Jeff Fedoruk

Plotting "Nowhere"

Towards a Theory of Urban Folklore on Vancouver's Gentrifying Frontier

On the subject of urban development in Vancouver's East End, particularly along the Hastings Street Corridor, Vancouver condominium marketer Bob Rennie has asserted that the city can develop in only one direction: "I've been saying since 2002 that the city will grow east . . . I only have three stories I tell all the time, and that's one of them" (Gold S5). Rennie's "story" is not unique. It reflects the beliefs, and even traditions, of a large group of marketers, developers, and city planners who have a vision for Vancouver. Not everyone agrees with Rennie, however, and other groups are quick to claim that such a story silences the voices of those who have lived and worked in Vancouver's East End prior to this recent vision. Consequently, designs for spatial growth and densification in the city take on narrative implications, with recent trends in urban development becoming normalized as "grassroots" public policies, pushing at and overwriting the everyday concerns of extant residents. This could be a working definition of *gentrification*. And yet the term contains many divisive and contested understandings, while nonetheless perpetuating a process that already has dangerous momentum. Broadly understood in cultural geography as "the transformation of a working-class or vacant area of the central city into middle-class residential and/or commercial use" (Lees, Slater, and Wyly xv), gentrification has been critiqued as "the public hegemony of creative economics and cultural politics" in the context of Canadian neoliberal urbanism (Keil 241). At the same time, literary critics such as Sarah Brouillette have taken interest in the role that the arts and creative economies play within processes of gentrification and discourses of urban renewal, making "literary expression a barometer for the creative capital that is now often positioned at the heart of civic renewal" (426). I hope to nuance the concept of gentrification by identifying Vancouver's Hastings Corridor as a current site of cultural struggle around issues arising from gentrification and by mobilizing a multifaceted theory of *urban folklore*, that is, of structured narratives and stories that represent the beliefs, traditions, and ritualistic tendencies of various urban peoples and groups.

Urban folklore is the nexus of discourses and stories around strategies for urban living. An urban folkloristics accounts for the power dynamics that exist within these discourses and within the process of gentrification, between the development policies that have perpetuated gentrification and the narratives that both define and resist it as an inevitability. I argue that, while policy actors and the ownership class have utilized a pseudo-grassroots or "AstroTurf" urban folklore to normalize gentrification processes and to strengthen their political and economic agendas concerning gentrification, an urban folklore from the perspective of extant residents continues to have the possibility of performing resistance. My argument explores such potential within the field of Canadian literary studies to bring together the narratives of gentrification and cultural production that have dispersed over the years, but also to augment the power of story in the extensive scholarship on the cultural, social, and economic impacts of gentrification. The ambiguity of gentrification as a process—who moves into an area and who gets pushed out—problematically persists in narratives of city life. Along cultural lines, urban folklore clarifies discursive positions within the popular media that shape the Hastings Corridor as a gentrifying frontier; urban folklore also clarifies discursive positions in the fiction, poetry, and performances that represent a potential resistance. In this article, I aim to first establish an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that viably aligns understandings of urban folklore with understandings of gentrification. I then turn to the contemporary context of the Hastings Corridor in order to explore how an urban folkloristics registers the effects of, and the potential resistances to, gentrification in the current context of the Hastings Corridor.

My analysis operates at the scale of the neighbourhood, for it is here that an account of cultural agency and cultural struggle in everyday life has been situated by urbanists, from Henri Lefebvre to Jane Jacobs to Richard Florida, and urban geographers, from Ruth Glass' 1964 coinage of the term *gentrification* in London's East End to Neil Smith's 1996 North American recontextualization and through Nicholas Blomley's cross-generational studies in Vancouver. The neighbourhood, as a dialectical entity, is both representative of and resistant to the global and civic pressures of gentrification, whereas the "city" has obfuscated its politics through public policies promoted at various scales. Thus, I am advancing urban folklore as an effective strategy for narrating the neighbourhood vis-à-vis the city framed both nationally and transnationally. Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighbourhood—an internationally notorious locality of class, race, and gender struggles—provides a particularly compelling example in this context; however, even as shifting development policies in the surrounding Gastown, Chinatown, and Strathcona neighbourhoods increasingly encroach upon the area,[1] the Hastings Corridor—just east of the Downtown Eastside—remains a similarly contested site that has received relatively little public or critical attention.

