. Drawing on qualitative fieldwork in the Downtown Eastside, including 57 semi-and un-structured interviews, over 200 hours of participant observation, and archival and case law analysis, the thesis traces the social, political, and legal threads that weave together to produce the shape of, and life within, public space in the neighbourhood. Overall, the thesis reveals how people in the settler-city experience, live in, and embody public space – and the ways in which they weave and negotiate new subjectivities, modes of sociality and home, and politics in the settler-colonial city. This work makes significant, novel contributions to scholarship on settler-colonialism, geographical understandings of home and of homelessness, and socio-legal definitions of public space. It highlights the ways in which the settler-colonial State comes to bear on intimate, everyday geographies and subjectivities beyond the Indigenous/settler dichotomy. It argues that current neighbourhood residents domesticate public space in ways that reveal, resist, and rework the wider carceral domesticities of the neighbourhood and, in turn, the enclosure of home under settler-colonialism. Finally, it posits that this unsettling of home and of public space produces new possibilities for multiple lived and legal relations to – and definitions of – public space, revealing the ways in which public space is a critical site of struggle in the settler colonial city.

ii. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors, Fiona McConnell and Alex Vasudevan, for their support, guidance, and patience throughout the last three years. Your insightful and thoughtful advice has been invaluable to the evolution and completion of the project.

I am also endlessly grateful for the time, patience, and engagement of my participants in Vancouver. In particular, I would like to express my thanks to Emiko Morita and Fiona York, as well as Jenn, Jaiden, and the rest of the staff at Oppenheimer Park, for supporting the project. Without your advice and knowledge the project would not have been possible. Many thanks also to Nicholas Blomely and Maggie Ramirez for welcoming and hosting me while I was in Vancouver, connecting me to an inspiring group of people, and offering generative avenues and directions for the project.

One of the research participants passed away during the write up of this thesis. I would like to thank them for welcoming me into their life, sharing their story, and going above and beyond to help me navigate the realities of fieldwork. To the tight-knit communities at Oppenheimer and Crab Park that welcomed me warmly, I hope this research reflects your voices and everyday lives.

I have been lucky to have researched and written this thesis both in Vancouver and in Oxford. I would like to acknowledge and thank the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Sk̓w̓x̓wú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations for allowing me to conduct research on their unceded territories. In the UK, I feel lucky to have joined DPhil 3 during the write up of the project – I will miss the friendship, silliness, and mutual support of our office crew.

I am endlessly grateful to my mum and dad, grandparents, sisters, and extended family for supporting the project in a multitude of ways, from dinner-table conversations where I was challenged to distil it into one sentence (!), through to being on the end of the phone after a hard day. Finally, to Rob for your constant companionship, for always being a sounding board when I need it, and for keeping me grounded throughout this journey – I am thankful for you always.

This research was funded by a Grand Union Doctoral Training Pathway Studentship (ES/P000649/1) and a graduate scholarship from St Catherine's College, University of Oxford.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction



Figure 1: Create a Real Available Beach (Crab) Park pictured in the evening, with West Vancouver, the city's most expensive and exclusive suburb, in the background. The Crab encampment is just visible on the park's far peninsula (Hills, 2023a)

As evening approaches, the park gradually fills with people – walking dogs, gazing out at the North Shore, and lazing in the grass with friends. There's even someone out swimming with the geese. Despite the growing crowd, the park is never truly busy. Crab is such a large expanse of green space that, even on a perfect summer's evening like today, it feels relatively quiet. The noise and intensity of Main and Hastings, with its ceaseless hustle of people and traffic, seems miles away. Sitting here, facing the mountains, the only reminder that Crab is a contested site is the intermittent barking from the camp's dogs; two large pitbulls like to patrol and protect the tents, barking at anyone who passes (Figure 1).

Located on the small teardrop shaped peninsula at the park's western boundary, encampment residents tend to remain close to the camp, rarely venturing much further than the red wooden gazebo which seems to function as an informal gateway. Speaking to Donovan, the camp's cook and a long-term resident, it's

clear he is frustrated at being isolated on the peninsula, although he tells me he understands why this is the case:

“I don’t want to be up on the hill because we face the kids and it’s not what the public want to see. I get that, I wouldn’t want it either”.

His voice is tinged with resignation, as though he’s been forced to accept that this camp, his home, and, by extension, he himself is a figure of risk, criminality, and disregard – that he somehow deserves to be kept out of the view of Vancouver’s ‘public’.

Continuing his story of the camp, Donovan tells me that the teardrop shape of the land the camp is situated on is a daily reminder of the ‘sadness’ and ‘grief’ caused by the “history of Indigenous death and violence which has happened here in Vancouver”. The peninsula, he believes, is sacred First Nation land and holds the weight of this history. He says, “they didn’t want us in the public eye, and now we are here, on sacred land, what are we supposed to do?”

In this quiet evening moment, Crab Park transformed into a space where seemingly separate struggles converged and were laid bare – where Vancouver’s settler-colonial history became inextricable from the encampment’s struggle to carve out and claim a space of their own. I began to wonder what was at play in this layering of stories. What could this park reveal about the city’s past and contemporary relationship to land? How might Indigenous histories and presence shape the camp’s ongoing struggle for home? And how would attending to these layers reshape who has the right to belong and to build a life in the city today?

– Field diary extract, Thursday 6th July 2023

Since the late 1990s, encampments¹, sometimes referred to as ‘tent cities’, have become a key feature of North American cities (Herring and Lutz, 2015a; Dunton *et al.*, 2019; Enzinna, 2024). Often understood as a byproduct of the 2008 financial crisis – the ‘origin myth’ of tent cities – geographer Chris Herring (2014) argues that the rise of encampments is better understood as a visible manifestation of roll-back neoliberal urban welfare policies and the failures of the American indoor shelter system model, acting as visible symbols of exclusive decisions over who matters, who counts, and who deserves to be able to live in the city (Peck and Tickell, 2002; Peck, 2012). As

¹ For the purpose of this thesis, an encampment is defined as a collection of tents and makeshift structures used by individuals experiencing homelessness for security and shelter (McKinney and Snedker, 2018; Jankovic, 2021). The thesis refers to those living in an encampment as a camp ‘resident’.

encampments have become commonplace, urban authorities have responded in divergent ways. They have become both visible targets for policing and enforcement as well as legitimate ‘solutions’ to homelessness, leading to the creation of sanctioned, legalised encampments in places like Fresno, California, and Seattle (McKinney and Snedker, 2018; Hennigan and Speer, 2019; Goldfischer, 2020). Yet, while there is a growing body of literature on the political and legal dynamics of encampments in the United States, there remains little discussion of the ways in which these spaces travel to, and reconfigure in, other contexts – such as in Vancouver (Smart, 2019; Buchanan, 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic brought significant changes to the visibility, size, and nature of homelessness across Canadian cities (Flynn *et al.*, 2022). A 2020-22 point-in-time count found that over 35,000 people were experiencing absolute homelessness on any given night across Canada, an increase of 12% on 2018 figures, including an 88% jump in unsheltered² homelessness. With shelter capacity constrained, ‘stay at home’ orders in place, and workplaces shut, thousands were displaced outdoors, finding shelter in makeshift structures and tents – in encampments (Howell, 2019; Smart, 2019; Housing Infrastructure and Communities Canada, 2023b, 2023a; Jones, 2024). In Vancouver, a 2023 point-in-time count found that 2,420 people were experiencing homelessness in the city, with 605 living unsheltered. This is widely considered an underestimate, with a recent research project estimating the figure to be over 4000 (Crompton, Yang and Withers, 2024; Figure 2).

² The typology of ‘sheltered’ and ‘unsheltered’ is used by the City of Vancouver to distinguish between people experiencing homelessness who are accommodated in designated settings (e.g. shelters and temporary housing) as opposed to people living outdoors in tents, vehicles, or entirely unsheltered (Mauboules and Lupick, 2023).

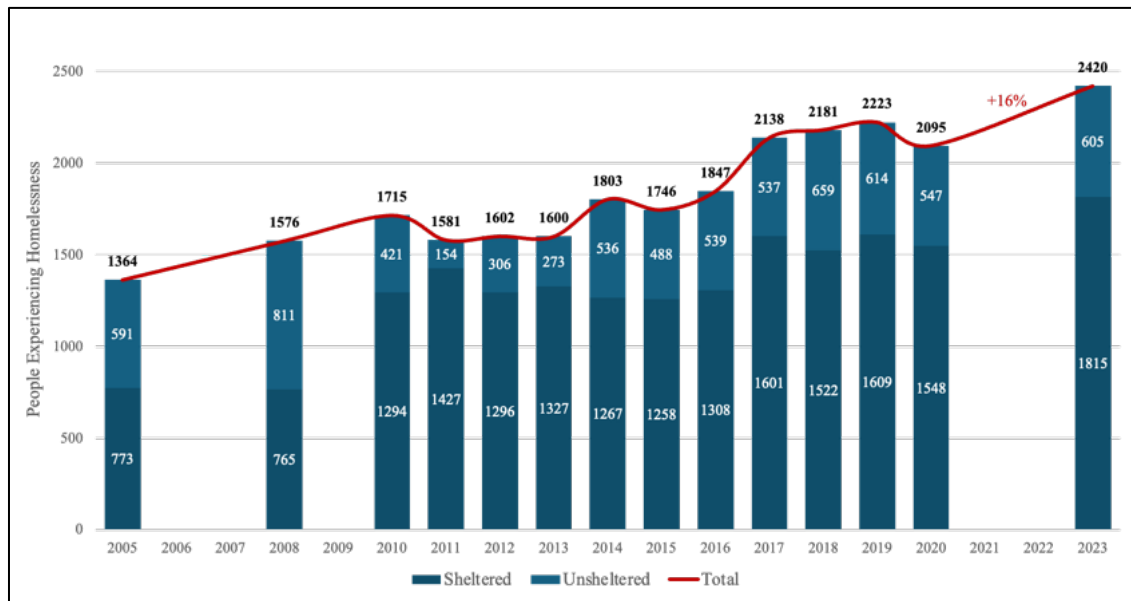


Figure 2: Over the past 20 years, growing numbers of people have experienced sheltered and unsheltered homelessness in the City of Vancouver (Hills, 2025; data sourced from Mauboules and Lupick, 2023)³

Responding partly in fear of Canada’s inner-city urban landscapes coming to resemble those of the American West Coast, many Canadian municipalities have cracked down on those living in encampments by denying camp residents basic services, removing tents and personal belongings with little notice, issuing by-law tickets for ‘anti-social behaviour’, and serving eviction and trespass notices (CBC News, 2020; Winter, 2021; City of Vancouver, 2023, 2024a; Fumano and Ryan, 2024). In the absence of available space in shelters and temporary housing schemes, these measures have done little but pushed those experiencing homelessness further into the urban margins, away from the relative safety that a camp can provide and beyond the reach of service providers (Global News, 2023; Office of the Federal Housing Advocate, 2024). As camp residents and advocates seek to highlight the effects of these policies, to demand access to basic amenities, and to claim the right to collectively shelter, encampments have increasingly gained attention in Canadian media and society. They are held up as evidence of the deep socio-economic inequality precipitated by the country’s intersecting housing and substance use crises and the state’s failure to address them. This research seeks to unpick this landscape in the socio-spatial and historical context of Vancouver, where

³ The first point-in-time homelessness count in the City of Vancouver was held in 2002 (Thompson *et al.*, 2012).

questions over who has the right to land, who can make home, and who belongs in the city have a long and unsettled lineage (Blomley, 2004c)

Across Canada, and particularly in Vancouver, Indigenous peoples face disproportionately high rates of homelessness, poverty, and substance use, the causes of which are rooted in Canada's long history of settler-colonialism (Adelson, 2005; Jongbloed *et al.*, 2017; Lavalley *et al.*, 2018; Smye *et al.*, 2023). Violence and abuse experienced by Indigenous peoples as part of the residential school system, as well as during the 60s scoop, to name just two examples of State-led displacement and dispossession, have left many communities contending with the effects of intergenerational trauma, mental and physical health issues, family breakdown, and socio-economic marginalisation (Christensen, 2013, 2017; Anderson and Collins, 2014; Thistle, 2017; Muree Martin and Walia, 2019). Ongoing discrimination in education and housing, the disproportionate representation of Indigenous children in the foster care, and racial disparities in the criminal justice system, contribute to persistent cycles of poverty and homelessness for First Nations and urban Indigenous peoples (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015; University of Manitoba and Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2016). While people identifying as Indigenous make up only 5% of the Canadian population, they accounted for 35% of those experiencing homelessness in the 2022 national count. Moreover, reports suggest that Indigenous peoples face higher rates of unsheltered and hidden homelessness, suggesting the true figure may be even higher⁴ (Thistle, 2017; COH Press, 2018; Housing Infrastructure and Communities Canada, 2023a).

In Vancouver, which has the third largest Indigenous population among census metropolitan areas in Canada, these inequalities are stark. Despite Indigenous peoples making up just 2.4% of the overall population of the city, over 40% of Indigenous residents live below the poverty line (City of Vancouver, 2020b). Indigenous peoples are also eighteen times more likely than non-Indigenous people to experience homelessness in the city, with almost half of unsheltered individuals in the 2023

⁴ Thistle (2017) and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness argue for a culturally appropriate definition of Indigenous homelessness which includes spiritual, affectual, and embodied elements of homelessness and accounts for a dislocation from place beyond the absence of a physical, secure space of habitation.

homelessness count identifying as Indigenous (Lu'ma Native Housing Society and City of Vancouver, 2023; Mauboules and Lupick, 2023). Across British Columbia, Indigenous peoples are five times more likely to experience an overdose, and three times more likely to die from one, compared to non-Indigenous people who use drugs, while urban Indigenous peoples also face higher rates of HIV and Hepatitis C infections linked to needle-sharing (Wood *et al.*, 2008; Urbanoski, 2017). Indigenous women and youth are particularly exposed to this intersection of poverty, substance use, and homelessness, reflecting the ongoing effects of colonisation, sexism, gender-based violence, and racism (Culhane, 2003; Torchalla *et al.*, 2015; Razack, 2016; Jongbloed *et al.*, 2017; Kidd *et al.*, 2019; Muree Martin and Walia, 2019).

Set against this backdrop, encampments in Vancouver have taken on meanings beyond demands for shelter and housing, emerging as sites from which urban Indigenous peoples have asserted their rights to the land and to life, gathering solidarity and support from local civil society, Host Nations, and Indigenous political bodies (McCue, 2014; Hyslop, 2020; Union of BC Indian Chiefs, 2020, 2024; Anderson and Flynn, 2021). During a homeless encampment in Oppenheimer Park in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighbourhood in 2014, Indigenous camp residents responded to an eviction notice served by the city by constructing a fire pit, tipi, and a longhouse and issuing their own in turn (*CBC News*, 2014a; Boynton, 2020). Drawing on precedent established in the Canadian Supreme Court's *William* decision, which recognized the rights of the Tsilhqot'in nation to use and manage – but not own – 1,750 km² of land in British Columbia, the encampment served an eviction notice to the City of Vancouver which stated that Oppenheimer Park was on unceded land and that the city had no right to force them to leave (Lukacs, 2014; Figure 3). As one reporter commented:

“The protesters' eviction notice was no finely tuned legal document, but it does raise thorny questions of law. Are parks and other lands commonly recognized as ‘city property’ really subject to assertions of aboriginal title? And, who has the authority to make such claims?” (McCue, 2014)



Figure 3: The 2014 Oppenheimer Park encampment also called for housing options beyond low-quality Single Room Occupancy units ('SRO NO') and the recognition of housing as a human right (McCue, 2014).

Encampments have, in this way, become tense sites of convergence for the struggles of urban Indigenous peoples, people experiencing homelessness, and their allies, to challenge the dominant urban order and assert new legal and lived claims to the land and to home in Vancouver (Christensen, 2013, 2017). As became clear in the police-enforced closure of the 2014 camp which soon followed the eviction notice, this layering presents both opportunities and challenges for city authorities and for Indigenous representation, resistance, and resurgence (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005; *CBC News*, 2014b; Dorries *et al.*, 2019).

This thesis explores the growing presence of encampments in Vancouver within this context. It examines how struggles over home, public space, and land intersect in Vancouver's inner-city, asking: what does public space mean for those for whom home figures in unsettled and insecure ways? What is at stake in the relationship between the public space and settler-colonialism? And, what can these intersecting struggles tell us about the potential of public space as it is used 'otherwise'?

To explore these questions, this thesis uses a feminist historical and geolegal approach to examine the everyday geographies of public space in Vancouver's Downtown

Eastside neighbourhood, tracing how they have been shaped by the intersecting forces of home/lessness, urban governance, settler-colonialism, and the law.

1.2 The Downtown Eastside

The Downtown Eastside is a small, inner-city neighbourhood of Vancouver which has long been of interest to geographers (Smith, 1996; Douglas and Shier, 2002; Blomley, 2004c; Masuda and the Right to Remain Research Collective, 2023). The neighbourhood is often described as the poorest in Canada, with many of its residents facing poverty, unemployment, precarious housing, violence, and criminalisation (City of Vancouver, 2020a). Low-cost, illicit drugs are readily available, and the area has high rates of drug-related mortality, over twelve times the provincial rate (Public Safety and Solicitor General, 2024). Approximately 20,000 people are estimated to live in the neighbourhood and rates of homelessness are the highest in the Metro Vancouver area (BC Centre for Disease Control, 2016). In 2023, a coalition of civil society and advocacy groups estimated that over 2000 people experiencing homelessness were living in the neighbourhood – a finding substantiated by an earlier point in time count conducted by the City of Vancouver which found that 52% of individuals considered ‘unsheltered’ in Metro Vancouver were in the Downtown Eastside (Mauboules and Lupick, 2023). As such, the area has a bustling informal street economy, its streets and other public spaces host a density of people and objects, of use and disuse. Walking them involves cautious navigation of people, belongings, and homes (Fast and Cunningham, 2018).

The Downtown Eastside has been central to the history and evolution of settler-colonialism and capital expansion in British Columbia – a context explored in more depth in Chapter 3. While the neighbourhood has long served as a refuge for Vancouver’s poor, marginalised, and unwanted, the exponential rise of homelessness in the area can be traced back to events in the late 20th century (Blomley, 2004c; Masuda *et al.*, 2020). Deindustrialisation in the 1970s and 1980s motivated dramatic changes in inner-city urban landscapes across North America. As industrial capital moved out and into the suburbs, downtown inner-city property values declined and these areas became stigmatised as spaces of urban blight, disorder, and risk – often with racialised and gendered associations (Smith, 1996; Sommers, 1998). Many urban authorities,

motivated by competition for the emerging global knowledge economy, sought to redevelop and revalorize the inner city by filling the ‘rent gap’ in these devalued areas (Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2013). This top-down ‘gentrification’ process transformed the built environment into a primary space for capital accumulation, as urban amenities like parks, streets, and transport networks were upgraded to attract wealthier residents and global capital. In Vancouver, by the early 1980s, a pattern of gentrification in neighbouring areas had begun to push and concentrate the city’s low-income and marginalised communities into the Downtown Eastside, protected somewhat from redevelopment and gentrification by a growing activist scene and a long-entrenched understanding of the neighbourhood as derelict and downtrodden (Douglas and Shier, 2002; Ley and Dobson, 2008; Proudfoot, 2011).

In the 80s, as part of preparations for the Vancouver Expo in 1986, the city undertook a series of large-scale urban renewal projects. This included the demolition of older buildings in the Downtown Eastside and surrounding neighbourhoods, displacing many of the city’s low-income residents (Smith, 2003). While some new housing was built, much of it catered towards a higher-income ‘pioneer’-gentrifier demographic, leaving many long-term urban residents either priced out or pushed into insecure SRO accommodation or homelessness (Smith, 1996). This, coupled with a Provincial move towards deinstitutionalisation in the mid-1990s, led to an influx of people and drugs to the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood (Boyd, Osborn and MacPherson, 2009). This period is often cited as the beginning of a substance use ‘crisis’ which continues to shape the neighbourhood – though the rise of the synthetic opioid fentanyl and of depressants in the form of benzodiazepines has intensified and reshaped this today (Boyd, 2017; Canadian Drug Policy Coalition, 2024).

Another key driver of homelessness in the Downtown Eastside is the history and conditions of the 100 privately and non-profit owned Single Room Occupancy (SRO) buildings in the area, which house approximately 4,500 neighbourhood residents (Bardwell *et al.*, 2019; Masuda and the Right to Remain Research Collective, 2023). Let out at close to welfare rates, SROs are typically small, single room units with shared kitchen and washroom facilities. Often poorly maintained ex-boarding houses, they are notoriously small, substandard, and unsafe (Blomley and The Right to Remain Collective, 2021; Masuda and the Right to Remain Research Collective, 2023). Housing

and health geographers have long charted the intersections of the housing and overdose crises in the neighbourhood and the ways this produces cyclical experiences of death, dislocation, displacement, and trauma for residents, both housed and unhoused (BCMJ, 2013; Bardwell *et al.*, 2019; Pain, 2019; Olson and Pauly, 2021). In 2024, 81% of drug-related deaths in BC occurred inside, of which 33% were in SRO accommodation, social and supportive housing, and shelters – only 19% took place in public spaces (British Columbia Coroners Service, 2024). Moreover, evictions from SRO units are common and, for many residents of the Downtown Eastside, homemaking is a precarious affair which involves cycling through Vancouver’s ‘housing continuum’ – from the streets, encampments, and shelters to supported housing and SRO units (Collins *et al.*, 2018; Fleming *et al.*, 2019; Pedersen and Jacobs, 2020).

Despite this, and the growing social, political, and academic recognition of the impacts of Vancouver’s combined housing and overdose crises on the urban landscape, there remains an unsettling disconnect between reality on the ground and the political discourse which has come to surround public space in the (inner-)city (Freiler and Holden, 2012; Collins *et al.*, 2018). Bound up in Vancouver’s self-image and promotion as a global, progressive, and sustainable city, celebratory visions of ‘urban greening’ have come to surround its approach to public space (Birge-Liberman, 2010; Janos and McKendry, 2021; Tu, 2021). This planning framework, adopted by the City of Vancouver and its ‘Board of Parks and Recreation’ (Parks Board)⁵, re-positions the city’s public space as a panacea solution for the climate crisis – as spaces of social interaction, mental and physical well-being, and environmental resilience (Greenest City Action Team, 2009; Walker, 2016; Angelo, 2019; Griffiths, 2022). While, on the surface, this curated vision of urban space might fit neatly with the vast expanse of Stanley Park (notwithstanding a much more complex and exclusionary history), such discourses and governance frameworks sit uncomfortably with the history and reality of urban public space on the ground in the Downtown Eastside, where nearly all of the city’s encampments have been located (Barman, 2007; Kheraj, 2013; Janos and McKendry, 2021; Chapter 4). Thus, while the relationship between public space and

⁵ Vancouver has a directly elected Parks Board with 7 commissioners elected for a four-year term. At the end of 2023, Vancouver Mayor Ken Sim passed a motion to request the Province to amend the Vancouver Charter to dissolve the elected Parks Board and bring parks management in-house – the Parks Board is currently challenging this (Office of the Mayor, 2023; Carey, 2024).

marginalised urban residents is an old question for geographical research on cities, to be sure, it has renewed layers, interest, urgency, and relevance in Vancouver today.

In view of this wider history and geography, this thesis explores not just the ways in which encampments feature in this continuum of home and homelessness, but the ways in which the neighbourhood's precariously (un)housed residents come to articulate and practice home beyond and between the boundaries of formal housing. Taking a feminist 'patchwork' approach to its field sites and methods, its interest is in the long histories and trajectories that have shaped current tensions over public space in the Downtown Eastside, and the swirl of political, social, and legal currents which come to bear on people's subjectivities, everyday relations, and imaginations and practices of home. The sections that follow introduce the key questions that guide this thesis and the conceptual entry points through which it seeks to contribute to geographical literature on the Downtown Eastside, understandings of public space and home(lessness), the law, and the nature of the settler-colonial city.

1.3 Research aim and questions

The central motivation of this thesis is to explore the relationship between the settler-city and public space in Vancouver, B.C., Canada. By tracing the histories of, and present tensions over, the production, governance, and use of two public spaces in the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood, the aim is to understand how they are implicated within – and therefore serve as a lens through which to understand and to unsettle – the settler-colonial city. In particular, the thesis is interested in the ways in which the struggle for home in the Downtown Eastside figures in this, engaging new actors, practices, and solidarities in the (un)making of the settler-colonial city. It asks:

- 1) What role does public space play in the (re)production of the settler colonial city?
 - a. How does public space figure in the reconfiguration of land into property?
 - b. How and to what effect does the geographical imagination, regulation, and governance of public space play a role in settler-colonial processes of racialisation, dispossession, and displacement?

- 2) Where, how, and to what effect do practices and understandings of home materialise in public space?
 - a. How do these shape people's everyday lives and subjectivities?
 - b. What political, social, and legal structures come to shape and surround these?
- 3) What potential does the struggle for public space hold in relation to understandings of the settler-colonial city?
 - a. What new ethical, political, and legal claims emerge from practices of homemaking in public space?
 - b. How do these support, or sit in relation to, modalities of Indigenous resistance and resurgence?

By addressing these research questions, the thesis unpicks three conceptual puzzles, outlined below. The first looks to (de)construct the history of public space in the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood in order to consider the ways in which public space has been mobilised in the production and evolution of the settler-colonial city, including the solidification and stratification of space and race, as well as modalities of liberal recognition (Coulthard, 2007; Edmonds, 2010a). The second turns to consider the rise of homemaking practices in public space (Brickell, 2012b), while the third examines encampments in the context of settler-colonial law, unpicking the relationship between encampments, understandings of property, and the law in order to trace the ways in which the remaking of home is a tool of both lived and legal resistance in the settler-colonial city (Bhandar, 2018; Blatman-Thomas and Porter, 2019).

1.4 Public space and the settler colonial city

The first conceptual puzzle considers the relationship between public space and the settler-colonial city, drawing together work in settler-colonial studies, human geography, and socio-legal studies (Blomley, 2003; Bhandar, 2018). Existing literature exploring this intersection charts the ways in which land's transformation under Western legal and philosophical understandings of private property has been central to the foundation and maintenance of settler-colonialism (Blomley, 2003, 2004c; Dorries, 2009; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Harris, 2021). Taking up this conceptual landscape,

this thesis looks to understand the role of public property in processes of settler-colonialism, charting the legal and material creation of ‘public’ land and the ways in which this engage(d/s) processes of Indigenous dispossession and displacement. In this vein, the thesis considers the relational production of the (sanitised and stringent) public and private spheres in the settler-colonial city (Chapter 4). Further, building on the work of British Columbian scholars on the nuances of race and immigration in settler-Vancouver, and wider scholarship which positions property as a racializing discourse, Chapter 4 reflects on processes of racialisation in and through public space in the Downtown Eastside across time (Roy, 1989; Anderson, 1991; Chapter 4). In turn, Chapter 7 takes up work in urban geography on the (neoliberal) governance of public space which raises generative questions and frameworks through which to consider who has the right to be in public space, how they can and should be used, and who has the authority to determine this (Zukin, 1995; Mitchell, 2003a; Purcell, 2013; Mitchell, 2020). Building on this conceptual backdrop, the thesis seeks to consider the connections between contemporary urban governance and the settler-colonial city in the context of encampments. To do so, Chapter 7 reflects on the evolution of the settler-colonial city and the ways in which technologies of exclusion and experiences of displacement and dispossession are shaped within and by the history and socio-political context of the Downtown Eastside.

1.5 Geographies of home/lessness

The second conceptual puzzle is centred on the production, lived experiences, and political potential of home/lessness. Speaking back to feminist geographical work on the home and homelessness – which seeks to blur the boundaries between these categories by positioning home as a process instead of a fixed geography – this thesis enters into conversation with Michele Lancione’s (2023) call for a study of home(lessness): a radical re-orientation which views the blurring of home and homelessness as a site from which to challenge and rework wider forms of oppression. In this light, the thesis looks to explore the multiple practices of homemaking in public space in the Downtown Eastside, tracing how the material, relational, and affectual geographies of home are made in, and come to remake, public space in the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood (Chapter 5). Following the work of Blomley (2004) and Burow, Brock and Dove (2018), the thesis takes up the notion of ‘unsettling’ as the process

through which ontological enclosures under settler-colonialism – the ways in which we come to understand the nature of land, space, and sociality – are revealed to be produced and are therefore troubled from their universal application. In this way, it looks to explore why and how homemaking functions as a form of quiet, embodied resistance to the settler-colonial city, including the new actors, practices, and solidarities it engages (Tomiak, 2017; Chapter 5). Through this discussion, the thesis also seeks to extend geographical scholarship on encampments to the Canadian context and to consider how these spaces sit in relation to the wider geographies of (un)housing in the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood – including where points of friction lie (Chapter 5 and Chapter 6).

1.6 Encampments, property, and the law

This final conceptual puzzle takes up the empirical and conceptual findings from those above and situates them in relation to the law. To do so, the thesis draws on scholarship in feminist and critical legal geography on property, which challenges traditional legal understandings by reframing property as a dynamic set of relationships between people and objects, and people and other people (Blomley, 2009, 2015; Blomley and The Right to Remain Collective, 2021). Taking up literature on the complex relationship between homelessness and property, and through the analysis of case law surrounding outdoor sheltering in British Columbia, Chapter 6 approaches the Crab encampment as a space that (re)produces and reshapes these relations in both legal and lived ways. By mapping the everyday discursive, embodied, and legal claims to property in the camp, the chapter looks to complicate traditional understandings of public property, moving beyond a singular ‘owner’ – the (urban) State – to reveal a much more layered and contested geography. By considering the swathe of real property interests at play in public space, it raises questions over who has the authority to make decisions over how these spaces are used, who holds power in such negotiations, and what this tells us about the socio-legal relations that surround public spaces (Dorries, 2009; Moeckli, 2016; Flynn and Stevenson-Blythe, 2024). Framing this discussion in the context of settler-colonial law, this thesis seeks to grapple with the opportunities and tensions created when Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in solidarity turn to the courts and win – asking: what forms of protection are afforded on the ground and how does this play out in practice as a modality of resistance in the settler-colonial city?

1.7 Chapter outlines

Thus, through four empirical-analytical chapters, this thesis seeks to bring together and contribute to work on settler-colonialism, geographies of home/lessness, public space, and legal geographies – it proceeds as follows.

The literature review (Chapter 2) situates British Columbia and Vancouver within the history and analytic of settler-colonialism, setting out why this provides a key lens to understand people's relationships to public space and to home. Building on this, it then outlines work in urban geography on public space and in feminist geography on home and homelessness, offering the ways in which this thesis seeks to build connections between, and to extend, these bodies of literature.

Chapter 3, the methodology, outlines the 'patchwork' approach adopted to study public space in the Downtown Eastside. The metaphor of the patchwork is not intended as a claim to a new methodology but is used to describe the way in which the project took shape, the feminist ethic which underpins it, and the process of weaving together multiple analytical lenses to approach the (hi)story of public space in the neighbourhood. A patchwork approach places emphasis on the socio-spatial context of each 'patch' – the grounded specificities of a particular place and the people within it – and is therefore a reminder of the place-based contingency of the thesis' empirical and conceptual findings.

In the first analytical chapter (Chapter 4, *Producing*), the thesis takes a feminist historical and political geography lens to contend that public space cannot simply figure in the background to private property in the story of settler-colonialism. Re-centring work on settler colonialism in Vancouver to the space of Oppenheimer Park, the chapter charts the early history of the area around the park and the arrival of immigrants from the British Empire. It reconstructs the socio-legal geographies through which Lot 196, Block 54 – Oppenheimer Park – was created as public property, demonstrating how this process displaced Indigenous peoples, enclosed immigrant relationships to land as shared commons, and enrolled and regulated racialised expectations and boundaries into space. Then, turning to an urban redevelopment program in the 1970s which centred on

Oppenheimer Park as a site through which to beautify and gentrify the wider Downtown Eastside neighbourhood, the chapter traces how the City of Vancouver recognised and mobilised a White vision of Japanese Canadian identity to undertake this work.

Unpicking the role of the law, ideologies of leisure, and processes of urban planning in the arrival and evolution of the settler-colonial State and society, the chapter reflects on how we can make sense of the relationship between public space, property, and race in the settler-colonial city.

Chapter 5, *Living*, turns to present tensions over the use of public space in the Downtown Eastside, considering how forms of homemaking are taking place at both the Crab encampment and Oppenheimer Park. Taking up Bud Osborn's call to think about public space as a site of potential and resistance, the chapter first turns to Crab Park to explore the materialities, relations, and affects through which encampment residents make home-like spaces in the camp. By bringing these into conversation with the extended practices of homemaking taking place in Oppenheimer Park, the chapter argues that the wider geography of home/lessness is blurred in neighbourhood as residents seek to 'network' their homes to compensate for the carceral colonial domesticities of the shelter, the SRO, and the State. In turn, the chapter traces how public space takes shape differently in the Downtown Eastside in ways that exceed normative social and scholarly expectations. In remaking the meaning and purpose of public space, while resisting the enclosure of home, these geographies unsettle settler-colonial imaginations of public space and domesticity.

Claiming, Chapter 6, looks at the legal and political claims and tensions which emerge from these practices of homemaking. Employing a feminist legal geographies approach, the chapter opens the 'black box' of public property to consider how the Crab encampment makes a geolegal claim to the Crab Park. In doing so, it reflects on the case of *Bamberger v Vancouver* (2022) to conceptualise an alternative ethico-political principle upon which the (legal) right to public space may be claimed and contested. Then, turning to the space of the park, it traces the everyday 'property-territory' landscape which emerged from the case, using this empirical discussion to guide reflections on the opportunities and limits created by the law as a site of ambivalent resistance.

As forms of ‘unsettling’ and resistance evolve so does the nature of the settler-colonial city. Thus, chapter 7, *Governing*, looks to the ways the municipal State has reacted to the encampment’s presence and (socio-legal) claims to land. Exploring the evolution, actors, logics, practices, and effects of ‘palliative’ encampment governance in Vancouver – in relation to the wider urban political geographies of home/lessness and harm reduction in the Downtown Eastside – the chapter illustrates how settler-colonial practices of ‘burden shuffling’, containment, and reconciliation bear out on the Crab encampment. What emerges from this analysis is a series of openings through which to understand the processes and tensions which make up the contemporary ‘progressive’ settler colonial city.

The conclusion (Chapter 8) synthesizes the findings of the thesis, reflecting on how public space in the Downtown Eastside serves as a site within which multiple visions of home, of the public, and of urban space co-exist. In turn, this thesis argues, by making home in public space, Indigenous peoples, their allies, and those experiencing home/lessness unsettle the settler-colonial city. The conclusion discusses the implications of these findings for research on the settler-colonial city, public space, home/lessness, and legal geography.

2 Settler Colonialism, Public Space, and the Geographies of Homelessness

2.1 Introduction

The central motivation of this thesis is to explore the historic and contemporary entanglements between the settler-(inner) city and public space in Vancouver. To inform this discussion, and to make sense of the Downtown Eastside as a geographic space, the thesis draws on and speaks back to three key bodies of literature in dialogue: work in human geography on settler-colonialism and the settler-city; socio-legal understandings of public space; and geographies of homelessness and encampments. Cross-cutting all three is a focus on the ways in which the law come to bear in shaping (settler-colonial) space, relationships, identities, and political possibilities.

The first section of this chapter provides a discussion of what it means – conceptually and politically – to approach Vancouver as a settler colonial city, setting out the distinction between settler-colonialism and other forms of colonialisms, and the ways in which urban space has been central to its territorial, social and political project. Taking up work on the colonial foundations and effects of property, and the central role of (private) property law in the resettlement of British Columbia, it suggests that turning to socio-legal negotiations over public property provides a generative opening through which to understand the logics and tensions which make up the settler-colonial city.

The second section provides a brief overview of geographical work on public space with respect to three major strands: work defining public space as a modality of property, the relationship between public space and the ‘public’, and forms of resistance in public space. Setting out these themes defines the parameters upon which public space has been understood, constructed, regulated, and contested in contemporary cities and highlights the ways in which scholars conceptualise public space as a refractor for wider political trajectories in the city and nation-state. Thus, this section sets out the foundation from which this thesis contributes to a deeper understandings of public space. By bringing these themes into conversation with work on the settler-colonial city, the thesis questions and ‘unsettles’ the history of public space by turning to the grounded practices through which public space has been ‘made’ and governed, as well as the ways

in which individuals experiencing homelessness redefine expectations and understandings of public space.

The final section zooms in on the specific socio-political context of the Downtown Eastside and the geographies of home/lessness that are present in the neighbourhood. After briefly reviewing geographical literature on homeless and encampment governance, the section outlines feminist studies of home and homelessness in geography which turn towards the lived experiences and understandings of those considered homeless, posing an epistemological challenge to the subjugation and invisibility of homeless bodies and lives (Speer, 2021). Building on this body of work, this thesis speaks back to the repositioning of ‘less-ness’ as a point of radical difference and potential in relation to normative understandings of property, home, and the public in the settler-colonial city by approaching homeless encampments as fragile spaces of refuge, resistance, and ‘unsettlement’.

2.2 Settler-colonialism and the settler-colonial city

At the turn of the century, a growing body of scholarship began to recognise and define settler-colonialism as a distinct process and structure (rather than an ‘event’) to extractive colonialism (Wolfe, 1999; Veracini, 2010). While – as in other colonial contexts – settler-colonisers sought to establish capitalist economies and to exploit Indigenous resources and labour, they also ‘came to stay’, involving the possession and re-settlement of the land, the construction of a new set of social, political, and legal institutions, and the demographic replacement of the local population (Harris, 2004; Wolfe, 2006, p. 388; Veracini, 2014). To legitimate and uphold the creation of a new (White) society and national sovereignty, settler-colonialism look(ed/s) to eliminate all trace of what came before (Wolfe, 2006). This require(d/s) the dispossession and displacement of Indigenous peoples, cultures, laws and relationships to space (Banivanua Mar and Edmonds, 2010). As an entry point into the sizable and growing body of literature on settler-colonialism, this thesis takes up the role of land – understandings of property and modalities of claiming and producing settler-colonial territory – in settling the foundations for forms of settler-colonial control, governance, and society (Simpson, 2014b; Veleznitsky, Hughes and Machold, 2020).

a. The resettlement of British Columbia

The construction of new spatial orderings is the central logic around which settler-colonialism orbits and, in the transformation of British Columbia from a province of trading stations and relations in the mid-late 16th century to the creation of the crown colony of British Columbia in 1858, what was newly at stake was the question of land (Banivanua Mar and Edmonds, 2010; Harris, 2021). As Cole Harris (2004, p. 169) argues: “colonies entailed settlers, and settlers required land, which could only be got by dispossessing native people”.

Taking up this imperative, much of the literature on the resettlement of British Columbia has sought to analyse the making, meanings, and modalities of property as a tool of dispossession and, in turn, the role of the law in the formation of settler territory and the expansion of the settler-regime (Blomley, 2003; Pasternak, 2014; Bhandar, 2018; Kedar, Amara and Yiftachel, 2018). Here, the work of philosopher John Locke is a key touchstone. In the *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, Locke argued that labour was the foundation upon which legitimate claims to land could emerge – that “land is mine when I clear, cultivate, and fence it” (Greer, 2012, p. 367). Surveying the landscape of North America, Locke argued that land in this ‘New World’ was open and available for pre-emption with no recognisable prior claims to ownership (Blomley, 2004c). This perception motivated cartographic and visual depictions of British Columbia as ‘Terra Nullis’ – “a vast amphitheatre of virgin solitude” – and enabled the mass seizure of land by arrivals (Blomley, 2004c, p. 117). In *Unsettling the City*, Blomley (2004) argues that this logic relied upon a very particular imagination of labour, land use, and human development. By understanding Indigenous livelihoods and uses of land as backward, undeveloped, and unsuited for the expansion of ‘productive’ capital economies, the normative imagination of ownership in the form of property drew on and produced a teleology of ‘valuable’ land use based on extracting capital value – and, tied to this, a hierarchy of human life (Banivanua Mar and Edmonds, 2010).

This work reveals how legalistic discourse on property masks its socio-political foundations and effects. Indeed, as property became a key mechanism for settler-colonial control, it not only marked territorial ownership but also racialized the ability to claim land. Harris (1993) argues that imaginations of ‘correct’ forms of land

ownership are White imaginations, which depend upon and perpetuate ideologies of racial superiority and civilisation in the form of stadial theory (Razack, 2002; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Safransky, 2022). In this context, Bhandar (2018, p. 106) contends that “Blackness and Indigeneity [come] to signify a lesser value not only in relation to white European settlers but with respect to relations of ownership” – a devaluation which is then circulated by and enforced through colonial law. In newly resettled British Columbia, therefore, property rights were mobilised to produce racial hierarchy, where recognition as a legitimate property owner was a marker of (proximity to) Whiteness and citizenship (Porter, 2014; Roy, 2017).

Thus, as land on the settler-colonial frontier was transformed into property, the boundaries of race were transported, legitimised and legislated into the landscape (Blomley, 2007a). Relationships between land and life were transformed from the complex, interwoven ecosystems which came before, into known cartographic space – mapped, gridded, and “simplified” under settler-colonialism (Harris, 2021, p. 182). As Tuck and Yang (2012, p. 5) note, the violence of settler colonialism is rooted in the land as “land is remade into property and human relationships to land are restricted to the relationship of the owner to his property”. This universal ontology of human-land relations – filtered through the lens of property – naturalised a new physical, legal, cultural, economic, and administrative landscape in British Columbia (Blomley, 2003; Harris, 2021; Wideman, 2021). As Cole Harris (2020, p.187) writes,

“this new human geography – the survey lines, the property boundaries, the roads and railways, the farms, the industrial camps, the towns – became, from a native point of view, the most pervasive disciplinary technology of all...Superimposed on their former lands, it defined where they could and could not go. Made by newcomers, it was reinforced by property rights held by landowners (or renters or leasers) wary of trespassers, people who knew their rights and where, in their terms, “Indians” belonged. Native people could no longer go where they had. Their movements were blocked or channelled, and the resources on which they had always lived were increasingly out of reach.”

By the 1930s, space set aside for Indigenous peoples consisted of just 1500 small reserves scattered across the province. These small reserves were designed and monitored to control and ‘eliminate’ Indigenous peoples’ ways of life, to encourage ‘civilisation’ and the diffusion of Eurocentric ideals of gender, economy, home, and

familial relations, and to reduce the possibility of cross-community solidarity and resistance to the new settler-colonial State (Harris, 2002, 2004; Mawani in Strange and Bashford, 2003; Banivanua Mar and Edmonds, 2010; Edmonds, 2010)

Extending this work, which sets out the ways in which settler-colonialism rests upon an ontological and legal reworking of the landscape into (private) property, this thesis looks towards the relationship between land, the law, and racialisation in the context of public property (Chapter 4). To do so, the thesis considers the complexity, layers, and nuance of racial hierarchies in the settler-colonial city with regards to the position of Japanese Canadian immigrants and other urban residents deemed less valuable with respect to questions of property – including those experiencing homelessness in the contemporary (settler-colonial) city (Roy, 2003; Blomley, 2009; Mawani, 2009; Stanger-Ross, 2020).

b. Vancouver – a settler colonial city?

Nowhere in British Columbia was more central to this process of re-settlement, or more shaped by it, than the City of Vancouver. Incorporated in April 1886, nearly 30 years after the creation of the Crown colony of British Columbia, Vancouver's port site at the intersection of the Western terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railway with the Burrard Inlet meant that the city grew rapidly (Perry, 2001). Immigrants arriving from the British Empire, recruited to work in the surrounding resource industries and salmon canneries, meant that the city saw a steady stream of people moving through it and an early multi-ethnic population of people who "might not have otherwise shared a common space" (Roy, 1989; Barman, 2007, p. 161).

Taking inspiration from work on imperial cities, recent scholarship in (settler-) colonial studies and geography has sought to unpick urban space as the pinnacle of colonial power (Peters, 1996; Jacobs, 2002; Moehring, 2004; King, 2015). Acting as centres for the formulation and expansion of colonial-capitalism, colonial cities are spaces where European understandings of land, politics, economy, and society are imagined, naturalised, and projected outwards (Jazeel, 2019). David Hugill (2017, 2021) has sought to distinguish the colonial from the settler-colonial city. While colonial cities were designed to facilitate the flow of human and resources back to the metropole –

often organised through segregation and the formation of closed, inward-looking ‘cantonments’ for the colonising population – settler-colonial cities are oriented towards territorial expansion, the creation of internal economies and societies to benefit settler arrivals, and are driven by an ongoing reinvestment in place over the transfer of resources elsewhere (Dorries, Hugill and Tomiak, 2019; Simpson and Hugill, 2022). Taking up this definition, scholarship on the settler-colonial city re-centres the ways in which the very emergence of urban space is built upon the dispossession, displacement, and erasure of Indigenous peoples – a process Glen Coulthard (2014, p. 175) terms “*urb nullis*” – and traces these dynamics into the present, exploring the evolution, ‘mutation’, and contemporary technologies of the settler-colonial city (Hugill, 2017, 2021; Blatman-Thomas and Porter, 2019; Dorries *et al.*, 2019; Simpson and Hugill, 2022).

Writing in reference to the reorganisation of the city of Victoria, British Columbia, in the mid-late 1800s, urban historian Penelope Edmonds (2010a) traces the solidification of urban space and life which accompanied settler-colonial expansion. While earlier trading relations involved a fluidity of social interaction, including mixed-race marriages and families, new legal regulations set limitations on ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples could inhabit city spaces and encounter each other (*ibid.*). This led to the creation of an Indigenous reserve in Victoria, described by settlers as a chaotic blight on the urban landscape – a slum with no value in these otherwise profitable new lands (*ibid.*). A similar hardening along socio-spatial lines was replicated in Vancouver, as small, scattered reserves were established to contain displaced Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh communities (Barman, 2007; Stanger-Ross, 2008). At the same time, processes of urban planning, municipal by-laws, and widespread anti-Asian sentiment contributed to the creation of the spatially defined areas of ‘Chinatown’ and ‘Japantown’ in what is now Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (Anderson, 1991; Wideman, 2019). Restrictive covenants in the white neighbourhoods of Shaughnessy, Point Grey, and Mount Pleasant reinforced this racialisation of Vancouver's urban space by preventing “Asiatics” from purchasing property nearby – note, though, that some ‘Asiatics’ were (initially and conditionally) permitted to purchase property (Roy, 1989; Anderson, 1991; Tsang, 2023).

In this vein, more recent work on the settler-colonial city has turned to the liminal position of the racialised migrant in settler-colonialism (Kelley, 2017). Drawing on the

framework of racial capitalism, this scholarship has revealed how the political economy of the settler-colonial city depended both on Indigenous deracination and on the management and exploitation of racialised labour – in the case of Vancouver, mostly Chinese, Japanese, and later Indian immigrants (Ward, 2008; Bonds and Inwood, 2016; Carpio, 2019; Dorries, Hugill and Tomiak, 2019). This thesis re-centres this conversation to consider the impact of settler-colonialism on new immigrants beyond the question of capital extraction, reflecting on how we might make sense of the plurality of differentiated subjectivities in the city and their relationships to (public) property and each other. Conceptually, it asks: how do we make sense of the relationship between land, property, racialisation, and differently valued lives in this context? (Chapter 4).

In this light, the thesis draws on literature which looks to understand how Indigenous and non-Indigenous bodies come to be understood, scripted, organised, and governed in settler-colonial regimes – the infrastructures and ‘techniques of re-settlement’ – and the mentalities, practices, and discourses which surround these (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005; Barman, 2007; Dorries, 2009; Byrd, 2011; Wolfe, 2011; Simpson, 2014b; Gombay, 2015). In the context of Vancouver, Jean Barman (2007) highlights how, accompanying the physical erasure of Indigeneity from the city was the simultaneous erasure of any social presence or positive (self-)identity. Instead, colonised Indigenous bodies were materially and discursively reproduced as inconvenient, immoral, and nuisance (*ibid.*). Such understandings perpetuated acts of displacement including the clearing of the city’s Stanley Park of Indigenous, Chinese, and Hawaiian ‘squatters’ who were deemed a public nuisance and health risk to the rest of the city (Barman, 2005; Mawani, 2005; Kheraj, 2013). In this light, Pasternak *et al.* (2023) turn more broadly to questions of governance, arguing that the material, social, and ontological infrastructures of settler colonialism are built upon Indigenous ‘dispossession, theft, and extraction’. They contend that one key mechanism through which these processes are enforced is settler-colonial law, which not only undermines and – when enforced by actors such as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police – violently contains Indigenous resistance to the expansion of settler-colonial infrastructure and governance, but also asserts jurisdictional authority over Indigenous territories and their customary laws and governance (Kobayashi, 1990; Razack, 2002; Pasternak, 2014).

Thus, recognising settler-colonialism as an ongoing set of socio-economic, political, material and legal structures, the “task” is also to “figure out how [these] have survived in new times, what they have become and what they are doing now” (Hugill, 2021, p.20). Calling for scholars to trace the ongoing reproduction of the settler-colonial city, Hugill (ibid., p.4) argues for closer attention to the:

“historically inaugurated modes of being together [which] persist as structural features of shared contemporary experience, functioning as a ‘relatively secure or sedimented’ set of relations that continue to enforce racialised forms of inequity.”

So far, scholarship on the contemporary settler-colonial city has paid attention to several mechanisms through which these structures reproduce, including: the role of urban planning and greening (Safransky, 2014; Parish, 2020; Porter, Hurst and Grandinetti, 2020); ongoing imaginations of Indigenous and racialised ghettos (Launius and Boyce, 2021); the creation new urban reserves (Van Lier, 2021); and through superficial processes of urban consultation and shared governance (Anderson and Flynn, 2021; McCreary and Milligan, 2021).

With respect to Vancouver, Stanger-Ross’s (2008) work on the logics of the 1928 *Plan for Vancouver* and the role of urban planning in ongoing municipal colonialism is particularly instructive. Here, Stanger-Ross traces how the city’s desire to create a network of ‘Large Parks and Pleasure Drives’ to vitalise the city was mobilised against the Kitsilano and Musqueam reserves (ibid.). By envisioning urban space as organic and interconnected, the Plan positioned Indigenous reserves as a risk to the health of the city and its citizens – a narrative which was later mobilised in 1937 to justify a ‘clean up’ the ‘unkempt’ Kitsilano reserve of non-Indigenous squatters by the Federal Department of Indian Affairs, under pressure from the City of Vancouver Parks Board (see also Slobodian, 2024). This racialised understanding of non-White bodies and non-normative domesticity as ‘risky’ is a thread which weaves into the present in the work of Geraldine Pratt (2005) who considers how the criminalisation and pathologisation of Indigenous women and sex-workers in the Downtown Eastside motivated a failure to investigate when many went missing in the late 20th century. These women were later found to be victims of serial killer Robert Pickton.

Drawing on Glen Coulthard's (2007, 2014) work on the limits of liberal recognition, a further body of literature examines the performance of reconciliation and the reification of certain imaginations of Indigeneity in Vancouver's urban space over a true reckoning with Indigenous presence and self-determination (Mawani, 2012; Daigle, 2016, 2019). Critiquing the trend towards recognising Indigenous claims to land and accommodating forms of self-governance in Canadian politics and in the law, Coulthard (2014) approaches 'recognition' as a particular modality of colonial dispossession. By re-orienting these claims towards the opening of land and resources for capital extraction, he argues, the State secures economic and political power without ceding sovereignty to First Nations communities. Thus, within these negotiations, the scope for Indigenous self-determination and resurgence is limited as land continues to be transformed into property for extraction and exploitation. In this vein, the work of Natalie Baloy (2014, 2016) highlights the limits of efforts to include Indigenous peoples and representation in Vancouver's urban landscape. Taking up stereotypical sites of representation, such as the Stanley Park totem poles, she argues that this reflects and reproduces non-Indigenous ideas of Indigeneity which – as passive, visual representations – render Indigeneity 'spectacular' and 'spectral' in Vancouver (ibid.). Such forms of visual recognition fail to faithfully represent and meaningfully act upon Indigenous voices and realities, claims to self-determination, and sovereignty – they do not unsettle the city (ibid.). Instead, as Daigle (2019, p.4) argues, they serve to alleviate settler-guilt and anxiety while "secure[ing], legitimat[ing], and effectively reproduc[ing] white supremacy and settler futurity". Mackey (2014) argues that this is – at least in part – motivated by a desire for a feeling of certainty on behalf of the settler-colonial nation State and settler population. Or, as Porter (2024, p. 370) puts it: moves to recognise and reconcile are, "of course, designed to ensure that everything stays exactly the same" (see also White and Castleden, 2022).

The tension between liberal recognition and meaningful political engagement also plays out in Vancouver's urban governance (Anderson and Flynn, 2021). Van Lier et al. (2021) examine the interplay between recognition and water governance structures in the wider Vancouver area, suggesting that the introduction of shared governance responsibilities between Fortis BC and the Tsleil-Waututh First Nation draw on a limited understanding of the traditional lands and lives of the Tsleil-Waututh peoples and foreclose the possibility of self-determined forms of community development and

political articulation. Building on this example, McCreary and Milligan (2021) highlight how a body of case law has incrementally set the rights of Indigenous nations with respect to environmental governance in ways that demand specific understandings of Indigeneity tied to their ‘distinctive culture’ and pre-contact practices and traditions (*R. v. Sparrow*, 1990 and *R. v. Van Der Peet*, 1996) and which limit their power over decisions to mechanisms of consultation instead of self-determination (*Haida Nation v. British Columbia*, 2004). Thus, legal attempts to ‘reconcile’ engage a spatially and temporally bounded vision of history and Indigeneity which ultimately undermines contemporary and future Indigenous self-determination, sovereignty, and livelihoods (Bhandar, 2004; Peters, 2006; Anthony and Hohmann, 2024). This is reflected in the 1982 amendments to the Canadian constitution which accept some visions of Indigenous jurisdiction, but not those which involve property or land (Pasternak, 2020).

In this vein, this thesis takes up the contradictory role of the law in processes of both recognition and Indigenous resistance, as well as highlighting the ways in which contemporary municipal governance and by-laws are imbued with settler-colonial logics, which act to shore up affectual, political, and economic power of the settler-colonial State and City (Chapter 6 and 7). In conversation with this body of literature, the thesis tracks the reproduction of modalities of settler-colonialism in Vancouver and the ways in which this comes to bear not only on Indigenous bodies and identities but shapes life for other marginalised populations or those acting in solidarity. Chapter 4 considers the ways in which the law and ideologies of leisure come to shape who can be in and use public space in the settler-colonial city, while Chapter 7 reflects on the ways in which exposure to the violence of the City – and, in turn, hierarchies of human value – continue to be determined by access to normative imaginations of property and settled expectations of domesticity. By turning to work on the limits to recognition in the courts in Chapter 6, the thesis raises critical questions surrounding how recognition is refused and reworked.

c. ‘Unsettling’ the settler-city

While urban geographers have successfully engaged settler-colonialism as an analytical tool, there remains limited engagement with the ways in which Indigenous sovereignties and self-determination persist in contemporary cities (Porter, 2020). In part, this is a

feature of the ‘colonial amnesia’ which surrounds the urban as a geographic form: cities, as the height of colonial civilisation, have come to be understood as places devoid of Indigeneity and ‘real’ Indigenous peoples (Jazeel, 2019; Nejad *et al.*, 2019). Yet, as Porter and Yiftachel (2019, p. 180) note, settler-colonialism is, by its very definition as a process, “always structurally incomplete, and it is in urban settlements that this incompleteness is most visible and most paradoxical”. In this vein, a growing body of scholarship is revealing the ways in which the city hosts Indigenous pasts, presents, and futures which disturb the dominant (hi)story of settler-colonialism (Peters and Andersen, 2013; Dorries *et al.*, 2019; Porter, 2020). Addressing questions of Indigenous survivance (Vizenor, 2008), resurgence (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005; Simpson, 2011; Daigle, 2018), refusal (Simpson, 2014a), and self-determination (Taiaiake, 2001; Corntassel, 2012; Daigle, 2016), scholars have traced the various scales and fora through which resistance is practiced in urban settings – from everyday activities through to exceptional acts and the formation of new solidarities in urban space (Culhane, 2003; Muldoon and Schaap, 2012; Kipfer, 2018).

