

Corpus Delicti:
Disappearance and bodily traces in Vancouver, 1978-2007

Melora Koepke

A Thesis
in
The Department
of Communication Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts (Media Studies)
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

April 2007

© Melora Koepke, 2007



Library and
Archives Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

ISBN: 978-0-494-34702-7

Our file Notre référence

ISBN: 978-0-494-34702-7

NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.


Canada

ABSTRACT

***Corpus Delicti:* Disappearance and bodily traces in Vancouver, 1978-2007**

Melora Koepke

Public stories regarding human mass murder tend to focus on killers as operative forces. The victims are sidelined in their sheer numbers, and the glamour of violence is almost irresistible. *Corpus Delicti: Disappearance and Bodily Traces in Vancouver, 1978-2007* is an investigation into the case of Vancouver's missing women who, now, are not only missing from their lives and their neighbourhood, but also, to a large extent, from the stories we tell about them.

Beginning in 2007, Robert Pickton, the so-called "Pig Farm Killer", is being prosecuted for the murders of twenty-six of these women. But our acknowledgement of these women's lost lives is broader than news reporting on details of the crimes committed against them. In order to properly memorialize the missing women and ensure that such disappearance never happens again, it is necessary to tell broader stories about the lives that have been lost.

Since 1978, the growing list of missing women was generally understood by the authorities to be discrete disappearances caused by the geopolitical determinants of the women's lives in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES) neighbourhood. Chapter One examines the geographical location of disappearance. In Chapter Two, a history of the "missing women series" in the newspaper shows how this public story put faces and names to these women, and how their public story brought momentum to the case which quickly resulted in a face and name being assigned to their accused killer. Chapter Three looks at various artistic enactments about and around the missing women, and suggests how we, the living, are necessarily implicated ourselves in their absence.

This thesis is dedicated to Vancouver's missing women and those who remember them.

I wish to thank my supervisor, Dr. Peter C. van Wyck, as well as my readers, Dr. Leslie Shade and Dr. Kim Sawchuk, and my oral defense chairperson, Owen Chapman.

I am grateful to Marlene Trick, Lindsay Kines, Chris Haddock, Maggie de Vries and Lincoln Clarkes for agreeing to be interviewed for this project, and to Sachiko Murakami and Anne Stone for sharing their work with me.

Thanks to Dr. Robert Koepke and Dr. Jean Koepke, Tricia Bell and Maya Merrick for their feedback and encouragement.

Thanks belong to Isa Tousignant, Meg Hewings and Jamie O'Meara for their patience, and to M-J Milloy and Jeremy Milloy for additional source material. Also, to Erin Churchill, Teena Aujla, Dimitri Katadotis, Lorien Jones, Siobhan McCann, Terry Lalos, Richard Burnett, Lyle Stewart, Heidi Rooke, Sandra Ryan and Elizabeth Northrop.

And to Peter-John Kennedy, always.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Apologia	14
Chapter One: The Geography of absence: “A history of hypocrisy” in the DTES	20
1. The Facts of life	21
2. Neighbourhood watch	23
3. Misuse and disorder	29
4. Collectivity	32
5. Names	34
6. Numbers	35
Chapter Two: The Story of Vancouver's missing women	39
1. The Facts of the case	42
2. Early reports	46
3. The “Missing women series”: “It was like covering an apparition, or an absence”	50
4. In the margins	53
5. The Farm and Beyond: “The story ended for me the day they arrested Robert Pickton.”	56
Chapter Three: Stories in close-up: The Missing women in public memory	61
1. Fiction is stranger than truth: Chris Haddock and <i>Da Vinci's Inquest</i>	65
2. The Fullness of Empty Space: Stan Douglas' <i>Every Building on 100 West Hastings</i>	70
3. Because they might not be here tomorrow”: <i>Heroines</i> as testimonial	73
4. “She imagined you”: The Life and death of Sarah de Vries	81
Conclusion	86
List of figures	101
List of unpublished materials	102
Bibliography	103

Corpus delicti: (Definition) Noun, Law

1. In law, the actual facts that prove a crime or offence against the law has been committed.
2. Inf. The body of a murdered person.¹

Corpus Delicti: The body of the offence; the essence of the crime. It was a general rule not to convict unless the *corpus delicti* can be established, that is, until the dead body had been found [my italics]. Instances have occurred of a person being convicted of having killed another, who, after the supposed criminal has been put to death for the supposed offence, has made his appearance - alive. The wisdom of the rule is apparent; but in order to insure justice, in extreme cases, it may be competent to prove the basis of the *corpus delicti* by presumptive, but conclusive, evidence.²

Now the lab is nearly empty.
What gentleness we muster now, to lift DNA

from a microscopic edge, and protect
the whole of the woman contained there.³

Loss has made a tenuous “we” of us all.⁴

¹ Definition of Corpus delicti from The Senior Gage Dictionary of Canadian English

² Definition of Corpus delicti from The Law Library's Lexicon

³ Sachiko Murakami, “We've seen little of her life and less of her death” from The Invisibility Exhibit (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2008—forthcoming)

⁴ Judith Butler Precarious Life (London, New York: Verso, 2004), 25

INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to prove a murder has been committed without a corpse on display. But sixty-five names remain on the official list of “Vancouver’s Missing Women”, which is a dossier of missing persons reports relating to women who have disappeared from the streets of Vancouver since 1978. Twenty-six of these missing bodies, or fragments of their bodies, have been unearthed in the soil of agricultural properties in a Vancouver suburb. But the forensic discoveries of previously missing bodies does not begin to encompass the crimes against these women, or express the significance of these absent lives from the city where they disappeared. Herein, I wish to discern the full *corpus delicti*: the “body of the offence, the real essence of the crimes”⁵ committed against these women’s lives, beyond what exhibits of their bodily remains can tell us.

On January 22, 2007, Robert Pickton’s trial began in New Westminster, British Columbia, for six of twenty-six first-degree murder charges. The trial began almost a full five years after he was first arrested, and was a tangible result of many years’ efforts by family and friends of the missing women to force an investigation into their loved ones’ disappearances. Previously, these demands had repeatedly been denied by the authorities, who surmised that these missing persons cases were the result of chaotic and unreliable Downtown Eastside (DTES) lifestyles, rather than foul play.

In the months following Pickton’s arrest, a massive forensic investigation meticulously unearthed thousands of tiny pieces of women’s physical remains from the soil of his properties. Subsequently, the authorities mounted a case against Pickton based on these exhibits, and eventually he was charged with twenty-six first-degree

⁵See epigraph, p.1

murders. When the trial date was finally announced, the volume of evidence suggested that the proceedings would last a very long time.⁶

In the meantime, we are left to contemplate a wider field of view. The lengthy and involved crime scene investigation and the prosecution of the accused serial killer is necessary as a legal and cultural step towards solving the particulars of these crimes; but these legalities cannot tell the whole story. The specific genomic story unearthed by the crime scene investigations is refracted in the empty space left by the women's absence. As the notoriety of the Pickton trial increases (it is, after all, the biggest serial-killer case in Canadian history), it becomes difficult to remember a time when there was a question as to whether the missing women had been murdered at all. It is instructive, therefore, to revisit the genesis of the missing women's story as it evolved from tenuous rumour to incontrovertible fact.

In mid-2007, while the Pickton trial is underway, the faces and names of his victims are prominent in the public sphere, though never as familiar as Pickton himself. Years after the women vanished from their own lives, their absence is much more present for us than their lives ever were. Now, as missing women, they are the opposite of missing. Their disappearances have afforded them a symbolic importance and presence that their actual lives never achieved.

Pickton's accusation and arrest is a short end to what is, historically and socially, a much longer story of women's disappearance in Vancouver. *Corpus Delicti* is not a serial killer shocker—rather, it is a contemplation of these women's “missingness”, which is shocking for many reasons besides the grisly details of their bodily remains. Even as details about the murders are revealed in court and on the

⁶ These details of the Pickton case are widely reported daily in the news of record in Canada. Reliable and concise daily news updates can be found on the news website of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/pickton/>

evening news, these lives that ended so violently are less prevalent in the public sphere than their DNA traces have become. We strive to understand such things could happen in our midst, but our attention is focussed on these questions only after the unthinkable has already happened. Only when these women's limited choices have already been exploited by a murderer do we wonder how their extreme vulnerability came to be.

The case of the missing women was not quick to crack. For more than twenty years, many women's individual disappearances from the DTES were presumed by the authorities to be disparate and random events that happened to transient, marginal people (at best) and dangerous criminals (at worst). Years of pressure from family members and friends of several missing women eventually resulted in the compilation of an official "Missing List", and only then did authorities begin to investigate the possibility that a serial killer or killers might be at work in the neighbourhood. The list took shape a full decade after care workers at the Carnegie Community Centre, which services the DTES, organized the first annual Missing Women's Memorial March as a demonstration intended to call attention to the crisis.⁷

Beginning in the late 1990s, certain storytellers concerned with the DTES — the sister of one missing woman, two photographers, a TV scriptwriter/producer, a poet, a painter, and others—began to create works that emphasized the issue of women missing from the neighbourhood.⁸ Their public artworks bolstered the notoriety of *Vancouver Sun* reporter Lindsay Kines' efforts around the same time to establish the missing women as an urgent and pressing story in the mainstream press. Kines'

⁷ Marlene Trick, "A Herstory of the Missing women's Memorial March", www.keta.ca. Trick, a community worker at the Carnegie Centre, is an organizer of the Missing Women's March.

⁸ For a detailed pre-Pickton account of the "case of the missing women", see Trevor Greene *Bad Date: The Lost Girls of Vancouver's Low Track* (Montreal: ECW Press, 2001)

investigative work resulted in a series of articles that ultimately “broke” the case,⁹ and intensified public pressure that finally compelled the authorities to allocate the resources for a proper investigation which, in a matter of months, culminated in the arrest of Robert Pickton in February 2002.¹⁰

The prospect of “solving” these homicides (after several years and expenses calculated upwards of a hundred million dollars, according to R.C.M.P. figures) is not the same as ending the ongoing story of missing women in Vancouver. Certainly, the “Pig Farm Killer” narrative has reframed the women’s murders and disappearances into a familiar trope of evil and violence, which in its inherent horror distracts us from our task of situating that violence on a continuum of sociological cause and effect where a serial killer’s alleged crimes against twenty-six women are not isolated events.

Sensational headlines recite the details of women’s recovered bodily remains in the soil of Pickton’s land, providing us with the certainty of their loss. But our immersion in this horror may, still, compel us towards another, more hopeful purpose: can we now enact an axis of identification between *us* and *them*, through which we can imagine the circumstances in which certain women became victims of such a predator. These women lived in the margins of our society in which, we hope, all are afforded the same protection under the law. How, then, were they left with no choice but to risk their lives every day? Once we confront the facts of their lives, we begin to understand how they were delivered into the absence that now causes us to seek them. In life, the women were not known to us as they are in death. Doris Salcedo points

⁹ Maggie de Vries, interview with author, minidisc recording, Montreal, Quebec, July 2003

¹⁰ Ibid.

out: “Violence, horror, forces you to notice the Other.”¹¹ Salcedo was speaking of “disappeared” political assassinees in her native Columbia, but these observations also relate to missing women in the DTES.

In order to discern the true shape of this story, it is necessary to begin at the end. The apologia that follows this introduction is a brief rundown of the “facts” of the case as they are now recognized by the public record: In other words, the story told in newspaper headlines and on the evening news. I present these “facts”—that is, the public *corpus delicti*—so that I may reference them in the rest of my thesis. My strategy is to provide them at the beginning, so as to emphasize that they do not constitute the whole denouement. I proceed, in the following pages, to forensically excavate the ground of the story, looking for evidence of a broader nature. There is more we can know.

News reports detailing Pickton's arrest and the subsequent recovery of human remains from his properties may signal “case closed” in one regard, but this human loss is more than a hermeneutic puzzle—it remains, in a larger sense, both unsolved and unsolvable. There is more at stake here than a crime scene investigation—we are ethically drawn to hold the women's stories in memory, to ensure that the earth containing their bodily traces remains open to the air. In order to find the real *corpus delicti* of their loss, we must not stop turning the soil.

In the following chapters, I unearth a broader story of the missing women and their enduring spatial and temporal presence for us, the living. *Corpus Delicti* is intended to document absences that can never be effectuated, and to contemplate the spaces from which they have vanished forever.

¹¹ Carlos Basualdo “*Carlos Basualdo in conversation with Doris Salcedo*” *Doris Salcedo* Princenthal, Nancy, Carlos Basualdo and Andreas Huyssen, eds. (London: Phaidon, 2000), 13

Chapter One begins by re-placing the women in their geography. When they were alive, they like each of us, inhabited their landscape. But the conditions of their “missingness” are as they are because these women's lives were different than most. It can be said that the women became missing because they were, in a sense, already missing.

The women's “missingness” is stated and restated with great regard for the context from which they disappeared: they are constantly identified as drug-involved, street-involved DTES residents, persons “known to police.” A passing familiarity with the socioeconomic conditions of life, which abetted the crimes against these women, is seldom ratified in the public discourse. We have been as troubled by the women's socioeconomic marginality as we are by the dismaying state of their bodily remains. I will discuss certain stories about the missing women that challenge their signification as “murder victims,” and expand the field of view.

Chapter Two retraces the emergence of the “law-and-order” narrative relating to the missing women, that was drawn out by Kines and other reporters at the *Sun*. I will illustrate that the publication of a series of articles about the missing women, in the fall of 2001, intensified the concern about whether there was, in fact, a serial killer or killers at work in the DTES. The early *Sun* cover coverage of the missing women was the story's first major emergence into the public realm, and the reporters' contributions to the case extend far beyond the usual duties performed by reporters in the mainstream press. Kines et al. drew the case as we now know it out of a “memory hole”, in which the missing women barely existed in the public sphere. A study of the *Sun* coverage authored by Kines et al. is instrumental to our understanding of the story. Kines, in an interview with the author, recalls how the newspaper coverage and

the official investigation mutually increased each other's momentum once this series of articles was published.¹²

In Chapter Two, Kines asserts that for him, “the story ended the day they arrested Robert Pickton”.¹³ In his view, the post-arrest coverage of grim discoveries on the Pickton property contributes little towards a coherent and complete understanding of crimes against the women whose remains have been found in the soil in Port Coquitlam. In other words, the missing women, now missing from their own lives and their neighbourhood, are now also, to a great extent, missing from the story of “Vancouver's missing women”.

In Chapter Three, I look at some enactments—two photographic works, a biography and a series of paintings—that considerably widen our field of view. Each of the works represents the missing women as inhabitants of their own lives, and offers more than a mere litany of facts about their absence. I also wish to indicate the ways our contemplation of these absent lives implicates us in the story. Why, after all, are we now moved to scrutinize the crimes against the missing women, only after they have vanished from our midst? Like the articles written by Kines et al., the works collected in Chapter Three enact the strategies these artists and writers have developed in order to bear witness to the empty spaces of loss.

This chapter is, for lack of a better term, a collection of artefacts of mourning. Each of the works discussed speaks to women's absence from the DTES as, and after, they disappeared. In hindsight, these stories seem crucial and somewhat familiar—but each of them, in their own time and in their own way, was an innovation in the terms by which the accumulated mass of absence in the DTES came to be discussed.

¹² Lindsay Kines, interview with the author, minidisc recording, Victoria, B.C., March 2004

¹³ Ibid.

In the years since Pickton's arrest, the case of the missing women has become more prominent in public discourse than the marginalized conditions of their lives in the DTES ever was. The long and heated debate about the veracity of claims that women were missing from the DTES has been quelled by the discovery of remains on the Pickton properties. But still, exclamations of horror about these bodily remains still drown out our indignation at the extent to which these women, when they were alive, suffered from insouciance by the bureaucracies that are meant, under the social contract, to be extensions of our concern for each other.

Screaming headlines appear on page A1 every day, which announce new testimony from the courtroom, and awareness of crimes against the women accumulates without end in the public memory. We are, finally, left to contemplate the women's absence beyond the terrible details of their deaths. Paradoxically and perversely, the missing women now become present among us. Only now.

Before I begin, there is a call for me to clarify a few aspects of my research plan. First, a couple of notes on my source material. When I first set out the parameters of this project, my schema was simple: to gather newspaper articles about the "missing women case" as a data set, bring forth the themes of representation in these stories of missing women, and to highlight the key role these news articles, and their authors, had in bringing the case of the missing women forth into the public sphere. I soon realized that a newspaper analysis, while alluringly easy to limit and discern, would not contain the scope of the missing women's stories as they revealed themselves to me. *Corpus Delicti* became a forensic investigation into the absence of the missing women, a search for the traces of their absence in the public sphere. I attempt to ascribe meaning and purpose in the spaces of absence their disappearances have left.

To this end, I have found it useful to consider multiple and diverse stories about the missing women that have been and continue to be told. How, I have asked, is a newspaper article different from eight seasons of a television program, or a painting, or a poem, or a memorial march through the DTES? It is more useful to consider how each of these stories render coherent the meaning of empty space. These are only a few of many available stories, which have illustrated for me the ways in which, as individuals and as a community, we can memorialize disappearance, how we can speak it, how we can keep it alive in memory, which, ultimately, is the only repository for “missingness” that can be found. There is an important distinction to be made here between absence and the stories we can tell about loss.

My data set remains open: *Corpus Delicti* is by no means a comprehensive taxonomy of stories about the missing women—rather, I offer this as a contribution to a collective and ongoing engagement with absence in the DTES, which cannot (and should not) be “solved” any more than the arrest of an alleged killer can explain how these women came to disappear.

My practice of writing compels me toward stories that do not usually begin with the knowledge of where they end. It is not my intention to “solve” the missing women's absence in Vancouver. Rather, I wish to locate the stories about absent women, and women's absence, despite—or, rather, because—they no longer may represent themselves.

A picture comes to mind, from a moment during the Missing Women's Memorial March on February 14th, 2007. For the first time since 2003, I was in Vancouver on Valentine's Day and could attend the march, which the Carnegie Community Centre has organized every year since 1991. The route begins inside the Carnegie Centre on Hastings and Main, and then proceeds through the DTES, every

year retracing a map of loss through the streets of Vancouver. We stop several times to contemplate several specific sites of disappearance, on the street corners and in the doorways where some of the women on the “Missing List” were last seen. When the crowd stops at each of these places, a prayer is said and a yellow rose is deposited in her memory, as her name is spoken. This year, the march stopped on Abbott Street across from the hole where a department store, Woodward's, used to stand. This was a new stop on the march, and consequently there was some shuffling and confusion. The previous stop, in front of the Portland Hotel on Hastings Street, was to honour Sereena Abotsway, a resident of the DTES who had, in 2000, attended the march and carried a sign that expressed her grief about some of the women she knew who had disappeared.¹⁴ Abotsway's remains were discovered on the Pickton property and he is currently standing trial for her murder.

While the crowd was stopped, I turned to look back along the path we had just walked. I wanted to photograph an Aboriginal woman, who, on her own, had stopped in a doorway beside the crowd in the street to perform a ceremonial smudge. She was waving a wooden flagpole with four ribbons, one for each of the four peoples of the world, she said. It was raining very hard and the button blanket she wore was soaked, so several passerby stopped to form an awning with their umbrellas. Interfering with the impromptu awning, also, was a tall man in a reporter's vest, with a soaked notepad which he had poised and ready to record the woman's name, as his colleague photographed her. That was my photo: One woman burning sage in a clamshell, a man poised to record her name, another aiming a lens at her. The reporter was originally in the way of my shot, but then his presence provided me with a more

¹⁴ Doug Ward “Abotsway once joined missing women march” *Vancouver Sun*, 15 February 2007, A1

complete picture. As the crowd moved forward, the woman in the button blanket was swept along, so was the reporter, and so was I. It occurred to me then that all of us—the woman, the reporter, the photographer, the tangle of umbrellas whose drips were causing more wetness than the rain, and me—all of us, in that moment, had altered this city street. The empty space of “missingness” was, for a moment, filled with stories of loss that jostled and interrupted each other, conjugated by hundreds of separate tongues.



Fig.1: This is the photograph I took before the one described above, which was destroyed by raindrops from an umbrella on the lens: The perils of rain and crowds. Photo by author, February 14, 2007

It is certain that stories about other people—especially absent others, *disappeared* others—are full of sharp ethical obstacles. But these limits of representation are the very essence of what I wish *Corpus Delicti* to address. It is not enough for us to find the bodies of missing women. We must also find ways of representing them precisely

because they are no longer here. In memory, their stories must occupy the vacant space of their absence so that time and space cannot encroach on the emptiness left by their loss.