In localizing larger discourses on gentrification within Vancouver's Hastings Corridor, then, this paper hones in "just east" of the mark. Roger Keil, following Vancouver economic geographer Jamie Peck, maintains that "as urban elites struggle to reorient themselves in a frantic world of inter-urban competition, they introduce drastic austerity policies on their budgets and communities while toying with concepts such as the creative class and the culture industry" (241). Political scientist Katherine Burnett locates this dynamic distinctly in Vancouver, where trendy restaurants have become both literal and figurative (economic) "spaces of consumption," supposedly attracting the Creative Class while simultaneously commodifying the historic, derelict, "authentic" working class or ethnic neighbourhoods (162). Peck himself deftly summarizes and critiques Richard Florida's now ubiquitous concept of the "Creative Class": "urban fortunes increasingly turn on the capacity to attract, retain, and even pamper a mobile and finicky class of 'creatives,' whose aggregate efforts have become primary drivers of economic development" (740). With "culture" seemingly the homogenizing force here, the resistance and counternarratives that have been mobilized in Vancouver's gentrified spaces risk social stigmatization simply by opposing attractive "Creative Class" tales of progress and improvement. Burnett notes that "activists and community organizations have challenged social constructions" of Vancouver's East End neighbourhoods, but she also laments that "an overly deterministic view of the neoliberal reconstitution of imagined spaces conceals the struggles waged over the symbolic meaning of space," since the business community is quick to emphasize "history, resilience, creativity, architecture," and "even the cobble-stone streets of Gastown" (159-60). Such is the scenario that has engulfed the Downtown Eastside, and which now creeps further eastward along the Hastings Corridor. If the Corridor were to gentrify to the extent that the Downtown Eastside and its surrounding areas already have, the public memory of marginalized cultural activity along the Corridor may fade rapidly relative to the other, more storied neighbourhoods of Vancouver's East End. The need for a consolidation of the Corridor's stories is urgent, and my analysis is therefore attendant to the function of literary production in storying and restorying the neighbourhood.

Literary production is an obvious starting point for my theory of urban folklore, but I am careful not to idealize its role in neighbourhood change, for it also plays a part in processes of urban marginalization. The most celebrated example in the context of Vancouver is Timothy Taylor's novel *Stanley Park* (2001), which tells of young chef Jeremy Papier's attempts to establish his own restaurant in "Crosstown," an up-and-coming area in Vancouver meant to resemble the spatial and cultural crossroads between the Downtown Eastside, Chinatown, and Strathcona. The novel's narrator equivocally states that the area "offered a shifting multicultural client base that nobody could consciously target . . . that embraced neighbourhoods in the earliest stages of gentrification: architects, designers, software developers" (52). The term *gentrification* appears devoid of critique—its agents, let alone its critics, are difficult to pin down. Taylor's novel attempts to conscientiously dwell in the contradictions of cultural production in socially vulnerable urban spaces, but its jamming of high and low food culture ends up celebrating the protagonist's artistic development while casting the urban poor to the plot's periphery.[2] The question remains: who gets pushed out when the Creative Class moves in? Literary analysis speaks to this, by nuancing and critiquing the ways in which gentrification is framed by urban narratives. Brouillette has recently suggested that while critiques of gentrification "have been definitive for urban geography," literary scholars also "have good reason to engage with them," since urban regeneration and poverty tourism have become prominent themes in literary texts concerning everyday life in the city. Such engagement, in turn, supports "the flourishing of a diverse young creative class [and] connects the revitalizing presence of art and artists to official urban planning strategy" (426). I want to expand this notion of "literary texts" to engage urban folklore explicitly, tracing the movement of gentrification ideologies from fiction into popular media, as well as in everyday writing forms such as newsletters and letters, and additionally in performances and stories orally told.

