Stories and Plays: Ethnography, Performance and Ethical Engagements

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Abstract: This article offers an account of an intentionally utopian ethnographic project, carried out in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. The "Stories and Plays Project" explored conditions of possibility for experiencing ethical engagements between researchers and research subjects in a context of deeply commodified research relationships dominated by biomedical and pharmaceutical research, and advanced marginalization. Articulating ethnography and performance methodologies within a framework shaped by improvisation as concept and practice, and committed to ethical-political relations of fieldwork processes over representational products, the project included an alternative, three-stage consent process. This article draws on current debates about theorizing fieldwork, engages in interdisciplinary debate, and seeks to provoke reflections on a "new," emerging experimental ethnography.

Keywords: experimental ethnography, performance studies, ethics, community-based research, Downtown Eastside Vancouver

Résumé : Cet article présente le récit d'un projet ethnographique intentionnellement utopique mené dans le quartier Downtown Eastside de Vancouver. Le « Stories and Plays Project » explorait les conditions de la possibilité d'expérimenter des engagements éthiques entre chercheurs et sujets de recherche dans le contexte de relations de recherche profondément chosifiées, dominées par la recherche biomédicale et pharmaceutique et une marginalisation avancée. Articulant des méthodologies ethnographiques et de performance dans un cadre façonné par l'improvisation comme concept et pratique, et répondant à un engagement envers des relations éthiques-politiques donnant préséance aux processus du travail de terrain par rapport aux produits de représentation, le projet comprenait un processus alternatif en trois étapes. Cet article puise dans les débats courants visant à théoriser le travail de terrain, touche aux débats interdisciplinaires et cherche à provoquer des réflexions sur une « nouvelle » ethnographie expérimentale en émergence.

Mots-clés : ethnographie expérimentale, études sur la performance, éthique, recherche fondée dans la communauté, Downtown Eastside Vancouver

Prologue: A Moment of Ethical Engagement

T approached me as I headed out the door after the last meeting of the "Stories and Plays Project":

T: Is this IT?
Dara Culhane: Yep! This is IT.
T: Well, now I want to ask you for something.
DC: O.K...
T: I waited until the project was over. Now, I've done something for you, I want to ask you to do something for me. You can say no if you want to. No strings attached for you or for me.
DC: O.K?
T: You know I'm going to court next week...
DC: Yeah...?
T: Would you write a letter for me for the sentencing?
DC: Oh, sure! I've written tons of those letters. No problem.
T: I'm not asking you to bullshit. I want you to write exactly what you really think of me. What I did in this project.
DC: Of course...I didn't mean...
T: I don't want any bullshit.
DC: Right. OK. I'll drop the letter off here tomorrow around lunchtime.
T: I'll be here.

T held the door open for me, and I walked through.

I went home and sat down to write the letter. It took me many drafts over several hours to find a writing voice that didn't sound like that of a bullshitter. The next day I met T in the lunchroom and handed him the promised letter in an unsealed, university letterhead envelope. T took the envelope from me. "Thanks," he said, looking me straight in the eye. T raised the envelope to his lips, licked and sealed it. "I'll give it to my lawyer," he said. I was surprised—and disappointed—when he didn't

read the letter. "I wrote exactly what I think of you," I said, "no bullshit." T ran his thumb over the flap to emphasize the seal, and put the envelope in his pocket. "I don't need to read it," he said, "I trust you." "Thanks... Well... Good luck in court."

"Whatever... nothing they can do that I can't handle. I'm my own man."

> I suggest that the experience of performance, the pleasure of a utopian performative, even if it doesn't change the world, certainly changes the people who feel it.
>
> —Dolan 2005:19

The "Stories and Plays Project" (hereafter SPP) was co-created by nine members of an inner city, street-front clinic and drop-in centre in Downtown Eastside Vancouver, British Columbia, called the HIV Positive Outlook Program (POP),[1] run by Vancouver Native Health Society (VNHS); six university students[2]; and me, Dara Culhane, an Associate Professor of Anthropology at Simon Fraser University (SFU).[3]

SPP consisted in 14 four-hour workshops organized around creative practices of sharing food and conversation, storytelling, performance and photography that took place over 10 weeks, April-June 2007. The project culminated in an event that included an exhibit, seven live performance pieces and quantities of food and non-alcoholic refreshment. The objective of SPP was to experiment with processes for creating conditions of possibility wherein university-based researchers and subaltern research participants might experience "ethical engagement."

Photograph 1: The Stories and Plays Project Team (2007, Anonymous, used with permission).

This article describes the context in which the project emerged, reviews how SPP unfolded in practice, and ends with a pause to reflect on surprises I encountered in conducting it and with lingering questions about its potential effects. Theatre artist-scholar Baz Kershaw's (2009) call for "boundless specificity" serves as academic storytelling method. Kershaw writes, "every example is incorrigibly particular...Boundless specificity produces precise methodological opportunities generally and a plethora of insights, understandings, knowings relevant to a wide range of disciplines specifically" (2009:5).

I turn to the SPP project three years after it was enacted and from a first-person perspective. In doing so, I am less influenced by popular genres of *reflection* focused on individual introspection than by emerging work on *reflexivity* that, following Holmes, I consider "to be more than reflection and to include bodies, practices and emotions"(2010:14). Reflexivity is epistemologically consistent with Fabian's argument that ethnographic knowledge is *"essentially, not incidentally, performative"* (Fabian 1990:5; see also Castañeda 2006b). This is a theoretical premise that guides my work. *Critical* reflexivity demands we challenge, more than claim, ethnographic authority, and calls upon us to critique "values and ideas that have been incorporated into the self" (Haddad 2003:66). While reflexivity necessarily includes individual reflection, I follow May's direction that the goal of critical reflexivity should be to develop insights into the "social conditions of...knowledge production and its relation to knowledge reception and context and thus its capacity for action" (May 2004:183). In my choice of writing voice, I am particularly inspired by Wright's argument that "an autobiographical approach is employed precisely to be specific and in the attempt to avoid the pitfalls of overgeneralization and the authority of authenticity" (2003:805).

How the Story Begins

From 2005-08, I was a co-investigator on a multi-project grant entitled "Health Care for Homeless People" (HCHP).[4] One of the objectives of HCHP was to explore alternative processes for securing informed consent to participate in research from people whom health researchers call "vulnerable populations." Towards this goal I submitted a proposal to my colleagues in HCHP that posed the following research questions:

(1) How might we construct *conditions of possibility* wherein *ethical engagements* between university-based researchers and subaltern research subjects could emerge in the specific context of Downtown Eastside Vancouver, Canada, in 2007?

(2) How might we design procedures for acquiring *informed consent from human subjects to participate in research* that are consistent with both SFU's Ethics Review Board's (ERB) criteria (that in turn are regulated by the Government of Canada Tri-Council Policy Statement [GC-TCPS] on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans [ECRIH]), and with an overarching anthropological-ethnographic principle: "Consent is a process that emerges within relationships. It is not an event sealed by a contract."
(3) Could an articulation between ethnography and creative practices constitute a methodology through which goals (1) and (2) could be realized?

