

“URBAN HOUSEKEEPING” AND KEEPING THE MODERN HOUSE

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IT IS USUAL TO THINK of the domestic landscape of postwar Vancouver as that of the “award-winning,” and much publicized, detached single-family, “westcoast style,” homes. These houses were promoted as the embodiment of ideal modern family life in such popular magazines as *Western Homes and Living*, and their aesthetic appeal was affiliated with “Canadian” identity in the 1951 Massey Report on the arts and sciences in Canada.¹ The kitchens and planning of these suburban homes for the nuclear family captured the talents of the advertising world and the imagination of potential buyers. However, it is not here that I would like to focus my discussion of the domestic. There was, and is, another landscape of domesticity that was developing at the same time – that of the high-rise apartment, a building type only problematically linked to modern domesticity.² The word “domestic,” in its most common usage, refers to residential buildings, houses and housing, and consequent notions associated with that more elusive term “home.”³ The domestic is, however, a rather enigmatic concept, which even a dictionary definition cannot securely bound: as an adjective it is “of the home, household, or family affairs,” or “of one’s own country,

¹ Canada Royal Commission of National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, Vincent Massey, *Report of the Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1951).

² In the nineteenth century, the introduction of apartment life for the bourgeoisie provoked controversy among theorists and architects of the period. Theorist and architect Viollet le Duc and publicist César Daly fretted over its appearance and consequence for proper domestic life. Le Corbusier hesitated in proposing high-rise living for the masses in his *Ville Contemporaine* of 1922, and many, like Catherine Bauer, continued to disparage it in the 1950s and 1960s. In Vancouver it was a commonplace of real estate rhetoric to privilege the homeowner over the renter and, hence, until the 1950s, single family homes over apartment living (when self-owned apartments arose).

³ Hal Kalman, “Residential Architecture,” chap. 11 in *A Concise History of Canadian Architecture* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2000), 595.

not foreign”; as a noun it refers to “a household servant.” Domesticity means “being domestic; home life or privacy.”⁴ And with the reference to “privacy,” the domestic and domesticity are all too readily consigned to the “private sphere” in opposition to the “public sphere” and the gender asymmetries associated with that division.⁵ However, the domestic sits awkwardly within any circumscribed private, public, feminine, or masculine dichotomies; in fact, it makes problematic this all too easy division. Domestic buildings – homes – have public faces, they convey status and represent a way of life. They are “private” yet are invaded by public regulations and outsiders, as for example in the policing of the “single family house” and the cleanliness expectations dictated by popular lifestyle magazines. While the domestic landscape is considered the place of private life and individuality, this landscape itself is also thought both to affect how people live and to reinforce particular social patterns and, hence, to be ideological and political.⁶

I would like to look at the appearance of high-rise apartments in two places in Vancouver: Strathcona and the West End. Both were sites of urban housekeeping and both were differentiated in their modernity – materially, physically, and programmatically. Together they raise questions about the homogeneity of the modern (an attribution arising either from a positive evaluation of its claims for social equality or from a negative assessment of its conformity to a strict formal canon). Their juxtaposition within the same investigative field also provokes questions about the manner in which the space of domestic modernity was produced. Were the mechanisms of production the same in each instance? And, if so, were the objectives identical? The high-rise apartment played a major role in this sorting out of gender, class, and ethnicity, what we might call “urban housekeeping.”

⁴ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 6th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

⁵ There has been theoretical debate about the notion of immutable “public and private spheres” as both analytical and explanatory categories. For a distinct discussion of this debate, see Leonore Davidoff, “Regarding some ‘Old Husband’s Tales’: Public and Private in Feminist History,” in her *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 227–76. Davidoff asserts, “Despite their instability and mutability, public and private are concepts which also have had powerful material and experiential consequences in terms of formal institutions, familial and kinship patterns, as well as language” (228).

⁶ Gwendolyn Wright argues that “domestic architecture in particular illuminates norms concerning family life, sex roles, community relations, and social equity.” See her *Moralism and the Model Home: Domestic Architecture and Cultural Conflict in Chicago, 1873–1913* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). Likewise, Joelle Bahloul, in *The Architecture of Memory*, trans. Catherine de Peloux Ménagé (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), asserts that “domestic space is the material representation of the social order and social reproduction is achieved through the symbolic perpetuation of the social order represented in the habitat” (129).

With "urban housekeeping," I wish to evoke the close relationship between urban redevelopment and notions of domesticity and the manner in which their intersection produced two different landscapes, two different notions of keeping house and of the housekeeper. With "keeping the house modern," I am interested in how domesticity, such as it was represented in an advertisement from *Western Homes and Living* in the early 1950s, would be negotiated in the postwar sites of reconstruction (see Figure 1). The advertisement shows the weekend patriarch fixing up his house, the robust and neatly attired son, and the confident housewife, distributing cleanliness, health, and order in her modern, step-saving, fatigue-ridding kitchen. It also shows a view to the protected and private backyard, implying pride of ownership and security of property investment. How was this image negotiated in McLean Park, a public housing project in Strathcona, and in the high-rise apartments innovated for the West End, both of which arose in the 1950s?⁷ I am interested in the histories and geographies of the bodies captured in and by these two locations (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). How did the fluid entities of "housewife" or "bachelor," "middle class" or "working class," solidify in these places and at this time?

Do these sites, and their assigned bodies, act as "reciprocal productions," as Elizabeth Groz suggests? Do they "produce each other ... [where] the city is made and made over into the simulacrum of the body, and the body in its turn is transformed, citified, urbanized as a distinctly metropolitan body"?⁸ The rhetoric of the 1950s had proposed that a home "be the nursery for domestic virtue and in turn a guarantee of a healthy community."⁹ As one observer of the domestic conditions of Vancouver's West End remarked in the 1940s, community, or group, activities could "offset the harmful effects of physical conditions and lack of opportunities for normal home life ... by providing facilities for the wholesome employment of leisure time."¹⁰ The aim was to "build

⁷ The West End apartments that I discuss were built in 1958 and 1959. These were "self-owned" apartments, an innovation just then being popularized. McLean Park, although not ready for occupancy until 1963, was designed between 1959 and 1961 and was first proposed in a 1957 Vancouver Redevelopment Plan in 1957, which had been funded by Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation in 1956. It had, however, been initiated even earlier by a 1946-47 study by Leonard Marsh of the University of British Columbia, as is discussed later in this article. The term "urban housekeeping" is used in this study.

⁸ Elizabeth Groz, qtd. in Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Cambridge, UK: Blackwell, 1999), 65.

⁹ "Design for Living Exhibition," Vancouver 1949, qtd. in Scott Watson, "Art in the Fifties: Design, Leisure, and Painting in the Age of Anxiety," in *Vancouver Art and Artists, 1930-1983*, ed. Vancouver Art Gallery (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1983), 78.

¹⁰ Vancouver Council of Social Agencies, Group Work Division, *The West End Survey* (Vancouver: n.p., 1941), 10.

up a body of self-reliant and responsible citizens.”¹¹ Clearly there was at this time a notion that the domestic, the community, and the nation were linked.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Strathcona and the West End were similarly categorized as “impoverished areas” and their renovation deemed critical to the creation of the modern city. Mixed populations living in a range of accommodation, detached houses, apartments, and rooming houses characterized both. Strathcona was associated with the harried housewife overwhelmed by her domestic location; the West End was characterized by “the little old lady living in genteel poverty.”¹² Obviously, gender played a role in coding these two spatial productions. Scrutinizing their domestic arrangements, sanitation departments, municipal surveys and real estate, investors concluded that both sites needed to be cleaned up, put in order, sorted out; they required some modern urban housekeeping.¹³ Yet the kind of housekeeping undertaken and the species of domesticity negotiated in each instance differed. Distinct histories and geographies produced these spaces and articulated the modern domestic sphere accordingly: they are both about managing the urban and the home.

