

Speaking for a  
Long Time



ADRIENNE L. BURK

# Speaking for a Long Time

Public Space and Social Memory in Vancouver



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# Preface

What does it mean, in contemporary societies, to remember? Historically, the official narration and crafting of memory has belonged to social elites who have used all the mechanisms of public memory – rituals, images and propaganda, and the design and placement of spaces for social engagement – to engineer alignments of individuals with wider social identities. In times of panic, elites have used memory devices to resuscitate heroic pasts or sketch prosperous futures, and in times of stability, to arouse grand ambitions. But now, just as memory crafting itself is shifting under the weight of the near-infinite content afforded by ubiquitous digital technologies, so too are other social fundamentals that have traditionally been used to align individuals within larger social contexts.

For example, consider how, from the ancient village founded on sacred geometries to the megalopolis of contemporary urban sprawl, humans have always deliberately fashioned areas in which to mix, to display, and to enact humanity. Precisely because public spaces have offered this mixing of personal and social realities in plain view, the notion of the self has been largely formed and negotiated in relation to particular *public* spaces: commons, arenas, markets, parks, stadiums, plazas, squares and streets. But with revolutions in printing, transportation and telecommunications, this place-dependent relationship of identity with particular sites has shifted. Now it is unusual to find people anywhere on the earth entirely unaware of other places and peoples; the exclusively face-to-face world of knowing is nearly gone. Instead, individuals

experience varying degrees of access and mobility across and varying spatial identities in many different kinds of public spaces. We interact meaningfully with people and images and ideas born in places we will never walk. The once foundational relationship between place and identity is increasingly unstable.

This is not the only fundamental shift. For decades now, a veritable parade of identities, whether those of nationalisms, diasporas, gender, race, sexuality, (dis)ability or political affiliations, has problematized our understanding of what, if anything, belongs to all, and how. Even the memories of successful collective enterprises (such as the origins of Canadian public health care; the truth commissions of Chile, East Timor and South Africa; the US Civil Rights movement; or the election of Barack Obama) are conventionally summarized in anecdotes of a few extraordinary or charismatic individuals. The more such cultural amnesia about collective action takes hold, the less we take for granted the very idea that individuals are part of a public and the more we hasten the day heralded by Margaret Thatcher's comment, "There is no such thing as society, only individuals."

Even religious affiliations, a possible source of societal integration, have become in recent years an increasingly tense array of strident fundamentalisms and secularisms. Taken together, these foundations for constructing identities – one between place and identity, others designed to help us construct a sense of self within historical and/or moral contexts – appear to have given way. Now, in a world mediated more by streams of decontextualized images, sound-bites, and 24/7 information than by complex discussion and nuanced rituals, it is difficult to construct a contemplative sense of self, and we have also lost opportunities for honing the skills and attitudes necessary for working productively with others.

The question of what to valorize and how to meaningfully remember in these shifting circumstances is provocative. Especially as our political leaders increasingly make public apologies for genocide, or apartheid or internment as a first step in cross-generational reconciliation, and especially as the truly global realities of climate change, food security and financial interconnections grip the peoples of the planet, it becomes ever more pressing to understand how it is that we actually make the societies

in which we live. How do we decide, and mark, what is possible, what is warned against, what is dreamt? How do we use memory meaningfully?

As a geographer, I found myself drawn to examine this question in an empirical way, by contemplating the built spaces of a modern Western city. But I should clarify: critical human geographers theorize spaces as existing not only physically, but imaginatively and representationally as well. And so, when in the spring of 1996 I encountered an unusual civic stalemate in Vancouver, British Columbia, I found a case that suggested rich analytical promise. The stalemate was this: a monument had been conceptualized, funded, designed, argued about and even sited in city plans, yet remained unbuilt. I was intrigued with the idea of a monument existing robustly in the imaginative and representational domains, but blocked from the physical domain.

I began my research and then was startled when, after seven years of delay, there came surprising news: groundbreaking for the monument was imminent. Within days I found out about another monument (just built), and yet another (to be built within a few months), all within walking distance of the first one, and all addressing quite similar issues – violence, in particular violence against women. Even more remarkably, it became apparent that all three monuments had been supported by the collective efforts of the socially stigmatized. Thus, people who were among the least likely to be able to set the terms of a social encounter had nevertheless attempted, and succeeded (in three separate instances), in one of the most difficult acts of cultural marking – to install, with permanence and in full view, a monument that acknowledged disturbing social facts.

Creating markers is not in itself an unusual activity. All types of markers, from the inuksuit of the Arctic to the stone cairns of the Maori, suggest that as a species, humans like to signal each other and telegraph information: “choose this way,” “one died here,” “this place is sacred.” It has been a human impulse to adorn the dramas of life’s passages with such forms. But to make monuments, in this day and age and in one of the most expensive and contested areas of real estate on the continent, is a remarkable enterprise, given how logistically, politically and financially difficult they are to install.

And so to a brief introduction of the monuments themselves, which are in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside: *Marker of Change*, the CRAB

Park boulder, and *Standing with Courage, Strength and Pride*. Despite what the monuments appear to have in common, their differences are also intriguing. Only one is perceived (and then not uniformly) as *of* the neighbourhood; the others feature in quite contested negotiations of ownership. Who is welcomed, and how they are welcomed, in the spaces surrounding the monuments is extraordinarily nuanced. How the monuments are used in the imagery of the neighbourhood, and in the imagery used to address the issue of violence, both for rituals and for memory-making, varies widely. The monuments have all been well received, as attested by the fact they are regularly used, tended and not defaced, but they are not sited in a typical neighbourhood for monuments (nearly all of the dozens of Vancouver's other civic monuments are housed elsewhere).

Vancouver's Downtown Eastside is a contemporary neighbourhood that sits on lands that have been intensely used and inhabited since they emerged 11,000 years ago from glacial retreat. The location's nearness to water influences not only human traffic, but also plant and animal life. These lands have served as destination sites, places of abundance and places of collective social activity – whether as First Nations villages or as rallying points for labour strikes. In contemporary terms, the Downtown Eastside physically includes several neighbourhoods, as well as the streets linking them: Chinatown, Gastown, Strathcona, Victory Square and the Hastings Street Corridor, a total area measuring approximately three kilometres east-west, another two north-south. For those who live in the Downtown Eastside, it is an area known almost entirely by foot. For those who do not, it is most often known as an area one passes through, situated as it is near the downtown business core and bisected by bus connections and wide cross-town traffic corridors.

There are many contradictions in this neighbourhood. Though developers who eye the prime real estate it occupies (it sits directly next to the central business district) try to portray the residents as transient, in fact the Downtown Eastside has until recently been the second most stable neighbourhood in Vancouver, after the elite enclave of Shaughnessy. It is full of artists and people deeply loyal to that area. Traditionally populated (since European contact) by seasonal labourers and the low-waged or unemployed, some contend that the Downtown Eastside

residents have paid rent so regularly and in such amounts over decades that they are entitled to a claim of property (Blomley 2004). But for many decades now, the neighbourhood has been hard hit by numerous changes. In the words of local community historians:

Vancouver's origins are based in [the Downtown Eastside]. Gastown's sawmills helped to spawn a commercial zone along Hastings Street. Eventually, head offices, banks, theatres, hotels and department stores all set up shop there. It was home to the main library ... and City Hall. Hastings Street was also a key transportation hub – a streetcar terminus located at the B.C. Electric Building allowed riders to catch connections to other parts of the city.

In 1958, streetcars stopped running in the area, taking away the daily infusion of pedestrians ... [soon after] many head offices began to follow suit. As a result, traffic to the neighbourhood decreased by almost 10,000 people a day. The gradual loss of low-income housing in other parts of town ... drove more people to the increasingly affordable Downtown Eastside ... by the 1970s, lack of public funding led to the de-institutionalization of thousands of psychiatric patients, who found the Downtown Eastside to be their only affordable housing option.<sup>1</sup>

Demographically, in the most recent figures, the neighbourhood is home to approximately 16,500 people, 67 percent of whom are low-income, two-thirds of whom are men, and as noted, many of whom suffer from mental health disorders.<sup>2</sup> Further, though the Downtown Eastside houses people from around the world, it is widely acknowledged within Canada as having one of the largest off-reserve concentrations of Aboriginal peoples of various First Nations. But one of the most difficult body blows to the neighbourhood began in the late 1980s, when cocaine became widely available, resulting in a downward spiral of negative social consequences. Now, it is possible to qualify as a senior citizen at the age of 45 within the Downtown Eastside because life expectancy is so low. In recognition of the systemic violence, particularly against Aboriginal

1 <http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/planning/dtes/communityhistory.htm>.

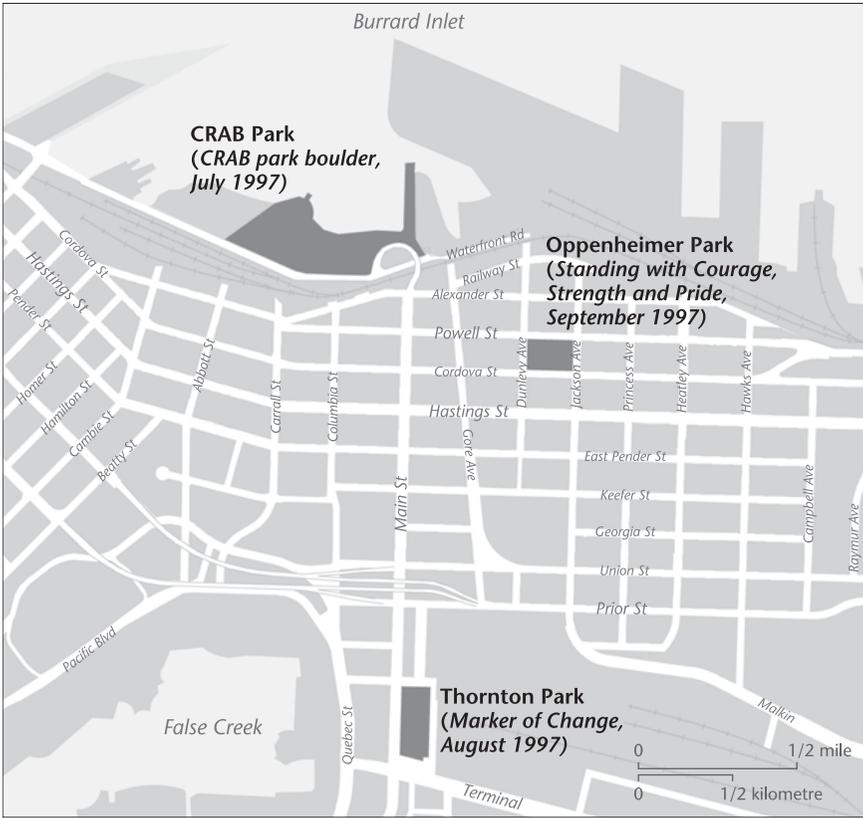
2 <http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/planning/dtes/pdf/2006MR.pdf>.

women of the neighbourhood, there is an annual march through the streets every St. Valentine's Day.

Given the heritage, multicultural, health, crime and property complexities of the Downtown Eastside, in March 2000, the City of Vancouver, the British Columbia government and the Canadian government signed the Vancouver Agreement, a five-year commitment to support sustainable community and social and economic development in the area. This has resulted in another contradiction: though the Downtown Eastside is one of Canada's poorest neighbourhoods, it is also awash with money. Four and a half million dollars came from the Vancouver Agreement alone, but millions more are set aside every year for scores of social services that are clustered in the few blocks of the area. One Canadian Press wire article claimed this amount neared two hundred million dollars/year (cited in Woolford 2001).

