

Reimagining Urban Space: The Festival as a (Re)Branding Vehicle  
For Inscribing Vancouver's Downtown Eastside as Japantown

by

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## ABSTRACT

This research study uses a synthesis of theoretical frameworks from sociology and geography to develop critical branding theory that guides an analysis for how urban space is branded with a narrative and identity. By combining political, economic, social, spatial, physical, discursive and geographical assessments of brands, a framework is developed that investigates how festivals can act as branding vehicles that reimage and co-create themed urban environments. This project examines a long running Japanese Canadian culture and arts festival called the Powell Street Festival that takes place in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, and it considers how this festival is involved in reclaiming space, and how it participates in the rebranding of this area through commemorative aspects. The study consisted of twelve qualitative interviews, document and archival research, and a participant observation of the Powell Street Festival as well as events relative to this project's focus. The researcher spent four months living in Vancouver and became engaged with the Downtown Eastside and Japanese Canadian communities. By examining the historical and significant connections between the Downtown Eastside and the Japanese Canadian community, it was determined that the Powell Street Festival performed as a vehicle for reimagining space, and through subtle-commemorative branding, Vancouver's Downtown Eastside has been rebranded, in part, with Japanese Canadian facets. The Downtown Eastside is vulnerable to being rebranded as 'Japantown' because of the historic Japanese Canadian connection to the space. The Japantown brand coupled with the high potential for urban revitalization of this space, leads to a concern over the possible social and physical displacement of current Downtown Eastside residents, many of whom are low-income persons. Through assessing the Powell Street Festival, the Japanese Canadian community, and Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, this study presents alternative branding techniques.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

To today's Japanese Canadians, Powell Street has taken on a somewhat mythical significance, idealized as a symbol of collective loss. Its violation was the violation of the presence not only of those who actually lived there, but of all those Japanese Canadians for whom the past is a displacement of freedom. We therefore attach ourselves to its memory as though only through the assertion of a sense of place can memories become redemption. ... Powell Street will never be what it was, of course, and few would wish to return to its particular past; but it remains as a focus of collective memory and ongoing community activity, a landscape of memory and hope (Kobayashi, 1992:24).

### *What the Project is About*

The connections between social relations and urban space comprise an interesting arena for sociological investigation. Urban space offers a setting that cultivates social interaction, and it is within this context that society and geography enter into a unique relationship that fosters the co-creation of community, identity, and landscape. The epigraph of this chapter states that location is important for memories and that places become inscribed with social and cultural meanings for the individuals and groups who occupy these geographical regions, whether in the past or the present. It also demonstrates how associations and representations of a place are fluid and relative to time and space – the culmination of society and geography resurrect the past, and histories come to life.

This project explores the relationship between urban branding and festivals, considering interconnections of society and geography. It suggests that festivals are culturally dense artifacts that reimage urban space by inscribing material and non-material attributes upon a landscape. Material and *non-material*? Yes, a festival marks a place with material facets such as signage and monuments; however, a festival can also play a role in non-material characteristics such as

the identities, names, and narratives associated with a space. More specifically, the study investigates how the Powell Street Festival (PSF) in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES) has contributed to rebranding and reimagining the area as Japantown. The image below outlines the entire DTES area, and this project is concerned particularly with the Oppenheimer region, which is known as the Downtown Eastside Oppenheimer District (DEOD).



Image 1: Found in Newnham, Jodi. (2005). "An Overview of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside for UBC Learning Exchange Trek Program Participants." *Vancouver: UBC Learning Exchange*.

The DTES was originally occupied by Coast Salish First Nations people for over 10,000 years, including the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations peoples, until their displacement and relocation throughout the nineteenth Century (Schatz, 2010:7). This area was soon occupied by other groups, for instance, the DEOD was home to Japanese Canadians from the late 1800s until 1942, at which point the community had their personal belongings seized when they were moved to internment camps in the interior of British Columbia (Newnham, 2005:2). Today, the DEOD is comprised of low-income community members who are vulnerable to the socially displacing effects of gentrification. The neighbourhood is in close proximity to Vancouver's buzzing downtown and the City of Vancouver and developers have set

their sights on this region for urban revitalization. As a result, the DEOD is subject to potentially be rebranded as Japantown, in the full sense (a culturally themed urban space marked with stereotypical ideas of Japanese characteristics, such as uniquely styled banners, lantern lighting, an entrance gate, bench design – general physical design and architecture – encompassing a sense of complete and authentic Japanese culture and lifestyle). Such rebranding draws on the history of Japanese Canadians in the area, and in particular, the community’s yearly return to the DEOD to celebrate PSF – an annual two-day Japanese Canadian arts and culture festival that started in 1977. The festival represents the former presence of Japanese Canadians in the area and celebrates Japanese Canadian culture and heritage. At the same time, it is part of the impetus for the ironic rebranding of the area as Japantown, and is vulnerable to being coopted as a strategy of urban renewal and revitalization.

PSF takes place at Oppenheimer Park and the surrounding DEOD area. It has become an important event that promotes participation and that has reconnected members of the Japanese Canadian community after they were interned and dispersed across the Canadian landscape. PSF is an excellent example of how festivals reimage and rebrand urban space by presenting a narrative of place that is reinforced by transformations in the social and physical landscape. This occurs via signage, design, walking tours, and the instrumental uses of culture. This thesis examines the use of festivals as a vehicle for urban branding, and simultaneously, considers the social implications of such spatial events and their link to reimagining space. It presents a unique intersection of geography, social life, branding, urban space, and urban festivals.

### *Research Question*

This study is guided by the question: “How is the Powell Street Festival connected to rebranding the Oppenheimer District in the DTES as Japantown?” In concert, it considers: *How are human*



*rights being addressed through PSF and the Japantown brand? What, and whose histories are presented in the rebranding of the area? How can histories and geographies of human rights struggle inform contemporary processes of rebranding the DTES?*

### *Why the Project was Pursued*

Urban renewal and revitalization projects are often predecessors for gentrification that result in the displacement of both the occupants of an area, as well as the area's socio-historical narratives. The individuals and groups that are subject to these practices experience social injustices and human rights violations, particularly linked to the *right to the city* (Attoh, 2011:674-677; Greenberg, 2008:251). This study is critical of revitalization efforts and urban branding initiatives that produce exclusive spaces and brand images. Vancouver's DTES has a history of displacement. This is evident by the movement of Coast Salish, Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations peoples beginning in the early to mid 1800s, and later, the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War (Schatz, 2010:7; Culhane, 2003:595; Newnham, 2005:2). By acknowledging the displacement of these groups, this project will determine how the current occupants of the DTES are in a position to experience reiterations of similar injustices as a consequence of current urban renewal projects. This study also investigates the contradictory ways that festivals connect to processes of urban branding. Although urban brands are often used as a marketing tool to produce a hegemonic representation of space, I consider how they can be harnessed to produce more inclusive spaces that iterate more complete, multifaceted socio-spatial narratives. In doing so, this paper contributes to the literature on urban branding, and posits new ideas regarding activism through festivals and counter-branding.

### *Completing the Project*

An analysis of festivals, specifically PSF, was the means of assessment to demonstrate how such social and cultural events are critical in branding urban space, and how they can be used to celebrate human rights and address various types of social injustices. To achieve this, I immersed myself in the DTES for four months. During this time I collected information about PSF, the DTES, and the Japantown brand through twelve qualitative interviews, a participant observation of the festival, and archival/document retrieval. The four month data collection phase returned an overwhelming amount of information about PSF, the Japanese Canadian and DTES communities, the history of the area and of the festival, and lastly, the reimagining, branding, and revitalization of the DEOD.

### *Chapter Summaries*

*Chapter two* explores the existing literature on branding, urban branding, and festivals, and develops the project's theoretical framework. This chapter discusses the multiple connections and entanglements between urban branding and festivals and illustrates how these linkages contribute to the reimagining of urban space.

The first part of the chapter focuses on urban branding and festivals. In this section, I argue that urban branding is associated with neoliberalism whereby cities compete with one another for attention and investment to boost local economies and return profits. It is here that I look at critical urban branding perspectives that assess the political and economic implications of urban branding. This includes the use of urban branding to facilitate consumption patterns and to expand capital, or what I call, neoliberal urban branding. The chapter also discusses place-branding and place-making and how they are techniques used for imaging space and cultivating identity based upon uniqueness and distinction. These techniques involve the use of both hard-

branding and soft-branding, which account for the physical and non-physical attributes of a place such as signage and culture.

Next, I describe the entanglement between brands and geography based upon Andy Pike's arguments (2009; 2011). Here, I claim that geography is a qualitative property of the brand, and in turn, a brand is a qualitative property of geography. This is because branding is relative to socio-spatial phenomenon spawning from geographical sites; while geography is inherently ingrained with facets of the brand. This section includes a discussion of brandscapes and how they are used to manage the co-creation of the brand by guiding the culture, practices and performances of the brand. I argue that the entanglement of brands and geography is dynamic and, therefore, should be called *branded-geography* because geography is branded, and simultaneously, the brand is geographical by nature.

Further, I discuss how counter-branding demonstrates the way that brands can be harnessed to resist hegemonic and imposed images, identities, and representations. Counter-branding resists commercial and imposed brand images and instead provides bottom-up representations of urban spaces, their history, culture, and importantly, local residents.

I also engage in a discussion of the literature on festivals, explaining the importance of festivals in the study of sociology, urban branding, and urban space. This section illustrates that festivals and urban branding are similar and that festivals are an instrumental use of hard and soft branding. This is evident in the ability of festivals to de-territorialize and re-territorialize space, whereby they permanently and temporarily transform space. Similar to urban branding, festivals create zones of consumption by using material and non-material features that cultivate a space's narrative, brand, and identity. This section ends with an examination of the ability for festivals

to attract a wide audience, and in doing so, become vulnerable to being coopted, commodified, and used for marketization.

The second part of the chapter presents the theoretical framework for this project by synthesizing different critical branding paradigms. These include political-economy branding theory, which Naomi Klein (2000) and Miriam Greenberg (2008) propose. The political-economy perspective views branding as a way to add value to products, and suggests that brands mask social inequalities and the exploitation that occurs during production. This branding paradigm is critical of the political, social, and economic effects of brands, and the making of unjust and exclusive urban brands. Post-structural branding theory is also part of the critical branding approach that I develop. This perspective views brands as informational media objects that loosely govern two-way asymmetrical flows of information that occur between the brand's producers and consumers, as well as between consumers. This paradigm has been developed by Celia Lury (2004), Adam Arvidsson (2006), and Liz Moor (2007). These authors discuss brand management, brandscapes, and how brands are co-created through two-way flows of information that are exchanged amongst the brand's producers and consumers. Lastly, critical geography perspectives are included in this synthesis because brands are unequivocally entangled with geography. Again, this is based on Andy Pike's (2009; 2011) proposition that there is an entanglement between brands and geography. This is because urban brands are found in geographical space, and evidently, arguments regarding linkages between brands and geography need to be assessed. I conclude the theoretical component by briefly discussing the importance of space and questioning who has the right to brand urban space with a particular brand image. The discussion of space is inherently important to branding because brands occupy and inscribe space, whether mental, physical, or social.

*Chapter three* discusses the methods used to conduct this study and summarizes the data analysis phase. The study used qualitative interviews, participant observation, and document retrieval. Twelve interviews were conducted with people familiar with PSF, including festival volunteers, members from Powell Street Festival Society (PSFS) partner organizations, and Japanese Canadian elders. The section on interviews explains in detail how the interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Next, I discuss the participant observation, which included an observation of setting up PSF, and its two-day operation. Observation data also consisted of walking tours in the DEOD, as well as community meetings that were attended during the fieldwork period. Moreover, I discuss the document retrieval process in this chapter, which included archival research that was conducted at the City of Vancouver Archives as well as the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre. Throughout the discussion of each method I posit the limitations and problems that occurred during the analysis phase. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of rigour and self-reflexivity, and demonstrate the concerns for a researcher operating in the parameters of social and qualitative research.

*Chapter four* titled ‘What’s in a Festival?’ explores the origins, background, and importance of PSF. This discussion takes the reader on a journey throughout the history of Oppenheimer Park and the DEOD, and develops an understanding of why the festival occurs at this park, and the deep sentimental attachment the Japanese Canadian community have to Vancouver’s DTES. It reveals the fluid identity of the DTES, based on the idea that different groups attribute varying identities and narratives of place to the same space. For Japanese Canadians, the DEOD is a historic site that marks the origins of their community, and is a reminder of the community’s interment and marginalization. This chapter proposes the framework necessary to understand the Japanese Canadian community and their right to the

DTES. Investigating the importance of PSF for the Japanese Canadian community, the chapter argues that PSF is a vital community resource that has cultivated the revival of the fragmented Japanese Canadian community and promoted Japanese Canadian arts and culture. The festival provides an inclusive space for Japanese Canadians to connect and strengthen their community.

*Chapter five*, 'Festivals and Local Residents', examines the consequences of festivals, specifically, urban festivals that take place within vulnerable spaces such as PSF. This chapter discusses the history of the DTES, its current status, and its current local residents. This includes a section on how PSF is perceived differently by Japanese Canadians and DTES residents. It exposes the negative consequences and unintended effects of the festival, such as displacing local residents during its operation. The chapter also examines the ways that PSF connects with the local DTES residents and how PSF tries to build a positive relationship with this group. The relationship between the festival and the local community is important because Oppenheimer Park is space used daily by locals. When the festival occurs it interrupts the regular flows and patterns of the area, and thus can be viewed as invading space that belongs to DTES residents. Through a community advocacy group, PSF continues to build a relationship with the DTES community. PSF hopes that in building community connections they can mitigate tensions between the local community and the festival, and resist becoming an event that invades the park and surrounding area for a weekend every year with disregard to the local community and its residents.

*Chapter six* presents an analysis of festivals and the reimagining of space. This chapter discusses the effects that PSF has had on the DTES, and how the festival's existence and lengthy presence in the DEOD has both reimagined and rebranded the area. This occurs permanently and temporarily. The festival leaves a permanent mark on the space through physical attributes such

as signs and plaques, as well as in immaterial ways via walking tours and other discursive practices. The festival temporarily alters the landscape of the DEOD by changing Oppenheimer Park and its surrounding area into the setting of a cultural festival. This includes erecting tents, booths, and stages, as well as transforming streets into market areas and food quarters. The temporary transformation includes the opening of alternative spaces in the area that are usually locked. In these ways, the festival actively engages in de-territorializing and re-territorializing urban space. The temporary transformative effects of the festival become mixed with the permanent ones as they both contribute to the idea that the DEOD belongs to Japanese Canadians.

The chapter brings these characteristics of PSF together to argue that there is a difference between reimagining a space with the intention of commemorating a group versus presenting a branded urban village in order to attract tourism and to boost the local economy. I present the ways that Japanese Canadians have refrained from extensively glamourizing their history and culture within the DEOD, and instead, have inscribed the space with a just representation of their community and its history, while simultaneously being respectful of those who they are commemorating and of the local residents. This is contrasted with the Japanese urban village that was proposed in the early 1980s (variations of which have informed ongoing urban planning processes) and how many within the current Japanese Canadian community are opposed to this type of redevelopment and depiction of their community. Through the analysis of PSF and the reimagining of urban space, I propose that PSF unintentionally performed subtle-commemorative branding and is closely aligned with a just and inclusive rebranding of urban space. This is evident when compared to a characterized neoliberal branding initiative that seeks culturally themed urban villages. The *conclusion* summarizes the key arguments from each chapter and

proposes how this project has contributed to an understanding of festivals, branding, and space. It questions where to go next in regards to studying branding in the DTES, and argues that inclusive and just branding assisted through festivals is a possibility, especially when facilitated through community participation and engagement.



## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL CONTEXT

### *Introduction*

Cities and urban spaces are zones of consumption. Consumption means more than buying commodities, or the act of physically or scientifically absorbing a material or cultural object. An analysis of cities and urban spaces informs us of other types of consumption, such as the consumption of culture and history, or the consumption of images and material culture in the form of street signage, banners, themed urban villages and urban festivals. Cities and urban spaces are geographical sites of intensified human development characterized by the densification of populations, boosted and high operating local and global economies, and the growing concentration of governance, surveillance, and policing. Importantly, cities and urban spaces mark the context where everyday life occurs; it is these settings that contribute to the production of a particular space by facilitating social interaction. Everyday life in the city may include walking, driving, using the transit system, or providing for subsistence. Along with these activities, everyday life in urban settings also includes social interactions, which may occur on the street, in a parking lot, on the sidewalk, at work, or at sites of social gatherings such as restaurants, cafes, or festivals. This chapter illustrates how everyday life in the city involves more than what is seen on the surface, it analyzes literature that critically engages in how urban branding, festivals, and space contribute to everyday consumption in and of the city.

Furthermore, it illustrates how urban branding and festivals contribute to the (re)imaging of space based upon geography, history, culture, and society, and how these are harnessed in order to (re)produce specific definitions of urban space.

## *Urban Branding*

Urban branding is a social, economic, political, and geographical process that is complicated. Branding and urban branding literature encompasses theoretical debates regarding the intention of brands and branding, as well as how brands and branding contribute to everyday social life. Although urban brands are complex, they can be defined in a succinct fashion. In minimalist terms, urban branding is a fragment of the blooming neoliberal political agenda, one that is characterized by the deregulation of markets, which has led cities to compete and jockey amongst each other to attract attention and foreign investment (Lang, 2011:541-542). The cenotaph of urban branding (if one existed) has *brand identity* engraved deep within the concrete monument, as the definitive characteristic of urban branding is to increase a place's value in relation to other places based upon distinction and use value.

Urban branding constructs spaces that are unique and that offer distinct experiences for consumers and users of that space. These experiences invoke representations and images of space that are used to create an attractive city encircled with commercialization. The experiences and identity of a place are reinforced by specific narratives, images, and material configurations within the location, and are co-produced through social relations that are driven by specific political and economic mandates. Liz Moor (2007) discusses 'branded spaces', stating that (re)branding a city is 'oriented towards the reworking, repackaging, and re-presentation of both historical and existing "cultural" qualities' (75). Moor (2007:75) suggests that branded spaces provide objectified relations that narrate how its external and internal audiences should use that space.

Urban branding is used to attract capital to areas in order to increase profits by facilitating consumption patterns and experiences that beget value. The branding of space thus leads to the

commodification of cities and their districts. In Chapter Six I give an example of how this type of branding was proposed in Vancouver's DTES and I refer to it as neoliberal urban branding. Although evidence supports arguments about the economic purposes of urban branding, there is also literature that suggests urban branding can be used to create inclusive spaces, whereby the original occupants of an area have reclaimed that space through the use of discourses and narratives of place that represent the occupiers, their culture, as well any historical significance and meaningful socio-spatial accounts tied to the physical location (Julier, 2011:214, 223-227).

### *Critical Urban Branding Perspectives*

The literature on urban branding is multi-faceted, with different analyses and perspectives that emphasize diverse aspects and effects. One of the main perspectives is evident in the work of Miriam Greenberg who notes that urban branding involves the creation 'of public-private urban branding coalitions', and that the public sector uses urban branding as an instrument in 'market-oriented strategies of economic restructuring' cities and urban spaces (Greenberg, 2008:34). Greenberg provides a critical view of urban branding, grounded in political-economy and cultural analyses. She argues that branding coalitions use media messages to create 'urban imaginaries' which 'overhaul the image and reputation' of cities and urban spaces (Greenberg, 2008:36). Public-private branding coalitions help create an attractive consumer city that results in the privatization of public space, whereby urban space becomes marked by an exchange-value rather than a use-value (Greenberg, 2008:34, 36). Greenberg (2008) is critical of urban branding because she believes that it transforms the city and urban space 'from a real place of value and meaning for residents and workers to an abstract space of capital investment and profit-making, and a commodity for broader consumption' (36). This is what I term neoliberal urban branding. Furthermore, Greenberg (2008:36) criticizes the political and economic inequities related to

urban branding, arguing that they are used to impose a ‘hegemonic vision’ of space. For Greenberg (2008), branded images such as I♥NYC represent exclusive visions of urban space and serve to mask social inequalities, processes of social displacement, and social injustices. This author’s perspective highlights many of the critical economic and political issues in urban branding; however, she neglects an assessment of the interaction between the complex objects in a space and the society that occupies the area. This assessment would include an analysis of how the material cultural practices that are defined by the geographical, historical, spatialized, and social qualities of a place are used to co-construct a narrative of place, and ultimately an urban brand.

#### *Place-Making and Place-Branding*

Urban branding initiatives manipulate landscapes, building designs, ambiances, streetscapes, and built environments to create vibrant arenas in which groups live, occupy, and consume. The processes of place-branding and place-making contribute to these features of urban branding. Place-branding is analyzed by Marjana Johansson (2012) who claims it ‘is to present a sanitised, appealing image of a place, which inevitably means selecting particular elements to be included in official messages while disregarding or erasing other elements’ (3612). *Place-branding* is a tool for highlighting unique and distinct features of a geographical space. Contrarily, it also censors and excludes other socio-spatialized meanings relative to the area based upon its residents and other vulnerable and marginalized groups. *Place-making* uses select histories and cultural influences tied geographically to a space to create a unique identity of an urban space. This means promoting specific images, meanings and representations of a place that are considered appealing to potential consumers.

Rantisi and Leslie (2006:366) illustrate how place-branding is developed, in part, through *hard-branding*, which involves a process of enhancing the ‘quality of place’ by investing in architecture and its built environment. This includes unique streetscapes, stadia, museums, arenas, and convention centres with avant-garde and one-of-a-kind building designs. An example of such infrastructure is The Canadian Museum for Human Rights, which has been built at a historical site in Winnipeg with a distinct, eye-catching appearance. The museum is unique in its contents and informational display, but also in its physical design and architecture. Hard-branding is most effective when it is accompanied by *soft-branding* initiatives. The two are differentiated by the fact that hard-branding is ‘used to distinguish a location at entry point’, while soft-branding ‘is used to denote a looser system in which a broader palette of options is available to carriers of brand identity’ (Julier, 2005:873). These concepts emphasize design and aesthetics, and encompass everything from street furniture to lighting and other aspects that create an urban ambiance. An example of hard-branding may be a culturally themed entrance gate, while soft-branding may encompass the types of stores, festivals, events and *culture* the space expresses. Both hard and soft branding encourages the consumption of ‘festival market-places, attractive streetscapes, bohemian quarters and flashy cultural infrastructure’ (Catungal et al., 2009:1096).

Together, elements of hard and soft branding cultivate a designscape - a concept similar to place-branding – defined as the ‘network of activities and artefacts that produce place-identity’ in a location (Julier, 2005:869). On one hand, by investing in hard-branding, place-branding and place-making give rise to a unique atmosphere that people can recognize and engage with in their everyday experiences; on the other hand, soft-branding is used to develop a brand identity and brand culture in due course. Overall, this view of urban branding highlights the discursive

and material strategies used to market urban spaces and brand an area through physical design and the instrumental uses of culture.