In the Canadian context, Tomiak (2016) highlights three modalities of Indigenous resistance which (re)shape Ottawa’s urban space: shared urban governance and acts of ‘scale jumping’ which connect local Indigenous community organisations to the Federal government; the political and legal claims of the Algonquin over land and public space; and Chief Theresa Spence’s hunger strike on Victoria Island which sparked the Idle No More movement, mobilising a network of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in different contexts in anti-colonial organising. Scaling down to the everyday, Indigenous scholars and feminist political ecologists have also sought to highlight the role of urban agriculture movements in the formation of decolonial understandings of nature and the resurgence of Indigenous governance in the city (Alfred, 1999; Heynen, 2016; McClintock, 2018; McGregor, 2018; Simpson and Bagelman, 2018). Taking the example of the Lekwungen Food Systems Project, Simpson and Bagelman (2017) suggest that everyday acts of tending to nature – planting, restoring and maintaining the ecology of Beacon Hill Park in line with Indigenous knowledge – refuses the city of Victoria’s claim to the land and is an act of territorial reclamation on behalf of the Lekwungen people. Here, “land refuses to be resolved via the invisibility of property as object, or the cunning promise of property as redress”, creating an everyday micro-geography of Indigenous resurgence (Blatman-Thomas and Porter, 2019, p. 40).

The question of land and Indigenous self-determination is revisited by Julie Tomiak (2017) in the context of ‘new urban reserves’ – satellite land holdings of First Nation communities that are located outside of an urban area. An official policy since 1981, the recent expansion of urban reserves across Canadian municipalities has been facilitated by Federal moves towards reconciliation under which First Nations have been provided with cash settlements for specific land claims (ibid.). When used to buy land in nearby urban areas, these ‘new reserves’ become situated within the wider tensions of Indigenous recognition (ibid.). While they – to some degree – actualise Indigenous self-determination, critics argue that settler-law, understandings of land as property, and neoliberal governmentality remain untouched (Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Tomiak, 2017). In this respect, the position of urban reserves speaks back to the work of urban scholar Libby Porter (Porter, 2014, p. 402), who asks:

"where can we possibly locate our hopes, if we have acknowledged that there is no possibility of standing outside all forms of hegemony? Is it enough to see struggles against dispossession as always contingent, partial and compromised, as the state of our ‘freedoms and our unfreedoms’, and just leave it at that?"

Given the settler-coloniality of Vancouver, there remains work to be done to consider how these questions – where resistance is located and the scope of its potential amongst the power and dominance of settler-colonialism – and the tension between resistance and recognition come to bear in the city. Responding to this framework as a means to understand the layers of colonial violence and Indigenous resistance in the inner city Downtown Eastside neighbourhood, this thesis re-traces the imperfect and inchmeal forms of resistance and decolonial imaginary and praxis emerging in the city, including new axes of solidarity between urban Indigenous peoples and other urban residents who have been subject to the power of settler-colonial ideologies, exclusions, and practices (Snelgrove, Dhamoon and Corntassel, 2014; Chapters 5 and 6).

In so doing, the thesis takes up the work of Nicholas Blomley (2004) in conversation with Burow, Brock and Dove (2018) to conceptualise the notion of ‘unsettling’ as the process of resisting, reworking and refusing not only the material transformation of land under settler-colonialism but also the ontological enclosure of land under which it is

viewed solely as (potential) property. Extending this notion of ‘unsettling’ to the ontological enclosure of understandings of human value and domesticity, this thesis looks to explore the co-existence of different ways of perceiving the land and home by Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents of the city, which undermine the settler-colonial drive for universalism. In this vein, it views the decolonial potential of such movements as not:

“the rejection of one modality of land for the other, but rather [] an uneasy path to maintain a hybrid assemblage of ontologies, with all of their attendant affordances and limitations” (Burow, Brock and Dove, 2018, p. 70)

In this respect, Chapter 5 explores what living within, and beyond, the limits of the resultant settler-colonial, domestic geographies looks like, while Chapter 6 takes up universalistic understandings of public property in the courts, positioning the law as a contested and contingent site of refusal and resistance in the settler-colonial city (Braverman *et al.*, 2014; Kedar, Amara and Yiftachel, 2018; Jeffrey, 2019; Anderson and Flynn, 2020; Gill and Hynes, 2021).

2.3 Thinking with public space: property, publics, and protest

To approach the role public space plays in the settler-colonial city, this thesis draws on wider work in urban geography which has looked to theorise public space. Specifically, this thesis speaks back to three key themes in the literature: public space as form of property distinct from the commons and of private space; the relationship between public space and the political ‘public’; and the use of public space as a site of resistance. In doing so, the thesis draws out points of connection between work on public space and settler colonialism surrounding: the division of land into public and private property as a means of socio-political exclusion and the ‘(re)settling’ of expectations of the domestic and the public (Chapters 4 and 6); the regulation of the ‘public’ as a mechanism of (settler-colonial) urban governance (Chapters 4 and 7); and the reclamation of public space as a modality of Indigenous and allied resistance (Chapters 5 and 6).

a. Public space as property

Central to the definition and theorisation of public space is the socio-legal division of space into public and private; under this framework, public space cannot be understood outside of its separation from private space and, in particular, the production of the “household as a privatised sphere of social reproduction” (Low and Smith, 2013, p. 4). This division of space is made material and reproduced through the law, which surrounds and bolsters this division with a bundle of differing access rights and responsibilities, producing public and private property. Notably, from a legal perspective, while public properties are open and accessible to the public (though often restricted to particular times/uses), they are owned and governed by the state and thus distinct from understandings of the commons (Jeffrey, McFarlane and Vasudevan, 2012; Blomley, 2015; Moeckli, 2016). While feminist scholarship has inspired a growing recognition of the blurred division of public and private – demonstrating that the private sphere, spaces of the home and the body, are inflected with and materially impact ‘public’ political issues, including settler-colonial violence – the boundary between these two spheres remains steadfast in the material and imagined landscapes of contemporary cities and in law (Hyndman, 2004, 2019; Pain and Staeheli, 2014; de Leeuw, 2016; Smith, 2020). In this sense, the existence of public space does not just rest upon the material parcelling of land but involves the ongoing reproduction of specific imaginations, discourses, and socio-legal practices. In the context of Vancouver as a settler-city, it is pertinent to approach this material, legal, and ontological division as one which is rooted in and inseparable from the arrival and expansion of settler and capitalist society, whereby spaces of leisure and work were detached from spaces of domesticity and people’s lives were remapped and enclosed into these two distinct and gendered realms (Jeffrey, McFarlane and Vasudevan, 2012; Sevilla-Buitrago, 2015). Developing thinking along these lines, this thesis considers the ways in which the production of public space is inseparable from the development of the (settler-colonial) modern city (Chapter 4).

In turn, this thesis takes up scholarship within urban geography which outlines how – in practice – people’s de facto and de jure rights not only to access, but to own, public property are neither blanket nor equal. Exemplified by the recent emergence of new, exclusionary quasi-‘public’ spaces – such as those subject to bubble zones and complex

private-public ownership arrangements – the non-normative arrangements of property relations in public spaces have started to be interrogated in geographical literature but, as yet, remain underexplored from a property law and legal geography perspective (Peck and Tickell, 2002; Atkinson, 2003; Blomley, 2004a; Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008; Flynn and Stevenson-Blythe, 2024). As such, this thesis acknowledges the complexities of defining public property by drawing on scholarship in socio-legal studies and legal geography (Blomley, 2004a; Page, 2020). By approaching (public) property as a set of norms, imaginaries, and practices that are reified by the framework of the law, this project foregrounds how the property relations surrounding public space are negotiated, subverted, and resisted on the ground in Vancouver (Blomley, 2007a, 2008, 2010, 2015). In this, it reveals how new socio-legal definitions of public space are emerging which unsettle the settler-colonial division of land into public and private property (Chapter 6).

b. Governing (un)wanted publics

In this regard, the thesis looks towards the co-constitutive relationship between public space, property relations, and those who spend time within these spaces – their ‘publics’. Thus far in geography, this relationship has been considered in relation to questions of citizenship, political representation, and (socio-legal) rights (Roy, 2003, 2017; Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008; Blomley, 2009; Staeheli, 2010). The linkage between public space and citizenship can be traced back to the prototype of the Greek agora which settled a normative vision of public space as one of an open ‘marketplace’ where ideas and goods are exchanged freely between citizens of the (urban) State (Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008). In practice, and as with most contemporary public spaces, rights to enter and participate in the agora were not equally distributed across society but were restricted to a narrow set of ‘ideal’ citizens with power and standing (Low and Smith, 2013). As Don Mitchell (1996, p. 127, emphasis in original) states “there are not and have never been any truly open public spaces where *all* may freely gather, free from exclusionary violence”. In this way, who is able to access and be in public space is implicated in and reflective of wider socio-legal processes of “defining who is and what is dominant and what is deviant” (Deutsche, 1998; Staeheli, Mitchell and Nagel, 2009; Burk, 2010, p. 93). As certain bodies and behaviours are welcomed and permitted in public space, and others are harassed, excluded, and criminalised, who counts in the

urban public is made visible within the physical landscape of the city – often taking shape across gendered, classed and racialised lines (Mitchell, 1995; Marne, 2001; Mitchell, 2003a; Ehrkamp, 2008; Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008; Sevilla-Buitrago, 2014; Mitchell, 2017).

To understand the motivations, mechanisms, and effects of contemporary exclusions in public space, urban and political geographers have studied the ‘revanchist’ turn in urban governance – namely, the rise of anti-homeless architecture and the increasing regulation and criminalisation of behaviours associated with homelessness (Smith, 1996; Davis, 2006; Hackworth, 2019). The rise of anti-homeless ordinances and increased policing of people who are rough sleeping or perceived to be ‘homeless’ for minor infractions such as jaywalking, littering, and public disorder, they argue, reflects a neoliberal (re)making of the urban landscape which centres middle-class and tourist ‘tastes’ and orderly, clean aesthetics over a ‘politics of survival’ (Mitchell, 1997, 2003, p. 189; see also Blomley, 2010; Rose, 2017). As Mitchell (2020, p. 30) contends: “[t]hese moves licence the creation of a ‘brutal public sphere’ which forces people experiencing homeless to oscillate between forced mobility and immobility, eroding their right to the city”. On the ground in the Downtown Eastside, the law and the police are central to the everyday experience of people sheltering in public space as advocates and academics highlight the over-policing of the neighbourhood and the kaleidoscope of laws and by-laws that come to bear on both housed and unhoused residents (PIVOT Legal Society, 2013, 2019; Boyd and Kerr, 2016; Bennet and Larkin, 2018). These range from direct prohibitions on setting up shelter in parks and public lands (such as trespass laws, Chapter 6), to the regulation of specific behaviours associated with homelessness, such as bans on panhandling (Collins and Blomley, 2007; Blomley, 2010), sitting or lying down in public, sleeping in cars, placing belongings on sidewalks (Blomley, Flynn and Sylvestre, 2020), and the consumption of alcohol and/or substance use in public space (Bennet and Larkin, 2018; Mannoe, 2022). Alongside the criminalisation of homelessness, academics have noted the rise of quasi-carceral ‘conditions’ which shape where, when, and what people can do in public space (Sylvestre, Blomley and Bellot, 2020). These are court-/police- imposed rules on people who have been apprehended by the police but not incarcerated (ibid.). They include abstinence requirements, curfews, and spatially defined ‘red-zones’ and are often hard (or impossible) for those experiencing homelessness to follow (Marie-Eve Sylvestre *et*

al., 2017). While ‘conditions’ were introduced as a way to break cycles of incarceration, studies have found that people experiencing homelessness risk racking up long criminal records for minor infractions when they breach the conditions and are (re)apprehended (*ibid.*). As such, people making home in public space are not just subject to the structures and strictures of homeless governance but are subject to a tangled field of regulation and legal controls, including those associated with progressive agendas (Johnson *et al.*, 2024; Przybylinski, 2024a, 2024b; Chapter 7).

Emerging from this work is a reflection on the ways in which the governance of public space is entangled in and reflective of wider processes of urban development and change, which go on shape the criteria upon which people are policed and in/excluded in the public (Katz, 2013). In this vein, much scholarship has approached public space as a bellwether for wider shifts in the neoliberal political economies of the city (Mitchell, 2003a; Madden, 2010). Under neoliberal urbanism and processes of gentrification, scholars argue, many public spaces have been mobilised, co-opted, and privatised by stakeholders beyond the state – for example, through public-private partnerships and engaging private security firms (Hodkinson, 2012). This reshaping of property relations – and the ways they are enforced – in public space has significant implications for both their publics and social environments. Corporate and state planners design spaces that reflect desires for security and profit, rather than fostering genuine social interaction, resulting in what Sennett (1991) terms ‘dead public spaces’ – a move away from the (somewhat) democratic agora (Thörn, 2011). Another outcome has been the creation of ‘festive’ public spaces that encourage consumption, such as malls and marketplaces (Mitchell, 1995; Zukin, 1995; Atkinson, 2003; Madden, 2010). Both these spaces assume new models of interaction in public space, where social life becomes a ‘theatre’ or a performance which replaces the unexpected and messy realities of life that is lived (Mitchell, 1995).

Thus, building on this view of public space as a material, discursive, and socio-legal landscape shaped by historic, social, and political relations – and as spaces that actively intervene in and (re)shape these relations – this thesis re-focuses work on the governance of public space and the ‘public’ to examine how it has been involved in the making and (re)making of settler colonialism. Chapter 4 considers the intersection between the governance of public space and practices and discourses of racialisation,

while Chapter 7 considers the ways in which particular aesthetic and behavioural expectations – tied up in normative imaginations of domesticity and public space as well as a wider processes of urban branding – come to shape the governance of Crab Park and the lives of those living in the encampment (Chapter 7).

c. Public space as a sites of struggle

As sites which ‘host; the public, public spaces are also open to acts of re-claiming – such as occupation, protest, and demonstration – by actors seeking to contest dominant visions of who counts in the urban public (Deutsche, 1998; Shiffman, 2012; Vasudevan, 2015a; Burgum and Vasudevan, 2023). As has been noted, policed, surveyed, and priced out, those deemed outside of the ‘acceptable’ imagination of the public have long been relegated to the margins of public space – backstreets, side alleys, disused plots, and out-of-the-way parks (Mitchell, 1995, 2003b; Brown and Rose, 2021). For some scholars, this impulse – exacerbated and made more brutal and visible by gentrification – signals the ‘end of public space’ with few, if any, cities in the global north permitting an inclusive public (Madden, 2010). Others, such as Don Mitchell, remind us of the importance of looking past any grand narrative of what public space is or could be. Public spaces are sites of “struggle”, he argues, produced by the tense dialectic between the presumed “end of public space and public space’s myriad ends” (Mitchell, 2017, p. 503-4). As such, to understand the nature of urban public space we must look beyond idealised notions of what public space could or should be to examine public space ‘materially’ – what public space actually is.

The case of homeless squatters in People’s Park in California is a case-in-point (Mitchell, 1995). Analysing the 1991 riot sparked by the University of California and City of Berkley’s plans to redevelop Berkeley’s People’s Park, Mitchell argues that this ‘actually-existing’ public space was produced through a struggle over two contrasting ideals of public space: public space as a space of ‘disorder’ – politics, struggle and ‘commoning’ – and public space as a space of order – of retreat and leisure, a ‘gift of the state and developers’. While proponents of the redevelopment saw a space “overrun with squatters, drug dealers, and the like” which excluded a more “appropriate public”, protectors of People’s Park viewed the space as one of the few remaining areas in the Bay Area where homeless people could live and in which political movements could

organise (Mitchell, 1995, p.115). In this regard, Mitchell suggests that the ‘end of public space thesis’ outlined in much of the literature on neoliberal urbanism is an oversimplification. Instead, he argues;

"oppositional movements continually strive to assure the currency of more expansive visions of public space. Still, to the degree that the ‘disneyfication’ of public space advances and political movements are shut out of public space, oppositional movements lose the space where they may be represented (or may represent themselves) as legitimate parts of ‘the public.’ As the words and actions of the protagonists in Berkeley suggest, the stakes are high and the struggles over them might very well be bloody. But that is at once the promise and the danger of public space” (Mitchell, 1991, p.127–128).

Thus, Mitchell (2017) contends that geographical research should return to the distinction between the ‘end’ and the ‘ends’ of public space – namely, to "how public spaces are deployed socially, strategically, ideologically as well as how they are used by myriad publics – the ends to which they are put" (p.503).

Connecting resistance in public space to a wider unsettling of the urban form, the works of Mitchell (2003) and Harvey (2008), amongst others, have drawn on Henri Lefebvre’s theorisation of the right to the city. By claiming the right to be – to eat and sleep in, and to inhabit and appropriate – public space, the argument goes, people are claiming their right to Lefebvre’s oeuvre: the collective struggle to make the city (Lefebvre *et al.*, 2003). This thesis engages with this question of resistance but in a way that reflects and refracts Lefebvre’s original formulation of the right to the city. As the notion of the ‘right to the city’ has travelled from Lefebvre’s original conceptualisation in scholarship and practice, it has often been mobilised to claim legal liberal democratic rights to (public) space and urban citizenship (Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer, 2012). This “boils down to claims for inclusion in the current system as it exists, [but] it does not aim at transforming the existing system” (Mayer, 2009, p. 369). Critical urban scholars have thus reflected on this tendency, asking “whose right, what right is it, and to what city?” (Marcuse, 2009, p. 185). Arguing that the right to the city encompasses more than just a juridical right, Harvey (2008) suggests that the goal of the right to the city is to demand a wholesale transformation of the urban condition beyond capitalist logics to support the livelihoods, needs and desires of all urban inhabitants (Purcell, 2013). While unsettling

capitalism, as a colonial economic modality, would go some way towards enabling Indigenous resurgence and the emergence of diverse economies and relations (Bledsoe, McCreary and Wright, 2022), the right to the city framing leaves answered fundamental questions over the nature of land in the settler-colonial city (Iveson, 2017).

Indeed, such claims, which presuppose the authority and existence of the settler-colonial city, sit uncomfortably alongside Indigenous knowledges and presence which resist the notion that there is a settler-colonial sovereignty from which to derive this right. As Libby Porter (2024) reminds us, to meaningfully engage with and challenge colonial representations, it is important to “reckon with the terms of the field” and to foreground Indigenous knowledge in our work – to cite and value Indigenous scholarship ‘directly, unambiguously, and generously’ (Todd, 2016). To avoid colonial writing, it is central we resist the ‘scientific’ universalism created by grand claims to urban theory which looks to theorise out from a specific geography and place (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Barker and Pickerill, 2020). Instead, the thesis turns towards how Indigenous ontologies of space are actually made and ‘done’ in Vancouver to avoid the colonial trap of presuming a level of ‘authenticity’ or ‘prior presence’ (Radcliffe, 2017b). Thus, to remain attentive to Vancouver as a settler-colonial city and to foreground Indigenous knowledge in its analysis of resistance, this thesis (re)focuses work on public space and resistance towards the claims made in the minor and everyday (Chapter 3; Hughes, 2020). It looks to understand how mundane and intimate claims to public space unsettle dominant norms about what public and private space is and – in relation to this – how this might evoke a wider retelling of the (his)tory of land and society in Vancouver (Chapters 5 and 6).

In this vein, the thesis builds on work which brings together questions of resistance, public space, and settler-colonialism in the geographic context of Vancouver. Central to the ways in which this debate has travelled to the Downtown Eastside is work on the ‘right to remain’ (Masuda and Crabtree, 2010; Masuda *et al.*, 2020). Taking up Ananya Roy's (2017) call to consider the layered experiences of dispossession in place, and the ways in which these motivate new solidarities and forms of resistance, Masuda *et al.* (2017) conceptualise the ways in which residents of the Downtown Eastside claim a ‘right to remain’ in the neighbourhood as a means of contesting their layered, shared, and spatially situated experiences of dispossession and displacement under colonial

urbanisation. Drawing threads between historic Indigenous and Japanese-Canadian communities and present day struggles for housing and against the gentrification of the neighbourhood, they argue that the 'right to remain provides a "situated and integrative vocabulary for consolidating grassroots praxis across [these] diverse social groupings and settings to address urban spatial claims (symbolically and materially)" in Vancouver (Masuda *et al.*, 2020, p. 229). The 'right to remain' is made up of four elements: material, existential, cultural, and political remaining and Oppenheimer Park is identified as one such site where these coalesce (Masuda and Crabtree, 2010).

Also writing in the context of the Downtown Eastside, Adrienne Burk (2010) outlines the ways that everyday modes of representation in public space – who is made visible, recognised, and remembered – can be a form of resistance. Through negotiations over public statues, such as the Oppenheimer Park totem pole and the Crab Park bolder, she argues that residents of the Downtown Eastside seek to assert themselves as part of the city's imagined citizenship and to demand State responsibility and accountability for the intimate forms of violence they face (*ibid.*). Further, these monuments and the ceremonies surrounding them go beyond a wider claim to (liberal democratic) rights to formulate grounded feelings of inclusivity, belonging, and pride for local residents. For Burk, the Oppenheimer Park totem pole, for example, "enhances a feeling of a village in this already vibrant place...[and] has truly succeeded as a monument done *by*, not *for*, the many peoples of the Downtown Eastside" (Burk, 2010, p. 87, emphasis in original).

Building on this scholarship, this thesis engages with conceptualisations of resistance by considering the unexceptional, intimate practices of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in solidarity in Vancouver – turning towards the ways in which unexpected alliances of people can work to unsettle the city in patchwork, incremental, and sometimes unintentional ways (Chapters 5 and 6).

2.4 Geographies of homelessness

As is clear through the discussion above, unpicking the relationship between public space, inner-city neighbourhoods, and homelessness is a well-trodden path for urban geographers (see Duncan, 1978). Since the 1980s, cities across North America and Europe have seen rising numbers of people experiencing homelessness, a trend which

rapidly accelerated after the mid-2000s driven, in part, by the global financial crisis and the introduction of ‘rollback’ neoliberal policies in many global cities (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Harvey, 2007; Mitchell, 2011; Hackworth, 2019). This growth, and the rise and intensification of the opioid crisis in the United States and Canada, has led to the emergence of new geographies of homelessness in North American inner-cities and the widespread growth of ‘tent cities’ as part of this (Chapter 1). This section looks to situate these new ‘geographies of homelessness’ within human geography, tracing the ways in which geographers have approached the emergence, meanings, and governance of encampments, before turning to theoretical work on the geography of home/lessness and setting out the potential of this lens for tracing the (un)making of the settler-colonial city.

a. New geographies of homelessness

As outlined above, neoliberal shifts in the global political economy in the mid-late 1980s and 90s saw the governance and aesthetics of public space move to the fore of urban policy (Smith, 1996; Brenner and Theodore, 2002). As cities looked to commodify the urban landscape to compete for investment from global capital, municipal governments embraced gentrification as means of re-developing the inner-city (Smith, 2002; Boyle and Haggerty, 2011). Doing so led to the exclusion of the precariously (un)housed to the urban margins, as they were simultaneously pushed out of the rental and social housing markets (Wacquant, 2007). Thus, North American cities have seen rising numbers of people experiencing homelessness – and, in response, have dreamed up new governance solutions; namely, the transformation and regulation of the public sphere and the emergence of the revanchist city (Smith, 1996; Davis, 2006). Responding to this context, geographers working on homelessness have explored the effects of this on people’s lives and have traced the complex legal matrices that individuals have to navigate in order to survive in public space (Langeegger and Koester, 2016; Olson and Pauly, 2023). Extending analysis of the relationship between homelessness and control to institutional spaces, geographers have explored the ways in which non-profits, government, and private sector organisations providing care for individuals experiencing homelessness can act to coerce, contain, and punish individuals – as well as reinforce specific behavioural and societal expectations and norms. The work of Veness (1994) and Hennigan (2017), for example, highlight the

ways in which the socio-spatial design of shelters and housing first programmes, respectively, recreates normative domestic ideals of individualism and private ownership, while Lancione (2016) demonstrates how institutional settings in Italy often expect and promote normative visions of homelessness and domesticity – tied to privatised, white, middle class norms (Klodawsky, 2009).

However, such oscillation between control and ‘civilisation’ is not a universal logic. Writing from the context of the UK, DeVerteuil, May and von Mahs (2009) argue that the motives and role of homelessness services are more layered and ambiguous, and that relationships of care and compassion are also part of how they function. These new ‘ambivalent’ geographies of homeless governance illuminate the “complex, nuanced landscape of homelessness that is simultaneously confining and open, punitive and caring”, arguing that the neoliberal management of homelessness shifts over space and time (Speer, 2018, p. 161). This body of work highlights the rise of ‘compassionate’ policy, shaped by the growing political recognition of the limits of punitive approaches, persistent numbers of ‘chronic’ homelessness, the popularity and adoption of rehabilitation and recovery-focused practices, legal decisions, and pressures from anti-criminalisation advocacy groups (Murphy, 2009; Sparks, 2012; Stuart, 2014; Margier, 2023). Against this backdrop, geographers have charted the expansion of spaces of ‘care’, such as shelters, and health, housing, and outreach services, alongside a new tolerance for homeless presence in urban public space (Hennigan and Speer, 2019). In San Francisco, Murphy (2009) traces how city authorities have adopted more compassionate approaches by redeveloping single-room occupancy hotels into supportive housing units, though these too risk perpetuating the stigmatisation and infantilisation of homeless individuals by enrolling them in stringent recovery programs (see also Fast and Cunningham, 2018; Blomley and The Right to Remain Collective, 2021; Chapter 5)

In re-focusing attention on the role of urban actors beyond the law, geographers have also tracked the diversification of stakeholders involved in the governance of homelessness, including the rise of non-profit organisations (Singh Kelsall *et al.*, 2023). These new spaces, actors, and practices are not necessarily ‘caring’ and demand further interrogation as to how they sit within/against the revanchist city (Thörn, 2011). Stuart (2014), for example, argues that the shift towards ‘recovery’ management, which

represents attempts to ‘rehabilitate’ homeless people into sober, responsible citizens, retains elements of coercion and flattens the agency and life experiences of people experiencing homelessness. Looking to further unsettle the binary of punishment and care, Hennigan and Speer (2019, p. 906) coin the phrase ‘compassionate revanchism’ to highlight "how [under urban revitalisation] caring institutions are themselves crucial to the punitive and exclusionary project of capitalist urbanisation" as they function to contain and control homeless people’s mobility and visibility in the city and enable punitive acts, such as the ‘compassionate eviction’ of homeless encampments in cities such as Fresno, California (Murphy, 2009; Hennigan and Speer, 2019; After Echo Park Lake Research Collective, 2022; Margier, 2023; Przybylinski, 2024b)

This framework is useful when considering the governance of homeless encampments across North America. Multiple US municipalities have sought to sanction encampments, presenting them as practical, ‘humanitarian’ solutions to municipal housing and finance crises (Herring and Lutz, 2015b). Jesse Speer highlights the quasi-carceral and “dualistic function of sanctioned encampments as spaces of homeless welfare on the one hand, and surveillance and isolation on the other”, designed to ‘place’ and to manage populations considered ‘placeless’ (Moran, Turner and Schliehe, 2018; Speer, 2018, p. 163). Indeed, these spaces are often semi-autonomous – managed through city contracts with non-profits – and have been shown to give residents a sense of agency and autonomy otherwise denied in shelters (Mitchell, 2012). Yet, sanctioning an encampment can also function to ‘seclude’ and make disappear homeless presence and politics in the city (Herring, 2014) and these spaces, often funded and managed by non-profits, have become part of the neoliberal urban housing ‘continuum’, functioning as sub-standard temporary holding spaces before individuals are moved into supported housing or other more permanent options (After Echo Park Lake Research Collective, 2022).

Turning towards the lived experiences of encampment residents, Rowe and Wolch (1990) provide an early analysis of encampments in Los Angeles as spaces which offer respite and communal protection for those experiencing homelessness. To elude detection by city officials and police – and to avoid the gaze of the wider public – encampments often establish in liminal, hidden spaces (Ruddick, 1996; Brighenti, 2016; Langedegger and Koester, 2016; Goldfischer, 2018). These private spaces enable

individuals experiencing homelessness to establish autonomous homes and routines (Sparks, 2010; Przybylinski, 2024a). The work of Jessie Speer (2017) has been instructive in thinking through the nature of home in encampment spaces. Writing from the context of Fresno, California, she argues that:

“by continuing to construct homes in public, homeless Fresnoans were challenging the public/private divide and the commodification of domesticity that are at the heart of mainstream housing. But the homeless in Fresno did not just make homes in public: they also challenged dominant ideologies of domestic space by calling the encampments home (p.18)

These new imaginations of domesticity, she continues, challenge private property as the only container for domestic space and subvert notions of home as belonging only to the nuclear family. This argument builds on her earlier analysis of homeless encampments’ demand for sanitation, which, she argues, represents a fight for ‘remaking the city’ beyond normative visions of urban life as neatly containerised within individual units of housing (Speer, 2016). Instead, the demand to service the encampment was a struggle which looked to delink domestic needs from private property and to – in turn – decommodify urban infrastructure (ibid.). Taking up this notion of encampments as spaces from which the urban is reimagined and the right to the city is claimed, Speer (2018, p. 587) highlights how, by engaging an “aesthetic of survival”, encampments present a challenge to the idea that the urban downtown is only for middle-class aesthetics, spaces, and homes. In a similar vein, Dozier (2022) takes seriously the history and cultures of encampments in LA as spaces which both critique current imaginations of the city and which host alternative visions of the urban tied to decolonial Black spatial futures. Further, speaking back to literature which positions the homeless individual as unpropertied, and therefore denied the right to have rights as a citizen, Tony Sparks (2017) argues that encampments constitute a claim to and a prefiguration of urban citizenship (Roy, 2003; Blomley, 2009, 2015; Przybylinski, 2021, 2022). For Przybylinski (2021, 2022) this claim takes place through the camp’s production of a non-exclusive common property-space – a contention this thesis takes up in Chapter 5. As such, encampments serve as deeply political sites from which residents not only make claims for access to urban infrastructure and basic needs, but also demand better shelter provision and treatment, more and higher quality social housing, the stringent regulation of building standards and landlords, and the wider

remaking of the urban landscape (Speer, 2016, 2019b; Dozier, 2019; Flynn *et al.*, 2022; Office of the Federal Housing Advocate, 2024).

Responding to this characterisation and literature, most of which emerges from the United States, this thesis provides conceptual and empirical depth on the governance of encampments in the context of Vancouver. To do so, the thesis places this literature in conversation with the existing rich body of work which traces the long history of temporary and precarious housing in the city (Sommers, 1998; Vasudevan, 2017; Blomley, 2020; Masuda and the Right to Remain Research Collective, 2023; Chapter 5). Indeed, in his historical exploration of squatting in Vancouver, Vasudevan (2017) notes how make-shift and temporary forms of home-making have shaped the city's history, ranging from Indigenous camps post-resettlement, through to contemporary urban squatting movements.

b. Geographies of home and 'lessness'

To further consider how encampments in the Downtown Eastside figure within these questions of refuge and resistance, and to fully situate these spaces alongside the wider landscape of precarious housing in the area, the thesis draws on feminist scholarship on the embodied and everyday geographies of home to set out the conceptual value of thinking with home/lessness.

Feminist geographers work to rethink, blur, and erode the divide between the public and the private and the social and political (Hyndman, 2004; Brickell, 2012a). Spanning studies of conflict, nationalism, statehood, peacebuilding, and (settler-)colonialism, just to name a few, feminist geographers have thoughtfully demonstrated that the intimate and the everyday are profoundly political and public (McConnell, 2009; Koopman, 2011; Williams, 2013; Brickell, 2015; de Leeuw, 2016; Hyndman, 2019; Smith, 2020). Rethinking the space of the home in this light, Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling's (2006) critical intervention expands the spatialities, materialities, and relations involved in making home, critiquing both its enclosed imagined geography as an amorphous realm behind the front door and its normative affective relations in the form of comfort, belonging, and safety. Home, approached critically and intersectionally, is far more complex, made up of unexpected practices, relations, temporalities, and spatialities, and

is found in ‘unhomely’ places (Brickell, 2012b; Baxter and Brickell, 2014; Blunt, Ebbensgaard and Sheringham, 2021). In this vein, Baxter and Brickell (2014) argue that home is a process of unmaking and remaking, rather than a static location, and different sites can come to function in homelike ways. Taking up this notion in an urban context, geographers (and sociologists) have explored the ways in which so-called ‘domestic’ and ‘public’ space are co-constitutive (Kumar and Makarova, 2008; Burrell, 2014). Blunt and Sheringham (2019, p. 818) describe how the

“language of domesticity...[can] be increasingly found in many different semi-public and public “homes from home” such as restaurants, museums and department stores, but also through the infiltration of ‘non-domestic’ practices and objects into the domestic interior itself”

Work in this vein has been particularly taken up by migration scholars, who have considered the extension of homemaking into public space motivated, in part, by migrants’ political and social positioning on the margins of the nation-state (Jackson, 2012; Boccagni and Brighenti, 2017). Hondagneu-Sotelo (2017), for example, explores the production of ‘surrogate homes’ by undocumented migrants in inner-city community gardens in New York, arguing that this is driven by their struggle to access secure forms of housing. Framing this literature is an argument surrounding how people “go about making a home in the city” – the ways in which urban public space “comes to be inhabited” and citizenship is claimed (Koch and Latham, 2013, p. 6; Sparks, 2017). It is this dynamic that this thesis explores, placing the act of remaking home in conversation with literature on public space and the settler-colonial city (Chapters 5 and 6). Indeed, while geographers have thoughtfully considered the implications of this extension for our understanding of the home, the social and political implications of practices for our theories and understandings of public space demands deeper exploration.

Existing literature in geographies of homelessness and on the Downtown Eastside highlights how, for many individuals experiencing homelessness, public spaces – parks, town squares, and streets – serve as ‘home-like’ spaces: they are routine places to return to, connect with friends, and from which to explore further (Rowe and Wolch, 1990; Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Robertson, 2007; Blunt and Sheringham, 2019; Blunt, Ebbensgaard and Sheringham, 2021). Alongside this, work on ‘formal’ homes – such as

supportive housing and Single Room Occupancy units – demonstrates how these ‘home’ spaces are only made to be fragile ‘good-enough’ homes through “the day-to-day practices, routines, and forms of sociality that generate a sense of stability and care” in these “un-homelike places” (Manson and Fast, 2024, p. 885). Practices of unpacking personal belongings, engaging in routine activities such as cooking, washing up, decorating, and forming intimate relationships with others help to transform a basic living environment into a space of safety, belonging and comfort (ibid.). This reveals the ways in which the boundaries between home and homeless are, and have always been, blurred in the Downtown Eastside.

To approach this blurring, the thesis draws on Michele Lancione’s (2023) theorisation of home(lessness). Drawing on work in critical geographies of home, outlined above, which re-positions home as a process, rather than a fixed unit of geographical space, Lancione (2023) outlines the notion of ‘home(lessness)’ as a new way of seeing with the voices and experiences of those perceived as homeless. He argues that prevailing definitions of home and homelessness are produced through a binary, delineated by specific norms around what counts as both. Specifically, only those who reside in nuclear, single-family houses, apartment buildings, and mobile homes are considered housed, while those who live collectively, or in transitional housing, shelters, and public spaces are relegated to the category of homelessness. Seeking to challenge these normative conceptions, his thesis is that these two ideas exist in relation to one another and on a continuum. Approaching home(lessness) in this way,

"means to say that the sharpest experiences of home(lessness), including but not limited to sleeping rough, living in camps, prisons, violent households, gendered and cisnormative spaces, and racialized lives, are not taking place in realms separated from the idyllic pastures of safe homes unless the latter are conceived and lived entirely beyond lessness – that is, outside racial capitalism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, nationalism, financialized housing, settler colonialism, and other common forms of expulsion and extraction" (Lancione, 2023, pp. 8–9)

Thus, instead of approaching the idea of ‘lessness’ as a space of lacking and deprivation, he argues that attention should be turned towards seeing it as a “plateau of life in and of itself...an entire world of its own” – a reading of ‘lessness’ in an affirmative fashion (ibid. p.3). Thus, home/lessness becomes a position from which to not only reimagine

what counts as home, but also a framework from which the remaking of home challenges and reimagines broader systems of oppression.

Building on this framework, this thesis examines the lives of individuals who make home in public spaces – whether through their daily routines or in makeshift encampments. It explores how their socio-spatial practices and relationships can offer a new perspective on the politics of home and housing in Vancouver (Chapter 5), as well as on the nature of public space in the contemporary settler-colonial city (Chapters 5 and 6). This lens provides a wider conceptual framework for this thesis through which contemporary struggles for home are brought into conversation with the long history of settler-colonial practices that have shaped ideologies of land use, property, domesticity, and belonging in the settler-colonial city. In this respect, this thesis draws on and responds to questions raised by Elliot-Cooper, Hubbard, and Lees (2020) encouraging geographers to (re)consider the connections between gentrification, (settler-colonial) displacement, and questions of home. They ask: how do residents experience the violence of un-homing under the pressures of urban gentrification; how does this speak back to other forces and contexts of displacement; how have residents defended their ‘right to dwell’ and remain; and what new solidarities – both theoretical and practical – emerge from speaking across these times and spaces?

Responding to these, Chapter 4 addresses the linkages between settler-colonialism, racialisation, and mechanisms of displacement from public space in the late 19th century in relation to a further wave under urban redevelopment pressures in the 1980s, while Chapters 5 and 6 consider the ways in which public space becomes a site of refuge within the ever-changing landscape of home in Vancouver’s inner city. Reworking and (re)claiming home in this way is, this thesis argues, part of a more expansive unsettling of the city and modalities of Indigenous and allied resistance (Christensen, 2013; Chapters 5 and 6).

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined and set out the centrality of the public/private division of land – and thus accepted forms of sociality and behaviours in these spaces – to both the structures and process of settler-colonialism and the bordering and (re)ordering of the

contemporary urban landscape. In this light, this chapter outlines the main conceptual and empirical points of contribution in this thesis.

By bringing together work in human geography on settler-colonialism and public space, this thesis seeks to extend work in both by turning to the ways in which understandings of public property, and the legal regime which comes to surround this, forms part of the reproduction of the settler-city. While work in the urban geography has generatively traced the history of public space to the Greek agora, there remains scope to consider the ways in which ideologies of public space ‘travelled’ with (settler-)colonialism. In doing so, the thesis takes inspiration from literature thinking through the relationship between (private) property, the law, and processes of racialisation to explore how public property is imbued with racial idea(l)s and notions of value (Chapter 4). In turn, this thesis draws on critical scholarship which turns the lens on contemporary iterations of settler colonialism in the law, urban governance, and modalities of settler-recognition. By bringing this literature together with work on the governance and regulation of public space, it considers how, to what extent, and to what effect settler-colonial logics bleed into forms of encampment governance – contributing to literature on the contemporary reproduction of the settler-colonial city (Chapter 7).

By situating encampments in relation to a much wider landscape of home/lessness in the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood, the thesis looks to de-exceptionalise these spaces, often considered in isolation in geographic scholarship, by considering the relations, conversations, and tensions between different modalities of expanded informal homemaking in Vancouver (Chapter 5). Further, by considering the multiple forms of homemaking engaged by neighbourhood residents, the thesis considers whether, and in what ways, home represents a site of resistance in the settler-city (Chapters 5 and 6). In doing so, it engages with questions of Indigeneity and home/lessness (Peters and Robillard, 2009; Christensen, 2013, 2017; Anderson and Collins, 2014; Thistle, 2017; Speer, 2024) and unpicks the modalities through which encampments and the homemaking practices of the precariously housed unsettle the foundations of settler-colonial property (Blomley, 2009; Sparks, 2017; Dozier, 2019; Przybylinski, 2021, 2022). Further, by turning towards the encampment’s use of the courts and case law as a means of reworking displacement attempts by city officials (Chapter 6), the thesis considers the tensions which play out when the legal field is mobilised as a site of

resistance by Indigenous and allied communities, extending work within feminist legal geographies (Cuomo and Brickell, 2019; Cuomo, 2021).

In sum, this project is an attempt to understand how turning attention towards the ways in which home is being remade in so-called ‘public’ spaces has implications for how we understand and unsettle the history and ongoing production of the settler-colonial city. By focusing on the case of the Downtown Eastside, it looks to unpick the relationship between these concepts from a ‘patchwork’ of epistemological lenses, public spaces, and moments in time. It is to contextualising and elaborating on this approach that the thesis now turns.

3 Methodology

3.1 A ‘patchwork’ approach

As the previous chapter foregrounds, this project is situated within and responsive to the specific historical geographies of Vancouver and its epistemological approach and methods seek to respond to this grounded context. In this chapter, I set out the ‘patchwork’ approach taken to do so and how this shaped the project’s methods, case studies, and epistemological framework. First, I explain what is meant by a patchwork approach and why I adopt this framing to describe the project’s evolution and methodology. I then provide a brief historical context for the two ‘patches’ of public space this thesis considers – Oppenheimer Park and Create a Real Available Beach (Crab) Park – followed by a discussion of the key methods used in the project, as well as considerations of positionality and ethics.

As I began my fieldwork in the summer of 2022, I realised that much of my prior thinking, framing, and reading sat uncomfortably with the socio-political context of Vancouver and the project I had initially envisioned carrying out. In this moment of uncertainty and flux, I began rethinking my research ‘in place’ – a process which allowed me to be open to new themes and events, and to attend to the specific assemblage of goings on in Vancouver at the time (Cresswell, 2019). As a result, I shifted the frame of my research, changing the title, aims, and methods iteratively as the research unfolded over the next two years. In this way, the project was shaped by my experience of being in Vancouver, the knowledge I gathered in place, and the way I collected this and then wove it together. While this iterative, ‘patchy’, approach to research is perhaps a familiar tale for many qualitative researchers – and particularly for those interested in feminist methods – such non-linearity has too often been written out of re-tellings of the research process, in conversations, conferences, and publishing (Harrowell, Davies and Disney, 2018). To fully represent this process of (re)shaping the project, then, I find the framework and process of ‘patchwork(ing)’ useful.

By describing a patchwork approach, I am not laying claim to a new methodology but rather mobilising a framework through which I hope to be open about this process of iteration in order to hold onto it as a critical part of the research project. The notion of a

patchwork approach, captures, as I elucidate further in the sections below, a combination of epistemological and methodological elements. These include: the contingent nature of reality – the way a patchwork comes together in multiple and unsettled ways and figures within a specific spatio-temporal context; in turn, the potential of individual ‘minor’ patches – processes, spaces, and moments – in building knowledge and theory; the relational nature of research, as knowledge is woven between the researcher and participants and through the use of multiple methods; and the personal and professional life of the researcher – the quilter – in shaping the research process and outcomes.

3.2 The spatial patches

A patchwork approach is grounded in everyday moments and spaces, in patches, and is attentive to the events and processes which connect these to wider structures of power. Through this cross-scalar approach, the project speaks back to ideas of ‘micro’ or ‘minor’ theory which is "interstitial with empirical research and social location; [and produces] scholarship that self-reflexively interpolates the theories and practices of everyday historical subjects " (Katz, 1996, p. 487, 2017; Dadusc, 2019; Lancione, 2023). Here, the minor is neither the small nor the antithesis of the major but is a way of intersecting ‘major’ power structures and revealing the “spaces of betweenness” – the lives, processes, and events “left hidden from geographic knowledge” and conventional projects which start out with pre-determined questions and build outwards (Katz, 1996, p.498).

In this vein, in order to understand how residents of the Downtown Eastside relate to public space, this thesis focuses on two ‘minor’ ‘patches’ of public space: Oppenheimer Park and Create a Real Available Beach (Crab) Park (Figure 4). Consistent with a minor approach, the thesis does not set out to compare these spaces but instead draws insights across them to build a picture of public space in the neighbourhood.

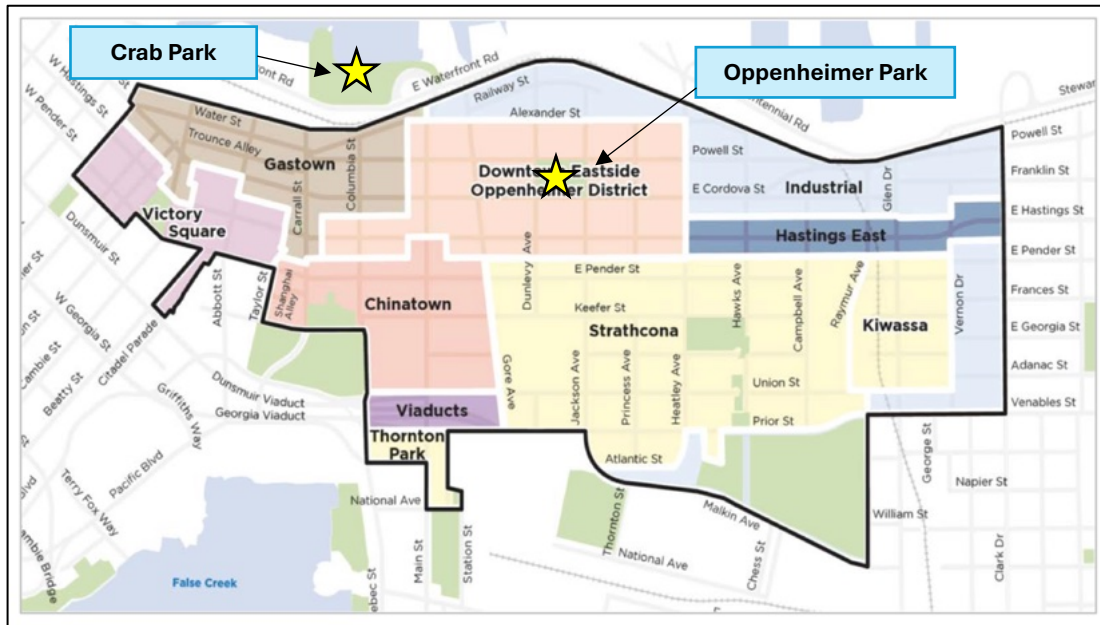


Figure 4: Map of the Downtown Eastside (outlined in black) and its sub-districts, taken from the City of Vancouver Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood Plan, with Crab and Oppenheimer Park identified (City of Vancouver, 2020; author inserted labels)⁶

a. Oppenheimer Park

Formally established in 1898 by the precursor committee to the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, Oppenheimer Park is a small park located at the ‘heart’ of the Downtown Eastside, situated between Powell and East Cordova Street. Originally named the Powell St. Grounds, this one city block green space is storied with history; it has been the centre of the surrounding Japanese-Canadian community (early 1900s-1942; Chapter 4), a site of labour protests and free-speech (1936, 1938), a baseball pitch (1900-present), a symbolic graveyard for overdose deaths (1997; Chapter 5), and the site of multiple homeless encampments (most notably in 2008, 2012, 2014, 2019-2020, and the winter of 2023-4) (Ayukawa *et al.*, 2008; Boyd, MacPherson and Osborn, 2018; Masuda *et al.*, 2020; Jankovic, 2021; Tsang, 2023; Fumano and Ryan, 2024). The park is socially, culturally, and politically central within the Downtown Eastside, hosting the annual Powell Street and Heart of the City Festivals and as the end point of the annual

⁶ Defining and cartographically representing the boundaries of the Downtown Eastside neighborhood is intensely political. Many residents defend a ‘felt’ sense of the Downtown Eastside over the static boundaries represented in Figure 4. From this perspective, the gentrification of various sub-districts, such as Gastown, has led to a shrinking Downtown Eastside with some residents pointing to the Downtown Eastside/Oppenheimer District area as what remains of the real ‘Downtown Eastside’. For a detailed discussion, see Douglas and Shier (2002), Blomley (2004), and Burnett (2014).

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's Memorial March which takes place on the streets of the neighbourhood (Culhane, 2003; Aoki, 2011).

Locally known as the 'backyard' of the Downtown Eastside, the park is an important site for the provision of social services and year-round community programming, run from its 'Fieldhouse' (Pedersen and Swanson, 2009). Redeveloped in 2010, the Fieldhouse is an extension of the Carnegie Community Centre, an arm's length organisation of the City of Vancouver (General Manager - Parks and Recreation, 2008; Southcott, 2012; Arvidson, 2015). Employees at the Fieldhouse are employed by the City of Vancouver as 'community programmers' to run daily activities, such as bingo, arts and crafts, haircuts, bike repairs and karaoke, and provide food through the small on-site kitchen (normally, breakfast, tea and coffee, and lunch) (City of Vancouver, no date).

Recent years have seen growing tensions over who can use the park, and what for. Throughout its history, Oppenheimer has been the site of multiple homeless encampments, the largest of which occupied the park between late 2018 and 2020 (Howell, 2019; Smart, 2019; Boynton, 2020; Jankovic, 2021). At its peak, the encampment was made up of 200 tents and was supported by various neighbourhood organisations, including the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU), 'Stop the Sweeps' and the 'Carnegie Community Action Project', alongside a wide network of mutual aid (Howell, 2019). The encampment was divisive within the neighbourhood, with reports of violence, gang activity, and sexual assault inciting broad public opposition to its existence (Howell, 2021).

In April 2020, Ministerial Order 128, citing public health concerns for the safety of those living in an encampment, ordered the closure of Oppenheimer Park and two other encampments in the City of Victoria (Topaz Park and Pandora Avenue) (Province of British Columbia, 2020). On May 9th, the park was 'decamped', fenced, and closed for restoration. Some of those sheltering at Oppenheimer received housing offers and others moved to nearby Strathcona park, where another large encampment was established and stood from 2020 to 2021 (Winter, 2021). Oppenheimer Park figured an absent presence in the neighbourhood until its partial reopening in June 2021, though it took until the following summer for the final lone blue fence to be removed. In the winter of 2023/24,

another encampment established itself on the park grounds, led by many of the research participants interviewed for this project – this was closed in late January 2024 by park rangers (Blatta, 2024; Fumano and Ryan, 2024). There remain unresolved questions over who has a say in the park’s governance, what rights people in the neighbourhood have to use the park, what kinds of uses are permitted, and who upholds this.

b. Create a Real Beach (Crab) Park

Located on the unceded Indigenous territories of Lek’Lekí/Luq’Luq’i (‘Maple Leaves Falling’ or ‘Grove of Beautiful Trees’), Crab Park is a seven-acre green space located on Vancouver’s waterfront, adjacent to the Downtown Eastside. Though situated in a forgotten corner of the city, next to the industrial port and only accessible from a steep railway overpass, like Oppenheimer, the park holds resonance for historic and contemporary residents of the Downtown Eastside.

The land on which the park is situated is formally owned by the Vancouver Port Corporation, a federal agency, and was temporarily leased to the City of Vancouver in 1987 for use as a temporary public park (Blomley, 2004c). The formal opening of Crab Park on July 29th 1987 followed a successful 5-year campaign by the ‘Create a Real Available Beach (Crab) Water for Life Society’ which petitioned for greater access to green, waterfront space for Downtown Eastside residents (Larson, 2018). Crab Water for Life, led by activists Don Larson, Fred and Barbara Arrance and Richard Pooley, organized several events at the site between 1982 and 1987, including a community music event (1982) and a 60 tent strong, 75-day, encampment occupation (1984) to demand the creation of the park (Burk, 2010; Larson, 2018; Figure 5). They also liaised with city councilors and politicians, gaining some support at the Federal level (Burk, 2010).



Figure 5: 1984 occupation of Crab Park by the Water for Life Society (Larson, 2018)

Since its founding, Crab has been the site of multiple homeless and protest encampments, most notably in 2002 following Woodsquat (Interview, Chris Livingstone, 27th July 2023). The ‘Crab encampment’ of interest to this project occupied parts of the site from June 2021 to November 2024, winning a landmark case against the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation in January 2022 which led to the establishment of a ‘designated daytime sheltering area’ on the park’s western peninsula (Flynn, 2022; Chapter 6). Alongside such organised encampments, there is a long history of informal sheltering in Crab Park, stretching back to Indigenous peoples who sought shelter there in the late 19th century (Matthews, 1898).

The physical landscape of Crab Park pays tribute to this history, hosting monuments to the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls (a memorial stone and bench) and to urban Indigenous identity in the form of the ‘Urban Indian Y2K Rock’ (Burk, 2006). On the 14th of February 2002, following the arrest of Robert Pickton, the memorial stone was used for a ceremony to pay tribute to and mourn the lives of those who had been lost. In her description of the event, Adrienne Burk, outlines how,

“as the ceremony began, an elder made an offering of tobacco to the sea as a thanks ‘for the blessing of the eagle’. After this, the group was asked to make a large circle around the boulder as if it were another person in the circle. Elders prayed, sang, drummed, smudged and spoke in several languages, each taking a turn in the centre. During, the boulder was referred to as an ‘Aboriginal memorial’” (2010, p. 64)

Crab Park’s future is uncertain. The expansion of the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority’s ‘Centerm terminal’ between 2018 and 2023 extended port infrastructure into the sightline of Crab Park, obscuring some of its North Shore view. Though, in 2019, COPE Park Commissioner John Irwin sought to protect Crab Park from further encroachment, submitting and successfully passing a Parks Board motion to look to expand the park and to construct a new ‘Indigenous-focussed healing, wellness, and/or cultural centre’, this project has stalled due to changes in the make-up of the Board in the 2021 elections and more recent questions over its future (Interview, John Irwin, 24th July 2023). Further, Crab Park’s lease to the City is temporary, expiring in 2032, and the park remains ‘undesignated’, meaning it is liable to be subdivided, sold and/or assigned a different use by both the City and the Federal government (digitalmonkblog, 2023)

3.3 Research methods

Despite the rich histories of these spaces and their contested presents, goings-on in Oppenheimer and Crab Park have often been thought of as a microcosm of, or sidenote to, the wider stories of change in the neighbourhood – or, indeed, not considered at all. This research begins from the position that these public spaces have their own stories to tell. In what follows, I delve into the practical elements of collating these stories, outlining the methods used and how I approached issues of positionality and ethics. This project used multiple methods; semi- and un-structured interviews, participant observation, archival research, and legal analysis were undertaken between June 2022 and November 2023. A patchwork approach goes beyond triangulation and validation when bringing together these methods (Freeman, 2020). While some of these methods ‘triangulate’ neatly together and speak to similar themes, this is not always the case (Kitchin and Tate, 2014). Approaching these gaps and tensions through the lens of

patchworking allows for these methods and data collected to come together at different points – or not at all – to produce different knits of knowledge.

a. Interviews

In total, 57 interviews were completed between June and October 2023, lasting between twenty minutes and three and a half hours. Nearly all were completed in person, either in situ in the relevant public space or in a nearby café. Some of the interviews with ‘elite’ participants, such as employees of the Parks Board, City of Vancouver staff, and municipal and provincial politicians, took place online at the request of the participant (n=17).

Half the participants identified as male (51%, n=29), 42% were female (n=24), and 7% identified as non-binary (n=4). 60% of participants identified as white (n=34), 11% identified as people of colour (this excludes those who identified as Japanese-Canadian or Indigenous). 7% were Japanese-Canadian (n=4), and 23% of participants identified as Indigenous (n=13), with two of these individuals identifying as both Japanese-Canadian and Indigenous (See Appendix 2 for full list of interviewees⁷).

An overview of interviewees can be found in Table 1 which also breaks down participant ‘roles’ and ‘sites’. 20 participants were interviewed primarily in relation to Oppenheimer Park, of which 6 were Carnegie Centre or Fieldhouse staff, 11 were long-term park users, and 3 were individuals who co-ordinate annual events and festivals in the park. 21 participants were interviewed about Crab Park, of which 7 were encampment residents, 6 were encampment supporters (some of whom had previously been residents), 5 were Parks Board staff, and 3 were other park users. Participant ‘roles’ have been categorised based on location of initial contact and topics discussed during interview, though many participants cross ‘roles’ and ‘sites’. For example, most of the civil society members counted under the Downtown Eastside ‘site’ were also regular users of Oppenheimer Park but are not categorised as such in the table below.

⁷ Where requested, I have used pseudonyms for participants. However, many participants were adamant about wanting to use their full names – to be fully represented and heard – in the project and provided consent for me to do so. I have followed their decision.

