

WOODWARD'S

Oral History Collection



Interview with:

Penelope Hetherington (PH)

Conducted by Josh Gabert-Doyon (JGD)

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– Penelope Hetherington

JGD: Can I ask you to start by introducing yourself?

PH: Yes, I'm Penelope Hetherington. I live in the Downtown Eastside Gastown area in a housing cooperative. I've lived there since 2002, and before that I was in the West End, chased out by rising rents, but not that sorry to leave.

JGD: Do you want to start by maybe going over what you have here?

PH: The reason I'm here is that I do have a mental and physical archive of stuff in an area that's been really important to me. It's really my affective response to that area of the Downtown that's driven my politics as well, because they're so related. If anyone starts messing with things that you need psycho-geographically, you're angry, right? So, I suppose my engagement was going on in the early 2000s when I was writing for Discorder Magazine. I had a column [Strut, Fret and Flicker], it included cinema and I just picked a few pieces—and thankfully there aren't that many—that are reviews of events that happened there, so I don't know whether you want me to talk about them or just give them to you, Josh.

JGD: Tell me why did you choose these ones?

PH: I chose these ones because they took place in some of the venues which were chased out, but that were in that, what I call transitional space, in areas that have been forsaken by the commercial and even the residential sector but weren't demolished yet. There may or may not have been plans for them but they were allowed to kind of decay. It was a scorched earth thing happening, but so many fantastic galleries and performance spaces existed there that I performed at or attended things in.

This one, um [sound of ruffling paper] is, I don't know if they're chronological, but it probably doesn't matter. [More paper sounds] Ah, this one is Radix Theatre, a piece they did in September 2000, in August actually, *A Strange and Tender Green*. Radix Theatre is much much bigger and more well known now, much more celebrated. This is the slightly earlier days, and they did a piece that I can only describe as a wander through the Church of Pointless Hysteria's space—and that group allowed them to use it. Or rented it to them. That's what this one is, and then another one, um. [More paper sounds] Oh, this is a beauty. This is at Church of Pointless Hysteria, too. In March of 2001, called *Things You Don't Want To Know*, and it was truly harsh, in ever such a good way, in ways that I like. There were things going on outside, like fireworks celebrating international skating championships and already sort of the growing idea that there was something happening that was going to be sweeping all this away in coming years, but that was a really significant event, too. Needless to say, it didn't get reviewed in the Straight or any other place. Last one for you, [paper sounds, pause], this is a space called the Hyperspace. I think I alluded to that in the email to you, not to that by name, but that it was on the 100 block of West Pender, which also in a much lower profile way, was really germane to that whole area. It was part of the 100-block, right? Physically part of the block, and there was a wonderful place there called the Hyperspace, which has kind of a balcony that you could hang over

and dangle from, and it was an amazing place. Naufus Ramirez Figueroa—who has since done post-grad art studies and has something coming up next year [2019] I believe at the Audain—did something here, along with a few other people, human folk. So yes, those are those things that go on in the middle of the night, and you don't know if you're asleep and dreaming, but it doesn't matter, you just want to hit the street, and it takes you to places like that. So few places like that anymore, and that's one of the things that I really mourn. Again, I'm being more aesthetic, psychological than political, but I think that's really important. This last bit, I'm being so analog on you here, but that's probably better. I didn't take a digicam to the last night of Woodsquat. We had to go as witnesses to make sure the police behaved themselves, and in fact they knew about it, and they hung around the sidelines giving people coffee. They were super nice, they didn't do anything. There was no actual take-down, which people expected on that night, so really, we were just—I did a shift in the middle of the night, and I don't think I've been so cold in my life, except for one performing experience. And there were people living out there. You know? Complete respect and awe. Anyway, this is just a picture I photographed of a wall poster, and that's something I found, you know, the residents had their own graffiti.

JGD: I've never actually seen a picture of what the squat was looking like when the people were inside.

PH: There were variations on the squat architecture, so to speak, but that little community was probably more on the East end of the block.

