A Hyperlocal Manifesto

Exploring Hyperlocal Publics through The Little Mountain Housing Project, Social Video Advocacy and Web Documentary

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Abstract

I launched *The Little Mountain Project* as a response to the eviction and destruction of a social housing community in Vancouver, Canada. Utilizing hybrid digital media practices, my work encourages citizens to meet and participate in democratic processes. The main components of this new media exploration consist of a blog and video archive, a multi-platform signage project, and a collaborative community web history project. This paper documents the development of a methodology for an innovative documentary practice – a hyperlocal web-based strategy – to empower a counterpublic and to facilitate community dialogue around rapidly evolving civic processes. I situate my practice within a critique of neoliberalism, the idea of the "public sphere," and the history of advocacy and activist filmmaking in Canada, in particular, the National Film Board of Canada's "Challenge for Change Program,"[1] a ground-breaking experiment in the use of film for the purpose of social activism. *The Little Mountain Project* aims to explore new forms of social, political, and cultural production within emergent practices enabled by web-based media, which propose new ways to facilitate dialogue within the public sphere.

[1] It must be mentioned that my initial impulse to re-invent my documentary practice was not inspired by the *Challenge for Change* program, the concept of the public sphere, or the emergence of hyperlocal web practices. It was through the process of research for a Masters of Applied Arts degree at the Emily Carr University that I applied cultural, theoretical, and historical contexts to my emerging practice. Research informed my practice, which as a result, evolved into a hyperlocal new media strategy employing hybrid elements.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Acknowledgements

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1. Methodology

1.1 A Local Documentary Manifesto Inspires a New Film

Six years ago, as my wife and I prepared for the birth of our second child, I made a professional decision to change the direction of my documentary filmmaking practice. I wrote a manifesto for myself, which I called the "Six-Block Manifesto." This manifesto was based on a number of factors. The first factor was a desire to stay close to my young family and be part of the lives of my children; the second was a disenchantment with the declining business of independent documentary filmmaking in Canada; the third was my conviction that within a walkable radius from my home I could find compelling stories to tell, which would deepen the relationship between myself and the place in which I live. In this chapter I will discuss the gestation of this manifesto and how it led me to focus my attention on the Little Mountain Housing Project in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Fig.1: The Six Block Documentary Manifesto. Satellite photograph of my neighbourhood showing a six-block radius from my home.

1.2 The Six-Block Manifesto

In 2006 my daughter was four years old. My wife was pregnant with our second child, a boy; I wanted to be in Vancouver for his birth and to be a supportive partner to my wife during the first years of our son's life. I wanted to spend less time traveling for work, and more time working from home. Responding to this situation, I wrote a manifesto for myself called "The Six-Block Manifesto."

The Six-Block Manifesto:

> *I must look no further than a 6 block radius from my door to find subjects for my films; I must own all of my production and post-production equipment; I must shoot and edit all of my own material; I must not allow a deficiency of financing to interrupt the production process, nor hinder post-production processes; and I must always retain creative control.*[2]

Meanwhile, in spite of the success of *Dark Pines: A documentary investigation into the Death of Tom Thomson*,[3] it seemed that the renaissance of Canadian independent documentary filmmaking, which started in the 1990s, was at an end. Colleagues were closing their offices and leaving the business, while the largest film production companies were flush with cash for series production. What happened has been clearly documented in a publication titled *Getting Real: An Economic Profile of the Canadian Documentary Production Industry*, a study published by the Documentary Organization of Canada (DOC) in 2011. It reveals that from 2006 to 2009, documentary production in Canada dropped to its lowest level in six years,[4] while lifestyle and

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[2] The *Six Block Documentary Manifesto,* David Vaisbord 2006

[3] A film I directed and co-wrote with Ric Beairsto in 2005 with major financial support from BRAVO! Television and Telefilm Canada. The film won a number of awards.

[4] As overall production of all documentary formats (including reality TV) dropped from 13% to 20%, POV documentary production in particular had its portion of all documentary funding reduced by a further 20%. To exacerbate matters for producers outside of Ontario (for example, those like myself living in British Columbia), statistics show a 17% increase in documentary production in Ontario, pointing to a greater centralization of documentary production in and around head offices in Toronto (DOC).

reality programming sharply increased. In this period of time, corporate consolidation of the market increased,[5] some independent film and video funds vanished entirely,[6] and all Canadian broadcasters severely reduced the commissioning of POV[7] documentaries and dropped their license fees.[8]

Today, limited financial support for the POV documentary still exists; the ones that do get produced tend to be ones which tell international stories. Here the "propaganda of the obvious" (Rosler 33) is made manifest, in the sense that more value is placed on filmmaking that takes place in foreign locales—and yet, there is a market logic to the pursuit of international documentary subjects. As Canadian producer Peter Wintonic explained in a 2012 interview at the Sundance Film Festival, funding for the POV documentary has dropped to the point that Canadian producers need foreign buyers to take the lead roles in financing Canadian films (Wintonic). While international co-productions may prove successful in the manufacture of films such as Wintonic's *China Heavyweight*, (a film about the emergence of professional boxing in China), they unfortunately seldom produce many films about Canada for Canadians.

As a filmmaker who in the past had almost exclusively produced and directed POV documentaries, the road ahead for me was clear enough. In order to continue working I would have to leave independent filmmaking and seek employment in the reality TV industry; spend

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[5] Canwest purchased the Alliance Atlantis channels, CTV and Rogers acquired and split up the CHUM conventional assets (A-channel, and City-TV, and OMNI, respectively), and CTVglobemedia separated from BCE (DOC).

[6] The Canadian Independent Film and Video Fund was terminated (DOC).

[7] POV documentary: Documentaries told with a strong authorial voice or subjective point of view that shapes the story line; also known as auteur documentaries because of their similarities to the auteur film movement; also known as the feature documentary, the one-hour documentary, or one-off documentary (DOC).

[8] Broadcasters are no longer supporting POV documentaries; they have stopped commissioning them, or have limited their exhibition windows. In 2009-10, many one-off strands were closed or put on hiatus, including *The Lens*, *Wild Docs*, and *Global Currents*. Broadcaster license fees for single-episode projects have also dropped to their lowest level in five years. In both English and French, the number of POV documentaries funded by the Canadian Television Fund (CTF) has dropped to its lowest level in four years (DOC).

large amounts of time and money (that I did not have) on foreign travel in search of documentary subjects, or continue a Quixotic search for nearly non-existent financing for my Canadian film subjects. None of those options held any appeal for me. Personally and professionally, it was time to choose a radical new filmmaking approach, one that consisted of a personal engagement with the humanist geography and social texture of the place where I live.

1.3 A New Documentary Paradigm

In 2008, two years after I wrote my manifesto, it came to my attention that the Little Mountain Housing Project (herein referred to as "Little Mountain" or "the Housing Project") was in trouble. Built in 1954, Little Mountain was Vancouver's first and most successful social housing project. In March of 2007, the Provincial Government of British Columbia announced that it was going to sell and demolish the Housing Project, and promptly began to relocate tenants. The majority of the 245 residents acquiesced to the decision and voluntarily moved to other social housing units run by their landlord, British Columbia Housing. Others, however, did not move, and stayed in their suites. Community advocacy groups supported them and their fight to "Save Little Mountain." It was these residents and their supporters who I began to hear and see appearing on radio and television programs throughout the spring of 2007.

Then, two friends who had grown up near Little Mountain called me to say how recent events at the Housing Project were bothering them. They were concerned about the preservation of the legacy of over fifty years of social housing at the site and encouraged me to make a documentary about it. What they said made sense, so on September 8, 2008, I dropped my son off at daycare and my daughter off at school, and I walked to the Little Mountain Housing Project. It was a sunny day and the first time I had ever set foot in the 16-acre complex. A flock

of geese was occupying the great central lawn, and above their honking and sputtering I could hear a young girl's voice emanating from an open door. Her father was the first Little Mountain resident with whom I spoke. He offered to tell me why he opposed BC Housing and why he was not going to leave quietly. I asked if he could think of any residents who might be comfortable appearing on camera and he suggested that I visit Ingrid Steenhuisen (See Chapter 2.2). Ms. Steenhuisen became a central character in what I was certain would become an engaging, enlightening, and inspiring character-based documentary.