APOLOGIA

At the time of this writing, in mid 2007, the case of Vancouver's missing women, or at least the trial of their accused murderer, is omnipresent in Canadian newspapers. Still, some background is in order. What follows is a description of the "facts" of the case, as they stand as a matter of public record reported in the media.¹⁵ Currently, Robert Pickton is on trial in New Westminster, British Columbia—he is charged for the first-degree murders of twenty-six women, all of whom disappeared from Vancouver's DTES neighbourhood between 1978 and 2001.¹⁶ As of March 2007, there still exists a "Missing List" containing the names of sixty-five women thought to be missing from the DTES. This list is maintained by the Joint Missing Women Task Force of the Vancouver Police Department and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Latest reports state that from this list, 102 women have been found by the Joint Task Force, as it is called, in addition to the women whose bodily remains have been found on property in Port Coquitlam owned by Robert Pickton.¹⁷ The unsolved disappearances of women from the DTES date back to 1978, though the first woman on the current "Missing List", Rebecca Guno, disappeared in 1983. The most recent additions to the list date back to reports of Missing Persons filed in 2001. Authorities arrested and charged Robert Pickton on February 22, 2002, two months after they announced the formation of the Joint Task Force to investigate the increasing numbers of women reported missing from the DTES. Pickton was arrested after authorities raided his property with a warrant to search for unregistered firearms

¹⁵ The facts of the Robert Pickton case are widely reported in all Canadian newspapers of record. A comprehensive account is available on the CBC website:
<http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/pickton/>

¹⁶ Map showing the geography of Vancouver and the locations of Port Coquitlam and New Westminster [fig. 2] is located on p.16.

¹⁷ Press release by the Joint Task Force on 23 June 2006. Not all of this number were officially declared missing or thought to be Pickton victims.

on 8 February of the same year. He had been a “person of interest” to authorities in relation to violence against DTES sex workers as early as 1997 when a woman had been found by the side of the road near his property in suburban Vancouver, and reported to police that she had jumped from his moving vehicle to avoid further physical and sexual abuse. As well, Pickton's name had been on a “bad trick” list published by WISH (Women's Information Safe Haven Drop-In Centre Society), a sex workers' advocacy group in Vancouver.

In the years before the missing women case garnered major public attention, several DTES activists and family members of missing women pushed the to authorities to accord more resources to investigating these missing persons reports. These efforts were widely ignored, until an announcement was made in April of 1999 that a 100,000 dollar reward would be offered for information leading to an arrest in the case. “Previously,” noted an article in the *Vancouver Sun*, “police had been reluctant to [mount a large reward], because rewards are generally used to investigate known criminal acts when other leads have dried up. So far, no evidence has surfaced that would indicate the missing women were victims of foul play.”¹⁸ The article also noted that this reward was posted only after family members of some of the missing women publicly observed that a reward of the same amount which had been recently announced by police for information leading to the arrest of the perpetrator(s) of a series of garage break-ins in an area adjacent to the DTES.¹⁹

Finally, the lobbying resulted in the formation of the Joint Missing Women's Task Force and the subsequent arrest of Pickton occurred after half a decade of skepticism on the part of authorities that these women might have been victims of a

¹⁸ Lori Culbert “Province okays 100,000 reward” *Vancouver Sun*, 20 April 1999

¹⁹ Ibid.

single serial killer rather than random casualties of a “dangerous neighbourhood”. All of the women on the “Missing List” were known to do what is called “survival sex work”, meaning sex work for low pay, usually performed in order to support chronic drug addiction.

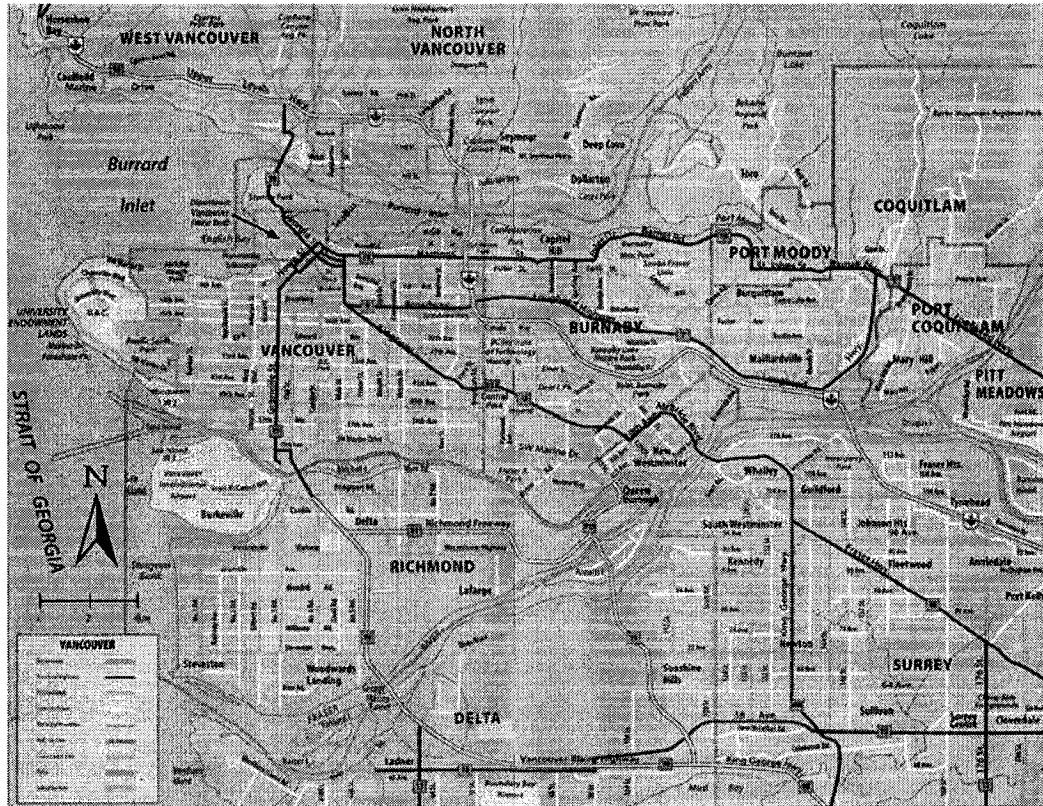


Fig. 2: A map of Vancouver's Lower Mainland, that shows the considerable distance between central Vancouver and the suburb of Port Coquitlam, where Pickton's properties were located. The opaque rectangle delineates, roughly, the boundaries of the DTES. A detailed map of the DTES (fig. 3) is located on p. 25. Courtesy of the Vancouver Public Library.

The Pickton case is thought to be the largest serial-murder case in Canada's history. After authorities had concluded their twenty-month search of two Pickton-owned properties. He was charged with fifteen first-degree murders on February 21, 2005,²⁰ and by May 25 of the same year, another twelve charges had been added,

²⁰ Press release by the Joint Task Force from 22 February 2002

bringing the count to twenty-seven.²¹ The search employed over a hundred people (thirty to forty police investigators and 52 forensic and archaeological investigators, in addition to several dozen archeology and anthropology student investigators), who sifted through 383,000 cubic metres of soil. The investigation lasted 20 months and yielded over 200,000 DNA fragments and other remains, which are being used as evidence in the Pickton trial.²²

In the first few months of the search, investigators found over 3,000 pieces of evidence in the top levels of dirt on the farm.²³ By the time the search sites were closed, authorities announced they had found remains containing the DNA of over 40 women (including cigarette butts, clothes, teeth, eyelashes, fingernails, and shards of bone) scattered in various biological “waste” around the property.

It was reported, around the same time, that although the Pickton farm was primarily used to raise pigs for slaughter, a dancehall called “Piggy’s Palace”, owned and operated by Robert Pickton’s brother David “Piggy” Pickton, also existed on the property in the 1980s and ‘90s. “Piggy’s Palace” was used for social events such as dances and private parties. Over time, the parties became rowdier, and “Piggy’s Palace” reportedly became a hot spot for bikers and so-called outlaws, among others.²⁴

Preliminary proceedings began against Robert Pickton in British Columbia provincial court on Monday, January 16, 2003. In July of that year, B.C. Provincial court judge David Stone ruled that there was enough evidence to bring Pickton to

²¹ Neal Hall “12 new charges against Pickton,” *Vancouver Sun*, 25 May 2005, A1

²² Lori Culbert and Neal Hall “Body parts found in freezer, jury told” *Vancouver Sun*, February 23, 2007, A2

²³ John Bowman et al. “Forensic Science: Its role in the missing women investigation”, *CBC News Online*, 19 September 2002

²⁴ Suzanne Fournier and Steve Barry, “A disaster in every way: Pickton sister” *Province* (Vancouver) 20 June 23, 2002

trial. During the *voir dire* phase of the trial, which began in January 2006, there was a publication ban on proceedings in the courtroom, but that ban was lifted before the trial began in January, 2007. Jury selection was completed in December, 2006.²⁵

In the spring of 2006, it was announced that the number of murder charges had, by order of the judge, been reduced to twenty-six. The twenty-seventh charge, a first-degree murder against a body whose remains were known as “Jane Doe”, was ruled inadmissible because she had not been identified.

Significantly, on August 10, 2006, the Vancouver Sun reported that the *voir dire* phase of Pickton's trial yielded an unusual decision. B.C. Supreme Court Judge James Williams ruled that Pickton's trial was to be split into two separate trials. Twenty charges of first-degree murder would be tried separately from the other six. The judge attributed his decision to a concern that one trial comprising all twenty-six murder charges would be an impossible burden on a single jury, and could result in a mistrial. It was also reported that the “nature of the evidence” concerning the six women split off for their own trial was “of a different nature” than the rest.²⁶

Speculation is that the six murder charges that have been separated from the others because the evidence is more comprehensive in these cases than the others. Since the “first six” murder charges are for the last six women who disappeared, it is likely that their remains were among the “freshest” and first to be discovered at the Pickton properties. However, at least one relative of a woman whose murder charge is among the “other twenty” has speculated about possible fiscal motives for the judge's ruling.²⁷ She has publicly wondered if, in the event that Pickton was found guilty of those six and sentenced to life without parole, the courts would attempt to avoid the

²⁵ *CBC News InDepth*, 29 July 2006, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/pickton/>

²⁶ Neal Hall “Judge Orders Two Trials For Pickton to Avoid Mistrial”, *Vancouver Sun*, 10 August 2006, A1

²⁷ *Ibid.*

considerable expenditure of prosecuting the other twenty murder charges. She vociferously denounced this possibility and expressed the desires of family members of the “other twenty”, who are eager to find “closure” for the crimes perpetrated against their own relatives.

On January 22, 2007, the trial began against Pickton for the first-degree murders of Sereena Abotsway, Andrea Joesbury, Mona Wilson, Marnie Frey, Georgina Papin and Brenda Wolfe.

CHAPTER ONE:

The Geography of Absence:

A “history of hypocrisy” in the DTES

It was vital to construct [the missing] in spatial terms...everything happens to us in spatial terms. To place the individual experience of marginal people in space is to find a place for them in our mind. I think of space in terms of place, a place to eat or a place to write, a place to develop life. So there is no way of isolating living experience from spatial experience: It's the same thing.²⁸

The history of human subtraction in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside spans several decades, and yet, only recently has the enormity of this absence become apparent. Until the late 1990s, there was little coherence in the story of missing women—when and if questioned about the expanding list of names on the list of women who had vanished from the DTES, the authorities generally dismissed the possibility that these women had disappeared due to the actions of a serial murderer or murderers (as discussed below, and in Chapter 2). As “survival sex workers” in the DTES, the women were routinely exposed to risk and injury, and it was assumed that their disappearances were a result of drug overdoses, transience, and other socio-political determinants of life in the DTES. Nevertheless, the family members of several missing women insisted that this “transient” behaviour—neglecting to phone home, or pick up their monthly government cheque—was unc customary, and it was these very interruptions in the women's usual habits that led their loved ones to suspect that they had met with foul play.²⁹

In this chapter, I want to expand the *corpus delicti* of the crimes against the missing women by highlighting the causal relationship between their geography and

²⁸ Carlos Basualdo, “Carlos Basualdo in conversation with Doris Salcedo” *Doris Salcedo* Nancy Princenthal, Carlos Basualdo and Andreas Huyssen, eds. (London: Phaidra, 2000) 15-16

²⁹ Maggie de Vries, interview, 2003

their disappearances—in order to do this, we must locate the DTES in the landscape of the city corpus.

1. The Facts of life

While particular swatches of land in suburban Port Coquitlam have recently revealed themselves to be crime scenes where women's bodily traces were recovered, the Pickton properties are not isolated sites of crime, nor are the streets of the DTES discrete sites of human disappearance. Indeed, a geographical understanding of the case broadens the landscape of absence, inviting us to consider a wider frame of view, one which highlights a collusion of the city corpus, and the people within it, in these absences of these women.

Certainly, the recovery of the women's physical remains speaks to the violence against them—and yet, it is wrong (both ethically and factually) to assign culpability for this violence to the acts of just one (or several) accused serial murderers. The conditions of life in the DTES were also causative of these women's disappearances. Socio-political and geographic determinants led to a reduced set of choices for many of the women, who were left with few alternatives other than to place themselves on a horizon of accident on which brutality, far from being accidental, was in fact likely to happen. Not in every part of town do women decide to climb into vans driven by strangers, and are never seen again. In late 2001, when Mona Wilson climbed into a van on East Hastings Street, despite the protestations of her boyfriend, Steve Rix, women were disappearing at an unprecedented rate from her neighbourhood. A community worker was quoted on the fact that the twenty-six-year-old Wilson, in the months before she disappeared, had repeatedly requested access to drug rehabilitation

resources, but had not found space.³⁰ By accepting that ride, Wilson's enactment of grave serious risk to her personal safety was indeed a choice—and yet, her ability to avoid that risk had been severely limited by socio-political circumstances well beyond her control.

In the days after Pickton's split trial was announced, the Sun published brief profiles about each of the “first six” murdered women for whose murders Robert Pickton would be tried. In these brief profiles, we learned that Georgina Papin was one of ten children who had been removed from her parents' home as a young child, and had begun experimenting with drugs and working in the sex trade when she was eleven years old. We learned when Sereena Abotsway disappeared, she had evaded arrest on a warrant for stealing a chocolate bar. Brenda Wolfe, though she had friends and a boyfriend in the DTES, was not reported missing for fourteen months after she was last seen.³¹

These and other subsequent profiles of missing women may be the rough beginnings of a public discourse about why so many women have gone missing from the DTES, rather than the more familiar how. As we learn about each woman's life in the years and months before her disappearance, each (cursory, incomplete) biography enumerates similar socio-demographic factors that speak to the limited choices each woman faced while enacting her daily tasks of survival—a lack of options that eventually, indirectly, resulted in the recovery of her body, in pieces, from the Pickton farm. The causal relationship between social injustice in the DTES and the case of the missing women has been indicated by, among others, *Globe and Mail* columnist

³⁰ Bill Boei et al., “More than statistics: missing women had real lives, children, family and friends” *Vancouver Sun*, 10 August 10 2006

³¹ Ibid

Gary Mason,³² and in a presentation to the House of Commons by Vancouver East MP Libby Davies several weeks later.³³ It is notable that these articles appeared in the first few days of the trial, when the horror was still fresh.

2. Neighbourhood watch

In the last 20 years, “geographic profiling” has become a field of great interest, and the practice has become useful in the pursuit of serial killers as well as many other applications.³⁴ But it is useful, for an expanded understanding of the the causation of death of these women, to turn the process of geographic profiling inside out.

Vancouver is a city renowned for the natural beauty of its setting, as evidenced by the province's motto, “Beautiful British Columbia” visible on every license plate in B.C. Embedded deep within this globalized city by the sea, one neighbourhood has achieved a different sort of notoriety. The DTES has been the epicenter of Vancouver since the early twentieth century. British Columbia’s economy has always been closely connected to the province’s natural resources, and Vancouver’s port has always been a busy one. The DTES—or “downtown”, as it was once called—has long lived up to clichés about ports of call. The term “skid row” is thought to have originated in Vancouver as a reference to the Gastown district, which was the end of a log-running line for the timber industry.³⁵ Water Street, Gastown’s main thoroughfare, was once a strip ridden with bordellos and saloons, where the rough

³² Gary Mason, “Business as usual in this wretched district”, *Globe and Mail*, 24 January 2007

³³ Peter O’Neil “Davies accuses lawmakers of negligence” *Vancouver Sun*, 3 February 2007

³⁴ Kim Rossmo, a former police officer, is one of the pioneers of Geographic Profiling, a practice which his superiors at the VPD were not quick to adopt—in 1995, he won Simon Fraser University's Sterling Prize for Controversy, and made a speech in which he extrapolated on his research, as well as on the missing women case from his point of view.

³⁵ This fact was common knowledge when I was a child growing up in Vancouver, and is confirmed by a variety of sources, including Wikipedia, as well as several of the books and articles (Shier, Sommers, Francis, Greene) cited below.

trade that came in on steamships and barges met up with the shrewd trade waiting for them on shore. Hastings Street, two blocks away from Water Street, was once the city's main shopping district along which ran the #20 streetcar line. Water Street has replaced its red-light attractions with the familiar lures of the tourist trade, but Hastings Street, two blocks south, is the main east-west thoroughfare in the DTES. At its heart, there are few legitimate businesses left besides pawnshops, SROs (single-room occupancy hotels), a Money Mart, all-day taverns, and convenience stores with grilles on the windows. The Army & Navy department store still stands at the corner of Carrall and Hastings, with double-strength grates on its windows during closing hours (I have also seen these grates left down during more active days for street life, including "welfare Wednesday", when an influx of government cheques increases the level of intoxication evident on the streets). Down the block from Army & Navy, Woodward's, the large department store that was once the district's main draw, closed its doors in 1993, though the many-storied structure still stood in the midst of the neighbourhood like a giant empty steamship parked in the middle of town, until it was demolished in 2006.³⁶ Recently, North America's first needle injection site opened up and is thriving both in numbers served and in service to the community, and North America's two most complete studies of intravenous drug use are being conducted at the site.³⁷

³⁶ After Woodward's closed, several local advocacy groups, including DERA (Downtown Eastside Resident's Association), tried to convince authorities to turn the building into low-cost housing through protests, squats and other tactics. The land was sold to a developer who has acquiesced a minimal amount of space for low-cost housing—the majority of the new building that is to be built on the site is allocated for market-priced condos.

³⁷ Information about ViDUS and other IDU (Intravenous Drug User) studies is available on the website of the University of British Columbia's Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS www.cfenet.ubc.ca

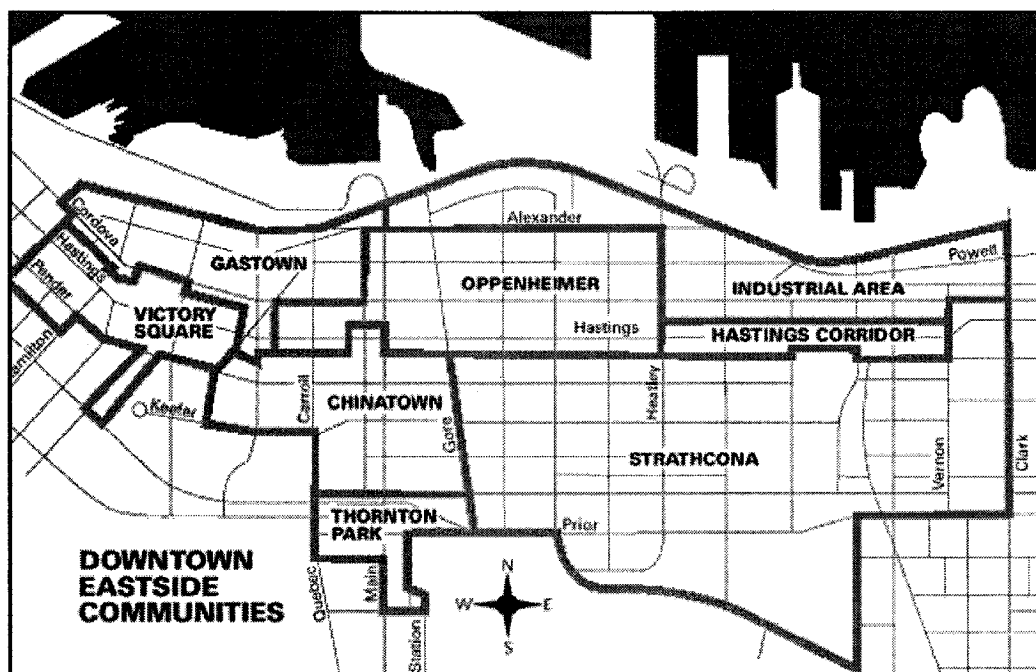


Fig. 3: The DTES. Map courtesy of DERA.

In anticipation of Expo '86, the world's fair, construction for the massive event dis-placed (or re-placed) so-called “street culture” away from the fair site and down into the DTES³⁸—this was a specific corralling of the “crime component” into a part of the city bordered to the north and south by tourist areas (Gastown and Chinatown) and to the east and west by industrial business and gentrifying residential districts. Subsequently, in the mid-1980s, the DTES, as well as other parts of the city, thrived as a port crucial to North America’s drug trade. The neighbourhood, subject to a strange combination of crime and forces of gentrification, became a hybrid inner-city area with a population that included a high percentage of poor, displaced, marginalized citizens who existed at the edges of the socio-industrial complex of

³⁸ The moniker Downtown Eastside is claimed by the community organization DERA, which was formed in 1973. A history of DERA can be found at <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/dera/achievements/achievements.htm>

Vancouver in the '80s (and beyond), and who did not necessarily join the economic momentum created by the aspirations of a future-forward city.