JGD: That's great, these are great images.

PH: Yeah, that one is just a poem, a piece of writing from one of the people, very heartfelt. These were subsequent, 2008 or 6, I didn't realize it was so far in the future after Woodsquat that the dem-

olition happened, the implosion, but these are just things I went out and took. That was a picture of, you know, what did I call this? Eve of Destruction or Implosion, and the Pacific Demolition logo was on there, which I thought was kind of poignant. This is 2003? Late lamented Church of Pointless Hysteria. That is what was their response to the no-entry order, after it was shut down ostensibly for violations and danger, but we had been "living" in there—not living, but spectating and performing there for ages and nobody ever got killed, you know [chuckle]. So, there it is. Their own text.

JGD: It's great.

PH: These ones are just partly from our roof, partly as I wander the streets, sometimes deliberate conflation of images of Woodward's pretty much before the demolition happened. Abjectly up [inaudible] like it knew it was going to die. These are the scorched earth ones after. That was horrible, I mean, there used to be Woodward's there, you know, just this square of dirt.

JGD: Wow, yeah.

PH: And this one, was sometime later, 2011 when Sally-Anne still had their shelter there, and for a metaphorical map, that sign [inaudible].

JGD: Wow.

PH: That's it.

JGD: So this one's super interesting because there's no "W" on top.

PH: I know. I had been to a ceremony of the taking down of the "W". It was on a flatbed truck on Abbott Street between Cordova and Hast-

ings. Absolutely heart-wrenching because there we all were, residents of cooperatives, a lot of people from shelters, people that we knew, and they were standing there, just shivering away watching that “W” laying down on the flatbed, and it was almost like, a whole object-hood thing. I thought of it as being sentient. At least its dignity was preserved because it was lying down and we were all around it. It was almost like a funeral, and this huge truck, like how they used to move houses in Americana photos, just drove it off—and that was the “W”. And of course, they determined that they couldn’t fix it because, I suppose it was more expensive to refurb it, blah blah, and make it shine brightly enough for the condos, but they do have that, as you know, at the entrance. So that was the “W”, lying on its back after it came down. And that’s a bit of crane that’s still left from the “heist”, the hoist.

JGD: Wow, because you don’t see images like this much when they’re not, when that “W” isn’t up in some way.

PH: It’s either not there at all, or the “W” is on it, I know, yeah.

JGD: Super interesting. These are fantastic. So you had mentioned that your kind of relationship with this thing started around the early 90s with going to performances in town.

PH: Exactly, when I got to Vancouver.

JGD: So what were the kind of—there was Church of Pointless Hysteria, which is interesting for one thing because there isn’t a particularly robust archive around it.

PH: Amazing, because if there is, I’ve probably got it. I know Joel, who was one of the founders [laughs]. Yeah, amazing, I can’t believe there isn’t. It’s wonderfully ephemeral.

JGD: I know! Understanding that this space was just so important at that time, and now there's nothing. What were some of the other spaces? I know there were some art spaces around there. What are some other ones that come to mind.

PH: Actually, an undergrad paper I did for somebody was almost like a physical project as well, it was just like, translucent/transparent paper with layers of what had been in various buildings, and I'm relying on memory here, but there had been the Or Gallery, it used to be a place called Parel Taylor and they very cleverly blacked out all the letters except "or" and called the gallery the Or Gallery. And, let's see, the Pitt had a space. Wasn't the 100 block, I think the 300, but that was further up. And there was a place called Ashé Gallery, which was kind of like a voodoo poetry gallery, It hosted a lot of poetry readings, when there was a resurgence in the 90s. There's the Ashé, and then there was Progression Gallery, which was I think at 106 down near where Prado is now, next to what used to be a pawn shop.