My "Six-Block Manifesto" had been based on three factors: the first was personal (I wanted to spend more time with my family); the second was professional (financial support for Canadian documentary had made it impossible for me to maintain a professional POV documentary practice in this country); and the third was artistic (I had a conviction that I could find compelling stories to tell and films to make within a limited range of my home). The Housing Project was situated within a six-block radius, and it soon became clear to me that *The Little Mountain Project* would become the first documentary film that my "Six-Block Manifesto" would inspire. I took my camera to the site and began to record my observations. The first stories I recorded from the residents at Little Mountain were about the rich social history of the community and its place within the history of social housing in Vancouver.

2. Little Mountain, Social Housing, and New Liberalism – A Brief History

2.1 Historical Memory

An historical amnesia has left most Vancouverites unaware of previous housing crises in the past century of the city's history. The drive for social housing in Vancouver complemented the tradition of housing activism that already existed in the United Kingdom and, to a lesser degree, the United States. Successful campaigns for social housing followed the end of World War Two. In January 1946, homeless veterans threw up a picket line around the old Hotel Vancouver at the juncture of Granville and Georgia streets to protest a low-income housing shortage that had reached a crisis. Their protests quickly escalated to a full occupation of the building, which would result in the hotel becoming an emergency shelter for 1200 families over the next two years (Wade, Houses 144). Successful campaigns for social housing such as the "hotel coup" resulted in the construction of the Little Mountain Housing Project in 1954 (Wade, Palace 309). The Housing Project was the first public housing project in Vancouver and only the second of its kind in Canada (the first being Regent Park in Toronto). The movement that produced The Little Mountain Housing Project inspired the building of a number of other federally-funded housing projects in Vancouver in later years. In this way, the social activists of the 1940's made far-reaching and lasting contributions to social housing and housing advocacy in Vancouver. In *The Death and Life of the Little Mountain Housing Project*, Thomas Thomson writes:

> The Little Mountain Housing Project was a landmark accomplishment for both the local and national housing movements. Little Mountain was one of the first examples of all three levels of government coming together, cash in

> hand, for the development of something crucially needed by the citizenry. One simply cannot appreciate what is now being lost with the privatization and demolition of Little Mountain without first understanding this history. (Thomson 71)

Thomson, who spent part of his childhood growing up at Little Mountain, was as shocked as the residents themselves when he heard that the provincial government was preparing the sell the publicly owned land to a private developer.

2.2 A Low Income Community Faces Destruction

On June 19, 2006, a press release authored by the Canadian Government was sent out to Canadian newspapers and television stations. The press release reported that the Canada Mortgage and Housing Commission (CMHC) was devolving all responsibility for publicly-held social housing properties across Canada to their respective provinces. While the significance of this moment was lost on most Canadians, it was not lost on Ingrid Steenhuisen—who today is the last remaining resident of the LMHP and one of the most vocal members of the Advisory Council. The CMHC announcement came on Steenhuisen's forty-ninth birthday, while she was living in publicly-held social housing. Steenhuisen, who had grown up in the Little Mountain Housing Project, had moved back into Little Mountain in 2006 in order to provide assistance for her aging mother. Steenhuisen was one of a set of triplets born into a low-income working class family in the city of Vancouver on June 19, 1957. News of the triplet's birth made the Steenhuisens local celebrities, and community leaders took it upon themselves to help the family. As a result of community efforts, Steenhuisen's mother was able to move her two-month-old triplets into the Little Mountain Housing Project in 1957. Steenhuisen describes growing

up in the Housing Project as a happy time, when the community, though severely limited in financial means, was rich in social capital and, through mutual assistance, pulled together in order to provide a safe, supportive, and high-spirited environment in which to grow up (Thompson 122) .

Less than four months after the CMHC transfer, the BC Liberal Government's Ministry of Housing announced that obsolete housing built on underutilized public land would be sold. Within a year of the government's announcement, a Relocation Office was opened at the Little Mountain Housing Project and all residents were invited to come in for a free cup of coffee and to book their exits from the Housing Project as soon as possible. I began my investigation into the happenings at Little Mountain around this time, and Ingrid Steenhuisen was the first person who agreed to meet with me and speak about it. We met at a neighbourhood coffee shop, and the depth of her historical and political knowledge impressed me. She spoke with passion about her community and the threat of neoliberalism, employing metaphors commonly used by urban theorists. She told me that the sale of the Little Mountain Housing Project represented the reconquering of perceived urban wastelands by gentrifying "settlers," a process which began with the removal of impoverished "natives"—of which she counted herself—from the land.

2.3 The Right to the City

There is a housing crisis in Vancouver. The percentage of homes sold above $1 million has doubled in the past two years. In the first nine months of 2011, fully one in five homes sold

on the Vancouver market went for more than $1 million.[9] That's up from ten per cent in 2009 (Mendleson). A recent study published by the University of British Columbia examining census data from 1970 to 2005, shows that dramatic changes are reshaping the city's socio-economic landscape. Vancouver, once solidly middle-class is emerging a city of extremes[10] (Mendleson). In many neighbourhoods the citizens of Vancouver are being pushed aside in favour of an international business class who view the city as a safe haven for surplus capital. In every neighbourhood, there are new and expensive houses sitting empty. Tower developments filled with luxury condominiums, are built in order to be sold and to sit vacant in perpetuity. In Vancouver's lowest income neighbourhoods such as the Downtown Eastside, gentrification is rapidly increasing the misery of an already impoverished class (Diewert; Drury), while at the same time, news releases by government laud the building of new social housing units in the same community (Cole). The political elites who rule the Province of B.C. and City of Vancouver are seemingly incapable of seeking and implementing innovative or imaginative solutions.

Neoliberalism is essentially an ideology that asserts that all civic and state institutions - including all public amenities, essential services, public utilities and so on - should be privatized and opened up to domestic or foreign ownership (Harvey 5). It stands to reason, according to neoliberal philosophy, that public land holdings should be

[9] Similar to Vancouver, the percentage of million-dollar homes sold in Toronto has doubled in the past two years. But in Toronto, one in 20 homes sold for over $1 million in the first nine months of this year, compared to one in five in Vancouver. (Mendleson)

[10] From 1970 to 2005, the proportion of middle-income tracts, or neighbourhoods, in the metropolitan area of Greater Vancouver fell significantly, from 71 per cent to 53 per cent. Meanwhile, the share of very low and low-income neighbourhoods increased from 13 to 23 per cent, and high and very-high income tracts jumped from 16 to 24 per cent. The shift has been even more pronounced in the City of Vancouver, where the share of middle-income tracts was cut by more than half, from 65 to 31 per cent. Higher income neighbourhoods doubled, from 16 per cent to 32 per cent, and lower income neighbourhoods jumped from 19 to 37 per cent. (Mendleson)

sold for profit. In this particular instance, it is the public lands used for social housing that should be privatized. The logic of the BC Liberal Government's Ministry of Housing is that the privatization Little Mountain will help to solve the housing and homelessness crisis not only in Vancouver, but in the rest of the province of British Columbia[11].

Urban geographer and social theorist David Harvey has studied the roles of capital and neoliberalism in the evolution of the urban environment. In his essay, "The Right to the City," Harvey writes that "The perpetual need to find profitable terrains for capital-surplus production and absorption shapes the politics of capitalism" (Harvey 24). He argues that surplus capital is driving the growth of cities in ways that are making them less and less livable. Urbanization, Harvey writes, is a class phenomenon, since surpluses have to be extracted from somewhere and from somebody. The Little Mountain Housing Project, therefore, situated as it was on under-utilized, low-density land and occupied by underprivileged people, was the perfect mark for the absorption of surplus capital. Here, Harvey discusses the violent effects of surplus absorption:

> Surplus absorption through urban transformation has an even darker aspect. It has entailed repeated bouts of urban restructuring through 'creative destruction', which nearly always has a class dimension since it is the poor, the underprivileged and those marginalized from political power that suffer first and foremost from this process. Violence is required to build the new urban world on the wreckage

[11] The BC Government stated that fifty-percent of the profits from the sale of the land occupied by the Little Mountain Housing Project would be put into social housing in Vancouver, and fifty percent of the proceeds from the sale of the land would be put into social housing outside of Vancouver, across the province of British Columbia. In addition, BC Housing stated that the same number of social housing units that existed on the property prior to demolition would be rebuilt in the new development. In essence this plan placed the burden of alleviating the social housing problems of the entire province on the citizens and neighbourhoods of Vancouver. BC Housing also stated that it would not build any additional social housing units on the site. It would only rebuild what existed prior to demolition, the roughly 250 units built in the 1950s.

of the old. (Harvey 33)

The logic of surplus absorption at the Little Mountain Housing Project was that privatizing it would leverage dollars to pay for social housing elsewhere. The only promise made to the former residents of the Housing Project was that their homes would be rebuilt, one-for-one, on the new site by the year 2010.