The Low Track, as the area frequented by survival sex workers in the DTES is called, has been the source material for several high-profile documentaries, books and art projects, which exploit the hard-luck facets of the community even as they contemplate the particular challenges of life in this neighbourhood.³⁹ Though some permanent residents remain in the core of the DTES, this multi-generational population is dwindling, since a trend began of “reclaiming” and renovating SROs in anticipation of the 2010 Winter Olympics, which will take place in Vancouver and Whistler, a ski resort town one hour's drive northwest of the city.⁴⁰

Even before the case of the missing women became well-known, the DTES encroached on the edges of Vancouver's optimistic self-perception. Both geographically and psychologically, the neighbourhood is a weak point of civic pride, a belt of unease between Gastown and Chinatown for tourists and residents alike. In the past, many attempts have been made by various civic planners to transform, or completely remove, the prominent characteristics of the area. Even as the city strains toward fulfilling its self-appointed potential for unfettered affluence, it is also the site of a vehement quietus perpetrated against its most marginalized citizens. Not only spatially, but also temporally, the DTES is delineated, in the city corpus, as a space where “Other” people live. On the streets, perpetual night exists, even in the daytime. Storefronts remain gated at all hours and activities that are usually identified with

³⁹ Each of the works I consider in Chapter Three, with the exception of Maggie de Vries' biography of her sister, was originally created to tell a story of life in the DTES not particularly related to the missing women. In addition to these, movies and books about and set in the DTES continue to capture the public interest. A recent film, *Mount Pleasant* (Ross Weber, 2006), about prostitution and property values in a neighbourhood adjacent to the DTES, was a sleeper hit when it was recently released in Vancouver movie theatres.

⁴⁰ Andy Prest “Protestors haunt SRO auction” *The Tyee*, 2 March 2007

nighttime—alcohol consumption, sexual commerce—exist on a 24-hour clock. The residents of the DTES enact a perpetual “‘colonization' of the night...” in which “...chains of events link up according to the logic of their purpose”, in the terms of the urban geographer Murray Melbin.⁴¹ In his recent *Red Light Neon: A History of Vancouver's Sex Trade*,⁴² historian Daniel Francis traces the city's relationship with its sex trade workers from 1873 to the present, power relations were exerted through geographical displacement, anti-prostitution legislation and the enforcement of that legislation (at times enthusiastic, at times less so). “Prostitution,” he says, offers an unusual perspective on the history of the city's politics, social geography...and moral atmosphere. Unhappily, the story does not show Vancouver in a positive light,” continuing that the city's history of prostitution “is a history of hypocrisy.”

In his final chapter, Francis discusses the missing women case and concludes that the cumulative effect of these historical attitudes has led to an exceptionally dangerous lifestyle for Vancouver's survival sex workers. Moreover, he traces a direct causal link between the criminalization of sex work in Vancouver (the “communicating” law) and the risky working conditions under which sex workers in the DTES have gone missing. Reading Francis, it is possible to pose Vancouver's long history of legislated ambivalence towards sex work, as evidenced by the bylaws and legislation enforced against the survival activities of sex workers, as a civic expression of a subsumed wish for their removal. Thus, a history of sex work in Vancouver can be seen as an enactment of the missing women's absence.

Though the DTES has long been a site of civic concern, the case of the missing women is certainly its most flagrant crisis. There has long been an awareness

⁴¹ Murray Melbin “Night as frontier,” in Doreen Massey, John Allen and Steve Pile, eds. *City Worlds* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 69

⁴² Daniel Francis *Red Light Neon: A History of Vancouver's Sex Trade* (Vancouver: Subway Books, 2006)

of multiple threats to the safety of women working in the area—however, these concerns remained mainly in the academic realm until the “serial killer” narrative hit the news in full force by 2001. John Lowman, a Vancouver-based criminologist whose well-known work relating to the criminalization of survival sex work, largely bases his findings on quantitative studies of street prostitution in the DTES. In a 2000 paper, Lowman summed up the statistical reality of this “stroll”:

Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, a neighbourhood of 16,000 residents, has one of the lowest household average incomes in Canada and one of the highest HIV and hepatitis infection rates in the Western World. The neighbourhood also has the highest number of bar seats per capita in Vancouver, with 28% of the city's total, and nearly 80% of the city's single-room occupancy units. Through a process of urban triage, the Downtown Eastside has long been a residuum for the homeless, the mentally ill, and the drug-addicted. From 1994 through 1998, there was an average of at least one illicit-drug overdose per day.⁴³

Lowman's article, which is concerned with the rate of violent crime perpetrated against street prostitutes in the DTES, details the missing women crisis as it stood in 2000 and mentioned that it was “in some respects extraordinary that police so quickly dismissed fears that a serial killer was at work.”⁴⁴ As he points out, there is “a systematic pattern of violence against prostitutes perpetrated by many men, some of whom are serial killers.”⁴⁵

Lowman's observation is also true in reverse: Since the women on the “Missing List” were sex workers from the DTES, who necessarily existed under the radar, their absence might not have perpetuated itself if they had been, for example, “nurses from a suburban neighbourhood”.⁴⁶ In a sense, the women's absence reproduces a prevalent “missingness” of their neighbourhood which is not only

⁴³ John Lowman “Violence and the Outlaw Status of (Street) Prostitution in Canada *Violence Against Women*, 6:9 (September 2000) 987-1011

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 11

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 12

⁴⁶ Maggie De Vries, interview, 2003

exerted from outside the neighbourhood. Within the margins, as feminist geographer Doreen Massey explains,

disenfranchised communities often exert their own process of cultural separation, the act of self-enclosure [which] may come about through groups seeking to protect themselves from the more economically or politically powerful...in the case of the latter the process of “walling in” is likely to be a matter of necessity, not choice.⁴⁷

3. Misuse and disorder

Geographer Jeff Sommers, in his historiography of men in the DTES, notes that for the last several decades, the DTES was an area of town unlike the rest, in which “misery, hopelessness and despair” festered, spurred by the disinterest of “society” and “the community”.⁴⁸ He quotes a City of Vancouver report that found

many of the DTES's visitors are there only for the drugs and related activities...The neighbourhood is becoming more and more isolated from the rest of Vancouver, and its residents increasingly under siege. Perceiving the area primarily as a haven for drugs and crime, fewer and fewer people who live elsewhere go there now...consequently, skid road is not just a geographic accident, it is a hard core of human failure.⁴⁹

In a sense, though it is located in the epicenter of the city, the DTES is a neighborhood of missing people, and is itself missing from the city as a whole. As Sommers notes in another article, the DTES is “a space of disorder, even danger, while its inhabitants have been consistently cast as social outsiders.”⁵⁰ As he also points out, women are among the “missing persons” in his own survey of masculinity in the DTES, which was published in 1998. Since then, however, the missing women story has become “the most important crisis in the area”.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Massey et al., eds. *City Worlds*

⁴⁸ Jeff Sommers “Men at the Margin: Masculinity and Space in Downtown Vancouver, 1950–1986” *Urban Geography* 19:4, 287–310

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Jeff Sommers “The Place of the Poor : poverty, space and the politics of representation in downtown Vancouver 1950-1997” (PhD dissertation, Simon Fraser University, 1998), 30

⁵¹ *Global News*, 8 December 2006.

Women, whether present on the streets of the DTES or missing from them, have especially signified an inherent chaos in that area, and by extension, in the city as a whole. Elizabeth Wilson, in her study of women in late nineteenth-century urban environments, illustrates that

Women have fared especially badly in western visions of the metropolis because they have seemed to represent disorder....women without men in the city symbolize the menace of disorder...that is why women—perhaps unexpectedly—have represented the mob, the 'alien', the revolutionary.⁵²

Certainly, there is an argument to be made that the criminalized activities of the drug and sex trades in the DTES especially pertains to female residents of the neighbourhood. If, as Stephen Pile argues in his psychoanalytic study of city space that “the material configurations of the city, alongside refigurings of the urban imaginary...operate as key locus for the forging of sexual (and moral) order...”⁵³, then it is also true that women are the progenitors of chaos in the area—the signifiers of disorder, of the biological functions the city corpus may want to suppress.

In one of very few generalized studies of prostitution and urban geography, Phil Hubbard relies heavily on John Lowman's quantitative work. He cites Lowman's assertion (which is backed up by Daniel Francis's narrative history) that the socio-economic and geographic situation of sex workers in this neighbourhood was created by a NIMBYist (not in my backyard) attitude as evidenced by various gentrification-oriented thrusts and a “purifying urge”⁵⁴ throughout the city's history. Hubbard illustrates that an area geographically delineated by and for prostitution is not cut off from the rest of the urban whole—rather, it exists as a thoroughfare to and from the rest

⁵² Elizabeth Wilson *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 157

⁵³ Pile cited in *ibid*, 63

⁵⁴ Phil Hubbard, *Sex and the City: Geographies of Prostitution in the Urban West* (Aldershot, Ashgate 1999), 150

of town. Interestingly, one of the major studies Hubbard cites about prostitution and urbanized space is Kay Anderson's 1991 history of Vancouver's Chinatown, an area adjacent to the DTES.⁵⁵

Hubbard extrapolates:

By sexualizing and feminizing the public realm, the prostitute demonstrated to male authority that its control of the city was not as complete as it would have liked others to have believed; cut loose from the bonds of monogamy, productive labour and religious asceticism, they were loose from the bounds of moralized space.⁵⁶

In this sense, the DTES is not only a geographical place, but a location in the metaphysical topography of the city—a delineated “red light district” of the unconscious, just as the DTES has become a space for activities, especially activities relates to the drug and sex trade, which are not desirable in other neighbourhoods.

These spaces of illegal and “immoral” activity are, as Doreen Massey notes in her landmark study of women in urban environments, highly politicized:

[T]he spatial organization of society...is integral to the production of the social, and not merely its result. It is fully implicated in both history and politics...In human geography, the recognition that the spatial is socially constituted was followed by the perhaps even more powerful recognition that the social is necessarily spatially constituted too.⁵⁷

In the case of the DTES, drugs, too, are relevant to the spatial and temporal constitutions of marginality. The opiate addictions that were a determinant of risk for all of the missing women signifies a participation of the body at the molecular level, within consumer structure of commerce that delivered their bodies, in recitation of

⁵⁵ Anderson cited in *ibid*, 85

⁵⁶ Phil Hubbard *Sex and the City*, 80

⁵⁷ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1994), 264

supply and demand, into the machine of commercial structure of “street trade” that is a part of the physical and metaphysical traffic of the city.⁵⁸

4. Collectivity

The DTES is a part of town in which, we think, everyone and anyone can disappear—more than anywhere else in the city. Though we feel, on one hand, that we cannot know what and how things happen “down there”, we also feel incontrovertibly connected to our own lack of awareness of this “Other” neighbourhood. In an interview, CBC reporter Kelly Ryan, who covered the early Pickton pre-trial, made reference to a “collective guilt” felt by an entire city once it was confirmed that these women disappeared one after another without the benefit of public outcry or an investigation.⁵⁹ We can perceive this “collective guilt” as a cog in the continuous industrial project of the city—a city that has, in the past, embraced its project of industrial urbanity even when it meant violence and displacement to, among others, sex trade workers—arguably its most marginalized citizens.

In her landmark paper on the geo-political space of street prostitution, Sherene Razack writes that

“women in prostitution are very frequently women without place, and their displacement often has its origins in sexual, racial and economic violence; which [leaves] uninterrogated the question of why it is permissible to have an area expressly zoned for prostitution and to have specific women marked for the purposes of prostitution...Once a place has been marked for prostitution, violence can occur there with impunity.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ For detailed examinations of the relationship between women drug users and their urban environment, see Stephen Randall *Substance and Shadow: Women and Addiction in the United States* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996) and Avril Taylor’s *Women Drug Users* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). Also of locational interest is Bruce Alexander’s “The Roots of Addiction in Free Market Society” Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, April 2001

⁵⁹ *CBC News*, 6 March 2002

⁶⁰ Razack, Sherene: “Race, Space and Prostitution: The Making of the Bourgeois Subject”; *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*, 10:2, 370

Razack includes a lengthy footnote about the murders of sex workers in Vancouver's Chinatown between 1986 and 1992. Clearly, this current case of missing women exists on a continuum—both historically, and also in the context of how these women were absent from an accounting of the city whole as a result of socio-political determinants of their lives. This continuum by definition implicates not only their lives but also our own, as their risk factors for violence are dictated by well-documented social policies relating to the city as a whole.⁶¹

Though the DTES is a particular space located at the margins of Vancouver (socially, if not geographically), it is by no means an isolated system of commerce. The open market of drug trafficking and sex work that persists in the DTES is not self-sufficient—indeed, these criminalized elements of commerce exist to serve the needs of other neighbourhoods as much as they feed into themselves, as Maggie de Vries illustrates in *Missing Sarah*.⁶² The various areas of commerce in a city are distinct locations in an urban circulatory system through which movement and exchange occurs through both planned and spontaneous patterns. The DTES, with the Port of Vancouver in the centre, is a crucial and primary epicentre, an entry and exit point for what is most foreign and most familiar. The DTES is, in addition to a geographical location, is also a semiotically compressed parenthesis of certain “societal ills”. Our efforts to bracket the neighbourhood, both literally and figuratively, is an acknowledgement of our complicity with the crises that exist there. Despite Massey's assertions about a necessary regrouping and “walling in” of certain

⁶¹ It would be possible to perform a study showing the causal relationship between risk-taking behaviour among survival sex workers in the DTES and recent changes in social policy in Vancouver. Environmental contexts for HIV infection are meticulously traced in “Deadly public policy, a paper by O'Shaughnessy et al.” presented at the International AIDS Conference 1998. For an anecdotal observer's account of how these changes to social policy have affected women in the DTES, see Marlene Trick's comments at www.keta.org.

⁶² de Vries, *Missing Sarah: A Vancouver Woman Remembers Her Vanished Sister* (Toronto: Penguin Boons, 2003)

areas done *from within*, the work of separating the DTES from the rest of the city is insufficient to negate the violent “missingness” that persists there.

5. Names

In early coverage of the missing women, newspaper reporters developed certain shorthand descriptors to address the uncomfortable topics they were addressing, as I discuss further in Chapter Two. Journalists must, of course, report the salient facts of the case, and therefore need to describe the particular neighbourhood from which the women had disappeared. In the months before the Pickton trial began, as I described in the early pages of this chapter, efforts were made to reach beyond the tropes about the women’s criminalized lifestyles. Yasmin Jiwani and Mary Lynn Young, in their study about the coverage of the missing women, point out that articles about the case perpetrated the “prevailing and historically entrenched”⁶³ stereotypes used to describe the DTES and its residents—their study is discussed in Chapter Two. But when we discuss these geographic and demographic determinants of the DTES and the people who live there, or lived there, including the missing women, there is overlap between what is considered a “stereotype” and what is merely a known statistical fact about the DTES.

Certain facts about the DTES have been repeated in every article I’ve read about the missing women—but these popular generalizations about the neighbourhood are not inaccurate, though they may be uncomfortable to consider. The DTES *does* contain “mean streets”⁶⁴ where poverty, drug use and survival sex work are prevalent.

⁶³ Yasmin Jiwani and Mary Lynn Young “Missing and Murdered Women: Reproducing Marginality in News Discourse”, *Canadian Journal of Communication*, Volume 31 (2006), p. 906

⁶⁴ One of the stereotypes distinguished by Jiwani and Young

There is an extended horizon of risk for survival sex workers in the DTES.

Though we may be tempted to think that acknowledging the terms of the women's socio-political marginalization re-inscribes stereotypes, I vehemently believe that this is not the case. Though the power inherent in the terms of discourse we use is undeniable, to avoid a description of their vulnerability not only denies it, but also solidifies our disavowal. We must be vigilant to ensure that our evasion of “stereotypes” do not absolve us of our complicity within the material reality of these stereotypes.

Consider the words of Marlene Trick, a community care worker at the Carnegie Centre:

These women died because of who they were. These women died because they were survival sex trade workers, they were poor women, they were addicted women, and many were Aboriginal women. These women had been involved in the sex trade out of necessity. The need to feed their family and/or the need to feed their drug habit.⁶⁵

Trick's words speak to a difficult truth about the missing women. It is worthwhile to consider following her example of speaking aloud the known factors about the missing women's lives in order to behold truths about their disappearances.

6. Numbers

The Joint Task Force list of missing women now has sixty-five names—but even that number frequently requires revision. Women are added, but they are also removed, if they are found to be alive, often living elsewhere, having escaped incommunicado from “the life”. Others, it is assumed, have died of overdose or disease or have been killed and their murderers found not to be Robert Pickton,

⁶⁵Marlene Trick “A Herstory of the Missing Women’s Memorial March” <http://www.keta.ca>

Although the rate of case closure of murders in the DTES, especially of sex workers, is much lower than the national average.⁶⁶ It is, as I've mentioned, difficult to keep track of people who live “off the grid”, because they have little motivation to remain accountable to a system that does not appear to account for them.

As with the enumeration of disaster victims,⁶⁷ in the process of counting bodies (or in this case, the absence of bodies), the enormity of lost lives contributes to a critical mass that complicates an awareness of particular individuals. Sixty-five bodies is a *lot* of absence, even over three decades of disappearance. In other cities, missing people are becoming crowds—such as in Juarez, Mexico⁶⁸—yet conditions in the DTES make it an easy place from which to disappear: “This is a particular case for a particular place.”⁶⁹

The forensic investigation of the soil on the Pickton properties has illuminated the absence that existed in the DTES long before the investigation began. Clearly, though, the women's “missingness” was greatly affected by the place they are missing *from*. Many of these women are now known to have been murdered, and therefore, are not missing or, as some poetical souls have called them, “lost”⁷⁰—this latter adjective implies that these women had somehow been misplaced by the city itself, rather than forcibly removed from their own lives.

66John Lowman, “Violence and the Outlaw Status of (Street) Prostitution in Canada” *Violence Against Women*, 6:9, September 2000

67Edward Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2000)

68Amnesty International reports that “since 1993, almost 400 women and girls have been murdered and more than 70 remain missing in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua, Mexico”. Information about these missing women is available on their site at <http://www.amnestyusa.org/women/juarez/>

69Kevin Potvin, “Media Circus Readyng its Tents” *Vancouver Courier*, 20 September 20 2002

70Greene, *Bad Date*

At this juncture, there exists a public awareness of these women's faces and their lives that was nonexistent in the mid-nineties, when the list of "missing women" was not yet a list, and women were being disappeared with efficacy. Indeed, the twenty-six murders for which Pickton stands accused of are all crimes against women who disappeared between 1997 and 2001. A geographical rendering of their neighbourhood must also include thousands of women who are not listed as missing, but who are effectively absent. As Marlene Trick said to me, "Everyone down here knows that the story of the missing women doesn't begin or end with Robert Pickton."⁷¹

Pickton's Port Coquitlam properties are located a half-hour's drive in light traffic from the DTES. The trip seems long, through downtown Vancouver and the suburbs of Burnaby and Port Moody, around Burnaby Mountain and along the Fraser River on the Barnet Highway all the way to PoCo, as it's called. Apart from the Picktons' agricultural land, which is flanked by a golf course and a brand-new housing subdivision, is zoned as a residential area with large single-family homes that climb up the sides of the mountain.

The fear and confusion a woman might feel, shortly after consenting to the terms of a transaction that results in a ride in a windowless white van, is barely imaginable. She would be crouched on a rough, dirty floor as the vehicle speeds through the dark along a smooth, quiet highway, taking her far away from the familiar sights and sounds of the DTES. The distress of a long drive to PoCo would be amplified in the back of a van, where she would be unable to locate herself in relation to the passing landscape.

⁷¹ Marlene Trick, interview by author, minidisc recording, February 12, 2003, Vancouver, B.C.

This womans' last geographic decision—the one that would eventually lead to the discovery of her bodily traces on Pickton's property, mixed together with the bodies of other women and of farm animals and other detritus in the soil—was largely a conflagration of space and place. Her “missingness” is merely the short end of a long story for which the prosecution of her alleged killer is an insufficient conclusion. Disappearance is, after Virilio,⁷² an accident built into the machine of urbanity—her absence is not separate from the city, or from us—it is integral to us, and we to it.