### *Geographical Entanglement*

Urban branding occurs within geographical space, meaning that branding and geography are two related areas of study, and it is not surprising that human geographers have taken an interest in branding. Inherently, urban brands are entangled with physical geography, and because locations have social and spatial attributes, the study of urban branding analyzes the socio-spatial context of a place (Pike, 2009:622-628). Relating to the entanglement of brands and geography is a discussion about how spaces cultivate spatialized narratives, or narratives of place. Jensen (2007:217) claims that geographical locations embody ‘spatialized narratives’ which spawn from the history, culture, geography and society of a place. Furthermore, Jensen (2007:217) suggests that in order to understand the social production of place, there must be a focus on spatialized narratives, history, society, and place. Based on the assumption that urban space is constructed from socio-cultural (e.g. culture and history) and physical (e.g. buildings, signage and topography) qualities, it is concluded that the combination of the two elements guide the development of meanings and narratives of space and place. The relationship between sociality and physicality is evident in how brands interact with urban environments and create brandscapes; brandscapes are geographically located and express information about culture and lifestyles (Harris, 2011:188-189). Moor (2007:88) suggests that ‘branding works to shape particular spaces and activities’, and it is in these spaces and with these activities that consumers interact and engage with the brand. Brandscapes provide brand users and consumers a site to interpret the artefacts of the brand and these ‘scapes’ are where brand identity is co-created through the exchange of, and interaction with, informational objects. For instance, Harris (2011)

discusses how brandscapes represent geography, culture and lifestyle, stating, ‘new urban brands are created through the practices, performances, and urban visions of particular cultural intermediaries acting in specific locations, and often have resonance and impact across a city’ (197). The statement describes how particular ambiances of urban spaces emerge through a dynamic interplay between various actors and discourses of place within a location. Thus, urban brands are co-created through a dynamic relationship, which also inscribes space with an unofficial, or de facto list of rules and characteristics that define a space’s meaning, image, and how it is used (or to be used). These consequences further effect how production and consumption patterns are performed within a space’s geographical boundaries. For example, Bookman and Woolford (2013:304) suggest that brands police the actions of those who use branded spaces, and the users of branded spaces are within some capacity governed by the branded-geography to reinforce a spaces particular image.

### *Counter-Branding*

The location-based qualities of brands and urban brands mean they are inherently entangled with geography. The distinct and uniquely recognizable identity of an urban brand coupled with its dynamic and amorphous qualities, enable brands to become appropriated and used by individuals and groups as a medium for resistance. The initiative for resistance may be provoked by a particular brand and its inscribed values; however, brands have also been targeted and coopted for purposes indirectly related to the brand in and of itself. The fluid quality of brands and urban brands accompanied by their ability to encompass particular values and meanings leave them vulnerable to counter-branding. Counter-branding is the process whereby efforts are made by a group to resist the branding of a particular object or space (Greenberg, 2008). In urban branding, counter-branding is initiated at the community level, and occurs when a group, such as a

grassroots organization, actively promotes an alternative message, image, or representation of that urban space than the one that is being marketed. Counter-branding is an important concept within branding literature because many authors have illustrated the negative effects of urban branding. It is imperative to be aware of counter-branding for resisting the exploitative and unjust nature of urban branding. Additionally, the idea of counter-branding illustrates how branding can be harnessed for the development of inclusive and just urban brands as well as be a mode for resistance against urban revitalization in potentially vulnerable communities.

Brands are geographical by nature, and because humans are (among other things) a characteristic of geography, urban brands may experience resistance from residents in a location, who make efforts for counter-branding. Julier (2011:214-227) explains how the entanglement of brands and geographies can initiate counter-branding. Counter-branding occurs via this entanglement because geographical sites that have been previously or currently inhabited adopt social and historical associations. These associations are embedded with meaning for the individuals and groups that live in that space; however, the meaning and identity of a location may be distinct and unique only to the former and current residents of that place and these identities can be undesirable for marketing that space in a neoliberal and economic fashion. The outcome of such a case can result in branding the space with an identity and image that either misrepresents the residents of the area or have absolutely nothing to do with the space other than to promote consumption. This has shown to inadvertently foster solidarity and community, and local residents respond by creating an alternative image that they feel accurately describes their community and that specific space. Julier (2011:214) gives an example of this through his analysis of the City of Leeds in England, which, under entrepreneurial branding coalitions, was inscribed with the brand identity 'Leeds. Live it. *Love it.* [italics added]'. Julier (2011:214)



argues that this involved the ‘codification of an urban identity’ and was not representative of the larger community. Academics, residents and community groups resisted the coalition’s brand slogan through the counter-brand ‘Leeds. Live it. *Share it.* [italics added]’ in order to reclaim the city for its residents (Julier, 2011:223-224,226). This illustrates how a society that has an identity and connection to a space can respond when they feel that they are being misrepresented by a particular brand. Therefore, the community that has a stake and innate connection to a location responds by promoting a representation of space that *brands* the *geography* with what they feel is an accurate depiction of that space and their community. Julier (2011:218) argues that conventional market-driven urban branding focuses on ‘material facets rather than on practices of everyday life’ and that urban counter-branding initiatives have illustrated the ability for branding to ‘shift attention from the city-centre as a site of tourism, shopping and night-time economies, to a participative city, encompassing all its spatial and demographic features’ (218).

Complementary to counter-branding, Eshuis and Edwards (2013:1071) argue that urban communities can reach ‘democratic legitimacy’ regarding an urban brand if the process involves participation from current residents, users of the community, and entrepreneurs. These authors claim that ‘the quality of participation involves incorporating the diversity of identities, perspectives, and interests within a community into a branding process with a view of collective learning and forming a shared sense of identity’ (Eshuis and Edwards, 2013:1071). Their analysis of democratic legitimacy and branding emphasizes the importance of participation from a community in the creation of an urban brand. Evidently, counter-branding is a strategy to resist unjust, exclusive, and unrepresentative urban brands and harnesses branding in order to reclaim both space and the identity of a place by and for its inhabitants.

The above discussion has illustrated that urban branding is tethered with complex social relations within urban spaces. By assessing urban branding and the use of festivals as vehicles for branding, it becomes evident how important it is to be critical of the choice of soft and hard branding techniques, as well as the social, historical and geographical narratives deployed, because they effect the production of images, meanings and identities of a place.

### *Festivals*

Festivals have been increasingly used as a means to market cities and urban spaces because they offer unique experiences where people come together to interact and participate in the celebration of an event within a specific social and geographical setting. Festivals have been useful for marketing cities, attracting tourism, and boosting local economies. Cities and urban spaces have also used events such as festivals, carnivals, and cultural celebrations as branding vehicles. Although festivals can be compared and contrasted with urban branding, it would be erroneous to consider the two as separate or equivalent entities. This section will consider the relationship between festivals and urban branding. Although the two may appear to be similar, it should be clear from the outset that festivals are more closely *one* component of urban branding, and are important in place-making and contribute loosely to hard and soft branding. They assist urban branding by sponsoring physical and cultural attributes of a place, and are important to co-producing distinct spaces. Festivals contribute to the identity, value, and image of a place, and therefore have an important role in supporting soft-branding techniques.

### *Festivals, Branding, and Reimagining Urban Space*

Festivals have become a popular form of celebration and image-making in the city. They have existed in Western cities since the mid-1800s, and are an effective way to develop culture and cultivate annual celebrations in a geographical space (Johansson and Kociatkiewicz, 2011:393;

Ferdinand and Williams, 2013:202-203). Recently, they have been used to improve a city's image and have been incorporated into city branding efforts (Aalst and Melik, 2012:196-197). Festivals often occur in the same geographical area, and when successful over a period of time, they become important to the city or space's identity (Aalst and Melik, 2012:198). Urban branding focuses on creating an image and experience of place that is unique, and although festivals have similar goals, they are celebratory tools that can be marketed to a wide audience and often attract hundreds to thousands of people to a specific location. Albeit both urban branding and festivals provide a space of consumption, a festival organizes a large number of people within a specific time and space and provides a distinct experience within these parameters. Therefore, an urban brand can easily be intensified through the creation or adoption of an urban festival.

Johansson (2012:3614) argues that events such as festivals are part of making a 'distinctive' city and urban space, giving them 'spectacular appeal'. Johansson and Kociatkiewicz (2011:401) point out that festivals contribute to the formation of a 'nostalgiascape', which is 'a representation of events and identities of a historical character' in a particular location. By presenting the festival in such a place, it can add to the identity of the location, and further legitimize the festival's presence and its transformation of the social and physical landscape of an area. Johansson and Kociatkiewicz (2011) also state that, 'festivals and other cultural events are seen as a means to contribute to a positive image of a place and to create employment opportunities to further economic growth' (393). Festivals have become an urban marketing tool, and also a force in altering urban landscape. This is evident in Harris's (2011) suggestion that festival marketplaces have preserved and branded 'historic urban features and architectural ensembles' which 'have offered both new commercial opportunities and a way of

responding to a greater collective desire and nostalgia in contemporary cities for more stability in urban life' (189). Festivals are endowed with cultural qualities that attract consumers and are useful in reimagining urban space.

The engagement of the festival with urban space transforms space from its everyday uses and meanings into an ambience with uniqueness and identity. Festivals are active in the de-territorialization and re-territorialization of urban space, and as a consequence they can invade space, leading to cultural and social gentrification, and surprisingly, they also lead to participatory action and the reclamation of space. Johansson and Kociatkiewicz (2011:396) describe how festivals actively de-territorialize and re-territorialize urban space by 'subverting the dominant meanings' and bringing new themes, activities, and persons to a location whereby they renegotiate the practices and representations of urban space as an urban brand. The urban brand that the festival imposes redefines the territory and inscribes it with new meanings, physical design, and people. Festivals are active in transforming space; the festival presents a space that is co-constructed by festival planners and its attendees, and place becomes (re)constructed through the forging of a 'ceremonial landscape' and 'the deliberate manipulation of landscape' (Waterman, 1998:57-59).

Arts and cultural festivals are being used by cities as a form of 'top-down regeneration' for economic renewal (Waterman, 1998:64). The space the festival is held in is altered to intensify urban social life. This occurs by 'utilizing "soft" infrastructure such as signs, policing, and moveable barriers' (Stevens and Shin, 2014:7). Festivals should not be overlooked when studying society, social relations, and urban space, because they reorganize the features of a place and affect the experiences and meanings associated to that location.

Festivals are methods of both hard and soft-branding; they can impose physical attributes upon a space, such as venues, the design of parks and green spaces, and stadiums. Additionally, festivals contribute discursively to the social, creative, and cultural attributes of a place, such as representations, images, and the looser contexts of inscribed meanings and values. Contemporary urban festivals reimage, reconstruct, and revitalize urban areas. Festivals can be historically and geographically tied to space and are active in transforming the space's identity and image. An example of this is Mardi Gras which is a substantive part of the culture and history in the city of New Orleans; the festival's presence has contributed to the infrastructure of the city such as the building of a domed stadium, a festival mall, a convention centre, a theme park, a river development, and the Audubon Aquarium (Gotham, 2005:229). Gotham (2005) states that urban spectacles such as festivals 'seek to transform the built and social environment of the city into an aesthetic product of symbolizing consumption, leisure and entertainment' (242). This suggests that urban festivals change the physical and social landscape of an urban space, and as a result, the space is commodified for uses of consumption.

Evidently, festivals are used for the marketization and the reimagining of urban space, and produce spaces that beget 'surplus-value' (Weller, 2013:2857). Mlagorzata Karpinska-Krakowiak (2009:339) discusses the commodification of the contemporary city, arguing that there is a 'festivalization' of cities and urban spaces. Karpinska-Krakowiak (2009:339) explains that the process of festivalization involves the use of contemporary mechanisms to organize urban social life, as well as the types of entertainment, tourism and zones of consumption within a city. This is done by using the distinct features of festivals that are often based upon unique culture found within a socio-spatial context; the commodification of contemporary cities has relied on cultural flows to create attractive urban spaces (Karpinska-Krakowiak, 2009:339).

Culture, stated by Karpinska-Krakowiak (2009), ‘proves its uniqueness and gives potential for articulating identity and constructing images, myths, and narratives about the cities’ (339).

Through the commodification of urban spaces, festivals use their inherent cultural aspects to reimage the identity of the spaces they occupy.

### *Instrumental Uses and Effects of Festivals and Culture*

Culture is at the heart of festivals, and the unfolding of the festival brings latent cultural values and traditions to life, transforming them into something tangible for festivalgoers to consume. In connection with discussions on brands, Moor (2007:88) argues that branding uses cultural resources to ‘reshape particular markets’ to intensify the ‘symbolic-expressive potential’ of competition within various patterns of consumption. Branding is not as much as the commodification of particular objects, markets, or industries, as it is the production of new space for consumption to take place based upon culture, experience, and symbolism (Moor, 2007:88). In relation to festivals, Stanley Waterman (1998) notes that, ‘a festival is an event at which culture is (re)produced and consumed’ (62). It is arguable that festivals and their unique facets are increasingly being commoditized; however, it is equally reasonable to agree that festivals are a cultural resource that expresses the allegory of the urban brand. Waterman (1998) adds an important geographical point to this discussion by stating that ‘it is not culture that is exclusively consumed; by just “being there”, by experiencing a place through its festival, the place, too, is consumed’ (68). Here the ideas of culture, geography and consumption are brought together to argue that festivals use social and historical characteristics and inscribe them upon a space to facilitate experiences and cultural flows. Moreover, one of the social and geographical consequences of festivals is that they ‘create a landscape of urban experiences’ (Karpinska-Krakowiak, 2009:339). These consequences can be positive and negative and are a by-product

of the festival's existence. Thus, an analysis of cultural events must account for 'how the discursive contractions that accompany events rework historical narratives, revise collective memories, alter the signification of cultural practices and revalue the symbolic capital of the city' (Weller, 2013:2855). These points are extremely important to this project's analysis of PSF in Vancouver's DTES because they demonstrate how discursive qualities have a role in the ways that festivals (re)image urban space. Festivals, for example PSF, utilize history and collective memory, and sell them as a product to the festivalgoers who perceive them as valuable. This process benefits the city and its spaces by facilitating arts, culture, consumption, economy, and lifestyle.

Festivals are celebrations that usually operate through inter-cultural relationships. Festivals can attract a wide audience because they often display several styles of art and offer different genres. By doing so, they present an experience of inter-culturalism which Okano and Samson (2010) state is, 'where we carry out joint activities through some kind of collaboration' (S11). Festivals enable a 'broad range of acts' that can 'cater to a wide audience' and, therefore, the participative quality of festivals is that they are a 'contemporary notion of mobilizing culture for social inclusion' (Johansson and Kociatkiewicz, 2011:398-399). Weller (2013) supports these claims by noting that festivals 'simultaneously produce spaces of celebration, community and enjoyment' (2857). Festivals consequently can have negative effects on urban spaces and their populations, however, they are also social events that organize collective identities, bring communities together, and are productive in revitalizing and maintaining marginalized and vulnerable groups.

Modern urban festivals have become democratized; they use public spaces such as streets, squares, and urban arenas as their stage, and 'the mundane, everyday landscape is transformed

into a space of cultural discourse' (Waterman, 1998:63). Kevin Gotham (2005:242) claims that festivals were once indigenously conceived local and unique gatherings, and that many were, and are, organized around geographical ties; however, he notes that festivals are now organized around standardization and rationalization. Today festivals are becoming more and more commercialized, which has prompted a growing tension in the definition of the festival as being either a celebration or an enterprise (Waterman, 1998:67). This is evident in Mardi Gras, which some feel has been appropriated to attract tourism, and where local residents are conflicted with how public nudity has become point and center of the festival's identity, image, and experience, and who feel that this debases the festival's original traditions and meanings (Gotham, 2005:232-235).

As celebrations of culture and history, festivals can be utilized as a means to reclaim space, celebrate the history of a space, and create solidarity and stability in contemporary social settings of urban life. In particular, they can be used to create community participation and to bring awareness to past injustices, specific cultures, and marginalized groups. Festivals draw attention to an event regardless of the specific area or context in which they take place; however, some festivals (such as the Powell Street Festival) are geographically located in a space that is historically tied to a specific culture (in this case, Japanese Canadian heritage). This adds an important element to the place-making aspect of the festival and the development of branded space; in this case the potential for the Japantown brand and urban revitalization of the DTES. It is clear that festivals are mechanisms that contribute to, and organize, economic development and new built infrastructure; however, they also contribute to cohesion within communities, and are active in restoring and celebrating 'local customs and traditions' (Karpinska-Krakowiak, 2009:340). The attention that festivals receive produces a zone of consumption that enables



festivalgoers to learn about the area and its history as well as to absorb cultural industries, activism, and identity.

By comparing and contrasting urban branding and festivals it is discovered that they are different social and cultural products; however, both are used as a means to create distinct urban spaces. The co-production of an urban brand involves numerous processes, many of which have been mentioned. Festivals comprise one of these processes; however, they are important because of their ability to contribute to multiple facets that dictate an urban brand. Festivals are active in inscribing space with material and immaterial qualities, including the built environment and the co-production of identity and meaning in everyday social life. Festivals are primarily social events that contribute to place-identity and brandscaping. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, festivals are active in creating spaces that are socially significant and inclusive, and just as easily, they can create securitized and exclusive spaces, and displace local residents. My study will explore how festivals are harnessed and operate as vehicles for urban branding, and will consider the contradictory social and spatial effects of festivals in terms of their involvement in place-making and re-imaging space.

## Theoretical Context

### *Critical Branding Framework*

The proposed study will adopt critical branding theory as part of its conceptual framework to analyze festivals as discursive tools that contribute to the co-production of images, experiences, and meaning of place. It does this by focusing on the Powell Street Festival in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, and its relation to the emergence of Japantown as an urban brand. This section will posit the different streams within critical branding theory, including political-economy and post-structuralist approaches to branding. On the one hand, political-economy

perspectives focus on the use of brands and branding to exploit urban space and its residents to beget value, on the other hand, post-structuralist accounts emphasize the complexity of brands and branding as asymmetrically co-produced media objects, and include analyses of the interaction between geography, society, culture, history, space, and discourse. The theoretical framework that I develop also uses geographical approaches to branding because an analysis of urban branding requires that we look at how society interacts with a specific location. Thus, I argue that a synthesis of theoretical perspectives is needed to guide my analysis so that it covers the various aspects that inform the branding of urban space. These aspects include the political, economic, discursive and geographical features of urban space that give an urban brand narrative and identity. Through a theoretical model that facilitates the analysis of these various facets, I am in a better position to fully understand how festivals contribute to the branding of urban space.

### *Political-Economy Perspectives*

The political-economy strand of critical branding theory is rooted in Marxist thought. It views brands as a way to augment the exploitation of both markets and the labour force and conceives of brands as tools for adding value to generic products, whereby brands enable increased values for commodities through aesthetics and the fetishizing of social properties such as names, logos, trademarks, people, and most importantly space. The theoretical components of this branding theory are derived from Marx's (1967) critique of the capitalist mode of production in *Capital Vol. 1* where he developed three ideas: 'The Fetishism of Commodities'; a labour theory of value; and a theory of surplus-value. The 'Fetishism of Commodities' is the notion that exchange-value is considered a natural quality of a commodity and is represented by the quantification of a monetary value; although exchange-value is perceived to be a natural quality

of objects, it emerges from social relations – and is a disassociation of use-value (Marx, 1967:76-87). Marx's (1967:45) labour theory of value argues that human-labour power is the creator and source of value (exchange-value is determined by the social average amount of labour required for its production) and that commodities are the representation of congealed labour-power. The value of a commodity in this theoretical perspective is the amount of labour-power that is crystalized in that product over the time of its production, including the congealed labour-power implanted in the materials, tools, transportation and equipment that precedes each step of its production. Marx (1967:45) views exchange-value as the total abstraction of value, and in the capitalist mode of production the value of a commodity is 'human labour in the abstract' (51). Marx (1967:155-573) claims that the capitalist economic system of production is exploitative because human labour-power is a unique commodity in that its consumption creates more value than it takes to reproduce it. What becomes profit to the owner of the means of production (the purchaser of labour-power) is a surplus-value, which amounts to the unpaid value produced by the labourer. Thus, labour is exploited because it does not receive in full the value it has created.

These notions are evident in the analyses of two key proponents of the political-economy perspective: Naomi Klein and Miriam Greenberg. Klein's (2000) book *No Logo* assesses brands, and how they exploit culture and invade space. Klein (2000) defines a brand as something different than a product; she claims that brands are 'a way of life, an attitude, a set of values, a look, an idea' (23-24). According to Klein (2000:66,74-84), branding uses cultural, city, and mental space, and the brands themselves appropriate ideas from cultural groups through processes such as 'cool hunting' (looking for unique characteristics of a group that are marketable) to continuously add to its brand image and value. Greenberg (2008) expands upon Klein's work, putting it into the context of urban branding in her book *Branding New York*,

which is discussed below in detail. These authors appropriate the above theoretical components from Marx and are critical of brands and branding as an exploitative phenomenon in contemporary society.

Political-economy branding theory defines brands as top-down entities that are created by the owners of production, economic elites, and public-private urban branding partnerships that impose brand images upon consumers. Eshuis and Edwards (2013) claim, 'branding is applied to impose particular meanings and transmit messages from the top-down' (1069). This is an accurate description of political-economy branding theory, which argues that informational flows regarding brands, their image, and their meanings are bestowed upon consumers from the *top*, leaving consumers little room to choose and interact with the construction of the brand. Both Klein (2000:138-141) and Greenberg (2008:31) view branding as the process of adding value to generic products, and turning the brand itself into a fetish that has masking qualities. It is important to state that this assessment of 'adding value' is based on the idea that branding adds value to the established value of a specific good through aesthetic qualities, which increases both demand and market price. In this process, the marketization of branding embraces a cultural understanding that these specific branded products have added meaning and that the objects use-value increases within the realm of social relations. Thus, an additional layer of value is added to these products based upon what the brand means within cultures, norms, and values that have embraced the importance of brands and their qualitative properties, such as aesthetics. In other words, the brand does not add an overall value to the good, rather, it adds a cultural layer of value. In regards to this understanding of the brand, Greenberg (2008:31) defines the process of branding as 'fetishizing the fetish'. Greenberg's argument suggests that branding has surpassed the idea of Marx's fetishism of commodities, whereby the already fetishized commodity

becomes encapsulated by the *brand* as a *natural* qualitative property of that object. Using Marx's analysis as a blueprint, it can be argued that the brand's fetishization, similar to commodities, is derived from social relations.

Although I offer criticisms to Greenberg's analysis, it is important to salvage the arguments that are supported with breadth in her study. Greenberg (2008:38) connects the analysis of branding products to branding the city, and explains that urban branding is used to add value to the city – and as determined earlier, this is a layer of value. As an aestheticizing force, urban branding commoditizes cities and urban spaces and operates as a mask that covers up the neoliberal process behind branding as well as the material conditions and related social problems (i.e. poverty, homelessness) experienced by those who reside in the city (Greenberg, 2008:31-204). The masking capabilities of urban branding should be held at the forefront of any urban branding study because it is a continuous reminder of the potentially harmful effects of urban branding. The political-economy viewpoint is a theoretical paradigm that is critical of the political and economic implications of branding as a means of creating an unequal society; however, it does not offer a complete analysis and explains brands in primarily symbolic terms such as logos, slogans, and images. The paradigm is incomplete in claims regarding the roles of consumers and producers; that is, it fails to acknowledge that branding is multifaceted and that different viewpoints are needed to understand brands as complex media objects. Other viewpoints include assessments of how brands are loosely governed, that brands are co-created through a two-way asymmetrical flow of information, the discursive characteristics of branding, as well as the entanglement between brands and geography. These other perspectives assess brands and society holistically, and by doing so, they include evaluations of culture, history, images, meaning, and events such as festivals, which illustrate that a particular space may share

multiple meanings and branded identities. Therefore, the political-economy viewpoint tends to define brands in unilateral terms, as top-down and imposed upon society, with the focus on their political-economic consequences. Therefore this perspective is ultimately incomplete.