As my research at the Little Mountain Housing Project continued, I observed and recorded the community advocates[12] who joined together with the remaining residents to protest the evictions and demolition. This group of advocates and residents argued, first, that it was wrong to privatize and gentrify publicly-owned lands given to the people of Canada for the purpose of public housing[13]; second, they argued that without a concrete plan in place to rebuild the social housing, it was unconscionable to destroy well-built and well-maintained housing during a crisis; third, the group argued that new housing would take much longer to build than the Provincial Government had estimated, and it was unlikely that evicted tenants would be returned to brand new social housing suites according to the time line promised by the government;[14] fourth, the advocates and residents argued that the dislocation of residents from their communities and support groups would cause great hardship for all, particularly the most vulnerable; and finally, the group argued that the plan amounted to a social disaster, set in

[12] These advocates consisted of members from CALM, Community Advocates for Little Mountain; RPSC, the Riley Park South Cambie Visions Group; and other concerned citizens.

[13] They argued that the developer's stated intention - to build up to 2000 new market condominiums on the site (a ten-fold density increase), while only replacing the roughly 250 units of social housing that were there originally- represented a wholesale gentrification of the site. They argued that the land should remain public. Sixteen acres in the centre of the city was an opportunity to find innovative solutions from around the world - through a mix of non-market and market housing - that would help to alleviate the housing crisis faced by the city.

[14] BC Housing promised that reconstruction would take two years. The community, on the other hand, argued that at least five years was necessary, probably more. To complete the suffering of the poor, the delivery of new social housing, promised by 2010, will be delayed by at least a decade, since the first phase of construction will not be complete until at least 2018. Most of the Housing Project's evicted tenants were moved out of by the end of 2008.

motion for the benefit of a multi-national developer eager to invest surplus capital into a bullish Vancouver housing market. The group's position was that taxation, not land liquidation, was the best way to generate new money for social housing in B.C., and that reductions in British Columbia corporate taxes were removing billions of dollars from government coffers. They claimed that the billion-and-a-quarter dollars sitting idle in Property Endowment Funds exposed the B.C. government's true lack of concern for Vancouver's housing crisis (Witt 8).

The arguments of the community made more sense to me than those presented by the government, but beyond the specifics of their arguments, there was a large issue at stake. The community was asking to be heard, to have a say in the city's future. I felt an urge to be active in this discussion. Harvey argues that:

> The question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from that of what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire. The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. (Harvey 23)

The "right to the city," however, is not, according to Harvey, a freely distributed privilege of citizenship; it is, rather, something that must be fought for through the exercise of collective power. Harvey reminds his readers that the "right to the city" is, "[a] common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the process of urbanization" (Harvey 23). He argues that whoever controls the necessary connection between urbanization and surplus absorption holds the right to the city, and that "[t]he democratization of that right, and the construction of a broad social movement to enforce its will is imperative if the dispossessed are to take back the control which they have for so long been denied, and if

they are to institute new modes of urbanization" (Harvey 39-40).

As the cost of living in Vancouver continues to increase and as development issues become more contentious, the city's citizens - not only those living on the margins but also the middle class - feel increasingly dispossessed. Following Harvey, in order to repossess their city, these citizens must exercise their collective power and engage in a form of "democracy" that is more participatory than the act of checking a ballot every four years. In order to do so, they must form "publics" and have their presence felt in the "public sphere." This formation of a public that then intervenes in the public sphere is exactly what I observed at Little Mountain. Through collective efforts (that is, through forming a "public"), community members took their message to a "public sphere" (the commercial broadcasting system of radio and television), and it was through this process of creating publicity that the general public learned about the events taking place at the Little Mountain Housing Project in 2008. What I was observing inspired me to take a closer look at my own documentary practice.

Throughout 2009, as I shot the events at the housing project, I underwent a personal transformation. I changed from an individual who lived on a numbered street in the city of Vancouver, to a member of a community who would become passionately interested in its people, their welfare, and our community's collective future. In addition, as I observed and filmed events at Little Mountain through 2009, I became less interested in the documentary form as an artistic endeavour and more interested in the documentary form as a political tool—a tool that might be used to strengthen the collective power of *my* community.

3. The Evolution of a Hyperlocal Documentary Practice

By the end of 2009 the dramatic arc of the events at the housing project was complete, and I had a choice to make. The protest to "save Little Mountain" had failed; the Little Mountain Housing Project was gone. There existed a documentary to be finished - one about a small group of families at the Little Mountain Housing Project, who, supported by a community and against all odds, fought for and saved one building from demolition. There was, however, a new process evolving: one that could change not only the length of my engagement with this story, but also the depth of my engagement and my role in this community's struggle. The former Housing Project had been vacated and demolished, and yet there was no plan for the redevelopment of the property. There are civic processes that are mandatory in the City of Vancouver, when large urban redevelopments take place. One of the first is the convening of a public process through which a community vision is developed. To do so, the City called for the creation of the Little Mountain Advisory Group, a voluntarily-formed assembly of community members who would consult with city planners, the architect, and the Holborn Group (the developer), on the future redevelopment of the Little Mountain site. The thought occurred to me that I could choose to delay the completion of the full-length documentary about the families who had saved the last remaining building at the Housing Project in order to continue the production process and record the meetings of the Little Mountain Advisory Group. The question of whether to stop or to continue shooting caused me to re-evaluate my engagement with the *Little Mountain Project*. Was my aim to produce a single documentary film based on a year of observations or to continue my involvement with the entire process at Little Mountain? Was my role better defined as an observer or active

participant? I chose the latter, even though it meant putting the completion of the feature documentary on indefinite hold, and on February 3, 2010, I began to record the meetings of the Little Mountain Advisory Group.

In the beginning I was not sure how I would use the footage I was accumulating, but I began to think that the idea of saving the footage for use in a larger documentary film, after the re-development process was over, did not suit my new political agenda. If the footage was going to be of any political use to the community taking part in the process (or other communities looking in on the process), the recordings of the meetings would have to be put on the web as the process was taking place. However, it took me over a year to gain the technical expertise necessary to launch a fully functioning blog site. It was not until July 9, 2011--the twenty-third meeting of the Advisory Committee - that I had the technical competency to live-stream a meeting through Vimeo[15] and onto the Wordpress blog that I had created, *littlemountainproject.com*.

[15] Vimeo, similar to YouTube, is a video sharing website, that allows anyone to upload videos for streaming on the web. At the time that the Little Mountain Blog/Archive was set up, YouTube had a time limit of fifteen minutes per video, which made it inappropriate for web-streaming of Advisory Group meetings, which often lasted up to two hours. Since Vimeo does not have a time limit, it was the better choice for a video-streaming platform.

