10-2014

New Portlandia: Rock n' Roll, Authenticity and the Politics of Place in Portland, Oregon

Jeffrey Ross London

Graduate Center, City University of New York

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

Follow this and additional works at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds

Part of the Sociology Commons

Recommended Citation


https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/447

This Dissertation is brought to you by CUNY Academic Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of CUNY Academic Works. For more information, please contact deposit@gc.cuny.edu.
New Portlandia: Rock n’ Roll, Authenticity and the Politics of Place in Portland, Oregon

Jeff London

A Dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City of New York

2014
This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the Dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

William Kornblum

Date

Chair of Examining Committee

Phillip Kasnitz

Date

Executive Officer

Sharon Zukin

Phillip Kasnitz

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Preface

Replanted, Slanted and Enchanted: Deciding to go west.

“Silent kid no one to remind you
You got no heel, no reels to remind you…
…This is the city life, come on
Let's talk about leaving”

(Pavement, *Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain*, 1994, Matador)

I walked out of my East Village apartment on 10th off of Avenue B. to one of those cold, sunny March days where the dirty, bumpy ice was just starting to melt and my insides began to thaw. I put on my headphones and my pocket CD player to check out the new Pavement record. I think they lived around here, I had seen them at CBGB’s recently as they had become new royalty in the indie rock community. As is the custom Stephen Malkmus hung out in the street that night and everyone pretended he wasn’t doing anything we all honored down deep. Now, on this day, I had his new album in my ears and the rhythm was much stronger, and lyrics screamed at me with furious ambivalence. Be in the city or leave the city, I thought, all at once. I knew I had to leave since, for one, my career-forward administrative assistant job for a very important non-profit, engaging with city schools in global education, had fallen through. I had recently turned down a Sunday for a Saturday at Siné, a local café that gave shows to new songwriters. Jeff Buckley would have been the headliner on that night.

The early nineties in the East Village was an in between time for music and performance culture. Gone was the bright light of punk and experimental post rock, replaced by the generalist supermarket of subcultures that developed in nodes like a spire around St. Marks. I took notice
that bands began to come from somewhere else, and that many of my favorite ones were part of scenes in cities that they wore on their sleeves.

The common culture of defeatist Generation X in movies and in cultural constructions was that of post college cynics reclaiming space in transitional neighborhoods in and around colleges with no futures. The notion of scene as an adopted family, live music as part of home culture, and the front porch lifestyle appealed to me. I visited to Portland Oregon and Durham North Carolina and checked out these scenarios. In Portland, I was introduced to 7” record after 7” record of enchanted objects that told a story of new bands and older ones, their backstories, and the emplaced collective history of the culture that makes these music meanings and music things. Finally, there was that magical sense that something was happening in the music scenes - that trope of authenticity that many of us were chasing not as additions to a lifestyle but as a full life. People were real there I thought, down to earth and sharing ideas and time. I packed my few things and moved to Montauk, N.Y., to wait enough tables and serve enough clams to buy a 1980 Honda Accord wagon painted primer grey. It had a hole at the heel of the accelerator big enough that by Arizona I had an Oklahoma pebble collection at my feet. Armed with two guitars, and a pocket full of cash I caught route 66 and then rode the 1 up to Oregon, and began a new life.
Abstract

New Portlandia: Rock n’ Roll, Authenticity and the Politics of Place in Portland, Oregon

by

Jeff London

Advisor: William Kornblum

This work is concerned with the situation of indie musicians and its relationship to the urban imaginary of the city of Portland, Oregon. Central to this inquiry is the interplay between music makers and the evolving cultural economy of the city. There are several key issues that arise in Portland for participants in the indie music scene, in the new, high-rent lifestyle city. The regional Northwest ecology of indie rock music and the collective memory of the underground is being utilized as an advertisement for the city, an identity for its new residents and for cultural tourism. This commodification of memory threatens the DIY (do it yourself) culture and its independent production practices that previously had thrived. The rise in rents and capitalization of space, both in warehouse spaces and homes with basements, has undermined the potential of small-scale processes of creation and exchange, from which the identity of the city today was derived. The precariousness of work in the digital age hits home for music makers, as their efforts to collectivize and monetize their production creates a bifurcated creative class, as opposed to a rising tide of creativity.

Spatial practices surrounding development and the use of the music scene as value pose interesting questions of potential and possibility in the new landscape of artisanal entrepreneurialism. As the television show Portlandia, and its related product lines illustrate, as
the imagineered version of the hip city overtakes the lived version, the indie culture’s value as part of a growth machine outpaces local quality of life measures, such as availability of work and cost of living in general. Participants use neighborhoods as sites of renegotiation, even with limited resources, and homeownership becomes a major mode of spatial entrenchment in the growth machine city. The dispersed archipelago of music places and networks across the city acts as a buttress against the rising tide of incorporation into capital frameworks seen in distinct Bohemian enclaves. In addition, the potential of digital networks of exchange and communication breathe life into a fragile urban cultural production scene.

This work contributes to the sociology of cultural production, and the sociology of culture concerning frameworks of identity in the new post-industrial city. Codes of authenticity are built up in the tone, technology and practices of the production of musical sound. A new left libertarianism of tiny publics of local goods, especially in the food cart and restaurant scene, have help reestablish spatial practices that embed alternative cultural production, its meanings and practices, in the Portland indie rock framework of authentic local historicity. The threat of the expanding use of space and the value of the music scene as part of the city as a growth machine, especially when the urban growth boundary forces development in close, has threatened the social fabric of creative actors, racial minorities and the working class. Future issues such as the preservation of local cultural identity and collective memory and the notion of artistic communities as a local cultural trust rise to the forefront as artisanal economies and collective networks are left to work to stem the tide of larger capital forces in the new leisure city.
Acknowledgments

On the long road that has been graduate school and the completion of my dissertation, there have been many people that have helped guide me towards the completion of this project. As a dissertation chair, Bill Kornblum has seen me through this process with the utmost of care, engagement, intelligence and a brightness of spirit that led me safely into harbor. I recall his support for me after my proposal defense, sharing tales of those moments in communities and music that are authentic, central and worth making meaning out of. I would also like to thank Sharon Zukin for her deeply incisive reading, generous draft notes, and meaningful and personalized reflections about my work. In addition, her guidance in aiding me in my use of her work was invaluable. Her generosity has moved my work and my development as a sociologist forward and I am grateful. I am thankful for the insights gained from my conversations with Phil Kasnitz, who helped me shape the direction of the final manuscript with some masterful guided conversations in which we came upon key concepts, turns of phrase and ideas about music production that proved essential to the project’s completion. Beyond my committee, I want to thank faculty members Mitchell Duneier, Patricia Clough, Stanley Aronowitz, David Brotherton and Mehdi Bozorgmehr for supporting me throughout this project and my studies at graduate school. I have grown immeasurably from my relationships with them as scholars and mentors.

I had the great fortune of having a family of supportive fellow students who have been there to advise me and unwind with through this process. I would like to thank Alex Frenette, Jon Wynn, Rich Ocejo, Karen Gregory, Patrick Inglis, Polly Sylvia, Ervin Kosta, Josh Howard, Carla Barrett, Grace Cho, Colin Jerolmack and countless others who were there for me along the way. In addition I would like to thank Mike Jolley, Deborah Gambs, Kristen Lawler, Darren
Barany, Robert Turner, Ayse Akalin, and Alex Welcome who were there, especially early on, to help me find my community in the city.

In Portland, there were countless people who assisted me in making this a reality and I can barely scratch the surface or offer enough thanks. I would not have gotten very far without the help of Adam Selzer, Rachel Blumberg, Randy Blazak, Bahar Jaberi, Cary Clarke, Rob Jones and the insights of Sarah Dougher and Alicia Rose. In Richmond, Virginia, my colleagues supported me with love and pride, especially Jennifer Johnson, Susan Bodnar-Deren, Meredith Katz, Christine Mowery, Avrum Shriar, David Croteau and Julie Honnold. Friends at large in my Sociology community, such as Blackhawk Hancock, Marc Cohen and Dan Morrison also helped at crucial moments, and I am grateful.

I want to thank my parents, for having me, as they’d appreciate me saying. They supported me when I was tired, when it seemed most difficult, when I gained strength, and finally, steady momentum. I want to thank my brilliant sister, who has always had faith in me. And for my Grandmother Shirley, who couldn’t be here but wanted to see the day that there was a doctor in the family. Finally, one person weathered this journey with me, read every line, and discussed every possibility for how and when I was to get myself in the field and to the writing table. Ece, you are my rock and my heartbeat. Thank you Ece Aykol, my dear wife, for putting up with me, believing in me and offering your remarkable scholarly eye to my early and then later work. I am too lucky for words. I want to dedicate this to the purveyors of music, food and craft that animate our cities and make our lives worth living and those who deserve the right to make a place itself again.
# Table of Contents

## Introduction
- Portland, Oregon: Indie Music in the New Lifestyle City ----- 1
- The Origins of the Scene: Preserving Authenticity ----- 3
- The Changing Scene and Scenery ----- 5
- Urban Theory and Cultural Change ----- 7
- Portland as a Cultural Economy: Cultural Production in the City ----- 9
- Making a Symbolic Economy: *New Portlandia* ----- 11
- Bringing it Back to the City ----- 12
- Community History: Place Making and the Symbolic Economy ----- 13
- A Brief History of Underground Music in Portland ----- 18
- Space, Place and the Making of the Portland Scene ----- 21
- Commodification and Marketing Distortion ----- 22
- Precariousness and Culture Industries in the New Leisure City ----- 24
- Space, Place and Livability ----- 27
- Portland and Planning: New Urban Revitalization ----- 29
- From Old Origins to New Beginnings: the Conquest of Cool ----- 30
- The Culture Industry in Portland ----- 31
- Digital Culture and New Responses to Commodification ----- 33
- Methods and Data ----- 35
- Chapter Outline ----- 38
- Objectives ----- 38

## Chapter 1: Indie City Northwest: Audio Identity and a Presence in the City ----- 41
- Portland and the Greater Northwest: Place Based Music Economy and Identity----- 43
- The Indie I-5 Archipelago: the 60s ----- 45
  - The 70s and 80s ----- 47
  - The 90s ----- 49
  - Olympia ----- 51
  - Salem ----- 52
- The City and its Audio Identity ----- 54
- Mapping the Topography of Audio Culture in the 90s ----- 55
- Becoming Involved, Having an Impact, Changing the Landscape ----- 57
- Time and the City: Dialectical Shifts in Sound ----- 59
- Spatial Practices of Production in the Scene ----- 65
- Hipster Identity: the Commodification Trap ----- 67
- Resistant Economies and Saving Face in the Indie Field ----- 71
- New Generations of Audio Aspiration ----- 73

## Chapter 2: Cultural Production and Precariousness in Portland ----- 77
Keeping it Weird (and Clean) ----- 79
Technology and Social Networks ----- 80
On Making Culture: From Music to Food ----- 87
Made in PDX: Artisanal Economy and Cultural Capital ----- 90
  Food Carts and the PokPok Explosion ----- 91
  Stumptown and the Barista ----- 93
  Creepy Doughnuts ----- 94
  Bike City ----- 95
Creativity, Agency and Alienation ----- 98
Live/Work Neighborhoods in Transition: From Storehouses to Nightlife ----- 104
  LoBu ----- 104
  The Pearl ----- 105
The Cultural Economy and the Markers of Value ----- 108
Technology and Work ----- 110
Work/Play Dichotomies, Value and Self-Worth ----- 113
The Precariat of the Creative Class ----- 116
Working Back into the New Cultural Economy ----- 118

Chapter 3: Being at Home: Neighborhoods, Nodes and Networks -----128
  Mississippi Corridor in Boise -----129
  The Preservationist Impulse: Defending Landmarks of Taste ----- 130
  The Inner Northeast: Consumer Hubs and Cultural Change ----- 134
  Alberta Street: Arts Gentrification and Social Practices ----- 136
Making Use of Space ----- 137
Coming of Age: Rock and Real Estate -----138
Conflict and Social Change in the Culture City -----141
The Inner Northeast: Mississippi to Williams through Big Development -----144
The Laurelthirst Public House: Spatial Practices in the Corner Bar ----- 149
Destination Work/Play: Neighborhoods and the Co-optation of Space -----152
Consuming Old Portland: Tourism and Deviant Tourism ----- 154
  Inner Eastside Industrial Spaces ----- 158
  West Burnside ----- 163
  New Spaces in the City: LOBU ----- 165

Chapter 4: Strategies of Collective Sustainability in Portland Culture ----- 168
  Community, Collective Living and the Dream of the Nineties ----- 169
Brand Yourself: Promoting Oneself Through Place ----- 172
  The digital self and online memory ----- 173
Digital Strategies in the City ----- 174
Kickstarter: Buying Into the Portland Spirit ----- 179
From Pop-Up Advice Stands to Community Institutions: New Resource Frontiers——180
Herding Cats in the Age of Teletechnology ——— 181
Representation ——— 185
They’re Playing our Song (But it’s Not Mine) ——— 187
The Fall of Indie Labels and the Rise of the Digital Storefront ——— 188
Here in Oregon: Community Service, Music, and the Return of Place ——— 189
Greening and Engagement in Public Spaces ——— 191
New Levels of Social Capital ——— 193

Chapter 5: Conclusion ——— 197
Portland Music Makers: Meaning in-action for the city ——— 197
Agency ——— 201
Future Frontiers for Research ——— 202
Local Economies, Lifestyle Authenticity and Social Reproduction ——— 203
Shared History and Emplaced Biography ——— 206
Social Wealth in the Age of the Digital ——— 210

References ——— 214

_Self-Reflections_

#1 ——— 89
#2 ——— 117
#3 ——— 203
List of Tables

Table 1 – Top-ranking metros with demographic effectiveness and net migration values --- 85
Table 2 – Portland Or. Migration stream by age and educational attainment, 1980 - 2010 --- 86
List of Figures

Figure 1 – Top artists revenue share --- 121
Figure 2 – Unemployment by age --- 122
Figure 3 – Net migration --- 123
Figure 4 - % change in population of color --- 142
Figure 5 - % income from performance --- 183
Introduction

Portland, Oregon: Indie Music in the New Lifestyle City

Portland, Oregon has earned a distinct place in the iconography of newly discovered livable, lifestyle cities. In the last twenty years, there has been a cultural renaissance in Portland that followed the national attraction to the Seattle music scene in 1992. This social phenomenon is characterized by a burgeoning amenity culture, artisanal production, and the symbolic rise of indie music. Indie music was born out of punk music, and the punk music affiliated “Do It Yourself” culture (DIY). Indie, shorthand for independent, still retains much of its resistant, smaller scale production and distribution networks. Local cultural economies of cool and their music scenes have served as a valued attraction for cities struggling to define themselves in the new post industrial American economy. With its unique ties to local practices and production cultures, the indie music culture is the social formation that underpins what Portland has become – hip, stylized and globally known as a breeding ground for new cool living.

Through scenes, music becomes the “part of the creative process whereby people in a community compose narratives of everyday life” (Bennett and Peterson, 2011). Everyday indie musicians and their affiliates in Portland have built a sense of identity and belonging under the threat of homogenization, gentrification and precarious labor in the new cultural economy. In the face of a highly rationalized and reductionist cultural system of popular mass consumption, local networks of production and value carve out an authentic symbolic code that governs participation in the community. In the case of Portland, those involved in making this social

---

1 Do it Yourself, the punk rock cultural anthem for the anti-corporate ethos of cutting out the production and distribution streams of music and media and using your own companies and resources.

2 Clark, the bike riding bike friendly bearded mayor from 1985 to 1992, also began the Mayor’s Ball, which brought
world are presently contending with commodification, which leads to growing audiences and new initiates, but also rising costs within in an increasingly expanding urban cultural economy.

The city of Portland has made its image on its subcultural of economy of indie cool. Portland rock is now the Portland sound, bottled and represented in brands and walking tours depicting a heyday in the recent past. The issue at hand is how musical artists in the present moment can be considered a cultural inheritance, and their provenance treated like a living library and part of a local cultural trust. Portland presents us with the problem of preserving culture and livability when the cultural economy is seen as the engine of “the city as a growth machine” (Logan and Molotch, 1987). The collective memory of the city is contained in the music places and collective practices built up over time; this small, resource sharing culture is becoming subsumed within the packaged new Portland. As young and artistic-minded creatives move in, the creative economy develops and rents slide higher. People are then displaced, neighborhoods are gentrified, and core people in the music community are forced to move out of town. When the idea and style of the music scene is elevated to a major motif of the city, makers, especially in the digital age, are now struggling to monetize their art and preserve their production culture.

In the digital age, the city has been able to monetize the symbolic value of the music scene far better than musicians have. Space and place serve as stable building blocks for capital accumulation, while artists trying to establish value in an increasingly destabilized system of monetary flows lead more precarious existences in the new cultural economy. Music serves as an ideal advertisement for cool “hipster culture,” while the musician has been incorporated into the iconography of the city as if a native plant. The city has found its attraction in its quirky,
collaborative, underground music culture, but the scene has been changed in its character by the burgeoning cultural economy and the new lifestyle city it has given rise to.

The Origins of the Scene: Preserving Authenticity

The signs of the music scene and its success are embedded in the development of the new touristic city. As the sound developed through the nineties and into the present century, an audio ecology of textures and a particular aesthetic was spread out along an archipelago of places in the greater northwest. Portland now houses a “Buy Olympia” store dedicated to its indie music, and has institutionalized its indie scene through organizations like PDX Pop Now and the now fruitfully duplicated Rock n’ Roll Camp for Girls. Preservation of this musical landscape is part and parcel of preserving the collective memory of the city. This micro-economy of artisanal libertarianism portends to establish the place of creators in the subcultural underground as archival shopkeepers within the new cultural economy. However, the city has invented its own version of the new urban imaginary to make Portland a lucrative creative city, with the underground economy still struggling to cope through expansion and/or collective networks of support.

The music scene has its roots in the West Coast punk scene of the late eighties and the underground print culture circuit. Maximum Rock n’ Roll, out of San Francisco, and other fanzines, printed masses of information about the goings on of bands in a publication distributed to alternative record stores and fanzine stores. These handmade publications threaded together a network of readership and affiliates for bands and subcultural bedroom tastemakers. Outside the stream of commodified music culture emerged this alternative network of making things DIY and on the cheap. Portland was a key hub and zine stores like Reading Frenzy were perfect
outposts of outsider culture, sitting in the shadow of the grand bookstore of Portland, Powell’s Books. These places are the spaces that house the texture of the audio landscape of the Northwest. Old posters, photocopied tracts and treatises, and now graphic novels and full-color magazines, represent the pulse of the music scene.

When riot grrrl culture developed in the nineties, it was a response, via zines, to the lack of space for girls in a male dominated rock scene. Bikini Kill, a band developed in Olympia who also lived in Portland, would come to carve out space for a critique of rock masculinity. These practices of production, in basement recording studios and cut and paste zine making, and in the clubs and cafes that let people be in the scene there, comprise a collective memory that has become iconic. The recent documentary on Kathleen Hanna (lead singer of Bikini Kill), Punk Singer, is a testament to this new iconography, and the key role of women in the Northwest music landscape.

In comparison, in the Williamsburg, Brooklyn music and art scene, the urban imaginary is drawn upon an industrial backdrop and comprised of the collective networks of galleries, musicians and a code of value (Zukin, 2010). Zukin contends in “Reconstructing an Authenticity of Place,” there must be a social history that appeals to outsiders through the social construction of either a material or a symbolic landscape” (Zukin, 2011: 162). Drawing from this, “newcomers engage in the reflexive creation of a spatial habitus,” (Zukin, 2011: 162) and those who choose Portland do so for a more pastoral concept of place, signified by the craftsman houses with basements to produce new music and art in the neighborhood city. The admixture of localist production culture around food, handmade ephemera and other signifiers of both natural and cultural history, have expanded beyond the personal networks of DIY music making. Authenticity in Portland is the real, lived experience of becoming an embodied part of local,
aural, textural identity and practices. The sound and the practices of community networks are borrowed from the past but are situated in new beginnings (Zukin, 2011).

New leisure cities in the 21st century commodify themselves as distinctive locales, in part through the symbolic capital of their music scenes (Frank, 1995; Bennett and Peterson, 2011; Straw, 1991; Soja, 1989). Musicians and the small-scale creative production cultures that produce the scene in Portland engage in a sped up dialectic with the globalized cultural economy, in a metamorphosis from old growth forest Oregon into hip New Portlandia. In the new leisure-city, rock n’ roll and DIY subcultures delineate distinct cultural practices, identity production, and collective memory (Kruse, 1993). As these subcultures become incorporated into the project of modern urban renewal, the precariousness of music makers’ work and way of living becomes more pronounced.

The Changing Scene and Scenery

As the musicians move from being in the scene to becoming a part of the urban scenery, the practical, material position of the musician in the chain of commodity exchange is pushed to the periphery. Within the music scene, the decline of the CD production culture, in favor of the digital song, has made the indie career financially precarious. Leafing through a box of CDs stored away at the top of my closet, I noticed that many of them were of contemporaries who put out records on small indie labels, or by self-styled brand imprints that hid the fact that they were doing it themselves. Networks of CD pressing operations, handmade packaging presses, home-based promotion companies and indie record stores made it possible for a few thousand dollars, to put a record out. Many of us in that art world would go on tour together, sell products face to face, and that is where many of the CDs I was looking at came from. Perhaps they are known in
their local communities, or remembered as their CD is perused as a tactile thing in a bin the local section of the repurposed record store. The new marketplace for independent music offers less capital-intensive pathways to get started, but more complex avenues to sell.

In a city like Portland, home to such a varied crop of indie music production workshops, these micro-economies have wilted under the ever-expanding digital music consumption structure. Artists have been forced to rely more on themselves, rather than the labels that put their CDs out. One is told to be web savvy, and to see oneself as a small business and understand the minutiae of royalty contracts made with streaming music sites. The new Internet based “sharing economy” that includes Air B n’ B, Spotify, and Kickstarter, offers new avenues for a casual economies of loosely tied affiliates, but is more likely to turn one’s leisure time into extended labor time. As the procurement of funds from music production becomes increasingly complex for the artisanal producer, the economy of music production morphs into the artisanal economy of tangible, local things, such as crafts and food. Adaptations to the expansion of the cultural economy have taken many forms - the food scene, for one, has percolated up from the music culture to make this transitional economy a sea change instead of a tidal wave. The growth of locally sourced artisanal production has provided substantive, but limited work opportunities in the new cultural economy.

However, the new opportunities afforded by the new outposts of the scene get subsumed into the growth machine prerogative of the city in its high-density development phase. Where housing units and hip consumption are favored at all costs, neighborhoods become unrecognizable and the cost of living rises. Both the physical face of the city and the practical topography of the city’s artistic and musical history become enmeshed within a dialectical contradiction where development and growth bring increased consumption, along with new
imperatives for the commodification of space and local culture. This contradiction is central to development within the creative city enterprise. Through this process, the urban imaginary, derived from the underground creative economy, serves as a representation for a budding city. This form of development and cultural change is crucial to the 21st century discourse on urban sociology and the cultural economy.

**Urban Theory and Cultural Change**

Urban theory in the United States in the first quarter of the 20th century sought to understand the issues of the uprooted person, psychologically adapting to the geometry of the mental life of the city (Simmel, 1950). Simmel, at the turn of the 20th century, was articulating a method of understanding urban disaffection in terms of economized social forms that led to social distancing and the blasé individual (Simmel, 1950). Robert Park, in *The City* (1925), outlined the patterns of mental dispositions in regions of the city. There are “moral regions” where different types of vocations flourish within a greater urban tapestry. The Chicago School continued to theorize cultural patterns of social existence through the spatial ecology of the industrial American city (Zorbaugh, 1929; Shaw and McKay, 1926).

In the mid twentieth century, cities were often the site of ethnic enclaves and public housing as suburbanization led to further dislocation along racial and class lines. Ethnic communities organized through industrial labor and negotiated their interests in neighborhood places such as taverns, churches, and union halls (Kornblum, 1974). Music and art served as a cultural reference point of lowbrow cool; Becker’s study *Outsiders* maps the allure of black cultural forms as a site for meaning making for disaffected youth (Becker, 1963). Folk music
places and cultures of the city later served a similar role for enhancing community and identity for suburbanites who wished to wade into the waters of bohemian otherness.

At the turn of the 21st century cities have become centers of symbolic value, leisure, and urban cultural cachet. The inner city, after a great decline in manufacturing, has been repurposed for leisure, consumption, and lifestyle amenities; models of redevelopment, capital strategies, and community responses emerge within this new formation of capitalist enclosure of the city (Harvey, 1983; Zukin, 1987; Castells and Murphy, 1982). The pattern of the reurbanization of downtown New York City, and specifically SoHo, took place through the revitalization and rehabilitation of old warehouses and the edges of neglected industrial districts (Zukin, 1982). Later, campaigns of cultural branding and the promotion of tourism moved New York forward from the city of bankruptcy and urban blight to the “I heart New York” campaign through a dialectical tension between real and the imaginary (Greenberg, 2008). The Los Angeles school explored a new pattern of archipelagos of reinvestment in and around the center, bringing to light the scourge of suburban sprawl and functional “strips” of consumption (Dear, 2002). Mike Davis, in City of Quartz (2004), describes the built environment of new downtown L.A. as productive of a class-tiered system of spaces and places that demarcate privilege in the city.

Post-fordist urban theory has taken as its object cultural representations of place, and the theming of spaces of consumption and leisure for urban dwellers (Zukin, 1995; Dear, 2002; Soja, 1996; Harvey, 1996). Zukin (1991) has noted how cultural politics of place come to define the identity of a city through relations of power already in place and related to present interests and concerns. In the 21st century cities develop symbolic cultural economies of distinction in a broader global field of cultural representations (Harvey, 1983; Bauman, 2000). As Portland’s manufacturing sector has declined, they have become increasingly valuable in the global cultural
marketplace. Institutional relationships and new power players in the cultural economy drive development initiatives and city differentiation on the road to becoming a hot creative city. Less studied today, but no less important, is the culture workers, their social wealth and personal stake in the new, leisure city. As Logan and Molotch (1987) assert, “social groups that push against these manipulations embody human strivings for affection, community, and sheer physical survival (p. 12).”

**Portland as a Cultural Economy: Cultural Production In The City**

Portland has expanded its cultural cachet through a symbolic consumerism and production culture that takes the local and community-based scene as its core. Richard Florida (2002), in *The Rise of the Creative Class*, stresses the importance of the presence of bohemians, creative cultural entrepreneurs, and various indexical standards of inclusive culture in spurring growth in the new creative city. Symbolic economies generate difference for a city; authentic, locally-networked cultural production are a source of the representations of cool that music and cultural scenes have come to loan their cities. The question is then - how do those creative subcultural and productive pioneers of difference preserve more traditional, and long-standing community-based production cultures in the face of commodification? Furthermore, how does city identity in the culture industry shape the new growth imperatives of the city, and how do artisans and culture makers create agency for themselves in this new economy?

The Portland recovery, from a post-industrial economy aging and in decline, has come as a part of the elevation of places of distinction on the mental landscape of a lifestyle-obsessed America. The city has offered tax incentives, public space, and its free space, Waterfront Park, to the promotion of culture for tourism in the city, and tourism from without. This extends the
lifestyle of a community of production from underground to the forefront of the symbolic economy. Cultural theories of work and production in artisan and bohemian modes have highlighted significant practices of identity through small-scale, localized trends of work, consumption and leisure (Lloyd, 2006; Sennett, 1998; Fine, 1996). Furthermore, dispositions relative to aesthetic cultural consumption are further defining our relationship to class and value (Bourdieu, 1984). The Northwest has come to represent the new “Hiptopia” of enlightened taste; it’s partly an imagined green utopia, and part vintage themed rock n’ roll playland. The rock scene has shifted away from being enmeshed within the underbelly of the city, to floating amongst the venerable discursive ideas of making the city a significant landscape in “the geography of difference” of the neo-liberal economy (Harvey, 1996). Portland’s uniqueness lies in its particular rain soaked green urbanism, and a vivacious sense of creativity uncanny for a city of its size and commercial heft.

The city first began to view its industrial warehouse district, within its historic urban growth boundary, as the “Pearl,” in the late nineties (Jones, 1999). At that time this was the same area that housed the band practice warehouses and the historic rock venue, Satyricon, was on the edge of the district as well. Both of these venues are now subsumed within the fully blossomed high art district, supported by specially set aside grants for art based business, and dedicated more to consumption than production (Jones, 1999). Rock n’ roll did not fit this description. This process of city coaxed revitalization would later occur in the early 2000s, set around a newly communicated rock culture, and a rock venue/50s style roadside hotel as its centerpiece.

Around the Pearl District, and radiating outward like a spire from Powell’s bookstore, are the nodes of the tourist landscape of consumption of the downtown Portland aesthetic. The Ace Hotel, designed to resemble early century frontier opulence, houses an expansive, open-plan,
warehouse space restaurant bathed in signature blond Northwest Douglas Fir. Stumptown Coffee, the signature franchise of Portland cool, has been exported to Ace Hotel New York, Charleston and Miami, and features locally roasted fair-trade coffee served via early 20th century stylistics. Tender Loving Empire, a tiny storefront for a local musical label, features a listening bar and handicrafts from Portland artisans. In eyeshot of the Ace Hotel and the new Portland Center for the Contemporary Arts (PICA), it sells tchotchkes of cool, and serves as a makeshift tourist kiosk for the hip connoisseur walking amongst the scene.

**Making a Symbolic Economy: New Portlandia**

With an affective cultural economy of cool, hip music, the bearded, bike friendly mayor Bud Clark², and a silicon forest economy, Portland has become *New Portlandia*, a pastiche of young post-college grads and indie rock retirees, living the slacker “dream of the nineties.” As *Portlandia*, the IFC television show (created by Saturday Night Live satirists and Carrie Brownstein, a prominent figure in the music scene from the band Sleater-Kinney) has become a commodified representation of aspects of the new creative city, so too has the city remade itself into the object of the “tourist gaze” (Urry, 1990). The city government tends to support development that incentivizes entertainment and lifestyle driven city living (Harvey, 1991; Greenberg, 2008) Participants in this scene are focused on both the challenges and opportunities of the new marketplace of cool.

New Portlandia serves as a representation of a city that is built on the promise of a new tomorrow, set apart in the forest and beckoning as a cultural attraction for creative labor and

______________

² Clark, the bike riding bike friendly bearded mayor from 1985 to 1992, also began the Mayor’s Ball, which brought rock bands and the city together for yearly festivities.
identity. It is an allusion to Fordlandia, the oasis city in the Amazon where Henry Ford attempted to produce tires from locally sourced rubber. It was heralded in postcards and the popular imaginary as the city of tomorrow, isolated but necessary to expand the manufacture of cars. Its colossal failure (it now stands as another monument to the Detroit car economy) serves as a cautionary tale; the imaginary fantasy city comes with a potential price, cut off from the elemental forms of social life such as functioning institutions and entrenched community.

However, this imaginary has percolated up to the highest rungs of the cultural economy:

This exemplifies the social construction of Portland cool as a product of a practical authenticity brought into a field of cultural production, turned into a commodity for the runway. The signifiers here, “bikes,” “beer,” and “plaid,” are reassembled and described as part of the definition of Portlandia, which, once a signifier for a statue and then a television show, is now a coinage of this list of superficial attributes.

**Bringing it Back to the City**

Jon Savage spoke out in the PICA (Portland Institute of Contemporary Art) symposium on the future of music in Portland in the summer of 2012:
I feel that in coming back here (from Europe) Portland is a great place to bring community together and I think there is that community building spirit. We need to be able to capitalize on that spirit, literally. I think that’s part of the challenge of Portland.

This comment highlights the state of creativity in the local community that is grounded in recapturing the energy of collective cooperation and sociality, as defined by Simmel (Sennett, 2013). However, the challenges of a cooperative art world controlling its own destiny are in part reliant on the degree to which careers can be sustained within the structure of the art world (Becker, 1982). The maintenance of a sense of authenticity also serves to valorize the music and cultural producers, and acts to preserve their value as essential to a spirit of place. As Portland has become itself a symbol of the “livable,” easygoing city that someplace like New York is not, the indie community must adjust to the expanding affective economy of the underground local scene, while holding together the tenuous networks of work and play that ground them.

Music makers who have lived in Portland for a long time have committed themselves to place-making work and lived experience of the scene. Some of them have moved into community support for artists, some have move behind a six-burner stove to add to the cultural economy of food, and some, like Trevor S., have returned from New York sojourns to run the big festivals like MusicFest NW. San Francisco, and then Seattle priced people out, and Portland offered the constancy and spatial grounding of home ownership. This emplaced identity differs from Florida’s conception of the creative class as primarily transitory. This emergent frontier identity of the Portland scene is tempered by the conditions for inclusion and participation in the new lifestyle city. With rising rents and forbidding job prospects, hordes of post-college seekers looking for self-realization in the scene may feel a bifurcated new creative American Dream.
Community History: Place Making And the Symbolic Economy

The history of Portland’s deviant past bubbles to the surface of the smoothed out surfaces of the new Northwest cultural economy. Portland, often called “the whitest city in America,” is also home to the history of seafaring vice in the new industrial west. Remnants of this darkness are embraced in the work of Chuck Palahniuk, Gus Van Sant and Elliot Smith, but also used as a badge of honor on guided tours of the old Shanghai tunnels where sailors were drugged and dragged off to sea. The reuse of cultural memory to tell a story is central to economic recovery of the city, and is interwoven with the hot music scene to create the kind of difference people crave in the urban cultural market place. All is not right with these alliances between the real and appearances. Old Town, with its flophouses, shelters and encampments have become upscale playgrounds; Gentrification and displacement of this sort leave scars on the surface when the addicts and wounded veterans are too far gone to move out to the outer ring of the city.

A homeless encampment sits on the central boulevard of downtown, where the hip Lower Burnside area spills over the river into the last remnants of Portland’s skid row. Along the margins of Chinatown, in the late 19th century, Burnside Avenue was used as a “skid road” to drag logs down wood skids that were greased to more easily drag them down. Loggermen and seafarers caught the nickname in this time in this place, “on the skids” and Seattle, Vancouver and Portland had their seedy quarters nicknamed “skid row.” These people are surrounded by the design forward architectural opulence promising the specific cultural commodity of green living, and homegrown Northwest cool. Their virulent cry to stop the city council from evicting them is painted on a sign on the corrugated construction company fence, right across the street from the “Keep Portland Weird” sign featured in the Portlandia opening sequence.
Portland subcultural history is a mixture of radical politics, transplant writers, indie filmmakers and the relationship of the natural landscape to the city. In 1915, journalist John Reed returned to his hometown and met Louise Bryant, who then left the city for Greenwich Village. They went on to become Portland’s most famous radicals, and key members of the Communist Party USA (Abbott, 2011: 94). In 1910, Joe Hillstrom wrote a letter, signed Joe Hill, to the IWW newspaper referring to himself as part of the “Portland local,” made up of dockworkers and lumber camp men (Abbott, 2011: 94). Many women were pushing forward the suffragette agenda at this time. However, underneath the bohemian surface of the city, a conservative streak of provincial order and morality held sway. According, to Abbott, by the time the 1920s rolled around, the IWW was supplanted by the organized force of repressive organizations such as the KKK (Abbott, 2011: 95).

The African-American opportunity structure in Portland in the 1920s is rife with restrictive labor conditions, and a more closed labor market than Seattle and Los Angeles in the early 20th century (Abbott, 2011: 69) During World War II, according to the Oregon Historical Society, the population ballooned to 6,000 when Henry Kaiser brought mainly southern Louisiana blacks to Portland to work in the shipyards. They mostly settled in the new Vanport community, by the Columbia River. In 1948 the Vanport flood decimated the entire community. Many of the community members moved into the already crowded Albina district, which then spread to the Alberta district. Segregation in the 1960s, spatially, was similar to what it was in Alabama at the height of Jim Crow. Almost all of the neighborhoods in this district became over 50% African-American in the postwar period after the Vanport flood. Redevelopment of the I-5 interstate and the Memorial Coliseum destroyed the jazz scene of downtown lower Albina (Abbott, 2011). The story of the integration of subcultures and eclecticism into the urban mythic
contains part of the story of African-American, Asian and Mexican populations. They are all less than ten percent of the population (Portland City Census, 2010), but part of the new urban imaginary in music, history and public culture. Although black and Latino participation in the indie music scene have increased (Y La Bamba of Portland is fronted by a Mexican-American woman), there is still very little black participation in the indie scene as a whole\(^3\). Furthermore, displacement of people of color in new hip neighborhoods of consumption pierces the façade of the progressive fabric of the city.

In the 1960s Portland swung back to the bohemian bastion in the woods. Maverick republican Governor Tom McCall passed the Beach Bill in 1969, assuring public access to beaches and Senate Bill 10, which allied farmers and environmentalists through the establishment of comprehensive land use plans for every county. Throughout 2014, commemoration in Oregon of fifty years on form the summer of ’64 has been focused on the Merry Pranksters and their acid tests, transforming the counter culture from just outside Eugene, Oregon. From the Portland Tribune:

George Walker has led what he calls “a rather illustrious career of not doing much at all and doing a lot.”

In 1964, Walker became part of a group of young Northwesterners known as the Merry Band of Pranksters who toured the country with author Ken Kesey in a hand-painted 1939 school bus named “Further.” Walker has now lived in Scappoose for more than 20 years (Portland Tribune, February 7, 2014).

\(^3\) For some fascinating insight into the absence of black participants in indie rock, see Martin Douglas's "The Only Black Guy at the Indie Rock Show" ([http://www.mtvhive.com/2013/01/16/the-only-black-guy-at-the-indie-rock-show](http://www.mtvhive.com/2013/01/16/the-only-black-guy-at-the-indie-rock-show)). A second recent insightful commentary is in Salon.com, where an article “Growing Up Black in Portland,” appeared.
Scappoose is just outside of Portland, on the road to the coast along the Columbia River. Walker and the Pranksters put more attention on the Northwest as a hideaway in the trees. This bubbled over to out and out activism in 1985, when Earth First! Sent out a call to arms for eco-activists to protect the trees threatened by Willamette Industries. Famously, Mike Jakubal inaugurated the first tree sit, culminating in the first Aerial Village in the Willamette National Forest in June 1985 (http://www.penbay.org/ef/treesit_first1985.html).