In this neighbourhood, the three monuments were installed between July 1997 and June 1998. However, these dates are slightly misleading without context. Though the first monument (*Marker of Change*) was conceptualized in 1990, it took seven years to realize, not least because of the tremendous controversy it generated. The second (the CRAB Park boulder), by way of contrast, was imagined and realized very quickly. And the third (*Standing with Courage, Strength and Pride*) was an idea that nearly came together at least once before it was actually undertaken; work on it began on Labour Day, 1997. Thus, a more accurate way to read the dates of when these monuments became material would place them as follows: the CRAB Park boulder, July 1997; *Marker of Change*, August 1997; *Standing with Courage, Strength and Pride*, September 1997.

In order to tell the stories of these three monuments, and to link them with wider debates, the book follows in three parts. In Part 1, each of the monuments is presented in some detail, drawing on research gathered over four years, including archival research, more than 80 semi-structured and naturalistic interviews with the artists and advocates for each monument, participant observations in neighbourhood meetings and events and analysis of key national, municipal and neighbourhood film and print media, as well as more than six years of neighbourhood artwalks, marches, and encounters at the monument sites themselves. Readers will thus find interspersed in the text archival materials, interview excerpts,



Part of what is so unusual about these three monuments is that they were erected only blocks away from each other and within three years. | *Cartographer: Eric Leinberger*

field-note observations and quotations from published material. The intent in Part 1 is to introduce the origin stories of each monument, so as to highlight the perspectives of its advocates and to introduce its design features, placement, wider social contexts and current usages. It is important to note that the relative weighting of the accounts in Part 1 is unequal. This is due to several factors. Most notably, more advocates were alive and thus available for interview for *Marker of Change*, and the archival sources for the three monuments varied dramatically, from the abundant (for *Marker of Change*) to the nearly non-existent (for the boulder). Also, as will be more fully explained, advocates and constituencies felt very strongly about the role of the media in regards to the monuments, and

in many cases banned photography of key events. I have tried to address this apparent inequality of treatment through the inclusion of other related images and texts of the Downtown Eastside, but I wish to stress that the weightings here do not correlate with the relative importance of the monuments in the social fabric of the neighbourhood, as I expect will become clear in the pages that follow.

Part 2 introduces a broader and more theoretically informed discussion about public space, social memory and monuments, with a particular emphasis on how these intersect within a geographic sensibility. Part 3 returns to the details of the narratives in Part 1 in light of the theoretical discussions of Part 2, and articulates the constellation of factors that permitted such extraordinary and unlikely monuments to manifest. These factors include not only those elements we would think of as essential to effective community organizing, but also a profound engagement with memory, space and place. This section also speaks to what lessons the rest of us can take from these monuments.

For these stories provoke us to discover and create such images within our own communities: as these cases reveal, the difficulty of creating such symbols does not excuse us from taking up the challenge. Championed by the poor, the traumatized, the discarded and the marginalized, the monuments examined here could hardly have had less auspicious beginnings. Their organizers began their efforts without offices, money, public knowledge or sanction. They endured the indifference and even hostility of powerful forces in the form of the media, the police, civic institutions and individuals. Normally in North American individualism-obsessed cultures we ascribe such achievements to the presence of highly charismatic persons with great social capital. But such an analysis diminishes us all. Things are possible collectively that are not possible individually, as these monuments attest. These activities require skills that we do not often see highlighted: those that nurture cooperation, tolerance, trust and collective problem-solving. Today each of these three monuments stands, and is used, honoured, and continuously engaged in civic life. Their installations and ongoing presence contribute, without doubt, to changes on multiple levels: the image of violence as a public rather than private issue, the political landscapes of Canada's legal and

police systems, Vancouver's civic elections, the city's imagined civic identity in the grip of the 2010 Olympics and, specifically, the City's responsibility and accountability to the residents of the Downtown Eastside. I offer this book in acknowledgment and appreciation of these stunning accomplishments to all those who inspired these monuments. May this book make the circle of attention and healing to those *you* honour that much larger, and in turn illuminate for us all what it can mean to actively remember.



# Acknowledgments

I am grateful to so many for examples of what emerged as the key qualities in this work: how to listen across difference, how to be brave enough to live with confusion and how to trust in human decency. I appreciate most of all the many decades of conversations and experiences exploring these things with my family: thank you, Tom, Bob, Pat, Elliott and Darcie for all you teach me, by design as well as by how you live your own lives. For similar help, and also for their thoughtful guidance with the original research, I particularly want to thank Ellen Gee, Dara Culhane, Nick Blomley, Michael Hayes, Sue Ruddick and Bev Pitman. Some periods during this project were especially challenging. For those of you who saw me through to the other side of them, my thanks to Jennifer Hyndman, Laura Carlson, Budd Hall, Sumiko Nishizawa, Lorraine Gibson and Sean Markey. For friendship and support throughout this project and many others, thanks also to Aurian Haller, Damian Collins, Tara Fenwick, Janice Bearg, Chris Gilmour, John LaBrie, Marti Roach, Pat Nicholson, Janet and Anne Ericsson, Ed Taylor, Ed and Lucille Broadbent, Jack O'Dell and Jane Power, and the estimable Harley.

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PART ONE

# ACT

*Marker of Change/À l'aube du changement*

The origins of the first monument can be precisely dated: December 6, 1989. That evening, in Montréal, Québec, a male gunman entered a university classroom, methodically separated the women from the men, and ordered the 51 men to leave. To the women who remained in the room, he said, “You’re women. You’re going to be engineers. You’re all a bunch of feminists. I hate feminists.” Nathalie Provost replied, “Look, we are just women studying engineering.” He shot her in the leg. He shot all the other eight women in the room too, then went floor to floor, shooting in all twenty-three women and four men. Twenty minutes later, thirteen female students and one female office worker were dead, and another thirteen were left injured. The gunman then killed himself. The suicide note in his pocket was quite explicit: “Feminists have ruined my life.” The third page of the note was a hit list of 19 prominent women, including union leaders, journalists and 6 female police officers who had beaten their male colleagues in a game of volleyball a few weeks earlier (Fitterman 1999).

What became known in Canada as the Montréal Massacre was, indisputably, a hate crime. It was directed against women in a university engineering school precisely because they were women in a university engineering school, a professional training environment that the killer felt was inappropriate for women. Canadian reaction was unprecedented: a nationally televised state funeral in Montréal, thousands of minutes of media coverage in every medium and much public soul searching. As the coverage began to focus increasingly on the notoriety

It goes on one at a time,  
it starts when you care  
to act, it starts when you do  
it again and they said no,  
it starts when you say *We*  
and know you who you mean, and each  
day you mean one more.

— Marge Piercy, excerpt from *The Low Road*

of the murderer, and as the female victims' names faded from public memory, a group of very determined women in Vancouver set about to make a national monument.

Though the idea of the monument began as a spontaneous response to the Massacre by a single student, crucial institutional support was given early on by Capilano College in North Vancouver. Although members of the original monument project group indicated to me that probably over the years some 40 women were significantly involved, there were 8 who oversaw the final realization of the monument. Like the original group and most of its members over the years, these eight were all working women of European-Canadian background (though of different national traditions). Many had spent years in, or were currently still working in, front-line services (for example, rape crisis centres, battered women's counselling and related services). They ranged in age from their early twenties to near retirement. What remained consistent from early on until the day of the monument's installation was a commitment to name the murdered women and leave the murderer's name unspoken. The murdered women's names are Geneviève Bergeron, Hélène Colgan, Nathalie Croteau, Barbara Daigneault, Anne-Marie Edward, Maud Haviernick, Maryse Laganière, Maryse Leclair, Anne-Marie Lemay, Sonia Pelletier, Michèle Richard, Annie St-Arneault, Annie Turcotte and Barbara Klucznik Widajewicz.

Support for a monument was widespread but not unproblematic. Not only were there the considerable (and in the beginning, unforeseen) complications of actually commissioning such an object, but there was

also ambivalence about using the monument form. One of the organizers explained: “Feminists particularly criticized the idea of a monument, I think. Quite effectively ... and had quite sophisticated arguments against it ... monuments had a bad rep. Because, I think initially, all the monuments around the World Wars were out of grief. But they don’t look like that to later generations ... I think that they look bad. They look like they’re perpetuating war ... and that they are glorifying war, and so monument making ... monuments were intrinsically a bad way to go.” Yet the idea persisted in part because of the personal experiences and knowledge of the early organizers. One advocate recounted how the idea of a monument took hold for her:

You know, I was in media ... I knew that I needed to do work on violence against women, and I wanted to do something that wasn’t front-line rape crisis. I knew I couldn’t do that any more ... And then ... ironically the massacre happened my first semester, and I didn’t want to do any of the things I was learning. I felt that permanency was a true answer to what happened ... I already knew that millions of women had been murdered, just during the times when the so-called witches were being massacred over those centuries, and I knew that the day-to-day murder had been happening for thousands of years ... of women and children. And I knew about rape and battery, and I’d been on a rape crisis line, and I knew that women were so oppressed that there we were only starting to acknowledge violence against women, really, collectively, and that it hadn’t been going on that long ...

[I was also discovering while] I was at school ... that I had worried so deeply about my sisters. Because not only was I abused, but I had three younger sisters. And that it had just been this torture for me. Like, the ramifications of more than one victim, and, and loving the other people involved, and, and not being able to protect them. I was the oldest daughter and, and I couldn’t protect them. I couldn’t. And it was just this horrible thing that I carry with me ... And this really motivated me. I felt that men use permanency very effectively. You know, we’ve seen them perpetuate real evil through permanency. But we’ve also seen good men try and do something

with permanency that's constructive, in terms of memory ... In terms of remembering bad things, so that they don't happen again ... I really felt that women needed to be memorialized ... There's a whole level of discussion where permanency ... if men use it, it's got to be bad. If it's part of patriarchy, it's got to be bad. But I think that's not true. I thought that there was a way to redeem permanency and use permanency in a constructive way.

As the organizers were to discover, however, the creation of a monument, especially one that involves a national submission and jury process, was an enormously expensive proposition, both in money and in time.

First, beginning in the spring of 1990, a series of meetings was held at Capilano College, now a university college in the city of North Vancouver, where one of the monument's advocates was enrolled. College faculty, students and staff came together, and the women's centre on campus donated office space and equipment. The idea of a monument was present from the beginning, but national reactions to the events in Montréal were still unfolding. For example, a woman who had been in the building in Montréal but who had not been shot undertook to coordinate a memorial that was sensitive to the school and families. Later, she devoted herself to a (largely successful) multi-year campaign to address gun legislation. A filmmaker decided to analyze the media responses to the event so as to underscore how certain voices of authority, such as the CBC, tried to gloss the event as about a "crazed madman" rather than as a crime specifically against women. The New Westminster MP, Dawn Black, began drafting a private member's bill that in 1991 would declare December 6 to be a national day of remembrance, education and action around violence against women. The Capilano College group, though it retained a strong organizing focus, was itself a remarkably fluid entity until 1993:

Anybody could come and go. And that's how we wanted it. At first, you know, you have to do it that way ... And ... we'd have meetings where you'd be completely undone. Like, everything would be in question. "Well, why even do a monument?" And I mean, you're three years into your project. So there [were] no

reference points to even discuss what was still just an idea, which was the idea of a competition, and the idea of a monument ...

For every woman who came in the door and sat ... whether it was 3 meetings or whether it was 30 or 300 meetings. Everybody had to go through their own process. And we allowed that. It, it was very time-consuming.

Initially, the Capilano College student who conceived of this project, Christine (Chris) McDowell, believed the monument should be located in Montréal. However, various factors combined to challenge that thinking. First, the tragedy was still raw in Montréal, making it harder for a project such as this to come together so quickly, a difficulty that some of the parents of the murdered women spoke about eloquently. In addition, many Montréal activists found themselves facing issues of security and the palpable public fear that a similar massacre might happen again. At the same time, Capilano College support for the project was strong. Thus, the decision was made by the advocates to establish a monument in a Vancouver public park. This initiated a cascade of considerations. As Chris McDowell said, “We knew we were breaking the rules. We knew there would be consequences. We just didn’t know what they would be.”