In Vancouver's East End, texts such as Maria Campbell's memoir *Halfbreed* (1973) and Wayson Choy's novel *The Jade Peony* (1995) are foundational in portraying the activities of marginalized communities at the intersections of labour and cultural production. Additionally, oral history anthologies such as Daphne Marlatt and Carole Itter's *Opening Doors* (1979/2011) and Wayde Compton's *Bluesprint* (2001)—both featuring Strathcona—demonstrate how literary work interacts with orature and storywork at the scale of the neighbourhood; indeed, Marlatt's own *Vancouver Poems* (1972) and Compton's *Performance Bond* (2004) and *49th Parallel Psalm* (1999) can be seen as reflections of their respective folkloristic efforts. These examples show that while gentrification is a city-scale process, its impact is registered most potently at the level of the neighbourhood. And while none of these texts encapsulate the Hastings Corridor as such, they all certainly highlight immediately surrounding pressures. Marlatt and Itter's interview with Gordon Lewis in *Opening Doors* perhaps comes closest to highlighting the joint history of labour and residence along the Hastings Corridor. Lewis, a Strathcona resident, describes the proximity and shared resources between the Hastings Mill and the Rogers Sugar Refinery as well as the active role these industries played in constructing a social identity for the neighbourhood (42-43). Nowadays, despite ongoing activities in the Rogers Sugar Refinery, the industrial sites of the Hastings Corridor are considered devoid of social exuberance or cultural production.

In an attempt to highlight the analytical flexibility of the term *urban folklore* and to reinforce its narrative leanings, this article begins by bringing folkloristics into critical dialogue with ongoing work on narrative form and cultural critique in Cultural Studies and Performance Studies, while simultaneously underlining its efficacy in critiques of gentrification; I ultimately hope to arrive at a formation of the relationship of gentrification, space, power, and urban folklore as a set of cultural practices deployed by both the marginal and the powerful in Vancouver. Within understandings of folklore are assumptions about *myth* and *frontier* that, through mediation in literary studies, Cultural Studies, and Performance Studies, open up space for an urban folklore of cultural resistance to gentrification. Here, I maintain a dialectic between an "AstroTurf" urban folklore and a more neighbourhood-oriented urban folklore, to emphasize the varied effects of actions by policy planners, developers, the Creative Class, artistic managers, artists, the working class, residents, and non-residents or vulnerable groups, and to detail how a theory of urban folklore allows a dialectical engagement between these voices akin to their current struggle in the existing conditions of gentrification in Vancouver. The Hastings Corridor is still a relatively new site of struggle in the public imaginary, and consequently my examples are broadly sourced. As such, I can only begin to account for the voices of resistance, but in gesturing towards the community work yet to be done, I hope to present a malleable framework for more inclusive critical engagement in future studies of gentrification and cultural production in Canadian urban neighbourhoods.[3]

Theories of Pushing Back at the Urban Frontier

An urban trajectory for folkloristics has seemingly informed the identification and critique of gentrification in North America. When Neil Smith argued, in 1996, that gentrification in 1980s New York City had been "generalized to stand for the 'eternal' inevitability of modern renewal, the renovation of the past" (34), folklorist and Performance Studies scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett had already written about an "urban frontier" for folklore studies in 1980s New York that promotes a perspective "designed to address the specifically urban character of city life and its expressive implications" (179). Under these premises, we might imagine how urban folklore could speak to the social impact of urban change even when prior infrastructures are so quickly buried. Today, the same situation persists in Vancouver: urban folklore could pose a challenge to the "inevitability" of gentrification. I follow Kirshenblatt-Gimblett as well as folklorist and Media Studies scholar Martin Laba in seeking what Laba calls "behavioral patterns which are essentially strategies for appropriate action in the diversity of face-to-face situations, and which are typical to city living" (164). The highly interdisciplinary work of these scholars allows for flexible application of their theories. Similarly, the urgency of urban issues such as gentrification has surely generated a climate for increasingly expressive behaviour, necessitating flexible approaches to understanding both the problem and the expression of the problem.