I titled my proposal: "Performing Consent: An Experiment in Experimental Performative Ethnography" (Culhane 2006). The HCHP team accepted the proposal I began consultations and negotiations with VNHS to launch the project.

My research design responded to a strong critique of "data-mining" (researchers using research subjects principally as means to researchers' ends) that has become a central dynamic in everyday encounters between research*ers* and researche*d* in Downtown Eastside Vancouver, and in protests voiced by some community representatives against university-led interventions in their neighbourhood. Many Downtown Eastsiders are astute political analysts who clearly articulate their understandings of themselves as "raw material for the extraction of surplus value" in the research and poverty industries.[5] Indigenous community representatives, in particular, often point out the historical continuities in their objectivized positioning as sources of intellectual and biovalue, and their exclusion from benefits or profits so derived. I take these critiques seriously.

Space

Downtown Eastside Vancouver has emerged in local, national and global imaginaries as a quintessential zone of what Agamben (1998) calls "bare life." It is one of those spaces in which global pharmaceutical corporations have organized a "guinea pig economy" based on research with human subjects (Abadie 2010; see also Petryna 2009). Here, a subaltern class of "surplus population" represented by conflations of social problems and biomedical disease labels and perceived as being entitled to, at best, basic subsistence, is subject to overt and covert regimes of spatial containment and medical-pharmaceutical governance and control.[6]

But who actually lives here? Precise population figures for an inner-city neighbourhood where real estate speculation, rampant gentrification and increasing "*houselessness*" compete for space are, of course, elusive. Downtown Eastside Vancouver is a "low income" neighbourhood but not a homogenous one. Census Canada imagines there are about 16,000 residents in Downtown Eastside Vancouver. Between 25%–40% are indigenous persons (depending on how the count is conducted, by whom and for what purpose) from all over Canada—and from elsewhere in North, Central and South America who have been dislocated over the course of years, decades or centuries. The neighbourhood is the historic site of Chinatown and still home to many East Asian Canadians. Another significant category of residents are described as "multi-cultural": people with diverse relationships to East Asian, South Asian, Latin American, Middle Eastern and African heritages. The "other" residents are Caucasian Canadians (of various sorts). Young people of all races—but disproportionately Indigenous—raised in government foster homes and now "released from care" live here. So do teenage runaways, refugees and asylum seekers from around the world, former patients of institutions for the mentally ill now "deinstitutionalized," unskilled and semi-skilled workers whose labour has been rendered redundant, disabled and chronically ill people. Many suffer with diseases like TB, HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C, syphilis, diabetes and mental illness. Their homes are in dilapidated rooming houses, or public housing projects, or outside on streets, in parks, alleys and doorways. Buying, using and selling concoctions of prescription and street drugs structure the everyday lives of some residents, and many women in particular support families and habits through street-level prostitution, now called "survival sex work." Epidemiological estimates claim that about 25% of the Downtown Eastside population is made up of heroin and crack cocaine "addicts."

There are also elderly people who have been here most of their lives and choose to stay, or whose limited pensions determine that this is the only neighbourhood they can afford to live in: "Ordinary working and middle class people"—like me—also live here in homes we or our parents or grandparents bought before home ownership became an option restricted exclusively to the wealthy, or in the diminishing stock of affordable rental homes, or in family social housing projects. There are activists and artists too, for whom the neighbourhood has long been a place where individuality and eccentricity can flourish. Finally, recently vying for space are "the yuppies," drawn by real estate speculators' new loft and condo developments. Of course, in "real life" most residents simultaneously inhabit more than one of the bureaucratic categories superimposed by governments and social scientists.

Relationships

I have found that conventional class or political economy analyses, and frameworks based in new social movements or identity politics, fail to resonate with, or offer theoretical insights into, the immersed ethnographic research I do in this "contaminated" (Stewart 1991) and "unfinished world" (Stewart 2008). The analytic category of "subaltern" is more meaningful and potentially productive here. For present purposes I invoke Spivak's minimalist definition: "By *subalternity* I mean those removed from lines of social mobility" (2004:531).[7]

As well, I make sense of the differences between the professional "us-researcher-not subaltern" and "them-researched-subaltern" by reference to three interrelated dynamics. First is the emerging class relation between us and them. I include in the category "us" all whose incomes and professional positions are derived in diverse ways from our work with subaltern persons. Of course, the differences among the minimum wage front-line worker, the street nurse, the police officer, the legal aid lawyer, the graduate student, the professor, the doctor, the transnational HIV/AIDS consultant researcher and the pharmaceutical representative are as many and important as they are among "subalterns." In casting these relations in such stark terms I take an analytic position, not a moral one: regardless of our origins or theirs, or our present locations in race, gender, sexuality, age, and dis/able-bodied structures of relations, *we* are currently accessing the lines of social mobility from which *they* are removed. More to the point, our inclusion in the legitimate economy arises from and depends on their exclusion from the same. I wish, in this article, to isolate and hold up for scrutiny complicity in what community activists label "poverty pimping."

The second and concomitant dynamic is the shape research gives to our interactions, what Castañeda identifies as a crucial difference between ethnography as a disciplined methodology and the conversation, storytelling and general social interaction everyone engages in through everyday life. He writes,

> The fieldworker, like the lay "person on-the-street"...has a thought in the back of the head...[that]...is the research design of the ethnography and the research problem that the fieldworker is investigating...Research problems may on occasion manifest similarities to the agendas in the back of the head of subjects of research, but ultimately...are quite distinct. (2006b:82)

Third and concomitant is an autoethnographic aspect. My connections with Downtown Eastside Vancouver are complex, longstanding and entangled, beginning long before my current role as an ethnographer. They include that I have resided on the gentrifying frontier of the neighbourhood for most of four decades. However, the six city blocks that separate my modest condominium from Downtown Eastside's infamous central intersection of Main and Hastings Streets encompass a distance that cannot be traversed in the five minutes it takes me to walk to my "field site," or erased through more collaborative research strategies.

Time

Like so many inner cities around the world Downtown Eastside Vancouver is changing as it undergoes rapid gentrification (Ley 2003). What makes Downtown Eastside Vancouver unique, however, is that this waterfront neighbourhood has also become an internationally renowned centre for medical and pharmaceutical research on HIV/AIDS and addiction. This designation dates back to 1997 when, prompted by epidemiologists' reports that local intravenous drug users were experiencing the highest rates of HIV infection in the "developed" world, the City of Vancouver declared the neighbourhood a Public Health Emergency Zone. Radical advocates in the Downtown Eastside rallied around harm reduction programs and achieved unexpected victories: needle exchange programs flourished, North America's first state-sponsored safe injection site opened; a clinical trial distributed heroin; methadone was dispensed in pharmacies; sex workers organized; and, a research industry expanded dramatically.

