Abstract

Cultural production constitutes a significant force in the reconstruction, reterritorialization, and reimaging of the postindustrial inner city, the privileged site of clustered production within a reconfigured metropolitan space economy. This has been best demonstrated within older precincts notably characterized by the adaptive reuse of heritage structures, often to the extent of the comprehensive restoration of entire blocks or subareas. The unique material characteristics of these enduring new industrial districts have led to an association of cultural production with a heritage built environment, generating an alluring and paradoxical aesthetic where the brick and iron of an older industrial vernacular mixes with the auras of technology, globalization, and modernity. Following the work of scholars who have introduced spatiality and materiality to the cultural industries research domain, this thesis addresses the reflexive relationship that cultural producers maintain with the unique material and semiotic characteristics of these enduring new industrial districts, in which heritage imageries and signifiers of collective memory inform creative personas, processes, and outputs. This ‘reflexive project of the self’ influences the maintenance of the built environment and has the capacity to alter imageries and collective memory wherever signifiers are re-associated or obscured. Drawing on interviews in Vancouver, British Columbia, as well as on a broad literature review incorporating sources on cultural production, the aesthetics of residential gentrification, and the ‘city of collective memory’; this paper seeks to assess a range of responses to the history of Vancouver’s inner city landscapes. The analysis demonstrates how Vancouver’s historical imageries have been romanticized and reinterpreted to inform a mythology of cultural production in the city. Our conclusions will be of interest to geographers attempting to ‘place’ cultural production within their understanding of the changing landscapes of the twenty-first century city, as well as to planners in need of a more critical interpretation of the dynamics undergirding the insistent upgrading of production districts.
Preface

Research for this thesis involved interviews with human subjects. Ethics approval was obtained from the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board, Certificate Number H11-00328.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. ii
Preface ................................................................................................................................................... iii
Table of Contents ................................................................................................................................... iv
List of Tables .......................................................................................................................................... vi
List of Figures ......................................................................................................................................... vii
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................... viii

## 1 Introduction ..................................................................................................................................... 1
  1.1 Cultural Production and the City ................................................................................................. 2
  1.2 Locational context ....................................................................................................................... 5
  1.3 Purpose and Objectives .............................................................................................................. 7
  1.4 Method ......................................................................................................................................... 9
    1.4.a Scope and Limitations .......................................................................................................... 11
  1.5 Organization ............................................................................................................................... 13

## 2 The City in the ‘Creative Age’ ......................................................................................................... 16
  2.1 Flexible Production Systems, Reflexivity, and the Global Geography of Cultural Industries ............. 17
  2.2 The Urban Geography of the Cultural Economy ......................................................................... 20
    2.2.a The Cultural Production District ...................................................................................... 21
    2.2.b Cultural Production and the City ...................................................................................... 24
  2.3 Regeneration, Dislocation, and the Creative City ......................................................................... 27

## 3 Heritage, Memory, and Identity in Cultural Production Sites .......................................................... 34
  3.1 Cultural Production, Space, and Material .................................................................................. 34
  3.2 Reflexivity, Creativity, Identity, and the Built Environment ......................................................... 36
  3.3 Place-Based Imagery in an Era of Reflexive Accumulation ......................................................... 39
  3.4 The Re-Imaging of Cultural Production Districts: Authenticity, History, and Mythology .............. 42
    3.4.a Appropriating Authenticity: Implications for the (Re)remembrance of Cultural Production Districts ................................................................................................................................ 46
    3.4.b Inserting Mythologies: Art, Bohemianism, and Cultural Production .................................. 48

## 4 Vancouver: Economy, Imageries, Memory and Identity ................................................................. 51
4.1 Vancouver in Historical Context: The Emergence of a Cultural Economy ........... 52
4.1.a The New Cultural Economy Ascendant .................................................. 59
4.2 Cultural Production Districts on Vancouver’s CBD Fringe ............................. 67
4.2.a Yaletown ................................................................................................ 68
4.2.b Gastown, Victory Square, and Railtown: An Historical Narrative ............ 72
4.2.c Gastown, Victory Square, and Railtown: Imageries and Memory of
Contestation .................................................................................................. 82
5 Findings ...................................................................................................... 88
5.1 Method ..................................................................................................... 88
5.2 Interviewee Characteristics ...................................................................... 90
5.3 On the Geography of Cultural Production: Rent, Space, and Material .......... 92
5.3.a Rents .................................................................................................. 93
5.3.b Spatiality and Materiality ..................................................................... 96
5.4 Reflexivity, Creativity, Identity, and the Built Environment ....................... 100
5.5 The Re-Imaging of Cultural Production Districts: Authenticity, History, and
Mythology .................................................................................................... 107
5.5.a Authenticity and Local Imageries ....................................................... 108
5.5.b Socially Constructed Imageries and the Guiding Mythologies of Cultural
Production .................................................................................................. 113
6 Planning Implications and Conclusion ....................................................... 117
6.1 Cultural Production, Space, and Material .................................................. 118
6.2 Reflexivity, Creativity, Identity, and the Built Environment ....................... 120
6.3 Cultural Production, Reflexivity, and the (Re)remembrance of the Inner City. 122
6.4 Implications for Planning, Preservation, and Creative Place-Making .......... 131

References .................................................................................................... 136
List of Tables

2-1. A disaggregation of Florida’s creative class .........................................................27
4-1. Changes in the occupational structure of the Vancouver census metropolitan area,
1996-2006 .....................................................................................................................62
5-1. The desire for authenticity in relation to the reflexivity of cultural producers ......107
List of Figures

2-1. Creative policy rationales for an international sample of urban areas, 2005-2008...29

4-1. The spatial structure of Vancouver’s metropolitan core in the mid-Twentieth century..........................................................54

4-2. Central Area Land Use Plan in the Central Area Plan, 1991.........................58

4-3. Twenty-first century landscapes of production, housing, and amenity in Vancouver’s postmodern metropolitan core........................................59

4-4. Distribution of firms for selected industries, Vancouver’s central area........64

4-5. The high-integrity built environment of the Yaletown Heritage Area........69

4-6. Loft living, Yaletown............................................................................70

4-7. Railway loading bays recolonized by café patios, Yaletown.......................71

4-8. Distribution of firms for selected industries, Gastown, Victory Square, and Railtown.............................................................................73

4-9. The architecturally-varied built environment of the Gastown Heritage Area...75

4-10. Interwar Moderne architecture offsets brick facades in Railtown...............75

4-11. Edwardian Classicism on Victory Square............................................76

4-12. Preservation and beautification on Maple Tree Square, site of the Gastown Riot...79

4-13. ‘Grittier’ Victory Square: ‘Cannabis Culture’ and the Dominion Building......81

4-14. Symbols of the changing fortunes of Victory Square: the Dominion Building and Woodward’s.................................................................84

4-15. Woodward’s as a site of remembrance....................................................85

4-16. The remembrance of contestation: the Gastown Riot at Woodward’s.........87

5-1. The Sun Tower as ‘creative space’..........................................................98

5-2. ‘Welcome to Eastvan’: a Gastown storefront, Alexander Street...............103
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1 Introduction

The ascendance of cultural production – while situated within the broad trajectories of globalization; the transition to more flexible, specialized, and technology-intensive production systems; and the emergence of a postmodern economy emphasizing aesthetic and semiotic content – maintains a distinctly urban focus. Specifically, its urban geography points to the salience of the repurposed inner city as the privileged site of clustering within a reconfigured metropolitan space-economy, a reaffirmation of inner city’s historic industrial and cultural roles. Given the demonstrated capacity of cultural production to redefine relationships between people, culture, and place in the city, the developmental implications of the ‘creative age’ have generated considerable enthusiasm among planners and policymakers. Critical urban scholarship, however, has problematized culture largely on the basis of its social implications, dislocation being the unfortunate insistent complement to regeneration experiences at the urban scale.

This thesis follows the work of scholars who have introduced spatiality and materiality to the cultural industries research domain. This literature points to the space-shaping power of the cultural industries, as well as the industry-shaping power of space, best demonstrated within older precincts of the inner city. These distinctive production sites are subject to significant reconfiguration and reconstruction. Historical streetscapes are fitted with imageries incongruous with or celebrating their origins, and heritage buildings are adapted for reuse on the basis of their perceived authenticity. Other implications are intangible, encompassing the reterritorialization of urban space and the reimaging and remaking of place. Based on a research program in Vancouver, BC, this thesis seeks to investigate how the cultural industries are engaging with the material and symbolic landscapes of the inner city, and the implications this has for the heritage built environment as a store of accumulated signifiers of collective memory. This research will be of interest to geographers attempting to ‘place’ the cultural economy within their understanding of the changing landscapes of the twenty-first century city, as well as to planners in need of a more critical interpretation of the dynamics undergirding the insistent upgrading of production districts.
1.1 Cultural Production and the City

Fascination with culture is a distinctive characteristic of urban theory and policy of the last decade. The extensive literature in which it is discussed is characterized at times by a volatility paralleling the accelerated and iterative restructuring of the cultural economy itself. Economic-geographical perspectives on cultural production emerged as a sub-domain within scholarship on the postfordist services sector, first under the rubric of the ‘producer services’, and then as a sector worthy of its own discourses in the industrial urbanism of the ‘LA school’ in the late 1980s, including the notable work of Allen Scott (1997). Synthesizing a host of industry-specific case studies, Scott has made the greatest contribution to this literature as a critical theorist, introducing, among other things, the ideas of Lash and Urry (1994) that we will draw upon here. For these scholars, globalized culture was resolutely urban, despite technological advances in image reproduction and transfer, offering an opportunity to retheorize the cultural legacy of urban places and its new economic inflections. But these treatments have been crowded out by a host of laudatory proclamations of creativity as an urban development panacea, the most prominent of which is the work of Richard Florida (2002). Florida’s thesis – based on ‘fuzzy’ causal logic (Markusen, 2006) – equates the so-called ‘creative class’ with urban regeneration, and refocuses attention more squarely on cultural consumption (Pratt, 2008) with the aim of attracting discerning, educated workers to the local labour force with the lure of experiential, ‘cool’ cities rich in cultural amenities. While critical scholars have been quick to chastise urban creativity strategies as an expression of neoliberal development agendas complicit in social inequalities and dislocation at the community scale (Peck, 2005), they have nevertheless resonated with planners and policy-makers engaged in regeneration strategies which encompass place (re)making and marketing as elements of competitive advantage.

Varying disciplinary perspectives within this research domain, and the intrinsic fungibility of creativity and culture (Hutton, 2009a), have contributed to contested interpretations of the cultural economy, its relationship to place, and its developmental implications. For Florida, the creative class is a broad occupational cohort associated with knowledge-intensive economic subsectors, most of whom are consumers of culture,
rather than producers, including financial professionals and the business elite (Krätke, 2011). But under the influence of the creativity agenda, a shift in terminology has taken place rebranding the industries involved in the production of cultural products – the industries Scott and his colleagues had in mind, as well as newer ones such as software and gaming – as the ‘creative industries’, serving rhetorical purposes but generating confusion and disguising the theoretical weaknesses of the creativity thesis (Garnham, 2005; Krätke, 2011). As we will review in Chapter Two, scholars such as Markusen (2006) and Krätke (2011) have argued that a more differentiated categorization of the distinct economic sectors constituting the creative class is necessary, such that occupations with differing spatial tendencies, political stakes in urban development, and degrees of contribution to economic success can be assessed independently. The scientifically and technologically creative workforce, comprising research and development, scientific education, skilled technicians and health care professionals, has an easily demonstrable significant positive impact on innovation and regional economic growth, far more so than finance, real estate, or management (Krätke, 2011). Artistically creative workers, the ‘image producers’ of the entertainment, media, publishing, multimedia, and design industries, are also associated with regional economic success, although not to the extent of the scientifically and technologically creative workers. The value of the artistically creative is, in part, their contribution to sociocultural qualities of place and a vibrant cultural life, as Florida has proposed and Krätke has supported. Pratt (2008) has, however, pointed out that this focus on the value of cultural consumption distracts us from cultural production, inextricable from consumption but also a significant growth sector in many urban economies in its own right. Thus we can demonstrate the value of cultural production scholarship, which privileges production among an array of cultural sector activities also concerned with the reproduction, distribution, and display of cultural products.2

1 We argue, in fact, that as a work of sociology Florida’s analysis of the ‘creative class’ largely amounts to a less critical reframing of Ley’s ‘new middle class’ (1996). For that matter, Brooks’s comic portrayal of the ‘educated class’ of bourgeois bohemians (2000) also covers similar ground.
2 For a broader cultural industries perspective incorporating these supplementary roles, see Pratt (1997) and Hall (2000).
The need for dedicated cultural production scholarship is also appreciable outside the urban economic development discourse, in the work of geographers and policy makers dedicated to understanding the physical and social expressions of these development trajectories at the neighbourhood scale. The disaggregation of the constituent industrial sectors of the creative class indicates their differentiated spatial distributions. We are most likely to find the scientifically and technologically creative workforce working and living on the periphery of the metropolitan area, often commuting to and from suburban office parks (Markusen, 2006). But for the artistically creative workforce, there is a salience and consistency to the clustered cultural production sites of the inner city – often (but not always) distinct from institutions and sites of consumption such as museums, libraries, theatres, nightclubs, or galleries – that has attracted considerable academic interest (see Hutton, 2008; 2009a) and prompted scholars to declare the reassertion of place as the privileged locus of both culture and economy (Scott, 1997; 2001). Adopting a critical spatial perspective, and with a disregard for the celebratory ‘cultural production as development panacea’ discourse, industrial urbanists have produced a significant literature on the space-shaping power of cultural production, best demonstrated within older precincts of the inner city. This entails (1) reconfiguration of the metropolitan space economy, introducing localized new industrial districts as well as a broader urbanization economy and cultural milieu; (2) reterritorialisation, comprising experiences of succession and dislocation, accompanied by the reimaging of long-established districts; and (3) the physical reconstruction of inner city landscapes, including the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings and, in some cases, the comprehensive restoration of entire blocks or subareas (Hutton, 2006). The unique material characteristics of these enduring new industrial districts have led to an association of cultural production with heritage buildings and districts, generating an alluring and paradoxical aesthetic where the brick and iron of the older industrial vernacular mixes with the auras of technology, globalization, and modernity. But while this signature aesthetic has translated globally via representations of the ‘mythologies’ of cultural production, it has obscured the distinctive and variegated aesthetics associated with the diverse global cast of cultural production sites, which serve to highlight the significance of local contingencies and contextual circumstances.
These outcomes point to the need to heed Scott’s caution that cultural production scholarship must “pay very special attention to the cultural resonances of place” (2010, p. 122), accounting for the tendency for there to be “powerfully and recursively intertwined relations between meanings that adhere to the urban landscapes and the symbologies of the goods and services produced in the local area” (2001, p. 17). This thesis will expand on a decade of scholarship that has responded to calls to ‘rematerialize’ analyses of cultural practices and retheorize the importance of space in concrete, non-representational terms (see Rantisi & Leslie, 2010). Earliest among these is Helbrecht (1998; 2003) on the concrete experience of the ‘look and feel’ of creative spaces that informs the creative process and the reflexive self-identification of creators. Alternately, in a representational mode of thinking, Drake (2003) concludes that it is the “subjective, imagined, or constructed localities” (p. 513) that provide visual resources and the substance of a brand or identity based on reputation and tradition. Both Hutton (2006) and Rantisi and Leslie (2010) integrate these perspectives in thorough reviews of the spatiality and materiality of creative production (see Chapter Three). Beginning in Chapter Two, we will generate new insights via the application of Lash and Urry’s (1994) conceptualization of reflexive accumulation to the analysis of the role of place-based narratives and imageries in cultural production. This frame of analysis reinforces the value of dedicated cultural production scholarship, as Lash and Urry describe the ascendance of an economy that is definitively knowledge- or technology-intensive as well as design-intensive or aestheticized. Cultural production operates at the convergence of these defining attributes.

1.2 Locational context

This thesis investigates the outcomes of cultural production in the inner city of Vancouver, BC, Canada. Vancouver has a reputation as a distinctive and instructive model of progressive urbanism, with a development trajectory characterized by a robust, knowledge-intensive, services-oriented economy of small- and medium-sized enterprises, and by transnational flows oriented to the emerging economies of the Pacific Rim. Within the reconfigured metropolitan core, the diversified, finely-grained landscapes of Vancouver’s CBD fringe and inner city are emblematic of the city’s postindustrial
transformation and postmodern urbanism. These include the celebrated residential mega-projects and unconsolidated, mixed-use ‘tower and podium’ districts that are best known as the ‘Vancouverism’ model of urban design, as well as a number of unique service industry clusters, some in historical, repurposed warehousing districts atypical of the city’s popular imageries (see Hutton, 2004b). Research on Vancouver benefits from an extensive literature that includes – much like the creative economy – laudatory popular media treatments and a body of critical urban scholarship. These perspectives imply the continued salience of Vancouver as a planning and policymaking laboratory, where high standards of urban livability for some have been achieved at the cost of an affordability crisis and neglected social problems for others.

Artistically- and technologically-creative industries – particularly film and video game production, software, computer graphics and imaging, architecture, and urban design – have emerged as centerpieces among Vancouver’s specialized services following its transition to a knowledge-based, post-staples economy. These interface with a broader cultural sector as well, which includes a substantial component of artists and a number of institutions serving education and the arts. Among the service industry clusters of the central area, a number of cultural production sites can be identified (see Chapter Four; Hutton, 2004a; 2008), from among which two will be examined in detail:

(1) Gastown/Victory Square, a large district now anchored by the centripetal force of the Woodwards redevelopment, possessing a high-integrity heritage built environment that includes the repurposed commercial landmarks of the original CBD, and evincing a grittier, more bohemian, and more ‘authentic’ imagery than Yaletown, ostensibly still the city’s epicentre of creativity (see Chapter Four). Its imageries are characterized in part by the visibility of marginalized social groups and the area’s symbolic role as the interface between the downtown peninsula and the Downtown Eastside, epicentre of social problems.

(2) Railtown, a compact, incipient production site on the northern fringe of the Downtown Eastside, possessing a well-maintained ensemble of repurposed
warehouses that provide an affordable base for smaller pioneering firms and start-ups, but at present lacking the full assortment of amenities, ‘third spaces’, and lively urbanism that facilitates the social benefits of agglomeration. Among the city’s ‘incipient’ cultural production clusters, Railtown is favoured as a highly desirable location (see Chapter Five).

This thesis builds on a rich legacy of cultural industries scholarship in Vancouver, including outstanding sources on spatiality and materiality (eg, Helbrecht 1998; Hutton, 2006) and a number of graduate theses (eg, Brail, 1994; Pope, 2002; Arthurs, 2012).

1.3 Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how Vancouver’s cultural industries are engaging with the material and symbolic landscapes of the inner city. Specifically, this thesis addresses the reflexive relationship that cultural producers maintain with the unique material and semiotic characteristics of these enduring new industrial districts, in which heritage imageries and signifiers of collective memory inform creative personas, processes, and outputs. This ‘reflexive project of the self’ influences the maintenance of the built environment and has the capacity to alter imageries and collective memory wherever signifiers are re-associated or obscured. By acknowledging the reflexive self-awareness of cultural producers, we contribute new insights into the relationship between production and space, where the built environment is a source of creative stimuli and a resource for self-identification.

Drawing on a selection of semi-structured conversations with creative directors of cultural firms, agencies, and studios, the thesis will generate a range of perspectives on and insights into the role of local history or mythology in cultural production districts. This study also includes a speculative component, which will draw on the literature on the built environment as a repository for ‘collective memory’. As historic districts are remade as sites of cultural production, and symbolic reminders of the past are obscured or re-associated, history is effectively ‘remembered’ or ‘forgotten’, occluded by the economistic imperative, and accompanied by sensory dislocation.
With regard to planning, this thesis integrates perspectives on the urban development capacity of the cultural economy with the interests of planners engaged in place (re)making. Besides its obvious utility for economic development planners concerned with the spatial dynamics of the cultural economy, this thesis will also be relevant to the field of heritage preservation planning given its focus on the reconstruction, reimagining, and re-signification of historical landscapes. The planning implications of this thesis’s findings will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

The primary research questions to be answered by my thesis are:

(1) In what ways do Vancouver’s cultural producers engage with the aesthetic and semiotic landscapes of the Gastown, Victory Square, and Railtown historic districts, whether as identifiable places from which they can inherit symbolic associations and local imageries, or as ‘placeless’ landscapes conducive to self-definition, or as a combination of both?

(2) What are the conflations of historical narratives and mythologies that are evoked in the commercial identities of Vancouver’s cultural industries?

(3) To what extent could the trends observed following questions (1) and (2) lead to the ‘remembering’ and ‘forgetting’ of eras of Vancouver’s past, effectively rewriting our collective history?

In a forthcoming paper, Hutton and Pratt argue that the resilience of the creative economy in the wake of the ongoing financial crisis challenges normative perspectives on the relationship between cultural industries and urban economies. There is a need, they propose, for a more nuanced conceptualization, taking into greater account the ‘socio-economic-political situatedness’ of the creative economy, that would contribute to the reconciliation of divergent critical perspectives and the elaboration of better-conceived ‘best practice’ policies (Hutton & Pratt, in press). This thesis makes a valuable and original contribution to this scholarly pursuit intended to expand on our understanding of
the relationship between cultural production and the spatiality and materiality of repurposed inner city districts. Specifically, the intention is to investigate the resonance of the distinctive historical imageries of these sites. Building on previous scholarship in this city and elsewhere, and drawing on relevant ideas from parallel discourses in the urban studies literature, this thesis contributes to the need for situatedness by providing analysis contextualized within debates on our collective remembrance of the history of urban places.

1.4 Method

The research methodology of this thesis follows a qualitative mixed-methods approach with two sequential research stages:

(1) The purpose of the first stage of research is to assemble a theoretical framework and generate workable hypotheses from academic review and observation that can be tested against the second research component.

This stage comprised a literature review and a historical review of the emergence of the creative economy in Vancouver, including both academic sources and relevant planning and policy documents. This research stage was augmented by field observation and some preliminary photography exploring the situation of creative firms within the inner city. An earlier literature review was completed as the major component of a directed study with Dr. Tom Hutton, submitted October 2010. The theoretical framework and hypotheses undergirding this thesis were also presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers, in New York, February 2012.

(2) The purpose of the second stage of research is to evaluate theories, hypotheses, and observations by testing them against a second data collection component. As is particularly useful where research is based on lived experience and social realities, and privileges the researcher as interpreter of observations, the
confirmed findings at this stage will be made doubly valid, as they have been developed and tested against ‘real world’ observation.

The primary component of this stage was thirteen semi-structured interviews conducted with the creative directors (and, in one case, the business director) of creative firms based in the study areas (and, in one case, the ‘greater Yaletown’ area). See Chapter Four for a definition of the study areas and Chapter Five for a detailed description of the interview process. The substance of these interviews, informed by the first stage of research, explored (i) factors influencing the location of firms, (ii) perceptions of the area and its history, (iii) perceptions of the firm’s own creative and commercial identity, and (iv) how this identity relates to place and history, if at all. This stage was augmented by additional field observation and photography, documenting representative examples of landscapes discussed with interview subjects.

Information and data gathered at the second stage was analyzed on the basis of literature reviewed in the first stage to arrive at the conclusions in this thesis. Following the review of findings in Chapter Five, these are discussed in terms of their implications for the maintenance of collective memory (also in Chapter Five) and in terms of their implications for future planning and policy-making (Chapter Six).

This thesis is informed by an extensive range of site-specific narratives published on cultural production districts in North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia. Canadian scholarship has included work on Toronto’s Liberty Village (Catungal & Leslie, 2009; Catungal, Leslie, & Hii, 2009), Montréal’s Mile End (Rantisi & Leslie, 2010), and Vancouver’s Yaletown, Gastown, and Victory Square (see Chapter Four). We will also draw on two other bodies of scholarship from within the urban studies realm. First, the literature on the aesthetics of residential gentrification is an obvious parallel given our interest in the ‘subjective, imagined, or constructed localities’ of the postindustrial inner city. The following chapters demonstrate the utility certain streams of this literature have for our interpretation of creative production landscapes, including (a) the aesthetics of
residential gentrification in general (Jager, 1986; Ley, 1996), (b) the phenomenon of ‘loft living’ (Zukin, 1982; followed by Podmore, 1998; Shaw, 2006; Hamnett & Whitelegg, 2007), and (c) the specific dynamics of artist-led gentrification (particularly Bain, 2003; Ley, 2003; Harris, 2012). Second, the speculative component of this thesis, on the implications for the collective remembrance of landscapes of creative production, is informed by work on the capacity of urban places to act as mnemonics for the collective perception of the past, where ‘collective memory’ is the subjective and socially-constructed parallel to objective history (for introductory reviews, see Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004; Crinson, 2005; Legg, 2007; Rose-Redwood et al., 2008). Throughout much of the scholarship on memory, sites of explicit remembrance – such as monuments, memorials, and museums – have provided the most fertile grounds for investigation. This thesis, on the other hand, follows scholars who have examined the street and ‘vernacular’ urban spaces as loci of collective memory (Hebbert, 2005; Stangl, 2008). This discourse theorizes the city as a palimpsest, a built environment ‘thick’ with accumulated traces of the past, some legible, others obscured (see Huyssen, 2003). To take charge of the built environment is thus to take charge of memory, for the ability to emphasize or obscure these traces is the ability to control collective remembrance.

1.4.a Scope and Limitations

In the spirit of economic geography after the ‘cultural turn’ (Barnes, 2001), and in anticipation of an argument that will rely heavily on diagnosing self-reflexivity in others, we would be remiss to not conclude with our own reflection on the inherent practical and epistemological limitations of the methodology just proposed. First, the practical: although our conclusions are framed within an especially broad literature review, the primary research is composed of a small number of in-depth interviews with representatives of firms that vary in terms of industrial/enterprise structure, scale and profile, geographical situation, and history. This is lower than the number intended (and expected), but seems to suggest the apparently growing reluctance of firms to participate in academic research. Perhaps we can attribute some of this to the pressures of an extended recessionary period; Pope (2002), by contrast, enjoyed the luxury of seeking interviews at a time of unprecedented good fortune in the new media sector prior to the
dot.com boom. But we also found, in at least two cases, that firms indicated that they no longer respond to the recurrent (and tiresome) requests for scholarly interviews. Participation rates were lower than expected: only 13 of 50 firms contacted consented to participate in the study (26 percent), contrasting with 26 of 69 (38 percent) for Brail (1994) and 25 of 64 (39 percent) for Pope (2002). After a full round of follow-up phone calls, which yielded the greatest number of willing participants but were often met with skillful deflection from assistants and administrators, ‘snowball sampling’ (requesting that participants provide further contacts) was also employed. These methods are discussed further in Chapter Five, but we should note that further study could draw on complementary methods, including informant interviews representing different stakeholder groups (eg, policymakers, representatives of other industrial sectors) and examination of textual records (eg, marketing materials, trade journals). Lloyd (2006) has effectively deployed a participant-observer approach to address similar research questions. For the present research, we have striven to make the most of our interviews by abandoning the highly-structured style employed in earlier graduate research in favour of an in-depth, semi-structured, and constantly-evolving (reflexive) approach. The results are qualitatively rich, but are not supported by the sort of empirical, survey-based data available elsewhere.

Our findings, then, are not necessarily generalizable, but add to the range of site-specific narratives available in the creative industries research domain, and may form the basis for iterative (re)theorization. Our intent is to present a range of perspectives, observations, and insights intended to form a compelling response to the research questions above. We make a brief attempt at what Barnes describes as ‘hermeneutic theorizing’ in the concluding chapter, followed by a speculation on the implications our conclusions pose for collective memory – all of which is limited by the capacities of the researcher as privileged interpreter, but benefits from situation within a broad literature survey. In part, this thesis is intended as an exploration that will direct further graduate study.
1.5 Organization

This thesis is organized into six chapters. It is guided throughout by the desire to develop a multi-scalar analysis capable of incorporating both macro- and micro-geographical specificities and contingencies, guided by knowledge of local historical development trajectories and site- and city-specific particularities (see Barnes and Hutton, 2009).

Chapter One introduces and frames the research task. The purpose and objectives, definition of the creative economy, research background, locational context, significance, scope and limitations, and method of the research are reviewed.

Chapter Two reviews the theoretical literature on cultural production and the city in the ‘creative age’. We introduce Lash and Urry’s (1994) notion of reflexive accumulation, which provides a framework for interpreting the heightened knowledge- and design-intensivity of postindustrial/postmodern economies. Following this, we provide an introduction to the determinants of the urban geography of cultural production, including economic and social agglomeration factors and the importance of the creative milieux. Third, we review the debates on regeneration and dislocation at the centre of discussions on the developmental implications of the cultural economy.