Site	#	Fieldhouse Staff/Park User/Event Co-ordinator	White/Indigenous/POC /Japanese Canadian	Male/Female/Non-Binary
Oppenheimer Park	20	6	6	10
		11	7	9
		3	4	1
		-	3	-
		Encampment Resident/Supporter/ Parks Board Staff/Park User	White/Indigenous/POC /Japanese Canadian	Male/Female/Non-Binary
Crab Park	21	7	18	11
		6	2	8
		5	1	2
		3	-	-
		Civil Society Member/Politician/ Municipal & Provincial staff	White/Indigenous/POC /Japanese Canadian	Male/Female/Non-Binary
Downtown Eastside	16	8	10	8
		4	4	7
		4	1	1
		-	1	-

Table 1: Interview participant breakdown across case study sites

Most interviews took a semi-structured format, though some verged on unstructured depending on the context of the interview and the preference of the participant (DeLyser, 2010). This flexibility allowed for a trauma-informed approach whereby respondents were able to share information and experiences on their own terms, and was particularly useful when interviewing people who use drugs (Edelman, 2023). Semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow participants space to respond to themes and ideas in unexpected ways, and to produce a conversational and free-flowing interview environment which helped to build rapport and trust (Hay, 2016). For these interviews, I followed a loose schedule covering the following themes: participants' everyday activities in public space; perceived importance of such activities and spaces; perceptions and imaginations of public spaces; opinions on park governance and by-laws; events during the 2018 Oppenheimer encampment and closure; the Crab encampment; the Powell Street Festival; and thoughts on who 'owns' urban public space (Appendix 1). This guide evolved as I spent time in the field and collected additional information. Following a conversation with one of the key advocates for the Crab encampment, for example, I included questions about the *Bamberger v Vancouver*

(Board of Parks and Recreation) court case and people's experiences of being in court, which led to the Chapter 6. I also edited the guide based on my knowledge of participants' backgrounds, both to ensure sensitivity to any topics that may be mental health triggers as well as to specifically ask about activities, moments, and governance decisions relevant to them.

The way that participants were recruited depended on the field site and the type of participant. In Oppenheimer Park, I mostly recruited participants by approaching them directly. As I was particularly interested in individuals who had spent significant amounts of time at the park, I selected who to approach based on information gathered during participant observation and through conversations with Fieldhouse staff or other park users who helped to indicate park 'regulars'. Knowledge gained from the archives also facilitated recruitment of participants in the park and wider Downtown Eastside neighbourhood as I appeared informed, interested, and engaged in neighbourhood histories and politics. During interviews, I was able to offer up information from the archives and place this in dialogue with participant recollections and responses – this sharing of knowledge became a form of reciprocity for participants' time and engagement with the project.

At Crab, I accessed participants – both residents and camp supporters – through snowballing from two key gatekeepers. The gatekeepers had significant influence over who I was able to speak to, producing a set of knowledge which is “interactional” and reflects only a partial representation of the population (Noy, 2008, p. 327). This approach was shaped by the practical demands of working at Crab; the gatekeepers played a key role in introducing me to participants, building rapport, organising interview meets, and ensuring both my and the participants' safety (see sub-section 3.5). In turn, 'elite' participants – municipal planners, politicians, and Parks Board staff – were approached via email, eliciting a surprisingly positive response rate. This may be a result of growing media and research attention on Vancouver's encampment governance, including its perceived success in 'managing' encampments (Canadian Urban Institute, 2022; Park People, 2022b, 2022a; The Shift, 2023).

b. Participant observation

During participant observation, I took on the role of a volunteer at the Oppenheimer

Park Fieldhouse. There is a long history of summer recruits at Oppenheimer Park (Burk, 2010). Joining these ranks helped me to negotiate access and to be broadly welcomed by park users. In July 2022, I met with the Fieldhouse lead programmer to scope out the possibility of joining the team the following summer. Over the following year, we negotiated the shape and scope of both the volunteer role and my research and, in May 2023, we undertook a form of community ethics review whereby I presented my research plans to the Oppenheimer Park Committee, a peer-led committee of the Carnegie Centre tasked with setting the direction for programming at Oppenheimer Park (Boilevin *et al.*, 2019; see sub-section 3.5). Between June and October 2023, I spent almost everyday at the park, supporting Fieldhouse staff with programming activities, events, and food provision. This long-term participant observation in such a small space allowed me to get to know the individuals who hung-out at the park, a sense of the rhythms of the place, and the intimate politics within it (Moss, 2002).

The shape of participant observation at Oppenheimer Park was contingent on the weather, the pre-arranged programming, and which members of staff were present. While some staff preferred for me to run structured activities, such as arts and crafts, others were happy to leave me to hang-out and chat to people and to support the Fieldhouse on a more ad-hoc basis, often with food preparation and provision. In either case, time spent at the park was never dull. Days at Oppenheimer were made up of a never-ending flurry of events and conversations, passing quickly. There were sad and tense moments – during my time at the park we attended to several overdoses – but, overwhelmingly, my experience was lively and full of surprises; on one particularly amusing and enlightening day, the park received a delivery of 900 pounds of mandarin oranges. Participant observation at Oppenheimer enabled me to get to know a much wider range of people than I formally interviewed. These participants were excluded for various reasons including age, disability, and linguistic barriers. I was also able to use the space of the park as a springboard for interviews; situating myself in the space allowed me to build rapport with participants both at Oppenheimer and in the wider neighbourhood and for us to negotiate the optimal time and space for an interview. This allowed me to access frequently ‘hard-to-reach’ populations, such as substance users.

While volunteering at Oppenheimer paved the way for informal conversations and interviews about users’ relationships to the space, I did not embody and experience this

relationship myself. Instead, my ‘participation’ element of participant observation was as a frontline employee, rather than a park user (Clifford *et al.*, 2016). And, as I spent more time at the park, my role shifted further towards that of a member of staff; I was given a pair of keys, tasked with organising meals, and became involved in closing up the Fieldhouse at the end of the day. While this shifting positionality opened moments of connection and care, it also raised difficult reflections on positionality as my growing authority in the space became an invisible player in the kinds of information park users felt they could share with me. In this respect, I was clear with participants that nothing they shared would be fielded back to park staff and re-‘placed’ interviews to a nearby café in an attempt to lateralise power relations (Elwood and Martin, 2000).

In August 2022 and 2023, I volunteered at the Powell Street Festival, gaining insight into the festival’s presence and history in Oppenheimer Park and access to key members of the Japanese Canadian community. Through this, I was invited to attend a series of consultation meetings on public space in the Downtown Eastside run by the organisers of the festival in 2023. The meetings were made up of around 20 neighborhood residents, each representing a key stakeholder group, such as users of Oppenheimer Park and members of the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU), and provided an insight into the politics and relations between different neighborhood stakeholders, some of the wider tensions around public space in the neighborhood, and the possible futures imagined by these groups. I also attended weekly meetings run by the Eastside Illicit Drinkers Group for Education (EIDGE)⁸, a sub-group of the organisation VANDU (Bailey *et al.*, 2023). In the summer of 2023, the group was interested in the relationship between public space and alcohol use, spurred on recent successes advocating for and setting up an outdoor ‘drinkers parklet’ (Sedore, EIDGE and Bailey, 2023). Through attending their weekly research meetings, I gained a sense of how substance users understand the appropriate publics and uses of public space in the neighborhood.

⁸ Illicit alcohol is ‘alcohol not meant for human consumption; illegally produced homemade alcohol; and store-bought alcohol that is used in an illegal way (e.g. drinking alcohol in public spaces)’ (Brown *et al.*, 2018). Illicit drinkers are stigmatised, likely to be precariously housed, are vulnerable to injury and exploitation, and face barriers accessing health and social services (EIDGE, 2023).

Safety concerns and the desire of encampment residents and supporters to remain autonomous meant that similar long-term participant observation at Crab Park was not possible. Instead, most of the research at Crab park was conducted via in-situ interviews, gathering ‘snippets’ of observations during and around these, and through intermittent volunteering as a legal observer of park ranger activities at the camp. To record my observations, I took short fieldnotes on my phone and expanded on these when I returned home in the evening. I paid attention to what I saw, as well as my own feelings and experiences. I also took fieldnotes during my first visit to Vancouver in 2022, a period where the shape of the project was in flux. These speak to the ever-shifting shape of the project during those months and the early emergence of a patchwork approach.

c. Archival research and legal analysis

In the summer of 2022, I undertook archival research at the City of Vancouver and Nikkei National Archives. Upon returning to Oxford, I continued this historical research using the online archives of *The Vancouver Sun* (1912 – 2023) and *The Province* (1960 – 2023) – these two dailies are British Columbia’s two major newspapers. Though *The Province* has been publishing since 1894, I was only able to access archival resources back to 1960. Over 300 primary and secondary sources were collated, including: City council and Parks Board policy and planning documents; Parks Board minutes and correspondence; images of Oppenheimer and Crab Park; newspaper articles; secondary sources on the history of the neighbourhood; and a series of pre-recorded oral histories with Japanese Canadian residents of Powell Street prior to 1942 (Table 2).

Archive Site	Fond	# of sources	Summary description of sources
City of Vancouver	Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation	23	Parks Board meeting minutes 1892-1962; letters to Parks Board relating to Oppenheimer and Crab Park; correspondence with city council over 2000s redevelopment
	City of Vancouver	30	City council meeting minutes and correspondence relating to Oppenheimer and Crab park, particularly 1970s and 2000s redevelopments; images of Oppenheimer, Crab and the Downtown Eastside; architectural drawings of the Fieldhouse;

			pamphlets and flyers of park events; City By Law 309
	Major Matthews Collection	6	Early images of Oppenheimer Park; historical maps of Vancouver; handmade postcards of Powell Street Grounds/Oppenheimer Park; file on Yorkshire Guarantee Association
	Stuart Thompson Fonds	2	Images of May Day demonstration at Powell Street Grounds
Nikkei National Museum	Sai Kai Project Oral Histories	23	Transcribed oral histories with residents of Paueru Gai, collected in 1994
	Oral History Monogatari Exhibit 2011	11	Series of transcriptions of oral histories with residents of Paueru Gai, collected between 1983 and 2011 for exhibition held between May and October 2011 at the Japanese Canadian National Museum. Curated by Beth Carter, Audrey Kobayashi and Linda Kawamoto Reid.
	Library collection	7	Reference texts on history of Paueru Gai and Japanese Canadians in BC: Kikyō (Wakayama and Hoffman, 1992); <i>Monogatari: Tales of Powell Street (1920-1941)</i> (Carter, Kobayashi and Reid, 2011); <i>Memories of Our Past: A Brief History and Walking Tour of Powell Street</i> (Kobayashi, 1992); <i>Powell Street Monogatari</i> (Morita, 1989); <i>Nikkei Legacy: The Story of Japanese Canadians from Settlement to Today</i> (Takata, 1983); <i>Spirit of the Issei: The Story of Tonari Gumi</i> (Masutani and Enomoto, 2010); <i>Story of Vancouver Asahi – A Legend in Baseball</i> (Goto, 2016)
Vancouver Public Library	Carnegie Centre Special Collections	8	Carnegie newsletter article about Crab Park; 13 th Annual Oppenheimer Park Community Art Show booklet; policy, design and planning documents for Downtown Eastside NIP; <i>Historical and Cultural Review: Powell Street (Japantown)</i> (Ayukawa et al., 2008); <i>Being True to Ourselves: Downtown Eastside Poems of Resistance</i> (Cameron, 2004); <i>Hastings and Main: Stories from an Inner City Neighbourhood</i> (Canning-Dew and Kimbley, 1987); <i>Oppenheimer Park</i> (Osborn, 1998)23/05/2025 13:57:00
Newspapers.com (digital archive)	<i>The Vancouver Sun</i>	147	Newspaper articles referencing ‘Powell Street Grounds’, ‘Oppenheimer Park’, or Crab Park from 1912-2023
	<i>The Province</i>	81	Newspaper articles referencing ‘Powell Street Grounds’ or ‘Oppenheimer Park’ from 1960-2023

Table 2: Outline of archives visited and sources analysed

I collected these sources in the midst of reshaping the project; interested in questions of settler-colonialism and municipal policy, a conversation with a long-term neighborhood resident of the Downtown Eastside about the fencing of Oppenheimer Park following the 2019 encampment prompted me to turn to the archives to think about the relationship between these events and histories of public space (Howell, 2019; Laube and St. Denis, 2021). From this, the thesis grew in patchwork. As such, these primary sources form a key foundation for the framing of the project and are analysed predominantly in Chapter 4.

Alongside these, I also collated and analysed court documents relating to a series of cases over encampments and outdoor sheltering in British Columbia. This included the Reasons for Judgement, court submissions, and affidavits (Braverman *et al.*, 2014). Taking a feminist geolegal approach, this project is interested in how the law ‘unfolds’ in space and is experienced by different bodies (Brickell and Cuomo, 2019; Cuomo and Brickell, 2019). As such, I also included questions about these cases and municipal by-laws in participant interviews. As I elaborate on further in the Chapter 5, by bringing these documents and interviews together, I look to critically analyse the legal arguments put forward in these cases to understand how geography comes to bear on shaping the ‘right to shelter’ (Brickell, Jeffrey and McConnell, 2021). Through this, I put forward a new set of principles – a technical legal argument – for another way of thinking about the regulation of public space. Here, I draw on the work of Joanna Kusiak who proposes ‘critical legal engineering’ as a methodological tool in ‘legal geographic-action research’ (Kusiak, 2021).

3.4 Data analysis

Of the 57 interviews, 53 were audio recorded. For those that were not, I wrote a detailed record of the discussion during the interview. Following an interview, I always set time aside to write detailed notes of the conversation, both its content and forms of non-verbal communication, as well as of the interview environment, any interruptions, and other reflections (Clifford *et al.*, 2016). Audio recordings were transcribed at the earliest opportunity. Throughout fieldwork and transcription, I wrote ‘memos’ of ideas and themes emerging from the interviews and participant observation (Moss, 2002).

Analysis involved an iterative process of analogue coding, reading, and writing. I first produced a series of descriptive codes, before broadening out to key themes. To produce these themes, I paid particular attention to in-vivo codes in order to attend to participant voices and understandings (Charmaz, 2014). Once I had a sense of key themes, I then returned to the interview and participant observation data once again with these in mind and I continued to do this throughout the writing process.

I followed a similar iterative coding process for the archival materials. Archival materials were analysed to understand when, how, and why public space governance decisions were made in the Downtown Eastside, how these sit within the context of wider governance decisions in the city, and the effects of these on the ground. In this sense, I read 'with the grain' of state documents, trying to understand the principles mobilised within them. In this way, this thesis takes a historically grounded approach to the present, explicitly seeking to understand how the history of the neighbourhood comes to bear on contemporary events and tensions.

3.5 Positionality and ethics

Turning to the metaphor of a patchwork foregrounds the feminist epistemological and ontological standpoint of this research project, which looks beyond the masculinist vision of one 'true' objective reality (Haraway, 1991). Instead, reality and knowledge about that reality is understood as produced by the weaving together of patches – bundles of incomplete understandings about space, place, time and process – which do not have one singular 'correct' arrangement (Rose, 2007; Freeman, 2020). Thus, like quilting a patchwork, gathering knowledge is an embodied process; all knowledge is relational, emerging out of the interwoven relationships between the researcher, research participants, and the socio-spatial environment (England, 1994; Rose, 1997; Sharp, 2005a; Rose, 2007). To account for this, feminist geographers propose the reflexive, intersectional, 'self-critical', and "self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as a researcher" as an important part of the making of geographic knowledge (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991; England, 1994, p. 82). Such questions of positionality are neither static nor retrospective, involving a continuous process of reflection throughout the project (Sharp, 2005a). Taking up this approach, this section explores how my

positionality shaped various stages of the research encounter, including questions of ethics.

a. Positionality and interactions with participants

While Valentine (2002) reminds us that researchers are never only ‘insiders’ or ‘outsiders’ to a research context, and perhaps my knowledge of the history of the neighbourhood positioned me as an insider in some respects, I considered myself and was most often read by participants as an outsider – both to Vancouver and to the Downtown Eastside. This position proved to be critical to gaining access to many of the ‘elite’ participants, who saw me as a credible, neutral, and objective interlocutor in a deeply political and divisive topic. I leant into this positioning, conducting wide-ranging interviews with Parks Board employees, municipal staff, and politicians where participants seemed comfortable sharing their personal thoughts on outdoor sheltering and the governance of public space. My gender almost certainly played a role in these conversations, as did my open and non-judgemental approach to questioning, as participants often perceived me as innocuous and would broach difficult issues, such as their opinions on homelessness, drug use, and the failures of City decision-making and governance relatively freely (McDowell, 1992; McDowell and Sharp, 2016)

At both Crab and Oppenheimer Park, I entered tight-knit communities of people who live in close social and spatial proximity to one another and have done for many years. I did, in a subconscious attempt to present as more of an ‘insider’, try to ‘fit-in’ by dressing like other volunteers in the neighbourhood – donning a research ‘armour’ of black jeans, a baggy top, and naloxone attached to a small bag – but my accent and lack of a network in the neighbourhood cemented my position as an outsider. This position was only heightened by my ethnicity, stature, and gender in what is a traditionally masculine and ethnically diverse neighbourhood (City of Vancouver, 2020a). Entering an open drug scene, I was aware of the possible safety risks that come with substance use, paraphernalia, and drug-associated gang activity (Ivsins *et al.*, 2019). Seeing my embodied identity as ‘vulnerable’ in this context, participants were often keen to take me ‘under their wing’ and would take the time to spell out their understanding of risk in the neighbourhood: where potential ‘unsafe’ sites were, the locations and nature of gang activity and crime, and the profiles of individuals tagged as ‘risky’. This unintentionally

provided a thick description of the history and social dynamics of the Downtown Eastside as seen by my participants. During participant-observation and interviews, I was able to ask follow-up questions, producing a series of informed, in-depth, and extensive interviews and field diary observations. However, when analysing this data set, I was wary of the veracity of some of the claims made, aware that some descriptions of spaces and events may have been overblown to impress me or impress on me the need to remain vigilant.

While this ‘outsider’ positionality stood me in good stead in the context of formal research interactions, it also meant encountering situations that perhaps would not have occurred if I was read differently. On one occasion, a group of individuals confronted me as I was leaving one of the field sites, asking me what I was doing and challenging me to ‘shake their hands’ – a request designed to see if I perceived their bodies and lifestyles as ‘dirty’ or ‘unclean’ (Rose, 2017). While this experience was unsettling, it reminded me of the unpredictability of fieldwork and the neighbourhood (Caretta and Jokinen, 2017). As Woon (2013) argues, such emotional experiences can provide researchers with embodied experiences of the reality on-the-ground. On this occasion, I was reminded that the Downtown Eastside is not always a safe place for everyone – particularly women and youth – and I was naïve entering the field thinking that my embodied classed, racial, and educational privilege would mean I wouldn’t also experience this (Pratt, 2005; Razack, 2016; Fast and Cunningham, 2018). This experience carried with me through fieldwork and writing, reminding me to be attentive to how people’s intersectional identities may come to bear on their experiences in public space (Boyd, 2008).

My outsider position also meant that many of my initial interactions with participants were negotiated through gatekeepers, particularly at Crab Park. This is a relatively standard practice for research in the neighbourhood, used to protect both the researcher and participants by introducing additional ‘checks’ of the researcher’s intentions, the parameters on the research, and safeguards around interactions (Von Benzon and Van Blerk, 2017). With reference to research in the Downtown Eastside, Susan Boyd (2008) highlights the role of non-profits in gatekeeping for the community and the entanglement of this with the wider non-profit funding environment; she explains that “in order to survive, organisations protect their turn (and their construction of the

Downtown Eastside) and create a high profile so that their service is seen as essential" (ibid., p.31). As such, though my reliance on gatekeepers was not unusual, my presence and research activities placed gatekeeper individuals in (new or heightened) positions of epistemic and social authority and I had to carefully negotiate these relationships. Further, the presence of a gatekeeper inherently shaped who could be represented in the research project and had the potential to silence voices perceived to be too vulnerable or too 'risky' – in this case of this project, this included substance users who were heavily dependent, as well as individuals who were more transient across both research sites (Von Benzon and Van Blerk, 2017). By reading across interview transcripts and participant observation, which inherently captured a wider range of subjectivities, I have sought to be attentive to this gap.

My race and ethnicity also created embodied power relations with many of my participants, particularly Indigenous and Japanese Canadian participants with whom conversations would often touch on issues of State violence. Early interactions in 2022 made this clear. As I attempted to scope out the shape of the project, many stakeholders asked me questions about my motivations beyond gaining a degree, my positionality as a White researcher from the United Kingdom, my knowledge of settler-colonialism and Indigenous dispossession, my position on outdoor sheltering, and my personal and professional ethics. These questions often created awkwardness and discomfort, as they made visible – and, indeed, almost anticipated – the colonial and exploitative research practices and knowledge mobilities I risked embodying (Shaw, Herman and Dobbs, 2006; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Esson *et al.*, 2017; Radcliffe, 2017a). However, these initial conversations and relationships encouraged me to think carefully about the shape of the project and delve deeper into questions of research ethics (Leeuw, Cameron and Greenwood, 2012; de Leeuw *et al.*, 2017).

b. Community-based ethics

The Downtown Eastside has long been a space of academic study; "too often researchers have descended on the neighbourhood, conducted their research from the top down, and fled. There have been no benefits to the 'researched', although there has been considerable benefit to the careers of the researchers" (Boyd, 2008, p. 24). Aware of these dynamics, the reality of research fatigue in the neighbourhood, and the risk of

fetishizing poverty, the project's framing and methods were shaped carefully in conversation with key members of the Downtown Eastside, paying close attention to the approaches of existing community-based research projects in the neighbourhood, such as the Right to Remain (Masuda *et al.*, 2020; Blomley and The Right to Remain Collective, 2021). Further, the ethics of participant relations and representation were so central to this project because the issues the thesis engages with – substance use, Indigeneity, poverty and homelessness – encompass demographics which have long been pathologized, silenced, and misrepresented in the media and in academic research (Liu and Blomley, 2012; Farrugia and Gerrard, 2016; Elwood, Lawson and Sheppard, 2017; Speer, 2021). Thus, the Downtown Eastside Research Manifesto, a guiding document for research in the neighbourhood, provided a foundational reference, and meaningful collaboration, careful negotiation of participant relations and representation, and solidarity-in-action were central to the ethics of the project (Boilevin *et al.*, 2019).

The process of reshaping the project 'in patchwork' involved evolving discussions with key neighbourhood stakeholders identified during the initial fieldwork period in 2022 – Oppenheimer Park users, Powell Street Festival organisers, the Right to Remain Project community and academic researchers, and representatives of the Crab encampment. This was a slow process of negotiation which took place between 2022 and 2023, initially in-person and then online. These conversations led to a degree of co-determination over the research questions and methods. They also involved a series of community based 'ethical' reviews, where I presented an outline of the project with descriptions of my positionality and motivation, the project framing and questions, suggested methods, a rough timeline, and initial ideas for turning the research into action, to these stakeholders for dissemination and review (Appendix 3). This was a protracted process, involving significant time and labour, which would almost certainly filter those researchers looking to 'grab and go'.

In line with standard practice in the neighbourhood, participants were offered cash payments for participating in interviews and were provided with snacks during (Collins *et al.*, 2017; Warnock, Taylor and Horton, 2022). While some research has suggested that financial incentives can influence participants to take part in research when they don't want to do so, Collins *et al.* (2017, p. 11) argue that, in the context of the Downtown Eastside, research compensation has become a way for structurally

marginalised individuals to “assume the role of expert for which compensation is seen as equitable”. To ensure participants were represented as they wished, I offered to type up and return transcripts to participants before coding. 15 participants took this up and we met again to discuss the elements of their transcripts that they felt were particularly resonant and reflective of their experience and voice. In her study of large-scale homeless encampments in Fresno, California, urban geographer Jesse Speer (2019, p. 326) observes that

“in speaking with people who lived in the camps, interviews morphed into conversations, and conversations into testimonies. Participants not only shared memories and stories but also critiqued local politics and imagined alternative social practices”.

This blend of observation, conversation, critique, and theory was a key feature of time spent with participants, instilling in me the importance of taking seriously the perspectives and understandings of participants as theory, and of avoiding the temptation to abstract out in ways that could cloud the reality on the ground.

Many of the project’s participants would be considered ‘vulnerable’ in that they were experiencing homelessness, more likely to be subject to mental and physical ill-health, and subject to forms of direct and structural violence (Bombay, Matheson and Anisman, 2014; Von Benzon and Van Blerk, 2017; Collins *et al.*, 2018). This had repercussions on both institutional and individual research practices. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Oxford Central Ethics Committee (CUREC) for both periods of fieldwork. To work with this participant group, I applied for an advanced CUREC prior to the second period of fieldwork in 2023.

While on the ground, I approached vulnerability as a relational condition, constructed through socio-spatial power relations. Doing so meant that I understood how research encounters could both produce vulnerability but, in turn, could also reduce it if carefully navigated. I used trauma-informed approaches to interviewing and observation, drawing from the growing body of literature on trauma within social health research (Alessi and Kahn, 2023; Edelman, 2023). This approach was often improvised and flexible in order to meet people where they were ‘at’, but included: extended contact and engagement prior to the interview; question design in collaboration with key

gatekeepers and participants; caring interview technique with warm-ups and debriefs; offering the presence of a companion during the interview (also compensated for their time); and, the use of ‘safe empathy’ and low-impact disclosure to avoid vicarious trauma. Participants also decided where the interview would take place – an attempt to somewhat lateralise the power relationships often conferred by interview environment (Elwood and Martin, 2000). Further, in interviews with such ‘vulnerable groups’, an unstructured approach was often taken, with some conversations bordering on oral history and storytelling depending on the desires of participants (Jeff Corntassel, Chaw-win-is, and T’lakwadzi, 2009; de Leeuw *et al.*, 2017).

In line with the Downtown Eastside Research Manifesto, part of the ethical vision of the project was a commitment to action and to “positive change” in the neighbourhood (Kobayashi, 1994; Boilevin *et al.*, 2019). The seeds of this approach are evident in the project’s ongoing research collaboration with EIDGE. In the summer of 2023, we collaboratively prepared a policy briefing which responded to a Provincial move to prohibit the public consumption of drugs (Union of BC Municipalities, 2023). During this period, I also ran a half-day workshop on how to design interview schedules, using this as an opportunity to build community knowledge and as a means of co-creating the interview guides for the project (Caretta and Riaño, 2016; Field diary, July 28th 2023; Figure 6). What such solidarity-in-action will look like moving forward remains open; I continue to be in contact with key gatekeepers, through which I am negotiating the shape of research outputs and providing ad-hoc support where it is practically possible.

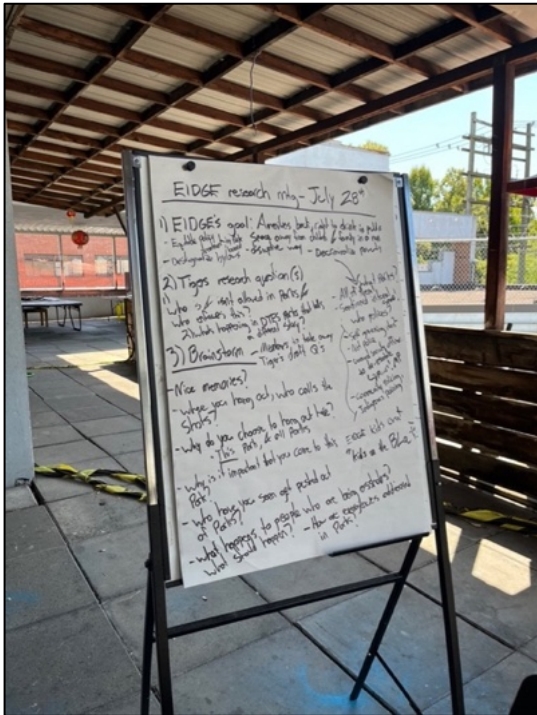


Figure 6: Image of interview question workshop with EIDGE at VANDU (Hills, 2023b)

3.6 Conclusion

As such, conducting fieldwork in the Downtown Eastside proved to be challenging, messy, imperfect, and generative. Traversing historic and contemporary events, this thesis does not seek to tell a complete or linear story of public space in the Downtown Eastside. Instead, it attends to momentary and illuminative ‘patches’ across space and time, imperfectly and unevenly quilted together. In this section, I have considered the ways in which this patchwork framing extended to my methodology, with epistemological, ethical, and practical implications. This patchiness is also reflected in the shape of the analytical chapters below. Though there is a narrative thread woven throughout – theorising the nature of public space in the ever-evolving settler-colonial city – the chapters, at points, feel distinct from one another, dealing with discrete spaces, themes, and moments. Read together, they build a patchwork story about making home in public space.

4 Producing Public Space: Land, Leisure, and Race in the Settler-Colonial City

4.1 Space and race in Vancouver

The story of this thesis, much like that of the City of Vancouver, begins in the neighbourhood surrounding Oppenheimer Park – the Downtown Eastside. Located on the traditional lands of the Coast Salish First Nations – the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), səlilwətał (Tsleil-waututh), and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) – the City of Vancouver grew from an early logging settlement located on the waterfront of the Burrard Inlet, at the foot of today's Dunlevy Avenue, where since the mid 19th century pioneer labourers had lived and worked in nearby sawmills (Francis, 2021; Harris, 2021). Situated on a natural harbour, this early townsite was chosen to be the western terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), built between 1875 and 1885 to connect eastern Canada with the newly confederated state of British Columbia in 1871. The arrival of the railway positioned Vancouver as a central node connecting Canadian trade and labor with the wider British Empire, as British Columbian geographer Cole Harris writes:

“a creation of the railway... [Vancouver's] spectacular growth to metropolitan dominance reflected its location at the junction of the main corridors of transportation affecting the province: railway routes east, coastwise steamer traffic, and deep-sea shipping" (Harris, 2021, p. 179).

Following the arrival of the CPR, the surrounding neighborhood grew rapidly in the late 19th and early 20th century to form the political and economic core of the new city, incorporated in 1886, containing city hall, the courthouse, banks, and the main library (Canning-Dew and Kimbley, 1987). The area became a centre of command for the resettlement of British Columbia, organising the expansion of capital into new geographies and supplying the rapidly expanding resource industries – mining, lumber, and salmon canning – with workers, finance, trade, and resources (Harris, 2021).

The growth of labour-intensive industry demanded a flexible, seasonal workforce, and the neighbourhood surrounding Oppenheimer Park became a central site in the reception and lives of labourers arriving from the Empire, including white settlers from Eastern Canada, Britain, and Continental Europe, as well as Chinese, Japanese, and

South Asian immigrants (Roy, 1989; Mawani, 2009; Tsang, 2023). The neighbourhood developed to accommodate this diverse population – grocery stores, bathhouses, boarding rooms, brothels, and bars were established to service the workers as they returned from seasonal contracts in the Province (Roy, 1989; Tsang, 2023). Thus, the early history of the Downtown Eastside was structured by the twin forces of industrial and resource colonial-capitalism and the diverse mix of people that came to co-inhabit the city.

In this new cross-racial ‘colonial contact zone’, Orientalist imaginaries of British settlers "brought ideas of ethnicity and race to the fore... and, as it did, racism was built into the landscape of settlement" (Mawani, 2009; Harris, 2021, p.171). Racialised discourses and practices, underpinned and legitimised by the growing popularity of ‘modern scientific’ understandings of race and stadial theory, were used to delimit who counted as a citizen of the settler-colonial State and to secure the political, cultural, and economic future of the new city (Perry, 2001; Banivanua Mar and Edmonds, 2010; Bonds, 2019). The strength of ideas of race drew both from the desire of settler-colonists to establish a ‘civilised colony’ – where individuals and ways of life considered ‘backward’ or ‘barbarous’ were either excluded or rapidly assimilated – and the need for capital to have access to a devalued, dispensable, and disorganised workforce (Anderson, 1991; Edmonds, 2010b; Dorries, Hugill and Tomiak, 2019). As scholars of racial capitalism identify, in both colonial and settler-colonial contexts, racist discourses and practices have long been mobilised to produce and to naturalise differently valued labour and lives, facilitating the expropriation of land for capital and the exploitation of individuals in search of profit (McClintock, 2018; Dorries, Hugill and Tomiak, 2019; Pasternak, 2020). In British Columbia, racialised labour was essential to the growing economy; Indigenous, Chinese, and Japanese men had long worked in salmon canneries and sawmills, often for less than half the cost of white labourers (Mawani, 2009).

Thus, the project of building settler-Vancouver involved the production, mobilisation, and spatialisation of ideas of race as the colonial government “racially distinguish[ed] one group from another, marking each to be inferior to whites” (Mawani, 2012, p.1085). Under this hierarchical framework, ‘Asiatics’ were "severe, haughty and miserly" individuals of moral and physical failing, but ‘natural labourers’, while Europeans were

"light, active, and ingenious" (Anderson, 1991, p.38). While Indigenous communities, considered to be 'immature' and underdeveloped, were targeted for protection, 'civilisation', and cultural elimination, Chinese and Japanese immigrants were subject to a 'political death' which sought to restrict their rights to property, to vote, and to citizenship, but to facilitate ongoing access to their labour (Harris, 2002; Wolfe, 2006; Mawani, 2009, p. 29; Stanger-Ross, 2020). As Japan was a major trading partner of the British Empire, the Japanese 'race' was perceived to hold a more assimilable culture and orientation towards progress than the Chinese and often treated favourably in society and at work – for example, while the Chinese population became subject to an entry tax in 1885, designed to curtail immigration, this was not initially extended to Japanese arrivals (Anderson, 1991).⁹

Although the Dominion and Provincial governments did not pass laws explicitly prohibiting interracial contact, de facto patterns of racial segregation developed in Vancouver's urban landscape in the late 19th century as white middle- and upper-class settlers moved west into neighbourhoods like Shaughnessy, Point Grey, and Mount Pleasant, and the Kitsilano and Musqueam Indian reserves were established (Harris, 2002; Barman, 2007; Stanger-Ross, 2008; Slobodian, 2024). As Kay Anderson (1991) explores through the case of Chinatown, the more-than-permissive stance of the Municipal government, combined with anti-Asian sentiment and racialised violence, ultimately led to the creation of the racialised enclaves of Chinatown and neighbouring 'Japtown' in the 1890s – otherwise known as 'Paueru gai', or Powell Street; the area surrounding Oppenheimer Park (Morita, 1989; Kobayashi, 1992).

More than 30,000 Japanese immigrants passed through Powell Street between the 1880s and 1940s, with many purchasing properties on the 200 and 300 blocks surrounding the park.

"Powell Street was a community in every sense of the term. Originally almost entirely composed of male workers, some permanent and many more temporary, with the advent of the "picture bride" system in 1907, the street began to change: thousands of women came to start families, and by the 1920s, two generations called Powell Street home, and the institutions that make a community were

⁹ The 1908 Hayashi-Lemieux 'gentlemen's agreement' placed a limit on the immigration of Japanese men to Canada in response to growing anti-Asian sentiment amongst White workers (Roy, 1989)

fully formed. The community was self-sufficient, in part because residents were not welcome in other Vancouver neighbourhoods, in larger part because it responded to the needs of a population that not only grew but prospered” (Carter, Kobayashi and Reid, 2011, p. 3)

It was in seeking to manage this contradiction between the lively presence of these ‘Oriental’ Others while maintaining access to their labour that Oppenheimer Park was produced in and by the settler-colonial City, and this chapter takes this tension as its point of departure.

In this respect, this chapter has two aims. First, through bringing together secondary historical literature on Vancouver with primary archival sources gathered from the City of Vancouver, Nikkei National Archive, and online newspaper archives, it situates this thesis in the place-based context of the Downtown Eastside, using the space of Oppenheimer Park as an entry point from which to trace the neighbourhood’s long and contested past. The second goal of this chapter is conceptual. Through telling a potted history of public space in the neighbourhood, the chapter seeks to consider the ways in which public space is part of the story of settler colonial resettlement and the evolution of the settler-colonial city. Taking up Cole Harris’ (2020) and Renisa Mawani’s (2009) – amongst others’ – understandings of British Columbian settler-colonialism as shaped by the combined forces of migration, capital, and race, it argues that the history of Oppenheimer Park is entangled in attempts to enclose, displace, and dispossess Indigenous populations from land, to control, civilise, and secure the body of the racialised immigrant, and to cement the wider codification and materialisation of racial hierarchies in settler-society (Paulson and Tomiak, 2022).

The chapter proceeds in three sections. The first deconstructs the process of enclosing Oppenheimer Park in 1889, outlining the ways in which the initial fencing and proprietorial designation of the land as a ‘public’ park deracinated Indigenous populations and social lifeworlds, replacing these with stringent, settler-colonial leisure. The second attends to the period between 1942 and 1976, during which the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood experienced socio-spatial decline and political abandonment. Tracing representations of Oppenheimer Park in newspaper articles, it argues that the park and ‘its people’ figured centrally in the wider pathologisation of the neighbourhood

and prepared the ground for its redevelopment in 1977. In turn, the final section explores how the material and social landscape of the park changed once again following the implementation of a Neighbourhood Improvement Programme in the late 1970s. Placing this in the context of a wider conversation around Japanese Canadian history and redress emerging at the time, the section argues that the park reflects a spatial recognition of Japanese Canadian presence in the city, at the cost of invisibilising the park's surrounding residents who had come to intimately inhabit and rely on the space (Coulthard, 2007). The chapter extends geographical scholarship on land and property in the settler-colonial city by tracing the discourses, practices, and technologies through which the urban landscape was transformed and has been re-transformed into public property over time, and the implications of this for the production of race, and the entanglement of race and space, in the settler-colonial city.

4.2 Enclosing Lot 196, Block 54

By unlocking land for settler pre-emption and capital extraction, the division and parcelling of land into private property was central to the jurisdictional, political, social, and economic expansion of the settler-colonial State and Vancouver's emergence as a settler-colonial city (Blomley, 2003, 2004; Chapter 2). Not only did the transformation of land materially confine Indigenous populations in British Columbia's carceral reserve geographies but settler-understandings of property carried and perpetuated racialised beliefs surrounding 'productive' land use, development, and human value used to underpin and legitimise the deracination, displacement, and erasure of Indigenous bodies, knowledge, and sociality from the landscape (Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Bhandar, 2018; Blatman-Thomas and Porter, 2019). Thus, by transforming human-environment relations from capacious understandings – emphasising collective stewardship, connection, reciprocity, and intergenerational responsibility – into understandings of the land as a commodity, property has been, and continues to be, central to the dispossession of Indigenous populations and the social, economic, and political security of the settler-colonial State (Radcliffe, 2017b, 2017a; Dorries *et al.*, 2019; Paulson and Tomiak, 2022). One way in which scholars have analysed this process of spatial and social transformation of land into (private) property in settler-colonial contexts is through the lens of enclosure.

Originally conceptualised with respect to the privatization of the English landscape from the mid-15th century onwards, whereby land ownership was transformed from a feudal system into private property in search of maximum agricultural productivity, enclosure names and traces how this transformation of land occurred (Turner, 1984; Thompson, 1993). Scholars argue that this took place gradually, involving a contingent array of negotiation, purchase, coercion, and violence, mediated through the socio-political specificities of place (Vasudevan, McFarlane and Jeffrey, 2008). To cement and uphold the power and sanctity of these new spaces, new social understandings emerged which positioned enclosure and, in turn, private property as essential to progress and economic growth, enabling legal frameworks which criminalised those trespassing or resisting change (Mingay, 1997). Thus, this transformation involved not only the conversion of landscapes and pastoral practice but a “concomitant extinction of common rights” and a wider process of socio-economic change (Blomley, 2007b, p. 2; Tilley, Kumar and Cowan, 2017). As Cole Harris (2002) argues, these ideologies and mechanisms of ‘primitive accumulation’ were exported to British Columbia, materialising in the displacement and dispossession of Indigenous populations and the establishment of the reserve system (Harris, 2002, 2021; Wolfe, 2006). For Harris,

“even the rhetoric of dispossession – about lazy, filthy, improvident people who did not know how to use land properly – often sounded remarkably similar in locations thousands of miles apart” (Harris, 2021, p. 189).

A report on the history of the land around Oppenheimer Park, published by the City of Vancouver and authored by a collaborative network of academics, local residents, community researchers, and members of Vancouver’s Japanese Canadian community,¹⁰ recounts the history of the area as part of the territory of the Stó:Lo and Squamish First Nations; specifically, as the site of a pathway between the seasonal villages of K’emk’emlay’ (Q’umq’umal’ay’) and Lek’lek’I (Luq’luq’i), as depicted on the map below (Ayukawa *et al.*, 2008; Figure 7).

¹⁰ The report, a *Historical and Cultural Review – Powell Street (Japantown)*, involved the collation of oral histories and interviews with contemporary residents of the Downtown Eastside, Coast Salish Indigenous elders, and academic historians, as well as primary and secondary archival research, and survey responses from 8 locations in the neighborhood. The authors engaged in a series of workshops to review, analyse, and develop the report. The document was produced to inform a City of Vancouver planning process (2004-2008) which looked to redevelop the ‘Public Realm’ of Oppenheimer Park in view of priorities agreed in the Vancouver Agreement.

al., 2008; Kheraj, 2013). Drawing parallels with understandings of Oppenheimer Park in the 21st century, they suggest that the space has always acted as a focal point for those displaced from other areas, where people gravitate towards to reconnect with those they have been separated from;

“as in the earliest stages of the white settlement of the place, approximately 1300 First Nations people – both housed and homeless – make up a significant portion of today’s resident population. Through ‘moccasin telegraphy’ people throughout Canada know that to find someone in Vancouver, they should go to Oppenheimer Park, which they sometimes call, the ‘United Native Nations’ or ‘Hastings Reserve’” (Ayukawa *et al.*, 2008, p. 23)

Contemporary residents of the Downtown Eastside often retell this history, with local organisers of the ‘Heart of the City Festival’ describing the park as

“a gathering place for Aboriginal people, a place to hunt and gather and meet others. First Nations people who felt unwelcome in Stanley Park after its founding in 1887 made this park ‘their home’” (Marlatt, 2011)¹¹

Thus, the plot of land represented an internal frontier in the new settler-colonial city, a pocket of prosaic refuge and an interstice in the settler-city grid where the collective use of space by Indigenous, Japanese, and Chinese labourers preserved the social and cultural survival of these racialised populations (Mawani, 2005).

The first photograph of the land around Oppenheimer Park was taken in 1887 (Figure 8). The fact that this image was taken – and that it depicts a small and empty plot surrounded by new properties and roads – is perhaps an indication of the transformation to come. As the work of Ariella Azoulay (2019), in conversation with that of Nicholas Blomely (2003), reminds us, photography was part of a wider imperial tactic of ‘objectively’ surveying, counting, and making known potential spaces of expansion and the extension of the empire (Scott, 2009). Here, the land is figured to be idle and undeveloped – anathema to the rapidly expanding and modernising city.

¹¹ Images in the City of Vancouver archives of the plot of land that Crab Park is now situated on suggest that this site was also used by displaced First Nations communities, figuring another ‘patch’ of resistance in the settler-colonial city (Matthews, 1889).



Figure 8: Image of Lot 196, Blk 54 (soon to be Oppenheimer Park) in 1887 (Centre-right, City of Vancouver, 1887)

And so it was that the following year, the plot was fenced, developed, and ‘opened’ for public use by the precursor body to the Vancouver Parks Board, becoming the Powell Street Grounds, as it was known until July 1911 when it was renamed Oppenheimer Park (Vancouver Parks Board, no date). In a postcard detailing the major events in Oppenheimer Park, Major James Matthews, a colonial archivist whose extensive records on Vancouver provide detail on much of the early history of the city¹², remarks: “my recollection of the ‘grand opening’ of the ‘new grounds’ was that, after ‘fixing it up’ they put a big fence around it” (Matthews, no date a).

The single quotation marks, retained from the original source, lend a theatrical and sarcastic tone to Matthews’ comment and the decision to highlight phrases such as ‘new grounds’ and ‘fixing it up’ indicate that his own interpretation of events differ. Perhaps, as is recalled in the community histories above, even Major Matthews recognised that the use of the land as ‘public’ grounds was not new – the land had always been used by people to come together and to connect, and the so-called ‘grand opening’ was anything

¹² From Wales, Major Matthews settled in Vancouver in the late 19th century. After retiring in 1924, Matthews started collecting records and documenting the city’s history. He was appointed by the City Council as City Archivist in June 1933, holding this position until he died, aged 92, in 1970. Major Matthews’ documents are extensive, providing detail on the early history of the city – though, of course, from his eyes (Schlase, 2006).

but. Indeed, the reference to the ‘big fence’ seems pointed (and antithetical) in this regard (Figure 9).

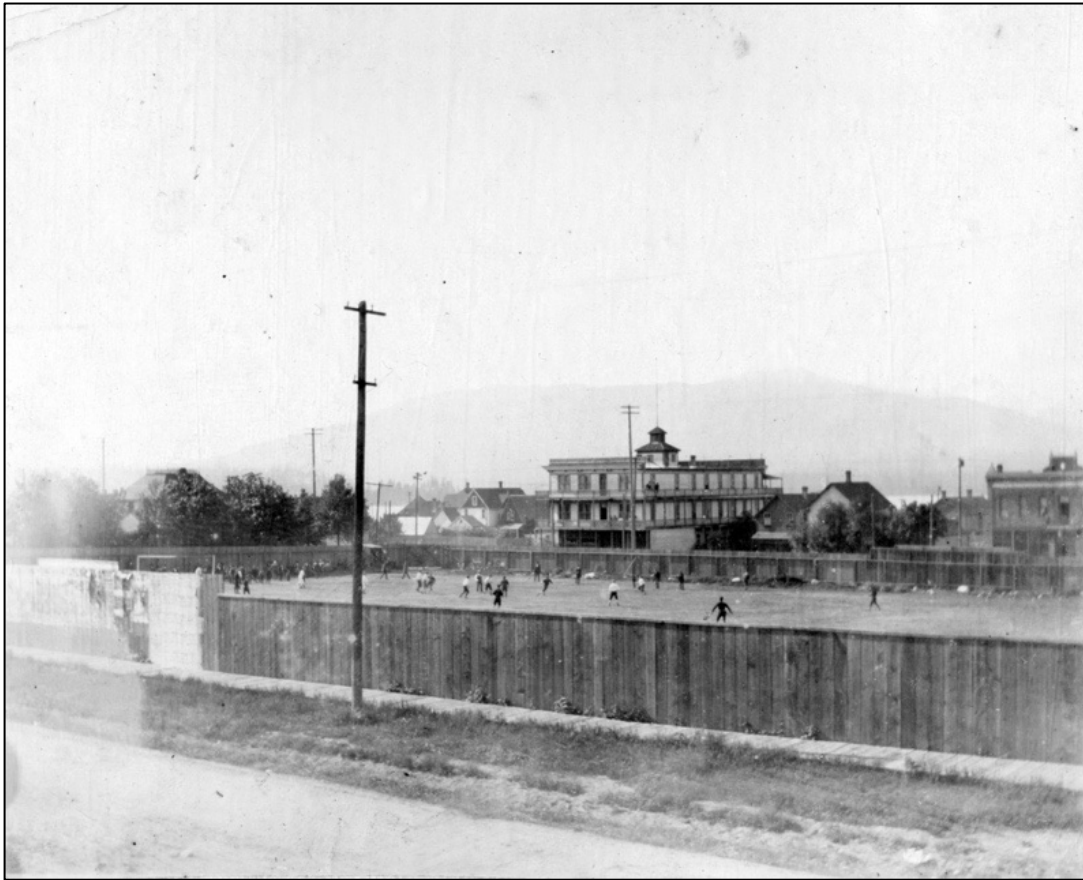


Figure 9: Image of Powell Street Grounds following its enclosure and designation as a public park (City of Vancouver, 1897-1902)

As Blomley (2007a, 2016) argues, the materialities of caging – the construction of hedges, fences, and walls – do more than just delineate a spatial area, they signify the territory of property: a boundary beyond which specific rights, rules, and laws can be willed into existence and enforced. In the case of Oppenheimer Park, this enclosure was both visible and symbolic. The construction of the fence physically disrupted the felt landscape – interrupting the grazing of animals and gathering of people – while at the same time visually signifying the arrival of a new socio-political order, the settler-colonial City and its municipal agencies and by-laws.

City By-Law 309, passed on the 19th of September 1898, “authorise[d] the acquiring and opening up of certain lands within the city as public places for the use of the

citizens” and earmarked district Lot 196, Block 54 – Powell Street Grounds – as one such site, specifying:

“the said lands shall be acquired by private contract or by expropriation from the owners thereof and shall forthwith after having been so acquired, be opened up...fenced and otherwise improved, so as to render the same fit for the use of the general public” (City of Vancouver, 1898)

Working in conjunction with processes of surveying, mapping, legal regulation, and the creation of reserves, this by-law became a key technology in the production of the territory of the settler-City, enabling the creation of a network of new, tightly regulated, public parks – Clark Park (1889), Cambie Street Grounds (1898), Harris Park (1898), Bridge Street Grounds (1898), and McClean Park (1911) (The Board of Parks and Recreation, 1972; Blomley, 2003; Barman, 2005; Mawani, 2005).

By the time the law came into force, most of Vancouver’s land had been pre-empted by settler-pioneers, and so the law was used to facilitate the transfer of this privately held land to the jurisdiction of the Parks Board. In the case of Oppenheimer Park, the plot was first privately held by the Hastings Sawmill and then was subsequently sold to Israel Wood Powell (B.C.’s first superintendent of Indian Affairs and a colonial businessman) and again to the Yorkshire Guarantee Association¹³ until its formal purchase by the Parks Board in 1902 (Vancouver Parks Board, 1911). As such, the timeline of Oppenheimer Park’s enclosure reveals how the process of land transformation in the settler-colonial city was inchmeal, involving the performance of enclosure first through fencing (1888), an act then retrospectively legalised by City By-Law 309 (1898), and the eventual transfer of land ownership in 1902 (Vancouver Parks Board, 1911). Though the transfer of the lot from one colonial entity to another may seem unimportant in the context of the mass upheaval of land into property at the time – in practice, the by-law and formal change of ownership was critical to the ‘felt’ geographies of the space. It facilitated the introduction of settler jurisdiction and forms of spatial regulation and governance which promoted and serviced settler-society and criminalised the communal, pastoral lifeways that had previously figured in the space.

¹³ The Yorkshire Guarantee Association was a colonial financial institution and property manager based in Huddersfield, Yorkshire, with branches all over the British Empire. Established in 1888, the B.C. branch had one representative and an office on nearby Cordova Street (Matthews, no date b).

In their place, the Vancouver Parks Board enacted a regime of (colonial) leisure designed to condition and facilitate access to ‘Oriental’ labour.

The early Vancouver Parks Board broadly ascribed to models of park management trialled in the United States (The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, 1988). During the Progressive Era (1896-1917), the dominant trend was towards the creation of ‘reform parks’ in working class neighbourhoods (Cranz, 1989; Sevilla-Buitrago, 2014; Takyi, 2016). These parks represented early attempts to inject bourgeois and upper-class aesthetics and activity into urban public space and were architecturally and legally constituted to assimilate working class populations into American society by fostering structured and controlled social interaction between classes (Marne, 2001; Bachin, 2004). The intention was not only to ‘civilise’ urban populations but to enclose individual subjectivities and secure ongoing labour for capital; under the reform agenda, urban public parks “were believed to be spaces where workers could relax and engage in recreational activities so they could return to work refreshed” (Birge-Liberman, 2010, p. 1395). Like other reform parks, Oppenheimer Park was enclosed and regulated to civilise ‘inferior’ populations. While previous historical scholarship on reform and leisure, situated mainly in the US cities of New York and Chicago, has focused on its implications for class relations, this chapter revisits and re-centres this work in relation to questions of race in the settler-city (Cranz, 1989; Birge-Liberman, 2010; Byrne, 2012; Angelo, 2019).

On the 7th of November 1906, the Board of Park Commissioners approved a set of 31 rules for all urban parks, enforceable by the park superintendent and park employees who were given the power to remove offenders from public property and apply both financial penalty and jailtime (Vancouver Parks Board, 1911). The wording of these provides a sense of how the Parks Board sought to imbue park spaces with socio-political values and regulate the behaviour of the ‘public’. Among them are rules stipulating that no person shall:

- “behave improperly or be disorderly”;
- “carry...filth, dirt, stone, or any offensive matter”;
- graze “horse, cattle, or swine”;
- “play football or any other game... except in such portion thereof as may be set apart for that purpose”;

- “light a fire”;
- or “beg of ask alms or commit any offence amounting to vagrancy” including “public speaking or haranguing” (Vancouver Parks Board, 1911, p.69-72).

These regulations demarcate a very specific public for whom the park was ‘opened’. By banning forms of non-capitalist economy (grazing) and Indigenous place-making, including modes of survival, livelihood, and ceremony (‘lighting fires’), as well as political resistance to the settler-State (‘public speaking’), parks were encoded and enclosed as spaces for ordered, transient, and tame forms of leisure activity such as games and sport – but again, only in those ‘portions set apart’. These rules were imbued with racialised implications in a society where individuals read as ‘Oriental’ were seen to be ‘improper’ and ‘filthy’ (Masuda and the Right to Remain Research Collective, 2021). As Kay Anderson’s work reveals, discourses cautioning of the health risks of “degraded Asiatics” were common in Vancouver, with growing concerns surrounding public hygiene and miasmatic understandings of disease spread producing Chinatown and Powell Street as “unsanitary sinks” of risk and immorality in the White imagination (Anderson, 1991, p.78). For example, Dr Hamilton-Grey of the Nanaimo Knights of Labour is recorded to have described the population of Powell Street as living

“generally in wretched hovels, dark, ill-ventilated and unwholesome, and crowded together in such numbers as must utterly preclude all ideas of comfort, morality and even decency” (Anderson, 1991, p. 37).

According to official Parks Board records, Powell Street Grounds became “purely a playground” used “almost exclusively for ball games – football, cricket, lacrosse and baseball” (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, 1911, p.20). The rich sociality which came before was replaced with colonial leisure: a baseball diamond and bleachers were built, and the grounds began to host the Industrial Baseball League, alongside other regular sports fixtures (Vancouver Parks Board, no date, p.277-8). This transformation enforced new ideologies of social mixing, which supplanted the unexpected encounters and rich contours of pre-settler sociality in the space with a catalogue of acceptable interactions and activities. It was not that Indigenous, Japanese, and Chinese populations were prohibited or excluded from the park space, but that they were conditioned to enter this space and to use it on contingent, regulated, and settler-

colonial terms – both through the law and through the regime of leisure in this new ‘playground’.

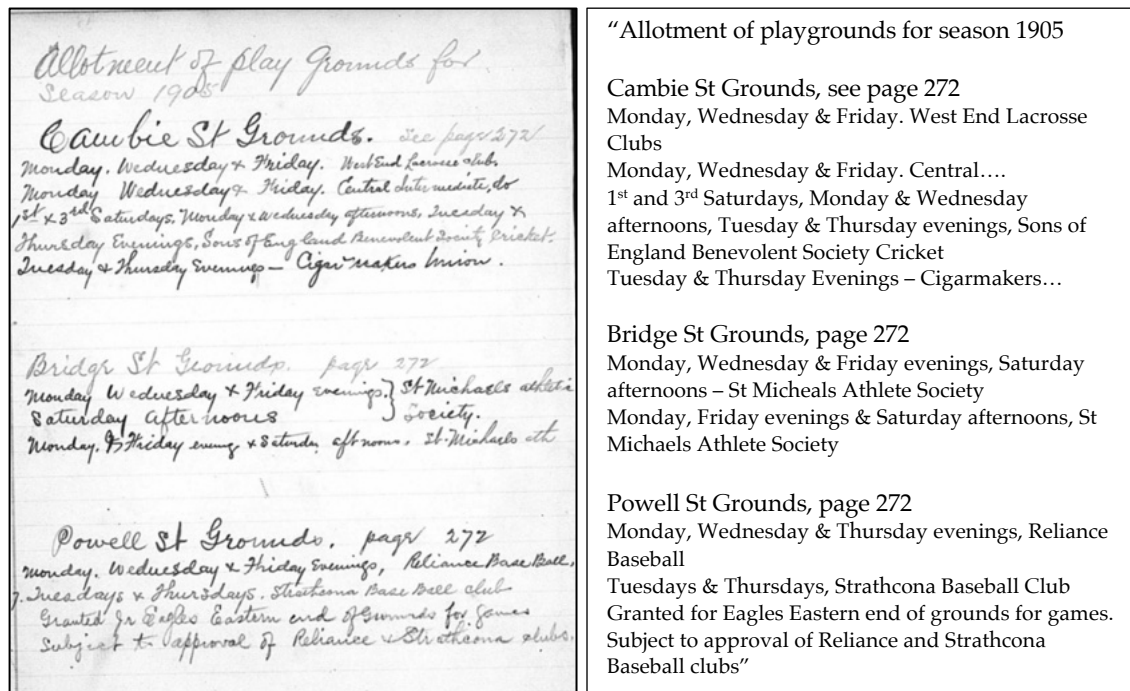


Figure 10: Page from the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation minutes (1905) outlining game schedule for Cambie, Bridge and Powell Street Grounds (Oppenheimer Park). For clarity, the text is transcribed in the adjacent box.