### *Post-structuralist Accounts*

Critical, post-structuralist perspectives offer a more substantiated and multi-dimensional view of the brand as a complex market cultural form. This branding theory was developed by key proponent Celia Lury (2004) and has been further elaborated by Adam Arvidsson (2006) and Liz Moor (2007). Post-structuralist branding theory offers a complete analysis and definition of a brand that explains its association with time, space, place and everyday social relations. This theory departs from recognizing brands as simply representations, and instead brings *information* and *objects* into relation with one another and exposes brands as hubs for interaction. The brand is an informational object that transmits *and* receives data. Post-structuralist branding theory defines brands as new media objects that act as interfaces in the patterning, integration and exchange of information; these informational exchanges contribute to a brand's co-creation and co-performance (Lury, 2004:1-51).

Unlike the political-economy perspective that observes brands as the product of a top-down and dominant dispersion of information, post-structuralist branding theory accepts brands as sites of information that involves exchanges among *consumers* as well as between *consumers* and *producers*. The latter conceptualization explains brands as co-generated by a number of subjective sites of knowledge within social relations. Lury (2004:7-51) claims that brands are 'the basis of two-way exchanges' of information and emphasizes that it is through these dynamic and yet asymmetrical flows of information that the brand, its meaning, image and value are co-produced.

Arvidsson (2006:82-94 & 129-130) adds to Lury's contributions by discussing how brand managers regulate the image of the brand using a Foucauldian mode of governance over the brand and its users. Arvidsson (2006:74) explains that this type of governance does not directly 'give orders' for a pattern; rather, it provides an ambience whereby 'freedom is likely to evolve in particular ways' (74). Brand management provides a particular framework and context for the identity, meaning, and value of a brand to evolve in a particular fashion; however, this method does not impose these actions directly upon consumers. This gives the consumer a greater role in the co-construction of the brand; the brand provides the context for how consumption occurs, and is entangled with the experience of the consumer (Arvidsson, 2006:8). For example, Arvidsson (2006) states, 'consumption should be understood as a constructive practice by means of which the consumer produces his or her self, through more or less intimate liaisons with different products' (56). This explains how the consumer is intimately involved in the co-construction and co-performance of the brand, its meaning, value, and image, as well as how brands contribute to the shaping of consumption patterns and consumer experiences.

This branding theory does not directly include urban branding analyses; however, it does assess brandscapes and place-branding, which are part of urban branding. Authors of post-structuralist branding theory explain how brandscapes are produced through the construction and management of a space to offer an experience that contributes to a brand's value and meaning (Lury, 2004:40; Arvidsson, 2006:67; Moor, 2007:88). For instance, in urban branding, a brand's value and meaning is the result of the cultural capital to project an 'urban habitus' which is performed in response to the 'built environment and other mechanisms,' such as websites and leisure infrastructure (Moor, 2007:75). The representation of the urban brand is produced, in part, by various social actors' cultural and social attributes that derive from varying types of

capital. The actors exchange this information, as well as the meaning that is created through the object(s) of the brand. The information that is traded is entangled with the urban brand and the surrounding geography, and the brand evolves through interactions with the material and immaterial properties of the loosely governed environment that make up a particular setting. The design, layout, and operation of the space is managed in order to provide a particular ambiance to produce desired brand meanings and to increase the brand's value.

Post-structural branding theory diverges from political-economy approaches in a number of ways. In particular, it views brands as multi-dimensional, considering the relational, material and spatial dimensions of brands rather than focusing mainly on their symbolic dimensions. Furthermore, it offers a view of the brand as open-ended: as something that opens onto and implicates consumption and broader environments. In this way it places more emphasis on *co-creation*, which includes the active involvement of consumers in the generation of brand image and value. Post-structural branding theory, moreover, argues that the consumption of brands is intrinsic to the production of everyday life, which occurs through the construction of branded space that contributes to lifestyle and consumption patterns (Lury, 2004; Zukin, 1998:832). By synthesizing these two critical approaches to branding, my conceptual framework enables a holistic examination, positing questions about the implications of brands. It is also informed about the role of brands as informational objects and how they contribute to everyday practices, performances and attributes of space and social life.

To fully understand urban brands and branding, it is important to incorporate critical geography perspectives regarding branding. *Branded-geography* is the term I use to refer to what Pike (2011:8-9; 2009:619-622) describes as the entanglement of brands and geographies. Pike (2011:8-9; 2009:619-622) explains that brands are entangled with geographical knowledge



and geographical space, which has ‘spatial associations and connotations that inescapably intertwine brands and the meaning-making of branding for goods, services, knowledges, spaces and places’ (9). This entanglement is illustrated through New York City’s I♥NY campaign and the aestheticization of Times Square into a cityscape; here the two concepts are brought into chorus (Harris, 2011:189). In this example, there is a brand, I♥NY, and there is geographical space, Times Square. By stripping the brand and geographical space down to their qualitative properties, it is evident that an element of the brand is geographical, and that an element of geography includes branding. This connects concepts from geography to a branding analysis and it reveals that brands are made of up geographical qualities, such as identity, meaning, culture, and knowledge. Although masked by their conventional conceptualizations in everyday analyses, the two concepts in this analysis are inseparable and complement one another in the practices of inscribing urban space with images, identities, and narratives. For instance, geography can be the source of the culture and identity that makes up the urban brand.

The broader connection between brands and geographies provides the ability to assess the informational and discursive components of the brand, including its ability to interact with, produce, and disperse spatialized narratives of physical locations (Jensen, 2007:217). The narrative of place, whether inherent to the space or produced through branding coalitions, is an essential asset to urban brand identity and is a qualitative property of geographical location. Brands and geographies are indivisible and enter a dynamic relationship contributing to both the physical construction of space and to the construction of a space’s identity. This framework is useful in my analysis of PSF and the DTES because it acknowledges the significance of a location, such as the history and narrative that is attached to space, and how this is entangled with the images that inform an urban brand.

### *Understanding Brands in Relation to a Theory of Urban Space*

The discussion of theory pertaining to urban branding frequently refers to the configuration and re-imaging of urban space. Thus, a discussion is called for about the theory of urban space. This project relies heavily on theoretical contributions about space from Lefebvre (1991). Lefebvre (1991:27) developed a critical analysis of the social production of space in which he concluded that space is a social construct and that social space is a social product. He also argued that social space is connected with mental and physical space, and when analyzing space it is important to assess the abstraction of space as well as the geography and social history of that space (Lefebvre, 1991:27). Lefebvre (1991:46) discusses spaces as representational, arguing that space is produced and that its production deals with history, reality, and social relations. In his discussion about representations of space, Lefebvre (1991) states, ‘representations of space are certainly abstract, but they also play a part in social and political practice’ (41). This illustrates how the production of space is connected to the geography, history, politics, economics, experiences, and fluid definitions of a location, which all pertain to brands and branding.

Attoh (2011) builds upon Lefebvre and explains that because space is a social product, those who live in urban spaces have ‘the right to inhabit the city, the right to produce urban life on new terms, and the right [of inhabitants] to remain unalienated from urban life’ (674). This viewpoint argues that residents of a city also have rights to housing, safety, ‘public participation in urban design’, communal aesthetics and rights against property laws (Attoh, 2011:674). Attoh (2011) concludes, ‘the right to the city can equally be a right to collective power and a right against unjust collective decisions’ (677). Although this does not offer an in-depth and full analysis of the right to space or the city, these notions of rights and space relate to this project’s arguments and analyses about the contradictory effects of festivals and urban branding.

Particular attention is paid to the potential for social and cultural displacement within the DTES by invoking the Japantown brand without inclusive action for Indigenous persons, the area's current primary residents and occupants, and an accurate historical account of Japanese Canadians. Each of these groups has experiences, socio-spatial meanings, narratives, histories and connections to this location, and each have a right to how this space is represented. Finally, and in regard to space, Miriam Greenberg (2008:251) asks the question, 'who has a right to the image of the city, and, with it, to a shared vision of the city's future?' It is this question that inspires the critical analysis of branded space within this project, and its aim to expand upon the literature about space by highlighting that urban branding is an important topic within modern urban renewal strategies because it can lead to social and physical displacement, the exploitation and misrepresentation of groups, and alter both physical and social landscapes.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter has outlined various perspectives regarding urban branding, festivals, and space. Urban branding is accompanied by the progressing neoliberal world with a focus on the expansion of profits. It is associated with urban renewal and development, creating zones of consumption that are attractive to both residents and tourists. Branded urban spaces facilitate both economic growth and urban revitalization; however, urban branding can lead to social inequalities, such as social displacement, as well as create unjust and exclusive brand images. On the contrary, branding can be harnessed to resist these dominant, and imposed, images and representations of space developed by city planners, entrepreneurs, and branding coalitions. This is evident in counter-branding, which promotes just and inclusive urban brands that more accurately represent the occupants of an area, as well as the identity, meaning, and narrative of space that is perceived by past and current residents. Festivals and branding are related in the

(re)development and (re)imaging of urban space. A festival is an urban branding vehicle and can assist in inscribing a geographical location with a branded identity. Festivals are culturally dense and are a valuable resource in place-making and place-branding. The instrumental uses of festivals and their cultural characteristics have shown that they reimage urban space and create unique and distinct zones of consumption. Thus, it is important to look at the entanglement between festivals and urban branding, and how the two are related in the completeness of an ambience.

This chapter has also proposed the theoretical context for this project. It introduces critical branding theory and synthesizes political-economy, post-structuralist, cultural, and geographical branding perspectives. Each viewpoint offers its own critical and unique assessment of branding. The political-economy perspective is critical of the negative effects of branding and demonstrates how brands mask social inequalities, are exploitative of the city and its residents, and regularly impose exclusive and unjust urban visions. The post-structuralist perspective introduces new ideas of what a brand is and defines a brand as a complex media object that is co-created through interactions between consumers, as well as between producers and consumers. This paradigm suggests that brands are loosely governed in order to maintain a positive image, and therefore, a brand is a fluid and dynamic object where meaning, image, and definition are relative to time and space. The cultural and geographical analyses of branding point towards branded-geography, and illustrate how there is an entanglement between brands and geography. This is an important assessment of the role of brands within social relations because it emphasizes the capacity that location has in defining brand identity. This viewpoint demonstrates how brands can be harnessed to resist imposed and unjust representations of urban space through the use of counter-branding. Additionally, it reveals the connection between

festivals and urban branding. Lastly, space is a concept discussed throughout this project, and it is important to consider the connection between space and branding. This will be evident in the discussion regarding who has precedence, if anyone, over the ways that particular spaces are reimaged, represented and branded. The ideas of space are presented throughout the discussion of PSF and the DTES, and engages a critical discussion about who is being presented in the reimagining of the DEOD, how these groups are being (re)presented, and explores what constitutes as a just and inclusive identity of urban space.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### *Introduction*

This study used qualitative methodologies that included participant observation, qualitative semi-structured interviews, and archival/document research. These qualitative methodologies have been used in similar urban branding studies. Catungal et al. (2009) used these methodologies in their urban branding research on Toronto's Liberty Village, Johansson (2012:3615) used participant observation and interviews in a study on place branding, and Johansson and Kociatkiewicz (2011:398) used participant observation, media coverage and documentation in their study on city festivals and urban branding. Ferdinand and Williams (2013:205) used archival data to gather the origins, history, and significance of festivals in their study, which provided them with a holistic understanding about the connections between festivals, location, and culture. Holstein and Gubrium (2005:483) suggest that a qualitative investigation will produce a richly detailed description about how experiences are socially constructed. This project investigated how PSF and the reimagining of space are connected with experiences in and of a space, and how this is co-constructed through the festival and social interaction.

Furthermore, by using three forms of methodological inquiry I was able to triangulate my data. In other words, by gathering data and analyzing it from three different perspectives, I was able to reinforce the validity and reliability of my research findings (Singleton and Straits, 2010:431-433). Baxter and Eyles (1997:514) state that triangulation is 'one of the most powerful techniques for strengthening credibility' and when the convergence of multiple sources produces similar findings, the integrity of those results is reinforced. The use of three methodologies enabled me to cross reference information, it also allowed me to have a broader scope of the complex situation in Vancouver's DTES, and to understand how PSF has participated in the

rebranding, reimagining and commemoration of this particular urban space. Qualitative methodologies were useful modes of inquiry in this study and produced a holistic understanding about how a festival, such as PSF, has inscribed the DTES with Japanese Canadian culture, identity, and narrative. These qualitative inquiries captured the issues and tensions between PSF and the DTES community, as well as the concerns about rebranding the DTES as Japantown. Although these methods were useful, there were a few problems and issues that occurred throughout the data collection and analysis phases that will be discussed below. Furthermore, I spent four months living in Vancouver to conduct research for this project. During this period I attended PSF, volunteered in the DTES, familiarized myself with the space I was investigating, attended community meetings about urban renewal in the DTES, and participated in the Japanese Canadian and DTES communities. Lastly, these methodological inquiries assisted me in developing a frame of the DTES in order to understand the social justice, moral, and ethical concerns regarding the reimagining and rebranding of urban space.

### *Interviewing*

I conducted twelve interviews with past and current members of the Powell Street Festival Society, past and current Powell Street Festival volunteers, members of affiliate and partner organizations of the Powell Street Festival, as well as others involved in Vancouver's Japanese Canadian community. All interviewees are residents in, or near Vancouver, and had attended PSF several times. The ages of interview respondents varied from their early-to-mid thirties to older seniors. The interviewees consisted of five women and seven men. Some had been involved in the Japanese Canadian community prior to the first festival, and were also a part of organizing the initial festival. Meanwhile, others were less involved in the festival; however, those who were less involved in the organization of the festival had either attended or had been

part of the broader Vancouver Japanese Canadian community for a number of years. Due to the project's need for in-depth experiences and acute knowledge of PSF, purposeful and referral sampling was used for recruiting interview subjects (Singleton and Straits, 2010:177-178). The ethical requirements of this project prohibited the investigator from directly contacting persons of interest to interview. To overcome this obstacle, Powell Street Festival Society (PSFS) was contacted and they were able to anonymously recommend a number of the festival's key volunteers and persons from the festival's partner organizations through email. PSFS, on my behalf, asked a number of people if they would be willing to be interviewed about the history and current status of PSF, as well as the relation between the festival and Vancouver's DTES. Additionally, the first interview respondents were asked if they could anonymously contact other persons whom they felt would be important to the study – this resembles a form of snowball sampling, which is a category of purposeful sampling. Those who were well connected to the Japanese Canadian community, and PSF's community, passed on the project's information. Twelve interview subjects were contacted and interviewed over the course of five weeks. This method of sampling was chosen because a specific population was targeted for this project, that is, a group who had knowledge regarding PSF, its history, and who could also discuss the DTES. A weakness of this sampling style is that it may have been affected by self-selection bias, or be regarded as convenience sampling; however, the population of potential interview subjects is relatively small. The small population was accompanied with problems of having people agree and commit to being interviewed.

Due to the relatively small population size, and the method of sampling performed, there was concern regarding the ability to find diversity in the responses. To overcome this problem it meant recruiting participants from a variety of PSF's partner organizations, or who had served on



different festival committees, as well as those who had been involved in a higher-level capacity with the festival during different eras. In order to achieve this, I targeted subjects who were festival volunteers, PSFS board members, from PSF partner organizations, and Japanese Canadian elders (some of whom had been involved since the festival's beginning). The seniors were an important population to reach because they were able to provide vital information regarding the history of the festival. All interview subjects had considerable knowledge regarding both the festival and the Japanese Canadian community. Through a diverse pool of interview subjects, I was provided with data that portrayed different opinions, and information from different time periods. This contributed to a holistic understanding of how the festival had reimaged Oppenheimer Park and the DTES. One validity issue regarding the interview subjects is that DTES residents and members from the City of Vancouver Planning Department were not interviewed. Therefore, neither groups' opinions were represented in the interview data, nor this study for that matter. This is a weakness of this study, and had DTES residents been interviewed there would have been a stronger understanding of how the festival affects the local community, and how the local community receives the festival. The City of Vancouver Planning Department would have offered insight in how the City positions itself in commemorating, reimagining and revitalizing space. Fragments of information regarding these concerns were collected through PSF volunteers who were well connected with DTES residents and organizations, and who had attended Local Area Planning Process (LAPP) meetings that discussed the future of the DTES. The purpose of this project was to understand how PSF is implicated in the rebranding of the Oppenheimer District of the DTES, and to accomplish this, it was necessary to collect data that directly involved the festival. Therefore, the justification for why these interview subjects were

recruited is because they were, and are, connected intimately to PSF and they could provide the richest accounts of relevant information to answer this project's question.

The interviews were structured in order to gather particular data about PSF, its history, and how it has contributed to reimagining the DTES. The interviews asked questions about the importance of the festival to the Japanese Canadian community and the community's opinions about rebranding the area as Japantown. The interview schedule was comprised of open-ended questions, and was unstructured. I found this to be important because I was able to follow-up and probe interviewees about information that was not reflected in the interview questions. This style of interviewing collected personal experiences and opinions from the respondents, which is important information that close-ended or forced-choice question type interviews would not have collected (Van Den Hoonaard, 2012:75-79). I found that qualitative interviews were flexible and produced 'thick descriptions' about PSF and reimagining the DTES that were informed from the participants' perspective (Van Den Hoonaard, 2012:79). The use of semi-structured and open-ended interviews facilitated descriptive inquiries about PSF, the Japanese Canadian community, and their human rights struggle, activism, and opinions about Japantown (Van Den Hoonaard, 2012:90). The project demanded that a particular sub-population, Japanese Canadians and those involved with PSF, be interviewed and provided both reliable and valid information.

The interviews were conducted at the participants' office or home, and took between forty minutes to an hour and a half. The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed on the computer, coded by hand, and analyzed manually (Morse, 1994:29&37; Welsh, 2002:1-10; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996:27-52). Once the interviews were recorded, they were transferred to my private, and password protected computer. This corresponded with the ethical requirements for this study, protected the interview subjects' identity, and confirmed anonymity. After being

transferred to the computer, the interviews were transcribed with transcribing software and a transcribing pedal. This part of the interview phase was time consuming and labour intensive. The files were named based upon the interview date and interview respondents' initials, which helped to protect the anonymity of the respondent (Kirby and McKenna, 1989:132). Once transcribed, each interview transcript was reviewed with the audio in order to correct typing and interpretation errors. The interviews were reviewed three times each, which gave me the opportunity to become more familiar with the data and begin thinking about connections and emergent themes. After transcription was complete, the transcripts were sent for review to the respondents who selected this option on their interview consent form. Next, the interview transcripts were coded. The codes emerged from listening and reading through the transcriptions, simultaneously making notes, looking for connections, and afterwards, establishing possible themes. In the end, six themes surfaced and were used to code the interviews: 1) The festival's role in reimagining space (FR); 2) The festival's historical importance and significance to the Japanese Canadian community (FHC); 3) Opinions on naming and revitalizing the DTES as Japantown (NR); 4) Japanese Canadian's historical and cultural connection to, and role in, informing the narrative of place and space of the DEOD, and how this has changed over time (HNP); 5) The festival's relationship, connection, and conflict with the Downtown Eastside community (DE); and 6) Issues around human rights, social displacement, and social injustices (HR). For example, a section about the festival and reimagining space from interview number seven was coded FR-7, which indicates the code and the interview number. This coding schema and process are similar to the ideas that Kirby and McKenna (1989:135-137) posit about 'bibbits' and 'properties'. Kirby and McKenna (1989:135-137) define a bibbit as a passage of a transcript that is marked so it can be easily located, and properties as the theme or

identifier located in a bibbit. I felt that it was unnecessary to separate these two phases, and instead, I coded the passages based upon their relation to one of the six themes. After coding was complete, each interview was summarized. This process provided the opportunity to separate the interviews based upon each theme. New documents were produced that were compiled of information regarding each theme. This step made it easier to analyze the interview data based upon the themes, and the way they were coded meant that the original names of the interviewees were removed. The summaries, now organized by theme, were reviewed again to find subcategories amongst each theme and were again organized according to the information to be discussed in each chapter of the paper. Pseudonyms were used in this project, to keep track of the corresponding interviewee and her or his alias, an ‘identity file’ was created that marked the interview number, the respondent’s name, and his or her alias (Kirby and McKenna, 1989:131). Aliases were created for each interview respondent in order to comply with the project’s ethical requirements that requested the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. The interview phase of this project was both labour intensive and time consuming; however, the data collected and analyzed provided great insight into the personal opinions and experiences about PSF and rebranding the DTES.

### *Participant Observation*

I conducted a participant observation of the Powell Street Festival, the Oppenheimer District, and two ‘Japantown’ walking tours. For this portion of the investigation I used the ‘participant as observer’ strategy, and I was immersed in the social and physical setting of PSF and the DTES (Van Den Hoonaard, 2012:60). The participant observation enabled me to have a firsthand experience of the festival and the Oppenheimer District. This gave me the opportunity to assess how the festival operates, how it is configured, how it reimages and transforms the Oppenheimer

District, as well as how individuals in the community interact with the festival, and how the festival is a means for producing a cultural experience for an audience of festivalgoers. The walking tour provided me with a broader understanding of how the DTES is imaged with Japanese Canadian attributes, such as commemorative plaques on buildings in the area, which is the basis of the tour. I also participated in the festival's setup, and was present over the course of its two-day operation. Throughout this period, and on each walking tour, I made jottings about: the formation of the festival; how the festival was configured; the images that were presented, both at the festival and in the DEOD; how the local community responded to, and interacted with the festival; signage that was both permanent and temporary; and lastly, how the walking tours interactively and discursively reimage the DTES. I was able to observe how people interacted with the Japantown brand by attending the walking tours – titled as, 'Historic Japantown Walking Tour'. The information in the jottings was expanded upon when it was reviewed, and details were added because I did not have enough time to write everything down in length during the observation. Once the information was ready for analysis, I searched for themes and information about reimagining space. I found many similar themes to those found in the interview data and coded the participant observation notes with a similar coding schema to that used for the interviews. This way, I was able to compare information and organize similarities, which helped to shape my data analysis and presentation chapters.

In conclusion, by incorporating a participant observation in the data retrieval phase, I was able to participate in, and actively observe the culture, setting, and meaning-making that occurs throughout the festival and the landscape of the DTES (Wolcott, 1994:10). The purpose of the participant observation was to understand how culture is co-created in the day-to-day realities of social life. By using this methodology, I was able to record a lot of data that could be analyzed

later and used to inform an answer for the ways that PSF contributes to rebranding the DTES (Coffey et al., 2003:103&114; Beach, 2005:3-6). Once all the data was collected, the field notes were analyzed for patterns that were found in the interview and documentation phases in order to form a robust analysis about festivals, urban branding, and human rights.