Chapter Three moves towards a finer-scale analysis of the spatiality and materiality of cultural production sites. This suggests further locational determinants, including the importance of architectural and urban configurations conducive to cultural production. Additional locational determinants are reviewed that follow from the premise of heightened aesthetic reflexivity, where the landscape becomes a resource of visual stimuli, imageries, and symbols, used as both a prompt for creativity and as a resource for self-identification. Images of place and producer have a heightened role in an economy of postmodern goods and services. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the relationship between cultural production and place-based imageries. We share some insights into the importance of ‘authentic’ historical imageries, leading to the proposal that cultural producers are influenced by a nostalgic desire to rediscover and identify with
local history and a simultaneous tendency to recreate the imageries associated with the universal mythologies of art production and bohemianism. This conflation of history and myth has important implications for the collective remembrance of cultural production sites.

Chapter Four addresses the need to consider geographical specificity. First, Vancouver’s historical development is reviewed, from the era of the staples economy to contemporary postmodern urbanism, finishing with the ascendance of the creative economy. Returning again to a finer scale, the Gastown/Victory Square and Railtown study areas are defined and discussed in detail, with the purpose of reviewing the unique histories, identities, and imageries associated with these landscapes, on the basis of which the following chapter’s analysis may operate.

Chapter Five begins by outlining the research methodology in greater detail. Following this, the results are presented and analyzed, organized in a way that parallels the thematic structure deployed in Chapter Three’s literature review. We cover locational determinants and spatial and material considerations; aesthetic reflexivity, creative identities, and the built environment; and finally the conflation of authentic and constructed imageries in the reconstruction of Vancouver’s cultural production districts. As the first two of these three themes covers similar ground to that of earlier scholarship, our intent is primarily to enrich the nuances of scholarly understanding and probe divergences from the narratives already available. On the third theme, our acknowledgement of reflexivity generates new insights that inform our speculation, in the final chapter, on implications for collective memory and planning policy.

Chapter Six begins by reviewing the conclusions of this thesis. Following this, we attempt to theorize the relationship cultural producers maintain with the aesthetic and semiotic landscapes of production, acknowledging their reflexive need to establish a place-based self-identity and maintain a biographical narrative grounded in spatial and material surroundings. We speculate that this emphasis on the creative self, and the general circumstance of the accelerated circulation of images emptied of meaning, leads
to a built environment characterized by indistinguishability between endogenous memory and exogenous mythology. These conclusions point to the need to reconceptualize the objectives of cultural policy, at least within the realms of spatial, land use, and heritage preservation planning. In particular, the compatibility of heritage preservation with cultural production is called into question, based on our negative projections for the future of collective memory associated with Vancouver’s heritage areas.
2 The City in the ‘Creative Age’

The clustered site of cultural production has emerged as a durable spatial construct in the sequence of industrial and spatial restructuring episodes transforming urban economies since the 1980s; it has been a seemingly permanent feature in the inner city landscape despite the recurrent succession and dislocation that have characterized the ever-changing ensemble of firms. As such, it presents compelling opportunities for the reevaluation of the industrial district and the urban space-economy, the reconsideration of the social and cultural landscapes of the contemporary city, and the reformulation of social and urban development planning policy. The thesis at hand finds its roots in scholarship that has identified cultural production as a significant transformative agent in the reconstruction, re-territorialization, and re-imaging of the inner city. This chapter will provide a review of perspectives on cultural production in the inner city that will frame the further theoretical review in Chapter Three and contextualize the overview of Vancouver’s cultural production sites in Chapter Four. First, the rise of the cultural industries will be situated within global economic transformations observed since the 1970s. We will argue that Lash and Urry’s (1994) conceptualization of ‘reflexive accumulation’ offers a superior intellectual vantage point from which the rise of the cultural services and their particular characteristics as described in subsequent sections of this chapter may be understood. Second, we will consider the factors drawing cultural industries together in the inner city. Cultural production districts benefit from ‘localization’ and ‘urbanization’ economies, the latter of which refers in this case to the place-specific benefits of cities as sites of diversity, creative milieux, and ‘neo-bohemies’. Third, we will consider the developmental implications of these neo-bohemian sites of cultural production in the inner city. While policymakers have routinely celebrated cultural industries as agents of economic and physical regeneration, they have tended to overlook or underestimate negative outcomes including the dislocation of residents and businesses and the reterritorialization of urban space.
2.1 Flexible Production Systems, Reflexivity, and the Global Geography of Cultural Industries

The rise of the new cultural economy can be situated within the accelerated globalization of production systems observed since the 1970s, manifested in the North American city as the decline of Fordist industrial manufacture and the rise of a significantly expanded service sector encompassing both internationalized finance and a range of specialized producer and consumer services. The expansion of the service sector – of which the cultural economy is a part – has been engendered by the postfordist transition from rigidity to flexibility in production systems, partly via the externalization of services from industrial corporations and enterprises and partly via new divisions of labour within production systems. Since the 1980s, continued economic globalization accompanied by growing competition and the deregulation of international financial markets has inspired further specialization and diversification in a service sector increasingly oriented to global markets.¹

These economic transformations account for the emergence of the cultural economy by means of two parallel developments. First, production in the postfordist era has become far more knowledge-intensive (Lash and Urry, 1994). The quick-changing needs and tastes associated with flexible production systems have positioned technological innovation as an important source of competitive advantage, particularly as it relates to information technology and telecommunication. For example, technology has facilitated the absorption of long-established cultural industries into the global economy, such as architecture, industrial design, and fashion design, aided by the capabilities of instant visualization and the digital transmission of design concepts across space (Hutton, 2009a), and has altered the nature of production in other now vertically-disintegrated culture industries, such as film, television, and music production (Lash & Urry, 1994). It

¹ These processes are summarized from Harvey (1990), on the transition to ‘flexible accumulation’, and Sassen (2001), on the global geography of producer services. These scholars offer dichotomous but complementary interpretations of global economic change: for Harvey, externalization was a means of bypassing the rigidity of an organized working class, by subcontracting production and services to disorganized and disempowered pools of surplus labour; while for Sassen, following Piore and Sabel (1984), externalization has been the necessary outcome of the increased complexity of production systems and the heightened specialization of services, which are most effectively provided by an external service sector realizing economies of scale.
has also spawned markets for new forms of digital entertainment, including computer and video gaming. Outside the cultural realm, knowledge-intensive production is also associated with ‘scientifically and technologically creative’ industries, as described by Krätke (2011). Generally, these developments fit the forecast of Bell (1973), who anticipated the coming of a ‘postindustrial society’ of professional and technical workers, attendant on the transition from a goods-producing to a services-based economy, where technology, intellectual theory, innovation, and education are highly regarded and valued. While postindustrialism is contested by industrial urbanists who object to its deprivileging of industrialization processes and the “spatial specificity of urbanism” (Soja, 2000, p. 166), Ley (1980; 1996; 2005) has effectively deployed the concept as a descriptor of the social, cultural, and political outcomes associated with the expansion of knowledge-based industries.² We must also acknowledge the place of postindustrialism within (and as an expression of) globalization, the scale of which Bell did not have the prescience to accommodate in his thesis. Postindustrialism has most effectively described conditions within major cities occupying privileged positions on the ‘global assembly line’, while industrialism still characterizes regional hinterlands and much of the global south.

Second, production in the postfordist era has also become far more design-intensive, meaning that it has taken on a substantial image-producing or -processing component. Following Lash and Urry (1994), we argue that this is the outcome of greater reflexivity on the part of both producers and consumers.³ The postmodern era of flexible production systems, characterized by the circulation of objects, information, and images over a greater distance at an ever-greater rate – for Harvey (1990), the ‘compression of space and time’ – is experienced by the consumer as an overload of signifiers and the

² Beyond its disregard for the continuing contribution of manufacturing industries to urban economies, postindustrialism also fails to recognize that the specialized services and innovations emanating from postindustrial cities near the top of the global urban hierarchy represent only a new form of production (Sassen, 2001); thus scholars such as Pratt (2009) propose the alternate term ‘neoindustrial’ to describe the postindustrial economy and Hutton (2008) theorizes the new economy as the ‘reassertion of production in the inner city’.
³ While our discussion is based on Lash and Urry’s Economies of Signs & Space (1994), we should acknowledge – as Lash and Urry do – the centrality of reflexivity to influential earlier critical treatments of contemporary societies, notably Beck (1992/1986) and Giddens (1991).
growing challenge of attributing meaning or ‘signifieds’ to them. The emergence of a greater critical reflexivity is a response to this bombardment. It is a process of learning to monitor and reflect on the self, where the collapse of Fordist structural rigidity engenders an ‘accelerating individualization’. Of particular importance is the emergence of what Lash and Urry call aesthetic reflexivity, which is a critical capacity of self-interpretation or self-identification, an awareness of how one’s disposition and exhibition of tastes create and define one’s self. Reflexivity is demonstrated in new practices of production and consumption, and in the flow of dematerialized objects with significant sign value and aesthetic content. Thus Lash and Urry describe the aestheticization of production, where the design process represents an important contribution to value-added and output differentiation, comprising both cognitive and aesthetic components. Consumption is guided by the creation of the self via the navigation of choices and, for the middle class, the assertion of status and class distinctions via the accumulation of cultural capital (see Bourdieu, 1984/1979). Reflexive middle class consumption thus guides the new middle class in their ‘remaking of the central city’ (see Ley, 1996; Butler & Robson, 2003) and informs contestation over urban space and its reconstruction (see Zukin, 1995).

As an alternative to flexible accumulation, Lash and Urry propose reflexive accumulation, describing an economy which is both knowledge- and, definitively, design-intensive, given that aesthetic reflexivity has permeated both production and consumption practices. The heightened role of cultural industries in a regime of reflexive accumulation is no doubt obvious, given “the proliferation of objects which possess a substantial aesthetic component” as well as “the increasing component of sign-value or image embodied in material objects” (Lash & Urry, 1994, p. 4). Reflexive accumulation is indicative of what Scott (1997) observes as the “very marked convergence between the spheres of cultural and economic development” (p. 323), the apex of which is occupied by the cultural or creative industries.4 As such, the range of cultural industries suggests both the increasing economic inflection of culture and the increasing cultural inflection of economies. A distinctive attribute of the these industries, comprising highly-social work

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4 Indeed, as discussed in Chapter One, the term creative production implies the investment of cognitive (knowledge) and aesthetic (design) reflexivity as its defining feature.
environments and the design-intensive labour of reflexive and expert individuals, is their conspicuous tendency to behave less like industries and more like artist communities; thus Lash and Urry describe a high-tech district as a ‘cultural district’ (p. 97) and Lloyd (2006) coins the term ‘neo-Bohemia’ to describe Chicago’s Wicker Park. As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, the notion of heightened aesthetic reflexivity serves as a critical theoretical foundation for this thesis, highlighting as it does the privileged role of place, space, and material attendant on the symbol-intensive nature of cultural production.

2.2 The Urban Geography of the Cultural Economy

The emergence of a globalized cultural economy, with the inner city production site cast as a manifestation of globalization at the micro-scale (Hutton, 2009a), reasserts place as the privileged locus of both culture and economy (Scott, 1997; 2001). Clustered production sites have demonstrated the continued importance of social interaction, physical proximity, stimulating and interactive workplaces, and localized economies of scale, contrary to conjectures about the ‘death of distance’ proposed in the 1980s and 1990s (see Pratt, 2000; Evans, 2004). Inner city production sites – selectively concentrated within a limited number of large cities and metropolises – interface with a global network, the geography of which is influenced by urban competitive advantage, including skilled labour supply, proximity to inputs and consumer markets, local specializations, and public policies and incentives. London, for example, encompasses multiple clusters of cultural production as an expression of its urban scale, while also hosting multiple banking and financial districts (Hutton 2008; 2009a). But the most salient characteristic arguing for the reassertion of place – and here we will acknowledge the influential work of Allen Scott – has been the tendency for there to be “powerful and recursively intertwined relations between the meanings that adhere to the urban landscapes and the symbologies of the goods and services produced in the local area” (Scott, 2001, p. 17), best demonstrated by such iconic global clusters as film in Hollywood, media in Manhattan, or fashion in Paris. Scott (2001; 2010) has described the

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5 On the social organization of cultural production districts, we can also acknowledge Grabher’s work on the advertising agencies of London’s SoHo as a heterarchic ‘ecology of creativity’ (2001).
capacity of cities to function as creative fields, defined, “in short, as a system of cues and resources providing materials for imaginative appropriation by individuals and groups as they pursue the business of work and life in urban space” (2010, p. 121).\(^6\) Importantly, given the shift in emphasis from technology-intensive industry to symbol-intensive cultural production, Scott argues that scholarship must “pay very special attention to the cultural resonances of place” (p. 122), which adhere to and differentiate the cultural outputs of distinct urban places. The following sub-sections will review the course of the literature on the urban geography of cultural production, which has indeed moved toward an increased recognition of the cultural resonance of urban spaces and creative milieux.

2.2.a The Cultural Production District

For scholars of industrial urbanism, these transformations have generated a lasting discourse on the new industrial spaces of the postfordist city (see Soja, 2000), including the production districts of the new cultural economy. With Allen Scott positioned as a key pioneering theorist, industrial urbanists conducted a series of case studies in the later 1980s investigating the specialized new industrial complexes that emerged from the extended and comprehensive restructuring process that began with the collapse of Fordist industrial manufacture in the metropolitan core in the 1960s and 1970s.\(^7\) From these, and in concert with a nascent interest in place-making, tourism, and heritage preservation planning, emerged an awareness of the inter-connections between postfordist economic development and the urban cultural environment, and the significance of ‘image-producing’ industries in particular, culminating in Scott’s landmark theoretical synthesis (1997). These new manifestations of industrial districts, pointing to a reassertion of production within the metropolitan core (and the inner city in particular), have provided a unique opportunity for re-theorization within the traditional industrial district discourse as well. Hutton (2008) refers to Harrison’s (1992) review of this discourse, which continues to hold some utility for the interpretation of clustered cultural production. The traditional

\(^6\) To be sure, Scott consistently acknowledges his intellectual debt to Lash and Urry’s work on reflexive accumulation (1994).

\(^7\) For a list of key case studies between the late 1980s and early 2000s categorized by sector, see Scott (2004, pp. 469-470). Sectors receiving attention in the literature include clothing, jewelry, furniture, fashion retailing, film and television program production, music, print publishing, new media, design services, and advertising.
industrial district is based on the benefits of agglomeration, including knowledge spillovers, both tacit and codified; a realization of external economies of scale based on common pools of factors of production, notably labour, land, technology, and infrastructure; and productivity gains accruing from specialization. Harrison also reviews later scholarship that has de-emphasized competition and identified the advantages attributable to the interdependence of firms, co-operative competition, and trust in social networks. Cultural industries continue to realize these benefits in agglomeration, although the new industrial district is distinguished by its tendency towards accelerated and recurrent restructuring, the well-documented role of public policy and incentives, its integration within global networks, and its emphasis on experimentation, innovation, and creativity (Hutton, 2008).

This discourse also includes perspectives that position the cultural production district as a reassertion of the historic economic and cultural roles of the inner city that predate the industrial districts of the Fordist era. Following the economic geographers who theorized the traditional industrial districts of the Third Italy as precedents for the new industrial spaces of postfordism, Hutton (2000; 2008) presents the cultural production district as heir to the historical legacy of design and artisanal production clustered in inner city districts. This lineage may be extended back to the proto-industrial guild organizations of design professionals and skilled artisans clustered in the inner city, which were highly visible from the medieval age until the industrial innovations of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, when technological innovation, urban economic restructuring, and mass production swept away traditional forms. Continuities in the present include the intricate social and technical nature of artisanal labour, the place-associations of specialized cultural products (e.g. Venetian glasswork), durable occupational and social formations, intimate inner city locations, and the continued reliance on adaptable workshop, warehouse, and studio spaces (Hutton, 2009a). In some cities, scholars have observed the evolution of the artisanal district in place, drawing on historical reputations and institutions and enriched by technological innovations, some maintaining traditional specializations, such as many of the craft-based districts in the

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8 Again, see Soja (2000) for a review of this discourse.
Third Italy or high-end luxury goods producers in Paris (Scott, 1997), albeit attuned to global markets and altered to accommodate the spectacle and experience of cultural tourism (Evans, 2004; Hutton, 2008). In other cases, the artisanal district takes on new specializations altogether in the new economy, as has occurred in Hanoi, London’s Clerkenwell, and Singapore’s Chinatown (Hutton, 2006; 2008; see also Surborg, 2006). We can also acknowledge Evans (2004) on ‘cultural industry quarters’, described as “an anachronistic hangover from traditional craft, cooperative and place-based manufacturing, but at the same time a renewed landscape in contemporary art, new media and advanced services production” (p. 72). Cultural industry quarters encompass not just production districts, which can be either specialized or pluralistic and synergistic, but sites of cultural consumption as well (eg, retail, markets, entertainment venues, or festivals), which increasingly threaten to displace production.

Hutton (2004a) makes a significant contribution to scholarship on the geography and spatiality of cultural production by synthesizing a number of case studies on the new industry clusters of the inner city. These benefit from economic and social agglomeration factors to be sure, but Hutton also draws attention to the distinct environmental characteristics drawing cultural production to compact inner city sites. These include characteristics of the built environment (particularly architecturally-distinct heritage structures), cultural amenities (including galleries, museums, and exhibition spaces, as well as sites of collective memory), environmental amenities (including small parks, squares, and other sites for social interaction and exchange), and institutions supporting the new cultural economy (serving educational, advocative, or other supportive roles). Hutton also reviews the environmental impacts of new industry clusters, which include (1) reconstruction, encompassing the adaptive reuse of heritage structures, often to the extent of the comprehensive restoration of entire blocks or subareas; (2) the reconfiguration of the metropolitan core, as development momentum and production-consumption ensembles shift to the CBD fringe; and (3) the reterritorialisation of inner city space, comprising the re-imaging, re-signification, and redefinition of inner city districts. Hutton’s attempt to establish a taxonomy of cultural production districts – and here we should also acknowledge the efforts of Mommaas (2004) – have established the
typology as a durable construct and a key constituent element of the postindustrial metropolitan core.

2.2.b Cultural Production and the City

Beyond the industrial district discourse, there is also a rich body of literature that reads cultural production as a distinctly urban process, reasserting the centrality of culture to urbanity, proceeding from Scott’s writing on the intersection of place and culture (1997; 2001). As stated above, Scott’s notion of the city as a ‘creative field’ provides a theoretical foundation for this work, undergirded by an acknowledgement of the principal advantages of urbanism for culture including: (1) the presence of large, specialized labour forces; (2) the dynamic circulation of information and the intensity and variety of social relationships, which destabilize norms and generate a propensity for innovation; and (3) the concentration of public goods, including physical infrastructures, institutions, and intellectual and cultural traditions (see Scott, 2001, p. 13). The economic-geographical perspective is enriched by the differentiation between ‘localization’ and ‘urbanization’ economies, both of which account for the clustering of cultural industries, as emphasized in the work of Lorenzen and Frederiksen (2008) and Krätke (2011). Localization economies, corresponding with much of the classic literature on industrial districts, refer to the co-location of firms related in product offer or knowledge base and benefitting from positive externalities including coordination, competition, and access to specialized labour forces and institutions. Urbanization economies, particularly suitable for the interpretation of inner city creative districts and accounting for most of the locational determinants discussed in this and the following chapters, are characterized by the positive externalities associated with diversified clusters and specific urban spaces: interdisciplinary collaborations, diverse knowledge bases and labour forces, technology and information spillovers, suitable built environments abandoned by declining industries (especially traditional industrial manufacture), and access to the sorts of institutions, infrastructure, global networks, and stimulating cultural milieux only available in urban areas.
With an intellectual debt to Hall (1998; 2000), perspectives on the culture-urbanism nexus have also emphasized the benefits of social agglomeration and creative milieux. Relating historical high-culture cities to London’s present-day cultural clusters, Hall (2000) uses Törnqvist’s notion of the creative milieu, conceptualized in the early 1980s, which refers to the exchange of information, shared memories, and presence of skills or competence that create the preconditions for creativity and innovation.\(^9\) Evans (2004) also posits the cultural industry quarter as the descendant of cultural quarters observed since antiquity, citing the historical clustering tendencies of artists, avant-garde cultural producers, and bohemians as precedents to the contemporary cultural quarter, which suggests a broad array of social agglomeration benefits supporting the notion of a cultural milieu, including the exchange of ideas, information, and other forms of cultural capital (at times more important than the economic imperative); the rejection of the ‘establishment’; the resistance of authority and control; and the ability to attract a cosmopolitan community.

This theme has been explored further by Lloyd (2002; 2004; 2006), who has developed the concept of ‘neo-bohemia’ to interpret the contemporary convergence of bohemianism with concentrations of creative industries and the regeneration (and gentrification) of former industrial spaces. In Lloyd’s narrative, both the cultural producer and the firm benefit from locating in a neo-bohemian neighbourhood (such as Chicago’s Wicker Park), but for separate reasons. Bohemia’s association with artistic and cultural production equates to a lifestyle guide for the worker, a reaffirmation of freedom and individuality, and a “blueprint for contemporary action” (2006, p. 12), even if the label itself is refused. The inner city bohemian district, then, attracts the worker on the basis of the lifestyle it offers, as well as social support, the opportunity for social recognition, affordability (at first), and “the cultural depth of older city spaces” (2002, p. 524). Additionally, the neighbourhood offers sympathetic spaces for social interaction, including cafés, bars, and restaurants, as well as venues for different forms of artistic expression. For the cultural production firm, Lloyd emphasizes the attraction of a large

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\(^9\) For a summary of the concept, see Törnqvist (2004). For a review of the creative milieu literature, which is extensive, see Meusburger (2009). The creative milieu is also a primary component of what Krätke (2011) refers to as the ‘creative capital of cities’.
flexible labour pool of workers willing to sacrifice salary and security for lifestyle and location, potential consumers of cultural products, and, of course, a cultural milieu, which Lloyd likens to an external and unsubsidized research and development branch. The fieldwork of other scholars has generated similar observations, including Pratt’s (2000; 2002) description of non-routine, highly-social, and overtly casual workplaces in New York and San Francisco during the ‘dot.com’ era; Indergaard’s (2004) narration of Silicon Alley as driven by social interaction; and Hutton’s (2004; 2008) documentation of the importance of dense social networks, opportunities for interaction and exchange, and the diversity of social groups in London, San Francisco, Singapore, and Vancouver.

These themes – and the emphasis on urbanization economies in general – are echoed in the well-known ‘creative class’ thesis of Florida (2002; 2005), highly influential in mainstream media and policy-making circles but passionately contested by some academics. Florida’s argument is anchored by the idea that sociocultural qualities of place are of primary importance in attracting members of the creative class, who are in search of “abundant high-quality amenities and experiences, an openness to diversity of all kinds, and above all else the opportunity to validate their identities as creative people” (2002, p. 218). Supporting this argument, concentrations of the creative class positively correlate with measures of bohemianism, which appeals to the creatives as an ethic valuing pleasure, happiness, creative freedom, and innovation. Creative class concentrations also positively correlate with measures of diversity and homosexuality, suggesting that rich social capital and tolerance are also important elements of the creative milieu. The rise of the creative class, for Florida, is associated with a ‘transformation of everyday life’, including casual, flexible, and non-hierarchical ‘no-collar’ workplaces; an experiential lifestyle oriented to individuality, self-statement, acceptance of difference, and creative experiences; a blurring of work and play, in turn affecting the pace of everyday life and career trajectories; and the formation of creative communities providing stimulation, diversity, and a richness of experiences.

Criticisms of Florida’s thesis are abundant (see Krätke, 2011), and tend to take aim at his excessively rosy take on the socioeconomic implications of the ‘creative age’
and his short-sighted optimism regarding creativity as an economic development or regeneration strategy (eg, Peck, 2005). These are worthy of extended consideration and will be addressed in the following section. But with regard to his core ideas correlating concentrations of the creative class with the sociocultural qualities of urban places, and with creative milieux and bohemianism in particular, it is important to briefly review scholarship that has challenged his ambiguous conceptualization of the creative class and evaluated and refined his arguments correlating qualities of place with economic growth (Markusen, 2006; Pratt, 2008; Krätke, 2011). As acknowledged in our introductory chapter, it is necessary to disaggregate Florida’s creative class, given that his expansive and somewhat arbitrary categorization of professions as ‘creative’ ignores dissimilar sociologies and varying prospects for regional growth. Krätke subdivides the creative class into five groups [Table 2-1], only the first two of which (commonly grouped together by other scholars as the ‘creative industries’) are relevant to regional innovative capacity. Krätke finds that, while it is the ‘scientifically and technologically creative’ workforce that is most directly responsible for economic growth, it is the ‘artistically creative’ workforce (the subject of this thesis) that is most accurately depicted by Florida’s sociology.

1. Artistically creative workers (occupational groups of the cultural economy).
2. Scientifically and technologically creative workers (occupational groups in the fields of R&D, scientific education, as well as skilled technicians and health care professionals).
3. The dealer class (finance and real estate professionals).
4. The economic management class (executives, business consultants).
5. The political class (members of legislative bodies, politicians, public administrators).

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<th>Table 2-1. A disaggregation of Florida’s creative class.</th>
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<td>Source: Krätke (2011, p. 46).</td>
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2.3. **Regeneration, Dislocation, and the Creative City**

Interest in the relationship between creativity and urban economies has expanded beyond academia in the last decade, reaching ‘popular’ non-academic audiences and dominating the discourses of economic development policy. As described by Gibson and Klocker (2004), Peck (2005), and Evans (2009a), popular interest in creativity as an
urban economic development strategy reflects a desire for quick and easy urban policy aimed at establishing new forms of competitive advantage. Creative policy is a movement, comprising specialists and gurus such as Charles Landry (2000) and Richard Florida (2002), research centres of all sorts (government, think-tanks, university-based), and dedicated conferences and symposia. It is sold as a ‘one size fits all’ development strategy, with standardized ranking systems such as Florida’s ‘Creativity Index’ allowing cities of all sizes to quantitatively assess their capacity to attract the footloose creative class. Evans (2009a) describes the international scale of the preoccupation with ‘creative industries’ in urban policy since the middle of the 2000s, demonstrated by a long list of municipal commissions and agencies dedicated to creative planning, as well as a global distribution of creative districts and industrial-scale facilities, all of which is accompanied by related initiatives dedicated to scientific, technological, or knowledge-based industries. However, Gibson and Klocker (2004) argue that the ubiquity of creative policy has allowed its assumptions to accumulate unchecked credibility, granting proponents such as Florida a rarely challenged authority and leading to the standardization of the creativity-led economic development narrative. Given the broad influence of the creativity debate, it is necessary to frame our research in this regard, and address the related implications for regeneration and dislocation.

For Florida, the economic fortunes of postindustrial cities lie in their capacity to attract members of the creative class, the sociology of which has been challenged above. This is based on a belief that, in the creative age, talented people do not follow jobs; instead jobs follow talented people, who are attracted to cities abundant in high-quality amenities and experiences with the openness, diversity, and milieux necessary to support their creative and experiential lifestyles. Based on Florida’s measures, the ‘winners’ of the creative age are those cities that are attracting and retaining the creative class, such as Austin, San Francisco, and Seattle. The ‘losers’, such as Louisville, Buffalo, or New Orleans, need to focus on building a ‘people climate’ rather than a business climate, which amounts to building a vibrant, high-amenity urban area and working to accommodate the exalted young, educated professionals wherever possible. The simplicity of Florida’s proposition, and his digestible, scientific approach to quantifying
success has made creativity a buzzword in political and policymaking circles. The success of creative policy, suggests Peck (2005), is also due in part to its capacity to work within “‘neoliberal’ development agendas, framed around interurban competition, gentrification, middle-class consumption and place-marketing” (p. 740-741). An international survey of the rationales for creative policies and strategies found that an overwhelming majority focused on economic development and job creation as the primary motivation, followed by infrastructure and regeneration [Figure 2-1]. The preservation of local cultural heritage and the benefits of creativity to quality of life were the least-cited policy rationales (Evans, 2009a).

Figure 2-1. Creative policy rationales for an international sample of urban areas, 2005-2008.
Source: Evans (2009a).

One of the greatest problems with the Florida thesis and the planning and policies it has inspired is the reproduction of the notion that almost any city, big or small, can
attract the creative class and, it follows, be successful in the creative age. Thus Gibson and Klocker (2004) find fault with the standardized and universal narratives of creativity as an economic development strategy. In his often-cited acerbic critique of the Florida thesis, Peck (2005) similarly challenges the easily replicated ‘creativity script’. Too often it activates a competitive spirit and heady desire for growth that leads to planning without consideration of a given city’s situation within larger urban regions, including overlooked opportunities for co-operative advantage or a risk assessment around issues of economic, social, or environmental sustainability (Evans, 2009a). Blind faith and constructed visions lead policymakers to not look beyond the short-term physical and economic impacts they hope to impart (Evans, 2005). The reality, argues Pratt (2008), is that the competition for creative investment is a zero-sum game, where the resource at stake (ideas, creativity, or innovation) can be re-located far too easily or traded online. Despite Florida’s assertion that all places can be creative, some cities will have the competitive advantage of creative activities already embedded in local production cultures, while others confront the risks associated with promoting creative industries not currently reflected in their economic and employment profile (Evans, 2009a). Better-informed planning is limited, however, by a lack of conceptual clarity surrounding creativity and its role in production and consumption (Pratt, 2008), and by the lack of quantitative evidence and indicators by which we can learn from the success or failure of policy initiatives (Evans, 2005).