Strathcona became – was made into – the site for McLean Park, a government-sponsored housing estate for working-class families. The West End became – was revamped as – a site for profitable private development for pre- and postfamilies. McLean Park became the embodiment of altruistic planning and modern architecture rhetoric, the West End of technological, financial, and business innovation geared to maximizing property investment secured by a refined architectural aesthetic. One was for families and a “community,” with all the territorial boundaries and exclusions that that entailed, the other vaunted the freedom of anonymity and mobility implied in the independently sited, open-framed structure repeated over ten, fifteen, or twenty stories. A differentiated rhetoric of the dwelling constructed these sites and produced these places. McLean Park and the West End circulated most comfortably in contrasting circuits of publicity – one in the social and state literature of and propaganda for public housing programs, the

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ann McAfee, “Evolving Inner-City Residential Environments: The Case of Vancouver’s West End,” in *Peoples of the Living Land: Geography of Cultural Dispersion in British Columbia*, ed. Julian V. Minghi (Vancouver: Tantalus Research, 1972), 167.

¹³ McLean Park was studied in Leonard Marsh’s *Rebuilding a Neighbourhood* (Vancouver: School of Social Work and School of Architecture, University of British Columbia, 1950) based on research undertaken in 1946–47. The West End was surveyed by the Vancouver Council of Social Agencies in 1941.



To the King's Taste!"

...AND THAT PRACTICAL CRANE SINK IS TO THE LADY'S!

It's just the kind she wanted for her step-saving kitchen—a flat rim, lightweight, stain-proof Porcelain-on-Steel model that's installed flush with a continuous counter top. Low in cost, it has enduring easy-to-clean finish—handy swinging spout faucet and finger-tip "Dial-Ese" controls.

Your plans may call for something a little different and more elaborate—for a sink-and-drainboard combination, perhaps. If so, you'll find it, too, in the complete Crane line—which includes dozens of modern types, with single or double basins, single or double drainboards—

from which you can select the right sink for your particular needs, with the size, depth and work area you desire—to fit your taste, your space and your budget.

For complete information ask your Plumbing and Heating Contractor. He'll be glad to tell you all about Crane-quality sinks, built for endurance, convenience and easy cleaning.

For every home... For every budget

CRANE

The Preferred Plumbing

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UST, 1952

35

Figure 1. "To the King's Taste!" AND THE PRACTICAL CRANE SINK IS TO THE LADY'S," advertisement. Source: *Western Homes and Living* (August 1952). Courtesy of Crane Plumbing.



Figure 2. McLean Park. Photo by the author, 2001.

other in real estate ads and fashionable lifestyle magazines. Although consequences of the same capitalist production of space, they were geared to different housekeepers.

What I want to prise open is the complex ways in which the fluid, socially constructed entities of class and gender, and perhaps ethnicity, intersected in these two sites, how they gelled, if momentarily, in the decade and a half following the Second World War. Why are the images of the Marsh survey of Strathcona in 1946-47, or its subsequent 1957 study, so bound to their site – a site at least partly constructed and perhaps overwhelmed by reformist images, reports, and surveys in ways that the

representations of the West End are not?¹⁴ The West End's people seem less bordered by their geographical location and free to roam in ways that the residents of McLean Park are not, as if the latter would appear out of place elsewhere in the city.

¹⁴ G. Sutton Brown (Director of Planning for the City of Vancouver), *Vancouver Redevelopment Plan* (Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 1957). See, similarly, Joan Adams (for the Vancouver Housing Inter-Project Council), *A Tenant Looks at Public Housing Projects* (Vancouver: United Community Services of the Greater Vancouver Area, 1968), 15-21.



Figure 3. Chilco Towers, the West End. Photo by the author, 2001.

High-rise living in Vancouver was not entirely an innovation of the postwar economy or of government reconstruction programs. Elegant, decidedly urbane blocks with fashionable addresses on Thurlow and Nelson Streets began to consume extensive street frontage in the first decade of the twentieth century.¹⁵ The Manhattan apartment block claimed a fashionable address on Thurlow in 1908, while in 1912 the Sylvia Court Apartments capitalized on the view along a stretch of English Bay protected from unsightly incursions by its public purchase for leisure purposes. Two-story tenements proliferated elsewhere in the city and could be found near sawmills and industrial sites.¹⁶ The West End apartments were often investment ventures by local industrialists and mill owners who seized the opportunity to profit from the status of an elite neighbourhood, modern infrastructure, and the amenity of parks and beaches unsullied by the lower classes or industry.¹⁷ Lots here were usually larger than elsewhere in the city and often included sizable and unencumbered gardens that could be more judiciously subdivided. However, the distribution of apartment blocks across the city was far from natural. Apartment blocks signposted the social structuring of an urban topography in which Chilco Towers overlooking Lost Lagoon and McLean Park in Strathcona would find their place.

A number of historical factors influenced this dual and complementary structuring of space to accommodate high-rise modernity. Lands granted to the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) had given the West End a cachet of prestige that was solidified by elite investments in luxury mansions set on large lots. Development, especially along the west, north, and east perimeter of the West End peninsula, and covenants on use introduced by its residents bequeathed large lots. It also bequeathed luxurious mansions and a status-conscious neighbourhood with amenities that included proximity to fashionable shopping as well as to cultural and business venues supportive of a genteel lifestyle. City taxes contributed to the improvement of English Bay and Kitsilano Beach, ensuring an appropriate leisurely environment and aesthetically rewarding views.¹⁸

¹⁵ The first apartment permit, probably two or three stories, was issued in 1900, although the earliest identified apartment building is the 1907 Haro Apartments on Haro and Thurlow. The four-story, brick Manhattan materialized in 1908; others followed on West Georgia, Nelson, and Chilco Streets. See McAfee, "Evolving Inner-City Residential Environments," 1972, and Harold Kalman, *Exploring Vancouver*, rev. ed. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1978), 121, 123, 131, 134, 137, 142, 254.

¹⁶ For example, in the 600 block Jackson in the Strathcona area and on the south shore of False Creek on West 7th. See Kalman, *Exploring Vancouver*, 73, 173.

¹⁷ See *Ibid.*, 254.

¹⁸ Taxes were used to improve English Bay and Kitsilano Park in 1908, and the Parks Board had spent 1.5 million dollars on Stanley Park and English Bay by 1913. See Alan Morely, *Vancouver: From Milltown to Metropolis* (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1961), 120, 127. The use of parks and

As much as these parks and beaches were public spaces in the city, they were also the places of elite representation. Hence cultural leaders fiercely opposed proposals to open up Stanley Park to the recreational needs of the working class, and this helped maintain the park as a wilderness reserve that only the city's more cultivated community would fully appreciate.¹⁹ As many elite families abandoned the West End for Shaughnessy Heights just before and after the First World War, they left a neighbourhood imbued with cultural capital as well as valuable real estate, public amenity, and private equity. Many families had profited from the exchange as the capital they had invested in the West End captured a housing market for a growing business, office, and commercial community.²⁰

The incursions of apartments into Strathcona, or what was known initially as the East End, were less decisive, never as monumental as in the West End, built practically, and plainly intended to anchor workers close to the docks, sawmills, and factories that lined Burrard Inlet and False Creek.²¹ The small lots and irregular topography of the area, as well as the limited resources of its residents, presented slight pressure on land values and little need to build more densely.²² Strathcona lacked the location, amenities, social status, and rise in land values that traditionally precipitate high-rise construction.²³ Instead of spaces of leisure

beaches in Vancouver generally and in the vicinity of the West End was contentious. Parks and beaches were also complex social, political, and economic elements within the city. For example, even though the establishment of English Bay as a public beach constituted an amenity for those living along its shores, protecting it from industrial incursions, it also served the interests of the Trade and Labour Council, which had demanded this availability for its working-class constituents. See Robert A.J. McDonald, "Holy Retreat' or 'Practical Breathing Spot'? Class Perceptions of Vancouver's Stanley Park, 1910-1913," *Canadian Historical Review* 65, 2 (1984): 150.

