

SHARLA SAVA / “Igniting the mercurial”: A Conversation about North Vancouver Culture

SABINE BITTER is an artist who lives and works in Vancouver and Vienna; JEFF DERKSEN is a writer and Assistant Professor, Department of English, Simon Fraser University; FRANCIS MANSBRIDGE is a writer who worked for many years as an archivist at the North Vancouver Museum and Archives; REID SHIER is Director of Presentation House Gallery; and JERRY ZASLOVE is Professor Emeritus, English and Humanities, Simon Fraser University. We met in Sabine and Jeff’s studio in February 2009 to talk about possibilities for culture in North Vancouver. What follows is our wide-ranging conversation about art, architecture, archives, and urban planning.

REID SHIER When we are talking about cultural models, outside of very dense urban cores—it’s one thing to talk about models we are all familiar with but another to talk about the context of North Vancouver in particular. North Vancouver is an old city that wasn’t always the suburb it is now.

FRANCIS MANSBRIDGE It is interesting that it grew up as a group of different towns or villages. You had Deep Cove, which was listed separately in the directories for a long time, not even part of North Vancouver. And you had Moodyville. And you had Lynn Valley. And you had Lonsdale. And these had post offices, and you had to send your mail to the region—you didn’t mail to North Vancouver. This has probably affected its development and its current state.

SHARLA SAVA When did the name “Moodyville” fall out of use?

FM Quite early. The mill at Moodyville closed down by about 1900, and after that the centre of activity shifted to Lower Lonsdale. Beyond that time Moodyville ceased to exist as a separate community.

JERRY ZASLOVE That was an imaginary boundary? It didn’t have political significance, is that right?

FM No political significance, like where does Kitsilano end . . .

RS For me it raises a really interesting question—a paradox around what Presentation House Gallery is and what it offers, presumably to a community,



and by extension what the communities in North Van are. The decision about living and working in two spaces is true for all the people working at the Gallery because we all live in Vancouver. A lot of our “community,” the people who come to see the shows, live in Vancouver or elsewhere. There is a lingering desire to name the audience of the Gallery that impacts us, and is at the root of a (perhaps misplaced or self-imposed) perception of our placelessness in North Van, and who and for whom we operate.

FM I wonder if this is changing at all with the huge increase of people in the Lower Lonsdale area. It seems to me this is a very different group of people than have traditionally been North Vancouver residents. I imagine they work in Vancouver.

RS I believe for the majority of those in Lower Lonsdale, as it is for many throughout North Van, the city is a bedroom community. People commute to Vancouver, and then return home at night.

JZ There is an influx of immigrants—Iranian, Philipino, Asian. A lot of people working in the hospital try to live in North Van but they can’t because it’s too expensive. When I’m driving east across the bridge, I’m always wondering who are all these people, going to North Van?

JEFF DERKSEN I guess it depends on how you think of the role of the institution, gallery, or museum. Does it plan its programming to reflect existing or imagined communities, or is it a site that produces communities? If it produces communities, then it has the potential of producing counter-communities. Or it can be beyond the boundary of the site, because the relationship between the centre and periphery of the city is changing quite a bit with the notion of the exurb, or the aerosol city, with the edges bleeding out.

JZ That's why I call it a gateway or threshold community—a conceptual name, to give the setting a sense of transience, and moving back and forth through the doors of a place where geography is the fate of the territory.

RS This is something that weaves us together with the civic protest around development in Lower Lonsdale and the galvanizing nature of a cultural institution. The idea of Lower Lonsdale as a gateway—there is a resident population, but we are talking about it as one that commutes out, so there is little current sense of an urban core. Politically there is a desire to form Lower Lonsdale into an urban centre, to position it as a node where there is activity night and day. One of the reasons Millennium Development's large condo towers were green-lighted was to gain kick-back money to fund social and cultural institutions, which would then form the nexus of the city.

FM “Bonusing” is the word they like to use.