Since 1997, research funding has steadily increased while public funding of social and health services has decreased, creating obvious dilemmas and tensions between researchers and community advocates, activists and residents. Health and human service providers and advocates must look to researchers for data to support their applications for funds to continue their work or to redefine service provision as "research." Over the past decade a veritable tsunami of data has issued from Downtown Eastside Vancouver. Medical researchers and epidemiologists funded by governments, foundations and pharmaceutical corporations have been its primary producers. However, scholars—including anthropologists like myself—as well as journalists, writers, community development practitioners, artists and theatre and film makers have also been employed in creating and communicating representations of Downtown Eastside Vancouver.[8]

In recent years public support has been pegged below subsistence levels. For subaltern persons, survival demands generating additional income. This creates a

pool of people available to work in the lowest echelons of the illicit drug, sex and petty crime economy, and to serve as research subjects in licit clinical trials of experimental drugs, community arts projects, and, yes, experimental performative ethnographies. For subaltern persons, access to public support and private philanthropy increasingly demands performing what I am calling a "bare life entitlement narrative," an available cause-and-effect narrative consisting in a life story featuring traumatic individualized experiences as causal of some recognized biomedical or social problem label.[9] For university-based researchers, access to public support and private philanthropy demands documenting, representing and reproducing bare life narratives supplemented by policy recommendations. These narratives are, in every important way, true; the pain they disclose is real. That their telling may be co-opted into commodified entitlement narratives when exchanged for food, housing, health care, attention, affection, compassion and belonging; or grants, publications, tenure and promotion is the result of political decisions not made by the tellers, or by researchers or by artists. People tell stories, but not in conditions of their own making.

Clearing a Space for an Experiment

As I explained earlier, SPP received funding to explore new, alternative processes for acquiring informed consent. Most readers of this journal are likely all too familiar with university ethics review requirements, and I will not rehearse the many debates here.[10] These prescribed processes for obtaining informed consent are based on political-theoretical assumptions drawn from law and medicine. Foundational are:

(1) that the data sought already exist and await mining;
(2) that what a research subject will say in an interview or do while being observed is determined by a set of discoverable patterns or rules;
(3) that the consequences of divulging this data to as yet unknown audiences can be sufficiently well known in advance for her consent to be "informed";
(4) that research relationships are contained within a formally defined interview or other clearly bounded times and places, and that moments in relationships that constitute "research" and "not research" are clearly delineated.

These premises are antithetical to the premises of performative ethnography and performance as research (see, for example, Kershaw 2009:6). The three-stage process for negotiating and renegotiating informed consent that I designed for SPP reflected different principles:

(1) a *performative* principle that meaning emerges in the performance of storytelling and reception by diverse audiences, and that to be as sincere as possible, consent should follow performance; and
(2) a *temporal* principle that the consent form and moment of its signing are enmeshed in layers of context that extend at least throughout the life of the research project and often beyond.

Therefore, an ethical engagement demands constant renegotiation over time.

In developing SPP I was significantly influenced by Castañeda's formulation of experimental ethnography. Castañeda argues that the primary value of anthropological interventions is located in processes of fieldwork and relevance to those who participate in them, and that ethnographic methodology is a political process of knowledge recirculation and production requiring theorization (2004; 2005a; 2005b; 2006a; 2006b; 2009). For Castañeda, *experimental* refers to the etymological root of the word, meaning "to put into peril," to try out practices without any certainty of outcomes. Castañeda begins with a strong argument against the subordination of fieldwork processes to products in mainstream anthropology: the book, the film, the play, "measureable outcomes," policy recommendations, et cetera. Castañeda proposes, rather, that the primary site of value should shift to the processes of ethnographic fieldwork.[11] Taking his point, I sought to create a research design for SPP that might at least work along the horizon, or in border zones, where the still distinct interests of researchers and researched might be brought into conversation.

The specific research questions I formulated became a series of "what ifs?". First, I asked *what if* the research design included the possibility that no conventional outcomes or products might result from the SPP project? Could this strategy constitute a concrete response to the criticism voiced by research subjects that exploitation forms the core of relationships between researchers and researched in Downtown Eastside Vancouver? I proposed that researchers put at risk the possibility of acquiring commodities like articles, books or policy recommendations. I also allowed for four possible outcomes from the project overall:

Process-related:

(1) We would conduct the 14 workshops plus a final public performance or exhibit or installation. Participants would be responsible for selecting the audience(s) to whom any performance or exhibition work would be addressed. That audience could—if the participants so chose—be limited to the project team only.

(2) Only 14 workshops would take place. There could be no final "event," simply a 14th workshop.

Products:

(3) After the conclusion of the project, publications could follow on either: (a) the experimental process for obtaining informed consent alone; or, (b) selected or all aspects of the project as determined by participants.

Or,

(4) Workshops and public performances and exhibits would take place (as per (1) and (2) above), but no publications (oral, written, performed or filmed) based on the project would result at all. SPP might exist only in the moments of its enactment, in the memories of the team and in informal conversations.

Honouring these promises could have required that I not produce any publications should the participants exercise option (4) above. This could have "put into peril" my access to further research funding opportunities, and negatively impacted my career progress. My privileged and secure—at least at the moment of this writing—position as a 60-year-old tenured faculty member who earns sufficient money to care for my family and myself constitutes the first "condition of possibility" that enabled me to take the risks necessary to carry out SPP with integrity.

I designed a three-stage process for negotiating informed consent with the SPP participants consistent with these possible outcomes. The SFU Ethics Review Board agreed to this process with the proviso that any changes to the forms initially approved would have to be vetted through their office as formal amendments. I will describe this three-stage process as my story arrives at the moments when "informed consent forms" were—literally—put on the table in SPP.

The second research question that emerged was: *what if* participants were not asked to *necessarily* perform "bare life entitlement narratives"? This question reflected a critique of representation familiar to anthropologists and artists, but also addressed a particular, local political campaign related to the "Missing and Murdered Women of Downtown Eastside Vancouver." Briefly, at least since the mid-1990s alarming numbers of women began "disappearing" from Downtown Eastside Vancouver. Relatives and friends charged that the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) and Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) failed to act on missing persons reports they filed, dismissing the women as transient drug addicts and prostitutes unworthy of expenditures of public funds and police resources. A protest movement mobilized around this issue that resulted in the 2002 arrest and subsequent conviction of William Pickton for the murder of six women, although the DNA of 33 reported missing women was found on Pickton's suburban pig farm in Coquitlam, B.C.[12] A central slogan adopted by activists has been: "We are mothers, sisters, daughters, aunties, and grandmothers. Not just prostitutes and drug addicts. Not welfare cheats" (Culhane 2003b:593).