¹⁹ For a more detailed account of the City Beautiful Movement and the complex interplay of it and the Vancouver Garden City Association, see Robert A.J. McDonald, *Making Vancouver: Class, Status and Social Boundaries, 1863-1913* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996), 169-71.

²⁰ McAfee, "Evolving Inner-City Residential Environments"; Vancouver Council of Social Agencies, Group Work Division, *West End Survey*; and Kalman, *Exploring Vancouver*, note that owners of mansions and houses sought to profit from the sale, development, or subdivision of their property in the West End. The residents listed in the city directory for the newly completed Tudor Manor on Beach Avenue in 1930 included four company presidents, three managers, three accountants, one clerk, an engineer, and a treasurer as well as two retired men and at least two single women.

²¹ Apartments did develop in Strathcona, especially after the extension of the streetcar line along Georgia, and by 1912 there were the Toronto Apartments, Ferrera Court, and Jackson Apartments. Duplexes and row houses were also present in the area. See John Atkin, *Strathcona: Vancouver's First Neighbourhood*. (Vancouver and Toronto: Whitecap Books, 1994), 34-5.

²² For a discussion of Strathcona as an area outside of the social mainstream of Vancouver before the First World War, see McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, chap. 8; and for the interwar years see Carole Itrter and Daphne Marlatt, *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End*. (Victoria: Province of British Columbia, 1997-98). For a general history of the area, see Atkin, *Strathcona*.

²³ For a discussion of the ideas of speculative apartment buildings of the time, see Horace Roberts, "Flat and Apartment Planning," *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* 17, 11 (1940): 189-93. With the development of the streetcar line along Georgia to Victoria Drive to the east,

and contemplation (such as promenades in the form of beaches and picturesque “wilderness”), 1912 Strathcona received public investment in a recreational playground.²⁴ The park was the product of a recreation and reform ideology that aimed to instill moral behaviour by disciplining young, working-class bodies to the goals of efficiency and the civilizing force of competitive games.²⁵

In 1929 these divisions were entrenched in the Bartholomew Plan for Vancouver. The city’s first comprehensive planning survey, it rendered rational the historically developed spatial differentiations of the city. The deployment of zoning concepts legitimated the West End as a high-rise middle-class apartment district, a residential neighbourhood, and a good investment area.²⁶ The plan counselled the city to secure more parkland along English Bay, thus securing the amenities of open space, greenery, and air that contributed to the image of the West End as a place of genteel leisure. The plan also allowed for the West End’s enhanced investment desirability by recommending six-story high-rise buildings with special density allowances whose profitability would in turn demand luxury apartments.²⁷ Conversely, in Strathcona, the Bartholomew Plan envisioned six-story light industrial buildings. The authors of the plan, Harlan Bartholomew and Associates of St. Louis, surmised that, “In these days, when apartment houses are so much in demand, Vancouver in the future should be deemed very fortunate in the possession of an apartment district west of Burrard Street, which while contiguous to business, has also the desiderata of a residential district,

there was some pressure to increase density, and the apartments built in the 1910s are evidence of this. So, too, is the development of row houses and the subdivision of lots in the interest of capturing the moderate incomes of workers and those with restricted incomes. The declaration of Strathcona as an industrial area in the Bartholomew Report (begun in 1926 and published in 1929) undermined the market processes conducive to investment in high-rise construction. See Atkin, *Strathcona*, 59–61, and n. 21.

²⁴ McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, 171.

²⁵ On the role of sports in social reform initiatives, see Thomas Markus, *Buildings and Power: Freedom and Control in the Origins of Modern Building Types* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993); and John Bale and Chris Phil, eds., *Body Cultures: Essays on Sport, Space and Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998). For Vancouver specifically, see McDonald, “Holy Retreat.”

²⁶ Harlan Bartholomew and Associates, *A Plan for the City of Vancouver British Columbia, including Point Grey and South Vancouver and a General Plan of the Region, 1929* (Vancouver: Vancouver City Hall, 1929). In commenting on the Bartholomew Plan, Norbert MacDonald mentions its “great impact on the subsequent development” of the city and quotes Bartholomew as commenting in a subsequent 1944 study that, although “not officially adopted [] or approved by City Council, ... it has been faithfully followed with few exceptions.” See Norbert MacDonald, *Distant Neighbours: A Comparative History of Seattle and Vancouver* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1987), 116, 118.

²⁷ The plan suggested that a six-story apartment building on a standard West End lot of 66 by 131 feet would be allowed five suites per floor, accommodating thirty units. A three-story apartment building on a standard lot elsewhere in the city, 50 by 120 feet, would provide eight suites. Bartholomew and Associates, *A Plan for the City of Vancouver*, 231.

due to its proximity to Stanley Park and the foreshore of English Bay."²⁸ In contrast, the authors noted that "those who have to gain their livelihood by manual labour should find in Hastings Town site [including Strathcona] and in replanned [sic] South Vancouver a place where they can build up modest homes."²⁹ While the Bartholomew Plan brought imported professional expertise and modern concepts to the organization of the city, it also incorporated and authorized the viewpoints of "local business and property investors."³⁰ These views and the plan itself were sustained even in the midst of economic depression and the dislocation of the Second World War, which brought overcrowding, conversions to rooming houses, and commercial infill to the West End as well as to Strathcona.³¹ But differences between these two locations were to be maintained; as the 1941 *West End Survey* stipulated, "the area west of Burrard Street was designated a six-story apartment area and should be given serious attention as such."³² Just what kind of six-story apartment area was made clear when it was described as an area of "office workers and artisans." Although home to "single women in receipt of municipal relief" and "the elderly receiving pensions," the neighbourhood evidenced (stated the 1941 Survey) "little ethnic mixing," "less juvenile delinquency," "the least number of families in need," and solid institutional support.³³

MCLEAN PARK

Strathcona was, according to social worker Leonard Marsh's 1946-47 study, not "an unqualified slum area ... not the worst example of housing conditions in Vancouver ... There were worse pockets of derelict, unhealthy or overcrowded housing blocks in the industrial area of East Kitsilano, or the rooming houses of the downtown business district. It was its *location*, in relation to False Creek, to traffic routes and industrial areas, [that made] it ... one of the critical areas for the whole future of town planning in Vancouver."³⁴ Strathcona would therefore be a "rehabilitated" location, a "community," where domesticity might be "regenerated." The

²⁸ Ibid., 26.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ MacDonald, *Distant Neighbours*, 116-17. They were, with one exception, all men.

³¹ For a discussion of the housing conditions in Vancouver in the period between the two world wars, see Jill Wade, *Houses for All: The Struggle for Social Housing in Vancouver, 1919-50* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994).

³² Vancouver Council of Social Agencies, Group Work Division, *The West End Survey* (Vancouver: Vancouver Council of Social Agencies, 1941) 4.