As an alternative to Florida’s creativity as regeneration thesis, which, as we have seen, has inspired an approach to ‘cultural planning’ that frames economic development, job creation, infrastructure, and regeneration as its desired outcomes, a second perspective exists which emphasizes the pervasive experiences of dislocation inherent in many postindustrial storylines (see Hutton, 2009b). At the metropolitan level the ‘rise of the creative class’ is implicated in growing inequality, at the expense of both the working class and the lower end of the service class, who are unable to participate in the ‘creative revolution’ (Peck, 2005), often due to a lack of education or technological capabilities; indeed, this is no doubt indicative of the general deepening socioeconomic polarization characteristic of flexible specialization or accumulation, as asserted by both Sassen
(2001) and Harvey (1990). At a finer scale, however, these social conflicts manifest as the dislocation and displacement of existing businesses and residents, where new high-growth firms bid up rents and outcompete for property and space. The effects of creativity-led regeneration may also be felt in adjacent commercial or residential areas (Hutton, 2004a). Thus Indergaard (2009) and Pratt (2009) have recently introduced the notion of ‘commercial’ or ‘industrial’ gentrification to their studies of the new economy, as a reminder that the residential focus of most gentrification literature disguises the broader domain of this economic process (see Curran, 2007).

While it is the industries themselves that are displacing former residents or businesses, they are aided and abetted by both policy-makers and the development community. Whether inspired by a thinly concealed desire to remake the city for the middle class or a poorly understood notion that regeneration will have trickle-down effects for the working class and the urban poor, economic development policy for the new economy frequently lacks the sensitivity necessary to mitigate dislocation and displacement experiences. Regeneration strategies require sensitive planning interventions, public commitments to community consultation, and retraining programs for those whose skills no longer match job creation (Hutton, 2004a). Indergaard (2009) recognizes the need for alternative policies that allow for a broader and more inclusionary understanding of who and what belongs in a creative community. Indergaard also documents the role of the real estate community in the gentrification of New York’s new economy sites, which is driven alternately by public policies that favour creative industries or by a lack of policy direction where lax enforcement and the anticipation of rezoning encourage speculation or illegal conversions. The mythology of bohemianism is doubly exploited: first as a strategy to attract cultural aspirants willing to sacrifice tenure and physical security for lifestyle and location (Lloyd, 2006), and later as a strategy to attract well-paid members of the professional and managerial middle classes into revalorized ‘loft-living’ districts (Hamnett & Whitelegg, 2007).

This observation on the exploitation of bohemianism invokes the rich body of literature on the artist-led ‘loft living’ mode of gentrification, which has transformed the
former manufacturing and warehousing landscapes of many cities. ‘Loft living’ is most closely associated with the classic work of Sharon Zukin (1982), who documented the conversion of lower Manhattan’s derelict manufacturing spaces to residential uses by artists in the 1960s and 1970s. Zukin found that, following praise for loft conversions from city governments and the press in the 1970s, the loft phenomenon was driven by investors and real-estate developers rather than artists, which quickly led to the displacement of the gentrifying artists as well, and the influx of a broader segment of the middle class. Zukin referred to this as the ‘artistic mode of production’, where a redevelopment strategy based on the arts and historic preservation was made possible via the revalorization of older industrial spaces by artists, a lowering of consumer expectations in light of high demand for loft spaces, and a changing perception of industrial society and its problems, which were no longer perceived as immediate or likely to return. Media and real estate communities have exported this redevelopment strategy worldwide, as documented by scholars in Montreal (Podmore, 1998), Sydney (Shaw, 2006), and London (Hamnett & Whitelegg, 2007). ‘Loft living’ has also contributed to long-established theories of gentrification that position the artist as the initiating agent (see Cameron & Coafee, 2005; Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2008). The mythology of ‘loft living’ will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

By inserting the cultural industries into the arguments of the ‘artist as gentrifier’ literature, we can theorize an ongoing process of gentrification that positions the cultural industries as heirs to the lofts and studios vacated by displaced artists as recurrent waves of gentrification progress. Ley writes about the artist’s “distinctive bridging function in conveying novel and sometimes iconoclastic styles to the middle-class from which he and she are commonly drawn,” which amounts to a “social role as a broker of fashionable middle-class taste, demarcating the frontiers of cultural distinction” (1996, p. 189). Ley extends Bourdieu’s (1979/1984) sociology of taste to the field of gentrification, to suggest that gentrifiers enter the field in a succession based on their aesthetic disposition and cultural competency, of which the artist is the middle class leader. Typically, cultural producers are among the earliest successors to artists, on the basis of their own high cultural capital. In time, those with lower cultural capital and higher economic capital –
such as lawyers, medical practitioners, business people, and capitalists – succeed the cultural producers and gentrification moves into its later stages. This hypothesis is supported by many cultural economy narratives, where the cultural industries are attracted to and follow a first-wave of artist-led gentrification, as reported in London (Evans, 2004; Pratt, 2009), San Francisco (Hutton, 2009), and Vancouver (see Chapter Four). It also accounts for the later waves of industrial gentrification, including the recurrent restructuring within the cultural economy itself, where “shifts between sectors and higher-value land use and capitalization” can lead to the crowding out of less-competitive cultural industries (Evans, 2009a, p. 1017), or the crowding out of cultural production itself by residential or other commercial/industrial land uses (Pratt, 2009).
3 Heritage, Memory, and Identity in Cultural Production Sites

The purpose of this chapter is to establish a critical framework for the interpretation of the relationship between the cultural industries and the built environment, particularly its aesthetic and semiotic contents, in Vancouver’s sites of cultural production. To begin, we review the literature on the spatiality and materiality of cultural production districts, which especially indicates the role of land rents and spatial configurations (both architectural and urban) as salient determinants of the geography of cultural production. Following Soja (2000), this section asserts the industry-shaping power of spatiality. Second, we reintroduce the notion of aesthetic reflexivity. This pursuit challenges us to consider the landscape as a resource of visual stimuli, to be used as both a prompt to creativity and as a resource for the creation of one’s own self-identity. Third, we examine the importance of place-based imagery in an era of reflexive accumulation. The images of place and producer have a heightened role in an economy of postmodern goods and services, or what Lash and Urry (1994) term an ‘economy of signs and symbols’. Last, the chapter culminates in a discussion of the relationship between cultural production and the distinctive imageries associated with cultural production sites. Drawing on a diverse literature including sources on the cultural economy, the aesthetics of residential gentrification, and the ‘city of collective memory’, we share some preliminary insights on how the cultural economy interacts with ‘authentic’ historical imageries. In doing so, we propose, they are influenced by a nostalgic desire to rediscover and identify with local history and a simultaneous tendency to recreate the imageries associated with the universal mythologies of art production and bohemianism. The result influences the fabric of historical signifiers, including the selective ‘remembrance’ of desirable histories, and the reversal of meanings as historical signifiers are reassociated with the postfordist era of globalized cultural production.

3.1 Cultural Production, Space, and Material

Motivated in part by a common desire to ‘rematerialize’ analyses of cultural practices (Rantisi & Leslie, 2010), a number of scholars have begun to explore the role of the material in cultural production. This research orientation has generated insights into the capacity of space and built form to shape the cultural industries, complementing the
documented roles of economic agglomeration, social milieu, and public policy discussed in the previous chapter. First, we can acknowledge the importance of land rents, for while the heightened aesthetic reflexivity of cultural producers lends credence to the sociocultural, artist-centric theory of commercial gentrification proposed in the previous chapter, assuredly cultural production firms are keen to balance commercial and economic concerns with the aesthetic, cultural, and functional. In cultural industries, low rents offer a distinct competitive advantage, as they facilitate aesthetic innovation via the financial leeway to take risks, experiment with new ideas in diverse fields, and avoid reliance on conventional clients to pay rents (Rantisi & Leslie, 2010). Here we can recall the well-known observation of Jacobs (1961) that “new ideas must use old buildings” (p. 188), as only these older, sometimes run-down structures offer the low overhead necessary to incubate new enterprises.

Second, the spatial configuration, durability, and style of obsolete manufacturing and warehousing buildings make them easily adaptable for reuse. As first described by Zukin (1982), lofts and other older industrial typologies offer high ceilings, open space, and natural light conducive to artistic and cultural production, as well as a minimalist aesthetic and open layout that encourage self-expression. Indeed, many warehouses, factories, and workshops, benefitting from technological advances in cast iron structural systems and predating postwar low-cost industrial construction techniques, were designed with flexibility and functional non-specificity in mind, as they were intended to accommodate the variety of activities and processes to which an industrial building may be subjected to during its lifespan (Dickinson, 2001). Lofts and other open-plan typologies are particularly well suited to the prevailing workplace layout of cultural firms, which eschews cubicles in favour of non-hierarchical and interactive communal space (Pratt, 2002). Further scholarship discloses more specific insights into the suitability of specific internal configurations, from the intimacy and seclusion of upper-floor studio spaces in Singapore’s shophouses (Hutton, 2006) to the vast factory spaces of former military factories in Beijing’s District 798, which encourage the production and display of large site-specific artworks in situ (Napack, 2008; see also Currier, 2008). Molotch and Treskon (2009) find that the migration of art galleries from the modest
upper-floor loft spaces of Manhattan’s SoHo to the larger ground-level spaces of Chelsea (many of which were equipped with garage-door fronts) was associated with an increase in the literal size of the art being created: the new Chelsea spaces became associated with complex, large-scale installation projects.

Third, the external and internal spaces available in the distinctive landscapes of older inner city sites are conducive to the intimacy, interaction, and highly social nature of creative work. From Chicago’s Wicker Park, Lloyd (2004; 2006) reports on the role of social institutions such as bars, restaurants, and cafés, which support the cultural milieu by fostering social networks and senses of local community or identity (see also Rantisi & Leslie, 2010). When these and other spaces serve as performance venues or exhibition spaces, they also provide exposure for local artists, both to the media and to one another, thus supporting the emergence of scenes (see also Watson, S., Hoyler, & Mager, 2009). Hutton (2006) points to the landscape and urban-design features of older inner city areas – including the finer grain of streetscapes, small parks, and open spaces – which also facilitate social creativity. In Singapore’s Chinatown, Hutton (2008) interviews creative producers who describe the district as ‘cosy’ and ‘intimate’, neither of which could be said of the corporate office complex of the CBD.

3.2 Reflexivity, Creativity, Identity, and the Built Environment

By inserting aesthetic reflexivity into our analysis, we can generate further insights regarding how the creative individual experiences and engages with the materiality of the urban landscape. Helbrecht (1998; 2003) advances scholarship in this domain by investigating how the aesthetic experience of the built environment informs the creative process. For Helbrecht, creativity is a reflexive practice, in that it enables the producer to “detect the spirit of the time and transform it into cultural messages” (1998, p. 6). Creativity – and one’s creative identity and subjectivity – is heavily dependent on one’s situation and surroundings, as “the invention of images, styles and design is born out of the creative dealing with the social, cultural and economic context” (loc. cit). Thus, the ‘look and feel’ of urban places is important, as cultural producers must “choose those locations and spatial settings that will foster, enhance and unleash their creativity” (p. 8).
The way in which we respond to these aesthetic prompts and stimuli, posits Drake (2003), is influenced by our subjective, personal, or emotional response, moulded by individual identities, perceptions, and beliefs. While Helbrecht privileges the concrete experience of space, Drake argues that our “subjective, imagined or constructed localities will be a resource of prompts, signs and symbols as important as, if not more important than, the ‘real’ or objective locality” (p. 513). Drake finds cultural producers in London using locality-based reputations and traditions as a source of stimulus or inspiration, alternately capitalizing on or rejecting the social, political, or economic histories of their locations.

While Helbrecht’s non-representational physicality is supported by observations such as those of Gibson (2005) on musical responses to the acoustic properties of recording studios, other scholars have reported similar findings to those of Drake, which support the importance of subjectivity, imagination, and construction. Bain (2003) describes how Toronto artists gravitate to the rugged, gritty, and decaying urban aesthetic of ‘improvisational spaces’, which encourage (and represent) diversity, flexibility, playfulness, and outrageousness. These support Edensor’s (2005) portrayal of the decay and disorder of industrial ruins as “happenstance montages” of disordered objects and unexpected juxtapositions of signs and symbols forming unintentional new meanings (p. 77). For Edensor, disused and decaying industrial spaces nurture creativity by “fostering notions about how the world might be differently ordered in accordance with looser aesthetics, less managed spaces, bodies and things, and multi-interpretable signs” (p. 95).

As an example, we can consider Wu’s (2008) description of a site-specific art exhibition held in an abandoned factory shop in Beijing’s District 798, where the artists’ experience of the creative environment informed their creative process:

The existing ruins in this space – mainly a two-story building with its dilapidated walls and dusty interior – provided a powerful setting … We made no effort to tidy up the space. The photographs … became part of the environment. Their dull metal frames further helped merge the images with the site… Installed here, these
images changed their identity from self-contained pictorial representations to a series of “visual commentaries” on the exhibition’s environment (p. 54).

Still following from the premise of heightened aesthetic reflexivity, ‘look and feel’ are of further value so far as they facilitate the self-identification of the creative individual or enterprise. As Helbrecht (1998) explains, the layout and design of one’s creative space is an expression of one’s personal or professional vision, through which the material world becomes part of the creative self. Importantly, those who consume cultural products are perhaps as sensitive to identity as those who produce them: consumers have equally strong expectations about what the cultural firm should ‘look and feel’ like. Thus space and material reflect and reinforce the image and brand of firms, and particular spaces or neighbourhoods offer an inherent competitive advantage based on our aesthetic perceptions of them. This is demonstrated in the findings of Drake (2003), where local traditions, reputations, or narratives are exploited not just as a creative stimulus, but also as a form of product branding, as well as a socially constructed identity based on legitimacy and authenticity. Similarly for Bain (2003), the consumption of marginal or gritty urban spaces by artists is motivated not merely by a hunger for creative stimulus and freedom, but also by an awareness of their own desired identities as outsiders or pioneers. This recognition of the role of identity creation based on one’s location and material surroundings adds a new dimension to the insights reviewed in the first section of this chapter: the reproduction of the ‘loft living’ phenomenon, for example, is motivated at least as much by the proliferation of media representations of the New York-style loft as an ‘avant-garde’ domestic and creative space as it is by the practical advantages of high ceilings, open space, or natural light (Podmore, 1998; see also Shaw, 2006; Hamnett & Whitelegg, 2007); likewise, Lloyd (2006) argues that the perpetuation of ‘neo-Bohemian’ lifestyles is a manifestation of widely-held ideas about what constitutes an appropriate artists’ lifestyle, not merely the social advantages of spending large amounts of time in cafés or bars.
3.3 Place-Based Imagery in an Era of Reflexive Accumulation

In Chapter Two, we argued that a definitive experience of flexible production systems, and of postmodernity in general, is the circulation of objects, information, and images over greater distances at ever-greater rates; and that, following Lash and Urry (1994), one outcome of this experience has been the aestheticization of production and consumption, where consumers’ heightened awareness of the sign value and aesthetic content of goods necessitates an intensification of the design (or symbol-processing) stage as an important contribution to value-added and output differentiation. But it is not just the product that must project an ‘image’: the brand or image of the firm is also a vital element of inter-firm competition for a number of reasons. First, as Harvey (1990) observes, the acceleration of perceived time by faster turnover rates in production and faster systems of communication, distribution, and financial exchange imparts an ephemerality and volatility to fashions, products, practices, and ideas, against which the image of the firm or the brand becomes an important source of visibility, stability, and competitive advantage in the marketplace. Second, as Lash and Urry point out, the characteristics of the producer form part of what is ‘sold’ to the consumer, particularly where the good or service is already wholly or in part semiotic. Third, as Florida (2002) argues, brand and image also attract creative workers to specific firms, and aid in the development of their own professional identities.

Image is also important at scales both lesser and greater than the firm. The nature of creative work – which is highly individualized, requires significant talent, education, and/or creative capital, and can encompass a lengthy ‘job-task’ – privileges the innovative powers of the individual producer, for whom the output is often a reflexive object converted into intellectual property (Lash & Urry, 1994; see also Harvey, 1990). Thus Lash and Urry describe celebrity cultural producers who themselves operate as ‘brands’, including film, music, television, literature, and art producers, as well as elite architects (‘starchitects’), designers, and chefs; while Lloyd (2006) describes waiters and bartenders who also work hard to achieve ‘celebrity’ at the neighbourhood scale. Other scholars describe the importance of collectively constructed identities that operate at the scale of the district, city-region, or nation. At the local scale, we can acknowledge the
values of spatial boundedness, distinctive morphologies, architectural characteristics, and/or resonant landmarks, institutions, or structures with which the creative individuals and firms can experience an affinity that informs a sense of collective identity (Hutton, 2006). Many adapted warehouse districts can be cited as examples of such distinctive architectural landscapes, while the value of landmarks can be demonstrated by Indergaard’s (2004) account of the Flatiron Building as a symbol of Manhattan’s Silicon Alley. Given the often-global scale of competition, districts, cities, and regions have benefitted from identifying with the characteristic and widely-known styles, themes, and images associated with a given locality, as pointed out in the previous chapter, including the crafts-based districts of the Third Italy or high-end luxury goods producers in Paris (see Scott, 1997). Alternatively, where no “master narrative of foundational high culture” exists, cities such as San Francisco, Vancouver, and Singapore have traded on the fertility of their transnational milieux (Hutton, 2008, p. 278). At the national scale, cultural production is also used to nurture individuals as international creative ‘heroes’, and to create national design or style identities (‘imaginaries’) which inform global competition (Reimer & Leslie, 2008).

All of this leads to the observation that when we consume an aestheticized good, we are not consuming just the material object, its symbolic or aesthetic content, and the image of its producer; we are also consuming the image of its place. The experience of postmodernity is marked by seemingly paradoxical concurrent forces of globalization and localization, for as we perceive globalization as the ‘compression of space’ – a collapse of spatial barriers facilitated by innovations in telecommunications and the falling costs of global transport – we becoming “much more sensitized to what the world’s spaces contain” (Harvey, 1990, p. 294). Thus we have what Scott (1997, p. 324) refers to as “a deepening tension … between culture as something that is narrowly place-bound, and culture as a pattern of non-place globalized occurrences and experiences.” Certain privileged places become globalized sites of aestheticized production from which information and images are broadcast worldwide – the privileged sites on the ‘global

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1 In the realm of public policy, there is also an extensive practice of ‘city branding’ on the basis of cultural production and historical legacies. See Evans (2003).
assembly line’. The outcome, for Scott (2001, p. 17), is an ecology characterized by “powerful and recursively intertwined relations between the meanings that adhere to the urban landscape and the symbologies of the goods and services produced in the local area.” In other words, place becomes part of product, and product becomes part of place, offering, in the best case, an instantly credible geographical prefix, as in the case of *Hollywood* movies or *Paris* fashion, which may even have positive spillover effects for other cultural sectors. Molotch (1996; 2003) illustrates this relationship in his treatment of ‘LA as design product’. Molotch argues that local aesthetic sensibilities permeate all forms of design and cultural production; these cultural-material interactions in turn inform the sense people have of the places from which they come. Based on our desire to consume goods associated with a place as a substitute for the consumption of the place itself, a positive place-image can become part of the local economic structure and a form of geographic capital.

Place images, however, can be appropriated, as in the case of the ‘California aesthetic’ found in cars manufactured in Detroit or in lifestyle products manufactured overseas, or in the case of the Manhattan-style lofts marketed worldwide. This leads again to the tensions of globalization and localization, or between what Appadurai (1990) frames as cultural homogenization and heterogenization. While on one hand the need for a distinctive image should lead to production of increasingly variegated places, as cities capitalize on their distinctive material characteristics and historical trajectories; on the other it can inspire a serial monotony, as aspiring cities strive to replicate the world’s unique urban places, resulting in places as simulacra, where the realities of origin, labour processes, and social relations are concealed by recreations of elsewhere (Harvey, 1990). The rest of this chapter will consider this tension at the scale of the cultural production district, where the historical resonance of inner city landscapes is fused with the global imageries of cultural production. As a precedent, we can cite Sophie Watson’s (1991) appraisal of the ‘new symbolic representations’ of a selection of postindustrial regions in Australia. Watson describes how the industrial areas surveyed are differentiated by their responses to change, where the most successful among them have created a unique sense of place and a myth of identity. The conclusions generated by this study anticipate the
main themes to be discussed in the remainder of this chapter: selective use of historical symbols, reversals of meaning, and the integration of universal mythologies and imageries.

3.4 The Re-Imaging of Cultural Production Districts: Authenticity, History, and Mythology

The contemporary fascination with historical imagery is a pervasive element of postindustrial urbanity, elements of which include, following Ley (1996), aestheticized consumption, the development of ‘festival markets’, the proliferation of gourmet restaurants and cafés, the preservation of heritage buildings, and the historicist architecture of new residential landscapes. Indeed, *nostalgia* is widely regarded as symptomatic of the postmodern condition, in terms of postmodern cultural goods such as the nostalgia film (see Jameson, 1991), and as a primary signifier of difference in an economy characterized by the compression of space and time (Harvey, 1990). The consumption and reproduction of history is a source of continuity and stability in an era of flux and ephemerality, as well as an important signifier of social distinction. Accordingly, Boyer (1994) portrays the postmodern city as ‘the city of collective memory’, characterized by a fragmented collection of juxtaposed imageries intended for enjoyment and appreciation; while the postmodern urban fabric is commonly described as a ‘collage’ of historical narratives (see Crang & Travlou, 2001). History is also equated with *authenticity*, a ubiquitous but slippery value central to the evaluation of contemporary urban spaces (see Zukin, 2010). Like nostalgia, the desire for authenticity reflects the mitigation of postmodern anxiety over the loss of place-bound cultures and local imageries as well as a rejection of the perceived homogeneity of the corporate/Fordist city and its leisure class. But it is also, at the neighbourhood scale, based on a desire to gain access to a community and establish a legitimate identity. Entrepreneurs and residents who cannot make a claim to an area’s cultural heritage either by upbringing or by direct experience may still gain a foothold by associating themselves with local aesthetics and imageries of local history (and by purchasing their way into the neighbourhood).
In some cases, creative industries may seek authenticity via an appeal to the industrial history of an area. This is what Drake (2003) categorizes as ‘locality as a brand based on reputation and tradition’. For example, Drake finds Sheffield’s craft metalworkers using the city’s long-established reputation for high-quality cutlery and tool manufacture to market contemporary aestheticized goods such as ornaments and jewelry, as well as a silversmith who locates in a 19th century workshop above a working foundry for the purpose of validating and legitimizing his or her own aestheticized production. Likewise, in the Third Italy, which, as observed above, has accessed global markets on the basis of its historic legacy of crafts-based production, Hutton (2008) describes how the Oltrarno Artisanal District in Florence has harnessed its reputation for specialized production to become a site of “scheduled spectacle and experience” for tourist consumption (p. 44). Evans (2004) describes cultural workspaces with names that celebrate their industrial history: “Powerhouse, Gasworks, Leadmill, Printworks, Perseverance Works, Foundry and the Arts Factory” (p. 72). Alternately, other scholarly narratives describe sites branded on a more recent legacy of artistic production, which suggests the potential lasting impacts of the artist-led aestheticization of space. Such is the case in Toronto’s Yorkville where, despite most art production having been displaced by gentrification four decades earlier, the lasting legacy of the 1960s art scene continues to inform the contemporary identity of the neighbourhood and its businesses (Mathews, 2008; see also Bain, 2006).

In other cases, authenticity may be associated with grittiness, where physical disrepair and social ills assert themselves as alternatives to ‘sterile’ urbanity. There is a long history of glamorous portrayals of urbanism’s dark sides – perhaps beginning with Film Noir and ‘hardboiled’ detective fiction – but it is only in the postindustrial era that this aesthetic has become associated with hip, innovative, and authentic cultural forms (Zukin 2010) – although, as described in the following subsection, there is a longstanding “Bohemian disposition to value the drama of living on the edge” (Lloyd, 2006, p. 80). Grittiness is an aesthetic in opposition to modernization, conformity, and renewal; the

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2 For another compelling example of the resonance of local reputations and traditions, see Goto (2012) on the centuries-long legacy of craftsmanship in Kyoto that has positioned the city as an important player in Japan’s new economy.
culturally-inclined segment of the middle class seeks out “places marginal to middle class definitions,” providing “oppositional spaces, social and cultural distance from the everyday life of the suburbs, its conformity, standardization, and under-stimulation” (Ley, 1996, pp. 195-196; emphasis in original). ‘Gritty’ has become the media’s favoured term to describe not just these ‘authentic’ spaces but also the cultural connoisseurs who colonize them, depicting “a desirable synergy between underground cultures and the creative energy they bring to both cultural consumption and real estate development, not as an alternative but as a driver of the city’s growth” (Zukin, 2010, p. 53). Although there is in some cases an economic necessity motivating the toleration of crime, noise, and visible social problems, there is a risk that the aesthetic appreciation of grittiness may be superficial or even fetishistic. Both Bain (2003) and Lloyd (2006) accuse artists and Bohemians of perpetuating Neil Smith’s (1996) mythology of the ‘urban frontier’ or ‘urban wilderness’ to be ‘pioneered’ by the middle class. Of course, this superficial treatment of lower income or marginalized neighbourhoods is especially problematic in its denial of the roles of real estate and public policy in the inducement of postindustrialization, as well as its denial of the historical – and contemporary – social identity of the local community. The myth disguises and facilitates the same processes of dislocation and renewal it ostensibly rejects.

Although he is writing specifically on the industrial ruins of Britain, Edensor’s analysis could be applied to many older structures, adapted to new uses but still bearing some amount of disrepair or ‘grit’, including many of those inhabited both by artists and our cultural producers (Edensor, 2005). For Edensor, the value of grittiness is partly its capacity to foster non-conformity and creative freedom. In such spaces, he writes, “the interpretation and practice of the city becomes liberated from the everyday constraints which determine what should be done and where, and which encode the city with meanings” (p. 4). These spaces resist regulation and classification, opening up “possibilities for regulated urban bodies to escape their shackles in expressive pursuits and sensual experience” (p. 18). Not only do ruins refute the capitalist myth of progress, as “emblems of [its] fragility and destructiveness” (p. 101), they also indicate alternatives to the present and future:
Because ruins are difficult to bring into dominant systems of representation, because they can’t be commodified without being entirely transformed, they contrast with the spectacles of the postmodern, themed city, and can stimulate imaginative, alternative practices which bring forth alternative and critical forms of consciousness. Fostering notions about how the world might be differently ordered in accordance with looser aesthetics, less managed spaces, bodies and things, and multi-interpretable signs, ruins can hint at potential futures in which individual creativities and desires are nurtured rather than being subsumed under individualistic consumption (p. 95).

For the cultural producer armed with a heightened sense of aesthetic reflexivity, ruins also offer the fabric of new symbolic landscapes: “Pleasurable by virtue of the interaction between objects bearing different semiotic charges, and the arbitrary relationships between different forms, shapes, textures and materialities, the unending diversity of unencoded material juxtapositions stimulate ineffable sensations” (p. 77). These imageries only await appropriation, inevitably accompanied by re-signification.3

To interpret the dynamics of this appropriation of signifiers, we can turn to the literature on the ‘gentrification aesthetic’, among which Jager’s analysis of restored Victorian housing is a landmark text (Jager, 1986). Jager explores the capacity that the appropriation of history and the “stylization of life” (p. 80) have to express the social status of residential gentrifiers (analogous in our case to the status and identity of commercial gentrifiers). The restoration of a Victorian house is at once a rejection of the contemporary middle class and a claim to cultural authenticity: “history is made the guarantee against modernity,” Jager explains, where “the past becomes a means of acquiring historical legitimation” (p. 81). Restoration is an attempt to achieve ‘historical purity’ via a denial (physical removal) of the more immediate past. Successive phases of

3 For an alternative analysis of the aesthetics and memory of deindustrialization and ‘industrial ruins’, see High and Lewis (2007), who adopt the perspective of the displaced industrial worker for whom ruins symbolize loss and victimization. High and Lewis are critical of Edensor, whom they charge with privileging a depoliticized perspective congruous with that of the white-collar middle class. In their reading, ruins in fact confirm Capitalist progress as manifestations of the ruthlessness of globalized industrialism.
gentrification, as Ley (1996) observes, encompass the recurrent restoration of the built environment, ascending from ‘sweat equity’ to more ambitious and costly work. The desire to reconnect with an older urban culture, effectively collapsing the beginning and end of twentieth-century urbanism into one another, is also demonstrated in the recreation of historical and vernacular styles in redeveloped inner city landscapes (Mills, 1988).