RS That's what we were part of, a bonusing situation that instead galvanized a number of community members against what needed to happen in order to fund us. The Catch-22 is that what you need in order to create a community is sensed by some as the thing that will destroy the community. So my question is what is Lower Lonsdale? To us it has always been the dream of forming a cultural institution in this area in order to help build a point of contact and destination rather than of flow-through. But right now few cities, North Vancouver included, have the money to build this type of infrastructure. The tool they do have is bonus amenity agreements.

JD This is also one of the paradoxes between culture and urban planning at the moment. Culture is seen as the fix or problem-solving aspect for urban problems, and yet there is a reluctance to actually fund cultural institutions that would shape the urban territory. So culture gets seen as a cheap way of solving urban problems. The “creative city” that Richard Florida talks about is a neoliberal dream of using culture not to solve urban problems but to make culture central to the gentrification process. So on the one hand you have the struggle of the gallery to produce or reflect communities, on the other hand you have an urban planning impulse that pushes the gallery or institution towards the production of an urban space that is more based on consumption and real estate. In effect, the “creative cities” model represents everything that we, within cultural institutions, tend to resist. So that seems to be the tension—on the one hand the centrality of

culture to urban planning, and then on the other a resistance to the possibilities of culture.

FM There's been an ongoing drive to establish a museum down at the waterfront, in the old shipyard lands there. Unlike archives which are specific to a community, museums are generally not. It was felt there was just not enough North Vancouver to make a good museum. So the intent has been to move the Maritime Museum over there. Again there's not enough money, at least in the community's view, and not enough federal money either.

SABINE BITTER I think it's actually interesting to think about who the public is for these museums. We no longer believe that there is one singular public that we have to serve, but rather the idea of various segmented and fractured publics. The Shedhalle in Zurich is one example of how institutions understand themselves to serve very specific and individual publics, immigration groups, unemployed youth—and do more project-based works with them. Another interesting model was the Rooseum in Malmö, which Charles Esche describes as a space of “democratic deviance” and a mix of community centre, club, academy and showroom. So on the one hand these institutions act extremely locally, they serve a very specific community, and on the other hand, they are linked to other institutions that identify with a similar profile. I think it is interesting that you can work with or engage with these different scales: not to imagine one audience located in North Vancouver, but produce different publics by linking with other institutions (like No One Is Illegal, other cultural institutions, universities, etc), and their publics, through related projects.

FM The only way that North Van can have a major cultural venue is by having people come in from elsewhere.

JZ But what are they bringing in when they come from elsewhere, and what are they taking back? In terms of the indigenous art gallery, I think Presentation House Gallery is an absolute hub for that kind of crossroads that has ultimately a political significance. Whereas the Maritime Museum is very different. It is a tourist attraction, as well as housing archives.

SS What about architecture? Does this have any relation to the way that we interact with these places?

SB One of the times that I got very excited about North Vancouver was when I

first arrived here. The longest trip I took was when I looked for the original site of the first Arthur Erickson house [the 1963 David Graham house]. To me it was strange that the possible demolition of the house didn't have an impact on public discourse. Architecture doesn't get a lot of public attention.

JZ Architecture in North Vancouver doesn't get discussed. The high-rises being built down there are just ugly buildings. What do you think about the new library?

RS The scale is small, and I'm sure there's a question about how it will serve the city over time—but the library is far and above what else is here. Perhaps my view is coloured by the constraints of the Gallery, and how difficult I find it is to have a conversation about architectural possibilities. I am interested in talking about what limits there are in terms of being able to develop architecture, given the existing hodge-podge, zoning bylaws, and the fact, as Sabine was saying, that it's about money. If a significant piece of architecture must be destroyed for the chance to build a much larger house, then there is little question about how the decision will go. In this context, to build a cultural institution, or something of perceived civic “value”—social housing, or some other such benefit—it is understood that it has its best chance through a developer getting extra density and therefore a higher investment return. There is no current strategy—or more accurately no tax base—to provide for landmark architecture or civic amenities.

FM We [the North Vancouver Museum and Archives] moved from Presentation House to new facilities about three years ago. There was a fortunate combination of circumstances that encouraged the district to renovate the old 1920s Lynn Valley School for as much as it would have cost to build a new building, over 4.4 million dollars. It's a really splendid facility for an archive. But museums and archives need to get out of the building and into the community. Not many people will come in when it is out of the way, up there. You get a lot more contact by going to shopping malls.