For the surrounding Japanese Canadian community, a timetable of fixtures interrupted the potential for spontaneous gathering and usufruct uses (Figure 10). Even when not occupied by athletes and crowds, park records show that the board required written applications for permission for other events and activities to be held, including carnivals, festivals, and protests (Vancouver Parks Board, 1911; Edmonds, 2010). By shaping everyday activities, the rules quietly disciplined and dispossessed neighbourhood residents of their prior forms of socialisation and encounter, and were designed to enclose and to “neutraliz[e] the street common[s] not only on [its] grounds, but beyond” (Sevilla-Buitrago, 2015, p. 1009).

Since the early 2000s, geographers have explored the recurrence of ‘new’ enclosures as part of the ongoing evolution and spatialisation of capital – particularly in the context of the contemporary city (Hodkinson, 2012; Jeffrey, McFarlane and Vasudevan, 2012; Sevilla-Buitrago, 2015). This literature reveals enclosure as a geographical process which operates "contingently, provisionally, and violently across a range of scales, sites,

and networks" to rescript spaces and populations towards more governable and exchangeable forms in the capitalist economy (Vasudevan, McFarlane and Jeffrey, 2008, p. 1641). This expanded approach challenges orthodox interpretations of Marx's primitive accumulation as a 'pre-history' to capitalism, taking up the call of the Midnight Notes Collective (1990) to consider its 'regular return[s]' (Harvey, 2003). This literature positions enclosure as encompassing more than just the permanent division of common land and orients attention instead towards the broader project of "capitalism's mobilization of diverse configurations and significations of space to deprive people of what they create in common" (Sevilla-Buitrago, 2015, p. 1000). Under this framework, geographers have revealed the variegated geographies, sites, and logics of enclosure, including the "cultural and the so-called immaterial commons – knowledge, skills, practices, affects, subjectivities" alongside the potential for emerging commons which "precede, respond to, and exceed" processes of enclosure (Jeffrey, McFarlane and Vasudevan, 2012, p. 1249; Sevilla-Buitrago, 2014, p. 153).

Transporting this understanding to the specific settler-colonial geographies of Vancouver, this socio-spatial transformation was situated within and shaped by wider colonial anxieties surrounding interracial relations and social mixing (Paulson and Tomiak, 2022). As the opening to this chapter highlights, cross-racial contact in settler-colonial society was common but seen to be perilous by settler authorities as it placed at risk the biopolitical goals of the settler-colonial state; namely, the socio-legal (b)ordering of peoples and space and the promotion of modern principles of civility, hygiene, and racial purity (Barman, 2007; Stanger-Ross, 2008; Edmonds, 2010a). As Mawani (2009, p.90) traces in the context of salmon canneries in Stevenson, Indian agents, police, missionaries, and other authorities expressed concern surrounding the

"proximate and persistent contacts between aboriginal, white, and Chinese populations"...they " lamented that drinking and socialising between races might lead to the forging of friendships and alliances. Too much contact across racial divides would only predispose workers towards "unwholesome" relations that could disrupt labour hierarchies and ultimately the pursuit of profit."

When placed in conversation with this broader context, we can re-approach the transformation of the park and the imposition of a regime of leisure as settler-colonial enclosure imbued with racialised relations of power and control. While the fencing of the park introduced the aesthetic and legal markers of White property into the

landscape, the introduction of leisure activities aimed to enclose the social and economic ‘risks’ of unsupervised interactions between peoples. The park was restructured from an unproductive ‘bedlam’ (Edmonds, 2010) to space designated and designed to secure capital and social value, largely by managing the social lives of local labourers and maximizing the potential profit made off of their exploitation.

This goal is perhaps most clearly reflected in the story of the Asahi. In 1914, Oppenheimer Park became the home of the notorious Japanese Asahi baseball team, who went on to win both the City and Provincial leagues between 1926 and 1941 (Takata, 1983; Jette, 2007a). In her history of the Asahi, Jette (2007) argues that the team was influential in ‘mediating’ the relationship between Japanese Canadians and White society by creating a platform for structured and level interactions. During a period where anti-Asian rhetoric was rife, baseball became a medium through which fans of all backgrounds would come together to watch the Asahi play. White fans, she argues,

“appreciated the sportsmanlike attitude, the skill and fervour the Asahis displayed in their game, and thought of them not as a team of a different race, but as equal in the name of sports” (Jette, 2007b, p. 8).

Or, as Toyo Takata (1983, p. 45) explains:

“During the trying pre-war years, sport was one of the rare activities in which the Nikkei could partake as equals with the hakujin [White people]. The team was not just a band of young men seeking victory on the playing field, but more crucial; a group earning goodwill for their community. ...No team performed a more admirable public relations job than the near legendary Vancouver Asahis”

Work on the Asahi is consistent in highlighting their broad and almost cult-like following in Vancouver and this sense of pride in their success resonates in oral history interviews with early Japanese Canadian residents of Powell Street (Goto, 2016). Kaye Kaminishi, born in January 1922 in a rooming house on Powell Street, joined the Asahi senior team at age 17. He recounts:

“All Nisei¹⁴ looked up to Asahi, we were proud to represent the community... we were a go between Occidental people to Japanese – [and] broke down some barriers” (Kaminishi, 2011)

Yet, while baseball provided a platform for positive interracial interaction and a medium through which to display Japanese Canadian intelligence and strength, this was always on the terms of the settler-colonial State. Kaye continues, describing how at baseball games the:

“Bleachers were full, everyone standing, 4 or 5 rows I think – Powell, Jackson, Cordova – all 4 corners. When the Asahi hits the ball – the crowd try to catch ball – Occidentals move away” (Kaminishi, 2011)

Here, the image of ‘occidentals’ moving away reminds us of how ideas of contamination and hygiene circulated in settler-discourses and imaginations of the Japanese Canadian residents of Powell Street (Carter, Kobayashi and Reid, 2011; Masuda and the Right to Remain Research Collective, 2023; Tsang, 2023). Thus, for the White Vancouver ‘public’, baseball perhaps opened Oppenheimer Park as a space for distanced spectation: to visit, to observe, and to marvel at the tactics, and athleticism of Japanese Canadian baseballers, but to not get too close.

As a technology of settler-colonialism, then, the creation of ‘public’ property, and the enclosure of space and sociality this involved, served to encourage the cultural ‘elimination’ and assimilation of Japanese immigrants. Instead of physically eliminating their bodies from the city, necessary for the profit of nearby industry and sawmills, the focus of municipal park planners was on erasing the presence and possibility of alternative forms of sociality, culture, and identity in the city (Wolfe, 2006). Such precarious inclusion operated in conversation with a wider geography of socio-spatial enclosure across Vancouver and British Columbia, from other public spaces that were either explicitly closed to Indigenous or racialised populations, such as at Crystal Pool where swimming was racially segregated, to a reserve and pass system which forcibly displaced Indigenous bodies from urban space. Together, these emplaced White social

¹⁴ Second-generation Japanese Canadians; the children of Japanese-born immigrants, Issei (Stanger-Ross, 2020)

reproduction in and spatial imaginaries of the settler-colonial city (Harris, 2002; Dorries *et al.*, 2019).

Yet, to illuminate the logics and intentions behind this technology of resettlement is not to invoke its ‘success’; crucially, the project of enclosure and of settler-colonialism is always incomplete and contingent (Jeffrey, McFarlane and Vasudevan, 2012; Porter, 2020). Archival records show that residents surrounding Oppenheimer Park often transgressed these expectations of behaviour and use. The park was used for displays of Japanese culture, including a ‘Japanese Parade’ to celebrate the city’s golden jubilee (permitted by the Parks Board in 1936, Figure 11; *The Vancouver Sun*, 1936a) and judo tournaments (Shigataro, 2011; Vancouver Parks Board, no date). Oral histories told by residents of Powell Street Kyoshi Shimizu and Tamiko Nakamura Corbett also recall how the park was used to run a “co-op” (potentially a food growing and exchange system), for outdoor Japanese language lessons, and for cultural events, including circuses, concerts, and the Bon Odori, a Japanese folk dance performed during the Obon festival (Shimizu, 1991; Corbett, 2011)



Figure 11: Image of two Japanese Canadian children in Oppenheimer Park, likely taken in August 1936 during the golden jubilee festival (Haspel, 1936-1938)

Further, the gating of the park and its racialised association with the Japanese Canadian population, encoded the plot of land as a space of alterity and difference within the city and it became a focal point for ‘unsettling’ events, such as anti-Asian violence in the riots of 1907 and, during labour unrest in the early 20th century, the organising site of choice for worker’s protests and socialist gatherings (Tsang, 2023; Vancouver Sun, 1912a; 1912b; 1931; 1932a; 1932b; Figure 13). In 1938, the space was the site of a massive protest against the police brutality of Bloody Sunday (The Vancouver Sun, 1938). Indeed, the park became so encoded as a site of political resistance that newspaper records show that the Parks Board endorsed a ‘Hyde Park’ strategy of permitting protests in Oppenheimer Park – at first, through a de-facto policy of non-intervention and then, following its designation as a site of ‘open public forum’ in October 1936, by permitting protest in the Parks By-Laws (Figure 12; The Vancouver Sun, 1937; Vancouver Parks Board, no date, p.364; Mitchell and Staeheli, 2005). According to newspaper records, this decision was deployed as a means of containing protests within the neighbourhood and “blow[ing] off steam”, a strategy which ultimately backfired given that those living in the neighbourhood were exactly the target audience for labour movements (The Vancouver Sun, 1937; Roberts, 2022). Thus, despite the city’s attempt to politically neutralise the park and control its ‘publics’, it remained, and remains, a space where different claims to and ways of being in public space emerge – a theme which is developed further in following chapters.

Commissioner Pettipiece reported that with the Superintendent he had interviewed the Chief of Police regarding the advisability of amending the Park By-laws to permit of Powell Street Grounds being used as an open forum, and stated that the Chief of Police was fully in accord with the following amendment:

"No person shall preach or pray aloud or make an oration, harangue, or any political or other demonstration in any public park except in the case of military services or parades which it will be lawful to hold as may be necessary to conform to military requirements; provided, however, that at the discretion of the Board of Park Commissioners such religious, political or other gatherings may be authorised to be held in the park known as Powell Street Grounds."

Figure 12: Text of Parks Board Resolution on Oct 22nd, 1936, to amend the Parks By-Laws to create a site of ‘open forum’ at Oppenheimer Park¹⁵ (Vancouver Parks Board, no date, p.364)

¹⁵ Despite its official renaming in 1911, park commissioners and Parks Board minutes continued to refer to Oppenheimer Park as Powell Street Grounds. It is only after the internment of Japanese Canadians in 1942 that the name ‘Oppenheimer Park’ begins to be the default in Parks Board minutes and newspaper articles consulted during archival research.

4.3 Abandoning ‘the zoo’

In January 1942, the Federal government ordered the removal and internment of Japanese nationals and Japanese Canadians from a 100 mile ‘protected area’ along the British Columbia coastline to workcamps and abandoned mining towns in the interior (Stanger-Ross and Landscapes of Injustice Research Collective, 2016; Stanger-Ross, Blomley and Collective, 2017; Stanger-Ross, 2020). The following year the Federal government seized and sold off Japanese Canadian owned properties on B.C.’s coastline – in the Powell Street area, some 10,000 residents living around Oppenheimer Park were forcibly incarcerated and dispossessed of their property and livelihoods (Stanger-Ross and Landscapes of Injustice Research Collective, 2016). In the decades following, the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood experienced decline as its traditional economy of manufacturing and warehousing operations began to close and relocate (Douglas and Shier, 2002). Driven by the combination of the sale of Japanese Canadian owned properties at below-market value, the loss of responsible landlords in the process, and a wider municipal abandonment of the neighbourhood, the physical and social landscape of the area transformed. The dismantling of Vancouver’s streetcar system in 1955 and the migration of city institutions, banks, retail stores, and affluent populations westwards meant that local housing, public, and transport infrastructure was neglected (Wideman and Masuda, 2018; Masuda and the Right to Remain Research Collective, 2021; Bailey, 2023).

This “restructuring of the waterfront-hinterland industrial linkages” and the changing focus of municipal government away from the neighbourhood “propelled the ebbing of the subculture that had formed around it” (Smith and Derksen, 2002, p.31). While prohibited activities, such as drug and alcohol use and prostitution, form a common thread throughout the history of the area, these activities began to define the neighbourhood in the 1950s and 60s and the morally dubious space of ‘skid row’ was (re)‘discovered’ – synonymous with sex work, nightclubs, liquor and gambling houses (Sommers, 1998). As the local economy declined, many of the area’s boarding lodges were converted to SRO units, catering mostly to working-class men who had retired from frontier resource industries (Sommers, 1998). A report published in May 1971 charted the area’s housing conditions: 33% of the nearly 7,000 residential buildings had received health by-law violations and a rising rate of building closure had led to the

frequent eviction and displacement of long-term residents (Masuda and the Right to Remain Research Collective, 2021). At the same time, the area's residents were pathologized and produced to be the cause of the inner-city's decaying landscape. As Jeff Sommers (1998) suggests, the neighbourhood became coded – in policy, the media, and everyday discourse – with moral and physical degeneration, a space shaped by and suited for the masculine figure of the 'abject': an individual who figures on the boundary of personhood and existence (Bailey, 2023). By 1976, three-quarters of the population of the area had an income of less than \$3000, 78% were on some form of income assistance, and 10% were considered 'hard to house' by the municipal authorities (Blain, 1980).

Oppenheimer Park figured centrally in this story of political abandonment and social pathologisation. Parks Board planning documents reveal that Oppenheimer Park straddled two planning 'wards' – the Central Business District and Strathcona – and so was placed on the cartographic, technical, and imagined margins of park planning ('The Vancouver Sun', 1980; O'Brien 1982). Funding procedures meant that allocations for park acquisition and improvement were open to democratic vote within a 'ward'. In practice, this meant that wealthier wards were able to approve substantially larger funding pots, and that parks where the surrounding population had lower rates of political participation were not prioritised for expansion, renewal, or redevelopment (The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, 1988). As a result, Oppenheimer was seldom included in the Board's investment and renewal plans and the park was left largely neglected and in a state of disrepair throughout the post-war period (The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, 1988).

Newspaper records reveal that the state of Oppenheimer Park was often mobilised to chart and portray the downfall of the neighbourhood to the citizens of Vancouver. Coverage in the two major B.C. newspapers – the Province and the Vancouver Sun – reveals frequent reports of petty crime, pickpocketing, stabbings, and murders in the park, with articles mobilising discourses of drug and alcohol addiction and uncleanness to stigmatise the space and its users (Collins, 1977 – '*Saga of Oppenheimer Park: Bozo at the Bat*'; Pynn, 1979 – '*Citizen patrols guard against muggings*'; Figure 13 – '*What do police care about people like me?*'). An article in

October 1979 collates multiple stories of assault, destruction of property, suggesting the area's perceived lawlessness:

“stems from the indifferent enforcement of existing liquor laws”... “One of the most popular and dangerous drinking sports is Oppenheimer Park at Powell and Jackson...resident caretaker Ron Kellington keeps a baseball bat just inside his front door. And he doesn't play Baseball”... “[Ron says] It's against the law to drink in the park. But to see how many people care about the law, you should see the collection of bottles I've got here” (White, 1979)



Figure 13: ‘What do police care about people like me’ article on page 26 of October 17th 1979 edition of *The Vancouver Sun* (White, 1979)

Reports also trace the deterioration of the physical space of the park, referring to Oppenheimer as the ‘dustbowl of the East End’ and ‘a down-and-outer’ (Hanson, 1977). In his exposé on ‘a ballpark and its people’ in 1972, Journalist Gorde Sinclair writes:

“The place they call The World’s Worst Ball Park slouches there in Vancouver’s skid road like a wino in repose...the real story of the park isn’t its [infrastructural] shortcomings. It is its people.... you look to the outfield and there’s two drunks strolling arm in arm across the field. Or some couple is trying to do its thing in the left centre. One morning, Lowry [local baseball player] says, a parks board crew found a corpse in the bleachers. Another time the game was stopped by a horse-less Lady Godiva... [it’s a] whole human zoo like place” (Sinclair, July 28th 1972, *The Vancouver Sun*)

For Sinclair, Oppenheimer Park housed uncivilised, non-human, ‘animals’ – the park itself, ‘a human zoo like place’. Constructing a divide between the ‘human’ people who infrequently visit the park for leisure, to play and watch baseball, and the ‘non-human’

residents who inhabit the park and spend more time than just passing through – are “*its people*” – this passage mirrors the ideological valorisation of rational, structured interaction and controlled forms of leisure, such as baseball, which emerged with the enclosure of the park (previous section). In turn, it presents the messy domestic and intimate use of public space – of ‘strolling arm in arm’ and a couple trying to ‘do its thing’ – as the root of the neighbourhood’s perceived disorder and an impediment to its (re)development and progress (Chapter 5). Anthropomorphising the park and its people as ‘slouching’ evokes ideas of a lazy, passive, antagonistic, and disinterested space, resistant to the tempo of change and urban development sweeping the rest of the city (Boyd, Osborn and MacPherson, 2009).

However, while the area surrounding Oppenheimer Park was de-humanised, it ‘was far from empty’ (Yakashiro, 2021). The neighbourhood was home to a politically active, low-income community, many of whom had been expelled from elsewhere within and beyond the settler-colonial city (Longstaffe, 2021). The 60s and 70s saw the influx of Indigenous peoples into Vancouver as a result of colonial dispossession elsewhere in the province, with nearly 20,000 people arriving by 1976, of whom 50% were unemployed and gravitated to the neighbourhood for its low-cost housing (Masuda and the Right to Remain Research Collective, 2021). Chinese, Black, Japanese, South Asian and other non-white migrants, including political refugees from Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, also often found themselves in the Downtown Eastside in search of cheap and flexible housing (Antonio, Interview, 26th Sept 2023). Thus, the neighbourhood was characterised by a racialised and low-income community and was viewed by others in the city as a space of ‘dubious morality, racial otherness, and masculine failure’ (Liu and Blomley, 2012; Bailey, 2023).

Yet, while the articles above stigmatise the space and ‘its people’ they also point to the centrality of Oppenheimer Park to everyday social life in the neighbourhood and the tacit concession, perhaps, of city authorities to illicit, informal, and ‘unsettling’ uses of the space (White, 1979; see Chapter 5). An article in the *Vancouver Sun* written by Alex MacDonell, a worker at the Hastings Sawmill since 1922 and a local resident, describes Oppenheimer Park as ‘*A Place to Hear a City’s Beating Heart*’, recounting how in the 60s and 70s informal forms of sheltering and homemaking (Chapter 5) took place in the park – a space of welcome and refuge amongst the city’s rapidly changing landscape:

“the Powell Street Grounds were also a favourite nesting place for the town drunks. There they could slumber peacefully, shielded from the evening sun by the spreading maple trees. No one bothered them; it was a tolerant age in that sense. What a man did was his own business” (MacDonell, 1980)

Another article, written in 1960, as a “Requiem” to Oppenheimer, which was slated to be sold off for industrial use at the time, speaks to the “joy” brought by the park to those living in the surrounding neighbourhood:

“‘It IS the worst field in the world’, said Mr Lundstrum, but once again there was a slight soupcon of pride in his voice, ‘but it is the only one that can support senior baseball. Baseball has continued through the depression, a war and prosperity at Powell Street Grounds... Without the park, it wouldn’t survive’” (Parton, 1960)

Further, responding to an article published which presented Oppenheimer Park as a space ‘*Where Apathy Rules*’ (Bacchus, 1983), Downtown Eastside residents wrote into *The Vancouver Sun* to protest the park’s portrayal and draw attention to the diversity and vibrancy of the space (Figure 14). Looking to remind readers that there are multiple ways of using public space beyond baseball and transient leisure, Richard Tetrault makes the case for the park being “probably the most actively used park in the city”, while Esther Rausenberg reminds readers of the park’s “vitality” to neighbourhood residents (Figure 14). The extent to which Oppenheimer Park was cherished, cared for, and protected by surrounding residents is reflected in the intimacy with which those interviewed in reports above describe the park, and the affectual sense of belonging and pride which resonates in residents’ voices.

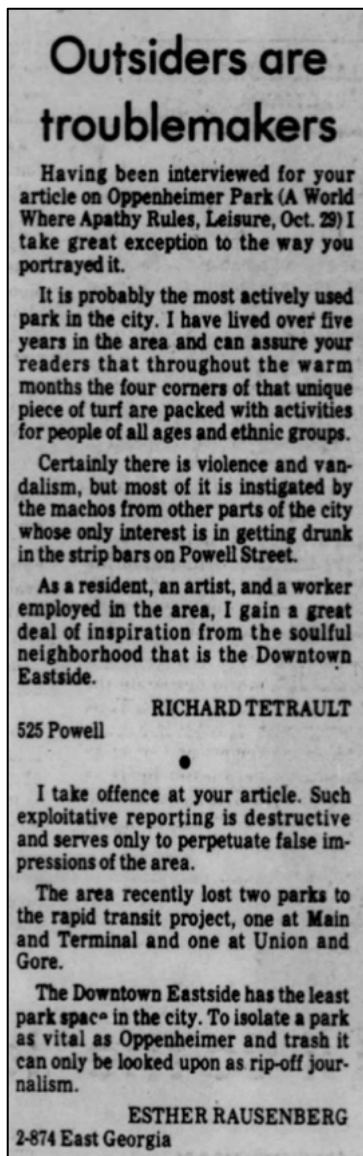


Figure 14: 'Outsiders are troublemakers' article in November 15th 1983 edition of *The Vancouver Sun*

It is hard to imagine another patchy and barely one-acre green space which has received quite as much appreciation, as HC McDonald, a resident of Tamura House SRO on Dunlevy Street (facing Oppenheimer Park), illuminates in his letter to the Parks Board on 30th July 1972. Petitioning for funds to repair sections of the park, he puts forward the case that:

“this small park, which is practically the only source of entertainment for the many old timers living in this area, appears to be the forgotten black sheep of the Vancouver Parks Board. An inspection by any of your members will reveal that the seats have become so rough and splintered and actually broken right off in place that they are real hazard to anyone using them... This park is also the

handiest playground for the many children living in a predominantly industrial district. To the best of my knowledge the only thing the Parks Board has done for this area this year is to dump a load of dirt to be spread around the low spots after the recent heavy rains. I think the people of this area deserve and should expect a little better treatment than this” (McDonald, 1972)

A similar letter from the ‘East Enders Society’ – a private social service group which worked to support women in *the Downtown Eastside* between 1965-1993 – highlights the importance of the green space to local residents and the disruption caused by the intensity of leisure activities such as baseball:

“The East Enders Society would like, once again, to express concern about the condition and use of Oppenheimer Park. As you no doubt know, there is a great concentration of people in the area living in one-room accommodation... although we see a great need for increased park and recreation space in the district, *we feel that there is a tendency to reduce the open space already existing....* The baseball games held at Oppenheimer do provide spectator recreation for some of the men living there and are therefore something of an asset. However, it is not desirable to allow this activity to dominate the use of the park... We would like, therefore, to make a request that the Board of Parks and Public Recreation that Oppenheimer Park be *considered a Neighbourhood Park rather than just an open space covered mostly with gravel and providing minimal facilities for baseball*” (City of Vancouver Archives, May 13th, 1972, emphasis added)

What threads through these views of neighbourhood residents is the desire to emphasise that the park's value, and its publics, should not be defined solely by conventional, orderly uses; just because the space is not used in ways that fit neatly into prescribed forms of leisure, residents argue, does not diminish its importance to the ‘public’ it serves. The park instead figures as a critical space of survival and sociality for neighbourhood residents who are otherwise ‘concentrated’ in small, single room accommodation (Chapter 5). Reading across this section, then, life in Oppenheimer Park in the mid-late 20th century presents a unique story about forms of urban abandonment. While scholars have considered the ways in which abandonment is a settler-colonial tool which reduces Indigenous bodies to bare life (Pratt, 2005), is mobilised as a narrative to legitimise and facilitate the future displacement of racialised and marginalised populations (Launius and Boyce, 2021), and – in “organised abandonment” – as a set of policies which contain Indigenous and racialised

populations in substandard housing and isolated inner-city neighbourhoods (Hugill, 2021, p. 44), the case of Oppenheimer Park illuminates how the lived experience of abandonment is also one where such isolated, unwanted spaces are reclaimed by their actual publics in grassroots and piecemeal ways – a precarious and tense dynamic this thesis continues to unpack moving forward (Chapter 5).

4.4 Re-scripting ‘Japantown’

The late 60s saw the growth of community organising in the Downtown Eastside with organisations, most notably the Downtown Eastside Residents Association (DERA, founded in 1973 and active until 2010) campaigning to re-write this story of abandonment (Daniels, 1974; Boyd, Osborn and MacPherson, 2009). Established and led by organisers Bruce Eriksen, Libby Davis, and Jean Swanson, amongst others, this grassroots organisation advocated for the recognition of the neighbourhood as a historic residential community made up of “former loggers, miners, seamen, railroad workers, waitresses, cooks, longshoremen, millworkers and others” and demanded greater provision of social housing, tighter alcohol restrictions, and other poverty reduction measures to support those living there (Douglas and Shier, 2002, p. 39; Boyd, Osborn and MacPherson, 2009). In 1975, DERA had its first major win and the Downtown Eastside was rezoned by the City of Vancouver from an industrial to a residential area, paving the way for a successful application for a Neighbourhood Improvement Program in December 1976 (Interview, Libby Davis, 25th Oct 2023).

The Neighbourhood Improvement Program (NIP) scheme was a Federal urban renewal initiative designed to be a more equitable and locally grounded alternative to the ‘tear down’ redevelopment models of the 1960s (Filion, 1988). NIPs involved collaboration between Federal, Provincial, and Municipal governments to co-fund investments in inner-city infrastructure and neighbourhoods, with the goal of “enhancing the environment from a people-oriented perspective” (Ibid.). Focused on local consultation, the renewal programs were developed and approved by municipal planning committees, who worked with a coalition of community stakeholders to gain buy-in and gather feedback. The Downtown Eastside N.I.P was allocated funds of \$589,300 by the Federal (50%), Provincial (25%), and Municipal government (25%), and was designed by an unwieldy set of actors, including city planners, local business leaders,

neighbourhood residents, church leaders, representatives of the Japanese Canadian community, and members of DERA – including Libby Davies, the partner of Bruce Eriksen, who became the chairperson of the consultation committee (Office of the City Clerk, 1976). Between 1975 and 1982, this ‘Oppenheimer Area Planning Committee’ held an office at 425 Powell Street, directly opposite Oppenheimer Park (Interview, Libby Davies, 25th Oct 2023). Alongside plans to build and expand community healthcare, social, and recreational facilities, the N.I.P recommended the “beautification” of ‘public open space’ in the Downtown Eastside, including a series of renovations to Oppenheimer Park jointly funded by the N.I.P (\$75,000) and the Parks Board (\$50,000) (City Planning Department, 1976; Vancouver Parks Board, 1976).

As is reflected in the stakeholders involved in the N.I.P, there was a return of Japanese Canadian interest in and connection to the neighbourhood during this period. Following internment, many Japanese-Canadians never returned to Powell Street, with prominent Nikkei¹⁶ newspaper *The New Canadian* describing the neighbourhood in the period after 1942 as ‘crumbling’, in ‘ruins’, and ‘dead’ – a space haunted by the spectre of Japanese-Canadian exclusion and a romanticised memory of the pre-war Paueru gai community (Yakashiro, 2021). In the early 1970s, inspired by the Asian Civil Rights Movement in the United States, a new wave of young, primarily Sansei (third generation) Japanese Canadians started to rediscover Powell Street, establishing Tonari Gumi, a Japanese-Canadian civil society, at 573 East Hastings street and a new zine, Community Voices, dedicated to uncovering and narrating the Japanese Canadian heritage of the area (Li, 2007; Masutani and Enomoto, 2010; Wideman and Masuda, 2018). At the same time, the Japanese Canadian Society invested in properties around Oppenheimer Park to house and support senior citizens who wanted to return to and live in the neighbourhood (Thompson, 1976). In June 1976, a photo exhibit opened at the Centennial Museum in Vancouver on the history of Powell Street and Japanese-Canadian life (Wakayama and Hoffman, 1992).

This period of reconnection and the return of some Japanese Canadians to the neighbourhood saw the introduction of new ideas of who and what should be prioritised in the urban landscape; an article in the Vancouver Sun (*‘Japanese area ‘threatened’*)

¹⁶ Japanese Canadian diaspora

in September 1970 reveals significant pressure from some Japanese Canadians to redevelop and gentrify the area surrounding the park. UBC faculty member Donald Matsuba, for example, promoted the creation of a “cultural centre for Vancouver’s Japanese” as an “asset for tourism”, saying:

“the area is in danger of losing its Japanese quality, due to the influx of Skid Road residents displaced by Gastown redevelopment; ‘if it moves, there goes an important element to the city’” (‘The Vancouver Sun’, 1970)

The centrality and influence of Japanese Canadian actors, identity, and history to the N.I.P is clear and was reflected in its planning documents. Goal 7 (of 10) in the 1976 ‘Concept Plan’ called for the promotion of “the historical importance of the area, including that of the Japanese community” and \$95,000 was allocated to the development of ‘Japanese/Community facilities, including the Buddhist Church on Jackson Avenue and the Japanese Language School on Alexander Street (Office of the City Clerk, 1976). A newspaper interview with Ken Takeuchi, the vice-chairman of the Oppenheimer Area Planning Committee, highlights the views of some Japanese Canadians of the goal of the N.I.P:

“we pointed out to the mayor that this [Skid Road] is a direct problem, because there is no way the Japanese community would want to identify with that kind of group” (Blain, 1980)

Renovations took place between December 1976 and May 1977, including: the creation of a ‘senior adults area’ with giant checkerboards, shuffleboards and horseshoe pits; the grading and drainage of the baseball field; a new children’s play area; repairs and painting of the fieldhouse; and the installation of park benches. On the request of Rick Shiomi, a young activist associated with Tonari Gumi, it was agreed that the renovations would be completed before May 1977 to accommodate the Japanese Centennial celebrations planned for Oppenheimer Park, including the planting of 8 Sakura cherry blossom trees (Shiomi, 1976).

Newspaper articles from the late 1970s present these renovations as a way of making it “more of a people place” (Thompson, 1976) as the ‘winos’ moved to “obscure back alleys less visible to the neighbourhood children” (Farrow, 1979). The park transformed into “a place for everyone, not just for derelicts” and was now a “real park” (Farrow,

1979). A renewed ‘oasis’ (Farrow, 1979), the ‘beautification’ of Oppenheimer Park was tied up in a moral and social ‘clean-up’, which displaced those using the park as a space of intimacy and domesticity into ever tighter corridors of public space, such as back alleys, and small corners of Oppenheimer (Rose, 2017; Figure 15). In this process of displacement, and hidden from view in side alleys, the lives of those who had once inhabited the park were made ever more precarious – at greater risk of sidewalk policing and inter-personal violence or overdose (Blomley, 2010; Aaron Bailey, Interview, 1st Oct 2023).

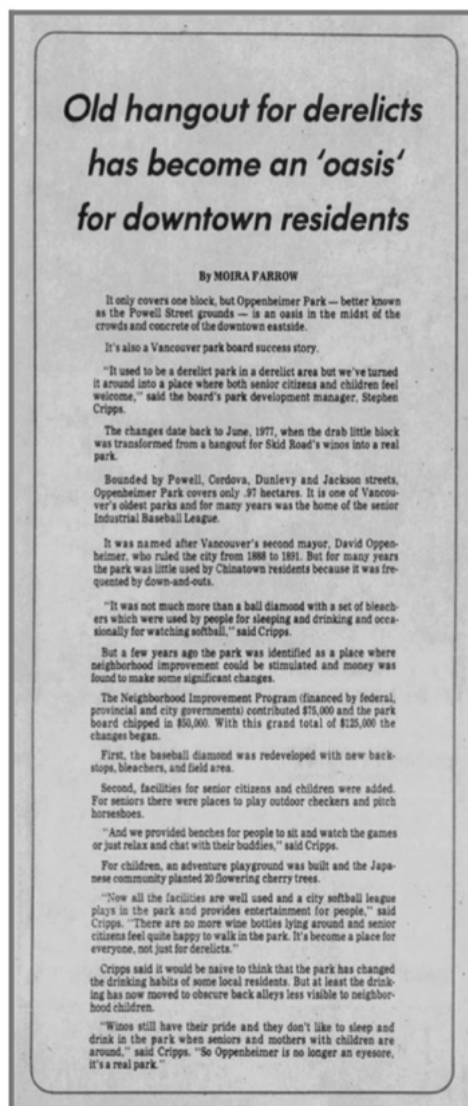


Figure 15: Article snippet from The Vancouver Sun in December 1979. Following the N.I.P, the author argues, the park transformed into “a place for everyone, not just derelicts” (Farrow, 1979)

As Stephen Kripps, Manager of Park Development, saw it, the redevelopment was a success:

“‘Some people were sceptical’ says Kripps, ‘they said we’d fix it up today and it would be a trash garden again tomorrow. But it has been an extremely successful redevelopment. We’re never going to get rid of the winos, of course, but we have made it more acceptable to other people. A lot of people are coming to the park that we never saw before’” (Hanson, 1977)

The N.I.P assigned a new the identity to the park, figuring new imaginations and prescriptions of its intended public and ‘regenerating’ and replacing the Oppenheimer ‘zoo’ with a cultural and historic home for the Japanese Canadian community in Vancouver:

“Encouraged by the revitalization of the community, the Buddhists dropped a plan to move and built a new temple in and auditorium at 220 Jackson St. in 1979, the 75th anniversary of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism in Canada. The high-water mark in recreating Japantown as a centre for celebrating Japanese and Asian culture was the creation of an annual Powell Street Festival. New immigrants and the sansei agreed: ‘We didn’t want our home to be considered Skid road... Our dream was to regenerate Powell St., to make it into a place where we could go, a place we could all identify with and become a part of’” (Ayukawa *et al.*, 2008)

Thus, the NIP involved a ‘cleansing’ of the history, nature, and publics of the park, simultaneously restoring its grounds and shaping a more ‘acceptable’ vision of its public. In this process, the Parks Board and Oppenheimer Area Planning Committee, displaced the needs, desires, and lifeworlds of the poor and precariously housed neighbourhood residents, erasing the previous forms of social reproduction – including the life sustaining practices (such as ‘nesting’) – that took place in the park (Sevilla-Buitrago, 2014, 2015).

By re-coding the park (and, by extension, the surrounding area) as a Japanese Canadian space, this process involved the formation of a new place-based modality of racialisation in the settler-city which settled new boundaries around acceptable expressions of cultural difference. Here, the Japanese Canadian ‘race’ was elevated to a ‘civilised’ status and perceived to be aligned with a wider municipal desire to unlock

land and economic value in the Downtown Eastside. By promoting an essentialist view of the area as a cultural ‘asset’, the NIP also promoted a temporal closure of the history of Oppenheimer Park centred on its Japanese Canadian history, replacing a much longer history of Indigenous presence and use (Coulthard, 2014). An interview with Bruce Eriksen in 1980 highlights the tensions which came with the NIP:

“The Downtown-Eastside Residents Association objects to the expenditure of the N.I.P funds for a beautification project. President Bruce Eriksen says the association believed the money should have been spent on upgrading the housing in the area... Eriksen says until these problems are corrected ‘we can’t have a real Japantown’... He says the committee that approved the beautification project was largely made up of ‘people from outside the community who had no real interest in the liveability of the community’... ‘What they (the city planners) are doing is *destroying the same Japantown that they say they want to protect*’” (Blain, 1980, emphasis added)

Here, Eriksen distinguishes between ‘Japantown’¹⁷ as it figures following the redevelopment and a ‘real’ Japantown. In doing so, he sets out a difference in the performance of Japanese Canadian culture as it played out in the N.I.P – funnelled through particular stakeholders and into a wider municipal push for redevelopment and ‘beautification’ – as compared to more grounded expressions and practices of Japanese Canadian identity. This distinction resonates with critical literature on settler-recognition – the ways in which Indigeneity is scripted and spatialised into specific practices and locations in a way that renders it legible to, and ultimately compatible with (and even generative of) the security and reproduction of the settler-colonial State (2007, 2014). As the work of Natalie Baloy (2016) highlights, such practices of recognition in Vancouver have often motivated ‘spectacular’ visions of Indigenous culture which fail to represent the complexity and diversity of Indigenous voices and histories. In the case of the N.I.P, a similar spectacular performance of Japanese Canadian identity was engaged, where what it meant to be Japanese Canadian was aligned with a relatively senior and wealthy public and the desire for cleanliness, beautification, and leisure. As Eriksen notes, this production of a White version of ‘Japantown’, overlooking its diverse, hybrid, and layered past, not only displaced those

¹⁷ The label of Japantown is no longer used to refer to the area around Oppenheimer Park, which is now known as Powell Street or Paueru-gai. For a discussion of the politics of naming in the area see Wideman and Masuda, (2018).

using the park as a space of home and intimacy but shut down the possibility for more meaningful changes to the housing and public landscape of the neighbourhood which would instead create genuine 'liveability' (Anderson, 1991; Wideman and Masuda, 2018). Indeed, in April 1982, a new city plan – the Downtown-Eastside/Oppenheimer Policy Plan – was published which proposed the creation of a “Japanese Village” in the Downtown Eastside, including “Japanese banners and lantern-style pedestrian lighting” (Wideman and Masuda, 2018). The policies encouraged the return of Japanese Canadian businesses to the neighbourhood over the creation of social housing; as Wideman and Masuda (2018, p.507) note, the City was “willing to use Japanese Canadian culture as a tool for economic development”, to displace the neighbourhood's existing low-income residents, and in doing so “some Japanese Canadian interest groups exercised their power to support the displacement of individuals from a neighbourhood they were physically removed from nearly forty years earlier”.

On April 16, 1977, a ceremony was held to commemorate the Japanese Canadian Centennial and over 70 Japanese Canadian seniors gathered to plant 21 Japanese Sakura Cherry trees and place a memorial rock in the park; “such was the joy of the afternoon that, over tea back at Tonari Gumi, the seniors broke into song” (Wakayama and Hoffman, 1992, p. 31; Figure 16), The cherry trees, some of which remain in Oppenheimer Park today, have since become a feature of the annual Powell Street Festival and an interview with Naomi, a Japanese Canadian redress activist who was present at the planting and has attended every Powell Street Festival since the first in 1977, outlined the importance of the event as the beginning of the path to redress:

“1977 was the Centennial year so Japanese Canadians were celebrating the arrival of the first recorded immigrant in 1877. And it was really a coming of age for the community. I think the community had been suffering post war and it was in a real period of denial, denial of community, denial of self. I think many people had taken to heart the government's idea, or desire, to destroy and dissolve the community. You know, William Lyon Mackenzie King's idea that, if he spread the Japanese Canadian communities out throughout Canada, that we would disappear within a generation or two, right? That was the goal. So, I think for the community to say, you know, this is an important moment that we need to celebrate and acknowledge our history was very important...this is just me kind of theorising but it's about reclaiming history. It's the community reclaiming its own history and, in a sense, reclaiming space. *Reclaiming a*

history in that space: that we, that our community, had been there” (Naomi, Interview, 6th Sept 2023, emphasis added).

Indeed, the Powell Street Festival, a much-loved annual event in Oppenheimer Park which started the year of the N.I.P renovations and continues today has long provided a medium through which the redress movement has been imagined, materialised, and campaigned for (Interview, Emiko Morata, 3rd Oct 2023; Figure 16; Figure 17). Naomi continued:

“Oppenheimer...was used as a physical space of dissemination of information, you know? People from the community could come together, and the redress people always had a booth and displays, and people could learn about the movement and what was happening. And many of the organisers and people involved would be there speaking to the community and giving out information. For example, Thomas Shoyama would come over from time to time and pre-war Powell Street was his neighbourhood – not his home physically, but I think it was the centre of the community for him...One year – this would have been, I guess, in the mid 80s – in those days the park had a little knoll on it with a bench on top and I was walking by and he was sitting on the bench, just looking out on the park, and smiling. I like to think that he was smiling at what he'd come back to – you know that this is the community that he remembered before the war, a vibrant community of all generations, activity, music, food, all that. That's what the space does. It's memory. It's remembering. It's taking you back. It's a reminder of what could have been had we not been dispersed” (Naomi, Interview, 6th Sept 2023)

In this way, then, the history of the N.I.P is more complex than one of displacement, liberal recognition, and urban redevelopment as it also created the wider conditions and landscape within which the Japanese Canadian redress movement could be imagined, organise, and expand – and for individuals to resist, and feel replaced in, the enclosed and alienated historical-geography of Oppenheimer Park. It is this nuanced, complicated tension between institutional recognition and the opportunities this opens for more meaningful grassroots expressions of redress which sits at the core of reconciliation politics and Indigenous and allied resistance in Vancouver today (Coulthard, 2007; Chapter 6).



Figure 16: Image of tree planting ceremony in celebration of centennial of first Japanese arrival in Vancouver, April, 1977 (Wakayama and Hoffman, 1992, p. 29).



Figure 17: Oppenheimer Park pictured in June 1977 during the First Powell Street Festival, following its redevelopment under the Neighbourhood Improvement Programme (Yee, 1977)

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter had two aims. Empirically, the chapter looked to situate the thesis in place and to tell a potted history of the Downtown Eastside from the lens of Oppenheimer Park. In turn, conceptually, the chapter looked to unpack the relationship between public space and the settler-colonial city, turning to understandings of property and enclosure, dispossession and spatial (b)ordering, and of racialisation and recognition, to do so.

Considering the production of public property, the chapter mobilised the conceptual framing of enclosure to consider how the gating and socio-legal transformation of Oppenheimer Park enabled the erasure of Indigenous and immigrant lifeways and common uses of the land. Placing theories of (new) enclosure in conversation Patrick Wolfe's (1999, 2006) framing of negative and positive assimilation, the chapter builds on and speaks back to David Harvey's (2003) theorisation of accumulation by dispossession by tracing how dispossession is enacted through the role of the (settler) State – instead of only economic actors – and targeted towards not just land and capital production but the socio-cultural realm (Midnight Notes Collective, 1990; Jeffrey, McFarlane and Vasudevan, 2012). It is suggested that the creation of the park both reflected and figured as a solution to a key paradox embedded within settler-colonial urbanism; namely, that while the newly emerging city relied upon consistent and growing access to immigrant labour for its economic success, its legitimacy as a new political authority depended on the simultaneous distancing and protection of White society from these 'risky', racialised, arrivals. To manage this insecurity, the creation of Oppenheimer Park and introduction of a municipal by-law re-coded this new public space as only for ordered, transient, and tame forms of 'leisure'. This created the wider conditions for 'productive' racialised labour and settled a societal and ideological understanding of acceptable behaviours in and uses of public space, situating the public/private division of urban space as a central to the creation and aesthetic of the settler-colonial city. This has implications for how we understand race in settler city and produced a (di)vision of the urban landscape which continues to enact violence on those who transgress these expectations today (Chapter 5, 6, and 7).

In the mid-20th century, the park was abandoned by municipal authorities and became an emblem of the wider decline and pathologisation of the neighbourhood and its diverse, racialised population. Denied basic services and infrastructure, surrounding residents embraced abandonment, and the park transformed into a site where messy, *unsettling* sociality took place: exchange economies, intimacy, homemaking, and a sense of collective ownership and belonging (themes this thesis develops further in Chapter 5). This set the ground for events in the late 1970s when the approval of an N.I.P to redevelop the Downtown Eastside saw Oppenheimer Park transformed once again. The embrace of Japanese Canadian motifs by municipal and park planners saw the park re-scripted to contingently secure Japanese Canadian identity and history and to promote economic development. As such, turning to the NIP reveals how multiple identities beyond the Indigenous/settler dichotomy have been subject to settler-colonial assimilation and liberal recognition, involving processes of cultural ‘dispossession, displacement, and domination’ for both Japanese-Canadians and the Indigenous, Black, Chinese and other ethnic minorities who have had long histories in the space (Mawani, 2009; Kelley, 2017; Simpson and Hugill, 2022, p. 1314). In doing so, this chapter contributes to theorisations of racialisation in the settler-city by demonstrating the ways in which the intimate, everyday geographies that make up the social fabric of life – moments of play, encounter, and sociality in public space – are shaped by political actors to perform and codify racial hierarchies (de Leeuw, 2016; Cabrera Pacheco, 2017; Radcliffe, 2018; Carpio, 2019). Public space, it shows, has been central to the aim of opening up the Downtown Eastside for colonial-capital – with the performed agreement of its residents.

While the predominant focus of this chapter has been on the evolving role of political actors and municipal planning in shaping public space, this chapter has also sought to gesture towards the ways in which the project of a settler-colonial society has never been fully achieved. Park users and surrounding residents have subverted – at different scales and levels of success – attempts to enclose and control the social fabric of Oppenheimer Park. In following chapters, the thesis turns to these activities, tracing how Oppenheimer Park and other public spaces in the Downtown Eastside remain sites of ongoing contestation between attempts by the municipal authorities to control and manage public space and the urban public, and the everyday activities of neighbourhood residents who assemble radical forms of survival, home, and rights in public space.

5 Living in Public Space: the Politics of Home/lessness in Oppenheimer and Crab Park

“and from this moment here in this community park
this park of great care where the streets and alleys
and hotel rooms of the downtown eastside
the killing fields of the downtown eastside
are transformed into living testimonies and memorials
of those who have brought us together today
in oppenheimer park where children play birds sing
young people create and seniors gather
these crosses are planted like seeds in our hearts
what will be the fruit these seeds bear?”
– excerpt from “a thousand crosses in Oppenheimer Park” by Bud Osborn, 1997
(reproduced in Boyd, Osborn and MacPherson, 2009)

5.1 ‘What will be the fruit these seeds bear?’

Despite the N.I.Ps design to revitalise the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood in the late 1970s, events in the decades that followed cemented the area’s geographic imagination as a marginal inner-city. The 1986 Vancouver Expo, combined with a Provincial push for deinstitutionalisation, led to an influx of drugs and former patients to the Downtown Eastside in the 1990s (Lupick, 2018). Homelessness in the neighbourhood doubled and use of IV heroin, crack cocaine, and methamphetamine surged (Boyd, 2017).

At the same time, the neighbourhood also became the birthplace of Canada’s harm reduction movement. In September 1997, the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU) was founded, led by Bud Osborn (Kerr *et al.*, 2006; Lupick, 2018). Bud Osborn (1947-2014) was a key advocate for the Downtown Eastside. His poetry and activism sought to challenge the stigmatisation and socio-spatial exclusion of Downtown Eastside residents by shedding light on the displacement and violence

caused by attempts to gentrify the neighbourhood (Blomley and McCann, 2014). Located just one block away from Oppenheimer Park, VANDU has grown to become one of North America's largest advocacy organizations for drug users – conducting research, providing frontline services, and pushing for harm-reduction based drug policies in British Columbia (Kerr *et al.*, 2006). The first meeting of VANDU took place in Oppenheimer Park in September 1997 as Antonio, a participant in these meetings and a prominent advocate for the Latin American community in the Downtown Eastside, described, Bud was:

“a poet and an idealist. He was always thinking about how society could be different. He was kind of a dreamer... When the meetings started at the park, there were so many people in a circle and Ann Livingstone and Bud Osborn were in the middle with a big paper and marker taking notes of all of the opinions of everyone. It was hundreds of pages of the ideas from the community of getting organised as drug users... VANDU was born as a result of those meetings at Oppenheimer Park” (Antonio, Interview, 26th September 2023)

Shortly after its founding, VANDU organised a direct action in Oppenheimer Park, planting a thousand crosses in its grounds to raise awareness of the exponential rates of hepatitis C, HIV, and overdose amongst drug users in the neighbourhood (Boyd, MacPherson and Osborn, 2018; Figure 18). The ‘Thousand Crosses’ event marked a pivotal moment in the history of drug policy in British Columbia, prompting the Vancouver-Richmond Health Board to declare a public health emergency and spurring momentum for a harm-reduction based response, which came to fruition in the Four Pillars report in 2001 (Boyd, 2017; Canadian Drug Policy Coalition, 2024). At the event, Bud staged a reading of his poem, “a thousand crosses in Oppenheimer Park”, painting a rich and intimate picture of the relationship between the neighbourhood and the park (Boyd, Osborn and MacPherson, 2009). In the excerpt above, Bud offers up the park as a space of difference and hope amid the wider necropolitical currents shaping the neighbourhood: a space of children and birds – of life and potential – nestled within the ‘killing fields’. Reflecting on the future of the neighbourhood and the legacy of the thousand crosses event, he asks: ‘what will be the fruit these seeds bear?’



Figure 18: The Killing Fields, 1997, photo by Elaine Brière (Boyd et al., 2018)

This chapter takes up Osborn's call to think with the geographies of public space in the neighbourhood and to consider how these spaces provide a particular (re)telling of its history. Drawing on geographical literature on public space, which has productively examined the relationship between public space, questions of access, and the public sphere, but has long overlooked grounded studies of how public spaces are actually used (Mitchell, 2017), the chapter asks not only *who*, but *what*, is public space for, for the residents of the Downtown Eastside, and what does this tell us about the relationship between home, public space, and the settler-colonial city? To reflect on these questions, the chapter draws on participant observation and interview data collected in the summer of 2023. To take seriously the perspectives of those on-the-ground, in-vivo codes, extended participant quotes, and rich descriptions of everyday life are foregrounded in the analytical discussion.

Having set out the colonial contingency of the public/private divide in Chapter 4, the chapter mobilises literature on the critical geographies of home as a means through which to think beyond this binary and to consider the relationship between the 'unruly' and unusual uses of public space taking place in the Downtown Eastside and the settler-colonial city. Taking up these literatures in conversation, the chapter contends that everyday users of Oppenheimer and Crab Park make home in public space, extending

the materialities, practices, and affective relations of home beyond formal housing. Approaching this domestication of public space from the lens of the settler-colonial city enables a reflection on the kinds of politics and lives assembled in these spaces, as well as their embeddedness in the wider political economy of ‘home(lessness)’ in the neighbourhood and the city (Lancione, 2023). Building on this analysis, the thesis offers an interpretation of homemaking not only as a way of living differently but as a series of practices which resist and *unsettle* normative expectations of (public and private) space in the settler-colonial city.

5.2 Home, domicile, and the settler-colonial city

Since the turn of the century, feminist geographers have worked to rethink, blur, and erode the divide between the public and the private, and the social and political (Hyndman, 2004; Brickell, 2012a). While the interaction between settler-colonialism and home was considered in early literature on the critical geographies of home – in their early discussion of ‘domicide’, Canadian Geographers Porteous and Smith outline settler-colonialism and the forced dispossession and displacement of Indigenous peoples from their homelands as an extreme form of “the deliberate destruction of home done by human agency in the pursuit of specific goals” – the intersection between these literatures remains underexplored (Porteous and Smith, 2001, p. 12). Recent work begins to rectify this. Positioning settler-colonialism as a project of homemaking, Handel and Kotef (2023) argue that, in ‘com[ing] to stay’, the destruction and replacement of the material and metaphorical homes of Indigenous communities is a critical element of the settler-colonial project. They argue that

"to tell the story of settler-colonialism is accordingly to tell the story of homes that are themselves tools of destruction – homes that have been constructed on the ruins of others' homes. It is to tell the story of those ruined homes – but in a way that insists to see beyond the mere act of destruction, to see into the life of ruin, as well as the life of all that remains" (Handel and Kotef, 2023, p. 158)

Thus, settler replacement involve(d/s) not just the destruction of material housing, but a wider sense of place, attachment, and belonging – the affects, practices, and relations which become associated with a sense of home (Blunt and Dowling, 2006).

Taking up this conceptual framework, Ram and Handel (2024) argue that the (ongoing) process of resettlement is characterised by ‘violent dwelling’ – the process of inflicting material, psychological and future suffering on those displaced. Indeed, the violence of settler-homemaking extends beyond the physical destruction of homes as it involves the conceptual reframing and resettling of what counts as home – namely, the normative White imagined geography of home perceived “solely as a space of retreat from the public sphere into the safety of the private self” and as a space of formal housing, heteronormative relations, the nuclear family, and boundaried gender roles (Nowicki, 2014, p. 787). Thus, by shifting the criteria for what counts as ‘home’, settler replacement sets the conditions under which these spaces and relations are protected in the law, as well as the social, political, and moral geographies which come to surround productions of home which do not fit neatly into this bucket – those who do not comply. By redefining what counts as home, settler-colonialism begins to shift what, and who, counts as ‘homeless’ and are, in turn, at risk of being subject to a punitive series of public order laws and homelessness governance strategies (Mitchell, 1997; Hennigan, 2017).

Yet, "if settler-colonialism works through the home – both as a symbolic order and as a concrete housing dispositive – it should not be a surprise to discover that homes are also an important tool of resistance to the very same regime" (Handel and Kotef, 2023, p. 164). Speaking back to this landscape, this chapter explores the ways in which Downtown Eastside residents make home in public space in ways that reveal, resist, and rework the wider domicidal geographies of the neighbourhood and, in turn, the settler-colonial city. Moreover, the chapter argues that the (re)production of home into public space occurs on a continuum from the creation of material homes in the form of makeshift shelter and encampments through to a wider networking of home, where neighbourhood residents might return to their SRO rooms or shelters to sleep but spend the rest of their lives in public space.

a. Producing home, for now

The clearest expansion of the material geographies of home into public space was at the Crab encampment. Shelters at the encampment, constructed using a range of reappropriated fabrics and materials – such as camping tents, plywood, metal fencing,

and discarded construction materials – were expansive, elaborate, and personalised (Figure 19). Some were multi-storied (Field Diary, October 4th 2023), many had front and back-yards (Field diary, July 6th 2023), others were painted and adorned, both inside and out (Figures 20, 21, 22, and 23), and most were designed to reproduce the distinct spaces of a ‘normal’ home, with separate living/hosting, sleeping, and storage spaces (Figures 20, 21, 22, and 23). Opportunistically and creatively patched together, these shelters represent more than make-do spaces of survival, but attempts to build homes (Speer, 2017). Outfitted with the trappings of safety and comfort, furniture, and places to store belongings, they enabled those living inside to build intimate relationships (Field Diary, 4th August 2023), host family/friends (Richard, Interview, 16th August 2023), and experience moments of privacy (Jason, Interview, 16th August 2023).



Figure 19: The front yard of a shelter at the Crab encampment, constructed with a metal fence previously used to surround the encampment and separate it from the rest of the park (Hills, 2023c, 1st August 2023)



Figures 20,21,22,23: Images of a makeshift home in the Crab encampment. This shelter was set up by those in the encampment for use as a transitory space for people seeking short-term refuge at Crab. It is made up of multiple connected spaces, including a separate bedroom, living room, and closet/storage space. The second image is of the hand painted walls of the ‘living room’. At the time these images were taken, nobody was inhabiting the space and photographs were taken with the permission of a Crab resident (Hills 2023d; Hills 2023e; Hills 2023f; Hills 2023g; 4th Oct 2023)

By the summer of 2023, many of the encampment residents had lived in the park for over two years and, in that time, had furnished and expanded their homes. Jason, for example, joined the camp in 2021 having previously camped outdoors in other public spaces:

“I’ve lived all over Vancouver in the downtown core. I’ve lived under the Burrard bridge, under the Shaw cable building, under many bridges, actually, and pretty much every park in the city. And one theme that seems to be ongoing is park rangers and cops chasing you away from where you live or lay your head. And they do that by throwing out your personal belongings. They do it by disrespecting you. The routine goes like this, you set up camp at dusk. And then at dawn you have to tear down. Seven o’clock in the morning comes around

pretty quick when you're homeless. You can't set up until nine o'clock at night. So, you don't really have time to relax... All you're doing is falling asleep and then back to the shopping cart, pushing it around everywhere. Yeah, well, I don't miss them days” (Interview, 16th August 2023)

In his interview, Jason described the ability to ‘relax’, sleep in comfort on a mattress, collect and display his belongings, and personalise his shelter as central to a new sense of stability and purpose in his life. Thus, as Geographer Jesse Speer found in the context of Fresno, encampment residents, like Jason, would strategically appropriate public space, and public infrastructure, such as park water taps (Rider Interview, 14th August 2023) and bathrooms (Fiona Interview, 13th August 2023), to produce homely spaces of ‘protection, comfort and survival’ (Speer, 2017, p.523).