A third question built on my professional interests in performance and ethnography. *What if* we experimented with an improvisational "devised theatre" methodology, rather than beginning the project with pre-determined topics?[13] *What if* they told stories that were not ***only*** about being HIV-postive, Intravenous Drug Users (IVDUs), Homeless Urban Aboriginals, Mental Health Consumers or Sex Workers? *What if* they told the stories I regularly hear in my everyday life, and in my work as an immersed ethnographer: complex, contradictory tales that are alternately or simultaneously moving, humorous, shocking, insightful, mean-spirited, compassionate and all things in between? I planned processes for devising performance pieces through improvisations that would emerge from any and all activities undertaken in the workshops in general, including casual conversations and sharing food, *and* from storytelling exercises and theatre games specifically.

Finally, I wanted to experiment with improvisation and performance as both a theoretical and methodological strategy that might create conditions of possibility for university-based researchers and subaltern research subjects to experience "ethical engagements." *What if* we tried to put into practice the notion that the entire SPP project and all its activities were "improvised, devised performances"? I hoped we might experience relationships with each other in the context of SPP as ends in themselves at least as much as, and perhaps as more than, means to researchers' ends.

Making It Real

Vancouver Native Health Society (VNHS) operates a medical clinic with on-site physician care, a pharmacy, methadone maintenance and maximally assisted therapy programs. The VNHS Positive Outlook Program (POP) offers HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C Virus prevention education, crisis intervention and a food bank, and houses a daily drop-in centre that serves hot meals. I asked VNHS for time and space to hold the project, and we negotiated issues around recruitment of participants, safety and building security. I was eventually granted their endorsement for SPP. I then recruited six SFU students (four graduate-level and two undergraduates; five from anthropology and one from theatre) as research assistants, offering them ten hours of paid employment at the same rate

($15.00/hour) as the participants. In initial meetings with these students and the individuals whom VNHS/POP administrators encouraged to join as research participants, I described the project as "14 creative workshops including a meal, storytelling, theatre games, art work, writing, and that may conclude in a performance or exhibit or some combination, but may not." I struggled to articulate answers to questions about the project that necessarily hovered "at the edge of semantic availability" (Williams 1977:132) because we had not yet created it.

Like me, members of the group had a hard time explaining to their peers the purpose of the project they were involving themselves in. Questions they faced (or asked themselves) about tangible outcomes and products illuminated the extent to which an open-ended, improvisation-based research design that intentionally created maximum possibilities for participants to shape the project in process flew in the face of community norms. Promising "policy relevant" research, or research for "program development" or research that is "therapeutically effective" is a dominant rhetorical practice that has resource-generating and employment implications. Reflecting on his first impression of the SPP proposal, one participant summed it up by saying, "I didn't get what the idea was, really. But I thought, hey, $60.00 and a meal? Why not? I didn't have anything else to do on Tuesday nights, so what the hell? I'll give it a shot." Another reminded me,

> I never believed you when you said there wasn't really a plan. Remember? At the first meeting, I said "what's the plan behind the no plan?" I figured there had to be one...and I'd hang around and figure out what it was.

Another woman said she had enjoyed participating in a previous performance project I had coordinated. She did not really give much thought to the goals of SPP, she said, but was game to "come along for the ride."

Finally, we were ready for workshop. I had in mind Fabian's description of how an ethnographer's role changes when performativity constitutes the theoretical premise of a project: "The ethnographer's role...is no longer that of a questioner; he or she is but a provider of occasions, a catalyst in the weakest sense, and a producer (in analogy to a theatrical producer) in the strongest" (1990:7). I set out to provide 14 occasions. Through the SPP workshops, I wanted to create an environment radically different from the everyday lives of the participants: a space and time in which they would be respected, fêted and treated as complex human beings with untapped creative capacities and imaginations. I wanted an ambiance of festivity, a celebratory and an energetic mood where they could intentionally make themselves up, perform themselves as they might have been, or are or might someday become. I designed SPP as if I were staging an improvised performance in an imaginary world that existed only for four hours a week for 14 weeks in the VNHS/POP lounge during the spring of 2007.

After issuing an invitation that I hoped would convey a sense of fun, respect and possibility, our first workshop began with a (relatively) plain language version of the required SFU form for informed consent by human subjects to participate in research. This form—Stage 1 of the three-stage process—asked participants to consent to a process, not a product: to engage in the first six workshops, during which we would develop the program for the final event, *and* decide if we would have one at all. We broke into small groups to discuss sections of the form, each group then explained the content of their section, relayed any questions or debates their group had raised, and detailed any revisions they might wish to propose. There were lively and detailed discussions during this process about the implications of what individual ownership of stories, casual conversational exchanges and photographic or video images could entail in practice.

"You have to sign to get the money," one woman explained to the team. Another summed up my lengthy explanation of the dense forms in four words: "review, revisit, revise, maybe." No revisions were requested. Everyone signed the forms.

The first hour of each workshop was taken up with preparing the meal we would share, making individualized cards for honoraria payments and socializing. Preparing food, eating and cleaning up were, as planned, times during which social relationships, conversations and project planning usually flourished, but unevenly. Menus were planned collectively, taking account of specific nutritional needs, but more importantly appealing to various tastes (Alexeyeff 2004; Mintz and Du Bois 2002). Refusing "bare life," we sought to nourish souls as much as bodies, so each dinner was a feast. We had appetizers, entrees and desserts. We covered our tables with tablecloths, arranged centerpieces of flowers and laid out real dishes, glasses, and cutlery. Excess reigned.

While some students and participants worked on meal preparation, others made honorarium cards. The first principle that guided the SPP experiment in paying honoraria was reciprocity: an exchange of money in return for labour and knowledge, and recognition that everyone involved in the project was being paid in various ways for their work. Individualized, decorated cards including personalized inscriptions and containing cash honoraria were distributed at the end of each four-hour workshop. We sought means of performing payment that would express

the complex cultural, political and affective meanings that money holds for all of us (Mauer 2006; Simmel 2004). This process was unevenly participated in and diversely analyzed by different participants. One woman said of the cards, "I love them. I got them all sitting on my TV." Another surmised, "it's all about presentation, not about money–a gift, someone's taken the time to make a card and say 'thank you for your generous time.'" Another concluded, "Usually it's, like, 'do the thing, here's your money, now piss off'...In this project it was like, 'do the thing, here's your money, *and a card*, now piss off.'"

The third and fourth hours of each workshop were spent in processes of developing a final performance and event (maybe). We played theatre games drawn largely from Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (1992) and Johnstone's *Improv for Storytellers* (1999). We engaged in storytelling circles using a wide range of prompts that excluded specific requests for stories about drug use, violence, child abuse, HIV or sex work. However, if anyone wanted to tell stories about those topics—and some did—we did not discourage them. The prompts I offered followed subjects like: tell a story about your name, your favorite food, a tattoo, your hometown. We took photographs and shared them at subsequent workshops. We painted. We recorded interviews, transcribed them and reviewed transcripts together. We experimented with writing scripts and monologues. Students paired up with, or formed small groups with, participants.