3.4.a Appropriating Authenticity: Implications for the (Re)remembrance of Cultural Production Districts

Two guiding themes emerge from this analysis with which we can interpret contemporary appropriations of history. First, by generating new symbolic associations via the aestheticization of the historical built environment, we affect an inversion of symbolism: “inner worldly asceticism becomes public display; bare brick walls and exposed timbers come to signify cultural discernment, not the poverty of slums without plaster” (Jager, 1986, p. 85). Ley (1996) expresses these inversions well in his treatment of a playground on Vancouver’s Granville Island: a formerly private and exclusive site of industrial production reimagined as a public and inclusive site of consumption and play, accompanied by a revalorization of adjacent land values. “And yet with postmodern irony, the visual environment was carefully (indeed so carefully, one might think carelessly) retained” (p. 7). Within the cultural industries, the inversion of symbolic associations in part reflects the new social practices, identities, and forms of workplace organization associated with creative work, as spaces of control are reimagined as spaces of freedom (Hutton, 2006). This ‘fetishization’ of the past creates an aesthetic of ‘industrial chic’, replacing unruliness and transgression with spaces for leisure and residence, at least as perceived by the middle class (Hills & Tyrer, 2002).

Second, there is the subjectivity and selectivity of what we choose to ‘remember’: “the appropriation of a very recent history, and hence the authenticity of [the building’s] symbols … succeeds only to the extent that it can distance itself from the immediate past – that of working-class industrial ‘slums’ ” (Jager, 1986, p. 83). To be fair, the immediate past in any given gentrifying area is never in fact a ‘working-class industrial slum’, but rather an area of obsolescent industry, struggling commerce, or residential communities
lacking the capital necessary for physical upgrades. Regardless, the most recent identity of an area must be erased to collapse the present into the desired historical era:

The effacing of an industrial past and a working-class presence, the whitewashing of a former social stain, was achieved through extensive remodeling. The return to historical purity and authenticity … is realized by stripping away external additions, by sandblasting, by internal gutting (p. 83).

The desire for authentic ‘grit’ might seem to secure the preservation of a ‘working-class presence’, but the risk is that the aestheticized working-class are nevertheless disempowered and treated as background features of the authentic landscape: “having been isolated and excluded, the lower orders resurface to be patronized as ‘the local people,’ ‘the local community,’ the ‘little tenants’ ” (p. 84). Consider also Harris (2012), who describes the tendency for gentrifiers to cultivate a detached appreciation of the inner city as an ‘urban pastoral’ – borrowing a term from art history – in which the remnants of working class life are appreciated at a distance, as if emblematic of an imagined, romanticized, or idealized industrial past. Practitioners of the urban pastoral desire a neighbourhood “ ‘full of incident’ and with ‘a little edge’ yet ‘not that unsafe’ and ‘not overly ghettoized or dangerous’ ” (pp. 231-232, emphasis in original).

As we erase their physical traces, we collectively ‘forget’ the aspects of the past that are not fit for nostalgic consumption in the present. This is an outcome of our treatment of the past as spectacle, a fragmented collection of juxtaposed imageries intended for our appreciation and enjoyment, from which we ourselves are removed (Boyer, 1994). Scholars writing on the collective memory embedded in the built environment of postindustrial Manchester have elaborated on this theme, where the selective quotation of working class history, and the denial of its more problematic aspects, amounts to “memory with the pain taken out” (Crinson, 2005, p. xi). “While appearing to celebrate industrialism, [adapted spaces] deny its historical realities” via their emphasis on industrialization as an impersonal world of “generic machinery” rather than social relations (Hills & Tyrer, 2002, p. 108). The “almost regressive desire for
slums and scenes of labour”, which despite their problems are seen as truer or more authentic than that which has been built since, leads us to value that which is perceived to constitute the essential character of the area – all else is inauthentic (Crinson & Tyrer, 2005, p. 60). The city, then, is a palimpsest, with the visibility of its historical layers determined by those who manipulate its materiality and symbols (see Crang, 1996; Huyssen, 2003). This is an important guiding metaphor to which we will return in our concluding chapter.

3.4.b Inserting Mythologies: Art, Bohemianism, and Cultural Production

While nostalgia and the desires for historical continuity and authenticity may be motivating the cultural industries to seek rootedness in the selected particulars of local history, simultaneous processes – likely complementary, not alternative – are acting at a global scale, determining the universal appeal and somewhat homogenous aesthetic of cultural production sites throughout global networks of cultural production. While the affinity of the cultural economy for repurposed industrial sites is well known, it is overshadowed within media and cultural representations (and the academic literature) by the universal, mythological affinity of artists and bohemians for these same spaces. With this in mind, the following section examines the attraction these archetypal environments hold for artists, bohemians, and cultural producers, largely on the basis of their mythological status. While the following can serve as a useful framework to interpret the spatial and material characteristics of sites of cultural production, only Lloyd (2004; 2006) has really pursued this line of thought. We introduce some preliminary ideas below, to be applied in the analysis in Chapter Five.

The research of Lloyd (2004; 2006) can be used to demonstrate the influence that the legacy of artists and bohemians in the city holds over contemporary practitioners of ‘neo-bohemian’ (and new middle class) lifestyles, who “draw on the cumulative mythology of past bohemias in designing contemporary strategies of action” (2004, p. 343). Accumulated mythologies resonate in an abstract sense, instructing present-day followers in the negotiation of spatial and material relationships with the social and cultural ‘mainstream’. Artists identify with “the long-established myth of the artist as
outsider – a myth that has encouraged many artists to identify with a ‘glamourised otherness’ ” (Bain, 2003, p. 311). Thus we should attribute the material desire for authentic grittiness, discussed above, at least in part to the allure of mythology. Spatially also, the ‘artist as outsider’ must locate with some degree of removal: “the ‘margins’ continue to be celebrated as mythical spaces of acceptance, where diversity and difference can be expressed” (p. 311).

The particular aesthetics and built forms of industrialism deserve comment, as they have been wholeheartedly appropriated by the contemporary art establishment, evinced in the bourgeois-chic iconography of ‘loft living’ and also adopted by major American and European public art museums since the 1970s and ‘80s. For Williams (2005), the 2000 opening of Tate Modern, London, in a repurposed nineteenth century power station – now the world’s largest and most-visited gallery of modern art – represents the apotheosis of the ‘industrial gallery space’. Like Zukin (1982), Williams traces the association of art and industrialism to midcentury New York, where the very same artists who converted New York’s lofts to new purposes also incorporated obsolete industrial parts into their art (eg, Robert Rauschenberg, Jean Tinguely) or experimented with industrial modes of art production (eg, Andy Warhol). Of course, the postwar New York scene was preceded by many other references to industrialism in earlier twentieth century Modernism – architects emulating the rationalism of factory design, artists exploring the hard-edged aesthetics of the machine age, and so on – but postwar appropriations are distinguished by their abandonment of elitism, and even more so by their loss of faith in industrial innovation and the Capitalist myth of progress. As Zukin argues, the postwar New York artists cultivated a poetic and nostalgic appreciation for that which was left behind by the accelerated depreciation of industrial machines that corresponded with the rise of postindustrialism, including the distancing of history and the decreasing immediacy of industrial society and its problems. The influence of this new outlook was guaranteed by what Zukin refers to as the “aesthetic conjuncture” (p. 15) of the 1960s and ‘70s, where artists’ living habits became a cultural model for the ascendant, well-educated middle class, simultaneous with postindustrialization, the emergence of New York as the world’s new art capital, and the changing nature of art
production itself, including the commercialization, professionalization, institutionalization, and media dramatization of art.

Indeed, even the New York ‘pioneers’ looked for their guiding mythology in the bohemian legacy of Paris’s Montmartre (Deutsche & Ryan, 1984). As we observed in Chapter Two, the New York loft was quickly exported globally, a phenomenon that Podmore (1998) has termed ‘SoHo syndrome’, referring to one of the earliest Manhattan ‘loft’ neighbourhoods. While loft landscapes in other cities are marked by the specificities of the local land market and the built environment in which they are produced – which may not even have industrial origins; see for example the churches of Lynch (2011) – they nevertheless depend on the same system of symbolic imagery for their legitimacy as “‘avant-garde’ domestic spaces and sites of identity construction” (Podmore, 1998, p. 284). The “aesthetic map to the loft lifestyle”, constructed in relation to SoHo, is provided by media such as interior design magazines and films, all of which have canonized the iconography of what was initially a bohemian lifestyle, but is now a widely accepted form of bourgeois urbanity (p. 291). Even in Sydney, Australia, Shaw (2006) documents an ‘imaginary of escape’ in real estate marketing that includes “images of Gotham, Sinatra’s famous song, references to ‘Broadway’ and the use of gentrifying district names such as TriBeCa, as well as the use of specific building names, such as ‘Dakota’ ” (p. 185). Nevertheless, here still we find the selective remembrance of local history, as Podmore writes of the divergent but coexisting sources of authenticity constructed in relation to either the local context or the New York archetypes.

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4 See also Hamnett & Whitelegg (2007) on the marketing of loft conversions in London’s City Fringe, which trade on a brand based on ‘cutting-edge’ space and social distinction. SoHo syndrome is overt in the New York case, where New York developer Harry Handelsman’s Manhattan Loft Corporation acted as market leaders in the early 1990s.
4 Vancouver: Economy, Imageries, Memory and Identity

Vancouver’s postwar development trajectory is widely regarded as a distinctive and instructive model of urban transformation, documented and theorized within a rich body of scholarly literature and exported as a prototype of planning and governance (Punter, 2003; Boddy, 2004; Hutton, 2004b). Although some developmental similarities may be observed with other nationally-important Canadian cities, including industrial restructuring favoring elite service sector employment accompanied by the insistent gentrification of residential neighbourhoods, the Vancouver experience is distinguished by its divergence from national trends, notably including its emergence as a ‘gateway’ city of transnational flows within the Pacific Rim urban system and its predominantly SME (small- and medium-size enterprise) economy, the latter including the significant cultural economy discussed in this text (Barnes, Hutton, Ley, & Moos, 2011).

Within popular media, Vancouver is celebrated as a global template for urban livability, best demonstrated by its three-year reign atop The Economist’s most livable city ranking (“Where the Livin’ is Easiest,” 2011). Academically, however, its treatment is bittersweet given the well-documented socioeconomic polarization, marginalization, and persistent social problems focused in the Downtown Eastside, including homelessness, substance abuse, street crime, and prostitution. These highly visible challenges often coexist side-by-side with the culture of the convivial city, with Gastown and Victory Square as the geographic interface between the Downtown Eastside and the downtown peninsula.

Barnes and Hutton (2009) argue that the emergence of Vancouver’s new economy must be understood via a multi-scalar analysis incorporating both macro- and micro-geographical specificities and contingencies. This chapter is intended to operate at both scales, and thus is organized into two major sections. The first describes the historical development of the city from the premier regional centre in the staples economy to today’s postmodern urbanism, where the new production spaces of the inner city offer salient evidence of a transformation that is not only economic, but social and cultural as well. The second section of this chapter moves to a finer scale of analysis,
presenting the Gastown/Victory Square and Railtown production district(s) on which this thesis is based. The aim here is not just to discuss the micro-geographical factors that positioned this area as a primary launching site for the new cultural economy. Following the theoretical foundations proposed in Chapter Three, the final section will also explore the history, identity, and imageries associated with these landscapes, which will provide the context within which the following chapter’s results may be discussed.

4.1 Vancouver in Historical Context: The Emergence of a Cultural Economy

While the extent and pace of industrial restructuring and physical reconstruction in Vancouver’s core since the mid-Twentieth century has been considerable, scholarly analysis nevertheless attributes the preconditions for the city’s success in the cultural economy to its legacy as the premier regional centre in British Columbia’s staples economy. Not only did the city’s economic provenance initiate a development trajectory that fortuitously expedited the transition to a postfordist, knowledge-intensive economy via the city’s orientation to higher-order industrial functions; it also provided a rich architectural inheritance and a selection of inner city districts characterized by the distinctive spatiality, morphology, and materiality conducive to new cultural production, as discussed in the preceding chapter. The staples economy dominated Vancouver’s economic development until the mid-Twentieth century, as described by Wynn (1992). Initially, this was a function of transportation linkages, as the extension of the Canadian Pacific Railway’s transcontinental line in 1886-87 guaranteed Vancouver’s role as the province’s primary distribution center and ensured also the city’s port would become the province’s most important by 1900. But attendant on this distributional role, the city also played host to banks, insurance companies, and wholesalers, becoming the finance, administration, and services centre for the provincial economy in the early-Twentieth century. These functions were enhanced by consolidation within the resource sector after the Second World War, which, encouraged by an influx of American capital, led to the corporatization of Vancouver’s economy (Barnes, Edgington, Denike, & McGee, 1992; North & Hardwick, 1992). The emergence of local firms such as MacMillan Bloedel, coupled with the arrival of American corporations, led to the expansion of Vancouver’s central business district of office high-rises, while some processing and manufacturing
activities relocated to larger locations on the Fraser River, some outside of the City of Vancouver. Associated sociocultural changes mostly related to increased affluence, particularly in the expansion of a white-collar workforce of corporate managers and clerical workers, but also to the enhancement of polarization, evidenced by the concentration of a low income, vulnerable population of former resource sector workers on the Downtown Eastside (Hasson & Ley, 1994; Hutton, 1997).

Vancouver’s spatial structure at mid-century was largely a physical manifestation of its economic geography [Figure 4-1] (North & Hardwick, 1992; Wynn, 1992; Hutton, 2004b). This consisted of an expanded CBD, accommodating the emergent corporate sector, financial and commercial functions, and related services; a large industrial district on the perimeters of False Creek and the Burrard Inlet, composed of both obsolescent processing and manufacturing and light industrial warehousing and transportation; and both older inner city residential districts such as Strathcona, Mount Pleasant, Fairview, Kitsilano, and the West End, and newer suburbs established further and from the city centre, in accordance with mid-century suburbanization. Although the western edge of the CBD was marked by a handful of newer skyscrapers symbolic of the city’s corporate functions, its eastern fringe exhibited evidence of decline, as investment and influence had migrated westwards with the construction of the new post office (1905-10) and courthouse (1906-12), and later development such as the Marine Building (1929-30) and the second Hotel Vancouver (1928-39). East side landmarks such as the Dominion Trust Building (1908-10), the Sun Tower (1911-12), and Courthouse Square (1888, renamed Victory Square), stood as reminders of the brief glory of this side of downtown (Wynn, 1992; Kalman, Phillips, & Ward, 1993). Similarly, the obsolescent manufacturing and processing operations crowding False Creek came to be popularly regarded as symbols of civic blight (Hutton, 2004b).
The 1970s and 1980s were decades of pronounced structural transformation, marked by a decoupling of the city from the provincial resource economy and a deepening integration within transnational capital and demographic flows, concomitant with sociocultural change and reinforced by new directions in public policy. These processes were shaped by a convergence of exogenous and endogenous factors, interrelated and cumulative, including globalization, multiscalar industrial restructuring, policy shifts at all levels of government, and the emergent postindustrialism within Vancouver’s social, cultural, and political landscapes. This trajectory has contributed to a significant respatialization of the city favoring the metropolitan core and, in particular, the CBD fringe, as well as setting the scene for the emergence of Vancouver’s new cultural economy. Barnes and Hutton (2009) observe that Vancouver fared much better than the rest of the province in the transition to a post-staples economy. Due to the spatially distributed model of Fordism within BC’s resource sector, where administration and management functions were concentrated within Vancouver, as well as the atypical vertical disintegration of Vancouver’s services and management sector (Barnes et al., 1992), the city was already poised to embrace the structural characteristics of postfordism, as well as the postindustrial orientation towards tertiary and quaternary
sectors. As described by Barnes et al. (1992), technological change and the transition towards knowledge-based work was in fact assisted by the forest resources sector, which introduced new production technologies and computerization in the 1970s and 1980s in an attempt to enhance flexibility and respond to new competitive markets. Meanwhile, the city's large producer services sector, facing declining local and regional markets as a consequence of corporate restructuring, undertook a reorientation towards global (especially Asian-Pacific) markets (Davis & Hutton, 1991), which accelerated the city's decoupling from the provincial resource economy (Hutton, 1997), encouraged the influx of Asian-Pacific investment and immigrants (Hutton, 1998), and provided some economic stability through the deindustrialization of the 1980s and 1990s.

David Ley has extensively documented the socioeconomic transformation that accompanied economic restructuring, as well as its sociocultural and geographic implications. The rise of a new middle class of white-collar workers has introduced both a new cultural politics and a new political culture to the city from the 1970s onwards, the establishment of which in turn has reinforced the adoption (usually) of a postindustrial policy agenda (Ley 1980; 1981; 1987; 1994; 1996). Given the affluence and influence of this new class, they have been able to affect the reconstruction of the central city towards the accommodation of their lifestyle preferences and consumption habits. This has included both new consumption spaces of aesthetic symbolism, conviviality, and spectacle, and the residentialisation of the central city, including both preservation and gentrification pressures in older neighbourhoods and the construction of new condominium landscapes dressed in a materialist postmodern nostalgia (Mills, 1988; Ley, 1996).

The introduction of a new political culture rooted in the liberalism of the new middle class had a dramatic effect on the respatialization of the city, particularly in the treatment of the obsolescent processing and manufacturing spaces surrounding False Creek. Middle class politics were institutionalized in 1972 with the election of a council dominated by The Elector’s Action Movement (TEAM), a reformist, progressive political party predominantly composed of members of the professional class, as opposed
to the business elite (Ley, 1980; Punter, 2003). TEAM was able to recognize the unique development trajectory emerging in the city and had the foresight to commit to an economic future in management, services, tourism, and higher education (North & Hardwick, 1992), anticipating the postindustrial forecast articulated by Bell (1973). Generally, TEAM’s sensitive approach to planning and design favored livability, inclusivity, aesthetics, environmentalism, and the promotion of a high-quality built environment, applied most dramatically in the redevelopment of the south shore of False Creek (begun 1975), where a former space of industrial production was replaced by a landscape of amenities, recreation, convivial consumption, and living space (Ley, 1980; Punter, 2003). As observed by Hutton (2004b; 2008), the redevelopment of False Creek South marked the acceleration of industrial decline in the inner city, as well as the assertion of a long-term policy commitment to the provision of housing, consumption, and public amenities in the urban core. Despite some opposition from TEAM prior to the party’s collapse in the final years of the 1970s, the momentum of postindustrialization in the 1980s was guaranteed by newfound support from the business community as well as investment from all levels of government, and an influx of foreign capital consonant with the city’s new global status (Hutton, 2004b). False Creek North, developed in conjunction with Expo ’86, is the signifying landscape of reconstruction in the core in the 1980s, reflecting the shift from the sensitive liberal policy of local government in the 1970s towards the mega-scale, pro-development neo-conservatism of the provincial government in the 1980s, as well as the increased presence of Asian capital in Vancouver’s real estate development (Ley, 1987; Olds, 2001). By sealing the fate of deindustrialization around False Creek, False Creek North ensured the primacy of a postindustrial economy in the urban core, thereby also ensuring the decline of the city’s blue-collar neighbourhoods, which were left ripe for gentrification (Hutton, 2004b).

Vancouver in the 1990s continued along a path of globalization, reimaging, and (post)industrial restructuring, as well as the ongoing redevelopment of the central area. The most significant planning initiative undertaken in this decade was the 1991 Central Area Plan, which provided directions for future policy and introduced a land-use policy framework directed towards livability and the continued enhancement of the urban realm.
(Punter, 2003; Hutton, 2004b; 2008). In response to an over-supply of office space in the CBD following the recession of the late 1980s – and an under-supply of housing – the CBD was to be placed within greater spatial confinement, with its fringe areas reinvented as high-rise residential communities and mixed-use communities. The plan also produced a finer-grained pattern of land uses, by introducing a number of sub-areas, including a number of new residential neighborhoods as well as ‘choice-of-use’ heritage districts, thus introducing Vancouver’s distinctively textured, highly-differentiated ensemble of inner city landscapes [Figure 4-2]. This new direction in land use policy was timely, given the extent of heritage industrial areas opened up in the CBD fringe by the contraction of the resource industry and the need for consolidated housing policy to guide the emergence of residential districts in the central area accelerated by global investment. But while the Central Area Plan is conventionally treated as a landmark reaffirmation of a civic policy preference for housing, Hutton (2004b; 2008; Murray & Hutton, 2012; Hutton & Barnes, in press) also points to its role as a key planning policy enabling a new phase of industrial urbanism in the central area, primarily by establishing the spatial and material preconditions for a new economy of cultural production (see Chapter Three). In particular, the plan demonstrated an appreciation for the differentiated terrains of the CBD fringe, and a prescient awareness of their significance for specialized service industries seeking “spaces different from new CBD office towers – spaces that are more affordable, that offer a more flexible layout, and/or that offer a distinctive image” (City of Vancouver, 1991; quoted in Hutton, 2004b, p. 1964).1

1 While Vancouver’s cultural production has colonized the loft and warehouse spaces of industrial heritage areas, consistent with global imageries of postindustrialism, the adaptive reuse of centenarian office and institutional buildings in the Victory Square area is also notable.
Figure 4-2. Central Area Land Use Plan in the Central Area Plan, 1991. Source: City of Vancouver (1991).

The effectiveness of this planning exercise is demonstrated by comparison with Figure 4-3, illustrating the spatial distribution of distinct spaces within contemporary Vancouver’s central area, some of which have emerged since the Central Area Plan, others of which predate and were preserved by it. Hutton’s categorization of landscapes includes service industry clusters, which assert the continued importance of production in the urban core; and residential mega-projects and unconsolidated neighbourhoods, the legacy of the residentialisation of downtown Vancouver; and ‘frontier planning’ areas, whose future remains in a state of redefinition (Hutton, 2004b). Among these service industry clusters, many are oriented to consumption; but we can also observe focused
sites of specialized service production, including the cultural production districts discussed in the following subsection.

Figure 4-3. Twenty-first century landscapes of production, housing, and amenity in Vancouver’s postmodern metropolitan core.

4.1.a The New Cultural Economy Ascendant

As argued by Barnes and Hutton (2009), and supported by the preceding text, Vancouver’s ascendance to a centre of the new cultural economy was an outcome influenced by the specificities of local economic development, taking place against the backdrop of the global shifts reviewed in Chapter Two. Local economic specificities include: (1) a postindustrial economic trajectory that had reoriented the corporate, staples economy towards a diverse cast of tertiary and quaternary activities (including producer services oriented to export markets), collectively evincing a notable SME, post-corporate character; (2) a heightened transnationalism favoring the Asian-Pacific Rim, including flows of both immigrants and capital, which has situated the city’s development within
global trajectories; and (3) significant capital investment since the 1980s, favoring both residential megaprojects and transportation infrastructure (Vancouver International Airport, upgrades to the Port of Vancouver, and the introduction of light rapid transit into the core), which has helped to remake the central area in the image of a global postindustrial city. We can add to these the contribution of prescient public policy, particularly in the provision of a built environment conducive to the formation of new industrial districts, including the preservation of heritage areas and the finely-grained, flexible land use policy framework introduced by the Central Area Plan.

The characteristics of the industries propelling creativity and innovation in the Vancouver region – including the predominance of smaller, ‘boutique’ firms, the assertion of a distinctive regional identity, and the emphasis on ‘alternative’ or ‘marginal’ sectors – also derive from contingent local circumstances (Hutton & Barnes, in press). In the absence of multinational corporations, major private sector head offices, and global universities, Vancouver has developed a dynamic and resilient ecosystem of start-ups and small enterprises linked by collaboration, knowledge crossovers, and the influence of an ensemble of well-integrated educational institutions, despite the limitations of the local market and the near-constant ‘churn’ of firms associated with accelerated restructuring. Local design industries, as well as the ‘Hollywood North’ film and television production cluster, trade on symbols of regional identity, including a rich architectural legacy and active ‘west-coast’ recreation (eg, lifestyle fashion leaders such as Lululemon Athletica and Mountain Equipment Co-op), although we will raise some concerns for local cultural identity below.² Hutton and Barnes acknowledge the Vancouver case as an ‘alternative’ narrative in relation to the innovation cultures of Toronto, Montréal, or even nearby Seattle, emerging from a unique development trajectory and (initially) characterized by success predominantly in marginal sectors, including video game design, other digital sectors, and fuel cell research.³ Following

² As a destination for creativity and technological innovation, Vancouver’s brand received a significant boost with the announcement in February, 2013, that Ted Talks, an internationally-recognized technology and design lecture series, would relocate to the city in 2014 (Bula, 2013). Vancouver’s role as the ‘Ted Host City’ has the potential to significantly recast the local creative imageries under discussion here.
³ While the forecast for the video game design sector has darkened since the onset of the economic recession (see following note), circumstances in the digital media industry remain positive overall, led by
Markusen (1996), Vancouver is undeniably a ‘sticky place’ – particularly on the basis of its superior lifestyle offerings (at least for the well-remunerated) – that enjoys an array of Marshallian and ‘satellite’ industrial clusters (see Coe, 2001; Barnes & Coe, 2010).

Using occupational data, we can trace the growth in cultural production in Vancouver since 1996, situated within a pronounced reorientation towards professionalization and knowledge-intensive work [Table 4-1]. Between 1996 and 2006, we observe the most significant rate of growth in the natural and applied sciences. These comprise professional and technical occupations in the physical and life sciences, engineering, and computer programming and systems analysis (in which we can be sure of considerable growth), as well as architectural and industrial design, with which this thesis is concerned. We also observe growth in arts and culture, particularly in technical occupations such as photographers, commercial artists, craftspeople, and designers in all creative forms (excluding architecture and industrial design). The chronology of early empirical studies reviewed by Brail (1994) suggests the heightened awareness of these industries that materialized towards the beginning of the 1990s (Shaughnessy, 1988; Young, 1989; Design Vancouver, 1990). Hutton (2000) identifies agglomerations of applied design firms clustered within the fringe areas of the CBD, with Yaletown and Gastown/Victory Square as the primary districts, with less-concentrated clusters of firms also identified on the northwestern fringe of the CBD and on the Burrard Slopes. By the late 1990s, it was clear that these districts, especially Yaletown, already exhibited characteristics of the archetypal landscape of the cultural production district. Despite constituting a relatively small proportion of the employed labour force in the census metropolitan area – roughly four percent in 2006 – occupations in art and culture represent a significant driving force in regional creativity and innovation, and the growth in digital animation and visual effects closely related to the fortunes of the film and television sector.

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4 Previously, Barnes and Coe (2010) have pointed out the locally-unique ‘hub-and-spoke’ characteristics of Vancouver’s video game design cluster, acknowledging the role of EA Canada as a dominant firm. Recently, however, circumstances indicate a shift towards more traditional Marshallian characteristics, evidenced by significant downsizing at EA and the departure, in 2012, of leading game design studios Ubisoft, Radical Entertainment, and Rockstar. While global economic recession and competitive incentives found elsewhere share some responsibility, shifts within the industry are increasingly favouring smaller, ‘indie’ firms. See Bradbury (2012).
primary industrial leader in the reconstruction and reimaging of inner city industrial districts.

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<tr>
<td>Natural and applied sciences and related occupations</td>
<td>51,470</td>
<td>75,115</td>
<td>84,830</td>
<td>+64.8%</td>
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<td>Occupations in social science, education, government service, and religion</td>
<td>66,190</td>
<td>85,965</td>
<td>98,685</td>
<td>+49.1%</td>
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<td>Occupations in art, culture, recreation, and sport, of which:</td>
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<td>Technical occupations</td>
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<td>23,725</td>
<td>25,915</td>
<td>+43.5%</td>
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<td>18,855</td>
<td>21,305</td>
<td>+39.6%</td>
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<td>Health occupations</td>
<td>45,545</td>
<td>54,855</td>
<td>62,350</td>
<td>+36.9%</td>
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<td>Management occupations</td>
<td>102,935</td>
<td>124,955</td>
<td>130,255</td>
<td>+26.5%</td>
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<td>Trades, transport, and equipment operators and related occupations</td>
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<td>130,045</td>
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<td>+18.0%</td>
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<td>Sales and service occupations</td>
<td>265,465</td>
<td>263,765</td>
<td>291,380</td>
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<td>Business, finance, and administrative occupations</td>
<td>205,850</td>
<td>207,905</td>
<td>219,205</td>
<td>+6.5%</td>
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<td>Occupations unique to primary industry</td>
<td>19,260</td>
<td>18,400</td>
<td>20,410</td>
<td>+6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupations unique to processing, manufacturing, and utilities</td>
<td>46,940</td>
<td>46,165</td>
<td>45,635</td>
<td>-2.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>993,190</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,073,010</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,169,595</strong></td>
<td><strong>+17.8%</strong></td>
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**Table 4-1. Changes in the occupational structure of the Vancouver census metropolitan area, 1996-2006.**

Source: Statistics Canada.