³³ Ibid., 5.

³⁴ Marsh, *Rebuilding a Neighbourhood*, iii.

area would be cleared of its wasteful land use as well as its “misery,” “corruption,” and “intolerable conditions.”³⁵ But this location would also be contested ground; there was already a vital domesticity here.

Two things are salient in the discussion of McLean Park. The first is the notion of community, of “rebuilding a neighborhood” – the title given to Marsh’s report when it was published in 1950. Community is seemingly the report’s urban rationality. The second is the notion of domesticity – the actual focus of the investigation. The neighbourhood and the domestic work in tandem. Both were to be reconstituted through the professional expertise of city planners and architects, municipal officers, and the three levels of government involved in financing its urban renewal.

According to contemporary community planning discourse and modern architecture’s interest, Strathcona was an ideal area for rehabilitation. In the opinion of these modernist adherents, the redevelopment of McLean Park would organize as well as rehouse people living in one of the oldest, now working-class and immigrant-receiving, residential districts in Vancouver.³⁶ But with only 3.5 per cent of all social assistance cases found here, Strathcona was admittedly not Vancouver’s most needy area.³⁷ Nevertheless, professional planners, architects, and a majority of city councillors were willing to identify Strathcona with “slum-living,” a condition that they believed “drains away self-respect and morale.”³⁸ The fact that Strathcona was deemed an area where expenditures outstripped city revenues by approximately two-to-one reveals that public fiscal health was as much at the centre of urban redevelopment as was physical well-being.³⁹ The Marsh Report had blatantly concluded that “slums are poor for public finance.”⁴⁰

Urban housekeeping began here, in the professional survey, with stocktaking, categorizing, and quantifying. The Marsh Report noted

³⁵ These were all descriptive phrases used in Marsh’s report, which was based on an extensive site notation survey.

³⁶ For a discussion of the discourse and ideology of modernist planning, especially as these pertain to the powers claimed by the “trained expert,” see Mayna Star Vaucaille, “To Build a Better City: Urban Renewal and the Culture of Modernity in Post-War Vancouver” (honours thesis, University of British Columbia, 2000).

³⁷ Marsh, *Rebuilding a Neighbourhood*, ix.

³⁸ Slums were characterized by Marsh, *Rebuilding a Neighbourhood*, iv, as “cramped homes, overburdened housekeeping, inadequate school facilities, poor health and delinquency.” This representation was undoubtedly due to the perception of Strathcona as an area that did not conform to expectations of visual order, normal lifestyles, or dominant ethnic background. For a discussion of the construction of Strathcona as a non-normative, or marginal, area, see McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, chap. 8; and Itter and Marlatt, *Opening Doors*.

³⁹ Marsh, *Rebuilding a Neighbourhood*, puts the figures at revenues \$150,000 and expenditures at \$298,000.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, x.

bodies per room and families per dwelling. It counted sinks, refrigerators, and stoves; it classified dirt, smells, and obscurities. It pointed to leaking roofs, failing structures, and collapsing foundations, and it evaluated good, fair, poor, and very poor dwellings: houses, apartments, rooming houses and cabins. It enumerated single men, single women, the aged and the young, married couples, extended families, borders, and lodgers.

Photographs constructed a slum: a railway siding, vacant lots, sheds, junk, industrial buildings, a horse! These images isolated (for shocked disapproval) haphazardly sited non-conforming buildings and outmoded tenements, antiquated stoves, inoperative plumbing, and the concentration of laundry, cooking, and mending in one room (see Figure 4). The constant refrain throughout the Marsh Report is the poverty in, or limitation placed on, "housekeeping facilities."⁴¹ Kitchens were universally "out-of-date": provision for food storage was poor, only a small number had refrigerators, and most cooking was done on wood or coal stoves. Indeed, only 15 per cent had "proper facilities" for cooking, and only nine electric ranges were found in the whole area. One-third of the dwellings did not live up to standards of bathing, and at least half were inadequate in their washing facilities. Strathcona was portrayed as a district where too many single men idled, where relatives burdened families, where the elderly were forced to take in lodgers, and where children played in abandoned properties and unused railway tracks.⁴²

The Marsh Report concluded with a plan to order and repair the community. Zoning was applied to prevent the immorality of mixing – of mixing industry and residence on the urban scale and of mixing family and lodgers on the domestic scale.⁴³ The non-family members of this community would be expelled to dormitories, thus releasing the family from overcrowding and allowing it independence and privacy. It would also facilitate the accommodation of streamlined families in their allocated apartments with the requisite number of bedrooms.

Missing from this rehabilitated domesticity are the single men who were once a significant presence in the area and a necessary, if transient, labour

⁴¹ Ibid., 15.

⁴² Ibid. See photos accompanying text. Many of these statistics are repeated in the 1961 film *To Build a Better City*.

⁴³ This segregation of functions was common to planning usually associated with high modernists like Le Corbusier and subscribers to the prescriptions of *Congres Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM), but it was also common to the more mainstream planners and architects. For a discussion of planning as it relates to modernist thought and government, see James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), esp. chaps. 3 and 4. For a general discussion of Canadian planning in the context of postwar developments, see Stephen V. Ward, *Planning the Twentieth-Century City: The Advanced Capitalist World* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2002), chaps. 4 and 5.



Figure 4. Interior of Strathcona dwelling, c. 1947. Source: Leonard Marsh, *Rebuilding a Neighbourhood*, 1950, n.p. Courtesy of University Archives, University of British Columbia.

force.⁴⁴ Single males were a problem to the “domestic community” model of urban housekeeping. They did not conform to the concept of “community,” and they did not fit within the mandate of the National Housing Act.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Marsh, *Rebuilding a Neighbourhood*, viii, reports that, of a population of between 7,000 and 7,500, 62 per cent were families but that there were “lots of single men.” He also comments that the population was mixed but that it was not “just foreigners” as 37 per cent came from Continental Europe (Scandinavians, Italians, Poles, Ukrainians) while 30 per cent came from Britain or North America. Chinese families constituted 28 per cent of the people in the area. Thirty-five per cent of chief wage earners were in mobile occupations (construction workers, lumber, etc.), while 90 per cent worked in adjacent businesses or on the waterfront. Forty-six percent had less than one mile to travel to work. Median incomes were \$1,225 to \$2,000, with the average being \$1,400. Chinese median income was \$1,200 to 2,100 (\$1,575 was typical).

⁴⁵ The National Housing Act was introduced in 1938 and was revised in 1944 and subsequently. It followed from a long history of politically and socially instigated efforts to provide some form of public housing. For the most part, any such housing realized by the government took the form of individual houses rather than apartment complexes. As the National Housing Act was based on the needs of the family, single individuals were considered outside its mandate. For a

Hence they were to be moved on, segregated from the domestic world just as industrial zones had been segregated from residential zones. The proposed hostel dormitories were bereft of kitchens and bathrooms because, not belonging to the category of family, such accoutrements were deemed unnecessary. A kitchen with a stove meant domestic life from which single males were, by definition, excluded. The removal of the cabins and Chinese dormitories marked the ascendancy of formalized civic planning over the informal mutual assistance practices of Chinese residents.