However, Crab residents also tended to couch discussion of their homes with the understanding that this stability was transient and precarious, both because of the ever-present risk of being ‘evicted’ by park rangers (a reality which materialised in April 2024, see Chapter 7) and because the camp represented a home from which they envisioned and sought to build a future elsewhere. As Kerry, another long-term resident of the camp who lived there with her partner, described: “the camp is stepping stone for us to find a way to move on” (Kerry, Interview, 4th August, 2023). Jason described it in a similar way:

“we just don't know how to live properly. In an indoor setting. This here gives us an opportunity. And as a project, we're trying to take over this parking lot over here. And, yeah, create tiny homes where you build your own home. And I think that's gonna give people the idea of ownership. You know, like, this is mine, I built it. And it gives them the chance to look after it properly because they put something into it” (Interview, 16th August 2023)

Here, Jason describes the encampment as a space for himself and other camp residents to practice and prefigure making home – a form of embodying in the present one’s vision for the future (Jeffrey and Dyson, 2021). Like Kerry, he sees living in the encampment as the starting point on a pathway towards other material settings of home, first in the form of a tiny home and then ‘indoors’. Importantly, for Jason, and in contrast with the wider domestic geographies in the neighbourhood, these future homes are his ‘own’. While he narrates this pathway as one necessitated by a personal

deficiency – not knowing how to live ‘properly’ ‘in an indoor setting’ – it is pertinent to consider the structural reasons that Jason has struggled to find a home elsewhere, emerging from jail into street homelessness, and cycling in and out of Vancouver’s overcrowded shelter system before finding stability at the camp (Jason Interview, 16th August 2023). While Jason perceives this as a personal failing, there is a much wider and longer political economy of home-(un)making at stake here (discussed further below).

This suspended temporality resonated across interviews with camp residents. Both Brent and Drew, Crab residents who live between the encampment and supportive housing units nearby, narrated their experience of living in and contributing to the functioning of the encampment as part of how they “earned” their current housing (Brent Interview, 19th July 2023; Drew Interview, 2nd August 2023). In part, this reflects the reality of Vancouver’s social housing allocation process; both Brent and Drew had been part of the previous Strathcona encampment where, as part of the decampment process, residents had been offered spaces in supportive and social housing units, with the City, Province, and Federal Government funding the purchase of additional buildings to enable this (McElroy, 2021; Kennedy Stewart, Interview, 11th July 2023). Further, interviews with social workers and B.C. housing employees revealed that, as encampments provide a centralised location for outreach workers to meet and follow up with people who are often otherwise hard to track down, residents are sometimes bumped up the social housing waiting list (B.C. Housing Employee Interview, 24th August 2023). As of September 2023, there were nearly 19,000 households waiting for social housing in the Metro Vancouver region – an increase of 27% from the previous year (Daair, 2024).

Yet, despite having access to formal housing units, both Brent and Drew maintain a shelter at the camp. When asked why, Drew described his shelter as a place where he could find solace from his supportive housing accommodation, where he felt de-humanised, ostracised, and surveyed. He explained:

“It goes all the way down to like when the person at my building hands me an orange or an apple like *this* [motions awkwardly with his hands], because they don't want to touch me at the same time...there's no progression for these people [tenants in his building]. It's a death sentence in a lot of ways. They're

threatening us at my building now for eviction if you put the garbage in the hallway, which we've always done – there are no receptacles in the building. And they're threatening eviction on the people's doors, all of the 96 doors. These are people writing these notes to people that have mental health problems in a mental health building” (Interview, 2nd August 2023)

Describing an ongoing conflict with building staff over an elevator which had been broken for months, Drew highlighted the lack of accountability to tenants and how this particular issue was reflective of a wider sense of feeling trapped in the building:

“because the ventilation doesn't work. There's no air and all the diseases and all the things that people breathe out. This is something that I think should be legally taken up. Why should the windows have to be like that [bolted shut]? Why would it be that I can't breathe? Why would there be no air coming out of the vents? And then why would you put the maximum temperature in my room to 71 and I have no heat. That's 12 degrees in the winter in a 10-year-old building? And why do my complaints go nowhere? Why does the CEO, who said he's gonna come to building and never does, have the answering machine of the previous CEO still on it when I call it? It is negligence and people need to be culpable” (Interview, 2nd August 2023)

Articulate, critical, and reflective, Drew intersperses his commentary on building standards, staff attitudes, stringent rules, and the threat of unlawful eviction with a wider sense of alienation from the affective geographies of attachment, stability, autonomy, and home in his supportive housing unit. For Drew, his room represents a space from which he has no future (“no progression”), and where he is in a state of constant insecurity and conflict, living in anticipation of displacement in the form of eviction or fire (St. Denis, 2022, 2023). By networking his sense and spatialities of home between the supported accommodation and the camp, Drew reworks – or works around – this ‘domicidal’ space and builds a sense of freedom and hope for home otherwise, elsewhere (Nowicki, 2014, section 5.2.b below).

In Oppenheimer Park, most of the regular park goers also have ‘formal’ accommodation in the surrounding SROs and supportive housing units yet many would spend almost all their waking hours at the park. By the time I’d arrive in the mornings, the regular crowd was almost always already there, setting up their ‘patches’ of the park with chairs and tables, unpacking their belongings, and eating breakfast (Field diary, 17th July 2023).

They would prepare and eat all their meals at the park, spend their days hanging out with others, charge their electronic devices in the Fieldhouse or with small solar panels, access the public bathrooms, and even have mail delivered to the Fieldhouse (Field diary entries, 27th July 2023; 1st August 2023; 17th August 2023; 30th August 2023). This routine was established not over months, but years – some of the park users had been inhabiting Oppenheimer Park since the late 1980s (Kellie, Interview, 17th August 2023; Suzie, Interview, 24th August 2023).

When asked about these activities during interviews, it became clear that park regulars used the park space and infrastructure to expand their material and affective geographies of home. Park users would often jump, without prompting, to describing the park in the language of home – “we treat it like our home because for a lot of us it is our home” (Phil, Interview, 31st August 2023). For Gladys, a mixed-race urban Indigenous and Chinese woman in her 70s, and a regular at the park since 1987, treating the park as part of her domestic space had a personal history. Gladys grew up opposite Oppenheimer Park in the 1950s, living in a small bedsit above a grocery on Powell Street. Reflecting on her childhood, she recounted how the living space above the shop was too small for her family and so they would use Oppenheimer Park as a material extension of their home:

“It used to be a vegetable stand and we lived upstairs. It wasn't big – my dad told me because I don't remember, I was really little. But my dad told me it was like two rooms and a bathroom. We'd come and have our tea out here, because we couldn't have company in there. It was like our bedroom or playroom for the kids” (Interview, 22nd September 2023)

Nearly 50 years later and housed in an SRO nearby, Gladys continues to use Oppenheimer as part of her home:

“This is like my living room almost. I like to meet my friends here. I like to party here. And. Yeah. It's a place where you can come and meet somebody without... Oh, it's so nice not having to be inside” (Interview, 22nd September 2023)

Though most park users, like Gladys, have formal housing, others fall under typical categorisations of ‘homeless’, relying on an available bed in one of the nearby shelters.

Kamal, for example, regularly slept overnight in the park when he missed the shelter cut-off time (Field diary, 11th August 2023). When this happened, his regular bed would be turned over to somebody else and he would have to wait, potentially for weeks, for another to come free. When asked why he didn't try to get a bed at another shelter, Kamal explained that the shelter he was at was safe, clean, and relatively drug free¹⁸ and that he would prefer to sleep in the park than in other shelters (Interview, 23rd August 2023). Kamal even looked forward to the relative freedom of sleeping in the park – he could enjoy the long summer evenings, wake up later, and breathe “clean air” (Interview, 23rd August 2023). Thus, as in Crab, park users selectively lived in the public space as a way of asserting control, choice, and autonomy over their domestic life and bodies – including exposure to substances. This was not only an accepted but a normalised and historically situated use of the space, as Jaiden, a member of the Fieldhouse staff, aptly put it: these spaces are their “own living entitles...[which] people draw on in different ways” (Interview, 31st August 2023) – here, to rework, reproduce, and resist the domestic spaces of the surrounding neighbourhood.

b. ‘The SRO looms large’

As such, in order to fully understand the reasons why neighbourhood residents extend their geographies of home into public space – and the implications of this for the geographies of home and of public space in the settler-colonial city – a wider reflection on the political economy of shelter and housing in the neighbourhood is needed.

The Downtown Eastside neighbourhood is one where discourses of uninhabitability and domicide – death, crime, filth, and dereliction – have long dominated and where residents – both ‘housed’ and ‘houseless’ – live on the margins of home (Robertson, 2007; Proudfoot, 2011; Liu and Blomley, 2012; Ivsins *et al.*, 2019; Kruger, 2019). As Aaron, a member of staff at VANDU, commented during our interview, the “geography of the SRO looms large in this conversation” (Interview, 26th September 2023). Today, approximately 4,500 Downtown Eastside residents are tenants of the 100 privately owned Single Room Occupancy buildings in the neighbourhood, living in single room

¹⁸ While many shelters have no use policies, the ability of shelter staff to enforce this is often limited and many participants spoke of open substance use in shelter spaces (Brent, Interview, 19th July 2023; Athena, Interview, 4th Aug 2023; Heather, Interview, 24th Sept 2023; James, Interview, 29th Aug 2023)

units with shared kitchen and washroom facilities (Fleming *et al.*, 2019; Masuda and the Right to Remain Research Collective, 2023). Often poorly maintained ex-boarding houses, the units are notoriously poxy, unclean, bug and rat-infested, poorly ventilated, and unsafe (Blomley and The Right to Remain Collective, 2021; Masuda and the Right to Remain Research Collective, 2023). In 2022, a string of fires in SRO buildings, which led to a number of deaths and the long-term displacement of tenants, brought to light these conditions, as well as the wider failures of SRO landlords and staff to adhere to building health and safety codes, and of the Provincial and Municipal governments to hold the relevant building owners and operators accountable (St. Denis, 2022, 2023; Singh Kelsall *et al.*, 2023). SROs are also known to have stringent tenant policies, set and capriciously enforced by staff, on guests, pets, belongings, and neighbourly conduct (Herb, Interview, 30th Aug 2023; George, Interview, 8th Sept 2023). Yet, at the same time, they are spaces in which domestic violence, conflict and substance use is rife, and where residents are subject to the threat of eviction if they speak out (Pedersen and Jacobs, 2020; Blomley and The Right to Remain Collective, 2021). SRO residents make home in a landscape of legal and embodied precarity, as they have both limited recourse to the law and are, at the same time, those most subject to its will and potential for harm (Blomley and The Right to Remain Collective, 2021). Set against this backdrop, it was unsurprising when Herb, an urban Indigenous resident and advocate of the neighbourhood, described why he spent time in Oppenheimer Park:

“It's like a living room...[you] can meet friends without being in an overly hot or overly cold room. Some [SRO] places have ID checks so you can't get in if you don't have ID. Some places have outright guest bans, like a total blanket ban, or there are others where some people, you know, they get a little bit tipsy in a [SRO] hotel and the manager just says they don't like them and that friend cannot visit anymore, or their gonna call the cops. So it's a place where you don't need ID. You can come here for free. You know, there's coffee and water here every day. It's a place to kind of just chill” (Herb, Interview, 30th Aug 2023)

The SRO is also a uniquely settler-colonial articulation of (non)home (Masuda and the Right to Remain Research Collective, 2023). Most of the contemporary SRO stock was built at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century as boarding houses for the transient resource workers who arrived in Vancouver to take up work – many of whom were Chinese, Japanese and South Asian (Chapter 4). As the racial boundaries of Vancouver hardened, the SRO stock surrounding Oppenheimer Park became ghettoised

and subject to a series of municipal by-laws designed to contain the public health risk they, and their racialised occupants, posed to the rest of the city (Masuda and the Right to Remain Research Collective, 2023). At the same time as effectively ‘containing’ and ‘cordoning off’ the neighbourhood, the by-laws also enabled the stringent surveillance and regulation of those living in boarding houses, often deemed ‘unhealthy’ and below (White) standards of ‘habitability’ – a condition which was imbued with racialised and cultural expectations given that, prior to internment in 1941, nearly 50% of licences for lodging houses in the area were held by Japanese-Canadians (Stanger-Ross, Blomley and Collective, 2017; Masuda and the Right to Remain Research Collective, 2023). Following the Japanese Canadian internment, and as the neighbourhood declined in the 50s and 60s, the SRO stock was either sold into private ownership or transformed into low-income social, and now, supportive housing. In 2013, a study found that SRO tenants are predominantly male (77%) and that 23% identify as Indigenous (Robertson, 2007; BCMJ, 2013; Vila-Rodriguez *et al.*, 2013). Thus, the very materialities of SRO units – and the twin forces of abandonment and surveillance which come to bear on them today – have their roots in the colonial-capitalist political economy of re-settlement, as evidence of the scale and exclusionary treatment of the cheap, racialised labour mobilised to actively re-settle British Columbia (Chapter 4).

In 2017, the City of Vancouver expanded their offering of supportive housing under the *Rapid Response to Homelessness* framework (Manson and Fast, 2024). Supportive housing refers to accommodation, most often managed by non-profit organisations, which provides wrap-around services – meals, laundry, and life-skills, social and recreational programming – for ‘vulnerable’ tenants, including youth, ex-offenders, or individuals with mental and physical health conditions, including substance dependency (Manson and Fast, 2024). As of the summer of 2024, there were approximately 2,500 supportive housing units in Vancouver, with a further 57 supportive homes committed to construction in the Downtown Eastside (BC Housing, 2024). In these buildings, tenancy agreements are subject to additional conditions including tenants’ successful participation in social programming provided by the non-profit, a condition which, scholars have argued, mobilises institutional forms of care to police, schedule, confine, and control the lives of residents (Fast and Cunningham, 2018; Blomley and The Right to Remain Collective, 2021; Singh Kelsall *et al.*, 2023). As Aaron, explained during our interview, the rise of supportive housing as a neoliberal approach to social housing –

whereby management is devolved to non-profits – has implications for the felt geographies of home in the neighbourhood:

“The withdrawal of, or sort of the absence of, like, actual public housing being built in Canada and the emergence of the nonprofit running the SRO as supportive housing, as the housing crisis worsens, [and] as shelters are full during the Covid-19 pandemic kind of necessitates that if people want any kind of socialisation, they cannot do it where they reside, if they reside anywhere at all. People are going to go outside, they’re going to go to the sidewalk, they’re going to go to the park bench... this is a sector that the state has just completely left, right? And, like, to the extent that it is involved, it’s to pass off contracts to nonprofits” (Aaron, Interview, 26th September 2023)

Here, he argues, the roll-back of state responsibility, has led to the creation of unhomely and ‘unsocial’ spaces where non-profits uphold and enforce a particular vision of home and homely conduct (Peck and Tickell, 2002; Hackworth, 2019). Indeed, supportive housing units, as sterile spaces of care, cleanliness, protection, and order, promote stringent, White expectations of domestic space. For those who don’t fit or perform to these social and legal expectations of homely behaviours, supportive housing becomes domicidal.

The intersection between municipal neoliberalism and domicile also characterises Vancouver’s emergency shelter system, which participants presented as frequently overcrowded, uncompassionate, and unsafe (Kamal, Interview, 23rd August 2023; Cindy, Interview, 3rd October 2023; Field Diary, 1st October 2023; Flynn, 2024). Long recognised as spaces of social control, most shelters in the Downtown Eastside have also been contracted out to non-profit organisations who set rules and expectations for the number and kinds of belongings that people may own, and the behaviours and schedules they must adhere to (Singh Kelsall *et al.*, 2023; Thompson, 2023; Flynn, 2024b). Many shelters have no pets and partner rules, forcing individuals to choose between a place to sleep and their family (Heather, Interview, 24th Sept 2023). Given the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in Vancouver’s homeless and precariously housed population, these spaces of control and (un)housing disproportionately come to bear on urban Indigenous residents.

Suzie, an Indigenous woman in her 60s who has been a regular user of Oppenheimer Park since she was 14, recounted being sexually and physically abused in a nearby shelter, and, as a result, her preference to sleep in the park as she navigated being locked out of her SRO by her landlord (Interview, 24th August 2023). When she was able to return to her SRO unit later in the summer, she quickly returned to sleeping in the park, saying that her new room “stank” and that her neighbour had overdosed and died during her first night back (Field Diary, 18th September 2023). When situated alongside the exponential growth of a financialised urban housing market, it becomes clear that residents of the neighbourhood living on welfare cheques, like Suzie, are unable and, in part, unwilling to move away from the neighbourhood they have long called home.

Caught up in this web of domidical geographies, Downtown Eastside residents such as Suzie:

“experience shelters as spaces of violence and crime, requiring a constant vigilance, where programs and meals are often linked to a religious agenda that they experience as insulting or alienating. Single-room occupancy hotels are described as places of surveillance with monthly cleaning inspections and places where an active drug culture persists... In response to these environmental factors, some homeless individuals opt to camp in public urban green spaces precisely because, in these spaces, they can achieve aspects of *being at home*, *having a home* and *sharing a home*. Their decision to camp outside is not an absolute preference; rather, it is a choice made relative to the viability of all other options” (Sarah Dooling, 2009, p. 627, emphasis added).

Thus, when formally ‘housed’ in an SRO and when ‘houseless’, most Downtown Eastside residents experience corporeal, legal, and affective insecurity – an unmaking of home.¹⁹ These carceral domestic geographies – oriented toward “custody and containment” (Boyd and Kerr, 2015, p.529) – are the intimate manifestation of a series of wider settler-colonial and neoliberal political economies, stemming from the period of initial settlement at the turn of the 20th century through to today (Masuda and the Right to Remain Research Collective, 2023). In an everyday reworking of and resistance to these wider geographies, Crab and Oppenheimer Park users make home in the public spaces in the neighbourhood, producing a sense of safety and autonomy and

¹⁹ Recognition of this dynamic by residents of the neighborhood led to a local campaign to get SRO tenants categorized as ‘homeless’ by the City of Vancouver (Chris Livingstone, Interview, 27th July 2023).

stretching the boundaries of home(lessness) both materially and ontologically into the wider urban landscape. Such ‘active dwelling’ poses both a challenge to the settled meaning of home in the city and the normative, White imagined geography of urban space as neatly divided into private and public property, each with their own assumed populations, practices, and relations (Harris, 1993; Ram and Handel, 2024). As such, it figures a form of embodied resistance in the settler-colonial city – a notion which will be explored further below and in the following chapter in the case of Crab Park (Chapter 6).

5.3 Unsettling public space in the settler-colonial city

In the process of making home in public space residents of the neighbourhood also unsettle what public space *is* and *is for*. This section explores this dynamic and the practices, relations, and materialities which are produced in urban public space as a result of these recast geographies of home. It argues that these reshape normative expectations of public space, moving from a space of controlled encounter to one of intimacy and care, from a reflection of the democratic ‘public’ to a space where demands extend beyond the State, and from a space with a singular ‘public’ to spaces with micro-geographies and publics – ‘niches’ – that hold different practices and actors of attachment.

a. Intimacy and care

A long-held tenet of urban planning has been the curation of social encounters in public space to encourage positive and orderly interactions – a marker of the modern urban experience and of the settler-colonial relationship to public space, as the previous chapter outlined (Mitchell, 1995; Zukin, 1995; Low and Smith, 2013; Chapter 4). This vision has carried through various urban movements, from early visions of urban parks as spaces from which to foster an orderly leisure class sensibility and manage public health, through to the present revisioning of urban public space in line with the demands of sustainable development and urban well-being (Marne, 2001; Birge-Liberman, 2010; Angelo, 2019; Anguelovski *et al.*, 2019; Chapter 1). The expansion of home into public space – and the intimate practices of care which come with this – begins to unsettle this curated expectation (Jacobs and Wiens, 2023).

Late in the summer of 2023, a Métis²⁰ grandmother and her granddaughter arrived at Oppenheimer Park. It soon transpired that they were relatives of one of the regular park users and that, having fled domestic violence, they had travelled from another province and were now living in an RV parked up on a road adjacent to the park. The regular crowd of park users warmly welcomed the new family, many pleased to see a child in the park, providing support in the form of food, clothing, childcare, and advice on how to navigate the density of social services in the neighbourhood – the best places to go for meal tickets, and who to speak to access housing and education services (18th September 2023).²¹ Their arrival sparked a series of conversations with park users, who spoke with deep empathy for the family. Pepe, an Oppenheimer regular since the early 2000s who has lived between his van and the park for the past two years, saw his own story reflected in theirs:

“this is how we all start out.... the park is more like a refuge. When you're feeling down and when you have no place to go. Open arms. Not only for me, but for everybody... You go there and then slowly start getting to know people, start making friends with some of them. Then after a while you become, like, comfortable with them. And then you start taking a little *niche* in the park, and then after that, maybe less than a week, now you find your place in it and after that you feel like family” (Interview, 23rd August 2023)

Reflecting on his own experience of arriving in Canada in the late 1980s as a refugee from El Salvador with no English language skills, Pepe recounts how he was placed by immigration officials on a bus at the border and sent to Vancouver. Arriving in the middle of a wet night, Pepe had no choice but to sleep rough in front of the Vancouver Art Museum. The following day:

“I wake up and I was looking for a place to eat. I was so hungry and I went to the pizza places that were there. But they don't understand what I was saying. After a while they shooed me out. So I kept moving and I got to a church. And I asked the father that I was hungry. He makes me a sandwich and gives me some water. And then he sent me to Oppenheimer Park. He said at Oppenheimer I could get a full meal. So I started walking. Using the address that he gives me I got to Oppenheimer. But at that time, I remember there used to be only a trailer.

²⁰ Métis are Indigenous peoples who are of mixed First Nations and European ancestry.

²¹ Vancouver's Downtown Eastside has a wide-range of social services, made up of shelters, food banks, clinics, harm-reduction services, and churches. This infrastructure emerged to service 'Skid Row' and expanded with the public health crises of the late 1990s (Boyd, Osborn and MacPherson, 2009; Lupick, 2018).

And I asked the guy for something to eat. And he makes me a sandwich. Young hippie guy. And I think they give me an orange or a banana. And I sat down – I think there were tables like this [motions to the long bench tables in the café] and I sat and ate. And then other people came in. With these guys, I don't need to speak English at all. I don't need to speak any English or any other language. It's just the moment that I was there, that guy knew that I was hungry and I wanted something to eat and he fed me. And then after that I stayed there for a little while” (Interview, 23rd August 2023)

Here, Pepe reveals a long history of welcome and care in the park, which stretches back into the 80s and beyond (Chapter 4). By drawing a parallel between his own experience of arriving in Vancouver and the arrival of the new family, he reflects a vision of the park as a ‘refuge’, where individuals in need receive not just immediate support but enter into a space where the normalised practice is to remain and build intimate relations with others; to become friends, feel a sense of attachment and belonging, and end up ‘family’ (Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Blunt, Ebbensgaard and Sheringham, 2021). Implicit in this story is a sense of solidarity built from shared experiences of violence and forced displacement, whether as a refugee or from domestic abuse, which connects the park public. This theme carried across other interviews. Vern, an Indigenous man who grew up in the United States, explained that:

“the one thing about this place it’s open to everybody. Everyone’s welcome. No one gets pushed out...Everyone’s got a story, right? Why they ended up here, you know” (Interview, 20th August 2023)

Similarly, Suzie, talking about her Oppenheimer ‘family’, had this to say about what brought them together:

Suzie: “Family is we take care of each other, feed each other, clothe each other, help each other, right? I used to make homebrew right. Yeah. We used to make kegs and kegs of it. We're all alcoholics. Right? Yeah. I'd bring it here. Put in the middle of the circle. And everybody got a cup. You were only allowed one cup at a time. These are my people man, my family. They may be a little bit different, bend out of shape and you know, whatever. But they are still my family”

Tiger: “What makes them your family?”

Suzie: “Because we're all going through the same thing. We've been hurt, we cry. We lost our family and lost our kids. We've been abused and reused, abused and misused. Some people just hurt too much to change. Even when they change, they still lose. No matter how hard they try. I feel like it's my family. It's where I feel at home and it's been my home since I was 14” (Interview, 24th August 2023)

A park regular for nearly 40 years, Suzie is a central figure at Oppenheimer Park and has a wide network of ‘family’ around her who are both supported by her and support her (Field Diary, 11th August 2023). Suzie’s alcohol dependency means that she often struggles to take care of herself in the evenings, and past experiences of domestic and sexual abuse have led to an aversion to indoor spaces, including public transport, her small SRO room, and the local shelters (Field Diary, 12th August 2023; Suzie, Interview, 24th August 2023). Recognising this, park regulars surround Suzie in a web of care which keeps her alive and well. Her ‘street family’ support her by monitoring how much she drinks and fetching her water, by accompanying her to hospital when necessary, and wrapping her up in blankets so she is not cold when sleeping outside (Field Diary entries, 17th August 2023; 31st August 2023). To make sure she is safe at night, members of her family take turns sleeping outside next to her:

“I got Ricky, Mani, and Alex every night, man. They make up my perimeter... I have a goose that sleeps on that side, and a crow that sleeps on the other side. Every night” (Suzie, Interview, 24th Aug 2023).

These forms of intimacy run alongside and beyond the institutional structures of care at the park, provided by the Fieldhouse staff, and in the wider neighbourhood (Arvidson, 2015). While regulars of Oppenheimer Park do selectively engage with these sites, the everyday relations in these spaces are distinct. Instead of looking to reduce Suzie’s alcohol consumption or to encourage her into formal housing, her park family provide non-medicalised support for her substance dependency and seek to affirm and improve the homemaking practices autonomously chosen by her (Sedore, EIDGE and Bailey, 2023). As a form of resistance in the settler-colonial city, these intimate relations and practices allow Suzie, and the new grandmother and granddaughter, to survive in the interstices of the wider domicidal geographies of the neighbourhood and to refuse and exceed the structures of the settler-colonial city – to exert autonomy over when, where,

and how they engage with non-profits and city-run spaces by having another option (Simpson, 2014a).

Such practices of intimacy and connective relations also extended to the more-than-human ‘others’ of both Crab and Oppenheimer Park. In Oppenheimer, though park inhabitants would often comment on the state of the grounds – plagued with drainage issues and geese faeces during the summer – with dismay (Kamal, Interview, 23rd August 2023; Field Diary, 21st September 2023), they also saw the grounds as something more than just a backdrop to their daily activities and social relations; instead, as part of their making. As Vern commented:

“I almost look at *her* [the park] as an entity. Like she's alive. You know what I mean? ...Her beating heart are the geese and the animals. Don't you think? I think that's what makes this different from other places” (Interview, 20th August 2023)

Here, Vern describes an intimate relationship between himself and the urban natures of Oppenheimer Park. Relating to the park grounds as ‘her’, he describes an energy emanating from the ‘beating heart’ of the park – the geese, kittens, dogs, and bunnies that run free – which differentiates the space from other public parks. There is a sense here of a public space that is uncontrollably overflowing with life in a way that enables such unexpected, unusual and intimate relations to emerge.

In their 2019 intervention on property in the settler-colonial city, Blatman-Thomas and Porter put forward the potential of a return to land in as a means of exceeding the structures of settler-colonialism. Land is distinct from property, they argue, in that the existence of the land and of relationships to land which exceed possession and objectification remain within and amongst the settler-colonial grid (Blatman-Thomas and Porter, 2019). By rekindling a sense of connection and reciprocity for the more-than-human natures of the park, Vern engages an understanding of the park’s land beyond its presumed shape and uses as public property and connected to Indigenous understandings of nature. Thus, for Vern, the park is, at once, a space of settler-possession (Chapter 4) and of grounded, quiet Indigeneity.

Residents of Crab Park, too, tended to the park grounds. Encampment residents regularly ‘swept’ the park grounds for needles, other drug-related paraphernalia, and litter, and were invested in maintaining the state of nature in the park (Field Diary, 3rd August 2023). For example, the camp had clear rules around respecting the biodiverse marshland and line of recently planted saplings located immediately next to the encampment (Field diary, 6th July 2023). During our interview, Brent spoke to the reasons for this:

“there was going to be a children’s festival here [at Crab] and I met up with the volunteers and co-ordinators of the festival and we discussed the children festival and our boundaries with that... they also came to me and they said ‘you know what, I just want to you know, like this is the nicest that we’ve ever seen this park’ and I’m like ‘oh really’ and [they said] ‘yeah, ... we’ve been down here for years and we have never seen that park like this this clean’. So, I explained to them that we have run a programme in here where we walk around the park and pick up all the cans, needles, and garbage and we clean this park up. And we do that still today. And it’s been going strong since day one. We respect the park that we’re in” (Interview, 19th August 2023)

For Brent, tending to and caring for the park was a way to contest wider tropes which position the encamped park grounds as ‘uninhabitable’, and thus paint drug users and homeless individuals as ‘unclean’ and ‘polluting’, an all too common discourse which draws on wider imaginations of the homeless as irresponsible urban ‘denizens’ unwilling to perform basic civic acts (Rose, 2017; Woods, 2019). Here, Brent enlists acts of caring for the park grounds as a way of resisting this perception and producing an alternative imagination of camp residents as engaged and deserving urban citizens, a positionality which features as part of the camp’s wider goal to be recognised both legally and politically as a necessary part of Vancouver’s housing landscape (Chapter 6).

With this in mind, however, it is important to avoid romanticising these caring spaces and relations. Care is imbued with power. Depending on who is deemed worthy of care, what kinds of care are prioritised, and who takes on this labour, care can be uneven (Middleton and Samanani, 2021), place burdens on certain – often feminised and structurally vulnerable – individuals (Longstaffe, 2021), and mask and reproduce relations of violence (Power and Williams, 2020). This dynamic became clear during an

interview in Crab Park where one participant described one example of care in the park as the unspoken rule that those in the camp

“just like don't talk to cops and like, fuck the police...Like there's like really basic, like systems of care that are in place that are, like, intrinsically understood” (Michelle Interview, 20th September 2023).

This understanding is situated within local anti-policing sentiment, with advocacy organisations such as PIVOT highlighting the disproportional allocation of policing resources to the neighbourhood and the frequency of police violence, harassment, and intimidation (PIVOT Legal Society, 2013; Boyd and Kerr, 2016; Marie-Eve Sylvestre *et al.*, 2017). For Michelle, not calling the cops and keeping issues in-house demonstrated care for the camp as an entity in itself, as she feared that doing so would give enforcement officers and park rangers an excuse to enter the camp, enforce park by-law violations, arrest residents, and potentially clear the camp due to safety concerns – as happened with both the Oppenheimer and Hastings Street encampments, in 2020 and 2023 respectively (CBC News, 2014b; CBC News, 2020; City of Vancouver, 2023). Without diminishing the legitimacy of this perspective, it is also important to think how this act of care may enable violence. Interviews at Crab Park revealed acts of sexual violence and domestic abuse within the encampment which had gone unreported due to this established ‘caring’ code of conduct, leaving some vulnerable to direct and potentially lethal violence (Field Diary, 16th August 2023). Further, the expectation, at both Oppenheimer and Crab park, that individuals engage in intimate, caring relations with one another often meant that those who failed, or were unable, to do so were often seen as unworthy of support, ostracised, and even actively displaced from these public spaces, producing new boundaries of in/exclusion in the ‘public’ and both violent and subtle modes of compliance to uphold these – detailed further below.

b. Visibility and the public

As Chapter 2 outlines, the relationship between public space, publics, and political visibility is a well-established theme in literature on public space and emerges from a long-held belief that public spaces act as a container of the democratic public – those deemed acceptable or who have earned recognition as a citizen (Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008). Thus, the ‘publics’ that have long gathered in such spaces consist of those with

power and those who have asserted their rights to access public space and to join the ‘public’, often through mobilisation and struggle (Mitchell, 1996; Bodnar, 2015). In particular, the ideal ‘public’ has often been defined with reference to (rights to) private property, whereby to count as a citizen you have to be able to enter and exit the public sphere through access to private property (Mitchell, 2003a; Blomley, 2009). This has implications for individuals perceived as ‘homeless’, as Don Mitchell writes:

“since citizenship in modern democracy (at least ideologically) rests on a foundation of voluntary association, and since homeless people are involuntarily public, homeless people cannot be, by definition, legitimate citizens” (Mitchell, 1995, p. 118)

From labour organising in Oppenheimer in the 1920s and 30s through to demands for representation within urban governance at Crab in the 80s, both of these public spaces have been used over time as spaces within which various publics have sought to stake a claim to visibility in the urban public and, in turn, citizenship (Chapter 3). Similarly, there is a long lineage within North America of constructing encampments to do this kind of political work, as these makeshift spaces stake a visible claim to the city and provide a contained space within which to prefigure alternative modes of inhabitation, governance, and socio-economic relations – the Occupy movement being the most well-known example (Vasudevan, 2015, 2017). Yet, alongside these claims to join the democratic public, users of Crab and Oppenheimer park also engage a more radical set of politics in their domestication of public space, which refigures the relationship between the public, visibility, and urban space as a way of illuminating the hidden histories and peoples of the settler-colonial city and of asserting the political authority of actors beyond the settler-colonial state (Culhane, 2003; Burk, 2006, 2010).

A common refrain which arose in interviews with park regulars, particularly in Oppenheimer Park, was a vision of the park as a “benchmark” (Aaron Interview, 26th September 2023) or “foothold” (Antonio, Interview, 26th September 2023) in the neighbourhood – a space used by residents of the Downtown Eastside to assemble, both to politically organise and protest and to gather socially. As has been established above, regularly assembling and seeing others in the park allows those in the neighbourhood to keep tabs on one another, to feel close, and to care for each other. The importance of such care resonated across people’s lives and in death. For example, it was through

regular meetings with residents at Oppenheimer Park that Antonio, a local advocate for the Latin American community, was able to find out about the passing of a senior member of the community who had long been ostracised from his family due to his HIV status. He was able to convey this information to his family back in El Salvador, bringing dignity and closure to him and his loved ones (Antonio, Interview, 26th September 2023).

For Antonio, however, this act went beyond care; the act of making visible the lives, and deaths, of park users and protecting their memory was also profoundly political. Since the mid-70s, Oppenheimer Park has been a central gathering space for Latin American refugees arriving in Canada, many of whom have been regulars at Oppenheimer Park and taken up formal and informal volunteer roles at the Fieldhouse (Antonio Interview, 26th September 2023). To highlight this history, Watari, a nearby grassroots advocacy and healthcare organisation originally set up in 1986 to support the local Latino community, installed a ‘volunteer memorial bench’ in the park dedicated to the Latino volunteers (Figure 24). Antonio explained the origin and importance of the bench:

“the idea was to recognise people who volunteer there [at Oppenheimer Park]. We were thinking about Wilfredo Jimenez – did you see his name there – he was probably the first volunteer Latin American at the park. He was also the first Latin American to be diagnosed with HIV and the first Latin American who suffered a lot of rejection from community workers who didn’t want to shake his hand. But he was always happy. And every time that he got sick – he got sick many times and he couldn’t talk anymore – the other volunteers at the park used to go and see him at the hospital. Every time the doctors told us, ‘Oh, just say bye, because he’s leaving us very soon’. No! He was 10 times the same. He recovered every time. He woke up and started to volunteer again. Fortunately, when he died, his mom came and we had a celebration at the park. And the idea of the bench came out.... And then we kept adding other names, the latest was Rodolfo and Jesus, both from Guatemala ... Jesus was the first person to die at the park in 2021. He died in hospital but he was attacked in the park he was Indigenous from Guatemala. Agriculture was in his blood. He planted flowers and vegetables in the park” (Antonio, Interview, 26th September 2023)

He continued:

“The message is organizing. It is we exist. We are and we were part of the life of the park” (Antonio, Interview, 26th September 2023)



Figure 24: The volunteer memorial bench, installed atop of a ceramic mosaic dedicated to Latino volunteers at Oppenheimer Park and outfitted with a series of plaques dedicated to various members of the community (Hills 2023h; Field diary, 18th September 2023)

A similar message of visibility, memory, and presence emerged during an interview with Aaron, who organised the installation of a ‘drinkers memorial’ in Oppenheimer Park in March 2023, pictured below (Figures 25 and 26).



Figures 25 & 26: The Drinkers Memorial on the lawn in Oppenheimer Park and an image of the plaque which dedicates the chairs (Hills 2023i; Hills2023j)

Later in the summer, VANDU added two further picnic tables to Oppenheimer Park. For Aaron, these small acts of disobedience were a means of “channelling and expressing grief” for the loss of close friends, making visible the lives lived in this often-forgotten corner of the city, while also materially challenging its abandonment:

“We're adding very physical memorials to people and, like, reminders of their memory while we're also like adding to the actual number of accessible and usable public spaces in the neighbourhood... And so we see those things as like pretty intertwined. Like, oh, that is the Miles Harps chair. Miles campaigned like hell for our benches and neighbourhood. So, we're going to put a bench down in his name. And I think, like, the guerrilla element of just dropping furniture – he would have loved that...I see it as, like, this kind of minor undoing of, like, if ten benches along Hastings [Street] have been ripped out over the last 20 years, then, you know, we're gonna undo that history just a little bit” (Interview, 26th September 2023)

Across both these examples, Aaron and Antonio put forward a vision of these ‘guerrilla’ memorials – the bench and the chairs – which go beyond one-dimensional acts of political representation to the democratic State. Instead, by explicitly connecting these visible infrastructures to a wider claim to the history and making of the present and future lifeworlds of the park, they look to make visible the groups of people who have otherwise been overlooked in the narrated history of the park – dominated, since the Japantown revitalisation in the 1980s, by a settler-vision of Japanese Canadian influence and more recently by forms of urban Indigenous recognition (Burk, 2006, 2010; City of Vancouver, 2022b). While Oppenheimer Park hosts other ‘official’ commemorative infrastructures – commissioned by the City of Vancouver – including two Indigenous totem poles (Baloy, 2014), a ceramic mosaic plaque dedicated to the Vancouver Asahi, and the row of Sakura trees along its western boundary (Chapter 4), these alternative memorials question whose lives are made (in)visible in the history of the park and issue a physical corrective (Burk, 2010).

In this way, they sit in conversation with wider socio-political debates in Vancouver, and in Canada, surrounding the legacies of settler-colonialism and the scope of policies of recognition and reconciliation – often spatially articulated in such commemorative structures which act as a visible reminder of inclusion in the democratic public (Burk, 2006; Coulthard, 2014; Baloy, 2016). Reflecting on the benches and chairs as

alternative structures that sit in conversation with these, the ‘guerrilla memorials’ go beyond a demand to be included in the urban public and instead question the legitimacy of the (municipal) government to do the work of defining the public. They assert an alternative display and spatialisation of authority over the history, public, and life of Oppenheimer Park which recognises the possibilities of multiple claims to the space, and by extension, Vancouver’s urban landscape. In this sense, they rework the ‘visibility’ of public space in ways that make demands beyond liberal democratic rights, recognition, and reconciliation; they open the political possibility of a history of the land, and providers of rights and social infrastructure beyond the Canadian (municipal) State. These grassroots claims, then, seek to resist and *unsettle* the political power and performance of the settler-colonial city.

c. Micro-publics

Yet, while these practices of making home in public space change the visibility of certain demographics and subjectivities within public space, this is not equally inclusive of all. Instead, the extension of home into public space engenders affects and practices of attachment within these so-called ‘public’ spaces, creating exclusive ‘acceptable’ micro-publics within each. By unsettling this foundational principle of public space – as open to all – upon which the normative imagined geographies of public space have been built and organised, this final strand of argument sets the empirical and conceptual scene for a wider rethinking of the ethico-legal principles on which access to and the use of public space *should* be determined, and the actors involved in doing this work – a notion further explored in the following chapter (Chapter 6; Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008).

Earlier in the chapter, Pepe called Oppenheimer Park a “niche”, a sense of place that is shaped by the practices of care and intimacy in the park (Interview, 23rd August 2023). Taking up this curious geographic imaginary, niches hold two spatialised meanings. The first relates to an ecological niche; an (often small) spatially bounded area within which the surrounding climatic and natural environment is such that it is habitable for certain species. The second relates to a socio-spatial understanding, where a niche is a small section of a space: often a corner, recess, or interstice – a margin (hooks, 1989). Thinking with the niche as a marginal geographical relationship to place, then, this

conveys an understanding that the individuals within a niche ‘fit’ in, or belong to, a small, reclusive, space where the wider socio-environmental conditions enable them to flourish. This understanding of the park as a unique environment for a particular subjectivity carried across participant interviews, from descriptions of others in Oppenheimer Park as ‘family’ through to discussions of a sense of “pride in belonging to the park” (Antonio, Interview, 26th September 2023). This sense is also shaped by wider experiences of exclusion from the rest of the city, as Herb – an urban Indigenous man – described:

“well, you know, this is one of the few places where visibly poor, visibly homeless people can just come and chill and be themselves. So, when we see like, like a Christian group come down here and be like, ‘oh better stay in school and say your prayers kids or you might end up like these people’ like that’s, that’s fucking insulting” (Interview, 30th August 2023)

The desire to avoid being made a poverty spectacle was also discussed by Phil, Justin, and Suzie who all described having experienced stigmatisation for being poor and feeling out of place in other parts of the city:

Phil: “they [non-Downtown Eastside urban residents] think it’s [Oppenheimer Park] a place they wouldn’t want to bring their kids to at all. It’s got such a bad reputation and that’s good. We don’t want the square jaws down here anyways. You know, it’s like a tourist trap. They come through it ‘oh look at him, look at him’, you know? It would feel like we are in a zoo” (Phil Interview, 31st August 2023)

Justin: “Oppenheimer was always one of the few parks where you were not judged for whatever lifestyle you have, you know? I grew up in the neighbourhood and ...there was a certain level of kind of shame or, like, I didn’t talk about it with my more middle class friends ... like anyone else from the community, like anyone who didn’t necessarily have drug, alcohol, mental health, trauma, all those sorts of things, they didn’t hang out in Oppenheimer Parks” (Justin Interview, 16th October 2023)

Suzie: “They think we’re a bunch of fuckin drug users and losers. I know that because I hear on the bus every time. They think that people down here are losers and drug dealers, drug users and all that. But, you can’t just come here as a millionaire and just pretend you know what you’re doing” (Suzie Interview, 24th August 2023)

As Phil, Justin, Suzie, and Herb outline, part of what makes Oppenheimer Park a space where they can extend their sense of home is both their exclusion from other spaces in the city and its wider pathologisation, shaped by media representations that present the park as unsafe, governed by ‘drug dealers’, and chaotic (Liu and Blomley, 2012; see previous chapter). For Suzie, tangled in this sense of belonging is a vision of who ‘fits’ within the public of Oppenheimer Park – not ‘millionaires’.

Vern also had a specific imagination of who ‘counts’ in the Oppenheimer public. For him, the park

“belongs to everybody, [but] not to those assholes [drug users sheltering in tents]. As soon as they get it, they shit all on everything. They have no respect for themselves or nothing else. Everywhere, they’ve turned into a garbage dump” (Interview, 20th August 2023).

Despite asserting that the park ‘belongs to everybody’ Vern reveals a very particular vision of Oppenheimer Park’s public, one which excludes the growing population of people who use drugs and are rough sleeping in the area. Enforcing this vision of the public, Oppenheimer Park regulars actively exclude those who they deem unworthy or unwelcome, as Phil explains:

“We tell them [drug users] about the kids. And you know, we don’t mind you doing it, but don’t do it in the middle of the park where the kids are – you know, take it to the edge or something... And if they choose to say ‘fuck you’, or whatever, 3 or 4 people might go over and have a little talk with him and then escort him off the property. Once in a while he may fall, but, well, we’re like that” (Interview, 31st August 2023)

Resonant in this discussion is Phil’s sense of his right to determine the public of the park, and the violence (‘he may fall’) that is sometimes used to enforce this. During participant observation at Oppenheimer Park, the pattern Phil describes, where drug users are only permitted on the edges of the park and are otherwise made to leave, was clear; while tents were often set up at the park, these were only ever at the very edges or behind the baseball diamond in the northwest corner (Field Diary, 28th July 2023). In informal conversations and interviews, park users described being in control of who was in the park and the use of coercion, intimidation, and violence to police this (Field Diary entries, 31st July 2023; 15th August 2023; 30th August 2023). Thus, as with other public

spaces, where public and private actors make decisions over who counts in the public and use architectures, by-laws, and policing to enact this, Oppenheimer park, too, does not figure as a perfect, inclusive ‘commons’ – a tension further discussed below (Marne, 2001; Peck and Tickell, 2002; Mitchell, 2003a; Jeffrey, McFarlane and Vasudevan, 2012).

5.4 Whose home matters?

In light of this conversation, it is important to critically reflect on the wider power dynamics engendered by the extension of home(making) and the blurring of public and private space in the Downtown Eastside. Reflecting on home as a site of ambiguity, feminist geographers remind us that

“its protective functions are interconnected with its limiting characteristics. Feelings of solidarity, safety, and protection are often achieved by severe acts of exclusion and regulation, which are in turn oppressive” (Schröder, 2006, p. 33)

In this way, the spaces, practices, discourses, and imaginations of home(making) are caught up in hierarchies of private property, ownership, and duty, the reproduction of the patriarchy, and the potential for intimate conflict and violence, all differentially experienced across people’s intersectional identities (Massey, 2007; Rose, 2007; McDowell and Sharp, 2016). This tension, whereby the home can figure as a space of safety for some and not others, and is itself an exclusive geography, became increasingly clear in the summer of 2023.

In April 2023, the City of Vancouver began a lengthy process of clearing a 90-tent encampment set up on East Hastings Street, just two blocks away from Oppenheimer Park (City of Vancouver, 2023). Unlike during previous decampments in Oppenheimer (May 2020) and Strathcona Park (April 2021), the City, citing urgent fire and safety concerns, did not secure housing or shelter beds for those living in the Hastings encampment before clearing the tents (ibid.). Instead, people living in the encampment were simply spatially dispersed – as more than one neighbourhood resident described to me “it’s like shovelling water” (Herb Interview, 30th August 2023; Aaron Interview, 26th September 2023). It was no surprise to anybody, then, when tents started to appear on

the edges of Oppenheimer Park. Their arrival revealed a fault line in the homemaking practices of the neighbourhood.

Conversations during participant observation revealed that the regular users of Oppenheimer Park, many of whom were above the age of 50 and had been long term users of the park and residents of the neighbourhood, saw those in the tents (often younger drug users who were relatively new arrivals to the neighbourhood) as “not genuinely homeless” and, as such, unworthy of taking up space in the park (Field Diary, 17 July 2023; James, Elijah and Tom Interview, 29th August 2023). Comparing the cost of acquiring drugs to that of renting an SRO room, Pepe saw the “decision” to make home in a tent as a “lifestyle choice” and their presence, even on the edges of the park, as a threat to the cleanliness of its grounds and the personal safety of the park regulars: “their needles will ruin the ground, they leave litter everywhere” (Interview, 23rd August 2023). Another Oppenheimer user, for example, referred to the tents as a “virus” to be contained “quickly, or it will just explode” (Vern Interview, 20th August 2023). Gladys went further:

“see, they [Park Board staff] let them have the tent up [overnight] and they put it down, which I don't mind because you need a place to sleep. But once they start moving in and they start infesting it with the garbage and that junk, and they don't clean up and poo and pee... They don't have respect for this place. Like it's like, ‘Oh, it's okay, we can dirty and trash this place because we can move on to another place and dirty and trash it’. That's like, that's how I feel sometimes” (Gladys, 22nd September 2023)

Here, Gladys engages stigmatising discourses of (un)cleanliness which entangle her perceptions of drug use and users with her sense of attachment to the urban space of Oppenheimer Park (Rose, 2017). Regardless of the actual conditions in which people maintain their living spaces and their reasons for tenting, many Oppenheimer park inhabitants had a set imagination of those tenting and what they represented for the future and public of the park; tenters were perceived to pollute the social and environmental landscape, and, as such, their attempts to make home were quickly dismissed as illegitimate and threatening to the accepted ‘public’ – the niche – of the park and the long-standing domestic practices of park inhabitants.

Speaking of her own sense of discomfort with those tenting in the park, Gladys explained that she had only just returned to the park after the previous encampment (2018-2020) and that she was feeling less connected to the space than before. Referencing media reports of sexual assault during the previous encampment and drawing on tropes of drug users as unpredictable and violent, Gladys articulated a sense that things had changed in the park and neighbourhood – that she no longer felt totally safe and welcome, a feeling she was quick to attribute to the growth of tent encampments throughout the Downtown Eastside (Gladys Interview, 22nd September 2023).

To understand this, it is pertinent to consider Gladys' perspective in relation to wider processes of demographic and social change in the neighbourhood, and the political economies of drug use and the overdose crisis. While the Downtown Eastside has long been home to a population of working poor and drug users, the intensification of the opioid and synthetic drug crisis over the past two decades has led to a marked shift in local demographics. Between 1991 and 2007, the population of the neighbourhood increased by approximately 140%, and a more recent study found that 52% of Downtown Eastside residents experiencing homelessness and mental health concerns had arrived in Vancouver between 2006 and 2016 – a proportion of the population which tripled in the same period (BCMJ, 2013; Boyd and Kerr, 2016). In 2023, drug overdose deaths in British Columbia stood at over 2,500 – up from an average of 203 per year between 2000-2010 – of which the City of Vancouver counted for 22% (BC Centre for Disease Control, 2016; British Columbia Coroners Service, 2024). The introduction of ultrapotent synthetic opioid, fentanyl, is cited as the cause of this increase (Public Safety and Solicitor General, 2024).

Although there has been some government support for these new arrivals, in the form of new supportive housing units, demand continues to outstrip supply and these spaces come with other barriers, such as rules around drug use and substandard conditions (outlined above). This, combined with the effect of COVID-19, has led to growing scale and frequency of encampments in the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood. With the intensification of the overdose crisis, many existing municipal and non-profit services have shifted their offering to support this new population and, at the same time, the 'old guard' of Downtown Eastside residents – seniors and working-class families – has

slowly moved elsewhere in the city or passed away. The elderly poor who remain are ‘trapped’ precariously housed in the Downtown Eastside by cost of rent elsewhere in the city, but feel increasingly spatially and socially disconnected from the neighbourhood (Fleming *et al.*, 2019; Grigoryeva and Ley, 2019; Griffiths, 2024). Gladys’ sense of displacement from Oppenheimer Park is reflective of these wider shifts in the neighbourhood – as she encounters an ever-changing urban landscape. For Gladys, Oppenheimer represents a final space of affective attachment and belonging in/to the city. Looking to protect her own sense of home, she would often approach Fieldhouse staff and ask them to intervene and to clear the tents (Field Diary, 21st September 2023). She and other park users were also supportive of park rangers who would appear each morning to request that those tenting pack down for the day (Field Diary entries 20th July 2023; 17th August 2023; 5th October 2023). Thus, as Blunt and Sheringham (2019, p. 825) remind us, it is important to “take into account the impact of urban change on those who do not [or cannot] move... [and the] experiences of displacement amongst those who stay put while their local environment undergoes rapid change”. Doing so reveals how “the city allows for new practices of home-making, whilst, for others, it is a crucial component in its unmaking” (Baxter and Brickell, 2014, p.826).

As such, while homemaking in public space is, as has been shown, an *unsettling* act, it not without its exclusions and tensions. In thinking with these, this chapter does not seek to valorise the lives and claims of one group over another, nor to belittle or demonise the needs and subjectivities of people who use drugs, but rather to further comment on the wider domicidal environment in the neighbourhood, where the political economies of housing in Vancouver produce a precarious sense of (un)homeliness for everyone in the neighbourhood, both indoors and outside.

5.5 Home and the unsettling of public space

While geographers have considered what the extension of home means for the politics of housing and shelter in other urban contexts, this chapter has reformulated this question, asking: what does the remaking of home mean for the uses and politics of our public spaces? And how is this experienced by those on the ground in the Downtown Eastside?

Situating this conversation within the wider geographies of displacement, domicile and uninhabitability in the Downtown Eastside, the chapter argued that instead of letting go of home, neighbourhood residents extend their material and imagined geographies of home into the public spaces of Oppenheimer and Crab Park. Aware of the deficiencies of living outside – the weather and cold, the discomfort of the hard ground, the ongoing challenge of keeping belongings and themselves safe, and the constant threat of police and rangers – residents of the Crab encampment recognise the precarity of their makeshift homes, as domestic spaces ‘for now’ and for prefiguring the future. At Oppenheimer Park, park users extend their material and affective infrastructures of home into public space, a phenomenon that has a long history and is practiced both by individuals ‘housed’ in SROs as well as individuals in the shelter system and sleeping rough.

Reflecting on the conceptual and empirical slippage between home and homeless, the chapter argued that the geographies of home in the neighbourhood are dominated by settler-domicide, traced and rearticulated from early colonial resettlement within the physical space of the SRO and the settling of a particular vision of home in the city – namely that of cleanliness, a discrete space of private property, and a nuclear family (Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Handel and Kotef, 2023). Given the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in SRO units and experiencing street homelessness in the neighbourhood, contemporary forms of neoliberal homelessness governance continue these domicidal geographies into the present, creating carceral spaces of containment and producing a sense of unhomeliness (see also Chapter 7). In this way, this chapter re-centred geographical work on domicile, which has productively considered the connections between settler-colonialism, active conflict, and the unmaking of home, to reflect on the more subtle modes through which this continues into the present in Vancouver.

With this extension of home, new understandings of the meanings, uses, and possibilities of public space as spaces of intimacy and care, of political representation beyond liberal democratic formulations, and the container of a micro-public ‘niche’, emerged. These sit in tension with steadfast understandings of public space as spaces of passive encounter, democratic publicity, and universal access. Thus, this chapter sought to speak back to the work of Michele Lancione (2023) who calls for a greater

engagement with the spectrum of home(lessness) and to approach (lessness) as an affirmative position from which to rethink the politics of home and beyond; to consider not what is lacking in the homemaking practices of those on the margins, but instead how this makes up “a different way of dwelling in the world” (Lancione, 2023, p. 12).

Indeed, by dwelling in the gap between house, home, and homeless, residents of the neighbourhood, pose a challenge both to the settled meaning of home in the city and the normative, imagined geography of urban space as divided into public and private fields (Harris, 1993; Lancione, 2023; Ram and Handel, 2024). This finding takes up and extends the work of Blomley (2004) and Burow, Brock and Dove (2018), which positions ‘unsettling’ as the process through which the ontological enclosures under settler-colonialism – the ways in which we come to know and relate to land, space, and sociality – are troubled from their universal application. In this vein, the blurring of public and private space poses a larger conceptual challenge to the formation of the colonial-modern city, a landscape premised in part on this distinction (Chapter 4). Dismantling the boundaries between these spheres creates an alternative vision of the spatial organisation in the city – perhaps one that goes some way towards unsettling the grand narrative of (colonial-)modernity.

Yet, raising this possibility also poses challenging, unanswered questions surrounding the intersection of home (un)making, unsettling, and decolonisation: if this is an unmaking of settler-colonial visions of home and urban space, which opens space for Indigenous relations to land, does this go far enough so as to decolonise the home and the city? And, in turn, the question also becomes what the reaction of the wider C/city is to these geographies: “does this remind settlers of their complicity in violence – and serve to unsettle – or to re-entrench a particular sense of home and belonging to the land”? (Handel and Kotef, 2023, p. 160; see Chapter 7)

The following chapter looks to grapple with these questions by continuing to unpick the ways in which such expanded geographies of home unsettle the boundary between public and private space from a geo-legal perspective, asking: what new legal understandings of ownership and property (rights) emerge from these uses of public space? What stakes are involved in their (re)production? And how does this re-cast the relationship between property, ownership, and land in the settler-colonial city?

6 Claiming Public Space: *Bamberger* and the Legal Geographies of Shelter and Property in Crab Park

6.1 The Crab encampment

When you visit Crab Park, you notice the camp first. The only entrance to the park is from an overpass to the east, and as you descend towards the shore you are treated to a panoramic view of Vancouver's skyline with the multi-coloured structures of the camp perched in front (Figure 27). You may also notice the camp because your only reason for visiting this out of the way park is to peer (leer?) at the camp. Spend any more time at Crab than a passing visit, though, and you will soon realise that the park and the camp are discrete spaces, shaped by their own rhythms, communities, and atmospheres. This chapter delves into this spatial division, unpicking the geolegal practices through which these distinct zones have emerged and are reproduced in the 'public' space of the park. In doing so, it looks to open the black box of public property further, building on the previous two chapters to explore who has a (property) stake in these spaces, the nature of these claims, and the geographies they produce. The story of Crab Park offers a critical perspective on the understandings and articulations of public property which emerge from its use for outdoor sheltering, and the implications of this for understandings of property and of the law in the settler-colonial city.