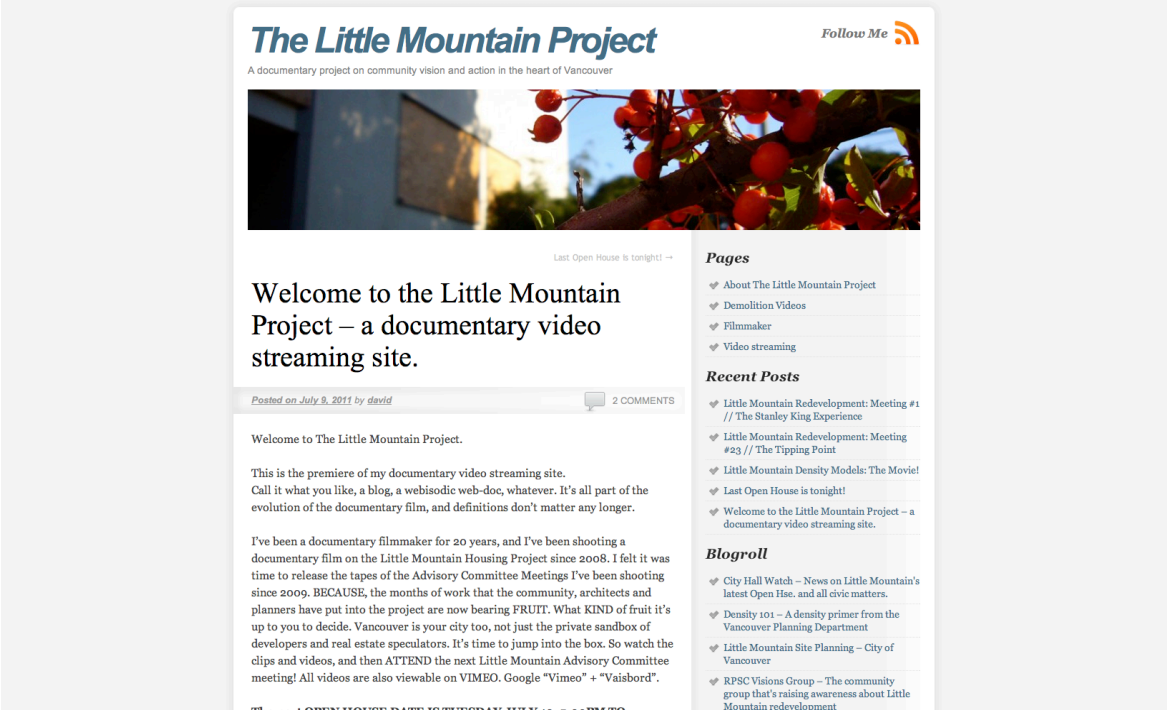

Fig. 2: The launch of the blog page, littlemountainproject.com, July 9, 2011.

3.1 What is Hyperlocal?

The differences between the terms *local* and *hyperlocal,* particularly in connection to documentary filmmaking, must be addressed at this point. While "Six-Block Manifesto" did engage a *local* methodology, it did not constitute a *hyperlocal* documentary practice until it was connected to a dissemination, distribution or exhibition process that was based in the Internet. As long as the filmmaking process was connected to the production of a conventional documentary for standard release (on festival screens, through theatrical distribution, or on television), it would have essentially remained *local* filmmaking. The documentary process for Little Mountain Project only became *hyperlocal* when the community of the Housing Project and the community who surrounded it, who were the subjects of the media production process, were identified as the

first and most important target audience for the completed film - and when I, as a filmmaker, began communicating with them directly through the Internet.

3.2 The Hyperlocal and the Public Sphere

The goal of creating a hyperlocal website is to form a *public* that is both local and virtual. Drawing principally upon the writings of Jürgen Habermas, Nancy Fraser, and Michael Warner, the terms *public sphere, public* and *counterpublic* will be explored as well as how hyperlocal publics can participate in alternative media forms which open up new avenues of communication and new democratic spaces.

Several researchers have attempted to define "hyperlocal." Jan Schaffer defines the hyperlocal as "citizen media," and applies it to a wide range of activity taking place on-line. She writes:

> Citizens are using community sites to bring attention to critical issues or to have their say on growth, crime, jobs, schools and the environment. They also stir up talk about lifestyle, noise, traffic, and who sells decent produce. Their approach is more often impressionistic than systematic, or what journalists would consider finished. (Schaffer 13)

The idea of "having one's say" or "stirring up talk" may seem somewhat banal, but the engagement of citizens in conversation with one another about subjects of mutual interest, whether they be of public or private concern, is the basis of a "public sphere."

Media theorists today are inspired by the ways in which the Internet, and the resulting capacity for an infinite expansion of public dialogue, may re-energize the project of democracy. Philosophers and social scientists look to the emergent hyperlocal project and see within it the

germ of a revitalized public sphere. Every hyperlocal cyber-site forms a *public*, and each public contributes to a new digital public sphere where "many-to-many" communications replace the "one-to-many" communications typified by mass media and industrial journalism. By extension, therefore, are we - those who participate in these online publics - not creating a new public sphere, the size and complexity of which has never been imagined? Media theorist Gene Youngblood states that "[c]onversation is the most powerful of human actions because through it we construct the realities in which we live" (Youngblood 321-322). He argues that uncontrolled conversation among the peoples of the world is the most powerful of human actions because it enables humans to construct shared realities and that - through the Internet's power to disseminate uncontrolled, global human conversation – make it possible to imagine the realization of humankind's ultimate utopian dream: a global democratic public sphere (Youngblood 322).

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jürgen Habermas argues that democracy took shape during the 18th Century, when a new rising class of propertied men, who debated on the subject of their private interests in meeting places such as coffee houses, salons and table societies, began to form (Habermas 30). At that time, the private interests of the bourgeoisie were as much about markets and capital as they were about Enlightenment values such as the "rights of man" (Habermas 104). Habermas writes:

> The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together [sic] as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of

> this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason. (Habermas 27)

The bourgeois public sphere's claim to power was the "rational-critical" debate where superior ideas and arguments prevailed, challenging the principles upholding autocratic rule. Like-minded individuals formed groups, or "publics," around particular sets of ideas, shared their views through "publicity," and used the newly formed media of newspapers and journals to disseminate their ideas. A free press was crucial to the process of rational-critical debate, and "Each person was called upon to be a publicist, a scholar whose writings speak to his public, the world" (Habermas 106). American literary scholar Michael Warner summarizes Habermas' theory and the necessary conditions for the formation of a public sphere, noting that:

> The emergence of the public sphere coincided with the appearance of new media, new markets, new forms of knowledge and new forms of bonds between strangers, which characterized what is known as a public. (Warner CBC)

It is precisely the appearance of new forms of media, markets, knowledge and relationships between strangers in the 18th Century which current theorists like Warner find so tantalizingly similar to our networked 21st Century. Placing digital communications into the context of Habermas' 18th Century public sphere, philosopher and social scientist, James Bohman writes:

> Certainly, globalization and other features of contemporary societies make it at least possible to consider whether democracy is undergoing another great transformation, of the order of the invention of representative democracy and its institutions of voting and parliamentary assemblies in early modern European cities. (Bohman 248)

These new democratic spaces are engaging citizens in debate on the future of their cities. Thus, in order to understand how *The Little Mountain Project* engages a hybrid public in different,

overlapping spheres, it is useful at this point to define what sort of public is formed by the Little Mountain Advisory Committee in both its physical and online manifestations.

3.3 The Little Mountain Advisory Committee is a Counterpublic

How do we define the public that the *Little Mountain Project* addresses? Nancy Fraser, in her paper "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," offers some useful ways of defining publics. Fraser defines sovereign parliaments as *strong publics* - those whose discourse encompasses both "opinion-formation" and "decision-making."[16] Publics whose deliberative practices consist exclusively in opinion-formation and do not also encompass decision-making, are defined as w*eak publics* (Fraser 75). The challenge for weak publics has always been how they are able to seize for themselves a decision-making role in their own lives. That challenge, according to Michael Warner, is the central field of antagonism in the modern world: "between the summoning power of public address and the finite and carefully controlled mechanisms for turning that address into meaningful activity…(that)…will shape their own history" (Warner CBC).

Barred by mechanisms of exclusion from full participation in the public sphere, Fraser argues that members of subordinated social groups [women, the working classes, peoples of color, and gays and lesbians] have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics. Fraser names these alternative publics *subaltern counterpublics* "in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourse, which in turn permit

[16] The first major structural transformation of the public sphere, as conceived by Habermas, was the emergence of parliamentary sovereignty, and sovereign parliaments are strong publics. (Fraser 75)

them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interest, and needs" (Fraser 67). Warner, in his book *Publics and Counterpublics,* argues against the use of the term "subaltern counterpublic" because it is not at all clear that "all counterpublics are composed of people otherwise dominated as subalterns" (Warner, Publics 57). Nevertheless, Warner retains counterpublic as a useful term. For Warner, "A counterpublic, against the background of the public sphere, enables a horizon of opinion and exchange; its exchanges remain distinct from authority and have a critical relation to power" (Warner, Publics 56).