SB But it's not always the locale—many places in Europe are really off-centre, and people travel there, it's actually exciting to travel, to be a part of it.

RS Is that willingness to travel a difference between a European audience and a North American one?

JZ Yes, I think so. The centralisation and monopolisation of culture in North American cities is based on where the universities or museums are, and where



Above: Jim Breukelman, *PacifiCat* #29, 2000

Chromogenic print on Kodak Endura Paper, 126 x 150 cm. Courtesy the artist and Republic Gallery, Vancouver

Below: Dominion Photo Co., *Wallace Shipyards, Yard #2*, July 19, 1916, [NVMA 4938]

the marketplace is—the symphony, the philanthropic milieu—and there is a hospital, and all that. The cathedral and the bastille are part of the city in Europe, but there are other cathedrals outside of the centre, so people get used to travelling around.

JD I just wanted to return to the discussion of architecture as a public discourse in Vancouver. Can we talk about the public sphere in Vancouver, or is that a fiction because what we are really dealing with is actually public/private space? And what kind of publics can an institution produce, or engage with, in this context? It seems that the cultural institutions are not meant to reflect or serve the public—and its diverse communities—so much as to enhance, or “bonus,” public/private space. So how do we imagine a public function for institutions? It seems to me there is a time lag. We have an imagined sense of an existing public, and the institutional problem is then how to get them to come to the place, whether North Van, Surrey, or Burnaby, which have all had interesting and progressive programming for decades. How do we engage with different publics? This recalls the conundrum of Canadian multiculturalism too.

JZ You can also add to public/private space the notion of “intimate space,” which I think the Gallery provides. I think of it as “mercurian space”—that place where nomads and unemployed and pilgrims and artists and intelligentsia mix up and come together around objective, created culture. The overwhelming nature of public/private space buries this, and it isn’t able to express itself, in a Georg Simmel way as a place in the metropolis. And that’s why I thought that Presentation House Gallery needed as much space as possible, in Lower Lonsdale, in order to allow for the creation of intimate, mercurian spaces. It is the mercurian space that criticizes the public/private, and gives you alternative public spheres.

JD That could be the central focus of an institution, to ask how you ignite the mercurial, or create intimate spaces. If you think about how neoliberalism seeps down into our most intimate relationships, having the gallery become an intimate space allows for a redistribution of even those sensibilities. It’s an exciting idea.

RS We can think specifically about how that occurs in Lower Lonsdale, which is an accretion of different types of spaces. Today Lower Lonsdale is a burgeoning residential area, but not so long ago it was a heavy industrial space, and it is

also crossed with pockets of light industry and commercial space. There are all these different kinds of development, layered one on top of another, and the conceptual idea of a cultural institution within it has a galvanizing potential as a space of interaction. This is hard to site. I would like to see it right on the waterfront. The location I have in mind has many possible uses—park, parking lot, residence, shop. There are strong voices in the city that see this site as necessarily one that must include retail and commerce, as its potential for revenue-generation offsets the cost of building anything there.

JZ Is Lower Lonsdale a marketplace?

RS Currently I see Lower Lonsdale as a place where you are *en route*, going to or from home. It's not an agora, it's a place that pushes people away or invites you to travel through. It is a thorough-fare, a conduit, and not a destination.

FM There were so many things that could have been done. They had an agreement to use some of the old shipyard buildings for some commercial purpose, but they were left so long, about ten years, that they were destroyed by weather. That is unfortunate, that the buildings were lost.

RS I really think the location we're at right now is just crippling the Gallery.

SB How so?

RS Well, you know, that three-block walk—

SS It's a steep hill! Not only is it three blocks, but it's three blocks up.