⁷²Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986)

CHAPTER TWO:

The Story of Vancouver's Missing Women

One of the reasons the authorities had trouble getting resources for their investigations is because they had no bodies. The police are driven by that—if there's a body there's a murder investigation, which gets a lot more resources than a missing-person investigation.⁷³

In the late 1990s, the climate of law-and-order in Vancouver was not receptive to the idea of allocating resources on behalf of a growing list of discrete missing persons reports. As this chapter illustrates, it was mainly newspaper reporters, at the urging of family members of several of the missing women, who drew the story of the missing women into public discourse. The process by which a team of reporters created a working lexicon of facts and arguments about the case of the missing women was a painstaking process of research and investigative work that finally emerged as an eleven-part series published in the *Vancouver Sun* between September and November of 2001.⁷⁴ These articles, which I refer to as the “missing women series”, precluded, and to a great degree precipitated, the expansion of the

⁷³Lindsay Kines, interview with author, 2004

⁷⁴The headlines of the “missing women series” tell the story of the case as it progressed:

Lindsay Kines, Kim Bolan and Lori Culbert “Police to announce expanded probe: Women have history of drugs, prostitution, links to Downtown Eastside” *Vancouver Sun*, 21 September 2001

--“Too few officers, police infighting and lack of experience undermined first probe into disappearances” *Vancouver Sun*, 22 September 2001

--“Coroner, police want data bank but B.C. has put it on hold”, *Vancouver Sun*, 24 September 2001

--“If they had arrested him earlier, maybe my sister wouldn't be dead right now” *Vancouver Sun*, 25 September 2001

--“Police face obstacles tracking down serial predators”, *Vancouver Sun*, 26 September 2001

--“The Case of the Missing Women means changes are needed”, *Vancouver Sun*, 27 September 2001

--“Unlike other missing women on the East Side, police found April Reoch's body”, *Vancouver Sun*, 28 September 2001

--“Sexual predator case prompts police review” *Vancouver Sun*, 29 September 2001

--“Relatives of missing women invited to discuss case”, *Vancouver Sun*, 30 September 2001

--“600 suspects in missing Women case: Families encouraged after meeting with investigators”, *Vancouver Sun*, 1 October 2001

--“DNA clears key suspects in murders”, *Vancouver Sun*, 2 October 2001

investigation into the missing women, and the formation of the Vancouver Police Department/RCMP Joint Missing Women's Task Force.

Vancouver Sun reporter Lindsay Kines and two colleagues, Lori Culbert and Kim Bolan, crafted the first widespread media coverage of the missing women crisis before it was a “case” in the parlance of the VPD (Vancouver Police Department), the RCMP, or the subsequently-formed Joint Missing Women's Task Force. The former are the authors of many terms now common in the public lexicon of references to the missing women, and they are also, in a sense, the progenitors of the “case” itself. In 2001, after Kines' initial stand-alone articles of 1999, but before the publication of the “missing women series”, a small Montreal publisher, ECW Press, put out a quickly-collated book about the missing women: *Bad Date: The Lost Girls of Vancouver's Low Track*. The book was written by a seasoned investigative reporter whose anecdotes and interviews were extensive and informative, though his coverage in general tended towards sensationalistic portraits of the DTES and the women who lived there. He conducted detailed interviews with survival sex workers and police officers who worked in the DTES, and also identified the crisis of disappearance that was then at its zenith. Finally, he advanced several viable-sounding theories as to who and what could be causing a spike of missing women in the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, his book barely made a stir when it was published.

Since Pickton's arrest in 2002, there have been several spates of front-page news coverage of the case: The arrest, the *voir dire*, the decision to split the trial, and other developments have all put the story on the front pages over the years. But the initial few days of the first trial in January 2007 brought unprecedented coverage for the missing women and their accused killer, especially the Crown's opening

statements, which detailed the evidence that would be presented in the case against Pickton.

Though the testimony of witnesses, informants and investigators now occupies a lot of space in the pages of our newspapers, the details of Pickton's alleged crimes were not always at the forefront of news about the missing women—in fact, during pre-trial proceedings in 2005 and 2006, the media was banned from publishing details of the case. It was, however, possible to discern the horror contained in the discoveries of the forensic investigation from early stories about fragments of bone and flesh, eyelashes, fingernails and cigarette butts, or a lone white mud-covered sneaker that was pulled out of a ditch on Pickton's Dominion Street property in front a battery of news cameras. Like the women's bodily remains scattered in the soil, our knowledge of the crimes against them was, and to an extent still remains, subsumed in speculation about Pickton's alleged activities during the decades leading to his arrest in 2002.

For now, the missing women are present in the public eye as the victims of horrific crimes—events so difficult to contemplate that the editors of newspapers began publicly addressing their roles as purveyors of information about the trial before it began.⁷⁵ The grisly fragments of horror displayed by Crown prosecutors in the New Westminster courtroom are only one aspect of the women's “missingness”—merely the physical traces of their long story of absence. As Lindsay Kines told me in an interview, in his view, the shift of focus onto the investigation of

⁷⁵ Ingrid Peritz “Canadians tuning out grisly details from court”, *Globe and Mail*, 27 January 2007, A12 and Patricia Graham “Editor's Letter: The Challenge of reporting on horror” *Vancouver Sun*, 22 January 2007 The latter is posted on the newspaper's Pickton coverage site. Every newspaper publishing coverage of the Pickton trial has a disclaimer to the effect that some of the contents of this coverage will be disturbing to some readers.

the Port Coquitlam properties after Pickton's arrest only served to further disappear the missing women in the thick of their own notoriety.

1. The Facts of the Case

One shocking aspect of the missing women's case is the vehemence with which authorities insisted that there *was* no case, for a very long time. These disavowals by authorities formed a narrative scaffold on which reporters could hang criticism, statistics, and interviews with family members of missing women in which, the latter insisted that there was, indeed, something more to the case. Early articles about the missing women focused on speculation by community activists and family members of missing women as to whether these disappearances were “random”, or the result of some foul play.⁷⁶

Until the late '90s, authorities, including the Vancouver Police Department, the RCMP, and even the mayor at the time, Philip Owen, systematically denied the possibility that a single serial killer was at work, attributing the women's disappearances to their geographical determinants.⁷⁷ The case received a boost in coverage when, in April of 1999, Mayor Owen recanted his previous refusal to offer a substantial monetary reward for tips leading to the arrest of individuals responsible for the women's disappearances, and announced that a 100,000 dollar reward would be offered.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Lindsay Kines, “Police Target Big Increase in Missing Women” *The Vancouver Sun*, 3 July 1998.

⁷⁷ For a detailed eyewitness reminiscence of this phase of the case, see de Vries' *Missing Sarah*. Specifically, she recalls the long process by which authorities denied the possibility of a serial killer at work, in the chapter “First Phase of the Investigation”. De Vries became an activist on behalf of the missing women during this period and met with the mayor and other authorities several times.

⁷⁸ Lori Culbert, “Province okays 100,000 reward” *Vancouver Sun*, 20 April 1999.

In 2001, after the “missing women series” appeared in the Sun, the investigation intensified, Pickton was arrested in February of 2002, media coverage skyrocketed as nearly a hundred investigators were sent to search his farm. Those advocating on behalf of the missing women were particularly frustrated by the sensationalistic, “blood-and-gore” nature of this coverage. Even though they had been pushing for increased publicity for the case as the rate of women's disappearances from the DTES in the previous years had accelerated.⁷⁹ The first remains found on the Pickton property belonged to two women, Sereena Abotsway who disappeared between July 2001 and February 2002, and Mona Wilson, who disappeared sometime between December 2001 and February 5th, 2002, two days prior to Pickton's arrest.⁸⁰

After Pickton's arrest, the mainstream media immediately began to speculate on the particulars of the case. From the little information released by frequent RCMP/VPD Joint Task Force press releases, reporters began to extrapolate on a story more gruesome than any folk tale: Robert “Willy” Pickton, a hermit living on a pig farm, lured drug-addicted working girls out of downtown with promises of a good party. The women were never seen again, while Pickton, the hog farmer, made frequent drop-off trips to a rendering plant that bought his animal entrails for use in, among other things, cosmetics and animal feed. “Investigators are looking for bodies and tiny body fragments,” reported *The Vancouver Sun* in the very first article about the case following Pickton's arrest, “with forensic specialists behind the scenes saying the bodies [of missing women] may have been put through a wood chipper and fed to

⁷⁹ de Vries, *Missing Sarah*

⁸⁰ Suzanne Fournier, Keith Fraser and Salim Jiwa “Daughter phoned daily for 13 years” *The Province*, 26 February 2002

the pigs." The report noted that Pickton, fifty-three, and his brother David "had 30 sheep, 12 pigs, 12 goats, a couple of llamas, and cows."⁸¹

Within a few days, however, "pigs" and "pork" had become incontrovertibly linked to the case and Pickton. The headlines screamed speculation about the comestible nature of animals presumed to have consumed the missing women's remains, despite authorities refutations of the possibility that the public could have consumed meat raised by the Picktons. While investigators began to search the 10-acre property with giant conveyor belts, on which they piled dirt to be sifted, a spokeswoman for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency asserted that "pig material only had been delivered as animal products to the rendering plant", though she conceded that a test to confirm this would have to be visually based, and would only check for chemical residues. "I can't imagine any testing that would distinguish, um, you know –animal matter one from another," was her famous quote.⁸²

The facts of the case provided a rich ground in which to connote and denote all kinds of expanded meaning as to the recovered bodies of the women, including an uneasy discourse about the women's bodies as "meat", as evidenced by an ad that PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) attempted to run in the *Sun* in November of 2002.⁸³ The ad, which pictured animal carcasses in a slaughterhouse, alluded to the Pickton trial and stated that that "It's easy to look at a tragedy like this and feel powerless." the ad then proposed that "adopting a vegetarian diet is one good way to say no to continued violence and suffering,"⁸⁴

⁸¹Lindsay Kines and Lori Culbert, "Police seal off farm, tell families they have suspect" *Vancouver Sun*, 5 February 2002, A1

⁸² Kim Bolan and Lindsay Kines: "Food inspectors join probe of pig-farm connection" *Vancouver Sun*, 13 February 2002

⁸³Nicholas Read and Lori Culbert "PETA rebuffed over anti-meat ad" *Vancouver Sun*, 13 November 2002, A1

⁸⁴Ibid.

Women and pigs, meat and murder, food and cosmetics possibly containing human remains, and so on—these were multiple angles of horror. There developed an incontrovertible connection between the missing women and pigs, and meat. Though there was a publication ban in effect, grisly speculation about the investigation's findings and what they indicated about Pickton's activities exponentially augmented the outrage about the missing women case. Still, while we are aghast at the possibility that Pickton may have fed women's remains to his animals, our queasiness points to a generalized and specific anxiety about our food sources. It also brings into play an interesting quandary: whereas the violence done to the women dismays us, the “meat” aspect of Pickton's alleged crimes places us differently on the continuum of violence: In a sense, because we ingest meat, we are culpable in the crimes against them. We are carnivorous, and our appetite is universal. Is it possible that we, then, feel ourselves to be secondary accomplices of the women's murders, in which their bodies were so utterly decimated that only tiny biological traces remain?

Meat and murder are not the only contestable details of the missing women's case. Another oft-stated assertion was that the majority of the women who are on the “Missing List” are Aboriginal, and that the missing women's story is perceived to have an aspect of particular violence towards Aboriginal women, in contrast to women of other ethnicities who are also on the “Missing List”.⁸⁵ This commonly repeated “fact” is often repeated, and is prominently displayed on a memorial mural on a Montreal wall painted by the sex workers' advocacy group Stella.⁸⁶ Well-intentioned as this assertion is, it is factually false, or at the very least, contested by

⁸⁵ Jiwani and Young, “Missing and murdered women”

⁸⁶ The mural is located on the Southeast block of Blvd. St-Laurent and Sherbrooke Streets in Montreal and states that the majority of the missing women were Aboriginal.

numerous other sources.⁸⁷ Though the “Aboriginal majority” angle of the missing women's story may prove to be less pronounced than is widely believed, these misapprehensions indicate at least two things about public discourse relating to the missing women: Though the disproportionate victimization of Aboriginal women by (this) serial killer is unlikely, there is certainly a disproportionate number of Aboriginal women involved in survival sex work in the DTES compared to the Aboriginal population of British Columbia and Canada. Also, highlighting Aboriginality is likely an expression of the perceived vulnerability of the missing women in the socio-political landscape of Vancouver, and Canada in general.

2. Early reports

At this juncture, it is useful to trace the story of the missing women back the genesis of public awareness about the case. In 1998, when Lindsay Kines wrote his first article about the missing women,⁸⁸ he was a cub police reporter at the *Sun*. Around the same time, *Da Vinci's Inquest*, a popular TV show then in its first season, began a long- running plot series about women missing from the DTES.⁸⁹

In an interview, Kines, now a parliamentary reporter for the *Victoria Times-Colonist* in Victoria, British Columbia, recalls the beginning of his involvement with the missing women story:

My involvement started, I guess, in 1997. I was a police reporter at the time, and I had no idea that a large group of women were missing from the DTES. Sandra Gagnon, whose sister, Janet Henry, was missing, called [the

⁸⁷ In my interview with Maggie de Vries, she asserted that a count of the women by the Joint Task Force “Missing List”, in 2003, refutes the claim that the majority of missing women are of Aboriginal descent. She mentions several instances where she had been contacted by people inquiring as to whether her missing sister, Sarah de Vries, self-identified as Aboriginal (according to Maggie de Vries, she did not). Carnegie Community Centre worker Marlene Trick, in her “Herstory of the missing women's March” (Trick, 2004), counts that 30% of the women on the “Missing List”: are Aboriginal.

⁸⁸ Kines, “Police Target Big Increase in Missing Women”

⁸⁹ See further discussion of *Da Vinci's Inquest* in Chapter Three

paper]. I have no idea how she was transferred to me. I did a feature story on this woman who was looking for her missing sister, but I had no indication that there was any larger pattern.⁹⁰

In July of 1998,⁹¹ Kines published an aperçu of the missing women crisis in the DTES. It featured an interview with Maggie de Vries, with police spokesperson Catherine Galliford, and with John Turvey, a prominent DTES activist who at the time did not believe that the women's disappearances were the work of a serial killer.

As Kines recalls:

Sandra called again on the anniversary of her sister's disappearance, so I did another story—this time I widened my scope, and I interviewed a daughter of another woman who was missing. Then, I wrote another follow-up a few months later when a man named Wayne Leng came into the newsroom. He was worried that this other woman, [Sarah de Vries], with whom he had had a romantic relationship, had gone missing. He had photos, and was quite [insistent], but I didn't do an immediate story on her disappearance because Leng had made some suggestions that [interested me]. He told me he had heard there were quite a number of women down there who had gone missing and suggested I look into a bit further...In July of '98 I went down and talked to some people on the street, as well as one of the community police officers down there. I found that they were quite concerned about a lot of women who had gone missing.⁹²

Kines' occasional articles about the growing numbers of missing women in the DTES continued throughout 1999 and 2000, as he remained on the lookout for developments in the case—or the “situation”, as it was then, since it was not yet defined as a case by the authorities. In those early years of the story, according to Kines' recollection, his editors did not veto his commitment to covering the missing women case, but they did not outfit him with the resources to proceed with his research, either. However, Kines does not attribute his editors' early indifference about the story to any desire on their part to deny the situation:

⁹⁰ Kines, interview, 2004

⁹¹ Kines, “Police Target Big Increase in Missing Women”

⁹² Kines, interview

I think people think there's a lot of forethought that goes into these [decisions about coverage and placement and resources within the newsroom] Actually, it's more haphazard—the factors that lead to [these decisions] aren't as deliberate as people assume they are...I don't have a strong recollection about my assignment editor's response. I'm trying to think of the best way to phrase this without having to go off the record...you only need to look at where those first stories were placed, and that will tell you everything: there's a large number of women going missing from the DTES, and it's a B-front story, and for the first little while, it was rarely on the front page... I think the story could have received better play early on, but that's hindsight 20-20. At the time some of the police explanations seemed plausible, right?⁹³

It becomes clear, speaking to Kines, that there was a certain crisis of purpose inherent in crafting a story about what was, essentially, the antithesis of a story: absence. How do you craft a narrative, especially a “newsworthy” one, about a lack of people, who may or may not have vanished into thin air? It is habitual for daily mainstream newspapers to organize each article, and the order and placement of each article, in priority based on the quality and immediacy of the “news” it breaks—and ultimately, Kines was attempting to fit a story about how “nobody knows anything” into the news of the day. In retrospect, Kines' work in those early years was remarkable, especially when we consider that he was a trained investigative reporter whose habits leaned towards inquiring as to every side of an existing story, rather than crafting a narrative out of a “news hole” in a neighbourhood where the big stories tend to be about law and order.

I probably could have done a lot more, but I found it a tough story to cover. How many stories can you do where people go, 'my sister's missing' and the police go, 'it could have been this or this or this'. There just wasn't a lot of concrete leads. It's like covering an apparition or something, like covering an absence. There wasn't something concrete to tie these stories to and a lot of these stories have a certain sameness to them, people are going, where are my loved ones? And the police are going, 'we don't know', essentially.⁹⁴

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Kines' early articles on the missing women, which appeared sporadically whenever there was an anniversary or a birthday of a missing woman from which to find the grain of a "lede", function as narrative memorializations of bodies already absent. They also provide for us an example of one way memory can be transformed into activism that transcends and augments our capacity to remember.

One of the actions taken in the early years of the case was the establishment of a memorial for the missing women. A book by the Toronto collective, The Cultural Memory Group, containing a chapter devoted to the installations of memorials dedicated to incidents of violence against women,⁹⁵ describes three memorials currently established in parks, all of which are in, or within walking distance of, the DTES.⁹⁶ Notably, in 1999, a small park-bench memorial in the DTES's Crab Park was installed at the behest of various groups in the DTES and on behalf of the family members of some of the missing women. Currently, in 2007, plans are being made to erect a larger, more comprehensive memorial to the women on the "Missing List" in Oppenheimer park, another green space in the DTES, where every year on Valentine's Day, the women's Memorial March culminates in a demonstration and vigil that takes place around a small, temporary monument that already exists there.⁹⁷

The erection of the Crab Park monument was one of few "newsworthy" events that provided an opportunity for Kines and others to report on the missing women's

⁹⁵ The Cultural Memory Group *Remembering Women Murdered By Men: Memorials Across Canada* (Toronto: Sumach Press, 2006)

⁹⁶ Ibid. The first memorial about violence against women to be installed in Vancouver was built in memory of the Montreal Polytechnique massacre, in which 14 women were gunned down by Marc Lepine on December 6th, 1989. The memorial, which is located in a park off Main street near the train station adjacent to the DTES, is a circle of 14 concrete benches with an inscription that states that it was erected "in memory of all women murdered by men." This inscription caused much controversy and resulted in a decision by the Vancouver Parks Board not to erect any future memorials of this nature.

⁹⁷ Matthew Burrows "Missing women must not be lost to time, say locals" *Westender* (Vancouver) 19 May 2006

case in the context of municipal organization of the memorial.⁹⁸ He and other reporters were able to cover press conferences relating to the monument, and rather suddenly, a shift occurred in the language used to refer to the missing women: It was more frequently referred to as a “case” rather than merely a “situation”. In other words, it became acknowledged in common parlance that it was a likely foul play was involved in the women's disappearances.

3. The “missing women series”: “It was like covering an apparition, or an absence”

It took more than two years after the installation of the Crab Park memorial for Kines and his colleagues Lori Culbert and Kim Bolan to obtain permission from the administration at the *Sun* to devote themselves full-time to researching the “missing women series”, the group of articles that catalyzed the missing women crisis, previously only a cause for DTES activists and family members of the women, into a crucial municipal issue. Shortly thereafter, the DTES became a main-issue municipal election platform,⁹⁹ and the investigation into the missing women by the RCMP began in earnest, as marked by the formation of the Joint Task Force. The progress of the investigation is well-documented in the procession of a series of press releases issued by the RCMP in late 2001 and early 2002.¹⁰⁰ Kines' proposal for a story, at the time, consisted of a request for man hours to further research the evidence to date: notes about a series of unconfirmed suspicions and complaints from family members and friends of missing women in the DTES—a story that was, at that time, not a priority for his editors and the administration at the *Sun*.

⁹⁸ Lindsay Kines et al., “Hundreds pray for missing women,” *Vancouver Sun*, 12 May 1999

⁹⁹ See my discussion of the mayoral election in Chapter Three

¹⁰⁰ These press releases are available in an archive maintained at <http://www.rcmp-bcmedia.ca>

I guess I was trying to trace back the story to its very beginning, and pursue it further—I didn't exactly know where, but my instinct was that there was a bigger story there, but I needed time and resources to pursue it beyond my regular crime beat.¹⁰¹

Kines asserts that while he “did not find any reticence among the police to actually talking about the 'Missing List',” there was “a reluctance to...raise the serial killer alarm bells. At the time their explanations seemed plausible. It is true, some of [these women] do move around, some of them do turn up elsewhere. They laid out these possibilities, but I could see even then that they were reluctant to say there wasn't, you know, more.”¹⁰²

In the fall of 2001, Kines' editors at the *Vancouver Sun* committed to an eleven-part series of daily articles, and assigned 3 reporters to work full-time on them. This allocation of time and resources made the difference between a one-off newspaper article and the stories that established the missing women's disappearances as a proper police case.¹⁰³ As Kines recalls, he investigated many of the same leads authorities were tracking, and assumes that his information was often provided by sources who were more willing to talk to the press than to authorities, including some residents of the DTES and family members of the missing women.