There was opposition to the proposed rehabilitation in the 1950s. This resistance arose in part because, as Delores Hayden has remarked, "Places make memories cohere in complex ways."⁴⁶ Neighbourly affiliations existed in the district: a Chinese YMCA, churches and missions, the Serbian Educational Club, and the Federation of Russian Canadians. There was the Russian Orthodox Church, a former synagogue, a home for the elderly run by the Sacred Heart, and mutual-benefit Chinese dormitories. Their presence within this "rehabilitation area" points to strong community formations from the past, which persisted into the 1950s. A sizable Italian community, substantial enough to constitute the Italian Property Owner's Association, remained in Strathcona. In fact, Marsh noted, Strathcona "has all the potential of a little United Nations."⁴⁷ There were several community and welfare organizations here, two day nurseries, some church kindergartens, and a boys' club. But it was not just to young children and boys that social workers turned their attentive gaze. Insisting that "good homes are needed," Marsh went on to clarify his thought: "Girls especially need a place to entertain their friends. Living in a crowded quarter chases them out into streets, beer parlor and tough company."⁴⁸

Certainly little of the area's past cultural richness emerged from the reform-minded rehabilitation reports of 1950 or 1957, although Chinese and Italian constituencies were acknowledged in the latter.⁴⁹ Scant reminders of this cultural wealth are to be found in the "pleasantly located meeting places," which were built in 1963 and through which the different groups revolved, their presence marked only temporarily and ephemerally in the building manager's calendar of events. Yet it was within the area's

discussion of the various players and institutional action involved in the construction of public housing, see Wade, *Houses for All*.

⁴⁶ Delores Hayden, *The Power of Place, Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1996), 43.

⁴⁷ Marsh, *Rebuilding a Neighbourhood*, 40.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁹ Brown, *Vancouver Redevelopment Plan*, acknowledges the publicity given by the Chinese Benevolent Society, which arranged for the printing and distribution of a special proclamation in Cantonese explaining the purpose of the survey. He also acknowledges similar help given by the Reverend Joseph Della Torre on behalf of the Italian community.

affiliations of families and individuals, cabins and tenements, that the complexly cohered memories, which Delores Hayden has identified with place, resided. For it is hard to place or evoke an Italian housing association or a Chinese benevolent society in the new modern spaces of the estate clubroom.⁵⁰

If in the 1957 report the modern architectural vocabulary erased the earlier memories of space and dismantled their mode of production, the neighbourhood precinct being proposed demarcated a housing project. The estate was disengaged from the urban “grid of dangerous streets” in the interest of establishing a safe pedestrian centre for shopping, childcare, household services, social services, and estate management. Conventional streets and lanes did not penetrate the neatly defined borders of this “super block,” whose dimensions were determined by the amalgamation of three standard city blocks into one. Sited within this precinct were two nine-story apartment blocks and ranges of four-story maisonettes that contrasted with their surroundings in scale, construction, and spatial syntax. Within the proposed tower blocks and maisonettes, housing was to be arrayed by specific categories and norms of occupant – single people (seniors) and childless couples in the bachelor- and one-bedroom units of the tower, families in the three-to-five-bedroom two-story units of the maisonette buildings. Each unit was to be equipped with the standard issue three-piece bathroom and basic amenity of sink, refrigerator, and stove; laundries with drying rooms were nearby. The apartment block provided communal balconies, the maisonettes private gardens. Space was calculated according to a privacy-per-person norm, community efficiency, and fiscal responsibility. The blocks themselves were sturdy, the windows modest, and the landscaping composed of practical surfaces.

Boundaries were as neatly inscribed on façades as they were delineated around the site and stipulated by dwelling typology. The buildings were implicated in a larger scale – a whole of which they were but a part. Similarly, each unit was ordered as it was subsumed into the structure of the building. Structure was distinguished from enveloping wall; continuous unadulterated reinforced concrete was set against colourful stucco in-fill panels; the disciplined, consistent, and conforming modularity of the construction process established and made visible the limits of individual units while also suggesting a propensity for

⁵⁰ In 1959 a Chinese property owners’ association was formed, in part to protest against the intrusion of the housing project. Initially, Chinese accounted for only approximately 37 per cent of the project whereas they accounted for 70 per cent of the surrounding population. The Chinese property owners’ association also proposed a neo-Chinese building for the block north of McLean Park, which was rejected by СМНС. See Donald M. Buchanan, “McLean Park” (University of British Columbia Special Collections, *Architecture* 425, March 1964), 6-8.

endless repetition. Windows were functionally zoned: a central pane for viewing, a smaller side window for ventilation. The buildings were didactic – an exposition on function, efficiency, and economy. The two matching towers were ostensibly straightforward, practical buildings and assumed like behaviour. It was hoped that, with the assistance of built form and tenants well educated in its proper use, the appropriate lessons would be learned. It was believed that "good housekeeping is much encouraged by good neighbours, and unless there is a fair mixture of the good with the poor or handicapped tenant, management problems will become intensified."⁵¹ McLean Park was intended as just such a pedagogical apparatus, a space of neighbourly scrutiny and tutelage.

I do not intend to romanticize the earlier Strathcona dwellings. Many had no running water. Toilet facilities were often inoperable, frequently outside and disconnected from the septic system. Spaces were crowded, some even without light or air and lacking in privacy. Still, even by Marsh's accounting, it was rare for more than 30 per cent of the houses to be structurally unsound, and those deficient in light and air made up less than 15 per cent of the whole.⁵² Yet it would have been difficult to keep clothes clean or homes tidy: laundry facilities were meagre, places to store things lacking. Keeping warm could mean lugging coal or wood to stoves; keeping clean might involve boiling water; keeping healthy could mean constant sweeping, cleaning, and washing.⁵³ How were women, the assumed doers of such tasks, to achieve a family of clean clothes and healthy bodies – the decency that women's magazines, school nurses, and city officials demanded? No doubt the women living here, under these pressures, would have looked desirously at the built-in cupboards whose doors would allow a tidy home.⁵⁴ They would have appreciated the electric ranges that did not need the same laborious, fatiguing cleaning that wood or coal stoves required. They would have commended the hot water that did not require fetching and boiling, and the nearby laundry that would allow them to keep children in clean clothes – children whose bodies remained healthy and who were brought up in draft-free homes.

It was, in fact, just these things that dominated later inquiries about the modern buildings: mothers pointed out the impossibility of keeping

⁵¹ P.R.U. Stratton, "Public Housing Experience in Vancouver," *Habitat* 3, 1 (1960): 21.

⁵² Marsh, *Rebuilding a Neighbourhood*, ix.

⁵³ Marsh seems quite obsessed with cleanliness, noting defective washbasins (34.6 per cent), defective water supply and bathing facilities (44.5 per cent), and defective toilets (51 per cent). See *ibid.*

⁵⁴ One Strathcona interviewee, Bessie Lee, noted that the original project presented at the Chinese Benevolent Association was "a beautiful plan." See Itter and Marlatt, *Opening Doors*, 180. It was just this modern amenity that was desired as part of later rehabilitation.

children safe in inappropriately designed balconies, the need for more cupboards conveniently placed to assist in keeping kitchens tidy and clean, the problem of keeping the look of the modern. Cleaning windows, for example, was difficult (see Figure 5). Similarly, while new household technologies assisted women in their domestic tasks, they did not eliminate them. Technology did, however, mightily lighten the labour of men and children. Men no longer had to tote wood or coal or to help with the very heavy cleaning; children no longer had to help with arduous chores. Men were freed for wage labour and children were free to go to school.⁵⁵ In fact, in the images and texts about McLean Park, there is little said of the men. Maintenance crews for yards and buildings, and central heating and garbage disposal systems for buildings, would alleviate their domestic chores, liberating them for work outside McLean Park. Conveniently placed but spatially contained schools, nurseries, shopping, and roof-top laundries would keep women, if not at home, at least within the “community.” In the minds of those who conceived McLean Park, the presence of women defined the domestic site they laboured to maintain.⁵⁶

THE WEST END

The West End was the spatial production of forces related, but often in opposition, to the community planning idealism that conceived and garnered Strathcona’s McLean Park. The West End had originated in a bargain between the CPR and the city, in which property was exchanged for the siting of the rail terminus at Vancouver. Due to the position and power of West End residents, especially as landowners and as influential members on city council, much of the West End could develop as an exclusive precinct of private estates. Initially, at least, the neighbourhood was largely unencumbered by public amenities that might unduly attract undesirable people: with large private gardens, recreational grounds were unnecessary; with wealth to afford private schools, public schools were not so urgent.⁵⁷ While dictating the need and presence of domestic help

⁵⁵ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 96–101. See also McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place*. Men doing tasks, such as chopping wood, were included in the film *To Build a Better City*.