Oh, and there was a place where I actually performed and rehearsed a lot in, which was a space that Monstrous Saints Theatre Company had, and that was probably the earliest that I was there, I don't know if it was '93, '94, I had attended a few events earlier in the decade. And that was run by a fellow named Jake and it was open to all communities—gay, straight, whatever—but he himself was an advocate, you know, of the gay community and a lot of the plays there were of that particular school. So there was that and also the Kootenay School of Writing with a space, the floor below us. Crazy enough to think they were there. And also, if I remember correctly, and I'm thinking of all these places that are now shiny new digs, but the Cultural Alliance had a space in that same building as Jake's theatre company. So there was that, and I think it was at 110? I forget the address, but I can get that for you, but it was all in the South side of the

street. The even numbers. And then the layers started to peel back. The Or left, and I think it was Progression that took that space? And then Ashé may have been in the space around 1994, '95. I'm not sure. And then around the corner, Hyperspace was existing around the same time as Progression.

So I can think of 3 venues at any given time that were kind of coinciding and then layers before and after that, but pretty much by 2003, the last holdout was Pointless Hysteria, and everything else had gone, either gone defunct or had gone somewhere else. The galleries seemed to become artist-run spaces and got [inaudible].. I think even Artspeak had something going on there. But that might have been before my time. But one thing too, about Pointless Hysteria—and I didn't experience this—but apparently the history is that it used to be called the At Gallery—ah, At Gallery—and it used to be someplace a little bit further East on either Hastings or Pender, and it was a super, you know, alternative hipster dive. When I got here I had a feeling that I was watching a vapour trail of what had actually been a scene. I had come from London and my culture shock was enormous, but I had a feeling that this place hadn't always been so naff, that there had been something going on here, and there were indeed people that would look at you when you walked into the decent cafes you found, and you would recognize each other from being of that kind of scene, and they would tell me about the places that used to exist. And I think At was a predecessor of Pointless Hysteria, but Joel would probably give you more on that.

JGD: What are some of the really good rehearsals or screenings or parties that you have memories of in these spaces?

PH: Okay, Alex Mackenzie was the founder of the [Vancouver] Underground Film Festival, and there was one, he kept it going at the Blinding Light!! [Cinema] while it was there, but he did the very

first one in the top floor of Pointless Hysteria. I remember I got there at about midnight, it had been going on for about an hour, but it was just hour-after-hour, it was almost—I don't know how long it went. I think it probably closed the place, but that was wonderful because you saw people come in and out, and the filmmakers were there, and the stuff that Alex championed is so good, you know. So there was that, and there was also, well, Strange and Tender Green that I've got a review of in there. That was a super memorable one. That was one of those ones where you felt, again, that you didn't know whether you were awake or not. I remember that I was a little bit drunk but not consciousness-altered in any other way. It was the actual event that did it, which is probably why I learned not to particularly like taking or swallowing anything that could interfere with how good stuff was. I usually rely on where I am and what's going on, right? And that's one great thing about the events there, is that you were already hooped, you know? [chuckle]

JGD: What did you think the politics were around the communities that were frequently in these spaces? Like, around being in the Downtown Eastside, and seeing this kind of slow, disinvestment from the neighbourhood?

PH: The politics were driven by the pending displacement, I think that—had that not been pending—people would have been making more art that doesn't reference politics. They probably would have been less activist if they hadn't felt threatened, which, fair enough, that's what we're feeling. The politics were often referenced in the art that was being made, in an oblique way.

I remember a performance of David Young's when he used to be at Pointless Hysteria, the top deck of it, he did something where he posed in one of his many personae as a construction worker, but he was, as usual, disestablishing something, he was taking it apart. It

obliquely referenced the demolition that was already beginning. There were lots and lots of poetry readings, part of cabaret events that happened in these spaces. There was one in Progression, and a lot of that was pretty entrenched in the political situation. And there was a lot of, at the time it seems naive, but there was a lot of slagging of places like Kits because it wasn't, it was a bit too clean, you know? [chuckles] But people were very conscious of how they liked it in the Downtown Eastside, and I don't see that as being self-congratulatory, it was just a comparative thing, I mean Vancouver was a place that was changing too rapidly, you know?