To begin examining urban folklore more locally, I must distinguish the term from colloquial understandings of *urban myth* and *urban legend*—these latter terms representing tales that circulate in city life as though true, though assumed to be false. Urban folklore can reframe urban myths and legends so that they do not hinge on their veracity, but rather on their circulation and effect. Whether or not these stories are factual or embellished, or changing over time (their repetition and iterations are what make them folklore), they are truthful to the extent that they reflect the tendencies and beliefs of an individual or group. The narrative dynamic between folklore, myth, and legend, teasing ideological veracity and falsehood in an urban context, has potential as a counter-narrative to the ideological discourses of gentrification and urban renewal. Along these lines, Henri Lefebvre, in *The Urban Revolution*, lays out a dialectical movement in the relation between myth, ideology, and ultimately utopia: myth is a "noninstitutional discourse," ideology is a justifying institutional discourse, and utopia attempts to transcend the institutional through a mobilization of myth. In other words, utopia "uses" myth to transcend ideology. And while Lefebvre's critiques of urban society emerge from the specific context of Paris following the urban uprising in 1968, his statement about gentrification also resonates in Vancouver: "However, the truth (the fragmentation of the city though gentrification) was hardly apparent to their contemporaries. What would it have taken for the truth to become apparent?" (110). This is exactly what I argue deep critical engagement with urban folklore can enable us to do—see the "truth" of gentrification today.

Perhaps more legend, or even ideology, than myth, the "urban frontier" has developed as a pervasive concept in policies and critiques of gentrification, producing a dominant spatiality within this mytho-ideological dynamic. This frontier is set up as a cultural "edge" for creative "heroes" to live at and develop, offering new ideas for economic success in the city. While Kirshenblatt-Gimblett implies an emancipatory potential for the "urban frontier" of folklore studies (179), Neil Smith sees the term in a more problematic light, as part of conservative political efforts that deregulate, privatize, police, and gentrify what he calls the "revanchist city" (44-47). The legend of the urban frontier, drawn from its own ideology, has thus come full circle under neoliberalism, and it underpins a colonial imagination of the city promoting unprecedented growth of both economic *and* social capital, without questioning the uneven development in the city itself. The new "heroes" of this neoliberal urban frontier legend are Florida's "Creative Class" and the young artists and artistically minded entrepreneurs whose creative labour helps the city to continue competing economically (Lees, Slater, and Wyly xix). The urban frontier legend is today mobilized to heroicize the ownership class for having the capital to instigate cultural initiatives. Therefore, the Creative Class focus on cultural production in urban territory is problematically biased towards artistic managers rather than artistic producers. This involves art and creativity in processes of gentrification while maintaining economic priorities, for it rationalizes, naturalizes, and promotes, via policy, artistic occupation and production in working class or vacant areas of the city. The Creative Class may celebrate the labour that goes into the work of art, but its focused occupation along the urban frontier has detracted from the "texture" of urban life, or what John Fiske describes as the "dense, vivid, detailed interwoven narratives, relationships, and experiences" of everyday life in the city (155). An urban frontier that caters solely to the Creative Class ends up smothering a multiplicity of voices, promoting cultural hegemony rather than texture.

As the urban frontier is both a spatial and an ideological boundary, it exists as a demarcation of cultural contestation—and cultural production. Vancouver geographer Nick Blomley, responding to Smith's figuration of the urban frontier, maintains that "[t]he politics of land, in relation to gentrification, has tended to turn on class. . . . In some cities, of course, a class-based politics is supplemented by an attention to racialized power-relations . . . troubled entanglements of possession and dispossession, settlement and unsettlement" (148). To demonstrate "the link between colonial dispossessions and contemporary gentrification," Blomley draws on the recent example of CRAB Park in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside: "[t]he campaign to secure CRAB Park involved native [*sic*] activists, and linked a community claim with historic native [*sic*] uses of the site" (149-50). The park now contains a number of sites of "particular native [*sic*] significance," such as a rock inscribed by Downtown Eastside resident Fred Arrance with the poem "Urban Indian," one of several "Story Stones," which calls out to the Indigenous community and settlers alike: "Mighty warriors now hunt in Safeway / . . . / Do not let the smell of money fool you / Indian ways are not for sale." The stones may seem spatially paltry, but their interspersion within a city-planned park draws attention to the overlaps and contradictions of spatial and historical precedence implicit in urban frontier ideology.