⁵⁶ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities: The Failure of Town Planning* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965), 94, remarks that one of the repercussions of urban renewal was that housing was planned “strictly for matriarchal societies.”

⁵⁷ It is perhaps coincidental, but nevertheless interesting, that, as parks and beaches became the locus of debate over wide public access in the first decade of the twentieth century, apartments for middle-class, but not necessarily elite, members of society began to develop.



Figure 5. Woman cleaning windows, McLean Park, c. 1968. Source: Joan Adams (for the Vancouver Housing Inter-Project Council), *A Tenant Looks at Public Housing* (Vancouver: United Community Services of the Greater Vancouver Area, 1968), 15. Courtesy of University Archives, University of British Columbia.

and gardeners, the West End had few employment opportunities for the industrial worker. Covenants on land occupation – size of house, extent of garden, obligatory setbacks – served as aesthetic and social controls and pre-empted early zoning initiatives.⁵⁸ They would remain the preferred instrument of monitoring social propriety and property values in the West End until they outlived their usefulness in the post-Second World War era.⁵⁹

However, the West End did not rest upon any assured bedrock. Its historical construction was the product of capitalist development and thus contained two contradictory impulses. One was to maximize profit from property investment and the other was to establish, and maintain, social status via privileged domestic and aesthetic accoutrements. When the West End was developed in the 1880s, the oversized lots deeded to

⁵⁸ McAfee, "Evolving Inner-City Residential Environments," 166.

⁵⁹ The federal government rescinded covenants in 1951. John C. Weaver, "The Property Industry and Land Use Controls: The Vancouver Experience, 1910–1945," in *British Columbia: Historical Readings*, ed. Peter Ward and Robert A.J. McDonald (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1981), 429.

the CPR were property investments, and they seemed justified by the large homes and extensive gardens that proclaimed a sympathy with the beaches, mountains, and park that formed their backdrop. The picturesque unity of residence and landscape implied residents who were proper stewards of the land and embodiments of “culture.” By 1910 many of the more financially agile of the West End elite were moving to the new CPR garden suburb of Shaughnessy Heights, where they could view the beaches, the mountains, Stanley Park, and the city.⁶⁰ Here they were also elevated above the industrial pollution of False Creek, which had managed to penetrate even the West End by this time.⁶¹ Those who remained were witness to changes in the wealth, family size, and housing of new residents who came to occupy the more modest dwellings built in the centre of the West End peninsula and then the stylish apartments that began to appear in the early 1900s.

That relationship between place and social elite that had characterized the West End had fractured by the 1920s; it would be reconstituted on the south side of False Creek. Between 1908 and 1920, the West End had begun to redevelop into a more densely occupied landscape as some owners of large residences redeveloped them as apartment buildings. In the 1930s, a number of manorial apartments were built, such as Tudor Manor along Pacific Avenue, which offered a modicum of luxury, including separate service entrances, in units now scaled to Depression economies in housekeeping. By the outbreak of the Second World War, the West End had extensive areas of genteel poverty. Once grand houses were divided into rooming houses, gardens were overbuilt or unkempt, “culture” had seemingly gone elsewhere.⁶² Profitability was on the move, uprooted, moving house. Property investment here could best be maximized by intensive land redevelopment. Houses with unused rooms, antiquated kitchens, and unproductive gardens could be rooted out and replaced with more efficient living. Where there had been one home for sale, there could now be several. The once “stately” mansions were replaced with elite apartments along the periphery of the West End peninsula, commercial buildings along its northeast edge (adjacent to the central business district), and less expensive subdivisions in its view-deprived centre.

The dilemma of property owners, developers, and real estate speculators was how to justify more intensive development while answering the aesthetic concerns of future occupants and nascent town planners. Although a

⁶⁰ For the social context of this move, see McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, chap. 6.

⁶¹ McAfee, “Evolving Inner-City Residential Environments,” 167, mentions the detrimental effects of pollution from False Creek.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 166-7.

tentative development of apartments had begun in the West End between the two world wars, the Town Planning Commission soon curtailed this. The commission feared that apartment buildings here would blight the foreground to Stanley Park; they perhaps also suspected that renters might mar the heritage and tax landscape established in the West End. The solution to the impasse would be the strong lobbying of the Association of Property Owners to change zoning, along with the development of new instruments of property ownership, innovative building technologies, and a new aesthetic.⁶³ One result was the self-owned apartment.

The 1950s development of the self-owned high-rise apartment in the West End was buoyed by the reworked rhetoric of efficiency and aesthetic amenity.⁶⁴ Efficiency of land use, material deployment, construction technology, and domestic space planning all recommended the high-rise apartment block. The local privileging of and cultural investment in "views" also recommended their multiplication in story upon story of unencumbered transparency. Each viewing subject – isolated from others by the superior insulation against sound and smell offered by reinforced concrete, and by the independent control of heat and light afforded by the latest mechanical systems – could dwell in an almost pure abstraction of modern space. And one could *own* it.

The West End was refashioned for "bachelors, widows and retired couples," although not for those evicted from the Strathcona development.⁶⁵ In the West End, one could become not a member of a "community" but a "share holder in a company where every suite-owner had a chance to become a director of the company" and where "every suite-owner" (stock-owner) could vet any prospective investor in the "company."⁶⁶ Self-owned apartments were a real estate innovation of the late 1940s.⁶⁷ A *suite-owner* helps, so the rhetoric went, "to improve

⁶³ As Weaver has remarked, the Town Planning Commission was devoted to aesthetic planning, landowners favoured conversion, and apartment blocks were the most profitable. Realtors had already assembled property for Eastern and local investors, most of whom did not want zoning. Speculative investors, some of them MPs, favoured apartment construction. Weaver, "The Property Industry and Land Use Controls," 436.

⁶⁴ The ideal of efficiency in city planning in Vancouver dates back to the Harland Bartholomew Plan of 1927, which was influential throughout the 1930s and in pockets like the West End long after. Bartholomew had proposed a concentric notion of city development that suggested that a high concentration of residences was needed at the core and that the West End would be an ideal location for this. According to McAfee, "Evolving Inner-City Residential Environments," 174: "the willingness of developers to invest here allowed local government to abdicate their role here."

⁶⁵ Norman Macrae, "Self-Owned Apartments Mushroom in West End," *Vancouver Sun*, 25 July 1959, 8.

⁶⁶ Anon., "What You Should Know about Self-Owned Apartments," *Western Homes and Living*, June 1958, 22-6; and McRae, "Self-Owned Apartments Mushroom in West End," 8.