JGD: The people that were frequenting these spaces, were they coming from the West End like you, or were they mostly coming from the Eastside? What was the...

PH: I never really, I never really knew, or clocked the demographic of where people were coming from because I just assumed that wherever they lived, they were living the sorts of aesthetic that I saw them displaying as audience members and performers. Probably, I don't know, perhaps Mount Pleasant, although that wasn't a thing then, perhaps a lot of people lived in the West End too, before we no longer could afford to do that. It had its own kind of scene, but it didn't actually take place there. It was people who were from there hanging out in other scenes. I would say probably West End and maybe East End, Commercial Drive. Oh yeah, there you go, the Drive was a thing. So there were a lot of people from there.

JGD: So there were people from the Drive, coming along down Hastings, that would have been their...

PH: Their trajectory? Yeah. As for people actually living in the Downtown Eastside, that was a sort of irony that there were never really "scenesters" in the Downtown Eastside outside of the housing

co-op scene. They were either there and they didn't feel they had a choice, they were in SROs, or they had been driven out of their one-bedrooms into housekeeping rooms, they weren't thinking of it as a particularly good thing, there were people in after the gentrification who moved into the condos or the affordable housing. So there were no actual, should I say, non-survival groups of residents there. We were coming from elsewhere until 2002, when I moved into Lore Krill housing co-op.

JGD: Let's go there, because that's an interesting time. That was right around the squat, when the squat was happening. Lore Krill had been around for a few years as a co-op? When did it open?

PH: Actually, no it hadn't. Lore Krill was the name of a woman who founded the Four Sisters Co-op, the first, I believe the first co-op—I might be wrong—in the Downtown Eastside. Her name was Lore Krill. The new co-op that was formed by her partner—guess she was one of the driving forces of getting it going—was given that name. It started in 2002 and had two locations: One, actually a condo development, a townhouse development that the developer decided to abandon because it was a bit too early to be in that area of Chinatown. The government bought it and gave it as one of the locations to Krill. So we've got one on Georgia Street in the 200 block, very close to here, and then another one in the Downtown Eastside, where I live. Though it was founded in 2002, its histories go before that because of the person whose name it takes.

JGD: But you were moving, you were kind of like one of the first people to—

PH: I was one of what they call charter members of the co-op in November of 2002.

JGD: And then around that time there was Woodsquat happening and you had mentioned this last day when you went as an observer. What was your interaction with the space other than on that last day? You must have been passing by it?

PH: Yes, we were. And we would, like a missionary [chuckle], we would bring stuff. You know, if we had a meeting, all that leftover food we would just bring to them. We had warm clothes drying in the laundry room, bring that. And also, just talked street politics with them, you know.

JGD: What was the atmosphere like down there?

PH: It's funny that I should forget that part, the atmosphere. It's hard to say. It was... you felt, everything felt endangered. And as members of a co-op, it was sometimes hard to know whether you were the tail-end of what needed to be honoured and protected or the beginning of the problem, because even though a housing cooperative isn't a condo, we still had the great huge fortune to be in secure, clean, affordable housing, which our neighbours were not, and they had the grace to welcome us to the neighbourhood. So our relationship was great, but it was a very strange position to be in. Now it's not, because the enemy is very clearly all the other stuff around us, which is driving our rents up despite the government's promises, you know.

JGD: What do you remember about the demolition?

PH: Oh, that was horrible. I probably reacted a bit more dramatically to it, but the night before it was like visiting someone on death-row. I took photos—which I can't find, it's sad—but I took photos. That morning we were on the roof, which was, you know, grade A seats for it. And in fact, a lot of professional photographers were on the

roof too, photographing it. The blast, of course, it doesn't happen right away, I don't know—it was like when they blew up the old Georgia building, it didn't happen, and you thought that was the building saying, "No, I don't want to die," but Woodward's did. It went up and it shook so badly that the windows in the buildings across the street blew out and when the dust settled, and we had plaster dust for ages. If it hadn't been from a place we loved so much, we probably would have resented it, but it was all over the gardens. There were people—nobody cheered actually, but photos were being taken, videos were being done. But yeah, it was horrible. I felt horrible. I just went home and back to bed and buried my head.