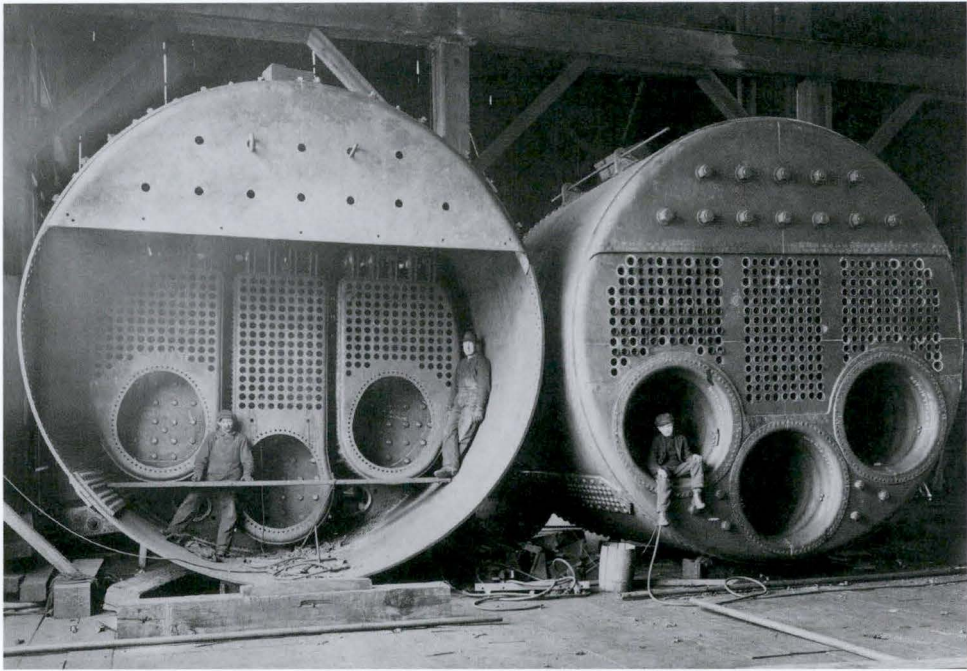
RS But more than that though, it's about being part of something. There's little there other than a 7-Eleven and residences. You don't get a sense of it being part of any kind of urban fabric or dialogue. Unless we imagine the Gallery at the top of Grouse Mountain, or somewhere as a unique destination point . . . I think it's vital to be part of something.

SS Well, you're part of a bunch of houses and apartments. It's *something*.

JZ I walk by it all the time, but that's because I live there. It's not a typical kind of a walk. I like to do it, I like to walk this route. I get off the SeaBus, walk back up, try to find a different way within the city. . . . So there never was any thought about moving up higher, for you [PHG]?

RS Like Upper Lonsdale? Up the mountain?

JZ Upper Lonsdale, centre city Did it ever come up?



136 Top: *Ships' Boilers*, 1918. Collection North Vancouver Museum & Archives [15684]

Bottom: Leonard Frank, *Imperial Press Conference Members on a Logging Train*, 1919. 20 x 25 cm
Vancouver Public Library, Special Collections, [5950]

RS We had some preliminary conversation about the Extra Foods site at Lonsdale and 16th but again this returns us to discussions about a bonus amenity situation. Without a major philanthropist with very deep pockets, there are few conversations about new space possible for a cultural institution of our scale that are not about attaching ourselves to an urban development. Unfortunately, in this latter context amenities get harnessed to the developers' needs. Social and cultural issues are conflated with the development, and the public sees them as an either/or—*If you kill it, you kill this*. We were perceived that way as part of Millennium's proposal. I find it's part of the political reality—we have to entertain every option we have. At the same time, I think the application of bonus amenities is troubling. It's a well-intentioned idea with often divisive consequences.

JZ Right, I agree.

RS One of these is how it absolves both cities and taxpayers of obligations to things they have responsibility for, and that they should exercise leadership over and make an argument for. Perhaps it's always been the case, but the developer can appear as the city's giver and destroyer.

FM If there are bylaws against or for something, I mean, why then allow them to do things that would've been against the bylaws, like putting in less parking or more storeys . . . ?

JZ And this was the argument that we, at the Lonsdale Citizens' Association, made. The very one that you just said: that the bonus amenity clause is the foot in the door for developers. When they produced the new Official Community Plan, they had already, in a futuristic way, lined Lonsdale with high-rises. They are futurists without imagination.