The Little Mountain Advisory Committee most relevant feature, I would argue, is its defiant stance toward authority and power, which makes the term "counterpublic" the most apt; however, there are nuances to the coalition's persona owing to its hybrid composition. The Advisory Committee is principally made up of two neighbourhood groups, the majority of which are homeowners. The first group of homeowners – I will refer to them as the general community group - are concerned about the scale and density of the new project and its impact on their neighbourhood, their views, tower shadows, and property values. The second group of homeowners – I will refer to them as the housing advocacy group - though they share the concerns of the first, are deeply concerned about housing issues in Vancouver. Some have taken an active role in community visioning organizations, forming groups such as the Riley Park South Cambie Visions Group (RPSC) and CALM (Community Advocates for Little Mountain), which responded directly to the evictions at the Housing Project. There is a third community group which is significantly under-represented in the advisory committee – the former residents of the Housing Project. Although this community once comprised almost two

hundred and fifty families, the relocation process scattered this community across Vancouver's Lower Mainland, and very few have the time and personal transportation necessary to attend regularly. As a result, the only consistent representative of this ill-treated community is Ingrid Steenhuisen, one of the last remaining tenants in the last remaining building at Little Mountain - a representation that is far too small to have much political impact.

There are in effect, three sub-groups within this counterpublic which have coalesced into the Little Mountain Advisory Committee, and at times there are tensions within the group around several issues.[17] At the time of the writing this thesis, the committee has managed to find a level of consensus, but consensus is not assured as the process moves toward conclusion. Within this matrix, my work supports a wide range of interests in the process, including those of the City of Vancouver Planning Department, the architect, the developer and the community,[18] though my personal bias leans toward those of the housing advocacy group.

3.4 Questions about the Hyperlocal

Is the creation of a "public" today too easy? Philosopher Daren Barney wonders if the proliferation of communications technologies has a politicizing or depolitizing effect on the public sphere, when, for instance, posting a video of something curious on the Internet can get 10,000 hits (Barney CBC). Is a flash mob political because it breaks convention, or does it

[17] For example issues of public property (whether it is right to sell public land for private development), social housing (numbers of replacement social housing or affordable housing units to be built), heritage value (whether or not to save the last building on the site) and overall density.

[18] Through casual conversation before and after Advisory Committee meetings, city staff and the project architect who have confirmed that the video records have been very useful for review purposes. Joo Kim Tiah, the head of the Holborn Group has read my blog and has spoken to me about it.

depoliticize politics by satisfying an appetite for public engagement without engaging in real politics? If so much of life is made public, does "publicity" lose its value? Barney answers with guarded optimism that, in the appropriation of this technology and in the practice with it, so many people are engaging in digital networks in unforeseen ways—to circulate content and intellectual property, and to communicate their political awareness of the world—that what they are doing must be understood as politically significant, motivated and intentioned (Barney CBC).

4. A Hybrid Strategy within the Public Sphere

The *Little Mountain Project* employs a hybrid strategy consisting of three elements: a Blog/Archive; a Sign Project; and a Social History Web Project. The first element was launched in July 2011; the second element will be launched in May 2012; and the third element will go on-line soon after the Sign Project's launch.

4.1 The Blog and Archive

The Blog/Archive was the first element of the hyperlocal website, *littlemountainproject.com* to go public, and is the core element of the hyperlocal documentary strategy described in this thesis. As previously discussed, my methodology did not constitute a *hyperlocal* documentary practice until it was connected to a dissemination, distribution or exhibition process that was based on the Web. My decision to stream the rushes (the contents of the Advisory Committee meetings) back to the committee and the community prior to any theatrical or festival film release, was a deliberate strategy aimed at informing the process, increasing transparency, and facilitating citizen involvement.

Every meeting of the Little Mountain Community Advisory Committee is recorded and posted to the blog, and in this way the community and general public are invited to watch participatory democracy in action. Every video is accompanied by a short written entry which situates each meeting within the series and highlights details of particular significance. I purposefully reveal my personal bias through the written entries, but the content of each complete meeting is unassailably truthful and unbiased. The meetings are recorded, uploaded to the web, and streamed in their entirety. At littlemountainproject.com audiences/viewers watch

unedited footage, and are encouraged to make up their own minds about the process. Some videos are accompanied by an optional "highlights" clip of two to ten minutes in length. These clips may be played by visitors to the site who want a quick overview of a particular meeting; however, as editors make choices, and choices are based on personal bias, these videos reflect my point of view. As author of the blog, I sign off each entry with the signatures such as "Self-appointed filmmaker in residence" or "neighbour," stressing my dual status as both media-maker and member of the community.

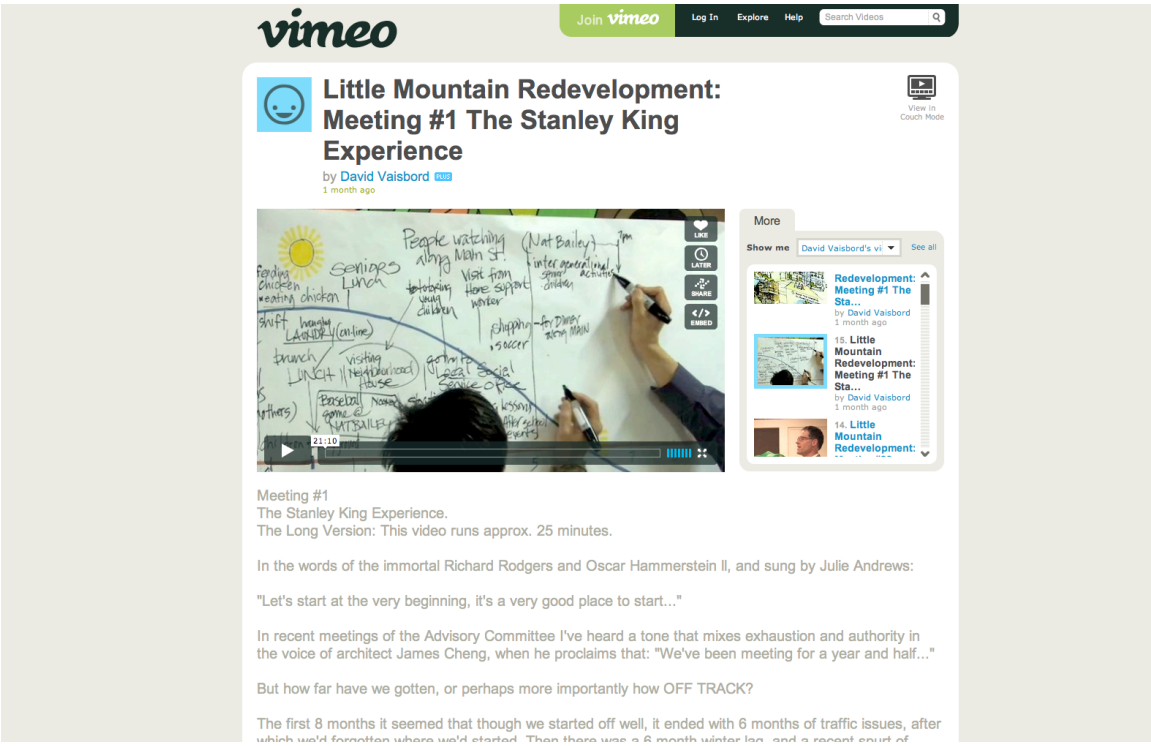

Fig. 3: Vimeo website, littlemountainproject.com, -- Meeting #1.

The Blog/Archive plays a part in the diversification of democratic discourse in Vancouver by contributing to a city-sponsored, community consultation process at Little Mountain. In a recent CBC *Ideas* program on "The Origins of Modern Public," Paul Yachnin,

argues that by subjecting a process such as the Advisory Committee meetings to democratic publicity, there is something more to be gained. He states that:

> [S]elf-consciousness is part of what public life is about. It is not only doing something that is public. It's about knowing that what you are doing can *leak*. An orientation toward futurity. That it can live beyond this moment and live beyond your lifetime. (Yachnin CBC)

The participants tell me that the recording process has deepened their commitment to the consultation process itself. Were it not for the recording process, the entire historical record would be a matter of hearsay, and their participation in it would largely disappear. Their participation is thus validated by the level transparency that the camera brings to the process. There is also some optimism that the element of public scrutiny provided by the camera will have the effect of encouraging (or shaming) Vancouver City Council into embracing a truly open, inclusive and participatory process.