⁶⁷ Apparently self-owned apartments had first arisen in Chicago in 1923 and then in western Canada in 1946. By 1958 there were reportedly 1,000 self-owned suites in Vancouver. See Anon., "What You Should Know about Self-Owned Apartments," 22.

the standard and beauty of an apartment.”⁶⁸ Still, it was necessary to confirm, as *Western Homes and Living* did in 1958, that these apartments were not family housing. They were for those no longer, or perhaps not yet, involved in the raising of children, those who had the leisure time to shop or gaze at the view that had replaced the suburban garden.⁶⁹

By the late 1950s, real estate agents who specialized in the sale of self-owned apartments, the Self-Owned Apartments Limited, and high-profile local architects engaged in the construction of these apartments had become part of the West End business landscape.⁷⁰ Architectural discourse, real estate advertisements, and news items often intermingled within the same text. There was an easy slippage between professional assessment, sales pitch, and municipal information, and there was a consensus on the benefit of high-rise living.

Rising nine stories from its West End location, Chilco Towers offered views from all of its thirty-six self-owned suites (see Figure 3). Its rooftop garden, underground parking, elevation on *pilotis*, ribbon windows, and exposed reinforced concrete frame made it the epitome of high modern style. It offered an equally modern interior – wall-to-wall carpet, coloured double plumbing, Westinghouse wall ovens, twelve-cubic-foot GE refrigerators, GE dishwashers, garberators, individual heat control, and plenty of storage at prices ranging from \$17,000 for a one-bedroom suite to \$38,000 for a three-bedroom suite. It provided “the ultimate in luxurious living to people of discriminating taste.”⁷¹

Ocean Towers, facing English Bay, was the poster-child of the West End self-owned apartment generation.⁷² When completed in 1959, it barely deigned to touch the material world: it floated above the earth on fourteen-foot columns, offering views to the north and southwest. There was no back lane and hence no encounter with anything that could be associated with a back alley. Just as the building itself stood as an anonymous object disengaged from its more banal and immediate

⁶⁸ Macrae, “Self-Owned Apartments Mushroom in West End,” 8.

⁶⁹ Anon., “What You Should Know about Self-Owned Apartments,” 22. This was also emphasized in newspaper articles appearing in the *Vancouver Sun*. Real estate agent Georgina Pearman makes a point of mentioning widows and elderly persons as the principal clients for such accommodation. See Macrae, “Self-Owned Apartments Mushroom in West End,” 8.

⁷⁰ Macrae, “Self-Owned Apartments Mushroom in West End,” 8. “Self Owned Apartment Ltd.” was first listed in the *British Columbia and Yukon Directory* in 1947 and was the business of E.D. Cope. Initially it appears to have been a home-based operation, but by 1949 it is listed at 163 W. Hastings in the *Greater Vancouver and New Westminster City Directory*.

⁷¹ Advertisement in *Western Homes and Living*, June 1958, 25.

⁷² Those involved in the construction of Ocean Towers were: Rix Reinecke of Chow, Nelson, and Reinecke; Otto Becker of Becker Construction Company; and Arnold N. Shook of Shook Realty. See ad. *Western Homes and Living*, June 1958, 23; and Vancouver Historic Building Inventory, entry no. 576.

context of adjacent buildings, service hook-ups, and indiscriminate public space, so too did the individual units. There was merely a transparent elevator core and canopy to serve as a communal lobby, from which two elevators allowed a speedy ascent to one's suite. A laundry on each floor eliminated "embarrassing rides with laundry" (the ad is not clear whether it is the state of the laundry, the fact that it might reveal some intimacy of the body, or the fact that one actually did one's own that would be embarrassing). The building was "strikingly modern," "tall, slim, beautiful," and pampered. Detailing would preserve surfaces from streaking, window cleaning would be professional: the patina of age would be avoided. The design would even preserve inner equilibrium: the slight projection of the balconies would counter any sense of vertigo when surveying below. The façade would remain forever young, those behind it psychologically balanced.

The interior offered suites with entertaining-scale living rooms and separate dining rooms, one-to-three bedrooms and double plumbing that provided an en suite in the "master" bedroom, and lots of closet and storage space. Kitchens were well equipped with garberators, fans, dishwashers, ten-cubic-foot refrigerators, electric ranges or built-ins, and a breakfast nook overlooking the ocean. Balconies afforded access to sunlight and air. For a cost of \$31,000 to \$38,000, plus \$86 to \$69 per month for up-keep, one could own one of sixty-eight suites in isolation from all the other owners. One could ride from underground parking to one's floor, enter one of four apartments, and close the door with a good chance of not meeting a soul. Individual thermostats, built-in fans, concrete walls and floors, horizontal windows, and plate glass balcony doors allow sequestered solitude and undisturbed participation in the spectacle of urban investment.

Although not all self-owned apartments were built in the West End, the ones that were offered the greatest cachet: they were supremely photogenic against mountains, park, or beachfront. They were also photographic apparati themselves, framing views to distant landscapes, blocking out the near ground – a neighbouring balcony, a public road. These apartments were, the advertisements emphasized, close to business, shopping, and the beach. They represented the West End dwelling as a clean, durable unit, all measurable floor space and window area, crisply delineated on a cool white background, a unit of lucrative space, almost floating in an investment world unfettered by history, unimpeded by community interest, anonymous and disembodied, exchangeable. This distinguished it from McLean Park, which was given different coordinates: near jobs, transit, and schools, disengaged (almost) from the circuits of property

exchange and real estate speculation, protected in a utopian reserve.⁷³

In these West End apartments, women do not appear to labour. There are purportedly no child-rearing tasks, no windows to clean. A woman must not be seen to do the laundry, and even cooking seems to disappear. Kitchen appliances vanish into the crisp planar wall surfaces of the interior design; ovens are built-in, garberators are discrete, dishwashers are hidden under counters. In this place, the housekeeper epitomizes specularized leisure, discriminating taste, and diligent consumption. Housekeepers here seem as effortlessly detached from the working world as do the buildings in which they reside, as illusionary in their aloofness as was modern architecture's apparent ability, via the merest of point supports, to hover above the ground in defiance of gravity.

The social topography marked by the West End high-rise and McLean Park project was cinematically captured in the 1963 film *To Build a Better City*, ostensibly a portrayal of the city's postwar urban improvements and aspirations.⁷⁴ What is striking is the manner in which the film structured its vision of the city through a number of binary oppositions. The opening sequence presents "English Bay apartments, drives, parks, apartments and offices" as signs of "modern civic progress."⁷⁵ A commercial high-rise (BC Hydro) stands as emblematic of modernity as a dynamic panning shot traces its sleek form to the sky. A disembodied narrator informs viewers that the replacement of older buildings with this contemporary architecture represents "the normal process of land and building rejuvenation." The film then shifts elsewhere, to what the narrator describes as a "blighted" Strathcona, an area of the city where this norm does not appear. Strathcona is captured in a number

⁷³ Of course, McLean Park was not entirely unaffected by the capitalist system of property exchange. It was isolated as cheap land by the process of "uneven development," which maintains a constant supply of inexpensive land for lucrative redevelopment as "elite" precincts. The presence of less favoured areas in a city reduces the supply of "attractive" properties. McLean Park is hence intimately tied in to the real estate development ethos of the city. On "uneven development," see Rosalind Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Chicago: Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996). On the role of real estate and speculative development in Vancouver, see Deryck W. Holdsworth, "House and Home in Vancouver: The Emergence of a West Coast Urban Landscape 1886-1929" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1981).