The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation (the Park Board) made it clear that since the petitioners didn’t constitute a “neighbourhood” or “recognized community,” the committee would first have to demonstrate that it did represent a community. This was a slightly surrealistic undertaking: in the national conversation about violence against women, there was only really one side to take; yet despite this, the City of Vancouver still wanted the committee to demonstrate that it spoke for a community of interest. In any event, the petitioners gathered a series of letters from a wide range of people in favour of the project – from MPs to therapists to front-line service workers (see text box on p. 6).

When the Park Board was satisfied that there was sufficient support for the monument project, deliberations about the site itself began. Criteria were developed by the Monument Project Committee and by the Vancouver Park Board and the Vancouver Public Art Committee, as well as the Downtown Eastside community associations and other

Women's Counselling Services of Vancouver	Senator Pat Carney
Audrey McLaughlin, MP, NDP leader	Rosemary Brown, former BC MLA
Hon. Mary Collins, MP, Minister Status of Women	Libby Davies, Vancouver City Councillor
Battered Women's Support Services	James Cormack, Counsellor
Status of Women Committee of the College Institute Educators Association	Joy McPhail, MLA, Vancouver-Hastings
Department of Women's Studies, Simon Fraser University	BC NDP Women's Rights Committee
Svend Robinson, MP, Burnaby-Kingsway	Margaret Birrell, Director BC Coalition of People with Disabilities
South Surrey/White Rock Women's Place	Margaret Mitchell, MP, Vancouver East
Darlene Marzari, MLA, BC Minister Tourism and Culture	Sheila Copps, MP, Hamilton East
	Linda Reid, MLA, Richmond East
	Dawn Black, MP, New Westminister-Burnaby
	Metro Action Committee on Public Violence Against Women

— from a press kit, “What They’re Saying about the Women’s Monument Project”

stakeholders. These criteria included “accessibility, safety and security issues, ambience and permanency.”<sup>1</sup> More than 40 sites were considered and 24 were thoroughly evaluated (see text box on p. 7). There was a strong interest by the Monument Project Committee in the new Science World park, and local community associations expressed support for this location; however, the Strathcona Community Association recommended Thornton Park as preferable because of its working-class roots and accessibility to working people.

Today, Thornton Park is 3.8 acres of Edwardian-style plantings and pathways laid out on the doorstep of the Canadian National Railroad terminus, offering a sort of gateway glimpse of Vancouver. Indeed, it was designed as a city park when Vancouver was chosen over previous favourite Prince Rupert to become the west coast destination for the

1 Simon Fraser University Archives, Women's Monument Fonds, F-101-5-0-10, “Why Thornton Park?” Part of a package referred to as “Sept. 30, 1997 Summary of Project Major Events, People, Aspects and Issues, handed out to media.”

*Marker of Change* sites considered (as of January 9, 1993)<sup>2</sup>

BC Hydro Plaza – hydro executive contacted WMP “shelter good for rallies”

Queen Elizabeth Park – no washroom, convenience, food, lighting, transit and telephone

Nat Bailey Stadium – open, plain, poor access to transit, phone or seating

Nelson Park (Thurlow, Nelson, Comox)

Barclay Heritage Square (Barclay and Broughton)

English Bay, Sunset Beach – overused, area is swamped, several pieces of art

Alexandra Park (Bidwell, Burnaby, Beach), English Bay Beach

Charleston Park (near False Creek 2nd Ave.)

Sutcliffe Park (near False Creek 2nd Ave.)

Granville Island (where?)

UBC, Capilano College – INACCESSIBLE, CANCELLED

Plaza of Nations

EXPO site in general (where?)

Trout Lake (John Hendry Park)

Thornton Park

Strathcona Park (Venables between Main and Clark) – very dangerous to women, limited green park space in area – CANCELLED

new park next to Science World (Creekside) – science theme ties in women, engineering, science

Pan Pacific Plaza

Plaza at Hastings and Hornby, North Side

Plaza at 666 Burrard (behind Christ Church Cathedral)

Robson Square – CANCELLED

new library – library and director “no controversial art here,” not ready until ‘95 a problem

Langara – too restrictive for access, convenience, parking, pedestrian

Grandview Park – CANCELLED, max. space being used

national railroad. But the park’s earlier incarnations are revealing. For some 3,000 years the area was an intensely fertile wetland, a one-mile tidal fish trap of sole, perch, sturgeon, flounder, perch and smelt. A trail wound from the south Fraser River (today’s New Westminster) through forests dense with fir, hemlock, crabapple and thousand-year-old cedars, all the way to Burrard Inlet. The clearing that would later become the park was a stark contrast: “The land is low, covered with second growth,

2 Simon Fraser University Archives, Women’s Monument Fonds, F-101-6, “Site Choices.”



*Marker of Change* | Note the understated way the monument sits alongside other benches | *Photo: Greg Ehlers*

old stumps, wet and swampy, sometimes flooded at high tide. In season there were flocks of water fowl, mallards, butterballs, herons, loons, all very wild, on False Creek waters. The Squamish lived at their village at Snauq and sometimes passed up the creek, and, at high tide only, paddled through to Burrard Inlet – about Campbell Avenue.”<sup>3</sup>

The Squamish people referred to the land here as “Khiwah’esks” (two points exactly opposite) because for thousands of years the land nearly touched over False Creek at the site of the present-day rail station; beyond, where the rail yards now lie (and near where the 2010 Olympics athletes’ village is built), lay a large lagoon. The first Europeans to the area built bridge after bridge over the waters at this point, each bridge collapsing in turn. In the 1880s, when it was decided that Vancouver would be the end of the rail line, the CPR and the City of Vancouver began to reshape the area in earnest. By 1918, the Main Street hill had been levelled three times, and the more than 27 acres of lagoon had been filled with 20,000 cubic yards of soil brought from Chilliwack (100 kilometres east of Vancouver), a feat engineered and financed by Henry Thornton, then General Manager of Canadian National Railways. The Park Board Annual Report of 1925 called the development “one of the most important under-

3 City of Vancouver Archives, DIST pg. 93 N91, caption on 1898 photograph.

takings of recent years ... Within a year from the commencement of operations the whole area was transformed into a park of lawns, flower-beds, trees and shrubs, with cement walks and an ornamental lighting system. An expenditure of \$30,000.00 was involved.”<sup>4</sup>

In 1923, the park was formally dedicated and named after Thornton. But in 1928 the Canadian National Railroad and the BC government swapped land, and the ownership of Thornton Park became legally and imaginatively ambiguous. In 1934, the City voted it the most desirable site for the new city hall, but for unexplained reasons, the city hall was built instead at its present location, about 2 kilometres south. When Thornton died, a plaque honouring him was mounted inside the rail station by the locals of 17 brotherhoods of organized labour. The boosters still preferred to focus on Thornton Park’s aesthetics, comparing them favourably with those across the continent.

Organized labour continued its presence in Thornton Park by using it as a site for rallies in the 1940s, decorating a 22-foot-high pylon with murals against fascism. In 1947, a long correspondence began, citing the original purchase agreements from 1924 about the proportions of support for maintenance that were to be borne by the Park Board and the railroad. Except for this episodic correspondence, which details diminishing interest by both the Canadian National Railroad and the City in maintaining the landscaping, the official City of Vancouver Archives has no record of activity about the park during the remainder of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, and much of the 1970s, save for a notice of an anti-Vietnam War rally held there.

During these years, however, much was changing in the neighbourhood around Thornton Park. Vancouver is a relatively new city, having incorporated in 1886. Like many cities, it was largely founded on the systematic dispossession of the indigenous communities and re-populated by migrant workers who immigrated or were brought in to build a frontier resource economy. Not inconsequentially, these same residents proved tenacious over the following decades in resisting their own displacement: “[the area’s] proximity to the industrial waterfront and the large numbers of industrial workers who lived in and moved through the neighbourhood

4 City of Vancouver Archives, PDS89, Thornton Park, Park Board Annual Report 1925, 27.

“No railway station entrance in the United States or Canada could compete with Thornton Park, the beauty spot in front of the station.”

— “Park Praised,” 1940<sup>5</sup>

meant that it was a key site of labour militance for much of the century. The supportive community in which this kind of oppositional culture thrived provided a vital legacy for the mobilization to improve living conditions that began in the late 1960s and early 1970s” (Sommers 2002).

Two key events fostered the activism of the 1960s and 1970s. Via Herculean efforts spearheaded by the Downtown Eastside Residents Association to redefine the area in popular perception as an actual *community* rather than a skid row site of transients, and through a coalition of community groups and individuals that successfully rejected a freeway construction that would have completely reconfigured the city centre, the area began to improve in terms of housing, health, parks and recreation. In other respects, however, this part of the city was getting markedly more dangerous. Beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, sex trade workers, who were often Aboriginal and often addicts living and working in the Downtown Eastside, were found murdered or were reported “missing.”

Moreover, the frenzy created around Expo '86 targeted precisely this area of the city, disrupting it further. More than a thousand residents were evicted from their homes in the Downtown Eastside. Thornton Park was developed as a presentation space for the city: its bordering streets were widened, and both Science World and the Main Street Sky-Train Station were built. By the year of the Montréal Massacre, Thornton Park was back in the City's sightlines as an underused public space. When the idea of the monument coalesced, one of the organizers recalled a Park Board commissioner saying: “[it] would be good to have a memorial in that park ... [as] a neglected park [the monument] would create a focal point ... the park ... wasn't being used. It was unsafe for people. And it was in ... a space that was ... it's sort of rundown hotels around it, and

5 City of Vancouver Archives, MSS54, Vol. 19, Thornton Park, unidentified newspaper press clipping, “Park Praised,” May 11, 1940.

people never used it. And if we had the monument there, it would ... make the space more public and useable.”

As mentioned above, more than 40 sites were considered for the monument over a period of a year, and the manner of those considerations was quite inventive, including visits to the sites at all times of day and night, picnics and rituals at the sites and observing who came and went through the spaces. There was an interest from the beginning in high visibility for the monument and in completing its installation rather than having it lost in years of planning because a site was particularly contentious. Of course, the organizers also wanted to include rather than antagonize the public and realized that the distribution of parks (and therefore of public play space for children) was markedly lower in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside than in other areas of the city. The chair of the Public Art Committee of the Park Board, Bryan Newson, suggested that two constituencies needed to approve a possible location. The organizers took his advice, and noted in their minutes of August 25, 1992, to “convince a *broad* and a *local* community. For example, [for] the two parks around the Main St. SkyTrain Station there’s little to worry about in terms of an immediate local community, but lots in a larger context (but he doesn’t know how to get that response).”

In the end, the committee selected Thornton Park because it was accessible and fairly well lit, it was equipped with phones and there were workplaces nearby (should a woman need help), and it was unlikely to be sold for development due to its symbolic value and, hence, possible protection as a heritage park. A further consideration was to prove profoundly important: “positioning the Monument near the Downtown Eastside – where many women are murdered – will help draw much needed attention to this reality.”<sup>6</sup>

Once the site was chosen, it was possible for the committee to put together the design criteria and start the process of sending out notices for the national competition. There were two certainties and one near-certainty at this point: the inscription, the necessity of including the

6 Simon Fraser University Archives, Women’s Monument Fonds, F-101-5-0-10, “Why Thornton Park?” Part of a package referred to as “Sept. 30, 1997 Summary of Project Major Events, People, Aspects and Issues, handed out to media.”