Portland rose to prominence as an activist, post-lumber city through its embracing of outsiders in architecture, film, literature and music. In 1985, the city brought *Portlandia* to Portland, in the form of a huge copper statue clutching a trident. Raymond Kaskey’s statue stands 35 feet tall in front of Michael Graves’ postmodern *Portland Building* (Abbott, 2011: 157). Although the building was reviewed unfavorably at the time, it remains a pillar of postmodern architecture (Abbott, 2011). In the nineties writers like Chuck Palahniuk, Katherine Dunn and filmmaker Gus Van Sant all gave Portland its accepting, uncompromising, haven for misfits status. Palahniuk, in *Fugitives and Refugees*, explains Katherine Dunn’s theory of Portland in-migration:

“Katherine’s theory is that everyone looking to make a new life migrates west, across America to the Pacific Ocean, Once there, the cheapest city where they can live is Portland. This gives us the mot cracked of crackpots. The misfits among misfits…all we are are the fugitives and refugees” (Palahniuk, 2003: 14).

This misfit theory is actually a conscious dig against what San Francisco, who the theory was created for, has become. It is essentially a bedroom community for dot-commers that is far too expensive for misfits anymore.

Portland in the 90s had begun to bubble over as the beacon of hope and home for a generation of beat Generation X’ers who needed a place to make art things and stay a while. It is
important to delineate this process of the frontier dialectic of detaching and then reconnecting with the self in new environs, with Neil Smith’s depiction of the frontier myth as it applies to direct colonization of neighborhoods in the city by white gentrifiers. Smith’s formulation is consistent with the results of gentrification in cities, but here the term is more closely aligned with its traditional colloquial subject matter; namely, the myth of the blank slate of the frontier and the cultural processes of self-reinvention and participatory inventiveness of new embodied identity construction germane to an aural, community driven landscape in the Northwest.

The distinctive characteristic of Portland as a community with a unique relationship to nature, the arts, and traditional structures (Oregon has the lowest religious attendance in the U.S.) is explained by its isolation that can be both geographic and teleological. Since Seattle is just as off the beaten path as Portland, it must have been in part due to the sense of dreariness that surrounded the idea of the city. The spatial geography of Portland has played an indelible role in shaping and being shaped by this process of music making and life-building. As cited in the book Hype!, on the Seattle music explosion, bands would bypass the Northwest cities of Seattle and Portland, allowing a strange local/regional aesthetic to develop. Firstly the beatniks and then hippies moved to Portland in the 50s and 70s respectively, mostly from California. However, the provincial nature of the power elite of Portland, both ahead of the times and behind them, led city power brokers to invite change but on its own terms. The “Californification” influx inspired a billboard on the highway that read, “Welcome to Oregon, a Nice Place to Visit, But Please Don’t Stay.”
A Brief History of Underground Music in Portland

The backdrop to the definitive character of the music scene in the 90s and its impact upon the city’s identity is the role that music played in the city prior to then. From the blog “The History of the Portland Music Scene,” by S. P. Clarke (2011):

The state was fresh from an edict handed down by the OLCC in 1972 that, at last, permitted the unholy admixture of live music, performed by real, living human beings, to be played in Oregon taverns. That was a luxury which, in the ’60s, was afforded only to hard-liquor “dinner clubs,” such as jazz pianist Sidney Porter’s memorable Sidney’s club in Northwest Portland. The alternatives had always been non-alcoholic venues: folk coffeehouses such as the Psychedelic Supermarket and the Folksinger in Southwest and the 9th Street Exit (which was originally located in the same Salazar Building, which eventually became La Luna) in Southeast; or teeny-bopper “pop” hangouts such as the Silver Skate, D [Division] Street in outer Southeast and The Chase, in Milwaukie. It was at the Chase where owner Ken Chase (KISN radio Program Director and entrepreneur), their manager, first contracted the Kingsmen (who were the house band at the club and went so far as to make a live recording there) to record “Louie Louie.”

The Oregon Liquor Control Council’s decision led to the opening of a slew of bars that featured rock music, and mostly danceable music such as pop and funk. Still the scene was punctuated by oddness and an artistic experimental edge. The band Sleezy Pieces was formed in 1971 and featured a beat poetry derived operatic frontman Earl Benson (Clarke, 2011). The underground scene was developing mostly around Fred and Toody Cole. They moved to Portland in 1971 after spending time in the Yukon the preceding year, evading the draft and homesteading in a cabin (Clarke, 2011). Fred had met Toody when he played the Folksinger, one of the folkhouses emblematic of Portland before the lifting of the rock in taverns ban. By this time they had opened Captain Whizeagle’s instrument shop, which became a key place for hard rock musicians traveling through and to Portland. In 1973 they developed a band Zipper, which embodied the loose, raw Led Zeppelin inspired rock that would later move into a central space in the iconography of Northwest city soundscapes.
Clarke (2011) describes a bellwether moment, in 1977, when the Ramones came through town. Greg Sage and his band, the Wipers, after that show, decided it was time to play out and make subcultural garage rock more of a live happening (Clarke, 2011). They had been making records but didn’t see the opportunity for public culture around their sound in the club scene in taverns and bars. Other bands formed in 1978 and 1979 in response to the Ramones show and local punk possibility. This gave the scene a new feel and independent persona, and clubs like Revenge and Long Goodbye began to cater to the new scene. Noise bands such as Smegma, often with spoken word artist Richard Meltzer, and all-girl band the Neo-Boys, headlined with bands like the Wipers. According to Clarke:

… And that is where our story truly begins. By the Spring of 1980 an incredibly hospitable musical environment had evolved, spawning whole cultures of various musical breeds. The “club” scene became so raucous in fact, that the Neo Boys, among several other punk and new wave alternative bands (possibly mindful of the Linnton Community Center riot), threatened to abstain from attempting to perform in venues where drinking was promoted, citing the dull audience consciousness at such gigs; preferring the wired-up energy of underagers over the glaring, jaundiced eye of the average pub-goer (Clarke, 2011).

Later, the music scene in the early 90s was still the ugly cousin of the burgeoning art city; it thrived in filthy bars such as Satyricon in Old Town, and many louder music sites came into conflict with the growing, mature, professional lifestyle culture⁴. The all-ages scene had at its heart the X-Ray Café, where all the biggest bands in the indie and punk scene played to players, fans and potential young initiates. It contained within it the cultural terroir from which the accumulated practices, styles, and community ethos would evolve into what is the core of the

⁴ EJ’s, a key rock club in the mid-90s that was a former strip club run by a former stripper on Sandy Boulevard in the Northeast, was closed in 1997 after repeated noise complaints from a few neighbors. It was a legitimate venue, though heroin was present, and one stripping pole still sat in the middle of the club. Etta, the owner, ran a great operation and had a woman booker, Xan, who booked many up and coming female rock groups, as well as loud, heavy rockers, who were often mixed gender.
Portland indie scene (Zukin, 2011). Wet, chilly afternoons inspired coffee-fueled art students and metal heads to meet halfway in the basements of middle class craftsman homes. Bands expanded transnationally with the onset of the Internet, and began to develop a following. Portland got a reputation for being cheap, rainy with mild winters, coffee shop rich, with many levels of clubs. The audio identity matched this embedded practice of retro thrift store cool. Pond, Heatmiser, Hazel, Motorgoat, Sleater Kinney, Elliot Smith, and Quasi lent a dark and cloudy aura to bright psychedelic pop bands like the Beatles or the Kinks. The production quality was often lo-fi, eschewing the technology of the day for analog organs and tape machines that capture the aura of the room and the naturalness of the instrument in a real space. This audio ethos, and poetry of existential unease, colored the grey landscape with its head nodding anthems. Songs about walking alone, high on amphetamines, and playing “the Happy Prole,” gave intelligent psychedelic pop and folk its Portland finish.

**Space, Place and the Making of the Portland Scene**

Geography informs indie music culture(s), and in the case of Portland and the I-5 corridor there is a geographically extended version of a place-based scene. Kruse, in her work on subcultural identity in the music scene of Champaign, Illinois, pointed out that indie pop was the musical style prevalent in Iowa City, and Columbia, Missouri (Kruse, 1993: 39). Although other places were very close and easily accessible, a different brand of indie music held sway. The Pacific Northwest is a region connected by a circuit of consumption, production, and friendship that nurtured a particular regional scene. Portland, Seattle and the towns in between developed music that overlaps and a cultural difference generated by isolation and a strangeness that comes from perpetual rain. Much of the challenge in retaining that identity of the scene relies on
reproducing the history of scene; scenes, although mostly localized, are generally less stable and more symbolic than a physical community (Straw, 1991).

In the 21st century, the Portland rock musician is building a scene-based identity that possesses the key factors that allow it to develop a distinct cultural landscape of difference. According to Zukin (2011):

(there are) three necessary and sufficient factors that create both a structural and an institutional base for modern settlements to develop distinctive, contrasting cultures. First and most obvious, individuals must be free to exercise choice in where they live. Second, there must be a local history that exerts appeal to outsiders through the social construction of either a material or a symbolic landscape. Third, local entrepreneurs must use a marketing strategy that emphasizes some elements of this landscape while suppressing others. (These elements may also be made obsolete or powerless by external factors). Only under these conditions do native-born residents and newcomers engage in the reflexive creation of a spatial habitus (Zukin 2011: 161-162).

Both the establishment of “Portlandness” and the rise in technologies of hype have given rise to a particular symbolic code for the Portland hipster. The ideal of the hipster, according to Mailer, was not to achieve a state of embodiment of the other, but to constantly approach it in order to escape the rationalized company man of mid-century manhood (Mailer, 1957). Leland, in *Hip: the History*, points to a poly-cultural set of references that new hipsters draw from to create social distance. In the late fifties black culture and primarily the jazz musician, embodied the outsider ideal that whites sought to emulate. In the present moment, black culture, in the form of hip-hop, is bound up in hyper commodification, materialism, and overexposure (Leland, 2006). The code here is a blend of blue-collar aesthetics, handicraft, and nerd otherness.

**Commodification and Marketing Distortion**

There is a growing push to brand the indie field of production and distort the social capital it is attached to in communities such as Portland for a larger market. This is a process
present in the post-punk alternative economy depicted in the mid-nineties in *the Conquest of Cool* (Frank, 1997). Using the hipster concept, products can be decoupled from their value in the world, germane to networks in a place, while the derogatory hipster persona serving as a distorted caricature in the looking glass. This creates the cultural sense of ‘hate the hipster,’ as a carrier of high rents, pretentious food, and detached, ironic coldness. Originally, before there was any opportunity in it, indie was not necessarily a subculture, but more often than not a scene in place, resistant to cultural norms of taste, style and the meritocracy of neo-liberal subjectivity (Kruse, 1993; Diderot, 2013). Wendy Fonarow, who has written on the cultural ecology of indie scenes, interprets this music culture and distinctions this way:

> In the most direct sense, “indie” (short for independent) refers to artistic creations produced outside the auspices of media conglomerates and distributed through small-scale and often localized channels (e.g., non-chain local retailers, art-house theaters, DIY channels such as Web sites and zines, and other small-scale enterprises). However, the indie marketplace is embedded in a sociocultural system of collectively shared cultural knowledge, aesthetic tastes, social networks, and systems of social distinction and hierarchies (Fonarow, 2006).

> The community of production and consumption has been tightly held together by face-to-face interaction and a foregone conclusion that only those near reference groups will get it. This is the spatial habitus of place that creates the cultural landscape that is attractive. In the new creative economy and the rise of creative cities, a place-based “audio identity” makes the city attractive as a marketable symbolic commodity (Florida, 2002). In its wake the production culture is mined for new caricatures of cool, and the music makers themselves find it more difficult to adapt to living in a more expensive cultural economy. The struggle to redefine the cultural identity germane to the scene, as either a business of entrepreneurial independents or stalwarts of the underground, confronts those who feel the pressure to grow up, as well pay the rent. Members of the community are drawn together through the ritualized and embodied
“liminal space of the indie music gig” (Fonarow, 2006: 14). Some may later exit the scene, losing their ritual and insider sensibility, though many others will search for continuance in professions within the indie music community (Fonarow, 2006: 15).

Precariousness and Culture Industries in the New Leisure City

The community has been forced to adjust to various cycles and the consumption patterns of new residents, increasingly younger residents and the new economy of cultural tourism. Old music stores like Ozone records that were the backbone of low paying but high access jobs for people with a foot in the indie music community are fading away. In their places may be some more opportunities in the fields of online production and distribution of music, although this eliminates key spaces for public interaction. Mixed use public spaces and local small businesses have popped up in their stead; in one square where I held interviews there is a coffee shop and roastery (owned by former Pond bassist Chris Brady), with a drum shop, a small vinyl record shop and a bar that features DJs at night. More intimate than a strip mall, this spot has a feel of a gathering space, with tables outside.

The creative economy is fueled by little Silicon Valley outgrowths Tektronix, Firefox and Google, design and marketing industries, eco-friendly development, and music. The number of jobs created by the tech sector and this type of small shop economy hasn’t kept pace with the rate of in-migration of mostly college graduates wanting to play a role in this post-college scene. These unstable service sector jobs are often seen as not sustainable unless one is resigned to them for the flexibility it gives them. Small-business ownership is a huge part of the independent and “authentic” character of the culturally specific Portland landscape. There are few people who will claim they have a “real” job that takes them away from their cultural production labor, but
many interviewees have claimed to be looking for work in one way or another. Jobs in real estate, green urbanism and hospitality all continue to grow, but they don’t support the massive inflow of new residents to the creative city.

Identity, whether it is an ethnic or religious group or an immigrant community, often gets its cohesive center around the most effervescent of all cultural forms, music. Griel Marcus, in *Lipstick Traces* contests that “once ideas go into receivership, there is nothing that cannot be done with them” (Marcus, 1989). He was referring to the notion of “Youth” as a potential vanguard class and how its consumption of itself constituted a tier of the economy. For Marcus: “(once) that sector expanded, seizing the notion that youth was a concept and not an age, (they) generated the values used to sell anything to everybody else” (1989: 272). As Marx would concur, youth as the new proletariat, “was the ever idling motor of a world bent not on making history but on stopping it” (Marcus, 1989: 272). The musical identity of youth rebellion was something you could buy and not necessarily something you had to be.

This is the hegemony of cultural production, cleverly creating tie-ins between one’s metaphorical spaces of resistance, one’s product’s placement, and now increasingly, the very city in which one lives. Keeping it fresh or keeping it real are buzzwords of marketing. The irony of the hipster culture of today’s indie rock loyalists and aesthetes is that this once was a shoestring budget, little known subculture where people had to “pay their dues before they could pay the rent” (Song lyric, Pavement, Silence Kit, Stephen Malkmus, 1994). However, in the rush to cash in and methodically reproduce the music, the aura and now “Portland,” longtime producers may begin to feel the backlash of the “new elite” hipster ascendancy. Some entities are profiting from all this, some are squeaking by and making a living and many Portlanders are trying to do fuzzy
The way in which cities attract cultural industries, according to The Rise of the Creative Class (Florida, 2002), is via creating the conditions conducive to the symbolic economy that “creatives” crave. Art, indie music culture, and transnational food culture, modes of nostalgia, handicraft and enlightened urbanism are the key indicators of a city’s ascension. Only this hasn’t “worked” in the sense of a comprehensive economic engine; in Portland notably GDP per capita has risen successfully but Per Capita Income hasn’t. “Bottom line: As the creativity becomes more valued the creative class grows,” writes Florida (Florida, 2002: 71). Florida attests that cities that are centers of culture and fashion, music and lifestyle amenities, attract talented people and grow. He also voices the concern that neighborhoods in the cities will see a rise in rents, and some creative people will remain in the service class (Florida, 2002: 259). He speaks fervently about the types of “technologically complex” creative work and workers that will be transferred into the Creative class as their creative contributions are more valued (Florida, 2002: 71). In this normative proscription is the contradiction that those without marketable skills will not join this elite class, which, through the expansion of highbrow consumption, will most likely expand the hip service economy in its wake (Lloyd, 2006).

However, many local producers have suggested that either they are not able to make as much music as before or the city in general being less financially amenable to new arrivals that want to start a band and make a go of it. Florida wrote, in an Atlantic Cities piece, his response to the bifurcation in the creative economy, where creatives wipe out most of their gains, especially for the adapting lower tier:
On close inspection, talent clustering provides little in the way of trickle-down benefits. Its benefits flow disproportionately to more highly-skilled knowledge, professional, and creative workers whose higher wages and salaries are more than sufficient to cover more expensive housing in these locations. While less-skilled service and blue-collar workers also earn more money in knowledge-based metros, those gains disappear once their higher housing costs are taken into account (Florida, 2013).

The new economy that he describes still paints a biased picture of the notion of “skills,” suggesting all cultural producers that contribute to the vitality of the city and the economy are not quantifiable, so therefore, not more than their day jobs. Therefore, the prospect of a long-term, productive, affordable spatial life for light earning musicians and makers is not necessarily a part of the new creative city. The “Creative City” thesis implies that urban attractiveness through growth is a win-win for all art makers, and that creative work will be rewarded if one’s skills are connected to the new economy. The downside is that many talented musicians and key agents of local know how are being priced out and tokenized. The commodification of some of the building blocks of the community notwithstanding, there lies a committed core of community agents, as Logan and Molotch (1987) add, many “culturally dominant newcomers,” trying to renegotiate the terms of their project – keeping the authentic reality of a music scene alive and reproducing livelihoods.

**Space, Place, and Livability**

The complexity of making a living runs in stark contrast to the “livability” factor of Portland as a major metropolis. According to Richard Florida, Portland ranked 18th in the country in its Creativity Index, a combination of science, art and education based job indicators (Florida, 2002). This does not discount the service class growth he also demarcated as high for the city. In the closing pages of his *Rise of the Creative Class*, he explained the nature of this vanguard class as not yet aware of itself “as a force” (Florida, 2002). However, those on the
fringes of this class, which include part-time workers in the service industry and budding entrepreneurs, make up a critical strata of the geography of the city. Furthermore, when he makes the case that Pittsburgh is missing the conditions that are viable to supporting a creative identity, he misses another crucial variable; namely, that attractiveness is the necessary but not sufficient condition for keeping a “creative” creatively employed, in every sense of the word (Florida, 2002:243).

This theoretical trajectory is useful for mapping the inheritance of spatial practices productive of neighborhood-centric community living. From Jane Jacobs and the white working class authentic of Greenwich Village, to the new beginnings notion espoused through 60s counterculture, what has become a vintage blend in Portland is the “aspirational consumption” of low-rent, low cost, urban, participatory cultural lifestyle (Zukin, 2011). This authentic urbanness is, as Zukin suggests, a social construction of want, built on alliances between preservationists, gentrifiers and aesthetes (Zukin, 2011). Nevertheless, these alliances, based on the political force against the homogenization of the “quality of American life,” can and have gained a foothold (Zukin, 2011: 161). “Cultural distinctiveness exerts itself in many ways…local history that exerts appeal to outsiders through the social construction of either a material or a symbolic landscape” (Zukin, 2011: 161). In Naked City, the notional representation of place is embodied in the concept of Kairos, where “there is a sense of the past that intrudes upon the present” (Zukin, 2010: 101). This imperative of consuming the local, urges city dwellers to discover the authentic value of social history.

This dialectic of the past informing the present in the way that authenticity is both of “origins and new beginnings” is central to the discourse of cultural representations and spatial practices in the city (Zukin 2010: 29). In Portland, through music, historical tropes of Punk and
DIY aesthetics inform the new amalgamation of memory and new creations. Homogenous style here gives way to scene that has roots but has branched out in different directions.

The core of this ideal culture is rooted in places where people gather, neighborhoods that emerge and then get covered over by capital intensive commodifiers, but then pops up elsewhere in the city. Important to note here is that this urban imaginary does not have a geographic center. Downtown does not simply demarcate the walkable heart of the city’s history of rock. This reflects the cultural moment we are in, where the idea of place can overcome the actual to become commodified. Still the city has to work to delineate opportunities for tourism that won’t disappoint. This is where the ephemeral power of music can be crucial. Development has pressed forward under the auspices of the “growth machine” version of the naturalization of renewal (Logan and Molotch, 1987). Transit corridor renewal zones, historical preservation tax abatement and cheap land deals in exchange for replacing depleted housing stock, are all ways in which condo developers and mixed-use initiatives swoop in under the auspices of maintaining the urban growth boundary.

**Portland and Planning: New Urban Revitalization**

Portland earned national acclaim in urban reclamation circles by turning away from the growth machine coalitions that normally dominated cities (Molotch, 1987). Instead, they developed the Urban Growth Boundary and Metro, the Metropolitan Planning Board that went into practice on January 1, 1979. According to Elliot and Frickel (2013):

Metro…worked to ensure suburbanization spread slowly through high-density development that was forged of compromises among state and local officials, farmers, downtown developers, industrial trade associations and variety of local advocacy groups.
This led to a picture perfect backdrop for development without sprawl, with a dense urban core, a repurposed warehouse art district, and old homes with yards in neighborhoods that became revitalized. The idea of a craftsman house in a working class community, off the beaten path and overgrown with a garden plot, impressed itself upon 90s youth culture as an alternative American Dream in bohemia. When the boom times came, the houses filled with transplants and the housing bubble forced the condo developers to build without regard to the character of neighborhoods (there is only a 1% rate of available housing in the city). In the Northeast neighborhood of Alberta the Alberta Arts walk gathers thousands to celebrate a fringe of the city culture, but it is white coded and a wave a racialized gentrification has followed in its stead (Shaw and Sullivan, 2011). The Mississippi Street Fair, a small crafts and art fair only ten years ago, has ballooned into a rock festival, food cart showcase and cultural happening that draws over 50,000. In a great and dramatic way the city has transformed itself culturally into a grand spectacle of taste specific micro-cultures of lifestyle. From the city of roses to pierced noses to African dance to southeast Asian street food hotspot, Portland seems to embody the spirit of whatever feels creative can fit in here. Only now it is at a higher price.

**From Origins to New Beginnings: The Conquest of Cool**

The new spatial mapping of the city recasts neighborhoods as shopping utopias of new value, while the representational landscape favors movies, television and the culinary. Shows such as *Portlandia* play part of this role; through satire they make fun of people searching for the perfect chicken and embodying an ideal lifestyle of cultural consumption. Additional movies and television have begun filming here, increasingly representing Portland as the actual place setting, as opposed to the backdrop for myriads of ads and deviant cult classics such as *Drugstore Cowboy*. Kevin Bacon is a regular fixture in the crowd at Portland Trailblazer games, Michael
Cera, a budding geek actor/icon, and New Yorker contributing writer, spent a month being seen in Portland coffee shops, another sign of ascendency in the symbolic status economy of the present.

This is another dialectical process, where the outside interpretation of place spurs development of the cultural economy in the city. The city in this way is constantly redefining its sectors, which in effect loosens the hold of local people to then mark the space through codified cafes and bars, and elite common spaces in the place of dark neighborhood ones. The maturation of the attractiveness of the cultural economy as a destination for condos and higher income people has pushed community networks to elevate their efforts to build inclusive spaces, revitalized but still reflective of the character of the city. Furthermore, stars and budding celebrities now use the feel of DIY Portland to springboard their own careers as alternative and quirky with a northwest sensibility.

**The Culture Industry in Portland**

The responses from the cultural community to issues in work and the preservation of the collective memory of the city are part and parcel of their continued role as self-appointed keepers of the cultural heart of Portland. In the technological sector Portlanders are trying to reclaim some of the market share of the commodification of cool, traditionally manufactured and repackaged in the marketing agencies and fashion houses of New York City and the production studios of the L.A. dream factory. Companies like North help manage local brands online by tracking user trends. Production companies in TV and film have relocated to business friendly Portland to capture the vibe, and entrenched ad agencies such as Wyden and Kennedy have expanded into a lifestyle company in their converted warehouse with its own rooftop lounge,
basketball courts and insight rooms, modeled after the Nike campus just out of town. The overlap of the indie culture and the tech sector has now blurred substantially; Portland’s web presence as a music community has given it part of its identifiable allure in social networks.

Weiden and Kennedy fit the Portland story as a compact mirror projecting its image of things onto the yet to be determined public landscape. As they grew, so did the city’s cultural economy of cool. David Kennedy, stepped down in 1995, at age 55, to return to sculpting and his rural roots. Tomas Boyd of the Oregonian describes him as “the authentic conscience of the agency” (Oregonian, 2010). Meanwhile, their work on the Nike brand catapulted them from boutique agency to global taste making machine. Now in the know subculturally, they have begun to incorporate the agents of cool they previously had borrowed from. In the 90s, when placements in ads for indie bands garnered a small fee, often musicians were paid nothing at all. In addition, they have moved to commodify the cool they have placed in ads as content by getting closer to the source, and adding musicians’ personalities to their lifestyle mystique. In 2006, Wieden+Kennedy debuted an afternoon showcase of established and emerging musical artists in the atrium of W+K's Portland office, dubbed the "LunchBox" concert series. They have recently partnered with New York’s Search Party, a company that sources and recreates music for ads and television, and they have opened a second office in PDX.

Herein lies the dialectic mapped in the Conquest of Cool, by Thomas Frank and Griel Marcus in Lipstick Traces, that the unique object of new subcultural production gets incorporated into a system of consumption and production that is accelerated and predatory. Benjamin’s classic take on the Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, on the dialectic of reproduction, is most relevant, because, unlike Adorno, he is not put off by the democratization of technology. Adorno asserts that the commodification of the art object leads to standardization
and limits the potential for negative aesthetics that express struggle (Adorno, 1937). Although many musicians are reaping the benefits of being chosen as providers in the accelerated flavor of the month club of cool, when their music is sent into the televisual universe removed from its context and object life the synthesized new object perhaps has lost something. Yet as a reproduction, it becomes a source of income, a highlight in a film, a potential meme that might enervate the edges of a rationalized movie script or break a career. Benjamin infers that this is the new politics of the work of art, freed from its aura of authenticity (Benjamin, 1999). Is it possible to hold a music scene in time, in place, when the potential of digital music as a new kind of commodity can help reboot the local independent production and consumption culture?

**Digital Culture and New Responses to Commodification**

Notions of exchange decoupled from a physical product have encouraged a revolution in the digital trading experience. “Getting by” within a state of structural inequality is one of the hallmarks of sociological research; it is complicated in this context by questions of what is a product or a service. Refashioned through technology and self-distribution, the means of musical production have been democratized and digitized. The musician finds oneself compelled to embrace a form of exchange more like a performance, where they hope to build a connection with their audience in the absence of a significant object of consumption. That thread of community, built over a series of platforms to like or relate to one’s digital self, forms the new spaces for staying in touch with the local.

Spatial practices that have been passed on through the collective history of the Portland scene in alternative culture in general, couple with the digital as building blocks for strategies of surviving the digital freelance economy and resisting incorporation. Whereas warehouse music
business making were booking offices or distribution spaces, now they are Search Party and A to Z Media, scouring the Internet for openings for placement of songs. In 2014, the freelancer relationship of one’s digital product to the general public seems necessary for survival, but in some cases the city and its concert spaces, streets that were once part of the archipelago of the audio identity of the city, are now gentrified or translated into boutique sites of leisure appropriation. Musicians at risk of being outsourced for more general musical talent are attempting to use their digital identities, and the memorialization of people and places, to preserve the lived experience of the city.

Collective strategies of community empowerment take on new light in this context with people advocating for the increased role of the arts in schools, the expansion of bicycle culture, and green politics of identity. Part of the urban cultural landscape includes the wild Forest Park, quiet light rail expansion, and the promotion of local bands at the afternoon concerts at the swank Ecofair of the Ecotrust group. Much of this set of cultural practices pertains to the setting in motion of new traditions of art and music events. Key agents get music placed in commercial spots, or try to use music as a resource for health care, public issues and the campaign to retain space in the face of homogeneity. Much of the adaptation to this new economic precariousness is the establishment of small-scale artisanal exchange networks, which survive via word of mouth and overlap with the music world.

The digital realm is the final frontier for resisting expropriation and managing one’s own trajectory. Besides having a house, a committed set of fellow travellers on this patchwork of a living, the precarious lower creative class has to thrive on more intimate modes of exchange and the collection making exercises of the new digital self (Belk 2013). As Kevin Robinson, member of Viva Voce proclaimed, in the aforementioned article on Search Party. "We've arrived at a
future that has all the answers," he says. "It's just a matter of conceptualizing them. We'll get there. We're just not there yet" (www.oregonlive.com, January 23rd, 2013)

**Methods and Data**

In order to understand tactics and practices of survival, conceptions of the viability of living and work networks in Portland, and the character of the music scene, a mix of participant observation, guided interviews and life history will be employed. Interviews, set up through early forays into the field and the snowball method, will be geared towards outlining one’s original perception of Portland’s uniqueness as a place to live, and the experience of making music here over time. This will offer insight into how musicians survive on the margins economically, how they integrated themselves within the conventions and distribution prerequisites of the local production networks and how that resonates with their aspirations.

Empirically, Markusen’s work on artist centers in cities such as Minneapolis offers a template that can inform the operational basis of this project (Markusen, 2006). She considers why some smaller cities appeal as places for artists to work, how artists serve their communities, and how certain centers (in this case, venues, recording studios, and nightlife) serve to anchor the community (Markusen, 2006). She provides a rationale for the manner in which the population is selected, a variant of “theoretical sampling” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) that implies the participants ought to come from a general type that bears resemblance to the target population (Markusen, 2006). In this way we can limit our potential subjects to those who affiliate themselves with indie music making, music promotion, venues, and the production culture.

As a participant observer, access to this scene was not an issue; once a known participant who was formerly local and involved, I was able to slip in and out of scenarios and the
confidence of major players to then meet newer, younger participants. Being a member of this culture, and then moving away, gave myself a useful insider-outsider position. I am familiar to some but not too close for anonymous disclosure, especially from the younger set, which are important in their perception of the attraction of the scene. Epistemologically, through extended social engagement one could best “take the role of the other, to acquire social knowledge” (Lofland and Lofland, 1984). People consuming the established symbolic economy, have particular struggles getting work or getting opportunities in a crowding scene, and expanding their work into careers. Generational cohorts play a role in the differing potentials of a music making lifestyle. In this sense the participants themselves served as observers, and their perspectives helps to clarify practices and notions of authentic “Portlandness”. The idea of the city, the scene and individuals in the community, open the door to interpreting its conflicts and its representative capital(s). In this way a grounded theory approach through urban ethnography is layered upon an interpretive analysis of this city’s distinctiveness in contemporary culture.

Going in I had a sense of who was making a mark on the community, some agents of change and some tellers of tales. Talking around a table, with owners and workers of a venue, or with musicians and producers of art and culture on the power and history of their contribution yielded rich detail and lead to new opportunities for focused interviews via the snowball technique. I was in the field in Portland in March of 2012, then the summer months of 2012, and then in the early summer of 2013 for follow up interviews. I conducted 42 formal semi-structured interviews and spent numerous hours note taking in hotel rooms and dimly lit booths at bars, cafes and rock n’ roll shows. Analyzing Social Settings has been invaluable in enhancing the quality of questions that were asked and the open-ended interview process (Lofland and Lofland, 1971). I was able to construct an interview guide that was not leading but probing, often
asking for explanation or further clarification of something I knew vaguely being a known observer. In some cases being a well-known observer had its requisite anxieties, such as the accession to permission to represent others in writing, but Lofland and Lofland address these issues and were instructive (Lofland and Lofland, 1971).

Reflexive analysis of my position and the logic of practices embedded in the habitus and dispositions of actors, in place, informed the process of conducting this research (Bourdieu, 1993). In order to render a sensitive portrait of what Bourdieu calls, “culture made into nature,” personal reflections and self-analysis guided my quest towards interpreting the meaning, form and substance of all of the capitals invested within in the distinction driven city (Bourdieu, 1984). I chose to give pseudonyms only to those that requested me to do so; for the people that make culture and are iconic in the community, I left their names unchanged. I asked and they were all considered and clear about going on the record.

Content analysis of the recent history of the community was done through the consideration of position taking, and issue generating media about local issues and community conflicts. The local press and televisual representations of place further define and redefine the city as cultural representation. Facebook and other social media have been invaluable in staying in touch with the lines of thinking and arguments and cases made by respondents. Over time, certain issues came to a head and were discussed in a public manner. In addition, the work of others in the realm of cultural production, community and lifestyle consumption has embedded my argument in a field of thinking about cultural value, practices of belonging and the concomitant celebration of the rise of cities and the rise of the “creative” person in the symbolic economy.
Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 looks at the audio identity of the indie scene in Portland, and how it has advanced its own cause and has become iconic to the authenticity of place in the lower Northwest. Chapter 2 addresses the burgeoning tapestry of work that develops around these cultural practices of music scene and the expanding cultural economy. Chapter 3 peers into the notion of home, as it pertains to the spatial practices inherited from past practices of using and maintaining space in the music community in the city. Both gentrification and innovation through new professional home making entrepreneurs have brought a new set of resistances to leveling of creative bedroom communities of mixed class and racial living during the interstitial time of the 1990s. In chapter 4, the digital landscape became the new spatial arena for contradictions to be played out. The freedom to distribute enabled by technology also weakens the sturdiness of institutions that have established ground practices and spatial presence in the new city. The creative divide grows in cyberspace, although the techniques of recovery are far more ambitious and potentially global in their reach.

Objectives

As Barthes proclaims, “Sociology is the history of the present” (Barthes, 1980). In this spirit the question in this context is: what is the significance of the translocal symbolic hype of Portland’s cultural scene for the artists there? How does the growth of the scene affect the collective cultural imagination at large, and what are the consequences for the creative economy of making art things? The methodological framework for collecting this data, combined with my own experience as an expert witness on the past and its inscription upon the present, makes this work about the preservation of collective memory and its value in new urban formations. The
artists, the spaces, and the neighborhoods in focus here are living in the shadow of what the passing time has crystallized yet in some instances swept away. The slick and the new have replaced the decaying industrial playgrounds of music production; manicured lawns have obscured the overgrown forests of front yard gardens and damp velour couches on porches. The present remembers what it wants and often what it is compelled to as the new city makes a very public case for itself. Inscribed on spaces like a palimpsest of history, interviews, the growth of critical presses and snapshot memories of key moments of transition comprise a full data set of historical change in a community and its production culture of indie rock over time.

Constructions of cultural identity and meaning, either deeply historical, or pieced together from the recent past, form a considerable case in point for real spatial practices of recasting value in the age of imitation. Community work, community aesthetics and entrenched neighborhood culture stands against one-size fits all model for creative cities, while still giving ground to an upscaling of the new creative economy. Musicians and artisans, as part of growing cultural scenes in cities, are engaging in the new politics of authenticity to make their value felt. In Portland, Oregon, this under valuation of a real, embodied resource is rife with imbalances and inequities.

This work will map the points at which the creative industry, through conflict and cooperation, conforms to the needs of those on the precarious edges of the creative economy. One key question is as follows: how do musical artists in the scene, who are often resource poor, balance work and play and while developing community power? The creative people who have sparked this new economy are confronted with a new production culture rife with imbalances and inequalities. Public space is up for redefinition and debate across the world in cities such as Istanbul, New York and Richmond Virginia, where the past is yearning for representation in new
development. In its stead are slicker, smoother spaces and places, controlled by organizations from above and public/private partnerships. Portland, through its history of independent spaces, places and practices, and its full range of authentically driven responses to real estate and culture commodification is a key place in point to understand the fissures in the creative economy.
Chapter 1: Indie City Northwest: Audio Identity and a Presence in the City

Cultural identities come from somewhere, and have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past (Hall, 1990: 187).

“Concentration of difference” is cited as the hallmark of what makes a place feel “authentic” (Zukin, 2010: 100). The textural audio identity of Portland is enacted through the spirit of a local history, reassembled into a pastiche of music places, sounds and remembrances. In Portland, the signposts of a reflexive self emerge from the underground, and the music that is embodied in it are highly relevant to the cultural representations that now drive the growth of the city as an outpost of difference. The audio identity of the city serves as an affective bond between the multiple and contradictory meanings of belonging to the indie music world in Portland. This complexity and the soggy, “weird,” “city that works,” serve as the backdrop for a music community steeped in hard rock, folk and jazz but distinctly of the moment. The aesthetic of the local indie rock music scene in particular provides the cultural material for the production of symbols, “which constructs both a currency of exchange and a language of social identity” (Zukin, 1995: 24). Some key components of this symbolic community are the equipment and embedded sound in those technologies, dive bar rock venues, storefront record stores, and associated music labels.

Tia DeNora, in *After Adorno* (2003), urges the sociologist of music to see music as a key mediating force, and to view the process of cultural machineries as objectifying that which is a linkage between “aesthetic structures and styles of consciousness”. In high modernity, it is of our
interest to make sense of the employment of music in developing a reflexive aesthetic self (Giddens, 1991; Lash and Urry, 1994). Through one’s daily life, aural spatial ecologies, tell us how people deploy ‘musical structures of action’ of agency through time and space (DeNora, 1999). This can be read through embodied action at a gig, the topography of scene spaces in a city center or an archipelago of localities in the greater Northwest. The first thing DeNora suggests, as an invitation to empirical grounding of this enacted consciousness of self, is to interpret the use of music “in action” (DeNora in Hancock and Lorr, 2013).