JD What's kind of amazing to me is that when we sit and talk about culture, the function of a cultural institution in North Vancouver or any other kind of expanded metropolitan area, is that in a way we've become, by necessity, urban planning critics. Reid and I have known each other for a long time, we've moved through the artist-run centre movement—so you go from being an artist to an organizer to a curator—and then somehow years later you end up being involved in urban planning.

JZ The same thing happened to me, but it happened in a slightly different way. You're at home, in a Bakhtinian way, and then all of a sudden you realize that the

language that you speak, the vernacular you speak, in your work world is affected by the space that you live in. Then you become an anti-capitalist, by definition, and the city becomes a symbol for a settlement and functions like a language.

JD This is what's interesting about Moodyville—as you move away from making things, the economy shifts towards insurance, investment, real estate, tourism and it draws culture into that as part of its productive engine. And the role given to culture is that of holding onto the past—the Maritime Museum would be something that does this—it shows that things *used* to be made in this area. One function for Presentation House Gallery could be to connect to the diverse, particularized communities in North Vancouver. I think what Sabine's pointing out is that the step that got skipped over is architecture. That architecture as a public discourse got skipped over, so that instead of talking about an imagined architectural space that would work for Presentation House Gallery, we end up talking about Loblaws and the bonusing of that space.

SS And it's continuous with what was brought up earlier, with Richard Florida—this is just a small part of a larger claim of the “creative cities” and “creative clusters” approach to urban planning, where creativity is seen as the source of technological progress, innovation, and the transition to a viable postindustrial economy. So we can study how city councils have embraced and integrated the principles of knowledge and creativity into their urban planning. The recent, and much celebrated, cultural renaissance in Toronto is such a great example. The irony, of course, is that they are so inseparably bound to public/private development models that they overlook the pre-existing fabric of creative urban communities.

JZ I see this as a problem of Vancouver, not of North Vancouver which wants to mirror Vancouver.

JD Or we could say it's a problem of globalized cities. It's not a unique paradigm.

RS But what is a city council to do in a situation where they would otherwise never be able to build these things? Politicians are in no-win situations.

FM I think part of it might go back, too, to what happened when the federal government managed to get this huge budget surplus. They did it on the backs of the provinces and especially the municipalities. The municipalities are being asked to do more than they really can afford.

RS They're caught in a very difficult situation and they're trying to use what means they have.

FM I think North Vancouver is even more fragmented than some of the other Lower Mainland communities. You have these groups that are almost self-contained . . .

RS There is another city there, underneath that city, which is the Squamish Nation, that has historically been ignored in all of this planning. This is now changing, but it has been true in the past. They sit side by side—these two cities, in fact these two nations. It's another country, when you drive through Squamish lands, you are not in North Vancouver.

SB I would also ask what are the cultural strategies to deal with these conditions? In Europe, some institutions in the last years just closed down, at least for a specific time period. They said, well, no more exhibitions, no more representation—some of them rented out their spaces to finance other projects with that—and instead they organized conferences, workshops and symposia to work in a more discursive way. The point is to find cultural strategies to create a condition where you can actually create new possibilities. This could be a move from “presentation” to production, or from fixed spaces to temporal situations.

JZ But Presentation House Gallery already has this—their identity is defined by presenting photographic work . . .

RS I don't think the mandate is about photography, the mandate is about the way the world can be represented through photography and the ways that artists use photography. I mean, I think photography is the least interesting thing about photography.

JZ Well we can agree about that—that's why the shows there have been so interesting.

RS One of the core values of the Gallery is the way one puts contemporary practices in juxtaposition and in dialogue with historical ones, the way that photography allows a certain possibility in that regard.

SS Is there some way in which what Presentation House Gallery stands for could turn into a more experimental architecture? Something that is more flexible in terms of not having a single site but multiple sites, or taking over, or inhabiting... or would that be inconsistent with how you understand it or with what purpose it's serving now?