Improvisation was the organizing and animating principle.[14] In beginners' theatrical improvisation, the central dynamics of relationship and communication between actors is embodied in "offers" made by one, to which the appropriate response of another is "yes, and." "Yes, and" keeps communication flowing, whereas responses that effect closure of communication—"No, but"—are referred to as "blocking" and discouraged. In practice, this meant, for example, that when a jar of honey on the dinner table evoked a story by Sam about his memories of bee keeping on his family farm, Rima—the student working with Sam—suggested he consider bee keeping as the subject of his performance. They began developing a piece through recording and transcribing Sam's stories and researching bee colonies on the internet. When Ralph (a participant) pulled "recite a poem" from the hat during a storytelling circle and surprised himself by recalling a poem he had learned in elementary school, Aliya—a theatre student—engaged him in imagining how the whole group could stage the poem under Ralph's and Aliya's co-direction. This happened at the fifth workshop and Ralph had been working with Pat (another student) for three weeks previously photographing and scripting a narrated slide show about Ralph's working life as a trucker. Students therefore carried the brunt of the responsibility to achieve an undefined goal through an improvisational process I could best describe to them as,

> Pay close attention...improvise...pick up cues...respond...support people in moving towards...something. Make sure we are ready to put on a good public performance by week 14. But, of course, don't predetermine what that might be. And remember! We might not have a performance at all.

One student later described her experience of the first few weeks of the project as like "being in a fog." Another recalled, less charitably, "I felt like I was being held hostage in John Malkovitch's brain."

After each workshop the students and I met at "after meetings" and reviewed what had happened, where each person's project was at, and what support we might offer to develop their ideas. The students and I circulated a "rolling collective fieldwork journal" by email that documented the process from multiple perspectives and kept us alert to experience, questions and dilemmas, including those of writing and sharing field notes! This was intended as a reflexive improvisational practice, extending the "yes, and" improvisational principle and the ethical-political principle of accountability to participants beyond the fieldwork encounter into a "perpetual present" practice of research design. The after-meetings were also the primary site where ethnographic documentation and reflection took place, and enacted our improvisational "surfing methodology"[15]—each week we tried to catch the waves generated by the participants, ride them as far as we could, not drown, and be ready for the next wave.

At the sixth workshop we agreed on a program for a final performance and exhibit. At this point, I requested another consent form be signed: Stage 2 of the three-stage process. This one asked participants to consent to participate in the next eight rehearsal workshops on the same terms as the first six, and up to and including the agreed-upon public finale program. The principle I was trying to put into practice was that until this turning point (where a "product" had been developed and agreed on) participants could not sincerely consent to participate in anything *but* a process of development. Although we repeated the exercise of breaking into small groups, discussing sections and reporting back, little discussion or debate ensued. No revisions were requested. Everyone signed the forms.

At each workshop up to the twelfth (of 14) I reminded everyone that we could, if we chose, conclude the project with an extra-special dinner instead of a public perform-

ance or exhibit as a finale. The participants consistently rejected this option. They wanted to put on a show of some sort for the audience they had chosen: family, friends and VNHS staff. They wanted to perform for these people. And they wanted to perform *well*. "We don't want to look like a bunch of fucked up drug addicts," one participant stipulated, and everyone nodded in agreement.

Thus came the final event, which was held in the Board Room of VNHS. It turned out to include, first, a more lavish feast than what we had become accustomed to, as well as an exhibit of photos and texts documenting the project's process. Ron (a participant) and Lesley (a student) developed a poster presentation about Ron's work as a west coast salmon fisher using transcriptions of Ron's storytelling and archival photos of his home village, fishing boats and canneries. We then presented the following program of live performances, each segment lasting approximately ten minutes:

Archie, a talented writer who had taken on the role of project ethnographer read from his field notes to introduce the audience to the project and our process. At a number of sessions we had taken turns reading his notes aloud out of interest and to explore shifts between writing text, performing one's own words, and hearing one's written words performed by others.

Rod (a participant) and **Marian** (a student) had photographed a day in the life of Sadie, Rod's dog, from Sadie's "close-to-the-ground" perspective. Rod, with Sadie lying at his feet, narrated this slide show. Rod had worked on a number of different ideas throughout the project, settling on this one about mid-way through.

Corrinne (a participant) and **I** worked through interviews, transcriptions, editing and conversations to produce a monologue that Corrinne read aloud about her experience of being diagnosed HIV-positive. Ironically, perhaps, given my political goals in relation to performance content, this piece was the most conventional in subject matter.

Anita (a participant) and **I** created a music video made up of photos of Anita posing in various masks and costumes to the background of Credence Clearwater Revival's "Proud Mary" (Anita's favorite song). Anita led the audience in singing along with the chorus—"Rollin', Rollin', Rollin' on a river"—while the slides were projected onto a screen behind her.

Heather (a participant) and **Lori** (a student) presented a PowerPoint slide show that documented Heather's work in the VNHS kitchen, preparing and serving over 125 meals per day. The background music was a N'amgis Feast Song from Heather's First Nation, and Heather stood by the screen as the slide show played. By her own account, she was proud of the presentation.

Sam (a participant) and **Rima** (a student) developed a short lecture-form presentation, illustrated by slides, about a looming, global environmental crisis—"Colony Collapse"—caused by bees abandoning their colonies.

Lyanna (a participant), **Marian, Pat** and **Aliya** (students) worked to create a satirical presentation in photos that highlighted various aspects of Lyanna's day-to-day life and included the various roles she juggles as mother, employee, research assistant and girlfriend. Lyanna narrated the slide show. Her piece, dedicated to her late son, was moving, eloquent, humorous and visually striking.

Ralph (a participant) and **Aliya** (theatre student) co-directed a performance of "The Highwayman," the poem that Ralph had recalled during an earlier storytelling exercise. Ralph and Aliya co-directed the whole project team in performing this poem. Ralph recited it while participants and students performed the characters: Sam played the Highwayman; Rod played the stable hand; Anita played the Landlord's daughter; Rima, Lori and Marian were King George's soldiers. Aliya directed. This group performance concluded our show.

Following a wrap-up and evaluation session a week after this finale, I requested signatures on a final consent form. Again, I was trying to put into practice a performative and improvisational principle: that participants could not know until after the performance/exhibit event how they themselves felt about it, or how the audience they had invited responded and thus contributed to creating new meanings and significances of the event. This final form included permission for the students and I to write and publish articles about the project; to create a manual about the project that would include photographs on the VNHS website; and to publicly distribute a DVD made of the finale. Again, we broke into small groups, discussed each section of the final form and reported back to the group as a whole. There was considerable discussion, particularly about putting the DVD and photographs on the VNHS website. The only revision requested, however, was that a "non-commercial use only" caveat be included in the release of any materials for publication. Researchers (the students and I) were to be restricted to publication in academic journals and use of materials for educational purposes in classrooms. Everyone signed the forms.