The indie music culture of Portland is a part of a landscape of memory of an extended place, and is connected to consciousness by a web of objects, and places of performance of self. Hancock and Lorr (2013), in looking at punk in Chicago, interview participants in a mosh pit to get a sense of their identity in action, as they divorce themselves from bodily control. In Portland many of the spaces signify key moments that are embedded in the sense of history there, and ever-present in one’s self concept and self-identification within the scene as it stands today. DeNora (1986) in “Is Extra-Musical Meaning Possible?,” invites the sociologist of music and scenes to interpret how transformative practices construct meaning. Through telling the story of local history of the realization of the phenomenon and the modes of production of making music, we can see the ”materials at hand,” through which meaning is constructed.

Music, claims DeNora (2010), is so compelling sociologically now because in fact it can accompany our minds and engage us affectively into sound tracking our experiential life like never before. Once it was a dinner party but now it is always a millisecond away, that sound, that voice. DeNora (1994) in “The Musical Composition of Social Reality,” contends “music provides a means for the construction of time, bodies, and courses of action” (p. 311). Therefore, “we need to consider…how music is used and oriented to, how it is constructed as a ‘work
space’ for the continuation of social life” (p.311). She implores the ethnographer to explore “how people connect with or ‘get into’ music, how musical realities get converted into social ones” (p.311). You cannot move the ‘Marseillaise’ out of the set of meanings ‘sedimented around it’ she theorizes (p.310). This is the situated character of the culture of music that is central in Portland.

The aesthetic distinctions of style, musical mood, and the representative values of productive things, drive identity and public strategies of collective action. This cultural economy of cool has emerged in an archipelago of Northwest places, tamed and made inhabitable by the indie music community and its values of localized exchange. Due to shifts in the sonic landscape and the concurrent rise of the Internet independent media, this formerly isolated, “in-the-know” subculture, has now expanded into a commodified code of the Portland “urban imaginary.” Although some markers of coherence are strained when the scene is commodified, the idea of the city as a topographical elevation of regional audio spaces holds firm, and from old origins emerge new forms of music identity and DIY values in the creative city.

Portland and the Greater Northwest: Place Based Music Economy and Identity

The pervasive effect the music production culture has had on the culture of cities like Portland emerges from a process where people have turned out and away from traditional forms of inclusion and self-value and towards this subcultural derived sense of Northwest authenticity. Before these places were well established as cultural enclaves, with the requisite coffee shops, restaurants, and related jobs, the music scene of Seattle and then Portland became the calling by which people came, often North or West, to establish a form of frontier authentic self, remade around the collective conscience of the indie rock ethos. The spaces where musicians came from or move through lie in between the big city and small town scenes. Towns along the I-5 freeway
corridor of the freethinking West coast serve as way stations for this cultural economy: Olympia, Seattle, Portland and Salem stand out as some of the places one can see in three dimensional space on the topographical map of this regional scene.

Portland became the product of these interstitial relations, and the cities and surrounding regions contributed to the soundscape that is now a local audio ecology of place. This musical ideal, a workshop notion of self-made production in a local scene, combined quite seamlessly with the slow paced and relatively affordable quality of life in Portland. In the mid nineties bands were relocating to Portland at a greater pace to reinvent their musical selves in and through that Portland sound. A sense of belonging developed out of knowing the way of hearing and embodying the local sound, wearing the clothes and values of Northwest outdoor life, and being a part of a grass roots scene.

What is often documented about the elevation of the “grunge” rock revolt into the mind of the mainstream is mostly through the character of Kurt Cobain and the case of Seattle. Rock n’ roll in its own right has had a pivotal place in the development of identity and of lived space for the individual in American culture. Lawrence Grossberg (1997) wrote of the closing of the distance between performer and audience, gleaned from Punk rock, that has fused the producer and consumer in an alliance of support. This import, from Britain and the lower east Side of New York has had great consonance with the Northwest underground social scene. The rock n’ roll documentary and book of the same name, Hype!, shed light on the intimacy and community of the Seattle rock world just before “punk broke” in 1992., With a limited consumer base to support touring bands, Seattle and Portland endured years of isolation as drive over towns. With no money, and basements and dive bars as concert venues, musicians in the local economy had little earning potential and turned inward. Something developed that was strangely hybrid and
uniquely Northwest, sonically and socio-culturally. With all that rain, moss and mud emerged music that some referred to as sludge – introspective, psychedelic, strange and unique.

**The I-5 Indie Archipelago: the 60s**

The sister cities of Portland and Seattle are actually linked up in a sonic ecology (DeNora, 2011) of towns - an archipelago of Northwest rock music culture that developed its sonic textures and spatial aesthetic in the wet, cloudy, mood-disordered subcultures of the scene. Portland has been seen throughout the twentieth century in relation to Seattle, its big sister city to the north. They both share a mid-century reliance on lumber, an overcast humility, and an overabundance of wood building materials.

Musically, both cities were cultural centers for locally incubated goods and music for generations. In his work on establishing a geographic ethnography of American rock n’ roll, Gill highlights the importance of the development of regional scenes like the one that spanned 1958-1966 and established “the Northwest Sound” (Gill 1995: 18). The Northwest sound was what he called a “protopunk” sound – loud, loose, and simple (Gill 1995:18). An early form of Garage rock, according to Gill, developed independent to widespread musical forms due to the relative isolation of the region, and a reaction to African-American rhythm and blues. This influence, melded together with British revival of rock rhythm and blues and the dancehall live music culture of the Northwest, led to this particular, danceable hybrid form. It began with instrumental groups reinterpreting popular songs into the raucous dancehall sound necessary to get people moving. In 1961, the Ventures (Seattle), Paul Revere and the Raiders (Portland) and the Wailers (Tacoma) landed hits on the Billboard charts with instrumental recordings (Gill 1995).
This regional hybrid form was mostly comprised of popular R&B and Rockabilly songs reinterpreted by the local form; technically it was a 12 bar blues, by 1963 with screamed vocals without vocal harmonies. The most famous song of the time, “Louie Louie,” was a Richard Berry song adapted by the Kingsmen. Local record labels and dancehalls comprised a network of concerts and distribution that had people playing overlapping roles, and making a good living (Gill 1995: 27). Roger Hart ran a Portland label, Sande Records, managed Paul Revere and the Raiders, had a dance club, and was a DJ at KISN. The Raiders made $255,000 in bookings in 1963 alone. Between the local singles, the dancehalls and a signature sound, the Northwest scene was established (Gill 1995: 27).

Famously rediscovered publically after the Grunge revolution of the nineties in Seattle were bands such as the Sonics, defining what became one of the signature sounds of the 21st century rock commodity chain - garage rock. The Kingsmen were another Seattle product who often played in Portland. Louie Louie was recorded in Portland for $37 and sold over two and a half a million copies, outselling the version by Paul Revere and the Raiders that was recorded in the same studio the very next day (Gill 1995: 28). The following year, 1964, the British Invasion began and although bands like the Who and the Beatles acknowledged the influence of the Northwest sound, with their schoolboy looks and candy coated hooks they stole the limelight. With the rise of the hippy era, nightclubs overtook dancehalls as the liquor laws loosened. Some of the bands attempted to adjust to this listening audience, but most of them disbanded soon after. The coffeehouse was a part of this scene in 1966, where folkies played and Dylan and Guthrie were the main influences. Jimi Hendrix grew up in the Northwest and entered the army during his high school years, in 1966, but the man who made many rock instruments famous for
his unorthodox use of them, brought his red Silvertone Danelectro\(^5\) in Seattle Washington. He also played his first basement show there in a Jewish temple, where he got kicked out of the band for showing off too much (Heatley, 2009). Eventually, he would pioneer the use of the fuzz pedal, overdriven amplifiers and the Fender Stratocaster guitar, all main ingredients in the future northwest mix of grunge and indie.

**The 70s and 80s**

Late 60s bands like US Cadenza developed the audience and sound that ruled the pubs in the early 70s. Steve Bradley, still active in the scene today, was the lead guitarist. They are remembered now in part for their show stealing opening set for the young Grateful Dead in 1967. They were polished and clean cut and played mostly R&B covers to adoring fans (Wheeder, WWeek, May 15\(^{th}\), 2013). The Pub Crawl was a rock music festival that resembles the city festivals in Austin and Portland today, only more raucous (Clarke, 2011). In the late 70s, Seafood Mama was a band courted by David Geffen and his new record label, Geffen Records. They later became Quarterflash and landed a top ten hit with “Harden my Heart” in 1984.

The modern underground of Portland music was established after bands like the Ramones came through in 1977. Greg Sage and his band, the Wipers, after that show, decided it was time to play out and make subcultural garage rock more of a live happening (Clarke, 2011). Other bands formed in 1978 and 1979 in response to the Ramones show and local punk possibility. According to Clarke:

\[^{5}\text{The Danelectro was an inexpensive guitar made by Sears that helped electrify guitarists in rock bands in the 50s after Elvis. They were (and still are) indicative of the marriage of the West Coast surf sound and the new garage rock insurgency.}\]
Soon there were dozens of “punk” bands playing the stages of the Revenge, the Earth Tavern, Euphoria and Long Goodbye. Bands such as Lo-Tek, Fix, the Rubbers, Pell Mell, the Cleavers, the Malchicks, the Kinetics, Stiphnoids, Faceditch, the Dots, Bop Zombies and SLA; the cult noise bands Smegma and Rancid Vat; the Marcel Duchamps of the music world and tres dada-esque Wallpaper Music; Ice 9, the Braphsmears and Suburban Guerillas, Hari Kari and the Ziplocs - all joined with headliners, such as Sado Nation, the Wipers and the Neo Boys.

The Neo Boys were Portland’s first all-female rock band. Though they were still basically novices on their instruments, their enlightened political stances and sophisticated demeanors are still in time with today’s standards. Vocalist Kim Kincaid, guitarists Jennifer Lobianco and Meg Hentges, bassist KT Kincaid and drummer Pat Baum, became outspoken feminist fixtures in the local underground scene. Hentges eventually migrated to Austin, where today she is still a very popular performer.

In Portland the music scene continued to percolate into the eighties. The club scene had grown to a point where the aggressive punk underground was already engendering a feminist punk notion of safe-space within the alternative music venue. This is truly a watershed moment in what is a major thread in the spatial practices embodied in the underground rock scene.

…. And that is where our story truly begins. By the Spring of 1980 an incredibly hospitable musical environment had evolved, spawning whole cultures of various musical breeds. The “club” scene became so raucous in fact, that the Neo Boys, among several other punk and new wave alternative bands (possibly mindful of the Linnton Community Center riot), threatened to abstain from attempting to perform in venues where drinking was promoted, citing the dulled audience consciousness at such gigs; preferring the wired-up energy of underagers over the glaring, jaundiced eye of the average pub-goer (Clarke, 2011).

The all-ages scene in Portland, an established trope in the political wing of the music scene, was born of the necessity for a gender neutral, participant safe, space for slam dancing and self-expression, free from exploitation.
The 90s: The New Northwest Scene

Amongst the competitive, trash-talking banter between the two city’s rock oriented residents, the joke was that Portland was the dirty eyesore of a younger sibling, only having Quarterflash to show for itself. However, the truth was that they leaned on each other to form the distinct Northwest circuit, and to differentiate each other to help form the Seattle sound and Portland’s version of the heavy, distortion soaked, sludge that supplanted corporate “hair” metal. The two music communities actually relied on each other as road shows and mutual appreciation societies; all the major Seattle bands played in places like the Satyricon and the X-Ray Café around 1990.

It is hard to detach the cities and unravel the music culture into urban symbolic communities when the history is awash is misremembered moments of origins. Courtney Love lived in Portland for some time, both working in a famous strip club and studying Philosophy at Portland State University. She was local here in the music scene - enough so to claim, in a sober televised interview, that she met Kurt Cobain at a Dharma Bums show in Portland in 1988. She is also known for a song about being a part of the community in Olympia, in her breakthrough album with Hole entitled “Live Through This.”

Making pilgrimages to Olympia in the late 90s illuminated the extended nature of place based music ecology in the Pacific Northwest. The craft of K Records exemplified the situated production practices that took root in Olympia. The label made handmade packaging, put out 7-inch records and had an impresario of a leader, Calvin Johnson. It was the first I understood that a record label could be your business, your persona, and house your artistic development. This is the indie ethos encapsulated, and it, plus the music itself, embodies the ideals and workshop
potential of this community. Out of this archipelago of islands along the I-5 corridor\(^6\) of indie rock, an aesthetic of values had emerged.

**Olympia**

Olympia, Washington developed its own community - most notably a series of bands with a feminist bent and various connections with Evergreen State College, a free-form institution with self-made majors and no grades. Shows and bands there were always loose and elemental, experimental and intense. This was true of Beat Happening, a band formed in 1983 as a three piece, with a woman and two men including peculiar frontman Calvin Johnson and his low baritone. With a single guitar, their almost elemental, minimal style, lines of single notes and a driving, repetitive nerdish sexuality, they anticipated the Northwest scene emerging.

That sense of camaraderie and experimentation was undeniable; it had the feeling of an archipelago of a spirit of commitment to doing something big and odd on a stage so small. Sara D. reflected on the connection between Portland and Olympia.

“There are so many personal connections between people in Olympia and Portland that built the pipeline. I have driven between Olympia and Portland literally thousands of times. We would go to Olympia for a party, or for dinner. I dated someone in Olympia for a year and I would say come down and she would come down.”

Parties that K and Calvin threw in the warehouses of that old port city had the feeling of a be-in, a culture that was out of the way and here, by the seaside, found. He had people dance and feel in

\(^6\) The Interstate 5 (I-5) corridor denotes the federal highway that runs from Canada to San Diego. In the Northwest context it generally refers to the left-leaning collection of cities that include, Eugene, Portland, Olympia, Tacoma, and Seattle.
a scene not known for dancing. He has a singular, herky-jerky way of moving that was infectious. Everyone seemed to know each other in a theater club kind of way.

Olympia, in the mid-nineties, had come to represent the negotiated space of riot grrrl culture in the subculture of indie and punk rock. Kill Rock Stars records, had a decidedly ant CORPORATIST POSITIONING, and supported bands such as Sleater-Kinney, Elliot Smith and Bikini Kill. Kathleen Hanna, the singular voice of Bikini Kill, had already established herself as a confrontational performance artist and fashion design activist. Banned from presenting her artwork at Evergreen College, already a progressive and permissive place, she became part of a collective that put on their own art happenings in the early nineties. At one key moment, she laid out how, through writing, she wanted to expose the persona of an aggressive male archetype that wanted to dominate women and at times violate them sexually. Acclaimed writer Kathy Acker told her that if she wanted people to actually listen to what she had to say that she should start a band (Anderson. 2013. The Punk Singer. IFC Films).

Soon thereafter, through the writing of zines in the Olympia scene and beyond, words “riot” and “grrrl” somehow got glued together into a force of transgressive confrontation of both male aggression, the spatial organization of the indie rock show, and proper protocol for sexual identity in being a feminist and promoting social change. This is almost simultaneous with the articulation of the notion of third wave feminism in academic circles. Young women, such as Hanna, were reclaiming girlhood with cheerleader chanting and baby doll personas, but with a fierce power backed by distorted guitars and a man on trial-like atmosphere.

Sara Marcus, in her book “Girls to the Front,” writes about the history and meaning of riot grrrl from the perspective of someone who needed and found a collective of girls dedicated
to the execution of a lyric from Kathleen Hanna’s song. “Dare you to do what you want! Dare you to be who you will!” (Marcus, 2010). She begins the first chapter of the book with Bikini Kill’s deconstructive politics alive on stage. They read from an article referring to their music as “man hate.” They take apart a piece about how they are liked by more famous rock stars, to assert how little that matters. On their own terms is the message to their rebellion, even if they are not exactly sure yet what that means in total. They certainly know what they don’t like, including the mosh pit that sanctifies the grunge version of punk rock that dominates the northwest. “Girls to the front” was a call Hanna made often at Bikini Kill shows. Take your space upfront and I’ll protect you. You can do what you want and no man will crush you. This made headlines, including an eventual simultaneous interview with Hanna and Gloria Steinam for Time magazine (Anderson, 2013. *The Punk Singer*. IFC Films).

Eventually Riot Grrrl shut down its channels to big media, for preying on Hanna’s complex identity for one - citing her for stripping and exploiting her own sexual abuse as making her somehow unfit to lead (in the film she makes clear her abuse was more so “inappropriateness”). This brought a higher level of consciousness of necessary separation of the media culture attached to the political feminism of the underground music scene, and as the northwest phenomenon become more commodified, the music scene at large developed its own media to combat mischaracterization and hype (Anderson, 2013. *The Punk Singer*. IFC Films).

**Salem**

South of Portland, and possibly less storied within the folklore, is the stream music and music makers coming up I-5 from Oregon’s capitol city Salem. Speaking with Mike J., a producer and distributor of CD’s and related media at CD Forge and now A to Z Media in a new
modern building on Lower Burnside, he talks about living in Salem while beginning his impresario journey into NW music history.

“I lived so close I didn’t feel like I had to move here. I had a business in Creative Landscaping and my band practiced in the building upstairs. We had a recording studio for my label Schizophrenic records and that’s where all the 15 Killers records were recorded. We recorded the Dharma Bums…They were still living in Scotts Mills and Silverton.”

He then came to Portland to start NAIL distribution, which became the nerve center for local to national distribution of local small independent labels.

In 1994 I had thus record label with about 15 titles on it. I ran it about 6 months in Salem. Basically it was I first started out just stocking me and my friends and my bands labels from Eugene. I would then come up here and deliver a 30 count box of titles of local music. In 1996 I hired Alicia Rose and we got a space near Produce Row, and I commuted for about a year, but there weren’t enough employees down there anyhow. Everyone either moved to Portland or New York. Larry Crane worked there, and Herman Jolly. Basically about 50 kids worked there who I am still in contact with now.

This is a prime example of the DIY or “Do it Yourself” spirit of production aimed at circumventing corporate control of the business of making music and making ends meet. Mike’s band practiced in the building in which he ran a small business out of, which also doubled as a label warehouse. When things go too big, and with the same ethos, and he invited people he knew to work in the warehouse and sell to stores. Larry C., who was in the band Vomit Launch in central California in the very early 90s became one of his first Portland salesmen. He later went on to build Jackpot recording studios with Elliot Smith, who ended up not pursuing the venture. He did record there, as did Rebecca Gates, Stephen Malkmus and countless others.

Jackpot Studios location at the time was in a corner store carved into a residential neighborhood in the inner southeast. As is the case with a lot of the places where the scene was produced, it bore no significance outside of what was happening inside. It was unadorned within,
and the waiting area had the feeling of a dentist’s office from the 1950s. Once within the control room the space was small and intimate, in a condensed way where nothing could be accomplished but intense focused work. When I first worked there I thought of Elliot Smith’s loose drum bits from his “Either/Or” album. I could hear the stick bundles’ tack-tack bounce around the little room. Larry C. is the godfather of the small, independent recording studio; he is revered for his writing in the recording geek magazine *Tape-Op* and for his dry sarcasm and been there, done that attitude.

**The City and its Audio Identity**

According to Florida, music is a key part of what makes a place authentic, in effect providing a sound or “audio identity” (Florida, 2012: 228). He goes on to say that, “(T)his is what many people know about these cities and the terms in which they think of them; it is also the way these cities promote themselves” (Florida, 2012: 228). Music then “plays a central role in the creation of identity and the formation of real communities” (Florida, 2012: 229). Simon Frith substantiates this by stating that music “provides us with an intensely subjective sense of being sociable. It both articulates and offers the immediate experience of collective identity. Music regularly soundtracks our search for ourselves and for spaces in which we can feel at home.” (Frith in Florida, 2012: 295). The authenticity of the indie music in Portland in the 90s is the unusual, unique aspect of a city that did not have a beautiful skyline, cooperative weather or a booming economy to draw those who did come in droves.

According to Richard Florida himself, in an *Atlantic Cities* piece he wrote considering whether Portland was place for hipsters to retire he asserts that:
‘Portland has long been a talent magnet. In another Slate article from 2007, Portland-based writer Taylor Clark pointed out that Portland had become an “indie rock mecca” – it was home to members of the Shins, the Decemberists, Death Cab for Cutie and Spoon, to name just a few - but not by producing bands from a local scene. Portland neither has a distinctive “sound” nor a ‘scene” to speak of (Florida in Atlantic Cities, 2013).

This attests to attraction of Portland as an affordable place with a good quality of life for music makers, and to the varying place in career of many musical transplants. I would challenge the aforementioned writers’ contention that it does not have a “scene” because there are transplants and the sounds of bands are varied and self-defined. This cohesion of sound is a somewhat superficial distinction of the cohesion of a scene; it is the community ethos, collective memory and networks of support and co-support that make up a place based coherence of modern rock scene. A poster bandied around the Internet recently of the 2008 PDX @ CMJ Festival at the Knitting Factory in Manhattan attests to the sticking power of a scene as a production and consumption community of like-minded agents of cooperation and fidelity. We paid homage to the collective memory of our shared experience there, even though participants like myself and others were already members of the Brooklyn Portland diaspora.

**Mapping the Topography of Audio Culture in the 90s**

The indie ethos as it pertains to Portland begins with the DIY culture. In indie music “the music fan, rather than the music executive, is emboldened to decide what counts as good music, as worthy art” (Cesafsky in Heying, 2010: 164). Blogs and webzines further this democratization and localization of value, where people come to appreciate music from the inside of their community. Local networks serve to clue people in to the most recent or most authentic inventions of Portland indie music, and local artisan producers and taste publics connect musicians and fans with new potential community members.
Zines or fan zines, self-made photocopied pamphlets, spelled out the ways and means of getting it done in the underground, as well as talking about the bands and politics of youth before the Internet. According to Stephen Duncombe (2000), “zines are a non-commercial, non-professional, small-circulation magazine(s) which their creators produce, publish and distribute by themselves.” He maps how “fanzines” from sci-fi, merged in the 80s with punk zines promoted their ignored music. Once Factsheet Five started listing and cataloguing these localized productions, chains of stores started becoming a network of distribution.

The signature zine store in Portland has been operational from the mid-nineties until now is Reading Frenzy, owned by Chloe Eudaly. She has recently been forced to relocate due to being priced out of her longtime location in the heart of the central West Burnside cultural center. Indie music stores, like Ozone records in Portland, were the site where music scenesters would go after the zine store and perhaps before the coffee shop. In Portland all these places were downtown (in one loop), around Powell’s books at 10th and Burnside. At Ozone the walls were thickened with posters of every band you wanted to be, often by the penmanship and comic art of a handful of local poster artists (most notably Mike King). This made for a visual aesthetic to match the feel of the room. If Heatmiser was playing loud in the store, you would sift through records or CD’s, bobbing your head in time.

Heatmiser was signature Portland at the time – many bands used Fender equipment for that jangly American sound (the Byrds, Surf sound, the Beach Boys) but they often added a distortion pedal. The music was mid-tempo but still loud and aggressive. Elliot Smith sang a lot of the songs and in the Gen X mode they reflected a whining rebellious stance of refusing to play at normative modes of work, dress and general conformity. Pond, another local band that spanned the 90s and early 2000s, was even slower, and more forceful. The songs were ironic, to
the point of silliness (“rock collecting can be so hard”) yet they confused mind and body by enveloping their word plays in macabre, brooding music, still in a major key to invoke a very dark pop music feel.

**Becoming Involved, Adding to the Sound, Changing the Landscape**

Dave D., who is a featuring member of bands like Loch Lemond, Norfolk & Western, the Fruit Bats, Menomena, Jolie Holland, and the Corin Tucker Band (frontwoman for Sleater-Kinney) got into the scene through answering an ad on Craigslist.

I looked on Craigslist for keyboards and it turns out Chad Crouch was selling a Farfisa organ and I realized he was Chad of HUSH records and I was pretty starstruck at meeting him because I loved the Decemberists and Norfolk & western. He asked me if I played bass because he needed a bass player for Blanket Music and I lied and said yes. I went home and learned all the bass parts on guitar and then frantically searched on Craigslist for a bass and found one, the one that I still use today, and then I met Mike Johnson and Corrina Repp and I was in the band.

He then went on to address how his single experience contributed to meeting key people and garnering opportunities to join several bands.

Eventually we were in the studio and Adam Selzer was recording us and he approached me and said that he needed a bassist because their bass player was unavailable and then I met Rachel and started playing with them and then I met just about everyone I know in Portland music through people like Rachel.

Adam S. who came to Portland in the late nineties, is known for his aesthetic focus, using vintage instruments and analog recording techniques to create old time atmospheres. After

---

7 Quite stream of consciously the historical antecedent for their sound might be Screamin Jay Hawkins “I put a spell on you” 45 RPM record played at 33. Led Zeppelin’s “Since I’ve Been Lovin’ You” is an influence, albeit with less vocal sexuality. In most music of this time the sex is played down.
working with myself, M. Ward and Peter Buck of R.E.M., he explains the fashion in which new aspirants find him to get recorded in a certain authentic “way.” (He still has a 2 inch reel to reel recorder, in addition to the digital system, that both come through a huge 1970s sound board. Most people by now are onto digital, but not all.)

A lot of people come in and say I love coming in here because it feels so good coming in with the old keyboards and pianos and the openness. A lot of people I work with come back. I’ve recorded a lot of people from out of town, and I think being in Portland makes them inspired because there’s such a rich music community. I’ve had the studio for 15 years and I’ve done a lot of records. Sometimes people refer to records that I’ve recorded to get a certain sound, a certain feel. I think that the studio has a unique sound.

Some recording artists would even try and take the relationship between the warehouse space, the weather and the sound the further confluences. I once had Adam and the assorted crew (music producers volunteering in an almost steady stream) put mics on the roof to catch a particularly heavy rain on the tin of the ceiling above. M. Ward, who now has an international following, sings on a recording he did there of having “left his heart in the Portland rain” (M. Ward on *Transistor Radio*, “Portland Rain”). Some of the sound experiments undertaken there, dropped boxes of glass, using an Optigan that plays bossanova discs as background tracks, and tuning into Mexican radio stations, all reflect the unintentional, thrift store, found object, vibe.

In the heart of the “second wave” of Portland indie rock cohorts, lyrical and historically referential content played into the art of the story. Hard rock still reigned heavy over the community, but in the wake of Elliot Smith’s shining star upon the music scene, and his translocal success in the greater indie music field, things began to change more furtively towards mellower sounds. It was the beginning of the bubble in housing, the rise of indie music to that of cool and significant music, and Portland becoming a hotbed of cool culture, if not a distinct sound.
This further differentiation, especially away from Seattle, coincided with buzz making work of cultural entrepreneurs like filmmaker Gus Van Sant. Tellingly, in the Oscar performance of “Between the Bars” for the film Good Will Hunting, Elliot performed a shaky, introspective version of the song, while Celine Dion sung the theme to Titanic in massive Hollywood style. The local global dialectic in the cultural industry had its contradictory moment on the international stage; this elevation to the general popular cultural consciousness of the outsider artist came at a time when a new cohort of college graduates were reading these signs and looking for city to fit into, and cobble together their audio identity.

**Time and the City: dialectical shifts in sound**

*I'm so glad that my memory's remote*

*'Cause I'm doing just fine hour to hour, note to note*

*Here it is, the revenge to the tune*

*You're no good, you're no good, you're no good, you're no good*

*Can't you tell that it's well understood?*

-Elliot Smith, Waltz #2

The late 1990s, in the wake of the Grunge explosion and the very masculine expression of angst coming out of Seattle and then represented elsewhere with less heralded bands. The particular intersection of place and biography accounted for differences in national notions of the central tenor of the sound, and its combination of hard rock and metal, the music of disaffected white suburbanites (Gaines, 1990). Elliot Smith began to play solo after returning to the city
from Hampshire College on a more frequent basis, but mostly at cafes and Reed College\(^8\). A friend told me there was this thing happening, where people sat on the floor and listened to these songs of hurt sitting cross-legged on the floor without a sound, at times in tears. She handed me a CD of his yet to be released untitled CD with a falling man in yellow over a blue backdrop. This was Thanksgiving 1995.

Immediately I realized this was an avenue of acceptability and artistic authenticity contained in a person with a story and a sound. Dour faced and expressionless onstage, Smith’s virtuosity on acoustic guitar, combining the folk picking of Paul Simon with the power chords of the minor key of Grunge, brought countless audiences to the sticky floors of clubs and balconies to sit rapt in attention to the town crier. Gradually he would retire some of the most ominous songs expressing his personal demons, like “Last Call,” but people would still call for it from the darkness. The light always seemed to bright for his eyes and I can remember him once asking for them to be turned down because he couldn’t see us anymore, in the crowd.

William Todd Shultz (2013) in *Torment Saint* writes of the uncanny comparisons between Kurt Cobain and Elliot Smith’s life trajectories. Living in the Northwest the weather plays a pivotal role in the psychological dispositions of its auteurs. According to Schultz, *Business Day* ranked Portland the #1 most depressed city, and Seattle #20 (Schultz, 2013). Both were anti-jocks in high school that befriended gay classmates. Both wrote songs about their decaying self-worth, with Smith penning “I’m damaged bad at best.”

\(^8\) Reed College is a competitive, small liberal arts college known for advanced scholarship on the undergraduate level in literature and progressive thought, and for the sparkle and fade of highly driven, high strung notable dropouts (My friend G., here, and also, Steve Jobs, to name another).
The lyrical mastery of Elliot Smith, his literary intensity and his intimate and almost psychoanalytic turn in indie music, has had a lasting impact on the audio identity of Portland. Schultz’s perspective on the life and poetry of Smith is from an academic psychologist’s point of view. At one point he caught the meaningfulness of the song *Waltz #2* from overhearing it on his daughter’s computer, a generation afterwards. This experience of listening, in one’s personal space, is conducive towards grounding a musically resonant identity (DeNora, 2010). This kind of listening is attentive, affective, and sticks to your soul.

Exactly ten years after his death an informant, Sarah D., tipped me off. “Check out the hagiographic accounts of Smith in the Willamette Week and Mercury,” she texted. He was being enshrined in the audio landscape of Portland’s collective memory, just as the autumn rains had begun. The writer Lisa Wells, in *the Mercury* magazine piece characterizes her experience with Elliot’s music while walking through the rainy city, as an extension of how the city felt to her, lived. Listening, after Adorno, which is also the title of DeNora’s aforementioned book, is not unlike the experience of music as text, separated from its existence as a product. One can live in resistance to the mattering map of the normal city, on the seedier boulevards that he sings about, displaced and downturned and out of step with an intent-driven time.

As Benjamin suggested, film offered a glimpse into the city that records fragments of the architecture and experience of the flaneur walking in place (Gilloch, 2000). Music, and the experience of listening that Wells alludes to, transports the listener into the affective space of 90s Portland melancholia. Anger and sadness blend seamless in the tone of Smith’s voice as he breathes a visual and aural texture into one’s ear buds while they walk in the rain.
Now on the bus
Nearly touching this dirty retreat

Falling out 6th and Powell,
a dead sweat in my teeth
Gonna walk walk walk
Four more blocks, plus the one in my brain
- ‘Needle in the Hay,’ Elliot Smith, Elliot Smith

As music has come to serve as affective mnemonic devices for the IPhone generation, Portland music had its landscape architect in Smith. Schultz’s book outlines the place memory work that these songs evoke; in an article in the Portland Mercury they even created a map to identify the places mentioned in his songs, entitled “Mapping Elliot Smith’s Portland.” They suggest, “Elliot Smith is the closest thing Portland had to a bard” (Portland Mercury, October 1st, 2013). The scene had many leaders and stalwarts, but as the millennium came to an end the city had a strange single star who had already moved but had made his mark. This low-cost, low rent collection of people, spaces and institutions had grown up, and new acts were moving in with a healthy reverence for the scene and its history.

I remember Larry Crane saying to me at concert back around 2000, when Bush was running, that indie music reflected the political mood of the nation. Blazak wrote about the rise and fall of the economy, and how bohemian scenes expanded with stronger economic prosperity (Blazak, 1991). Times were good before 2000, relatively speaking, and the music was softer and exploring personal relationships to narrative hues. Norfolk and Western was the band that Adam divined; he had a band but they barely needed amplification. In this way they could play at the many lounges that stood in as clubs in that period, from about 1997 to 2003. He saw me first at 17 Nautical Miles, the tiny storefront near Reed College, a highly competitive private university with as many dropouts as graduates making high-minded DIY art in the city.
I saw his band at Bar of the Gods, a red velvet kind of French boudoir lounge in a neighborhood with a few bars and mountain, Mt. Tabor. Matt Ward was in his band, which evoked an Appalachian Americana with California easiness, like Neil Young in another era. M. Ward was also from this crew of San Luis Obispo grads who were making their way into the cultural scene. Matt and I played a few concerts to small audiences, and one had the feeling that his sound and his booming voice and haunting production verve (Phil Spector meets Tom Waits in the recording studio) was going to lead him to a bigger audience.

His connections out of town with Giant Sand bandleader Howe Gelb reflected back on the Portland scene to raise his visibility. M. Ward eventually landed his work on an out of town label, run by Howe Gelb in a desert town, Tucson, Arizona. He was also on a label called Film Guerrero with Norfolk and Western, the label run by John Askew. The sound featured the big reverb of spaghetti western soundtracks, while M. Ward songs are sung in a gravelly baritone over folk blues. More and more bands, especially Adam and the Decemberists, began dressing in a more costumed style of bygone eras; American was not only being evoked in the pedal steel or accordion or Fender amps, but it was being worn as another trope of identity reaching for representations of a vintage American past.

Chad C., friend and the man behind my label, told me I would like Colin Meloy so I figured I would go check him out. He was playing at this little dive bar in a basement called the Rabbit Hole. It was somewhere around 2000, and he hadn’t had a band just yet. He was seated in a corner with just microphone, though I remember he didn’t need it. I recall he did songs about characters from some BBC drama, then a song about letting someone named Steven let their bicycle get stolen, and then he’d move through a medley into Neil Young. The crowd was mixed and few were there to see him. He was a lunch pail singer-songwriter, singing loud and full of a
theatrical tone that was from somewhere else. Kill Rock Stars, the label that represented Sleater-Kinney and Elliot Smith, signed him to a deal not soon after. His band the Decemberists had expanded their sound and had become an exuberant, earnest and literary folk rock band, referencing troubadours and steveadores and characters from a late-Victorian novel world; he was one of the leaders of the second wave of post-grunge Portland indie music.

In the 21st century a new hybridity of local musical identity began to form. Artists seemed to borrow roots from a variety of sounds from the city and region. The audio topography borrowed from the broader landscape of the interstices of the greater Northwest. A *frontier authenticity* of the 21st century - a desire to shed one’s skin, move north and west, to tap into a new, potential self emerged as the music scene became enmeshed with the search for a new affordable west coast city. In Grazian’s *Blue Chicago* (2003) the search for landmarks and songs that reflect the authentic history of Chicago blues, was part of the search for meaning through manufactured iconographies in an age of disenchantment. Authenticity here is a style and ethos - low-key, lo-fidelity and community connected. It’s an underground scene, emplaced and subject to translocal trends, but rooted in specific markers of production and distinction (Kruse, 1993; Straw, 1991; Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 2004). This frontier self is the sense of one’s reflexive potential identity in the moment before the force of spatial processes that Neil Smith alludes to as *the frontier myth* - the normalizing myth of exclusionary gentrification – that soon began to determine the fate of places in the community.

Tim Perry is someone who has been around the music scene, in and around the Oak St. Building scene of warehouse semi-legal housing situations. His band Ages and Ages typify what is hot and signature Portland. In their recent 2014 video “Divisionary (Do the Right Thing)”, created by local creative guru Alicia Rose, Tim begins inauspiciously, by strumming and singing
on an acoustic guitar in a typical Portland craftsman living room. Gradually, the audience is revealed to be members of the music community, and they begin to sing along. Shot in a crisp digital, the viewer feels that sense of camaraderie and almost serial closeness that is a part of the Portland underground infection. Then the camera cuts to a side room filled with small children singing in a children’s choir, somewhat roughly, but with a great deal of spirit. The clothes are thrift store, country cotton, and earth tone floral prints, brown suspenders and fedora hats. One of their songs gained notoriety by being featured on President Obama’s campaign playlist. They, along with Blind Pilot, have supported the Decemberists on the road, which helped their reputation out.

**Spatial Practices of Production in the Scene**

17 Nautical Miles was a white walled windowless room, where bands played on a makeshift stage I watched being built. In summer the sweat was thick and only the initiated could stand the packed, chair-free room. Basements have been key to the house aesthetic, where bands could play where they practiced. In a way you were invited into their thinking space; this breaking of the distance between performer and audience could not be any more pronounced. Tres Shannon put on shows at the X-Ray Café, which was in the city proper, but still a storefront room, dark and full of close bodies. The press eventually got more attuned, perhaps when the music approached the general public through a global/local dialectic, and then came back to Portland as the symbolic value in its cultural midst. (Zukin, 2010: 46).

According to Fine, “we reside in a universe of small groups – of tiny publics” (Fine 2012:19). Subcultures will come to frame the local, and then diffuse it into the larger pop culture stream (Fine, 2012). The transmission of this culture relies on cultural intermediaries (Bourdieu,
which are often from the media covering the unspoilt ‘gritty’ in an out of the way place (Zukin, 2010). In the 21st century, the study of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) and social “connectors” (Gladwell, 2000) takes on a more pertinent tone. Music cultures rise and fall but in this climate, connections between the rise of indie music culture, hyper-bohemies like Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and now Portland, and the incorporation into a much larger taste public have changed the tone of the scene. Articulations in music, style and humor reproduce characters and cultures and show up in the system of symbolic production.

Beneath the denigration and diffusion there is then a theory of practice of cultural capital in the “indie” field (Bourdieu, 1993). This field is translocal, referring to a place like Portland as some marker of identity but constituted in in a culture that is now worldwide and anchored by work as well as style. Work in this case is the social practices of production and distribution anchored by the very relationships that emerge out of the scene. This gets valorized in the Portland “weird” culture at large, as was the case in Paris where they held a “Keep Portland Weird Music Festival in 2012. Those who played spoke of staying up all night in hotels and really getting to know those who have been holding up their end of the bargain in the scene for decades, including Rachel B.:

The organizers said this to her and I don’t remember the exact words, but he just observed the camaraderie amongst each other, and she just said, ‘That’s how we are,’ and we didn’t realize that it was unusual.