RS Well, practically, if we're showing photographs, one thing we have to do is be able to provide a secure environment. That's a necessity, I think, if we're to support and maintain the mandate. But to me the Gallery is not necessarily a site of presentation: it's a site of production—a site of the production of a dialogue about history and the intersection of historical and contemporary culture.

JD What's ironic is that what's hidden in the city are all the former sites where things were made, all the former sites of production. The city's greatest intensification of urban development and gentrification is precisely in the areas that used to make things—Coal Harbour, Moodyville, False Creek. You could say the erasing of the history of the working class on the waterfront, displaced through the class project of gentrification, is most intense in these areas. I know when Sabine first came to Vancouver, one way we decided to get a sense of the area was to drive the waterfront as long as possible, so through the North Shore, linking up over into Surrey, New Westminster, through those productive and former productive spaces on the waterfront.

JZ It's different from San Francisco in terms of the working class, or even Seattle with the Wobblies and the Scandinavian community. We had our riots but what's



140 Babak Golkar, *House of Sulphur*, 2008. Chalk drawing on Presentation House.
Courtesy the artist, Photo: Blaine Campbell

interesting in Vancouver is that you turn your back on history. And you're also turning your back on the wilderness. So you're huddled in this place, at the edge. It's an inland waterway, a fictional coast city.

JD This gets to Reid's point about the overlapping of First Nations as a separate nation within the urban territory. Unless you have a sense of social justice and actually address land claims and political organizing, then your project *has* to turn away from history—otherwise you have to address inequities in the present. In a funny way Vancouver gets involved in the production of an imagined history of itself, after having already stripped away, let's say, actually existing history. Rem Koolhaas has a nice essay where he talks about the idea of a “generic city.” For him, the generic city is a city that strips away its history and then starts an industry to replace the history that it stripped away. And that seems to me to be part of the process that Vancouver is involved in. And I think the kind of tepid public art that we see is often trying to produce a sense of history to replace an actual investigation into a material history that is there. For instance, there is a public artwork in Coal Harbour that takes the only lyrical lines from the Earle Birney poem, “November Walk Near False Creek Mouth” and memorializes them on a wall of falling water and with a lone figure hovering above. The actual poem is a harsh and funny critique of Vancouver as a colonial city and its imagination of itself as a peripheral city, as well as an early critique of Vancouver's use of nature, but the artwork makes the poem a generic lyric excerpt.

RS Well, Canada's always been very good at erasing its own history. That's certainly been its project. More specifically, I think, Vancouver, or the *success* of Vancouver if you want to call it that, has been its ability to erase certain histories. So you have Expo 86 which just levels the ground of what was there, and then that's leveled, and now we have a new, wholly conceived and completely engineered city, from the bottom up, and it looks, for all intents and purposes, like it's always been there. Condominiums have erased the light industrial history that preceded them, which had, in turn, erased the native history that was there before it. So Vancouver's radical ability to reinvent itself through total erasure is strong. North Vancouver doesn't quite have that rapaciousness, so you get these overlaps of different histories that exist as a kind of palimpsest, on top of one another.

FM There is perhaps still an opportunity to do a lot of things there...

RS Well, you get to see it all. You get to see the Squamish Nation, which is there,

right next to the industrial shipyards which are derelict but still *there*, next to, you know, this kind of weird '70s idea of architecture with the ICBC building next to Lonsdale Quay which is still there, next to all these new condo towers. It's all just layered together.

SB Before I came to Vancouver, I knew lots about these things through contemporary artwork—through Jeff Wall, of course, and then Ken Lum's idea of multiculturalism and Stan Douglas's representation of social housing and colonialism in relation to the First Nations people. We talked about that in Vienna because those works were very present. So many of these things you describe I've heard about through contemporary art production, which has been internationally incredibly important.

JD We tend to denigrate our own localness as mere localness in that way, I think.

JZ But I don't believe in "localness."

RS Presentation House was perhaps a more internationally-oriented gallery ten or fifteen years ago than it is now. I mean, we're still doing lots of exhibitions with international artists, but we're also doing—well, as part of my directorship, I'm interested in the local in a very strong way.