Relationships were good. Participants were happy with the event and the response it had received. Fellow feeling was running high. For the participants, raising questions and objections at this point might have been socially awkward; they may not have wanted to appear ungrateful for a new experience or as if they were not holding up their side of the reciprocal relationship, or contract, between researchers and researched. Perhaps some feared that raising objections would be hurtful to me, since my investment in the project was obvious.[16] In

retrospect, a process that offered participants an opportunity to provide confidential evaluations might have been more informative.

A Pause...for Reflections, Surprises and New Questions

> In abandoning any lingering yearnings for purity—a search which anthropological work should long have brought into question in any case—scholars will have to accept partial solutions, concepts that are useful but flawed; they will have to themselves self-consciously occupy margins...We hear, then, a repeated theme—a call to humility about the constructs with which we must work but also a call to engaged scholarship.
>
> —Mertz (2002:369)

One of the greatest promises of ethnography is its capacity to surprise. So we pause, rather than conclude, at the end of specific research projects, more often than not with new questions rather than definitive answers. I pause now to share reflexive reflections about useful and inevitably flawed work, and to pose new questions about experimental, engaged ethnography.[17]

I have been continually confronted by questions about "outcomes" in relation to SPP. These questions range, depending on who asks—doctors, medical researchers, health care providers, advocates, activists, artists, researchers, colleagues, students or research participants. "Did SPP help participants manage their addictions more positively?" "Did they comply with HIV medication regimes more effectively?" "What policy or program recommendations were produced?" "How was it different from other community theatre projects?" "Was it just another fun thing for researchers that exploited research participants like all other research projects?" "What was *the point* of SPP, anyway?"

Certainly, the usual "outcomes" increasingly demanded by funders of social sciences, arts and humanities research and community artistic performances did not emerge. No team members stopped using illicit drugs. We tested no licit drugs. We asked no questions about intimate sexual practices. We broke no new ground in theatrical aesthetics. We offered no policy or program recommendations. We cannot point to any change in the material conditions of participants' lives. Nor has the three-stage process for negotiating informed consent been taken up by other researchers working in Downtown Eastside Vancouver, although many make sincere efforts to insure research participants understand the forms they are signing and, in day to day relationships, often *must* de facto negotiate and renegotiate "consent." This new process for consent was not adopted as general policy for research at VNHS either, although their Research Committee continues to try to hold researchers accountable in various ways.

In 2009, the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR), Aboriginal Community-Based Research (CBR-A) Operating Grants Program soundly rejected a proposal several colleagues and I submitted in partnership with VNHS/POP for funding to carry out a three-year research program that would have built on and expanded the work we began in SPP and other projects in experimental ethnography (see, for example, Krawcyzk et al. 2007). The CIHR adjudication review committee concluded that:

> Although this proposal involves communities and includes many novel, creative, and indigenous methodologies that would certainly constitute a fertile training ground for trainees...Although the involvement of community is apparent and community letters attest to strong support for the proposed project...(and)...the references and methodology are relevant...overall the committee felt this was not a *research* project. [emphasis added]

Despite this, I am confident that attributing primary value to the fieldwork process—the first principle of the "new" experimental ethnography— and considering the project *as a whole (processes and products) as a "utopian performative,"* we can claim modest success.

Therapeutic Effects of a Utopian Performative

> Utopian performatives describe small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense.
>
> —Dolan (2005:5)

Reflexive Reflections: "Addiction" is a motor force in the political economy and governance of Downtown Eastside Vancouver. Biomedical and psychological theories of addiction begin with assumptions that individuals diagnosed as "addicts" require therapy in order to be cured, normalized and managed, whether through abstinence-based 12-step Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous, or harm reduction programs. The concept of therapy proposed by Tyler (1986) and explored by Castañeda (2006b) is based on different premises and goals. Tyler describes

therapy as a process "that departs from the commonsense world only in order to reconfirm it and to return us to it renewed and mindful of our renewal" (Castañeda 2006b:92; see also work by feminist ethnographers Hogan and Pink 2010 and performance studies scholars-artists Cheu 2005:137 and Nash 2005:191). I trace one of the ways SPP has rippled through structures of feeling in Downtown Eastside Vancouver since 2007—or, we might say, has had therapeutic effects there—through a lens sharpened by Dolan's idea of the "utopian performative," and by critical alternatives to biomedical-psychological concepts of therapy articulated by Hogan and Pink, Nash, and Tyler.

A few of the participants and a number of VNHS staff have commented on how participation in SPP served as a springboard for them to become more involved and less isolated. One participant later pointed to the moment when he stepped forward to take a role in "The Highwayman" as the moment when he decided to do something for other people, to stop living only for himself. The participants' chosen audience of family, friends and service providers, meanwhile, clearly enjoyed the finale event and were proud of the participants' demonstrations of talent and skill. In *not* reproducing the conventional "bare life entitlement narratives" anticipated by themselves and by the audience, I believe performers "cracked open," to use Garfinkel's term (Castaneda 2006b:78) a space in themselves and in the audience to do and imagine themselves and each other in unexpected and provocative ways. Friends and family members experienced their stigmatized mothers-fathers- aunts-uncles-cousins-wives-lovers-husbands-sisters-brothers-friends as smart, funny, attractive, admirable persons. Stigmatized mothers-fathers-aunts-uncles-cousins-wives-lovers-husbands-sisters-brothers-friends experienced themselves being sensed as such by people they care about.

Audience members experienced the "HIV positive-IVDU-Sex Worker-Homeless-Urban-Aboriginal-Other" as proud, knowledgeable, entertaining performers. The HIV positive-IVDU-Sex Worker-Urban-Aboriginal-Other experienced the "Doctor-Social Worker-Nurse-Pharmacist-Security Guard" as laughing, clapping, singing-along persons. Many staff members expressed surprise about the talents and knowledge displayed by the performers. No one *became* or consumed an "Other." Differences that preceded the event succeeded it.

Surprises: While my focus when designing SPP had been on creating a space for stories other than "bare life entitlement narratives," to be told, following writers who espouse experimental performance methodologies (see particularly, Conquergood 2006; Hamera 2006; Stewart 2005), I was intrigued by proposals that performance not only represents and re-circulates pre-existing knowledge but may itself be a generative source of new knowledge (Magnat 2005; Quirt and Kugler 2004; Riley 2009; Sandahl and Auslander 2005). I believe the "liveness" of the SPP final performance (Auslander 1999), the multisensory and embodied experience of performing and witnessing, and the affective "flow" between audiences and performers (Schechner 2002) were as significant for audiences and performers as the content of the stories themselves. Even less tangible but no less significant were the ways that traces of the relationships developed during the 14 workshops shaped and manifested within and through the final event.