14 women's names, and the site. The Park Board reserved for itself an "out" as far as the monument's location was concerned. The arts consultant for the board's recreation department, Susan Gordon, noted, "the planned pathways, the plaque, and the as-yet-undetermined size of the structure make it hard to determine if [the monument] adheres to park board guidelines for permission to situate on public land ... 'I don't necessarily see it as being simple. I don't foresee instant approval'" (Dunphy 1992).

Indeed, the committee was already running headlong into some harsh resistance that it had not anticipated – resistance from those it had imagined might be supportive. Given the realities of the need for front-line services and their pathetically low levels of funding, a tremendous amount of discussion was generated about the value of campaigning and organizing for a monument rather than, for example, fundraising to aid direct services. One of the organizers, Krista, recalled: "People were saying, 'Don't you get it? Like, you have no idea what it's like, what the need is.'" One advocate mused that such stances were particularly ironic, given that it was precisely *because* so many of the committee members had worked or were currently working within direct services that they felt drawn to the originality, "hope and proactivity" of the monument project.

One of the most articulate and painful letters the committee received came from Vancouver's Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW), a rape crisis centre that had sponsored the December 6, 1991, vigil at which it had invited committee representatives to speak. This letter, which arrived six months after the vigil, is two single-spaced pages; it is only excerpted here. First, the letter notes the "error" of using a monument as a form: "We feel that in proposing to build this monument to the 14 women murdered at L'Ecole Polytechnique, you have succeeded in perpetuating the myths of the mainstream media, by romanticizing their deaths and setting up these women as martyrs. To erect a monument is, in our opinion, to buy into patriarchal models of glorification of the dead. We do not believe that such endeavours do anything to further feminist goals of ending violence against women."<sup>7</sup>

7 Simon Fraser University Archives, Women's Monument Fonds, F-101-2-0-1, letter received from WAVAW, June 10, 1992.

Second, there is the claim about money:

We understand that your committee has set a goal of \$300,000 for erecting this monument. This is sufficient money to maintain a paid staff of 5.25 women and provide a year's worth of rape crisis services to Greater Vancouver women who have been sexually assaulted, including a 24 hour crisis line, support groups, one-to-one counselling and [accompanying] services to police, court and hospital. To spend this money on a concrete block seems ludicrous to us ... As women we will not soon forget the 14 women ... nor will we ignore the countless other women who were murdered, abused and assaulted by men on December 6th or any other day. We do not need a monument for this. Our everyday lives as women serve as reminder enough of the threat of male violence ... we do not believe that the work you are currently doing is feminist. We suggest that you reconsider your goals and your means to achieving these goals. In spite of having invited you to speak at our Vigil, WAVAW/RCC does not support the work you are doing ... We ask that any funds collected by your committee at the December 6th, 1991 Vigil be donated to WAVAW and/or returned to the donors.”<sup>8</sup>

WAVAW was invited to meet face to face with the committee to discuss points of difference, but the organization never responded; neither were the donations collected by the Monument Project Committee returned to the donors or donated to WAVAW. It was extremely painful, and consistent throughout all the years of the project's fundraising, that, as Janine, one of the members of the monument committee, put it, a scarcity mentality appeared to dominate “around resources. And what's available. And that somehow ... there's a small bit of money out there to, to help us survive, and, and ... we just said, ‘No. We don't. We don't buy that.’ There are billions and trillions of dollars out there ... for guys to support their sporting events ... You know. I mean, it's bullshit.”

But in a way, the monument advocates did have a sense of playing on a larger stage: the women had a keen appreciation for the fact that the

8 Simon Fraser University Archives, Women's Monument Fonds, F-101-2-0-1, letter received from WAVAW, June 10, 1992.

spectacular nature of the Montréal Massacre and its national coverage had the potential to open doors to fundraising and awareness. From the inception of the project, all fundraising events were intentionally co-organized with other, direct-service agencies so as to support both the monument and front-line organizations. There was also an intentional strategy, because the project was art-based, *not* to compete for direct-service funding. The fundraising for the project was always envisaged as coming from donors who were giving “to the issue of violence against women for the first time;” such donations would include artistic grants from the Canada Council and funds from architectural and engineering companies.

Two other members of the committee commented that what was most troubling about the presumption of funding scarcity was how it was used to obscure both the issue of violence against women and the possibility of an alternative approach:

Part of the, part of the pain of doing this project, when we were criticized, is that people didn't want to see that we were ... all working class or student ... class, or welfare class, or ... you know, people earning under 20 grand, mostly ... a year. They didn't want to see where it was really coming from, this thing. That it was coming from working, or student, or non-working women. That it was coming from a complete grass-roots thing. That every single cent had to be fundraised. That it was being fundraised by people who had no connections to power and money. Period. And so the wonder of it ... was always not seen. Just like the women themselves weren't seen. They were always called middle class, white privileged women who happened to get shot, or something. And again, that wasn't true who they were, either. About three came from privileged families, out of the fourteen, as far as I can tell from talking to the families. So it, it just doesn't make sense to me. What happened to us. And yet, that was how we were dismissed. And how we were objectified, and kind of nullified by people who were against it. But then, there's all these people who've perceived something closer to the truth, and responded extremely openheartedly. You know our

letters, are, like this [hands wide apart] ... like, they're not in the middle usually, right? And the phone calls were the same way. So it was ... It was very strange. But it just shows you part of how people dismiss each other. And objectify each other. And part of it is a class thing. And in our case, it was to call us upper class, and 'screw you.' Or to see us as upper middle class, and ... 'screw you.'

Even years later, when committee members went out to ask for support or to provide education about the monument, they were frequently confronted by arguments that inaccurately cast the project as against direct services. Once they went to a local community college with a presentation tailored specifically for a college audience. In the end, the self-identified feminists on the college committee turned down their donation request, giving the \$500 requested by the monument group to a front-line service instead, while at the same time criticizing the monument project as “not grass-roots” enough. Committee representatives told me that although they were very frustrated by this turn of events, “we applauded them for donating the money, because you know that was the first time they'd done that. [But I thought] You know, you sure are high and mighty for doing the right thing, but why don't you do that every year?” One member reflected that such exchanges “were not about the truth ... The point was discrediting [the project]. It wasn't about truth. And that was what's so painful ... that's when you realize you're really, you know, you're in a war of words that's not about truth between you and that person. But, but then you use it to try and educate other people because you do care about the truth.”

In November 1992, the Monument Project Committee and the Battered Women's Support Services (BWSS) co-sponsored a fundraising event, *Voices for Change*, with half the proceeds going to BWSS. In addition, all records from the event, including the names, addresses and phone numbers of the ticket purchasers, were made available to the BWSS. The committee had, since its inception, claimed it would do its fundraising in this way, to enlarge the pool of funds, increase education about and deepen the social awareness surrounding issues of violence against women. So the assaults – about principle, about feminist practice, about means,

about goals – cut deeply across what once seemed a natural constituency of support. As one reporter opined, “it seems strange to me that women’s groups, who would undoubtedly argue that violence is fostered by a society that condones it in thousands of small ways, don’t seem to believe that the reverse must be true – that violence can be prevented by a society that condemns it in thousands of small ways” (Bula 1992).

As if there weren’t enough concerns for the Monument Project Committee, there was also the issue of how, and whether, to invite men to work on this project. The committee had made a decision early on that if men wanted to participate and help out, fundraise and promote the project, they would be welcome. In fact, right at the beginning, Bill Tieleman, a journalist and political advisor to the New Democratic Party at the time, volunteered to help the committee write a direct mail fundraising letter, and indeed his efforts were used as the working draft for the first letter that went out. This fit with the initial decisions about how men could be involved, as advisors and as resource people. One committee member clarified the terms of involvement: “But, but [men] would never be invited to, to be an actual committee member. They wouldn’t be a part of making any formal decisions about the monument.”

Even with all the organizational incoherence and the setbacks in support, by the beginning of 1993, the project seemed more clearly on its way. Two December 6 anniversaries had come and gone. December 6 had been dedicated by Parliament as a national day of commemoration and education. Cate Jones, a woman with considerable fundraising experience, had been hired by the committee and had consolidated a campaign strategy for fundraising from foundations, unions, organizations and individuals. The committee was meeting regularly; city space had been (almost entirely) assured; the parents of the 14 women had agreed to support the project; and in spite of all the apparent rifts, still the project and other cross-country events had combined to keep the issue of violence against women in the public eye. The committee had begun to raise money in earnest, and it seemed that the end of the project was possible to imagine.

But there was still the problem of how to reconcile the project with its location. In a letter written on May 20, 1993, Chris McDowell wrote to the other members:

I've been in the situation of "explaining" to women of the Downtown Eastside why we are naming the 14 women murdered in Montreal and none of the women murdered here. What I've said is the 14 women symbolize the importance of remembering the loss of individual women ... they say that that is not true, the 14 don't mean that to them and we should name Downtown Eastside women. The problems are obvious really ... the class and race differences get in the way of [the Montréal women] symbolizing poor women, women of colour, et cetera.

Lately, I agree with them. When this project started we did not know that the 14 women would be remembered so well. We did not then know that so many people in Canada would respond so strongly to those murders.<sup>9</sup>

And then, two months later, another surprise: On July 19, 1993, the Park Board approved the monument in principle and officially named Thornton Park as its selected site. Design specifications for the monument were clarified, using much of the language that had, up until this point, been used in fundraising letters and letters soliciting statements of support to demonstrate that, indeed, there was a "community of interest" in the monument.

For some reason, however, the reaction to this news (though the details of the monument project had long been in circulation) galvanized vicious resistance. This resistance took several forms, and involved for the first time many new, articulate and socially prominent people who declared themselves publicly against the project. Most of them noted the inscription:

For all the women murdered by men  
For women of all countries, all classes, all ages, all colours.  
In memory and in grief  
We, their sisters and brothers, remember,  
and work for a better world.

9 Simon Fraser University Archives, Women's Monument Fonds, F-101-2-0-2, letter from Chris McDowell to Committee members, May 20, 1993.

The phrase “murdered by men” is, of course, explicit. True, the texts of most memorials don’t cast blame, but to be unspecific about the male violence in violence against women was, in the eyes of the Monument Project Committee, to be unacceptably ambiguous. There had been no ambiguity for the 14 Montréal women – they’d been murdered by a man *because* they were women. Their murderer had even systematically separated the men from the women so as to ensure he killed only the women (although later he did also injure a number of men). He left a note explaining his reasoning, and listed several other women whom he believed deserved to die. However, just as in the original debate following the Massacre, the right to speak explicitly about the crime was, again and again, assaulted. A city councillor said he was “offended” by the wording; another called the inscription “severe and misleading.” Apparently it was okay to say that women were being murdered, but not who was doing it.

The arguments against the monument presented in letters to the editor, in opinion pieces and in letters to the committee were circular, relentless and very, very familiar. The proposed wording of the monument was refuted as spurious: “There is no quantification of ‘all the women murdered by men.’ It is in keeping with the recent report from the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women. This is the one with the poisonous, unqualified opinion that virtually every woman in Canada has been abused. Yeah, sure for \$10 million, we get a ‘survey’ that conveniently reinforces every stereotype of male behaviour” (Rayner 1993). There was an attempt to deny overwhelming empirical evidence: “And in this era of gender equality and understanding, why are we taking a step backward and stereotyping all women murderers as men?” (Jang 1993). Some tried to change the subject: “The point, of course, is this: We have established as acceptable in this country that while all sorts of moral and legal barriers protect the ‘disadvantaged’ from criticism, slander and abuse of any kind, the supposed ‘advantaged’ (meaning white males who earn a living and aren’t gay) may be maligned at will” (Byfield 1993). And there was confusion about the prevalence of violence in terms of gender: “Men are five times as likely to end up dead as a result of violence ... Amazing, isn’t it, that people most often victimized by violence are men and the violence is most often inflicted by other men. If men kill men, maybe it doesn’t

have anything to do with gender ... Gender categories prove themselves as irrelevant as racial ones under even the slightest inspection” (Lett 1993).