The series reads as a detailed, anecdotal assessment of the situation, heavy with quotes from missing women's family members expressing the pain of not knowing the fate of their loved one. There are also many quotes from the police that lament a lack of manpower for the case. Though these stories constitute a vanguard introduction to a virtually unknown problem, they are notable as much for what is missing from them as for what they include. There were, and still are, a few devoted family members who lobbied police and the press for more attention—but there are

¹⁰¹Kines, interview, 2004

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³Ibid.

many more women on the “Missing List” for whom no voices have emerged. Indeed, the layout of thumbnail pictures of the whole mass of missing women indicates a harsh truth: the majority of the photographs are mugshots, since those were the most current photos of many women. Others are represented by family pictures that are drastically out of date, and couple of the names on the "Missing List" appear without any photographic representation at all. In fact, the portraits of the missing were so notable to some for their “criminalizing” tendencies, with the result that a collective of police sketch artists volunteered their time to produce pencil sketches of each missing woman that express a “softer side of missing women”¹⁰⁴ The *Sun* published a five-page spread that featured this singular art project in December of 2005. Todd Matthews, the artist responsible for coordinating the project, said that he “thought that the prevalence of mug shots were not...a true reflection of the women's inner spirits: They didn't reveal that these women were wives and mothers, sisters and aunts, with families friends and unfulfilled dreams.” Matthews believed that the collection of thumbnail mug shots “sent a message that the women were photographed by police for doing something wrong, and...it was important to be viewed in a more positive light.”

The collections of tiny mug shots and old pictures that appeared in the original series, as well as Kines' piecemeal accumulation of each woman's biographical information and the details of her disappearance, are poignantly incomplete. These mini-biographies stand as the vestiges of the women's generalized invisibility, and emphasize the absence of normal contexts of human belonging from which the women often suffered.

¹⁰⁴ Lori Culbert, “Sketches express softer side of missing women” *Vancouver Sun*, 17 December, 2005, C1

4. In the margins

In the first published academic study of early media coverage of the case, Yasmin Jiwani and Mary Lynn Young posit that early articles about the missing women, when viewed together, function to enforce the marginality of the missing women's lives.¹⁰⁵ Further, they claim that the coverage and its discourse about the women and the geographical determinants in the DTES enact a “war on women in Canada,” evidenced by the stereotypical portrayal of the missing women's lives as they have appeared in the mainstream press. Near the end of Chapter One, I began to engage with this analysis by arguing that in order for us to bear our culpability for the “missingness” of these women we must remain focused on the actual facts of their marginal conditions of life, rather than on our dismay that these facts are rendered in the newspaper. Jiwani and Young analyse the tropes in Kines et al.'s articles, in which they unfurl the ongoing details of the missing women's case.¹⁰⁶ Though their study discerns patterns of representation related to the coverage, their apt analysis of how these tropes function after the fact, do not address the way the articles functioned as a mechanism of the ongoing story: not only did the articles define the terms of discourse relating to the case and to the missing women, but Kines et al.'s work was crucial in putting public pressure on the authorities to re-prioritize their treatment of the case.

The Jiwani and Young study criticizes Kines' articles for insufficiently highlighting and examining statements from family members of the missing women: “In the latter part of 2002, the families and friends of the missing and murdered

¹⁰⁵ Jiwani, Yasmin and Mary Lynn Young “Missing and Murdered Women”, 906

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

women were mentioned and nearly always quoted toward the end of news stories.”¹⁰⁷

Though this observation is accurate, nowhere do they mention the primary reason that loved ones' quotes are treated thus: this practice is the typical, and required, “pyramid” format of a news article, in which the lede, which comes first, is elicited by quick facts that are later elaborated on by quotes from people involved. In fact, the use of quotes near the end of an article by way of conclusion is often done to increase the impact of the quotes, not to diminish their importance.

Jiwani and Young also assert that the causality of the women's troubled lives is not emphasized in any of these news articles to the extent that it becomes a sociologically illuminating event: describing a short newspaper profile of one of Pickton's alleged victims, they observe that “Serena Abbotsway (sic) was an Aboriginal woman, but the circumstances influencing her life, the reasons behind her adoption, were never explored in a way that linked them to the devastating legacy of colonialism and residential schools.”¹⁰⁸

Several identifiers of the missing women seem to be problematic for Jiwani and Young, who imply that reporting facts about the women's ethnic origins, social class, and other socio-political determinants is problematic because they perpetuate stereotypes.¹⁰⁹

Near the beginning of their article, for example, Jiwani and Young complain that “[d]espite the sympathetic coverage and tone of public accountability that this early coverage sought to impart, the stories underscored stereotypical portrayals of the DTES as an area of “mean streets” and the women working in those streets as drug-addicted sex workers. It was often noted that “many” of the women were

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

¹⁰⁹ See p. 34

Aboriginal".¹¹⁰ The above are, indeed, facts as reported in the "missing women series" and other articles by Kines et al., and are limited but factually accurate portrayals of many missing women.

Jiwani and Young also note that the mug shots on the missing poster "highlighted the Aboriginal heritage of many of the missing women"—yet, a snapshot does not "highlight" anything—it is the best, most accurate representation of what the subject looked like at the time the photograph is taken. Since the pictures on the "Missing List" are mug shots, they do highlight the women's criminalized lifestyles. However, these thumbnail pictures also perform a purely functional (and, I would argue, primary) purpose: They were initially compiled for the The Joint Task Force's "Missing" poster, which was originally intended to alert the public that these women were missing, in the hopes that they would be found alive. Moreover, these were the most recent photographs of what each woman actually looked like at the time of their disappearance.

It bears repeating that the purpose of these news articles was to tell a story that had not previously been told, for as wide an audience as possible, and that, according to Kines, his motivations were primarily to serve the public. In the interview, he recalls that the progress of his research into the details of the not-yet-declared case of the missing women was neither rapid nor easy. Though some sources suggest that the name "Pickton" was on everyone's lips since at least 1998"¹¹¹, Kines refutes these hindsight accusations.

That's not my impression! I mean, we were down there, asking around. I had heard the name Pickton—just the last name Pickton from a cop as early as '99. He surfaced as a suspect in '98, so I knew this was a guy they were looking at...but I heard different names from different cops. It wasn't

¹¹⁰Jiwani and Young, "Missing and murdered women", 897

¹¹¹Lindsay Kines, interview, 2004

obvious...The reality is, you can go into the Supreme Court database, type in the word prostitute, and you'll get hundreds of names that pop up, and we did, to the point where, well, you just get overwhelmed...

For people to suggest that it was all out there, is so wrong. I have some sympathy for the police in this case...there were thousands of potential suspects. And we certainly were eager to break the story, and would have followed up any lead that stood out above others.

It would be the same conversation time after time, and then I would make more calls, make more searches... each time they...added more people to the investigation...I was more [counsellor] than reporter at some points...the family members would always call and...I would say, 'I'll make some calls, I'll look into it' and to my surprise, each time I made more calls I would always find something new.¹¹²

5: The Farm and beyond: "The story ended for me the day they arrested Robert Pickton."

For Kines, the enduring significance of the missing women case is not to be found at the Pickton farm, nor are they stored in evidence rooms full of women's remains. His story, rather, was concerned the disparate disappearances of women from the DTES, and the fact that authorities seemed not to be paying very close attention. He recalls, however, that other media outlets did not cover the same ground, and ignored what they deemed to be a non-story until the day the barriers went up around the Pickton farm in February 2002:

Once Pickton was arrested, I became somewhat less interested in the story. By then they had a hundred cops working on it, and it was no longer the case that the police weren't paying enough attention...Once they have guy in custody, and 100 cops (sic) searching the farm, what public service is being done at that point from all the media coverage? I mean, obviously, they have to keep people informed. But all that attention, if it has been focused earlier...would he [have been] arrested earlier? It's a question I can't answer, that comes back to not knowing the impact that the coverage had. *Never mind, if there [had been] some attention to the missing women as an overall societal problem...*[my italics]

Some of the stories after Pickton's arrest seem to have more sensational nature than any sort of public service...There was a story that came out, about a month after Pickton's arrest, that such and such an outlet has learned that they had found heads and body parts in the freezer. I mean, seriously. [At this

¹¹²Ibid.

point] he's charged. I have to ask what kind of public interest is being served by those sorts of stories. The story ended for me the day they arrested Robert Pickton.¹¹³

Still, Kines acknowledges that the “missing women series” and the other articles about scale case seem to have had wide-ranging residual effects in Vancouver. In his opinion, the biggest triumph of his coverage is one of language and scope. The *Sun*'s early coverage of the Missing Women case was instrumental in delineating the linguistic terms of reference for the case.

If I can say one thing I'm quite proud of, it's that in the beginning, I objected to the use of the word prostitute. If you'll notice, from the very first story I did not refer to these women as missing prostitutes. And from then, the police did not refer to them as such either....I don't know that that had an influence, but in the early days the police were referring to the “unsolved female homicide task force”. Just know that it was a conscious decision on my part. It's more cumbersome to say “authorities are concerned about a growing number of missing women who work in the sex trade, who are drug-involved and affected by the poverty of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighbourhood”. It's much easier to write, “police are worried about a bunch of missing drug-addicted hookers.”¹¹⁴

The care with which Kines chose the language of discourse endures. In his earlier book on the case of the missing women, Trevor Greene refers to the area, its residents and their activities with language that compromises what is actually a fairly well-researched and in-depth look at the pre-Pickton case. When discussing violent crimes against dozens of women, terms like “coke binge”, “kiddie stroll”, “bad guy” and even “lost girls”, the book's title, do not help lessen the potentially lurid cast of certain details of the case. It should be noted, however, that Greene does not limit his tabloid sensibilities to the women—his theories about who a serial killer might be include out-of-province truckers and the “trampers” who work on the freighters that harbour in the port adjacent to the DTES.

¹¹³Kines, interview, 2004

¹¹⁴Ibid.

These terms Kines, Bolan and Culbert laboured to coin are, generally, non-reductive and respectful, and in a sense, they set the tone for a potential future understanding of the missing women as more than absent bodies or murder victims. Their thoughtful referents are, however, not universal, as a recent Pickton-related article in the *Sun* plainly illustrates.¹¹⁵

The feature, published in August, 2006, announced the split trial. A layout following the front-page splash that included a headline that read: “More than statistics: Missing Women had real lives, children, families and friends”. This headline presents a perplexing argument in order to refute itself. The article announces the split trial and features a tidy layout with unusually detailed, if cursory, biographies of the six women whose murders will be prosecuted separately. Five of the six women in his group are Aboriginal, except Andrea Joesbury, and her accompanying picture is not a mug shot. Also, though the other five profiles begin with a brusque intro- date last seen, family ties, drug habits—Joesbury's profile begins with a subjective description of a “beautiful young woman with blond hair and a winning smile”, and takes pains to mention her recent adherence to Methadone treatment. As has become customary in profiles of the missing women, each of the women are listed alongside the family members who survive them.

Jiwani and Young's study of the *Sun* coverage states that the habitual inclusion of these family ties

fulfill[s] the ideological labour of reinforcing hegemonic values. The description of the missing women as mothers, daughters, and sisters serves a twofold function. On the one hand, it makes these women more like “us”. It rescues them from a place of degeneracy to a zone of normality. On the other hand, it conforms to the dominant hegemonic values, in that the only women

¹¹⁵ Neal Hall and et al. “More than statistics: Missing women had real lives, children, families and friends” *Vancouver Sun*, 10 August 2006, A5

who can be rescued or are worth saving are mothers, daughters, and sisters—women like us.¹¹⁶

However, the family ties detailed by these articles serves a third, more important function—not to make the women more like “us”, but rather to make “us”—not just *us* women, but *us* everybody—more like *them*. By contemplating their human ties vis-a-vis the horrors of their absence, the sameness between ourselves and the missing women is underlined. Almost everybody shares the experience of being, or at least having, a mother, sister or daughter, or a loved one, and the missing women's sameness is emphasized in these articles along with the horror of their “missingness”. In this view, the recitation of the missing women's family ties, rather than becoming a normalizing force to further violence against them, can function to close the remaining distance between *them* and *us*, between the absent and the present, the safe and the disappeared. This storytellers' urge to make these absent women present among us is less an enactment of hegemonic separation than an ethical imperative to erase the differentiation between the disappeared and those of us who remain, by rendering their human value in terms that are accessible to everyone.

Recent news of a split trial for the missing women points to a defining truth about their story: it confirms that the sheer number of missing people is so large that even the ordered system of law cannot contain it. The crowd of absences is crucial in its immensity. Many women have disappeared; some will remain missing for ever, while others have been unearthed during the searches at the Pickon properties. These “found” shards of genetic material are reportedly useful in providing “closure” for the murdered women's loved ones, though these same microscopic, mute remnants of

¹¹⁶Jiwani and Young, “Missing and murdered women”, 904

body matter are evidence of gruesome decimations that cannot be gathered together into a coherent whole.

This is, in a sense, all about scale— tinyness and hugeness are both incomprehensible here. The vastness of “missingness” is apparent everywhere; in the longevity of the forensic investigation on the Pickton property; in lengthy pre-trial proceedings in which several roomfuls of evidence were presented; in the somewhat indignant newspaper reports of large and endless monetary expenditures on the case. The litany of faces arranged in columns on the official Missing Women poster is giant when viewed as one, though each small thumbnail face represents one of many insurrected lives. The enormity of so much blood and bone, so many unanswered and unanswerable questions, so much grief, so much abbreviated life, is hard to grasp. The judge's concern that twenty-six victims is “too many” for any twelve jurors to withstand, or any single legal process to justly encompass, is another indication of magnitude. And yet, the slow, terrible accumulation of women's absence is inseparable from the disquieting memory of the city's long insouciance as women vanished, one after another. Each new legal development is merely shorthand for an absence whose end is unwritten. Certainly, the trial is not the whole story any more than the newspaper articles encompass the whole scope of what has been lost.

CHAPTER 3:

Stories in close-up: The missing women in public memory

If you could look inside my mind
Would you like the woman you find?
Would you understand me?
Would you want to love me?

Look deep into my windows
Past the mass hysteria of confusion
Now look, look harder¹¹⁷

In the midst of daily news updates from the Pickton trial, it becomes especially difficult to recover our engagement with other stories about the missing women. Yet, alternative stories about them remain available to us. It is the stories about the missing women as living people and as absent people that must endure for us after the Pickton trials are long over, just as it was emerging stories about women, and about their “missingness”, which initially created public awareness about the crisis in the DTES, forcing authorities to prioritize an investigation of the women's disappearances. Though Kines et al.'s articles and other news stories discussed in Chapter One formed the primary public “news” narrative of the missing women, other stories emerged as well—significantly, Chris Haddock, the writer/producer of the TV show *Da Vinci's Inquest*,¹¹⁸ spent the entire span of his show's run on the national broadcaster telling a story about the missing women, a story that slipped into the discourse of public culture to a significant degree, along with the non-fictional news reports published in the *Sun* and other newspapers. In this chapter, I discuss stories about the missing women other than those that appeared in the mainstream press—*Da Vinci's Inquest*,

¹¹⁷Sarah de Vries, as quoted in Maggie de Vries, *Missing Sarah*

¹¹⁸CBC's *Da Vinci's Inquest*

as well as two photographic works and a biography, which invite us to contemplate the missing women's lives and their disappearances. The importance of constructing alternate stories for the missing women cannot be overstated. It is these stories which afford us the metaphysical space to confront their absence, rather than allowing news reports about the recovered remains of their bodies to replace what we are able to know about their lives. We are compelled by the absence of their lives, as we must continue to be, to witness and remember what has been lost.

In this chapter, I present an incomplete collection of third-person narratives dealing with the DTES and particularly the women's absence from it. I hope that a contemplation of these stories can offer us a strategy for our necessary refusal to measure loss in blood spatters, or DNA, or recovered bodily traces. These stories, to a large degree, are emblematic of emptiness. Just as, in the first chapter, I detail the difficult process by which journalist Lindsay Kines' newspaper articles were able to give the women's absence a tangible presence in public discourse, thus forging a "case" out of a vacuum of information, so do each of the works discussed in this chapter find imaginative narrative strategies through which to conjugate loss.

Now, in mid-2007, the news delivers fresh horrors daily relating to testimony and evidence introduced at the Pickton trial. Our instinct is to limit our cognition. We are tempted to submit to our natural urge to "pass over in silence what cannot be spoken of,"¹¹⁹ or at least, to imagine that by closing ourselves off from a full apprehension of the particulars of murder, we inure ourselves against furthering the violence committed against these women by refusing to think of them in their brutal context. Still, the question remains: How *else* can we think about their lives, and their

¹¹⁹Ludwig Wittgenstein *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, David Pears and Brian McGuinness, trans. (London: Routledge, 1961)

loss—certainly, our refusal to imagine their last moments should not signify our unwillingness to remember the women in other ways?

Maggie de Vries' had become one of the most vociferous activists on behalf of her sister Sarah de Vries, a survival sex worker and drug addict living in the DTES who disappeared in 1998, as well as all the other missing women. After Pickton was arrested, de Vries wrote a book about her experiences dealing with the police and the mayor on behalf of the missing women. But her memoir, *Missing Sarah*,¹²⁰ is much more than a non-fiction account of the missing women case—it is largely an account of Sarah's life in the DTES previous to her disappearance.

De Vries' book about her sister serves as a remembrance, yet that directly engages with the political and social ramifications of the case in a work of non-fiction. However, the only readers of de Vries' book are those with a particular interest in the case. This was not the case for television viewers engaged with *Da Vinci's Inquest*, which, from its inaugural season in 1999 until it ended in 2005, followed an ongoing storyline about women missing from the DTES.

Lincoln Clarke's series of photographs *Heroines*¹²¹ was not intended to be incontrovertibly related to the missing women case—when he began photographing women he knew who were survival sex workers in the DTES, he wanted to present an account of their lives in a series of individual portraits. It was only later, when several of his models disappeared, that his portraits became linked to the ongoing story of women missing from the DTES. Vancouver-based photographer Stan Douglas' *Every Building on 100 West Hastings*,¹²² a photographic installation depicting the human absence on one block of the DTES, does not overtly address the crisis of missing

¹²⁰ de Vries, *Missing Sarah*

¹²¹ Lincoln Clarke, *Heroines* (Vancouver: Anvil Press, 2002)

¹²² Shier, Reid, ed. *Stan Douglas Every Building On 100 West Hastings* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2001)

women. Though a companion book of essays exploring the themes of his work indicates that (as with Clarkes' *Heroines*) the emerging story of the missing women casts an immediacy to the generalized themes of absence, disappearance and abandonment inherent in his work. Each of the works discussed in this chapter are, of course, different in their nature, in their genesis, and in what they have to tell us about the DTES and the crisis of absence within the neighbourhood.

Each story recalls the geography of the DTES and about the people who live there, and some who are absent. Each one signifies a way into the loss that was previously only expressed as an absence, or a non-awareness, of what, and *who*, is absent. They provide us with stories or at least, give us a chance to listen to stories that were previously distant from our ears and from our view, as were in most cases, the names on the "Missing List". These are not stories about crime, and murder—they represent “missingness”, and the people who are missing—but what they have in common is that they invite us to remember the loss, the “missingness”, the people who are missing, and what we can know about their lives, in ways that do not repeat the violence already perpetrated against them.

1. Fiction is stranger than truth: Chris Haddock and *Da Vinci's Inquest*

One ongoing narrative about the missing women was prominent in Vancouver's popular culture as far back as 1998, and embedded within the most mainstream story of the DTES that ever was. *DVI* was a weekly hour-long television serial fiction that came to contain a surprising amount of sociological veracity. It was a gritty, verite-style show about the forensic work done by its hero and protagonist, provincial coroner Domenic Da Vinci, a troubled man whose work largely pertained to murders committed in the DTES. In the very first episode, Da Vinci pursued a

killer who had murdered several Aboriginal sex workers from the DTES by force-feeding them liquor (a crime story that was based on an actual case in Vancouver from the 1980s).¹²³ In the first episode of *DVI*, that killer is apprehended, but the coroner soon becomes concerned with the fact that many other women from the DTES, some though not all of them Aboriginal, drug-addicted survival sex workers, are disappearing from the DTES. This situation, of course, parallels other storylines about crime in Vancouver. The newsworthy quality of these episodes about crime and disappearance in the DTES contributed to the show's hard-boiled, "ripped from the headlines" appeal, making *DVI* a modest hit immediately following its pilot episode. The popular notion that *DVI* was at least partially inspired by "real-life stories" due to a collaboration between Haddock, the show's head writer and executive producer, and then-head Provincial Coroner Larry Campbell, who was the show's technical advisor and also co-wrote some of the episodes in the first season. Haddock also publicly credited Campbell as the inspiration for the show's hero.¹²⁴ Campbell and Haddock were friends, and Haddock was a longtime DTES resident.

Along with other topical narrative strains about violent crime, poverty and drugs, vanishing sex workers from the "Low Track" was a trope not unfamiliar to other crime shows in the same vein. But Haddock and Campbell developed this storyline with an eye to keeping the missing women theme as an ongoing narrative thread. The storyline continued through several seasons of the show, even as women continued to disappear in real life from the streets of the DTES. *Da Vinci* did not solve the case in the first, or in subsequent season.

¹²³ Chris Haddock, interview with the author, minidisc recording, Vancouver, B.C. March 2004. The same case was the subject of a play *Unnatural and Accidental*, by Aboriginal playwright Marie Clements, and has recently been adapted into a film of the same name by director Carl Bessai. The film is awaiting release in 2007.