### *Documentation/Archival Research*

I used document/archival research as a third methodology in order to create a contextual framework, and understanding, of the history and linkages between the DTES, the Oppenheimer District, and PSF. This process informed the analysis about the complex history of the DTES, and was critical for learning about the origins, changes, and purpose of PSF. Archival and document data was collected at the City of Vancouver Archives and the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre. This methodology was important in learning about the history of the DTES, such as the Japanese Village that was proposed in 1980, as well as the history of the Powell Street Festival, which was supposed to be a one-off as part of the Japanese Canadian Centennial Project in 1977. Few problems occurred throughout the document retrieval process. To find documents, relevant phrases were searched in the databases of both the City of Vancouver Archives and the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre. The phrases included, for example, 'Japantown', 'Powell Street', and 'Powell Street Festival'. Once relevant documents were located, they were requested and reviewed. Documents that provided information applicable to the project were digitized. This process involved taking pictures of each document with a digital camera and uploading the pictures to a computer. Each document's location, name, box number, containing folder and other important information were recorded. Once uploaded, the document pictures were placed into a single folder with the appropriate citation information as the folder's filename. The images from each file were later compiled into

single PDF documents that included a citation page with the citation details that were provided by each institution. Digitizing the documents meant that I had my own copies of the original information and that I could review them at anytime, as often as I wanted, and I could also highlight and mark the digital pages with notes and comments. One problem with the document retrieval phase was that an overwhelming amount of data was retrieved. I collected over one hundred documents, each ranging from one page to over four hundred. It was time consuming to sort through the multiple documents and to separate the most relevant and informative documents from the others. The positive aspect of this is that I had a lot of document data to inform this study and could contrast and compare the document data with the participant observation and interview data. One factor that helped mitigate issues with sorting through the document data was that when I found documents that I felt would be extremely important to the study I made a note about that specific document in my project journal. This made it easy to relocate these documents. In the end, I found the document data to be vital for learning about the history of the DTES and PSF, as well as the various proposals and changes in both the Oppenheimer District and the festival.

### *Rigour*

The use of qualitative methods needs justification and the issues about creditability, validity and reliability should be addressed. Baxter and Eyles (1997:506) argue that qualitative methods need to establish rigour, which they define as the embracement of validity, reliability, objectivity, as well as academic integrity, responsibility, and honesty. This study used triangulation to strengthen these issues with regards to data gathering, analysis, and presentation, and although multiple methods may mean triangulation, it does not necessarily mean rigour (Baxter and Eyles, 1997:508). In order to establish rigour, a study can offer thick descriptions that *show* rather than

*tell*, and they can also provide information about, and rational for, the interview sample and size (Tracy, 2010:843; Baxter and Eyles, 1997:508). This study has stated that it used purposeful sampling, and in particular, reference sampling was used to recruit twelve interview respondents who were determined to be appropriate to the topic in question. Although it was a relatively small sample size, rigour was met on the basis of two items Baxter and Eyles (1997:513) posit: ‘rich cases’ and ‘redundancy’. The population in question is relatively small because there are not many people who live in Vancouver that are directly connected to PSF, and who have been intimately involved with the festival throughout various time periods over the past thirty-seven years. The subjects interviewed were extremely knowledgeable about the topic and they provided extremely rich data that offered various opinions and crucial information about PSF. That said, project themes and patterns began to emerge after about eight interviews, and responses started to become repetitive. Thus, a few more interviews were conducted with the same results, and as a researcher, I felt that the answers to the particular questions being asked were becoming redundant. This was later confirmed in the analysis of the interview data; and therefore, I argue that ‘redundancy’ was met.

Another concern regarding rigour is reflexivity, in particular, self-reflexivity. Self-reflexivity is recognizing one’s own shortcomings as a researcher, and is the ability to achieve authenticity and honesty with oneself (Tracy, 2010:842). In order to achieve this, I acknowledged that I was unfamiliar with the territory and community that was being investigated. I was also self-aware about being a young white male, who is in a privileged position within Canadian society, whereby I have not experienced the challenges of racism, poverty, social displacement or sexism on a daily basis. Although I was aware of this, I cannot say for certain how it may have affected my data analysis and presentation. In an attempt to



overcome these concerns, I made a conscious effort in recognizing these different positions during my interviews and data presentation. I tried to put myself in the other's shoes, and understand, with the information provided, their viewpoints, their life experiences, their situation, and how this was their story. I found that the use of quotations in this project was useful because it presents the participants' story and their original opinions, rather than my own interpretation of the data. This was a constant challenge, and by being self-reflexive, I believe that a more honest and authentic research study has been presented because the voice of those studied has been emphasized. Rigour is an important part of research, and a research study can establish rigour by presenting the processes and problems throughout the data collection, analysis, and presentation phases. This study has presented as much about these processes as necessary in the time and space provided, therefore, rigour is established through informing the reader about how the data was collected, analyzed and presented.

### *Reflexivity*

In the last section I discuss my acknowledgment of being a white male of privilege. In this section I will comment on aspects of positionality, and how my theoretical perspective and relationship to PSF, the DTES, and theory exists in the presentation of this study. The theoretical perspective of this project argues that different paradigms are synthesized, however, each theory is outlined and the presentation of a full theoretical synthesis is not necessarily clear. This is problematic because it leaves holes in, and room for criticisms of, the theoretical framework developed and used for analysis. As the researcher, I engage in the analysis of PSF and the rebranding of the DTES by using ideas from each of these theories and although these different theoretical perspectives are presented, my theoretical position leans towards post-structuralist and geographical perspectives regarding brands and branding. This is evident in my

arguments regarding the co-production and co-construction of culture, festivals, and the branding of urban space. As I argue in the theoretical section of this study, I believe that political-economy branding theory is an important contributor to branding analyses because of its critical engagement in the unjust and exploitative concerns of urban branding. As a researcher, I acknowledge that my personal theoretical perspective shapes, in part, the analysis, findings, and presentation of this project, which is skewed by my personal fondness of post-structuralist and geographical branding theories.

As an outsider to the Japanese Canadian, PSF, and DTES communities I argue that I present the project's findings as the story of those who are being researched. Although I attempt to achieve this through the use of thick descriptions, I am also aware that I have a unique relationship with this community through affiliated research projects that are partnered with PSFS and other DTES and Japanese Canadian organizations. Additionally, thesis committee members are associated with these communities; for instance, Dr. Masuda has a lengthy relationship with members of both of these communities and has assisted in introducing and connecting me with members of these groups. In ways that are undetermined, this affects the manner in which members of these groups have built individual relationships with myself, and most likely has increased my ability in accessing these groups and gaining knowledge about the festival and the DTES. Thus, the way that I present and frame these groups, and the rebranding of the DTES via the presence of PSF, is to some extent a result of relational experiences that stem from my unique introduction and relationship with these communities and the space of the DTES.

## *Conclusion*

In conclusion, I note that qualitative methods grasp a deeper understanding about the intimate processes involved in social events, such as festivals and community, rather than quantitative methods. This is because qualitative methods provide detailed descriptions about the research participants and what they feel is important in their everyday life (Van Den Hoonaard, 2012:2-3).

Additionally, a participant observation provides a first hand account about, and real-life experience of, the location, event, and community under investigation. As an investigator I was able to see, touch, and feel the data rather than observe it from a second or third account.

Archival and document retrieval provided me with the history of both the DEOD and the festival, which was important in understanding their present day configuration. Each of these methods has informed the ways that festivals reimagine, rebrand, and alter urban space, in other words, they have provided the information necessary to answer the questions this project has posited.

## CHAPTER 4: WHAT'S IN A FESTIVAL?

### *Introduction*

An analysis of the Powell Street Festival (PSF) in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES) provides an excellent illustration of how geography, history, and the narrative of space is maintained, revitalized, and co-produced through cultural events such as festivals. My investigation is focused on determining how festivals contribute to (re)imaging and (re)branding urban space; however, it is also a sociological investigation that assesses the importance of festivals in society. This chapter presents and analyzes data regarding PSF, particularly the significance of the location of the festival, and the importance of the festival to the Japanese Canadian community. This chapter's analysis is guided by C. Wright Mills' (1959:6) 'sociological imagination'. Mills (1959:6) argued that 'no social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history and of their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey'. Therefore, by incorporating how the intersections of individual biography and history construct social realities, this study will determine the importance and merit that festivals, such as PSF, have in contributing to the continuance, revitalization, and celebration of marginalized social groups, such as Japanese Canadians.

PSF has existed for more than thirty-seven years since its inception in 1977 as part of the Japanese Canadian Centennial Project – a celebration marking the hundredth anniversary since Manzo Nagano arrived in Canada – the first Japanese person to immigrate to Canada. Since the festival's introduction, there have been numerous changes in its co-ordination, board, and programming, including a major shift in the early 2000s from being a volunteer run festival to having year-round staff members, and becoming a professional arts and culture festival.

Throughout these transitions, other elements have largely remained the same. These include the

location of the festival, which has taken place at Oppenheimer Park in the Downtown Eastside Oppenheimer District (DEOD) since 1977, with the exception of one year in the late 2000s when the park was undergoing renovations, and in 2014 when the festival chose to setup on the streets of the DTES in order to not interfere with local protesters using the park. Authors who study festivals note that particular social and cultural attributes of a specific group are determining factors for the festivals existence and presence in particular locations (Gotham, 2005; Johansson & Kociatkiewicz, 2011; Karpinska-Krakowiak, 2009; Waterman, 1998). Before analyzing how festivals (re)image space and how they relate to the communities and residents in the areas they occur, it is important to examine their context: *Why does a festival take place in a particular location? What is the historical significance of that space and place? What importance does the festival have for the community it targets?* These questions outline the discussion of this chapter, where PSF's identity and importance to the community will be explained, and this will illustrate how the displacement, dispersion and attempted eradication of a community has been overcome and, instead, show how an annual cultural event has invigorated that same community. The significance of place will be analyzed, which refers to the emotional and sentimental relationship between a geographical space and a group, community, or individual. The importance of the festival is that it has given the Japanese Canadian community time and space to celebrate, whereby the community is brought together for a social gathering and is a means for group interaction and development.

### *The Historical Significance of a Place*

The very proposition of place includes the notion of a geographical location, and when geographical locations are inhabited, cultural associations and social relations are forged. An analysis of PSF fosters questions about the cultural associations and social relations between the

PSF community and the DEOD, in other words, the relationship between the festival's community and the place it is located. This includes, but is not limited to, questioning why the festival takes place at Oppenheimer Park and not elsewhere, as well as what importance Oppenheimer Park has in the identity and narrative of the festival. In turn, it should be asked how PSF has contributed to the ongoing narrative and identity of the park, and how this has contributed to an ongoing connection to the area, for both the past, present, and future PSF community.

To start, this particular geographical location is historically significant to the Japanese Canadian community because it was a central location where many Japanese immigrants began to settle in the late 1800s and early 1900s. This area was one of the primary locations where the first generations of Japanese Canadians originated. Although issues regarding referencing and potentially naming the DEOD as Japantown will be addressed in another chapter, a Japanese Canadian interview respondent named Chris<sup>1</sup> who is a member of a Japanese Canadian organization affiliated with PSFS (Powell Street Festival Society), explained the importance and historical significance that the Oppenheimer District has for the Japanese Canadian community:

[Japantown] has a number of different connotations to people... For some people it reminds them of the time that they were ghettoized in that area. It wasn't that they wanted to live there necessarily, it just happened that that was the only place they could live and that's the place where they could afford to live, and that's where all the services and so forth existed. ...But economic necessities and various other things on the Japanese community to some extent, dictated where their concentration would be. The Hastings Saw Mill was a big big draw in terms of low-level labour... The Japanese couldn't get any of the higher-level jobs so they were labourers and labourers that worked in those sawmills. And if you worked on those sawmills you didn't want to have to travel a long distance away to get there, so that's where you lived. So it wasn't as if somehow or other they decided, "Ah, we need to create Japantown and this is where we are going to live and... it is going to have a culture and everything associated with it". It was just something that evolved because of economic circumstances, so it wasn't some developer came in and said they wanted to create a Japantown, what it is, is that there is

a whole series of different individuals that just chose to live there for various reasons, then you get a critical mass then others will come.

Chris's commentary highlights the existence of the pre-war Japanese Canadian community in the DTES and provides an explanation regarding how the development of the community at that time was organically produced and was guided through economic, racial, and social boundaries, rather than forced by the interests of developers.

The DEOD is thus a historic landmark for Japanese Canadians; however, the connection between geography, historical significance, and narrative of place is enhanced due to the forced removal of Japanese and Japanese Canadians from Canada's west coast in 1942 during the Second World War. In 1942 the Canadian government interned those who were linked ancestrally to Japan and living on the west coast of British Columbia. The process of internment included the confiscation and sale of property as well as the displacement and forced removal of Japanese Canadians whereby many were incarcerated in internment camps that were located in the interior of British Columbia (Finlay and Sprague, 2000:425-426). Although 1945 marked the end of the Second World War and culmination of internment, the racially marginalized group was not allowed to return within one hundred miles of Canada's west coast until after 1949 (Finlay and Sprague, 2000:425-426). The effects of the social and physical displacement of the community are present in the connection that the current Japanese Canadian community has to the DTES. By looking at the intersections of history and individual biography, the history, social values and experiences of the Japanese Canadian community in Vancouver become tangible. This informs an understanding about the current status of the community, for instance their group identity, and more so, their geographical and social connections to the DEOD.

The multi-generational connection of the Japanese Canadian community to the DEOD is noticeable in the discourse and terminology that individuals use to refer to the park and its

particular surroundings. Powell Street is the principle thoroughfare of the pre-war community, and is used as the reference to the DEOD by the pre-war and post-war Japanese Canadian community. Just as their ancestors referred to the area as Powell Street, and Oppenheimer Park as Powell Grounds (or the Japanese alternative Poweru Gai, also seen Paueru-gai), the contemporary community references the area based upon these terms rather than the Downtown Eastside, the Oppenheimer District, or Oppenheimer Park. This is shown in a partial interview transcription retrieved from the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre's archives, where one Japanese Canadian explains how Powell Street was vital to the community before the war. This individual depicts 'Powell Street Grounds' as being where things happened, such as sport days for school<sup>2</sup>. The individual further discussed how there are a lot of memories at Oppenheimer Park, which, at that time, was called Powell Street Grounds or Powell Grounds<sup>3</sup>. These terms, however, were noted to be relevant to the immediate context, as many interviewees for this project explained that if they were speaking to someone who was not Japanese Canadian they would refer to the area as the Downtown Eastside, and the park as Oppenheimer Park. Nevertheless, the use of historic terminology feeds the ongoing narrative and connection between that geographical space and the Japanese Canadian community.

Thus, the location of the festival is directly connected to Japanese Canadian origins and histories of displacement in Vancouver. This is documented in literature about the festival, and discussed by many interviewees. A memo about the fifth annual PSF (1981) stated the location of the festival is at 'the historic Powell Grounds (Oppenheimer Park) which has been the heart of the Japanese Canadian Community', illustrating the discourse that is used to refer to the area, and how it is also used for the reasoning and justification of the festival's location<sup>4</sup>. In addition, an article about the festival written in 1986 explains that Oppenheimer Park was chosen as the



site of the festival when it originated in 1977 because the location was the ‘original site of settlement in Vancouver’ for Japanese and Japanese Canadians<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, in an interview with Susanne, a Japanese Canadian, she explained that it is important that PSF remain at ‘Powell Grounds’ saying, ‘yes, from my point of view it is... because there is a historic connection and I think it’s unique and it’s one weekend... I think it’s just great that the park is being used’. The importance of this connection is depicted in Ryan’s interview when he said, ‘the feeling really of the festival, um, in its roots I think are in Oppenheimer Park. I can’t see it [Laughter] being anywhere else, and it’s where it belongs’. Ryan added, ‘that memory of that physical space that we call Oppenheimer Park is very much alive in people’s minds’. These responses demonstrate the importance of the location for the festival, in that the DEOD is associated with ideas about the community’s roots, origins and heritage. There appears to be an active and ongoing sentimental attachment based upon the pre-war connection to the area, a time before the community was dispersed across the Canadian landscape.

The festival uses a space that is both historically relevant and significant to the Japanese Canadian community. The Japanese Canadian community are the main supporters and key stakeholders of the festival, and they have an intimate connection to the DEOD area because it was once occupied by their ancestors. By returning to the DEOD, it becomes the spot where the cultural and social narratives of the community are developed and play part in co-creating the identity of PSF. In this particular case, it is history, biography and space that preceded the existence of PSF, and the festival itself is a manifestation and celebration of the past, and now, present Japanese Canadian community. This is clear in the responses from two Japanese Canadian elders who were involved in the community prior to the start of the festival. They explain that coming back to the DEOD is meaningful for a community that was marginalized.

This meaning existed when the festival began in 1977 and still exists today. For instance, the elder named Michelle said, ‘I mean part of the charm of the Powell Street Festival is the neighbourhood, you know, is that historical connection and that you can take people and walk them around and say, “this is where this happened, and this used to be...”’ Jack, another Japanese Canadian elder, said in his interview that the art exhibit and book, *A Dream of Riches*<sup>6</sup> (1978), as well as the Japanese Canadian Centennial Project<sup>7</sup>, initiated new excitement for the Japanese Canadian community. Jack discussed the importance of Oppenheimer Park as the site of the festival:

It was a celebration, what better way than to have this huge party on Powell Grounds, which was a perfect expression of the joy of what we were all feeling in the discovery of our history, the discovery of ourselves and forming community. And secondly, it was a political statement too, and we were very aware of that political statement because it was saying, “Okay, we’re back”... ..In coming back to Powell Grounds we were saying, “Oh, we have survived, another generation is back here, and we’re back, we are proud of our history and you have failed in your attempts to destroy us.” And so the festival was an expression of those two elements.

Jack’s comments emphasize the importance of historical connections, and how returning and reclaiming the area was uplifting for a community that was physically and socially displaced. The festival is active in reclaiming Oppenheimer Park and the DEOD for the Japanese Canadian community. By returning to the area the festival promotes a sense of belonging for the community, and marks a specific location with sentimental attachments such as it being the origin and home of the community. Although very few Japanese Canadians still live in the area, they celebrate in the space, which is emotionally inscribed with the identity and legacy of the community.

Sentiments regarding this connection to the DEOD are also found in literature and archival material about the festival. For instance, an interview transcript about the festival found

in the Nikkei National Museum's archives demonstrates the importance for the festival and the festival's community to stay in the DEOD, and at Oppenheimer Park. In this transcription, a Japanese Canadian individual explained that if the festival was removed from Oppenheimer Park few (people) would remember the area and what happened there, stating, 'having it there brings the younger generations back to that area, so it needs to be recreated in a certain sense'<sup>8</sup>. A document outlining the festival from PSF's 1988 Administrative Records stated that the site of the festival was chosen 'because of the historical roots of Japanese Canadians in the Powell Street area', and that the original aim of the festival was to bring Japanese Canadians back to the area because it is important for 'keeping an "historical continuity" for Japanese Canadians on Powell Street'<sup>9</sup>. The festival and its community have a historically significant connection to the DTES, and in particular, Oppenheimer Park and its immediate surroundings. This connection is the basis for the Japanese Canadian community's persistent social and cultural narrative that has evolved into one facet of the DEOD's identity. The result of the festival and its location is new phenomena within a particular space, this facilitates an ongoing connection between the younger generations of the Japanese Canadian community and the DEOD – it continues to be a place where memories are formed.

The location of a festival is sometimes guided by the infrastructure that surrounds a location, while others, such as PSF, are geographically located based upon history, cultural associations, and social relations. The Downtown Eastside, particularly the area surrounding Oppenheimer Park, has an importance to and for the Japanese Canadian community. By celebrating the festival in this area the community actively engages in reclaiming space where a connection is both felt and viewed to be of importance. By doing so, the previously stigmatized community overcomes issues of discrimination, and moreover, narrates an identity of space as

belonging to a community that had once occupied a geographical location prior to its displacement.

### *A Festival's Importance for Community*

Location is an important part of PSF, however, the festival itself is monumental to the Japanese Canadian community. It illustrates the reclamation of space, and the revitalization of a fragmented and dispersed community. Additionally, the festival contributes to the ongoing life of the Japanese Canadian community. This section will illustrate the importance of PSF to the Japanese Canadian community, answering the question: *What importance does the festival have for the community it targets?* In particular, it will discuss how arts and cultural festivals can be forceful in reviving marginalized groups, bringing communities together and promoting solidarity via celebratory contexts. This section will also touch upon the importance of PSF in generating revenue for multiple organizations within its immediate social sphere.

PSF began as a one-off during the 1977 Japanese Canadian Centennial Project when a newer Japanese immigrant who wanted to have a matsuri, which is a major Japanese celebration, initially suggested the festival as part of the centennial project. Michelle mentioned in her interview that the initial proposition of having a festival was met with a lot of resistance from the first and second generation Japanese Canadians, who did not want to make a 'fuss' and draw attention to Japanese and Japanese Canadian people. The group was hesitant to celebrate their community and culture outwardly after the mistreatment they had experienced during and after interment. Despite these concerns, the festival was well received in its first year by the Japanese Canadian community; in fact, it was such a success that another festival was organized for the following year with the vision that it would become an annual event. Michelle also noted that the photo exhibit, *A Dream of Riches*, which opened just prior to, and continued during the first

festival, brought new life to the community; however, the exhibit did not compare to the excitement brought by the festival. Michelle also noted that, ‘this was everybody together, in one place, all at the same time... It was really exhilarating’. Moreover, archival documentation retrieved from the Nikkei National Museum revealed that the initial idea of the festival was to revive the Powell Street area; however, after the first three festivals (77-79) it was clear that this was an annual event by the Japanese Canadian community that opened their culture and strengthened their ‘own unique sense of identity’<sup>10</sup>. The effects of the festival continuously ripple throughout the Japanese Canadian community. This is illustrated in Chris’s interview when he stated:

The first centennial Powell Street Festival, and subsequent Powell Street Festivals are sort of an attestation that the Japanese community is back in the lower mainland... That despite all of the efforts to destroy it, and to disperse it, that many people have come back...

In particular, PSF was a means of overcoming many of the social and personal issues that multiple generations of Japanese Canadians felt due to consequences of internment. Ryan, a Japanese Canadian elder, believed that in order for the recognition and apology of Redress in 1988 to have taken place, the Japanese Canadian community needed to overcome the shame and hurtfulness imbued by internment. PSF was, and is, vital in celebrating being Japanese Canadian, and establishing pride and identity for those who are Japanese Canadian. Ryan stated:

There’s a fearfulness in, I think, both the Issei<sup>11</sup> and the Nisei<sup>12</sup> generations that had to be overcome before we could even think about the possibility of redressing the wrong that they had experienced, and part of redressing that wrong, I think, was to take pride in oneself and one’s culture, and that’s what Powell Street is about, is proclaiming that pride.