But more worryingly, there was inflammatory ranting:

The radical feminists have disgracefully diminished the slain women by expropriating their deaths for their own ideological purposes, while at the same time rehabilitating their killer and absolving him from his awful deed by insisting that after all he was just like other men. They happily let one man off the hook the better to hang the rest ... The man-haters know exactly what they are doing. They, and the larger movement of which they're a part, are not liberals. They intend to re-define common sense. They hate Western Christianity. They hate Western capitalism. They hate Western individualism. They think in groups. The state is their pal ... It's the wider public that doesn't know what it's doing. It's disarmed. It's confused ... It loses every case against the moves of the sexual Stalinists. (Lautens 1993)

There were dozens and dozens of such pieces in local newspapers over a four-week period. As a direct result of this kind of response in the press, phone calls began to flood the Park Board office, and as of July 26, telephone support was 30:1 *against* the monument project. Phone calls into the monument office – both for and against the monument project – had also increased in number. The committee was notified that several previous donors and supporters were “getting cold feet”; at the same time, however, unsolicited donations had increased – more money had come in since July 19 than in the rest of the year in total. But other events that month also affected public perceptions: one of the organizers was called at her home and personally threatened, and a bomb threat was made against the project office.

Such incidents drew the most attention, of course, but a selection of other voices indicates a shifting discourse around the whole topic of violence against women. Responding to Lautens’ “feminist expropriation” column excerpted above, a reader mused:

Mr. Lautens is vehemently opposed to the erection of a monument honoring women slain by men because he is concerned that it is sexist

and “man-hating,” although blatantly misogynist pornography and billboard advertising that uses sexualized images of women’s bodies to sell everything[, ] from gym memberships to stereos, freely circulate in this city.

Is he afraid *the monument could help redefine common sense* and thereby provoke some men to become proactive against male violence against women? Certainly, by belittling attempts at making the public aware of violence against women, Mr. Lautens is saying in effect that he is not prepared to let women take control of their own voices. Just who is being sexist? (Duthie 1993; my emphasis)

The monument organizers also tried to enter the debate constructively. In an essay, two members of the Monument Project Committee reiterated the reasons for the monument and its origins, and wrote out the inscription in full. They suggested that some of the controversy was due to the perception that such explicitness over the violence (“by men”) meant “we are not honoring dead women, but dishonoring living men.” The essay quoted Park Board Commissioner Dermot Foley, who had asked openly in a meeting, “Who is the group this [inscription] is offending?” The essay detailed the reaction:

The response of almost everyone in the boardroom – women and men, staff, media, project supporters and strangers – was spontaneous laughter. Foley went on to say he wasn’t being facetious, but that it was obvious the only group being tarred was male murderers.

That the inscription inspires unease in some people, women and men alike, is to be expected – senseless death is not an easy subject. Only by facing up to the twisted reality of what violence against women can lead to, will society be moved to change. (Phillips and Jones 1993)

Of course, there were also thoughtful men and women who spoke out. One man, who had come to the project as a volunteer, was reported by Cate Jones as saying, “If we want men to donate, we should make sure our language is inclusive.” Jones continued, “As someone who witnessed his father abusing his mother he would really like to donate, but said he found the language on the dedication excluded him as a male.” Another

reflected, “‘Women murdered by men.’ Honestly, I really believe that made people so uncomfortable. That ... even if you’re a feminist for ten years, you’re not necessarily that kind of feminist that could say that ... Because that split the feminist community like mad. That wording.” Another added, “But you know it is important to make a statement that lasts ... because people lie so much.” The debate raged back and forth across newspapers, airwaves and dinner tables. Two women who had previously donated money wrote a thoughtful letter withdrawing support and requesting that their names not be inscribed as donors because they thought the inscription wording now represented a “wasted opportunity”: “We don’t object because [the phrase] isn’t true or because it will offend men or because it’s too radical ... [We object because] the inscription leaves out not only women who are not murdered, but were beaten, raped, threatened or abused as children, but it also leaves out women who are abused by other women ... At this monument, of all places, do we want women survivors of *any* abuse/violence to feel invisible?”<sup>10</sup>

There were suggestions to alter not only the inscription but even the form of the monument/memorial: why not make it, for instance, a rose garden? One letter writer responded: “The trouble with rose gardens is that their beauty lulls one into a state of peaceful acceptance and, in the bee-filled heat of a summer afternoon, a kind of forgetfulness. But how can one forget what our society has barely begun to acknowledge?” (Drake 1993).

Many suggested changing the inscription, making it refer to “all victims of violence,” or “all victims of violent crime.” It was in this atmosphere that the Monument Project Committee held a meeting mid-August that addressed the discussion around what to do regarding the inscription and the use of names, as well as the bomb threat. On these issues, the committee’s minutes are reproduced here in full:

CATE: talked about feedback on dedication.

MARGOT: feels that listing all women adequate; the politics of identity is a shifting discourse; has talked to lots of people who want more women

10 Simon Fraser University Archives, Women’s Monument Fonds, F-101-3-0-7, letter received from A. Vrlak and S. Hornstein, August 17, 1993.

named; likes idea of having names of women murdered between December 6, 1989 and when WM [women's monument] unveiled.

CHRIS: wants to focus on "by men"; it's the burning issue; Chris has not changed her feelings on it; she had been vacillating on it but she thinks it was because she was afraid; wants to be forced to change it; public debate has hit on why it's needed; stands by dedication as a whole.

ELINOR: feeling very tired of it; has thought about changing it, suggestions on strategy; check stats on how many articles published whole dedication, etc.; should use bomb threat to our advantage.

LORNA: keep it; can't back down now try to draw stronger connection between women murdered and 14 women; list 14 women, say these women were murdered December 6/89; since that time "X" number of women were murdered by men; this is taking back space for women and women's issues; look at how we win people back on a symbolic issue.

JANINE: more determined than ever to keep "by men"; concerned about letter from Joan; doesn't favour using bomb threat.

CAROL: doesn't want to use bomb threat either; supports "by men."

ANGELA: supports "by men."

CATE: supports "by men"; major political battle ahead; we have to put a plan in place.

MARGOT: "pissed off" at men writing letters that say we'll use vandalism, etc. as proof of our cause; not talking about bomb threat is another mechanism for silencing us; we should talk about it later in the project; it should be part of our history of the Monument now ... discussion around how much energy should go into this; can the park board take this away from us?

LORNA: asked Chris what if it's "by men" or nothing?; can we go with an inscription at all and in the artists' guidelines talk about the inscription we wanted, say it was turned down and see what the artist comes up with?

CHRIS: wants inscription to stay because it's the voice of the women who created it; she wants "by men" but can't imagine getting it.

ELINOR: it's important that we get a lawyer on board in case they pull the rug out.

AGREED To keep “by men” and take it to the Park Board

Do we go with an alternative?

Do we leave the inscription up to the artist?

LORNA: don’t underestimate the ingenuity of people submitting; connect the dedication with the 14 women.

JANINE: don’t react to the public – let them battle it out; keep on with our work; re-establish relationship with Park Board Commissioners; we’ve defended ourselves enough in the paper; we have to get away from the defensive position.

MARGOT: we’d betray ourselves if we changed the dedication; we’re making history here; if Park Board bends *that* needs to be the story; need to phone people to phone in support; what we’re asking for isn’t outrageous – when we get turned down, we expose it.

ANGELA: can we put the WM at Cap College with our dedication? Can we get war veterans to stand up for us? If we lose “by men” at least we’ll still have a monument.

AGREED If we can’t get “by men” we ask them (Park Board) what they’ll accept; get their list and then say we’ll take their suggestions back to the WMP [women’s monument project] committee.<sup>11</sup>

In the end, the committee did not back down. After a summer of relentless attacks and high tension, September brought with it a slight shift. One editorialist travelled north to a small town in BC to assess what violence against women looked like outside an urban context, and wrote back:

In Vancouver, nice guys fret over whether words on a plinth might damage their reputations. Around them women are beaten to death, raped, assaulted, verbally abused and psychologically terrorized by the tens of thousands.

One in ten women gets this treatment, says the most comprehensive survey ever taken. You figure it out. About 750,000 women in Greater Vancouver points to 75,000 casualties.

11 Simon Fraser University Archives, Women’s Monument Fonds, F-101-2-0-3, minutes of the meeting of Women’s Monument Project, August 14, 1993.

... Women are targets of directed violence. It's their femaleness that's assaulted. And we all know this violence is not about sex, it is about establishing who has power. It is intended to invade and occupy. (Hume 1993)

An article in the feminist magazine *Kinesis* noted that even WAVAW had recanted its earlier objections: "the inscription now clearly recognizes all women murdered by men." The Vancouver Status of Women acknowledged that the monument "is not what we identify as a priority ourselves, right now," particularly in light of the "tremendous racist backlash right now against women of colour and Aboriginal women," but added that every contribution women see fit to make to end violence against women is welcome: "The monument project aims to show people that these things occur. It's going to be visible and that is good. It will be a reminder" (Bouchoutrouch 1993).

The debate was not yet over (arguably it is still not over). Editorials, cartoons and arguments appeared regularly in the media, especially over the next year. Privately, one of the Park Board commissioners and the committee met to resolve the inscription issue. They emerged from that meeting having preserved the inscription in its entirety, but inverting two lines: the inscription now began with "In memory and in grief." Park Board Commissioner Nancy Chiavario noted she personally thought the resolution had been possible because "the project was a right project. Otherwise we wouldn't have seen the answer." By December 1, 1993, the Park Board had unanimously approved the application, and the design process was officially launched. In one way, the Monument Project Committee's work had been simplified; in other ways it was just beginning. To run the national competition, the committee was hoping for guidance from the Public Art Committee of the Park Board, but they were disappointed. The Park Board's assumption, that a national grass-roots feminist design competition could be completed in three months was, in the opinion of one committee member reflecting on that period, "honestly, so wrong of them. So profoundly wrong." In the end, the competition took four months (though it could just as easily have been six) in order to make the process as fair as possible.

Part of the difficulty in organizing the competition had to do with the intended openness of the process. First of all, more than 4,000 calls for entry in English and French were sent out across Canada to the media, educational centres, women's centres, First Nations' media and to magazines and newsletters about architecture, landscape architecture, engineering and the visual arts. But as one committee organizer asked, "How long does it take you to get the call out? How long before it gets picked up by the media? How long before it gets to your town?" It is important to remember that this competition was held in the days before widespread web availability: the calls for entry were sent out by post. The committee also intended that there be a stage in the entry process "where artists, people who wanted to submit ... could write down their questions, submit it to the jury, we had to answer those questions, and get it back to all the people who had inquired, all at the same time, so that everybody had the same information." This created a kind of logistical nightmare, as Chris clarified: "Your call goes out, and [artists] submit and get a package. So then, everybody who submitted to get a package gets this letter ... with the question and answer. Then there's more questions, then there's more question and answer ... [yet] the public art committee was adamant ... about this three month thing." Once again, the committee proceeded despite less than ideal circumstances.

The design call went out with an explicit rationale for why only female artists were asked to submit proposals. Ninety-eight entries were received. The competition was to be juried by seven women from across Canada, all of whom had made significant contributions in the visual arts, literature, architecture or human rights: Nicole Brossard, Rosemary Brown, Wilma Needham, Maura Gatensby, Doreen Jensen, Haruko Okano and Irene Whittome. This was the first time in Canada that a jury had been made up of only women.