Questions: What if rather than aspiring to legitimate ourselves in the terms of natural, social or policy sciences, we assessed the ethical-political and intellectual-artistic value—the effects—of "experimental performative ethnography"—by criteria articulating the following three principles: (1) an experimental ethnographic principle of assigning primary value to participants' experiences of the process they have engaged in; (2) a performative principle as articulated by Powell and Shaffer: "The most exciting performances...are those that make the audience think differently about the world far after the performance is done by capturing our attention *with the performance*" (2009:4); and, (3) a political principle that values interventions in the politics of affect:

> What the performative approach shows is in just how many registers the political and political action operate, even as it necessarily questions straitjacketed notions of what the political and political action consist of....the performative approach can provide...several new means of enunciation and an ethic. [Thrift 2003:2022; see also Carmody and Love 2008]

Material Effects of a Therapeutic Utopian Performative

I trace the individual and collective "therapeutic" effects described above as *simultaneously* political-economic effects.

Reflexive Reflections: As I described earlier, the research and community arts industries are important sectors of the Downtown Eastside political economy and the occupational niche of research subject-community participant is expanding. This means that research participants may reinforce their entitlements to services and accumulate some paraprofessional capital and legitimate-legal employment possibilities by their participation. The work they can secure is poorly paid on a piece-rate basis,

temporary and part-time. Nonetheless, these jobs are safer and freer from direct violence than work in the sex, drugs and petty crime industries, a consideration particularly significant for women. Employment as a research participant is only ever one of many strategies available to keep the backbone from scratching the belly in a day-to-day struggle for basic survival. It does not replace other sources of income or offer possibilities of social mobility beyond the enclosures of subalternity.

Research participants in Downtown Eastside Vancouver consistently and vociferously voice critiques of the political economy we work in. But many also say that along with the need for money, they are motivated to exchange their blood, urine, memories and stories with researchers by the sincere desire to contribute to discovering vaccines and cures and to changing policy. Many say, too, that they welcome opportunities to "tell their stories" and to be heard by interested researchers and the audiences we can reach, and to develop friendships across difference. That they receive pittances of cash in exchange does not exhaust explanations of their motivations to participate any more than the fact that we researchers receive substantial financial rewards and accrue professional capital as collectors of blood, urine, memories and stories exhausts explanations of our motivations. That we inhabit contradictory positions that shift and change over time, that we never fully understand ourselves and that we desire each other's recognition, approval and friendship are what researchers and research subjects have in common. Of course, we experience similarities *and* differences from our diverse locations within the unequal and unjust social worlds we share.

Surprises: I have come to consider the participants' final granting of permission to us to publish as a gift in the Maussian sense; that is, there is no such thing as an "altruistic gift" given without expectation of and desire for return. Gifts are always part of complex systems of exchanges. Each act of gift-giving necessarily simultaneously effects payment of a past debt and incurs a future debt. Refusal of these obligations severs social relations—such as when a gift is refused or returned, when one fails to reciprocate, or when, as givers, we deny the expectation of return or the capacity of the recipient to return the gift in some form, someday. Gifting cycles keep open the possibility of ongoing social relations into an unpredictable future. Unlike the one-off interview, completion of a questionnaire or deposit of bodily fluids and payment or receipt of cash for the same that circumscribe research relationships within the moment of exchange, our exchanges of stories and cash and food and sociality through ethnography and performance in SPP extended over time.

Question: What if time facilitated more possibilities for negotiation of relationships and interactions and thus for moving—*even by a small step*—away from a commodity exchange and—*even by a small step*—towards a gift cycle along the commodity-gift continuum?[18]

Informed Consent to Material Effects of Therapeutic Utopian Performatives

Reflexive Reflections: Challenging and often fraught relationships of exchange and reciprocity between anthropologists and research subjects are nothing new. However, time-space compression, intensified commodification of all aspects of human life and the particular form of Taylorization of research in places like Downtown Eastside Vancouver produce complex ethical and political challenges for ethnographers and artists working in what are now commonly referred to as "guinea pig" economies.[19] In taking their place as "research subjects" in medical and epidemiological HIV/AIDS and addiction research, Downtown Eastside Vancouverites join the ranks of human subjects in clinical trials that have swelled, globally, from 4000 in 1995 to 400,000 in 1999 (see Abadie 2010; Elliott 2008; Petryna 2009; Rajan 2007).

Anderson and Weijer argue that the irreducible ethical question is whether an individual participates in clinical trials research as a result of "undue inducement" (2002:360). This condition can only be satisfied if participants have sufficient access to other sources of income and morally uncompromising options to render their participation a meaningful choice (see also Dickert and Grady 1999; Rajan 2007; Weijer and Emanuel 2000). In impoverished zones like Downtown Eastside Vancouver, Anderson's premise is simply not met. Endemic poverty renders any notion of "choice"—to be a research participant, a (licit or illicit) drug consumer or seller, a community arts project participant, a petty criminal, a binner or a sex worker—too compromised to be politically or morally meaningful. Nonetheless, even in conditions of economic desperation in Downtown Eastside Vancouver, subaltern persons do, quite regularly, turn down invitations to participate in projects they find too objectionable for various reasons. They may passively resist, through silence, withholding or other acts of non-compliance if they do officially participate. They resign in protest if participation experiences are unsatisfactory.[20]

Surprises: When informed consent forms were first required beginning in earnest about 15 years ago, it was not unusual for potential research subjects to become so intimidated or just generally put off that they would opt out of participating, a situation that continues in many contexts today. Ethnographers call this "the chill factor"

and lament it loudly (Bradbund 2006). Initiating relationships through the signing of legal contracts threatens ethnographer's desires for "rapport," "access" and "dialogic communication." In Downtown Eastside Vancouver though, these days, research subjects most often respond to requests for signatures saying things like "Oh yeah, I've signed lots of these. Just gimme the pen."

Surprise: My mantra on the subject of ethics and informed consent throughout SPP—and the one by which I have written and taught the question for many years—was "consent is a process that emerges from relationships; it is not an event sealed in a contract." Now I would argue that my initial formulations were too simplistic and remained trapped in a moralistic and abstract either–or binary: relationship *or* contract. Consent forms, after all, are far more legally binding on researchers than on research subjects. While they increasingly serve as "liability insurance" for universities, they continue to bear the traces of their origins in demands by, particularly, indigenous peoples, for protection of research subjects' legal rights (see Fassin 2006). Reflecting on the experience now, I suggest that we *integrated* contracts and relationships in practice and lived experience that necessarily produced excesses that the dualistic binary could never contain.

In SPP, the political and economic underbelly of our relationship was made visible and experienced bodily and affectively throughout SPP by *explicitly* performing *ethical consent.* We *demonstrated* through the three-stage process of negotiating consent and signing new forms that participants *could withhold* their ultimate consent and could exercise the power of a final no *after being paid.* I believe this practice generated a small shift in the power embedded in the researcher–researched relationship that was *experienced as possibility* throughout the project.