While Vancouver’s experience in the new cultural economy has asserted the importance of place, as demonstrated by the stability of Yaletown and Gastown/Victory Square as rediscovered sites of production, experimentation, and innovation; it has also illustrated the turbulence associated with the reindustrialization process, as the

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5 Technical occupations in art and culture include (1) technical occupations in libraries, archives, museums, and galleries; (2) photographers, graphic arts technicians, and technical occupations in motion pictures, broadcasting, and the performing arts; (3) announcers and other performers; (4) creative designers and craftsmen; and (5) athletes, coaches, referees, and related occupations. This last sub-category pertains to sports and recreation, muddying our otherwise clear evidence of an ascendant cultural economy.

6 Professional occupations in art and culture include (1) librarians, archivists, conservators, and curators; (2) writing, translating and public relations professionals; and (3) creative and performing artists.
experiences of individual firms and industries attest, where accelerated waves of restructuring have resulted in the recurrent succession of firms within each district (Hutton, 2008; Barnes & Hutton, 2009). In part, this has reflected the general evolution of specialization within the new economy, best demonstrated by the boom, bust, and subsequent restructuring of new media in the early twenty-first century. In the early 1990s, Yaletown and Victory Square were primarily the focus of the city’s well-established architectural and interior design communities, with the incipient graphic design industry also occupying a prominent role (Brail, 1994). Perhaps an extension of Brail’s observation that Yaletown firms were much more “technology intensive” (1994, p. 68), the site would emerge later in the 1990s as the city’s premier high tech and new media cluster, right at the brink of the ‘dot.com’ crash (Pope, 2002). Recent studies have reaffirmed Yaletown’s resilience as a site of elite high tech cultural production, identifying a more robust ensemble of new media services, while Gastown and Victory Square are host to a diverse range of industries associated with film production, art, and design, as well as a number of educational and professional institutions (Hutton 2008, Barnes & Hutton, 2009). A persistent hierarchical relationship has been observed, where Yaletown is regarded as the most desirable (but expensive) location, while Victory Square is a secondary site, more accessible to start-ups, but evincing a grittier, less upscale imagery (Brail 1994; Pope, 2002; Hutton, 2006; 2008).

The spatial distribution of cultural production firms in Vancouver’s central area is presented in Figure 4-4. Clusters are evident, but they are characterized by messy portfolios of intermingled sectors. This reaffirms the advantages of both diversified clusters and specific spatial typologies, recalling our discussion of urbanization economies in Chapter Two. Particularly in the CBD fringe sites, we can identify considerable mixing of firms by type; however, we will note in the following chapter that firms tend to distinguish between Yaletown and Gastown/ Victory Square on the basis of certain qualitative characteristics. The marked spatial confinement of Yaletown,

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7 This map was produced with the support of Profs. Tom Hutton and Trevor Barnes, as a component of a research assistantship associated with their comparative study of Vancouver and Seattle. The data were compiled from Yellow Pages listings.
generally conforming to the spatial extent of the Yaletown Heritage Area, speaks strongly to the importance of built environment factors.

While our kernel density ‘heat map’ confirms the continued importance of Yaletown and Gastown/Victory Square as the premier concentrated sites of production on the CBD fringe, it also points to the need to acknowledge additional sites within the central area. The vertical portfolios of these sites are different: they are not layered with spaces of cultural consumption to the degree we observe in the CBD fringe sites. They also, as we will note, are more likely to cater to specific sectors, which suggests a greater role for localized factors such as specialized labour and intradisciplinary coordination or collaboration. This thesis addresses the eastward drift of the Gastown/Victory Square cluster into Railtown, a spatially-concentrated former warehousing district at the northern
end of Strathcona specializing in graphic design and commercial arts. Additionally, we can observe growth in two expansive districts south of False Creek, compared with a 2004-05 survey conducted by Hutton (2008, p. 245). The Mount Pleasant industrial district is particularly important to the city’s film, television, and music production, interwoven with a closely-related digital media contingent. Relative to the 2004/05 survey, firms have increasingly concentrated in the southern half of this district, likely due in part to pressures following the development of Southeast False Creek. The Burrard Slopes industrial district, especially important as an architectural design cluster, has expanded eastward onto the Fairview Slopes and has developed an epicentre in the Armoury District, also an important site for high-end furniture design and retailing.8 We can also acknowledge the lack of firms in the False Creek Flats area [cf. Figure 4-3], a failed attempt to induce a high-tech cluster based on projections cast in the midst of the 1990s tech-boom. The reimagining of this area as the Eastern Core, led by a visioning exercise in late 2011, has renewed intentions to dedicate the site to postindustrial production (Hutton & Murray, in press).

Despite its fertility as a dynamic centre of cultural production, Vancouver lacks a coherent civic policy direction in support of the industries under investigation here. The City is faced with inter-scalар cultural-policy disjuncture, including a lack of strategic unity amongst the twenty-two regional municipalities and a parsimonious funding model at the provincial level (Hutton & Murray, in press). For example, we can point to a motion to support Vancouver’s digital media sector presented to council by Mayor Gregor Robertson in summer, 2012, which amounted to no more than a list of governmental bodies that could be campaigned for help.9 But the policy challenge is also an outcome of the purview of Vancouver’s arts and cultural policy division, which, unlike Toronto’s broader Creative City vision (see City of Toronto, 2008), has emerged from a social planning and neighbourhood-development perspective, and therefore is

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8 Notably, designers and retailers located in the Armoury District have self-organized for branding and promotion. See http://thearmourydistrict.blogspot.ca/
9 The motion may be viewed on the mayor’s website at http://www.mayorofvancouver.ca/digitalmedia. The motions proposed are: (1) letters to the Premier and Minister of Jobs, Tourism and Innovation urging them to revisit the provincial digital media incentives; (2) a letter to the Federal Minister of Industry calling for a national digital media strategy; and (3) a request to the Vancouver Economic Commission to pursue solutions for the local digital media sector.
aligned more closely with granting and support for the non-profit arts sector (Murray & Hutton, 2012). In this sense Vancouver’s cultural policy agenda differs from most, for which the criticism is usually a neoliberal bias towards economic imperatives (see Peck, 2005). The sorts of image-producing industries we are concerned with fall mostly in the gap between provincial tax incentives for digital media and film and television production on one hand and provincial and municipal granting structures for non-profit arts and cultural activities on the other. Nevertheless, our built-environment focus is apt, as it is in the domains of land use planning, heritage preservation, and urban design that we can cite the most effective policy contributions in the Vancouver case. As already noted, Hutton makes a great deal out of the Central Area Plan as the most single most important policy piece enabling Vancouver’s geography of cultural production, in concert with supporting initiatives that have contributed to the spatial and material circumstances of local cultural production districts. Looking forward, too, we can expect physical planning to retain primary importance, as a competitive property market and the dwindling availability of suitable workspace stand out as limitations on future growth. Indeed, these concerns are echoed in current policy directions for the local non-profit sector, which identify the need for ‘cultural facilities’ – particularly performance and studio spaces – as a critical challenge for local arts and culture (Artscape, 2008).

In another sense, the challenge for local cultural production is intangible, although here too this thesis has relevance. Despite trading on a strong architectural-design legacy and an eco-conscious west-coast lifestyle imagery – the building blocks of Vancouverism – Sacco, Williams, and Del Bianco (2007) argue that Vancouver lacks a well-developed, collective cultural identity of the sort necessary to compete as a world-class cultural city. Consumption (of the materialistic lifestyle sort) prevails over production in the city’s projected imageries and the Vancouverism brand. Besides the popular observation that the city never ‘plays itself’ in the host of locally-shot film and television productions always set elsewhere, Sacco et al. find that an array of cultural products are exported from the city without achieving significant local visibility. For example, Vancouver’s ‘photoconceptualist’ school of internationally important artists, including Rodney Graham, Jeff Wall, and Stan Douglas, are not widely known among
most Vancouverites. Murray and Hutton (2012) make the same argument regarding the ‘enigmatic emerging cultural metropolis’, pointing to enduring themes of hybridity, ephemerality, imagination, and transparency in monographic portrayals of the city, including ‘Postmodern City’ (Delany, 1995), ‘Dream City’ (Berelowitz, 2005), and ‘City of Glass’ (Coupland, 2009) – although they suggest that a prolonged process of redefinition coupled with a nascent commercial art market may be conducive to more experimental cultural forms. Sacco et al.’s argument addresses a problem of self-identification: “the city has never worked on building self- or other-awareness of its cultural potential and of its cultural assets” (p. 28). Without a sense of collectivity, Vancouver’s cultural production sectors – most of which we know are independently strong – miss opportunities for interaction. Sacco et al. observe “an incredible quantity of loose ends” (loc. cit.). Anticipating our own arguments, they believe that the challenge is ultimately one of symbolic capital, or of what we would describe as the distinctive imageries that are the grist for aesthetic reflexivity. They make an argument that we will repeat in the following section: the Downtown Eastside (or at least a selection of its constituent districts) is the “cultural lab” of the city (p. 32), leading in innovation and cultural fertility; but it is inconsistent with the city’s popular imageries of high-design residential neighbourhoods, found almost exclusively on the west side. Clearly the strengthening of collective memory in the city’s east side cultural production districts will be of primary importance in encouraging the projection of a more distinctive cultural identity, and in promoting the unified collective cultural identity necessary to escape Sacco et al.’s “identitarian conundrum” (p. 29).

4.2 Cultural Production Districts on Vancouver’s CBD Fringe

In this section, we focus our analysis on the cultural production districts we have identified on the CBD fringe: Yaletown, Gastown, Victory Square, and Railtown, with the latter three treated as a single interconnected but multinodal district. While it is this second district – situated on the eastern edge of the CBD, acting as its interface with the Downtown Eastside and as a focal point for Vancouver’s west/east dualisms – that is the

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10 Although the installation of Douglas’s provocative photograph in the Woodward’s atrium has surely contributed to his local renown.
subject of our analysis in the following chapters, we begin with an overview of Yaletown, conventionally described in scholarship as Vancouver’s premier cultural production district. While we challenge this hierarchical relationship, we acknowledge the need to situate our own findings in regard to Yaletown’s influence on the geography of cultural production. Following Yaletown, our examination of Gastown, Victory Square, and Railtown has two parts: first, an historical narrative that accounts for the provenance and character of their distinctive industrial built environments; and second, a discussion of the imageries they project, which are inextricable from the legacy of social contestation on the Downtown Eastside.

4.2.a Yaletown

Two decades’ worth of scholarship have described the Gastown/Victory Square area as the ‘second site’ to Yaletown in Vancouver’s hierarchy of cultural production districts (Brail 1994; Hutton 2006). Hutton (2008) describes Yaletown as Vancouver’s ‘signifying epicentre of production’ (p. 257), its success indicative of the positive relationship between historically significant landscapes and cultural economy clusters, and indeed it has also been described (somewhat hyperbolically) by heritage advocate Robert Lemon as “the only area of Vancouver that has a character and has buildings worth saving” (quoted in Hutton, 2008, p. 259) [Figure 4-5]. We can draw some parallels with London’s Hoxton, for not only has Yaletown been host to a globally-significant concentration of new media activity, it has now reached a more consumption-oriented phase of elite gentrification that we might describe as ‘post-creative’ (see Hutton, 2008; Pratt, 2009; Harris, 2012). The narratives are similar, beginning with the influx of artists in the 1970s and 1980s close on the heels of displaced workshops, suppliers, and warehouses, which left behind an easily-adaptable industrial built environment. Further waves of commercial/industrial gentrification have proceeded with the formal design sector as a powerful agent of dislocation, complemented by the rise of a technologically-oriented new economy in the era of dot.com boom and bust (on Yaletown in this period, see Pope, 2002). Hutton’s most recent observations in both districts disclose the relentless incursion of gentrification, promoting physical and social relayering (Hutton, 2008). But, while Pratt (2009) observes that it was truly in its phase
as a producer, rather than as a consumer, that Hoxton was a cultural powerhouse – and we can say the same of Yaletown – it is finally upscale residential uses, and their complementary amenities, that have outcompeted cultural production for property, with the blessing of real estate agents, property developers, and civic policymakers [Figure 4-6]. As Hamnett and Whitelegg (2007) have observed in Clerkenwell, just west of Hoxton, industrial premises have been lost to residential conversions. Both initially highly compact, the cultural production clusters in Hoxton and Yaletown have declined in favour of somewhat more diffuse production geographies elsewhere, and both districts have taken on new image-producing functions more closely associated with corporate culture, particularly advertising and marketing (Pratt, 2009).\footnote{In the Vancouver case, this was confirmed by mapping conducted by the author for Profs. Tom Hutton and Trevor Barnes.}

![Figure 4-5. The high-integrity built environment of the Yaletown Heritage Area.](image)
While Yaletown in the present day continues to host an ensemble of cultural production firms, these are accompanied by upscale residence, retail, restaurants, nightlife, and other forms of convivial consumption for the new middle class. While a third of Yaletown’s design firms lamented the need for more restaurants and retail in 1994 (Brail, p. 64), today a popular restaurant review website catalogues 110 restaurants in the greater Yaletown area.\textsuperscript{12} In popular usage and for policy-making purposes, ‘Yaletown’ has expanded to encompass a larger segment of Vancouver’s southern downtown, as well as the affluent high-rise residential landscape of False Creek North (Hutton, 2008). This is undoubtedly an indication of the toponym’s superior appeal within the central area property market. The sense of ‘hipness’ that characterizes Yaletown today is not countercultural in any sense; rather it is a playground for the younger among Vancouver’s professional and business elite, who can appreciate and

\textsuperscript{12} [http://www.urbanspoon.com/n/14/1325/Vancouver/Yaletown-restaurants](http://www.urbanspoon.com/n/14/1325/Vancouver/Yaletown-restaurants)
afford its high-end retail, boutique hotels, and residential lofts, and the globalized-chic imageries of upscale fusion cuisine. While the district retains some cultural production – particularly the architectural and new media elite – these are not visually apparent from street level, where the predominant imagery is of former railway loading bays colonized by café patios [Figure 4-7]. But further decline may be indicated by the departure, in summer, 2012, of Ubisoft and Rockstar, leading video game design studios.  

Figure 4-7. Railway loading bays recolonized by café patios, Yaletown.

While our initial intention for this thesis was to offer a comparative analysis of Yaletown and Gastown/Victory Square, we were unable to do so because of the disproportionate reluctance of Yaletown firms to participate in our interviews. The findings of the following two chapters, however, address Yaletown from the perspectives of our participants in the Gastown/Victory Square and Railtown areas, and suggest, at

13 Perhaps it is the elite cultural producers who have felt most fully the effects of ongoing global economic difficulties, as they are most deeply integrated within transnational markets.
least, that the development trajectory and imageries of Yaletown are sufficiently divergent from those of the latter areas to necessitate dedicated study of their own. As a preliminary conclusion, we suggest that Yaletown’s position atop the hierarchy of desirability for local cultural production is no longer universal; beyond greater affordability, Gastown/Victory Square, and Railtown’s morphological assets, amenities, and symbolisms are now, for many, entirely preferable.

4.2.b Gastown, Victory Square, and Railtown: An Historical Narrative

Gastown, Victory Square, and Railtown comprise a larger production district on the northeastern fringe of the CBD, sharing an altogether more stylistically and typologically variegated heritage landscape than Yaletown, with the redeveloped Woodward’s Department Store as its highly visible and deeply contested centerpiece [Figure 4-8]. Production is joined here by landmark cultural institutions, artists and galleries, and a well-established counterculture, as well as a highly-visible and well-documented population associated with the Downtown Eastside to the immediate east struggling with socioeconomic marginalization, homelessness, and high levels of substance use. Victory Square in particular has emerged as a design-related services cluster since the early 1990s (Brail, 1994), although development has been more incremental than the Yaletown experience and fraught by greater dislocation, tension, and conflict (Barnes & Hutton, 2009). More recently, this insistent yet gradual gentrification and upgrading have been accelerated by the influx of educational and cultural institutions into the Victory Square area, as well as the high-profile redevelopment of the Woodward’s site completed in 2010 (Hutton, 2008; Barnes & Hutton, 2009), which promises to raise the commercial ‘status’ of the area while further

14 Although previous scholarship (and planning) has tended to treat Gastown and Victory Square as discrete sub-areas of the inner city, the geography of cultural production (and the well-documented interfirm linkages that characterize it) suggests that they function as a single site of agglomeration [cf. Figure 4-4]. Additionally, while heritage preservation, investment, and gentrification have favored Gastown at the expense of areas to its south and east, this is changing with the acceleration of investment in Victory Square. The Woodward’s redevelopment is the greatest signifier of unification here, acting as a centralizing landmark in the reterritorialization of the districts and imposing a centripetal force drawing investment into previously devalorized blocks of West Cordova and West Hastings. In this thesis, we speak of Gastown/Victory Square as a holistic entity in most cases, but make a distinction between them where certain differing characteristics require.
shredding the social fabric of already threatened low-income and marginalized communities (Sommers & Blomley, 2002; Blomley, 2004).

**Figure 4-8.** Distribution of firms for selected industries, Gastown, Victory Square, and Railtown.
Source: Author’s survey (2012).

As the historic centre of Vancouver, Gastown and Victory Square possess an historical resonance that has been dampened neither by insensitive, overprescribed heritage preservation nor by the accretion of historical layers and creative destruction associated with the varying phases of the area’s growth, decline, and transformation.

Gastown marks the location of the original townsite founded in 1867 and incorporated in 1886 as Vancouver. Like Yaletown, many of the buildings that line Water Street today were constructed as warehouses and wholesale stores, albeit as much as quarter-century earlier, many of them begun in the aftermath of a fire that destroyed much of the townsite in 1886 (City of Vancouver, 2009a). As such, they reflect a different architectural era, predating the early twentieth-century utilitarian austerity of Yaletown. A product of
Victorian-era tastes, economic good fortune, and the aesthetic demands of commingled land uses, even Gastown’s warehouses are clad in the decorative trappings of the Italianate or Romanesque architectural styles favored by the new middle class, including projecting bay windows and cast-iron façade detailing [Figure 4-9]. Gastown also includes many early hotels and commercial buildings on Water and Cordova Streets, some constructed in the speculative late-1880s, others built in response to the gold rush at the dawn of the century (Kalman, Phillips, & Ward, 1993). Railtown lies at the eastern end of this warehousing district, far enough from the original townsite that it doesn’t have a legacy of intermingled land uses, and its architecture possesses a more utilitarian character. It is, however, uniquely punctuated by a handful of Art Moderne and Art Deco industrial buildings dating from the interwar period [Figure 4-10], including the large American Can Company plant at the eastern junction of Railway and Alexander Streets (built 1925) and Empire Stevedoring (395 Railway St., built 1941), the former converted in 1988 into a large art, design, and architecture studio complex (Kalman & Ward, 2012).
Figure 4-9. The architecturally-varied built environment of the Gastown Heritage Area.

Figure 4-9. Interwar Moderne architecture offsets brick facades in Railtown.
To the south of Gastown, Victory Square emerged as the city’s most prestigious commercial zone in the early 1910s, eclipsing in importance the retail district at Main and Hastings, which became associated with less affluent working-class consumption and accommodation (Blomley, 2004). An office and retail district emerged around Courthouse Square (now Victory Square), at the awkward intersection of the original townsite with the grid platted by the CPR. This included the Dominion Bank Building overlooking the square (built 1908-10) and the World Building (or Sun Tower) at Beatty and West Pender (built 1911-12), each of which was briefly the tallest building in the British Empire (Kalman, Phillips, & Ward, 1993). The lavish classicist detail of these buildings and their iconic profiles symbolize prestige and commemorate the ambition of the city prior to the First World War, while also speaking to technological growth and the significance of Vancouver’s emerging finance and service sectors [Figure 4-11].

Figure 4-11. Edwardian Classicism on Victory Square.
Uninterrupted decline immediately followed the ephemeral boom in Victory Square in the early 1910s, and set in across the east side of downtown broadly by the postwar period. Factors included the westward drift of the CBD as recounted in the first half of this chapter, marked by the construction of new landmark institutional and office buildings on the west side of downtown and the emergence of a postwar CBD of corporate modernist high-rises. Other elements of respatialization enforcing decline included the formation of a new retail core on Georgia and Robson Streets and the emergence of suburban shopping centres in the 1950s (Hutton, 2008; Barnes & Hutton, 2009), as well as the suburbanization of warehousing affecting both Gastown and Yaletown (North & Hardwick, 1992). Disinvestment was also stimulated by the socio-spatial processes that began concentrating poverty on the Downtown Eastside, first via the effects of economic hardship in the 1930s, and more permanently following the population of retired resource workers that took up permanent residence there in the 1940s (Hasson & Ley, 1994). Gastown, Victory Square, and Railtown were very much implicated in this decline, particularly following the spatial, structural, and technological transformations observed in the resource industries after World War II; by the 1950s, when ‘skid road’ became the pejorative term for the area, observers discussed ‘squalor’ and ‘immorality’ extending as far west as Cambie north of Hastings (Sommers & Blomley, 2002). Particularly since the 1960s, substance abuse has become a highly visible and lasting challenge on the Downtown Eastside, including related problems such as crime and prostitution (Hasson & Ley, 1994).

Following observed sociocultural transformations since the late 1960s, Gastown has informed David Ley’s theorization of countercultural forces and the arts community in particular as agents of gentrification and the aesthetic re-evaluation of inner city spaces (Ley, 1996; 2003), which, as discussed in Chapter Three, expands on a literature in which the artist takes a primary role in the sociocultural theoretical complement to the rent-based ‘production’ of gentrification (see Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2008). Ley (1996) documents the countercultural hippy culture that settled in Gastown in the late 1960s, anticipating the aesthetic disposition, liberal politics, and preference for inner city locations of the new middle class. The Gastown narrative is distinct however, in that
while artists and hippies acted as what Ley calls the ‘expeditionary force’ of the new middle class, the political rhetoric that was ultimately used in favor of preservation had more to do with reclaiming Gastown from the countercultural community, who were portrayed as drug-addicted and unclean (Denhez, 1978). A few months after the Gastown Riot of August 1971, in which mounted police violently dispersed a crowd gathered at a ‘smoke-in’, council asked the province to designate 236 properties, mostly on Water, Carrall, and Pender streets, as historic (Punter, 2003).

Heritage preservation and the ensuing ‘beautification’ schemes of the early 1970s created multiple identities for Gastown that have not been reconciled. One of these is the staged landscape of tourist kitsch, which has received considerable criticism for its theme-park-like recreation of a sanitized urban space, including ‘heritage’ brick paving, cast-iron street furniture, faux-Victorian globe street lamps dressed with flower baskets, abundant street trees, and, most controversial of all, the faux-Victorian steam clock (Punter, 2003) [Figure 4-12]. Via overdone and inauthentic design, Gastown was disconnected from the urban fabric as well as from its own distinct history. While this identity has faded with time and the visibility of social problems, Gastown remains one of Vancouver’s most important landscapes of tourism, convivial consumption, and gentrification. However, Gastown is also a site of resilient bohemianism and cultural production coexisting with the sanitized streetscape, particularly within the loft spaces above ground level retail and consumption. The arts community has remained in place, although condominium conversions threaten studio spaces. Since the 1980s, cultural producers have entered Gastown (Ley, 1996), with a particular attraction for ‘start-ups’ (Hutton, 2006). The district retains a discernible grittiness that Yaletown lacks.
Victory Square, meanwhile, continued on a trajectory of disinvestment and worsening social problems during the 1970s and 1980s. The ongoing deindustrialization of False Creek and postindustrialization of the central area economy placed increased pressures on the working class communities of Vancouver’s east side (including gentrification), thus eroding support for Victory Square retail, anchored by Woodward’s (Barnes & Hutton, 2009). The collapse of retail was confirmed in 1993 with the closure of the department store, following which many Hastings storefronts were boarded up (Hutton, 2008). The City’s protracted effort to prepare a coherent planning and policy vision for the area has been hampered by the difficulty of accommodating the range of constituent interests, which have included low-income residents, many precariously located in the district’s single-room occupancy hotels; merchants and property owners, many of whom favor redevelopment; and heritage advocates, who recognize the significance of the district’s Edwardian commercial architecture (Hutton, 2008).
Beginning in 1993, this planning process resulted in drafts published in 1995 and 1998, but was not finalized until 2005 in light of the complex suite of planning initiatives in the Downtown Eastside (City of Vancouver, 2005). The *Victory Square Policy Plan* generally advocates the continuation of the incremental process of transition that had begun by at least the early 1990s, as documented by Brail (1994), and makes a commitment to the arts, culture, and education industries and institutions that have already guided this incremental change.

The rise of arts and culture in Victory Square has taken two primary forms, acting at distinct scales but closely linked within the design- and knowledge-based economy. First, we can acknowledge the educational and professional institutions that have located here, attracted by low rents, the cultural milieu, and gritty historical ambience (Barnes & Hutton, 2009a). These include the Vancouver Film School, Vancouver Community College, the UBC School of Architecture, the Architectural Institute of British Columbia, the British Columbia Institute of Technology, and a number of buildings associated with Simon Fraser University. At a finer scale, however, the arrival of artists, small design-related enterprises, and small countercultural retailers and enterprises have recolonized many of Victory Square’s heritage buildings and introduced an edgy Bohemian and artistic ambience, as well as created a tightly interlinked production economy. Although Victory Square’s cultural production has received more scholarly attention than that of Gastown (Brail, 1994; Hutton, 2000; 2008; Barnes & Hutton, 2009), the steady pace of its transformation has not yet motivated the wholesale re imaging experiences observed elsewhere. Victory Square projects the ‘grittiest’ imagery on the CBD fringe, escaping the more abrupt upgrading and ‘beautification’ experiences of Yaletown and Gastown [Figure 4-13].
In Railtown too we can detect culture-led postindustrialization since the 1980s (Brunet, 2012). Also evident is the district’s marginality: a number of surface parking lots have long-awaited infill development. Unlike the other districts under study here, Railtown has undergone few planning interventions. It has no dedicated heritage or design guidelines, and has not hosted any ‘beautification’ schemes such as we can observe in Gastown. Notably, it is the only cultural production district we have identified that still falls under industrial zoning (M-2) – the Burrard Slopes and Mount Pleasant production districts fall under the ‘light industrial’ schedules intended to be more compatible with surrounding residential and consumption activities – and indeed we can observe traditional light industrial activities immediately adjacent to digital media enterprises in the area. In the 1980s, an interviewee tells us, design firms commonly described the area as ‘Japantown’, borrowing the now mostly-forgotten designation of the area to the immediate south prior to the disruption of the Japanese community during
the Second World War. For the most part, this and other histories are not readily legible in the built environment. Without the involvement of preservationists, little of Railtown’s past has been reintroduced to collective memory, although at least its authenticity has gone unchallenged. As a cultural production district, this thesis marks the first scholarly interest in the area, but we can readily observe an incipient cluster of designers and commercial artists. As such, Railtown is competitive with the Armoury District and Mount Pleasant, and, like the former, its resident firms have attempted to self-organize and brand the district mostly via an online presence, albeit to a lesser degree of success.\footnote{http://www.railtowndesigndistrict.com/}

The recent announcement that HootSuite, a local social-media heavyweight, will relocate with the City’s support from Railtown to Mount Pleasant in search of larger premises may weaken Railtown’s competitive prospects in comparison with these other incipient production districts (Bula, 2012).

4.2.c Gastown, Victory Square, and Railtown: Imageries and Memory of Contestation

The futures of Gastown, Victory Square, and Railtown are closely interlinked with that of the Downtown Eastside, where planning and development have become highly politicized, particularly with the pivotal role played by the Downtown Eastside Residents’ Association and antipoverty activists. Imageries associated with polarization coupled with the challenges of street crime and public nuisance have thus far put a limitation on reinvestment in the area (Ley & Dobson, 2008). Despite the City’s efforts to achieve ‘revitalization without displacement’, however, the continued use of revanchist\footnote{Revanchism, from the French word for revenge, is Neil Smith’s term for social policy, influential since the 1980s, directed at reclaiming the city for the hegemonic social group, variously aimed at minorities, the working class, women, homosexuals, or immigrants (N. Smith, 1996). While Vancouver’s civic politics are predominantly characterized by social (and economic) liberalism, Smith and others have described as revanchist a number of policies explicitly or implicitly targeting low income and disempowered residents, particularly squatters and the homeless. On revanchism in Vancouver, see N. Smith and Derksen (2002).} rhetoric aiming to claim the Downtown Eastside for the middle class matched with insensitive neoliberal approaches to attracting reinvestment continue to suggest that gentrification might be the inevitable and unfortunate end for the area (N. Smith & Derksen, 2002; H. Smith, 2003). Through the 2000s, this debate was anchored by the ongoing battle over the Woodward’s redevelopment, which, although containing a
number of non-market housing units, continues to indicate that wholesale gentrification is imminent (see Blomley, 2004).