There were two stages to the competition: The first stage was a blind review in which only the design was judged and the proposals remained anonymous; three finalists were chosen and given development money to further their proposed projects. During this second stage of the competition, the jury met with the finalists and discussed their entries. The winner of the competition was chosen following these meetings. Yet in

addition to the official competition, the submissions were featured in other fundraising, education and advocacy events. Maquettes of the three finalists' designs, as well as 16 honourable mentions, were involved in four showings entitled "The Women's Monument Exhibit" (in Toronto, Calgary, Vancouver and Surrey). There is a strange "What if?" tangent to the selection of the final design. Artist Susan Point was originally one of the three finalists. Now a highly regarded Coast Salish artist, Point had withdrawn her participation in the competition due to a death in her family, fearing she would not be able to work within the specified time frame. If the winner had been a First Nations artist, would this fact have altered the debate around placement? Around the right to erect such a monument? Around the right to criticize it? Would a winning entry by a First Nations artist have affected the time it took to fundraise or the public's reception of the project?

In October 1994, the Monument Project Committee announced that the winning design was Beth Alber's *Marker of Change*. Alber offered an elemental design – a wide circle of 14 benches surrounded by tiles naming the donors to the project. With the project's details moving anew into public discussion, the press once again featured many shrill and inflammatory reactions. Though the design was now clear, the pressures of organizing the competition under these circumstances, as well as the enormous time commitment (meetings often lasted several hours and, because all committee members worked, had to be held on weekends or evenings) wore on the committee. One member who lived through the whole period reflected: "I think that the group that had so much conflict – and it's painful even to think about that group – was a very courageous group, and took on all those arguments over and over ... because that was during the absolute shit coming at us about everything. You know? Everything. The wording ... of the dedication, the women-only competition ... you know. Even being a women's group is suspect, right? And that was a great group for ... arguing that publicly and insisting on certain points of view."

In time, new voices of support rose up. One of the most moving of these was that of a man who worked with the group and whose opinion piece appeared first in the local *Vancouver Sun* newspaper and was then reprinted nationally in the *Globe and Mail*:

To deny the phrase “murdered by men” is to ignore who is raping, who is killing ... What are the consequences if men insist upon removing the “male” from “male violence”? In effect, it is to suggest that violence is some natural phenomena [sic], like the weather, which Canadian men and women have to endure ... It is men ... And they are committing these atrocities under cover of the reputation and good name of men who are decent, non-violent and law-abiding ... I realize now the simple and painful truth of that inscription. *It is not about collective guilt, but collective responsibility.* (Gale 1994; my emphasis)

Slowly, the public represented by the monument, and the movement against men’s violence against women, was redefined. The focus was not anti-male. The public the monument claimed to address was full of men, women and children. The money for *Marker of Change* trickled in again, but now the really serious work of fundraising began, and that meant further organizational changes. The committee decided to become a closed collective. As one advocate recalled:

We had to stop sitting around the table and, and just dealing with people’s different ideologies and philosophies on certain things, because we had to get out there and make the money ... Like VanCity [a local credit union] said, certain criteria had to take place before we could get their money. And that was a pretty substantial chunk. And once we had that, then we could go to other people and say, “Look, VanCity’s given.” So there were all these things that had to come into place. I think that was part of the motivation for saying that we thought, well, if women come on a volunteer basis to three meetings. Maybe that never became totally formalized, but we had talked about that. That if they showed ... that it wasn’t until after a certain period of time, or maybe it was three months of being involved, that then we would invite them to actually be key decision makers.

All agreed that the pressures of fundraising changed the dynamics:

I remember that we were drawing a big debt with Cap College.  
And honestly I thought so many times, I just felt like smashing my

head on the wall. That while we're drawing all this money, we're arguing for 10 months about the wording of the first direct mail letter. It was just unbelievable. And I just couldn't believe that it was happening. But certain people in the group ... whoever they were ... couldn't allow things to resolve ... they just couldn't. And I think there was a resistance to fundraising. That they wanted to be there for the ideas part, but for the serious fundraising, when the serious fundraising started, they left. In hindsight, it seems some of them may have been there more to influence the competition than work with the fundraising. You know, in retrospect.

When fundraising had to get serious, the committee came up with the idea of a "film-a-thon." At this point, the committee had only three people. The committee set about recruiting new members (including women who then stayed with the project all the way to its installation), and two men. Krista, one of the women who stayed on, said:

When I joined, I didn't meet the committee. I met with the people ... who were going to be doing the film-a-thon. And for months, or, actually, I don't know how long, we had this ... very committed group of people, and we couldn't do anything. I hated the monument. Or the Monument Committee, I should say. They were like the Wizard of Oz! It was, like, everything we decided, we'd have these incredibly intense meetings, we'd have all these great ideas ... we have to run it by the committee ... Finally we were just so fed up, we were just like, "Look. We need some independence here if we're running this thing!"

Over the next few years, the efforts and setbacks around fundraising were a source of constant tension, but the minutes of committee meetings also show that extraordinarily positive, unexpected events occurred as well. A Québec quarry firm contacted the committee to say it would be honoured to donate the granite slabs; Sumas Clay likewise donated the tiles that would encircle the monument and then later helped a group of volunteers stamp them. The Women's Monument Exhibit went on tour, and the committee and its advocates followed a constant schedule of fundraising and press events. Suzanne Laplante-Edward (mother of the

“This is ... the most heartwrenching piece of writing ... because it is impossible to put her brief but meaningful life into a few short sentences.”

— Comment from one of the parents of the murdered women<sup>12</sup>

murdered Anne-Marie Edward) encouraged and worked with each family to create wording for a personal tile for their daughter.

In mid-summer 1996, the committee held an “envisioning ritual” in Thornton to help raise money and to imagine the monument in place. Even though several members told me they felt like “idiots,” a group of about 10 took string and stakes with them and actually created a little monument one night in the park. This event had at least two other unintended consequences. First, the police came asking questions; as it turned out, someone had robbed a gas station nearby and the police had assumed the thief had run across the park. The women laughed as they told me the anecdote, noting, “So the money was coming through the park, it just wasn’t coming to us!” There was no laughing about the other event, however. At a “very intense” moment in the ritual, several men approached the group. Though they seemed simply curious at first, they became incensed when told that this was a private ritual, and to please let the women be. Three of the men became very hostile, tore down the little monument and threatened the women. The women left the park unharmed, but set a precedent that evening to always leave Thornton Park with a particular set of ritual gestures and gifts, a practice they still continue.

Finally, in 1997, as it appeared the monument would actually be built soon, the committee undertook the task of determining which languages would be represented on the benches. Initially, the committee decided that it would choose seven major world languages and leave seven benches without an inscription. In keeping with their commitment to

12 Simon Fraser University Archives, Women’s Monument Fonds, “Granite and Circle of Donors/Tiles.” Part of a package referred to as “Sept. 30, 1997 Summary of Project Major Events, People, Aspects and Issues, handed out to media.”

open and consultative practice, the committee developed a questionnaire and circulated it widely across Canada to determine both a process and a decision-making group. This group, made up of the design jury, the project committee, Carol McCandless (from Capilano College), Suzanne Laplante-Edward (mother of Anne-Marie), and Beth Alber (artist), decided on five languages by consensus, but the group's right to choose was challenged by a woman at Douglas College. She wrote back, "You have no right to pick all the languages." The committee members' reaction surprised even themselves: "Oh, we were so happy. It was like 'She's right! We have no right.' We're going to ask the Black Women's Congress to pick the African language. And then we, we asked these Native women to pick the Native language. And it was like 'Phew! Thank God!'"

According to several committee members, it was within the context of languages that the first "real" conversations with activists in the Downtown Eastside took place. Up to that point, some of the committee members said "it felt like a really trendy thing" to be *against* the monument, as though it were somehow being imposed on the area. The irony was that through the long process of public education associated with *Marker of Change*, "the issues of the Downtown Eastside became more revealed, and there was more media and public attention." The question of languages provided a direct, pragmatic vehicle for discussions that were more difficult. Lianne and Janine described this process:

I remember there was some dialogue that started to happen around the languages. "Well, just what is it that you want us to do? And why do you want us to do this?"

There's a whole thing around this, though, that was unsolvable. And unresolvable, that you just have to [pause] just admit ... [We] asked them, if there was a viable project happening, could we do a last direct mail, after we're finished fundraising ... but there was no solid project emerging from the Downtown Eastside. But ... it's just so painful. Because, ultimately, what we were faced with, was women saying, "You know, my daughter, or my friend is murdered here, and somebody else's name is going to be on your benches, who lives 3,000 miles away ... why aren't you naming local women

on your monument?” And ... there’s actually an answer to that question. But, but at the same time, there is no answer [pause] except that, yes, there should be another one, and yes, it should come from the Downtown Eastside, and it should address women lost in the Downtown Eastside. And ... we couldn’t, we couldn’t transform our project into that.

Yet the placement of *Marker of Change* served the idea of such a monument-to-come. Lianne mused that if *Marker of Change* was at “Oak and Sixteenth or something ... it wouldn’t bring that kind of attention ... But [*Marker*] is ... sort of a bridge, in a way. It’s a way of leading to their project.” But the bridge was still very uncertain. An anonymous insert was placed in the Carnegie Community Centre *Newsletter* of June 15, 1997, including excerpts from a poem identified as being written by Barbara Gray, with the note: “If it is accepted by the community in general, Barbara will be asked for permission to use [the poem] as the dedication” on a tile specifically to honour local women. It read:

To all women on  
 The downtown eastside:  
 We come together  
 To begin the healing.  
 We have trudged  
 These paths before  
 Too many times.  
 We have had enough –  
 Enough violence  
 Enough beatings  
 Enough stabbings.  
 We shout we scream  
 No more.

In the next issue of the publication, Barbara Gray herself wrote, “I do not support the December 6th Women’s memorial, their committee or anything and anyone connected with this project.” In the end, the

committee acknowledged it was unable to successfully collaborate with the Carnegie Centre (the city-funded community centre located at the neighbourhood's main intersection of Main Street and Hastings Street) and the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre to create a tile in memory of the local women killed. Instead, with the assistance of two women who are poets and supporters of the project, the committee approved the following:

IN LOVING MEMORY  
OF THE WOMEN KILLED  
ON VANCOUVER'S  
DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE  
SO MANY WOMEN LOST TO US  
WE DREAM  
A DIFFERENT WORLD  
WHEN THE WAR ON WOMEN  
IS OVER

In July 1997, the *Marker of Change* organizing committee broke ground and began the process of installation. Vince Stolon, an elder of the Musqueam Nation, was invited to Thornton Park to offer a blessing for the groundbreaking ceremony. He found that one member of the committee was crying profusely: a friend of hers had just been found murdered. Stolon would not permit her to stand within the circle while the ground was dug – a decision that bewildered the woman and infuriated others, who saw it as a denial of the very point of the monument. It was a painful moment. Some imagined that, given that the spirit of beginning something has consequences, perhaps Stolon was not acting in denial but for the protection of all concerned – the earth, the dead woman, the people present and the “spirit world.”