As a discussion tool, the site accepts observations by viewers on the content of the meetings, and encourages reflection on the history of the process and its current direction. Commentaries written on the *littlemountainproject.com* blogsite can be viewed in Appendix I. As an informational and organizational tool, the blog disseminates information on meeting dates and times, encourages participation by the community-at-large in landmark events such as the Open Houses - which have been witnessing record attendance levels. To date, twenty-six meetings have been recorded. While a dozen meetings and Open Houses have been published to the Archive, many still remain to be uploaded. The blog does not limit itself exclusively to Advisory Committee material, but also occasionally posts videos related to issues of social and affordable housing in

Vancouver.[19] Vimeo site records indicate that Advisory Committee recordings have been played nearly one thousand five hundred times since the launch of the site.

4.2 The Sign Project

The Little Mountain Sign Project supports the core political aims of the *Little Mountain Project,* to engage and focus the community on the dialogical process. Walking from sign-to-sign connects tour participants to an active process in the urban realm. Through an embodied experience, there are opportunities to reflect upon the scale of the former housing project, the bleak landscape beyond the fence that separates them from the now empty lot, and their physical relationship to the urban landscape. Here is an opportunity to examine what remains of the Housing Project, its history, its legacy, and its future, with encouragement to join the discussions of the Advisory Committee in person, or through *littlemountainproject.com*. The *Sign Project* is a link between two systems of observation, between the physical act of walking, and the physical act of surfing the web, and the synergy between the two.

The *Sign Project* is a self-guided walking tour around the former housing project, following information on four outdoor panels erected on the North, South, East and West sides of the building site. Each sign illustrates one stage in the Little Mountain's history: the first outlines political actions which led to the Housing Project's construction; the second recollects community life during the Housing Project's heyday; the third describes the politics and protest surrounding the Housing Project's destruction; and the fourth discusses the future of the site, bearing in mind the work of the Little Mountain Advisory Committee, the challenges presented

[19] Such as the mayoralty debate of 2011 between incumbent Gregor Robertson and Susan Anton, or a recent speech by Naomi Klein on re-development issues in Vancouver's downtown east side.

by Vancouver's housing crisis, and the redevelopment opportunities presented by the size and location of the Little Mountain site.

Fig. 4: Early mock-up of Panel Number One of The Sign Project.

The images to appear on the sign-posts will be colour-printed onto four-foot by four-foot weather-resistant, heavy-duty, corrugated plastic product known as "Coroplast." There will be photos, text, and QR codes that appear at the bottom of each sign. The QR codes[20] create direct links to video streaming from the *Little Mountain Project* website, making each sign an

[20] QR codes (an abbreviation for Quick Response) are a form of barcode, which when scanned by a smart phone, creates a direct it to link to a URL.

exhibition platform for a tour participant. Thumbnail images placed next to each QR code (the same size as the QR code itself – not shown in Fig. 4) will illustrate the content of each video. Additional QR codes on the site will link audiences back to the hyperlocal website - *littlemountainproject.com*. Videos will include interviews and film footage connected to the thematic content of each sign. The sign project takes as a given that there are members of the community and the general public who regularly walk, cycle, or drive past the site without understanding its significance. Figure Number 4, for example, tells the story recalled in the "Historical Memory" section of this thesis, about the World War Two veterans who picketed and occupied the former Hotel Vancouver in order to bring attention to a post-war housing crisis in Vancouver.

Fig. 5: Google Earth "phantom live-site" circa 2009.

Another QR code on each sign will link tour participants to Little Mountain's "phantom live-site." The phantom live-site is a 360-degree "Google Street-View" of the Housing Project that was photographed by Google in 2009. The Street-View images show the housing complex not in real-time, but as it was prior to the demolition. The phantom live-site not only travels around the complete perimeter of the former housing complex, but also penetrates to the interior of the complex using the streets which still exist, but now lead nowhere.

Fig.6: Mock-up of Little Mountain Social History Website.

4.3 The Social History Web Project

The Social History Web Project is a component of the *littlemountain.com* project that carries forward social, historical and ethical issues presented in the sign project in a virtual format. It is a collaborative project between myself, and current Little Mountain resident, Ingrid Steenhuisen. The Social History Web Project virtually recreates the Little Mountain Housing Project, serving as a portal to stories of families who grew up together in a collaborative community. Thus, The Social History Web Project celebrates the contributions of residents of the Little Mountain Housing project to the fabric of the city. The Social History Project is a place for families to share memories with one another and to build an on-line community. The Social History Project is also an integral part of the hyperlocal website as it encourages dialogue on the future of social and affordable housing in Vancouver.

Fig. 7: Detail of Little Mountain Social History Website (concept) showing virtual housing block and six story-bubbles situated around it.

Currently under construction, the Social History site will invite participation by former residents of the Housing Project to present and share their stories, photos, videos and commentaries. The site will be designed and produced by graduate students of Emily Carr University, and operated by current resident, Ingrid Steenhuisen, who will maintain the site.

5. Creating Publics through Documentary Film – An Historical Perspective

5.1 The National Film Board's Challenge for Change (CFC) Program

In this section, I draw parallels between my work in the *Little Mountain Project* to the Challenge for Change (CFC) program in order revisit some extraordinary efforts in using film to build community. Very few historical examples of documentary practice come close to the CFC experiment in terms of "breadth and historical vitality or . . .its unique, exemplary record of collaboration among state bureaucrats, artists, community activists, grassroots media organizers, and spectators" (Winton 424). Ezra Winton and Jason Garrison succinctly summarize the goals and achievements of the CFC program in the following way:

> Proactive Canadian policy-makers in the 1960's tried to achieve social transformation through the Challenge for Change /Société Nouvelle (CFC/SN) program, imbuing documentary cinema with radical participatory impulses, at the levels of both production *and* distribution, creating "a revolution in community organizing and development of communications which continues to this day." (Winton 405)

The Little Mountain Project is similar to the CFC in the manner in which it supports a grassroots counterpublic, in order to intensify ongoing political process, through the filmmaking process.

Colin Low was the director of the first CFC project shot on Fogo Island, Newfoundland. The Fogo Island film series consisting of 29 films. Due to severe economic decline Fogo Island faced a bleak future. When Low brought 16mm film and NFB crews into the Fogo settlements, the Federal Government of Canada was planning to resettle the entire island

population to the mainland. Low filmed interviews with different members of each community, screened the rushes back to the community for approval, then to other communities on the island. In such a way, Low created a series of "vérité observational or feedback documents" (Marchessault 358). Low theorized that "the media could be made to function as a collective mirror, enabling communities to view themselves, discover their strengths and bring their ideas to better order" (Marchessault 358). In such a way, community communications were strengthened, and so were the processes involving the building of consensus and advocacy around particular issues (Marchessault 358).

In 1969, employing a similar but more radical process, filmmakers Dorothy Todd Hénault and Bonnie Shier Klein cut the NFB directors and producers entirely out of the picture, preferring to act instead as media educators and facilitators. Hénault and Klein used new video tape recording (VTR) portapack technology, which was so simple to use that community members learned how to use it in a very short space of time.

In "In the Hands of Citizens: A Video Report," Hénault and Klein write that they recognized the value and impact of video portapak technology in the rapidly evolving CFC experiment:

> Very few people have access to the media of communications in our society. [However, the] video tape recording project in VTR St-Jacques is an attempt to extend to its logical conclusion, the conviction that people should participate in shaping their own lives, which means among other things directing and manipulating the tools of modern communications necessary to gaining and exercising that participation. (Hénault 24-25)

When viewed on closed circuit television in the impoverished Montreal neighbourhood of St. Jacques, the community "recognizing their common problems…began to talk about joint solutions. It proved an important and effective method of promoting social change" (http://www.nfb.ca/film/vtr_st_Jacques).