The identities of Gastown, Victory Square, and Railtown are continually shaped by these social problems focused nearby. The area has a long-standing history of contestation, which informs perceptions of place and is preserved in collective memory by a number of landmarks associated with historical conflict, including the Woodward’s redevelopment. Sommers and Blomley (2002) describe the history of Victory Square as a battleground between the organized working class of the east side and the public forces of the city. Hastings Street and the square itself have been Vancouver’s primary gathering places for social protest since the Great Depression, marked by a police riot in 1935. The “mythical tradition of conflict” described by Ley and Dobson (2008, p. 2483) has been acted out since the 1970s between advocacy groups, the City, and the other actors in the battle for or against the gentrification of the Downtown Eastside, which has been documented extensively (Hasson & Ley, 1994; Sommers & Blomley, 2002; Blomley, 2004; Dobson, 2004; Ley & Dobson, 2008). Awareness of the conflict has been maintained recently by the work of poet and activist Bud Osborn (Blomley, 2004) and the ongoing Hope in Shadows photography project (Cran & Jerome, 2008).

The Woodward’s redevelopment has doubtlessly been the most contested landmark of the last decade, such that it will become a lasting symbol of conflict and dislocation on the western fringe of the Downtown Eastside [Figures 4-14 & 4-15]. Thompson (2005) writes of the importance the department store has long held in Vancouver’s collective memory, primarily as a symbol of a time before social problems had become the dominant narrative of Victory Square. In contrast, Sommers and Blomley (2002) position Woodward’s as a symbol of decline itself. For Blomley (2004), the battle over the Woodward’s redevelopment was one of community ownership, a contest between polarized socioeconomic groups. Since the 1990s, antipoverty activists tried to symbolically claim ownership by voluntary maintaining the site and decorating it with anti-displacement slogans and cheerful images. As the neoliberal provincial government moved towards the redevelopment of the site in 2002, a large protest
encampment was set up on the surrounding streets and squatters entered the building, to be forcefully evicted by police. The municipal government purchased the site in 2003, choosing a high profile local developer to redevelop it. Although the redevelopment as realized includes non-market housing, community spaces, and other amenities, the likely conclusion will be that the new middle class succeeded in claiming final ownership of the site. The sales pitch for the condominiums, “be bold or move to suburbia” (quoted in Ley & Dobson, 2008, p. 2484) sets the revanchist tone for the project, while the branding slogan, “intellectual property” (quoted in Hutton, 2008, p. 252) overtly grants symbolic ownership to the professional middle class (see also Proudfoot, 2011).

Figure 4-14. Symbols of the changing fortunes of Victory Square: the Dominion Building and Woodward’s.
In contrast with Yaletown, Gastown and Victory Square present an accretion of layers of history and memory, including negative memories as well as positive. *Abbot and Cordova, 7 August 1971*, a large-scale photographic recreation of the Gastown Riot by Stan Douglas, was put on permanent public display at Woodward’s in 2009, creating a visible symbolic remembrance of the role of counterculture and conflict in history of Gastown and Victory Square [*Figure 4-16*]. As with his earlier work *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* (2001),¹⁷ which stimulated a critical discourse on how revanchist urbanism was remaking Victory Square and the Downtown Eastside (N. Smith &

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¹⁷ *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* is significant today as a record of the state of commercial activity on the south side of this block in 2001, prior to the redevelopment of Woodward’s immediately opposite. In Douglas’s composite photo, we observe mostly boarded-up storefronts, interspersed with a pawnshop and a handful of convenience stores. The scale of change since the reopening of Woodward’s is remarkable, and indicative of considerable gentrification. On a recent site visit, we observed a salon/spa, a restaurant, a bistro café, fashion apparel retailers, and a high-end baby furniture and accessories retailer, as well as the Vancouver Film School. The pawnshop remains in place, as does at least one SRO; these are now complemented by employment services and a payday loan and check cashing service.
Derksen, 2002; Sommers & Blomley, 2002), Douglas once again creates a high-profile image that “resists viewers’ attempts to incorporate only ideal images of the city” (Oleksijczuk, 2002, p. 97). Broadly, Woodward’s is contributing to a reterritorialization of Gastown and Victory Square, bringing new life to Cordova and Hastings and restitching Gastown and Victory Square together as a unified district with Woodward’s as its centralizing force. Soon, Victory Square may no longer be an “interstitial urban space” (Hutton, 2008, p. 249), as its memory and identity are reconstructed via the revitalization of the district. But while the displacing effects of this transformation on both the marginalized low-income communities and the growing community of artists and designers remain to be seen, the eviction in November, 2012, of the W2 Media Café, an artist-run centre located within the Woodward’s atrium, for failure to pay over $80,000 in City-levied amenity fees, has raised concerns over the City’s increasingly cloudy relationship with its arts and culture community, and added fuel to a debate on arts support initiated in part by earlier arts-related evictions in the Woodward’s vicinity (see Bula, 2011).
Figure 4-16. The remembrance of contestation: the Gastown Riot at Woodward’s.
5 Findings

This chapter presents the results of interviews conducted between November, 2011 and February, 2012 in Gastown, Victory Square, and Railtown. The chapter begins by outlining the method in detail, followed by an overview of the interviewee characteristics. Following that, we present an in-depth review and analysis of the interview results, organized to map to the themes reviewed from the literature in Chapter Three: locational determinants and spatial and material considerations (sections 3.1 and 5.3); aesthetic reflexivity, creative identities, and the built environment (3.2 and 5.4), and the conflation of authentic and constructed imageries in the reconstruction of cultural production districts (3.4 and 5.5). This final section introduces points for consideration that will be addressed in the speculative component of the thesis, regarding collective memory, in the concluding chapter.

5.1 Method

The primary component of the deductive research stage of this thesis is thirteen semi-structured interviews conducted with representatives of creative firms based in the Gastown, Victory Square, and Railtown study areas (and, in one case, the ‘Greater Yaletown’ area). The broad Gastown and Victory Square area was delimited on the basis of the 2004 and 2005 mapwork published by Hutton (2008, p. 245) and later confirmed by our own mapwork conducted in 2012 [see Figure 4-4]. The more recent mapping survey suggests in particular the eastward expansion of the cluster, presumably stimulated in part by the Woodwards redevelopment, notably on Cordova between Cambie and Columbia and on Hastings between Cambie and Carrall. Additionally, the new map confirms the significance of Railtown as an incipient cluster with an easily identified distribution (based on firm location and the character of the built environment) along Alexander and Railway streets between Gore and Princess, already selected as an additional study area on the basis of preliminary keyword searches (‘shorthand’ mapping exercises) in Google Maps (eg, ‘architect’, ‘design’, ‘studio’). Of our thirteen interviews, four of these were drawn from the Railtown cluster and eight from the broader Gastown/Victory Square area. One interview conducted in Greater Yaletown, scheduled prior to its abandonment as a study area, was specifically structured to explore generally
the locational determinants and spatial, material, and semiotic characteristics of creative work.

Several categories of creative firms were identified from Yellow Pages listings which fit the definition of aesthetically- or artistically-creative industries outlined in Chapter One: architects, audio visual production services, video game designers (listed under ‘games & game supplies’), graphic designers, industrial designers, landscape architects, motion picture producers and services, multimedia services, recording services (sound and video), video production services, and web page designers. Internet research was used to confirm the location and suitability of these firms, and to gather contact information for their creative directors. Of these, 41 were sent introductory letters via email, and, when needed, contacted later via telephone with an interview request. 10 consented to participate in the study. Additionally, 9 firms were contacted via ‘snowball’ sampling, where interview participants offered subsequent introductions. Of these, 3 more interviewees were identified, for a total of 13 participating firms. This represents a 26 percent participation rate for the potential interviewees contacted. Time constraints, holidays, and business travel were the most frequently cited reasons for declining, but some firms indicated fatigue or annoyance with evidently recurrent requests for scholarly interviews.

As indicated in the previous chapter, Yaletown was discarded as a study area at the initial contact stage (although one interview in the area was completed) on the basis of a common reluctance to participate in research amongst its creative community. It was determined, however, that Yaletown presents an altogether different narrative that could not be adequately addressed within the scope of this thesis. Within this chapter, one will note the tendency of interviewees to criticize Yaletown for its perceived inauthenticity and ‘unhip’ character, and for its very real lack of affordability. As we’ve already suggested, perhaps later research will explore Yaletown as a site that has moved into a ‘post-creative’ stage, complete with new imageries and production/consumption relationships on par with other iconic sites such as New York’s SoHo (see Molotch & Treskon, 2009) or London’s Hoxton.
The substance of these interviews, informed by the inductive stage of research, explored (i) factors influencing the location of firms, (ii) perceptions of the area and its history, (iii) perceptions of the firm’s own creative and commercial identity, and (iv) how this identity relates to place and history, if at all. The interviews were semi-structured, following thematic guidelines, but with questions evolving on the basis of the results of previous interviews and customized to explore the specific location and ‘brand’ of individual firms. While the requested length of interviews was twenty minutes, the actual lengths varied (ranging between 14 and 45 minutes for transcribed interviews) based on interviewees’ time constraints and loquacity. In ten cases, the interviews were recorded and transcribed in full. Three others were documented by hand-written notes, as one interviewee preferred to be contacted by phone and two interviews were conducted spontaneously upon introductions from other interviewees. Interview data was coded and analyzed on the basis of literature reviewed in the inductive research stage. It is important to note that while the semi-structured nature of the interviews yielded a rich qualitative set of perspectives and insights, it also made demands on time that imposed limitations on the collection of background data (eg, firm history, employment demographics) that would be expected of a more rigid, less exploratory study. The present research is thus divergent from and complementary to previous graduate research in this field (specifically Brail, 1994; Pope, 2002).

5.2 Interviewee Characteristics

While a varied sample of potential interviewees was contacted from the list of industrial categories above, the selection of willing participants disproportionately hail from the broad and overlapping realm of creative agencies and studios offering design and branding services for multiple media platforms (10 of 13 interviewees). We speculate that this willingness may reflect the smaller firm size, more casual social style, and greater need for broader social networks within this industry relative to others.

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1 A video game designer who is happy to lead a researcher into the offices of the neighbouring multimedia and design firms to request interviews is a potent demonstration of the social benefits of diversified clusters.

2 For this reason, our review of interviewee characteristics (see Section 5.2) is somewhat more cursory than the corresponding sections of previous studies. The background information presented here is compiled from information provided on the firms’ websites, as well as from details offered incidentally in the course of the in-depth interviews.
(particularly film and architecture) that were consistently or mostly unwilling to take part. One architecture firm, one game design firm, and one industrial designer rounded out the participants. Nevertheless, there was wide variation within the sample of design firms in terms of both general characteristics (eg, size, offerings, style and identity) and in terms of the opinions expressed. While it is very common for these firms to offer a wide range of ‘multi-dimensional’ services – in many cases technology has blurred the distinction between design for traditional/physical media and design for new/digital media – each firm tended to offer one or more areas of specialization, at times seeming to defy their limited human resources. These included (without providing examples that would identify notable firms) typography, packaging, and social media campaigns. Additionally, some firms specialized in design and branding for specific industries reflecting Vancouver’s characteristic industrial ensemble, including mining and forestry, architecture and condominium development, and food and beverage packaging.

The sample of firms interviewed indicates the scalar range of the cultural industries, with many staffed by very small but flexible teams. While none of Vancouver’s most elite cultural firms (indicated by the operation of offices in more than one large urban centre) consented to interviews, three of the firms interviewed possessed a larger staff (between ten and twenty employees), and two of these projected imageries of a more formalized corporate culture. These two, a large design and branding firm and an architecture firm, have demonstrated stability by remaining at the same location for much longer than the other firms interviewed. Interestingly, both have long been located in the Railtown area – for approximately twenty and fifteen years respectively – demonstrating the extended gestation process of this incipient site. The third larger firm, working in video game design, has grown more recently, as indicated by the interviewee’s observation that the space they vacated only a year ago due its excessive size would in retrospect have been too small to accommodate their recent growth. The ten smaller firms interviewed, with an average size of 6.1 people and a range of between 2 and 10, spoke in many cases of more precarious circumstances. While only one of these

3 It should be noted, however, that these might not be deliberate specializations but rather the outcome of reputations and social networks earned from previous commissions.
referred to the challenge of national and global economic circumstances – specifically, the 2008 financial crisis still reverberating in 2013 in a Eurocentric form – most indicated the significant localized pressures associated with urban land economics. While we will return to the theme of gentrification in the following section, it is important to note its explanatory power with regard to the spatial dynamics of Vancouver’s geography of cultural clusters.

While all but the two largest firms interviewed exhibit the imageries and spirit of a creative start-up (recalling the sociologies of creative milieux discussed in Chapter Two), most of them recount a longer narrative interwoven within the evolving geography of cultural production in Vancouver – as is indicated in their comments and insights below. Recalling Krätke’s argument that Florida tends to overstate the mobility of the creative class while understating the importance of ‘personal trajectory factors’ (Krätke, 2011), many of the interviewees described an association with Vancouver’s cultural economy that precedes their time as the creative director and/or principal at a cultural firm. Some are alumni of the Emily Carr University (or Institute) of Art and Design, and one designer serves as a sessional lecturer there. Many worked previously for other local cultural firms before launching their own commercial ventures. Some described experiences working in Yaletown and Gastown as early as the late 1980s.

5.3 On the Geography of Cultural Production: Rent, Space, and Material

The first of three sections presenting and analyzing interview findings, this section is organized into two sub-sections, the first dealing with considerations relating to rents and the second dealing with the spatiality and materiality of cultural production. In this section of the research, we are covering ground already dealt with in detail by Hutton (2006) and Rantisi and Leslie (2010), among others. With this in mind, our intention is to enrich the nuances of our scholarly understanding and probe divergences from the narratives already available.

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4 See Hutton and Pratt (2012) for a discussion of the fortunes of the creative economy in the financial crisis. Following their arguments, we point out that, while none of the firms interviewed here depend directly on consumer spending, their orientation to Vancouver’s services economy seems to have ensured a sufficient number of degrees of separation from volatile circuits of global finance.
5.3.a Rents

The persistent need for a careful balancing act between commercial considerations and the unique social, cultural, or aesthetic needs of cultural-products firms is demonstrated by the ubiquity of affordability concerns within discussions on the positive or negative qualities of the study areas. While there has been a tendency in positivist and Marxist urban geographies, however, to place emphasis on microeconomic abstractions of rent-driven locational choice (e.g., the influential ‘rent gap’ model elaborated by N. Smith, 1996), our interviewees’ perspectives support a more nuanced and qualitative interpretation of cost considerations. Four points can be made. First, rent is assessed against the perceived value of a space, determined not only by cost considerations, location, amenities, or material factors but also in most cases by intangible aesthetic or semiotic assets that defy traditional notions of utility maximization. Given the variability of the relative importance of this wider array of attributes for different firms, interviewees expressed different opinions on rent. The architect emphasized the attraction of low rent, and spoke only of a limited set of other needs his location met (note the dismissal of agglomeration factors):

I think the aesthetics of the building are one thing; the rent’s the other part. When we moved in it was really attractive rent … I don’t particularly find needing to be in a precinct where there’s other architects is that important, but I think most architects will find themselves in more or less the same circumstances. They want a nice big space, [and then] there’s rent.

A designer, however, prioritizes being part of a place-specific scene, after which rent and authenticity are secondary considerations:

I think there’s lots of places I could rent for the same or cheaper. There are certainly cheaper places I could do lunch. I don’t buy the whole rent thing, I think

5 Indeed, as discussed in previous chapters, Scott (2001) argues that there is a direct relationship between the aesthetic and semiotic landscapes of cultural production and the cultural products output. To repeat a Scott quotation from Chapter Two, “there will tend to be powerful and recursively intertwined relations between the meanings that adhere to the urban landscape and the symbologies of the goods and services produced in the local area” (2001, p. 17).
at the end of the day people want to be part of something and you associate yourself with certain areas of the city geographically, so I think you make decisions within that area. For us, you get a little space on Cordova and it’s a lot cheaper than getting an office on Water Street, and in some ways it feels a little bit more authentic.

Second, following that last quotation, we also must acknowledge the distinct variations in rent and cost that exist within each study area, including what Pope (2002) identified as “pockets of prestige” (p. 83). A large ensemble of factors contribute to the dynamics of spatial variations in rent and costs, including the specifics of building structure, condition, and aesthetics, and the presence of amenities such as parking or building security. The lasting prestige of Water Street and the centripetal forces of reinvestment following the Woodwards redevelopment were acknowledged by interviewees. Also, not only have some interviewees relocated to more expensive or cheaper locations within the same neighbourhood, in some cases there is considerable flexibility to upgrade or downgrade in situ. A few interviewees indicated that they had moved to larger quarters at the same address, while one had knocked down a wall to annex the adjacent space and two had requested that their space be subdivided.⁶ Some interviewees had either shared or considered sharing their workspaces with other firms.

Third, interviewees demonstrated an awareness of the temporal dynamics of real estate that figures into locational decisions. One designer discussed how a decision was informed by anticipation of the future effects of gentrification:

We looked at another building in Yaletown. We could’ve gotten three years’ free rent there. It was on top of one of the big restaurants, an old brick building on Hamilton … But we could feel the growth happening, and the vibe … at that point the two big concerns were after that we’re gonna have to leave; it’ll be way too expensive, and also we were foreseeing the plans of the development all around, and we could see what was happening.

⁶ These modifications would not necessarily alter the rental costs per square foot.
The same interviewee later considered purchasing a warehouse as an alternative to leasing, but declined due to concerns about the distractions and risks associated with real estate ownership. Awareness of gentrification and processes of change will be discussed further below.

Fourth, and most importantly, interviewees tended to demonstrate greater concern with the dynamics of leasing rather than with rent itself. This is a subject worthy of future study, examined only tangentially in these interviews. Generally, the study areas are more likely to offer leasing agreements favourable to the precarious circumstances and unique needs of cultural firms, including month-to-month leases, informal or genial landlord-tenant relationships (including, in some cases, willingness to allow firms to host after-hours parties), and less likelihood of triple net leasing (although landlords may maintain the property to low standards). Interviewees described their search for landlords and leasing agents “who are a little more human as opposed to hyper-corporate.” For example, Jacqui Cohen, president of Army & Navy and owner of the Dominion Building, was praised by one interviewee for her supportive attitude toward cultural firms as tenants. In particular, firms desire landlords who will allow them to modify and redecorate their spaces, even when leasehold improvements are not funded. As one designer explains:

They were actually quite uncomfortable initially when we talked about moving walls … as it turned out, once they saw what we did with it they used it as one of their model suites. So they’ll bring potential tenants in and show them this … even though we signed a two-year lease, we put our own money into all the upgrades.

And another:

The landlord was adamant that he was gonna be putting new carpet in … so I made a deal with him that I would buy the floor and that I would install it. So in the first office I actually installed it myself, and then when it went on he realized
how nice and clean it looked, so he actually helped to pay for the floor in the two other spaces.

A third designer recounted how upon moving into a very large warehouse space they determined the exact square footage they desired, and the landlord erected a new wall to the precise specifications of the firm. These narratives indicate that the role of the landlord has been overlooked in scholarship identifying warehouse and loft spaces as easily convertible typologies – but they could also indicate that Vancouver’s cultural firms will be subject to the same exploitation as artists: transitional tenants imparting cultural capital to space (see Zukin, 1982; Ley, 2003).

5.3.b Spatiality and Materiality

Given that the characteristic spatiality and materiality of cultural production districts has been the dedicated subject of scholarship reviewed in Chapter Three, the purpose of this sub-section is to enrich the selection of narratives with specific insights from the Vancouver case and to highlight the local contingencies that determine the range of built environments associated with cultural production in this city. While the literature depicts an iconic typology of repurposed loft and warehousing spaces – found locally in Yaletown, the Gastown heritage area, and Railtown – the ensemble of favoured local typologies also includes low-rise mid-century industrial districts south of False Creek, refurbished live/work spaces in older structures not dissimilar (on the inside) from the city’s ubiquitous condominiums, and, most significantly, the repurposed Edwardian office spaces of Victory Square, formerly Vancouver’s central business district. While all of these share the patina of heritage character (even refurbished live/work spaces tend to retain the ‘brick and beams’), their variegated attributes offer a range of advantages (and disadvantages) for cultural production.

Since Zukin’s landmark monograph, the advantages of *Loft Living* have been well-known. The practical appeal of high ceilings, natural light, and open spaces as well as a poetic or romantic appreciation for the materials and semiotics of industrial architecture certainly resonated with our interview respondents. Just as important was
their aversion to postwar commercial spaces, as one designer explains: “I don’t know that we went out seeking [a character building] as much as we desperately don’t want to be in a 1960s office building. I think that’s more it; the alternative is so distasteful.” Said another:

We looked at some stuff on the Broadway corridor, and it was all either really crappy, or it was just a box. Zero character to it. Here’s your standard office, where maybe it had some shared amenities or something, but it was paper-thin walls and gross office carpet, beige walls, and all that kind of stuff.

While some pragmatic considerations were recounted regarding things like air circulation or even (perceptions of) earthquake safety, these comments seem to express the poetic appreciation of ‘look and feel’, or a studied appreciation of heritage character as in the following:

What attracted us to this space was the variety of materials … We’ve got these cement forms; you can see the wood texture on them from when they were originally poured eighty years ago. And you’d never see a wall built like that now.\(^7\) You can kind of see through them, and you can see some of the original nails that are in there.

With regard to ‘loft living’, however, our interviews suggest that scholarship has tended to neglect the disadvantages associated with the typology, often cited by interviewees. But these are voluntarily overlooked in favour of emotive or symbolic values: “The power sucks. You see sparks coming out of the breaker box, and that’s sort of a bad thing, but it’s nice to work in a space that you feel good about.” Other interviewees discussed challenges such as the constant brick dust that is problematic for computer systems or the uncomfortable temperature variations in poorly ventilated spaces. One perceptive designer had the following to say:

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\(^7\) Referring to exposed laths, from which the plaster had fallen away.
I think there is a big population of people that walk in and go ‘oh, I love this brick’, and it’s like, ‘do you really, or do you just think you do because that is what people have told you you’re supposed to like?’ Because brick walls really suck. They suck the light; they are dark; dust falls off them constantly; you can’t hang anything on them. They’re really not a very nice thing but they’ve got this romantic quality and people have been told these walls are so nice. Same thing goes for concrete floors … they’re so cold; they don’t clean very well … [but] our culture has taught us to appreciate certain things.

Victory Square offers an opportunity to consider the advantages of an alternative typology, where cultural production has successfully colonized a distinctive built environment comprising former commercial, office, and institutional buildings, some richly detailed in the style of Edwardian Classicism. The adaptive reuse of lofts and other industrial structures has occupied a starring role in ‘urban regeneration’ scholarship – perhaps because it is the most strikingly and literally ‘post-industrial’ – while the latent potential of other obsolescent typologies has been somewhat under-appreciated (with some exceptions in the gentrification literature). We find, in fact, that many of the advantages of Victory Square’s commercial spaces are the same as those of lofts, including high ceilings, natural light, opening windows, and heritage character. We can draw from Willis (1995), whose architectural history of tall office buildings sets aside questions of style and ornament to interrogate the practical and economic considerations that dictated their form in the first half of the twentieth century. Prior to the introduction of fluorescent bulbs in the 1940s, the quality and rentability of office space was determined by the capacity of high ceilings and large windows to provide adequate natural lighting. Before air conditioning in the 1930s, operable windows were also integral to comfort – and these were cited as a primary attraction for one designer located in the Dominion Building. Furthermore, office buildings from this era were designed to accommodate a large number of small firms occupying small spaces – for reasons that included smaller space requirements (smaller workforces, limited use of technological equipment), the space-defining limitations of structural technology, and the simple economics of speculative development – hence their suitability for the small agencies and
studios of the contemporary cultural economy. Indeed, the marketing of the Sun Tower as ‘creative space’ demonstrates that some leasing agents have come to the same conclusion [Figure 5-1]. Interviewees occupying these types of spaces expressed consistent satisfaction and had routinely planned their décor to showcase the superior architectural detail.

![Sun Tower](http://suntowerbuilding.com/)

**Figure 5-1.** The Sun Tower as ‘creative space’.
Source: [http://suntowerbuilding.com/](http://suntowerbuilding.com/)

While spatiality and materiality at the neighbourhood scale was discussed only briefly in most interviews, we can acknowledge a handful of insights that generally confirm the findings of previous scholarship, notably Hutton (2006; 2008) and Rantisi and Leslie (2010). Interviewees did not comment in detail about urban design qualities, although one designer, located in the Cambie/Beatty streets area of heritage buildings connecting Yaletown and Gastown, described how she often encourages herself and employees to get out of the office for creative stimulation: “when I’m working on an identity, for example, I’ll often just go and sit outside at a terrace and sketch for a few hours. Just that change of situation usually unlocks things because it’s a different environment.” The same designer, however, spoke negatively of Gastown’s built environment:
Gastown is too dark for me. The buildings are very close together. I like walking there, mostly at night, but I find in the day that the buildings are quite close together, and while I love the design of the buildings and how [they] look in the streets and all that, for working I don’t think I would enjoy it as much.

For others, the Gastown/Victory Square area is valued for its amenities (restaurants, retail, grocers) and its ‘24-hour community’, and the interspersion of housing is recognized for the contribution it makes to a vibrant street life. Interviewees expressed selective preferences for certain types of street life however, as discussed below. For those in Railtown, described by one interviewee as “pretty thin”, there are far less ‘third spaces’. For many, Railtown is anchored socially by the JJ Bean Coffee Shop, on Railway Street in the heart of the small district, complemented since mid-2012 by the Railtown Café. An interview conducted over coffee at JJ Bean presented an opportunity to observe the marked conviviality shared between local ‘creatives’ and the barista staff. On the other hand, Railtown is favoured for the ready availability of street and lot parking, which was very frequently cited as a negative attribute in Gastown/Victory Square.

5.4 Reflexivity, Creativity, Identity, and the Built Environment

As discussed in Chapter Three, the heightened aesthetic reflexivity of image producers challenges us to consider how they perceive themselves to be situated within a space, with regard to dimensions both ‘non-representational’ (concrete experience of space and material) and ‘representational’ (subjective/constructed experience of semiotic associations). But while previous scholars have tended to champion one dimension at the expense of the other (eg, Helbrecht, 1998; and Drake, 2003; respectively), our interviews argue for the indivisibility of these dimensions of experience, both of which are part of the rich and immediate experience of space for creative individuals. This creative director obliquely refers to both dimensions in these insightful comments (both describing and demonstrating reflexivity):
It is interesting that creatives are inherently more demanding of their environment than so-called ‘non-creatives’ … I think that it is true that we’re more aware, and I think we are also … inherently interested in the new and the unique … so I think that this area of the city, in many ways, historical areas tend to offer more variety of experiences, of spaces, of relationships between functions. It tends to be just a more organic, messy, interesting sort of place to be…

However, while we can easily demonstrate that ‘creatives’ are more demanding of their environment, or at least that they are very demanding, it remains unclear what they are demanding. In Chapter Three, we acknowledged two themes that emerge from the scholarly literature: first, that the ‘look and feel’ of creative spaces is an important stimulus for and input into the creative process itself, and second, that the selection and maintenance of a creative space becomes an expression of the individual or firm’s own professional vision and identity. Interviewees expressed divergent views on which of these bears greater significance. While all agreed that spaces vary in their capacity to foster creativity (although some believe that you can always, in the end, ‘do it anywhere’), they expressed a broad spectrum of viewpoints on space as a resource for self-identification, correlating with the likelihood that a client meeting would be conducted in the workspace. The following section will review interviewees’ comments with regard to each of these themes.

Interviewee’s comments on space as an aid to creativity demonstrate the intertwining of concrete and constructed experience, in defiance of Helbrecht’s dichotomized ‘binocular’ view (1998; 2003). This interviewee, echoing Helbrecht’s description of an “emotional attachment” to space and portrayal of the designer as a fundamentally creative individual, relates the organization of space to the nature of the design task:

It’s not as much of a profession; it’s who they are. So they don’t walk out the door and stop designing and stop thinking and stop visualizing in their head. I think it’s

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8 In the sense that these dimensions should be discussed as both/and, not either/or.
about being in a place that’s going to be conducive for your team’s creativity, and
your own personal creativity … the idea is that it’s all about the work, the
concepts, and the creative, and this is more of a canvas. Rather than the ping pong
tables, the grass turf, and the really crazy stuff. It’s to match the style of the work
that’s being done, and the style of strategy and creative that needs to be
happening, and the interactions that need to be happening … there’s a lot of
iteration, and a longer process of innovation that goes on. I think the more
minimalist, tranquil kind of setting seems to pervade most of that kind of design
firm.