⁷⁴ The film was the product of a two-year collaborative effort between the City of Vancouver and the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation of Canada. It was made by Pageant Productions Ltd. of Vancouver according to a script by Roy Minter, and it was produced and distributed by the National Film Board. The 1961 script and a copy of the film can be found at the Vancouver City Archives. There is some discrepancy between the script and the film, and the film may be missing the opening sequences. It had many objectives, including publicizing Strathcona (among other achievements in recent urban redevelopment) and garnering support for the next phase of a planned twenty-year redevelopment plan.

⁷⁵ Roy Minter, "To Build a Better City" script. City of Vancouver Archives.

of discrete shots that "hold on blight," a place "where nothing happens but dilapidation," where "dying property values" can be equated with a "dying community." Here bodies are scrutinized, women doing laundry or cleaning in cramped spaces, and children playing in deserted railway tracks or streets while the narrator speaks of disease, inefficiencies in land use, and insufficient tax revenues. There is no such inspection in the West End. Where the space of the city core and the West End is fluid and vibrant, that of Strathcona is static; the danger is, the film suggests, the spread of stasis and blight beyond its present borders. The film is in accord with Marsh's delineation, even though by the time of its making this portrayal was already being questioned by Strathcona residents. However, its purpose was not just documentation, it was also publicity distributed by the National Film Board of Canada: it made domestic space public. *To Build a Better City* sought to simultaneously showcase the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation and government initiatives in national welfare and the profit-making possibilities and investment potentials of the City of Vancouver.⁷⁶ Clearly the housekeeping conjured up by the film was not that of the rooming house manageress of the West End or the laundresses of Strathcona;⁷⁷ rather, it was that of professional men. The film script by Roy Minter repeats many of the statistics used by Leonard Marsh, and it updates rather than questions Bartholomew's assumptions about zoning and social location.

CONCLUSION

West End apartments could often offer two parking stalls per suite and a plethora of modern domestic conveniences, including dishwashers and on-floor laundries, that would afford the housewife here the leisure time for shopping and travel. Caretakers and maintenance plans freed the husband, the implied owner of the "owner-occupied" suite, for his business interests and well-earned vacations. (Promotional material as-

⁷⁶ In the presentation of the duality of the city, the film portrays the source of urban development tensions. See David Ley, "Chinatown-Strathcona: Gaining an Entitlement," in *Neighbourhood Organizations and the Welfare State*, ed. Shlomo Hasson and David Ley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 20.

⁷⁷ Many people living in the West End moved or were forced to move because of the "natural" rejuvenation of the area. The single women on social relief, the elderly living on old age pensions, and even the women managing the rooming houses would undoubtedly have been displaced by redevelopment. More research needs to be done here. By 1956-57, residents in Strathcona, in particular Chinese families who had purchased homes in the neighbourhood in the early 1950s, had hired lawyers to protest low expropriation evaluations for their homes, and the founding of a Chinese property association had been initiated by 1961. See Itter and Marlatt, *Opening Doors*, 177-8.

served of self-owned apartments that “*he* provided it for his wife should she be left a widow; widows held it in trust for their children,” and with a purchase of an apartment “*he* might become a director” of this apartment block company.)⁷⁸ In 1968, British Columbia passed a condominium act that allowed the strata ownership of one’s own unit outright rather than just shares in a building, as had been the case with “self-owned” apartments. Ownership was thus less encumbered. By the 1970s, the easy housekeeping assured by modern apartments allowed owners previously uncelebrated and considered unconventional – single women and men, young professionals – the anonymity of an architectural language derived from mass-produced and machine-fabricated components. The lack of attention to “community”-defining features in the past encouraged a space for a different, non-family kind of occupation.⁷⁹ The generalized construction of domesticity exemplified in government policy, consumer advertising, and social agencies in the 1950s, and evidenced in the focus on the “family home” in publications such as *Western Homes and Living*, became disassembled as “bachelor,” “middle class,” and “working class,” came to take on new meanings in the 1960s and 1970s.

The McLean Park rehabilitation had aimed to inculcate habits of cleanliness and sanitary living by means of tower blocks and maisonettes that were spaced to afford access to health. They ensured sun and air and were filled with efficiency-inducing appliances. The MacLean Park development constituted an economic space that provided greater ease in the performance of domestic work and cleaning. Some have argued that the preoccupation with domesticity evidenced in such housing schemes produced a space that empowered women. This empowerment was understood to arise from women’s command of modern technology, which lightened housekeeping burdens and afforded greater leisure time. Others have seen this line of reasoning as a strange kind of fiction, noting that modern appliances increased rather than decreased women’s labour in the home.⁸⁰ Jane Jacobs, writing just as MacLean Park was being built, observed that such housing schemes excluded women’s perspectives on the relationship between domestic life and the community.⁸¹ Places like McLean Park were premised on conventional gender roles. In all the photographs and implied in the literature about MacLean Park, the housewife is portrayed in the traditional role of producing the fit working husband and the healthy “educable” child. In performing these

⁷⁸ Anon., “What You Should Know about Self-Owned Apartments,” 26.

⁷⁹ McAfee, “Evolving Inner-City Residential Environments,” 174–80.

⁸⁰ See Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986).

⁸¹ Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 94.

tasks, her body produces the worker and the school child, and in doing so in this place, she helps define the working-class neighborhood. These tasks were no doubt done with greater ease in modern buildings such as MacLean Park, but women continued to perform them.⁸²

With regard to McLean Park, the idea of modern home life worked out by planners in their spare graphic representations of towers and row houses replicated block-on-block did not materialize in real space. Once construction began and the mechanisms of land clearance and tenant selection became clear, opposition to the wholesale development of the Strathcona area formed. McLean Park became a place around which a community rallied in an effort to keep intact a notion of community and culture that was different from that proposed by planners.

More than one historian has concluded that "Vancouver is unique in North America in the one-sided mingling of real estate interests and planning concepts."⁸³ The histories of McLean Park and the West End suggest that this uniqueness had spatial as well as temporal dimensions. From the late 1940s to the early 1960s, Strathcona, because of a misconception concerning its social structure and a misrecognition of its physical form, seemed to offer a safe harbour for idealist planning initiatives that were emerging from newly installed university programs as well as for professional planning bodies deeply imbued with American and European notions of community planning. The West End, with its strong coalition of property owners and realtors, favoured more informal zoning, more abstract notions of property and growth. Here numerous conflicts with idealist planning notions produced a different landscape.⁸⁴ In both Strathcona and the West End, notions of domesticity were upheld in the architecture and urban plans and the rhetoric accompanying them. Hence at McLean Park, it was children frolicking in a playground set in the midst of modern housing and safely sequestered from vehicular traffic that dominated the official representations of the project.⁸⁵ In the West End, family life was also referred to, but only to be put aside. In the early 1950s at least, apartments were envisioned for those who were no longer, or not yet, involved in the conventional family

⁸² What, we might ask, would a more virile domesticity be like? And does it imply begrudging women space even here?

⁸³ Weaver, "The Property Industry and Land Use Controls," 428. Ward places Vancouver's "uniqueness" slightly differently but does attribute it to a singular mixing of American and British models of planning in Vancouver that arose in an unprecedented synthesis by the 1970s. See Stephen V. Ward, "The International Diffusion of Planning: A Review and a Canadian Case Study," *International Planning Studies*, 4, 1 (1999): 53-77.

⁸⁴ Weaver, "The Property Industry and Land Use Controls," 433-6.

⁸⁵ This is especially evident in the film *To Build a Better City*.

life of husband, wife, and children. Chilco House and other apartment blocks in the West End proposed another domesticity – one of retirees, widows, childless couples, and individuals. Urban housekeeping as envisioned at MacLean Park and Chilco Towers worked to position people, respectively, within their working-class (Strathcona) and middle-class (West End) urban sites.