Figure 27: A drone image of the encampment taken in March 2023 (Robinson, 2023)

In late 2021, the Supreme Court of British Columbia heard a case between the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation and representatives of the encampment, *Bamberger v Vancouver (Board of Parks and Recreation)* (*'Bamberger'*, BCSC 49, 2022). The outcome of the case was a landmark decision over the right to shelter in British Columbia, with Justice Kirchner outlining a new stringent threshold for municipal injunctions against those sheltering outdoors. This chapter thinks with this case – its precedents and aftermath – to explore how the presence of the Crab encampment troubles the dominant legal and ethical paradigms governing the right to public space and, in turn, settler-understandings of public property.

To do so, the chapter takes a feminist legal geographies approach, drawing on court document analysis and interviews with Parks Board representatives and camp residents and advocates to consider how the law is both constructed and resisted through embodied practices and everyday activities (Cuomo and Brickell, 2019; Jeffrey, 2020). This emerging approach within legal geographies centres attention on the prosaic and mundane production and function of the law, including how legal understandings and decisions shape people's relationships to each other and to everyday spaces such as the home, street, and public space (Brickell and Cuomo, 2019)

The chapter proceeds in four sections. The following section situates the chapter within legal geographies and work on public space – which productively unsettles the myth of 'public' access but is yet to delve into more nuanced questions of ownership and property – before considering the lineage of legal cases on the right to shelter in British Columbia. Taking up this academic and legal backdrop, section 6.3 thinks with the *Bamberger* case, working through the decision to tease out how and why it has implications for how we think about public property in the settler-colonial city. In turn, section 6.4 reflects on what this means on the ground: asking, how did the *Bamberger* decision circulate within and beyond the everyday geographies of Crab Park, and what do the actually existing articulations of property in the space look like? Taking this up, section 6.5, examines the relationship between property and settler-colonial power, reflecting on the political implications of the existence of a layered and diverse set of property interests in the park space and, in turn, on the potential and limits of the law as a site of resistance in the settler-colonial city.

6.2 Property, public space, and the right to shelter

As is outlined in Chapter 2, geographers studying public space have productively revealed how the normative model of ‘public’ access is flawed. The work of Don Mitchell (Mitchell, 1995, 2003a, 2017; Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008), amongst other geographers and socio-legal scholars, has revealed how the law has been mobilised by state authorities to condition the kinds of activities which can take place in public space in ways that regulate the behaviours and bodies counted as acceptable within the ‘public’ (Sylvestre, Blomley and Bellot, 2020; Brown and Rose, 2021; Chapter 4). Alongside this work, geographers have also demonstrated how public space is increasingly mobilised, co-opted, and privatised by stakeholders beyond the state, who go on to play a role in shaping the public (Hodkinson, 2012). While traditional models of public space construct public space as property owned by the state for the benefit of the universal citizen, this literature raises questions around who actually has an ownership stake in these spaces, for what means, and to what effect (Atkinson, 2003; Page, 2020; Anderson and Flynn, 2021; Flynn and Stevenson-Blythe, 2024). Taking up and building on this work, this chapter asks: if public space is never truly public, what other formulations of property come to bear on these spaces; how might turning to these reveal alternative principles for its governance; and what does this mean in the context of the settler-colonial city?

As has been outlined, property is most often understood through the (settler-colonial) framework of the ‘ownership model’ where property is imagined as a thing/resource owned by a single – often White and male – owner who has the right to use that resource however they wish, and their right to do so is state-backed (Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Rose, 2019; Blomley, 2020). In relation to land, this model materialises in the Lockean enclosure of land into discrete plots of ‘private property’ within which the only relations that count are those between the owner and their territory – a vision of property and ownership which has been the source of violence for Indigenous and racialised communities over time (Blomley, 2004c, 2016; Bhandar, 2018). Property geographers have since problematised this model, arguing that it does a poor job of capturing the reality of property *relations*. Here, the work of Nicholas Blomley is central. Instead of seeing property as an object, he argues, we must reapproach property as a (set of) relationship(s) of power and entitlements over resources which creates

differential relations between people and things, and between people and others (Blomley, 2020). Turning to property as a series of relations allows multiple property interests to co-exist on the same land and for these overlapping, relational interests to position parties in unequal relations of power. While some interests may be backed by the state and by the law, others take more informal forms (Blomley, 2004c, 2015).

Cheryl Harris' (1993) work on the whiteness of property reminds us of how race functions as a means of discerning who is entitled to property whereby acts of possession are only legible through the cultural norms of whiteness (Bonds, 2019). As such, (colonial) authorities have so often failed to recognise the landed practices and relations of Indigenous and racialised populations, legitimising deracination at the hands of the (settler-colonial) state and via the medium of the law (Bhandar, 2018). Taking up this work, it is clear that state recognised property under the 'ownership model' inherently privileges some claims over others, and, in doing so, reinforces existing hierarchies of value and personhood in the settler-colonial State and City (Roy, 2017; Safransky, 2022). With this in mind, there is evident value in turning to a more inclusive, relational framework to deconstruct the nature of property and to recognise the actually existing landscape of property relations in the settler-colonial city (Blomley, 2009; Blomley and The Right to Remain Collective, 2021). This understanding is the building block for the remainder of this chapter, which seeks to extend this framework to the context of outdoor sheltering in public space and the Crab encampment.

a. Outdoor sheltering case law in British Columbia

As this thesis has set out, outdoor sheltering blurs steadfast imaginations of distinct public/private spaces, as individuals engage in private, homemaking activities – sleeping, eating, caring – in public (Chapter 5). In turn, legal scholars have argued that encampments take on a somewhat private nature as a result and by de facto interrupting 'public' access to the spaces they occupy (Wood, 2022b). In view of this, when legal cases are brought over the right to shelter, what is at stake are questions of the nature of space and of property in the (settler-colonial) city.

Across Canada, the courts have played a critical role in shaping the ways in which municipal authorities have responded to encampments – almost entirely by arbitrating over the legality of by-laws mobilised to evict them. As B.C. legal scholar Alexandra Flynn (2024, p. 6) states, tracing “the jurisprudence is important, as court decisions – not legislation – have set the bar for what is permitted in terms of encampment evictions”. What follows sets out the scope of B.C. case law on encampments and the ways in which this law has drawn on and produced specific, limited imaginations of public property (Table 3).

Over the past 25 years, 24 cases in B.C. have sought to address the balance between outdoor sheltering, often articulated in terms of the Section 7 right to ‘life, liberty and security of person’ in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (‘Charter’), and the maintenance of public access to municipal public space (Flynn, 2022). B.C. courts have been overwhelmingly punitive towards those sheltering in public space, readily granting interlocutory²² injunctions despite the high bar supposedly needed to do so (Wood, 2022a). In this litigation, priority is given to the maintenance of a ‘balance of users’ in public space. A principle which, in practice, often takes shape as the prioritisation of recreation and passive public space use over forms of homemaking or survival, adhering to specific ideological visions of public space as places of order, transience, and (colonial) recreation (Chapter 4; Mitchell, 1995; Blomley, 2010; Sevilla-Buitrago, 2014; Wood, 2020, 2023).

For example, in the cases of *Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation v Williams* (2014) (adjudicating over an encampment in Oppenheimer Park), *Nanaimo (City) v Coutoreille* (2018), and *Saanich (District) v Brett* (2018), the judges agreed with claims that encampments interfered with the wider public’s ability to recreate safely and marred neighbours ‘natural greenbelt views’ (BCSC 1926, 2014; BCSC 1629, 2018; BCSC 1648, 2018). Similarly, in *Victoria (City) v Smith* (2020), the court cited concern for the aesthetics of urban nature and the preservation of the ecological and cultural landscape of Beacon Hill Park (BCSC 1173, 2020). Such discourses of ‘pristine’ nature,

²²Granted in 75% of cases, interlocutory injunctions are injunctions made by the judge during a case which last until the case is determined. They are recognized as severe actions as they restrain the relevant defending party’s activities before the evidence and arguments have been heard (Wood, 2022a).

safety, and cleanliness have too often been mobilised against people experiencing homelessness – in social, legal, and political contexts – in ways that pathologize their bodies and behaviours and are used to legitimise their displacement from public spaces (Rose, 2017; Chapter 5).

In the context of Crab Park, two prior cases, one in 2003 (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation v Sterritt) and the other in 2020 (Vancouver Fraser Port Authority v Brett, ‘Brett’) have been brought against individuals sheltering in the park. In both, injunctions were granted based on the private-natured property relations of encampments (BCSC 1421, 2003; BCSC 876, 2020). *Brett* is particularly useful to think with in this context. As set out in Chapter 3, Crab Park is located on Federal land, leased temporarily to the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation for use as a public park (Figure 28). To the west of the park is a concrete small parking lot, also leased to the City of Vancouver for use as a parking lot. In 2020, an encampment of more than 100 occupants established on the parking lot – many of whom had been decamped from Oppenheimer Park (CBC News, 2020). Within a week, the Federal authority sought an injunction to remove the encampment. Presiding over the case, Justice Hinkson accepted the claim that the parking lot was akin to private property and that those occupying the site were trespassing, granting an injunction (BCSC 876, 2020, para. 98; Wood, 2022b).

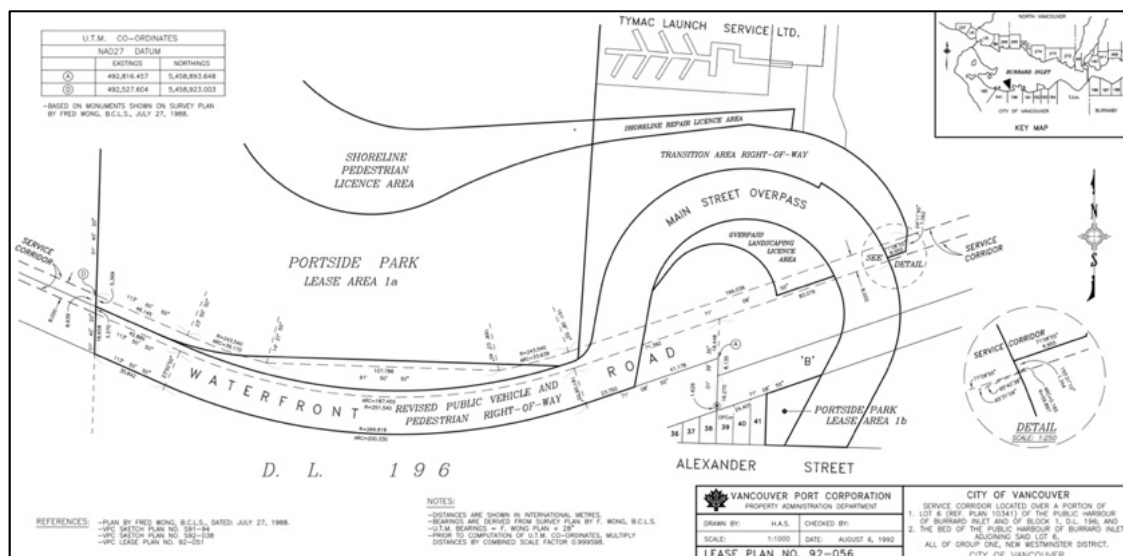


Figure 28: City of Vancouver planning map showing boundaries of ‘Portside Park’ (Crab) lease area, found in *Bamberger* case files (BCSC 49, 2022).

The characterisation of this site as private property was, however, not self-evident; indeed, any articulation of property is performed and constructed – cartographically, materially, and discursively ‘enacted’ (Blomley, 2007a). At the time the encampment was established, the lot was empty and unfenced and had long been used by the public as an extension of the park and, before the encampment established, the Port Authority had done nothing to stop it being used in this way (Fiona York, Interview, 13th Aug 2023; Wood, 2022b). As such, the property relations on the ground sat in tension with the de jure property relations on the page – a gap which did not feature in Justice Hinkson’s decision. Instead, he placed value in the formal lease agreement, erasing the informal property relations which had long existed in the space. Carys, a key supporter of Crab Park, expressed frustration with this outcome during our interview:

“our legal culture is a bit obsessed with ownership on a level that is not always practically helpful. You end up with idiosyncrasies like the *Brett* decision where the decision was: ‘Oh, sorry, you move to the parking lot next to Crab Park and boom, instantly out’. It’s nonsensical. But that’s where our private property ownership law leads us” (Interview, 25th July 2023)

Comparing the decisions in *Bamberger* and *Brett* clarifies the often static and binary approach taken by the courts towards models of property (Wood, 2022b). In legal terms, both plots are owned by the Federal government and are public properties, leased, respectively, to the Port Authority and the City of Vancouver (Flynn, 2022). The sites had similar everyday geographies, yet decisions in *Brett* and *Bamberger* identify the parking lot and neighbouring Crab Park as distinct property types – one private and the other public. Deconstructing these decisions, Wood (2022b, p.1) argues that the courts rely on a binary understanding of property which collapses

"a nuanced spectrum of government-owned property into a formalistic dichotomy in which any state-owned property that is not formally open to the public as of right [such as parks, streets, Parliament Hill and courthouse laws] is private property for civil and constitutional purposes."

In the decision to uphold this distinction between public and private property, the strength of this zero-sum imagined geography of property is revealed – as is the function of the courts and settler-colonial law as a means of reproducing these (Bhandar, 2018). Instead of adapting to the real property formulations on the ground, the law here

is revealed as specific and narrow tool with often adverse, even violent, consequences for the lives of those sheltering.

Where final (as opposed to interlocutory) injunctions are sought, and cases come to trial, there is a much lower success rate for injunctions (Wood, 2023). This body of law draws upon the *Victoria (City) v Adams* (2009) decision which set a critical precedent for the right to shelter outdoors (BCCA 563, 2009, '*Adams*'). The litigation was protracted, beginning in 2005 when the City of Victoria sought an injunction to clear 20 tents in Cridge Park (BCCA 563, 2009). In rebuttal, camp lawyers claimed the injunction would infringe on the Charter rights of those sheltering. Justice Ross of the BC Court of Appeal agreed, holding that the injunction application and the by-laws prohibiting temporary shelter violated the Section 7 rights of homeless people and that, in cases where there is inadequate indoor shelter, individuals should be able to set up shelter outdoors (Flynn *et al.*, 2022). While the *Adams* decision recognised the importance of encampments to people's health, safety, and access to services, the courts restricted the right to shelter in two key ways: firstly, it only exists when there are no available indoor sheltering spaces, and secondly, it was limited only to overnight hours (Flynn, 2024a)

Since *Adams*, a series of decisions have broadened the scope of the right to shelter²³, expanding the definition of inadequate shelter from the number of beds available at shelters to whether these beds are genuinely accessible to those camping outdoors (Table 3). These cases begin to rework legal understandings of the purpose and nature of public space to encompass the provision of (limited forms of) shelter and survival. Yet, as with *Adams*, decisions in these cases often retain a desire to maintain a 'balance of uses' in municipal parks by limiting the right to shelter to overnight, despite a growing body of literature which articulates the harms of daily decampments (BCSC 1909, 2015; Blomley, Flynn and Sylvestre, 2020). Thus, the strength of ideas of public space as sites for (colonial) recreation and as spaces of inviolably equal access – which fails to

²³ Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation v Williams, 2014 BCSC 1926; Abbotsford (City) v Shantz, 2015 BCSC 1909; British Columbia v Adamson, 2016 BCSC 584; British Columbia v Adamson, 2016 BCSC 1245; Nanaimo (City) v Courtoreille, 2018 BCSC 1629; Vancouver Fraser Port Authority v Brett, 2020 BCSC 876; Prince George (City) v Stewart, 2021 BCSC 2089; Bamberger v Vancouver (Board of Parks and Recreation), 2022 BCSC 49

recognise the reality in which Indigenous, racialised, and marginalised individuals have long been locked out of the public (Chapter 4) – is retained even in these cases, upholding a settler-colonial spatial and legal framework in which marginalised individuals experience daily harm and displacement. Set within this legal landscape, the *Bamberger* case begins to trouble this vision of the law.

Understanding of Public Space	Case	Impact on Decision
Recreation/‘balance of uses’	Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation v Sterritt (2003)	▪ Court noted: “people have testified to the relative safety of this subcommunity as compared to life on the streets at large. They have testified to the need for a living space for those that are thoroughly disadvantaged and the arguable advantages to the whole community of designating some publicly-managed park space as available for this type of use” (BCSC 1421, 2003, para. 3) ▪ However, interlocutory injunction was granted on the principle that the encampment placed at-risk the ‘mandate’ of the Park Board to govern to the ‘benefit of the entire community’ (para. 8)
	Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation v Williams (2014)	▪ Court notes the cancellation of community events in the park such as a “summer carnival for residents of the Downtown Eastside, the annual celebration of Japanese culture which is deeply ingrained in the history of the area surrounding the park, and a health fair...Br Bromley [GM of Park Board at the time] describes the park as the backyard of the Downtown Eastside” (BCSC 1926, 2014, para. 8) ▪ Grants interlocutory injunction to clear Oppenheimer Park based on the breach of Parks Control By-Laws section 3(a) and (b), section 10 and section 11 (para.4), citing evidence that “other groups of members of the public have been denied permitted access to this Park as a result of the bylaw violations. The Park Board and the City is liable for activities on public land and as such must control their use” (BCSC 1926, 2014, para. 54)

Recreation/ ‘balance of uses’	Aesthetic	Saanich (District) v Brett (2018)	▪ Interlocutory injunction granted – Justice Branch agrees that the encampment interferes with the public’s ability to recreate safely due to the fire (para. 112-116) and safety risk posed by the encampment (para. 120)	▪ Justice Branch notes that the encampment interferes with the ‘natural green belt views of the neighbouring residential properties’ (para. 90)
Aesthetic/ Nature		Victoria (City) v Smith (2020)	▪ Justice Mayer states that encampments place at risk the preservation of the ecological and cultural landscape of Beacon Hill Park, granting an injunction (para. 38)	
Property Relations		Vancouver Fraser Port Authority v Brett (2020), BCSC 876	▪ Justice Hinkson recognises the parking lot as private in nature, and the encampment as trespassing on this land. Collapses vision of government property into zero-sum; any space that is formally open to the public as of right – such as parks, streets, Parliament Hill and courthouse lawns – is public for purposes of constitutional and civil litigation. All other government property is private property (para. 90-91). ▪ In para 56. Justice Hinkson states that residents should be removed due to violating park regulations e.g. engaging in disallowed activities such as building a fire and in unsafe and unhygienic activity (Flynn, 2024a)	
		British Columbia v Friends of Beacon Hill Park (2023), BCCA 83	▪ In this case, the park in which people are seeking shelter is on land that the City of Victoria manages as trustee for the Province. The City applied to the Supreme Court to see if overnight outdoor sheltering was consistent with the trust conditions. The chambers judge held that this use was inconsistent with the terms of the trust, whereby: ‘the Park is to be used for the recreation and enjoyment of the public, which use does	

		not include temporary overnight sheltering’ (BCCA, 83) ▪ Upon appeal by the Province, the Court of Appeal dismissed the case suggesting that the Court was unable to address questions of rights to outdoor shelter in its role as adjudicator of the terms of the trust
Right to Shelter	Victoria (City) v Adams (2009), BCCA 563	▪ Found a Victoria bylaw prohibiting homeless persons from erecting temporary shelters in Victoria parks infringed on their s.7 Charter rights ▪ Concluded that, where there are inadequate indoor shelter spaces to accommodate people genuinely experiencing homelessness, those persons are entitled to set up <i>overnight</i> shelters in public parks ▪ Justice Ross noted, “Public properties are held for the benefit of the public, which includes the homeless.” (BCCA 563, 2009, para. 131) ▪ However, narrowed the scope of the right to shelter and affirmed that the courts retained the right to limit access to the park in order to maintain its environmental, social and recreational purposes (BCCA 563, 2009, para.122; Flynn, 2024)
	Abbotsford (City) v Shantz, 2015, BCSC 1909	▪ Justice Hinkson stated that many shelter spaces were ‘impractical’ for the City’s homeless due to the imposition of stringent rules ▪ Para. 276 found “a legitimate need for people to shelter and rest during the day and no indoor shelter in which to do so” but looked to balance the interests of users, holding that “a minimally impairing response to balancing that need with the interests of other users” would be to allow overnight sheltering between 7pm and 9am (paras. 279-280)
	Prince George (City) v Stewart, 2021, BCSC 2089	▪ Recognised that few shelters in Prince George are ‘low barrier’ and importance of taking into account accessibility when evaluating adequacy of indoor shelter ▪ Court notes the high representation of Indigenous peoples in the encampment and the legacy of colonialism, including residential schools (Flynn, 2024a, p. 8)

		▪ In the context of cold weather, court suggests that sheltering could be extended to daytime situations
	Bamberger v Vancouver (Board of Parks and Recreation), 2022, BCSC 49	▪ Justice Kirchner agrees with petitioners that the evidence relied upon by the Park Board to confirm available adequate indoor shelter was insufficient and ‘conclusory’ (para 97) ▪ Upheld evidence provided by the petitioners who argued that indoor shelter spaces were insufficient in number, unavailable for residents sheltering in the park, and unsuitable, extending definition of inadequate indoor shelter

Table 3: Summary analysis of selected case law over the right to outdoor shelter and encampments in British Columbia

6.3 Bamberger v Vancouver (Board of Parks and Recreation)

In the summer of 2021, a collection of tents and up to 150 people gathered in Crab Park, many of whom had recently been decamped from another large ‘tent city’ in nearby Strathcona Park (Flynn *et al.*, 2022). In response, Donnie Rosa – the then General Manager (GM) of the Parks Board – sought to put in place two ‘Orders’ to displace the tents. The first, in July, prohibited overnight sheltering at Crab and the other, in September, looked to fence off a large section of the park for ‘remediation’ (Fenton, 2021; Rosa, 2021). In response, two individuals sheltering at Crab – Kerry Bamberger and Jason Hebert – filed a judicial review, petitioning the courts to examine the Parks Board’s decision-making process and use of evidence (Flynn, 2024a). Their case argued that the Orders were made without paying due attention to the rights of those sheltering, and that the Orders were ‘unreasonable’ as they relied on a weak evidence base regarding the nature and availability of alternative indoor sheltering spaces (BCSC 49, 2022). In turn, the Parks Board brought its own case for an injunction to enforce the 7th September Order. Further, if this Order was to be struck down during the review proceedings, the Parks Board argued that the Court should still grant an injunction to enforce the Parks Control By-Law which limits sheltering to overnight hours. These cases were merged and heard in December 2021, with the final decision in January 2022.

The decision had high stakes; the case was to determine the fate of the Crab encampment and the lives of its residents who relied on the camp for basic necessities, food, shelter, and access to wider networks of support (Chapter 5). In judgement, Justice Kirchner granted the application for judicial review and remitted the Orders back to the Parks Board General Manager for reconsideration. He also adjourned both injunction applications and suggested that the General Manager consider alternative methods for seeking compliance such as providing a ‘designated daytime sheltering area’. The case is seen as a landmark decision over the right to shelter, setting precedent for how to define ‘available’ indoor sheltering space and displaying deep contempt with the techniques used to manage encampments by the Parks Board. Further, Justice Kirchner took the extraordinary step of adjourning the case to provide an additional layer of legal protection for those sheltering. As Carys recounted:

“*Bamberger* is as close to scathing as a judicial decision will get about many decision makers, especially for a judge, and Kirchner is a very careful judge... one of the useful things about [him] adjourning the injunction decision is that that was a great way of making it really, really hard to appeal. Like, if he actually decided and made a decision one way or the other, B.C. has a very conservative Court of Appeal that may have been keen to interfere with the decision. But, by adjourning it, he put the Parks Board in a pretty tough spot, which was great. Thank you, Justice Kirchner!” (Interview, 25th July 2023)

This section draws on analysis of the documents of the *Bamberger* case alongside interviews with key stakeholders – Parks Board employees and encampment residents and advocates – to delve deeper into the reasoning behind this judgment. Doing so reveals another reason why this case was so pivotal. Despite being ostensibly bound to the confines of administrative law as a judicial review, the case sets out the potential for a ‘positive right’ to public space in two seminal decisions over the ‘right to be heard’ and the need for ‘sufficient, available, and suitable’ indoor sheltering space. Explored in depth below, these decisions work within and around the boundaries of settler-colonial law to set out the *elevated* rights of those sheltering to be considered in decisions over the park space – rights conditioned by their embodied precarity.

a. ‘The right to be heard’ and the decision on ‘reasonableness’

Procedural fairness is a component of Canadian administrative law which states that there is a specific duty on public authorities, when making decisions that are not legislative in nature but affect the ‘rights, privileges, and interests’ of individuals, to hear the concerns of those uniquely affected (BCSC 49, 2022, para. 44). In *Bamberger*, the camp petitioners argued that the Parks Board had not followed any such protocol (para. 41). Through this argument, the petitioners sought to highlight the false imagination of universal access to public space, contending that even when a decision will impact the entirety of those who *could* access a space, those who *actually* use that space – here, those sheltering – have a different scale of interest. As such, there is, they argued, a hierarchy of who’s needs, and what kinds of needs, should be heard and come to bear most in decisions over the space.

Justice Kirchner agreed with this assessment, recognising the specific ‘rights, privileges and interests’ of campers tied to their Section 7 Charter rights. He stated:

“at stake for [encampment residents] is nothing less than their S.7 Charter right to life, liberty, and security of the person. This *elevates their right to be heard* above ordinary users of the Park, or even particular users of the Park, such as (to take counsel’s example) a soccer team whose game is cancelled when a field is closed for maintenance” (para. 63, emphasis added)

Thus, in his assessment, Kirchner differentiated between the rights of those genuinely seeking shelter in the park and everyday users, such as those using the park for leisure (para. 70). He suggested that there are elevated stakes at play for people experiencing homelessness and that these specific users have an ‘elevated right’ to be heard as a result.

While this right is, on first reading, not explicitly spatial, the implications of it in practice are, as it engages the idea that this group has a specific right to influence decisions over the park space, though in non-binding ways. In judgement, Justice Kirchner observed that the implementation of this elevated right might take the shape of meetings in the park or written correspondence between the camp and the Parks Board (para. 71). As such, if we understand property to be a stake in, or relationship to, the

land of some kind, which does not necessarily take a de jure or ‘ownership’ model, it is possible to consider this ‘right to be heard’ as a type of property relation situated alongside, indeed potentially above, those of ‘ordinary’ park users (Blomley, 2004c, 2004b). This principle complicates the story of property in Crab Park by articulating a new (semi-legal) mode of ownership, shaped by an individual’s Section 7 ‘rights to life’. In this case, property relations are produced not by property law but through a combination of administrative law, Charter rights, and their implications in practice, revealing how the legal geographies of property extend beyond the field of property law (Blomley, 2008).

This principle is further developed in the decision on the ‘reasonableness’ of the two Orders. In *Bamberger*, the petitioners also challenged the reasonableness of the GM Orders, contending that the evidence used by the Board to make the orders was insufficient (para. 75). Kirchner agreed. In his reasons for judgment, Kirchner drew on the Vavilov standard for reasonableness which differentiates the standard of evidence and decision-making process based on the nature of the consequences of the decision, requiring a higher standard if there are likely to be particularly severe or harsh impacts (para. 77). He agreed with the petitioners that the evidence relied upon by the Parks Board to demonstrate the availability of indoor shelter for those in the encampment – emails from British Columbia Housing Management Commission (B.C. Housing) confirming the number of beds available – was insufficient and ‘conclusory’ (para. 97). Instead, he upheld evidence provided by the petitioners who argued that indoor shelter spaces were *insufficient* in number, *unavailable* for residents sheltering in the park, and *unsuitable*. This trio of ‘sufficient, available, and suitable’ went beyond previous precedents set for defining appropriate indoor shelter, as Carys explained to me in our interview:

“in *Adams*, they stop at the point of being like: ‘Oh, well, if there are shelter beds in the city, then that’s it’. We tried to cut off that kind of ‘numbers game’ of pointing to beds on a spreadsheet without taking into account where they are and their quality etc. Nobody had really done that...[we argued] we have to not only make sure it’s available, but that people can get there and, alongside this, there needs to be a proportionate level of confidence in the information you have and investigation into that” (Interview, 25th July 2023)

In his judgement, Justice Kirchner also demanded different measures of credibility than those used in previous sheltering cases, placing greater value on the ‘embodied evidence’ provided in the affidavits of encampment residents who spoke to their lived experiences of cycling in and out of the shelter system, having belongings confiscated by staff, and trekking to shelters across the city only to be turned away (Jeffrey, 2020a; BCSC 49, 2022, paras 110–135). As Jason, a long-term camp resident and one of the petitioners of the judicial review, described to me during our interview:

“Yeah, I guess, Kerry and my story had enough weight and merit that the judge said ‘give these people a chance, give them a place to lay their heads’. You know? You can’t go to shelters anymore: they’re run by gangs; staff don’t really care about what’s going on; the place ain’t clean to begin with - most of them are dirty; your stuff gets stolen; you have no personal space; all you’re allowed to bring in is two hampers, two little bins, plastic totes, that’s all you’re allowed to have. I got a tent full of stuff. So it’s like, if I want to go to a shelter, I have to throw out all my stuff or rent a cubicle, a storage place, which I can’t afford. It’s just ridiculous the way they got it set up” (Interview, 16th Aug 2023)

In valuing the life stories of camp residents and supporters as credible – even ‘expert’ – knowledge surrounding the functioning of the city’s shelter system, in lieu of evidence from B.C. Housing, Kirchner deviated from previous case law which consistently turned to institutional knowledge and quantitative data over oral testimony (Jeffrey, 2020a; *Brett*). In doing so, he also put forward an understanding that people’s ability to access indoor shelter is highly contingent on an unpredictable set of factors, including their own needs and addictions, shelter rules (both formal and informal), personal relationships between individuals and shelter staff (and between shelter staff and advocates and outreach workers), the time of day they seek shelter, and so on – the complexities of which are flattened by the ‘numbers game’ evidence provided by B.C. Housing. This understanding builds on the work of geographer Alex Jeffrey (2020a), who highlights how the courts often treat bodies as objects ‘to be analysed’ by technoscientific interventions rather than subjects, leading to flawed decisions. Here, Kirchner resists rendering the homeless body abstract in this way, recognising the truth of their experiences as they are told rather than as they are corroborated. This is a powerful position which rewrites the story of the law for those experiencing homelessness at Crab, as identities generally found at law’s ‘edge’ (Jeffrey, 2020b).

By recognising individual experiences and embodied evidence, Justice Kirchner quietly begins to intervene in the terms and praxis of settler-colonial law. As Kobayashi (1990), Razack (2002), Pasternak (2014) and Bhandar (2018), amongst others, highlight, the law is a central site through which the Canadian settler-colonial project has been enacted, naturalised, and ‘maintained’ – introduced and mobilised to justify the displacement of Indigenous peoples from land and to write over Indigenous laws and jurisdiction. Audrey Kobayashi (1990) reveals how the law has naturalised ‘common sense’ understandings of differential human value, often along racial lines. Thus, she continues, the law enables and motivates dispossession but also conceals this process by attributing legal decisions as necessary, rational, and natural (Kobayashi, 1990). In this vein, much of the existing case law surrounding the right to shelter has so far naturalised and deemed necessary the displacement of those experiencing homelessness (section 6.2.a), a population within which Indigenous peoples are overrepresented in British Columbia and Vancouver (Chapter 1), in order to protect a specific, colonial, and imagined vision of public space as equally accessible and for a ‘balance of uses’ (including leisure, Chapter 4). Further, as a field imbued with the drive for truth and rationality, it is unsurprising that individuals found on (settler-colonial) law’s edge have been subject to its violence, as their knowledge and experiences are often not read in these terms – and this is particularly the case for Indigenous peoples (Deloria and Vine, 1997; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Radcliffe, 2017b, 2017a). Under this paradigm, courts have so often overlooked the complex set of factors which lead people to live their lives in public space in lieu of ‘simple’ regulatory solutions which belie the individual needs and realities of those on the street (Mitchell, 2003a). This is where Justice Kirchner’s approach becomes radical. By placing value on embodied knowledge, Kirchner resists this drive for performed, ‘rational’ truth and, in turn, the codification of the homeless body into a pre-determined subjectivity, instead turning to the individual experiences and subjectivities of each person. In doing so, the camp lawyers, the camp residents, and Justice Kirchner rework the legal field as a site from which members of marginalised communities can claim moments of justice and change the foundations and terms of the field in a piecemeal way (Katz, 2001).

Interviews with camp residents revealed their pride in being represented in the courts in ways that challenged their previous experiences with the law. Jason, for example, had previously spent significant time in jail and at the time of the judgement for *Bamberger*

was in jail for another offence. When asked how he felt about the outcome of *Bamberger*, he responded:

“Hm, that's a good question. It made me finally believe that my mouth means something. That when I say something, I'm actually being heard now. You know, they're hearing us. Finally. It's not just about power and control anymore” (Interview, 16th Aug 2023)

This speaks back to work on courtroom geographies, revealing how entering the space of the court on their own terms, being treated as knowledgeable, and being witnessed by others provided plaintiffs with a sense of self-worth and hope (Faria *et al.*, 2020; Gill and Hynes, 2021; Flowers and Klosterkamp, 2023). As Kerry Bamberger, one of the two lead petitioners on the case, described:

“When I put my name on those court papers, I put my name on this place. And for me, that means that any changes made, especially on a legal level, are going to fall on my head. I'm the one who put my neck out there for that” (Interview, 3rd Aug 2023)

During our interview, Kerry reflected on becoming ‘part of’ the law, both literally, as in the letter of the law, and in a more expansive sense; she now has a stake in how the case travels and is mobilised in other contexts (Gill, 2020). Through this, the courts are opened as a space in which those experiencing homelessness at Crab, including Indigenous peoples, and their allies, experience moments of autonomy and justice in an otherwise controlling and punitive landscape.

Thus, the reliance of the Parks Board on the limited evidence provided by B.C. Housing led Justice Kirchner to find that the Board had failed to understand the grave stakes involved in the two Orders. In paragraph 147 of his judgement, he stated:

“In my view, it was incumbent on the General Manager to satisfy herself that closing the last major public park in or near the Downtown Eastside to overnight sheltering would not adversely affect the Petitioners’ ability to access the services and other facilities they need to *survive*. There is nothing in the record to show that she turned her mind to this question or that she reasonably addressed it” (emphasis added)

Here, Justice Kirchner draws upon and reveals the mutual production of legal and the spatial to inform his decision and, in turn, the evolution of case law over the right to shelter (Braverman *et al.*, 2014). In their application for an injunction against the camp, the Parks Board positioned the application as necessary to undertake ‘remedial work’ to sections of Crab Park, suggesting that campers could find “another place to go” (BCSC 49, 2022, para. 146) and would therefore not have their Section 7 rights impaired (Rosa, 2021). Denying the application, Justice Kirchner reminded the court of the series of park closures in the Downtown Eastside: first Oppenheimer (May 2020), then the parking lot next to Crab (June 2020), followed by Strathcona (March 2021), and now Crab. While the Parks Board’s injunction application sought to ignore this socio-political context, Kirchner turns to these grounded geographies to deny the injunction. He notes that most of the social services used by those sheltering are located in the Downtown Eastside and that Crab is comparatively distant from nearby housed residents, separated from the Downtown Eastside and Gastown by railway tracks. Drawing on this “constellation of factors” (para. 176) he says, “it is difficult to see how the public interest is served by risking the relocation of the camp to an area that will more directly impact surrounding residents” (para. 189). Thus, while a dominant body of doctrinal law assumes that the law is placeless and universal (Bartel *et al.*, 2013), the grounded ‘power geometries’ that intersect to produce Crab park as a place mattered to Judge Kirchner, guiding his final decision in favour of the camp (Massey, 2007).

b. A precarious property right?

As such, by suggesting that individuals using the park for shelter have a greater right to be considered in decisions over park governance than others; by recognising people experiencing homelessness as genuine holders of knowledge on the shelter system; by imposing a higher duty of evidence on the Park Board; and by adjourning the case, the camp lawyers and Justice Kirchner mobilised the courts in support of the camp.

In practice, the decision, and the subsequent designation of a ‘designated daytime sheltering area’, created not just a physical space for the camp but provided a temporal break from the daily arrival of park rangers and police seeking compliance with the Parks Control By-Laws (Section 6.4). At the same time, it also opened conceptual space for a new ethical principle guiding the right to public space; layered within the language

of Justice Kirchner's decision, analysed above, is the potential for a 'positive right' to public space.

In 'Precarious Life', Judith Butler (2006) reminds us that precarity is a shared human condition and that it is our connections to others that both condition our vulnerability and our resilience. Precarity is therefore unequally distributed, with bodies scripted with less value often the most exposed to social marginalisation, economic insecurity, violence, dispossession, and displacement (Lewis *et al.*, 2015a, 2015b; Campbell and Laheij, 2021). Recent work has extended this thinking to explore how precarity is conditioned through property relations, arguing that the variegated devolution of rights and people's 'jural statuses' create degrees of vulnerability (Blomley, 2020). To expand: a home-owner's access to shelter is precarious – they still have to pay a mortgage – but, generally, their right to shelter is afforded a higher degree of legal protection from the state than that of a tenant (*ibid.*). In comparison, an SRO tenant in the Downtown Eastside often faces an even higher risk of eviction, loss of shelter, and precarity as they may be subject to the status of licensee which enables landlords to exercise additional power and relations of control (Fleming *et al.*, 2019; Blomley and The Right to Remain Collective, 2021; Chapter 5). The recognition of this precarity, and its production within and by social and proprietary relations, Butler argues, generates an ethical obligation for a society to organise relations such that we minimise precariousness (Butler, 2012).

Approaching *Bamberger* with this in mind opens up a conversation around what taking precarity into account might mean for the right to public space in law – and, in turn, how this may reshape understandings and the function of public property in the settler-colonial city (Chapter 4). In the terms of his judgement, outlined above, Justice Kirchner spoke to the entanglement of public space and the vulnerability of people sheltering at Crab. He suggested that being able to access this public space would help to build resilience against their embodied precarity by facilitating (more) secure access to shelter, first and foremost, but also to basic needs, relationships, and wider state and non-state services (para. 140). Fundamentally, the encampment helps those within to 'survive' (para. 147). This logic culminated in the non-binding suggestion that the GM consider using subsections 11B(b) and (c) of the Parks Control By-law to designate an

area of the park for daytime sheltering (para. 195) – a suggestion which offers a *new grounded articulation of the right to public space, based on the ethic of precarity*.

Under Canadian law, the right of access to public space is implied or ‘residual’. In this sense, the law does not guarantee it as a right to be upheld by the state; instead, the state has a ‘negative obligation’ not to interfere with the right, as the right is implicitly extant (Moeckli, 2016). Yet, within the designated daytime sheltering area, the right to public space is reshaped into a ‘positive’ right – one which guarantees access for those who most need the space for shelter and is, in this sense, redistributive of state resources with the aim of safeguarding their ability to live ‘liveable lives’ (Butler, 2016). This new right is also not universal to all (Blomley, 2015), but graduates access based on degrees of vulnerability. Geographers interested in public space have long encouraged a recognition that public access does not mean equal access – as conditions are set based on norms, architectures, regulation, and red-zoning to name but a few (Mitchell, 2003a; Sylvestre, Blomley and Bellot, 2020). If we know this to be true – and we know that this creates a de facto hierarchy of rights to public space – perhaps it is not such a leap to propose a de-jure hierarchy which prioritises those who need it the most, but are most often excluded?

Taking up the possibility for this right demands a significant shift both from – long discredited but closely held – ideas of equal access to public space in law *and* of neat and binary (public/private) propertied visions of urban space (Section 6.2.a, Chapters 4 and 5). Indeed, this new right to shelter, and the ethics that underpin it, speak to a wider question around the extent to which Indigenous peoples and their allies can mobilise the law, as a structure that continues to violently assert jurisdictional authority over Indigenous territories, customary laws, and governance, in ways that protect and enable Indigenous lifeworlds. Thinking with this paradox, the turn towards the right to shelter, and, in turn, shifting the boundaries of settler-law to accommodate more flexible, messy, and hybrid visions of public property in the city, is one example of how, by petitioning the courts and winning, Indigenous peoples and their allies can make small but meaningful gains towards unsettling the colonial foundation of urban space, and the socio-legal structures that surround it (Barkaskas and Buhler, 2017). In this way, this mode of resistance – the reworking of the courts – speaks back to question posed by urban scholar Libby Porter (2014, p.402), who asks “where can we possibly locate our

hopes...” in contexts where “struggles against dispossession [are] always contingent, partial and compromise”? In the following sections, this chapter suggests that, while the right to shelter may present a small reworking of settler-colonial law, it has had material effects both on the ground in Crab and elsewhere, creating new spaces within which such ‘hopes’ can find fruition and cascade further (Section 6.4).

At the same time, however, proposing this principle raises challenging questions surrounding its implementation in and potentially *for* the settler-colonial city: how would we judge who needs the space the most? And who would mediate between competing claims? Is there ever justification for (de facto) closing off public space from some members of the public? And, how, within this framework, do we meaningfully account for Indigenous claims to land? The following sections delve into these layers to explore how the *Bamberger* decision has ‘travelled’ to and shaped the everyday legal geographies of Crab Park, the terms upon which such a new, positive ‘right’ is and is not justified, and the implications of this for the geographies of land, property, and resistance in the settler-colonial city.

6.4 *Bamberger* on the ground

The outcome of the *Bamberger* case changed the everyday routines and geographies of Crab Park by clarifying who has a stake in the park and the relative status and roles of these actors. As Donnie Rosa, the General Manager of the Parks Board at the time of *Bamberger*, explained:

“[Before *Bamberger*] some believed that the Park Board shouldn’t be in this business. The court made it so we couldn’t shirk our responsibility... it was a way of getting it written and the case became a road map for managing the encampment” (Interview, 12th Aug 2023)

Similarly, Andrea Reimer, a former municipal politician and adjunct professor of public policy at UBC and SFU, commented that:

“the Park Board used the injunction against Crab as a way of getting the facts on the table, and as a way of getting a response from B.C. Housing. It’s a well-rehearsed process and was quarterbacked by the City” (Interview, 2nd Aug 2023)

Here, Andrea suggests that – despite losing the case overall – the Park Board actually mobilised the law as a political technology, using the case as a means to force the Provincial housing authority (B.C. Housing) to recognise the existence of the camp, to clarify the relative roles of different government agencies, and to gain fiscal support from the Provincial and Federal governments (Kusiak, 2019; Chapter 7).

This backfired. Instead of calling on B.C. Housing to step in, the *Bamberger* decision named the Parks Board as the primary frontline agency in the management of outdoor sheltering and homelessness in Vancouver, with implications for the shape of the organisation. In March 2022, the Parks Board recruited a ‘Director of Urban Relationships’ – Betty Lepps – tasked with ‘responding to the needs of people experiencing homelessness’ (City of Vancouver, 2022a). The following month, the Board created a new park ranger role, ‘Homeless Outreach Officer’ to lead on ‘compassionate’ approaches to outdoor sheltering (Ranger, Interview, 15th Oct 2023). This interpretation of the Parks Board as the main institutional authority responsible for managing outdoor sheltering and – by extension – urban homelessness resonated across interviews with camp residents and advocates. During participant observation, a key advocate for the camp described the Parks Board as a ‘shitty landlord’ with ‘no accountability’ (Field Diary, 10th Aug 2023). Thus, *Bamberger* placed the Parks Board and camp residents in a direct relationship with one another, entangled through the grounded legal and felt property relations of Crab Park.

In April 2022, Donnie Rosa heeded the recommendation of the court, delineating a “designated daytime sheltering area” on the northwest peninsula of Crab Park (Rosa, 2022). Interviews with Donnie Rosa and Darren Pedersen, the Parks Board manager responsible for Crab, reveal that the decision to locate the designated area on the peninsula was taken as a “good compromise” (Darren Pedersen, Interview, 5th Sept 2023) which “avoided fencing” but enabled “control over where the tents could expand to and kept it manageable” (Donnie Rosa, Interview, 12th Aug 2023; see Chapter 7). This decision divided the park into two property spaces, involving different property relations, through the ‘bounding’ power of the law (Blomley, 2020). Whereas the east of the park remained subject to the Parks Control By-Law, which stipulates that daytime sheltering is illegal, on the western peninsula, daytime sheltering was permitted (Board of Parks and Recreation, 2020). Through permitting daytime sheltering, the

Parks Board ceded their property right, by law, to exclude people looking to shelter outdoors from the peninsula and enshrined the right to shelter, partially materialising a ‘positive’ right to public space.



Figure 29: ‘Notice from the General Manager of the Park Board’ outlining the area designated for ‘temporary daytime sheltering’ in accordance with the Parks Control By-Law. These notices are located on nearly all posts in Crab Park (Hills, 2023k)

The borders of the daytime sheltering area were communicated via posters on all the noticeboards in the park (Field Diary, 11th July 2023; Figure 29). Though often considered in relation to the nation-state, scholars have re-thought the history and geography of territory, delinking understandings of territory from top-down control, regulation, and calculation towards a more expansive set of technologies, practices, and affects which imbue space with political meaning (Agnew, 1994; Elden, 2010, 2013; Halvorsen, 2019). Joe Painter (2010) reminds us that territory is an effect, produced through practices that define, stabilise, and normalise a set of political relations within a space. Within this literature, scholars have also turned to the territory *of property* to consider how the law acts as a means of ‘spatial classification’ – “rather than stipulating

an extensive list of objects governed by property rules, and the associated rights attached to them, territory presumptively preassigns ownership over all objects contained within it” (Blomley, 2016, p. 597, 2022). In the case of Crab, as with other sites of settler-colonial control, such cartographic representations have been used to territorialise the peninsula, ripe for new and distinct forms of governance (Chapter 7).

Interviews with encampment advocates revealed that, pre-*Bamberger*, rangers’ morning interactions with those sheltering were “capricious” (Ryan, Interview, 28th Aug 2023) – sometimes rangers would simply chat to those sheltering but at other times they would go as far as to start removing a tent without the consent of those sheltering (Michelle, Interview, 20th Sept 2023). The creation of the designated sheltering area changed this morning routine and stabilised a new set of enforcement and governance practices. After *Bamberger*, park rangers started to arrive in a van sometime between 8am and midday, parking at the front of the red gazebo located at the eastern entrance to the peninsula before patrolling the peninsula on foot. When tents were present elsewhere in the park, they would visit them and ask them to pack down or move to the designated area, waiting for compliance (Field Diary, 6th July 2023). When asked the purpose of these daily patrols, rangers spoke to the importance of keeping order in the camp – though one ranger brought up welfare concerns (Ranger, Interview, 15th Oct), others prioritised health and safety checks, fire hazards, and cleanliness (Darren, Interview, 5th Sept).

This daily practice is an act of territoriality (Elden, 2010), the shape of the patrol physically reinforcing the distinct spatial boundaries of the peninsula and acting as a reminder of the continued role and authority of the Parks Board within the space despite the *Bamberger* outcome. Indeed, the extent to which this space was understood as a (settler-) territory to-be-managed is evident in an offhand comment made by Donnie Rosa during interview. They mentioned that when the Park Board initially designated the sheltering area there was a plan to spray-paint 3x3 square lots for tents in order to visually grid the peninsula and enact the enclosed aesthetic-regime of private property within the park – an almost comic irony given that those involved had just contested a case where they fought to eradicate any semblance of private possession by those sheltering (Blomley, 2007a; see Chapter 8). This plan reflects the deeply held imagined geographies of private property of the Parks Board authorities, the intense desire to

curate a neat (White, settler-colonial) propertied aesthetic in the park, and the ways in which forms of settler-colonial governance evolved to do so (see following chapter).

Though not entirely cordial – Ryan, a volunteer and advocate for the Crab encampment, described the new state of affairs at Crab in August 2023 as “stability under the threat of displacement” (Interview, 28th Aug 2023) – these new, more passive routines of authority allowed those sheltering to build stable shelters and routine and to no longer face a daily battle for their home and possessions (Chapter 5). Brent, a long-time resident, and camp ‘elder’²⁴, described the scale of the change:

“Before [*Bamberger*] we were just a small voice right but now we have so much behind us. We have the world behind us. We have strong support....we're stronger within the camp, we do our own petitions and our lawyers are just amazing. I tell you they [Park Rangers] don't touch on a lot of things they used to. Everything has changed because of these lawyers”

He described “winning” the case as the “backbone” of the camp:

“[camp] seniors know that it's because of them standing their ground that we are here. They know what the backbone is. They know that we have these court conditions that we have to live by and as long as we're abiding by those conditions, and we pass those conditions on to the new ones, the camp can stay. We stress this over and over and over and over” (Brent, Interview, 2nd Aug 2023)

Here, Brent hints at the way the *Bamberger* decision has also been interpreted, and appropriated, by camp residents. Interviews with camp residents revealed that the encampment had a set of rules which people had to follow to be allowed to join and remain in the designated area. Almost everybody spoke to some variation of the following:

“We have two sets of rules; we have rules that were decided by the city and conditions that we have to be in this park, and then we have our own. The judge order, as you may know, has come with conditions and that is: to keep the park clean, to keep the one-meter rule between our tents so that is fire safe – fire is

²⁴ There is no hard-and-fast rule for who counts as a camp ‘elder’ or senior. During interviews, the title was described to me as applying to somebody who has either spent a long time living in or advocating for the camp and has the respect of other residents. Another way it was used was to describe somebody who was older in age, Indigenous and has ‘earned’ the title (Drew, Interview, 4th Aug 2023; Phil, Interview, 31st Aug 2023; Amy, Interview, 2nd Oct, 2023).

our number one concern here in this camp and also the number one entity that can actually get us kicked out of this park – and we also have keep the peace within the community and in the park and outwardly, visually” (Brent, Interview, 2nd Aug 2023)

Referring to Justice Kirchner’s reasons for denying the injunction – in which he notes that the camp had not yet posed a health and safety risk to the wider public (BCSC 49, 2022, para. 198) – Brent describes Kirchner’s observations as a set of ‘conditions’ for the camp. Though Kirchner’s comments were never intended to be interpreted as binding, this interpretation reveals a high level of legal awareness within camp elders, who perceived the courts as their main means of protection against future displacement. By communicating these rules to newcomers, camp elders brought to bear an alternative site of authority and jurisdiction over the designated sheltering area, which sits alongside that of the Parks Board, setting out alternative terms under which people were permitted to remain in the camp and access camp resources – the kitchen, donation shed, and warming tent.

This layered territoriality was particularly evident during an interview with Drew, another camp elder, when we were interrupted by a tourist who had walked into the camp. The tourist explained that he was keen to walk around the camp and asked for permission to do so. Patiently, Drew replied that he couldn’t stop him, as the park was a public space, but that the tents were people’s homes and it would be disrespectful to enter them (Interview, 4th Aug 2023). When the man left to walk around, Drew remarked to myself and others hanging around that this was the reason why he had suggested building a fence around the encampment and tagging visitors with armbands – “we don’t know who they are, and we don’t know what they will do” (Interview, 4th Aug 2023). This interaction revealed and enacted the complex set of understandings of property-territory which emerged from *Bamberger*. While the tourist perceived the non-public nature of the designated sheltering area and reproduced practices of private property by asking permission from who he perceived to be the ‘owner’ to grant his entry (Blomley, 2007a; Rose, 2019), Drew initially resisted this perception, deferring to dominant understandings of public property as space of equal access. Once the tourist had left, however, Drew – clearly frustrated and concerned about the presence of the newcomer – turned to private articulations of property and a desire to enforce

mechanisms of control and exclusion over those entering (Bhandar, 2018). As such, this reveals the liminal proprietary nature of the designated sheltering area, as no longer totally public property but not private to the camp either – an example of a quietly unsettled urban space in action.

The stability and partial autonomy provided by *Bamberger* raised the profile of the camp, positioning the encampment as the frontline of the fight for outdoor shelter, representative of and connected to the struggles of other encampments in B.C. and beyond. For residents and advocates, the outcome of the case went beyond being able to shelter in Crab; it placed their bodies, stories, and struggles within a wider political and legal landscape. As Fiona York, a key advocate for the camp, put it: “the camp is light on the ground but leaving a legacy, and *Bamberger* is part of that” (Interview, 13th Aug 2023). Brent explained:

“We were once a molehill. But now we're a mountain. I didn't realize this until I saw that this was global news. And when I spoke to the Globe and Mail myself and did the news, publicity! I knew that we have a purpose here and that we had a voice now. And other camps are now looking at this right?” (Interview, 2nd Aug 2023)

Camp residents and advocates are connected to other encampments in B.C., regularly messaging and visiting other camp leaders to share advice and messages of solidarity (Rider, Interview, 14th Aug 2023). As part of these efforts, advocates and volunteers at Crab actively track developments in legislation over outdoor sheltering and the evolution of by-laws regulating public space, engaging in court-watching beyond the space of the court and circulating this knowledge through their networks (Fiona York, Interview, 13th Aug 2023; Gill and Hynes, 2021). As such, the territory of the Crab peninsula acts as an organising device – both in the sense of socio-legal categorisation described above, and as a physical site for homelessness organising (Painter, 2010; Blomley, 2020; Jackman *et al.*, 2020). It represents a point of focus for a wider – though piecemeal – political movement which looks to both resist punitive municipal policy over outdoor sheltering and to prefigure an unsettled vision of city space in which the distinction between public/private property is blurred and remaking home beyond its normative boundaries is possible (Lancione, 2023; Chapter 5).

In late summer 2023, the camp expanded onto the hillside beyond the designated area, citing concerns around overcrowding on the peninsula (Field Diary, 27th Aug 2023). In response, park rangers increased their patrols and demands to ‘pack-down’ the tents on the hillside, visiting more often and with police in tow. The Parks Board also set out new ‘guidelines’ over shelter size within the designated area in an attempt to (re)organise the peninsula and create space for others to join (Field Diary, 27th Aug 2023, Figure 30). Perceiving these activities as an escalation of Park Board control of the camp, residents and supporters started to occupy tents on the hillside during patrols, to pass around legal notices (Figure 31 and 32), and to engage in ‘legal observation’ of rangers. A field diary entry on the 26th of September accompanies a resident who was shadowing three rangers and two police as they circulated the camp:

“They walked around all the structures and returned to the gazebo. Now rangers and police are saying they are not going to allow anything that is not a tent unless it’s permitted by the general manager. Rangers are also referring to anything ‘over a certain height’ which is not in the by-laws or fire code. Resident M asked one of the rangers for a copy of the by-laws that the structure is in breach of – ‘have you got anything in writing’. Ranger shook his head and tried to dismiss the resident. I am later reminded by Fiona [key camp advocate] that ‘guidelines are not by-laws, they can’t be enforced’” (Field diary, 26th September, 2023)



Figure 30: ‘Guidelines for Shelters and Fire Safety at Crab Park’ (Hills, 2023I)

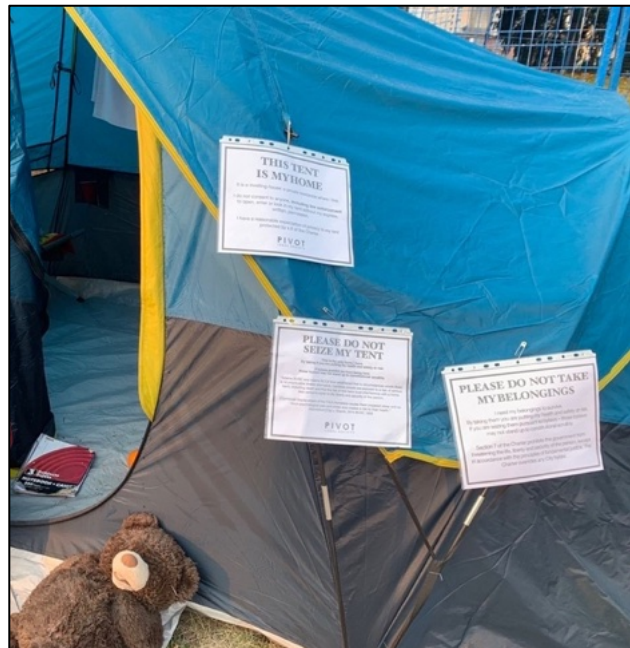
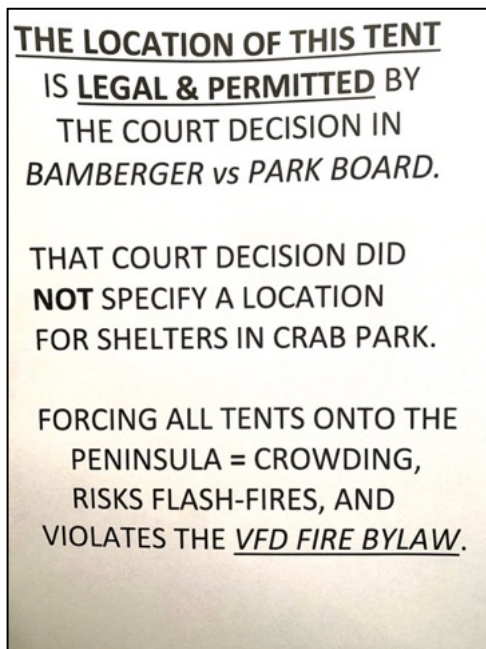


Figure 31 and 32: Flyers attached to tents on the hillside suggesting that rangers' attempts to contain outdoor sheltering to the Crab peninsula are illegal (Hills, 2023m; Hills, 2023n)

These acts of resistance continuously reminded rangers of the outcome of *Bamberger* and demanded ongoing evidence of the legality of rangers' actions. Thus, by circulating the notices, camp residents revealed the shaky legal ground on which the Parks Board operated in Crab and sought to *refuse* the Board's authority by taking ownership of the law, asserting their own interpretations of both the *Bamberger* case and municipal by-laws (Figures 31 and 32; Simpson, 2014a). Athena, an urban Indigenous woman, perceived attempts to police the camp as part of the story of ongoing violence against urban Indigenous peoples and explained her decision to continue to camp and to circulate the notices as:

“about Indigenous rights to land. They didn't have the right to come in. They didn't have any rights to have a judiciary, or to call for a grouping of people to be dismantled and dispersed, as they did. Because it's not their land” (Athena, Interview, 4th Aug 2023).