They gave Tara Jane her own day to curate and she doesn’t even live in Portland, she lives in L.A….but that’s just the French Filter…Jon Raymond read, and Vanessa showed her films, and I felt really proud of Portland…Malkmus played one night and curated it and Rebecca Gates played one night and curated it. We got to play the Pompidou and there’s a Matisse exhibit upstairs…culturally the French treat musicians more as artists, they brought us over as artists…it doesn’t happen in the United States that much, though it does in Portland. There was an art gallery and they had pictures of Portland on screens.
This description of a loose collectivist band of producers is indicative of the playful rites that comprise the space where things get done and alliances get made. The pressure on this audio identity grows as the commodification of the city as a representation meets the marketing of indie cool in fashion and sound.

**Hipster Identity: The Commodification Trap**

Bound up within the discourse of becoming a Portlander is the ineluctable identity debate about being a hipster. Often derided as the cultural advance scouts for the capitalistic displacement of long time tenants (Smith, 1996), from a personality based perspective, the “hipster” relates to social categories more flexibly and unevenly. According to Mailer (1959), in his take on the “White Negro,” he did not assert that the hipster was trying to become black, or mimic black culture and commandeer its best assets, but that he or she gravitates towards that which is cool, detached and transgressive. Barbara Ehrenreich, on the Beats, noted “the two strands of male protest – one directed against the white-collar work world and the other against the suburbanized family life that work was supposed to support-come together into the first all out critique of American consumer culture” (Ehrenreich in Leland, 2004: 149). For the beats, black culture was their ticket out of the center of that experience, as refugees from the Lonely (Leland, 2004).

Nowadays, the hipster is drawn towards various cultural artifacts, appearing like a trend jumping, shape shifting collector of near era genres and costume of the early 1920s. “Caucasian kitsch—which includes redneck rock, wife beater tank tops, homey Little League t-shirts, corn dogs that package whiteness as a fashion commodity that can be donned or doffed according to one’s dating needs. Post-hip treats whiteness the way fashion and entertainment have historically
treated blackness. It swaths white identity not in race pride but in quotation marks” (Leland, 2004). The symbolic economy commodifies and dilutes cool culture near its source by appropriating it for a larger market. In addition, in studies of hipster culture as of late, this time-dislocated creative identity culture is part of the new urban imaginary that is being commodified, and the “hipster” purposively undercut.

For these consumers, the prevailing marketplace myth is experienced as a trivialization of their aesthetic interests, rather than as a source of identity value. In response, they employ demythologizing practices to insulate their acquired field-dependent social and cultural capital from devaluation. (Arsel and Thompson, 2010).

For those outside the fields of normative social capital and accreditation in work and culture, indie producers and consumers confuse the uninhibited with their aesthetic principles.

For these consumers, the hipster myth is akin to a fun-house mirror that distorts and potentially devalues their cultural interests, aesthetic predilections, and social milieu (Arsel and Thompson, 2010).

In essence, the hipster mythology is a distortion seized upon by the marketplace to appropriate the identity and then turn it into a stigma. In the infamous article, “the Death of the Hipster,” in PopMatters magazine April 2009, they cleverly dissected this dialectic of deviant identity dominating the cultural zeitgeist. In referring to the n+1 magazine symposium on “What was the Hipster?” they point out some key questions themselves. They ask whether there is a hipster at all, or merely “the boogeyman who keeps us from becoming too settled in our identity, keeps us moving forward into new fashions, keep us consuming more “creatively” and discovering new things that haven’t become lame and hipster” (Horning, PopMatters, 2009) In addition, the hipster seems to somehow bear the brunt of the blame for the corruption what we find to represent ourselves in late capitalist frenzy of consumptive identity. “We keep consuming more, and more cravenly, yet this always seems to us to be the hipster’s fault, not our own. One must start with the
premise that the hipster is defined by a lack of authenticity, by a sense of lateness to the scene, or by the fact that his arrival fashions the scene” (Horning, *PopMatters*, 2009).

“(V)ested consumers manage these identity threats by distinguishing their field of consumption from an imposed marketplace myth that has crossed into the realm of cultural caricature” (Arsel and Thompson, 2010).

This has recently become the branding and beguiling of hipster identity in the 21st century. The expansion of the hipster ideal can be seen as an aestheticized expansion of these production cultures into wider society. The hip consumer then serves as the prospector for fertile new sources of art and cultural production within the emerging scene. The symbolic capital built up in alternative scenes, with almost no financial backing, amounts to a “buzz”. Scott asserts that:

Cultural entrepreneurship … may therefore be defined as the carrying out of a novel combination that results in something new and appreciated in the cultural sphere (Scott, 2011).

However, Scott’s depiction of this process as productive of appreciation, obscures the role of musicians in this case, who are producing the culture and the “amateur spaces” that curate the experience in a way that is “authentic” (Zukin 2010: 46). By nurturing the music and art culture in unfinished spaces, with limited licensing and capital, the musicians and scene members themselves build out the spirit of place by hand (Zukin 2010: 47). The development of attention and distinction through subsequent media attention paid to these DIY spatial practices in Williamsburg, resemble the process of building the scene and its textural audio identity in Portland. Todd P., who later moved to Williamsburg, built an all ages clubs in what began as a tiny storefront near Reed College. He promoted the bands and informality of his spaces in Portland and later resurfaced as Williamsburg’s spokesman for the self-made scene.
Hipster distortion and its relevance in the Portland cultural economy has many sources, one of which is the massive influx of post-college bohemians looking to embody the lifestyle of the Portland scene. The representation of Portland in popular culture can and has caused some strain in the unexamined naturalness of Portland life. *Portlandia*, the hit television show on IFC has garnered carefully measured thoughts about its relative value to the city. People think it’s kind of true, and its satire is a form of faint praise. However, it contains plenty of the caricatures that make a certain indie Portland “type” more visible and less opaque. Even before the TV show hit, bands and bodies were moving back and forth between Portland and other hipster enclaves. This globalization of the style culture had the residual effect of watering down its substance. Uprooted form distinct localities (the Chicago scene and its art rock, Boston and its singer-songwriters), the general overwhelmed the particular and covered over the history of the identity with a place name and a brand target.

What appears charming as a style culture soon can feel overwhelming to longtime residents as well. The Mississippi neighborhood was a majority African-American; the music community came alongside a consumer culture that appeared to be a reflection of it. The former rock club La Luna, before that Pine St. in the early 90s, is now filled with offices, including one that licenses music for commercial use. *The New York Times*, in associating the urban chic of Williamsburg, with real estate advertising, led to a perception that it was losing its cultural past, the Polish and Puerto Rican shopkeepers and landlords that offset a monochromatic shift. This has even been referred to as the “portlandification” of Brooklyn, in an article entitled *A Twee Grows in Brooklyn*, referring to the self-consciously 60s retro brand of indie pop (Jeffries, 2011).

In Portland, its isolation still gives it some cover, along with a broader swath of housing to keep its livability factor afloat. However, as the commodification of cool accelerates, how do
communities of work and indie production maintain themselves beneath the hype? Music may feed the city its main attraction but how and in what form can its community weather the storm.

**Resistant Economies and Saving face in the Indie Field**

Following Bourdieu, in the indie field of production, cultural capital includes style and audio taste, having been in college radio, written for press or a blog related to the community, or having recorded in the genre (Arsel and Thompson, 2010). The embodied forms include participation in the places relevant to the aesthetic, the products in the collector’s ethos, and concerts (Arsel and Thompson, 2010). The translocal quality of the indie field is the product of global flows of culture and information that have extended place based actor networks into global commodity chains (Castells, 2009; Giddens, 1984; Bourdieu, 2004). The combination of the cache one earns outside the city through tours in Europe and in concerts in New York, or acceptance to festivals such as CMJ (the College Music Journal Festival) or SXSW (South by Southwest) in Austin, Texas, affects and is affected by locally generated cultural capital. Historically, the outside credibility garnered in the general indie production culture has driven the success of bands in town.

The social capital embodied in one’s connections to the field can result in a feeling of connectedness with the community, moving into a position as an insider, or converting informal or weak ties into stronger more formal ties. Jobs in music related shops or businesses get those with some cultural capital social capital that can extend into becoming tastemakers and notable representatives in the field. However, exchange in a music community characterized is much more akin to gift economies described by Bourdieu (1997) and Mauss (1989) in that “gift economies emerge to provide incentives for social identities using the immediate use-value of
alternative capital” (Scott, 2011). Identity, in this way, is both reflexive (Giddens, 1991) and relational (Hall, 2000).

What people are doing on an individual level is finding the space and situational network to produce and consume within a field like indie, amassing social capital converting that into exchangeable resources for both personal growth and a collective power. Once one sees the opportunities in “saying yes” as Dave D. put it. There are opportunity structures for production, social service based contribution and a broader lived experience around being a local musical contributor. Adam S., in teaming up with Peter Buck from REM for recording, and Scott McCaughy who has played with R.E.M. and the Seattle band the Posies, has invested his energy in accruing community importance through commitment to local things. Pete K. is promoting Care Oregon, the exchange set up by the state to expand health care to more Oregonians, including musicians. Know Your City organization is featuring local musicians on streetcars rolling throughout the city. More and more, independent agents of cultural entrenchment are taking back space and place through embodied collective practices of everyday creativity.

It is more difficult to conduct “business as usual” in a music scene when the stakes are higher – making rent, keeping things looking sharp, and upping the ante on food and pay scales for bigger acts takes it toll. Satyricon was a great hard rock club that was lauded for its raucous shows but also appreciated for the fact that it had a side-door attached to a café you slide into, or a doorman that only needed to know your name. The authentic feel of the scene, once based in part on a less monetized system of exchange, is still the template for the new young vanguard, remaking the resistant underground economy.

New Generations of Audio Aspiration
I waited for Matthieu at the bar of the Doug Fir. I ordered some kind of a smoked whole trout dish that seemed a little refined for the restaurant part of a rock lounge. It was actually the counter of an old Howard Johnson’s type place that shared a lot with a motor lodge. Now it was a retro-hip venue adjoined to the Jupiter Hotel. The Bar and restaurant are the missing link between the old and the new in Portland music; built in a hollowed out old punk bar a major local promoter turned the place into a high end, raw wood log based, neon lit, homage to a 50s lounge, and the opulence of it altered the landscape of this neighborhood on Burnside Ave, and the perception of a ‘good’ music club. He arrives in a cowboy shirt, Nashville era country with inlaid snaps. He’s a big guy, and it he seems to be intrigued by the arrangement; I was alone at the long bar which made it all the more noir.

He told me about his upbringing in Hawaii, and how he had high hopes for making it in music in Portland. Over time he’s settled in to the slow struggle of the rigors of getting heard and getting paid. He went on to speak very frankly about the potential of house shows, and a new mode of value that is outside of the product, but that is bound to the promoter and the “house.” This is the proverbial house, as it can move around and still be connected to a particular house. It creates the small town vibe in a city that has become bigger and more differentiated in the level of commodification of niches of music genres, for neat categorization.

The really cool thing though is there's a lot of bands getting together and throwing house parties and Glass Bones played, and we played one last night it was fucking a ridiculous amount of people there you know? It's almost like the Banana Stand, have you heard of that?

….Yeah, you know, you get a house that you can throw a party at and have a bunch of bands, change $5 at the door, $3 at the door, or something like that. You know that then, everybody can get paid. I think it's, I think a lot of bands are getting together and throwing parties, like last night. It was so interesting to see, like the guys who threw this party and it was like four other bands that were playing. So it's like, you're meeting so many people.
The Banana Stand and house shows go back to the punk circuit and smaller networks of indie music culture. Zines, handbills and Internet newsgroups have historically communicated these in the know events. Now, in the social media age, connectivity allows for a wider call to attendance; consequently, they have grown to the point that beer distribution companies may “sponsor” some of these shows with a small keg or two.

In addition, in speaking about the community at large, he felt strongly that there was enough of a culture of persistence to offset the notion of aging out necessarily. Many bands were on the rise with members in the thirties and forties.

I think that the most people who are in Portland are, relatively speaking, doing stuff in the city in their mid 30s that I've seen. There's lot of young bands as well, but I think it's an interesting kind of thing like my perception of like bands like Y La Bamba or something like that, you know, where majority of the people in the band, one of the dudes in the band is like 60, you know what I mean? People are like "well, instead of trying to be a rock star I guess I'll play some cool fucking music and be an all right person." And I think people respond to that, you know? I mean it helps a lot in a lot of ways because I think it allows for more organic sounds. People are not trying to sell out, because there's nothing to sell out to.

The mode of authenticity germane to the lifestyle of Portland is a combination of the structure of production (Peterson, 2005) and measuring up to an identity that is authentic and undeterred by the trappings of normative viewpoints on ageing out of scenes and participating in traditional vocational art worlds (Fine, 2003). It also has to do with a collective network of exchangeable resources, social wealth from cultural capital. Bourdieu (1984) explains this cultural capital is the dispositions and know-how relative to the field of action; in this case it is an indie world of production and notably the local one in Portland.

Punk rock was heavily theorized by the scholars of the Birmingham school as an identity of refusal and a self-conscious manipulation of symbols towards overturning the commodity
form of rock. The musical form known as indie that emerged from behind the shadow of Punk can be traced to the strain of Punk that went to art school and eventually got their hands around college radio and backwater American towns. If we were to hermeneutically approximate our sociology of music subcultures timeline and say that indie came right after Punk petered out, we could say that indie was a Punk outgrowth that could no longer scare anyone. “The Ramones kept it primitive by pumping out a litany of almost indistinguishable three-chord punk anthems, but are remembered for their raw energy and daring; Beat Happening (from Olympia) was admired for atonality and the propensity of its members to switch around among instruments despite pedestrian ability in each one” (Cesafsky in Heying, 2010: 164).

In 2013 there are cleaner clubs with better sound systems. Doug Fir is one club that is iconic to many journalists and newer residents, and has a great venue space, that is reflective of some of the change in the city. Alternative country is still very front and center; band from Richmond Fontaine to Laura Gibson and Blind Pilot reach for old Nashville with a hard beat and symphonic, anthemic vocal lines at times. Other bands are all-girl bands that may be holding onto the punk ethos that good music is the attitude and soul of your songs and not the virtuosity with which you play. Playing well is a value in such a music city, but showing off is a no-no. No amount of skill can cover up for bad taste. I am reminded of a light bulb joke heard at an indie rock wedding. How many indie rockers does it take to screw in a light bulb? You don’t know. Knowing the little ways to be out of key, behind the beat, tastefully, are the unspoken techniques of inclusion in getting it wrong in just the right way (Becker 1983).

Florida, in his revised edition (2012), has a great deal more to say about the role of music culture in the overall creative attraction of a city. With an eye on economic dynamism, or development over growth (with a nod to Jane Jacobs), Florida goes on to cite the value of
difference and a working diversity of characters as both cultural and economic conditionalities for economic vitality. This approach puts a much greater emphasis on human capital than many theories of post-fordist global urban city planning, which include tax breaks for major employers, big box stores, and large barely present corporations with tiny base operations. Music culture, in the case of Nashville, has blossomed into a multi-scene industry by attracting players, producers and impresarios alike. Through this diversification of human capital Nashville has become the third largest city of music professionals after New York and Los Angeles (Florida, 2012).

It is not, however, simply the sum of human capital that defines the relative attraction of a city for accelerated development. Communication of a place identity is central to the politics of attention in the new urban ecology. Zukin (2010) makes clear the phenomenon of a new authenticity, a culture built on the spirit of these earlier outposts of art in ethnic lower Manhattan, reassembled in a pastiche of vintage shops showcasing the history of spaces, old-time, high-tech coffee shops, and reimagined turn of the century cuisine. It is not important from whence the culture came and what place did it first; it is the spirit of new Portland because the symbolic representations emerge from the underground. The audio identity of the city is the affective economy of intensity, inclusivity, and the cultural memory of sound etched into a heard representation of a shared history.
Chapter 2: Cultural Production and Precariousness in Portland

The shared networks of production and exchange in the music community have become a part of the social fabric of the city. This elevation of artisanal production, local authenticity values, and adhering to a sensible system of emplaced style and community are the calling cards of the burgeoning food culture, visual arts and the craft scene. Becoming a Portlander entails getting in the know, connecting to work and ones neighborhood, and a connected cultural entrepreneurship that is grounded in a DIY philosophy. Whether you are an urban winemaker or a restaurateur there are still routes in, and still often through the audio landscape of the city. However, once inside, a different dialectic emerges, where the pressures of bigger and better and a winner take all economy push against those who want to intermix work and play and live low cost in a bohemian landscape.

I met my community of Portland people through what we made. Some people that I was introduced to, mostly from the Bay area, traded songs in a basement after I was invited into their circle. This led to my meeting the person who for me most embodied the Portland spirit that I now know, although then he was like me, sort of starting out. In fact he embodies some of the qualities that Florida (2002) suggests archetypically embody the spirit of the creative. He at once was awash in productive play, not self-consciously “Bohemian” via resistance to some authority, but able to integrate creativity and work seamlessly.

I was working in a restaurant as a server, when a young man of incredible energy approached me to help him realize his vision. He had great cultural entrepreneurial flair, but lacked some of the organizational acumen necessary to run a space for visual arts. The Everett Station Lofts were on Broadway downtown, on the strip the cuts seedier old town off from the
fancier arts district of the Pearl in Portland. This was the transitional set of live/work galleries - live/work spaces in studio apartments in a loft. We called them fishbowls. We found an artist named Chad who had work up at our restaurant. He saw that he could do what we were doing, better than we were, so he rented his own space two doors down. Two months later he was three times as full. When I walked by I discovered he had a music label for himself. His debut album was entitled, “Portland, Oregon.” When I took it home I fell in love with it. It was his homage to Portland. I wanted to be a part of his live-work scene, and I became part of that label in its infancy.

We recorded our first CD as a homemade project. Myself, Chad, Ben (Barnett of Kind of Like Spitting) and Mike J. set up a simple digital recording studio in Chad’s loft. It was on the corner in the Pearl District, the center of the urban art walk locale in Portland so people stopped and watched as we cut tracks. The drums were downstairs and the vocals and guitar people were upstairs for some sound separation. It was a split-level so there was still some eye contact though we were apart. I recorded a song about a strange irrational “triangle island floating on Sandy Boulevard, that sure looks like me a lot” that I got to “tape” after a long night of bussing tables, still in my black work fatigues. Not ironically, upon entering the field the first thing I noticed was that they efficiently eliminated that odd, unsafe structure and replaced it with new one-way, orderly designed intersection. Portland had gotten a face-lift lately. But actually, that wasn’t the first thing I noticed after setting foot in town via car. I was stopped with twenty or so motorists for an hour to allow the passing of a naked cycling parade. The weird was still present and accounted for, albeit very well organized.
Keeping it Weird (and Clean)

That weirdness was an important part of many an itinerant transplant’s origin story on how they came to make Portland home. This is in spite of the fact that “Keep Portland Weird,” the famous dictum immortalized on the TV show *Portlandia*, is actually borrowed from the dictum “Keep Austin Weird.”¹ This characterization was adopted by Red Wassenich in 2000 while giving a pledge at an Austin Radio Station. He later documented the movement, designed to spur local businesses, in a book *Keep Austin Weird: A Guide to the Odd Side of Town* (Wassenich, 2000). *Weird City: Sense of Place and Creative Resistance in Austin, Texas* (Long, 2010) is a scholarly book from UT Press that underscores the way creativity and resistance via place becomes resilient in the face of potential “Houstonization.”

This was told to me by Rachel B., who as a native and long time participant of the music scene, has seen the yarns spun thick in a community of such an emergent collective memory. Yet the identity of this underground is a complex mix of off-kilter and in process. The place where I got invited into the mix was through a weekly, Sunday night songwriter’s open mic in a Christian rock club that was on an unfinished warehouse floor worth possibly a million in Soho. They served hot cocoa in Styrofoam cups out of an electric kettle. Many of those early shows at Meow Meow related to a more widespread movement of college indie music categorize loosely as indie pop. Rachel B. was well immersed in that scene, and her band *boycrazy*. The label, Magic Marker, was considered twee⁹ centered at the time, melancholic and/or surf tinged

---

¹ Twee (from the *Urban Dictionary*) Something that is sweet, almost to the point of being sickeningly so. As a derogatory descriptive, it means something that is affectedly dainty or quaint, or is way too sentimental. In American English it often refers to a type of simple sweet pop music, but in British
unaggressive 60s pop music that worked the college radio circuit as we did. We played in the studio on air at Cal-Berkeley as we traveled down to Los Angeles. Rachel, as the forward thinking online business and promotions manager of the tour, made sure to get us and ad here a mention there, and sometimes a place to sleep.

**Technology and Social Networks**

In 1999 we were involved in indie pop Internet newsgroups, precursors to social networks on the web that would blossom into media integrated visual and html based pages and interactive sites. Back then it was message threads, although it was all very fruitful. The PDX Pop Now organization and annual festival came out of that resource to chat and set up shows, find places to sleep and communicate news about music and this specific branch of the indie music scene. The year I moved to New York the festival, PDX Pop Now was hatched to expand upon the list. Cary Clarke, who was one of the founders of the festival and has helped to turn it into a 501c3.

Now in the non-profit sector, PDX Pop was gearing up to have its first festival of Portland indie pop music in 2003; I had organized and promoted many a small local and out of town show via its Internet newsgroup pipeline. Now it had become a formal organization, possibly at the very moment formal organizing in the rock scene had transcended stiff and uncool. Cary Clarke and I sat down at the Townsend Teahouse on Alberta St. on one gloriously sunny May afternoon. I had never met him but everyone I knew raved about him, and through

---

English it is used much more widely for things that are nauseatingly cute or precious. It comes from the way the word sweet sounds when said in baby talk. The band Belle and Sebastian are the Beatles of twee.
the snowball technique of amassing names of those that I ought to interview, his name turned up like a planted card in a fixed deck. I asked him how he came to be involved in the connection between the music scene and the city, and he paused and slightly grinned. He had a lot to say on the matter.

There’s been all these great records made in Portland recently and they were all touring nationally but are still playing to the same 5 people in town and we thought, what can we do in town...there was this meeting at the Lucky Lab(rador Pub) in South East Portland without any agenda or real structure...an answer that people all rallied around was some sort of music festival. There were about 14 or 15 people who organized the first PDX Pop festival. Locally I was really excited about what I was hearing and seeing. Just through that first process of organizing around this music community.

He also expressed the complexity and schizophrenia of constantly shifting between various levels of role invention, in order to be a purveyor of local music while still paying the rent and being an artist.

I stayed on with PDX pop when I realized it was going to be an ongoing non-profit organization with a role to serve. I was on the board from 2004 to 2009. I was touring with band “at dusk”. I then started writing a local music column for the Portland Mercury in 2007 called, “Our town could be your life.” I was interviewed by a then reporter and asked to stay on. Full title of what else I was doing was a Russian English language interpreter at the Parkrose Middle School.

Cary’s story goes on and then on to his next venture, which was as the liason for arts & culture for the city of Portland under then mayor Sam Adams. What he continued to stress was the openness of the city to extend resources and the mayor to push forward an arts agenda with musicians and the music scene at the helm. As was pointed out in other interviews, RACC (the Regional Arts and Culture Council) has continued to create more grants for musicians and music related work that doesn’t fit neatly into the coded language of grant-writing and elite cultural capital often associated with the conceptual and visual art world.
Cary Clarke on the city, the non-profit sector and music:

Before I worked at the city “PDXpop Now” got their federal 501c3 status in 2008. We went to RACC (the Regional Arts and Culture Council) and they were extremely helpful in helping us write a grant that at first was unsuccessful but then we got one. It has been interesting to see Oregon as a state move beyond what was acceptable to be funded publicly…The Oregon Cultural Trust had testimony from the PDXpop on their mailer. They were saying, “look, we don’t cater to this high art conception.” …Also, those are real jobs in those non-profits for working artists and musicians. The mayor, had a town hall for Act for Art in 2009, and I remember Sam being on stage and there was sort of a tough love moment and he said, “look, all of you on stage who work in arts and culture are doing a lot but you are also the worst organized interest group in Portland and if you got together you would realize there is a lot more support out there than you think there is.”

Mayor Sam Adams (now former) has done a great deal for music, sports (the Portland Timbers soccer team have developed a fanatical following, taking over the old minor league baseball stadium near downtown), and arts in the schools. The social wealth of the indie music scene, as felt by the success of bands like the Decemberists, has begun to gain relevance to larger structural forces of cultural policy. When the mayor took Cary Clarke, the organizer of PDX Pop Now festival, onto his staff as Arts and Culture Coordinator, he was the first mayor to take that area as his own. Previously, mayors have let that agency go other city council members. He had already had a concert at city hall and had local bands playing on the city’s hold music. Now, this networked set of actors with their established principles of resource sharing have begun to make space for themselves at the table of government as the underground scene develops new strategies in reaction to the hype.

Then I was involved in the outreach efforts for PDX Pop. Bring local musicians into schools and trying to increase all ages’ music access. That was the first time I got involved with public policy and music. In the Mercury I wrote about a venue

---

10 The hold music project was set up by the mayor’s office to pay local musicians to have their songs play in the background of the phone system at city hall. When a caller is on hold, you can hear Portland bands playing.
that was zoned as a Hare Krishna temple and the city wasn’t sure if they would zone it as a live music space. My real dealing with the city began in 2006 when then commissioner Adams asked us to do a concert at city hall and asked us if we could do hold music for the city. In other cities the DIY arts community is desperately trying to get the attention of the city, but in this case it was like “hey you guys are doing cool stuff, why don’t you come do it at city hall.”

In this moment, with the mayor being an indie music fan, and the profile of acts like M. Ward and the Decemberists growing nationwide, some people stepped up to the plate and championed the role of the music community in spatial development and the “branding” of the city.

In July of 2013 the Willamette Week newspaper in Portland was running a where are they now on the bands of the first PDX Pop Now showcase in 2003. Many of them have phased out into part-time musical output – most of them are still in Portland and some are at the forefront of the scene 10 years on. Here is a smattering of that report which serves as an ethnographic time capsule of aging out, hanging in and the precarious road of a local producer.

**9:40, the Wanteds**

THEN: After a last-minute cancelation, a call went out to Tommy Harrington, who hauled in his keyboard, guitar and drum machine and did his one-man band shtick.

NOW: After being the subject of a 2011 documentary, Harrington moved on to acting, appearing in a local production of Sam Shepard’s *Fool For Love* in April.

**10:25, Empty Set**

THEN: “Big guitar pop tunes with harmonies galore,” says PPN board member Jayme Caruso, who produced a later incarnation of the group.

NOW: Went through multiple lineup changes and became the Contestants. Currently building a studio and plotting its third album, says member and PPN co-founder Josh Kirby.

**11:05, Corrina Repp**

THEN: Smoky-voiced singer-songwriter known for writing sparse, hushed confessional.
NOW: Repp is on a break from Tu Fawning, the noir-pop outfit she formed with 31Knots’ Joe Haeg in the late 2000s.

11:45, Wet Confetti

THEN: A dark-hued art-rock trio.

NOW: Evolved into the dark-hued dance trio Reporter. Drummer Mike McKinnon owns french-fries cart Potato Champion.

12:25, Sunset Valley

THEN: Portland’s next big thing, playing tight guitar pop.

NOW: After the band was dormant for many years, leader Herman Jolly tentatively revived Sunset Valley in 2011, though all it has done so far is played a gig at Mississippi Studios two years ago.

The takeaway from this jagged-edged timeline is that what seems to blossom and flourish in the local music scene is often contingent upon making a living, keeping the band together or the fleeting attention span of the underground music scene\textsuperscript{11}. As is expressed in Zukin’s conception of “cultural entrepreneurship,” one has to make their mark on their community through engaging with the sense on the ground of authentic creation and attractive creativity in a broader mediated sphere (Zukin 2010). The dialectic between Portland locally and its distinctions in a global cultural marketplace have pushed the symbolic code of production out of the local and into fields like international food carts. People come to music for many things, including, “non-instrumental orientations—such as the resurrection of moral economies (Banks, 2006); sub-group solidarity around cultural production which reinforces social bonds (Cheal, 1988); and the sheer sociable pleasure of making culture (Finnegan, 1989; Merrill, 2010)” (Scott, 2011). Through this lens, this timeline serves as a time capsule highlighting the meandering

\textsuperscript{11} Will Straw (1991) cites Mackenzie Wark (1991) as doing an excellent job mapping the cycles of circulation of commodities into and out of fashion in the post-fordist economy.
currents of change in people’s trajectories, in an open-ended scene. People have turned to small business, an expanded cultural press, and food as outgrowths of the cultural economy of the underground music community (Zukin 2010).

In Richard Florida’s self-reflective piece, “Is Portland Really Where Young People to Retire?” he questions the assumptions set forth in the mocking *Portlandia* piece that suggest people wake up at 11, go work at coffee shops and essentially have no ambition. He cites Portland State University scholars Jason Jurjevich and Greg Schrock examinations of Portland’s ability to attract YCE’s or young, college-educated people.

Table 1: Top Ranking Metros with Demographic Effectiveness and Net Migration Values, Migrants Ages 25-39 with a Bachelor’s Degree or Higher, 2008-2010 (Jurjevich and Schrock in Florida, 2012).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Metro</th>
<th>Demographic Effectiveness (DE)</th>
<th>Total Net Migration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Louisville, KY-IN</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>3,045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Portland, OR-WA</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>7,530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Seattle, WA</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>12,780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dallas-Fort Worth, TX</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>14,573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pittsburgh, PA</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>4,583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>San Antonio, TX</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>5,377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Houston, TX</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>10,382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Austin, TX</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>6,605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Washington, DC-MD-VA</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>20,907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Tampa-St. Petersburg, FL</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>4,112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Charlotte, NC-SC</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>4,160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>San Jose, CA</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>6,101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Boston, MA-NH</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>10,501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Kansas City, MO-KS</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>2,897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>San Francisco-Oakland, CA</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>11,007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Top 50 MSAs</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>224,967</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 2008-2010, 3-year estimates. Calculated by authors.

This table, using the metric of “Demographic Effectiveness,” makes the case that after the financial crash of 2008 Portland still ranked second among top 50 cities in attracting and keeping college-educated migrants (total net migration). In addition, they found that net in-migration was heavily weighted towards those with higher education.
Jurjevitch and Schrock importantly concluded that this in-migration was supported by lifestyle and amenity culture and the “consumer city” thesis championed by Harvard economist Ed Glaeser (Florida, 2002). More importantly, they bring up ‘the amenity paradox’ – the notion that the attractiveness and amenity value of a city draws more people to the region but additional growth pressures have the potential to erode the quality of life that makes the region attractive in the first place (Jurjevich and Schrock in Florida, 2012). Joe Cortright, economist and demographer at the Oregon Council of Economic Advisors, points out that “the number of 25-39 year old college educated (people) running their own businesses is about 50 percent higher than the average for large metros. This high degree of entrepreneurship is a positive for the regional economy. It also shows a strong DIY culture; if the economy doesn’t provide you a job, make your own” (Cortright in Florida, 2012).

As amenity culture brings in a talented, well-educated workforce, those with cultural capital via the music scene are compelled to further commodify and diffuse their mode of
cultural production in the face of difficult jobs picture. This is not a thesis of uplift through a creative economy. Rather, it is a snapshot of the post-fordist globalization of the value of the city, here in a self-promotional mode, as an adaptation to a still limited jobs culture.

**On Making Culture: From Music to Food**

Part of the expanded economy radiating out from the core of the music scene is the identity driven cultures of food. Rebecca C., now a member of Wild Flag (with Carrie B from *Portlandia* and Janet W.), and a touring member of other bands as well, shared her story of coming through town with the Minders, a band from Colorado, and the welcoming spirit of everyone she met. She was taken to Dots in the morning, and iconic 50s style diner with pinups and polka-dots, and offered the gravy cheese fries, which sealed the deal for her. As others have echoed, Portland is a place where upon first entry you are offered a chance.

As Alicia R. recounted, most people come to Portland doing one thing, and then feel at liberty to remake oneself and try their hand at something else. She cited Andy Ricker as a case in point. He was a house painter she said, before traveling to Southeast Asia and bringing Portlanders a taste of Asian street food. Now, he is a famous Portlander after having his Pok Pok restaurant make the leap from Southeast Portland to Brooklyn, and then to Anthony Bourdain’s TV show. In the same vein Naomi Pomeroy, now a televisual “Top Chef” and owner of Beast restaurant, had taken a trip through Southeast Asia and begun at the bottom, bussing with me at Il Piatto in Portland, before embarking on Ripe PDX. This was a monthly communal supper in a warehouse space that featured, in rotation, almost all the chefs that are now the foundation of the Portland restaurant scene.
Ricker was quoted as saying, in reference to food, that “there are tons of people going at it in sort of an indie rock way, mostly because they can” (Cegefsky in Heying, 2010: 78). This is an example of the force of an attitude that constitutes more of cultural production than music itself, although transferred from the more collectivist, DIY scene. Most musicians interviewed talked of getting an opportunity out the gates and getting a fresh start. The fact that the cost of living is kept lower than most west coast cities, coupled with the sheer volume of micro-communities of production, set the conditions that gave rise to Portland culture and creativity.

The food cart scene is the most ‘indie rock’ of the local food institutions, mostly because it was an outgrowth on experiments that were creative, DIY and circumvented larger distribution and bureaucratization networks. Portland is well known and a pioneer in the creation of whole lots of carts regulated after the fact and embraced as a cultural opportunity by the city. Furthermore, they have been more reflective of Portland’s larger Asian immigrant population and other diversity initiatives. In 2013 the city adopted a program to provide tamale vendors, going door to door with coolers, shiny 50s looking aluminum push carts to vend with. Chef’s both trying to create something new and authentic (like the Viking Soul Food cart\(^\text{12}\)) and one’s that just want to do it their own way and have a single food fantasy, can get involved.

**Self-Reflection #1:** The food carts are buzzing at a low-energy pace as it rains on the alleyway where they sit. People eat in shirt-sleeves in shades of scruffiness in the mid-afternoon. It is June but it is chilly, in the 60s but with effort. The rain is coming down but people are eating outside under sight awnings at picnic tables. I can’t get into it so I

---

\(^{12}\) Viking Soul Food is a red food van with Norwegian flags around it that sits in the communally rented parking lot on Belmont street around 42\(^{\text{nd}}\) avenue. They share generators as well. They make a wrap with Lefe, a potato crepe, and stuff it with radishes, curried chicken, cilantro and a special sauce, for one. This, somehow, is Viking Soul Food - a riff on a take of a re-creation of a misbegotten memory of a national food.
slide into one of the adjoining decks of the twenty or so additional restaurants on this half-mile stretch of Mississippi. I did sample a tofu bowl, with a peanut sauce and some kale that was delicious, and served in a biodegradable container. No one at the establishment questioned whether I was patronizing their restaurant or another one in the lot. The rain tapped on the corrugated tin overhang as I ate. When I was through and went to leave, the recycling was well marked.

Field Notes 6/10/2012

Portland is still an example of a place that affords the opportunity of finding oneself in the city grounded within networks of mutual necessity. This is a product of a symbolic economy of style and play as a form of work, and commitment to an underground scene economy. This model contrasts the cultural recipe put forth by Florida (2002) when he asserts that cities ripe for music have the most music professionals and thus professional opportunities (2012: 157). But what does it take to gain inclusion, and to avoid the transactional affinities that develop with more complex social geometry? In addition, can there be a model of urban development around the rise of a symbolic economy that sustains enough work and residential affordability in a more competitive economic culture?

Made in PDX: Artisanal Economy and Cultural Capital

More recently, the agency potential of the indie actor has been met by some of the actions of the city. The social wealth of the elevation of the indie music scene, as felt by the success of
bands like the Decemberists upon those of us living outside of the city, begins to gain relevance
to larger structural forces of cultural policy. When the mayor took Cary Clarke, the organizer of
PDX Pop Now festival, onto his staff as the Arts and Culture Liaison, he was the first mayor to
take that area on as his own. He had already had a concert at city hall and had local bands
playing on the city’s hold music. Now, this networked set of actors with their established
principles and mode of barter/resource sharing have begun to make space for themselves in the
cityscape, as a counterbalance to the amenitized version of the authentic underground scene
develops in reaction to the hype. That is why, as Heying rightly states, it is wise to promote a
local, place based version of what he calls the “artisanal” culture, as opposed to putting “biker
shorts on a Sunday cyclist” (Heying, 2010: 298).

Charles Heying, in his book Brew to Bikes: Portland’s Artisan Economy, lauded the post-
fordist small production related culture he called “Artisanal Portland” (Heying, 2010). Heying is
an Urban Studies professor at Portland State University, and through his study, he recruited
researchers to illustrate that ethos and cultural landscape of production scenes in the city.
Artisanal production refers to things that are made to last and improve with time, things that
engender connection with the maker, and sustainable, meaningful small-group networks of
exchange. This mode is not on “one or the other side of the production/consumption coin” and it
creates “democratically distributed wealth” (Heying, 2010: 56). He also asserts that in creative
cities, marked by flexible labor markets and shifting needs, these kinds of small-scale production
schemes, catering to knowledgeable patrons, provide a sustainable culture that promotes place.

This community production of culture is a crucial component of what has set Portland
apart from a general conception of a city economically benefitting from its creative class. Its
unique attribute of a middle tier craft culture allows for artistic actors to thrive and develop their
artistic autonomy. This autonomy cannot be romanticized, however marketable and generative it has been within its scale. It is apparent from the psychic struggles and compromises of musicians that a purely consumptive hipster culture employing an artistic “service class” has not simply subsidized a utopian of bohemian localism. Amidst this struggle, alternative forces of creative cooperation rebuild a ransacked scene economy upon the networks that remain.