Here we find ourselves returning to the practical considerations reviewed in the previous
subsection (eg, high ceilings, natural light), as comfort and tranquility – presumably
integral parts of what Helbrecht describes as ‘look and feel’ – have a direct bearing on the
creative process, given the sustained concentration and reflection required. As noted
above, many interviewees referred to the aesthetic disadvantages of lofts, which deter
their creativity. As another example, one designer fretted over the unpleasant tactile
experience of working at a glass desk, which had been intended to distinguish a “really
cool” workplace. But the workspace must also be a resource of stimuli, semiotic or not,
following Drake (2003), Bain (2003), and Edensor (2005). In one designer’s words, a
building should have “some character and some soul” and a neighbourhood should have
“some grit” and “not feel too cleaned up”. Vancouver feels, at times, “pretty plain and
sanitized”, hence the gravitation to areas such as Gastown and Victory Square, which
present, for another, a desirable “level of anarchy” (cf. Bain’s ‘improvisational space’). A
third designer, located in Victory Square, described the rich inspiration available in the
immediate neighbourhood: “colourful people, colourful language, colourful everything”.
Interviewees pointed out that Yaletown retains some cultural production firms on the
basis of the visual stimulation still available there, despite its loss of ‘rawness’; but for
many of them it is now, as one interviewee eloquently put it, “a little too fucking
perfect.”
Comments on space as a *resource for self-identification* do not convey such a tidy consensus, which, as said above, is partly a reflection of the extent to which clients are expected to visit the workspace. Some workplaces operate as a sort of ‘behind the scenes’, and creative directors recount the surprise of clients who have dropped by with false expectations. A video game designer explained how his company established a brand with little effort, in part based on their products themselves but also by conforming to the already well-established construction of what a video game design firm should look like. But the workspace is often perceived as an opportunity to at least elaborate on and express the firm’s design aesthetic, or to go so far as to create a distinctive identity that eclipses the product output altogether. Two firms feature images of their workplace prominently on their website, which they believe helps establish a unique brand.

Recalling Indergaard’s description of the iconic Flatiron Building as a signifier for Silicon Alley (2004), two firms located in the Dominion Building cited the advantages of their own (locally) iconic location. For others, the neighbourhood comes with its own symbolic associations – as will be discussed in more detail in the following section. For two younger creative directors, Gastown is notably “hip” or “hipster”, and signifies freedom, self-expression, cultural awareness, and non-conformity. An interviewee contrasted Gastown with Main Street, which signifies even greater independence but lacks professionalism. As will be addressed below, there are a number of applicable place-identities that indicate some level of heightened authenticity, including Gastown as well as the Downtown Eastside and ‘East Van’ in general [Figure 5-2].

As an indication of the increasing mythologization of authentic ‘East Van’, consider the ongoing *This is East Van* photography book and exhibition project, which aims to capture an “authentic glimpse” of East Vancouver and displays a distinctly neo-Bohemian aesthetic. [www.thisiseastvan.com](http://www.thisiseastvan.com)
about local economy, local people. It’s not about huge change; it’s not about
global views; it’s about a real intimacy that is definitely in line with my company.

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 5-2.** ‘Welcome to Eastvan’: a Gastown storefront, Alexander Street.

Nevertheless, while the sort of pressures to evince a distinctive local identity
described by Molotch (1996; 2003) and Scott (1997; 2001) are driving firms to seek
authenticity in the local, many of our interviews identified counter-pressures urging
conformity to the socially constructed imageries of cultural production.\(^{10}\) These are
significant, but somewhat under-emphasized in the literature apart from Lloyd’s well-
known elucidation of neo-bohemianism as a “blueprint for contemporary action” (2006,
p. 12). Many cultural producers confessed to feeling compelled to meet their clients’
expectations; as one designer said, he feels they are “held to a little bit of a higher level”:

\(^{10}\) As discussed in Chapter Three, Section 3.3, this is to be expected as a manifestation of globalization’s
inherent tensions between cultural homogenization and heterogenization.
It’s important for our clients to come by – they like to come by – and not only talk about their projects, but see what else is going on. So they want to come into our space, and I think they expect it to be a little more than a shoebox office.

For many, this involves decorating the workspace to demonstrate the firm’s creativity. It can also involve organizing the workplace to foster cordial and relaxed client relationships:

Some person wrote an article and said it feels like going over to somebody’s house for dinner. It’s got a real hominess to it and I really like that. I think it puts people at ease when they come over.

But there is also a heightened pressure to ‘look the part’, including dress and décor:

I think clients want to believe that everything’s in tune. So if they come to me and they see I’m wearing a three-piece suit, and we’re in a big office building with shiny marble floors and so on, something’s not gonna jive there. It just won’t feel right to them. In some respects it’s that if it looks like a creative studio they maybe feel more like they’re getting good value. Would you want to buy pharmaceuticals from a place that looks like a pizza shop?

On the other hand, one firm in particular is striving to defy expectations to attract a certain clientele:

We don’t allow any of our staff to wear jeans. Monday to Thursday they’re expected to wear business casual attire … We have to look professional … We do a lot of work with the mining industry, probably more conservative clients, and I think they appreciate that … we’re servicing our clients, and we have to win them over.
Location is also significant, as cultural producers are well aware that potential clients will look for them in certain areas of the city. As one interviewee explained, “clients don’t want their creative firms to be where they are. They want their creative firms to be in these weird spots.” Indeed, firms are sensitive to the status associations attached to rental costs in a unique way: in two cases, interviewees shared their concern that locating in an area perceived to have higher rents – in this case, the Gastown heritage area – would lead to reduced patronage due to clients’ assumption that these equated with higher fees. Lower rents are presumed to signify greater value for the client. Thus, while there is no doubt a hierarchy manifested in the urban geography of cultural production, it may work in ways that are more nuanced and counterintuitive than traditional microeconomic abstractions suggest.

An important insight follows from these observations, although we must acknowledge the influence of other local scholars who have made the same observation with regard to Vancouver’s literary (Joseph, 2011; see also Asfour & Gardiner, 2012) and visual arts communities (Watson, Scott 1991; 2005; see also Ballantyne, 2011; O’Brien, 2007; Shier, 2002). That is, Vancouver’s cultural producers are characterized by a heightened awareness of processes of urban change, and by an acute reflexivity regarding their complicity in these transformations. Self-reflexivity, charges Joseph (2011), is the missing factor in Ley’s influential narration of artist-led gentrification (1996; 2003), the result of which is an underestimation of the capacity of artists to mobilize politically or mount resistance to redevelopment and dislocation. Vancouver’s arts community has at times figured prominently in the local development discourse, as a lasting activist presence in the Downtown Eastside, and recently as a strong (but unsuccessful) voice of opposition to the proposed ‘Rize’ condominium development in Mount Pleasant in early 2012. ¹¹ The cultural economy – as defined in this thesis – is obviously poorly positioned within the broader field of cultural production to contribute to social activism, given the more pronounced economic inflection of its cultural output. But some interviewees nevertheless articulated the professional and personal dilemmas associated with their

¹¹ The announced closure in January, 2013, of the Waldorf Hotel, a self-styled ‘creative compound’ fusing nightlife and arts production in the Grandview-Woodlands area, looks set to incite further arts-led resistance to development. See Bula and Lederman (2013).
perceived complicity in gentrification and dislocation, which compels us to adopt a nuanced interpretation of their affinity for authenticity, locality, heritage and memory – as much a rejection of sanitized bourgeois taste as an act of cultural appropriation or commodification. With reflexivity in mind, we now move into the concluding section of this chapter.

5.5 The Re-Imaging of Cultural Production Districts: Authenticity, History, and Mythology

This final section considers the re-imaging of cultural production districts. As in Chapter Three, we can distinguish generally between the tendency to draw on authentic signifiers of the local – where the built environment acts as a palimpsest of symbols and memories – and the tendency to conform to the constructed imageries or mythologies of cultural production. As demonstrated by the preceding section, both of these can be interpreted with regard to the heightened aesthetic reflexivity of cultural producers, which motivates: (1) a response to place as a source of creativity; (2) self-expression and self-identification via the selection and maintenance of a workspace; (3) an awareness of the need to conform to socially-constructed expectations; and (4) an underlying sensitivity to one’s complicity in processes of urban change. The desire for authenticity, for example, is associated with each of these [Table 5-1]. Authenticity will be addressed in the first of two sub-sections. Following this, the second sub-section will consider the constructed imageries and guiding mythologies that are being used to transform local authenticities. This final section presents ideas for consideration that will be deployed in the speculative component considering implications for collective memory, in the following chapter.

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12 On these tensions, with regard to cultural production, see Chapter Four in Harvey (2012).
Motivation, with regard to reflexivity | Outcome, with regard to authenticity
--- | ---
Place as an aid to creativity | Desire for ‘colourful’, ‘messy’, ‘real’ urbanity
Place as a resource for self-identification | Desire to inherit the associations of place (e.g., working class or countercultural legacies)
Conformity to socially-constructed expectations | Desire to fit client expectations and create a perception of value
Sensitivity to processes of urban change | Desire to resist gentrification, dislocation, or the ‘sanitization’ of urban places

**Table 5-1.** The desire for authenticity in relation to the reflexivity of cultural producers.

5.5.a Authenticity and Local Imageries

For interviewees, Gastown/Victory Square is widely regarded as representing a more authentic Vancouver, the downtown correlate of authentic ‘East Van’. Indeed, it serves as the interface between the (inauthentic) CBD and the grittier (perhaps too authentic) Downtown Eastside:

One of the only true manifestations of this city is this six blocks.\(^\text{13}\) When you get further east into the heart of the Downtown Eastside then you have lost perspective, and when you go too far west you totally lose perspective. I feel like this is sort of the front lines of what Vancouver is, which is this incredibly diverse place. People dropping hundreds of dollars for dinner besides people who can’t eat. That to me is Vancouver, so I feel if you want to be part of the evolution of this city than this is the kind of place you want to be in.

Gastown was frequently compared with Yaletown, which is regarded as inauthentic, or “Gastown Lite” – a telling re-working of Gastown’s subordinate position as the “consolation prize” circa 2003 (anonymous interviewee quoted in Hutton, 2006, p. 1831). While Yaletown is believed to offer improved safety, cleanliness, and a better-maintained built environment, interviewees also associated it with symbols of crass consumerism and inauthenticity: “fake tans”, “fake breasts”, and “small dogs and Juicy Couture”\(^\text{14}\) Often, interviewees expressed the viewpoint that Gastown/Victory Square is not on a similar

\(^{13}\) To situate this comment geographically, the interview from which it was taken was conducted in a coffee shop near Cordova and Carrall Streets.

\(^{14}\) Juicy Couture: a Californian apparel company known for their velour tracksuits.
trajectory towards gentrification and inauthenticity – and indeed they may be right, given that the Gastown Heritage Area has largely retained its ‘grit’ and social mix despite the recurrent ‘beautification’ and adaptive reuse schemes undertaken since the early 1970s. One interviewee anticipates a more inclusive form of incumbent upgrading (but note that the W2 Media Café has been evicted since this interview took place):

I’m sure rents will go up, but it’s not going to become gentrified in the same manner [as Yaletown] … There’s a bigger move here to gentrify it in a way which includes the community. The W2 Café, it’s a media centre that hires local projects … they want to make sure [gentrification] is inclusive and doesn’t just push out … You got Nestors here, London Drugs here. These didn’t happen in Yaletown. They are providing services, the everyday needs, toothpaste and produce and things like that.

Another already observes authenticity in decline as the district becomes self-consciously hip, signaling that gentrification is well underway:

The downside of this area right now is … it’s so fucking pretentious. Like, it’s just out of control. It’s more cultured than Yaletown, but it has that same sort of… People are art-directing their clothing choices in the morning far too much. I find that part of it somewhat distasteful. It feels sort of snobby, and I don’t really like that … I think it’s creeping in as you get fancy sandwich shops … it feels a little silly.

These widely-differing perspectives were elicited from two interviewees working in the same building overlooking Victory Square.

Interview questions were also asked to explore our assertions, made in Chapter Three, that authenticity can be equated with history, and that the desire for authenticity often presents itself as nostalgia for past eras still legible within the urban palimpsest. This was truer for some than for others. Some interviewees confessed to having little
awareness of the district’s history, which was appreciated only subconsciously via the concrete experience of the character, materiality, patina, or “soul” of older structures, in accordance with Helbrecht’s non-representational interpretation of ‘look and feel’ (1998; 2003). One interviewee described the importance of surrounding yourself with “the bones of the past” to feel “grounded” as an artistic or creative person:

I look and I see my building’s 125, 130 years old. Well, I’m here, and there were people here before me, and I’m part of a community, and I’ve got some history and roots and some bones in this place. That helps a lot when, you know, everything else in your life is temporary.

A number of other comments support the notion of ‘history as legitimacy’. For these interviewees, it was clear that the rich accretions of historical layers found within the palimpsest are valued as – in Edensor’s words (2005, p. 77) – “happenstance montages”, as in the following:

Never want to see it completely polished. You look into the hallways here and there’s all kinds of pipes and wires in the ceiling. I think as soon as they put a veneer over it it’s gonna lose that charm that it has, which is that history. It means it’s been built up over time. And it’s adapted with the times, and it hasn’t hidden it. It kind of wears it on its sleeve.

For others, the resonant symbolisms of history figured more overtly. Interviewees were often able to cite the previous uses to which their workspace had been set, which in all cases were spoken of as something that adds stimulation, excitement, intrigue, and, of course, authenticity to the space. These included a salmon cannery and a meat packing facility, with the meat lockers converted to washrooms. One interviewee recounted a string of former uses, from munitions factory to welding shop to the studio of photographer Jeff Wall. For one, located in Railtown, surrounding oneself with the legacy of Vancouver’s port and rail hub, and its constant movement and signifiers of global trade, grounded the firm in a “workingman’s philosophy”, as explained here:
I think the connection with industry and work, because it’s a creative field, it’s not a very blue collar, hands-on type of work, but I think connecting yourself to that through the environment you’re in can give your work a sense of industriousness, and a sense of maybe a more traditional working aesthetic, more than an office aesthetic, [or] corporate.

It is curious, however, that this sort of comment represents something of an exception. While the interviewees routinely appreciated the patina and character of the heritage built environment, their awareness of historical detail, or even their sensitivity to collective memory, was limited. Perhaps most significantly, their relationship with local history was often peculiarly non-self-reflexive, meaning that they often believed that the memory signifiers associated with their workspace had little significance for the process or output of their own cultural production. The significance of this lapse deserves some consideration, and will be returned to in the following chapter.

The desire for ‘grittiness’ was more easily identified as a tendency shared by many interviewees, while the willingness to at least tolerate a heightened level of disorder and visible social problems was common to all. The opinions expressed closely fit Harris’s assertion that the aesthetically-sensitive middle class desires a neighbourhood “‘full of incident’ and ‘with a little edge’ yet ‘not that unsafe’” (Harris, 2012, p. 14, emphasis in original). With regard to the Woodward’s redevelopment as an agent of gentrification, one interviewee described the balance so:

Woodward’s is a mixed blessing. It’s nice that when you walk around you’re less likely to smell pee … but the downside is once you see stores that have ten thousand dollar sofas for sale, immediately I think it’s going to become a lot less accessible.

Interviewees desire “some grit” and “like for things to not feel too cleaned up”. More recently in Railtown, one has observed “not as much of that undesirable element, but … still enough of it to keep it interesting” (emphasis added). The following comments
express the need to strike a balance as well, but also indicate the personal dilemmas associated with a heightened awareness of urban social issues:

Moving here is funny because we are now officially in the V6A postal code, the poorest postal code in North America … I bought this great shirt that says ‘Downtown Eastside’ on it and felt like a loser wearing it, but then at the same time I thought ‘I work in the Downtown Eastside, so … I am legit’. I think there’s a funny thing that is happening where there is something almost ‘cool’ about the Downtown Eastside now and I think that’s good and bad. As people start to realize it’s not this kind of crazy, dangerous, dark, horrible place, I think that’s a good thing … I would say that we ‘dip our toe’ in the Downtown Eastside. I’m not pretending to be a true member, but I like the fact that we’re aware.

As one interviewee said of Victory Square,

I don’t see the grit and authenticity getting pushed out too far because I think that the people who are coming down here to open their offices still want a bit [of it]. Maybe not tons of it, but just enough that it’s a bit torn at the edges and dogged (emphasis added).

However, some cultural producers described a sense of solidarity with marginalized populations, indicating something rather different from the more condescending attitudes implied by the ‘urban frontier’ myth elucidated by Neil Smith (1996) and others. Of course, one could argue that this nevertheless implies a superficial treatment of the local community, and threatens to negate their social identity. It may also merely perpetuate Lloyd’s “bohemian disposition to value the drama of living on the edge” (2006, p. 80). But it suggests an alternative reading that accounts for the reflexivity of a cultural producer who identifies in him or herself an opposition to conformity and distance from the bourgeois ethic signified by the (romanticized) marginalized individual. This sense of solidarity is a bridge between responses to local imageries and appropriations of constructed identities, given its centrality to the mythology of neo-bohemia (Lloyd,
2006); thus it serves to introduce the following sub-section. To conclude, consider the following two comments, which meld self-reflexivity and evocations of neo-bohemia:

I think there’s a fine line between creative and crazy, and I think one of the reasons why artists gravitate towards the seedy and the downtrodden is because we can see ourselves in the neighbourhood. If it wasn’t for the internet, and for the interesting stuff that’s happening in the social gaming industry, I might be homeless. Because I’m kind of crazy, and I really don’t have very conventional ideas, and my work ethic doesn’t match society, and I have a strange fashion sense. I could easily be that person. I think a lot of artists feel that way. We talk about our art; people look at us like we’re nuts.

The end result of creativity isn’t always polished, isn’t always refined. Although it can be, especially with design. But the root and the path travelled to that end state can be mired in grit and troubles along the way. I think that people who are creative are troubled in many ways, just being creative … Sometimes we creatives feel that we’re just one step from the gutter if you don’t do the next big project, you know? You’re only as good as your last show, and if you don’t have that creative idea…

5.5.b Socially Constructed Imageries and the Guiding Mythologies of Cultural Production

The discussion thus far has spoken strongly to the pressures compelling firms to perpetuate the socially constructed imageries associated with cultural production, including media representations and client expectations. These include expectations relating to dress and manner, as well as the décor and location of the workspace, which should be in an area associated with low rents to signal higher value for the clients’ investment. We have already quoted the interviewee who felt that cultural production firms were “held to a little bit of a higher level” with regard to the constant expression of creativity throughout the course of the designer-client relationship. Interestingly, these pressures were mostly attributed to satisfying the expectations of the client. This marks a
departure from (or expansion of the scope of) Lloyd’s neo-bohemia (2006), emphasizing the benefits of bohemianism for the individual (ie, a lifestyle guide, and a chance for social support and recognition) and the cultural firm (eg, a large, flexible labour pool tolerant of exploitation, and a creative milieu). Florida (2002) also omits the clients’ expectations, treating bohemianism as intrinsic to the identity of the creative individual and – most importantly – a signifier of alternative and innovative thinking attracting creative firms to local labour pools. Our interviewees may define themselves in opposition to the corporate world, but they are also keenly aware of how to keep its attention.

That is not to say, however, that the imageries they present are uniformly bohemian, although in many cases they are. Certainly, when asked, interviewees denied the label, but many – generally, the younger – shared its ethos or ideology to varying degrees. Informality of all sorts is prevalent, including dress, manner, speech, workplace organization, and relationships with clients and leasing agents. Also common is the celebration of non-conformity, and its reciprocal, rejection of the corporate identity of the CBD. With less frequency, we can detect echoes of the myth of the artist as outsider, including the statements of solidarity with marginalized populations discussed above, and the following comments from the creative director of a successful gaming design firm:

As long as you’re gonna be poor you want to feel noble about it … Artists don’t like being poor. It’s sort of a mythology, right? … That’s why we try to find nobility in things that are old and cheap, because it makes us feel better about the fact that nobody else really values our work as artists … If the well-fed artist was the cliché, then probably we would feel perfectly comfortable with the neighbourhood gentrifying.

It is also clear that Gastown/Victory Square meets the criteria of Lloyd’s neo-bohemia, pooling together various forms of cultural producers and production, and providing social support and recognition within a creative milieu. As we have already discussed, interviewees cited the neighbourhood as a source of inspiration on the basis of its
vibrancy, diversity, and hipness, and some felt that it allowed them to access and stay abreast of the latest in cultural trends and innovations. Additionally, some interviewees described the importance of parties held in their workspace, which allow for networking and heightened the visibility of the firm, but are often held in contravention of liquor laws.

Many interviewees, however, projected imageries far removed from the iconography of bohemianism. Generally, these were the larger firms, with an older senior staff, who had adopted a more formal, professional identity commensurate with their status as the local design elite. Once again, we are prompted to disaggregate Florida’s creative class, for while bohemianism may be correlative with successful creative professionals, it is not necessarily descriptive of them. But here too we find imageries distinct from that of the corporate CBD. Firms of this sort tend to favour a sleek minimalism, characterized by exposed concrete, white walls, and open plans, all offset by ‘character’ details. As one designer described her office’s aesthetic, deceptively located in a former salmon cannery: “very modern, clean lines, minimalist, Scandinavian.” While there is a tendency to merely describe this sort of space as ‘contemporary’, it also indicates the dissemination of an imagery native to the design world characterized by the juxtaposition of modernist austerity with the textured heritage familiar to the cultural production district, a visual pairing analogous to the juxtapositions emblematic of the new cultural economy itself: global representations and localized imageries, or technological reproduction and individualized craftsmanship. These designers indicate the need for scholarship to introduce new guiding mythologies to the study of the new cultural economy apart from neo-bohemia, and distinct from the legacy of artist-led loft living. As one interviewee explained:

I think the mythology of loft living and artists is something that’s maybe still on the minds of those that are a little bit older that can still relate to the fact that there were lofts in the real SoHo in New York, that have long been pushed out by the Banana Republics … even here, in Vancouver, there may be some romantic

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15 Although perhaps indebted to the iconic white walls of the Museum of Modern Art.
notions with that, but I think it’s something that’s fading, and there have been too many references made to it in glossy brochures for condo developments. I think loft living now is more something that the average middle class businessperson relates to more than artists.

Recall also the comments quoted earlier on the socially-conditioned taste for the loft aesthetic in defiance of some of their negative aesthetic qualities.

Given the ascendance of design as an industry over the last three decades, we should expect the social construction of a distinctive imagery and a guiding mythology, which has only been glanced upon in the urban studies literature – and does not always conform to Lloyd’s neo-bohemia. As a preliminary consideration, and corresponding with the resonance mid-century New York has for visual artists, we can look for iconic eras in design’s own history. German design in the Weimar period is one such fertile and resonant era, reaching culmination in the ideas of the Bauhaus school frequently mentioned as a primary design influence by interviewees (especially those inclined towards white-walled minimalism). Under Walter Gropius, and bearing the influence of the earlier Deutscher Werkbund, the Bauhaus school made important contributions to the professionalization and legitimization of design, in architecture as well as typography and graphic and industrial applications, which resonate strongly in the present. Stylistically, they promulgated an approach of technical rationalism that reverberates in the minimalist workspaces and design output of some of the firms that participated in this research. Guiding their work, however, was a dedication to cultural problems that remain unresolved today, primarily, the task of enriching machine-era production with the aura of hand-craftsmanship, bridging the gap between artists and producers, and infusing and enriching the objects of mass production with meaning and spirit. Thus, as a gesture towards future study, we propose that the minimalist and Bauhaus-influenced studio be acknowledged as one alternative spatial archetype in the design world, at least equivalent in importance to the repurposed loft.

On the Bauhaus and design history, Colquhoun (2002) and Frampton (2007) were consulted as introductory texts.
6 Planning Implications and Conclusion

Contributing to a rich body of scholarship on the relationship between industry and urban space in the field of cultural production, this thesis has provided a selection of insights into the reimagining processes acting on Vancouver’s inner city cultural production districts. While we acknowledge the considerable allure cultural production continues to hold for urban development thinkers and practitioners, we have striven to maintain a critical perspective that holds cultural production to account for disruptive outcomes including social and commercial dislocation as well as the loss of place-bound signifiers of collective memory. Our perspective on the relationship between space and industry has also benefited from a frame of analysis that accounts for (1) the cultural and historical resonances of place, or its semiotic attributes; and (2) the reflexive relationship cultural producers maintain with these resonances, which inform their creative personas, processes, and outputs. This latter point in particular has led to valuable insights on the value of the built environment as a source of creative stimuli and a resource for self-identification. Additionally, on the basis of the heightened self-awareness of cultural producers, we have pointed to the need for scholarship acknowledging (1) their sensitivities to pressures to conform to the resonant legacies of cultural production as blueprints for the re-imaging of production districts (eg, neo-bohemia), particularly with regard to clients’ expectations; and (2) their awareness of the complicity of cultural production in urban transformations (ie, gentrification and dislocation). The re-imaging of cultural production districts evinces a dynamic interplay between heterogenizing and homogenizing tendencies, indicating conflicting desires to preserve and celebrate authentic signifiers of the local and to conform to the socially constructed imageries and mythologies of aesthetically creative work.

Following an extensive literature review, which introduced useful sources from outside the cultural production research domain – including scholarship on residential gentrification and the ‘city of collective memory’ – we conducted a series of in-depth semi-structured conversations with the creative directors (or, in one case, the business director) of firms based in our study areas. While this generated a rich set of qualitative insights, our findings are not in all cases easily generalizable, but rather respond to
Vancouver’s legacy as an important laboratory for cultural production scholarship, as well as progressive urbanism generally. Amongst a literature that abounds with city-specific narratives, Vancouver stands out as fertile terrain for (re)theorization. Our thick qualitative perspective is intended to complement the empirical data produced by earlier graduate research on local cultural production (particularly Brail, 1994; Pope, 2002).

This chapter comprises four sections. The first two provide a succinct restatement of our conclusions. First, we address the importance of the spatial and material qualities of sites of cultural production, contributing a set of observations that will add to an already well-developed area of study. Second, we review the importance of reflexivity with regard to the relationship between the cultural producer and space or place. Following this, the third and fourth sections of this chapter apply these conclusions to two very different analyses. In the third section, we consider their implications for collective memory, given that the reconstruction and reimaging of these heritage districts has significant consequences on our capacity to remember the associated past. While this section is speculative, it is informed by a review of the relevant literature and is intended as a point of departure for future study. We propose that the outcome of an emphasis on the creative self, and the global circulation of images emptied of meaning, is a built environment characterized by the indistinguishability between endogenous memory and exogenous mythologies. In the fourth section, we adapt our conclusions – including those generated in our speculation on memory – for application in planning practice. In particular, we frame our findings as a challenge for heritage preservation, and make some suggestions for a preservation perspective better aligned with cultural production and the challenges of dislocation and the disappearance of memory.

6.1 Cultural Production, Space, and Material

As acknowledged in the preceding chapters, this thesis benefits from – and contributes to – the rich set of case studies and theoretical synthesis (particularly Hutton, 2006) documenting the spatial and material dimensions of cultural production. For this reason, our somewhat cursory examination of these dimensions in the Vancouver case – really more of a refreshment of the observations made previously by Hutton and others –
was conducted with an eye for deepened nuance, local specificities, and divergences from the well-documented typology of cultural production spaces. A handful of insights emerge from this analysis.

Although touched on only briefly, rent was addressed via a qualitative perspective, indicating possibilities for a more nuanced and humanistic evaluation of its role as a locational determinant. In defiance of traditional conceptions of utility maximization, interviewees referred to a range of intangible aesthetic or semiotic assets such as ‘authenticity’ for which they are willing to pay a premium. Interviewees also discussed the flexibility of effective rental costs \textit{in situ}, which could be modified by subdividing or sharing workspaces, or by annexing adjacent space as needed. Interviewees base locational decisions on expected future conditions, including projected real estate markets and anticipated qualitative transformations associated with urban development in general. Lastly, we can cite their concern with the intricacies of the leasing process itself, including social relationships with leasing agents and landlords, and the terms of the leasing agreement (eg, the availability of month-to-month contracts, avoidance of triple net leasing, and flexibility regarding leasehold improvements).