¹²⁴ Haddock, interview, 2004

I interviewed Chris Haddock at his *DVI* production office in the Dominion Building on the corner of Hastings and Carrall Streets, on the northwest corner of the DTES, in 2004, during *DVI*'s penultimate season on the CBC (the show ended in 2005 and evolved into a series called *Da Vinci's City Hall*, in which the coroner is elected mayor of Vancouver). In the first few minutes of our conversation, Haddock, much like Lindsay Kines, recalled that his awareness of the case dated back to around 1997. He recalled that Campbell first introduced him to the crisis of missing women in the DTES, though the real-life coroner, was skeptical about whether the women had been murdered because of a lack of bodies. Haddock recalled, much as Kines had, that the absence of women's remains made investigating their deaths more complicated in the context of a bureaucratic system that prioritized homicide cases much more highly than missing persons cases (especially, he implied, missing persons cases relating to DTES residents known to be drug users and/or sex workers).

Said Haddock:

Talking with Larry [Campbell], I was made aware of the investigations by the police and their knowledge of missing women from down here. He knew of these missing persons, but they hadn't come across his coroner's DTESk because they hadn't been reported or declared dead.¹²⁵

It is particularly notable that Haddock's *Da Vinci's Inquest* scripts avoided having his coroner "solve" the case of the missing women. *DVI* is one of few crime series that creates ongoing storylines about cases their protagonists are unable to solve. Because of Haddock's choice to leave these crimes unsolved, his show developed a semi-documentary quality:

I knew if I was to begin to address the case of the Missing Women in a responsible manner, that I wasn't even going to begin to give it a fictional conclusion. The storyline was never intended to do anything but mirror the inconsequence of the police investigation up to that point, and then when

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Pickton was arrested and charged we laid off the [fictional] storyline and began to refer to [the real events of the case]. We referred to it, and continued to refer to it, and even said that they may have the right guy in Robert Pickton. *But the emphasis in the storyline was on the fact that the conditions which allowed him to work haven't changed at all* [my italics]. The situation is wide open on the streets, the conditions for women living and working in the DTES are probably, even, worsening to some extent. If anything, my goal in continuing with the missing women storyline after Pickton's arrest was to bring attention to the fact that this thing isn't resolved, that the DTES is still an open landscape in which sex trade workers can be assaulted, and killed. Since the arrest of Pickton, after all, other people have gone missing.¹²⁶

Haddock's intentions with *DVI* were, as he recalls, marked by a desire to address social issues both as a way to add momentum to his story, and also to possibly affect the realities of the world it reflected by increasing public awareness of issues in the DTES. *DVI* managed, in fact, to become a narrative rendering of issues Haddock had experienced due to his involvement in the DTES. The points of view of his fictional characters provided a lens through which the complexity of socio-political issues in the DTES could be explored coherently and sympathetically, to a greater extent than via the “impartial” purview available in mainstream news reports.

I've managed to sort of find a way of in my avocation of writing to engage with the situation of the DTES. I know a lot of people who live and work here, and it's a place in which I can write about what I want to write about, which are all those kind of characters. [My stories] have social issues caught up in them, and it gives me a way to satisfy my need to write about things that are real, and also a great pool of real life characters from which I can draw... accurate embodiments of lives you don't usually see.¹²⁷

Of course, *DVI* was only one catalyst at play in the political climate of turn-of-the-century Vancouver's political climate. Nonetheless, my emphasis here is on storytelling as a strategy of contemplation—in the early, unacknowledged pattern of women's disappearance from the DTES, Haddock's storylines are a public

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷Ibid.

acknowledgement that this unresolved absences in the DTES required attention, but wasn't getting enough.¹²⁸

I asked Haddock whether the Sisyphean efforts of Da Vinci, his coroner, in solving this puzzle of “missingness”, either in the context of the show or for the audience, ever allowed for any kind of redemption.

I'm not sure about redemption, I think there's an amount of, I would say, reinforcement in the fact that viewers can see what I consider to be the real conditions of the neighbourhood reflected to them, there's a connectedness that happens. For good or evil, I think that TV is a place where society has a conversation with itself. Because it's a short kind of loop: Lots of DTES groups and individuals have come to me asking me to shine a light on this or that social issue, because they feel people will respond to an awareness of [social issues] through a different filter than if they hear about it on the news. There's more room for compassion, because the interplay of social conditions is presented in a different context... We say things on this show that are not being said on any other drama anywhere in the world—about the legal issues sex workers face, among other things—and about the struggles of the people who are working to tackle these problems, too...

We've asked some good questions, without necessarily providing easy answers. The right question asked at the right time so it actually resounds for the audience, and lingers there, and allows the space for people to answer their own questions.. They're engaged in their own completions, and their own continuations of what has happened, is happening, and will happen—I encourage this by making every problem, and every character, open to interpretation and conception and ambivalence. People on the show have ongoing lives, off-screen lives, and I have shown these lives.¹²⁹

DVT's formula, certainly, struck a chord. The series was popular and, furthermore, it managed to insinuate itself into the real life of Vancouver. Though efforts had been made to keep *DVI* non-site specific (presumably so the show could later be syndicated in the U.S. and internationally, which it has been), it is also, in another sense, completely site-specific—most Canadians know that the show is about Vancouver, about the DTES, and that Da Vinci himself is based on a real-life

¹²⁸Danny Schechter, in *The Death of Nadia and the Fight to Save Democracy* (Hoboken, N.J.:Melville Manifestos, 2005) argues that popular culture programming has the space to deal with social and political issues through narrative with the complexity no longer current in mainstream news sources.

¹²⁹Haddock, interview, 2004

person—a person who has long been a player in politics with a platform of concern for socio-political conditions in the DTES.

Larry Campbell was elected Mayor of Vancouver in 2002—during his campaign, he was largely engaged with real-world solutions to social problems in the DTES, including changes in prostitution laws and a safe injection site—all issues that have parallels in *DVI* storylines.¹³⁰

Though it seems unlikely that credit for Campbell's term as Mayor lies solely with the popularity of his TV counterpart, Haddock indicates that there existed a reciprocal relationship between Campbell's work on the show and his political trajectory in real life. Neither Haddock and Campbell has obscured the fact that the latter was the real-life inspiration for Domenic Da Vinci, nor, in our conversation, does Haddock shy away from the possibility that his show has had an influence on the real-life politics of Vancouver:

A couple of years ago, we started to see Da Vinci, the character, quoted in the newspaper as if he was real. This is prior to Larry's election. People would refer to subjects and issues we've written about, and journalists mentioned them in newspapers and magazines.

It was like all of a sudden, people were less concerned with Da Vinci solving a given crime than with watching him tackle the known problems in their own city, deep social causes for real-world problems that were intimated and skirted around in the news. There had been this idea, at the network, that there had to be progression on this story...that people [at home] want to see resolutions somewhere. The style and intention of Da Vinci's *Inquest* was that we don't want to resolve things that are impossible to resolve—closure is not that precious...

As a scriptwriter I knew, that I could somehow give people the satisfaction of a soap opera that never has closure, that has nothing but an unfinished story continuing on end, and they would come back for it...especially in later seasons, I got into ongoing stories that followed season-long, or longer, arcs....I could have done it shorthand and have all sorts of truncated moments, 'yes we are going to find the serial killer of all missing women in DTES by the end of Episode One'. But you're not really mining, or respecting, the material in same way—if I were talking about something made-

¹³⁰On the show's successor, *Da Vinci's City Hall*, episodes explore an alternate reality in Vancouver in which the city had a delineated red light district.

up, fine, but I don't find that there's a distinction in that sense between fictional and non-fiction. I don't wish to provide the satisfaction of moving on.¹³¹

2. The Fullness of Empty Space: Stan Douglas' *Every Building on 100 West Hastings*

Ironically, one of the first places the missing women were ever to be seen was on an empty street. Stan Douglas' photographic installation was first presented as an exhibit in the show *Journey Into Fear*,¹³² which was mounted at Vancouver's Contemporary Art Gallery in the fall of 2002 (the installation was subsequently exhibited at the Vancouver Art Gallery). *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* measures 66 x 427 centimetres. It is composed of a suite of photographs of the facades of every building on the block, sutured together to form a composite panorama suite that assumes, in the words of the gallery notes, "a fantastic, impossible perspective". The work is not tall, but it is long, and forms a visual and psychic landscape of emptiness for the viewer.

Stan Douglas Every Building on 100 West Hastings is a handsome 119-page book that includes a smaller-scale poster of the photographic work, and contains several essays that extrapolate on the meaning of the work, and about the neighbourhood it represents.¹³³ Along with an essay on the geography of the DTES by Jeff Sommers,¹³⁴ the urban geography specialist whose work centres on the DTES and who I cited at length in Chapter One, and an essay on the social violence of gentrification.¹³⁵ Finally, in *Haunted Spaces*, a prescient essay by UBC-based art historian Denise Blake Oleksijczuk, views Douglas' work as an interrogation of power

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Stan Douglas, "Every Building on 100 West Hastings" (Photographic installation from the group show *Journey Into Fear* (Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, B.C., September 2002)

¹³³ Shier, Reid ed. "Stan Douglas Every Building on 100 West Hastings "

¹³⁴ Sommers et al. in *ibid.*

¹³⁵ Smith, Neil et al. in *ibid.*

relations in Vancouver and provides a cultural history of the missing women case in this context.¹³⁶

She begins with a brief social history of the DTES, which performs the dual purposes of situating Douglas' work as a poetic locus for a social geography of the DTES:

The city block, a fundamental unit that organizes and shapes the space of the city and the lives of its inhabitants, provides a context in which social rules and expectations are internalized. Attempts to isolate people with low incomes, sex trade workers, and drug users within a bounded space such as the Downtown Eastside is an important means through which power is produced and maintained in the city.¹³⁷

Oleksijczuk, a specialist on panoramas, elaborates on the primary significance of human absence contained in Douglas's work:

The picture's profound emptiness is one of the organizing principles that might be used to unite the subject matter of the picture, this particular block of Hastings Street at night; its multi-perspectival visual format which encourages fleeting, embodied readings; and an ongoing, highly publicized social crisis in the Downtown Eastside.¹³⁸

Of all the absences present in Douglas's work, Oleksijczuk's analysis privileges the case of the missing women, which at the time of the book's publication in 2002 was emerging into the public sphere: "A picture of this block at this time, then, has the potential to indicate that a space of tragedy, and its long-term dismissal by those at a safe distance from it, lies at the core of Vancouver's social and psychic life."¹³⁹

Along with references to other canonical works of urban documentary photography by Ed Ruscha, Martha Rosler and others, Oleksijczuk briefly recounts

¹³⁶ Denise Oleksijczuk, "Haunted Spaces" in Shier, ed. *Stan Douglas Every Building on 100 West Hastings*, 114

¹³⁷ Ibid

¹³⁸ Ibid, p.98

¹³⁹ Ibid, p.99

some of the details of the Pickton case, including a short history of Kines et al.'s work in the *Sun*. She also includes the now-familiar aerial shots of the Pickton farm taken at the height of the investigation: Littered with conveyor belts, earth-moving machinery shifting massive piles of dirt, the lands are as devoid of human presence as Douglas' panorama.

The inclusion of Oleksijczuk's essay in a book intended as a companion piece to a work of artwork signifies an early attempt to experientially express, for those at a distance from them, the ongoing events in the DTES.¹⁴⁰ Placing newspaper photographs of the Pickton property in a book about a photographic installation links this public art to the public's experience of the same subject represented, for example, in a newspaper article. She states that a possible effect of looking at Douglas's panorama could be "to put the viewer's established notions of subjectivity at risk...a viewer's corporeal adjustment to the dictates of the image may be a means of identifying more closely with the missing women, who themselves routinely experience objectification by those who repudiate them". Furthermore, his work might serve an associative purpose of implicating us in the picture, and the story it tells.

In the conclusion of her essay, Oleksijczuk posits that the meaning of *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* is shaped by "the link between the living and the dead...[that the] reconnection of art and politics might be made through our

¹⁴⁰Though the Contemporary Art Gallery, where Douglas first exhibited this installation, is located on Hastings Street at the west end of the DTES, I would argue that there is a certain psychic distance between the avant-garde art community that occupies devalued buildings as gallery space in the DTES and the street culture of the neighbourhood. The relation between the art community and other elements of the DTES would in fact, make for an interesting topic of study in itself. Certainly, the Vancouver Art Gallery, which subsequently bought and exhibited *Every Building on 100 West Hastings*, is about as far removed from the DTES as possible, especially considering that the building that is about 10 blocks away.

willingness to acknowledge we have failed these women.”¹⁴¹ Her idea is that Douglas' artwork gives us the opportunity to differently contemplate the neighbourhood: that a picture of an empty city block can be a psychic repository for our knowledge about what is missing, and what is present in the DTES. In this photograph, absence is both figure and ground, but the spaces shown prevail upon us to us to place ourselves in the picture.

3: “Because they might not be here tomorrow”: *Heroines* as testimonial

While Stan Douglas's work in *Every Building on 100 Block West Hastings* postulates a lack of human presence in the DTES through aesthetic means, Lincoln Clarkes' *Heroines*¹⁴² engages with people in the same area—while Douglas provides us with a diagrammatic rendering of absence, Clarkes' pandect of close ups and medium shots of women from the DTES are a detailed accumulation of presence that call our attention to the fact that absence in the DTES also contains its opposite.

Clarkes, a long-time resident of the neighbourhood, had already been well-known for his fashion photography and celebrity portraiture since the 1980s. In the autumn of 1996, he took an impromptu portrait of a friend, Leah, shooting up in a bus shelter in the DTES (fig. 4). Looming large behind her in the shelter was a Calvin Klein advertisement featuring model Kate Moss.

Clarkes' photograph of Leah became the first in a confrontational series of over four hundred portraits of women from the Downtown Eastside. An early selection of *Heroines* photographs were shown publicly for the first time in 1998 at

¹⁴¹Oleksijczuk, “Haunted Spaces”, 114

¹⁴²Clarkes, *Heroines*

Vancouver's avant-garde Helen Pitt Gallery. Since then, *Heroines* has toured the international gallery circuit and has appeared frequently in local and international press. His photographs were collected into a book in 2002.



Fig.4: *Leah*, by Lincoln Clarkes.

Clarkes described his *modus operandi* in an interview with the author in the spring of 2003.¹⁴³ His process for shooting the *Heroines* portraits was as follows: Every Sunday, Clarkes walks around the DTES accompanied by a female assistant. He approaches a woman who he either knows or who are introduced to him through the social network of the neighbourhood, and asks permission to take their picture in exchange for cigarettes, fresh fruit and a modelling fee (usually 50\$-100\$). Once the terms are agreed upon, he and the woman agree on a pose, an outfit, and a location—

¹⁴³Lincoln Clarkes, interview with author, notes on paper, Vancouver, B.C., April 2003.

generally a place near where he meet s them. He shoots her with his medium-format Rolleiflex and that's all. The whole process takes between 15 minutes and a couple of hours.

During the time I spent with Clarkes, one rainy March afternoon, we took a long walk through the DTES, and he stopped to talk to at least a dozen women during our walk through the DTES, making arrangements with several who wanted to come to his home-based studio to view their prints.

The *Heroines* portraits are each taken near where the model lives. The photograph is then identified by place and date and, occasionally, with the name of the model. Each photograph, like the woman it depicts, is separate and unique, and also part of a representational crucible that is greater than the sum of its parts. Each woman poses in her own scene, and yet the portraits, when viewed together, form a critical mass.

During the picture-taking process, Clarkes and his assistant worked with the model and address any requests of distance, pose etc—the one request they make is that each model maintain eye contact with his lens. Clarkes explains;

"[Eye contact] was important to me. It was confrontational and almost like a dare, like a close-up they had been waiting for. For me, and I thought sometimes for them...that stare into the camera is so that all those people who will never know the women, who hit the gas and lock their doors when they drive around here, can know them."¹⁴⁴

Clarkes and I stopped for lunch at the cafe of the Portland Hotel Society, on West Hastings Street between Abbott and Cambie streets. The Portland is a former SRO which has been turned into a not-for-profit rooming house and community centre for residents of the DTES. When we were there, the cafe was displaying

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

several portraits from the *Heroines* series, and Clarkes seemed especially eager to show them to me. He told me that he had hand-picked the ones in which the models looked defiant, or proud, or which he felt disabused certain stereotypes about the DTES. He also mentioned that he was pleased that most of the people who frequented the cafe and would see the pictures were residents of the neighbourhood.

It is notable that the *Heroines* portraits are not unified by mood or scenery. Of hundreds, each model has a different demeanour: sad, or tired, but just as often, confrontational, contented, bored or distracted. The photographs were, and continue to be, controversial. The portraits are an opportunity for people to gaze at the models as closely and as long as they want without fear of offending them or being stared at in return. As always, a photograph provides an opportunity to view its contents without self-censure or regard for the social contract that denies us the opportunity to openly stare at a stranger on the street. People looking at photographs are free to engage imaginatively with the people pictured, without exhibiting themselves in the process.

Indeed, there is an operative imperative towards *knowingness* in the *Heroines* photographs which has been more than disruptive. They seem to have catalyzed a sense of outrage about their subjects, which even actual media coverage of adverse socio-economic conditions for women in the DTES did not achieve. One letter in the *National Post* stated:

Clarkes' bemused fascination with the women of Vancouver's downtown east side bastardizes the art he claims to create... The only truth in his work is self-gratification...I would argue Mr. Clarkes gravitates to these 'tragic' beauties because they confirm he is everything they are not... Clearly, he is drawn to a group of women he sees himself superior to.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵Kirsten Murphy "Maiden Matters", *National Post*, letter to the editor, 18 February 1999

This and other letter-writers are disturbed by what they interpret as Clarkes' coercion of his subjects and the bargain-basement fee they were paid to pose for him. The fact that the women agreed to be photographed and signed releases—thus, in possession of the same rights and agency as any model—was contested by the idea that their poverty and need dictates that the usual rules of engagement should not apply. Certainly, the model's geographical location affects her ability to exert agency, but who is the correct arbiter of that agency? Perhaps, for some, as with Jiwani and Young's critique of news coverage about the missing women, the reality of socio-economical injustice of certain conditions of life are seen as interchangeable with the representation of these same conditions.

"The photographer's aim," said Andre Breton, "should be a profound likeness, which physically and morally predicts the subject's entire future."¹⁴⁶ Clarkes, for his part, told me that in his opinion, each woman's decision to model for him was a combination of her desires and her needs, and that was sufficient for his ethics. He continues:

What makes any woman, any person, want to be photographed? Some of them think they're beautiful, and they are—look at them, some of them could have been models. Some of them were high—they were mostly high—but it wasn't as though I coerced them. I would never do that. In many cases, they came to me and asked to be in the series...If anything, it's that they want to be recorded for the record. Because they know they might not be here tomorrow.¹⁴⁷

The language of protest used by Clarkes' critics belies a discomfort not only towards the process of his portraiture, but also about what is in the frame. The women pictured in *Heroines* portraits agreed to be photographed for their own reasons, that remain their own by critiquing their right to do this, we are ascribing to each woman

¹⁴⁶ Andre Breton as quoted in John Berger "A Jerome of Photography" *Harper's* December 2005, 84-85

¹⁴⁷ Clarkes, interview, 2003

an identical sense of shame that is not necessarily evidenced in the portraits themselves.

The best-known Heroines portrait is one that has been cropped almost beyond recognition. Clarkes' photograph of Patricia Johnson, in the Heroines series, is simply titled "September 13th, 2000: Chinatown Alley, 83 East Pender Street".¹⁴⁸ A thumbnail square of Johnson's face from that photograph has been mounted, along with dozens of other tiny snapshots, onto the joint Task Force's Missing poster- Johnson was last seen February 21, 2001. On June 25th, 2002, her DNA was discovered at Pickton's farm, and he was charged with her murder on September 20th of the same year. Clarkes, around that time, found himself on the other end of the process when he was interviewed as a friend of Johnson's in an article about her disappearance. He was quoted as saying that "Johnson, who was 24 when last seen, on March 3, 2001, was 'very bright and outgoing... a very happy, upbeat person who loved her children and talked about them all the time'".¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸Clarkes, *Heroines*, 64

¹⁴⁹Suzanne Fournier "Pig farmer is now charged with murders of 11 women: Police expect to stay at PoCo farm for months" *The Province*; 20 September 2002, A7



Fig. 5: "September 13th, 2000: Chinatown Alley, 83 East Pender Street" by Lincoln Clarkes

Out of hundreds of portraits in the collection, Johnson's is not the only one that represents a now-missing woman. Trevor Greene's book contains several of Clarkes' photographs, of street scenes in the DTES, as well as five *Heroines* portraits, including one of Sheila Egan, who disappeared in 1998, and Julie Young, who vanished the following year.¹⁵⁰

The most iconographic of all *Heroines* photographs is the last in the book: three young women with swollen eyes sitting on a stoop, entitled "Waiting for a Fix".¹⁵¹ One woman pictured is Patricia Johnson again—her eyes in shadow, her shoulders slouched over, she is almost unrecognizable from the other, earlier picture that is now so familiar to us—a different photograph on a different day.