**Food Carts and the PokPok Explosion**

December C, a booking agent, promoter and long-time facilitator of musical entrepreneurship in the southern-looking acoustic indie or alt-country scene in Portland, had a lot to say about the opportunity Portland affords new enterprises in and around the music scene.

“One thing is my boyfriend is from Boston and then he went to Ohio, and one thing he says is ‘no one will ever tell you no here. Like if you have a dream no one will tell you, no, that will never work.’” We also spoke about the ability for people to shed one skin and move on to another vocation. The following chef has a packed outpost in Red Hook, Brooklyn but came out of the Portland independent music scene. You know like, I remember when Andy started PokPok, the little foodcart. All the musicians were saying, "we're going to go eat at Andy's food cart." They just were supportive. Andy was like; "I don't want to paint houses anymore." "I've been going to Southeast Asia for the last ten years and this is what I want to do." So everybody was just like all right, we're going to help Andy the only way we know how, we're going to go eat there. And then if it's a business that artists support, the mainstream really latches on to it I think.

Differently from the top down or knowledge elite (Eater NYC website now has a Eater Portland site) conception of determining what is good in the food culture, Portland still relies on word of mouth, creativity factors and who is doing the enterprise. In the contemporary moment a critical culture of press, such as Eater PDX, etc. has been set up, bolstered by international and
New York Times acclaim, but it’s still essentially a “point and describe” culture. Most descriptions varied from, “you gotta check out the one on upper Belmont” (which we had to then be walked to), or there’s this Chicken Thai cart downtown that will blow your mind (Nom’s) which probably in the most authentic street food I’ve eaten in the United States, and did just that – blow my mind.

Similar to the process of cultural entrepreneurship described in Williamsburg, Brooklyn (Zukin, 2010), the food economy has risen beyond the word of mouth culture that gave it its original cachet. Eater PDX is an outgrowth of the app phenomenon Eater NYC, which creates heatmaps of where the hot restaurants of the moment are. Only when a city achieves a critical mass do they earn a separate app for themselves. Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital was exemplified by the culinary; taste in the literal sense was associated with class and status (teachers versus industrial workers), to account for different modes of consumption for those with varying habitus of value in food desire. “The manner of presenting and consuming food, the organization of the meal is …considered as much in terms of shape and colour (like works of art) as of their consumable substance. This whole commitment of stylization tends to shift the emphasis from substance and function to form and manner” (Bourdieu, 1979) He goes on to suggest, in a footnote here that “the preference for foreign restaurants rises with the level in the social hierarchy” (Bourdieu, 1979). This positioning, which is an embodied practice, is also learnable through educational cultural capital, and much of this consumption is aspirational.

**Stumptown and the Rise of the Barista**

Stumptown Coffee began in a single, southeast Portland coffee shop in 1999 by Duane Sorenson. He brought together musician-baristas, Danish design and craft roasted artisanal
coffee on a big vintage machine. The machine sat front and center in the Division street storefront, burlap bags denoting real places of origin hanging over the piles of freshly roasted coffee. This fresh bag wasn’t for show, but was the real source material slovenly strewn on the floor. Right away I recognized many baristas as fellow musicians. They were allowed to tour as part of their unwritten contract with the company, and it became a spoke in the wheel of advancing creativity in Portland while increasing the social wealth in the music scene. If you want to leave town you find people to have your shifts covered, and you’re on your way. Having a job that lets you tour is key to building that subcultural capital which has generated so much outside support for the music scene as it has gone global.

In investigating how, at least in the early years, people managed to take off work in order to tour I expected some kind of an institutional response. However, the more I probed the more it appeared that management, echoing the sentiment of the ownership, was willing to say “yeah dude, that’s cool man,” to whatever short term leave request was related to music and the arts. They always have had a steady supply of baristas looking for a shift or two to fill the vacancy. In addition, for every party, and opening event local bands would be promoted and play in a coffee shop, such as now national act the Thermals (former employees) and up and comers Red Fang.

The cultural forces that socially constructed this expanding universe of work are multiple. Speaking with a roaster in Richmond, Virginia whose company was born out of the training program established at Stumptown in Portland, I gained some insight into the broader forces at work in the groundswell of artisanal labor in the localist cultural economy. She said to me “thank goodness for the collapse of the education system, or there wouldn’t be people like us. I do this because it’s my passion and it fuels me.” It isn’t only to support the arts that these self-motivating independent crafts are proliferating; Echoing Crawford’s From Shopclass as
Soulcraft: An Inquiry Into the Value of Work, people are buying in to the challenges and satisfactions of community bound, manual work (2009).

Creepy Doughnuts

Ten years ago Voodoo Doughnuts arose, literally, out of the side of Berbati’s Pan, a Greek restaurant and lounge that became the central downtown hub of Portland’s nineties rock community. Tres Shannon was one of the great impresarios of the rock scene back then as well. He booked clubs like the O’Hell and X Ray Café, which were the backbone of the all ages scene, and then took over the helm of Berbati’s around the turn of the millennium. After Berbati’s closed, he probably surprised many by using his outsized rock n’ roll personality, replete with purple boots and feather boa, and opened Voodoo Dounuts, specializing in rock themed dounts for the late night crowd. He was always a nurturing force and a symbol of the edgy core of the music world. Now, he turned to a “trashy” food of a decadent age, combined with goth punk imagery of hard living and nocturnal badness. Situated at the corner of where the street walking prostitutes, drug addicts, rock n’ rollers used to walk, and blocks from the famous Mary’s Club all nude girl revue, Voodoo seemed to stand in for all things authentically dark and Portland that could be consumed now the edges had been softened on the downtown scene.

Just this week it has been announced that Voodoo Donuts is opening an outpost in Denver. This fact doesn’t strike one as particularly unusual since many of the Portland branded “authentic” companies are hitting other cities and reproducing Portlandness for a wider audience. The idea of constructing a branded consumption of place doesn’t need to be place based anymore. The idea of authentic value has been replaced by the quality of the reproduction and the dignity of the process, as opposed to being in the place where it came from.
In his discussion of the shift from Fordism to a post-fordist economy, Heying describes Portland as avoiding the shift from production to consumption that characterizes our age. The key to this attachment to place, he thinks, is not just the idea or symbolic economy of the place, but what he terms the artisanal economy of Portland. The social and moral construction of production, consumption and value is part of a continuous local moment fed by patronage and networks of exchange (Heying, 2010). A good example of this is the bike community.

**Bike City**

The first impression one gets when they think of bicycle initiatives in the American city is akin to the work of the government to create safe lanes in places such as New York City. Portland Oregon was rated the #1 bike city in the U.S., with 180 bike lanes and 79 off-road trails (Bicycling.com). Bike *structure* is now something that cities increasingly pat themselves on the back for; beyond New York, it is a relatively inexpensive way to improve transportation infrastructure and to “go green.” Bike *culture* is emergent and often disregarded in the city as subcultural or daredevil (Kidder, 2008). As Heying portends, the artisanal and networked value sets of biking are established by underground norms. Similar to the music scene, cyclists in Portland not only fought traffic and established their own critical mass culture to take back the streets and announce their presence in the space of the roadway, but they have created an apprenticeship culture of repair and reuse as well.

Recently, a city bike activist and mentor to many had fallen ill with a life threatening disease. Pleas and pronouncements and calls to fund her on *Kickstarter* came spilling out onto facebook, many from those who overlap into the rock n’ roll and comic book creator scene. The bicycle movement has grown to the point that the city has built protective elements into stop
lights and street design; the community however still acts like it needs each other to survive on a visceral level. In cycling more than music, the low level of health care carriers is more auspicious because of the rate of injury and danger inherent in being a city biker. Cycle culture in Portland includes a naked bike ride numbering in the thousands, Hood to Coast races that involve hundreds of miles of city and mountain road racing, dedicated bike lanes on bridges and main thoroughfares. According to bikeleague.org, Portland is the only city over 150,000 people to get a platinum rating for its bike policy, planning and initiatives. But it emerged from DIY bike makers and fixers, most notably Citybikes. This is an excerpt from its statement of organization:

Citybikes has been a worker-owned cooperative since 1990. In a nutshell, this means that the workers own and run the business. We share responsibility and profit equally among the worker-owners.

Citybikes currently employs 20-27 workers, 6 of whom are co-owners. Because we are equals, Citybikes has no managers. We run the business through a series of monthly committee meetings, at which we practice consensus decision-making. We share all tasks, from pondering which product lines to carry, to maintaining the buildings, to mopping the floor. Everyone that works at Citybikes is a trained mechanic, even our bookkeeper.

This place embodies practice that Richard Sennett illustrates in his book *Together*, which underscores the relevance in cooperation in work and discursive life (Sennett, 2013). In citing 19th century idealists such as John Ruskin, he marks the freedom to do, partly for oneself and partly for service, is the hallmark of a workshop culture. This is embodied here, and worker cooperatives like Stumptown Printers, the letterpress art printers, occupy a special place in the community.

Cultural values, and networks of community have made the city overlap with forms of symbolic exchange that attract cultural industries relevant to the Portland “lifestyle”. The Bicycle Transportation Alliance (BTA) say on their website that they provide a service to promote a “sustainable, healthy, community centered” alternative mode of transportation. They provide
legal services to those injured while biking, co-promote events related to biking awareness, and advocate for bike culture politically. They recently teamed up politically with Bud Clark, the famous bike riding mayor of Portland from the 1980s, to run an event called “Expose yourself to biking,” which references an image of the mayor apparently flashing a bronze statue with the subheading “Exposé Yourself to Art.” This is in coordination with Pedalpalooza, an event celebrating bicycle culture, underground bicycle detailing and jousting on wheels.

In Portland, the admixture of leisure, subculture and work/play continuity is no better met by the city’s goal to be a bike friendly city. The BTA has offered plans, many of which have been or are being put into action, which cite commuting, amenity retail corridors and leisure. They promote a ‘cycle track,’ which is a lane protected with a concrete barrier from traffic, as the most sensible way for riders to move in and out of retail areas noticing new ones, for instance, and being valued as seeing and witnessing passers through the city (BTA blueprint for the city, 2013).

Cycling provides a marker of community activity that is connected to work and play and their interconnectedness; many Portlanders ride to work in the rain with business satchels, khakis, plastic overpants and Columbia jackets. This new normal, with separate bike lanes and office bike culture riding side by side with grungy messengers, fixed-gear single speed hipsters, is at the center of symbolic universe of Portland, and ideas about getting to “work.” For a time, Portland had one of the earliest national conceptions of the bike share program, started in 1994. In Portland’s inimitable subcultural style, the Yellow Bikes were low-grade bicycles that were just left about to take around and leave them where they lie. Due to vandalism and theft, the program eventually was shelved. Alta Bike Share is set to open a city sponsored bike share program Spring 2014. It is the same company that runs the program in the city of New York.
Looking at Florida’s conception of the Creative Class, the useful takeaway from this is to acknowledge the shift towards the valorization of symbolic goods and services infused with a spirit of place that can be consumed. Most often it is possessed through consumption in an activity that supports authenticity and the cultural memory of home. It will be hard to see the city grow financially, economically and creatively alone from the amenitized version of the artisanal economy. However, the rise of social leisure groups around the city, such as Kickball leagues, bike aficionados, preservationists and the rabid followers of the Portland Timbers Major League Soccer squad, signal a renewed incorporation within a “home city” as a value in itself.

Creativity, Agency and Alienation

The vanguard potential of the Creative Class in the *Rise of the Creative Class* inspires Richard Florida to suggest that thinking independently is a hallmark of creativity, and one needed to lift themselves into the creative economy (2002). In his revised volume, Florida cited Matthew Crawford’s *Shopclass as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work* (2009), and challenged his thesis of craftwork as value unto itself, arguing that it is actually more a function of “being your own boss” that drives the creative endeavor (2012: 44). He also refers to the growing importance of location as a value for creative people post 2008. Alienated from traditional the job structure, globalized and deteritorialized creatives are rooting themselves in places that offset the risk of economic freelancing. This acknowledgement of the agency of situated actors in places with high location quotients speaks loudly of the contingent nature of the culture worker in the creative economy. In a recent discussion at a wedding with a friend who was given the *Rise of the Creative Class* as part of an ad development campaign for BMW, she found the argument compelling in general. However, companies all around her, including the one
she works for, were downsizing creatives while further expanding the creative economy on paper, as “work” as we know it is further dematerializing.

Crawford, in his book cited above, quoted Hannah Arendt: “The reality and reliability of the human world rest primarily on the fact that we are surrounded by things more permanent than the activity by which they were produced, and potentially even more permanent than the lives of their authors” (2009: 32). Making things that last beyond men is one of the hallmarks of men. Much of the work in crafts and the layering of even music stickers in music venues like the Old Satyricon, now made into a documentary, concern a hands-on approach to things. Dan D. would keep going out on the road with the van with the carburetor he rigged to keep running; Tony from the Portland band Norfolk and Western built an old time radio contraption he could sit in to make noises that sounded like he was tuning in 1948.

In a 21st century context the highly mobile post-fordist culture industry poses some problems for artists and musicians trying to claim a slice of their community, and work with their hands. The music maker in Portland, like in Wicker Park, is considered part of the core of the signifying practices that give a place culturally exchangeable value (Lloyd, 2006: 162). This highly symbolic field of production, coupled with the observed phenomenon of aging out, suggests that their career trajectory lies with the content purchasers, cultural intermediaries and technological elites (Negus, 2002). Leaders, lawyers, luddites and outliers have all made grand pronouncements as to how the creative lower middle class is going to handle these new wrinkles in the expanding cultural economy of lifestyle and music. Thomas Frank, in a 2002 piece in Harper’s Magazine, his reputation made for his 90s work, Commodify Your Dissent, addressed the new, celebrated, potential for creative ascendency in society:
…the (issue is the) idea that creativity was the attribute of a class — (a) class Florida identified not only with intellectuals and artists but also with a broad swath of the professional-managerial stratum... The reason these many optimistic books seemed to have so little to do with the downward-spiraling lives of actual creative workers is that they weren’t really about those people in the first place (Frank, 2002).

In a Big Data world quality resonates, proximity enervates and success percolates. What then, of cooperation, handiwork and discontinuities?

Portland is an emerging dynamic site of this struggle. With one foot in the hybridized arena of technology aided distribution and production, and another in the DIY underground, the anomic state of the present cultural economy poses a variety of new challenges to city dwellers. Why aren’t the truly creative drivers of the re-enchantment of place on the ground, via innovative music and business, appreciated structurally? How is economic growth and lifestyle vitality not concurrent with economic prosperity? What are the movements of place-work and collective memory that tell the true story of this affective colonization of working spaces?

*Reflections on a loss of a Space:*

Rachel C. Blumberg (as posted on facebook)

Chloe Eudaly posted the following this morning and I think it's really important, so well stated, and wanted to share (and not just for Portland too)...

Dear Portland, A big part of what's going on in the retail landscape that you don't like is down to who owns the commercial property and what their priorities are. For most landlords it is extracting every last dollar from their tenants that they can. This is not sustainable. This is not the way to build vibrant neighborhoods and communities. This is not the way to support long-term success and living wages. And in the end it harms the land-owners interests although most are too greedy and shortsighted to see it. While many big businesses are getting PAID to be here (through tax abatements and other forms of corporate welfare), small businesses -- who provide the most jobs collectively and make our city awesome -- are nickel and dimed to the brink of existence. I see three solutions -- a commitment by existing landlords to provide affordable and secure commercial spaces (maybe they could get corporate welfare for this?), action by the city to preserve affordable and secure commercial spaces (commercial land trusts?),
and small businesses buying their own buildings (SBA?). Many people seem to believe that gentrification and displacement is inevitable, part of the natural order of things, but it doesn’t have to be. Let’s think ahead to what our ideal communities would look like and work backwards in order to figure out what we need to do now.

Chloe’s call to arms represents another issue encroaching upon all aspects of knowledge labor and the cultural industries. The role of the precariat and precarious labor in general play into the crisis befalling creative workers in a strained economy, especially those who weren’t embedded into the marketplace as stakeholders in the first place.

Jared M. came to Portland from Southwest Colorado with an idea for a small community business. His family business was a tiny hotel connected to a hot springs.

I was able to see what a tiny business looked like, what worked and what didn’t…I have to give a lot of credit for my parents for giving me the idea of entrepreneurship, hard work, dedication…We landed in Portland because a bunch of our friends landed in Portland. We hit the ground running, going to shows all the time. We couldn’t believe that we could go to shows five nights a week, coming from LA where everything is so spread out, you know we were able to go to gallery openings, be involved in indie crafts…I guess we were like living in a different way as before and had left over money. We were meeting lots of people, like comic book artists and I had learned how to silk screen. We had made this name up Tender Loving Empire.

Jared decided to set up a shop to represent everything he did through his label, house his silk-screening shop, and distribute crafts and ephemera from a central location. He believed in small business through his parent’s hotel and he tapped into the spirit of acceptance of new pioneers in urban enterprise. His concept was based on grounded craft production and a DIY authenticity in which the products were approachable as was he, and you could listen to music at a listening station that resembles a jukebox or the earliest of carrolls at CD generation stores. The location
he gambled on was one of the most central spots in the landscape of Portland’s iconic cultural
landscape, a little storefront a stone’s throw from Powell’s and the Ace Hotel.

So it’s all operating … you know everyone needs a windfall, but perhaps with the
record label we could make some real money. The store may improve and the
neighborhood is getting better. Every year is better for the store and every year
has been better for the label…the store is there to identify with the independent
craft rebirth that bubbled up after 2002, and the music label has the same name.
It’s a good way to get people to listen to music (on headphones at a station) that’s
curated for you. Music on the Internet isn’t curated enough…you can have a
unique experience when choice is limited. Someone can tell you something funny
about the bass player, or something about the collectible vinyl. We pride
ourselves on being to create that personal interaction, and there’s no substitute for
that. We just did our numbers for June and were 30% up from last year. The
neighborhood is getting better and we’re learning what people like.

This is one of the various strategies of resistance and/or incorporation into the cultural economy
of the new cityscape. Knowing his label and the things he carried was a part of this iconography;
he also put himself within the growing cultural tourist geography that walks in from Europe or
Louisiana, giving them headphones to take in a song or two and browse effervescently. There’s a
buzz here for young aspirants in the know of the scene; a twenty or so year old girl spoke in
French with her parents about needing to go inside for a while and telling them to move on for a
bit. This has become a scene space carved out of an increasingly much higher end downtown
scene.

Now, in terms of the spatial practices of consumption in the city, the archipelago of the
audio ecology of the city is more disjointed. It appears that nightlife and shopping are coded and
there are only tiny closets left for these expressive spaces where one can embody the sense of
place and music described in the last chapter, all at once. It is important to explore the ways in
which new attention is being put on community as a public sphere where women, cultural and
racial groups can be enjoined within the mission of the growing cultural economy of cool here. It
is true that the art world of indie production can provide the cultural capital for cliques and affective spaces that can be counterproductive in this effort. In new ways, the breakdown of this downtown sphere of the rock imaginary has spurned more interesting conjunctions. A hip-hop dance party in a 60s bowling alley bar called the Spare Room, out 42 avenues, was pumping with the multi-racial, mixed musical energy of 20 somethings, away from the light of the old, walkable, city center. It was decidedly hipster, but unabashedly reflective of one’s curatorial digital self.

The community in effect, as a network of work and spaces that reflect local, authentic production from the scene, is feeling the enclosure from capital imperatives of more generalized spaces of consumption. Music spaces have evolved from raw warehouse spots like the Oak St. Arts Center, established in the late nineties, to many more bars and nightclubs that offer their spaces to the community and use corporate sponsorship to support these endeavors. More still, it is becoming more of a challenge from the perspective of a consumer or an independent artist to navigate these places and spaces of commodity and/or community.

In October 2013 Know Your City, an organization taking upon itself the task of educating the city about itself through music and storytelling, co-sponsored the Street Car Mobile music Festival, along with PDXPop and the city. Riders on streetcars all throughout the city would encounter a mini-concert from a local musician in a streetcar as a part of bringing public art to public transportation. The streetcars are very new plastic Czech made quiet things that slide along the city like eels or water snakes. The photos of the event seem to bring the warm glow of community to them, and attach moments in space with memories in place.

Live/Work Neighborhoods Transition: From Storehouses to Nightlife
The westernmost part of east Burnside Avenue has, through development incentives, attempted to “clean up” its image as a strip of car dealerships and vice. Its name reflects the Manhattanization of niche districts in city culture: LOBU. This refers to its place at the bottom of a hill rising for the river to 15th street. Most nighttime revelers used to think of the bridge as that auspicious passage over and through homeless drug users to get from the bars on the West to the car dealerships and motels on the east. Today, the Doug Fir Lounge gleams brightly with its 50s roadside attraction veneer – suction pole posted plastic letters announcing the bands on the upscale marquee. Now, this strip of the inner eastside industrial district east, LoBu, is teeming with so much nightlife and shopping that it is unrecognizable from ten years before (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003). Of the old, only the strip bar, Union Jack’s remains.

Travel and Leisure, in a 2005 article on LoBu, described the Doug Fir as follows:

…a Modernist log cabin, Doug Fir Lounge (830 E. Burnside St.; 503/231-9663) draws an eclectic crowd—artsy urbanites, bikers in black leather, aging hippies—for blackberry Cosmos and late-late-night comfort food (croque-monsieur at 4 A.M., anyone?).

In doing so they try and cast a wide net around the types that come through on different themed nights, to create the appearance of total eclecticism always. Taste serves as a temporary enclosure here, as different bands on different nights bring different crowds. Living there for about a week (at the adjacent Jupiter Hotel) gave proof to the general, local perception that it was serving a bridge and tunnel type excursion crowd upstairs of the music room below. Its fire pit strewn Hawaiian-style deck and the Jupiter’s Miami white hip-hop backlit glow lounge create an aura of some warmer climate dropping its social life while passing through. There are even palm
trees. Somehow it works, as more and more nightlife seekers want an upbeat, sexy entertainment that transcends the place it thrives.

The bachlorette party in the rooms above my head lent a surreal quality to the pseudo roadside motel rooms we occupied. Heading down to the basement venue to hear the earnest, dark pop of Talkdemonic within this same setting further confused. This is a new placement of music in the city, uncomfortably alongside a very mainstream high-energy party. This is the new role of music now, with a lot more participation but perhaps less attention.

The Pearl

Previous to the nightlife-hyped new LoBu, on the other side of Burnside, the Pearl District developed with government’s guiding hand. Designated an “arts enterprise zone” in 1998. It was set up to move form a gritty, industrial area to a beacon for galleries and artists. According to the Portland Development Commission report, initiatives to provide tax incentives for storefront improvement, to increase floor to area ratios (FAR), and to support density along the streetcar corridor, all serve to encourage private development of mixed use and residential space. This has created at first, a thriving gallery district with artist lofts but now, a dense upscale loft community for workers in the upper tier of the cultural economy. Once the home the biggest practice space warehouse for musicians, now it is a clean, green design-forward city within a city.

Work Worlds in the Scene

In terms of inspiring initiatives to tap into existing governmental sources of revenue to help musicians to help themselves, for instance. Rebecca G. has been working with The Future
of Music Coalition in Washington, D.C. on tracking where musicians get their revenue from, as well as advocating for musicians rights on a national level in general. Jessica J. has worked in non-profit arts management in Portland and sees the changing landscape as a looming socioeconomic lifestyle shift and a metaphor for the new business ethos in indie rock:

When the city of Portland started using the artist as its brand it was so much the talking the talk and not walking the walking. If the city is going to do that they really have to look at the infrastructure that supports the life of the artist. Portland is going to become the pearl\textsuperscript{13}. Artists have to start demanding their value, in the GDP. It could be a union, but on an individual level artist have to start demanding their value.

When she suggests that artists have to start “demanding their value,” she freely admits that this outward pressure has stepped on toes and caused rifts in bands and in the scene. She cited self-perception as an issue; she sees that as a major contributor to blocked opportunity for music makers making their mark on their city and making a living.

They’re starving artists they say, but no, they create as much value as almost anybody. I also was noticing that the creative class includes web developer, game developer, but we’re talking about people who are making art, fashion, music, energy, and that’s where the schism is. But artists do have a confusing relationship with money, and are conflicted by selling out so they don’t value themselves monetarily.

I don’t think artists are being used but I think they are being taken for granted. I think it’s been delightful watching musicians and sound artists getting funding from RACC. At a lot of these forums where the city invites people to talk about

\textsuperscript{13} The Pearl District is a catch all for new gleaming consumer development with high end food and a lot of \textit{match your couch} art galleries.
the state of the arts in Portland, there seems to be an unwillingness to discuss a problem without talking about how its already being a addressed.

The Regional Arts and Culture Council is one city actor that has taken some ownership of its embattled music community, and the unequal opportunity structure in the arts. As we delve deeper into work and play and the stigma of their overlap Jessica’s statement becomes clearer. There seems to be little demand from amalgamated agents of culture for a strategy or strategies of forward thinking, business-like formations. If the music scene and musicians have to compete in the coming bifurcated creative economy, where grants and corporate scouts and advertising and television pick and choose young aspirants, how should music people view themselves in a bohemian setting that is thriving but short on jobs?

In Bellah’s “Habits of the Heart,” the notion of the lifestyle enclave was linked closely with leisure and consumption, usually unrelated to the world of work; it brings together those who are socially, economically, or culturally similar. Rather than a community (which attempts to be an inclusive whole, celebrating the interdependence of public and private life) lifestyle as an enclave essentially celebrates the narcissistic and is segmental - explicitly involving a contrast with others who do not share their lifestyle. Lifestyle enclaves serve as a form of collective support in an otherwise radically individuating society. In Portland, “work” was being made in and around a lifestyle but people weren’t gaining a foothold in the world of work for the most part. In effect, people were losing status, slipping from the precarious limbs of the middle class, and, as highlighted here, situated in a particular moment of a the life course in a generation. As Generation X or Y, this “suspended adolescence” as it is called, is now part of a Bohemian symbolic economy enhancing the cultural character of cities.
The definition of these communities has been a source of debate amongst researchers and scholars attempting to demarcate the character of these social formations. *Subculture* was the terminology preferred in the 70s, coming from the Birmingham School for Contemporary Studies (CCCS). However, this moniker was more appropriate for the British school of punk that was distinctly oppositional in its resistance to normative values. Straw concept of a *scene* has been used to describe local spaces or trans-local phenomena where various practices of cultural production and consumption take place and interact (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004: 13). It thus encompasses a wide range of cultural practices, and takes differentiation and change into account (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004: 14).

Bourdieu offers the added explanation of the role of cultural intermediaries (Negus, 1999) and ‘buzz’ to allow ‘cultural entrepreneurs’ in a DIY context to build careers via co-operation and alternative capitals (Scott, 2011). This brings together the logic interaction practices of Art Worlds (Becker, 1982), the spatial contingency of Bohemian enclaves (Lloyd, 2006) and the lightly capitalized but highly engaged economies that are emergent in and around the cultural economy of value the city is hanging its hat upon (Zukin, 1994; Cohen, 1991).

**The Cultural Economy and the Markers of Value**

This cultural pattern of hype and mediated attention has heralded the rise of the scene and its representation in cultural production, but not always the fortunes of its members. The ascendancy of the creative class requires creative agents to realize their potential membership as part of the vanguard class (Florida, 2002). This part is a tall order in cities that have less consumer power than creative ingenuity. At the level of the city as variable, issues of density and “street-level serendipity” play a role in the realization of creative community and synergy.
through interaction (Florida, 2012: 329). He maps the co-influence of Gay and Artistic residency as openness to newcomers, since they themselves often enter into situations where they move into places where they “have to build networks from scratch” (Florida, 2012: 245). He then sees the value of these residents in driving up property values, in that they signal that a location is valuable in a “feedback loop” (Florida, 2012: 245). Zukin elucidates the process by which capital is valorized through “sweat equity” in refurbishing property; an aesthetic eye for authentic charm plus DIY work skills equal real taxable, usable community change (Zukin, 1989).

In Elizabeth Currid’s *the Warhol Economy*, the potential and real value of the creative economy as a part of the burgeoning cultural service sector is seen in the raw number of people working in creative industries. She makes the case that art and culture are the “distinction” in New York City’s service sector, seen through the prism of a location quotient, and that few sociologists deal with understanding “how art and culture happen” (Currid, 2011: 64). This perspective is germane to the industry at hand, the art/fashion nexus of New York, but is also generalizable. In fact, when David Byrne in his new collection of essays, *How Music Works*, reflects on the early collusion of art and music and fashion in the East Village, there are artists and business owners (Hilly of CBGBs) just letting people do their thing (Byrne, 2012). This can then be reimagined as the groundwork for creative collective effervescence of new intensities, and the flowering of new scenes (especially with nightlife).

When we bookend this approach to emerging nightlife and scenes with the role of the indie creative as a precariat\(^\text{14}\) (Morgan, 2010; Standing, 2011) or relegated creative service

\(^{14}\) The precariat class or precarious position of contingent, ‘liquid’ work, is a more or less permanent state of fluctuating, unstable, low-paying cultural labor.
employee, we have a fuller picture of the limits of the cultural industries to radically alter the
plight of the disenfranchised cultural creator. The project of the Florida’s *the Rise of the Creative
Class* (2002) challenges cities to spur growth in human capital by investing in post-fordist
creativity production or buoying its Bohemian indices. Within this matrix lies the developing
community of production and the creative identity built out of a local commons. What, however,
are the fortunes of the actors developing themselves in the new, less enfranchised, cultural
economy?

**Technology and Work**

However, one important factor that must be considered in a larger economic context, i.e.,
what sets Portland apart from, say, Detroit, is the *Silicon Forest* and the export economy. Apart
from craft consumption and production, raw materials, enticements and tax rebates plus a well-
educated populace lured research and development arms of major Silicon Valley companies
North to Portland. In a recent *Atlantic Cities* article, “Weird Is Good: What Portland's Economy
Can Teach Every City in the World,” the author makes two important points concerning
Portland’s self-conception and its rise to prominence.

"Weird and crunchy" Portland, it turns out, is also the home of Silicon Forest, a
robust cluster of computer and electronics firms. The Forest was initially planted
in 1946 when four returning war veterans started Tektronix to invent and
manufacture oscilloscopes. Tektronix grew to be one of the top manufacturers of
test and measurement instruments and, over time, spun off dozens of start-up
companies. In 1976, the semiconductor maker Intel started up in Silicon Valley.
Portland was conveniently close to Silicon Valley, with a lower cost of living and
inexpensive raw materials for manufacturing (like water and electricity). Soon
thereafter, Intel moved a cadre of engineers to Portland, and a Portland-based
team developed the company's signature Pentium chip. Portland's computer and
electronics manufacturing cluster now employs 33,200 people, and it is the
region's top international export industry, accounting for 57 percent of the its total
exports and 63 percent of export growth between 2003 and 2010 (Katz 2013).
Beyond the indie rock milieu, the technology economy (including chip makers), have been the recently powerful purveyors of the cultural economic engine. Paul Allen, co-founder of Microsoft, owns Portland’s basketball team and financed the opulent, albeit classed, arena. The level of tech savvy in the scene has led to countless opportunities in flexible work and applicable experience that has led to home production and web design. Although Portland ranks in the middle in software jobs per cool cities (GFLorida in Creative Cities), it does have many freelance designers, web support workers and technocreatives.

Dave D. referred to himself in our talk a couple of times as a “hired gun.” I saw him on tour with one of those bands, a fortysomething band fronted by the electrified Corin Tucker, lead singer and guitarist of riot girl band Sleater-Kinney. They seemed much more like a little touring family than a band with a session man. To be a “session man” as he said he aspired to, you have to know the ins and outs of the style of music you’re playing, and be well known and liked within the art world of Portland indie rock.

“One thing I’ve gained from making music to order (via licensing) is that it’s been great for honing my engineering and production skills. When I have to dial up a certain sound or feel, I know how to do it. Also, straining over Adam Selzer’s shoulders all these years as well.”

Being a known quantity, being able to pick things up quick (he has perfect pitch) and, playing worldwide for various notable Portland bands, has allowed him to tour rather consistently as a bass player and multi-instrumentalist for the past decade. Dave. D explained to me how he made his way as a working musician after one of major his bands declined.

“After Norfolk I got set up with Jolie Holland in a hired gun gig sort of thing. She hired Rachel and they needed a bass player and I was game. I did the same thing with Mirah. I really loved music and touring and I had this computer gig that let me take off on the road and could do tours for less the living wage.”

He has the musical acumen to be available for most music work related opportunities,
and has thus elevated himself in the scene as a player of note (Becker, 1983). However, its has been his flexible work in the software and data manipulating work culture of the freelance tech economy that has made his unstable music work world less precarious (as of April 2014, he has landed a one year job for international artist Ray Lamontagne on the guitar).

Since I had my computer job, one that let me work remotely while I was on tour, I could play for little pay, although that has gotten better, and say yes to everything. I’ll be able to do this for a while longer, until some young, pretty trendier kid comes to take my place. Music is not an old man’s game. When I’m like 45 I’m not sure. I’ve had some sleepless nights thinking I can’t live like this much more, not knowing if I’ll get paid from one month to the next…I’ve picked up some freelance work in programming that has made things a little easier, but I don’t know.

Incorporating risk in to one’s work in the music scene is paramount to functioning in a mostly freelance economy governed by circulating trends in the larger music universe (Beck, 2004; Wark, 1991). Often, to maintain work, people gravitate to one of the other cultural economies that confer and are governed by similar scene based cultural capitals that are transferrable (Bourdieu, 1996). In the city with the least sunshine in the United States, coffee and beer have taken on iconic (and necessary) status. Portland’s renown as a bike city is harder to imagine, except under the localist credo that the weather is just a passing extension of the natural northwest. In the bike scene, bike fixing and bike remaking is a craft with apprenticeships and serious attention to the producer’s handiwork. Heying points out that the great concern of Urban sociologists such as Zukin, that “spaces of consumption” are handled by “knowledge workers” with a consumers understanding of aesthetic value. The authenticity of artisanal craft has been a wellspring of value-making and reclaiming of space in order to make a living with ones hands. However, the other process of disneyified vintage utopianism is making its presence felt.
The completed realization of creatives in *The Rise of the Creative Class* is part of his proscriptive recommendation to cities to foster the arts in your midst (Florida, 2002). Currid echoes the issues that exist the city as a structurated place, making life difficult economically for this generation’s creative aspirants in New York City (Currid, 2009). The model of measuring the relative value of the arts and culture to a city’s growth has permeated new city initiatives nationwide. The idea of building a structure supporting the vitality and vibrancy cultures of bohemianism, food, music and art is entering the city’s civic consciousness. Festivals and outdoor concerts reflect this, and civic roundtables with artists reaffirm ties and commitments. What, then, is the gap between the culture of urban lifestyle consumption and the agency of cultural producers who make cultural work? As revenue streams and cheap rents dissolve around their feet, musicians are finding that to embody subcultural capital and to mine the success of cultural industries a difficult peace.

**Work/Play dichotomies, value and self-worth**

Richard Sennett, sociologist of theories of capital(s) and work in the city, novelist, and essayist, recently addressed to the subject of craft in modern life. Mapping the pattern through which we have come to devalue working with the hands in solitude, he cites moments in the 19th century where William Morris wept and Ruskin raged against the domination of work by efficient machines. “In craftwork, Sennett finds a way to heal the modernist rift between manual and mental labor. Craft joins the head, hands and the material in a continuous process of resistance and response. The mental skills of playful experimentation, appreciation of ambiguity, and confidence that comes from mastery are particularly relevant to our current time” (Heying, 2010: 39). But some of those involved in institutional responses to the crisis of the musician and
artisan in the city see the lack of engagement in the self-conception of entrepreneurship as the barrier to cultural change.

Kasnitz, in his review of a series of new books on work ethnographies and service laborers, points to two key points about workplaces in the present culture. The first is that work is barely in a place anymore, which leads to the second; the quandary of qualifying and quantifying work such as music, in undisciplined spaces and done in private (Kasnitz, 2013). Jazz in the middle of the 20th century had its places, and conventions, and wage structures (Becker, 1963). Now, workers in an indie scene operate with different musical conceptions of value (some virtuoso, some elementary) and occupational discourses. Some consider themselves ragged edge workers or outsider troubadors, while others try and establish a living and a career.

Jessica J., interested in the role of support initiatives for artists to become agents of production and self-promotion for themselves, had this to say:

I have a theory about this. In western culture people have so exalted the enigma of the artist life. It’s considered other, it’s considered an enigma, its a non-necessity. That is just how our culture has grown…

As Jessica J. ironically commented, “you (the musician) are going to and play now, aren’t you? Yes, said the musician, I am going to clock in now, and play.” Play, here, is the field of endeavor of making the symbolic economy of Portland. However, playing requires an investment in time, missed opportunities in work, and an amorphous system of exchange that is still a developing cultural formation. Here, both urban ecology and postmodern critiques of political economy apply. How do we make a culture of exchange that enhances social wealth, resists bureaucratic modes of work and work ethics, and embolden the agency potential of individual actors to grasp the cultural capital necessary to live on this precarious edge of work/play?
Alternatively, other artists have stared into the lens of professionalization and decided to stay free of a systematized and rationalized commitment to “making it.” Adam S. on his new band, “Alialujah Choir,” talked about how the band decided not to envision tours and sales prerogatives, but to move from one event to the next and concentrate on the music. They do, however have a good deal for Portland music history and accolades behind them, but as a model it fit with the attitudes of many musicians here in PDX. It is true that Jessica J. said that her pronouncements on musician’s inability to see oneself as a business were at times unpopular.

This further complicates and enriches the role of the musical artist in a scene in the new lifestyle city. At once they run a small business, but in addition, the enterprise requires a degree of detachment from much of the business of distributing and promoting that in fact might take place elsewhere. Playing it cool will always be a characteristic of a deviant bohemian music scene; with growing food entrepreneurship the tattooed, long-touring, music producing ‘players’ can adopt another identity that is accruing cultural capital – the food and wine connoisseur as well.