A folkloric reaction, debunking the myths of neoliberal revanchism, has risen most prominently on East Hastings Street from the Carnegie Community Centre Association (CCCA) and its associated branches, the Carnegie Community Action Project (CCAP) and the *Carnegie Newsletter*. The CCCA describes itself as "a grassroots organization that supports programs at the Carnegie Community Centre and works to give voice to low-income Downtown Eastside (DTES) residents" ("CARNEGIE" n. pag.), and its newsletter has been printing since 1986. Its reach is broad, but its directness regarding issues of gentrification and resistance is exemplary in Vancouver's urban folklore nexus. Reacting to popular media coverage of violent anti-gentrification protests in 2013, the CCCA clarified its position and the goals of its Action Project, stating

> At the core of this work at present is CCAP's 2010 document, "Assets to Action: Community Vision for Change in the Downtown Eastside" and the 12 key actions the report identified after collecting the stories and views of over 1200 DTES residents. CCAP, its few employees, and numerous volunteers, occasionally plan and execute protest actions in support of the 12 key actions. These actions come from the grassroots, street level, straight from the minds of low-income people living in the Downtown Eastside, and have the complete support of the CCCA. . . . Other actions, which have included smashing windows and stealing private property, are completely outside of CCCA's mandate from the community and go against our non-violent values, yet have been wrongly linked in the media with CCAP and its organizers. CCCA supports the democratic right to protest. ("CARNEGIE" n. pag.)

"Stories" once again take precedence here, and the oral-print relationship inherent to the CCCA's "Assets to Action" document is a testament to how community activism generates its own narrative, thus participating in a broader restorying of the neighbourhood cultural production that I read as urban folklore. The directness of the CCCA's initiatives starkly contrasts the actions of for-profit publications stemming from the area, such as the *Gastown Gazette*, which covers "original investigative journalism, enlightening videos and great writing about everything from local and world news, local events, business, art, travel, food, fashion, music, politics, sports, drugs, sex, health and cute animals" ("The Gazette" n. pag.). The *Gazette* may flaunt localism by proudly stating that it is "made in Gastown," but its superficial focus actively disavows the large-scale tensions of its classed cultural discourse, effectively celebrating gentrification. The close jamming of appeals to "AstroTurf" and neighbourhood grassroots folklore—both within and amongst publications—is what necessitates an understanding of the various contexts through which urban folklore is derived, in addition to the media through which it is reproduced.

Urban Folklore and Its Literary Leanings Along the Hastings Corridor

The Downtown Eastside offers many telling examples of urban folklore, but further east the Hastings Street Corridor desperately lacks any attention towards stories of resistance, despite its being a crucial site of cultural production and gentrification in Vancouver. Nevertheless, an examination of current media coverage, in addition to recent and historical literary production that suffuses the area, can plot a trajectory through which we might anticipate and begin to examine cultural resistances. As with the Downtown Eastside, the particular context and parameters of gentrification along the Hastings Corridor can be parsed in terms of urban folklore.
The recent renovation, sale, closure, and now reopening of the Corridor's

Waldorf Hotel are indicative of how neoliberal revanchism can overwrite neighbourhood-specific urban folklore. This "cultural oasis in the middle of nowhere," as *Globe and Mail* journalist Marsha Lederman has identified it (S1), attracted, for a time, many creative projects as well as an enthusiastic audience, while at the same time drawing attention to the development potential of surrounding lots. However, this idea of the cultural oasis is based upon the erasure of the extant narratives. The Hastings Corridor has a complex and indeed rich cultural history and cultural memory, which includes its history as a location for the International Longshore and Warehouse Union Canada, the BC Maritime Employer's Association, the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre Society, the Urban Native Youth Association, the Vancouver Native Housing Society, and Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services, as well as the various iterations of the Waldorf and numerous other small businesses, publishers, galleries, and organizations. The long-standing presence of these various social organizations and cultural institutions is a testament to the labour and community activities that have been overlooked in recent cultural surveys of the area. And while their narratives of resistance have yet to be mobilized, their continuing activities certainly warrant the kind of cultural attention already paid towards the Downtown Eastside, Chinatown, and Strathcona.