JZ You're redefining the local—to mean something more than simply a heritage museum. Presentation House Gallery, and the artists that you're talking about, have redefined the local.

SB Well, the city almost became a brand within the art market . . .

RS I would be hesitant to conflate all those practices, as I think there are a number of different approaches to ideas of the local in Vancouver. For some, Vancouver could be any place—it just happens to be Vancouver. For other artists Vancouver is more central, as are its histories. In the dialogue that we're having about the impact of internationalist practices, coming back into a local context—going out in the world and then coming back . . . what does that mean for us? How does it change our perception of the local to see a Jeff Wall image in Frankfurt? What is it to see the Georgia Viaduct in a German museum?

JZ It's an alienation effect intrinsic to not defining the local.

RS It gives the local new meaning for me. I'm interested in the hybridity of North Vancouver. You know, the awful mishmash of things—I think it offers possibility, a kind of productive confusion.

SB Yes, there is the industrial side, as well as houses that are architectural jewels, or potential case study houses, and the Iranian community. Just all these components provide a fantastic condition for site-specific projects with and around these sites and communities.

RS Jerry, I'm interested in your conceptualization of the local. What is your idea of the local?

JZ The local, I would describe as situational. There should be a sense of how an event is situated, specific to the local.

RS Yeah, I guess I'm also thinking of it in a larger context—I'm trying to understand the potential of a gallery such as Presentation House within a place like North Vancouver. In this city there are many different things sitting on top of one other without much intercourse between them. I've started to see the potential of that disjunctiveness more as one of possibility than I had before. So I guess my question about the local was . . . is the local a cohesive thing? Or is it a schismatic, screwed-up thing?

JZ Given the time and place we are in historically, with neoliberalism, capitalism, the market expansion into culture, I would say that we're talking about an incommensurable concept of the local. That precisely because it can't be clearly defined, it needs to operate at the borders of those incommensurable conflicts that come up in the city and that artists are particularly good at showing or that curators can actually bring out. So we're not talking about a homogenous community.

JD I think the local can simultaneously be cohesive—be the experience of cohesiveness—while at the same time the shape of the local is scaled throughout the globe. Decisions that shape the local can be made elsewhere. Global networks of developers and financiers are making decisions elsewhere that are absolutely shaping the local. What happens is the local can be maintained as a cohesive experience by people who live and produce it, but it's fragmented by how the decisions shaping the local are made. So you have a loss of local control over the planning of it, but at the same time you still have an intense localness. And I think our experience of localness is that we can actually take in that complexity of scales.

JZ We agree about that. But a place for art is a shelter, an ideological shelter.

JD And this for me is the fascinating tension, because we say that art, in a sense, seeks an institutional shelter or a degree of distance from the economic, let's say—

it seeks a critical space. It seems to be the central curatorial problem—how do you handle that relation between critical distance and the centrality of culture as an urban plan? And then the aesthetic question is, how do we handle that in terms of how we imagine culture spatially? The kind of uneven development of North Vancouver that we're talking about, and the fragmented spaces and the layering of different histories and the way that that's visible through the types of architecture and the way that communities interact...actually that site, as Reid pointed out, becomes a site of real potential. In a sense, how does the uneven space of North Vancouver open possibilities and make these processes, which are often invisible, visible?

SS Reid, you were talking earlier about the bonusing situation that PHG was engaged with—and I am trying to think about this in relation to the current financial situation, to the massive economic disruptions of the past year. Do you think that the neoliberal paradigm is changed now that it has shifted? Are we going to look back one day and think about the bonusing of culture as *the good old days* of neoliberal opportunity?

JD I think it's a mistake to think that the neoliberal period is over . . .

RS I would agree with that. We may have taken a little bit of a break.