JGD: That's also strange, the collective experience too, how everyone was on the roof and watching that. Did you, jumping back for a second, when you moved there in the early 90s, did you ever chance go to the department store while it was still open?

PH: Yes, I did, but the very very last days when the staff was complaining, like people who had worked in the lingerie department for 21 years and, "It's the first time I've been able to tell my customers I don't know if these stockings will come in." I thought, "Oh my god, that's so sweet and awful." It was getting trashy, but you felt that it was not the store's fault. The window displays: they started hauling out more tacky ones instead of the more traditional ones—which have ended up at Canada Place. I made lots of notes, which I forgot to bring, about my impressions as I went past there. The last Christmas display was this horrible talking tree, which was just so abjectly tasteless, but I felt really badly for the building, that it had to be done up that way. And then Artropolis [1993], which I remember very very well.

JGD: I was so interested to find out about Artropolis. There are archives too, and it's such an unusual event, but it also seemed mas-

sive. And the attendance numbers were out of this world. What do you remember from Artropolis?

PH: I remember, again, having my usual holistic response to the building, yes, there's something in here and we're with you. It took over two floors, and it used every inch of the first, you know, two floors, and it was art in lots of different mediums, lots of installation work, lots of reference to what was going on. So there was political art. I don't remember much performance, actually, but there were a lot of really beautifully done installations that riffed on the area that they were in. And it was visited by tons of people from out of the country as well, we knew that. I went, I can remember going... I can't remember if there was an admission. I think there was an admission price, but they had like, cheap Thursdays, and after work or after class, whatever I was doing, I would go every single Thursday until I had done everything in it. So that was great. No photos, but Artropolis was beautiful. And you might, I don't know if you know, but there were many Artropolis' that have happened since. I think, 1988. The 88 society... they must have been in 1988, '90 and '93.

JGD: Right, interesting. I'm so interested in this, kind of as a big event, if you think of the way that it's sandwiched between Expo '86 and the Olympics that came later on.

PH: Actually I had never thought of it that way! It was right book-ended by those things, yeah.

JGD: Right, and the fact you had the multiple, recurring, also makes it this kind of—

PH: Overlapping, yeah.

JGD: In a weird way. How do you think people were seeing the city at that time?

PH: It would depend on the people. People who felt like me, it's hard to tell how many they were. I would just go off about things that were important to me with people who felt the same, but I think that many of us saw this as a last stand, a last goodbye, and an incredibly good move on the part of the Artropolis crew, to use that building, it was at the same time a physically intelligent place, because there was so much space, it was also sort of a psycho-geographically important thing to have done because it was occupying a space that wasn't going to last that way, and it was also, just from a very practical social level, doing the right thing that was using space that would otherwise remain empty. That was my feeling about it, and there was art, so what's not to like. But people who came to it, and here I'm not criticizing, I think Artropolis was always well advertised in the mainstream and people thought, "Oh, how interesting to come down to this decaying area, how cool, and we can see an exhibition in what used to be Woodward's, that I used to shop at, that my mom used to shop at, and my grandmother"—however they think about it, so I think they saw it as a heritage experience as well as an art experience. And some may have just thought of it as a cool experience as an art spectator, whatever.

JGD: Do you get the sense that this was—especially for you coming from London—did you feel that Vancouver was trying to find itself as an international city?

PH: Yes, but in the worst possible way. It was already dubbing itself a world city before it deserved it. I would almost say it's a bloated small town, which in a way it still is. It was trying to do the boil-in-a-bag method which it could not do, which you can see that if you've been to any genuinely big cities. So there was one faction,

the ones who were responsible for development doing that, and there were the people who were confident in the art they were making, making art, and I don't know what their aspirations were. It's almost like you don't decide that there's going to be politics in art. You just step back and if it emerges, it emerges, and I think that the artists took that view of what they were doing. If this gets onto the world stage, it's because of the art, not because of the city. Two different attitude sets there.