¹⁵⁰Greene, *Bad Date*

¹⁵¹Ibid, p. 119

As Clarkes asserts, when he pointed his lens at a model, he did not intend to document the dead—an interpretation that became popular as the Pickton furore grew. Rather, the media spotlight due to Pickton inquiry and increased interest in the DTES have conveyed Clarkes' images to a larger public, and altered the relevance of his work. The book version of *Heroines* concludes with an essay, "Down Here", by Elaine Allan, a DTES social worker.¹⁵² Allan brought *Heroines* portraits with her to a federal policy meeting in Ottawa as a visual reference to accompany her presentation about the economic and social crisis in the DTES because she felt that Clarkes' portraits conveyed an urgent emotional truth about their subjects that was not apparent from the charts, statistics and anecdotes she had prepared. Certainly, the *Heroines* photographs are the closest many people have ever come to looking at into the eyes of a woman in the DTES, or to walking down a street in the DTES, or even to thinking about the neighbourhood as a human place. In this sense, Clarkes' photographs do crucial work of identification—how different these portraits are from a courtroom sketch, how strange to look into their eyes after thinking, for months on end, about bones and DNA traces and decimated bodily remains. *Heroines* provides us with a different kind of evidence about the crime that has been committed, a greyscale account of lives that once were. That is a beginning.

4: "She Imagined You": The Life and Death of Sarah de Vries

After Maggie de Vries' sister Sarah disappeared in 1998, her outspokenness on behalf of her missing sister threw her into the role of leader among the missing women's family members. Her book, *Missing Sarah*, retells the history of the missing women investigation from the beginning, from Maggie's point of view. It is a remarkable indictment of various policies relating to the lives of the city's most

¹⁵²Elaine Allan "Down Here" in *ibid.*, 129

marginalized citizens—including her sister Sarah—a mother of two whose remains were eventually found on a Pickton property on August 8th, 2002 (Pickton was later charged with her murder). De Vries, along with the majority of sex workers' advocacy groups, supports decriminalization of sex work in Canada. She describes the various means by which her sister survived. In her last chapter, de Vries also makes an impassioned plea for the necessity of educating men and boys about women's issues and about the rights of sex workers in particular.

Aside from de Vries' recounting of her involvement in the missing women investigation and her opinions about public policy due to her involvement in the aftermath of her sister's disappearance, *Missing Sarah* is also about her journey towards understanding more about Sarah's life in the DTES. De Vries wanted to make her sister's life real for herself, her family and her readers, believing that political attitudes can be better informed by an understanding of the lives these policies will affect. Although *Missing Sarah* is also a keenly felt memorial to her sister, which might be the most radical political act of all.

Maggie de Vries went to the DTES to look for her sister, and ended up finding her—not as she wished to, alive and well. Yet during the months de Vries spent with her sister's friends, learning about her life far away from the family home in affluent Point Grey. Sarah de Vries will be known in the pages of her sister's book, in a way that negates her fame as merely another one of dozens of women whose bodily remains were recovered in Port Coquitlam. As Maggie de Vries said:

[It] comes up over and over again, people want to talk about evil...there was this enormous interest in this one man, this pig farmer," de Vries told me. I don't care if people think about evil...I want them to think about my sister, and other sex workers, and how their lives are made more difficult because of our judgements of them.¹⁵³

¹⁵³de Vries, interview with author, 2003

Thanks to *Missing Sarah*, we now know vastly more about Sarah than any testimony provided by her recovered DNA can ever tell us. In the course of *Missing Sarah*, de Vries painstakingly tells the tale of her sister's slip into invisibility. She recounts their childhoods together, and then the fourteen years when Sarah lived in the DTES after running away from home: her growing drug dependence, her occasional visits home to Point Grey, her love for her children, her struggles with disease, and with the law. Maggie's writing is also, pointedly, interspersed with excerpts from Sarah's own diaries. Beyond being autobiographical, or a plea for the legalization of sex work, the book is an individualized account of the disappearance of one missing and murdered woman. De Vries was able, after spending months searching for her sister in the DTES and from talking to Sarah's friends, to piece together a detailed account of Sarah's last few hours before she vanished on April 14th, 1998 from the corner of Princess and Hastings, where she was working with a friend.

Missing Sarah is not only compelling read, but the most detailed and painstaking account of the life of one DTES resident ever written. It reveals that which is too hard or too large or too unfamiliar for thumbnail portraits in the newspaper to express: that Sarah, alive, was greater than the whole of her "missingness". *Missing Sarah* invites the reader to know her, to gain insight into her attitudes, her habits, her opinions, and to better understand the circumstances surrounding her eventual decision to get into the car for the ride from which she never returned. For de Vries, writing a book about her sister was a way of "making Sarah

real for me, and real for people, so that next time they see a woman on the corner [in the DTES], maybe they'll think, oh, that's an actual person."¹⁵⁴

De Vries' gift to the reader is conveyed in the language she employs. Her words (which I have reproduced at some length here) evoke trauma as we read them. But also, somehow, they relieve us of a fraction of our helplessness in the face of this horror and loss. In *Missing Sarah*, de Vries encompasses the extremes of representation—Sarah's recovered bodily traces, her loss, her absence, her life, the circumstances of her vulnerability. This is a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end—albeit, necessarily, an incomplete one.

In the summer of 2002, soon after the search began, a reporter phoned me to inquire if the police had asked my family about Sarah's dental records. She mentioned an article in *The Province* earlier that week that talked about an expert at Simon Fraser University who can get reliable DNA from teeth.

Oh, I thought. They've got teeth.

I have had a number of such revelations during conversations with members of the press, the police, or while reading, watching listening to the news. Oh, I think each time. And I wish that I could go and vomit. I wish that I could purge all that information and what it means. Bits of my guts should come flying out of my mouth. Bleeding stigmata should appear on my skin. But none of that happens.

The horror of imagining that my sister's teeth are in a lab somewhere, which leads to the horror of imagining where they were before and how they got there, is marked only by a prickling in the back of my throat as I write these words. The reality comes in the ink flowing onto the page in the solitude of the crowded Swartz Bay/Tsawassen ferry where I am writing this. I am writing this book to make it real for myself, to gather all that has passed in the last four years and pin it to the page. I am getting to know Sarah better now than I did when she was alive.

I am also writing this book to make it real for you, the reader. Many Vancouver women are missing. At least fifteen of them have been murdered. They are gone, but I want all of us to know them, to know what and who we have lost. If we can start to leave the gritty image of the sex worker behind and begin to see real people, real women, to look them in the eye and smile at them and want to know who they really are, I think that we can begin to make our world a better place for them and for us, for everyone.

For now, I will tell Sarah's story. She helps me to do that through her journals, which she kept for many years. Periodically throughout this book,

¹⁵⁴Ibid.

she speaks for herself...throughout her journals, she addresses a readership.
When she wrote, she imagined readers.
She imagined you.¹⁵⁵

In *Missing Sarah*, de Vries' research and Sarah's own journal entries elaborate on many aspects of Sarah's life, including facts of her life in the DTES: Sarah was a drug addict whose cycle of addiction and sex work, as well as other aspects of her lifestyle, forced her to perform, the author estimated, thirty criminal acts a day. These are, overtly anyway, the reasons Sarah lived in the margins, and in a secondary sense, why she died. While many of her daily activities were illegal, Maggie de Vries is careful to highlight the difference between Sarah's individual choices and the [she feels] unnecessary hardships brought about by the illegalities of her lifestyle. Near the end of the book, de Vries carefully illustrates how the margins of culpability for Sarah's death extend far beyond any actions allegedly performed by a serial killer:

It was very difficult to write about Sarah's world and her experience in a way that achieved the right balance. I already knew her life in many ways was horrific; every week she experienced violence, drug addiction, desperation, health problems, missing her children, guilt that she wasn't raising her children, degrading experiences with selling sex. She was forced up there on the sidewalk over and over because if she doesn't, she's going to get sick [from drug withdrawal]...But the other things, I think, might surprise most people: there was lots of laughter in Sarah's life, there was camaraderie, people with whom she had lasting friendships, who would almost die for each other; a sense of support in many ways more than a lot of people in mainstream society experience in their lives. I wanted to portray that, but I wanted to portray it in such a way that wasn't going to make people think [the DTES] was a nice place, because it's not. [But] people want to say that all prostitution is sexual slavery, and what Sarah was doing was slavery, but it wasn't. She had a choice; Sarah had lots of choices...Sarah had a right to sell sex whether she loved it or hated it, just as you and I have a right to do things that hurt us—it's not up to you to come by and stop me from hurting myself. I know Sarah, she was a tough woman, she wanted out and struggled. But nobody could come along and pick her up and shove her into detox.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵Ibid, p.3

¹⁵⁶de Vries, interview, 2003

Death, after all, represents the end of all possibilities—the missing women had choices while they were alive, despite any and all adverse circumstances, their deaths represented an end to those choices, an end to any and all possibilities that might have altered the courses of their lives, or not altered them. De Vries illustrates this poignantly in a passage near the end of her book, in which she recounts a visit she made to “Alex” a friend of Sarah’s who had worked the streets at the same time as Sarah, but who had left the Downtown Eastside, and now lived with her children in a house far away from her old neighbourhood. “What if I could drive to a little house far from the Downtown Eastside and visit my sister and find her happy, living the life she chose for herself?” writes de Vries. “If Alex could do it, Sarah could have too. Who can say when the right moment would have come?”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷de Vries, *Missing Sarah*, 239

Conclusion

The more I learn, the greater my loss. With what I've learned I could relate to my sister so much more deeply today, even if she didn't change a thing about her life, but irony is a terrible thing: I've learned what I have only because she is gone.¹⁵⁸

STILL MISSING

Rebecca & Wendy & Yvonne &
Sherry & Lillian & Linda &
Sheryl & Laura & Elaine &
Mary & Nancy & Taressa &
Elsie & Ingrid & Catherine &
Elaine & Sherry & Gloria &
Teresa & Catherine & Kathleen
& Leigh & Angela Dorothy
& Stephanie & Jacqueline & Dawn
& Marie & Frances & Ruby &
Olivia & Cindy & Sharon
& Richard & Sheila & Julie
& Marcella & Michelle & Tania
& Tiffany & Sharon & Yvonne¹⁵⁹

Perhaps...one mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly for ever.¹⁶⁰

We cannot look to the facts of the case against Robert Pickton as the whole story of the missing women, nor a tidy end, nor “closure”—this *corpus delicti* should, and will, always be incomplete, as a memorial to those for whom the present has been stolen. The shape of our stories are the shape of mourning: a visible, tangible and ongoing open pattern. The list of the missing is a constellation of memory, which can truly only ever provide us with a map of their “missingness”, rather than its actual dimensions. However, that list—and what we can know of the women represented on it— is a start, and it is all we have.

¹⁵⁸ de Vries, *Missing Sarah*, 269

¹⁵⁹ Murakami, “STILL MISSING”, from *The Invisibility Exhibit*

¹⁶⁰ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 21

The missing women's lives were abbreviated by violence, but no such violence need be done to the stories that we can tell about them, stories that surpass the details of their recoverable bodily traces—because memory does not end in the same way bodies do.

Corpus Delicti is not an attempt to achieve “closure”. Rather, I set out to highlight the necessity of stories that continue beyond the projected end of the Pickton trial. Ideally, stories about the missing women can do several things: They provide us with a chance to know something about the lives that have vanished, and the faces and names of women whose “missingness” signifies that their potentialities and futures have been stolen from them. Possibly, the picture they provide us of the women's lives, including the circumstances and causes of the working conditions that ultimately caused them to be vulnerable to a killer or killers, can inform social policy changes in the DTES.¹⁶¹ Next time we learn that a detox centre in the DTES has closed, or that government infrastructure has been reduced in the city to the detriment of its most marginalized citizens, it may be more possible for us to trace the cause and effect of the ways in which reduced resources in the DTES allowed a predator to function, undetected and unstoppable, for at least twenty years. It is the stories about the missing women's lives that can perpetuate their memory by providing them a presence after their absence.

Ideally, changes to public policy would complete acts of memory by which we remember the women we now know as missing and/or murdered from the DTES—whether this happens or not remains to be seen, and will doubtless form the material for future studies. Of course, which public policies should result from our knowledge

¹⁶¹On the fourth day of the Pickton trial, an article in the *Vancouver Sun* speculated that the trial would intensify debate about possible changes to anti-drug and anti-prostitution laws that would affect women's lives in the DTES: Chad Skelton, “Trial likely to boost calls for legalization of sex trade, RCMP report” *Vancouver Sun*, 26 January 2007, A4.

of the crimes committed against certain women are contested—both Maggie de Vries¹⁶² and Chris Haddock¹⁶³ say that two changes that would improve quality of life for residents in the DTES include decriminalizing prostitution and implementing harm reduction strategies for drug users. Obviously, these changes would only benefit women still living in the DTES, not the missing and murdered women. But public discussion and effort towards social change in DTES would be acts of memory, as well as tacit acknowledgement that we are all complicit in the causes and effects by which those women disappeared.

Of course, not everyone agrees on which policy changes would benefit the missing women's memory. For many years, when the Missing Women's Memorial March has stopped in front of the VPD Department headquarters at Hastings and Cordova, UBC Professor and Aboriginal women's advocate Fay Blaney has spoken to the crowd. In 2003, while the investigation at the Pickton farm was in full force, she spoke out against what she saw as an over-funding of the Pickton investigation:

I do not support the allocation of more funds to the Pickton investigation. We stand together to honour [the victims'] hopes and their dreams, we stand together to honour the lives they have left behind . . . But we should also memorialize our sisters who are the walking wounded in these streets.¹⁶⁴

That, in brief, is the *corpus delicti* of the missing women. The investigation of Pickton and his trial have, to date, cost over a hundred million dollars—and yet, relatives and friends of many missing women recall how in the months before their disappearances, they had sought help, in the form of detox beds, shelter, methadone treatment or other strategies to change their lives and narrow their horizons of risk: and yet, insufficient help was available to them while they were alive. Down at the

¹⁶² de Vries, *Missing Sarah*

¹⁶³ Haddock, interview, 2004

¹⁶⁴ Author's transcription from minidisc recording, 14 February 2003.

Carnegie Community Centre, in the heart of the Downtown Eastside, community worker Marlene Trick wondered, around the same time, why money wasn't found sooner if there was (at that time) 70 million dollars to sift dirt on the Pickton properties. "That's where I think it's really important to [exert pressure] to have the inquiry into why [this] wasn't investigated years back," she says. "It could have saved many women's lives, and it's important for this to never happen again."¹⁶⁵

During the Missing Women's Memorial March of 2007, Fay Blaney spoke again in front of approximately 800 people in front of the VPD headquarters:

Grandmothers of the Coast Salish Nation, thank you for allowing us to walk on your territory, and please guide us as we honour your granddaughters here today. Here our calls for justice, for our sisters whose lives were taken while this police department stood by. Each year I stand here, and we demand justice on this monolithic institution...Now we have this murder trial going on for the savage killing of our sisters. Will this trial bring justice that we long for, will this trial bring peace and closure for the families of our slain sisters? I say maybe. But that's not the main goal of the justice system, is it? Who will care for the needs of the family and friends, will this trial give answers for the safety and other needs of our sisters who still walk the streets? Not likely...

I call on all levels of government, including ours, to recognize that Aboriginal women... need to speak for ourselves. When we have our own voices we can say no to legalized prostitution. We say no to the exploitation of our bodies, we say no to the violence in our lives and we say no to the sexism in our communities. What we need is a change to the Pickton mentality that seems to run clear across this city and this country...Our daughters and our granddaughters are waiting for these changes.¹⁶⁶

Currently, in mid-2007, the provincial and federal governments have already provided the resources for a massive recovery of dead women's bodily remains, on pre-trial renovations, and on Pickton's prosecution and defence—and the trials have only just begun. This monetary amount seems, strangely, both astronomical and paltry—a number that so vastly exceeds the original missing women's reward offered

¹⁶⁵Trick, interview, February, 2003

¹⁶⁶Author's transcription from digital recording, 14 February 2007

¹⁶⁷By the end of the Pickton trials, legal and forensic search costs are estimated at around 150 million dollars

by the City of Vancouver, and yet, still just a lot of dollars, available only to solve the primary crime.

As Maggie de Vries told me,

I think it's terrible that all that money is suddenly available, once it becomes a murder investigation, that is not there to support living women...But I've heard people say, 'Oh, they've already found [enough remains for fifteen murder charges], they don't need to investigate any further.' But that's from people who are seeing the women as one mass, rather than individuals. Can you imagine if at Ground Zero in New York City they were saying, 'Oh, they've found a hundred bodies, it's enough'?...Each family needs to know about their missing loved one, it doesn't help them to know about other women being found.¹⁶⁷

The money, and the stories, should not and need not be mutually exclusive.

The physical evidence found by forensic investigators is refracted by a long history of misplaced priorities relating to women's lives in the DTES. Their remnants are used as exhibits in the prosecution of their murders, with bodily traces and the stories they tell, which seem take precedence in the public imagination over the people who are still here, in danger.

The story of violence in the DTES continues as before, and yet, opportunities exist for deaths and disappearances to achieve a presence for the living, if they can endure in the stories we tell about them. Their physical absence need not dictate their presence in public memory

Judith Butler, in *Precarious Life*, wrote about “ungrievable bodies”, and there are several writers whose recent work applied this schema to the mourning of missing women from the DTES.¹⁶⁸

But my question remains: Who's not grieving?

¹⁶⁷ de Vries, interview, 2003

¹⁶⁸ Jiwani and Young cite Butler on this in “Missing and Murdered Women”.

The story of the women's disappearance, over twenty-nine years, is uncontained in its horror, but this horror is not merely the frame by which we look for them. The details of the Pickton investigation that we must now contend with do not merely shape a tawdry tale of murder: they are physical expressions of a loss which was discerned by the women's absence from their lives long before fragments of their bodies were found. In one sense, the details of torture and death alluded to by these body parts shock us into our relation with them—their physical obliteration forces us to contemplate the violence of their invisibility among us.

The cultural geographer Susan Friedman asserts that telling stories “fulfill the necessities of memory, testimony and survival.”¹⁶⁹ Perhaps one of these crucial acts of memory is an open pattern of stories about the missing women, so that they may be referred to as a caution that invisibility for women in the DTES should not continue as before.

There are many ways for the missing women story can continue—the Missing Women's March is one. Every year, the march continues to occupy spaces in the DTES, conjugating loss in every footstep of every person in the crowd: the number of attendees grows exponentially each year. But other ways, both inside and outside the DTES, other stories are being told that trouble the boundaries of Otherness of the neighbourhood. Last year, *In Plain Sight: Reflections on Life in Downtown Eastside Vancouver*, a collection of stories and journals written by women residents of the DTES was a moderate bestseller.¹⁷⁰ More recently, Christine Welsh, a Métis documentarian, began a series of public screenings for *Finding Dawn*,¹⁷¹ about the

¹⁶⁹Susan Stanford Friedman *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998)

¹⁷⁰Leslie Robinson and Dara Culhane, eds. *In Plain Sight: Reflections on life in Downtown Eastside Vancouver* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2006)

¹⁷¹Christine Welsh, *Finding Dawn*, National Film Board of Canada documentary, 2007

search for Dawn Crey, a member of the Sto:Lo Nation of the Fraser Valley, and the twenty-third victim on the Joint Task Force's "Missing List". Shortly after its completion was recently shown at the 51st session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.¹⁷² The film, which is only partially about the search for the remains of one missing woman, is much more about the marginalized status of Aboriginal women in Canada: The DTES is not the only site from which too many Aboriginal women are absent in Canada. The documentary is also about Aboriginal women's strategies for combating their vulnerability on and off the reserves, and the efforts they are making to stop the violence perpetrated against themselves every day in this country.

These are but a few out of many stories about the missing women that are being told, and there are others available to us as well. It is only by telling these stories can we trace the monumentality of their absence, since the monumentality of violence against them is difficult to apprehend.

Judith Butler writes;

What grief displays...is the thrall in which our relation with others hold us, in ways that we cannot always recount or explain, in ways that often interrupt the self-conscious ourselves we might try to provide, in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control. ...the very "I" is called into question by its relation to the Other, a relation that does not precisely reduce me to speechlessness, but does nevertheless clutter my speech with signs of its undoing.¹⁷³

While it seems that in Vancouver and in every other city, we struggle in a thrall of Otherness, it seems possible that grief may well be, intermittently, the undoing of those conditions by which we have separated ourselves from the disappeared. The missing women are not invisible anymore. In their "missingness"

¹⁷²Kevin Griffin "Combatting (sic) Violence Against Women", Vancouver Sun, 8 March 2007

¹⁷³Butler, *Precarious Life*, 23

they are more visible than when they were living their lives on the streets of the DTES—and the violent connotations of their recovered parts can denote the vacuum of their absence, but it cannot tell us everything we need to know about them. Contrary to Butler's assertion that those who are apart from us constitute the ungrievable Other, it is my contention that stories about the missing women can disrupt the relational separation between us and them. In their “missingness”, they have become everywhere, and suffuse the cityscape from which they disappeared with traces of their inconsolable absence, by virtue of the stories we tell about them.