The end result of CFC films is that communities changed. It is not clear if the CFC impact on communities was correlative or causative. But, as both Low, and Hénault and Klein note, CFC interventions intensified (or complemented) community action, supporting processes of engagement already in place. Low notes that when the filmmakers first entered Fogo, the Federal Government had determined that a structured withdrawal from the island was in order, and that fourteen years after he entered the community to produce his CFC project, Fogo Island was one of the healthier communities in Newfoundland (Low 18). Low, however, did not take full credit for the success of the Fogo Island process. As he argues, the filmmakers did not create the community meeting processes. Instead, they:

> *[I]ntensified* them. When we arrived Fogo was on the verge of action in a number of areas . . . by communicating the action trends and by exposing the problems, the consensus was enlarged and intensified. [The Fogo Process] was critically linked to a sustained program of community development efforts of the university and government. (Low qtd. in Wiesner 90)

The same could be said for the more citizen-directed processes inscribed by Hénault and Klein. The St. Jacques neighbourhood in Montreal was already politically active, prior to and during the video-making process. As Hénault notes:

> No amount of video can replace a good community organizer, no amount of video can make fuzzy thinking turn into clear social and political analysis… The important thing to remember is that the media are tools in the social process. They are not the social process in itself. (Hénault qtd. in Weisner 81-82)

Both examples of the CFC experiment strengthened counterpublics, which successfully organized and engaged in political action. Variations on this process were repeated in over 200 CFC films and videos.

The Little Mountain Project exists in a technological world that is vastly different than the one occupied by the CFC in the 1960s. There are a number of questions raised by the CFC that are no longer relevant to a hyperlocal web project. Scott MacKenzie, in *Société Nouvelle: the Alternative Public Sphere,* raises these questions about the CFC:

> What kinds of communities are formed through the processes of image making? What role, in the end, do images play in this process? Can the community survive outside of the highly constructed context of image-making production? (McKenzie 334)

McKenzie finds the answers to these questions to be "not as uplifting as one would have hoped" (MacKenzie 334). The kinds of communities formed by the CFC process were fragile, in that the majority of them could not survive the withdrawal of government funding. Once the image-making technologies, (cameras and crew etc.) and the distribution and exhibition infrastructures (screens and venues such as union halls and community centres) paid for by the National Film Board disappeared, the communities disappeared along with them. MacKenzie notes that:

> Community groups and filmmakers alike should have seen images as a starting point, to bring people together, to debate, and to engage in democratic action. Eventually, the

> image should have fallen away, once the space that the group needed was secured. Yet, to a great extent, this did not happen. Once these images were gone, so were the groups; there was no other infrastructure to maintain the publicness of these alternative publics. (MacKenzie 335)

In contrast to the CFC films and filmmakers, there is no danger that *The Little Mountain Project* will abruptly or tragically cease to exist in the middle of production, owing to a sudden lack of government or corporate sponsorship. Through film, video, and new media technologies, the power to document the world and to distribute moving images to viewers has fallen into the hands of the citizenry. Questions about the "survival of the community" quite simply miss the point, since the Little Mountain on-line community will exist as long as the web site has relevance to the community and this is as it should be. New hyperlocal publics will come into existence as new challenges and community needs arise. The democratic public sphere as an emergent form through new media is flexible, adaptable, and most significantly, free (when it choses to be) from government and corporate interest.[21]

The CFC was an experiment revised the filmmaking process by taking the filmmaking "artist" out of the filmmaking program, and it is fair to say that the tension between the filmmaker as artist and the filmmaker as community facilitator does exist in *The Little Mountain Project*. The community habitually refers to me as the "videographer." On the surface, that title appears to be a significant demotion in status from that of "director," a title which I have assumed on previous film productions. Nevertheless, the concept of a director controlling the actions of the Little Mountain Advisory Committee would be absurd , as my role is to support the community process, not to direct it. The resolution to the dilemma, however, was discovered during the

[21] Web masters can chose at their discretion to accept or reject corporate sponsorship for their sites.

existence of the CFC, when directors/facilitators followed up the participatory process by editing a full-length documentary film, from the raw footage – always with deference to the wishes of the community, and with their input.. For example, projects such as *VTR St. Jacques* were never viewed outside of a community context, others were completed as theatrical documentaries, and traveled nationally and internationally as ambassadors of under-represented Canadian communities, such as the Mohawk nation in *You Are on Indian Land* (1969) (http://www.nfb.ca/film/you_are_on_indian_land).

In the case of *The Little Mountain Project,* the valorization of process, above product, does not necessarily exclude the creation of a final "product" - a complete, full-length documentary film. The developmental process of *The Little Mountain Project* is evolutionary: the Blog and Archive followed the initiation of the recording process; the Sign Project followed the Blog and Archive; the Social History Web Project followed the Sign Project. What comes next? Possibly a full-scale web documentary, perhaps a full-scale documentary film produced for conventional exhibition format, or another site-specific media or installation project. All of the options, in fact, enhance one another. I do not deny the enormous power of documentary cinema to bring audiences to social, political, historical, or environmental awareness. What *The Little Mountain Project* reveals is that the process itself, of gathering images for a larger documentary project, can be particularly important. Processes can become products, and the results that manifest in the course of making documentary processes public can contribute to the outcomes of documentary films. It depends, certainly, on whether the filmmaker sees him or herself as an advocate or observer. Within an advocacy context, the Challenge for Change Program is an inspiration. *The Little Mountain Project* gleans from the experiment of the CFC

seeds of ideas, about the use of film technologies to enhance democratic participation, which have found a new time and a new place more than forty years after the program's termination.

6. Summary: What is the *Little Mountain Project?*

The Little Mountain Project was not conceived with myopic digital enthusiasm. It may not change the world, but it will lead to insights into how communities interact with politically-motivated hyperlocal web sites. No one involved in the project expected instant recognition to follow the first flash of new activist media uploaded to the Internet. The project was seen from the start as a long-term endeavour, one having a possible duration of several years. This is not the *fast* web, where literally anyone with a phone-cam can shoot, edit and upload a film in one day, get 10,000 hits and call themselves a filmmaker; instead, it offers innovation in creating the *slow* web. Eight months after its launch, *littlemountainproject.com* is starting to gather public attention from other internet media sites, such as Open File Vancouver (vancouver.openfile.ca) and City Hall Watch (cityhallwatch.ca). What's more, the strategy appears to be paying off: the hyperlink, *littlemountainproject.com*, is at the top of most Google search lists, and videos in the archive have seen nearly one thousand five hundred plays.

The Little Mountain Project is grassroots political filmmaking that supports a community initiative. In contradistinction with the totalizing power of mainstream industrial media, it focuses attention on the collective values of a small group. It seeks a dialogue with a local audience, not a mass audience. By shifting its attention away from industrial broadcast and commercial-theatre systems of production and distribution, the *Little Mountain Project* explores ways of supporting democratic processes through the use of new media. There remains much more to consider in terms of hyperlocal strategy, particularly on the subject of dissemination. Would it be possible, for instance, to draw the conversation about Little Mountain (through possible collaboration with other communities or counterpublics) into the purview of a wider, possibly national, social

housing debate? At this point in the process, the project is still unfolding, but it can quickly respond to shifts and changes from within and without, as it continues on the journey of making itself public.

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APPENDIX 1: COMMENTARIES

Submitted on 2011/07/10 at 6:51 pm
Great work David. I can't wait to see how things progress after the 2 open houses. Should be interesting. I must say though, in all honesty. I'm getting pretty sick of waiting to move back home. I really wish these (…), would hurry up and get on with it! See you at the next meeting.

Andrew

Submitted on 2011/07/15 at 7:09 pm
Great site David. This allows me to get to the meetings that I'm not able to get to! Looking forward to more videos in the future and to digging more deeply into your site.

C. Pfeifer

Submitted on 2011/07/20 at 2:03 pm
Hi David,

Thanks for this. I went to the link you provided to fill out the form on-line, but found that I couldn't. My choices and comments weren't coming through on the PDF. Any advice?

Good for you for creating this important blog.

For me the principles for Little Mountain redevelopment are clear:1. There must be at least double the number of social housing units in the redevelopment as there were at Little Mountain before its destruction. That is, between 450 and 500 units of social housing at a minimum. Many of those units should be for families. There is a crisis of homelessness in this city that needs to be dealt with now.2. The rest of the units should be affordable rental for families, seniors and young people. Affordable means the rents cannot be more than 1/3 of family income. That family income calculation needs to be tied to the average family income of Vancouver residents. The last thing Vancouver needs is hundreds more million dollar+ condos. We need affordable housing for working class and middle class families.3. The deal with Holborn, which privatizes a large area of prime land that belongs to the people of British Columbia, needs to be scrapped. There is no reason to sell off the land. If government wants to derive a financial benefit from this asset that belongs to all of us, leasing part of the site for rental housing is a much better way to go and will provide income to the people of the province for as long as the leases

last. In addition, privatizing the site means development decisions in the future will be made to satisfy private rather than community priorities and needs.4. Any redevelopment needs to be consistent with the character of the community and the priorities set out by community members in the city's Visioning Process which hundreds of residents have participated in over many years.