Questions: What if the routinization and repetition of the so-called "ethical informed consent process" has subverted the influence consent forms *actually exert* in the shaping of lived experiences of research relationships? *What if* the effects of the pro forma legalistic script recede, and the improvisational, performative and far more challenging face-to-face human relationships ascend? *What if* we surrender the protective shields of professional expertise or step-by-step codified methods set out in textbooks calling themselves "toolkits?"

The Questions: So what? Who cares?

Weems accuses feminist, postcolonial and other researchers she classifies as committed to "emancipatory ethnography" of authoring "victory narratives...(about)... how they eventually gained trust and better data through a combination of reflexive collaboration and ethics of caring...[and who]...offer confessions to the research community as evidence of...authentic connection with participants" (2006:995; see, for example, Tomaselli 2003). From a position in Marxist anthropology, Smith (2006) critiques the privileging of experiential knowledge that ignores the fact that "The Logic of Capital is the Real Which Lurks in the Background" (the title of Smith's work) behind social relations in capitalist societies. These authors caution ethnographers against being seduced by naïve realism and empiricism.

In SPP we *did* put on a final performance and exhibit, and the participants *did* give final consent to our "extraction of surplus value" from them: I *am* writing and publishing this article and others. Students *did* each receive stipends, a course credit, and valuable training and experience. Participants each received honoraria, and we were all treated to 14 unusually sumptuous meals (plus 14 take-homes), fun and creative experiences, training and reputation that advanced our respective competitive edges as researchers and research participants in the local research economy. We did not overcome the fundamental political, economic and social differences between researchers and research participants. A project is not a revolution.

I believe that we succeeded in creating *experiences of ethical engagement* in the *context of embodied, affective relationships* that generated *effects* that *may* have the *potential* to be politically productive in the mutually constitutive realms of affect, memory, political power and economic survival. I also hope that through writing, teaching and speaking about this project we will contribute to conversations in anthropology, performance studies and related fields[21] and perhaps beyond into what we euphemistically call "the real world."

Question: What do you think?

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Acknowledgments

I thank the SPP research team for their permission to publish this article. I also wish to acknowledge the support of Doreen Littlejohn, Executive Director of the Positive Outlook Program, Lou Desmarais, Executive Director of VNHS, and the contributions of D.D. Kugler (Theatre, SFU) who served as an advisor to the project. The present essay has been significantly strengthened by comments from two reviewers for *Anthropologica*, Lesley Cerny, Julie Cruikshank, Denielle Elliott, Susan Erikson,

Mary Ellen Kelm and Stacy Pigg, and the editing assistance of Marguerite Pigeon. Errors, interpretations and analyses are my responsibility alone.

Notes

1 Sam Cvetkovic, Corinne Gurney, Archie Mayan Jr., Ralph, Anita Peace Maker, Rod Rock Thunder, Ron Skulsh, Lyanna Storm and Heather Walkus.

2 Lesley Cerny, Pat Feindel, Lori Gabrielson, Aliya Griffin, Marian Krawcyzk and Rima Noureddine.

3 This article is excerpted from a larger work in progress based in ten years of immersed ethnography in Downtown Eastside Vancouver and focused on three demarcated "research projects," of which SPP was the third. The working title is "Complicity: Performing Ethnography, Autobiography, Ethics and Politics."

4 The Principal Investigator was Dr. C.K. Patton; co-investigators were Dr. M. Tyndall, Irene Goldstone, Dara Culhane and Olena Hankivsky. It was funded by the Canadian Aids Network for Research and Action (CANFAR).

5 Downtown Eastside Vancouver has a long history of political activism. Analyses and language of diverse left-wing and popular movements permeate the consciousness and vocabulary of many neighbourhood residents. Researchers are regularly confronted by challenges to explain themselves in these terms.

6 See also Bauman (2004), Bourgois and Schonberg (2009), Rajan (2007), Sharma (2009) and Sylvester (2006).

7 Discussions and debates about formulations of "subalternity" by Spivak and others are vast and it is beyond the scope of this article to address them in any depth. To trace Spivak's development of the concept see Spivak 1988, 1999 and 2000.

8 As a sample survey, see Blomley (1998), Collins et al. (2005), Culhane (2003a, 2003b, 2005, 2009), Manzoni et al. (2007), Mehrabadi et al. (2009), O'Donnell (2007), Pullen and Matthews (2006), Robertson (2006, 2007), Robertson and Culhane (2005), Roe (2009/1010), Shannon et al. (2005), Wood et al. (2008), Woolford (2001) and Wunker (2008).

9 Following Shuman (2006) and Norrick (2005), "available narratives are the stories that become tellable in a particular context about a particular topic" (Shuman 2006:150).

10 For in-depth and comprehensive discussions of the current state of these debates in anthropology, see Bradbund (2006), Brenneis (2006), Davidson (2007), Fassin (2006), Garber et al. (2000), Huisman (2008), Lederman (2006), Marshall (2003), Meskell and Pells (2005), Pels (1999) and Strathern (2006).

11 To demand that anthropologists and their ethnographic processes be accountable to the people they engage is not, of course, a new idea. This has long been a tenet of feminist and indigenous anthropology (see, for example, Visweswaran [1994] and Tuhiwai-Smith [1999], respectively), and it is an important raison d'être of most applied anthropology.

12 A report resulting from an investigation headed by retired Police Chief, Doug LePard, released in August 2010, criticized the VPD's and RCMP's handling of these cases, and called for a public inquiry (LePard 2010).

13 Here, I am drawing on critical scholarship on community theatre practices. See, for example, Cheu (2005), Dolan (2005), Edmondson (2005, 2007), Goodman and deGay (2000), Hutchison (2005), Magnat (2005), Mündel (2003), Nash (2005), Rose (2008), Salverson (1996), Sandahl and Auslander (2005) and Szeman (2005).

14 For more on the potentialities of considering improvisation as central to ethnography, see Ingold and Hallam 2007:1-24; Malkki 2007:162-187; Riley 2009:214-222; Sawyer 2001:149-162.

15 I am grateful to Sabine Silberberg for sharing this term that she invented to describe her own ethnographic work with drug users in Vancouver.

16 Thanks to Lesley Cerny for pointing this out.

17 Thanks to Adrienne Burk for suggesting the idea of concluding with a "pause" rather than a conventional "conclusion."

18 See Morris 2007 on Derrida's discussion of the relationship between time and reciprocity.

19 See Hecht 2006, Petryna et al. 2006 and Veissière 2009 for discussions about ethical-political dilemmas faced by ethnographers in these zones.

20 Research subjects exercise agency in determining what form their participation will take. See, for example, Castañeda 2006b on research participants as "emergent audiences" for "ethnographer's installations," and Ortner 1995 on "ethnographic refusal." Recent work on reconceptualizing agency is apropos. See, for example, Mahmood 2005.

21 See Castaneda 2009 on "expanded documentation" and experimental ethnography.

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