Furthermore, in an application made to document the festival from 1977-1991, it was argued that since the first PSF, the voice of the Japanese Canadian community grew with confidence and developed a political mind that spoke of the injustices that the community experienced<sup>13</sup>. This

indicates that the festival has its own unique place in the motion for Redress made by the Japanese Canadian community. The festival can be viewed as the soul of the community and central to shaping its identity. Reportedly, the festival attracts, on average, over ten thousand people to celebrate Japanese Canadian culture at Oppenheimer Park every year. Many view PSF as a resuscitating force for a community that was marginalized, displaced, and dispersed. It was pivotal in breathing new life into the community, and having that community reclaim its identity and pride. Therefore, festivals such as PSF are important cultural events that are a means for reconnecting communities and establishing solidarity for oppressed and fragmented groups.

The early years of PSF have demonstrated the power that festivals have in bringing communities together to celebrate culture. The festival has also shown that cultural celebrations bring overt excitement and energy to groups and festivalgoers. The discussion of community is central to the analysis of festivals, and thus, the effects that festivals have on the broader community are important to report. PSF provides a *space* that co-produces a zone of inclusion where those who are outside of the immediate community can join, learn, and engage in the community through a celebration that promotes a positive and socially inclusive environment.

For instance, Chris said:

Powell Street Festival provides an opportunity for a rather disparate community that is scattered throughout the area, with no major concentrations in any one particular area, to be able to come back and see each other and to meet... It is amazing how many people that you hadn't seen for more than a year or two to suddenly just bump into them at the Powell Street Festival... [PSF is important] to not only meet, but that sort of reknitting of parts of that community.

This is echoed in an interview with Darren, a middle aged Japanese Canadian, who explained that PSF is important to Japanese Canadian culture because it provides an opportunity for the community to get together and for people to come to the DEOD and learn about the history of

Japanese Canadians in the area, the pre-war community, and internment. Jack, a Japanese Canadian elder, mentioned a particular quotation from the book *Kikyo: Coming Home to Powell Street* (Wakayama, 1992), which details the history of the festival and includes a number of excerpts from interviews done with festivalgoers and DTES local residents. The quoted Japanese Canadian stated, ‘you bump into your old friends either at a funeral or at the Powell Street Festival’ (Wakayama, 1992:149). This quotation describes the commitment, heart, and passion felt by the community about the festival, equating it to the importance of attending an individual’s memorial. Bill, also a Japanese Canadian, said in his interview that the festival is ‘one of the few opportunities for the entire community to get together and cooperate and collaborate’. Bill noted:

Not to say that there aren’t issues, there are always issues that come up, but for the most part it’s pretty harmonious. I think it really brings people together and... The fact that it is in Oppenheimer Park, between Powell Street and Cordova, which was the heart of the Japanese community, it’s like coming home, they always say, “Coming home to Powell Street,” and you know I think that it really, there’s a sense of reclaiming the park, reclaiming the community just for a weekend. And uh you know people, sometimes you see, there’s people that you only see at Powell Street, you don’t see them the rest of the year. So I think that it’s uh, it just feeds the soul of the community in many ways.

The theme of ‘coming home to Powell Street’, and the comments by a number of interviewees are illustrative of the emphasis that the festival has in providing a venue to individuals who are part of the Japanese Canadian community and who congregate annually to celebrate their culture and community. Over time, the festival itself has shaped the very community that produces, organizes, and attends the event. The festival is propagated through the excitement and energy in the community, and this is the very excitement and energy that the festival has spontaneously crafted and harnessed over the years – the festival has sprung to life, reproducing itself, and shaping the identity of its audience.

The community aspect of festivals is noticeable in the ability for festivals to recruit new members and participants. Festivals provide a space for non-members to become members of both the festival and its larger community. PSF connects with a variety of people who have little or no linkage to the Japanese Canadian community. It provides a space and an opportunity to reconnect with one's ethnic identity, and learn about the history of the community, which is crucial for those who have been affected by the displacing consequences of internment. In his interview, Bill explained that soon after PSF started as an annual festival, there was an invigoration in the Japanese Canadian community, and this led to more organizations and more projects in the community. The festival cultivates Japanese Canadian culture, which is important, because as Ryan noted in his interview, Japanese Canadians intermarry at a rate as high as ninety-five percent. Ryan considers the festival to be an opportunity for those who are Japanese racially-mixed, and disconnected from the immediate community, to actively engage in learning about their history and culture, and importantly, it provides them with an entrance for group membership. Blaine, an interviewee who had no prior connection to the Japanese Canadian community, and who identified himself as being racially mixed Japanese, experienced these circumstances. Blaine stated that he was drawn to the festival and became an active member in its coordination and programming. The festival is a recruiting ground for the community because it provides an inclusive space that attracts new members in a welcoming fashion. An interviewee named Melissa, a Japanese Canadian originally from elsewhere in Canada, explained:

The importance of the festival is that it existed when I got to Vancouver. If people hadn't started that festival and hadn't kept it going, there wouldn't really be a Japanese Canadian community for me when I came here, there was no, there wouldn't had been a way for me to get involved to connect to my roots, to connect to my history, it would still be, you know, through my family which is very personal.



A few moments later, Melissa discussed how the festival is a zone of inclusivity that welcomes group membership to those who are Hapa, or mixed-racially Japanese, as well as for those who are from other backgrounds and circumstances. Melissa's insights illustrate that the festival engages people who may not have been previously connected to its community, or to the Japanese Canadian community. Melissa stated:

There is something for them to connect with and... at the festival there's arts, there's culture, there's panel discussions, there's political things, you can be involved in one of the groups... that work the food booths, or you could be a craft vendor, or you could be part of the JCCA or human rights group, you can be part of all of those things and then you come together at the festival... ..I mean just the festival itself, involving people and making them feel connected I feel is really incredibly important for me, all these things... you know the arts, the culture, the politics, and the community building, and the leadership building. All of those things tied together is such an amazing way, that's why Powell Street Festival means so much to me, and I think that's why it's really important for the Japanese Canadian community...

The festival provides a celebration of art, culture, community, and history, and it is also an opportunity for those who are not connected to the community to become engaged and active in learning about their history and to join the present day community.

Festivals offer spaces where culture can be celebrated and they offer important financial opportunities for organizations within the festival's larger community. The celebration of culture is a key facet of PSF. In Chris's interview he voiced the cultural importance of the festival by stating, 'Powell Street Festival is really sort of, in my view, an integral part of the culture of the Japanese community here in the lower mainland... ..It is an expression of an opportunity within the community to share their culture, to explore different aspects of their culture and the arts'. The cultural importance of the festival is further described by Susanne, a Japanese Canadian involved in PSF, who explained how the festival is an occasion for the

history and culture of the Japanese Canadian community to be showcased. Moreover, in Michelle's interview she stated that, 'one of the main *raison d'être* for Powell Street Festival is to provide this glimpse of Japanese Canadian performing arts and what people are doing'. This is especially noticeable in the festival's unique programming, which many interview respondents commented on as being different than many other types of festivals. For instance, Blaine discussed how PSF's success lies in the fact that it reflects Japanese Canadian culture and history; however, it also presents political work that is critical of the status quo and simultaneously challenges arts and culture with avant-garde performances and art pieces.

In addition to providing a space to showcase, mentor, and attract Japanese Canadian culture, arts and artists, PSF provides a place for Japanese Canadian organizations, most of which are non-profit, to generate revenue. Chris, for instance, explained that PSF is important to the community because it provides an opportunity for Japanese Canadian organizations to fundraise and gain exposure. Susanne provided insight on this by noting that there are a number of food booths at the festival, which, until recently, were only operated by Japanese Canadian community organizations. Food booths are a major revenue generator for organizations within the community such as Tonari Gumi, the Buddhist Church, and the Vancouver Japanese Language School. The festival makes commissions from the food booths in order to support itself, since it is also a major community organization and is registered under the Society Act<sup>14</sup>. By being a non-profit in its current capacity, it must generate most of its annual revenue in the two-day period. Most of the community organizations are non-profit, and rely heavily on fundraising in order to survive. A substantial amount of the yearly revenue for these organizations is generated over the course of the two-day festival. PSF is important to the community because it offers a space where culture is celebrated, displayed and consumed, and

additionally, the festival provides an economic opportunity for Japanese Canadian community organizations.

PSF indubitably is important to and for the Japanese Canadian community. It signifies the ability for festivals to create community engagement, and group solidarity. The festival has been described as a central force in the revival of the Japanese Canadian community, a group that was forcefully displaced and fragmented across the Canadian landscape. The festival is a means for overcoming the generational effects of marginalization, by doing so it has cultivated confidence, excitement and a sense of community for Japanese Canadians. PSF is crucial in encouraging Japanese Canadian artists, art, and culture and provides a space for these products to be showcased and consumed. The festival offers a zone of inclusion where the Japanese, Japanese Canadian, and non-Japanese engage in community building.

### *Culture, Community, and PSF*

PSF is a unique cultural festival; it is distinct in its origins, its community and relationship to the DTES, and in its programming. These varying aspects of the festival dictate how the festival operates, and how the festival is co-produced through community, politics, and economics. Since PSF's beginning, it has met challenges from the Japanese Canadian community, for instance, second generation Japanese Canadians (Nisei) were largely opposed to having the festival in its opening year. These competing politics of the festival are evident in the festival's programming. First and second generation Japanese Canadians removed themselves from facets of Japanese culture, however, the celebration of Japanese Canadian culture in PSF illustrates contradictory narratives. Attending PSF, I experienced many aspects of Japanese culture, such as Japanese characters on signage, the types of food that were sold, and particular events, for example, sumo wrestling. These characteristics of the festival make it distinct, however, critical

analyses of the festival may point out that the festival is a display of inauthentic Japanese Canadian identity. It is here that an acknowledgment for the co-production of culture, identities, branding, and festivals is apparent. The co-production of PSF includes the Japanese Canadian organizations that support the festival, the new (and subsequent) Japanese immigrant(s) that were involved in organizing the first and later festival(s), multi-generational Japanese Canadians' role in shaping the festival, the importance of programming to create a unique and distinct event, and economics, such as funding. Perhaps an example of how PSF is a result of these varying influences can be seen in the funding the festival applies for and receives. For instance, in 1996 the festival applied for a grant from the Office of Cultural Affairs from the City of Vancouver, in 2001 the festival submitted a grant application to The Canada Council for the Arts, and in 2002 they applied for funding from the British Columbia Arts Council<sup>15</sup>. Funding is just one of the external forces that shapes the formation of the festival, its programming and its identity. Successful grant applicants are most likely to be those that illustrate something that is coherent, logical, and distinct, and this ultimately forces the festival, in some regard, to trade on stereotypical notions of Japanese identity and use these to market a festival that is unique. This is an example of how the festival is politically, economically, and socially co-produced by the different people and industries that go into its make-up. Therefore, as the festival produces a version of itself in order to receive funding, other versions are simultaneously being produced based upon the ideas and values from members of the Japanese Canadian community, the City of Vancouver, the Downtown Eastside, and elsewhere. Ultimately, the festival is co-created through the involvement of multiple actors, organizations, and partnerships.

## *Conclusion*

This chapter has analyzed the significance of place and festivals as well as the importance of festivals for community building and solidarity. This analysis has looked closely at the Powell Street Festival, determining that geography, history, and social relations contribute significantly to the festival's location. Moreover, it illustrates that the present and historically perceived geographical and social attributes of place contribute extensively to the emergence of cultural events and the locations they transpire. Additionally, these perceived qualities of place (geographical, social and cultural aspects) are important in guiding the narrative, identity, and justification of and for festivals and spatial events. In turn, the discourses that are co-constructed dynamically between geography, history, and community help guide the identity of place, and this identity is one that is fluid and in the abstract.

In harnessing a sociological imagination, my analysis of PSF has demonstrated the historical significance of place, as well as the importance that festivals have in (re)producing community and facilitating social cohesion. Thus, the intersections of biography and history reveal that festivals, in particular PSF, are important for marginalized groups. Festivals are a means for *constructing* and *marketing* group identity, whereby festivalgoers consume the cultural products and *meaning* offered at the festival. PSF is a grassroots organization, and is an example of how grassroots organizations are forces greater than the sum of its parts, this is evident in the fact that the festival began as a one-off during the centennial celebration, and has transpired into an annual festival approaching almost four decades of celebrating Japanese Canadian art, culture, history, and community. Additionally, PSF is the heartbeat of the current Japanese Canadian community; it has been pivotal in the community's revival, its current day magnetism, and the group achievements made since the festival's inception, such as developing

artists, begetting vitality, and Redress. Its location is based upon historical and social significance, and the impact it has had on the Japanese Canadian community over the past thirty-seven years is difficult to textualize.

## CHAPTER 5: FESTIVALS AND LOCAL RESIDENTS

### *Introduction*

In this chapter I will examine how PSF alters the physical and social landscape of the DTES, how DTES residents perceive the festival, and how the festival tries to forge ties with local DTES residents by valuing the idea of inclusivity. Before beginning this analysis it is beneficial to take some time to discuss how festivals located within residential space participate in relationships and interactions with the permanent inhabitants of that physical location. Festivals transform space; they create artificial boundaries and alter the normal flows of a space, especially for those who are everyday, year round users of that area (Johansson and Kociatkiewicz, 2011:394). The temporary, and sometimes permanent alteration of space includes the transformation of public space into quasi public-private space. Public space becomes privatized during the festival, which leads to the securitization and governance of space while it is in operation. Dependant upon the formation of the festival, and its relationship with the inhabitants of the area where it is located, permanent residents may be excluded, and just as deleteriously, they may experience the effects of cultural, social, and physical gentrification (Johansson and Kociatkiewicz, 2011:403). The inclusiveness of a festival can be dependent upon whether the festival is free or has an entrance fee; inclusivity may be effected by whether or not the festival has temporary or permanent dividers, fences, or gates that separate festivalgoers from non-festivalgoers versus those without an entrance gate or an established perimeter. The intentional and unintentional attributes of festivals can have serious consequences.

The points regarding the interaction between a festival, its location, and its relationship with local residents is important to my analysis of the PSF. In this chapter I will discuss how

PSF – a free and inclusive festival without borders – modifies the landscape, ultimately leading to the displacement of the everyday users of Oppenheimer Park, where PSF is held. The Powell Street Festival Society (PSFS) attempts to establish a relationship with the DTES community and welcomes community members to attend the festival; however, the festival faces adversity within the community, and members of the DTES community do not always accept the festival's presence. PSF and the Japanese Canadian community have their own unique relationship to the physical space that is Oppenheimer Park, whereby their historical, cultural and social connections to the area date back over a century. Therefore, the use of the park for the festival becomes a contentious issue when determining who has a right to the space of the park.

#### *Local DTES Residents' Perceptions of PSF*

The DTES, and more closely the DEOD, which is the general site of PSF, is currently home to various marginalized groups. The DTES is a multi-cultural neighbourhood that is better known for its social ills than for the positive and vibrant community that exists beneath the surface of this portrayal. The community is comprised of many low-income persons, and has a large homeless population; moreover, many of the neighbourhood's inhabitants suffer from addictions, mental health issues, and other health related matters. The community, although largely disenfranchised, has a history of fighting for rights and individual freedoms, many of which pertain to issues around the rights of a community, such as the right to remain in the DTES. The community has a high ratio of single-room occupancies (SROs) that are historically relevant to the area's previous industrial characteristics. Many of the SROs were previously boarding and rooming houses used by labour-workers in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Due to Vancouver's social and geographical circumstances, such as being a densely populated space within physically determined borders, land near Vancouver's downtown is considerably



valuable. These facts are directly linked to the study of PSF and the DTES because, recently, the City of Vancouver, investors, and developers have demonstrated an interest regarding the property and physical space of the DTES and the DEOD. Consequently, the low-income neighbourhood has become attractive for urban renewal and revitalization.

The DTES community, analogously to Japanese Canadians in 1942, are vulnerable to social and physical displacement, and the notion of gentrification is a major issue within the current DTES community. Moreover, literature suggests that festivals can be a means for urban redevelopment, as well as cultural and economic regeneration, with gentrification being the end result (Johansson and Kociatkiewicz, 2011:396-397; Gotham, 2005:225-226; Waterman, 1998:64; Aalst and Melik, 2012:196). Therefore, scepticism towards the possible repercussions of PSF contributing to efforts of redevelopment in the DTES is reasonable. However, this is not the festival's intention, nor is it their mandate. Nevertheless, the festival's efforts to remain in the DEOD over the past thirty-seven years and to connect with, and support, the current DTES community has failed in terms of the festival being unanimously accepted by DTES residents. Here I discuss the numerous reasons for this, such as the displacing effects of the festival, as well as the lack of integration of DTES residents in the festival's general programming and organization, such as festival booths and food provisioning.

The festival takes place over a weekend and the setup for the festival begins Friday, the morning before the festival commences. PSF has no entrance fee and everyone is welcome to attend and participate in the festival. The festival makes an effort to include the DEOD's local residents, and although the residents of the DTES community are welcome to participate in and with the festival, the effects of the festival's presence are evident in the current festival-resident relationship. Based upon my participant observation of the festival I noticed that as the festival

starts to setup on Friday morning, many of the local residents and common users of the park begin moving toward its outermost edges. This is more evident once the festival is in full operation as many of those who are presumed to be DTES community residents sit on the outside of the park and watch the festival from afar. PSF has an ultimate aim for inclusivity, however, to some degree the everyday occupiers and users of the space are displaced. On the one hand, some residents are displaced entirely from the park due to their decision to not be involved in the festival. On the other hand, those who do choose to stay, or come to watch the festival, are vacated from the park's centre because the festival, its moveable infrastructure, and its intended audience consume the majority of the park.

The park is important for DTES residents because the space is comparable to a living-room. Many DTES residents live in small quarters, and public space in the form of parks is vital to the needs of the community. The idea of the park as a living room was echoed in a number of the interviews conducted for this study, for instance, in Melissa's interview she said that Oppenheimer Park is 'a living-room for the people who live in the neighbourhood'. Evidently, some community residents grow frustrated by the festival's invasion of one of the few spaces they have for relaxing, social interaction, and community engagement. Lucy, an interviewee who has recently been involved with the festival, had reservations regarding the festival and its relationship with the DTES because, although it is not the point of PSF to displace people, she feels that for the days the festival is operating the DTES community who use the park on a regular basis are pushed out. Regarding the latent effects of the festival, George, a middle-aged Japanese Canadian, stated that:

I also sometimes feel that as though you're, for a couple days you're kicking out all the regular people that would be using that park. I think that they have access to the park, they could come in if they wanted, but they don't, they don't have the regular, I guess, free-rein of the park that they would

normally have, so I'm a little bit torn on that, I mean, I would like to continually see that festival being held there, but at the same time, I also sometimes feel a little bit bad that you are kind of displacing those people, every year you're displacing them for two or three days.

The festival inadvertently leads to the displacement of the DTES community, the same community that it is trying to build a relationship with and include in its yearly operation and production.

Booths are also a major part of the festival. These include food booths, market booths (crafts and commodities), and organization booths (Tonari Gumi, Nikkei National Museum, JCCA etc.); however, booths occupied by DTES organizations or by other community affiliations were absent from PSF in 2013. Although the festival remains committed to being inclusive, and having DTES residents partake in the festival's activities, presence of familiarity and support for the local residents was nonexistent. Additionally, there are a number of food booths at the festival, all of which sell food to make a profit or fundraise for their respective organization. Concerns about food security are a major issue in the DTES, and conflict between the festival and local residents occurs because the festival does not give out free food (the festival does provide food tickets to its volunteers). Claire, a Japanese Canadian who has a long history of volunteering at the festival, discussed some of the issues regarding food. Claire explained that she knew an individual who lived in the DTES and that they told her, 'you'll never starve in the Downtown Eastside... You won't have a roof over your head, but you'll never starve because there's so many food programs now'. She noted that there are currently more food programs than when this individual was homeless living in the DTES in the mid-1990s. Evidently, frustrations regarding issues around food security appear to be felt by both communities.

In relation to the displacing effects of the festival, it is also important to understand how the local community perceives the festival. In Blaine's interview he discussed how the DTES community receives the festival. Blaine had previously been involved with the festival's programming for a number of years and he was open to new ideas regarding the festival. These ideas included the possibility of having DTES community members on PSFS' board, which would allow them to contribute to the festival's programming. This was something that other interview respondents from the Japanese Canadian community almost unanimously opposed. Blaine felt that those involved with PSF embraced the role of the 'do-gooder' for setting the festival in the DTES. Blaine suggested that the DTES community might not receive the festival with the same enthusiasm as Japanese Canadians. He drew on a particular experience that he had with a DTES resident who regularly attended the festival. The local resident told Blaine, 'you know every year... Every year a carbon copy, of a carbon copy, of a carbon copy'. Blaine discussed how at times he also felt this was true, and stated:

Here's a resident who, you know, the do-gooders of Powell Street... I want to put myself in there, one of the do-gooders, it's like we're coming down here, we're creating this excitement, this energy, this festival every year, you know, and then you've got a resident saying, "Well it's kind of predictable guys".

Although this may be an isolated incident, it demonstrates that local residents can perceive the festival differently than the festival's hosts. Blaine also questioned whether-or-not the DTES community would want to be involved in creating a festival that suits their neighbourhood, and if the PSFS board would be open to the idea of having DTES residents involved in the festival's organization.

This conception of the do-gooder that Blaine refers to captures the sympathetic viewpoint of PSF's relationship to the DTES, and it displays that there are different perceptions about the

festival. The do-gooder mentality blinds organizers to the reality of the festival, and the effects that it has on DTES local area residents. The do-gooder mind-set is evident in Jack's interview. Jack has been involved with the festival since its inception and when asked about the festival and its relationship to the DTES community he stated that it is a 'tremendous asset to the Downtown Eastside... Because it is one of the few bright spots in the life of that community which has been described as the Downtown Eastside, the Skid Row, the slums, the drug culture, the drug centre'. Jack continued by explaining that on a weekend each summer 'there's this glorious event called the Powell Street Festival which happens there, which is all inclusive... There's no fences guarding it, it's totally open, and people come in and out, and people do come in and out. And it's a tremendous kind of boost to the local community which is a vital participant'. A comparison between Blaine and Jack's descriptions of the festival demonstrates two opposing viewpoints about the relationship between the festival and the DTES community. These descriptions posit contradictory claims about the festival and illustrates that the festival co-creates different experiences, which are dependent upon the manner in which those experiences are consumed, interpreted and perceived. PSFS and its broader community attempt to create an inclusive festival, which is important because firstly, the current status of the DTES, and secondly, the history of PSF and Japanese Canadians. Thus, the festival is conscientious of the local community and makes an effort to be respectful of the local residents and the space the festival uses; however, the actual effects of the festival on the DTES are tenebrous.

#### *How PSF Forges Ties With DTES Residents*

When a festival occupies an area that is inhabited by a marginalized and low-income population, there are concerns about the relationship between the festival and the area's residents because conflict can easily occur. Controversy under these circumstances increases when the festival

represents a group that was historically marginalized, interned, and displaced, leading to systemic social consequences such as the fragmentation, and near genocide and cultural annihilation of that group. A group in these circumstances proclaims its unjust experiences outwardly and publicly. Albeit this is the case, PSF, its stakeholders, and its community feel an intrinsic obligation to include the current marginalized community of the DTES in the festival's organization and operation. This is evident in an interview with Bill, a Japanese Canadian who has been involved with PSF for a number of years, who said, 'I think there's a sense of responsibility... Because it would be easy to just fold up and move somewhere else, I think there's a commitment, to um, keeping it there'. Bill's comment highlights the idea of an inherent duty for PSF to remain in the DTES, and support the local community. This notion was resonated throughout many of the interviews completed for this study.