Here, Athena uses an unspecified ‘they’ to indicate the network of authorities involved in the displacement and policing of the camp – from the Province, to the City, the Parks Board and the police. Athena reminds us that the law is a colonial institution, its jurisdiction illegally seized on unceded territories, and that attempts by ‘them’ to control the camp are illegitimate as a result. For her, the protection of the camp is about more than accessing shelter, it is about unveiling and refusing the myth of colonial authority

on Indigenous land through her body and presence (Simpson, 2014a; Dorries *et al.*, 2019).

For political geographers, questions of territory are often – though not exclusively – entangled with those of sovereignty (Agnew, 1994). In *Mohawk Interruptus*, Audra Simpson (2014) introduces the notion of *refusal* as a form of resistance where Indigenous people decline to be fully legible to or incorporated within the settler-state – a political alternative to recognition. This includes refusing the state's definitions of citizenship, identity, and belonging – a dismissal of the state's claim to define subjects and activities within their so-called territory. For instance, the Mohawk people often refuse Canadian or U.S. passports, insisting on their own self-determined identity as members of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. By refusing the state's authority in this way, the Mohawk peoples articulate themselves politically as people who belong to a sovereign nation other than the United States or Canada, predating and surviving conquest. As is evident in the discussion of Crab above, where residents seek to mobilise the law to refuse the authority of the settler-colonial city, this creates everyday 'lines of escape' where people are able to protect their belongings, shelter, and autonomy on a daily basis – but it also goes beyond this (Katz, 2017). In the case of the Crab encampment, these practices of refusal also enable the resurgence and practice of alternative sovereignties, including forms of embodied (previous chapter) and legal Indigenous self-determination – outlined further below.

6.5 The limits and potential of the law

As has already been outlined, in *Bamberger*, Justice Kirchner decided to adjourn the case and to remit the injunction request back to the Parks Board along with a series of non-binding 'observations', including the possibility for a daytime sheltering area. As such, the eventual creation of the designated area was not legally required and was instead Donnie Rosa's decision. Because of this, the Parks Board has been able to retain the balance of power in Crab in two ways. Firstly, through the ability to continue to impose and implement mechanisms of control over the space (such as with the sheltering guidelines above) and, secondly, by retaining the threat of removal; just as the Parks Control By-Law gives the GM the power to *designate* a daytime sheltering area, they also retain the power to take it away. Moreover, B.C. municipal authorities

have a track record of simply ignoring court decisions and taking extrajudicial action against those sheltering outdoors. This tactic were used in Prince George when an encampment on the ‘Moccasin Flats’ was decamped by municipal authorities in November 2021, despite the Supreme Court’s refusal to grant an injunction in support of the municipal authority (BCSC 2089, 2021).²⁵ The city eventually apologised for its actions, but the damage was done – people had moved elsewhere, lost possessions, access to critical social networks, and more (Hermer, 2022; Holliday, 2022; Kurjata, 2022). Encampments are ephemeral and make-shift formations and they do not simply reassemble (Vasudevan, 2015b). The action taken by the city was both illegal and effective.

Similar extrajudicial action was proposed on November 6th, 2023, by the Government of British Columbia when amendments to the Community and Vancouver Charter were suggested to include a description of a ‘reasonably available alternative shelter’ in encampment situations.²⁶ Designed to substitute the expansive definition of shelter set by the courts in *Bamberger*, this amendment was intended to facilitate successful injunction applications as municipal authorities would more easily be able to point to available, alternative indoor shelter – now defined in the terms of the State (Flynn, Wagner and Wood, 2023). The amendment made clear the Province’s priority to protect a neat property aesthetic – an ordered, green, and colonial-vision of British Columbian urbanity defined by distinct private and public property spaces – over the shelter and survival of people experiencing homelessness. This once again reminds us of the limitations of the courts as sites of resistance; as institutions inextricably linked to the settler-colonial State, they can provide only limited and contingent protection for those sheltering outdoors and are *ambivalent* sites of resistance.

Further, while – as has been shown in Chapter 2 and 4 – questions of land ownership and use are deeply entangled with the ongoing process of settler-colonialism in Canada, direct discussions of Indigeneity and Indigenous claims to land barely featured in the *Bamberger* case. This is despite approximately 70% of Crab encampment residents

²⁵ Prince George (City) v Stewart

²⁶ “a staffed place where an individual may stay overnight and have access, either at, or nearby the shelter to a bathroom, a shower and an offered meal” (Ministry of Housing, 2023). The law was shelved by the Province in July 2024 (Wood, 2024).

identifying as Indigenous (Cindy, Interview, 10th Aug 2023).²⁷ In one of the only discussions of Indigeneity in the case, Arnold Manitopyes, a man in his late 60s from the Muskowekwan First Nation, describes the pathway from his childhood to the camp in his affidavit:

“I have not had a stable home since 2000. I lived on reserve until I was six and a half, then went to residential school. Residential school messed me up. I was only there a year and a half but that was enough. My brothers and friends would get taken into the priests' quarters at night, and I remember finding children's bodies out by the fence. I said that to people and no one believed me. But now they're finding bones” (Manitopyes, 2021, paras. 2–3)

After time working in mining, forestry, and construction, Arnold found himself in Vancouver working as a sculptor. He lived on a boat before becoming homeless and has been living at Crab since August 2021. He continued:

“I was raised to know how to survive on the land; that was an important part of my childhood, my years taking out the dog sled. I feel safer and more grounded sleeping near grass than I do on the concrete of an alley.... I'm here because these are the only people that accept me, and because it is the safest and cleanest housing option I have right now...I tried to get rental housing in the past and been told by a landlord they won't rent to me because I'm Native. I know there's a lot of prejudice against Native people. I feel hopeless that anyone will rent me a space. At one point someone talked to me about moving into an auditorium. Into a cot. Count me out. I can live better in a shelter that I build myself than in an auditorium. But the way it's going, I feel like I'm fighting a challenge that I don't feel like I can win. I've experienced discrimination for being Native and seen how the system is corrupt towards Natives ever since I was put in residential school, and after decades of experiences of discrimination I just can't trust that I'll be safe in a cot in an auditorium... I need to live somewhere where I don't have to sign in and out, or sign my guests in and out. Since the 1800s, my family, my grandparents had to sign in and out of reserve. Generations later, I don't want that for me. I want to break that cycle. I don't want to have to sign in and out of my home.” (Manitopyes, 2021, para. 9-27)

Arnold's deposition rehearses for the court the decades of discrimination and intergenerational trauma he has experienced as an Indigenous person – on reserve, at

²⁷ This is not an official statistic but a percentage quoted in the interview with Cindy which rings true with my observations on the ground and the overrepresentation of people identifying as Indigenous under the category of 'unsheltered' homelessness in the 2023 Vancouver Homeless Count (Chapter 1; Mauboules and Lupick, 2023).

residential school, in attempts to gain rental housing, in curtailing his autonomy in indoor shelters, and in disruptions to his shelter at Crab Park. Arnold does not just experience attempts to clear Crab as a singular violence, but as resonant of these ongoing violences he and generations of his family have experienced at the hands of the settler-colonial state. From Arnold's account we might begin to articulate an understanding of precarity in relation to Indigenous dispossession, one which situates the Indigenous experience within a different *order* of precarity in the settler-colonial city, with implications for the terms under which he has a right to outdoor shelter and, perhaps, in turn, for the right of the camp to remain in Crab Park as a home for urban Indigenous peoples.

Yet, unlike previous encampments at Oppenheimer and Strathcona, organised by Chrissy Brett, Crab is not led by an Indigenous elder (Ball, 2022). The camp itself is also situated in a contentious location – Crab holds memorials dedicated to the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls and the Squamish First Nation (Burk, 2010). Indeed, one Indigenous resident of the camp described the Crab peninsula as the resting place for Squamish ancestors, reflecting on how they avoided pegging their tent down so as to avoid disturbing the land. Indeed, most camp residents were aware of the challenge of (not) taking possession (Porter, 2014), often expressing “regret” that they were on the site but that they had no choice – “it was the only open space left” (Brent, Interview, 2nd Aug 2023). Richard, a Crab resident from the Haida Nation, spoke about the importance of recognising his position as a temporary guest and asking the host nations for “permission [to be on the land], because they're from here. Because, traditionally, I have to ask for permission to do anything because it's not my territory” (Richard, Interview, 16th Aug 2023).

In this context, then, the account this chapter provides of property, the law, and its limits, raises challenging questions surrounding the role of the Crab encampment in Indigenous dispossession; does, as this chapter and Arnold's account perhaps begins to suggest, the camp provide a space for the genuine re-assertion of Indigenous autonomy and resurgence of Indigenous lifeworlds? Or, does the camp risk re-possessing the land in ways that continue to alienate and dispossess long-standing Indigenous relations, including those of the Squamish, Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations (Porter, 2014)?

Working through this problematic, Richard continued:

“I wanted to build 5 Indigenous longhouses here, on the walkway to the bathrooms. I told the City it could be an apology for the Squamish and for disrespecting us and putting us on the memorial” (Richard, Interview, 16th Aug 2023)

As such, for Richard, if (re)possession of the land by the encampment is happening, it is because of decisions taken by the Province, City, and Parks Board to close off other spaces in the city. This perspective resonated in interviews with other urban Indigenous residents of the Downtown Eastside, such as Chris, a Downtown Eastside elder and advocate who had been part of a previous encampment in Crab in 2003. He argued:

“If you look across Canada, it’s nothing but land, but that’s not habitable to the level that it could be. To me, that’s what landback could be... It doesn’t necessarily have to be for Indigenous people only. But raising the question of how people are using the lands that they’re on now? and Crab Park is kind of an example of that. We’re always looking for angles and looking for targets and, for an Indigenous person, the Port Authority is definitely a good target. If we pay attention to what they’re doing and how they’re using the land and how did they even get to own that land forever? Like, down at Crab Park, there’s the railroads that go through there and there’s like, 6 or 7 trucks down there, and there’s not a lot else. They’re not really using that all the time. So to me, it makes sense that they figure out how to make those lands available for people...to me, landback means that we *activate the land for the people that are actually there*” (27th July 2023, emphasis added)

Here, Chris speaks to a version of reclaiming urban space, of ‘landback’, which remakes relations to urban land in ways that puts it to ‘use’ – not as exclusive private or public property, or as a space for passive leisure (Chapter 4), but a common space for those individuals who are ‘actually there’ ‘all the time’, sleeping, eating, socialising, and living at the camp. Placed in conversation with other forms of urban landback – such as the creation of urban reserves – Chris articulates a version of this which resists formulating these new relations in a shape which reconciles these relations into a shape legible to, and not unsettling of, the settler-state (Tomiak, 2017). Instead, he suggests a version of landback and of re-claiming which is inclusive of all and situated in the historical-geographies of the Downtown Eastside as a place, reparative of the wider social and political geographies of the neighbourhood (Chapter 5).

The issue of reconciliation and the recognition of Indigenous rights and claims to land is particularly resonant in the case of Crab Park, which sits on Federal lands. In 2016, the Federal government endorsed the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and committed to implementing it and, in 2019, British Columbia enshrined UNDRIP in law (Kopecky, 2024). The same year, the Federal government recognised the right to housing as a fundamental human right in the National Housing Strategy Act (NHS Act) (Office of the Federal Housing Advocate, 2024; Van Wagner and Flynn, 2024). Despite these commitments, a 2021 open letter sent from the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, Pivot Legal Society, the BC Civil Liberties Association, Aboriginal Front Door, and the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing acknowledged that ‘the forced displacement of Indigenous peoples from the Crab encampment is out of step with reconciliation and contravenes their human rights to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent’ (Smith, 2021). As Alexandra Flynn (2022, 2024; Flynn *et al.*, 2022) has argued, these legal developments raise the possibility of an Indigenous person legally challenging the city’s authority to displace those in the encampment on the basis of upholding and protecting their Indigenous *and* human rights (McJunkin, 2023; Van Wagner and Flynn, 2024). In doing so, they could invoke alternative jurisdictions to protect these spaces and to further unsettle the legal and political authority of the state (Office of the Federal Housing Advocate, 2024).

6.6 Conclusion

In sum, this chapter has asked: what new grounded and legal understandings of property emerge from making home in public space? How do these come to bear on the space and subjectivities of Crab Park? And what stakes – individual, political, and ontological – are involved in their (re)production?

To answer these questions, the first half of the chapter looked to unpick case law over the right to shelter in British Columbia, positioning the legal field as simultaneously an arena for the elaboration of settler domination as well as of subversion, negotiation, and reworking by Indigenous communities and their allies – a space of ambivalent resistance. The outcome of the case unsettles and reworks the longstanding, and long questioned, principle of universal access to public space, moving from a framework where everyone has the same (imagined) right to ‘not be excluded’ towards a set of

positive, graduated rights to public space, shaped by the ethics of precarity. Situated amongst the backdrop of ever-encroaching settler-colonial and neoliberal (en)closure of urban public space, this principle posits radical and challenging questions around the meaning, purpose, and property landscape of public space in the settler-colonial city.

To explore how this decision played out, the chapter then turned to space of Crab Park to understand how *Bamberger* was felt, enacted, and appropriated by those on the ground. Tracing how the case initiated a new set of territorial practices, undertaken by both park rangers and the camp, to the designated sheltering area, the chapter demonstrated how park rangers evolved their governance of the camp to exert control within the limits of the law (see Chapter 7), while camp residents simultaneously *refused* this, reclaiming the designated area through grounded property claims and by evoking Indigenous rights. Taking up this tense landscape, the final section reflected on what is at stake politically in the outcome of *Bamberger*. In doing so, it revealed how a focus on only the new legal rights gained by those camping at Crab risks concealing the ways in which the state has sought to continue to curtail the power of the courts in cases of sheltering (see also Chapter 7 and 8), alongside ongoing tensions and possibilities emerging from how the camp sits alongside wider Indigenous resistance, visions of landback, and structures of liberal recognition – a theme further developed in the following chapter (Porter, 2014).

7 Governing Public Space: Palliative Geographies and the Progressive Settler-Colonial City

“How have we got to a position in society where the main interaction for people experiencing homelessness with the social security net is park rangers, who are trained to trim hedges and paint swings?”

– Ryan, encampment advocate and documentarian (Interview, 28th Aug 2023)

7.1 From ‘manageable’ to a ‘managed’ camp

On the 8th of April 2024, the Parks Board passed a series of amendments to the Parks Control By-Law, supposedly to

“support use by those relying on parks for overnight shelter, to set-up users of the cleaned up and repaired Crab Park Designated Area for better hygiene and safety outcomes...and to support improved relations between these park users and Parks operations staff” (General Manager, Board of Parks and Recreation, 2024, p. 2).

To achieve these purported goals, the new by-laws redefined permissible ‘temporary shelter’ – stipulating that individual shelters in Crab Park could only be a tent or canopy of a maximum of 100ft² with no belongings or additional structures around or outside of the tent – and sought to further define the boundaries and layout of the encampment by introducing standardised spacing between the temporary shelters (ibid.) The laws also outlined new responsibilities for those sheltering in the park, including to maintain, “keep tidy and clear of debris” the area surrounding their tent, and set out new conditions under which the General Manager could inspect and order the removal of a temporary structure (General Manager, Board of Parks and Recreation, 2024, p. 7). In practice, then, the new by-laws were designed to enable and justify a Parks Board ‘clean-up’ of the encampment which took place between March and April 2024 (Figure 33).



Figure 33: Image of Crab encampment following the Parks Board ‘clean-up’ (Zavarise, 2024)

During the ‘clean-up’, park rangers removed the community tent which had previously functioned as the centre of the camp, a space for people to socialise, temporarily sleep, and an overdose prevention site (City of Vancouver, 2024a; Wells, 2024). The encampment, once a colourful, bustling, diverse, and overflowing space of salvaged materials, make-shift structures, and human and more-than-human life (Chapter 5), was transformed into an (en)closed, gridded series of uniform tent ‘parking lots’ with space for just 27 residents (CRAB Park Tent City / Ay’x Village, 2024a). No new residents were permitted to join the encampment.

Following this, the Parks Board increased its oversight of day-to-day life in the encampment, with camp advocates highlighting increased surveillance and a sense of imprisonment at the camp as park rangers, sometimes accompanied by police, stringently enforced the new regulations (CRAB Park Tent City / Ay’x Village, 2024b, 2024c). Rangers have been recorded entering tents and taking people’s belongings with no warning and have implemented tactics to obstruct documentation of this process by both camp residents and the media (CRAB Park Tent City / Ay’x Village, 2024c). In April, Sandra Singh, the Deputy City Manager for the City of Vancouver, told *The Tyee* newspaper that the cleanup was designed to “close the camp for good” as remaining residents would “be offered housing over the next few months with the hope the encampment will be gone by winter” – as camp advocates put it, the move signalled a

process of ‘eviction by attrition’ (CRAB Park Tent City / Ay’x Village, 2024a; St. Denis, 2024). By June 2024, just 11 people were left at the camp (CRAB Park Tent City / Ay’x Village, 2024c). Today, the camp is closed (see Chapter 8).

This chapter traces the build-up to this event, focusing on the period between the conclusion of *Bamberger* in January 2022 and April 2024 to reflect on the ways in which various State authorities responded to the case and sought to reclaim control over the public space of Crab Park. Shifting focus from urban law to urban governance, the chapter asks: what happens if we, quite literally, understand the park authorities’ continued attempts to close and enclose the encampment as a continuation of a settler conquest that has not yet ended (Chapter 4)?

Responding to this, the chapter draws on interviews with municipal politicians and Parks Board and City of Vancouver staff, Crab and Downtown Eastside advocates, and encampment residents, alongside analysis of relevant Federal, Provincial and Municipal policy documents, Crab press releases, and local media articles. It argues that this period between the outcome of *Bamberger* and the April 4th ‘clean-up’, reflects a specific ‘palliative’ model of encampment governance which emerges both from the boundaries of *Bamberger* and the wider political-economies of the Downtown Eastside (DiMario, 2022).

7.2 Tangled homelessness governance in the Downtown Eastside

The governance of homelessness in the Downtown Eastside involves a tangled field of actors and motivations. Within Canada’s federalised political system, issues of housing and health are devolved to the Provinces, while the management of urban public space sits with municipal authorities, who create and use by-laws and engage processes of urban planning to enforce their governing vision (Chapter 4; Mitchell, 1997; Dorries, 2009; Blomley, 2010; PIVOT, 2013). Thus, broadly, the Federal government’s role in managing homelessness is limited to the ‘governance of governance’ – shaping the funding landscape, setting national directives, and collecting national-level data (Smith, 2022). In 2019, Canada committed to a prevention-oriented model for addressing homelessness called *Reaching Home* which set new national goals to reduce chronic homelessness, target support at Indigenous people and vulnerable populations, and to

develop coordinated systems to facilitate ease-of-access to housing services across Provincial and Municipal contexts (Government of Canada, 2022). This model builds on the Housing First paradigm of homelessness reduction, first trialled in the United States and then imported to Canada in the early 2000s (Gaetz, Scott and Gulliver, 2013; The Homeless Hub, 2021). In British Columbia, the Provincial government has, since the 1970s, been relatively interventionist in housing and homelessness policy, operating principally through its arm's-length organisation, B.C. Housing (Smith, 2022). In the Downtown Eastside, the three levels of government tend to collaborate on the issue of homelessness, with the Federal government and Province providing the funding and policy direction and City of Vancouver acting as a key implementation partner – a structure cemented by the Vancouver Agreement (2000) (Smith, 2022).

The early 21st century saw a dramatic increase in homelessness in Vancouver, from 1,291 in 2005 up to 2,420 in 2023 (Thompson *et al.*, 2012; Mauboules and Lupick, 2023; Chapter 1). Against this backdrop, homelessness governance has broadly focused on emergency response, such as the provision of temporary emergency accommodation (shelters) and the expansion of low-barrier services. Though this aspect continues to be prioritised in government spending, in 2017 the Province – as part of the *Rapid Response to Homelessness* program – turned towards a Housing First model (Manson and Fast, 2024). This included the expansion of supportive housing projects in the Downtown Eastside, designed as low-barrier pathways into housing with 24/7 staff and wrap-around health and social programming (Fast and Cunningham, 2018; Chapter 5). Like shelters, these are often contracted out to non-profits to run and form part of the City's vision of a 'Housing Continuum' through which people transition from low-barrier shelters into more permanent forms of housing over time (City of Vancouver, 2011; After Echo Park Lake Research Collective, 2022; Singh Kelsall *et al.*, 2023)

Taking up the Federal turn towards prevention, the Province also introduced the *Belonging in BC* homelessness plan in 2022 (BC Government, 2024). This committed over \$2bn to the creation of complex care housing units, new programs to support people into rental and permanent housing, and an 'Integrated Support Framework' to coordinate service delivery for those most at risk of becoming homeless (ibid.). Under this plan, the Province also established the HEART & HEARTH programs which aim to “provide rapid supports to people sheltering in encampments and create new spaces to

help people move indoors, quickly” through the creation of encampment response teams and by ring-fencing funding for emergency shelter and housing spaces for encampment residents (ibid.). The teams operate in partnership with municipal staff, First Nations and Indigenous groups, regional health authorities, and non-profit service providers.

This focus on coordinated, integrated services aligns with public health approaches that have shaped Vancouver’s governance of substance use since the early 2000s (Kerr *et al.*, 2006; McKelvie, 2020; Bailey *et al.*, 2023). In 2005, the City of Vancouver introduced the ‘Four Pillars’ drug policy prevention plan (Bardwell *et al.*, 2019). Predominantly targeted at the Downtown Eastside, this substance-use governance approach was informed by harm reduction approaches, such as methadone programs, needle exchanges, safe injection sites, and naloxone distribution, as well as the expansion of treatment services (Cohen and Csete, 2006; Wilton and Moreno, 2012; Boyd, 2017). The scale of the overdose crisis in the neighbourhood²⁸, along with the significant overlap between homelessness and substance use, weighs heavily on the nature of homelessness governance in the Downtown Eastside. For example, the prioritisation of ‘supportive’ housing, which centres recovery and rehabilitation, medicalises residents and incorporates a harm reduction approach (Murphy, 2009; Liu and Blomley, 2013; Collins *et al.*, 2018; Fast and Cunningham, 2018; Bardwell *et al.*, 2019). It is at this juncture, and in recognition of the entangled web of governance that is shaped by and comes to shape the housing and overdose ‘polycrisis’ in the city, that this chapter draws upon and extends the work of sociologist Anthony DiMario (2022) who, observing and commenting on the logic behind county-led harm reduction approaches in Los Angeles, conceptualises the notion of palliative governance as:

"a range of splintered *discourses, histories, institutions, and strategies* that converge practically on the *maintenance of subjects’* bare, biological life, but, for myriad reasons, are unable to do much more. Palliation is enacted through, in response to, and despite, larger contexts of policy dysfunction and institutional failure. Put simply, it *governs through failure*" (DiMario, 2022, p. 882, emphasis added)

²⁸ In April 2016, the provincial health officer declared a public health emergency in response to the rise of drug-related overdoses; in 2023, there were 2,511 drug-related deaths in British Columbia and the majority of these were in the Downtown Eastside. The local health area which contains the Downtown Eastside (Vancouver-Centre North) reported a death rate 12 times the provincial average (Public Safety and Solicitor General, 2024).

Thus, instead of attempting challenging, structural change, palliative governance involves the introduction of stop-gap measures to provide minimum standards of ‘care’ which “simply try to keep very poor subjects alive” (ibid., p. 860). Taking up this conceptualisation in relationship to the Downtown Eastside, this chapter sets out how the City of Vancouver and the Parks Board have oscillated between tolerance, indecision, and indifference in responding to and providing for those living in Crab Park. Extending the work of DiMario, this chapter considers how palliation plays out in space, place, and context, moving from palliative governance to palliative *geographies*. Doing so, the chapter takes up the framework of palliation as a way of attending to the intersecting political economies of home/lessness and substance-use which come to shape the governance of the Downtown Eastside, placing these in relation to the wider production and evolution of the settler-colonial city and its concomitant processes of displacement and deracination (Chapter 4), the construction of settled visions of urban space and the public (Chapter 5), and the mobilisation of specific settler-visions of Indigeneity (Chapter 2) to pursue the interests of the settler-State.

7.3 Pre-Bamberger encampment governance

For most of the period before *Bamberger*, there was no formal arrangement between the three governments with respect to homeless encampments in Vancouver. Instead, as Chapter 6 shows, the shifting requirements of the law were central to State-encampment interactions. In this landscape, according to Kennedy Stewart (Mayor of Vancouver, 2018-2022), the approach taken by the City of Vancouver towards encampments was mainly preventative (Interview, 11th July 2023). Through ‘street sweeps’²⁹ or by seeking by-law compliance, the City of Vancouver’s approach was to discourage people from tenting during the day and to encourage people into emergency indoor shelter accommodation at night. If this failed, only then would a court injunction be sought to legitimise any decampment process. Whether the City or Parks Board decided to go to

²⁹ Street sweeps is the name given to the practice of City of Vancouver Engineering Services workers, accompanied by VPD officers moving through city streets to enforce the *Street and Traffic By-Law* (sections 71A and 84). This by-law prohibits people from placing objects, structures, and garbage on city streets or sidewalks. This has been an ongoing practice in the Downtown Eastside since the early 2000s but was brought to light in 2021 by advocates in light of events in Oppenheimer and Strathcona park (Mannoe, 2022; Goldshear *et al.*, 2023).

the courts depended on housing and shelter availability (as per the *Adams* decision) and on pressure from the media and other governmental actors, particularly the Province:

“so in the last council we agreed with the Parks Board that we would not pursue injunctions unless there was enough housing for folks to go to – whether that's temporary modular housing or, or new-build housing or, or even kind of select shelter space, there had to be something for folks to go to. And, and so the Parks Board would not [seek] injunctions [until then] and the provincial government was jumping up and down, you know, because these encampments would show up on the news every night. And the Premier of the province would get blamed and he'd be demanding injunctions” (Kennedy Stewart, Interview, 11th July 2023)

In practice, under Stewart's mayorship, the City was relatively lenient towards encampments; the Oppenheimer Park encampment (2018-2020) lasted nearly 2 years and the Strathcona Park encampment nearly a year (2020-2021). In both, the City provided outreach services and, in Strathcona, B.C. housing – under pressure from advocates – set up washrooms, showers, and a large community tent (Mackie, 2021).

In April 2021, Stewart signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the (then) Provincial Housing Minister (now Premier) David Eby and the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation (BC Attorney General, 2021). Providing an initial skeleton for encampment governance in Vancouver, the MOU sought to clarify the respective responsibilities of the governments with respect to ‘unsheltered’ residents and placed an

“obligation to act immediately in a positive and compassionate way with viable alternatives, along with access to social and health services to support unsheltered residents and those living in temporary structures in parks and public spaces” (BC Attorney General, 2021)

The MOU looked to the housing continuum as the solution for encampments. This meant that at the decampment of the Strathcona camp only proceeded once the pre-requisite housing and shelter spaces had been secured, including the purchase of additional SRO units (Winter, 2021). The MOU also positioned the Province as the lead actor in a decampment process, with primary responsibility for the provision of housing options as well as the planning and coordination of a decampment. In turn, the City of Vancouver, through the provision of outreach staff and by liaising with community

organisations, was to support operationally, while the Parks Board assumed responsibility for day-to-day activities on the ground: specifically, the management of park space (including fencing, some of the logistics of decampment, and park remediation) and the ongoing enforcement of the Parks Control By-Law (BC Attorney General, 2021). Notably, and despite the arguably national-scale drivers of the housing and opioid crises, the Federal government assumed no role in encampment situations (Office of the Federal Housing Advocate, 2024).

Perhaps the first major test of this MOU came in April 2023 when, following the election of centre-right, ‘tough-on-crime’ ABC Mayor Ken Sim in November 2022, the City of Vancouver engaged in a mass decampment of a camp on Hastings Street, a main thoroughfare located at the centre of the Downtown Eastside (City of Vancouver, 2023). Though the decampment was presented by the City as a necessary act, citing health and safety concerns and the infringement of fire by-laws, it has been widely held up by local advocates as signalling a punitive shift in the Municipal government’s approach towards homelessness and their lack of respect for the courts and the MOU (this action did not follow the *Adams* decision and ensure housing/shelter availability beforehand, nor consult with the province) (Gut, 2023; Luba and Jinjoe, 2023; Ryan, Interview, 28th Aug 2023).

7.4 Palliative geographies

Yet, at the same time as the mass decampment was occurring on Hastings Street, the encampment in Crab Park remained. This section looks to unpick this disjuncture by uncovering the relative responsibility of the layers of government which have a stake in Crab Park; the nature and logics of governance practices in the park; the effects on these on the ground; and the discourses used to legitimise and narrate these. Through this, the on-the-ground realities of palliative governance are explored, positing that palliation involves the production of a ‘responsibility sink’ over the Crab encampment, practices of containment and slow violence, and the legitimising discourses of consultation, ‘reconciliation’, and progressive politics.

a. The ‘responsibility sink’

Andrea Reimer served on the Vancouver City Council between 2008 and 2018, representing Vision Vancouver, and is currently an adjunct Professor in Public Policy at UBC and Simon Fraser University. During our interview, she patiently explained the complicated relationship between the Parks Board, the City of Vancouver, and the B.C. Government. Understanding the history of these institutions and their complicated and – at points – fractious relationships with one another, she argued, could go some way to answering Ryan’s question, posed in the introduction:

“I don't know that I'm an expert on this. But then I think the problem is nobody's really an expert and everyone kind of goes out of their way not to be an expert on it because of the complicated nature of it. There's a term they use called ‘governance conundrum’... I think the issue is [that] it's like the Spider Man meme where they are pointing at each other” (Andrea Reimer, Interview, 2nd Aug 2023)

To explain what Andrea means by this, we have to understand Vancouver’s model of a separately elected Parks Board and City Council, a disjointed set up which is unique to the city and is a ‘debris’ of (settler-)colonisation – a lingering remnant of early colonial rule which continues to shape social, political and legal relations today (Stoler, 2013). In 1887, the colonial Dominion Government agreed to lease a 950-acre military reserve to the City of Vancouver for use as a park – today’s Stanley Park (Kheraj, 2013). This decision created an imperative for an authority to administer and govern the space; thus emerged the elected Parks Board in 1890 (The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, 1988). As defined in the Vancouver Charter, the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation is a subcommittee of the City Council and has no legal status independent of the City; this means that park rangers, for example, are City of Vancouver employees (*Vancouver Charter*, 1953; Reimer, Interview, 2nd Aug 2023). However, politically, the Parks Board is made up of 7 directly elected ‘commissioners’ who have “exclusive possession of, and exclusive jurisdiction over...areas designated as permanent public parks” and, as such, are able to operate and make decisions completely independently from the City Council (*Vancouver Charter*, 1953, section XXIII, line 488). To complicate matters further, the Parks Board is mostly funded by proceeds from the City of Vancouver and it is often the case that the political party in control of City Council also dominates the Parks Board – as has been the case since the

election of ABC to City Council in 2022.³⁰ As such, ‘soft diplomacy’ occurs between politicians and planners working in each institution and detangling decision-making in this context is tricky (Reimer, Interview, 2nd Aug 2023). In essence, though, the Parks Board has “total control” over park spaces “but few [independent] resources” (Kennedy Stewart, Interview, 11th July 2023). Andrea continued:

“so, the Vancouver Charter says that the Parks Board’s responsibility is when an issue is related to parks. Then it comes down to what is an issue related to a park, right? What happens when housing happens in a park? Is that a housing issue or is it a park issue? I don’t know! What happens when public safety issues happen in a park? Is that park issue? Or is it a policing issue? So that’s where the Charter did not anticipate the modern realities that a Parks Board would be dealing with. Well, I don’t think it even anticipated the historic realities they were dealing with, but it definitely didn’t think its way through to today” (Interview, 2nd Aug 2023)

As Andrea suggests, it is pertinent to reflect upon this institutional set-up as one that fails to meaningfully comprehend and deal with the realities of urban space – both ‘modern’ and ‘historic’. By separating out the governance of park space from the rest of the city, this institutional set-up reflects, carries, and cements modern imaginations of the division between spaces of nature (alongside leisure and recreation) and those of (urban) society – an artificial distinction which has worked in other mediums to discredit and dispossess Indigenous law, livelihoods, claims to land, and knowledge (Shaw, Herman and Dobbs, 2006; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Esson *et al.*, 2017; Pasternak *et al.*, 2023). Yet, as Andrea neatly outlines here, and as is established in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, the binary produced by these separate institutions has never actually existed; the most intimate moments of human life happen in urban public spaces, which can also be vessels for intense politicisation. In this context, Andrea reflects, how do we draw boundaries around what is a ‘Parks’ and a ‘City’ issue, and who gets to do this?

This question remains at the core of encampment governance in Vancouver as the 2021 MOU, which looked to clarify institutional responsibility for park encampments, was “all but ripped up” during the Hastings Street decampment – leaving a ‘responsibility

³⁰ On the 6th of December 2023, Vancouver mayor Ken Sim proposed a motion to dissolve the Parks Board. Following the announcement, three ABC commissioners left the ABC party and indicated they would form an alliance with the Green Party commissioner (CBC News, 2023).

sink' over the issue of encampments (Kennedy Stewart, Interview, 11th July 2023). Interviews with Parks Board and City of Vancouver staff made this ambiguous and dysfunctional landscape clear. For example, Sue Baker, director of outreach and homelessness services for the City of Vancouver, suggested that the real responsibility for encampments lay with the Province saying, when asked who's responsibility the camp was, "we [the City of Vancouver] don't do housing, we don't do health" (Interview, 28th July 2023). Darren Pederson, the Parks Board manager responsible for overseeing the ranger team at the Crab encampment, also looked to pass on responsibility to other levels of government, explaining:

"we're not the de facto encampment managers. This this is not something we're equipped to deal with...if some other organisation, if B.C. housing or someone, wants to come along and do a more proper setup, then we would probably welcome that. But we're not equipped to take that on...we have waited two years for other levels of government or support to come. Nothing has materialised... we [the Parks Board] are the lowest common denominator" (Interview, 5th Sept 2023, emphasis added)

Here, Darren's description of the Parks Board as the 'lowest common denominator' hints at the ways in which encampment governance has become a political hot potato, with the Province and Municipal government looking to pass-the-buck on taking responsibility for the camp, including the provision of basic services, outreach support, and general management of the site, to the Parks Board. The Parks Board, in turn, has jurisdictional responsibility, but no real resources or training to do this work and, as Darren notes, 'nothing has materialised' to support with this³¹. This institutional arrangement is, quite literally, 'set up to fail' (Wells, 2020).

Whether intentional or not, the denial of responsibility is not a new – nor a neutral – feature of settler-colonial governance (Sylvestre and Castleden, 2022). Instead, Shiri Pasternak and colleagues argue that such gaps represent a tactic of control, or 'colonisation through omission' (Pasternak *et al.*, 2023). Analysing the British North America Act of 1867, through which the Federal and Provincial governments carved out their respective realms of power, they note how both governments came to share

³¹ In 2023, the Federal and Provincial government provided \$715,000 to the Parks Board to provide services and facilities to the Crab encampment. A significant proportion of this was spent on hiring more park rangers (Thibault, 2023).

jurisdiction over Indigenous lives and the separation of Indigeneity from other spheres of governance – such as resources or social services – facilitated a limited reading of Indigenous presence and rights. She argues

“while “Indians and the lands reserved for Indians” falls under section 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1982 [Federal government responsibility], natural resources fall under Provincial jurisdiction (section 109)...[thus] when natural resource extraction impacts Indigenous peoples, a black hole of power opens as if Indigenous law does not exist beneath them both” (Pasternak *et al.*, 2023, p. 5)

Under this framework, the Federal and Provincial government can ‘shuffle’ the ‘burden’ of responsibility between them – as the Province, City of Vancouver, and Parks Board do in the case of Vancouver (DiMario, 2022; Sylvestre and Castleden, 2022). This political tactic obfuscates and shuts down avenues for accountability, advocacy, and negotiation for Indigenous and allied actors on the ground. There is something underhand about this method of governing; it is insipid – technical, invisible, and easy to deny – and holds the potential for profound violence without meaningful recourse. Indeed, it is not that the Crab encampment has been left ungoverned. Instead, as Darren hints above, this ‘burden shuffling’ has led to the downward devolution of decision-making into the hands of park rangers and operations staff, who act to exert forms of control over the camp and to deny residents the right to autonomy and basic services (see Chapter 6 and section 7.4.b below).

Employed to assist with park events and maintenance, to “educat[e] the public about park regulations”, “enforce[e] the Park Board By-Laws”, and, now, to “deal[] with homelessness as it impacts parks, and connect[] individuals with support services”, the subjectivity and experience of the park ranger was a source of curiosity for many of the camp residents and advocates (City of Vancouver, 2024b). Despite being the primary figure of the State at the Crab encampment, rangers represented somewhat hesitant and capricious sites of authority; one resident described them as ‘soft souls’ (Field diary, 3rd Aug 2023) and another thought they needed “therapy” (Athena, Interview, 4th Aug 2023). An interview with a park ranger³² revealed this conflicted subjectivity:

³² As is set out in Chapter 3, where consent was provided, participant names have been used throughout this thesis. Otherwise, pseudonyms or role descriptors, such as park ranger, have been used instead.

“I'm gonna start off with saying the City of Vancouver doesn't know what to do. I mean, there's no plan. And so it's left for me, a [park] ranger, to work it out. I have to decide whether or not we, you know, if someone's not complying with the by-law, do I have to go ‘heavy’ on them? Or do I take a compassionate approach? I'm very empathetic. I'm very good at creating bonds. My mum was homeless. My father's a crack addict, so I share my story. That builds relationships” (Park ranger, Interview, 16th Oct 2023)

They continued, describing the job as like:

“being with an abusive partner. That's how I feel. This job takes so much out of you and it beats you up. But I just keep coming back for some reason...[you feel like] you're not doing anything, we have a term here it's ‘whack-a-mole’, that's what it is” (Park ranger, Interview, 16th Oct 2023)

The ranger described feeling burdened with the responsibility of having to make decisions surrounding when to enforce the Parks Control By-Law and the day-to-day management of the Crab camp with no real guidance, both from their superiors and levels of government (‘there’s no plan’). Comparing this work to ‘whack-a-mole’, the ranger saw and felt the effects of the responsibility sink above them:

“I want to turn to my management and say, ‘can we have some definition on what an encampment is, or can we have some policies in place depending on like, whether, it's pouring down with rain or not?’ I don't think we should be putting people out into the elements where they could get wet and where they could die... So you can see I'm torn. I have this job, which I get paid well for. And, yeah, but it almost goes completely against my ethics...like it's so complex. You know, *parks are for enjoying. But, in my head, humanity bypasses that*” (Interview, 16th Oct 2023, emphasis added – see Chapter 5 and 6)

Revealing the dysfunctional responsibility sink at work, this park ranger’s relationship towards their job takes us beyond a description of palliative governance to its lived geographies on the ground. It shows how this model of pass-the-buck-governance shapes the subjectivities of those eventually burdened with facing its realities and subjects. The park ranger’s description of the mental toll of the work of governing Crab Park and frustration with decisions made – or, indeed, not made – by those above them carried through to interviews and discussions with other frontline staff working elsewhere in the Downtown Eastside, such as in Oppenheimer Park. Interviewees discussed the very real health and safety risks they faced on a daily basis, the vicarious

trauma of working on the frontline of an overdose crisis, and a sense of feeling disempowered to take meaningful action while on the job – often working around the boundaries set by their job descriptions and hours to do so (Jenn, Interview, 5th Oct 2023; Jaiden, Interview, 31st Aug 2023; Field diary entry, 16th Sept 2023). As such, the devolution of responsibility down to frontline actors by the ‘responsibility sink’ above produces somewhat hollowed, even impotent, labouring subjectivities; rangers and frontline staff who feel torn between the moments of care and connection they can provide as frontline actors, the need to avoid housing precarity themselves, the demands of the law, and the vague direction set by those higher up. Thus, turning to the subjectivities of these over-burdened workers reveals the ways in which palliation is contingent and incomplete, as individual moral and ethical codes hold the potential to create moments of connection and meaningful support. However, the reality is that – even if and when this happens – any intervention is short-term, stop-gap, and temporary; on balance, the responsibility sink, as a debris of colonial government, creates the ‘failed’ and dysfunctional (DiMario, 2022) governance conditions within which meaningful provision of public services and support to those on the ground simply does not happen – as is explored further below.

b. Geographies of containment and slow violence

As the previous chapter explores, *Bamberger* introduced divergent legal regimes in Crab Park as the ‘designated area’ was granted exemption from the Parks Control By-Law, initiating a series of everyday interactions between rangers and residents of the camp. The impact of the case, however, was not limited to Crab Park and spilled over into the activities of park rangers elsewhere in the city.

As discussed in Chapter 5, a small collection of tents began to establish in Oppenheimer Park in late summer 2023, creating friction between long term park users and the new, often younger, arrivals (Section 5.4). On the 30th of August, these tents were ‘swept’ by park rangers – a process described in following field diary entry:

“Arrived at 8:00 and there were probably around 15 park rangers and 6 police watching people dismantle their tents in the corner of the park behind the baseball diamond. Spoke to a couple of Oppenheimer regulars – they say they were about 20 rangers earlier. Yesterday, there were maybe 7 tents over there,

including a couple sheltering with the woman's mum, and another tent with a guy who had been recently stabbed and sutured himself. [Fieldhouse employee] says 'this is every single park ranger on shift'. Word around the park is that somebody called the police because people were 'cooking up dope' in the tents...Spoke to one of the park rangers who joined the team a year ago from City Protective Services. They said there is a worry about the tents becoming an encampment or 'Oppenheimer 2'. I asked where rangers are telling people to go, he replied that sending them to Crab 'is part of the conversation'" (Field diary, 30th Aug 2023)

Though not an official Park Board policy, the practice of 'sweeping' and sending people sheltering in public space to the Crab encampment emerged as a widespread pattern across field diary observations and interviews. As Sue Baker put it, after *Bamberger*, the Parks Board and City of Vancouver felt they "ha[d] to accept that Crab Park exists and work really hard in other parks" (Interview, 28th July 2023). On one occasion, Fiona York, a key advocate for the Crab encampment, described seeing the police drop people off at the edge of park and that this approach had also formed part of the Hastings decampment (Field Diary, 6th July 2024; Interview, 13th Aug 2023; Figure 34).



Figure 34: Screenshot of a tweet by Fiona York on the 30th April 2023 describing Crab being used as a space to contain some Hastings encampment residents (Hills, 2023o)

Discussing this tactic with residents of the Downtown Eastside, it became clear that this marked a shift from encampment governance prior to the *Bamberger* case. One housed resident of the neighbourhood noted:

“There have been two people that have resided in the park [behind my apartment] since I moved in almost six years ago. And they're forced to remove everything every morning now. And they've been there for years” (Evie, Interview, 19th Oct 2023)

In part, the limited scope of *Bamberger* enabled this practice by providing protections for those within the designated area but not beyond it. However, the decision to police previously overlooked encampments and outdoor shelters suggests that there is something political about this decision – a change in approach which, though perhaps facilitated by *Bamberger*, cannot be fully explained by the law. Instead, as Kennedy Stewart suggested in interview:

“It’s out of sight, out of mind...it’s good for the City [Council] because that’s [the Downtown Eastside] not where their votes come from...And the Province too. I mean I *know* it, because they’ve said, like, “Phew! They’re in Crab Park and we don’t have to worry about it. But when it’s in Oppenheimer, where people are driving by all the time, or it’s on Hastings Street, where its very very public, that definitely influences the Province’s interest. The only call I got from the Premier throughout COVID was about Oppenheimer, he said ‘Oh, I’m gonna send help to get that park cleared up’... Like I said, it’s all about the optics and especially what Global TV covers” (11th July 2023)

Here, Stewart raises questions about the ‘publicness’ of these spaces, contending that “some public space is less important than other public space, politically” (Interview, 11th July 2023). Layered in this reflection is a commentary on the interaction between public space and the makeup of the urban ‘public’ in Vancouver. By referencing ‘where the votes come from’, he illuminates the ways in which the traditional users of Crab Park, Downtown Eastside residents, figure on the boundaries of Vancouver’s ‘public’ both in that they are not the main voter group relied upon by ABC and in that their needs and demands are less likely to be picked up by the media outlets who work to hold government accountable. In comparison, events in Oppenheimer Park or on Hastings Street, as main thoroughfares of the city, hold much more political salience and ‘optics’. Here, the linkage between public space and (claiming to be part of) the public is disrupted, as Stewart reminds us that this is contingent on which public spaces

count as vessels for this relationship (Mitchell, 1995; Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008; Burk, 2010). Instead, squirreled away in the forgotten waterfront park, the encampment and its residents are contained, ‘secluded’, and hidden from the public (space) that ‘counts’. Crab provides a convenient space to contain and to control the (visual and discursive) narrative around the scale of homelessness across the city. By displacing those experiencing sheltering elsewhere into the camp, public spaces in the rest of the city are emptied. In this sense, such practices of containment neutralise the visible, unsettling ‘threat’ these tent-homes pose to the settler-colonial city (Chapter 5) as they disappear further into the urban margins and no longer garner the attention of other urban residents or the media.

As David Hugill (2017, 2021, p. 23) reminds us, in settler-colonial contexts “Indigenous peoples themselves were more often removed from city life through a series of evictions, expulsions and relocations”. Alongside practices of enclosure (Chapter 4), the production of reserve geographies, and the socio-economic exclusion of Indigenous and racialised peoples from the labour market and White society, the production of geographies of containment at Crab Park function to do exactly that (Blomley, 2003; Harris, 2004, 2021). By rendering invisible the different ways of making home in the city, where private and public space messily entangle, settler-colonial aesthetics of the propertied and ordered urban landscape are upheld through the Parks Board’s practice of containment. In this sense, these practices could themselves be considered a mode of slow ‘urban violence’ – a form of violence which is the product of colonial-capitalist urbanisation itself, emerging from “the structures, narratives, practices, and bodies that constitute the urban” (Pavoni and Tulumello, 2020, p. 50).

In 2011, Robert Nixon argued that the poor, precarious, and racialised were more likely to bear the brunt of slow violence – “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, [and] an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (p. 2). Understanding containment as a slow and quiet process through which spaces (both in the wider city and at Crab) are rendered less and less hospitable to people experiencing homelessness provides a useful theoretical framework from which to understand the everyday geographies which emerge from palliative governance (Pain, 2019; Pain and Cahill, 2022).

In the summer of 2023, the rate of new arrivals at the camp had placed significant pressure on leaders and advocates to find space for people to set up their homes and to provide the material infrastructure to support their survival (bedding, food, and sanitation facilities). One volunteer admitted to me “the camp is overcrowded and there is a real fire risk, but what can we do, there’s no other space” (Michelle, Interview, 20th Sept 2023). Aware that this admission could be mobilised by municipal authorities to either increase their oversight of the camp or to evict it altogether, camp residents and volunteers were often reluctant to speak in such frank terms. The camp was placed in a double bind; to raise the risks of overcrowding would provide a route for the Parks Board and City of Vancouver to intervene and potentially close the camp, but by continuing to accept these new arrivals, the camp was becoming less and less safe for all its residents.

While the Parks Board had previously heard and responded to requests for support from the camp, these were often limited and short-lived. In early 2023, the Board provided an electricity connection, which soon broke and was never replaced. This was followed by granting access to the park washrooms and, later, permission to establish a community garden (Field diary entries, 20-22nd July 2023). In interview, advocates were sceptical of the intent behind these actions and critical of the scale and scope of the basic infrastructure provided³³. Michelle, a volunteer at the camp, explained why she thought the Parks Board had done so little:

“They’ll give you, like, liability reasons. And I guess I understand the electrical box liability. Sure, okay, we can’t use the electrical box anymore, I guess. But that doesn’t mean that you stop trying to figure out ways to bring electricity to the park! They know that there are generators [at the encampment], even though we are not technically allowed them. So, like, can you like maybe help us pay for propane to keep those going? Can we figure out an alternative solution, rather than just say that’s the end of discussion? The reality is we need electricity when it starts to get cold and we need it to cook. So, like, we’re going to have to do that in a way that is going to be less legal and less safe. Can we collaborate

³³ In December 2023, the Crab encampment filed a human rights complaint against the City of Vancouver and Vancouver Parks Board detailing the ongoing denial of basic services to the camp and their impact on residents. It stated: “the group occupies a camp in a city park with inadequate basic survival services. Some of the referenced inadequacies include insufficient washroom and showering facilities, no shade in summer, insufficient electricity, and a lack of comprehensive sanitation of public facilities” (CRAB Park Tent City / Ay’x Village, 2023)

instead? That would be real community engagement” (Interview, 20th Sept 2023).

In her nuanced and balanced reflection, Michelle made clear that she understood the position of the Parks Board; they had to negotiate with other City of Vancouver departments, like City Engineering, to provide services like electricity and this meant that some of the camp’s demands were impractical or not within their scope of responsibility (another ‘sink’). Yet, she also argued that this should not mean the end of the conversation between the camp and the Parks Board, but that it instead should be the start of a negotiation over what sustainable access to ‘survival’ infrastructure – water, electricity, sanitation – might look like (Mitchell and Heynen, 2009; Speer, 2016). Like others, Michelle thought that the Parks Board’s limited support was pushing the camp into more dangerous and illegal modes of surviving (such as through propane fuelled generators) and felt that the board was “doing the bare minimum and making it look like they’re doing more” (Cindy, Interview, 10th Aug 2023).

‘Doing the bare minimum’ tallied with Betty Lepps’, the Parks Board’s ‘Director of Urban Relationships’, descriptions of the role of the Parks Board and rangers at Crab. For Betty, the goal of the Board was “health and well-being...we don’t want anybody to die” (Interview, 1st Aug 2023). Similarly, Darren, the park operations manager, spoke about the importance of maintaining ‘clean and safe’ conditions in the camp and the centrality of this to the eventual introduction of the sheltering guidelines in autumn 2023 (see Chapter 6.4):

“our focus is going to be cleaning up the designated area, because if you walk through there you can see that there’s a tremendous amount of space that is wasted, in our opinion, because it’s filled with items that are not related to people’s survival or tenting” (Interview, 5th Sept 2023)

The items that Darren is referring to here are people’s belongings – bikes and mobility scooters, cobbled-together patios, mini-gardens, shopping trolleys, suitcases, and dog sheds – and the camp’s communal tents: the donations shed, kitchen, and ‘warming tent’ (Field diary entry, 2nd Sept 2023). For Darren, the space is ‘wasted’ because these belongings and spaces exceed the basic needs of people living in the camp. In his view, people should have just enough to survive for one, maybe two, nights of camping – not enough to create a home in the park. Consequently, unlike the overflowing, messy,

community-oriented space described in Chapter 5, park rangers like Darren viewed the encampment as a place meant only for the *basic maintenance* of life and they worked to shape the designated sheltering area to reflect this limited vision (DiMario, 2022). This vision of simply maintaining life reflects and perpetuates deeply entrenched perceptions of people experiencing homelessness, portraying their lives as solely centred on day-to-day survival (Speer, 2021). It also sustains the view that homelessness – particularly when intertwined with substance use – is an individual failing or illness, requiring a medicalised solution (Liu and Blomley, 2013; Boyd and Kerr, 2016).

Reflecting on the work of the Mobile Exchange of Los Angeles, DiMario (2022) considers the limits of palliative governance. Analysing the case of a man who arrived at a needle exchange van with a rejected skin graft – a wound in need of serious and immediate medical treatment – but was sent away with only some gauze, antibacterial ointment, and advice, he notes that palliative governance, even when well intentioned, can only go so far to alleviate experiences of suffering in the moment and fails to provide meaningful, root-and-branch solutions (ibid.). It only distances death through delay – a form of slow violence (ibid.). The practices of containment and maintenance enacted by the Parks Board do similar work. Despite the protections afforded by *Bamberger*, the encampment is perceived and produced to be as a basic, stop-gap solution to Vancouver’s housing crisis – and one that is increasingly precarious for those living within it. This slow, stretched-out, material and affective duress was designed to make the alternative of moving into an indoor shelter, supportive housing, or SRO unit increasingly attractive – or, as Sue Baker explained, to “make it uncomfortable” enough that camp residents make this ‘choice’ (Interview, 28th July 2023). Unlike Sue, Cindy, a volunteer at Crab, saw the potential outcome of this slow violence as “not a choice, it’s like signing a contract under duress” (Interview, 10th Aug 2023, see also After Echo Park Lake Research Collective, 2022). In this way, Cindy saw the slow violence experienced by those at the camp as tied to the potential for further forms of slow, structural, and direct harm in the neighbourhood’s notably unsafe, but formally-‘housed’, environments (de Leeuw, 2016; Pain, 2019; Chapter 5).

c. Consultation, reconciliation, and the settler-coloniality of progressive politics

Thus, while on one hand Crab Park has been seen as a blight on the pristine, green agenda of Vancouver and a political poisoned chalice, this chapter has so far shown that the Parks Board and City of Vancouver also had some interest in maintaining – at least minimally – the functioning of the site and was mandated by the courts to do so. One way in which this ‘maintenance’ was enabled was through weekly ‘consultation’ meetings between park rangers, camp residents, volunteers, and service providers, including representatives from the Indigenous non-profit and housing association Lu’ma, and Carnegie Outreach, the City of Vancouver’s homelessness outreach organisation. When asked about these meetings during interview, Betty Lepps described them as

Betty: “where our [the Park Board’s] core engagement starts is in making sure we have a presence in the park, making sure we're hearing what people's needs are... We walk through the park, we bring – you know that food is close to everybody's heart – we bring drinks and doughnuts. The team walks through and talks to everybody. And then we gather under the pergola and host a meeting to hear from people about, you know, we hear things like the water and electrics, and so on. We also ask for their support when we do a large cleanup, because that’s one of the key things in camps is the cleanliness for health and well-being

Tiger: So, you co-ordinate all these organisations and their role in the camp. It seems like it is your job to sort-of manage what is happening at Crab Park?

Betty: I stay away from that word. It's *manageable*. And why I stay away from that word is that it's not a sanctioned encampment. It's not a managed encampment. What we're doing is providing and ensuring that people have what they need for their health and well-being.” (Interview, 1st Aug 2023)

Despite Betty’s insistence that these meetings formed the foundation of the Parks Board’s engagement with the camp – notably, as *manageable* not *managed* (this is before the April 2024 clean up) – this view was not widely shared by the others involved. For example, Sue Baker reflected on the meetings, saying: “I’m just not sure they are very beneficial, but I like going, if that makes sense?” (Interview, 28th July 2023). Darren Pederson, talking about the introduction of the sheltering guidelines in

the summer of 2023 (Chapter 6.4), which were supposedly shaped through these consultations, reiterated this view:

“I wouldn't say that they [the sheltering guidelines] came about from like, extensive community consultation, I mean, I have a background in community development through the work that I've done before. And it's, I would say, not really what was done” (Interview, 5th Sept 2023)

Camp residents and volunteers also spoke about their frustration with these weekly performances, citing multiple occasions where meetings were cancelled last minute, when Parks Board staff showed up late or not at all, and a sense of hostility and dismissal from Board staff and rangers (Field Diary 6th July 2023; 16th July 2023; 5th Aug 2023; Fiona York, Interview, 13th Aug 2023). Engaging in participant observation as a legal observer of these meetings, I too found them short, stilted, awkward, and sometimes tense (Field diary, 25th July 2023).