JGD: You also mentioned that you were finishing up your SFU degree and you were referencing the block in different ways. Tell me a bit about that.

PH: I went back in January of 2007, having done a lot of different things in different places, and it was a great time because I knew exactly what I was interested in, and I opened to stuff I didn't know. I became a total theory-head, which is great. Theory is so useful, it's like a viewing platform for what you already know. And so all my papers were things that were important to me. I never had trouble thinking of a topic or picking a topic, and I would make sure that I would honour the theoretical requirements of the paper, you always could with culture theory and, particularly, with critical theory. So the paper I pdf'd you was actually an article assignment for an English course, and it deals with the 100-block. And there's a paper that I kind of developed from that--and often plagiarized myself a bit--on the psycho-geography of transitional space, which takes it, it doesn't forsake the political, but it takes it into other, more personal affective areas. So that's another one, if you want me to send it to you. Those are the sorts of things I wrote, and then I also did projects where I would fall back on my own response to areas pre- and post- and during development, and track my own psychological reactions and dismay and grieving, in a way. And again, I tracked that through theory. That's what I do.

JGD: One of the periods I'm curious about as well was this period between 2002, which is the end of the squat, and then 2006, where the building is still empty, but the doom has happened already. What were you feeling at that time?

PH: I was feeling that... Two things were happening: the complete burn-off, clearing of the landscape was being allowed to happen in a way that would be criticized in any other district for any other reason. It was as if vacant possession was being allowed to happen. Bed bugs, fires, a lot of drug busts, clear-outs of squatters, buildings being truly, truly uninhabitable, and nobody wanting to use them—but of course not, because they were going to tear them down anyway. That was being allowed to happen so that the excuse could be called regeneration rather than what it really was, gentrification.

So that was happening, the other “was what a fucking waste”. These things could be revitalized in a way that honoured the architecture that had been there for decades or a hundred years, and people could have affordable places to live, but that was an alternative that Vancouver didn't even talk about. At least it pretends to care now, but it didn't even pretend to care then. So that's what the attitude was, and it was real. It was horrible. It was aggravating, but you didn't want to not be there in case something happened while you weren't looking. Weird thing to say, what could you do, but that was interesting you should mention that time because it's just such a good point.

JGD: That was also a run-up to the Olympics, and I know that was really big for the Church of Pointless Hysteria as well, that the Olympics was this antagonistic moment where the city was trying to do something and the community was kind of looking to counter that in some way. Joel was talking a little bit about the political attitude around the Olympics at that time. What was your kind of politics?

PH: Well first of all, just pulling back to the timeline there, I didn't think of there being overlap between the end of Pointless Hysteria as a physical space and the talk of the Olympics. I know, of course, cities get their bids in very early, but in 2003, for instance, I think that's what this is, I don't know that, were they talking about the Olympics? Maybe, I don't know.

JGD: I'm looking to verify this in part. Joel was talking about how Pointless Hysteria was trying to have this anti-Olympics fundraiser and the day after they-

PH: -Yes! Yes!

JGD: -there was eviction notices.

PH: I do remember that, I do remember that. I'm so sorry, yes. It's amazing how far back that goes. Yes, they were. And everybody denied, I even called the City and said, "Is there a connection?" Oh no, of course not, of course Joel thinks there is.

My politics around the Olympics—in fact I had a little piece in Disorder—whilst I have nothing against contests of athletic prowess, I have everything against the Olympic juggernaut, which is two weeks of money-making and the athletes, poor things, just have their moment to shine, but it's not really about them. And of course, all the displacement that happens, all of the aftermath that the City usually has to pick up in terms of debt overruns. I hated it, I demonstrated, I joined the Olympic Resistance Network and was quite active in that, and distributed my own anti-Cultural Olympics flyers and dropped them in the boxes of a lot of galleries and people who should have known better. I was pretty active there, but I forgot all about that thing with Joel! Yes. God.