The installation period, like so many other moments in this monument's development, was fraught with unforeseen obstacles. A city strike meant that all building permits and much city equipment were frozen for several weeks. Asked how this affected her, *Marker of Change* artist Beth Alber, who was visiting from Toronto specifically to oversee the installation, sighed, smiled, and said, “Something in me knows this

monument wants to be in the world. It just does. I trust that.” And sure enough, the strike was finally settled just in time for the complete installation to begin before Alber had to return to Toronto. The monument’s design features 14 benches arranged in a perforated 300-foot circle. The design is visually reminiscent of ceremonial sacred geographies, from standing stones to healing circles. It is a non-hierarchical form representing a continuum and suggesting a protected or consecrated space. There are a number of other subtle design elements. The solid mass of the stone benches and each bench’s length of five and one-half feet suggest a collection of coffins. Alber, an artist highly attuned to the qualities of the materials she uses, originally wished to use construction-grade granite to underscore the fact that the murdered women were engineers, but when tombstone-quality granite from Québec was donated, Alber found this gesture so powerful that she adjusted the design. The gloss and the hue of the donated granite are thus both suggestive of cemetery stones. But Alber’s choice of granite itself tells a story: Alber wanted



*Marker of Change* | The ring is made up of tiles on which are written over 6,000 names. Notice also the sandblasted “gash” on the bench top, which artist Beth Alber indicates “is a place for water to gather, a sign of life,” though she notes that “the scars will also never heal.” A scar is a part of each bench. | *Photo: Greg Ehlers*



*Marker of Change* | The benches are intended to be deliberately suggestive of coffins and are the approximate size of an average North American female body. |  
*Photo: Greg Ehlers*

materials that were taken violently from the earth, wishing to learn to work with the energy and loss that came from the stone. Indeed, she wanted to emphasize the loss, rather than submit to the sombre acceptance of these deaths. To do so, she “gashed” each bench with a long, sandblasted form, unique to each. She suggests that this makes a place for rain water to gather, as water both renews life and collects reflections. Scars, however, will never disappear.

The monument is intriguing in terms of its ability to communicate with viewers. It is open and accessible; there is no point of domination, and it can be seen clearly from a long distance, though it blends in completely with the other benches of Thornton Park. Each bench on the inside of the circle bears the name of one of the women killed in Montréal in 1989, as though these women, who were in many cases looking at each other as they died, are now memorialized in a similar configuration. On the outer circle, the inscription is written on seven of the fourteen benches, in one of seven languages. Around the benches, as noted in the fundraising brochure, “a continuous ring of paving bricks behind the granite forms are positioned in the ground with the names of the contributors handstamped into clay. The circle of donors acts as a frame – a protection, a caring gesture. An orientation stand is positioned outside the circle with Braille and raised lettering for people with sight-impairment.”<sup>13</sup> Beth Alber originally wanted only names on the monument – she felt silence spoke most eloquently. But in time she agreed to the inscription, for what are perhaps paradoxical reasons: “[Every time I hear the inscription] it still makes me bristle; I think that’s exactly what it’s supposed to do.”

In December 1997, eight years to the day after the Massacre, the dedication process began with a group of local First Nation women marching through the Downtown Eastside, drumming, singing, and praying, all the way from Carnegie Community Centre to Thornton Park, where a huge crowd waited. The day’s speeches proceeded, braiding anger with grief, and intimacy with formality, in a variety of languages, cultures,

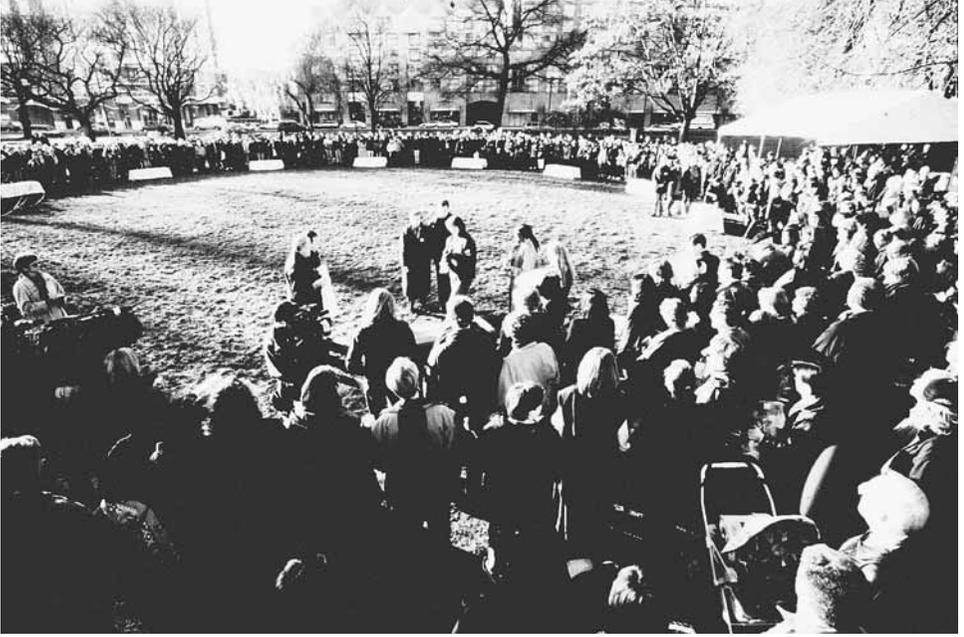
13 Simon Fraser University Archives, Women’s Monument Fonds, F-101-5-0-10, “Why Thornton Park?” Part of a package referred to as “Sept. 30, 1997 Summary of Project Major Events, People, Aspects and Issues, handed out to media.”

gestures and silences. The diversity, enormity and dignity of the crowd astonished even the organizers and all of the family members who came to see the monument for the first time that morning. My own account of the day recalls some details:

The whole event was taking place amid the miasma of the death of Reena Virk, at the hands of seven girls, in Saanich, BC.<sup>14</sup> Suddenly, it seemed, there was a new and terrifying shape of violence against women ... It was an exceptionally cold day ... [and] I feared lunatics and violence. I expected about 35 people ... As I came off the Skytrain, I heard drumming, and saw the crowd in the thousands, and I felt tears of excitement, energy, gratitude in my throat ... I saw hundreds of men, all races of people, dogs, infants, elders. There were several speeches ... at first, there was no mention of male violence, only of loss of these young women – so many young women – lost to us ... then Suzanne [Laplante-Edward] spoke, beginning with how she speaks often to “the girls,” who give her energy, and crediting them with the beautiful bright day, so unusual for December in Vancouver, saying it was their brightness brought near. She spoke quite personally, and quoted from a long piece written by a man, in Québec, a few days after the massacre ... The line I still remember is “How is a man’s fist in a women’s face only a woman’s problem?” ... [Another speaker asked us] to form a circle around the benches.

There were so many of us, it became two or three or maybe four rings. We faced each other over the sarcophagi, the slight rise of the earth green and frosty under our feet ... I found myself holding hands with strangers; at different points each of us cried. We stamped our feet against the cold, looked at each other occasionally, but did not speak. Music, written especially for the day, swelled over the crowd and we fell silent as the unveiling started across the circle from me. I knew from Beth it would be the bench for the first woman killed, as Beth had ordered and worked with

14 Subsequently, both male and female participants have been tried and convicted of the murder.



*Marker of Change* unveiling ceremony, December 6, 1996 | This photo was taken before the drapery was taken off each of the benches. Notice that the distance between the benches is too great for a conversation to take place; the viewers must physically enter the monument's spaces in order to converse with each other. |

*Photo: Tim Matheson*

the benches so as to honour the times and spaces of the moments these women had died. Two people lifted the shroud over each bench, folded it slowly, and laid it with the others on outstretched arms. A lantern was carried around the circle, lighting one at each bench. To complete the circle with such reverence took a long time – far longer than it took to kill these women. It was an extraordinarily long time for a crowd to be silent, a long time for strangers to touch. At the end, we were invited to place any things we had brought in the part of the monument most meaningful to us. In a matter of moments, each bench was covered with flowers, candles, messages, as were many small places in the grass. The circles broke, and people re-massed in to the heart of the monument, some going to the south side of the park for the tent with food, warm drinks, seats, a petition in favour of gun control.

There were more speeches. The mother of Cheryl Ann Joe – whose death is now commemorated as part of the Feb. 14th march. The woman who was chief engineer on the monument, talking about the night of the Massacre, and how she phoned the only other woman engineer she knew in BC, and how they cried ... I watched as the engineer faltered, her voice breaking when she spoke, about giving birth to her own daughter and how that crystallized her hopes *and* her fears – Lianne came behind her, put her hand mid-back and rubbed up and down her spine – energy, warmth, the message she was not alone, was only the voice for many. That gesture seemed the whole essence of the monument to me.

... I happened to turn the moment Chris and Suzanne passed Suzanne's daughter's bench. They saw each other as I saw them, and collapsed into a long embrace behind the mound of flowers. It struck me then – as extraordinary as this monument is, as its development has been, as brilliantly as the day had gone, as vibrant as the atmosphere felt – strong, clear, determined to do better in the world – soon twilight would fall, the benches would stand in the night alone in the cold and darkest hours. I watched these two women, sobbing and smiling and holding each other, who had come to know each other for all the wrong reasons and struggled so hard across years and a continent to make this moment. And at the centre of it, Suzanne's "girls" are dead.

### Since Installation ...

Since the unveiling, of course, violence against women has not stopped, but the committee's aspirations that *Marker of Change* would be an interactive monument, a place for reflecting and commenting on such violence, have been realized. There are both formal and ad hoc uses of the monument. On the key ritual day of December 6 there are a variety of activities. The committee members usually clean the monument the weekend before, carefully tending the site and washing each bench. On December 6, many of them go first thing in the morning, and place candles and flowers and food on each bench, walk the circle, spend time there in silence or in offering a meditation. Over years of observations,

I have noticed that a pattern has developed over the mornings and early afternoons of December 6. Many people come and spend a few moments there. Their styles differ, as shown by my field notes: “A tall man, white-haired in dark, sharp clothes with an umbrella, walking by himself on the donor tiles, counter-clockwise. And pairs of women and men, hovering, pausing, reading a bit. Some two dozen over the morning.” By afternoon, there are usually more:

- 1:45 PM media person, plus two, then another – women – lighting candles, some interviews. People tend to stroll around the outside rather than walk across ... This reticence, this gentle negotiation is different than I expected. There is something mediating about the site. It is liminal. One is not sure of preferences. Do people want to talk, or not? Are they praying? Crying? During all the filming, four of us just watch. Another goes by checking trash cans.
- 1:50 she is back, walking slowly with her bike. She is relighting the candles. Small acts of attention. Young boy running around on the donor tiles, like a game. Two more women come, with flowers. Appear to make a small comment/ritual before each bench.
- 2:10 another white-haired, blazered man at the plinth ... he stands like he’s at an altar, his arms resting open on it.
- 2:21 blind man with a cane and a woman walk and light candles at three benches, then leave.

Sometimes I am amazed at the conversations people strike up with me, particularly men. My notes reflect my own wariness and ambivalence:

As men have approached at the gatherings, marches, vigils, observations, I feel terribly caught between wanting to welcome them – feeling their presence and attention is absolutely essential – and being frightened that, perhaps, this is one man who will ‘go off.’ It happens. I’ve known enough vets, enough psychotics, enough good people that became ill, and isolated, and “lost the line.” Any attention seems to draw more attention ... yet the presence of the

circle seems protective. It occurs to me when I talk to men to be concerned – what if this sends them into a rage? What if they are men who, though abusive, are also charming? One man first sees me sitting on a nearby bench. He walks over to the plinth, looks at the inscription, walks closer by a few of the benches, then comes to sit beside me. He introduces himself (Larry), and asks, “So what do you make of this?” I say something vague and non-opinionated, and return the question. He looks at me for a while before speaking. “Until people come to a certain level of consciousness, they have no choices. After that, they do. But the guy who did this ... [he waves at the monument] ... didn’t.” What is Larry saying? The guy who did this had no choice but to kill? But Larry seems calm and we talk a bit further. Suddenly he takes my hand and places it on a (healed) wound near his knee “to show you how the pin has slipped” from some botched surgery. I am struck again that at this place, strangers touch. But this encounter paled alongside the quiet alarm I felt later that day as a man easily twice my size came up close behind where I was standing and suddenly barked, “Sad reality is – if it were eleven guys who’d gotten drilled ... this would’ve happened a long time ago.” The miscalculation (why eleven instead of fourteen?), the insensitivity of being a big man suddenly far too close to a small woman, the loudness of his voice, the verb, all jarred me deeply. And the ambiguity of what he was saying – what would have happened? A monument? Men are killed all the time, and most don’t get monuments. What was he saying?