Brought into the Parks Board to lead on ‘urban relationships’, Betty Lepps’ background – first, in social work and then as the regional director of shelters and supportive housing at B.C. housing – suggests she has genuine compassion for those sheltering outdoors (Park People, 2022a). This was clear in our interview:

“the scope of this work is multifaceted. It's looking at those sheltering in the park through a rights-based lens, as well as an equity lens. So, with our mandate at the Parks Board, are we abiding that those sheltering in park are also users of the park? And so that means that we are providing the same things that we would provide for anyone else to have and allowing them to use our parks and our facilities no matter who they are. So: ensuring water access, ensuring that it's clean, ensuring safety, all of those are key pieces for Parks and Recreation” (Interview, 1st Aug 2023).

Betty was both impressive and progressive, adept in the vocabulary and outlook of human rights, social justice, and intersectionality. She talked about being “trauma-informed”, “collaborative”, and “rights-based” (Field diary entries, 18th June – 23rd June 2023), centring the “health and well-being” of campers, and the idea of “moving at the pace of trust” (Interview, 1st Aug 2023). At the time of interview, the Vancouver Parks Board was working with The Shift, a right-to-housing advocacy organisation, as part of a 2.5 year ‘solutions lab’ project to conceptualise what a human rights-based approach to encampments would look like and to implement best practices on the ground (Field

Diary, 12th July 2023).³⁴ Yet, as is explored above, camp residents were struggling with the conditions in the park and limited water and electricity access and there was a deep sense of antipathy towards the intentions of the Parks Board, Betty, and park rangers.

The role of Indigenous-led non-profit, Lu'ma, at the encampment was particularly emblematic of this tension between consultation, progressive discourse, and conditions on the ground. Lu'ma provides health-focused programs, services and affordable housing for urban Indigenous peoples in Vancouver and has a track record of partnering with all three levels of government to fulfil this remit, winning housing and health contracts with the Province and as a key 'Indigenous Community Entity' for the Federal Government 'Reaching Home' homelessness strategy (Katie, Interview, 24th Aug 2023; Sophie, Interview, 24th Aug 2023; Flora, Interview, 24th Aug 2023). In December 2022, Lu'ma was contracted by the Parks Board to provide 'cultural outreach' to residents of Crab Park under the purview of their 'complex care housing outreach' programme, funded by Vancouver Coastal Health, the Provincial Health Authority (Sophie, Interview, 24th Aug 2023). During an interview with Lu'ma representatives, they described their role at the camp as providing 'cultural support' through food, activities such as drum-making and smudging, and by connecting residents to community elders and knowledge keepers (ibid.). Earlier in 2023, Lu'ma had also taken the decision to stop accompanying the Parks Board representatives as they walked around the camp handing out doughnuts and drinks, a standard part of the weekly consultation meetings. When asked why, Flora explained:

"So when we were first asked to come and provide cultural support, one thing they did ask was that we collaborate with other service providers. So, there was a meeting on Thursdays, which was meant to have the Park Board, B.C. housing, Carnegie outreach, Kiala Lellum [Indigenous health non-profit] and us. It started out as a time and place where all providers could come and be able to provide support right away to residents. And then it kind of turned into just the Parks staff and us. They would walk through the encampment handing out coffee and hot chocolate because it was cold out. And that is pretty much all we did. But then we had a chat with advocates and realised that maybe it was more than that. So, I think during those walks like they're looking at fire safety, they're probably

³⁴ The Shift is a global advocacy and research organization focused on the right to housing. Led by Leilani Farha, the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing (2014-2020), and acting in partnership with the United Cities Local Government and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (The Shift, 2023).

trying to see who's staying in the park, count tents. And we have a completely different agenda. Like, we're not looking out for any of that. We came to learn that us walking through the encampment with park rangers made it look like we're working with park rangers, or for them. So then we politely declined to do that" (Flora, Interview, 24th Aug 2023)

Here, Flora reflects on the legitimacy afforded to rangers by their presence; in fear of becoming another broker of displacement for the City, Lu'ma stepped back (Singh Kelsall *et al.*, 2023). When asked why they thought the Parks Board was interested in working with Lu'ma, Sophie replied frankly:

"I think because we're an Indigenous organisation. Honestly, I think it's a little bit of tokenism. But like, I decided to take on the project anyways... I wanted to work in a different way. I was hoping to change things... We have a funder, but at the same time, like where can we advocate? So it's kind of sometimes a delicate dance of, like, don't step on everyone's toes and make them all mad, but like, we're here for the residents of Crab Park and no one else" (Sophie, Interview, 24th Aug 2023)

This reply – and the ‘delicate dance’ of avoiding ‘tokenism’ while undertaking advocacy – speaks to a wider and more fundamental question about the role of non-profits in contemporary neoliberal municipal governance (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Peck and Tickell, 2002; Hennigan, 2017; Hackworth, 2019; Singh Kelsall *et al.*, 2023) and the ways in which Indigeneity is co-opted in this landscape in the settler-colonial city (Coulthard, 2007). Prior to their work at Crab, Lu'ma had been involved in the closure of the Strathcona encampment, brought in by B.C. housing to provide housing options for some of the camp residents (Flora, Interview, 24th Aug 2023). An interview with a representative of B.C. housing confirmed that there were similar plans in place for Crab with the intention being to open a ‘tiny shelters pilot’ in collaboration with Lu'ma (Katie, 24th Aug 2023). Though camp residents were not the only potential clients for this new space, they represented a ‘particular target’ (Katie, 24th Aug 2023). Even though Lu'ma's frontline workers were keen to ‘do things differently’ and stressed to me that they would never enable an eviction of the camp, it is hard to overlook the organisation's (well-intentioned) potential role in providing spaces on the ‘housing continuum’, a pre-requisite (as per *Bamberger*) for the closure of the camp. Michelle, a camp volunteer commented on this arrangement, arguing: “It feels like that's the City of Vancouver in a nutshell. Like all of their decolonization and reconciliation stuff: do they

actually do those things?” (Interview, 20th Sept 2023). Reflecting upon what happens when Indigeneity becomes institutionalised in municipal governance, Michelle suggests that what is truly at stake in the relationship between Lu'ma, Crab, and the Parks Board is the nature of governance in the contemporary settler-city. She asks: when does decolonising the city become ‘more than a metaphor’ (Tuck and Yang, 2012)?

Since the early 2010s, Canadian politics has been going through a reconciliatory turn. In response to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, a legal settlement between the Canadian government and residential school survivors, the Federal government established a ‘Truth and Reconciliation Commission’ to collate testimonies of individuals involved and to bring attention to the impact of settler-colonisation on Indigenous peoples and communities (Corntassel and Holder, 2008; Regan, 2010; University of Manitoba and Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2016). Vancouver was the first Canadian municipality to embrace the Truth and Reconciliation process and became a self-declared City of Reconciliation in 2014 (City of Vancouver, 2022b). In practice, this manifested in urban governance sharing agreements with the Musqueam and Squamish First Nations, alongside a patchwork of social and economic policy directives such as the planned inclusion of UNDRIP recommendations and reconciliation-specific funding for Indigenous and non-Indigenous led civil societies (Mochrie, 2021). The City of Vancouver, as with the Parks Board, hired ‘decolonisation planners’ and included Indigenous reconciliation within key policy frameworks, such as VanPlay (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, 2020, no date). Yet, the scope and impact of these actions on the ground remains contested. A 2020 letter sent from the Urban Indigenous Peoples Advisory Committee to Vancouver City Council epitomises these tensions (Hyslop, 2020). In it, the committee – tasked with advising the city council on how to best move forward with reconciliation – puts forward a “growing discrepancy between the stated values and vision of the city... and the actions of its institutions”, citing a series of oppressive actions against Indigenous peoples and knowledge in Vancouver, including but not limited to tent decampments, and calling for the city to move beyond “symbolic gestures and empty promises” (ibid.). It seems this call for meaningful collaboration between Indigenous communities and municipal authorities is yet to be heard four years on:

“I'm put into a reconciliation workshop and then I'm told to evict First Nation people that claim that this is their land. How do you even begin there? How do you talk to someone, like, about that?” (Park Ranger, Interview, 16th Oct 2023)

What is perhaps most worrying about this reconciliatory turn is the ways in which it comes to bear on the scope and nature of Indigenous and allied resistance in the settler-city, as in the case of Lu'ma at Crab Park. When the governance practices undertaken by a municipal authority are invisibly violent, justified in the 'right', progressive language, and oriented towards a socially acceptable and normalised outcome (in this case, indoor housing, no matter the quality or suitability), what political opportunities remain to challenge this? This question becomes particularly challenging in a landscape where frontline actors, who genuinely believe in their role as compassionate actors, and are burdened and burnt-out themselves, are buffeted between layers of government that have so far failed to take meaningful responsibility. Against this 'progressive' evolution of the settler-city, what options are left for communities who want to put forward the possibility of relations to each other, to home, and to property which go beyond those of the settler-colonial city?

7.5 Conclusion

As such, while this chapter has sought to unveil the nature and effects of encampment governance at Crab Park, and to understand the indifference displayed to those sheltering at Crab as compared to on Hastings Street, what has emerged alongside this analysis is a series of openings through which to understand the processes and tensions which make up the contemporary 'progressive' settler colonial city (Hugill, 2021).

By removing responsibility and recourse for park residents' lives, enabling the (re)production of the ordered landscape of the modern city through practices of containment and maintenance, and masking the effects of these with unsubstantiated discourses of compassion, rights, and Indigenous reconciliation, this chapter argues that municipal authorities produce palliative geographies. These geographies barely maintain the lives of those sheltering and create unsafe conditions on the ground, enacting slow violence against those inhabiting public space in the city. Further, the palliative geographies produced are settler-colonial. Not only do they come to bear on

those experiencing homelessness – a demographic within which racialised and Indigenous peoples are overrepresented – but they figure within the spectre of settler-State practices of displacement and containment, shore up colonial authority over the autonomy of ‘others’ by shirking accountability, and look to harness – through reconciliation politics – the unsettling political potential of the tent encampment (Chapter 5 and 6). ‘Set up to fail’ to get to grips with the root-and-branch causes of homelessness, palliative governance reproduces medicalised and stigmatised understandings of those living in public space and is a mode of governance designed to fill a gap – not as a permanent solution. As such, placing events in April 2024 and then in November 2024 (Chapter 8) in relation to palliative approaches reveals how quickly it can slide into direct violence and punishment. This reminds us that, though contingent and incomplete, palliative governance represents a particularly insidious mutation of the settler-colonial city in that it does little to contest the imaginations and logics which motivate and legitimise the punishment of those deemed outside the urban public and poses challenging obstacles to the formation and shape of Indigenous and allied resistance. As such, this chapter critically speaks back to and extends work on the contemporary settler-colonial city, arguing for further reflection on the intentions and scope of seemingly ‘progressive’ urban governance.

8 Conclusion

8.1 Returning to ‘open’ use?



Figure 35: Parks Board rangers and Vancouver police close the camp on the 7th of November 2024 (Kulkarni and Baker, 2024)

In November 2024, the Crab Park encampment was closed (Figure 35). Following the camp ‘clean-up’ in April when City of Vancouver crews cleared people’s belongings, shelters, and makeshift homes, along with the generators and propane they relied on for electricity, cooking, and heating, the number of people living at the camp dwindled. By late October only seven remained (Kulkarni and Baker, 2024; Zavarise, 2024). In a notice outlining the timeline for the November decampment, the Parks Board General Manager, Steve Jackson, stated that the intention of the closure was to return the park to ‘open use’ ‘for the whole community’ and that the designated area was no longer “supportable operationally or in terms of providing a *small number of people ongoing exclusive use* of highly valued community parklands” (Jackson, 2024, emphasis added). The final residents of the camp were offered alternative housing arrangements and told that, if they decided to remain in the park, they would have to pack-down their belongings and shelters daily in order to comply with the Parks Control By-Law (Jackson, 2024; Judd, 2024). In the end, none of the remaining camp residents decided to take up the formal accommodation offered (The Canadian Press, 2024).

While the Gastown Residents Association – representing those living and working in the nearby gentrified neighbourhood – welcomed the news (Judd, 2024), the Union of British Columbian Indian Chiefs condemned the decision and actions of the Parks Board, stating:

“Crab Park has been home to residents since May 2021 and continues to shelter seven full-time residents, some of whom are First Nations. These seven individuals represent a mere 0.3% of the homeless population desperately in need of shelter in the area. This move by the Vancouver Parks Board *is nothing short of a forced eviction*, demonstrating a blatant disregard for human rights, and exhibiting a clear lack of empathy and compassion for the unhoused, while *prioritising park aesthetics over human dignity*. The Vancouver Parks Board claims to have consulted with residents of Crab Park but the process has been a mere formality aimed at justifying a pre-determined eviction. This is not consultation and does not meet the standard of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent. It reflects a lack of attention to the real needs and rights of those living in Crab Park” (Union of BC Indian Chiefs, 2024, emphasis added)

Standing in solidarity with those remaining at Crab, the UBCIC statement recognised the homemaking practices of those within the camp, challenging the narrative that the makeshift shelters in the park were anything less than homes. By calling the closure an ‘eviction’, the statement sought to remind the City and residents of Vancouver that the re-opening of this so-called ‘public space’ would involve the unmaking of people’s homes and lives, their displacement from spaces of privacy, safety, and belonging, and the seizure of their possessions (Blomley *et al.*, 2023; Chapter 5). Further, the release compared the closure of the camp, and the process through which this was eventually achieved, as in opposition to the rights of Free, Prior and Informed Consent, evoking the framework of Indigenous rights to highlight the underhandedness of the Parks Board’s actions (Chapter 6). By layering claims to Indigenous rights within the wider landscape of home/lessness in the Downtown Eastside, the statement foregrounds the themes which have been central to this thesis, asking: under what ethical, social, and legal parameters should we come to use and to govern public space? Who should be tasked with this? And what would it take to genuinely reimagine public spaces in ways serve and support the most marginalised in the settler-colonial city?

This statement, then, and the return of the park to putatively ‘open use’ provides an empirical convergence through which to think with and across the chapters of this thesis and consider its contributions and implications, both to human geography and to a wider socio-political debate on the purpose, nature, and governance of public space in the contemporary (settler-colonial) city. In doing so, this chapter first revisits the patchwork approach taken in this thesis (Chapter 3), before responding to the three central conceptual puzzles set out in Chapter 1.

8.2 The final threads

The thesis has not sought to tell a complete or linear history of public space in the Downtown Eastside but has instead pieced together a series of ‘patchworks’ across space and time to tell a story about the production, use, and politics of Vancouver’s public spaces (Blomley, 2004c; McFarlane, 2021). By employing a ‘patchwork approach’, the thesis sought to centre the contingent nature of reality – the way a patchwork comes together in multiple and unsettled ways; the potential of individual ‘minor’ patches of empirics – processes, spaces, and moments – in building knowledge; the relational nature of research, as woven knowledge built across the researcher and participants; and, the personal and professional life of the researcher – the quilter – in shaping the research process and outcomes.

Further, by paying attention to the patches, or the ‘minor’, the thesis took a feminist epistemological approach, foregrounding the ways in which space, place, and landscape are experienced differently by different people and paying attention to often overlooked political currents and sites, including the home, the body, and the everyday (Katz, 1996, 2001, 2017; Moss, 2002; Hyndman, 2004; Sharp, 2005b; McDowell and Sharp, 2016). In line with this approach, the project engaged multiple methods, including semi-structured interviews, participant observation, legal document analysis, and archival research, undertaken between June 2022 and October 2023. Further, this ‘patchiness’ was extended to the empirical content of the thesis and the various analytical lenses used, including historical (Chapter 4), cultural (Chapter 5), legal (Chapter 6), and political (Chapter 7) geographies. As such, though there is a narrative which strings together the thesis – centring on the relationship between the settler-colonial city and public space – the chapters deal with discrete spaces, themes, and moments. Read

together, they build a patchwork story which responds to the three research questions set out in Chapter 1:

1. What role does public space play in the (re)production of the settler colonial city?
2. Where, how, and to what effect do practices and understandings of home materialise in public space?
3. What potential does the struggle for public space hold within the settler-colonial city?

To complete the process of piecing together the chapters and questions above, the following sections return to the three conceptual puzzles that weave throughout the thesis, namely: the relationship between public space and the (evolution of) settler-colonial city; the lived experiences and socio-political implications of the contemporary geographies of home/lessness; and, the ways in which encampments figure within (settler-colonial) law and understandings of property. Through these, this thesis makes significant contributions to work in human geography on public space, settler-colonialism, the law, and the contemporary geographies of homelessness.

8.3 Public space and the settler-colonial city

This puzzle draws inspiration from an observation made in 2019 by urban scholars Naama Blatman-Thomas and Libby Porter, who argue that

"in urban scholarship, unless the central subject of the study is colonialism itself, the colonial structure inevitably fades from view. It is as if once 'passed' colonialism is no longer relevant to the understanding of urbanisation and urban relations" (2019, p. 31)

Responding to this call, this thesis has sought to re-centre the process and structures of settler-colonialism in its study of urban relations in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, turning attention to the ways in which settler-colonialist imaginations, logics, and laws have been central to the production and governance of public space in the city (Kelley, 2017; Cowen, 2020; Hugill, 2021). In particular, this thesis has centred the subtle

technologies and tools of settler-colonisation – the areas of social life where settler-domination often involved/s not just spectacular violence but the quiet replacement of cultural norms, socio-spatial relations, and the slow erasure of alternative lifeworlds and epistemologies (Wolfe, 1999, 2006).

In Chapter 4, the nature of the relationship between public space and settler-colonialism was examined through the lens of land and property, building on the work of British Columbian scholars Cole Harris (2002, 2004, 2021), Nicholas Blomely (2003, 2004, 2022), and Renisa Mawani (2009), amongst others. In doing so, it approached property not as a purely legal designation, but as a relationship to a space which is brought into being (a theme the thesis returned to in Chapter 6). Mobilising the conceptual framework of enclosure, Chapter 4 posited that the transformation of land into property at Oppenheimer Park sits in relation to the multi-scalar geographies of enclosure – the grid, the reservation, the internment camp – which produce/d British Columbia's re-settled landscape (Blomley, 2007a; Jeffrey, McFarlane and Vasudevan, 2012; Sevilla-Buitrago, 2015; Harris, 2021). By tracing the initial enclosure of the park in the late 19th century, the chapter explored how the construction of public property is a process made up of spatial, legal, and cultural threads; without the fencing of the space, the introduction and enforcement of new parks by-laws would not have been possible, which went on to set new boundaries of acceptable behaviours and activities, such as leisure (The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, 1988; Marne, 2001; Sevilla-Buitrago, 2014; Goto, 2016). Thus, extending scholarship which brings new theories of enclosure into conversation with (settler-)colonialism, this thesis has argued that the enclosure of public property, and the deracination of Indigenous peoples and lifeworlds which had used that land prior, involved not just the transformation of land for capital, but seizure and control of social, cultural, and subjective commons (Harvey, 2003; Greer, 2012; Jeffrey, McFarlane and Vasudevan, 2012). In this vein, the chapter also situated the relational production of the (sanitised) public sphere and the private space of the home in the settler-colonial city (Banivanua Mar and Edmonds, 2010; Edmonds, 2010a, 2010b; Handel and Kotef, 2023).

The chapter went on to explore how the enclosure of 'public' land and the imposition of socio-legal boundaries involved the formation and solidification of racial hierarchies and relations (Roy, 1989; Harris, 1993; Mawani, 2009; Moreton-Robinson, 2015).

Unpicking the role of leisure as a means of diffusing inter-communal tension in the diverse and racially charged settler-colonial city, Chapter 4 argued that the introduction of a set regiment of activities and games figured as a solution to a key paradox embedded within (early) settler-colonial urbanism; namely, that while the newly emerging city relied upon consistent and growing access to immigrant labour for its economic success, its legitimacy as a new political authority depended on the simultaneous distancing and protection of White society from these ‘risky’ racialised arrivals (Anderson, 1991; Mawani, 2009; Dorries, Hugill and Tomiak, 2019; Hugill, 2021). The chapter argued that leisure functioned to do just that by encouraging the cultural ‘elimination’ and assimilation of Japanese immigrants (Wolfe, 2006; Mawani, 2012). Turning to the Neighbourhood Improvement Programme in the late 1970s, the thesis argued that the redevelopment of Oppenheimer Park codified a White imagination of the Japanese Canadian ‘race’ – elevated here to a ‘civilised’ status entangled with the aesthetics of cleanliness and beautification and perceived to be aligned with a wider municipal aim to unlock land and economic value in the Downtown Eastside (Anderson, 1991; Smith, 1996; Rose, 2017). Conceptually, then, this thesis has asked: how do we make sense of the relationship between land, property, racialisation, and differently valued lives in the settler-colonial city (Bhandar, 2018; Dorries, Hugill and Tomiak, 2019; Safransky, 2022)? Speaking back to this, the thesis has demonstrated the ways in which multiple subjectivities beyond the Indigenous/settler dichotomy have been subject to settler-colonial assimilation and liberal recognition and that this is achieved not only through the production of spectacular spaces, such as Chinatown, but by the conditioning and control of intimate, everyday, embodied geographies in public space (Anderson, 1991; Radcliffe, 2018).

Chapter 7 built on this finding. Taking up the work of Penelope Edmonds (2010), David Hugill (2017, 2021; Simpson and Hugill, 2022), Heather Dorries (2009; Dorries *et al.*, 2019; Dorries, Hugill and Tomiak, 2019), Julie Tomiak (2016, 2017), and Jordan Stanger-Ross (2008) who have productively demonstrated the role of urban planning, municipal by-laws, and social policy in the ongoing exclusion of Indigenous peoples and communities from/in contemporary urban space, Chapter 7 returned to the intersection of public space and the settler-city in the context of the Crab encampment. This chapter sought to understand how the settler-colonial City has evolved and is shaped within the specific spatio-temporal contingencies of the Downtown Eastside,

including forms of substance use and homelessness governance. It argued that the City of Vancouver and Parks Board engage a palliative governance regime to manage the camp – one that ‘barely maintains’ the lives of those subject to it. Extending the work of Anthony DiMario (2021) and Robert Nixon (2011), the chapter posited that palliation is not just a series of governance logics but produces a set of geographies to contend with on the ground. Interrogating these geographies, the chapter argued that this governance turn represents a mutation of the settler-colonial city, producing a ‘responsibility sink’ over the encampment and enacting forms of abandonment and slow violence against its residents (themes the thesis also considered in Chapter 4). Palliative governance is unspectacular and engages practices that are neither visibly nor directly violent, but are harmful. Indeed, palliation involves layered ambiguity, not only in which actors are responsible for the (in)decisions made, but in the intentions and ethics behind them: do Park Rangers, for example, genuinely believe they are supporting camp residents into housing and a ‘better life’ by displacing them from the park? Such moral ambiguity, the chapter argued, is central to the legitimacy of this form of government, as it enables the practices undertaken to be spun and enveloped in discourse – their violence further obscured by the ‘progressive’ language of consultation and human rights. In this way, palliative geographies pose challenging questions for the future of Indigenous and allied resistance in the settler-colonial city; what happens when violence is not just slow and invisible, but is narrated within and oriented towards a socially normalised outcome – in this case, the equation of home with formal housing (Chapter 5)? Scaling out from the Crab context, then, this chapter sought to speak back to geographical literature on the settler-colonial city, calling for greater critical reflection on the intentions and scope of seemingly ‘progressive’ forms of urban governance in the City of Reconciliation and beyond (Daigle, 2019; Hyslop, 2020; McCreary and Milligan, 2021; Van Lier, 2021).

Cutting across these chapters, this thesis has sought to further problematise idealistic and inert understandings of public spaces in the settler-colonial city. Attending to the call of Don Mitchell (2017) to consider both the ‘ends and end’ of public space, the thesis contributes to geographical literature on public space and settler colonialism in the following three ways. First, by recentring work on the relationship between land, property and settler-colonialism to public property, the thesis contends that public spaces have not only borne witness to the ongoing socio-spatial dispossession, displacement and marginalisation of Indigenous communities but have played a key role

in their production. In turn, and through this, the thesis has set out how practices of land transformation and social stratification under settler-colonialism come together with imaginations of the ‘public’ (Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008; Staeheli, 2010) and ideologies of leisure to produce racial hierarchies and interactions, extending work on the production of race, and the entanglement of race and space, in the settler-colonial city. And, finally, the thesis has traced the evolution of these logics into the present, extending work on neoliberal homelessness governance, liberal recognition, and reconciliation to consider how these become tangled in spatialised practices of encampment governance at Crab Park.

Crucially, the thesis has also maintained throughout that to illuminate the logics and intentions behind such technologies of settler resettlement and exclusion are not to invoke their ‘success’. Indeed, the project of settler-colonial enclosure is always incomplete, and public space is also a site from which the settler-colonial city is *unsettled*, materially, ontologically, politically, and legally – a contention that the following conceptual puzzles develop further.

8.4 The geographies of home/lessness

This second conceptual puzzle responds to the question of where, how, and to what effect do practices and understandings of home materialise in public space – and what does this mean for how we understand the contemporary settler-colonial city. Taking up feminist geographical scholarship that reframes home as a dynamic and ongoing creation – an interplay of relationships, ideas, and materialities through which power is negotiated and expressed – the thesis sought to consider what thinking with this reformulation of home tells us about the settler-colonial city (Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Baxter and Brickell, 2014; Speer, 2017; Blunt and Sheringham, 2019; Blunt, Ebbensgaard and Sheringham, 2021). Chapter 5 explored how residents of the neighbourhood extend their material, imagined, and relational geographies of home beyond putatively ‘private’ spaces and into the public realm. This happens at both Crab and Oppenheimer Park, as well as in tents set up on the neighbourhood’s streets and in other smaller green spaces, plazas, street corners, and back-alleys. Building on this analysis, the thesis offered an interpretation of such homemaking as not only a way of living differently but as a series of practices, materialities, and relations which resist,

rework, and ‘unsettle’ normative expectations of (public and private) space in the settler-colonial city.

Building on the work of Nicholas Blomely (2004) and John Borrows and colleagues (2018), *unsettling* was conceptualised as a modality of resistance which involves not only the physical remaking of the urban landscape, but also an ontological challenge. Unsettling unpicks the universalism of settler ontologies by recognising and maintaining the possibility of multiple worldviews and lifeways – a pluriversal urban landscape (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Daigle, 2018; Escobar, 2018). From this perspective, unsettling works to undermine the foundational principles upon which settler-urbanism and settler-society functions; in this case, the divide between public and private space. In Chapter 5, such unsettling is shown to involve the formation of new alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples who have, in their own ways, experienced forms of exclusion and marginalisation from making home in the city – a web of solidarity which has historic resonance in Vancouver (Mawani, 2009, 2012). Through this, the thesis sought to empirically and conceptually substantiate how attending to the gap between home and homeless is a position from which to not only reimagine what counts as home, but also a framework for challenging broader interconnected systems of oppression across space and time (Lancione, 2023).

Within this analysis of home, Chapter 5 also considered the "forms of community-making, subject formation, and cultural apparatuses [that] stabilize belonging (that is: home) amidst settlement"; in essence, how – in practice – this reformation of home comes into existence and how is it experienced (Handel and Kotef, 2023, p. 161). In becoming sites for homemaking practices, it is argued, public spaces become vessels for relations of intimacy and care, political representation beyond liberal democratic formulations, and the creation of new, niche, publics. These subjectivities, practices, claims, and relations sit in tension with steadfast understandings of public space as spaces of passive encounter, democratic publicity, and universal access (Mitchell, 2003b; Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008; Burk, 2010; Staeheli, 2010; Low and Smith, 2013). Indeed, the thesis challenges the long body of scholarship which sets out public space as a site where the predominant relationship is between the public and the State (Mitchell, 1995; Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008; Staeheli, 2010; Low and Smith, 2013). Instead, this thesis argues, public space has come to be used and inhabited by Downtown Eastside

residents as a way of building social relations between each other and of producing political claims which demand something beyond liberal State recognition. Thus, this thesis contends that the remaking of home unsettles not just ontological understandings of home, but of the nature and purpose of urban public space – a reason why these practices are so often, and so violently, targeted by the settler City and State (Chapter 7).

In sum, then, this thesis makes several interventions in the fields of home(less) geographies and geographies of public space. Firstly, it provides empirical depth on the connection between contemporary resistance to housing precarity and settler-colonialism, responding to the call of Elliott-Cooper, Hubbard and Lees (2020) to consider how these displacements intersect, support one another, and also sit in tension. In doing so, the thesis advances an understanding of home as a site of *unsettling* – a site from which residents of the neighbourhood both materially rework the domicidal and colonial home-spaces of the Downtown Eastside and ontologically unsettle the foundation of the settler colonial city. Namely, the normative, White imagined geography of urban space as neatly divided into private and public property, each with their own assumed populations, practices, and relations (Harris, 1993; Ram and Handel, 2024). This represents a significant contribution to work on Indigeneity, resistance, and urban space, as well as to the geographies of home/lessness.

However, these homemaking practices and the process of *unsettling* are not without their tensions and this demands a wider consideration of the relationship between home (un)making, unsettling, and decolonisation. In this vein, Chapter 5 asked: if this is an unmaking of settler-colonial visions of home, urban space, and property, which opens the potential for Indigenous relations to land to resurge, does this go far enough so as to be a mode of decolonising the city? Or does this, in fact, open new avenues through which the settler-colonial city can pathologize, control, punish and exclude such ‘other’ ways of living and surviving (Chapter 7)? It is to these reflections, and the question of what encampments, in particular, signify about the settler-colonial city, and the ways in which they pose a potential reimagining of land, property, and the law that the final conceptual puzzle turns.

8.5 Encampments, property, and the law

The final conceptual puzzle this thesis sought to address was the relationship between encampments, property, and the law in the settler-colonial city. To do so, the thesis employed a feminist legal geography approach, considering the ways in which the law and socio-legal concepts – such as property – are constructed through, and play out in, space, everyday interactions, and people’s subjectivities (Cuomo and Brickell, 2019; Jeffrey, 2020a). Building on the work of Nicholas Blomely (2004, 2016; Blomley and The Right to Remain Collective, 2021), this thesis understood property as a set of relations between people and other people, and people and things – relations which are actively produced as opposed those predetermined by the state-backed ‘ownership’ model, where they may only be derived and negotiated in (settler-colonial) law (Harris, 1993; Razack, 2002; Moreton-Robinson, 2015). With this framework in mind, the thesis considered how case law over the ‘right to shelter’ has reshaped our understanding of the relations which constitute public property (Chapter 6).

Chapter 6’s analysis of *Bamberger* set out the potential for a new formulation of the ‘right to public space’ within the constraints of (settler-colonial) law – specifically, an *elevated, positive* right provided to those seeking shelter to access and to use Crab Park (BCSC 49, 2022). Here, public space is prioritised for those who need it most: who rely on public space not for leisure or socialisation but for survival. Thus, drawing on the work of Judith Butler (2006) this right was conceptualised within an affirmative ethic of precarity. This finding carries significant conceptual, political and legal implications. Conceptually, it troubles the very foundation of what we normatively understand public property to be and offers a new socio-legal framework through which we can conceptualise public space as never truly open. This work extends geographical literature on public space by empirically and conceptually substantiating a new ethic through which exclusivity in public space is enacted and justified, though those who are prioritised here are not those deemed by the State to be the preferable or ‘accepted’ public, but those who have (legally) claimed a right of access in the face of wider marginalisation (Mitchell, 1995; Low and Smith, 2013). Politically and legally, this renewed understanding is now baked into Canadian case law, influencing how political authorities act and (fail to) respond to outdoor sheltering (Chapters 6 and 7) and shaping

the legal strategies of both the State and of encampments who pursue court action elsewhere (discussed below).

Explored in depth in Chapter 6, the formulation of this right – the evidence and arguments which shaped the outcome of the case – worked around the strictures and boundaries of settler-colonial law. While much of the existing case law on the right to shelter has normalised the displacement of people experiencing homelessness – a population within which Indigenous peoples are overrepresented in Vancouver and in Canada more broadly (Anderson and Collins, 2014; Lu'uma Native Housing Society and City of Vancouver, 2023; Chapter 1) – in *Bamberger*, camp lawyers, residents, and Justice Kirchner collectively reworked the legal field into a space from which those sheltering could be heard and treated with dignity, reclaiming the law in an embodied and incremental way (Braverman *et al.*, 2014; Jeffrey, 2020b). This had tangible effects on the ground in Crab, enabling new routines and stability for those in the camp to make their homes in ways which *unsettled* urban space in practice (Chapters 5 and 6). Thus, this thesis has revealed the legal field as both a tool for enforcing settler domination (Razack, 2002) and as a site for subversion, negotiation, and transformation by Indigenous communities and their allies (Barkaskas and Buhler, 2017). In this vein, the thesis has pointed to the necessity of having to both navigate an imposed settler legal geography while also bringing this entire legal geography into question and has sought to position settler-colonial law as a site of ambiguous resistance for contemporary Indigenous and allied movements, with the potential to be reworked from within, with effects that ripple across space and have broader socio-political implications (Simpson, 2011; Blatman-Thomas and Porter, 2019; Dorries *et al.*, 2019; Chapters 5, 6 and 7). This represents a significant contribution to geographical scholarship on settler-colonialism and the law.

Building on this, the thesis also connected encampments to ideas of property, both within (as above) and beyond geolegal frameworks. Drawing on understandings of property as territory (Blomley, 2016, 2020, 2022), it examined how the encampment makes territorial claims to the designated space through the imposition of rules, everyday maintenance of the land, and by asserting alternative legal interpretations and arguments, including to human and Indigenous rights, to refuse the authority of the Parks Board (Chapter 6). Responding to Ananya Roy's (2017, p. A3) question of how

‘poor people’s movements’ “work with, and rework, the social category of property”, this analysis suggests that the camp performs a form of property beyond that of the settler-colonial state and law, engaging a decolonial re-imagining of the land (Coulthard, 2007, 2014; Tomiak, 2017; Van Lier, 2021). The Crab encampment, Chapter 5 and 6 argued, represents a space of autonomy and self-determination for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples – moving beyond narrowly defined, state-recognised visions of Indigeneity and of repair, including a potential vision of ‘landback’.

The approach taken in Chapter 6 also posits a methodological contribution to legal geographies (Braverman *et al.*, 2014; Brickell, Jeffrey and McConnell, 2021). While feminist legal geographers have so far paid close attention to the socio-spatial entanglements of law, there remains scope to bring the discursive and processual elements of case law into conversation with its lived realities (Cuomo and Brickell, 2019; Cuomo, 2021). By analysing the history and scope of case law over the right to shelter, and the legal documents attached to the case, this thesis sought to pay granular attention to the ways legal reasoning draws on and produces imaginations of space and potential principles over its use (Kusiak, 2019, 2021). It shows how closely analysing a single case – how it draws on or exceeds precedent, materialises in practice, and influences legal decisions elsewhere – can contribute to broader theoretical and conceptual debates in (legal) geography.

Finally, threading through the above contributions, the thesis re-centred academic focus on the ‘publicness’ of public space from a focus on those who use public space to the variegated actors who enter into property relations over public lands – from questions of access to ownership (Blomley, 2010; Page, 2020; Flynn, 2024; Flynn and Stevenson-Blythe, 2024; Chapter 6). Thus, speaking back to work in legal geography on property, this thesis has provided empirical depth on the complex, layered, and contested geographies of property – both legal and performed – taking place in a single public space and raised questions surrounding the legitimacy of both the Parks Board (as the land’s putative ‘owner’) and the courts in governing the land. Neither institution can truly account for the complexities of claims to land in these spaces, particularly in Canada’s settler-colonial context.

8.6 Are we ‘gonna keep failing’?

“In Canada, in Vancouver especially, is all about land and having control over land. And that's all it's ever been about, ever, since contact. So the issues you're asking about are ground zero, right? Anytime you're talking about public space, you're running into this. You're striking at the heart of the Canadian creation story. Without appreciating that we're gonna keep failing.”

– Andrea Reimer, Municipal Politician (Interview, 2nd Aug 2023)

Since this research began, questions of housing, encampments, and the future of urban space have become more central than ever to Canadian and North American politics. The resignation of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in early January 2025 marked the culmination of mounting discontent, among both the Canadian public and his own party, over the ways he has handled – among other issues – the country’s escalating housing crisis (Murphy, 2025). Canada’s housing market is now among the most unaffordable in the world, with average house prices soaring to more than four times their 2000 levels in 2021. In 2024, Vancouver was ranked the third-least affordable place to live in the world with a median price-income ratio of 12.3, well above the ‘affordable’ benchmark of 3.0 (Grigoryeva and Ley, 2019; Ley *et al.*, 2020; Cox, 2024; Griffiths, 2024). The same report also found four out of Canada’s six major housing markets to be ‘severely unaffordable’ and highlighted the spillover effects of Vancouver’s housing crisis on surrounding metropolitan areas, including Chilliwack, Fraser Valley, and Vancouver Island (Cox, 2024). This crisis extends far beyond affordability, encompassing issues of social and market housing supply, quality, and stability (Ali and Zhu, 2024). Amid the rising cost of living, growing numbers of homeowners are struggling to meet mortgage repayments, while renters contend with ever more expensive, crowded, and unsuitable conditions (Tranjan, 2023; Ali and Zhu, 2024; Daair, 2024). Although Canada officially recognised the right to housing in 2019 and, in 2024, set out an ambitious plan to build nearly 4 million homes by the beginning of the next decade, the reality is that the process of making home in Canadian cities is becoming ever more precarious for everyone.

Such housing precarity – driven by and alongside processes of globalisation, commodification, and financialisation – is not unique to the American West Coast; housing crises are shaping social, political, and economic life in cities across the globe (Madden and Marcuse, 2016; Davis, 2017; Wetzstein, 2017; Ley *et al.*, 2020; Walks

and Soederberg, 2021; Coquelin *et al.*, 2022; Spratt, 2022). Globally, urban residents face increasingly insecure forms of tenure and fewer regulatory and public safeguards, with rates of homelessness, overcrowding, and informal sheltering in public space on the rise (Baxter and Brickell, 2014; Mendez and Quastel, 2015; Blomley and The Right to Remain Collective, 2021; Tranjan, 2023). In contexts beyond North America, scholars have long charted the social and political lives of informal settlements, whether in refugee camps, contemporary conflict zones, or in long-established settlements in major cities – from Cape Town to Nairobi, Mumbai to Rio de Janeiro (Davis, 2017). These spaces are sites of creativity, hope, and urban alterity, but they too face State encroachment, violence, policing, and control (Roy, 2005, 2009, 2017; McFarlane, 2012; Banks, Lombard and Mitlin, 2020; Speer, 2024). Tensions over who owns, and who has the right to own, urban land – and what it should be used for – are everywhere.

In Canada, municipalities and regions are grappling with these tensions in divergent ways. While some have embraced *Bamberger*, such as in Halifax, the capital of Nova Scotia, where the city has designated nine legal camping sites, others are taking a more punitive and unlawful approach (Duncan, 2023; Yousif, 2024). In January 2023, Justice Valente of the Ontario Superior Court rejected the Municipality of Waterloo's application for an injunction to close an encampment, citing the risk of violating the Section 7 Charter rights of the camp's residents (as in *Bamberger*). Instead of recognising these rights and the court decision, a coalition of Waterloo mayors responded by drafting and signing a letter which petitioned the Provincial government to intervene (Mahler, 2024). They called for the Province to evoke the controversial 'notwithstanding clause' of the Canadian Charter, which enables governments to temporarily suspend certain protections (Wherry, 2024). Their demand: to forcibly clear encampments in the region and to mandate substance-use and mental health treatment for those sheltering within them.

In the United States, a landmark ruling by the US Supreme Court in June 2024, *Grants Pass v Johnson*, overturned a previous decision which ruled anti-camping ordinances 'cruel and unusual punishment' – now, instead of being somewhat protected by the law, people experiencing homelessness in the US can be arrested, ticketed, and fined for sleeping outside, even when there are no alternatives (Hills, 2024; National Homelessness Law Center, no date). In this decision, and in dominant public discourse

surrounding encampments, concerns for human dignity are overlooked and accountability for the wider housing and overdose crises are obscured. Instead, the return to criminalisation and to punishment across North America reflects a deep-seated desire for sanitised and ‘properly’ developed and used urban space. The question of what counts as proper, however, has a long history (Chapter 4) and the scope of the law to contest this seems to be ever eroding.

Understanding these political and legal trajectories requires a reminder that the realities of living in an encampment should not be romanticised. Life in a makeshift shelter is often cold, dangerous, uncomfortable, and unstable (Olson and Pauly, 2023). Many, if not most, hope to move on (Chapter 5). Yet, as this research and the work of others has shown, encampments also serve as spaces of safety, social connection, personal autonomy, and choice (Speer, 2016, 2017, 2019b; Dozier, 2019; Flynn *et al.*, 2022). Encampments occupy public space in a blend of politics and survival, a visual commentary on the state of public housing and shelter provision, the encroachment of gentrifying forces, and the existence of urban space done differently. These are places where people can prefigure and claim more than is offered by the City, the State, or private and non-profit providers in times of crisis. In these blurred spaces of home and homelessness, we find political possibility.

Set within this wider landscape, this thesis has sought to attend to the voices, needs, ideas, and claims of those living and making home amidst such precarity and encroachment. It raises questions about how decisions over these spaces are made – both in politics and in the law – and over how we understand these *unsettling* urban homes. Arguing that existing mechanisms fail to grasp both the lived and legal stakes of these spaces, it suggests that we should turn to the histories and realities of so-called ‘public space’ to more justly, fairly, and meaningfully decide who gets to use them, and on what terms.

As a starting point for this conversation, this thesis poses as many questions as it seeks to answer – this is, perhaps, the very nature of a patchwork approach: to point us towards ever more patches of knowledge yet to be woven together. What, for example, would it look like to truly reckon with, and provide redress for, the history and nature of public property in a settler-colonial city? How might reimagining its purpose – both in

praxis and in law – have repercussions beyond the housing crisis on the wider historical-geographies of exclusion, marginalisation, and violence that shape urban life? And, how might the *unsettling* of public space help to re-‘right’ and rewrite the story of housing precarity not only in Vancouver, but elsewhere too? These questions remain open, inviting further patchwork – of academic thought, political action, and advocacy on the ground – in the ongoing struggle for more just urban futures.

9 References

9.1 References

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9.3 Author’s images

Hills, T. (2023a) *Create a Real Available Beach Shoreline View* [Photograph].

Hills T. (2023b) *Interview workshop with EIDGE, 28th July* [Photograph]

Hills, T. (2023c) *Crabby Shack in Crab Park, 1st Aug* [Photograph]

Hills, T. (2023d) *Tent living room, 4th Oct* [Photograph]

Hills, T. (2023e) *Painted walls of Crab tent, 4th Oct* [Photograph]

Hills, T. (2023f) *Outside of makeshift shelter, 4th Oct* [Photograph]

Hills, T. (2023g) *Tent bedroom, 4th Oct* [Photograph]
Hills, T. (2023h) *WATARI memorial bench, 18th Sept* [Photograph]
Hills, T. (2023i) *Drinkers memorial circle, 18th Aug* [Photograph]
Hills, T. (2023j) *Drinkers memorial plaque, 18th Aug* [Photograph]
Hills, T. (2023k) *Designated daytime sheltering area notice from the general manager, 11th July* [Photograph]
Hills, T. (2023l) *New sheltering 'guidelines', 27th Aug* [Photograph]
Hills, T. (2023m) *By-law flyer, 21st Aug* [Photograph]
Hills, T. (2023n) *PIVOT flyers on camp tent, 21st Aug* [Photograph]
Hills, T. (2023o) *Screenshot of Fiona York Tweet, 30th April* [Photograph]

10 Appendices

10.1 Appendix 1 – Sample interview schedule

Broad Topic	Indicative Questions
Warm-Up	• Could you introduce yourself and how long you have been resident/working in the DTES?
Everyday uses and value of park spaces	• Do you spend much time in parks in the DTES? Why? • Are there particular times of the year you spend more/less time in parks, why? • Where is your favourite public space in the DTES, why? • What do you do when you are there? • Do you think parks are important in the DTES, why?
Feelings of social in/exclusion; access to green space	• Do you feel welcomed in the park? • Who might not feel welcome in the park, why? • Who are parks for in the Downtown Eastside?
Park governance; park rangers; policing	• What kinds of activities are allowed/not allowed in the park? • What do you do if you see somebody doing something they shouldn't be doing in the park? • When do park rangers/police get involved in the park? • Have you ever felt unwelcome or been evicted from a park? • Is it important to have somebody in control of the kinds of activities that happen in a park? Who should this be? What kinds of rules should be followed?
2018-2021 Encampment and closure	• What was the encampment between 2018 and 2020 about? • What happened when the encampment was moved from Oppenheimer Park in 2020? • How did you feel about the camp and the park being closed?
Encampments; CRAB Park	• Why do people move in to CRAB? How long do people generally stay? • Can you tell me about your everyday life? What do you get up to? • What kind of support do people get here? Which organisations visit? How does this support differ to that if people were in a shelter/SRO? • How does the camp organise this support/fund itself? • Who comes to the encampment? Who stays away? • Are there particular rules people have to follow to be part of the encampment? Who calls the shots? • What is the goal of the camp? • What are your favourite memories at CRAB?

	• Why do you think the camp is only on the peninsula? • Why is there no electricity or water to the camp? • What is your relationship like with park rangers? • What wins has the encampment had, and how did these come about? • Why has this encampment been allowed to stay? • How did the Bamberger case impact the camp? Has it changed the camp? • What was it like being part of the case? • Do you think the case changed how park rangers interact with the camp? • What is the future of the camp? Where do you see yourself going?
(Right to) Overnight sheltering; everyday displacements	• Why were the Oppenheimer/Strathcona camps decamped? • Should encampments be permitted in all parks, or only some? Why?
Indigenous resurgence; claims to park land; forms of recognition; shared governance	• Why is Oppenheimer Park important to urban Indigenous people? • Why has CRAB park been called an urban reserve? • How can public spaces recognise Indigenous rights to land in Vancouver?
Ownership; property; publics; who's 'backyard'	• Who owns Vancouver's Park land? • Whose 'backyard' is Oppenheimer Park? • Who should own Vancouver's Park land? • Who owns CRAB park? Does the camp change this equation?
Japanese Canadian history and influence; Powell Street Festival	• Why is Oppenheimer Park important to Japanese Canadians? • What do you think about the Powell Street Festival? Should it remain in Oppenheimer Park?
Other festivals and events e.g. Heart of the City Festival	• What other events and festivals happen at the parks? • Who attends these events, and who should?
Future possibilities for governance and uses	• How can we better design parks to make them accessible and welcoming to everyone? • Do you want more green space in the DTES? Where could this be? • How could the Parks Board better support people who are experiencing homelessness? • Why have people asked for an Indigenous Longhouse in CRAB park?

10.2 Appendix 2 – List of interviewees

#	Date	Name/Pseudonym	Role / Location	Time (mins)
1	11 th July 2023	Kennedy Stewart	Municipal politician	73
2	19 th July 2023	Brent	Resident, Crab Park	121
3	24 th July 2023	John Irwin	Commissioner, Parks Board	76
4	25 th July 2023	Tony	City Employee	72
5	25 th July 2023	Carys	Supporter, Crab Park	100
6	27 th July 2023	Chris	Civil society member, DTES	60
7	28 th July 2023	Sue Baker	City employee	85
8	31 st July 2023	Giles	Carnegie member, DTES	66
9	31 st July 2023	Jean Swanson	Municipal politician	48
10	1 st Aug 2023	Betty Lepps	Staff, Parks Board	84
11	2 nd Aug 2023	Andrea Reimer	Municipal politician	60
12	2 nd Aug 2023	Drew	Resident, Crab Park	86
13	3 rd Aug 2023	Simon	Park user, Crab Park	61
14	3 rd Aug 2023	Rose	Park user, Crab Park	61
15	3 rd Aug 2023	Kerry	Resident, Crab Park	170
16	4 th Aug 2023	Athena	Resident, Crab Park	52
17	8 th Aug 2023	Simon	City Employee	60
18	10 th Aug 2023	Cindy	Volunteer, Crab Park	72
19	11 th Aug 2023	Donnie Rosa	Ex-GM, Parks Board	76
20	13 th Aug 2023	Fiona York	Volunteer, Crab Park	164
21	14 th Aug 2023	Rider	Volunteer, Crab Park	71
22	15 th Aug 2023	Saber	Resident, Crab Park	20
23	16 th Aug 2023	Richard	Resident, Crab Park	73
24	16 th Aug 2023	Jason	Resident, Crab Park	71
25	17 th Aug 2023	Rika	Carnegie Staff	84
26	17 th Aug 2023	Kellie	Regular, Oppenheimer Park	25
27	20 th Aug 2023	Vern	Regular, Oppenheimer Park	52
28	23 rd Aug 2023	Pepe	Regular, Oppenheimer Park	120
29	24 th Aug 2023	Sophie	Civil society staff, DTES	54
30	24 th Aug 2023	Flora	Civil society staff, DTES	54
31	24 th Aug 2023	Katie	City employee	42
32	24 th Aug 2023	Suzie	Regular, Oppenheimer Park	57
33	28 th Aug 2023	Kamal	Regular, Oppenheimer Park	58
34	28 th Aug 2023	Will	Park user, Crab Park	42
35	28 th Aug 2023	Ryan	Volunteer, Crab Park	85
36	29 th Aug 2023	James	Regular, Oppenheimer Park	49
37	29 th Aug 2023	Elijah	Regular, Oppenheimer Park	49
38	29 th Aug 2023	Tom	Regular, Oppenheimer Park	49
39	30 th Aug 2023	Herb	Civil society member, DTES	89

40	31 st Aug 2023	Jaiden	Staff, Oppenheimer Park	75
41	31 st Aug 2023	Phil	Regular, Oppenheimer Park	38
42	5 th Sept 2023	Darren	Staff, Parks Board	68
43	7 th Sept 2023	Justin	Civil society member, DTES	68
44	6 th Sept 2023	Naomi	Japanese Canadian elder	99
45	8 th Sept 2023	George	EIDGE member, DTES	45
46	20 th Sept 2023	Michelle	Volunteer, Crab Park	70
47	22 nd Sept 2023	Gladys	Regular, Oppenheimer	58
48	24 th Sept 2023	Heather	EIDGE member, DTES	48
49	26 th Sept 2023	Aaron	VANDU Organiser, DTES	72
50	26 th Sept 2023	Antonio	WATARI Organiser, DTES	87
51	27 th Sept 2023	Savannah	Organiser, Heart of the City Festival	139
52	2 nd Oct 2023	Amy	Volunteer, Oppenheimer Park	125
53	3 rd Oct 2023	Emiko	Staff, Powell Street Festival	90
54	5 th Oct 2023	Jenn	Staff, Oppenheimer Park	56
55	16 th Oct 2023	Park ranger	Staff, Parks Board	93
56	17 th Oct 2023	Libby Davis	Politician	88
57	19 th Oct 2023	Evie	Staff, Oppenheimer Park	45

10.3 Appendix 3 – Sample community ethics handout

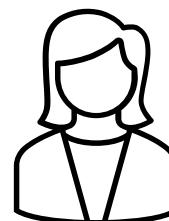
Oppenheimer Park Project - Get to Know Me

This document introduces me and my PhD project and answers some of the questions set out in Research 101: A Manifesto for Ethical Research in the Downtown Eastside. It is intended as a way for us to start a conversation around the shape of the research project and how I can build an ethical research project which respects and is useful for DTES residents.

Position – Who am I?

Hi! I am Tiger (she/her) and I am a PhD student at the School of Geography and the Environment at the University of Oxford.

I currently live in Oxford in the UK, and I have previously lived in London, Singapore, and Hong Kong.



My connection to and interest in Vancouver stems from a visit to Vancouver Island on a summer scholarship in 2014. While there, I was introduced to Canada's settler-colonial history and how this shapes contemporary inequality and injustices in Vancouver. Having grown up in South-East Asia while holding British citizenship, learning about the long history of colonial connection between Britain, Canada, and South-East Asia reshaped how I understood the world and the causes of global inequality. This experience is what inspired me to go on to do a BA in Geography. After my degree, I briefly worked as a teacher in London before undertaking an MSc in Migration Studies. My current research explores how marginalised populations assert their rights, build meaningful lives, and create spaces of

belonging and community amongst state and municipal policies of exclusion. The DTES is a space where the community has long faced policies of displacement and marginalisation at the hands of the city but is also home to a rich mix of people from different backgrounds and cultures, and a tradition of community activism. This project explores how Oppenheimer Park is part of this story.

Outside of the PhD, I am actively involved in campaigning for migrant rights in the UK and I am a keen runner; I will be completing (hopefully...) my first ultra-marathon in May!

As a white woman living and working in the UK, I recognise that my dislocation from Vancouver and social privilege will limit my ability to fully understand the lived experiences of people I am working with and the issues I research. I am committed to doing this research in ways that are non-violent and true to the voices of people on-the-ground, and I hope to build a meaningful partnership with the Oppenheimer Park Fieldhouse in order to do so. I hope that this research project will support the Park's programming and provide evidence for community calls for increased and higher quality green and public space in the DTES.

Funding and Partnerships – What are my sources of funding and research partnerships? Who else is going to be seeing or using, or benefiting from this research?

I am funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC, UK), and I am supervised by Professors [Fiona McConnell](#) and Professor [Alex Vasudevan](#). My funding does not tie me to any kind of political 'leaning' or require specific outputs from the research, though it does introduce some complications around data storage and sharing. The ESRC requires any data to be deposited with the UK Data Service following the completion of the project. Prior to depositing the data, the data will be anonymised, and there is an option to apply to deposit the data with a 'Secure Lab' to further limit access to the data. Beyond this, my supervisors and I will have access to data collected through this research.

Approach – What are my plans to do this research to the community in a respectful, meaningful and accessible way?

For some context, this research project aims to analyse the social and political dynamics taking place within Oppenheimer Park in relation to processes of urban change and governance. The broad aims of the research are to:

- (1) Examine how the governance of the park has been part of wider agendas to exclude and to manage the population of the Downtown Eastside
- (2) Understand whether and how the park space has been reclaimed by everyday users in order to directly resist these processes of exclusion and control
- (3) Understand the role of encampments in the park and other public spaces in the Downtown Eastside

To do this, I would like to undertake community-based research in the DTES by spending the summer volunteering at Oppenheimer Park, getting to know people, and interviewing people who regularly use the park and the Fieldhouse programs. I have already completed a period of archival research on the history of the park at the City of Vancouver Archives and the Nikkei National Museum Archives in Burnaby.

At this point, ideas for methods include:

- running workshops in the park

- hanging out in the park
- interviewing people who use the park (residents, volunteers, and employees) and
- interviewing people who are involved in its governance (Parks Board members & employees, and Carnegie park committee members)

I would like to do up to 50 interviews. Interviewees and those taking part in workshops will be paid and always have information about the project discussed in-person with them beforehand and will have time to decide if they want to take part and to ask any questions they may have about the research process. I have completed a 6-week course in trauma-informed research practice and will be careful to ensure that my interview questions are sensitive and avoid triggering trauma. An important part of this will be asking individuals familiar with the DTES to pre-screen the interview questions.

I have already had ethics review approved by Oxford university, which I am happy to circulate to individuals to review. I also intend to submit the research for ethics review with other key DTES community stakeholders – *are there other organisations you would suggest running the research past?*

Feedback and Reciprocity – What is the plan to bring this research back to the community and how is the community going to benefit from this research?

After the summer period, I will return to Oxford to analyse the findings and to write up my PhD. During this process, I will be in conversation with key participants who will be given the opportunity to respond to the findings and to contribute to the analysis.

The following year, I hope to return to Vancouver to communicate my research findings. The findings will be converted into a report and/or another creative format which will be made freely available for the DTES community. I would also like to host an event during this time such as a presentation/workshop to speak through the findings and answer questions/have an open discussion on the research process. The eventual journal articles which come from the PhD thesis will also be open access and deposited with Carnegie library.

Action – What is the plan for taking action alongside members of the community to advocate for change?

The research will hopefully create evidence for the importance of green and public spaces for the DTES community and support advocacy around their existence and use. I also see the research helping to highlight some of the limitations of the ways that the City of Vancouver, Parks Board and police govern the park and encampments. *Are there other ways I could be helpful to people at the park?*