JGD: It's interesting too because you have the Olympics kind of also as a cultural event, especially in Vancouver where there was this whole attempt to perform some sort of reconciliation, or lead some sort of parade of Indigenous culture in this way—

PH: —Include in order to excuse.

JGD: Right. And then you also have Shane Koyczan, who was speaking at the Olympics.

PH: Oh god, yes yes.

JGD: In trying to figure out the role of culture and artworkers in the history there, I feel like it's really important thinking about the Olympics. But I've had trouble kind of working through it and I was trying to figure out, like, for you, you're opposing it and kind of watching at the same time, Vancouver try to do something cultural. Explain to me a little bit, while the Olympics were actually going on, what were you feeling?

PH: I was uncompromisingly critical. I was pretty pretty rigid. For somebody who's completely non-religious, sometimes I had to laugh at myself and think, "I'm almost evangelistic about this." The Cultural Olympics were actually an arm, a very specific corporate arm of the sports Olympics, and they had their own infrastructure, which was totally congruent and running parallel. It existed, and it basically bribed—and I can bring you some flyers, I didn't know you would want that much close to the present—they bribed cash-strapped arts groups with grants and exposure, and that was what was wrong with the Cultural Olympics. I don't really think that any benefits that have accrued from that have been ideologically beneficial. I think that people often have tried to live that down. And it's fine, but there's no excuse, absolutely no excuse. And I so admire the artists who said

no, and who didn't sign on. I remember, it was VIVO as well—they were on Main Street at the time—they were invited because they were an artist-run centre and it was very great to have those on board. They said no, and what they did was they held—I think it was nightly or several times a week—they had newscasts on what was happening in terms of Olympic resistance instead of being a centre for dissemination of Olympic-related culture. So there were people, and Giorgio Magnanensi as well, I think I'm pronouncing his last name correctly, is quite well-known now, he said no, no thank you. And he didn't really need to. He wasn't so much known in the political realm then. So a lot of people said no. Simon Fraser didn't. Lots of other artists, I won't mention them, they did, they signed on.

JGD: But you saw that there was a lot of power in this refusal...

PH: Certainly there was a lot of power in terms of the respect that they got from people who felt the same but it was a complex situation, not for me, but I saw how I would be looking in the eye people that I normally would have thought as being ideological bedmates, and they were fine with it, and that's where it becomes really difficult when the culture machine and corporate machine basically co-opt the lexicon of resistance and make a lot of people think that it's all okay. It's harder to define who your enemies are. And I think there is sort of a school of thought that says, we shouldn't be thinking in terms of enemies and us and them. You have to, because if you don't, stuff happens that you don't want to happen. You have to be able to define, at any given moment—it could change tomorrow—but at any given moment in time, you have to be able to see what's on the other side of where you're trying to go or not go. That was when that became most apparent to me.

JGD: How do you think about the building today?

PH: Oh! It's a massive sell-out. [chuckle] Yes, there are things that it's trying to do right, and many things are good that happen, but what happened is that I attended most of the meetings that Westbank properties held, and—I was living near as well—the original idea was for one tower to have residential units, much lower than the current highest one. And then there was another meeting and suddenly there are two towers, one is huge. I went and talked to Westbank and said, "How did that happen?" and "Oh, oh all your people down here signed off on it." And I said, "Which people?" and they pointed at Portland Hotel Society, among others. I went over and said, "Did you sign off on this?" They said, "Oh yes, because we got preferential mortgages in the building." There's nothing more to say. There's a lot of buying-off going on, and it didn't turn out the way it should. Jim Green, R.I.P., signed off on a lot of changes because there was going to be I think 100 social housing units instead of 75 or something? I don't know the exact number. I wasn't in that position, so I really can't say. I think I know what I would have done, so it's hard to criticize because they're the ones that got these things going, but the developers got what they wanted, and it wasn't what they originally promised anyway.