Although all DTES residents may not accept the festival, PSFS has sought after the inclusion of DTES residents in the festival's operations. For instance, local residents are invited to volunteer for the festival. Volunteering may include helping to setup and disassemble the festival, and in return, volunteers receive free lunch the day of setup, and a free dinner the evening of disassembly. PSF also seeks volunteers from the DTES to help with festival security. These volunteers are often connected to the festival through organizations from the DTES, such as Life Skills. Many interviewees reported that security is a major issue during the festival, primarily because of the possibility for tension to occur between the festival and festivalgoers, and the DTES community. Melissa, a long-time PSF volunteer, explained that it has been important to have DTES residents perform security because they are able to relate with the community based upon the same status, norms, and viewpoint; therefore, problems that arise

with DTES residents can be diffused appropriately. The festival takes precautionary actions so that the relationship between the festival and local residents remains peaceful.

It can be important for festivals to have outreach programs to connect themselves with the local community. PSF has invested in an Advocacy Committee, which is an outreach program with the intent to connect the festival more intimately with DTES residents. PSF's Advocacy Committee establishes a yearlong presence in the DTES, and crucially, outside of the festival's operation and with local residents. This is done through a variety of activities and events that are structured to engage DTES residents. These events include daylong workshops within the DTES, as well as workshops and booths that are present at local DTES events and festivals. For example, Melissa explained that PSF had a lantern making workshop and a button-making workshop at two separate DTES community events. Melissa noted the importance of the Advocacy Committee by stating:

But that part of trying to be, to encourage local residents to come to the festival and feel they are part of it, that's a totally ongoing thing... ..And, so that's sort of a longer term thing that we are kind of working on, and also doing a little more outreach in terms of asking people what would make them feel like they were, more like they were included and maybe ways we could figure that out.

This is an illustration of how PSF has attempted to forge ties with DTES inhabitants, and become an active member of the local community rather than a disconnected entity that, as many interview respondents said in his or her own fashion, parachutes in for the weekend and then exits immediately after the festival ends. PSF is dedicated to building positive relations with the DTES community, however, part of the initiative for these connections has to do with Japanese Canadian's historical experience, such as being a marginalized group, and not entirely because the festival occupies the community space for a weekend each year.

Michelle, a Japanese Canadian elder who has been involved with PSF since its beginning, noted that by staying at Oppenheimer Park the festival's presence is 'a stand for the neighbourhood', with regard to how it is currently physically and socially configured. Michelle explains that the DTES has always been a low-income community and said, 'it's skid row, Downtown Eastside, skid row... All the people who ever lived down there were people who were outcasts, as the Japanese were, you know, that's where they congregated because it was low rent and they weren't really part of society, the normal mainstream society.' Moments later Michelle added:

I do know the festival is, and always has been committed to forging ties in the community and trying to work for the betterment of that community, without evicting everybody from it. Just, being aware of what, where its roots are, and sure we would like those lives to be improved, but not at the expense of those lives.

The social injustices experienced by Japanese Canadians are similar to the injustices that the DTES community is currently facing. Although the threat of internment for DTES residents is unlikely, the community is vulnerable to forced physical and social displacement.

Contemporary mainstream society often neglects to perceive the process of gentrification as the forced removal of persons and groups, however, when redevelopment occurs with a particular *cleaned up* vision of an urban centre it is followed by higher property values (ownership and rental). The higher valued rental and sale units are more costly than what would have previously existed. Therefore, the existing community is evicted because they lack the economic resources necessary to remain in the area. Human rights violations are an element of the narrative of PSF, as well as the history of Japanese Canadians, and because of this, PSF and PSF's community continue to support DTES residents. Bill stated:

I think there's a sense of responsibility... That sense of responsibility that came out of the Redress agreement where a lot of people said, "Well you



know we, a lot of people supported us when we were fighting for Redress and now it's our turn to support, you know, the disenfranchised". So I think there's some of that element in there as well.

Bill's comment demonstrates the reasoning behind PSF's desire to connect with and support the DTES and DTES local residents. In this regard, festivals can be located within spaces that are controversial, and that have a parallel narrative to that of the festival and its audience. In this case, the festival was originally located in the DEOD because of historical connections; however, the festival has remained in the area and reached out to the local residents based upon its community's past experiences and social injustices, as well as the narrative that the festival has developed and maintained.

Thus, the relations between the Japanese Canadian community and PSF, and the DTES foster similar accounts. DTES residents are vulnerable to human rights violations, particularly their physical and social displacement. The Japanese Canadian community were racially and economically marginalized, a predecessor to being forcefully removed and displaced from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. The historical narrative of the Japanese Canadian community has led the community itself, and PSF, to adopt a position on human rights and social justice. This has left both PSF and the Japanese Canadian community with the obligation to stand-up for the DTES and DTES local residents. This is most evident in the festival's will to stay at Oppenheimer Park, its Advocacy Committee, and its openness to other cultures. Ryan, a Japanese Canadian elder, noted that:

It's not just Japanese Canadians that are coming... You have Aboriginal people coming. And I've seen just a very diverse group of people that come to the festival and... They're enjoying extensively Japanese Canadian culture, but that culture is very diverse also... You might see gay rights proclaimed... I'll give you an example, the human rights committee, it's a Japanese Canadian human rights committee, but they might take on say Japanese corporations that are trying to um... Do, um, mining or exploration in Aboriginal lands, because they're not so concerned about being racially

loyal, if there is such a thing, they're concerned about the rights of all people regardless of this thing we call race, and I think that's something that the festival seems to promote too, that openness to rights and causes that go beyond just being tied to the mother country, which is Japan.

Ryan's comment illustrates that there is a strong sense of inclusivity within the narrative of PSF and Japanese Canadian culture. The theme of inclusivity and human rights is evident in PSF's identity and its commitment to the DTES and its local residents. Ryan succinctly summarizes this by stating:

Japanese Canadian might not be so much of a racial type, it may be more along the lines of equity and justice, and what we call social justice – that regardless of how much Japanese Canadian you have in you, but you can use Redress as your compass in some ways to point you in a direction, then they are following that compass, um, so I say all the power to them. I don't think Japanese Canadian culture's going to die away as long as those people are involved in those projects... ..You use it [Redress as a compass] whenever you encounter an issue you hold it up as a litmus test saying, "Okay, so you know, what would the people that fought for Redress for Japanese Canadians, what would their take be on this issue? And what would be honourable in this situation? Having been, having achieved Redress for our own community, okay. What would be just and respectful of this other community, and its dreams, and its desires?"

Ryan's comment is powerful, and is a message to the Japanese Canadian community to remember their own unique history and battle for the recognition of social injustices. In connection to this comment, Ryan voiced his concerns about the current DTES community's vulnerability for displacement. In culmination, the recent work by PSF's Advocacy Committee appears to be strengthening the relationship between the two communities, however, the festival could harness its unique history more powerfully in order to build an understanding and harmonious relationship with the DTES community.

## *Conclusion*

The relationship between a festival and the local residents of the area that the festival takes place is important to analyze. The analysis of this relationship provides an opportunity to understand both of the communities, their viewpoints, and how the festival creates meaning, which is open for interpretation and may be perceived differently. The relationship between PSF and local DTES residents demonstrates that even when a festival, its history, and its narrative, correlate with the contentious issues faced by the local community, it is still possible for conflict to arise between the two communities. Although determined to be an inclusive and socially just festival that supports the inhabitants of the DTES, PSF still contributes to the gentrifying effects of festivals in urban spaces. The local residents and everyday users of the space are pushed out of the park, or to its outer edges. From the observations conducted for this study, it was noticed that those presumed to be DTES residents were also within the park, sitting on the grass and occupying the festival area with the other festivalgoers. However, it was observed that many of those who sat down placed herself/himself at the perimeter of the park. Although PSF is relatively inclusive, notably because it has no entrance fee, no gates, and it attempts to include local residents to volunteer, the festival still invades public space, whereby it transforms the space for the festival's use, and creates a public-private space. PSF is, however, committed to solving issues with local residents, and this is guided by its grassroots origins, history, and narrative. This is a positive contribution by the festival, and engrains the festival's identity with the notions of social justice and inclusivity.

## CHAPTER 6: FESTIVALS REIMAGING SPACE, AND HOW THEY CULTIVATE NAMING AND MEANING

### *Introduction*

The goal of this study was to answer the question, ‘How is the Powell Street Festival connected to rebranding the Oppenheimer District in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside as Japantown?’ This chapter analyzes how the Powell Street Festival has contributed to reimagining the DEOD. In particular, it assesses the physical markings that the festival has engraved upon the surfaces of Oppenheimer Park and its surrounding area, and discusses how the festival has marked the space with discourse, narrative, and meaning. The relationship between the festival and the physical space of the DEOD reveals that the festival, in a subtle fashion, has contributed to the landscape of the area. It has also contributed to the identity of the DEOD as a historically significant space for Japanese Canadians.

The festival is active in bringing together a community for a celebration, and is central to the renewal and continuation of Japanese Canadian culture and community. Yet, festivals are also vehicles for rebranding urban space. They contribute to the physical attributes of a space, such as its infrastructure, design, and built environment. Festivals also contribute to a narrative of space, which includes meaning, discourse, and the imagining of the social, historical, and cultural elements that are attached to a geographical location. Imagining is arguably a unique way to reference an area; however, the facets of both festivals and urban branding engage people to imagine the features and characteristics that encompass a space. Therefore, it is important to consider how festivals, such as PSF, are branding vehicles, and how they contribute to renaming and reimagining urban space with a new identity and theme, such as those signified in Japantown,

Powell Street, or more appropriately, the DTES – in other words, they help frame the setting, context, features, and characteristics that are associated with the complete conception of space.

This analysis will illustrate how ‘the mundane, everyday landscape’ of Oppenheimer Park is ‘transformed into a space of cultural discourse’ (Waterman, 1998:63). The festival’s presence in the DEOD has left its mark on the landscape, and additionally, the festival has inscribed itself upon the DEOD abstractly. This is noticeable through the Japanese Canadian narrative, culture, and identity engraved upon this space. However, the presence of these characteristics is not overwhelming, rather, it is subtle, and simultaneously, very accessible. This investigation will conclude with an assessment of efforts to rebrand the DTES and the DEOD as Japantown. This section is informed by the opinions of Japanese Canadians and will demonstrate how members of this community feel about using the name Japantown and, moreover, the idea of creating a Japanese themed enclave in the DTES. It will examine how PSF permanently and temporarily reimages the DTES, as well as how festivals and urban branding can be used in a commemorative fashion and, just as easily, be used unjustly in a way that imposes meaning upon a community with a frame of misrepresentation.

The following discussion is cautiously presented because it may lead to unintended consequences: the information provided here could be used for purposes other than designated. This includes being coopted and used to illustrate how to appropriate cultural identities in order to rebrand space under the perception of being just, while in reality the motive is for urban revitalization. Therefore, it is noted that the idea of socially and physically displacing a community, such as the current DTES residents, by capitalizing on the perceived stereotypical cultural facets of a previously marginalized and displaced group is unethical, ironic and socially unjust. This can occur in situations outside of this context, and this project uses the example of

Japanese Canadian culture and heritage for masking human rights violations against current and past communities for the purpose of urban renewal.

### *Festivals and Reimagining Space*

The literature regarding urban branding and festivals demonstrates that the two are tightly knitted and that both contribute to transforming landscapes, creating zones of consumption, and inscribing geographical locations with meaning and narrative. The analysis of PSF further illustrates how festivals and urban branding are intimately connected. Events and festivals facilitate urban branding because they contribute to the built environment of an area, its ambience, and its social and cultural identity. Festivals are social and cultural events, and because festivals overflow with culture they reflect place-identity and contribute to place-branding (Johansson and Kociatkiewicz, 2011:394; Lury, 2011:52). PSF's presence in the DEOD is based upon the nostalgia of the area, in other words, the location is a 'nostalgiascape' because it presents itself as pertaining to historical identities and characteristics (Johansson and Kociatkiewicz, 2011:401). Thus, the DEOD is reimagined through the branding vehicle of the festival which defines space through the retrieval of memory and history and it uses these to (re)inscribe the contemporary landscape (Johansson and Kociatkiewicz, 2011:401). Evidence of this are the plaques and signage in the DEOD that pay respect to Japanese Canadian heritage.

Festivals contribute to the image, culture, and identity of a space, and each of these is a component of urban branding. PSF has contributed to the aesthetics and physical attributes of the DTES and has also participated in recreating and maintaining historical facets within the narrative of space. The DTES is comprised of, using post-structuralist terms, a fluid and dynamic identity where meaning is constantly changing. For instance, one day it may be referred to as Skid Road, and the next it may be referred to as the site of Powell Street Festival.

This investigation accounts for two of the three dominant narratives of space that pertain to the DTES. Three narratives that exist are: the outsiders-mainstream narrative that is informed by the media, namely Skid Road; the local resident and community members' narrative that is informed by those living and working in the DTES and associating with the DTES community, knowing the area as the Downtown Eastside; and lastly, Powell Street, which is informed by PSF and Japanese Canadians. The latter two are presented in this study because of the ongoing interplay between the DTES and the festival, notably the ways that PSF has inscribed the DTES with Japanese Canadian identity. I do not agree with the portrayal and discursive consequences of referring to the DTES as Skid Road, therefore, out of respect for DTES residents, I refrain from using or elaborating on this label.

The literature on festivals suggests that they are events that contribute extensively to transforming space (Gotham, 2005:242; Waterman, 1998:57-59; Stevens and Shin, 2014:7; Johansson and Kociatkiewicz, 2011:396). The transformation of space is compounded with the imagery and physical attributes of a place. The presence of PSF in the DTES has contributed to urban branding in the area; however, unlike the analyses conducted in most of the urban branding literature, PSF's reimagining of the DEOD is based upon reclaiming space—the recognition of the internment of Japanese Canadians and the celebration of culture and heritage. This is different than the common justifications for urban branding, which are grounded with the reasoning that reimagining space will facilitate consumption patterns for economic returns. Thus, cities use urban branding to aid in urban revitalization to both, 'clean up' 'slum' neighbourhoods, as well as to produce attractive spaces that make the city or space globally recognized and boost its economy and tourist industry. This is a neoliberal vision of urban branding, and for the purposes of this chapter will be referred to as neoliberal urban branding.

Regarding PSF and the DTES, the presence of Japanese Canadians in the area is not a direct result of the festival itself; rather, some physical attributes were installed through partnerships with the festival as well as with other Japanese Canadian organizations, the City of Vancouver, and Parks Canada. Furthermore, I argue that, because of the festival's presence in the area for more than three and a half decades, the festival is directly correlated with contributing to the resurgence and maintenance of the DTES as a historically significant space for Japanese Canadians. Therefore, it is claimed that the festival is the rationale behind the existence of the permanent and fluid inscriptions upon the geography of the DEOD. Overall, the festival brands and reimages the DTES in two ways: first, through a permanent presence, including the annual return of the festival; and second, via temporary transformative effects due to the occurrence of the festival.

## The Powell Street Festival: Reimagining Urban Space

### *Permanent Presence and Alteration of Place*

The permanent, or fixed characteristics of the festival that are inscribed upon the DTES involve both physical and discursive attributes of place that substantiate and reinforce identity, culture, and narrative. Firstly, permanent signage in, and around Oppenheimer Park is important in creating an everyday yearlong presence of PSF in the park. These markers are part of the space's built environment and give the fluid and shifting sphere of meaning associated to a space a textual reality. In other words, these permanent fixtures assert this area as belonging to, and associated with, the festival and Japanese Canadians. Secondly, the festival's presence in the park, its ability to attract attendees from outside the DTES, and its support for walking tours of the DEOD contribute to an identity and narrative of space that legitimizes Oppenheimer Park as



the site for the festival and where its immediate community belongs. Thus, the festival's presence has effected the physical and nonphysical attributes of space in the DEOD and Oppenheimer Park. These discursive and abstract features for reimagining space reinforce the idea that the area belongs to Japanese Canadians, and can be considered as Japantown. The festival feeds this perception, whether it attempts to or not.

The festival has reimagined the DEOD and Oppenheimer Park in multiple ways. Firstly, the initial festival took place at Oppenheimer Park during the Japanese Canadian Centennial Project in 1977, and earlier that summer Issei (first generation Japanese Canadians) planted Sakura trees (Cherry Blossom trees) in the park to commemorate the first Japanese immigrant who arrived in Canada in 1877. Planting the trees in 1977 is important to the unfolding of PSF's presence in the park, as well as its overall impact upon the landscape of the DEOD. The trees mark one of the first times that the Japanese Canadian community altered the imagery of the area since the community's displacement in 1942. This earlier alteration of the landscape proved to be vital in the way that PSF and the Japanese Canadian community responded to the planned redevelopment of Oppenheimer Park between 2008 and 2010. The redevelopment of the park, according to interview respondents for this project, was orchestrated through a process that involved meetings between the City of Vancouver, community members, and stakeholders within the DEOD and Oppenheimer Park's surrounding area.

The redevelopment of Oppenheimer Park was an opportunity that PSF and the Japanese Canadian community used to continue their presence in the area. The initial park plan did not include keeping the Sakura trees that were planted in 1977, explained Lucy, a middle-aged Japanese Canadian who I interviewed. The city was unaware that the trees had significance to the Japanese Canadian community. Lucy explained that the Japanese Canadian community

responded by forming a coalition to save the Sakura trees because of their historical importance to the community. She noted that it was important to her mother that the trees stay in the park; however, Lucy did not feel the same sentimental attachment. Susanne, a Japanese Canadian closely aligned with PSF also commented on the Sakura trees and the park's redevelopment. She said that once the 'parks board' was informed about the importance of the trees, efforts were made to redesign the plans to include the trees. Susanne added that PSFS, which remained separate from the coalition to save the trees, was caught in the middle because they were aware of the importance of the trees for recognizing heritage and as a commemorative aspect; however, PSFS was cognitive that the park's redevelopment had to suit the day-to-day needs of the DTES community. This included the placement of the new Fieldhouse, which was based upon levels of safety, visibility, access and lighting, as well as its proximity to the street for deliveries. PSFS' concerns during the park's renovation regarded the way their setup and organization of the festival would be affected; this included, for instance, access to suitable infrastructure and resources. By staying in the park, the festival indirectly stimulates growth in the attachment to Oppenheimer Park and the DEOD by Japanese Canadians. This continuation is evident in the everlasting significance of the Sakura trees felt by the community.

The redevelopment of the park included a number of features for preserving Japanese Canadian heritage. For instance, George, an interviewee who is a middle-aged Japanese Canadian, noted that either one or two large rocks were also part of the 1977 commemoration and that the rocks remained in the park after its redevelopment. I was unable to ascertain the significance of these rocks, other than their commemorative nature. Moreover, the windows of the new Fieldhouse in the park included etchings of Sakura trees and a poem. George, an interviewee, said that the poem outlines the significance of the Sakura trees in the park. He felt

that this was an important feature because previously there was no recognition as to why the trees were in the park, and that this may have been partly why the City was not aware of their importance and did not include them in the initial redevelopment plan. The etching informs the Japanese Canadian community and the general public about the Sakura trees. Such recognition, however, is also a discursive practice that shapes the meaning and representation of the area as belonging to Japanese Canadians. The interviews conducted for this study demonstrated that, in the end, the renovation of the park only saw one or two of the Sakura trees removed, and one or two transplanted. Additionally, new Sakura trees were planted in the park. The preservation of existing trees and the planting of new trees strengthen the community's presence in the park and announces who is being (re)presented in that space.

PSF has been directly and indirectly involved in other forms of reimagining the area, which include signage and commemorative plaques. For example, Susanne, a Japanese Canadian closely linked to PSF, explained that the plans for redeveloping the park included commemorative aspects, such as Asahi and Pirates signs, which were mounted to the upper section of the backstop of the baseball diamond on the northwest side of the park. The Asahi were a Japanese Canadian baseball team that existed prior to the Second World War and they played their games at Oppenheimer Park, often against their rivals, the Pirates. It was unclear when these signs were mounted on the baseball diamond; however, a few interview respondents believed that it was during the City's recent redevelopment of the park. The data gathered regarding the park's redevelopment shows that PSFS and the Japanese Canadian community were involved in shaping the plans, and it is likely that they supported the idea of the signs. Additionally, behind the backstop at ground level is a commemorative plaque placed by Parks Canada in 2011 in recognition of the Asahi baseball team. Japanese Canadians initiated the

Parks Canada plaque. Furthermore, there is a commemorative Asahi – Pirates baseball game held in the park each year. These elements are evidence of permanent fixtures that pay homage to Japanese Canadians and inscribe Oppenheimer Park and the DEOD with meaning relative to Japanese Canadian culture.

PSF's direct contributions to reimagining the park and the surrounding area are less obvious than planting Sakura trees, which are highly visible, especially when in bloom. The festival's presence is a defining factor in the existing legacy of Japanese Canadians in the DEOD and is accompanied by the festival's direct participation in erecting signage that extends beyond the park and throughout the DEOD. In particular, PSF partnered with the Nikkei National Museum to create the 'Open Doors Project'. According to project's website, in 2010 six removable vinyl signs were put outside six buildings along Powell Street<sup>16</sup>. In 2011, permanent plaques were installed on the outside walls of twelve buildings along Powell Street, and four along Alexander Street<sup>17</sup>. In Susanne's interview she said that a Japanese Canadian artist designed most of the plaques. Susanne also noted that PSFS was involved in the project and completed interviews, found participants, and had some of the historic buildings in the area open their doors during the festival so that festivalgoers could go inside. The buildings no longer open their doors for the tour. Also, Chris, an interview respondent, felt that the Open Doors Project designates the area as being historically significant. The Open Doors Project legitimizes these types of definitions and identities of the location. Additionally, the project includes a walking tour. Between the permanent plaques and the walking tour, the Open Doors Project publicizes knowledge about the DEOD and reinvents a narrative of the space as innately Japanese Canadian.

The Open Doors Project's plaques include images and written descriptions of what the buildings were used for, who lived in them, and general information about the buildings and the community prior to the Second World War. In Darren's interview he noted that some of the buildings still have characteristics from the prewar era, for example, a few of the buildings have names written in tile at the entrance, and one building has its name embedded up high on its front wall. I observed this during the walking tours, and I also noticed that one building still had writing in the ground-tile at its door front. Thus, the buildings are part of the area's infrastructure, and with the assistance of the plaques, these features are highlighted and they contribute to legitimizing the space's identity as being Japanese Canadian. The Open Doors Project produced small brochures that discussed the project, the plaques, and a self-guided tour. Regarding the plaques, the brochure states that, 'each design draws on the aesthetics of traditional Japanese *hanafuda* flower cards and combines illustration, oral histories, and archival photographs to prove an entry point into the layered and complex memories and histories of social and commercial spaces that were used by the Japanese Canadian community and other residents before and after the war'<sup>18</sup>. The permanent fixtures authenticate the narrative of Japanese Canadian heritage in the DEOD through an educational medium. The plaques are permanent and some have been damaged and vandalized since being installed, although PSF is hoping to have them repaired or replaced. The plaques reinforce the justification for PSF to occur at Oppenheimer Park and they legitimate Japanese Canadian heritage and culture as being part of the space's identity in two ways. First, the images and written text on the plaques educate the public and inscribe Japanese Canadian heritage upon the DEOD. Second, the Open Doors Project includes both a guided and self-guided tour. Indeed, the tours are an important part of reimagining space because they comprise an interactive and social process that substantiates the

claims that Japanese Canadians are part of the neighbourhood. The guided tours attract Japanese and non-Japanese Canadians and inform participants about the area from a Japanese Canadian perspective. Evidence of this exists in the Open Doors Project tour pamphlet, which reads, ‘use the Open Doors panels as landmarks and learning tools as you journey through the streetscape on a self-guided walking tour’<sup>19</sup>. The Open Doors Project and subsequent walking tours reimagine and rebrand the DEOD as a Japanese Canadian cultural site.