With regard to the spatiality and materiality of cultural production districts, we revisited the perceived dominance that industrial loft spaces hold as iconic spaces of creativity. While the practical advantages and aesthetic appeal of lofts are well known, and were echoed by our interviewees, this thesis found that scholarship has tended to neglect the disadvantages also associated with the typology. These were physical inconveniences: faulty electrical systems, uncomfortable temperature variations, poor ventilation, and the constancy of brick dust, for example. While these are partially offset by features such as high ceilings, natural light, or open plans, in some cases our interviewees stated that it was ultimately emotive, symbolic, or aesthetic values – or even just pressure to conform to the designer lifestyle – that keeps them in loft spaces. Meanwhile, interviews conducted in Victory Square allowed us to consider the attractions of alternative spatial typologies associated with the city’s Edwardian-era commercial and institutional centre, where cultural production has forgone rugged exposed brick to thrive
in spatially-confining prewar offices. In this case as in others (eg, Hutton, 2006, on Singaporean shophouses; or Currier, 2008, on Beijing’s military factories), we note the possibilities for cultural production to thrive outside of the repurposed industrial districts sometimes considered the only cultivable sites for creative regeneration. We drew on Willis’s architectural history of tall office buildings (Willis, 1995) to cite some common features of this typology conducive to cultural production, including many also associated with lofts, as well as superior architectural detail and layouts intended for a large number of smaller firms.

6.2 Reflexivity, Creativity, Identity, and the Built Environment

The reality of heightened aesthetic reflexivity as a defining attribute of postmodern production, drawing in particular on the work of Lash and Urry (1994), for whom it is a motivating factor in the rapid rise of image-producing industries, is an undergirding principle in Scott’s groundbreaking work on the relationships between place and cultural production (Scott, 1997; 2001) and the primary theoretical preconcept for Helbrecht’s early work on the spatiality of creativity (Helbrecht, 1998; 2003). Heightened aesthetic reflexivity challenges us to consider the landscape as a resource of visual stimuli, to be used as both a prompt to creativity and as a resource for the creation of one’s own self-identity, and thus should be restored to a privileged position in scholarship on the industry-shaping power of spatiality. In this thesis, it has guided analysis of urban re-imaging processes and allowed us to contribute to the already rich literature on the spatiality and materiality of cultural production.

Acknowledging the influence of Helbrecht’s ‘binocular view’ and the work of Drake (2003), we argued that the rich and immediate experience of space includes both a concrete phenomenological experience and a subjective response to semiotic associations moulded by individual identities, perceptions, and beliefs. This was evident in the comments of interviewees, whose descriptions of “messy” or “colourful” urbanism refer to both dimensions of experience. We reviewed two key ideas from Helbrecht’s research. First, the ‘look and feel’ of creative spaces is an important input into the creative process itself. To some extent, this is merely a need for comfort and tranquility to sustain the
necessary concentration and reflection for creative work. But the workplace is a resource for stimuli as well, which helps to account for designers’ rejection of the sterile and controlled spaces of the CBD. While Helbrecht dances around the need to resort to representational theory to account for the obvious semiotic inputs into creativity, we argued that the concrete and the subjective are intertwined in interviewees’ desire for “some character and some soul”, “some grit”, and “colourful people, colourful language, colourful everything”. Second, Helbrecht tells us that the selection and maintenance of a creative space becomes an expression of the individual or firm’s own professional vision and identity. Our interviews suggest that the accuracy of this observation varies. At the least, however, the workplace is an opportunity to elaborate on and express the firm’s design aesthetic, and sometimes to display ongoing creative outputs. For some firms, the workplace is a key component of a distinctive identity, and may be featured in promotional materials as an element of the firms’ brand. The Dominion Building was cited as an example of a locally-iconic location advantageous for its creative tenants. We also discussed the symbolic associations attached to relevant local neighbourhoods, including Gastown, Railtown, Main Street, the Downtown Eastside, and ‘East Van’ in general.

We identified two further outcomes of reflexivity with regard to the spatiality and materiality of cultural production. First, cultural producers are aware of and feel compelled to respond to heightened social expectations concerning the ‘look and feel’ of cultural production. As one interviewee said, creative workers are “held to a little bit of a higher level”. Many interviewees believe that this influences the way they look and act, as well as their locational decisions. But while scholars such as Molotch (1996; 2003) and Scott (1997; 2001) have described the need to seek authenticity in the distinctively local, our interviews point to significant but under-appreciated counter-pressures to conform to the socially-constructed (and increasingly transnational) imageries of cultural production. Lloyd (2006) leads scholarship in this regard, on neo-bohemianism as a “blueprint for contemporary action” (p. 12). The imageries of cultural production – while not necessarily neo-bohemian, as we will review below – are deeply influenced by producers’ awareness of clients’ equation of value with perceptions of creative freedom.
or ingenuity. Our interviews disclose complex spatial dynamics associated with this phenomenon. Cultural producers are well aware that potential clients will look for them in certain areas of the city, likely different from and ‘weirder’ than the clients’ own locales. And while our interviews confirmed the interdistrict status hierarchies observed in earlier scholarship, we find them to be more nuanced and counter-intuitive than previously recognized: for instance, two interviewees shared their concern that locating in an area perceived to have higher rents would lead to reduced patronage due to clients’ assumption that these equated with higher fees.

The final outcome observed, with an intellectual debt to earlier scholarship on Vancouver’s literary and visual arts communities (especially Joseph, 2011), is that Vancouver’s cultural producers are characterized by a heightened awareness of processes of urban change, and by an acute reflexivity regarding their complicity in these transformations. While the cultural economy – as defined in this thesis – may not have the necessary liberty from economic circumstances to mobilize politically or maintain an activist presence, interviewees described the professional and personal dilemmas associated with their perceived complicity in gentrification and dislocation, which are determining their attitudes towards local social problems and inequalities and influencing their desire for authenticity as a rejection of cultural appropriation, cultural commodification, and sanitized bourgeois taste.

6.3 Cultural Production, Reflexivity, and the (Re)remembrance of the Inner City

The largest component of this thesis investigated the re-imaging process associated with cultural production in relation to the heritage built environment as a palimpsest of symbols and memories. As stated above, the purpose of this section is to review our findings in this regard, but also to speculate on the implications for the place-based collective memories inherited by cultural production districts, given that the capacity to selectively reconstruct the built environment equates with the capacity to selectively reconstruct the collective remembrance of local history. We will offer a theorization of the relationship cultural producers hold with the aesthetic and semiotic landscapes of production, acknowledging their reflexive need to establish a place-based
self-identity and maintain a biographical narrative grounded in spatial and material surroundings. We will argue that this emphasis on the creative self, and the general circumstance of accelerated circulation of images emptied of meaning, leads to a built environment characterized by indistinguishability between endogenous memory and exogenous mythology.

While our conclusions with regard to memory outcomes are proposed only as speculative notes for future study, they are grounded in a review of the academic literature on urban memory, as addressed in Chapter Three. Overall, our literature review benefitted from a broad scope, including sources on cultural production and the aesthetics of residential gentrification, as well as the ‘city of collective memory’, all of which guided our exploration of how the cultural economy interacts with authentic historical imageries. This literature indicates that fascination with historical imagery is a pervasive element of contemporary urbanity, just as authenticity, however imprecise, is a ubiquitous criterion central to the evaluation of contemporary urban spaces and signifiers of the ‘local’ (see Ley, 1996; Zukin, 2010). At a broad scale, nostalgia and the desire for authenticity can be attributed to the need to mitigate anxiety over the loss of place-bound cultures and local imageries as well as a rejection of the perceived homogeneity of the corporate/Fordist city and its leisure class. But, at a localized scale, they may also be attributed to desires to establish and legitimize oneself within a community, where newcomers may gain a foothold by associating themselves with local aesthetics and imageries. The need to associate with authentic signifiers – a need additional to the pragmatic spatial and material considerations reviewed above – is a salient determining factor of the geography of cultural production, common to gentrification and other forms of aestheticized consumption as well.

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1 Indeed, for Giddens (1991), the reflexive desire to strengthen self-identity is likewise a response to broad global transformations, including the interpenetration of self-development, reorganized social systems, and globalized systems of mass communication (particularly electronic/digital).

2 This underlying motive does not even require history or memory so long as some forms of legitimate authentic signifiers are present; thus it is authenticity, not history, acting as a primary criterion of aesthetic desirability in cultural production districts without a substantial ensemble of heritage structures or with fewer visible memory signifiers (e.g., Burrard Slopes or Fairview Slopes in Vancouver).
Recall the guiding themes for interpreting collective memory discussed in Chapter Three. First, the aestheticization of the historical built environment entails the re-association of memory signifiers, where new significance and meaning is created on the basis of a discerning poetic appreciation of built heritage. Industrial spaces associated with asceticism and worker control, for example, are reimagined as spaces of freedom and creativity. Second, selectivity as to which memory signifiers are fit for preservation serves to filter the accretions of historical layers legible in the heritage landscape. That which is deemed authentic is celebrated and subjected to nostalgic consumption while other ‘inauthentic’ historical fragments are obscured. Third, we anticipate the insertion of exogenous mythologies into collective memory as imported imageries effectively construct alternative histories, neo-bohemian or otherwise. This section will draw conclusions in regard to each of these themes.

Given that a central argument of this thesis is the need for scholarly perspectives acknowledging the heightened aesthetic reflexivity of cultural producers, we should also frame this section within the conclusions drawn in the previous. Cultural producers’ relationship with space, materials, and imagery is configured by their creative needs and by ongoing reflection on and maintenance of their self-identities. In Chapter Five, we demonstrated that the desire for authenticity could be attributed to each of the four dimensions of reflexivity discussed here: the dimensions of reflexivity are the motivations, and the need for authenticity, expressed in different ways, is the outcome [see Table 5-1]. Historical imagery could also be substituted for authenticity in this analysis, given that they are often equated with one another in the evaluation of urban landscapes. But while this schematic of motivations and outcomes is useful as a coherent representation of a complex relationship – indeed, both sides are necessary to form a compelling response to our research questions – it is not without limitations, and these should be acknowledged prior to the following discussion. First, there is the difficulty of trying to identify discrete dimensions of reflexivity. Although this was effective in an analytical mode, as the previous section demonstrates, reality is not so tidy: many quotations in Chapter Five demonstrate multiple dimensions at play. Second, for the same reasons, it is not easy to attribute a specific outcome (eg, a tendency to identify with
marginalized social groups) to a specific motivation. People are not so forthcoming about their underlying motives, nor are they usually capable of making such astute self-observations when reflexivity is such a complex and multi-dimensional thing. So, while the following discussion is primarily concerned with the outcomes of reflexivity, it does not strive to attribute these in a specific way to dimensions summarized in the preceding section.

So, how do we interpret this relationship with the built environment? Given the historical nature of our study areas – and of so many other well-known sites internationally – we’ve conceptualized these landscapes in terms of historical imageries (the aesthetic components) and memory signifiers (the semiotic), both of which are implied in the metaphor of landscape as palimpsest of semi-obscured accumulations of history. The dualism here is intended to suggest not just that of signifier and signified, but, following Helbrecht (1998; 2003), two immediate but distinct levels of experience, one a subjective experience of the semiotics of memory, and the other a phenomenological experience of the historical landscape as highly textured and finely grained, uniquely conducive to creative work. Interestingly, at both levels of experience we value the palimpsest primarily for the cumulative appeal of its layers, rather than for any specific texture or association legible within. In both cases the holistic appreciation of the palimpsest evokes the sort of “colourful,” “messy,” or gritty urbanism that is highly desirable and especially authentic. With regard to memory, we could say that it is the deep and comprehensive sense of time associated with the layered palimpsest, rather than the resonance of any specific era, that acts as a source of legitimacy and as an antidote to the timelessness and placelessness of globalized postmodernity, particularly for cultural producers at the forefront of technological innovation and accelerated image circulation. This was demonstrated, for example, in our interviews, when interviewees described the appeal of the “soul” of older structures, but were less interested in discussing the significance of any specific use to which a building had previously been put.
Overall, this points to the significance of new ways of regarding space represented by the aestheticization and poetic appreciation of the built environment. As a metaphor, the palimpsest is similar to collage, a favourite of postmodern cultural critics, as well as assemblage, used by Ley (2003). All of these indicate a composite and intertextual reading of the built environment as landscape. Victory Square, for example, is no longer a collection of singular architectural monuments: the architectural symbolisms of its constituent buildings are eclipsed by appraisals of the district’s messy urbanism. Reading landscape in a way that takes note of juxtaposed imageries triggers new aesthetic judgments and necessarily generates symbolic inversions and re-associations. One interviewee, for example, detected a “level of anarchy” in the architecture, imageries, and socio-spatial formations of Victory Square.

Thus when we strive to explore an assertion such as Scott’s that “there will tend to be powerful and recursively intertwined relationships between the meanings that adhere to the urban landscape and the symbologies of the goods and services produced in the local area” (2001, p. 17), we are more concerned with locality as a brand or reputation – to borrow a phrase from Drake (2003) – than with locality as a landscape of discrete signifiers. Gastown/Victory Square is widely regarded as representing a more authentic Vancouver, corresponding with the more authentic brand of ‘East Van’ in general and occupying an intermediate position between the CBD and the social contestation of the Downtown Eastside. The historic legacy of this district is important, a “true manifestation” of the city and “the front lines of what Vancouver is,” in the words of an interviewee, the outcome of a development trajectory divergent from the mainstream Vancouverism planning narrative. The palimpsest – however fragmented and disordered – is important for its own sake, its texts deeply layered in lieu of more comprehensive redevelopment elsewhere in the city. The desire for authenticity here is a desire for remembrance, as the rejection of the triumphant Vancouverism model is a desire for urbanism apparently truer to its historic origins.

Despite the importance of the palimpsest to authenticity, however, we argued in Chapter Five that the relationship cultural producers hold with the memory signifiers
associated with the district or their workspace is peculiarly non-self-reflexive, meaning that they often feel that memory has little bearing on their own creative persona, process, or output. For example, the previous uses of a workspace, whether legible or not, and whether earlier (eg, a cannery) or more recent (eg, an artist’s studio), were spoken of only as adding stimulation, excitement, or intrigue to a space – quite different from facilitating an individual’s creative self-identification. This may indicate that the mnemonics of memory have become weak, or that the palimpsest has been rendered illegible by the opaque present: the results of hasty reconstruction, reimagining, or insensitive preservation. This would be a cause for concern for scholars and local planners engaged in the maintenance and preservation of Gastown and Victory Square as historic districts. But the lapse may also indicate – and this is supported anecdotally by interviewee comments – that for whatever reason cultural producers themselves are not as attuned to collective memory – despite their affinity for historical districts – as we might have expected. This could indicate that few individuals engaged in the local cultural labour force have a lengthy personal history in Vancouver’s metropolitan core. Indeed, only one interviewee described an attachment to the district based on actual childhood memories (as opposed to his/her training or early career):

As far as choosing the building goes … as a kid we would go to the hat shop, and shop at Woodward’s, so [the Dominion Building] has been an icon for a long, long time. And every November I see the ceremony across the street for my grandfather who was in the war, and I see this building … a really big icon, unique to this city … this is the heritage of a young town like Vancouver … When I was a kid there used to be an art store called Maxwell’s right around the corner where I used to go with my dad because my dad was an artist. We’d go get his art supplies, his acrylic paints and all of his brushes and everything … to see it being reborn again is really exciting.

The rarity of these sorts of comments indicates a concern for Vancouver’s preservationists, at its worst in an area marginal to the local development trajectory for at least a generation and subject to a very rapid and almost absolute postindustrial
transformation. The use of terms such as “blank canvas” to describe the district is indicative of the preservation problem.

But if cultural producers are not as attuned to collective memory as we might have expected—localized and place-bound collective memory, to be precise—we should also consider the possibility of alternative globalized imageries and memories to which they may be sensitive. Indeed, reflexivity is based in, for Giddens (1991) as well as Lash and Urry (1994), the rapid circulation of print media, digital media, and new forms of mass communication, the effect of which is that “the influence of distant happenings on proximate events, and on intimacies of the self, becomes more and more commonplace” (Giddens, 1991, p. 4). The reflexive project of the self, therefore, operates within global systems, and must respond to images circulating at a scale far broader than that of the urban village—including collective memories that are not so narrowly place-bound as those we’ve discussed so far. While this does not preclude a consideration of the implications for collective memory at a localized scale, it becomes apparent that an investigation of the substance of self-identity or biographical narrative in the cultural economy must account for the global circulation of memories and mythologies including, but clearly not limited to, Lloyd’s resonant legacies of creative production (2006). Of course, we’ve already begun to do so in this thesis by discussing the importance of exogenous mythologies, but our conclusion must acknowledge the difficulties of trying to probe creative identities at only the local scale.

As for the implications for memory, if cultural producers are responding to and reflexively situating themselves within a global socioeconomic system of cultural production and its attendant imageries, we should also expect some difficulty in tracing local processes of remembering and forgetting, given the interpenetration of exogenous and endogenous memories in processes of reconstruction and reimaging. By blurring the real and the imaginary, or more accurately by suggesting a new real without origins in (historical) reality, the cultural production district as memory landscape is Baudrillard’s simulacrum (1994/1981), albeit configured by mediated experience and operating within a global self-referential social system, as described by Giddens (1991). Re-remembrance
is a process of making the imaginary real, of rescripting memory by inscribing new texts within the palimpsest. We cannot remember an alternative, truthful past when we have only the memory landscape as a self-referential mnemonic system. As Baudrillard writes, it is easier to be nostalgic for a history that is ‘irreferential’, depoliticized, and irresponsible to historical fact. This ‘history without meaning’ is the basis for what memory scholars call nostalgie de la boue, and for what Crinson describes as “memory with the pain taken out” (2005, p. xi). It is also the basis for the fine balance of order and disorder sought by our interviewees, where there is “not as much of that undesirable element, but still enough of it to keep it interesting” (emphasis added).

In Gastown/Victory Square and Railtown, specific re-associations and symbolic inversions achieve this condition. The legacy of industrialism and the working class that still informs the identity of these districts is retained as a stimulus for creativity, and a “workingman’s philosophy” is noted as the basis for a creative work ethic and new, informal socio-spatial formations. This echoes the findings of Harris (2012) and Hutton (2006), the latter of which interprets the inversion principally as a space of control becoming a space of freedom. We should add the local significance of an erasure of the legacy of marginalized retired male resource workers frequently charged with dereliction on the Downtown Eastside (see Sommers, 1998), as well as the general challenge of distancing the negative social outcomes of deindustrialization while they remain a painfully real circumstance elsewhere in the Canadian hinterland (see High & Lewis, 2007). There are also complex outcomes with regard to the legacy of social contestation associated with the area, referred to as a “mythical tradition of conflict” by Ley and Dobson (2008, p. 2483). The essential challenge here, we argue, is a recasting of the principal actors within the enduring contestation narrative. Previous scholarship points to the significance of shifting representations of contestation, despite the constant stakes of community ownership and the right to space, which has at various times highlighted the plight of the organized working class, derelict resource workers, and, most recently, victims of mental illness and substance abuse (Sommers, 1998; Sommers & Blomley, 2002; Proudfoot, 2011). The threat, emphasized in treatments of local gentrification (Ley, 1996), is that the protagonistic role may be usurped by artists, cultural producers, or other
countercultural forces, who have claimed the district as an affordable and supportive site for alternative cultural practices. As we will address in the following section, this is an inevitable outcome of the tendency of cultural producers to identify with marginalized social groups and reflexively frame themselves in opposition to the ‘mainstream’ middle class, although there is also potential here for progressive political outcomes. More so than any interview conducted for this thesis, the salience of a representational shift is best demonstrated by Abbott & Cordova, Stan Douglas’s large-scale photographic installation in the Woodward’s atrium. However effective it is in its resistance to didacticism and closed meaning, it is these qualities that compel us to question the significance of the event being depicted – a seemingly frivolous protest that has come to mark the onset of gentrification in the area (Ley, 1996). Perhaps one could posit the artwork as a gentrification of the contestation narrative itself: a social upgrading of the mythical outsider from derelict to bohemian.

Ultimately, what we observe is a recombinant place identity, with real and imaginary, or endogenous and exogenous, fused almost imperceptibly. The mythologies and resonant legacies of creativity blend with the local in the new simulacrum of authenticity. Aware of where potential clients will look for them, how clients expect ‘creatives’ to look and act, and how the cultural firm can create perceptions of value – often based on the assertion of a bohemian, but sufficiently professional, ethic – cultural producers reconstruct both the present and the past of the production district. Vancouver’s cultural production firms fit Lloyd’s neo-bohemianism to a degree, particularity in terms of informality and the celebration of non-conformity. The production district as a whole meets his criteria as well, pooling together producers and production within a supportive community and a creative milieu. But we have found that the imageries projected differ from the iconography of bohemianism. We’ve observed a sleek minimalism characterized by exposed concrete, white walls, and open plans, offset by the character details of a heritage setting. Bohemianism and the legacy of arts production are less relevant here; future research needs to account for mythologies and imageries native to the worlds of architecture, design, and other forms of aesthetically creative work. For example, we noted the influence of the Bauhaus era, the teachings and
concerns of which are echoed in contemporary design practice. A greater understanding of these resonant legacies is needed, as our reliance on scholarship on arts communities is hardly satisfactory for the comprehension of contemporary cultural production districts.

Our conclusions point to the need to theorize aesthetically reflexive cultural production within the mediated experience and globalized social system Giddens describes as a precondition for reflexivity. If cultural producers appear peculiarly non-self-reflexive with regard to local imageries and memory, as we noted above, it is because their reflexive project of the self is operating at a different scale – one that accounts for the collapse of space and time, accelerated circulation of images, and a cultural production economy that is increasingly transnational in outlook. More important than the need to situate oneself within local cultural legacies and development trajectories is the need to situate oneself in relation to the ongoing development of one’s industry and creative field generally, an example being designers’ articulation of how their own work environment responds to the lasting influence of the Bauhaus school. This thesis has focused only on the spatial and material expressions of this process at a localized scale. So, while we can analyze the outcomes as the re-remembrance of the inner city, the process itself is more effectively theorized as the re-remembrance of the creative self.

6.4 Implications for Planning, Preservation, and Creative Place-Making

This final section returns to public policy perspectives on cultural production introduced in Chapter Two, in which ‘creativity’ is optimistically recognized as a route to community economic development and physical regeneration, in practice often accompanied by a social dislocation challenge. In keeping with our focus on the spatiality and materiality of cultural production, we are limiting ourselves to spatial planning and heritage preservation opportunities from within a policy suite that also includes business support services, grants and loans, fiscal/tax schemes, and ‘soft’ infrastructure (Evans, 2009a). As noted in Chapter Four, however, preservation and spatial planning are especially significant in the Vancouver cultural economy policy narrative, standing out against a backdrop of policy disjuncture (Hutton & Murray, in press), organizational failures, and unrealized symbolic capital (Sacco, Williams, & Del Bianco, 2007). Hutton
has routinely acknowledged the *Central Area Plan* (City of Vancouver, 1991) as the most salient policy initiative enabling the rise of a new economy of cultural production within a reconfigured metropolitan core – accomplished via a preference for the ‘industrial character’ of the inner city, the designation of ‘choice of use’ mixed use areas, and the confirmation of heritage district designations for emergent production sites (Hutton, 2004b; 2008; Hutton & Murray, in press). The following discussion rethinks the confluence of culture-led regeneration and heritage preservation in the Vancouver case, pointing to an uneasy relationship and potentially conflicting intentions and outcomes, applicable to the analysis of sites elsewhere. Drawing on our conclusions in the previous section, we address reimaging and re-remembrance as a planning challenge, with an opportunity to make the most of symbolic capital and consolidate creative identities via best practices.

While the spatial and material outcomes of the *Central Area Plan* have been good for cultural production, the same is not necessarily true of the ongoing efforts of preservation planning. Equipped with a better understanding of the reflexive relationship cultural producers maintain with the built environment, we can anticipate future incompatibility based on current preservation policy. For example, the zoning district schedule and design guidelines for the Gastown Historic Area (HA-2) (City of Vancouver, 2002; 2010) are carefully prescriptive, indicating a desire to maintain a “turn of the century” historical and architectural character (2010, p. 1). The design guidelines are intended to always steer rehabilitation and restoration closer to Gastown’s late-Victorian origins: “It is therefore desirable … that any changes bring heritage buildings closer to their original exterior appearance” (2002, p. 2). The Victory Square design guidelines (C2) (City of Vancouver, 2006) refer, like most Canadian municipal preservation guidelines, to the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada* (Parks Canada, 2010), which advocates rehabilitation or restoration wherever possible, collapsing the past into a desired historical era. Edensor (2005) is particularly good at capturing the difference between the memory retained by

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3 We can also expect the *Standards and Guidelines* to figure in future preservation efforts in Railtown, little of which has received heritage designation at the present time.
preservation versus the memory valued by creative individuals. For Edensor, the heritage industry “banishes ambiguity,” “excludes what went before and what comes after,” and involves a “radical decontextualization” in the processes of giving order to fragmentation and fixing the meaning of space (pp. 133-134).\(^4\) Contrast this with reflexive creativity, which, as we quoted in Chapter Three, values the “happenstance montages” of disordered objects and the unexpected juxtapositions of signs and symbols forming unintentional new meanings in a heritage landscape (p. 77). This observation is supported by our own findings on the desirability of the thickly layered palimpsest. While preservation may be more accountable to authenticity and the accuracy of collective remembrance, it also threatens to discard the rich and messy urbanism essential to the vitality of our study areas as stimulating creative spaces.\(^5\)

Vancouver’s own cultural policy emphasizes spatial planning initiatives, with implications for heritage preservation, although this policy is geared primarily towards artistic production and the non-profit sector. The Cultural Facilities Priorities Plan (Artscape, 2008), the centerpiece of present cultural policy, notes the limited and precarious availability of production and studio space concentrated in Vancouver’s industrial heritage areas. Plans to provide new space, however, disregard the spatial and material characteristics that have made these neighbourhoods viable creative districts in the first place, and have not fully acknowledged the difficulties associated with enticing creativity into new inner city locales. This is a challenge that should be clear following the very limited success of the rezoning policy for technologically-creative production in the False Creek Flats (City of Vancouver, 2009a). It would be more practical to build on the lasting legacy and resonance of cultural production districts already in place, at least as a supplemental strategy; this is the spirit, for example, of the Victory Square Policy Plan (City of Vancouver, 2005), which envisions complementary strategies for heritage preservation, artistic production, and social housing in situ. But here again we must

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\(^4\) We could also draw a parallel with the closed meaning of traditional commemorative memorials, which Huyssen (2003) argues are (paradoxically) aids to forgetting, in that they allow us to bring dialogue to an end and no longer challenge the viewer to play an active role in the interpretation of history.

\(^5\) Already we can cite the overprescribed preservation of Water Street – and the tourist kitsch of its landmark steam clock – as evidence of creeping sterility, offset by social circumstances in the adjacent Downtown Eastside that inject a resilient imagery of disorder and grittiness into the area.
acknowledge the potentially conflicting objectives of preservation planning. Above all else, Jane Jacobs’s aphoristic “new ideas must use old buildings” (1961, p. 188) refers to her assumption – made prior to the era of preservation and gentrification – that older buildings were inherently more affordable, and thus more suitable for the incubation of innovative or less-commercial activities. Jacobs’s principle is invalid, however, wherever a suite of grants and subsidies is available for the rehabilitation or restoration of heritage structures. For a critical urbanist, these should be recognized as mechanisms of gentrification: the realization of potential ground rent via re-capitalization (N. Smith, 1996). Using Canadian data, Shipley (2000) has demonstrated that even the mere conferral of heritage designation is likely in most cases to raise the property value. Thus the potential for dislocation is a second point of dissonance in the confluence of cultural production and preservation planning.

In counterpoint to the cultural facilities focus, Sacco, Williams, and Del Bianco (2007) see Vancouver’s primary cultural challenge as one of identity, as we noted in Chapter Four (see also Murray & Hutton, 2012). Here too our focus on collective remembrance yields new insights. Their critique is that Vancouver lacks a consistent cultural identity, attributable to an “absence of symbolic capital”: “The city has never worked on building self- and other-awareness of its cultural potential and of its cultural assets” (p. 28). But while they recognize that this is partly a challenge of gaining greater recognition for present-day cultural output, their proposed solutions fall short of framing the challenge as largely one of collective memory, which is ultimately the substance of what they term symbolic capital. There is a need for preservation policy acknowledging the accumulated cultural resonance of Vancouver’s heritage districts. Symbolic capital is strengthened via restoration that accounts for the thick accretions of history and the narratives with which they correspond. A more effective preservation challenges the viewer to engage with and discursively sustain memory by opting for multivalency over didacticism, just as site-specific and interpretive public art has the capacity to strengthen memory and identity by challenging streamlined historical narratives.6 Most importantly, this thesis points to the opportunity to strengthen cultural identity via cultural producers,

6 With regard to public art and social contestation, for example, see Deutsche (1996).
who have the capacity, when so desired, to forcefully inject place and memory into cultural product (see Molotch 1996; 2002; Bain, 2006). As we have concluded, place-based imageries are frequently caught up in cultural producers' reflexive need to situate themselves within global social and cultural systems. The imperative for cultural planning and preservation is to offer local histories, imageries, and identity to cultural producers as the material for their own reflexive self-identification – in other words, as material for a contemporary cultural identity based on an authentic local cultural past.
References


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