JD Well, also, neoliberalism narrativizes itself always as crises and breaks—so to see the crisis and the break as the end of it, I think, doesn't allow a kind of clarity. What I've been trying to do is separate the economic, governmental aspect of neoliberalism from the cultural policy aspects of it. So you suddenly had this great cry from Thomas Friedman and through every other influential economic commentator who has a public voice, saying that neoliberalism is over, its economic policy is over. But at the same time, the intensity of the cultural project of neoliberalism continues, and that's precisely around the inability of people to imagine citizenship that is anything other than individual, or to imagine themselves being part of a larger collectivity—of course I'm exaggerating in a way, but notions of collectivity have been fundamentally cracked and made suspicious through neoliberalism. In “the long neoliberal moment” the question is how do you produce an understanding of publicness in an era when the cultural dominant has been to break down the social and the cultural to the individual? And not only that—that was the Thatcherite program—but then to ignite competition between individuals. So for me that raises a cultural project, one that tries to counter that tendency.

RS I think why I raised the issue of community to begin with—what it does perhaps provide is a way to dismantle that idea of the gallery, or of culture, as being part of a civic or urban locus. What the gallery can be is a much more mobile place of community. This gets back to the core function of the gallery—as a site of production and presentation, a site of dialogue. It's not contingent on architecture, it's more of an intellectual architecture.

JZ In a hierarchy of goods, education for and about the local is a real good.

SB To me it's also interesting that in exactly these spaces where you have a generation that has never experienced security, and who cannot move freely, you can have a very critical art scene. For instance, I have been working over the last years in Serbia, working on projects in Belgrade—and it's the most amazing, critical engaged art scene. Some of the people are so young that they cannot even really remember what it means to be secure—they were five years old when Milosevic came into power. But it's interesting because there are all these cultural collectives, and they're very culturally, even globally, networked: they just know how to move around Europe despite the visa and money problems. Of course, when they go to Germany and Austria they're not treated as Europeans, but . . .

JZ But the cultural underground is there. I mean in terms of cultural mobility, in terms of imaginary worlds: they know the world of art and film and music.

SB There's this group of artists who are very clear that they are East Europeans, that they are not sharing a notion of Europeans as we—in the sense of Middle Europe that was promoted culturally—reference Europeans. Neoliberalism, feminism, urbanism, gentrification, immigration and borders—those are the main issues being talked about in their cultural production.

JZ These are different histories and conflicting histories of modernity. What's missing here, in the cohort of two generations of students that I see—going back to what Jeff said before, here the controversies aren't real, or they're gone, or they're fleeting. The issues don't last. I'm enough of a historical materialist to say that if the controversies aren't grounded in experience and in the institutions that have affected us, they're not going to have any meaning. You don't even see them.

SB Every time I go over the Lions Gate Bridge, I always think it is strange that the actual conflict of the First Nations, spatial and cultural, is not actually visible. I realize of course that it is different, but it is not like in Belgrade, where the

Roma settlement is also situated under a bridge. The conditions of looking at the settlements in a distant way are similar, but unlike in Belgrade, here the conflict isn't as public.

JZ It's a peaceful settlement here because of the legal working out of land claims.

SB But there's a conflictual relation there still today, no?

RS Part of that sense of absence is not so much about that history not being there, but our ability to look past it and erase it at the same time.

FM The First Nations people have their own archives, and they have made a very conscious decision—most of the First Nations people, or at least in BC—not to give their materials to provincial institutions.

RS But is it also that the significance of those objects has a different cultural resonance for First Nations communities? Those objects have a different function within a very different situation.

JZ There's a different kind of conservation and preservation of historical memory in documents, from the point of view of oral cultures, and so on. My point is about the mobility of capital, and that now capital is stuck, and that institutions become more and more ideologically rigid, in order to preserve what they represent and protect. But when everything becomes ideological it's impossible to break it apart into historical material.

RS It's difficult to look at it freshly.

JZ That's the form of the commodity—it becomes dead. It can function only as a commodity and be exchanged in terms of whatever possibilities there are for that commodity to transform itself into something else . . .

RS I think that's why photography is so infinitely inventible—its ability to upset our best efforts to turn it into a commodity . . . prints are *sold*—but the reproducibility of photographs—more so now with digital technologies—allows a kind of latent, irreducible “newness.”



Keith Nahanee, *Ceremonial Blanket*, 2004, (detail) wool, 2 x 1.2 m