The consultation process puts us as residents in a very difficult position, because the key questions are never asked and critical information is never shared. I have attended a number of the public meetings and every time I do I ask the same questions: What is the development going to be? How much is going to be social housing and how much will be affordable for families? There's never a clear answer. Personally I am prepared to support some greater density (as long as it's consistent with the guidelines from the Visioning Process and consistent with the character of the neighbourhood) if that increased density is social housing and affordable family housing, not hundreds of million dollar condos. But none of that information is forthcoming. It appears that the plan is simply to replace the 224 social housing units that were destroyed – with 10 additional social housing units but no additional floor space.

Instead of a discussion about what will be built in the redevelopment (how much social housing, how much affordable rental, how many million dollar condos) we are asked to tell them where to put trees and bike paths.

It appears to me that the deal is stalled anyway. Holborn made its deal with the provincial government when condo prices were going through the roof. Rich Coleman decide that he's rather be a property speculator that a Minister taking care of the housing and homelessness crises. The result of all that is the destruction of a successful community, the needless displacement of hundreds of people, and a huge vacant lot which is likely to stay vacant for many more years.

David Chudnovsky

Submitted on 2011/07/28 at 8:34 am

Hello David. Thanks for all your work and documentaries. Ties everything together very well and, to me, shows the futility and sham status of 'public consultation'.

I think I can already predict the process, and it's sad it's so predictable. Holborn will go to the City with its proposals- 'sandbagged' to include two 14-19 storey towers (already a given in the media). Then, under fake pressure will give way to

8-14 storeys as a compromise (common negotiation method). By then the City can claim they had a 'robust public consultation process' (quoted from the response to opposition to another recent rezoning meeting for some other project). This process is simply the last few years' worth of open houses, where they simply tell you almost nothing. I already see the news media and some politicians saying the process is now being 'held up by the public review process'.

The City is obviously going for way more density- mostly along the Canada Line (three new >200 foot towers at Marine), and everywhere else it can. Probably needed, but also probably for profit for the likes of Holborn, maybe a mix of the two. Whatever the reason, they will double and quadruple height rezoning everywhere they approve a project and not give the public any real say/input. Although they can claim they did since they held so many open houses which were essentially PR campaigns. I agree that we do need to go more dense, maybe 50% higher or even double the height (up to 8 storeys for Little Mountain's case) in some buildings. But 19 storeys? Fourteen storeys?

In the end, if the public actually does hold up any project, they will just blame them for being anti-social housing, or, withhold 'amenities' as in 'if you don't let me build higher, then I can't give you that (water feature, bike lane, day care, etc.)

Anyway- just my rant. Keep up the great blog. I will point people to it for sure since it's the best summary/tracking site of this process. I'm a bit amazed at how many people are unaware of the process to date. I tell my neighbours that this site will include 10-14 storey buildings and they all reply 'they're not allowed to do that'.

Thanks
D. Simpson

Submitted on 2011/07/31 at 1:05 pm
David,

Again, thanks for this excellent service you are doing for our community.

I was out of town so couldn't attend the meeting, but Ned made a critical point. There is an attempt by both Holborn and BC Housing to blackmail the community into accepting a huge increase in density. And that huge increase in density will be million dollar condos, not affordable housing for families. They pretend that the sale price for the land (which nobody except them knows) must pay for supportive housing on the sites around the city in addition to the replacement units at Little Mountain. But at least two things make that threat

unacceptable.

First, as Ned reminded everyone, Coleman has said that he will fund the supportive housing sites even if the Little Mountain deal doesn't go through. Second, why should the Little Mountain community (and the residents of the city) pay in increased density for the fact that Holborn and BC Housing made a stupid and unsustainable deal in 2008?

Developers take risks. That's the justification for their (often ridiculously high) profits. Holborn took a risk when they made the deal to buy the Little Mountain site and now they want us to pay for the fact that their risk didn't work out. It's exactly the same as the bailout of the banks two years ago when the economy was in crisis. It's not our responsibility to bail Holborn out just because they took risks they shouldn't have. That's their responsibility.

Ben Johnson from the city tried to say all of that in his explanation of the numbers – although he was much more circumspect and polite than I am. I think city council and the mayor need to provide more leadership on this issue. Of course they need to be respectful of the province, and of course they have to work with Coleman and BC Housing. And of course Coleman must be threatening them that he will withdraw funding for projects that the city needs for supportive housing. Still, there's need for the city to be much more proactive in both advocating for the Little Mountain community and advocating for much needed social and affordable housing for families, seniors and young people.

The answer here is to start over again. We need a community process that starts from the question: What do we want Little Mountain redevelopment to look like? We can't start from the question: How much density do we need to accept in order for Holborn to be happy with their profit margin?

David, do you know when the next public meeting will be held? I think there should be a major mobilization to get people to attend and refuse to be bullied.

David Chudnovsky

Submitted on 2011/08/05 at 1:15 pm

I had an interesting experience the other day before attending a friend'sdinner party at a condo in the Olympic Village. I explored the shorelinejust west of their building, where there is an experimental garden. In thisgarden at the water's edge they are growing veggies in recycled things,like pallets, burlap sacks, various found objects. It is quite a complete contrast to the Olympic Village condos. It made me think that that is what is missing in these large high-end developments – there is no

sense of some sort of organic tactile relationship with place and community. I think people were trying to get at some of these ideas in the first design process at LittleMountain.I don't know enough about the design and economics of these large urbandevelopments but I wonder if there is a way to create a more vibrantcommunity and allow for a more creative, interactive, tactile relationship toplace. If not, I think (from what I see in the architect's recent drawings) thedevelopment at the Little Mountain site could easily turn out to be a repeatof what exists at the Olympic Village.

Deb

Submitted on 2011/08/05 at 5:31 pm
Your documentation of the little mountain project is fascinating and so important. You have captured the co-design process accurately. Co-design artists work hard to be the hand for the mind's eye of the participants. I observe that the citizens feel an ownership of the images they created. Thank you for continuing to remind people of the designs that emerged that day.

Susan

Submitted on 2012/02/09 at 12:59 pm
Thanks again David for all your documentary work here- great compilation and timeline of this entire process.

I attended the Jan 28th open house (and previous ones), and managed to talk with James Cheng for about 10 minutes. He told me a few interesting things:

-The much higher density and building heights have nothing to do with profit.-The community input/process to date indicated we all wanted these densities/heights.-Arbutus Walk type of densities and heights were never feasible or in the picture.

So just a few things that we get mis- or disinformed about regularly, in my opinion.

There seems to be a common comment from those who attended these and previous open houses. Yes- go higher than 4 storeys if it helps. Yes- put in 4-6 or even 8 storey buildings. If all the density increases helps pay for more social housing (here and elsewhere) and the developer gets their profit then go ahead.

The previous open houses, with multiple proposal models from 1.45FSR to 3.25FSR, seemed to indicate they would go down the middle at something like 2.5FSR and 4-8 storeys. In fact, the

feedback compiled on the City's website shows that most were in favor of 4 storeys only, some 4-6, some 6-8, but little above that. Also, most respondents indicated that, beyond FSR of 2.5, many of the Principles for building variety, neighbourhood transition, views, and sun/shadowing are not met. In spite of this, Holborn comes with an even more dense proposal and claims this is what the people asked for.

City of Vancouver feedback source:

http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/planning/littlemountain/public/Little%20Mountain%20-%20Open%20House%20Feedback%20Summary%20-%20data%20graphs%20-%20July%202011.pdf

Well, the first point about this not being about profit should be a red flag. On that note, the sale price of this transaction (yet to be completed) should be made public, since it will involve major rezoning, and, is the only way to check the figures, which is what Ned Jacobs' group is tasked with doing.

I ask that people follow this site (http://vaisbord.com/blog), and check out Ned Jacobs' and Michael Gellar's blogs/updates from time to time. I think these 3 sources will be the only open and objective sources of information.

Thanks- and keep up the great work!

PS: And thanks for showing video of the architect trying to blame this community process on delaying the social housing tenants' return to their homes. That delay was created by tearing down the buildings prematurely, not by the review process. And the community adamantly wanted this tear down stopped- again documented by your site.

D. Simpson