During the data collection phase for this project I attended two walking tours of the area, once during the festival and again a few months later. The tours are led by the Nikkei National Museum, and are offered during the festival as well as numerous dates throughout the year. As I experienced the tours I realized that, in part, they were a tourist activity that casted a positive representation of Japanese Canadians in the area and denoted the area’s current inhabitants and status. During the tour that I attended outside of the festival I observed local residents respond to the tour’s audience as though they were there for entertainment purposes, and were cashing in on the historical trademarks of the DTES as well as the contemporary community’s status. Through participation in the tours I argue that they operate as another mode for rebranding space, and are tactically involved in framing the identity of space through social interaction and the facilitation of meaning via authority and performance. Regarding the naming of the tours, the museum refers to them as ‘Historic Japantown Walking Tours’. The notion of a walking tour of Japantown is misleading because it creates the perception that the area belongs to a particular group, who through previously living in the area contributed aesthetically to its urban design, architecture, character and identity. This is true as the remnants of the pre-war Japanese Canadian community continue to exist through the distinct design of many of the buildings in the area because ‘most of the original single family dwellings had been converted into ground floor

establishments with family residences or boarding houses above' by Japanese Canadians prior to 1942 (Kobayashi, 1992:19). The distinct architecture and building design included residences and businesses in the rear of the structures, and original residences added false fronts to appear 'business-like' (Kobayashi, 1992:19-20). The misleading and discursive consequences regarding a walking tour of 'historic Japantown' provides the perception that Japanese still live in the area, and that the area is in some shape or form inscribed with visible *Japanese* cultural facets. Evidently, this is not the case and the historical inscriptions of the area are found in the general design of the buildings, which most would not identify. Comparatively, the Open Doors Project is subtitled "commemorating the diverse histories of the Powell Street community", which is a more accurate statement regarding the presence of Japanese Canadians in the DEOD, and does not cast the perception that it is an active Japanese cultural enclave.

The festival is directly and indirectly involved in rebranding the DEOD. The festival was a main participant in the Open Doors Project and in establishing the walking tours of the area. It promotes the current walking tours during the festival by being part of the festival's programming. The festival has reimaged the DEOD through both signage and discursive practices, including walking tours. These elements contribute to both place-identity and a narrative of space, and when collaborated, they reimage and rebrand the DTES as being inherently Japanese or Japanese Canadian. In general, the festival is an important branding vehicle in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. When the Japanese Canadian community returned to Oppenheimer Park to plant Sakura (Cherry Blossom) trees and place the large rocks as a commemoration a few months prior to the first festival in 1977, it was the initial reimagining of the area and was done with the intention of honouring and celebrating culture and history. Unknowingly at this time, it would be a defining event that would dictate how things would

unfold in the years to come. This initial commemoration, however, was achieved without overwhelming the DTES with Japanese Canadian identity. The festival's thirty-six year existence in the area is central in the continuation of Japanese Canadian artefacts and general presence in the DEOD. The signage present in the area is subtle, and most people would have to know the history of the area to understand what the signs and physical features inscribed upon the space represent. The festival both succeeded and precedes discursive features that exist in the park today, such as the etching on the Fieldhouse's windows, the Sakura trees and the two rocks, the signage and plaques in and around the park, and the walking tours. Each of these features participates in branding urban space, and although multiple narratives of space may be associated with the DTES, it has a strong Japanese Canadian identity due to permanent and discursive facets.

#### *Temporary Transformation of Space*

The festival is also involved in temporarily reimagining space, and although it is only temporary, it has a significant effect on the identity of the DEOD. The festival temporarily transforms the park from a local common space into a space of consumption and celebration. The festival includes tents, stages, booths, tables, signage, and barricading streets, and with these it reconfigures the space for the purpose of the festival. The most evident transformation of the park is that the festival setups tents, stages, and booths – converting what was once an open park into the setting for a cultural celebration that overflows with festivalgoers. The festival changes the park from a space for DTES residents to one that is solely for the purpose of celebrating a specific event. The festival also alters how the space is socially configured, for example, it attracts an audience that does not normally go to the DEOD. Michelle, an older Japanese Canadian I interviewed, stated that once the festival got bigger it began to attract people outside



of the Japanese and DTES communities. She said that it started to attract ‘indie people’ and that ‘you’d see more young white faces coming down’. She believes that this was a precursor to the white, middle-class, and older festivalgoers that now make up part of its attendance. This mainstream consumer audience demonstrates how festivals temporarily transform the social landscape of a space. Initially the festival transformed this social landscape by attracting a community that attended the festival for specific cultural, social, and ethnic purposes. The shift in the audience that Michelle discusses illustrates a mainstream consumer audience that attends the festival for its entertainment value and less for its historical and original significance. In culmination, most of the festival’s audience reside outside of the DTES, whether they are the festival’s inner-community or the mainstreamers, and by attracting these people to the DEOD for the festival the social makeup of the area is temporarily altered.

The festival is active in de-territorializing and re-territorializing urban space, both permanently and temporarily (Johansson and Kociatkiewicz, 2011:394,397). It changes physical space and interrupts the normal flows of the city; it also opens alternative spaces for the purpose of the festival that would otherwise remain closed off (Johansson and Kociatkiewicz, 2011:394,397; Waterman, 1998:58). These temporary transformations are visible in PSF’s street closures, which are done in order to create more space for the festival. The festival closes off three blocks worth of streets—the streets adjacent to both the east side and the west side of the park, as well as the block northeast of the park. This space is transformed into food courts, market squares, and stage and seating areas. In Susanne’s interview she explained that PSFS made compromises during the park’s redevelopment because they felt that the park had to meet the needs of the local community. The final plans effected how the festival used and organized the park; however, Susanne said that PSFS was supportive of these alterations and they had to

think of other ways to configure the park for the festival. Susanne noted that a lot of the space in the park ‘is for the community that uses it year round, like that’s probably more important... So we just had to think outside the box and that’s one reason why we started spreading down another block of Jackson... [The festival used to] just close down two blocks, but now we close down three blocks’. The festival requires appropriate space, resources, and infrastructure to remain in Oppenheimer Park.

The festival also has a bike valet located at the southeast corner of the park, and through my observation of the festival it was noted that this was another temporary alteration of space. The presence of the bike valet transforms an open grass area into a barricaded storage space for bikes. Furthermore, PSF erects banners and signs during the festival and uses auxiliary spaces that usually have their doors locked. For example, the only two remaining Japanese Canadian affiliated organizations in the area, the Buddhist Church and the Vancouver Japanese Language School, open their doors during the festival and are used to host exhibits, discussions and other types of activities. The Firehall Arts Centre (Firehall Theatre), which is a few blocks from the park is also used by the festival to host plays, performances, and other showings. However, based on the interviews I conducted, as well as personal observations during the fieldwork phase, it was clear that the Japanese Canadian affiliations – the Buddhist Church and Vancouver Japanese Language School – have their doors locked the rest of the year and visitors must use an intercom in order to be let inside. As such, the festival changes the daily patterns of the area and opens up additional spaces for the purpose of the festival that would otherwise be inaccessible to the general public.

In sum, festivals, such as PSF, transform ordinary urban space into a multifaceted arena. PSF has shown to transform the park and the surrounding area, de-territorializing and re-

territorializing space and ultimately interrupting the day-to-day flows of the DEOD in order to celebrate Japanese Canadian culture. During the festival, the landscape of the DEOD is altered and the area is temporarily invaded by physical and non-physical attributes, both of which contribute to reimagining the space. The festival is an urban branding vehicle that permanently and temporarily reimages the landscape of the DEOD, by doing so, the festival dictates a specific narrative of the park, and focuses its uses, its meaning, and its identity.

### *Commemorative Reimagining Versus Branded Urban Villages*

As discussed in previous chapters, PSF is a festival that celebrates and recognizes a community that was subject to human rights violations. The Japanese Canadian community was interned, socially and physically displaced, and had the majority of their properties confiscated and sold. The festival marks the regeneration of this community, and throughout the festival's life, the DTES, and more closely the DEOD, is reclaimed and marked as a space that is nostalgic, sentimental, and significant. The festival has contributed to reimagining the DEOD, specifically Oppenheimer Park. Throughout the festival's presence it has led to both the permanent and temporary reimagining of space; however, this is done under the intention of commemoration.

This indicates an important point regarding the way that a festival may reimage space and contribute to urban branding. The intention of PSF is to commemorate a community, and, at the same time, contribute to contemporary Japanese Canadian arts, artists, and culture. The festival participates in reimagining space based upon the integration and uses of culture and identity in order to remember a historically relevant and significant space. While it contributes to reimagining space, the festival has been absent of any involvement in a branding coalition with the attempt to create a Japanese Canadian ethnic village or streetscape, especially one that is informed by stereotypical Japanese culture and values. This is an important distinction, because

it demonstrates that urban branding and the reimagining of space also occurs unintentionally and comes from grassroots organizations for purposes other than the creation of themed urban spaces. Indeed, the festival partakes in what I term subtle-commemorative urban branding, that is, the acquiescent physical and non-physical inscriptions upon the DTES landscape that are conceived out of tribute. Regarding the plaques from the Open Doors Project and the other signage in the area, Susanne, a Japanese Canadian interviewee stated, ‘you would have to pay close attention to them’ to even notice their existence. This is very different from the potentially exploitative, violent, and exclusive urban branding that is often used in urban renewal and revitalization efforts.

The remainder of this chapter will analyze the notion of Japantown, and how the potential rebranding of the DEOD as a themed Japanese cultural urban village is exploitative, unjust, and disrespectful to the Japanese Canadian community. This analysis will illustrate specific examples of urban branding characteristics that the DTES is vulnerable to experiencing, such as the cliché and repetitive examples used by urban branding coalitions that include street lighting, culturally themed décor, and hard-branding techniques, such as an entrance gate that mark identity at a spaces admission point.

### *Commemorative and Meaningful Branding*

The differences between subtle-commemorative urban branding and neoliberal urban branding can be distinguished by characteristics such as those presented in the analysis of PSF and the reimagining of the DTES. For example, the plaques, signage, Sakura trees and use of Oppenheimer Park are intended for recognition of cultural and community significance. They do not intend to impose upon the DEOD a Japanese Canadian culture that would facilitate a narrative and identity of space that promotes consumption patterns to be used for economic

gains. Rather, the festival leaves subtle markings that offer guidance for those unfamiliar with the territory to understand the social, spatial, historical, and cultural meanings attached to the geographical space. Other than when the festival is occurring, PSF has a limited effect on the everyday ambience and identity of the DEOD. The identity and narrative of space that is associated with the festival and Japanese Canadians is held within particular parameters, in other words, those who recognize the permanent features would have some type of connection to, or knowledge about, the festival, or Japanese Canadians in the DTES.

Comparatively, and hypothetically speaking, a neoliberal urban branding model would exploit the stereotypical Japanese norms and values in order to facilitate consumption, promote urban renewal, boost tourism, and advance the economy in the area, and for the City. This model would promote a Japanese culturally themed streetscape, such as the one analyzed later in this section. This type of reimagining is unjust, and is partly demonstrated by Claire, a Japanese Canadian interviewee, who stated that it would be a fallacy to equate the culture, values, identity and norms of Japanese Canadians with Japanese. Thus, the imagery regarding Japanese Canadians in the DEOD must respectfully, accurately, and appropriately represent the identity of this group, and in order to be socially just it should be relatable to the history of Japanese Canadians.

PSF and the Japanese Canadian community have displayed commemorative reimagining of urban space, however, there have been previous motions for the creation of a Japanese culturally themed space. This type of rebranding is still a possibility in the future of the DTES and would involve the exploitative capitalization of the Japanese Canadian community in order to market and develop a Japanese themed urban village, such as a Japantown, in the DTES.

### *A Japanese Village? Who is it Good For?*

The naming of an area, and how that naming informs a narrative and identity of space, can have a number of consequences. This study has illustrated that complex geographical spaces such as Vancouver's DTES, which has a number of varying social, cultural, and historical connections that reflect diverse ethnic and social groups, has been altered by the presence of an annual festival. The effects of urban branding and reimagining urban space when informed with a neoliberal agenda would pursue an ambience that is quite different than that illustrated by PSF. For instance, dating back to the late 1970s there were initiatives to rejuvenate the DEOD. This included improvements along Powell Street such as a 'Japanese Village', that was proposed in two development plans from 1980 and 1981 regarding the Downtown Eastside<sup>20</sup>. The idea of a 'Japanese Village' was discussed in meetings between the City of Vancouver, Japanese Canadian organizations, and business owners along Powell Street during the fall of 1979 and in early 1980<sup>21</sup>. The document titled, "Downtown- Eastside/Oppenheimer policy plan" from 1981 stated:

The purpose of these meetings was to determine support for a possible upgrading of a portion of Powell Street with a Japanese theme, partially to recognize the important historic and cultural contributions of Japanese-Canadians in the Oppenheimer Area, and partially to provide an impetus for the revival of the commercial retail-restaurants aspect for Japanese-Canadians, tourists and others<sup>22</sup>.

This quotation illustrates a few interesting points. First, although urban branding is a relatively new strategy for promoting urban and economic development, this statement demonstrates that marketing strategies characteristic of urban branding were being pursued in the late 1970s and early 1980s for the same purposes that contemporary urban branding tactics seek. Second, it discusses the alteration of the DEOD to establish a Japanese themed ambience. The document

continued to discuss the characteristics of such a design, often referring to it as a ‘beautification scheme’<sup>23</sup>. The document proposed that the beautification scheme ‘would include basic sidewalk repair/replacement with Japanese-theme decorative treatment near the curb, lantern-style pedestrian lighting, Japanese banners, street signs, and some plantings’<sup>24</sup>. All of these characteristics were to create a ‘Japanese Village’ that would promote business and facilitate consumption for economic gains, all under a culturally informed and identifiable streetscape. These stereotypical cultural ideas for reimagining space were also found in a document at the City of Vancouver archives that had a number of slides illustrating proposed designs and architecture for the potential 1980s ‘Japanese Village’. The document titled “Powell Street Improvement Project” (1981) illustrated a variety of stereotypical Japanese culturally informed designs, such as paving stones, a tree guard, a Japanese themed entrance gate, lantern styled lighting, garden planters, and benches<sup>25</sup>. Also, letters from Japanese Canadian organizations in the 1980s appeared to support the idea of the Japanese village<sup>26</sup>. These documents are interesting because throughout the course of this investigation an opposing and very different narrative regarding the support for a Japanese culturally informed streetscape surfaced. Fortunately the village and beautification scheme from the early 1980s never materialized. Additionally, the notion of a Japanese Village has reemerged in the recent DTES Local Area Planning Process (LAPP) discussions and documentation. For instance, on February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2014, the City of Vancouver published a draft of the “Downtown Eastside Local Area Plan”. Japantown is seen in this document twenty-five times (not including the Index), and is used to reference the Oppenheimer District<sup>27</sup>. A critical assessment of the discourse in this document illustrates that instead of referring to the area as simply ‘Oppenheimer’ or the ‘Oppenheimer District’, the document reads ‘Powell Street (Japantown), Oppenheimer’ when first introducing the zones of the DTES, and

after the initial introduction uses ‘Powell Street (Japantown)’ without Oppenheimer numerous times<sup>28</sup>. Placing Oppenheimer behind Powell Street (Japantown) in the initial introduction of the zones suggests that it is used less by the general public and gives the other reference supremacy. Additionally, the document discusses a ‘Powell Street (Japantown) Revitalization program’ in support of Japanese Canadian heritage, which will ‘encourage community programming including celebration, and interpretative amenities’<sup>29</sup>. In a discussion of retail strategies for ‘new enterprise investment’ ‘Powell Street (Japantown)’ is listed as an existing retail space that should be supported by having ‘a vibrant mix of shops and services’<sup>30</sup>. The document also discusses the importance of place-making in order to develop ‘interesting’ and ‘engaging space’, the document’s discussion of place-making puts an emphasis on the importance of heritage, meaning, and historic spaces<sup>31</sup>. This document illustrates that the threat of a Japanese Village being developed in the DTES is still a very real possibility.

### *The Japanese Village... Refuted*

Although a minority of the interview respondents were either supportive of, or on the fence about, a Japantown revitalization, most respondents were opposed to the idea of revitalizing and rebranding the area with inherent Japanese cultural attributes. The disapproval was based on the fact that Japanese Canadian culture is not the same as Japanese culture, and recreating streetscape with Japanese artefacts was felt by many to be offensive to the Japanese Canadian community that once lived in the neighbourhood. Instead, there are other and more just ways to commemorate this community and this space that do not involve the creation of a Japantown. The reasons people opposed this style of development included the effects and the injustices that would be faced by the current DTES community, such as social and physical displacement. A Japanese Canadian interview respondent named Claire, who expressed disgust in the use of the



term Japantown stated, ‘the idea of an ethnic village is kind of repulsive’. Claire continued by saying:

I think there should be a memory of what took place, but that can be any number of... Sometimes I walk down the street and there is just some kind of, like when I went to Monterey... On the streets they have all these historic plaques just talking about what this area once was... Not just the Japanese, but, you know, all the different communities and you know commemorating people who were important to the area... The buildings, just knowing that this was this building, you know, once housed the main dried goods place, or the fishing, or the rice merchant, or whatever. Just knowing, like having some kind of memory. The history, you know, to me when I lived away from Vancouver I’d come back and I’d say, “there was something there that’s been torn down, I don’t know what it was, but I feel like there’s been a loss and no kind of, um, no memory left”. And that kind of scares me because if we lose our memory, you know... And my parents always said, “history can repeat itself”.

Claire demonstrates that spaces and people can be remembered through commemorative facets that do not include themed streetscapes. She also presents the possibility for the current DTES community to be displaced, which would be similar to what happened to Japanese Canadians.

Melissa, also a Japanese Canadian, supported these points stating:

This thing you’re talking about, branding, it’s a little bit worrying to me about how it could get used in terms of gentrification, how it can get used in a way that’s just sort of flying flags up on the sign posts saying “Japantown”, “This is Japantown!” And not really designating the neighbourhood in a meaningful way that actually means something to members of the Japanese Canadian communities that have ties there and who have history there... Whatever you decide to either name the area, I think it’s really important to be talking to the First Nation communities about, because really, we’re guests on their land anyway... I think there’s ways to work on those kinds of issues with other community groups, or other communities, because a lot of different people have lived there and have been the low-income community there... You know different people have lived in that neighbourhood and maybe feel some kind of connection to it as well, so, you know, how you designate these things is really something that you want to do from the group-up... You want to get people’s stories and you want to know how they connect to the neighbourhood and what things are meaningful to them and how do you want to be represented. You don’t want somebody just saying, “oh yeah, that’s Japantown,” and here, “we’re going to slap it with this kind of

designation or we want it to look like this”... Then that’s just disconcerting to me... Japantown doesn’t really mean anything to me personally.

Melissa touches upon many interesting points regarding urban branding and the DTES. Her comments reveal the importance of connecting the imagery and place-identity of an area with the current local residents, as well as others who have significant connections with the geographical location. Melissa touches upon the differences of inclusive and exclusive urban branding, and supports the idea of an inclusive urban brand, whereby those connected to an area have the right to be included in shaping its identity, representation(s), and image(s). Ryan, a Japanese Canadian elder, said that it is too narrow if the focus is just on Japanese Canadians because there are layers of history in the neighbourhood that include African Canadians and Indigenous Peoples. It appears to be important to some Japanese Canadians that however the DTES is invested, redeveloped, or modified, that it be an inclusive and just urban brand that is both representative and selected by those who have a tangible and natural connection to the geography.

The redevelopment of Oppenheimer Park, for the most part, has followed an inclusive redevelopment model. For instance, Darren, a Japanese Canadian involved in the DTES and with PSF, spoke about commemorative aspects in the park for the First Nations community, and in Susanne’s interview, she noted that there was a soapbox placed in the park in order to recognize the labour history of Oppenheimer Park and the area. The redevelopment of the park considered various groups and a number of historical geographical associations. Moreover, the interviewees who appeared to be on the fence about revitalizing the DTES into a Japanese village believed that it would not materialize because Japanese Canadians no longer live in the neighbourhood. Others argued that creating a themed village was the disneyfication of Japanese Canadians. This is apparent in Jack’s interview, a Japanese Canadian elder, who was asked for

his opinion about developing the DEOD as a stereotypical Japanese urban village. He responded by saying, ‘yeah, it becomes Disneyland, really’, and moments later stated:

That’s the danger you gotta watch out for, is like, “uh, well lets go down to Japantown and check out the quaint little Japanese down there.” You know, uh no, I would be appalled if it was going to be like that... If you’re going to, if the attempt is to cash in on the cache of the historical roots of the community which has abandoned the area for all intense and purposes, it has washed its hands of it... Not withstanding the institutions of the Language School and the Buddhist Temple there, and the festival, okay. So if the attempt is to cash in on that and to build something cute and folksy and Japanese-y... That’s appalling to me.

Jack illustrates the irony, offensiveness, and dangers in rebranding and reimagining the DEOD as a Japanese themed urban village.

In sum, this section has outlined how an area such as the DTES could be rebranded and reimagined in a way that does not have any meaningful relations to the local community, or the community whose culture and identity is being used create a particular ambience. If this were the case, it would be exclusive to, and a misrepresentation of, both communities. The 1980s conception of a Japanese themed urban village was everything that the majority of those interviewed for this project opposed. Particularly the idea of a Japanese-y Disneyland, and would be a weak attempt to use the Japanese of Japanese Canadians to reimage and reimagine urban space. The concerns in this analysis are presented by the notion that the previous Japanese Canadian community and the current Japanese Canadian community are disassociated from these stereotypical, and often offensive representations of Japanese culture. These histrionic characteristics do not have a place in Vancouver’s DTES, and from the understanding compiled in this study, they amount to another social injustice against the Japanese Canadian community due to the offensive nature of equating the Western mainstream conception of Japanese with Japanese Canadian. Thus, a more inclusive and positive way for a community to reimage and

reclaim space is through a restrained presence, which is assisted by the moderately and temporarily invasive annual festival that provides an opportunity to celebrate community, history, culture, heritage, social justice and performed as a commemoration.