Consider Pamela Masik's work-in-progress *The Forgotten*, a series of sixty-nine 8 -by-10-ft canvas and paint portraits of women on the “Missing List”. The paintings in *The Forgotten* are immense, imposing in their size and completely reframe the all-too-familiar thumbnail portraits from the “Missing List”. These gigantic composite collages of handwritten phrases and stitched portions of canvas are woven into a grand scheme of brushstrokes, of shape and colour, which, when viewed from a distance, are recognizable as the face of Brenda Wolfe or Andrea Joesbury or Sarah de Vries or Marnie Frey. These sixty-nine portraits, created inch by inch from photographic fragments, belie the human effort that made them: Finally we see the faces of the missing women containing a life—their representation is alive with loss, and we can witness the mourning exerted by the artist's composition. On Masik's own website, an essay describes her process:

Each enormous portrait is densely layered with powerful brushwork, collaged with personal information and materials, slashed with deep cuts, sewn with stitches, and emblazoned with text written by Masik...Some of the women will fade like ghosts because little, if anything, is known about them.. But Masik's project shouts at us. It speaks of women marginalized in societal structures, made dependent and disillusioned about their own power and self-worth. It points to our own geographic and spiritual distance from them. After all, they are not where we live; they are "downtown"; they are sick, or poor, or "on drugs". We might even think they could help themselves if they really

wanted to. We certainly believe other people will help them if we don't. They are invisible both physically and socially in the alleys where we don't go, behind cars where we can't see them, in buildings we will never visit.

This is the moral distance that Masik goes, to make us see their faces and hear their voices, to force us to face the passion, anger and despair in lives and deaths like these. She brings the missing women to us and wraps us in the violence.¹⁷⁴

Similarly, photographs on Masik's website speak to the physical and psychic engagement the artist made while creating these giant-scale portraits—video footage of the artist in action shows her throwing her body into the act of creating, straining limbs to fill in a shadow on the eyelid of one woman, racking her back to reach the tallness of another woman's forehead, crouching to fill in a wrinkle around another one's mouth. Masik is engaged fully in representing the women's faces, painstakingly rendering them. Much care went into an amplified contemplation of each facial feature, as though each painting were, among other things, an atonement and a comment on the woman's lack of visibility in her own time and place:

They say she is less important to care if she went because she was forgotten when she existed as long as she is not one of us then she is less important ever wonder where she went when she was lost or forgotten or found dead.¹⁷⁵

In *The Forgotten*, Masik performs a duty central to any process of storytelling or memorialization about the missing women. She places herself in the context of the city from which they disappeared, acknowledging the women's absence, and the fact that their absence was long undetected. She confronts the incontrovertible fact that unites all posthumous stories about the missing women—that their lives are more coherent to our storytelling in their absence than in their presence. Masik's art performs necessary acts of remembrance, and it tells us that she, like we, have

¹⁷⁴Mia Johnson "Pamela Masik: *The Forgotten*—about the exhibition", from the artist's website, www.masik.ca

¹⁷⁵This text by Pamela Masik will appear as part of her multimedia exposition *The Forgotten*.

delineated an ethics in regard to these women, but only after they have disappeared and died.

There are many ways to address the incomprehensibility of loss. Sachiko Murakami, in her forthcoming volume of poetry *The Invisibility Exhibit*, filters the story of the missing women through a lens of Vancouver life exploring the dimensions of incoherence and absence as charted by the news accounts of the missing women. This collection is loosely tied thematically to the topic of “missingness”, and Murakami employs numerous linguistic strategies to render coherent the fragments of the missing which she collects in her recitation of loss and mourning. Her strategies range from a simple naming (as in the poem *Still Missing*, the epigram of this conclusion) to complex discursive formats in which form follows function, organizing the incomprehensibility of the subject matter into a non-sense poem that reveals the incohesion of their absence. Consider “News Development”, a poem from *The Invisibility Exhibit*:

Sunday, September 18th, 2005

Documents are fresh critics of at least six released promises.
Officials reach a deal, a hotline, a database.
Reliable statistic almost two months after the money, currently
on hold, but

the delay was due to the need to develop related delays.
Another two months went by.
Waited round, required review in October. The reviews are necessary.

Responsible for release, she’s not moving.

The potential risk of the problem is real. The reaction is not.

The urgency deserved:
chastise liberal statistics:
five times more likely to die violent.

Who knows what common families deserve;
preliminary anecdotal evidence?

Suggest at least five hundred women respond.
Launch its sisters; a major dent.
Six women reported missing that we know of.
Every report and account. Measure Ottawa,
she stressed.¹⁷⁶

Murakami's poetry shows her obsessive need to revisit, from as many angles as possible, her/our involvement with the causes and effects of the “missingness” of the missing women. In *The Invisibility Exhibit*, people wrap fish in newspaper, speak on the news, pass by, encounter bones on walks in the woods—they read newspapers, and mull over lines about the missing women in their heads, taking familiar platitudes and twist them round. These words tie knots of desperate need to understand, to make sense, to not make sense—and mostly, to remember. The author is liberated, by the parameters of poetry, from the job of pointing fingers, and charting blame. In “The People Files”, Murakami speaks in the fragmented voices of, one assumes, case investigators—speakers who, like Murakami herself, perpetuate hope that coherence is possible:

Saturday, October 1, 2005

You never know. So you just keep looking.

*

One disturbing niche –
other hunting. Lost for days or for decades.
Many cases grind, some break –
a handful of play. Mostly innocuous people gone wandering.

She maintained history. She had a cellphone.
People like her fall forward.
Cold plate. Cold time. Cold avenues, dead process.
Cold woods, a grisly collection of west.
The girl, a folded unit.

*

To find out who they are,
reconstruct structures, departments;

¹⁷⁶Murakami, “News Development” from *The Invisibility Exhibit*

find the woman alive and well in Newfoundland,
find a baby with her boyfriend.

*

A missing person, the woman found –
Information / The girl in the woods
/ A database / Everyone in Canada.

The bank remains an impossibility of privacy.
Legislation soldiers on within limits.

I'm not giving up hope. We'll just keep going.¹⁷⁷

Murakami places the women's "missingness" in the quotidian, as something that could occur within the banalities of everyday life—it could happen to anyone, or not. She worries over this universality of loss, and of "missingness", throughout the length of *The Invisibility Exhibit*, in which long poems are interspersed with the shorter poems of the "Portrait of..." series: brief aperçus in which non-missing people are cast as the missing, as Murakami seeks to delineate the temporal/spacial safety zones that separate some people from others, the missing from the rest of us. *The Invisibility Exhibit* contains several of these poems: "Portrait of suburban housewife as missing woman", "Portrait of hockey player as missing woman", "Portrait of my mother as missing woman", and, finally, "Portrait of it as missing woman"—a poem that reminds us that "missingness" continues to perpetuate itself on living women in the DTES every day.

And now what you've been looking for,
it leaning against the back door of the Victory café.
Stroking its cheek with a dirtier hand.
Head to-toe red and redder where scabs haven't healed,
or would be if the photo weren't so black & white.
Its body emptied of the expected contents,
purse spilled on the road before it.
It did this for money to feed itself.
Look at it. Like it's about to cry
or crack. Don't worry about it.

¹⁷⁷Murakami, "The People Files", from *The Invisibility Exhibit*

It can't look up to find your gaze.¹⁷⁸

During one of the speeches to the gathered crowd that took place right before the march began this Valentine's Day, in the hall of the Carnegie Community Centre, Chief Phil Fontaine, a relative of Marnie Frey, one of the missing women from Pickton is accused of murdering, addressed a standing-room only audience:

Good afternoon. First of all, I would like to greet the chief and leaders, express deepest appreciation and gratitude to all of you.... We appropriately mourn the loss of the women from this community... But when you look at what has happened to the women from our community, the missing women, the women that were massacred here, it took so much effort on the part of so many courageous and committed people to force police to take appropriate action, and there is just no reason for that. They didn't listen and they didn't acknowledge the value, the women who were forced into the streets because of grinding poverty that causes so much pain and suffering for our people. And this is in the midst of incredible wealth. Canada is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, and as we've said and we will continue to say this, as often as we must, nobody has been able to explain why there is so much poverty in our community, nobody has been able to give me one good reason. This is completely unacceptable. So all of that manifested in this part of Vancouver and other cities, in such sadness. It's a tragedy. And it's completely unnecessary. We've been given the opportunity to be here, to walk with you, and to honour the memory of our friends who were massacred here, and to the memory of the missing women. I congratulate you for your determination, and for your tears.¹⁷⁹

After Fontaine concluded his remarks, someone sang an a cappella rendition of the traditional African spiritual which has become the unofficial anthem of the march: "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child". Then, we moved down the steps of the Carnegie Centre out into the street, and formed a circle in the middle of the intersection, stopping traffic as we gathered. I wondered to myself—for sixteen years, on the same day, at the same time, at the same place, and the VPD still hasn't made a plan to divert traffic to accommodate the march?

¹⁷⁸Murakami, "Portrait of it as missing woman", from *The Invisibility Exhibit*

¹⁷⁹Author's transcription, digital recording, Carnegie Community Centre, Vancouver, BC, 14 February 2007

The crowd formed a drum circle and we began to chant the familiar Coast Salish women's warrior chant that has, these sixteen years, punctuated the crowd's slow tread of mourning. There, as I stood among the umbrellas and among eight hundred people crowded together to occupy the streets of the DTES with our bodies and our mourning, I noticed how this influx of our purpose transformed the landscape. This intersection, which is habitually defined by the furtive commerce of the DTES, was completely altered by a crowd of eight hundred people, from all over the place, from the DTES, from Montreal, Surrey, Port Coquitlam, and from down the street. In those moments it was like any other city intersection—a place where human traffic met and mingled in cross-purposes, except that we all had the same purpose. We filled more than an entire city block. As we marched west to the Funky Winker Bean's Pub, where Angela Jardine was last seen on November 20th, 1998, our footsteps pounded out a map of absence. This year like last year and next year and the year after that, our feet find the shape of the *corpus delicti*, and recover the bodies of loss.

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Photograph by author, Abbott Street, February 14, 2007	12
Figure 2: Map of Vancouver's Lower Mainland	16
Figure 3: Map of the DTES	25
Figure 4: Lincoln Clarkes, <i>Leah</i>	74
Figure 5: Lincoln Clarkes, "September 13th, 2000: Chinatown Alley, 83 East Pender Street".	79

LIST OF UNPUBLISHED MATERIALS

(in chronological order)

Marlene Trick; interview by author, minidisc recording, February 12, 2003, Vancouver, B.C.

Fay Blaney; speech given at Missing Women's Memorial March: Author's transcription from minidisc recording, 14 February 2003.

Lincoln Clarkes; interview with author, notes on paper, Vancouver, B.C., April 2003.

Maggie de Vries; interview with author, minidisc recording, Montreal, Quebec, July 2003

Lindsay Kines; interview with the author, minidisc recording, Victoria, B.C., March 2004

Chris Haddock; interview with the author, minidisc recording, Vancouver, B.C. March 2004.

Phil Fontaine; speech given at Carnegie Community Centre, author's transcription from digital recording, 14 February 2007

Fay Blaney; speech given at Missing Women's Memorial March, author's transcription from digital recording, 14 February 2007

Sachiko Murakami; *The Invisibility Exhibit* Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2008 (forthcoming).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alexander, Bruce "The Roots of Addiction in Free Market Society", Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, April 2001
- Basualdo, Carlos "Carlos Basualdo in conversation with Doris Salcedo" *Doris Salcedo* Nancy Princenthal, Carlos Basualdo and Andreas Huyssen, eds. London: Phaidon, 2000
- Belknap, Joanne *The Invisible Woman: Gender, Crime and Justice* Albany: Wadsworth, 1996
- Bloom, Sandra et al. *Bearing Witness: Violence and Collective Responsibility* New York: Haworth Press, 1998
- Blunt, Alison and Gillian Rose *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* New York, London: The Guilford Press, 1994
- Boei, Bill et al "More than statistics: missing women had real lives, children, family and friends" *Vancouver Sun*, 10 August 2006
- Bolan, Kim and Lindsay Kines "Food inspectors join probe of pig-farm connection" *Vancouver Sun*, 13 February 2002
- Bowman, John and Kelly Ryan, "Forensic Science: Its role in the missing women investigation", *CBC News Online*, 19 September 2002
- Breton, André as quoted in John Berger, "A Jerome of Photography" *Harper's* December 2005, 84-85
- Butler, Judith *Precarious Life* London, New York: Verso, 2004
- Cameron, Deborah and Elizabeth Frazer *The Lust to Kill: A Feminist Investigation of Sexual Murder* New York: New York University Press, 1987
- Caputi, Jane *The Age of Sex Crime* Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987
- Caputo, Tullio, Richard Weiler, and Jim Anderson *The Street Lifestyle Study*. Ottawa, ON: Office of Alcohol, Drugs and Dependency Issues, Health Canada, 1997
- CBC News InDepth*, 29 July 2006
- CBC News*, 22 January 2003
- de Certeau, Michel *The Practice of Everyday Life* Stephen F. Rendell, trans. California: The University of California Press, 2002

Clarkes, Lincoln *Heroines* Vancouver: Anvil Press, 2002

Culbert, Lori "Sketches express softer side of missing women" *Vancouver Sun*, 17 December 2005

--"Province okays 100,000 reward" *Vancouver Sun*, 20 April 1999

--and Neal Hall "Body parts found in freezer, jury told" *Vancouver Sun*, 23 February 2007, p. A2

The Cultural Memory Group *Remembering Women Murdered By Men: Memorials Across Canada* Toronto: Sumach Press, 2006

Currie, Sue, et al. "Assessing the Violence Against Street-Involved Women in the Downtown Eastside/Strathcona Community". Vancouver, 1996

de Vries, Maggie *Missing Sarah: A Vancouver Woman Remembers Her Missing Sister* Toronto: Penguin Books, 2003

Douglas, Stan *Every Building on 100 West Hastings Street*, Photography installation, *Contemporary Art Gallery*, September 2002

England, Jennifer "Disciplining Subjectivity and Space: Representation, Film and its Material Effects" *Antipode* 36 (2), 2004

Friedman, Susan Stanford *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998

Fournier, Suzanne and Steve Barry "A disaster in every way: Pickton sister" *The Province*, 23 June 2002.

-- "Pig farmer is now charged with murders of 11 women: Police expect to stay at PoCo farm for months"; *The Province*: Sep 20, 2002

-- and Keith Fraser and Salim Jiwa "Daughter phoned daily for 13 years" *The Province*, 26 February 2002

Francis, Daniel *Red Light Neon: A History of Vancouver's Sex Trade* Vancouver: Subway Books, 2006

Gill, Alexandra "Pork Not On the Menu for Fancy Feasts" *Globe and Mail*, July 2002

Graham, Patricia "Editor's Letter: The Challenge of reporting on horror"
www.canada.com/vancouver/sun

Greene, Trevor: *Bad Date: The Lost Girls of Vancouver's Low Track* Montreal: ECW Press, 2001

Hall, Neal, "12 New charges against Pickton" *Vancouver Sun*, 25 May 2005, A1

--"Judge orders two trials for Pickton to avoid mistrial", *Vancouver Sun*, 10 August 2006, A1

Hubbard, Phil, ed. *The Entrepreneurial City* New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1998

--*Sex and the City: Geographies of Prostitution in the Urban West* London: Ashgate, 1999

Jiwani, Yasmin and Mary Lynn Young "Missing and Murdered Women: Reproducing Marginality in News Discourse", *Canadian Journal of Communication*, Vol 31 (2006), p. 906

Kines, Lindsay "Police Target Big Increase in Missing Women" *Vancouver Sun*, 3 July 1998.

-- "Hundreds pray for missing women," *Vancouver Sun*, 12 May 1999

--Kim Bolan, and Lori Culbert "Police to announce expanded probe Women have history of drugs, prostitution, links to Downtown Eastside" *Vancouver Sun*, 21 September 2001

--"Too few officers, police infighting and lack of experience undermined first probe into disappearances" *Vancouver Sun*, 22 September 2001

--"Coroner, police want data bank but B.C. has put it on hold", *Vancouver Sun*, 24 September 2001

--"If they had arrested him earlier, maybe my sister wouldn't be dead right now" *Vancouver Sun*, 25 September 2001

--"Police face obstacles tracking down serial predators", *Vancouver Sun*, 26 September 2001

--"The Case of the Missing Women means changes are needed", *Vancouver Sun*, 27 September 2001

--"Unlike other missing women on the East Side, police found April Reoch's body", *The Vancouver Sun*, 28 September, 2001

--"Sexual predator case prompts police review", *The Vancouver Sun*, 29 September 2001

-- "Another Nine Women Feared Missing," *Vancouver Sun*, 26 July 26 2002

--and Lori Culbert, "Police seal off farm, tell families they have suspect" *The Vancouver Sun*, 5 February 2002, A1

--"Relatives of missing Women invited to discuss case", *Vancouver Sun*, 30 September 2001

- "600 suspects in missing Women case: Families encouraged after meeting with investigators", *Vancouver Sun*, 1 October 2001
- "DNA clears key suspects in murders" *The Vancouver Sun*, 2 October, 2001
- Linenthal, Edward: *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory* Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2000
- Low, Setha M. and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga, eds. *The Anthropology of space and place : locating culture* Malden, MA : Blackwell Pub., 2003.
- Lowman, John: "Violence and the Outlaw Status of (Street) Prostitution in Canada", *Violence Against Women*, 6:9, September 2000
- Street Prostitution in Canada: Assessing the Impact of the Law* Canada: Department of Justice, 1989
- Mason, Gary "Business as usual in this wretched district", *Globe and Mail*, 24 January 2007
- Massey, Doreen *Space, Place and Gender* Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1994
- John Allen, and Steve Pile, eds. *City Worlds* London ; New York : Routledge in association with the Open University, 1999.
- Moss, Pamela, ed. *Feminist Geography in Practice: Research and Methods* Oxford: Blackwell, 2002
- Murphy, Kirsten "Maiden Matters", *National Post*, letter to the editor, 18 February 1999
- Peter O'Neill "Davies accuses lawmakers of negligence" *Vancouver Sun*, 3 February 2007
- O'Shaughnessy MV et al. "Deadly public policy" *International AIDS Conference* 1998; BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, Vancouver, Canada.
- Peritz, Ingrid "Canadians tuning out grisly details from court", *Globe and Mail*, 27 January 2007, A12
- Pile, Steve and Michael Keith, eds. *Geographies of Resistance* London ; New York : Routledge, 1997
- The Body and the City: Psychoanalysis, space and subjectivity* London: Routledge, 1996
- Potvin, Kevin "Media Circus Readyng its Tents" *Vancouver Courier*, 2 September 2002

- Pratt, Geraldine "Abandoned women and spaces of the exception", *Antipode*, 37 (5) 2006
- Prest, Andy "Protestors haunt SRO auction" *The Tyee*, 2 March 2007
- Randall, Stephen *Substance and Shadow: Women and Addiction in the United States* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996
- Razack, Sherene "Race, Space and Prostitution: The Making of the Bourgeois Subject" in *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 10.2, (1998):
- Read, Nicholas and Lori Culbert "PETA rebuffed over anti-meat ad" *Vancouver Sun*, 13 November 2002, A1
- Ryan, Kelly Animal Rights Campaign Compares Murdered Women to Meat, *CBC News Online*: 22 January, 2003
- Rossmo, Kim "Loyalty to the truth": Speech given at Simon Fraser University, at the ceremony for the Sterling Prize for Controversy.
- Saunders, Philip "The Missing Women of Vancouver" *CBC NEWS Backgrounder*, Sept 19th, 2002
- Seltzer, Mark *Bodies and Machines* London: Routledge, 1992
- "Serial Killers (1)" in *Differences*, Spring 1993
- "Serial Killers (2)" in *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn 1995
- Sharp, Joanne P., ed. *Entanglements of power: Geographies of domination/resistance* London; New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Schechter, Danny *The Death of Nadia and the Fight to Save Democracy* Hoboken, N.J.:Melville Manifestos, 2005
- Shier, Reid, ed. *Stan Douglas: Every Building on 100 West Hastings Street* Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2002
- Skelton, Chad "Trial likely to boost calls for legalization of sex trade, RCMP report" *Vancouver Sun*, 26 January 2007, A4
- Shon, Phillip C. and Dragan Milovanovic, eds *Serial Killers: Understanding Lust Murder* Durham, North Carolina: Carolina University Press, 2006
- Soja, Edouard *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* London: Verso, 1989

Sommers, Jeffrey *The Place of the Poor: Poverty, Space and the Politics of Representation in Downtown Vancouver, 1950-1997* Simon Fraser University Theses (Geography), 1998

--"Men at the Margin: Masculinity and Space in Downtown Vancouver, 1950–1986" *Urban Geography* 19:4

Taylor, Avril *Women Drug Users* Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1993

Trick, Marlene "A Herstory of the Missing Women's Memorial March"
<http://www.keta.ca>

Virilio, Paul *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology* New York: Columbia University Press, 1986

Walkowitz, Judith R. *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of sexual danger in late-Victorian London* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Ward, Doug "Abotsway once joined missing women march" *Vancouver Sun*, 15 February 2007, A1

Weber, Ross *Mount Pleasant L'Etranger* film productions, Vancouver, British Columbia, 2006

Wilson, Elizabeth *The Contradictions of Culture: Cities, Culture, Women* London: London: Thousand Oaks, 2001

---*The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* London: Virago, 1991

Wittgenstein, Ludvig *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, David Pears and Brian McGuinness, trans. London: Routledge, 1961