Gary Allen Fine’s (2003) distinction concerning folk art authenticity points to a personalized mix of embodied capital in a cultural field. Although there are critical presses to valorize an art object within the greater indie world, biography, as in folk art, plays a continuing role in substantiating authenticity. “Selling out” may be a watered down concept compared to its ferocity in the punk past, but in a local scene like Portland’s there still is much reverence for authentic roots. Greg Sage of the Wipers and Elliot Smith are examples of performers who even after success still carried one’s simple torments onto the stage, being characters of memory that perform insiderness as a trope.
The Precariat of the Creative Class

This community of music and concomitant arts that define place in the city, have open doors to new cultural industry players, but seem to be falling short of setting a place at the table for themselves. Rebecca G., after meeting with coalitions from around the country in D.C., exclaimed: “I came back to Portland and basically the Mayor came in and told the arts scene to get their shit together. By the way, there are thousands of musicians here and we have no presence in the city at all.”

The role of the artist in the city in this light is to occupy a space within the place making initiatives of the city. She noted the NEA under the Obama administration is funding place-making grants, and someone in Seattle is looking at ways to tap into public money to foster the arts and music, and create models relevant to Portland as well. The private sector then, is one piece to the puzzle, but still a monocultural approach to the precariousness of the new symbolic economy. It is not that the craftsman has to be poor, per se, but taking apart the neoliberal subject and the moment of creation, one draws attention back to art work decoupled from its endpoint, ostensibly in the market. People produce for the market, but the craftsperson is often not embedded within the market creatively. Spatial practices in Portland protect some music makers from this mode of subjectivity (barter, service work, sharing networks). The idea that the creating subject has to be an entrepreneur, creating for the market, is a deterministic viewpoint suggesting the lack of an opening, where those disenfranchised are not of value.

George Morgan elucidates one of the core problems in noting that “managerial discourse has challenge(d) the separation of art and industry, the idea of artistic independence, and the classical presumption that economic imperatives can only inhibit freewheeling symbolic expression” (Morgan, 2010). Neoliberalism has subsumed “creativity” into its uniform logic of
business for the greater, where now “copywriter and poet” cannot and should not be considered separate moments in art (Morgan, 2010). Morgan’s assertion that the “creative underclass” is meant as a “polemical” is meant to draw attention to art, music and subcultural practices that may give rise to place-based cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) or subcultural capital (Thornton, 1995). The bifurcation of the creative economy in a city building a booming creative industry, affords some protection via community arrangements of culture, local value and emergent agency.

**Self-Reflection #2: On Precarious Community, Karaoke and Kinko’s Culture**

Chloe is closing up her shop on Stark Street. It’s the place I would go into to touch base with the folded page denizens of my adopted community. Dishwasher Pete would be sending out his dispatches from behind piles of dishes on the road. Many bands would be giving dos and don’ts in this town or that. We were enamored with the photocopy machine and thought it would free us from bad journalism, and our own insignificance. The shop it has shut its doors in early 2013, and I can’t help but thinking that its absence will represent a wound in the physical memory of the scene. That awkward floating block amongst the new glimmering business buildings had Reading Frenzy as it’s port of call for the restless makers of zines and scenes. Slipping out from Portland landmark Powell’s books around the corner, the pull was toward a real, immediate, punk rock life as opposed to long forgotten histories and new shimmering economies.

- Field Notes, May 2013

They are having a Karaoke benefit concert and a good deal of people I’ve known and admired will be “humbling” themselves for the cause of the stores’ overall survival. Portland
music subculture has been continually enhanced by the collective ridiculousness expressed at a dive Karaoke bar where the most serious of feminist and folk gloom rockers can be seen singing the hits of the 80s and beyond. The notion of clasping arm and arm together and counting down to jump is no better exemplified by the non-respectable habits of the indie community, co-conspirators in each other’s destinies.

As many Americans still are “Bowling Alone” (Putnam, 2000) and measures of social isolation resonate through the sociological literature, breakaway republics such as Portland and its artists buck the trend. Some people of course work in jobs where the cultural and technological sector feeds off their creative energy and desire to live in bohemian enclaves, leaving only slices of time for art. Many others, create a more muddled picture for themselves, and make common culture, or social wealth, that buttress themselves and even their kids, of the encroachment of spaces of hip consumption.

**Working Back In to the New Cultural Economy**

In the summer of 2012, Laura Veirs, an indie artist who had recently moved to Portland from Seattle, played a concert in the zoo to a thousand or so. I was taken aback by how many kids and babies were out there on the blankets in the sun. When she started playing songs off her kids record, all the kids in the late single digits ran to the front and formed a jubilant kind of mosh pit and sang along. You Who is another children’s band and project, with members of the Decemberists. According to an article in the Oregonian, You Who was created by the Decemberists’ Guitarist Chris Funk and his wife, Seann McKeel.

“A packed crowd dances, cheers and sings along as the Decemberists perform at the first of monthly shows specifically crafted to appeal to parents and their kids. Decemberists guitarist
Chris Funk and Seann McKeel, launched the program when they ran out of places to take their own toddler” (Olivia Banks in the Oregonian, 2009). Kids paint life-sized puppets, “listen to” air guitar gurus and then may watch puppet shows backed by Black Prairie and other top tier Portland bands.

Chris F. also works for Search Party, locating hip music to license for commercial purposes. The precariousness of the work/play economy, as Alicia R. attested to, relies on these inputs from commercial work in production in film, music and television. Many musicians have had bit parts on the TV series Portlandia. Carrie Brownstein herself was the guitar shredding force in front of Sleater-Kinney a Portland and Olympia based band that helped define the Riot Girl sound. Yet the best antidote to modern life that this cultural economy offers is that of the camaraderie, resource sharing and mutualist localism. Whereas in a community in Barrington, Massachusetts they print money which only have value locally, here they build cultural products and events that recirculate income, cohesion and the frontier authentic in so far as they can afford to.

To be able to frame place and continue to negotiate one’s right to be the purveyor of that affective thing called the Portland scene, plays into a lot of efforts to use one’s agency to tether one’s resources into structural arrangements that can make city life less precarious. Jared M. from Tender Loving Empire said that he had shifted in the last year, from his music to his label, which is populated by two bands that embody the new guard of Portland music: Typhoon, Loch Lamond, Y La Bamba and Radiation City.

Our store is a lot of tourism. I think we have like 70% tourists. During the holidays it’s like 30% tourism…There’s probably a dozen stores within two blocks that have similar aesthetics, Chrome, Flora, Magpie, and then there’s a big urban Target going into the galleria. And then the streetcar too. And I attribute the
growth of the label to the growth of the store. People just seem to buy things, compilations…in 2010 when Typhoon went on tour with the Decemberists and then played David Letterman, and things started to move forward.

We continued to talk about how to sustain this publicity that these bands are starting to garner.

He understood his limitations and the function of his micro-industry as a DIY hub. He screen-printed posters by hand for a band while we talked, in his office/studio where I sat on two milk crates, close enough to his face to see determination lines under his eyes (or was he just tired).

We have to do some creative accounting in order to not have to spend fifty thousand dollars to put out a record…We have tried to do all the services for the bands in Portland, but eventually we’ve had to go to New York and LA for publicity and some distribution…I think it’s in the best interest for everybody that we don’t go out of business…it’s sad when you have to go outside of Portland…if Portland was just like New York and had the infrastructure I would do everything here.

In music, scale is priceless, as is foretold by Jared. The downward pressure on the economy of music is fueled by the fact that our winner take all economy in the business sector is mirrored in the rock n’ roll economy. This is a graphical representation of the top 1% of revenue earning musical artists in rock getting a larger proportion of concert ticket earnings overall. In this way he suggests the acceleration of the concentration of wealth into the hands of the few is mirrored in the economy at large (WhiteHouse.gov). At the same time, the share of concert revenue taken home by the top 1% of performers has more than doubled, rising from 26 percent in the 80s to 56% in 20h03. The top 5% take home almost 90 percent of all concert revenues.

**Figure 1: Artist Share of Concert Ticket Revenue (Future of Music Coalition, 2013)**
Tours and concerts, perceived to be the bread and butter of the rock n’ roll business model, is about as unequal as salaried compensation in corporate framework. Community production, for all its attraction to the tourists of the craft city culture movement, is at odds with development, job creation and economies of scale.

In addition, the unemployment rate remains startlingly high for those 18 to 30 years of age, a core dynamic force in the continuing renewal of the city’s identity as a rock n’ roll hotbed filled with young creatives. “Oregon Employment Department regional economist Carolyn Eagan said the overall unemployment rate last year was 9.4 percent but was 19 percent for workers age 16 to 24, compared to about 11 percent i07” (Bend Bulletin, April 9th 2012). This rate is only marginally higher than that of Portland, below:

*Figure 2: Portland Unemployment by Age (Source: U.S. Census, American Community survey, Table S2301)*
https://datacommons.research.pdx.edu/weave/weave.html?defaults=econ_unemployment_age_msa.xml
This deficit of jobs in the youth sector of the labor market in Portland suggests the creative class may be at that same impasse here Florida acknowledged it was at in 2002. The recession barely slowed raw job growth in Portland as the general economy expanded and the hospitality sector led the way. In the field it was plain that many creative souls straddle these economies, creatively stitching together a series of temporary opportunities and looking for something more solid to take hold. Most alarming is the massive in migration of 15 to 29 year olds noted in a recent data mapping machine released by the University of Wisconsin.

Figure 3: Net Migration Rates per Age, Multnomah County, 2000s
The traditional clear, articulated youth subcultures posited the Birmingham School Scholars of Subcultures has given way to a migration of hipsters and cultural resistors heading out a few year after college, to settle and engage with identities and economies of smaller scale in the city. In 1950, Isidore Isou defined youth as "a concept [which] could be enlarged to include anyone who was excluded from the economy – and anyone who, through volition, or for that matter dissipation, refused to take a preordained place in the social hierarchy" (Marcus 1990, 270). In addition, the “transcendence of such a quandary generally known as the American Dream” as the driving force of youth; however, through the commodification of cool, these stylistic rebellions have become the new semiotics of the cultural production (Marcus 1990, 273). Technology, infrastructure and mass communication still rule the roost in cultural economies of cool (Hesmondhalgh, 2006; Scott, 2011). People here are rooting themselves in an affective economy of home, and the networks of trust necessary to navigate a risk society (Beck, 1992). Even so, the neighborhoods that anchor those practices are changing in ways that shift the landscape of makers on the ground.
I asked Alicia R. how her work, former booking agent for major clubs, now making videos and doing photography, is still a community thing.

It’s mostly about getting work and doing work. I did more in the last quarter than I made all of last year. It’s all from the photos I’m taking and the work I’ve done. The videos I do are kind of for fun. Another thing I love about this community is that you have the ability to morph and change in this community. Look at Andy Ricker for instance. You have the ability to reinvent yourself. People work for me and help to change big ideas in to reality. I’ll put it out to my Facebook community and they’ll come up with things I never could have gotten. It’s not competitive as much at it is collaborative. No other community could I get this from. Its small and so cohesive and everybody is so tuned in…people are proud of their artistic interests here. People did not keep their trade secrets to themselves, people see the value in sharing…when I was at Doug Fir, I wanted to drag everything I had there and to pull it together so people could see it…we live in this giant community of show and tell. Where everyone is showing people and one-upping, not to be competitive but like, “oh my god you have to see this” and living in a community that embraces craft and quality. To live in a community like this is really exciting.

Alicia’s history and continued presence in the scene is an example the utilization of, and continued repossession of subcultural capital. Although she spoke about just recently being involved in much more commercial visual production efforts, her long-term work in the community relied upon a cultural role that helped her to make things happen; in addition, the sharing network she is referring to echoed by Jared M. earlier, is the unique open source ethos of lending a hand in a workshop of city music and visual production culture. Subcultural capital offers marginalized aesthetic social worlds a currency of value, and borrowing from Bourdieu, power in a field (Thornton, 1995). Here, touring for low renumeration with a local act, being an extra in a music video, and lending a prop for a shoot, are part of the being in the flow of work and play, where networks are being strengthened. The rewards of the market being less individualized, this affords people the opportunity to work and be seen. The cultural scene rewards less money centric production, as an alternative value set to New York and LA. There is
tension when the distinctions of the commodified cultural economy subsume the ideals of subcultures. Yet the engine of this community keeps running, fed by the fuel of new membership, new arrangements of production and to some degree valorization by the city and the general community.

Sarah D. spoke about the slow movement away from the overreach of the elite families in what she termed a “provincial” town with concentrated resources (the fact that it has 2 Fortune 500 companies to Seattle’s 8, which include Microsoft and Amazon). The contributor class in Portland can be identified by names and addresses on the cliffs of the West Hills. She talked about the new formations of institutional art and music culture developing as Portland’s symbolic economy garners increased international attention.

I’m teaching a class in intro to girls studies. I showed a video that was on Youtube from Miranda July called Joanie for Jackie, that was a chain letter project, and she had interns from the very beginning. She had interns from the very beginning from Smith College. I think it was important for her longevity as an artist to loop into that population. Then she donated all of the art to Bard and one of her interns run her chain letter from Bard. This is another example of the institutionalization of local art happenings.

Miranda July used to perform opening for rock shows at the old O’ Hell café, and was the performance artist of the mid-nineties music scene. Now she is internationally known for the Sundance produced “Me and You and Everyone We Know” as a filmmaker. Women and girls have played a significant role in the Portland scene, for one because the masculinity challenges to female entry, so high in rock n’ roll traditionally, are somewhat lower in this social world. Girls have been key in documenting the scene and in the ‘zine culture that developed how to guides to being a DIY producer in indie rock. The Simple Machines guide is an excellent example of this, and though not coming out of Portland, is part of the lineage of accumulated practices that underlie the community. Riot Girl culture had many of its beginnings between
Portland and Olympia, and of course the Rock n’ Roll Camp for girls, which generates a community forum for girls empowerment, began in the Women’s studies department at Portland State University.

The culture of authenticity that has risen up through the rock subculture, exemplified in the politically and emotionally earnest bands of Riot Girl, the plainspoken handscribed photocopied zines of early DIY culture, and the bodily practice of political commitment to place engendered through cycling, are pieces to a broader picture of the work/play world of PDX. The scene’s continuity exists in a tenuous relationship with the paucity of jobs in these commodifying fields, rising land rents and housing market expropriation. The commitment to localism by consumers engaged via identity practices to the aura of authentic object that also fuels the production scene.

The cultural entrepreneur is a small producer who bears these “high costs of origination” (Toynbee, 2000: 16). Ellmeier (2003) describes them as “multi-skilled, flexible, psychologically resilient, independent…and unattached to a single location” although in Portland there is a distinction from this general conception; here, they see their interests as tied to a social wealth that holds the key for networks of art world know how germane to place. Place is certainly part of the process of reclaiming power for DIY creators and local musicians in the Portland story, and we can point to by the influx of transplants in Portland, and the complaints of those who claim the new aspirants don’t recognize their own community. Anecdotally, a music producer got news of a slick L.A. style studio head taking projects from him mid-production, to add gloss to the finish of the record. He soon didn’t have to defend his turf any longer, as those who signed up with this high input technology studio, and his wining and dining of prospective “clients,”
jumped ship. He is now out of the picture. His studio was in a posh suburb and for that reason alone, he barely stood a chance.

These artisanal symbolic values exchange does come from a past non-conformist set of principles. They have held together because of the necessity for their continuance by people who are appreciated for making the core work that the scene is known for. Like in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, the producers become even better “entrepreneurs,” only the hype in a less mediated town doesn’t catapult them, but gives them a bit of a wider audience. Keep Portland Weird is part Portland valorizing these producers as a city heritage. They haven’t actually been helped so much.

The spatial practices of resisting the commodifying force of the bright gloss of the culture industry, plus the dialectic in which local agents in a moral system of exchange adapt to global pressures of the new, have led to a furtive struggle in and around space. The buildings that housed clubs, venues and meeting places, collective spaces of living and working, are all contested territories. Home, the craftsman and its basement, situated in a pocket of production overgrown with moss, is the birthplace of the history of the scene, and how this city manages its neighborhoods is a map of its future.
Chapter 3: Being at Home: Neighborhoods, Nodes and Networks

Portland’s landscape of cultural production is a palimpsest of history. Layers of nostalgia weave through the narratives of places gone by the wayside, clusters of music moments in time, and the ongoing crisis of representation and preservation in the city. Some are preserving old buildings as the historic register expands and contracts to gerrymander the needs of mostly developers. In other instances, neighborhoods try to retain their quality as developed but bohemian. In the midst of this urban renewal, the less capitalized production culture has been driven into smaller spaces on avenues of consumption (Zukin and Kosta, 2005). In effect, so has the diversity treasured as constitutive of “bohemia” (Lloyd, 2006) in the first place. According to Shaw and Sullivan, “although Portland has been a celebrated example of a creative city (Bulick et al. 2003; Peck 2005), our findings suggest that it is not racial diversity that matters in neighborhoods where the arts are used to leverage growth” (Shaw and Sullivan, 2005). Long time residents of homes in key neighborhoods and people who are the makers and creators are productive of local spatial knowledge, have formed alliances that are necessary to mark and control space in an overheated development culture. These circumstances have catapulted them into the role of agents of spatial resistance, in order to keep the essential quality of life in place.

People in Portland don’t always live in bohemian enclaves, although many neighborhoods are quickly becoming them. This creates a spatial sense that is markedly different than that of New York’s Greenwich Village or Chicago’s Wicker Park. The sites of memory relative to the scene are dispersed and tucked away on strips in neighborhood communities, often on the more residential east aide of the Willamette River. Artisans, artists and rockers live in modest craftsman homes in middle-class neighborhoods with overgrown farms for front yards and a 30 year-old couch on the porch. In many communities the neighbors would tolerate a band
practicing in the basement, and a party here and there. In the house where I stay when I do my research and visit, Ron and Kate come by, tie-dyed and greying, and tell us which vegetables they’ve planted in the shared front yard that we can pick for supper. In neighborhoods like Boise and Alberta, people began to spruce up their yards, come out on their porches, and participate in urban renewal in their community. With the rising tide of value sweeping away the sweat equity agents of growth, new forces of upheaval, including developers, cultural producers and the city, change both the stakes and the spirit of place.

**Mississippi Corridor in Boise: Revival and Gentrification**

The Boise Neighborhood has seen an influx of white homeowners and an outflow of African-American residents over the last twenty years. Its Mississippi Avenue corridor has become home to hip Thai restaurants, coffee shops and has transformed itself from a tough street with a few shops, with of few artistic white residents, to a nightlife hub for hip vintage and indie rock consumption. Mississippi Studios is a concert venue that now is attached to a bar, “Bar Bar,” and has become a favorite hangout of musicians and concert house. This neighborhood also houses Adidas headquarters, a corrugated aluminum earth toned fun house perched on a hill above this old, traditionally African-American Portland neighborhood. *Fresh Pot*, a key early adopter of edge spaces for hip consumption, staked out an old storefront below a Bordello-style set of apartments above, as early as 1997. A vinyl record store survives next door as part of the vinyl revival that’s a part of the consumptive identity of cool. It also houses a very real craft record label that reissues rare Turkish and world rock music from the 60s. One of the key public indicators of the shift in the neighborhood, besides the well-minted strolerati, is the Mississippi Street Fair held every year.
The fair was once a scrappy mix of local arts and street musicians while now it has evolved into a public spectacle. In this way neighborhoods have not only established themselves as home identities for Portlanders, many of them transplants, but they are also acting as destinations for people from other parts of the city to explore Mississippi. The enclosure and then production of space as a late capitalist strategy entails “people in place… (that) try to differentiate their place from other places and become more competitive” (Harvey 1996: 297). Borrowing from Wittgenstein’s theory of language games, it implies that there has become “a fragmented world of ‘interpretive communities’ made up of both producers and consumers of particular kind of knowledge/experience/imaginaries, operating within a particular institutional context, a particular division of labor and pattern of social relations, and within particular places at particular times” (Harvey 1996: 285),

The Preservationist Impulse: Defending Landmarks of Taste

Some residents express concern for the heritage of the neighborhood, often expressed through the preservation of historic homes. Coordinated activism around limiting the pure capitalization of neighborhood space suggests restlessness with overdevelopment. This recent petition highlights the struggle to preserve an important house there:

To: Andre Kashuba with Exceptional Homes by Andre, Owner/Developer

It is clear our old close-in neighborhoods are under attack from wealthy developers from the suburbs. We face architectural pillage by them because the city is promoting high density and has deaf ears for historic preservation. Portland has been noted for sustainable living, but the destruction of old buildings and replacement with modern structures is not sustainable and results in the waste of resources. The recent recession has created foreclosures on local residents, and developers have targeted these properties getting them at low
prices and profiting from their destruction or radical alterations. Like the example 1890 house here, some of them are destroying historic buildings. This loss is great to the block here, and it is nearly the most original of the earliest houses built on the block. The historic buildings in our communities give us our sense of place and cultural memory. Our old neighborhoods help make Portland special and now in danger of becoming “anywhere USA”.

Please, stop the demolition of the Edwin Rayworth House.

This argument, along with the earlier characterization of the city and city programs as falling short of providing resources enough to house those being displaced, echoes that of Brown-Saracino (2009). In her work on gentrification, she highlights the presence of “preservationists” who work to serve neighborhoods they occupy even while displacement is occurring (Saracino, 2009). There is tension between their agency, and the structure of economic opportunity and capital reinvestment. Finally, in 2013, the organization fighting for the Rayworth house won, as the Fox family moved in and the fundraising campaign on change.org was a rousing success. In the victory email I received (as part of the two year old petition), all were invited to an open house, and were implored to check out the shopping and grab a sandwich on the adjacent Mississippi avenue while they while they were there.

Angie M. walked with me down Mississippi in the rain. “The school system is sort of messy. I had to put her in Montessori. There’s a new one in the neighborhood. This drummer from the Rock band Hazel takes her kid there too. We wait for each other to come when we pick them up.” The school is on the edge of the hip strip. It’s sign is flat white with black letters in a very 70s lowercase font. The kids are inclined to use their independent selves, as Melvin Kohn suggests in looking at working-class and middle class education (Kohn, 1977). Low income
housing is considered priority here, as are the arts in schools, but parenting choices challenge even the most open-minded adult, and white school ‘choice’ weakens local public schools.

The “incommunicability between these interpretive (italics mine) communities…of a fragmented postmodern sensibility” (Harvey 1996: p. 285) has led to the fragmentation of geographic community purpose. Gentrification has led to the displacement of long-time black residents both physically and culturally. Gibson (2007) gives more specific data on each neighborhood based on census numbers. According to her, Boise – whose Black Population peaked in 1970 at 84% – was 70% African American in 1990; by 2000 it was down to 50% (Gibson, 2007 in Petruziello, 2010). Neighborhood development and pioneering subcultural community places are relevant to the grass-roots effort at social change and community revitalization. In part, they are subsumed beneath larger issues of more capital intensive neighborhood development and levels of attention brought by hip consumption to Mississippi Avenue.

According to Petruziello, in his study of the Mississippi corridor, The Boise Neighborhood Plan was initiated in 1999 along with the Mississippi Historic District target area Economic Development Strategy, prepared by E.D. Hovee & Company in 2002. Petruziello goes on to delineate the structures of civic commitment at work:

(Activist) Kay (Newell) credits Housing Our Families with being the instigators, recalling “They came to me with the city of Portland and said ‘we want to start the Target Area.’” According to Kay, the organization wanted safe and affordable housing for low-income families in the area. One program of the Target Area that she highlights is an initiative to help seniors and people with disabilities fix up their homes. They offered up to $5,000 per home to do home repair, while using community residents as a labor force. “We were giving people living work skills, at the same time we were providing maintenance for seniors and disability.” Ms. Newell’s statements suggest that they, as well as other neighborhood groups, were essential to the neighborhood’s revitalization.
Many of the initiatives lead by the Target Area appear to have been instrumental in encouraging the revitalization of the area. Ms. Newell credits it with the creation of the Business Association and the Street Fair – a summer event featuring live music, art, vendors, and various community activities – both of which began to foster an environment of collaboration among local businesses. The Target Area also had small amounts of money for storefront improvement and business planning. *Pistils*, a locally owned nursery on Mississippi, apparently made good use of these kinds of incentives.

The Portland Development Commission offered development opportunity loans that matched monies for rehabilitating houses in the area. Simultaneously, around 1994, people noticed that the building that would later become the record shop was a squat where bands would play. White indie bands, the interviewee admitted, led to a feeling of safety, that invited new bohemian residents to move in (Petruziello, 2010).

The neighborhood holds much of the promise for a fusion of Portland’s past and its new beginnings. Shelley S., a native and local songwriter, told me about a soul singer from the 50s that lived in a house he rebuilt himself after a fire in the 70s (Singer, 2013). He had played with Otis Redding and James Brown, and had people over his house to jam regularly. In late 2013, Scott M., a local musician and DJ of old soul, is backing him with a 9 piece band at the Doug Fir. They both see it as a chance to change the score on some level, giving points to the past and a less white present.

The ultimate goal, Magee says, is to eventually get Thomas in the studio and record a set of all-new songs. Thomas already has a concept, framed around stories even older than his own: his mother’s. Some are supernatural; others relay encounters with brutal racist violence. The idea is to show how our past is never that far behind us. It’s something he knows well.

“I want to tell the history of man, and how cruel he is to himself,” Thomas says. “People need to come together and really understand we’re on this ship together, and if this motherfucker sinks, we’re all going down.”
The Inner Northeast: Consumer Hubs and Cultural Change

Alicia R. owns two homes in a neighborhood of mixed incomes and many African-American homeowners in the now hip inner northeast. She bought the second one to help supplement her income booking bands and later doing visual arts in film and photography. Her expanded career in music and advertising related video and photographic work has been aided by being rooted in place. She cites the wellspring of talent and “ sharers” that contribute to her ability to produce video on the fly and on a budget.

Things were pretty ghetto when I moved here in 1998, and things were pretty rough until the police cracked down on the drug trade. The Whole Foods (formerly Natures) opened up down the hill things became a little more gentrified. Then little restaurants came, Jason French started opening things and then small independent stores, and it’s starting to look like Williamsburg around here. You know it’s like the same thing that was happening downtown, where there are so stores opening but there are not big box or national chains, and now it’s happening up here on the east side. Most people around there haven’t moved, most of my neighbors haven’t changed, they’ve stuck it out.

In addition she noted that most of her neighbors 15 years later are the same as when she had moved in. We talked about the value of the Albina Community Bank, her bank, which is a community development bank, federally entrusted to support mortgages in this African-American locale. She holds a connection to the diversity and grass roots ethos surrounding this more recently stabilized and refurbished neighborhood. She mentioned her local around the corner bar, Tiga, employing DJs, and a coffee shop run by a former major label music artist Chris Brady. Adjacent is a drum shop owned by the drummer of the Breeders and Los Lobos. When I asked him how he got to Portland, he said he had to get out of LA, buy a house, and “retire.” Portland is fast becoming the indie rock South Florida.
Chad C. has two homes in the Northeast corridor, one of the newly hip regions of Portland. Through one he operates his music label, HUSH, and has tenants, and the other he remodeled as his home for his family.

I had no models. It seemed everyone did it because they enjoyed doing it and it was interesting to start something that was always a lemonade stand kind of cottage industry model and that just kind of snowballed to become some sort of three-bedroom cottage industry. It’s not something that could feed a family but something we would definitely miss if it was stripped away from us…there’s no need to shutter this business, there’s definitely a lot of service that’s happening.

Chad also had the personal experience of moving from a small “storefront loft” that was part of public-private venture known as the Everett Station Lofts, near the historic train station and the Bowery-like Broadway. It was perfectly placed as an island of up and coming art, at the southern divide between the Pearl District, the established collector based gallery walk scene, and the spotty, scruffier neighbor Old town, comprised of a shrinking Chinatown and much of the city’s downtown homeless population. I had a place there that I curated, and after showing Chad’s artwork there, he took a space himself.

That space was mostly devoted, square footage wise, to showing art. I never liked the shopkeeper hours, I didn’t enjoy being a shopkeeper, and I preferred working with musicians more than artists. I always thought music was more pervasive than art in that art requires a whole set up to take it in, while music just sort of wafts through the air. I think musicians are more down to earth with their needs and I just enjoyed that working with those people more…The business model of the place didn’t appeal to me at all because I was doing better with my own art and I was supposed to keep these hours.

Chad purchased a house on Fargo St., in a neighborhood with crime activity, and a house that needed some gutting to say the least. The flow of foot traffic of musicians and art types in and out of the house garnered looks from the residents of the block, many of whom were African-American and lower middle class. The average home values around here started to rise more steeply in the eight years up to crash, only leveling off slightly afterwards. Chad eventually
moved to the Alberta neighborhood, traditionally the most African-American neighborhood in Portland. Between 2002 and 2004 it morphed into being deemed “the Alberta Arts District.” This seemed both a slight (to the long time African American population) and a slight of hand.

**Alberta Street: Displacement, Spatial Practices, and Footholds of Spaces**

I was surprised somewhat to see the degree of diversity at the monthly arts walk along Alberta Street. Despite that complex and often depressing situations that lead to economic displacement, the neighborhood vibrancy in this case is not exclusive and the food carts expressing the consumptive patterns here were of equal weight Mexican, African-American, neo-diet for a small planet, and perhaps disproportionately Thai if anything. Data does express some of this displacement through gentrification (Sullivan and Shaw, 2010), and the art walk they depict is white coded in its aesthetics, but observation reveals a more nuanced scene. In 1999, when I moved to this neighborhood, random shootings and visible drug task force Police vehicle roamed the streets, relatively empty at night. The crackle of gunfire rang through the side streets and I was involved in a one chase of a gunman in my own rented backyard. My friend was a real estate agent and waitress and we worked together at a restaurant in a quieter neighborhood. This was an earlier version of the Alberta neighborhood, one that blacks were steered into when other neighborhoods were redlined in the 50s and 60s (Local Color, Documentary). The art walk in 1999 was about three blocks long. Today it must be over a mile. Not a lot remains of that Alberta Street in terms of storefronts. Terrell Brandon, a former trailblazer, bought a building that houses the African-American barbershop, and youth center. The old Alberta Rose Theater, which was a black church, is now a music venue.
The “People’s Republic of Portland” refers to a corrugated cardboard pop-up street cart stand at the Alberta Arts Walk celebrating the last Thursday of every month. It was meant to be an alternative art walk to the first Thursday of every month, which is held in the ritzy Pearl District, the first area of Portland to gentrify. Only in the Pearl (as they call it), the rockers were gentrified out, most evidenced by the betrayal of the practice space. However, this last Thursday, as a public alternative to first Thursday, began as it was advertised, as a crafty low-priced “approachable” art gallery stroll along a slowly gentrifying stretch of dilapidated storefronts, known as the Alberta Street corridor. This democratization of art, in that the aesthetic celebrated was less abstract and theoretical and more, spiritual and useable, still drew a particular new-agey crowd, and not necessarily very diverse.

The “People’s Republic” folks are part of the culmination of the years of evolution of this event, from the fire-eaters of burning man to what is now an all out street fair. Food carts, and jugglers for kids, earring sales and boxcar hobos on stilts – this spectacle has now transcended the particularity of the art worlds of Portland and indeed, one summers eve, the fake cast iron tables outside the hipster café Barista were filled with black, white, Latino and Asian families eating ice cream and fueling up to go back inside the throngs to get freaked out.

**Making Use of Space**

Critical spatial theory focuses on geographic fusion with the sociological, forging a bond between the spatial and/or nature as a variable in understanding the self, alienation and new formations in a struggle within the city Critical spatial or postmodern geographic theory, postulates that space has become a site for exclusion and inclusion into the consumptive classed landscapes of the city (Soja, 1989). According to Lefebvre, “faced with city’s complexity and
unintelligibility” we have assigned experts to stand in for ‘users,’ whose particular conflicts comprise the only real “contradictions of space” (Lefebvre, 1984). City-planning has unintended consequences, especially when space is cast as ‘abstract space,’ which may bend to the political revaluation of capitalist expansion (Lefebvre, 1984).

People like Chad C. appealed to me early on as agents of a new urban pioneer in that the old landscape of rock n’ roll. The latter revolved around the bar and the beer-soaked rented basement or warehouse space, but now are being replaced by conscious efforts at live-work spaces and enlightened design. There was a sense, as the tide turned around 2000, that that feeling that one might be missing out on the rising boats of musical achievement might be the same as the need to buy a home and get settled in as the town began to become appreciated for its mix of a culture steeped in its music, the horticultural and the political (leftist and tolerant).

**Coming of Age: Rock and Real Estate**

December C. has always been around the music community associated with the alternative Americana sound, and women singer-songwriters in Portland for two decades. I remember her loft office space where she booked bands that made it feel a lot like New York, except mellower and very welcoming.

I always knew this would happen to Portland because Portland is the last city in the west to blow up, like it's the last real city to blow up in my mind... It's like San Francisco and Seattle and Los Angeles, they had all like really, and San Diego... but Portland just kind of was like a sleeper city and I think what when I knew it was going to happen, we bought our house when Elijah was born in 1995 and there's nothing here. I mean nothing. This was a Asian minimart and a used video store and then all the storefronts on Freemont were boarded the Whole Foods was an empty PGE building and instantly Nature's bought that building and put a Nature's in and then it kind of changed hands a few times... when they redid all those boarded up storefronts on Freemont, I was like "oh shit" because the real estate was still so affordable that I think that, you know people like Colin or
people that moved here were like "you can live here and be an artist and you play music and work in a coffee shop and make a living, or in Colin's case make pizza and start a band and you can do it" so that was really attractive to a lot of people and I think just word of mouth, being on the road, people would be like "where are you from?"

In *Loft Living*, Zukin refers to the fact that artists had lived in lofts since the 30s and no one had ever found that romantic until the 1970s, so something must have happened to our values in relation to the aesthetics of living in the city in the 1960s. She cites the fact that there must have been some kind of “aesthetic conjecture” inherent in the cultural shift to value those spaces as sites of living, emulating the open uninhibited floor plans of abandoned urbanity (Zukin, 1982: 15). She goes onto to cite a post-modern and postindustrial investment in lofts as revalorization of physical, built capital in the inner city.

In the march of the creative class into the 21st century, the rush to invest in the modest housing stock of Portland represents a new “aesthetic conjecture” of midcentury suburban living in the urban setting. Property values bubbled in a town that was selling opportunity and time to artists, and cool, ethical living to transplanted Americans. Rumblings of a new housing economy have percolated into the calculations of music makers, affecting life chances and life choices. This coincided with the aesthetic valorization of the newly recognized music and cultural scene in Portland, epitomized by Elliot Smith, the new Ace Hotel downtown and then more lucratively, the rise of the coffee and food culture. Chad C. added:

It’s tricky. It’s already heated up again here in town. It’s standard to have more than 6 months of inventory but in neighborhoods we like there’s one. Slim Pickins, it’s really a sellers market. Things are a jumble…I think its time for a shift, out of the music industry. Its dormant right now…I don’t have any plans for working with an artist that’s like really ambitious because I’m not really connecting with that mentality of ‘I’m going to make it as a performing artist’ right now. December C. reiterated the transformations that have taken place in these cultural boom times. “…when I saw that change happening from Portland being like that sleeper city to Portland really becoming cool, which ten years ago,
twenty years ago, Portland was not cool. Portland was, you know, a town of warehouses and working class people and we were barely a blip on the grunge music scene. We never had our scene.”

This echoed the notion of aesthetic conjecture and the bet people made on this part of town as a new frontier. Spatial practices of inclusivity in neighborhoods, small-scale culture industry “mom and pop” shops offer some relief from the rising economic tide. However, the aesthetic and economic conflation of value led to a resonant symbolic code that weathered the crisis of 2008, as evidenced by only moderate drops in sales and housing prices.

December and I were outside of Extracto coffee, run by Chris Brady, former bassist of Pond, one Portland’s most important mid-nineties bands. The café tables formed a cruddy courtyard in front of the café, the record store, the drum shop, and the tiny bar, Tiga. It felt like the scene in miniature, a little cleaned up, a simple and unadorned hub of cool consumption amongst the neighborhood that changed around us, with homeowners who quietly settled in to their investments.

I bought my house for nothing. Like literally, nothing. It’s now (the housing market) coming back to a more realistic state, which is impressive. I'm really happy about that because I didn't want my friends to be closed out of the market, but it's way better. It's more realistic, I was like, you know, they're trying to sell houses in my neighborhood for half a million dollars, and they're one story with no basement you know. I was like "are you joking?"

I asked when this all started, this explosion in value, this speculation in the boundless future of elevating cool that would be the cool, creative city to come. San Francisco and Seattle experienced this housing bubble that barely burst in 2008, since the waiting list for homes in the proper neighborhoods was long, and the jobs in tech, media and cultural life were plentiful.

“… it was then probably like, probably like seven years ago or eight years ago (2003/2004), you know right when the Decemberists moved here where they got signed to Kill Rock Stars and they started having some real success is kind of
when I started to see that influx of newer musicians coming to town and more people coming up here and setting up shops.”

Although this timeline is informal, people’s recollections seem to match mine. The acceleration of neighborhood alteration, home price increases and the development of transitory culture of migrant rock makers went full throttle at around the turn of the millennium. I remember that night, Y2K, waiting tables at Il Piatto, in a little Victorian house on the inner eastside. A potential love interest was wandering the streets of downtown; a lot of us eastsiders thought there was still nothing to do down there. I was still paying $300 a month rent; my house, at 26th and Belmont; 26 blocks from the river is considered close in, especially since, as Smith (1992) suggests, gentrification radiates in rings out into the 40s and 50s today.

**Conflict and Social Change in the Culture City**

The conceptual framework behind *Loft Living* (1982) makes the case that state forces were active in rezoning and facilitating urban redevelopment. In the stage between 1995 and 2005 loosened lending requirements helped facilitate urban homesteading of collective households, new arrangements of ownership that weren’t necessarily nuclear familial. Then, the city has been able to in some cases team with developers to create new housing and mixed use spaces in and around the already developing neighborhoods. Soon these hip enclaves were occupied by an increasing amount of homeowners relative to renters, and they became the dominant party of concern.