Even a quick account of the breadth of cultural activities along the Hastings Corridor immediately points to their folkloric and resistant potential. Despite what the popular media has reported, this part of Hastings Street is not the middle of nowhere. Opposite the Creative Class agenda of the Waldorf, there are counter-narratives of creativity in the initiatives of the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre, for example, which range from weekly "cultural nights" of West Coast Indigenous and Métis song, dance, and textile-making, to Pow Wow Family Nights ("Cultural Nights" n. pag.), as well as occasional Hip Hop for Social Justice events (Kozuback n. pag.). And across the street, the Urban Native Youth Association has a long-running series of programs for Indigenous youth in Vancouver, focusing on recreation, education, personal support, and live-in support (*Urban Native Youth Association* n. pag.). All in addition to the essential services provided by Vancouver Native Housing and Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services, such creative and social initiatives expand on and complement wider expressions of Indigenous culture. Moreover, the cultural activities of the various Indigenous groups in the area demonstrate how labour beyond that of the Creative Class—the labour of what Richard Florida problematically labels as the "Service Class" and "Working Class" in *The Rise of the Creative Class*—is inherently creative.

For literature to participate in active resistance to gentrification and widen the dialectic between "AstroTurf" and neighbourhood urban folklore, it needs to resist equivocal formulations of gentrification as an inevitable process. To date, gentrification is more of a general theme than a specific issue in contemporary Vancouver "city" texts. Michael Turner, who worked as a creative programmer for the Waldorf Hotel, barely polemicizes the term *gentrification* in an artistic description of the Waldorf lobby written as a preamble to the *Grand Hotel* exhibit at the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG). He defers the issue to two hairdressers, who shift from discussions of Susan Sontag, Giorgio Agamben, and Bob Dylan to respond in a "slow and measured" fashion that "the area is still zoned for light industry, and that whatever is 'redeveloped' will only allow for much-needed social housing," and that "if The Waldorf had not had its 'makeover,' it more than likely would have been torn down and replaced with what is coming anyway" (n. pag.). Even without any new social housing projects to substantiate their impressions, the intentions of Turner and other creative programmers at the Waldorf might be positive in the sense that they are assumed to be culturally and socially constructive (as well as productive); however, the assumption and deferral of the inevitability of gentrification dampens the critical capacity within the space of the Waldorf. Ironically, shortly after Turner wrote his blurb, Vancouver condominium developer Solterra purchased the Waldorf, and the Waldorf disappeared almost entirely from the VAG exhibit. Waldorf Productions, the hotel's former management group, similarly appealed to the inevitability of the Corridor's gentrification despite admitting to an awareness of their venture's own complicity in the process (Lederman S1). The ultimate irony, then, is that Waldorf Productions were quick "victims" to the process they knowingly ushered in as they went into massive debt and did not really profit from their venture.[4]

A stronger resistance could be generated through a more comprehensive account of gentrification's social impact—a conversation that local authors have at times attempted to facilitate. For example, Madeleine Thien, during her 2013 writing residency at Simon Fraser University, worked on a "multimedia storytelling project" titled *Vancouver of the Mind*, which focused on her desire to remember the East Hastings Street on which she was raised. She presented this as an act of public remembering. As part of the project, she distributed a questionnaire with inquiries that have urgency in the current problematic of cultural memory and gentrification along the Hastings Corridor. She asks, "Do you believe in the future?" and "How would you describe your relationship with forgetfulness?" (n. pag.). Most pertinently, Thien also asks, "When Hastings Street is mentioned, what comes to mind?" and "What would Vancouver be like if there were no East Hastings?" (n. pag.). Such questions present an interesting engagement with memory and location, since they paradoxically invite an imaginative experiment in erasure to emphasize presence. Thien rhetorically implies that Hastings Street has always been spatially and mythically contested in Vancouver, and that to consider erasure would entail a recollection of personal, embodied memories and experiences. Although the results (or a literary manifestation) of Thien's survey have yet to appear, the structure of her appeal within the context of her writer's residency nevertheless offers a more direct engagement between literary and local cultural production.