Also on these days, I have witnessed that two teachers from the nearby ESL course centre bring their classes “every year. It is so important. [The students] are always shocked, really shocked. People can’t get guns in their countries (Japan, Korea), so we talk about what violence against women is like – other kinds. After, the women feel a bit more afraid, so we talk about that.”

Occasionally, quite extraordinary encounters happen. On December 6, 2001, in the late afternoon, I met a woman at the plinth – she is a Métis who works with the UBC Aboriginal Law Project, and who had driven from Saskatoon a few months earlier. The previous night, she had

seen a documentary about the monument, and had felt “called” to come. She pulled from under her coat a small, heavy iron pot – her mother’s smudging pot, given her for this time away from home – and some sage she and her partner had picked along the drive. My notes recall what happened:

We talk, she asks me to smudge with her. Muddy ground. She touches me. We smudge ourselves, then light the candles and smudge each name as we squat by each bench “Prayers for ...” She doesn’t want to go backwards in the circle, and thanks me when I do to fetch candles. She says, often, when things are not just right, ‘must be meant to be.’

She tells me she is ‘sick of white rich men’ doing violence to native women in Saskatoon. I tell her it is very similar here. We kneel, light, say the names together, smudge.

At the last bench, Randy appears. Shy, well-muscled, not apparently high at the minute anyway, and he begins tales. Says he’s been trying to keep the site nice. (In fact, there are flowers, candles, oranges at each bench and around the circle, with some in the middle). Says he’s going back to Red Deer. He says things like “ma’am.” Mentions he’s a carpenter. Says he doesn’t want a hand-out. But he is talking, interrupting.

I find myself irritated by how I cannot ever come to the monument and simply be still without getting hit on. However, we are out of matches for the last candle, and Randy ... figures out how to light it. Anna and I are both, I can tell, not sure what to do with Randy. I say I want to finish our ritual – Anna invites him to circle with us. Amazing – it calms his story, and he joins us, walking.

As we go ‘round they ask dozens of questions and I find myself telling them stories – amazed I know them, amazed I have joined the story of the monument myself. We talk about languages, silences. We complete the circle and it starts to rain. Randy tells us he is here because his tools are stuck in a locker in the bus station that he thought was one price, but it turned out to be a per day price. I decide I believe him, and decide to give him some money. I also tell him that it is likely when the events start at twilight, there will

be food. When we go towards the side of the park, we see a double rainbow, and it makes Anna cry out with joy – it means much in her family. Randy spontaneously hugs us both, then leaves to check about the food. Anna hugs me and laughs. We say goodbye, and I come home. The next day, she sends me an email, though I did not give her my address, and she says she is glad I am doing this research, because I am a person who listens. I read, astonished, and take it as both instruction and encouragement.

Sometimes, the monument is used ritually on other days. The first public gathering called there, curiously, was for neither a Canadian nor a woman. It was a vigil for Bernard Slepian, an American doctor who worked with women on all kinds of health care and pediatric issues. According to the one who shot him, he was murdered because he also allegedly performed abortions. Other spontaneous responses at the site appear as reactions to the news about horrific murders or beatings, or to the events of 9/11 (a giant peace symbol was fashioned from flowers within the circle) or in honour of the Valentine's Day marches. (These marches, held every February 14th since the early 1980s, seek to commemorate and remember the missing and murdered women of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Though every year the route alters slightly, certain customs have remained constant: leadership for the march comes from female Aboriginal elders, who offer prayers and rituals at key sites, including the last places some of the women were seen, or the locations where their bodies were found.) Often certain benches are decorated with flowers, messages or candles. There are happier uses too. Carvers come to work there (as indicated by the shavings left behind). Once, someone unrolled a sleeping bag in the centre of the circle and slept long into the morning on a cold autumn day. In 2001, there was an Earth Day celebration called there (though the memorial was referred to as the "Women's Monument"), and in March 2002, for the first time, the official International Women's Day rally was called at the site. More casually, though people most often sit on nearby benches rather than on the ones in the monument, on occasion people will picnic or nap on the monument benches. Birds drink from the water that collects in the sandblasted scars.



The monument is placed directly across from the train and bus station. |

*Photo: Greg Ehlers*

Once, there was (indecipherable) graffiti left on the plinth, but other than that, I have never seen the monument defaced.

Given its heft, its substantial and powerful physical presence, it is interesting how *Marker of Change* functions in terms of media. The organizers realized early on that the whole idea of a monument as a response to male violence against women constituted a historical first. They began taking photographs to document the process. The fact that the project was immediately given office space by Capilano College meant that files were kept from the very beginning of the project – press releases, fundraising letters, financial records, phone logs, minutes and original correspondence, as well as photographs and video. (The archive, officially opened in Summer 2000, includes over 12 linear feet made up of nine

boxes of documents and items). In 1994, the May Street Group (a film-making collective) approached the Monument Project Committee and asked to make a documentary; it began filming in earnest around the making of the tiles, continuing episodically all the way through the unveiling ceremony. At the time, no one had any idea how the Montréal events would affect Canadians across the country or how the events would be memorialized. As they've unfolded over the years there have been literally thousands and thousands of texts, films, images and art projects devoted to commemoration, education and action. Yet even among these, *Marker of Change* assumed an iconic status because it was the first intentionally national grass-roots response to the Massacre following the funerals. The national juried art process, the tiny fundraising events in small towns and large cities, the radio shows, the direct-mail campaigns and the public speeches all contributed to the huge broadcast "reach" of the monument as idea and, after selection of the design, as image.

Because the monument is so large and so understated as a design, the media images used to depict it are largely stylistic – they capture the essence and intention of the forms, but not a complete visual rendering of the whole (except in one aerial shot). Instead, images focus on one or a handful of benches, offer a detail of a name, a donor tile or an inscription or show one of the scars full of water. Rarely do these images show people, except perhaps as non-identifiable individuals whose comparative size suggests the scale of the art. The only element of the monument that is described or depicted in its entirety is the text. This is interesting, given that when people come to the site, they seem most often to walk the complete circle of it.

When pieces of the marble used for the benches were passed around as part of information and fundraising events, people seemed notably impressed by the colour, temperature and weight of the stone. But more often, news of the monument has circulated via text (as in fundraising letters) or other media. The documentary *Marker of Change* debuted in December 1998, and copies are now housed in hundreds of college and university film libraries, primarily throughout North America. The film is broadcast nationally every December 6 on television as part of the annual commemoration events. It has likely been viewed by millions of people.

Yet the monument's advocates remain curiously wary about the role of the media. As Chris McDowell put it, and others agree, organizing events around violence against women is tricky:

It can go sour. And it can go to a point where people are just completely fed up. That's what we found out. Because we suffered through event after event, and fundraising, and, you know, the years of experience ... But it is so horrible to do events that have two audiences: the press and the people attending. And, who are the people attending? Are they number one? They're number two. And it's so painful to be number two. "I'm here as a body for the press. To see that a body came." And that's so awful. And that's what we discovered. That we did that kind of event, we lived to regret it. You know, we got used by other people, we used other people. Finally, you know, we tried to cater to the media, the media just shot us down. When it comes to violence against women, why focus on the media? They are part of perpetuating violence against women. You know, if only people would just do events that were about healing and social change for the people that come to them[,] and screw the press.

This sentiment was particularly strong when the committee talked about how it had prepared for the day of the unveiling. Claiming they had learned so much from the power of ritual that characterized the Valentine's Day march and various meetings they had attended with First Nations people, the committee members decided to have "[a] press conference because we didn't want politicians to speak at the unveiling ... so we created two separate events." On the day itself, early in the ceremony, a cameraman slipped from the rings of people surrounding the monument and walked into the middle of the circle to "get the shot" of those who were lifting a veil from one of the benches. Immediately, Chris strode across the circle and physically dragged him to the margins. Such clarity about the role of media versus the role of attendees was also obvious in discussions about the "hand-off" event (in December 2000), when, for the first time, the committee was not in charge of the official December 6 gathering. Instead, the ceremony was to be run by none other than

WAVAW, the very group that had nearly destabilized the whole project back in its early days. Several committee members commented that it was a great relief to “see someone else take that [the official event] over,” because it “was very freeing ... you know, we’ve already ... talked about what we want to do next year. And it’s personal, like, we don’t have to worry ... we don’t even have to publicize it.” For the 2000 event, WAVAW had originally asked committee members to be involved. The ensuing exchange was not without irony, as related by a committee member: “I phoned around, and people were open, and I phoned [the WAVAW organizer] back, and said when we could meet: Monday, Wednesday night or Friday night. And she said, ‘At night? You can only meet at night?’ And I said, ‘Yeah, that’s right.’ ‘Oh, well that’s no good’ ... and she said, ‘Can’t you meet during the day?’ I said ‘We all work.’ You know. Like, we all work. And, [the WAVAW person said] ‘Well, we’ll tell you what to do.’”

The entire committee was incredulous. Of all the community groups, WAVAW (“after just about publicly crippling us”) had little claim, in the advocates’ opinion, to tell them what to do. In the end, the committee members attended the events, as did I, but did not take part officially. As it turned out, the WAVAW-led ceremony included a whole series of actions staged for the camera, including Japanese drumming, speeches about welfare and a shouted, angry address about why events like this didn’t draw as many people as football games. The WAVAW organizers chose to place themselves in the centre of the circle (rather than to one side, as the committee had always done). Camera spotlights were set up to focus on those in the centre, and attendees were left to choose between not circling the monument or circling it, but ending in some cases in various locations being either blinded by lights or hidden behind the speakers. The spotlights required huge, noisy generators that made it impossible to hear. The event, in short, was designed at least as much, if not more, for the media as for other participants. As one woman said to me, “You don’t want to be, but you know, you hear women talk about ‘I went to this thing and I never want to go to a feminist thing again in my life.’ And they mean things like this.”

The framing that results from such media presence at these ceremonies and from using these monuments in this way is itself quite alienating: it often highlights sensational violence while simultaneously failing to

provide any context in which to understand or address it. For example, one December 7, I read a daily Vancouver paper cover to cover and counted seven articles concerning horrific attacks on women, murders of women and threats to women. None of them connected to male violence as an issue, though all these attacks were instigated by men. None of them connected to the memorial services the day before across the country, even though an article about those services appeared in the midst of the others.

### **The CRAB Park Boulder**

To understand the second monument – the CRAB Park boulder – requires another introduction first, to CRAB Park itself. The boulder was dedicated 10 years to the day after the park was dedicated; it is inconceivable not to link the two events. As noted, there is a density of occupation and a scarcity of shared public spaces in the Downtown Eastside. CRAB Park represents an extraordinary victory of residents in even imagining, let alone securing from developers, acres of public land that give local residents access to waterfront. Thus the park and all its features constitute a kind of running conversation about property rights in the neighbourhood. There have been tussles over virtually every feature in the park, including the presence of playgrounds and bathrooms, pedestrian access, benches and plantings and all the art work. These debates preceded the official opening of the park and are frequently revisited. Don Larson, a key activist in the CRAB Park campaign, and a CRAB-Water for Life Society organizer, claims that there is even a modest annual sum paid by the Vancouver Port Authority for a contribution to a Canada Day celebration and a kid's Christmas party “just to keep [him] off their backs.” To concentrate solely on the monument's content would thus miss much of the intention behind it and its role in the life of the neighbourhood.

CRAB stands for “Create a Real Available Beach.” CRAB Park is the name that local residents have used for years, rather than its more formal original name, “Portside Park.” (As of 2008, the name was formally changed by the City to “CRAB Park at Portside Park.”) The park's genesis was modest. As Don noted, it was “a discarded part of the environment of the city where everything wasn't tidied up perfectly.” Some of the park's key supporters, in fact, laughed the first time they heard the idea