Portland, already the whitest major city in the country, has become whiter at its core even as surrounding areas have grown more diverse. Of 354 census tracts in Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties, 40 became whiter from 2000 to 2010, according to The Oregonian's analysis of the **2010 Census**. Of those, two lie in rural Clackamas County. The 38 others are in Portland.

The city core didn't become whiter simply because lots of white residents moved in, the
data show. Nearly 10,000 people of color, mostly African Americans, also moved out. And those who left didn't move to nicer areas. Pushed out by gentrification, most settled on the city's eastern edges, according to the census data, where the sidewalks, grocery stores and parks grow sparse, and access to public transit is limited.

As a result, the part of Portland famous for its livability -- for charming shops and easy transit, walkable streets and abundant bike paths -- increasingly belongs to affluent whites” (Freisen, 2011, www.Oregonian.com).

**Figure 4. Percent Change in Populations of Color, per Portland Census Tract, Regional Equity Atlas Project of the Portland –Vancouver area, 2000-2010 (www.equityatlas.org).**

These figures represent the whitening of Portland’s inner Northeast, from 2000 to 2010. The second category, depicted in a the grey textured areas in the center of this map, represent the -42 to -25 % change in populations of color in the area in question. The tracts down the middle of the
space between the two main rivers, the Columbia and the Willamette, represent the Northeast.
The change raises unsettling questions for a city that prides itself on tolerance, social equity and
valuing diversity.

“Blacks made up only between 2.0 and 3.0 percent of the Portland metro areas population
in any given decade between 1980 and 2010, but black segregation is relatively high for a metro
area of its size and racial composition. The dissimilarity index for blacks in the Portland metro
area increased from 47.4 percent in 2000 to 51.4 percent in 2005-2009” (Logan and Stults 2010
in McKenzie 2013: p.140).

(In Seattle and Portland) blacks were squeezed by restrictive property covenants
and racial prejudice into a small but highly visible central district –black majority
islands in a white sea. By 2020 the islands had largely gone. Seattle and Portland
had become “smart cities,” magnets for hordes of young, highly paid newcomers,
most of them white and childless. Hungry for “diversity” and rushing into
relatively rundown black neighborhoods, they snapped up the only housing
bargains left...as gentrification gathered pace, property prices exploded
(McKenzie 2013: p. 140, City and Community).

These reports highlight the already tenuous peace between the ideal culture of
progressive Portland, and the real culture, which is characterized with real displacement due to
gentrification. The thrust behind these pieces is to illustrate that black displacement out of the
cities and into the surrounding counties has persisted, and even accelerated in some places, due
to rising housing costs. Many neighborhood groups, the city and its commitment to arts in
schools, and the energy of musicians themselves in developing a movement to help pass Measure
26-146\textsuperscript{15}, attempt to stem the tide of the damage of upscaling and neighborhood change. Keeping

\textsuperscript{15}From the Portland Mercury around the November election 2012: This measure is tricky to support, both because
its campaign has been misleading and the tax itself is regressive. The "School and Arts Together" campaign is built
around the funding of one art teacher for every 500 public elementary school students in Portland, thereby
the music scene alive and authentic still and always figures into the mix, although the culture industry coupled with government facilitated gentrification recasts the neighborhood character in whatever is good for development. The median home value has jumped significantly in the last decade. Estimated median house or condo value in 2011: $275,500 (it was $154,700 in 2000) (citydata.com). Through the recent issues of bizjournal.com, Portland is a major lightning rod for new design-forward developers from California and beyond. The new Burnside Bridgehead development will be a boon for Beam Development. In addition, moneyed artists in computer programming, architecture and advertising, will stream into these new spaces, some of which are the newly attractive live work spaces Like Milepost 5. As a wealthier set of residents moves in, and as Florida attests, a creative class that is more mobile, what will become of these alliances of community interest?

The Inner Northeast: Mississippi to Williams and the Development Imperative

Mississippi neighborhood (Boise) is at the crossroads of a lot of cultural and governmental changes in Portland surrounding gentrification, cultures of consumption, music and the arts. A friend, small property manager, and shop owner spoke to me about a building she wanted to subdivide into two apartments, The city, in its efforts to promote density, had ruled that they had to make it three units. In addition, she would have to pay $19,000 in fees to undertake this endeavor. Eventually capitulating, they went through the process, though it was backfilling deep cuts that have nixed full-time art teachers entirely from 22 local schools over just the past five years. But $3.8 million of the $12.2 million collected annually through the tax wouldn't go to photogenic school kids it would fund dozens of Portland arts nonprofits like the Portland Opera and Portland Symphony. Plus, the proposal calls for a flat $35 annual tax that would hit nearly all adult Portlanders equally… Only 18 percent of elementary schools in Portland have someone on staff to teach any kind of art classes. That's especially dismal compared to the national average of 83 percent of schools having that kind of instruction. If you support stable funding for Portland's arts organizations and creating jobs for arts teachers in Portland's schools, vote yes.
made more difficult by the fact that the planning department, which had gone from 62 employees to 4 at this time. She was also aware that projects in the neighborhood, taken on by larger developers, were subject to less restrictions and had fees waived for them. In many cases obstacles to renewal were dissolved for some in neighborhoods that already had a base of new lifestyle amenities, and were less expensive to invest in for the Portland Development Commission (Willamette Week, 2010).

Eli Haworth, a Commercial Broker at PPG Commercial Real Estate and former small project development manager, and I met over Thai food in a new building in the center of Mississippi Avenue. I asked him about the ease of entry into contracts for the big developer versus the pitfalls of small developers trying to get in to build design forward work in scale. Mississippi had just built two new buildings with dark, slatted panels, which were approved through a historic design overlay in a historic district. “I don’t know that anyone has done it all that well. The process doesn’t do much to facilitate to getting anyone to good design. They are just design cops in a sense. There’s a historical design board that sets the tone, but it’s the bureau of sustainable development that controls the process.”

The design board seems to function like a gatekeeper for the historical conservation district, but in acting beyond the purview of the neighborhood association, they merely add some prerequisite hoops for already welcome big developers to jump through.

“The city and its planners think its works, but if you talk to anyone who is in development, they would say that it doesn’t achieve any historic feel whatsoever. They don’t even achieve a Disney style look…. a number of small developers came in and tried to do really interesting modern lofts and got burned. The Kurisus tried to do something, a small local company, but they are out of here now.”
When the neighborhood, in and around the housing crisis, tried to get in the way of the green lighting of all these buildings, there were unintended consequences.

“There was a period 6 and 7 years ago, when a number of activists types got on the design review board, and stopped a lot of development. Meanwhile, bigger developers stepped in and avoided the design review board. Trammel Crowe threw up Tupelo Alley by purchasing a lot just outside of the conservation district.”

In the Mississippi corridor, bigger developers used their capital and bureaucratic acumen to navigate the process, or circumvent it all together. Eli essentially weaved a narrative together where the developers, in encountering resistance, moved to areas that were more blighted and with less valuable homes, in order to get more incentives and easier situations to build bigger. One of these strategies is to buy existing homes at fair market value and relocate people.

“Williams is hot now. It is a central employment zone, which is the easiest zone to build in…It’s supposed to facilitate employment in the middle of the city…Now it is mixed use apartment buildings. They are expensive ($2 a square foot). Were in an urban renewal district…transit oriented tax abatements, its gotta be close to a light rail stop, and it doesn’t require low income set aside residences.”

Other strategies included buying homes, locating centralized consumption spaces that welcome different forms of culinary cultural capital, such as New Seasons (Zukin 2005; Logan and Molotch 1986). This is coupled with new art and music spaces that may invite black and white patrons, but as a deeper commitment to ones identity, serves to exclude blacks (Shaw and Sullivan, 2000).

On Interstate and Skidmore, they bought up the block, house by house, with all kinds of incentives including transit abatements. If the house in reasonable shape, I’m ok with moving the house. If the city really wanted to preserve the historic character of the neighborhoods they would protect historic assets…If there are more incentives to protect homes…Small timers are getting squeezed out right now. You know like Ben Kaiser, he’s been able to survive the recession. He’s got a new project, right by New Seasons, on Fremont. New Seasons changed the game. It’s our town center right now.
When it comes down to race in the inner northeast, a few recent controversies, and some subtle buy ups of historic buildings, point at the lack of a real preservational culture.

The Oregon African-American Entrepreneurs building has just sold on North Williams. Williams is a workforce-housing street. No, well, not really workforce, a little more expensive than that. There is a less than 1% vacancy rate in the core of the city…and the Trader Joes Controversy. I didn’t appreciate the race card that was being played in that instance. There’s racism and gentrification issues in Portland that no one wants to talk about. That was a case of a corporate giveaway.

This was a plot of land, on an abandoned lot, in a traditionally African-American neighborhood, on a main thoroughfare. A California development company was sold the land for half a million dollars when it was worth about four million, if not more.

PDC (Portland Development Commission) really dropped the ball on that. I was so frustrated with them. Why do stupid stuff like that, and the African-American population in this community is already so so angry and doesn’t like the PDC. They took out Williams (the downtown area for black culture decimated under the Great Society programs) for the Hospital and really ruined this neighborhood. People see this and say “its just PDC giving away money to the fat cats again.”

Then the pressure falls on Trader Joe’s as the tenant, to deal with the backlash. “They didn’t open up that bidding and they decided this in back rooms. The mayor is now going to go to Trader Joe’s and try and fix this thing,” said Eli. Trader Joe’s has pulled out of the project, leaving the land vacant, jobs there unfilled, and the city without revenue it could have used to subsidize some of its programs to keep people in the neighborhood who are being priced out. The city club of Portland held a Friday forum on housing and homelessness on April 4th, 2014, and the topic of rapid rehousing was brought up. In addition, in tweets, it was noted that “the right to housing is not an entitlement.”

Logan and Molotch, in Urban Fortunes, call out the growth machine development and differentiation agenda of cities as “damag(ing) localities, hurting their poor, their middle classes, sometimes even their renters and elites (Logan and Molotch 1986: 293). As with the conflict of
Trader Joe’s attests to, the “privileged zones most attractive to capital” appear as value-free development, but there is increasing damage for the continuing press for intensified land use in enterprise zones (Logan and Molotch 1986: 293). In a nervous but matter of fact tone, Eli stated that development is always good, right? The conversation veered slightly to how things were done wrong, and what ever happened to the youth center and other sites of memory. In fact, Mississippi corridor weathered some kind of storm; many of the archipelago islands of music scene have resettled further up the street, displaced once over, but successful through networked spatial practices that used benefits and hip landlords and community will to hold spots on the avenue of consumption.

As more and more Americans identify with membership in the creative class and a relationship to amenified hip urban culture, Portlandification - this unique brand of gentrification dotted with signs of sweat equity and local artisanal culture - will become more of the norm in reimagining urban space and place. A combination of real estate speculation, new urban renewal and disneyfication of neighborhood identity is displacing African-American residents in diverse neighborhoods. This is the real ideological heft of the frontier myth that Neil Smith (1992) refers to.

The frontier myth makes the new city explicable in terms of old ideologies. Insofar as gentrification obliterates working-class communities, displaces poor households and converts whole neighborhoods into bourgeois enclaves, the frontier ideology rationalizes social differentiation and exclusion as natural and inevitable (Smith, 1992).

While bringing a measure of community support and promotion of housing initiatives, bars and venues, still as plentiful as before, have taken on a more themed and streamlined quality. The McMenamin family's historic reproductions of ballrooms and the slick interior design of the Doug Fir (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003) are examples, as is the bar on the edge of the Boise
neighborhood featuring cocktails and using the Portland skyline as a backdrop for a new Portland noir where the jazz scene lay under its foundational concrete. As dreamy as Portland seems now, and as culture driven its comeback appears, it will require more than the non-profit, micro city initiatives to stem the rising tide of Portlandification on Portland itself.

The Laurelthirst Public House: Spatial Practices in the Corner Bar

Self-Reflection #3

“The work of memory collapses time.”

-Walter Benjamin

Walking in there this past summer to watch my friend Kelly B. play his pensive, singer-songwriter songs, a Northern California tinged bit of 70s folk rock, was to be transported. Despite some talking, I felt the quality that made this place so quintessential to me. It was a graciousness of the room, embodied in the space, the economic ethos, the staff, and those who frequented this landmark. Everyone is forced to confront the artist in a hall like setting, and most of the crowd was sitting at the bar, heads turned over their shoulders to him. Broken bicycles hung from the walls, busted old horns, and other layers of ephemera. It is a smorgasboard of old-timey kitsch. The bands that frequent it play enough bluegrass, and gypsy jazz, and Americana, build on this authentic hue.

Field Notes 6/14/2012

A lot of what has been taken for Portland culture and the idea of folksy nostalgia, style and earnestness, comes from historical places and built collective entities reimagined. The Laurelthurst café still sits in the Portland landscape as a beacon of nostalgia, simplicity, musician
rights, and acoustic northwest style. When I arrived I saw the indie scene in its dark punk driven and new populist threads grow outward. However, I was always drawn to playing and laying low at the Laurelthirst. Still, as flashy and televisual as the Portland place-based music community has become, there, a badly padded booth and a cheap show beckons.

“A few years back our neighbor Terry dropped off an envelope with pictures of the ‘Thirst from the 30s, 40s, and 50s. Thanks Terry,” wrote the owner of the Laurelthirst on their website. Glenn owned the place from 1939 to 1960 and called it “Glenn’s Blue Keg.” On Sunday’s they would open the café for lunch to the down and out.

The Laurelthirst Public House has been part of the Kearns Neighborhood in Portland Oregon since 1988... The Laurelthirst has been lucky enough to foster a community of exceptional and diverse people that includes its staff, musicians, neighbors and customers. It is a community that we are constantly thankful for (www.laurelthirst.com).

This is part of the mission statement of the public house on their website. In a humble fashion, they highlight characteristics such as “friendly,” “diverse” and a “community” that is an important to them. The musicians are paid the entire door take; it’s usually collected by someone on a stool, irresolutely engaged with the task at hand and has no technology to officialize his accounts. In this way it also keeps with the values of trust and easy authenticity that the place evokes. Many of the top Portland artists that are associated with the scene are associated with the place, often with their beginnings. In addition to witnessing Pete K. come into his own as a gypsy jazz band leader through his group and solo nights and days at the Laurelthirst, I’ve seen many others treat it like home. Warren Pash, A Nashville transplant (who has since gone back) that penned ‘Private Eyes” by Hall and Oates if my memory serves me, used to host an in the
round evening that we all rotated through. Little Sue, a true Appalachian folk artist who also veers into alt-country, has played there for twenty years. Michael Hurley\(^{16}\), one of America’s most renowned folk artists and a living legend, had monthly happy hours there with Rachel B, from M. Ward and the Decemberists and other major bands in the community. She said although it mattered little, and despite the informality for the vibe, they always walked home with some good money from some generous tips. “Lily has always put the musician first there,” she imparted.

It made her think of Jeremy Wilson and John Moen, whom she went to high school with in Portland and were in the seminal band the Dharma Bums back around 1990. We walked by their house one night and she made mention of the fact that a lot of Portland music history happened there. Jeremy has created a foundation he has built to support local musicians when they can’t pay their medical bills. Jenny from the Decemberists also played at the Laurelthirst in various bands. With a pool table, torn red vinyl booths and a do it yourself PA you float above the room on a rickety stage while people swivel slightly to meet your eyes while they imbibe at the bar and you croon. Maybe its not the most purely attentive room – little tables line the middle and some people are there to devour a cannonball (beans in a bread bowl) and talk, but I’ve always found the bar to be on the level with the music and listeners sit up tall.

\(^{16}\) Hurley’s debut album, First Songs, was recorded for Folkways Records in 1964 on the same reel-to-reel machine that taped Lead Belly’s Last Sessions. In the late 1970s, Hurley made three albums for Rounder, all of which have since been reissued on CD. His 1976 LP Have Moicy!, a collaboration with the Unholy Modal Rounders and Jeffrey Frederick & The Clamtones, was named "the greatest folk album of the rock era" by The Village Voice’s Robert Christgau (www.en.wikipedia.org/Michael_Hurley_(musician))
Portland music could be a little fragmented but it’s a place that puts people together. It is without a doubt a “Great Good Place” as Ray Oldenburg (1989) defines in his book of the same name. As a bar, luncheonette, and music venue it embodies the comforts of the third place, a place that is not home and not work, where people can be themselves and participate in the practices of making themselves as a part of a music community. The tavern functions as place for “primary groups” to bond around a working-class ethos in the community, and with an added notion of hippie tinged American roots (Kornblum, 1974). Working class neighborhood patrons are interspersed with musicians with an aesthetic affiliation through style and worldview. This simpler process has now been complicated in the digital age, where sitting around all day or playing a weekly happy hour gig, is harder to come by in more commodified spaces of consumption.

Destination Work/Play: Neighborhoods and the Co-optation of Space

Commodified spaces of consumption are increasingly encroaching upon the uncommercial streets of the eastside of Portland (Zukin, 1995). Each neighborhood seems to be tagged and coded, and a new kind of sustainable, northwest raw wood chic architecture comes with it. The neoliberal city recapitalizes space by establishing zones of consumption and establishing itself as a place in a globalized landscape of meaning (Zukin, 1995; Harvey, 2000). Other spatial practices involve creating urban islands of revitalization, and archipelagos of articulated space that produce an idea of who should populate a locale and how (Soja, 1989). Sometimes, a neighborhood has a serious of stops and starts, which can serve a marginal music community well. Harvey (1996), in *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, notes the disjuncture between public and private space demarcated by parking lots and patches of
grass behind buildings. Here was Club 21, a broken down 50s nightclub in a single room, looking half Casablanca and half workmen’s drinking hall. Its stucco arches didn’t hide the rug stains, the video poker, and rockers drinking bourbon before a show at EJ’s across the street. Both of these were our taverns, comprising a blue-collar camaraderie, now declassed for the codification of our choice and darkening our spirits with drinks. The Sandy Hut was nearby, a real stale old place, smelling like fried anything and where bands went after shows and got really tanked; there’s that famous picture of Al Hirschfield’s of the Algonquin roundtable above the booths, mirroring our ecstatic chatter. It was surreal but also edifying. We were cast away in this tired old Hawaiian style 50s kitsch but we felt right at home.

Eventually, one makes their way to what the kitschiest of 50s kitsch of them all, the Alibi Lounge on North Interstate. A full-blown tiki bar with a neon sign, it is now on the outskirts of the new trendy North Portland. Many Karaoke superstars have left it all out there, but the city now looks to its new, clean blond wood, Mississippi Avenue for nightlife. This is turn invites what Florida (2002) calls “tourism within the city.”

The food cart lot on Mississippi Avenue abuts Skidmore Avenue, where a laundry shares an old ranch house with a cheap Thai restaurant. Now, a Czech beer bar opened into this pedestrian eating mall, with bike parking in front. This is a recent and clear example of how lower-income neighborhoods can be converted into consumptive space via aesthetic revitalization. There is also a struggle to combine older infrastructure, memory and history into the social imaginary. According to Zukin, “There is, then, a necessary marriage of convenience between profit-oriented place entrepreneurs, as Logan and Molotch (1986) call them, and culturally dominant newcomers” (Zukin, 2011). There is shopping and food across the street from here, catering to boutique foodstuffs and cooking classes, that are built into brand new
buildings financed by developers. The neighborhood in question may have been anchored by the efforts of musicians and artists, who then stand on the edge of the new city with a dwindling share of their hard-earned sweat equity. They must either align themselves with the “accumulated practices” of place to reproduce the authentic, or play second fiddle to consumerist capitalism and use cultural capital to “fit in.”

Lloyd (2006) explains this phenomena by suggesting capital does not merely swoop in to low rent areas, but it is coupled by a mix of bohemian cultural producers and consumers that make it viable. It is not only “land rents” as Neil Smith postulates, affecting the rise of gentrification and the outflow of residents, but a more complicated “aestheticization” of space and a population of active, artists and bohemians who fill out the new neighborhood culture (Smith, 1996). Zukin and Kosta (2005) mapped the transformation of 9th Street in the East Village into an avenue of consumption as boutiques took over long time shops that catered to services and the longer-term population. In Portland, the avenue of consumption sits in a corridor of renovation. Many trendy purveyors wait until a critical mass of homeownership develops. Finally, an event that celebrates the neighborhood and casts it in a certain light changes the flavor of it for good.

**Consuming Old Portland: Tourism and Deviant Tourism**

On a spring day in 2013 the debate in Portland City Council surrounds a new clear sidewalk ordinance, which will further empower the city to clear people off of the streets for sitting or general vagrancy. Labeling certain behaviors in the city is often the city’s code for cleansing areas of one element to expand the growth of sidewalk cafes, window shopping, and walking in a consumer mode. The area to the West of the Burnside Bridge was and is filled with
homeless people. The mapped territories of consumption, newly minted as historical and trendy, exposing renovated hotels (some former brothels) can be found on tourist maps like the one reprinted in the *Portlandia* guidebook to Portland. This simulacra of a map covers that which was the real, with a wink and nod to those who’ve been around. In the late nineties the symbolic dark began to replace the really deviant. The Shanghai Tunnel bar, created in the late 90s, was in a cellar where seamen were “shanghaied” - drugged, dropped through a trap door into a basement and taken to ships sailing for China. Carl Abbott, A leading Portland analyst in the Urban Studies department at Portland State University, has written about well-attended opium dens and the “jackrolling” or drugging and robbing of sailors in the old saloons in *Portland in Three Centuries* (Abbott, 2011).

One of the more real walking tours you can get taken on in Portland is Michael Jones’ Shanghai Tunnel tour, where he has cleaned and cleared tunnels just enough that you can see the piles of broken glass and discarded shoes to know how escape was not an option for people in there. However, an expose by Helen Jung of *the Oregonian*, revealed that most of the scant mentions of the actual practice in the Oregon Historical Society folders were from interviews with Jones himself (the Oregonian, Thursday October 7th, 2007). She wrote, “While San Francisco was the ‘world's capital of shanghaing’ a century ago, Portland at times rivaled the Bay Area for its kidnapping and selling of seamen,” according to Richard H. Dillon's 1961 book, "Shanghaiing Days." She continues, “Still, despite the prevalence of kidnapping, several historians said that in their review of old newspaper articles, seamen's publications and city and historical society archives, they have found no mention of tunnels being used to cart off men.”

In the modern moment the history depicted is a “real imaginary” in its selective memory of the past. Photos of the old Portland streetcar hang in the Ace Hotel, but it is a reinterpretation
of some early century hotel charm. “In 1912, Portland’s Vice Commission investigated the city’s 547 hotels, apartment buildings, and rooming houses and found 431 of them to be ‘Wholly Immoral’” (Palahniuk, 2003). Mary’s Club, Portland’s most famous strip club, still sits in the middle of its glistening new hip enclave in the middle of downtown. Walking around downtown groups of tourists led by a tour guide was attuned to the behemoth limestone towers that connote “downtown.” Others take the Know Your City hip walking tour of the centers of vice of the early century, just around the corner on a Saturday afternoon.

Around the block were famous houses of ill repute, like the Louvre at SW Fifth Avenue and Stark Street and the Paris House on the NW Davis between Third and Fourth (Palahniuk, 2003). Moral crusades were common, including the one in 1999 that defined the inner Burnside corridor as a, “Prostitution free-zone.” This increased the penalties on sex work in the district. When the law was struck down, Teresa Dulce and her danzine collective became famous amongst independent sex-workers for protecting women from draconian statutes that used spatial practices to amplify their violations. Teresa would come to my Deviance class at Portland State and explain to the students how she worked to keep the sex worker safe and keep lines of communication with police open. Riot Girl punk overlapped with this kind of independent media outreach. Courtney Love, who went onto challenge the appropriate roles of women in rock, danced at the famous exotic nightclub “Mary’s Club” in the 80s. It challenged the hard gender power dynamics of traditional strip clubs; comics and cross-dressers and informal communication was the norm, and the bar is the stage where dancers and patrons interact.
Commodified codification of the past, and its seedy underbelly, began to dot neighborhoods and hipster enclaves with traces of former spaces. On Northwest 21st (called trendy first back in the day), one place, the Gypsy\(^{17}\) represented the rock scene, served food late night to stumble drunk post-show patrons, and had shows, pinball and characters to show for it. However, a much higher income consumption scene, and not very rock oriented, was built up there in the early 90s. Music Millenium, a local record store with two shops, also was in the neighborhood. Today the façade is still in place, overgrown with ivy as a prop to stand in for history. A generic upscale café filled with well-dressed diners sits where we once browsed endlessly, aimlessly. My last memory is of us kneeling on the floor, rapt, between stacks of vinyl to watch Elliot Smith unveil his majestic, Beastlesesque record, \textit{XO}, acoustically. That was 1998 since there have been tributes to the 15th anniversary of its release in 2013. It was one last taste of Northwest neighborhood rock intimacy.

In the inner eastside industrial district, the late night restaurant \textit{le Bistro Montage} is an open warehouse space that specialized in three-dollar tomato macaroni and cheese. The waiters and waitresses were heavily tattooed rockers for the most part, and the wine was cheap. It was representative of the cheap and seedy nightlife of the mid-nineties. Now, in the inner east side district, there are a number of cocktail bars, music venues, and upscale restaurants serving farm to table fare as destination dining. Many of these warehouses were once illegal live/work spaces or secret supper spots, but now they are restrictively priced, public and relatively chic.

\(^{17}\) Today it features a drink called the fishbowl and is known for lewd karaoke and sexually dangerous scenarios for young ‘spring breaker’ scene women. The commodification of risk in the city has been co-opted by a new extreme cultural trend where rock is much maligned.
The new pastiche of history makes sense as the cultural identity of New Portland on a number of levels. As the historical reference point of authenticity in New York or Chicago are themed around signposts and signifiers from the collective zeitgeist that we already have (e.g. Chicago “Blues” and New York “street life”), Portland had the distinction of being something of a blank slate, what December called “a sleeper city.” This non-distinction has allowed the city’s cultural identity, it’s reimagined new post-industrial self, to cut and paste from its music, poetry and outdoor cultural heritage. The “Portland Building,” often cited as the first postmodern official, city structure in the United States combines elements from a relatively disparate set up historical epochs. Its coloration and pasted on embellishments make it appear almost cartoonish. It sticks out like a sore thumb from where it sits.

*Inner Eastside Industrial Spaces*

Stumptown Printers are a printing press that employs hulking German lithographic machines, in gleaming black and brass, reinventing the early days of the information age. It is not from here that here takes its cue in becoming something unique in the American landscape. In *Creating Country Music* Peterson (1997) writes of the manufacture of the country sound, the yodel as a production, and the costume and character as a willful enterprise with manufactured taste. Here, as a micro-industry, Bluegrass and Old time music reappear in special spaces, less of a con than a wink and a nod as if you’re in on the joke.

Brian Bagadonas was already well-known as part of the Foghorn String Band, a nationally recognized bluegrass band. When he and Rebecca gilbert formed Stumptown printers in 1999 they started with a 1950 Heidelberg German lithographic press and began making posters for bands, as well as cardboard fold up CD sleeves for music artists (including myself),
who didn’t necessarily want shrink-wrapped, Soundscan coded, digitally-imprinted trackable packaging. They created the plate and ran them through the machines in a small local industrial process. Eventually they got their own former industrial warehouse space, where a good deal of metal fabrication has and still does take place, down by the grain elevators and the district of spaces that include the major glass artist and recording studio spots.

“So we shared a warehouse space, the majority of the space was dedicated to the all ages cl…, let's just say project, because it got off the ground but not for long,” Brian recollected.

“And it was a music venue and restaurant. They had like a little cafe thing in there too, right,” added Rebecca.

“Yes so Todd from 17 Nautical Miles…,” Brian finished, “was a leaseholder and he subleased the space to us and to some folks who wanted to open a cafe, and maybe some artists I think, in some other part of the space…So yeah, that was 99.”

“So we built the walls and put a door on, “ Said Rebecca.

“And actually ran the electrical power from the main panel and built infrastructure for the shop. Then the club lasted for...It lasted a year.” Brian mumbled.

Their beginnings overlapped with Todd P’s, with whom my beginnings overlapped with as well. Todd booked me in his original space near Reed College opening for major indie college smart folk type self-analytical soft-core acoustic stuff. Eventually he told us about his expansion plans, and we all picked up paintbrushes and hammers and nails and took to erecting the space in a warehouse under the Morrison Bridge that used to serve as a beverage distribution center. When his idea to pass the fire inspection proved an idea and not a reality, things became difficult in terms of throwing shows there, and the grand plans of housing antecedent subcultural businesses. He left for New York, where we later crossed paths and worked together a bit. By then, he had figured out his craft and had tapped into the rise of the Williamsburg dance punk underground at just the right time.
Curtis K. has a space in the inner eastside industrial core, which has been the consistent hub for Portland industrial production and has still retained a great deal of its industrial character. It is called the Yale Union for Contemporary Art and it houses shows in small cut away spaces teeming with light and vacuous industrial era open space with hulking columns where women would launder the work clothes of the newly emerging city.

Curtis K. takes me outside of his the building that spans a short city block. The grand structure, with a large, open, iron-beamed space looking out over the downtown cityscape, sits beside us out of place in the smaller, low slung, off the river, block, as he goes through some of the grand plans for the decaying loading dock entrance.

So we were talking about the Oak Street building and how it's the roots of this place, Yale Union, Y U Contemporary, because I was there at the Oak Street building and we started thinking about how much we were paying in rent collectively, and so I tried to get everybody together and be like "let's take this 300,000 dollars a year that we're giving to the Oak Street building and put it to our own place." You know? And make it legal.

I did know, but I kept my mouth shut and just let him go. He has a face and eyes that are much younger than his years, an elegant salesmanship in his tone, an insistent gait and nervous speed talking that is irresistible. I decided to get charmed for the sake of argument. Conceptually, he was telling the story of how and why this is the place and the time for Portland to invest in its art, architecture and his vision for putting it all together. It is DIY on a bigger scale, which is clawing the edges of making a more permanent home for public arts while aiding in the recovery of inner warehouse districts of American cities.

(still walking up a creaky metal stair) I was like, "oh." I think this building is so much more amazing than the idea that I had for it, which was basically like a retirement home for me and my friends, you know, I realized, but also to cut this space up would be a crime. So as soon as this became a place, in 2008, I was like "oh my god, this is one of the most beautiful buildings in the city."
I thought, ‘what can I do with it now?’ And so, I brought along my friend Jamison, who started the Department of Safety, up in Anacortes (An art cooperative in a former Police Station in Anacortes, Washington). He and I together were like (snaps) contemporary art center, you know, the PCVA, the Portland Center for the Visual Arts. The thing that Portland has tried to make, a dedicated contemporary arts center, several times, has kind of failed, you know, a few different times for different reasons that I've been witness to this whole time. So learning from those mistakes, hoping that, you know, Portland is big enough to be able to support a dedicated center, knowing that it needs it.

He then goes on to delineate the way in which he is working to keep the collective spirit in what it is his baby, and how bureaucratic structure becomes a tool for mimicry towards inclusion in funding streams. In order for the production culture born of the music scene (he himself is music label owner and recording engineer) to emerge as a player in the expanded landscape of the new city, you have to both sell-yourself as able and humble yourself to the hierarchy of gatekeepers that predate you.

We're in year four and a half and there's a staff here, I'm the director of the program, but it's like the titles are ridiculous, you know, it's all non-traditional. The titles are kind of like, for grant applications, you know, in-house it's a totally free thing, we have jobs that we do better than anybody else here, but there's also tons of overlap and it's not hierarchal, like a lateral power structure. The decision making has been decentralized. It's like a great, fucking amazing project.

Tension picks up a bit as the issue of money percolates through the discussion and the initial focus on the vision. The conversation opened back up to the potential of the project, the prospects, especially when it came to the role of arts entrepreneurs and their alliance with the productive end of historical preservation. Industrial spaces have been increasingly most productive as high-end living or authentic homes for the urban arts (Zukin, 1988). Here’s how Curtis puts it:

It's grounded. It's a 100 year old building which is pretty old for Portland, it's striking architecturally, you can't deny the sound qualities, the light, the windows, the height of the ceiling, the wood creaking, and where it is in the city. We're in central eastside Portland. It has everything to do with Portland and the people of
Portland to me, and it's not a commercial effort. It's a 501c3...There are things I want to do next that I think are more important than art, but anyway, more important than music. So we're getting there, we're getting there step by step. Oh and music is more important than zines, which is where I started out (laughs)...Well this has got to be one of the newest cities on earth, so it doesn't have a lot of history.

Curtis finished with a rant on preserving the history of the city, embedding the memory of the working class experience of the inner eastside onto the consciousness of art consumers in a way that both an art narrative and the story of the city are told at once. He claims that what is more important than music, what he wants to do next. This echoes much of what I heard from Portlanders, who are more interested in looking forward than clinging to the glow of the history of the musical heyday; in actuality, he is holding onto the space in its raw, open, blank manner, inadvertently or not, preserving the punk, DIY ethos that goes back to Calvin Johnson’s warehouse parties in Olympia, and those hosted by Todd P.

It was a laundry building with all women working here in the '20s and '30s, there were crazy union battles between the major big business laundries in town and the unions working for like better wages, better rights. And in this building exists to tell that story permanently. But it is different than reading about history you know, I mean I can see the foot marks worn into the floor where women were like working machinery upstairs for 50 years, you know.

I agreed as we went outside and he talked about potentially quitting smoking. This is a different preservationist impulse than the historic, academic version; he wishes the walls to talk while they are used without heavy-handed remembrance. They are to be used rather than consumed. As there are many different levels to this building, and many layers to his mind, many others in Portland who know and trust him through the music scene support his vision as it percolates into reality through the floorboards and their stories.
West Burnside

*Powell’s Books sits at the heart of Portland’s shopping and consumption hub. At its back entrance, tourists hedge on whether they want to go in, walk a bit more, or save it for a rainy day. Its an urban oasis of color coded, barely furnished, books and stairwells with placards directing you through book tunnels to the purple room or the red room or the orange. The orange hyper-modern streetcar slides silently by across the fish tank glass of the reading room. My neighbor to the right is reading Lao Tzu, I am reading Palahniuk and the woman to my left a guidebook on Chinese Country driving. This urban living room opened in 1971, by Walter Powell, after his son Michael created one in Chicago while at the University of Chicago. He was the first to prospect on derelict West Burnside St.*

*Field Notes 6/10/12*

The inner west side was mainly Stark St, the gay nightlife district, Powell’s books, and the old Castle-like Henry Weinhard Brewery, in the mid nineties. Powell’s was established in 1971, as the owners migrated from Chicago in what was the first youth driven foray out west in the rock and roll era. Today, it is home to chic restaurants, the Portland iconic Ace Hotel, all within renovated historic buildings (many of them former flophouse hotels), conveniently filled by coffee shops and window-shopping friendly stores such as “Crafty Wonderland” and a dine in movie house called “the Living Room.”

On the weirder side of things, catering to the aging rockers of yesteryear and Portland iconoclasts, Voodoo Doughnuts has carved a niche in and among the old Strip Bars and Street Hustling corners of Chinatown/ Old Town. Tres Shannon, an early rock legend of Portland bands
and a founder and booker of the scene making underground club the X-Ray Café, now is consumed as your groovy doughnut man. This is an excerpt from a 2011 interview with him in the Willamette Week.

There’s a black velvet painting of Barack Obama in the living room and a Keith Richards charcoal. We have a bourbon in Shannon’s kitchen. Then more bourbon at Old Town strip club Magic Garden. Then to Dante’s for the Karaoke From Hell set, with regulars screaming “Helter Skelter” and crooning “Desperado,” accompanied by the five-piece combo. Shannon plays tambourine, gong and cowbell, and sings backing vocals. At the set break, we walk to Voodoo. A woman in a short gold dress is vomiting in the alley outside. Shannon finds her a bucket. “I think we gotta get back to keeping Portland sketchy,” he says. “All Old Towns in major metropolitan cities are sketchy. We should be rough and rowdy. We should get back to it.”

“But isn’t Voodoo merely packaging punk vibes into tourism dollars?” says the reporter.

“We just saw people puking in front of my business,” Shannon replies.

“The obvious next step is to open a bar,” wrote the writer, tongue in cheek.

He is opening a bar, a place dedicated to the letter P for some reason. It seems like a strange clubhouse with pool and ping pong and PBR beer and other things hip and P. Tres has always fit the mold of impresario, a character in scene dedicated to putting on shows and booking acts well known and unknown, profitable and fool hearty. By commandeering space and place and branding it weird he helped save some of the authentically weird history of seedy West Portland by the waterfront, and made dedicated doughnuts to represent this. Tres created Karaoke From Hell, a live Karaoke band, before it was cool to cover songs for fun in a rock scene. The ‘90s cool was about original music; the Seattle scene was about dark rebellion and taking the heavy back from the hair bands and cover bands. In this way Tres led more Portland poking fun at the city up North that may be taking itself too seriously. He has always been a part
of the music scene and always a ringmaster in the community of lightening things up. He wears purple pants and feather boa in his interview.

**New Spaces in the City: LOBU**

To half of the people who encounter it, it is a not so subtle reminder of the transformation of seedy chic enclaves into shiny new avenues of consumption in a fortnight. The anchor of this transformation of the riverside East Burnside strip from strip bars and used cars to nightlife, shopping and consumption is the Doug Fir Lounge and the Jupiter Hotel. Once a motor lodge and a Howard Johnson’s just outside the city core, in the 50s people could drive up, and grab a taxi into the city a mile and a half across a bridge and down the avenues. There also was a great deal of vice, still immortalized in the famous and somewhat revered Union Jacks club (still with it’s red and black gleaming sign with a dancer at its heart).