As a final example, I want to point to Timothy Taylor's *Stanley Park* as a local novel that neglects a polemical view of gentrification but still opens ample space for such a critique. Put differently, the determined localism of *Stanley Park* has been received on a national scale (as a Giller Prize and *Canada Reads* finalist) thus projecting an authoritative "Vancouverness" that questionably simplifies the realities of lived experience at Vancouver's social margins. The protagonist Jeremy Papier certainly experiences ambivalence about his restaurant's presence in "Crosstown," which influences his shift towards a hyper-local foraging cuisine based on the strategies of Stanley Park's homeless community, but his eventual disillusionment with the city's restaurant scene results simply in his self-serving relocation to a heritage home in Chinatown and a shift towards a more "secret" dining experience. Even at the end of the novel, the narrative does not question the impact that Jeremy's social capital might have on the vulnerable areas into which he is moving. Jeff Derksen encapsulates this scenario best when he writes about *Stanley Park* that "the local, developed through an extended metaphor of the local as 'bounty' and food, . . . has its more resistant aspects buffed off—it returns as connoisseurship and taste cultures, as a value-added experience of the global-urban experience" (55). In this novel, even the character of the Professor—Jeremy's urban anthropologist father and his connection to the Stanley Park homeless community—cannot trouble the Creative Class narrative since his work is intellectually self-serving: he lives in and amongst the Stanley Park street people during his fieldwork, but returns to his home in Vancouver's highly affluent Point Grey neighbourhood to write up his "findings."[5] So, while *Stanley Park* offers many openings for community engagement in Vancouver's East End, it maintains a Creative Class sense of "edginess." It is an important example, though, because it depicts Vancouver at the current global neoliberal conjuncture. Urban folklore therefore enables literary scholars to engage the issues and voices that fiction sometimes obfuscates with a broader material reality (popular media, oral histories, performance, everyday life) while pointing to recently and historically contested sites of urban change.

Conclusion: Towards a Political Folklore

Bob Rennie's "story" from my introduction seems to reinforce the sense that the gentrification of Vancouver's Hastings Street Corridor is an inevitability. His claim to authority on this topic (aside from his marketing activity in the area) is built upon his office's presence in Chinatown, and upon his personal narrative as a local East End boy made good. Similarly, Timothy Taylor has appealed to his own entrenchment on Vancouver's gentrifying frontier by working in an office "on the edge of Gastown" ("Writers' Rooms" n. pag.) while writing *Stanley Park* and his second novel, *Story House*, which takes up a Creative Class home restoration in the Downtown Eastside as its main subject. These kinds of appeals to cultural capital have a significant influence on public and political perceptions of the area, to the extent that the "Crosstown" from Taylor's novel is now a very real neighbourhood designation in Vancouver, where real restaurants are placing pressures on the local population.[6] A recognition of urban folklore helps to nuance the effects of stories in specific neighbourhoods while drawing critical attention to the depth of cultural production both contributing to and resisting gentrification. I understand urban folklore here as a way of both reading and writing about marginalized voices in vulnerable urban spaces. Brouillette's claim that literary expression might serve as a "barometer" for Creative Class gentrification is instrumental in my critical push here, but I want to add that literary texts as commodities become deeply invested in the gentrification processes that they represent by being placed (and purchased) within larger frames of "authentic" urban narratives. Attention to the urban folklore of a neighbourhood maintains a dialectical perspective on local cultural activities.

This article stresses such a dialectic by showing how "grassroots" urban narratives are actually derived at multiple scales—and not always with the best of intentions for local residents. Ultimately, this dialectic represents interactions between policy and everyday life. In Vancouver, the ownership class has used urban folklore to strengthen its gentrification policies, casting economic development as cultural development. Yet, urban folklore in the same areas has the possibility of performing resistance, and long-standing organizations such as the CCAP in the Downtown Eastside, along with the multiple Indigenous organizations along the Hastings Corridor, demonstrate both directly and indirectly that such resistances have staying power.

The political dialectic between "AstroTurf" and neighbourhood cultural production can be muddy, but distinctions become more prominent when discerning revanchist and resistant forms of urban folklore. My goal here has been to draw urban folklore closer to literary studies as a distinctive strategy for reading and writing the city, particularly at the scale of the neighbourhood, while recognizing similar approaches in Cultural Studies and Performance Studies. Distinct from, but close to, these disciplines, folkloristics has greatly expanded its conceptions of orality and the folk in part to demonstrate how far it has come from its classist and racist roots. Folklorists today are engaged in a conversation about how folklore might become more politically involved. Stephen Gencarella calls for a "collaboration between the fields of folklore and rhetoric and for the development of a critical folklore studies," arguing that "[a] performance of folklore, as an active memorial to common sense and the need for pieties, constitutes 'the folk' as a political category; accordingly, such constitutions may be critically engaged for the sake of emancipatory, impious, and comic advance of new social imaginaries or the reduction of violence" (190). In this formulation, folklore does not necessarily require a folklorist; rather, much of folklore's power rests in its endless transmission and iteration orally and through other mediums, in spite of academic appropriations or political challenges. But literary writers and critics can also find a place for themselves in and amongst the folk. The carriers of folklore can be anyone, but a dialectical theory of urban folklore necessitates more active participation from all storytellers if a substantial resistance is to manifest on the gentrifying frontier.