### *Japantown For Whom?*

This project would be incomplete and discount the diligence of the researcher if it did not touch upon the information collected regarding ‘Japantown’. Japantown is the English translation of Nihonmachi, which was used historically to refer to Japanese communities that were outside of Japan. The DEOD is referred to as Powell Street, Powell Grounds, and at times, Japantown within the Japanese Canadian community. The issue with using Japantown to refer to the DEOD is that it is an ahistorical concept. The first and subsequent generations of Japanese Canadians never referred to the DEOD as Japantown; instead, they referred to it as Powell Street or Powell Grounds, as well as the Japanese translations and pronunciations of these names. Furthermore, some Japanese Canadians find Japantown offensive because they view it to be an extension of, and derived from, terms such as Jap-town or J-Town, which Caucasian and dominant Canadian cultures used as a pejorative to refer to the DEOD in prewar time. The possibility of Japantown used in the urban revitalization of the DTES is concerning because naming frames a space before it is even entered and preconceives its meaning and identity, which gives structure to the anticipated images, design and architecture to be experienced.

Japantown is considered to be ironic because it would oversee the potential revitalization of an urban space that would physically displace current DTES residents by capitalizing on a group that was previously displaced from the same location. There is a definite parallel between the forced removal of Japanese Canadians and the potential displacement of current DTES residents. PSF is a culprit of using Japantown as the site of the festival in a number of

documents, such as grant applications, stating that the festival is held in ‘Japantown’ or ‘historic Japantown’<sup>32</sup>. For example, a section prepared for a grant application from 2001 stated, ‘situated in Oppenheimer Park in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, within the heart of what once was Japantown before WWII, the Festival draws on Japanese Canadians’<sup>33</sup>. Additionally, a section from a newsletter produced by PSF reads, ‘there are many reasons why the festival is tied to the Powell Street neighbourhood. The main reason is the historical tie to Japantown, the area where many of the first Japanese immigrants lived’<sup>34</sup>. The festival has used Japantown in its own literature, however the reason for referring to the area as Japantown appears to be that of convenience. This was discussed in an interview with Blaine, a Japanese Canadian who has a long history with the festival. Blaine explained that it was often used in grant applications because it was useful in the context and position the festival was coming from, that is, to make a historical connection to the area and the park. Blaine said that the use of the term helped give an authentic reason to have the festival at Oppenheimer Park and that no one really ever called the area Japantown. Moreover, in Susanne’s interview she said that Japantown is ‘an easy way of describing in a nutshell of who used to live there’. The term appears to be used within the Japanese Canadian community out of convenience to inform others about the history of the area; however, most members of the Japanese Canadian community refer to the area as Powell Street.

Furthermore, the interview data included a number of varying opinions regarding the use of Japantown. For instance, Chris, a Japanese Canadian, said, ‘fortunately calling it Japantown now wouldn’t necessarily be a negative, but Jap-town before the Second World War wasn’t a positive’. Chris did not think that revitalizing the area under the Japantown slogan would work or make sense, and was neutral when discussing the positive and negative effects of the term. Meanwhile, Susanne expressed a different opinion, suggesting that Japantown resembled the

disneyfication of the area and that it glosses over the social injustices that occurred against Japanese Canadians. Susanne's opinion is similar to Claire's, who is an older middle-aged Japanese Canadian who felt that Japantown sanitizes the history of Japanese Canadians in the area and instead equates Japanese Canadians with Japanese culture and values. Claire stated, 'to call it Japantown it's ironic, it is completely ironic to me that it would be called that... The City would love to see it called Japantown... The Japanese elements of the community would probably like to see it called Japantown. I just don't get it... To me it's really offensive'. Claire also discussed how Japantown is associated with the derogatory name Jap-town. Although using Japantown to describe the DEOD was viewed by many as negative and unjust, some interviewees, such as Darren, suggested that it could possibly provoke people to question why it is called Japantown and to learn about the history of the area. Darren, however, was against rebranding and revitalizing the neighbourhood as a Japanese culturally themed streetscape. The issue of naming is important because of the complexity of the DTES, such as its long and multipart history, and how naming can easily censor particular groups and histories while selectively promoting others.

To complete this study it is necessary to discuss issues around using the term Japantown because of the merit it was given in interview responses. Japantown is controversial when used to refer to the DEOD. Understandably, it has been used out of convenience to capture the history and presence of Japanese Canadians in the geographical area by the festival, and others within the Japanese Canadian community. Japantown, whether formal or informal in its use tends to be perceived negatively by the Japanese Canadian community. Due to the negative connotations associated with Japantown, it would be unscrupulous to use it as a branding strategy in order to create an urban village with the purpose of economic gain and for urban redevelopment.

Therefore, Japantown is declared as inappropriate for referring to, or naming, the DTES or the DEOD.

### *Conclusion*

The Powell Street Festival has contributed to reimagining and rebranding Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, specifically the Oppenheimer District. Although some of the Japanese Canadian characteristics of the area existed prior to the first festival, with the establishment of an annual event, the thirty-seven year presence of the festival has provided the rationale for these previous facets (e.g. Sakura trees, large rocks, historical significance and sentimental attachment) to remain in the park, and to continue to have meaning. The festival has reimagined the DTES through permanent features such as plaques, signs, and inscriptions; it also temporarily transforms space during its operation, which is fundamental in the co-creation of its identity and narrative. Through the celebratory features of the festival, the DEOD becomes a space that is claimed by, and belongs to, Japanese Canadians. However, the festival eventually packs up and leaves, and the space is transformed back to its original state and used by the local residents. PSF is temporarily invasive of the DTES, and the permanent ways that it has contributed to inscribing the landscape in the DTES are subtle and commemorative. Thus, it performs subtle-commemorative branding, which is respectful of both communities, and in the case of PSF, is both inclusive and courteous of the DTES community. The accounts given by Japanese Canadians in interviews and the documents retrieved from the City of Vancouver Archives have been used to compare and contrast the differences between inclusive and exclusive urban branding. This analysis has argued that it is exploitative and would be yet another social injustice to misrepresent Japanese Canadians in order to revitalize the DTES, which would be the reiteration of the human rights violations experienced during their internment.

Neither the Japanese Canadian community nor PSF have contributed in creating a cultural enclave in order to promote consumption and urban development for the exchange of a higher profile. The idea of creating a stereotypical Japanese urban village would be a misrepresentation of the festival and the Japanese Canadian community. In the end, a branding of this sort would be disrespectful, offensive, and unjust, both in its representation of Japanese Canadians and in the disregard for the history of the social injustices that the community faced during the Second World War. The notion of a cultural enclave and using Japantown as the identity and branding slogan of the DEOD is undesirable, and it would reach a new level of exploitation by urban branding. Therefore, through subtle-commemorative features, PSF has justly and respectfully rebranded the DTES.



## CONCLUSION

This study has brought theoretical contributions from the literature on urban branding and festivals in the fields of sociology and geography to examine how socio-spatial events and location play a vital role in the branding of urban space. In collaboration, these theories have provided the roadmap for demonstrating that urban brands and the reimagining of space occur at multiple levels. For example, branding may be used to accompany urban revitalization; it is also used to create ethnic enclaves or to market particular niche and cultural quarters. Moreover, as illustrated in this project, urban branding includes commemorative imagery inscribed upon a space by a community and through an annual festival. Although literature already exists that assesses these types of conjunctions, this project has offered a relatively original assessment regarding commemorative aspects and urban branding. The findings push the boundaries of what constitutes branding; the concept of a brand is broad and ambiguous. This project has demonstrated that branding occurs through indirect avenues, for example, the type of trees that are planted in Oppenheimer Park. I have outlined how festivals, such as PSF, are branding vehicles, and how, in particular, PSF has reimagined Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, specifically the DEOD, with physical and non-physical attributes of Japanese Canadian history and culture.

The study began by positing the question: 'How is the Powell Street Festival connected to rebranding the Oppenheimer District in the DTES as Japantown?' In response, I have outlined the history of the festival, its cultural and historical significance to the Japanese Canadian community, the relationship between the festival's community and the DTES, and lastly, how the festival has contributed to the imagery and branding characteristics within the DEOD. The answer to this question lies within the relationship between the geography of the DTES and the

festival (including PSF's broader community). This includes the festival's thirty-seven year presence at Oppenheimer Park, and how this presence has initiated commemorative inscriptions upon the surface of the DEOD. Additionally, the festival participates in the temporary transformation of space that enables both discursive features and the narrative of space to authenticate the identity of the DEOD as belonging to Japanese Canadians. These fluid and more abstract qualities signify Japanese Canadian-ism as being inherent to this particular location. In conclusion, I suggest that PSF, its community, and the Japanese Canadian community have unintentionally branded urban space. Through the commemoration and celebration of Japanese Canadian history, culture, and community, the DTES has been reimaged benevolently.

Subsequent questions that were posited to guide this study were: How are human rights being addressed through PSF and the Japantown brand? What, and whose histories are presented in the rebranding of the area? How can histories and geographies of human rights struggle inform contemporary processes of rebranding the DTES? The project has determined that the 'Japantown brand' does not invoke human rights; rather, such an imposition would only add to the social injustices upon current DTES residents (via revitalization and potential gentrification). 'Japantown' is argued to be disrespectful to Japanese Canadians; however, the term has been used out of convenience by PSF and Japanese Canadians to narrate the history of the area. The Japantown brand does little to address human rights, although it is possible to argue that the brand recognizes the human rights violations that occurred to Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. However, many Japanese Canadians appear to view the term as a pejorative reference to the community that once existed. Moreover, PSFS has addressed human rights in their mandate as a festival, and have acted upon this mandate; this is visible in the festival's

commitment for supporting and siding with the low-income and DTES community. This is illustrated through the festival's advocacy group, and recently, PSF's 2014 decision to relocate the festival to the surrounding streets of Oppenheimer Park in order to support and not interfere with the DTES community's protest taking place at the park. This protest called for rights to housing and for the right to remain in the DTES. Moreover, the latter part of this paper has emphasized that PSF and the Japanese Canadian community have participated in subtle-commemorative branding, and therefore, have embarked, perhaps unintentionally, on an inclusive and more just version of reimagining and rebranding urban space.

In a response over what, and whose histories are being represented in the reimagining of the DTES, I argue that PSF and the Japanese Canadian community have inscribed the DTES multiple ways. These inscriptions have operated under consideration for both PSF's and the local DTES residents' community. It is evident that there is a strong representation of both the festival and Japanese Canadian identity upon the surface of the DTES; however, the DTES community have their own events and festivals in this area throughout the year, which illustrates a common sharing and use of the DTES as a site for events and social gatherings. Additionally, PSF and the Japanese Canadian community have supported the representation of various groups and people who have occupied and lived in this location. This is evident in the redevelopment of Oppenheimer Park, where features of the park represent First Nations peoples, as well as the labour histories of the DTES. Pertinently, gathering data on how the more recent DTES community (i.e. the past twenty to thirty years) is represented in the geography of the DTES was beyond the scope of this research project, and is an important consideration. Further research could compare and contrast the magnitude that current and past communities are given in the presentation and branding of this location. This would demonstrate who is actually being

represented in the identity of the area and who is not. In culmination of who is being represented in the DTES, I argue that a variety of groups and histories are being presented, however, the Japanese Canadian community have left a deep mark and legacy upon the landscape of the DTES, perhaps more noticeable than other groups.

This project claims that histories and geographies of human rights struggle inform the contemporary rebranding of the DTES through the nuance of commemoration. This is illustrated by the extent that PSF and the Japanese Canadian community have inscribed the area with a variety of physical and non-physical attributes. The DTES's landscape is an epitaph for Japanese Canadians – it says they used to live there and have reclaimed the area by enriching it with a sense of belonging and ownership. This is visible through the yearly presence of PSF, the thriving Japanese Canadian participation and concern of the area, and the permanent signage in and around Oppenheimer Park.

This study has outlined the differences between the permanent and temporary reimagining of space. Uniquely, the analysis of the temporary reimagining of Oppenheimer Park illustrates important aspects of rebranding space; this is because the act of the festival itself contributes to the creation of both brand and place identity – although the festival only operates for a few days each year. In other words, PSF's celebration guides the discourse and narrative of the area as being Japanese Canadian and says this is where this group celebrates art, culture, identity, and community. The festival is important to reclaiming space, however, it inadvertently masks social problems in the DTES during its celebration. I argue that these effects are neither completely positive nor negative in this particular situation because the festival is open (with limitations) to including the DTES community in its celebration. Additionally, the cultural features inscribed upon the DEOD's landscape are subtle and are respectful of the current and previous

communities. The festival does not *try* to displace the local residents and mask social issues, rather, the festival's focus is on creating a zone of consumption that facilitates the co-creation of culture and identity that commemorates Japanese Canadian history, and as a result, has led to the unintentional reimaging and rebranding of urban space.

The issues of brands and branding have been gaining attention within academia as an area of study and topic for critical analysis. This study has contributed to the literature and analysis of urban brands in both sociology and geography. It has linked the disciplines of sociology and geography to illustrate how a multidisciplinary study provides a more in-depth analysis of society than either discipline could achieve singlehandedly. Furthermore, this study verifies the idea that branding is sociological and shows how sociological approaches to branding can provide useful insight into determining how brands effect and become facilitated through social interactions. Importantly, I have added to branding literature that argues there is an inherent link between geography and branding, and by doing so, I demonstrate the entanglements between brands, geography, and society.

The importance of this study is that it contributes to the literature regarding the development of cities and urban spaces, and the magnitude that branding has in the process of urban renewal and development. This is emphasized through analyses of brand identities and images that justly represent those who live in, and produce, specific social and physical spaces. I argue that it is important to consider how vulnerable groups, amongst others, can be negatively affected by urban brands. I illustrate this by showing how both urban festivals and urban branding can produce branded spaces that have no inherent relationship to the occupants of that space, and I also consider how festivals and branding can result in gentrification and social displacement. In regard to PSF, the festival has recently stood up for the low-income

community, and by doing so, they cast themselves as a supporter and partner of the DTES community, and inadvertently indicate that the festival will not be coopted nor will it play a part in social and physical displacement. This is important because in terms of urban renewal in the DTES, especially with the consideration of Japantown, PSF is in a vulnerable position for being commodified and coopted with the intention of assisting with the elaboration of the Japantown brand. By voicing their position publicly, the festival can counter such vulnerabilities. I believe that this is important because, as this study has illustrated, a festival can be a main urban branding vehicle and assist in urban revitalization and renewal.

### *Limitations*

There are a number of limitations to this study, some of which are subject to the size and time restraints required for its completion. Perhaps one of the key limitations of this study is its failure to include broader contextual information about the DTES, such as an in-depth description of the history of the Indigenous populations that inhabit this location, and the space's challenges with stigmatization. This discussion would also include the labour history of the area, and discuss the reference of Skid Road, which is based upon the logging skids that were dragged to Hastings Mill. Additionally, this study has excluded an extensive investigation into the current situations within the DTES. It presents the area as a place of historical marginalization, and as a space that is currently affected by social ills. By avoiding current situations in the DTES and relating them to the notion of rebranding, the project misses an important analysis about the consequences of (even) discussing the branding and rebranding of the DTES. The result of this is that it ignores the stigmatization of the area and avoids critically discussing the way the area is portrayed and presented by the media and framed within everyday relations by those living in, and analyzing, Vancouver. Thus, the project is bound by particular constraints,

and the investigator acknowledges that not presenting issues of stigmatization regarding the frames, naming, and idea of rebranding the DTES is a weakness to the overall investigation of this study.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, I ask ‘how can festivals and branding be used simultaneously to counter-brand vulnerable urban spaces?’ The answer to this question may be found in the future of the DTES and PSF. I believe that brands, as well as festivals, can be harnessed and used simultaneously to counter-brand, reclaim space, and produce inclusive urban areas. In this regard, inclusive brand images *are* a possibility, and they can be presented in ways that do not push groups out of urban centres, or consume all available physical and abstract space in and of an area. PSF and the Japanese Canadian community show that this is possible through the embracement of what I define as subtle-commemorative branding – a concept that is entirely original within branding literature, and one that captures a way for groups to justly and respectfully reimagine urban space. PSF and its community share the DTES rather than flood it with a single media message. This is evident through the little amount of space in the DTES that is marked with Japanese Canadian influences, as well as the methods for how this group has chosen to be presented within this urban space. Therefore, future branding should consider just and inclusive urban branding techniques, such as commemorative branding, and communities should look toward festivals as a branding vehicle for promoting multi-layered representations and identities of those who live, lived, and have innate and intimate connections to urban spaces.

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### *Notes and Primary Sources*

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<sup>1</sup> The names of all interview respondents have been changed and replaced with pseudonyms to protect her or his identity.

<sup>2</sup> Nikkei National Museum, PSF Fonds, Collection: 2011.46.

<sup>3</sup> Nikkei National Museum, PSF Fonds, Collection: 2011.46.

<sup>4</sup> Nikkei National Museum, Box: MS78 PSF Fonds, File: Administrative Records 2011.46, Folder: 22, Title: The Fifth Annual Powell Street Festival, 1981.

<sup>5</sup> Nikkei National Museum, Box: MS80 PSF Fonds, File: Fundraising + Grants 2011.46.10, Folder: 9, Title: Powell Street Festival (In Radiowaves), 1986.

<sup>6</sup> *A Dream of Riches – The Japanese Canadians 1877-1977* (1978) is an art exhibit and book about Japanese Canadians. Initially presented as an exhibit, pictures were taken by Japanese Canadian photographer Tamio Wakayama and were later compiled into a trilingual (English, French, Japanese) book that discussed Japanese Canadian history from 1877-1977. It is titled after the idea that their ancestors came to Canada in the search of new riches, however, were marginalized and many were put into internment camps.

<sup>7</sup> The Japanese Canadian Centennial Project occurred in 1977 and was a major celebration that marked the one-hundredth anniversary since the first Japanese immigrant arrived to Canada. It was a critical project and celebration because the first Powell Street Festival was born from the event, and was also one of the first times since being interned that Japanese Canadians congregated in a large group to celebrate their culture and history.

<sup>8</sup> Nikkei National Museum, PSF Fonds, Collection, 2011.46.

<sup>9</sup> Nikkei National Museum, Box: MS81 PSF Fonds, File: Administrative Records 2011.46.12, Folder: 3, Title: File: A: Think.DRF, 1988.

<sup>10</sup> Nikkei National Museum, Box: MS78 PSF Fonds, File, Administrative Records 2011.46.3, Folder 9, 1979.

<sup>11</sup> Issei refers to first generation Japanese Canadians.

<sup>12</sup> Nisei refers to second generation Japanese Canadians. Additionally, Sansei is used to refer to third generation Japanese Canadians.

<sup>13</sup> Nikkei National Museum, Box: MS82 PSF Fonds, File: Administrative Records, Folder 10 2011.46.15, 1991.

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<sup>14</sup> Nikkei National Museum, Box: MS80 PSF Fonds, File: Administrative Records 2011.46.11, Folder 17, 1987; Nikkei National Museum, Box: MS81 PSF Fonds, Title: 1989 Powell Street Festival Request For Funding, File: Fundraising + Grants 2011.46.13, Folder 9, 1989.

<sup>15</sup> Nikkei National Museum, Box: MS84 PSF Fonds, File: Fundraising + Grants 2011.46.19, Folder: 9, Title: Operating and Project Grant Application, 1995; Nikkei National Museum, Box: MS117 PSF Fonds, File: Fundraising + Grants 2011.46.25, Folder: 2, Title: Multidisciplinary Festivals Project Grants, 2001; Nikkei National Museum, Box: MS117 PSF Fonds, File: Fundraising + Grants 2011.46.26, Folder: 11, Title: British Columbia Arts Council, 2002

<sup>16</sup> Open Doors Project, 2010 Historical Panels, n.d. (\*See Bibliography).

<sup>17</sup> Open Doors Project, 2011 Historical Panels, n.d. (\*See Bibliography).

<sup>18</sup> Open Doors Project: Commemorating the diverse histories of the Powell Street community, n.d.

<sup>19</sup> Open Doors Project: Commemorating the diverse histories of the Powell Street community, n.d.

<sup>20</sup> City of Vancouver Archives, Title: Schedule A : Downtown-Eastside/Oppenheimer official development plan, Reference Code: PUB-: PD 2016, Year: 1980, Page(s): 22-24; City of Vancouver Archives, Title: Schedule A : Downtown-Eastside/Oppenheimer official development plan, Reference Code: PUB-: PD 674, Year: 1981, Page(s): 21-23.

<sup>21</sup> City of Vancouver Archives, Title: Downtown-Eastside/Oppenheimer policy plan, Reference Code: PUB-: PD 1371, Year: 1981, Page(s): 50.

<sup>22</sup> City of Vancouver Archives, Title: Downtown-Eastside/Oppenheimer policy plan, Reference Code: PUB-: PD 1371, Year: 1981, Page(s): 50.

<sup>23</sup> City of Vancouver Archives, Title: Downtown-Eastside/Oppenheimer policy plan, Reference Code: PUB-: PD 1371, Year: 1981, Page(s): 50-51.

<sup>24</sup> City of Vancouver Archives, Title: Downtown-Eastside/Oppenheimer policy plan, Reference Code: PUB-: PD 1371, Year: 1981, Page(s): 50.

<sup>25</sup> City of Vancouver Archives, Title: Powell Street improvement project, Reference Code: Box: 137-F-4, Year: 1981.

<sup>26</sup> City of Vancouver Archives, Title: Japantown beautification, Reference Code: Box: 54-G-3 folder 9, Year: 1982.

<sup>27</sup> Downtown Eastside Local Area Plan, 2014:11-188.

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<sup>28</sup> Downtown Eastside Local Area Plan, 2014:11-188.

<sup>29</sup> Downtown Eastside Local Area Plan, 2014:38.

<sup>30</sup> Downtown Eastside Local Area Plan, 2014:112.

<sup>31</sup> Downtown Eastside Local Area Plan, 2014:26-44.

<sup>32</sup> Nikkei National Museum, Box: MS116 PSF Fonds, File: Publicity 2011.46.23, Folder: 11, Title: “The neighbourhood and local heroes” (In Powell Street Festival February 1999, Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 2), 1999; Nikkei National Museum, Box: MS117 PSF Fonds, File Fundraising + Grants 2011.46.25, Folder: 2, Title: Powell Street Festival Society, 2001; Nikkei National Museum, Box: MS117 PSF Fonds File: Administrative Records 2011.46.25, Folder: 4, Title: Powell Street Festival Society, 2001; Nikkei National Museum, Box: MS117 PSF Fonds, File: Fundraising + Grants 2011.46.25, Folder: 2, Title: Multidisciplinary Festivals Project Grants, 2001; Nikkei National Museum, Box: MS117 PSF Fonds, File: Fundraising + Grants 2011.46.26, Folder: 11, Title: British Columbia Arts Council: Project Application, 2002.

<sup>33</sup> Nikkei National Museum, Box: MS117 PSF Fonds, File: Fundraising + Grants 2011.46.25, Folder: 2, Title: Multidisciplinary Festivals Project Grants, 2001.

<sup>34</sup> Nikkei National Museum, Box: MS116 PSF Fonds, File: Publicity 2011.46.23, Folder: 11, Title: “The neighbourhood and local heroes” (In Powell Street Festival February 1999, Vol 5. No.1, p. 2), 1999.