JGD: What were these meetings? Community consultations?

PH: No, open houses, where they did the whole thing, boards and, you know, these mind-numbing plaques that you have to read, and, you know, you stay awake and realize there's stuff you see that you need to know. And you sign petitions. Oh, and they always like you to have your piece of paper with your opinion, that they invite. That's where they were.

JGD: These consultation meetings that now get held in the Woodward's atrium.

PH: Absolutely. For 58 West, for example. You're really in the belly of the beast.

JGD: Watching that happen with Westbank, you kind of regarded these as compromises—they were basically compromises in your eyes—that people like PHS¹ and Jim Green were making.

PH: Perhaps with the best will, but... yeah, were making.

JGD: Are there any other moments in the building's history that you kind of interacted with that you find particularly resonant?

PH: Not in terms of events. I mean, Artropolis was a huge one. Last night of Woodsquat was another. Walking by all the time, looking at, photographing, thinking about it was another. I think basically going in there when, quite sadly, there was not a thing I would want to buy anymore because it was becoming so run-down, I would just go in there. It was like a vigil. And those were kind of individual moments, they weren't events really. Oh! And the cafe in the back as well, which you'd enter from Cordova Street, still sold smelly hot dogs and Orange Julius and stuff like that. People who now sit in the coffee bar in Army & Navy eating the same kind of food, although I wouldn't myself, it's just a huge affection for it. It's not condescending, it's just that sort of stuff needs to be protected at all costs. There are things that are parallel to that that I need and I use that should be, too. So yeah.

JGD: Any other remarks or thoughts on Woodward's?

PH: Probably that—and here it's less effective and more practical—is that something had to be done when Woodward's backed out, whatever the reason was, it was no longer a retail space, of course, there

1 Portland Hotel Society

was a moment—I don't know if you remember—in time, it was brief when the new library, which [Moshe] Safdie designed, it's lovely but they were thinking of putting in Woodward's. And I was thinking, "Oh, what a gorgeous, gorgeous transition, the City uses and repurposes its space." Vancouver, unlike Europe, wasn't so cognizant of repurposing. However, there were people here who were, and they said that it would be so expensive to rejig the infrastructure because of all the fiber optics and stuff that was going into modern libraries, and sure, financially it would have cost way more in a sense and I don't deny that, but what a beautiful transition that could have been. It could have been made into affordable housing without even blowing anything up. I mean yes, there would have been a lot of walls knocked out and new ones put in, but I think there wasn't nearly enough of an effort to repurpose that building in some way because there's not as much money to be made. I guess my last thought is that—a practical one.

JGD: This is a question I've been asking mainly activists that worked around Woodsquat, but it seems you were doing tons of work around the Olympics too and leading up to that. Are there any other lessons that you think you learned through Woodward's and Woodsquat and that resistance that would be useful for future opposition?

PH: I think something I alluded to, or more than alluded to a few minutes ago, and that's that resistance and change are more slippery now than they were in say--look at the historical resistance like the 60s or the 30s or whenever. They're more difficult now because you're coming up against people that you have been with in other ways, and in agreement with in other ways, and it's all got to do with the appropriation of the lexicon by people who want to use the vocabulary of resistance to make sure that they're not judged and that they get their way.

This iconic battle for the future is taking a very different shape

now. My lesson is that, for one, you can't trust anything in the way that one probably used to be able to. The other is that we need a new method of resistance, and I think thankfully there are people, colleagues and friends, that hold various para-academic events around town, that seem to feel that way too. I think empowerment comes from being with people like that, talking, having really intelligent, rational discourse, and then going out and fucking shit up. You don't go in a mass that forgets the next day, you fuel yourself with discourse, and then you go out, if necessary, and do physical things. I think that's the only way, the only way to make a mark, whether it works or not, I don't know, but at least you're not manipulated and fooled.



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