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NOTES

1 The 2011 Chinatown Historic Area Height Review encapsulates the kind of social and economic pressures that Chinatown and the Downtown Eastside are currently facing. Vancouver City Council voted in favour of relaxing building height restrictions in the area, thus compromising the status and structure of many low-income housing units. Many businesses, activists, and academics weighed in on the issue (see Pablo; Cole).

2 Emily Johansen is skeptical of the political potential for any local-global dichotomies that the novel might encompass, arguing that "Jeremy's commitment to local food—a commitment which would suggest global environmental responsibility . . . only marks his personal/psychological commitment to local place and an attempt to understand his position within an authentic tradition" (135). For Johansen, food is merely another plot device in *Stanley Park*, and the world of the novel does not seem overly concerned with the economic tensions of local-global capitalisms—nor does it seem concerned with the labour politics of food beyond "that of the chef, a highly trained and privileged individual" (136).

3 I am envisioning an oral history anthology that features the voices of labourers and residents based along the Hastings Corridor: Indigenous organizations, longshore workers, industrial labourers, street people, and sex workers. My future research will certainly involve interviews in some capacity, in addition to a broader examination of existing literatures regarding the area.

4 One of the venue's managers, Thomas Anselmi, states in the *Huffington Post* that "The irony that the Waldorf was taken over by a condo developer in the very area we helped reinvigorate is obvious to anyone. The Waldorf filled a void" (qtd. in "East Vancouver's Waldorf Hotel Sold to Developer"). But his use of the term *reinvigorate* draws attention away from any sense of gentrification, and as a representative of the Creative Class he and his business are simply perpetuating colonial tropes of emptiness and "void." With regard to their business model, CBC reporter Elliott Garnier explains that the original fifteen-year lease was compromised by rent forgiveness "after a slow start in 2010," but no clear delineation of budgets or profits explains the situation that Waldorf Productions found itself in just prior to the building's sale. The change of beer taps from cheaper domestic beers to more expensive craft beers, for example, might have ostracized the formerly profitable labour-class clientele. In any case, with the Waldorf's tortured recent history both culture and capital are rendered equivocally and problematically vulnerable: Waldorf Productions plays victim to the process to which it was central, and in effect this business' poor practices write over the larger narrative of gentrification along the Hastings Corridor.

5 Taylor prefaces *Stanley Park* with an Author's Note that begins: "One strand of this novel is based on fact" (ix). He then details a 1953 murder case concerning the skeletal remains of two children found in Vancouver's Stanley Park. Within the novel's narrative, this "fact" is of primary importance to the Professor; but the Professor is less concerned about its factual aspects than he is about the "different views on this over the years . . . the *myths* surrounding their death" (26; emphasis mine). This quick shift from *fact* to *myth*, and to a mythology of what the Professor calls the "Babes in the Wood," is what indicates the irony of Taylor's initial statement. Throughout the novel, *urban myth* and *urban legend* are terms attributed to perceived rumors, condemning myths to the realm of falsity and consequently eliding their cultural or behavioural implications.

6 A recent example in Vancouver of Creative Class "restauranting" at the expense of vulnerable communities is PiDGiN restaurant in the Downtown Eastside (very much

within what Taylor imagined to be "Crosstown"), which is located at a former Single Room Occupancy site directly across the street from a popular meeting place for street people, Pigeon Park. By the name alone, this restaurant's opening was seen as a slap in the face to the disenfranchised locals, and heavily policed protests ensued. For a detailed analysis of PiDGiN's problematic presence in the Downtown Eastside, see Ellan.

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