The Doug Fir comes off as a hunting lodge with a space aged lounge layered atop its northwest lumber pastiche. In fact, that is what it is, albeit tongue in cheek. It really is a powerhouse of a nightclub; a professionally managed upscale operation that threw down the gauntlet in terms of business meets mid-sized (500-600 person) rock venue. As Alicia R. puts it:

The Portland rock scene was pretty provincial for a long time, like you said; it was just people making music, no big whoop. I think personally what I would be able to accomplish at the Doug fir, also Holocene opened and smoking stopped in the venues in 2004 ….the music scene in Portland was super undisciplined except for La Luna and when La Luna went away everything was shitty. People started skipping Portland and then when the Doug Fir opened it was a no brainer for me. A super beautiful architect put it together, my friend ran it at Monqui presents and I said this could be something. I approached and they planned on having Monqui book it but I convinced them to hire me. Nobody knows I could do this I would be their secret weapon. I was really able to pull energy from all these different agents really were skipping Portland who didn’t think anything was worth it there. People started realizing that they could count on us, touring bands realized that they could count on us.
Still the club had to walk the fine tightrope between its design, in the motif of Northwest aesthetics, and its neon lit and fire pit posh patio that stretched its appeal beyond the subcultural crowd. This is similar to the argument that Peterson puts across in mapping the different routes to maintain authenticity in a production culture. One of them is to be in dialogue with the authentic traditions of a place (Peterson, 1997). This is true, even though to some extent these traditions are ‘invented,’ or at best recent collective memory reimagined by newly engaged communities (Hobsbawn and Roger, 1983 in Candace Jones, N. Anand and José Luis Alvarez 2005).

The Jupiter Hotel, adjacent to the club, by 2013 is part of a rock tourism that resembles an LA party scene at a metal band’s house in the hills. Leather, new tattoos and spectacular heels lined the indoor-outdoor carpeting of this all white motor lodge scene as bass pumped and escalades rolled into to a strangely New York Meatpacking district kind of Portland portal. There was a bachelorette party upstairs of my sparely re-done Motel 6 turned modernist sheik hotel room. It was a toss up whether the little hotel soaps individually wrapped were retro or from a hotel goods salvage yard. It may very well be both. Nevertheless, this is the far edge of the transition, combining rock and urban brown space to recapitalize space via the working subculture to spurn a neighborhood enclave of consumption (Zukin, 1995; Harvey, 2008).

At the center of the north, south, east, west crossing point, at the center of the Burnside bridge, the street names all shift their directional prefixes. At the pin of the compass point, gentrified New Portlandia radiates outward up the hills of the river’s banks. Along the Eastern waterfront buildings are continually being bought up by commercial real estate to use for condos and fill the rental market crunch, as Eli had said to me. “Representing smaller business, I no
longer can secure a space for a company wanting warehouse loft office space. They are no longer available to anybody but the big guys.” Farther up Interstate Avenue, along the light rail, roadside motels where sex workers would meet newly released prisoners, are now bought up by private developers along tax abated transit channels. As resistance through spatial practices of holding spaces through productive networks, and holding onto homes in a neighborhood becomes tenuous, how do Portland scene makers assert their value as progenitors of this scene? With the rise of self-reflexive technologies and a growing community power base, the moment is cluttered with both precariousness and opportunity.
Chapter 4: Community, Localism and Digital Empowerment

In the new cultural economy Portlanders are trying to reclaim some of the market share of the commodification of cool (Frank, 1995). In the age of institutionalized production cultures, brands were manufactured and repackaged in the marketing agencies and fashion houses of New York City and the production studios of Los Angeles. In Portland, historically, indie labels took care of the exigencies of business and tied together the physical network of production and distribution. In the digital age, Portland companies like North help manage local brand identity online by tracking user trends, and enhancing the image of the idea behind the artistic enterprise. Songs and identities, through indexed spaces in online media, extend the reach of creative entrepreneurs and help make the scene translocal. The city is becoming more of a playground and a nesting space for creative workers who are more likely to consume than produce space. In this climate, the spatial practices of home and connective enterprise make connections with a wider field of resources; concurrently, the push for agency and continuance in local production networks is both aided and troubled by the promise of a hyped commodity culture. A few empowered leaders in the music community are using their connections to digital entrepreneurship and/or collective networks promoting artists rights, to illuminate a path for artists to take back the commons to empower themselves in the city.

As production companies in television and film have relocated to Portland to capture the vibe and the technical labor pool, the creative economy has developed a technological divide. Entrenched ad agencies such as Wyden and Kennedy have expanded into a lifestyle company in their converted warehouse with its own rooftop lounge, basketball courts and insight rooms, modeled after the Nike campus just out of town. The overlap of the indie culture and the tech sector has now blurred substantially; however, some unattached creators are overheating their
laptop hard drives in coffee shops to keep up with the digitized, freelance cultural economy. Portland’s web presence as a music community has given it part of its identifiable allure in social networks. However, as the nature of authenticity in the scene enters a dialectical relationship with the culture of cyber cool, what will happen to the culture of place?

When space is commodified, those who produce and consume within this space may be connected, digitally, but cut off from face-to-face networks of production. Labels, collective houses, and the spatial practices of community networks within the audio identity of the city are under threat in the fragmented, speed driven cyber culture. While Portland advances into the forefront of creative cities, linking technologies with creativity, how do agents on the fringes of the creative class hold space and place within the culture of the city, as selfhood gets digitized? As neighborhoods become special centers for real estate exchange value, “the commodity status of an area within the larger urban system, combined with its internal organization, will determine the fortune of the neighborhood” (Logan and Molotch, 1987).

Community, Collective Living, and the Dream of the Nineties

Artists living in digital cities run the risk of getting pushed out of the neighborhood they themselves played a role in gentrifying, in favor of the technologically sophisticated creative “upper-middle” class. This is a phenomenon currently unfolding in San Francisco in 2014, where Google employees are pricing out longtime residents of the mission district. In this way one of the key components of the spatial practices of urban power - home - is upended even as neighborhoods are preserved and avenues of consumption flower. The opportunity in Portland has been the nascent power of homeownership, collective living, and the pooling of resources
through festivals, recording studios and other nodes of spatial power that are holding out against a sea change of scaling up, both productively and residentially.

*Portlandia: A Guide for Visitors* is a book accompaniment to the television show that serves as a travel guide but is tongue in cheek. It offers little secrets that will get you to the authentic places and in-jokes of hip, provincial Portland town. When they turn to housing, one’s inability to find cheap and authentic spots on the edge of the urban frontier is solved by a savvy tour guide. The search for a perfect, cheap, pseudo-dilapidated apartment with urban cachet is fraught with difficulty. There is also the knowing critique of the gentrifying hip buyer that wants this alternative American Dream, and needs an edge real estate connoisseur to find it.

You are looking for a place to live. You are looking to go a little bit out of your way to get something more affordable...A place that says, I found the coolest little gem, I was the lucky one.” If it has super cheap rent and tons of character, it’s probably owned by an Eastern European immigrant who doesn’t seem to understand the value of the property. Inside it’s cozy and cute with brightly colored walls, on the outside it’s crumbling, with visible signs of tough teenage vandalism. The place is a clear representation to all of your friends and acquaintances that you got into the neighborhood before the waves of gentrification swept through and homogenized everything, everything that made the place cool and edgy in the first place. Welcome to “Artist Living on the Frontier Properties!” We specialize in brand-new properties that maintain the dilapidated look of lower-income areas (*Portlandia: A Guide for Visitors*, p. 71).

This farcical construction helps to unpack the rhetoric of the idealized urban creative class culture. Inherent in its new creative city normal, the latent dysfunction of this set-up is the real dearth of such places, and at its core, less formal landlord relationships with first or second generation homeowners who will rent to you on the cheap. This is a very different picture than Brown-Saracino’s (2004) notion of the “preservationist”. There isn’t an endless supply of this housing, land-rents have been capitalized, and unsuspecting landlords aren’t as naïve and willing to rent to you the artist’s dream space. In season four, episode two, in early 2014 on *Portlandia* a
few “hipsters” find a huge, unfinished loft and when they find out its $5000 per month, the real estate agent, in a tie, attempts to make it work. They find eighteen roommates, but no one has good credit so they just put the name of an affectless extra, “Josh” on the lease. If anything, there are now two anomic American Dream cultures, one in the suburbs with the picket fence and this one, right on the edge of the dysfunctional, intoxicating urban ‘gritty.’

According to Florida, “a broadly creative environment is critical for generating technological creativity and the commercial innovations and wealth that flow from it” (Florida 2002: 22). He also stresses that “(creativity) is associated with the rise of new work environments, lifestyles, associations and neighborhoods, which in turn are conducive to creative work. Such a broadly creative environment is critical for generating technological creativity and commercial innovations” (Florida 2002: 22). These spaces and their spirit of place, the aforementioned new frontier place for the digital frontier self, along with networks of production, are what makes the new cultural economy advance (Zukin, 2010). The new technological freelancer, operating in a self-styled nurturing community of creativity, must control both the destiny of their spatial community and their productive identity.

The aforementioned satirical piece from Portlandia underscores the stark divide between those who can now afford to live in the lifestyle enclaves of cool, and those indie makers who are relegated to the service sector and are pushed out into the farther rings of the urban landscape (Lloyd 2006). Eventually, these bohemian spaces boil over into markets for competitive high-income, cool place seekers. The unregulated demand for shrinking housing stock highlights the barriers to entry into the creative economy, and the potential loss for those who move into the new economy without support structures. The spatial practices of protecting local networks,
know-how and the cultural sensibility of the lived city, are key to preserving the emplaced music scene in Portland, Oregon.

**Brand Yourself: Promoting Oneself Through Place**

_Cashmusic.com_, a Portland initiative to empower musicians, recently tweeted that the only way to success for a musician in the risk-laden landscape of music making and sales is to “invent your own model of establishing and claiming what is due to you.” Many of the people I have interviewed have echoed this point of view, and some have “favorited” this tweet. Afloat at SXSW18 2013, he came up with this epiphany on the value of valuing one’s music in the age of digitized exchange. March 13th, 2013, was the Portland Party at SXSW interactive music, film and video festival and it was filled to capacity. Tender Loving Empire set up an underwater photo booth to tweet pictures of people diving into the pool.

The Portland buzz has permeated the alternative music world, and where there were once labels standing in as identifiers of music styles, this mobile party is place based, and resolutely “Portland.” This buzz was not achieved in a vacuum of free-floating signifiers of inclusion and Portlandness. _Cashmusic.com_ has embarked upon a clever campaign of recruiting top musical personalities and aligning themselves with other agents of “voice” in the digital commons. This mirrors the scene building mechanisms in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, documented in Zukin’s _Naked City_, albeit with a digital twist (Zukin, 2010).

---

18 South by Southwest (SXSW) is an independent art and culture festival that takes place in March of each year. What began as street length music festival down Austin’s bar filled Fifth St. is now an interactive, film and digital media enhanced consortium of thinkers and companies that bookend the dwarfed music festival at its center. Once open to small indie bands it is now more exclusive.
Like other arts districts, Williamsburg’s vitality depended not just on the presence of artists, writers and musicians, but also on their ability to become cultural entrepreneurs. In truth, some of them brought their best creative efforts to this role (Zukin, 2010: 46).

In fact, most of this work of scene building has come before this moment, on the ground and “in-town,” through small events that have built into bigger ones, like the music festival NXNW (North By North West, now Musicfest NW) and, even more so, pop-up galleries and rock shows. It is at concerts where deals happen, and in shared spaces like record stores and distribution warehouses. Yet, in the era of digital production, distribution and promotion, the practice of preserving cultural memory is under duress. In the up to the second digital universe the high-speed traffic of web representation seems like a king making machine. However, it still requires emplacement, though now on a wider stage.

*The digital self and online memory*

The dialectic in digital culture where production creates exchange value but the object of one’s making becomes diffuse, displaced and abstract, often results in a sense of loss. However, the new practices of emergent identity that the digital form inspires, as a listener, a collector and a distributor, offer new opportunities for reflexive selfhood (Castells, 1996; Giddens, 1991). Belk (2013) in his assessment of the problems of meaning and value associated with the digital object, interprets the loss of tangible “aura” of the musical object in the following way:

We might add to this that digital possessions as well as most digital devices lack the soft tactile characteristics of clothing and furniture that make it possible to almost literally embed our essence in such possessions (Belk 2006). This essence is the characteristic that Benjamin (1936/1968) called “aura” and that Belk (1988) described as contamination (contagion)—the soul of the person rubbing off on or impregnating the object (Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011). Furthermore, for virtual possessions that are endlessly replicable, it is difficult to regard them as perfectly unique, nonfungible, and singular (Belk 2013).
In music, there is a new type of listener, in possession of a new type of object-world to relate to. The objects themselves might not be singular objects referring to particular moments, but they have a textural, embodied, engaged-in quality (DeNora, 2011). There is a singularity in one’s digital collection, albeit less tactile than the historically connected contents of one’s library (Belk, 2013).

Digital theorist Jaron Lanier writes, in *Who Owns the Future?* (2014), that the opportunity for a new micro-payment culture and a creative middle class of self-distributed producers is possible. It’s “urgent,” he claims, “to determine if the felling of creative-class careers was an anomaly or an early warning of what is to happen to immeasurably more middle-class jobs later in this century” (Lanier, 2014: 212). In this way, one must be their own creative agent in monetizing some aspect of the transaction between fan and artist. This open source philosophy renders all “products” decoupled from traditional price mechanisms; in this way, t-shirts and handmade art pieces, special personal recordings and other ephemera, come to represent music consumption through channels of craft and performativity. The self-appointed spokesperson for this creative commons capitalism, is web personality and digital strategist, former socialist punk band member, and new Portland scene guru, Dave Allen.

**Digital Strategies in the City**

“No escape from society
Natural is not in it
Your relations are of power
We all have good intentions
But all with strings attached”
- Gang of Four, “Natural’s Not In It”, from *Entertainment!*

Dave Allen is a founding member of the seminal politico-punk band from Leeds, *Gang of Four*. They took their name from the four members of the Chinese Communist Party, led by Mao
Tse-Tung’s wife, who orchestrated the Cultural Revolution. David Fricke of *Rolling Stone* described *Gang of Four* as "probably the best politically motivated band in rock & roll" (Gang of Four entry, Wikipedia). The group’s debut single, “At Home He’s a Tourist,” from 1979, is an anthem of consumer alienation that I’d blast on my bike careening through Portland after my critical theory classes.

“At home he feels like a tourist
He fills his head with culture
He gives himself an ulcer
He fills his head with culture
He gives himself an ulcer”

At the time, the theorists of the CCCS (the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies) were writing about subculture and style as a site of resistance to the aesthetics of authority. Much of the Birmingham school was suggesting we “opt out” to reclaim our class-consciousness, as opposed to participating in a classed consumptive façade. Interestingly enough, the Dave Allen I met with, for two hours, has a very different take on the potential for music and music culture in the digital and “Portland” age. Now teaching a class on Digital rights at the University of Oregon, and working for digital brand tracking company called North, he was singing a different song, as fiercely as he may have sung the one before.

The website for North consists of a couple of postcards of 60s faded, kodachrome, nature shots of models amongst moose, mountains and streams. If you click “people” up comes Dave in a parka, his mustache covered in snow. After a few minutes I realized what mattered to Dave A. “I kind of moved away from the music industry quite a lot, not that I moved away from the music scene in Portland, but now as an observer…the Gang of Four reunion reminded me of how awful it is (the music industry).”
According to his resume, he came to the Northwest via a gig to work with Intel to digitize music distribution. Recently, with North (he has since moved on to Beats music, where streaming music service will be undertaken via expert curation of playlists from celebrities), and his involvement with musician support companies like Cash Music, he practices what he preaches. His intent is to use big data to increase the exposure of brand identities nestled within the symbolic economy of Northwest cool. He exudes confidence in regard to this promise, and it feels like talking to a punk rock evangelist for the new “free culture.”

It’s fascinating to me that I got in a major spat with David Lowery last week. My company apologized to David because I let loose. Basically I see them as luddites. They want to find the gears of the Internet and grind it to a halt.

The title of my post was, “the Internet couldn’t care less about your mediocre bands.” It’s an ironic statement “all of your bands now belong to us.” I’m not known for anything less than blunt…but I got depressed defending Emily (White) from NPR…For such a forward thinking town, the discussion among musicians is often about stealing and I have my foot in both camps. The discussion among technologists is always about opportunity and if you only embrace this you’ll be able to make money. The question shouldn’t be how do we stop people from stealing music but, how do we help musicians to make a living.

This “spat” dominated a portion of our discussion. I knew it was going to, as I first spotted it as a reaction to the letter David Lowery wrote to Emily White on the NPR website. This became a facebook viral thread, and he is right when he said that many men, of an older generation of record store sales clerk taste culture gatekeeper critics, led the charge against a young woman who claimed she didn’t pay for almost all of her music. Many accused her of “stealing.” Stealing in and of itself in many contexts is a social construction; the air was considered an unregulated space until air travel and skyscrapers made that resource finite. A music file is a self-renewing

Lawrence Lessig wrote a book of the same name clarifying the legal and business principles behind the exchange of goods and ideas online.

Member of legendary indie musician Camper Van Beethoven and recording engineer in Richmond, Va. and blogger for the rights of music royalty persistence.
If this person chooses not to stream a song but give them a few free mp3s, that are moving to monetize it, and if they give them a link to *Itunes* they might buy the rest of it. I read an article on pay what you want on Harvard Business review, and 90% give something…

I was at a show at a conference and I said, if I could give any financial advice to any band on tour, it would be to allow people to pay what they want. I had tons of people email me to thank me. One guy gave one band $20 on a 4 song cd. I’ll give you the link. Gang of Four was on tour with Ben Taylor (son of James Taylor) and he said, “lets do this.” And people were paying over and above what they were asked.

“That is the spirit of Kickstarter,” I say.

“I love Kickstarter,” responds Dave, swinging his pint towards me.

“I’m on the board of Cash Music here in Portland and it’s an open source software for people to plug and play here in Portland. People care, if you build this for musicians to help musicians promote music in their own way. It’s the new marketplace.”

These are tactics as opposed to strategies, ways of developing adaptive technologies and practices to cope with the shifting, thing-less landscape of consumption. From a Foucauldian perspective, the digital consumer can become the “object of the panoptic gaze,” categorized and authorized to access various mediated versions of themselves in delineated ways (Humphreys 2006). But Humphreys also points out that resistances are possible in renegotiating consumption in the digital realm (Humphreys 2006). This new consumer whom, according to the words of Gang of Four, “feels like a tourist” at home, may be empowered in the frontier culture of micropayments and collecting attention that is cyberspace.

The backlash however, to this defense of post-royalty anarchy, has been fierce; Allen was harassed via comments on his blog and in the comments in the local paper *the Willamette Week*. 
People shot back at him that they were going to give away his whole back catalog online. He replied that most of it is up there, and in fact he gets new listeners that way all the time.

An example that I like to use is Rupert Murdoch and the Wall Street Journal. Rupert Murdoch is a newspaper man. He decides that the lack of newspaper subscriptions is hurting advertising income. So he creates the Daily, at 99 cents a day. It’s an Ipad app. The problem is that it costs him $300,000 dollars. So what they do is build a giant paywall. So Richard Branson builds one too. These three companies are disregarding how people are accessing the news today. The first thing I do is access my Twitter feed and find the main stories…You guys are facing the wrong direction. It’s like a town in the 19th century, saying take this locomotive and turn it around.

Dave A. talked about challenging fans at the recent Gang of Four reunion tour to pay what you will, and they paid more, through volume purchasing, then they would have had they been confronted with a fixed higher price. Kickstarter, Indieagogo and Bandcamp are all digital outposts for music funding that allow the consumer to be a part of community around a creator, and pay what they can.

The idea of the Creative Commons goes back to the original conception of what Jefferson had intended when the intellectual copyright laws were set up.

Thomas Jefferson, architect of original American copyright law, argued that ideas should remain in the public domain rather than bound by legal restrictions. Instead, only the expression of such ideas in artistic works would be eligible for copyright protection and this only for a limited period of time to ensure that creators would have incentives to continue to produce artistic work (Vaidhyanathan, 2001: 20–4).

After the 1984 conglomeration of the music industry, fewer resources were being designated towards the “incentives to continue to produce,” and were not therefore, necessary for the protection of artistic reproduction, but of the profit enterprise (Garcelon, 2009). Furthermore, one of the key problems being experienced by the music industry actor is that the bureaucratized
production culture and its representative schemas of capital have been disrupted (Garcelon, 2009).

**Kickstarter: Buying Into the Portland Spirit**

Adam Shearer had great success using *Kickstarter* for his most recent album for his band Weinland. In this all or nothing format, they were forced to be creative to compel people to participate in an outpouring of support for what feels like a collective engagement. The value of the rewards for certain pledges ranged from practical to comedic. For a pledge of $1,974, you could win their 1974 Ford Econline tour van that has actually been in Adam’s family since it was new in 1975 (Brauns, 2011).

The music is ostensibly free, but the connection to its production puts one in the artisanal stream of community. If it seems less than a perfunctory product the fund raising might peter out. This concept of crowdsourcing, is much more democratic than say, micro-credit, where small farmers in India have turned to selling off livestock and even suicide in the failure to repay even a tiny loan. Here, you either make your target or the money goes back to where it came from.

This ingenuity emanating from ideas and technologies latent in the programming community has become de riguer in the music scene here. The Banana Stand, a roaming institution of music production and presentation, has their business model set up this way:

Bands are recorded at private live shows every month. Recordings are free to the band, as is the production and online distribution. Any profits from the sale of the album are split 40% to Banana Stand Media, 40% to the artists and 20% to the recording engineers (Banana Stand, facebook.com).

As the 21st century conception of a music scene grapples with ideas of value, fairness and moral communities of production, learned from practices germane to the scene (such as profit sharing,
or being able to tour and swap responsibility) serve as field guides to new arrangements of making a living. With all these threads of production culture intentionality, a level higher than creative entrepreneurship is necessary to represent these disparate meanings of the indie career.

**Herding Cats in the Age of Teletechnology**

Many advocates for musicians see the way forward as somewhere in between these two potential extremes. Samantha H. has been working with the Future of Music Coalition, compiling data and lobbying in Washington, in order to highlight and agitate for fair and transparent revenue models on digital download services such as Spotify and Pandora. She also is applying for grants to create a pop-up type clearinghouse of information and networked advocacy that can help independent producers circumvent large bureaucratic organizations that are weakening in this new digital production culture. However, putting together a group of Portland musicians to become a part of enterprises such as this is daunting.

This complicates the picture in the new digital landscape of promotion, production and revenue streams and has prompted pioneers like longtime Portland resident Rebecca G. to lead an activist enterprise. This initiative centers around how to develop flexible resource initiatives that can be a clearinghouse on how to proceed in the new music economy. As many of the middlemen, like indie labels and distribution companies, have fallen away, where is “the cause and effect” measurement of promotional acumen, as Rebecca put it, now that the structure is mostly gone. “Were trying for a structure that’s almost like a resource center, to be useful but to have that flexibility,” Rebecca told me. “I know this is something that is happening in design and tech.” We talked about what people do with their digital time, and potential collective change in that arena.
“There’s a lot of ego and a lot of territory. I’m not interested in helping people write a better blog. I’m trying to ground it in an open source framework. I’m not into the conversation about whether you’re a real musician or not, or can we save it for after hours. The *Future of Music (Coalition)* is about working musicians…real music careers. “

*The Future Music Coalition* is a wellspring of data for how artists are surviving, for analyzing revenue arrangements with digital streaming companies and for public forums mapping strategies for musicians across genres into the future. The further fracturing of social formations like labels, distributors, and even the power of recognition of community scenes has led people to turn to think tank models of networking to head off the artists at the edge of the digital unknown, and offer tools for collective agency.

**From Pop-Up Advice Stands to Community Institutions: New Resource Frontiers**

Music is unique in, for instance, the minstrel period when you’d you go from one town to other towns, etc… When we were on Conan O’Brien people thought we were a more important band. We got an *Oregonian* article written about us even though we didn’t sell any more records. The thing about the label system was that it introduced a system of causality. You could pay the engineer, and they’d say, “Here, I’m gonna help you develop this and promote this.” Now, I’m gonna put out a record, there is no cause and effect. I’m gonna get a couple of reviews, I’ll probably sell a couple to family and friends, but it’s really tenuous. Part of being an artist is not needing that answer. *Is* there gonna be a way if you are not on a label, to build a career?

This is the pressing question at the intersection of the new digital landscape, and the decline of necessary elements of local culture as anchoring structures. Community as a resource is further complicated by the contradictory role of place in the modern production culture in the city. At once there are mechanisms to add new members, new jobs in tech and new need of promotion and touring (Becker, 1982; Peterson, 1975). On the other hand, the individuation brought about by flexible production and micro-networks of “nomads,” as Rebecca calls these roaming musicians, strained the structural resources that are placed-based. In essence, manning
the new “pop-up shop, resource centers” with interested and reciprocal agents of their own
music, is like “herding cats.”

… it’s hard to organize musicians around, they’re babysitters and it’s a hectic life
and it’s like herding cats, but on the flipside it’s the amazing community, that’s
non-geographical, which used to be almost exclusive to us but with the web it is
not. We would show up in a town, you can kind of create this alternative reality
it’s the idea of the minstrel carry the news or the minstrel with their stringed
instrument. For me that helped me and my own practice, curating gave me
vocabulary about how to think about music, and the power of the nomad, and I
think musicians don’t get reminded of that enough… to think in terms of urban
planning and place-making versus, like, “were here to rock you.”

Rebecca is buoyed by the potential of technology - curated moments of extension of the
self into the cyber realm - but the struggle then becomes how to harness one’s reflexive self
while staying connected to value-driven action that is part of being in the city. Musicians here
have a hard time seeing themselves a resource for anterior social potential, although in Portland
that is changing fast. On the ground musicians are contributing to community building,
representation in the city, and supporting struggling institutions and raising public awareness to
social issues.

However, this does not preclude the work of converting cultural capital and its potential
agency into social structural power.

How can you start something that is like campfire? An interesting thing for me is
that I talked to this one band who covered a Spinanes (Samantha’s band on
SUBPOP) song and they talked to Larry (Crane) at Jackpot (studios) and they got
in touch with me, and basically I had to explain mechanicals and all the business
stuff to them. I didn’t ask them for money, but I said if for some reason someone
wanted to use it for cheap you have to send them to me.

Cultural producers with in the city are struggling to gain traction in order to articulate
their own role and community-based identity. In the face of post-fordist flexible accumulation of
what is now the capitalized symbolic economy of Portland, space is the notion of place that can
be reimagined, occupied and retrofitted to act as a resource for music makers. From the
basements of house parties, to Rebecca’s “agency of me,” cultural entrepreneurs are trying keep
their resource base headquartered in Portland proper.

Rebecca G. and I talked about the pros and cons of musicians being nomads; at once they
can touch upon nodes of like-minded people in other cities and can be an embodied presence in a
network of social action. On another level, they may make Portland their home but do they
successfully respond to the amorphous but real necessities of precarious creative producers? In
the areas of health care, digital rights, publishing, PR, etc., resources abound but they are hard to
pool into concrete stations to be accessed. Unions typically have not been the arena where indie
musicians have put their energy into; travelling and various modes of income generation
complicate the role that a local union could and may have played for musicians in the past. The
myth is that the most money made by musicians is on the road. According to the Future of Music
Coalition, this is one of the grand myths of the mighty road band.

Figure 5. Percent of Income from Performance (Artists Revenue Stream, March 2012, the
Future of Music Coalition, www.money.futureofmusic.org)

In aggregate, 28% of
survey respondents’
income in past 12 months
came from live shows/
performances.

N = 5371
These percentages were even higher for some of our interviewees, as well as our financial case study subjects. But, it is rarely their only source of music-related income. Indeed, less than 13% of respondents rely exclusively on income from live performance, being a salaried player, or a combination of both. Touring itself has its own caveats; touring costs money, it’s not very scalable, and it requires constant output. And, for some musicians, playing live is simply not part of their career structure (thefutureofmusic.org, 2013).

At SXSW 2014 a piece in the New York Times, by David Carr, marveled at the audacity of artists like Lady Gaga, requiring fans to film themselves doing something outrageous to gain entry into a concert. The self-objectifying videos then were uploaded to Twitter via the Doritos brand account to promote their brand’s participation in music culture. Carr said that he couldn’t attend the show, because he wouldn’t offer free content to an advertiser as a fee for music. In this way, music serves as symbolic coding for digital media advertising firms, and they often use promotions to circumvent artists’ rights. Carrie Brownstein, of the Northwest indie band Sleater-Kinney and now Portlandia, was also interviewed, and pointed out that music was now mostly free, and there are few products to be sold that are concrete and verifiable means to income for musicians.

“I almost felt like I was in festival-land and the bands were there as part of the theme park,” she said. “Still, it’s good there is a physical place where people gather to watch music because so much of it seems to come from nowhere at a cost of nothing.” With record sales a thing of the past, she said, “everyone in music is trying to figure it out and there is no algorithm for that. It’s very treacherous” (Carr, 2014).

Carr goes onto cite the new outsized role of brands and music collection agencies, trying to sign bands in much the same way as labels once did. On this front, local bands are adrift in the now overhyped SXSW to get noticed and potentially placed in an advertising context. The festival
circuit is growing, due to the allure it offers for sponsoring brands to seem in the know as a product producer. Bands are under increasing pressure to commodify themselves without contracts or promises to be paid. The expansion of opportunity for bands to be seen and heard comes amidst a contradictory need to curate their reputation and get paid. In the city of Portland there is an ongoing push to situate musicians in the local economy, to help them procure services and grants, and place their work contractually in media and advertising.

**Representation**

Bob Ham, a local music journalist, interviewed Dave A., who has a lot to say about the potential for indie music in the new economy. “I’ve always felt that we needed someone in City Hall to push agendas on behalf of the indie music business. City Hall is a bureaucracy with a top down agenda, but the true indie music scene comes from below the street. Sam is the perfect person to meet these two groups in the middle and make that connection.”

Bob then interviewed Mayor Adams and asked him about connection to the music scene. “There was a lot of untapped potential there,” Adams remembers, “but a lack of adequate support. And the community itself was the worst interest group in terms of organization and advocacy that I have ever seen. So I ran to become, Arts & Culture Commissioner, to try and take care of some of the basic stuff: resources, venues, and affordability for artists to be able to earn more of an actual living at their creative pursuits.” Bob goes onto cite a representative case where the city and its commission system of the regulation of alcohol, seems to morally disrupt the spatial practices of the music community already set up on the ground.

To those ends, Adams helped increase funds given by the city to the Regional Arts & Culture Commission (which gives out grants to artists and groups working on their behalf), opened up City Hall for art exhibits and events, and, in a rare
show of support by a Portland politician, petitioned the Oregon Liquor Control Commission to relax their stringent laws—thereby allowing more all-ages shows in venues that also sold alcohol.

This distinction has been at the core of battles throughout the northwest corridor, harkening back to the early 90s Riot Grrl scene and ‘zines explaining how to make your own venue. Todd P., who later became one of the most widely known music promoters in Williamsburg, Brooklyn had two spaces in Portland that many of us painted, presided over and played at. Unlike many other locales, wristbands weren’t used to separate the drinking spectators from the underage fans as a regulatory tool. He was a very vocal and regulation-bending advocate for inclusiveness in public spaces for young fans. These actions have led to the normalization of under-21 participation in the indie and punk rock nightlife.

“There were some of my staff that were quietly surprised that I came out as strongly as I did,” Adams says. “I know that they need the purchases of adult drinks to survive, but relegating the underage to second class status at music venues or just excluding them is not tolerable.”

These tie-ins with a Mayor who once DJ’d a record store day by playing the Decemberists and Pete Krebs at Jackpot records in the heart of downtown, haven’t catapulted him and his administration into icon status. Ideas about an ideal community center/education space haven’t yet come to fruition. Mayor Adams chose not to seek another term and Charlie Hales stands in his place. Those who put their weight behind a candidate seem to be realizing that, just as the music scene produces itself from below, so might the new social formations germane to the technological and real opportunities in the indie music city.
They’re Playing Our Song (but it’s not mine)

In a recent article in the *Daily Beast*, Richard Florida admitted there were limits to the potential of the Creative Class to uplift the fortunes of city dwellers, let alone precariously situated local producers. He put it this way:

The rewards of the “creative class” strategy, he notes, “flow disproportionately to more highly-skilled knowledge, professional and creative workers,” since the wage increases that blue-collar and lower-skilled workers see “disappear when their higher housing costs are taken into account.” His reasonable and fairly brave, if belated, takeaway: “On close inspection, talent clustering provides little in the way of trickle-down benefits” (Kotkin, 2013).

The inherent benefits in a more creatively driven economy have not, it appears, trumped the real economy pitfalls of contingency work in cultural industries plus the rising cost of living in a lifestyle economy. However, Florida’s rebuttal mirrors our agenda here – to recognize the precariat at the underside of this amenitized city, in which income is going up, but for whom and in what rate relative to the cost of living. Says Florida to Kotkin:

Back in 2005, my *Atlantic* article “The World Is Spiky” showed how skills and prosperity tend to concentrate in a relative handful of places, and not just in U.S. cities, but around the world. I pointed out that we cannot afford to cut down the innovative peaks (the great urban clusters) that power global economic development, but must lift up the people and places that the knowledge economy is leaving behind (Florida, 2013).

He goes on to cite the lack of supply as the reason behind rising housing costs in quality of life cities (Yglesias, 2012). Structurally, that lack of supply is in part due to, “organizations and institutions whose routine functioning reorganizes urban space” (Logan and Molotch, 1987). This process, along with “the active promotion of a complementary ideology of consumerist individualism,” has led to strained social bonds in the neighborhood, overshadowed by a hyper-individualized conception of exchange value in art-making (Ewen 1976 in Logan and Molotch,
1987). In Portland, patterns emerging in the Division Street corridor and on Williams St. attest to the logical fallacy that the sheer volume of housing units drives down price and thus is the problem of the lower class of the Creative class. If units are placed without restraints on rents, and consumerism is of an elite bent, the problem of adaptation to a gentrified and amenitized landscape will require more than more housing.

**The Fall of Indie Labels and the Rise of the Digital Storefront**

Dan D., longtime music maker, and early adopter of computer recordings, handmade “products”, and sweat equity for art/business space, is uploading bundles of files of atmospheric synthesized pop sequences for commercial use. The website serves as clearinghouse for potential users, who can sift through the content anonymously searching for that little tidbit of sound that might animate a game, suit an app, or score an ad. His trajectory is one of adaptation to the changing business practices, the decline of the physical product, and the rise of the digital storefront for musical as audio textures, songs and landscapes. He landed far from where he started, exchanging songs on acoustic guitars in a basement in 1996. Through that process, and spatial practices of art enterprise in the city, Dan would procure space, and eventually we would attach ourselves to each other and build a record label called HUSH.

HUSH was constructed by Dan and literally cut and pasted together by myself and Darena S. in what we called TANK, referring to the fishtank on the historical corner of Broadway and Everett by the grand old Union railway station by the river. In the Pearl district, an art enterprise zone, the Everett Station lofts were a converted train station where ground floor artists must exhibit in tiny studio apartment “lofts,” while the moneyed creative lived above them and shopped their wares on open evenings. In the light of foot traffic, we took old math books
from the 50s and cut equations into abstract cover art for our home burned compilation called LESS, continuing the recognizable four letter spare motif developed by Dan. He would showcase his art in the space on first Thursdays, and self-represent his work to the public.

This moment refers to a time in the late nineties, where place making seemed approachable; real estate was affordable and we all held food service type jobs and lived financially just above drowning. However, from Chapter 3, home in Portland has been linked to the little craftsman with a practice room in the basement, and this loft living didn’t take root as the urban chic mode like in New York. Instead, artists crammed into four bedroom craftsman homes in the depths of neighborhoods, and the amenities followed much later. This illustrates the way in which spatial practices, more so through networked ties, dominated the growth of the scene. This connectedness beyond consumer enclaves is another building block of potential collectivism.

**Here in Oregon: Community Service, Music and the Return of Place**

In the summer of 2013 the state of Oregon, in promoting their new state Health exchange initiative, featured Laura Gibson, a HUSH records alum, playing a self-styled and penned song as an homage to Oregon living.

Oregon plans to launch a $2.9 million multiplatform ad campaign on Tuesday to promote its new online health insurance market, *The Oregonian*'s Nick Budnick reports, and the ads they're using are very...Oregon. Folksinger Laura Gibson stars in the 60-second "Live Long In Oregon" spot, which is aesthetically similar to the title sequence from Fox's *New Girl*. As Gibson stands in a red sundress in the middle of a field singing about "the Oregon way," earth-tone-clad stagehands and children rotate through carrying cardboard clouds, rainbows, waves and paintings of various Oregon locales. The lyrics, meanwhile, celebrate Oregon's diversity:
This sunny paen to Oregon living and livability, and shared responsibility, definitely tugs at the heartstrings. It also underscores the very Portland parodied in Portlandia at the same time. We can fix problems of the neo-liberal economy and contingent labor via the social, with our energy and commitment to something; in this case it is being provided by the state. However, it’s not the beauty of the song that is at issue but perhaps the logic that still persists in the social world of the creative heart of the scene in general. How will the artists fare even as they become primary (not “indie rocker” in the lyric) to the cultural identity of the city? Is there no greater reward than exposure? As a postscript to this ad, John Oliver, in his new HBO mock news show, made a spoof on the song to highlight how Oregon spent $100 million on the program (including ads) and the website didn’t work. Although the musicians do represent a general taste in Portland (which dominates the state voting population), there has emerged a backlash due to “hipsters” being featured in sunny expensive state run commercials.

The cultural entrepreneur that deals in cultural capital and co-operation networks still exists at the margins of the burgeoning lifestyle city. As in the example of Williamsburg Brooklyn set forth in Naked City, agents of grass-roots production have brought artists into the forefront of the cultural economy (Zukin, 2010); the Doug Fir Lounge, slick and modern as it is, uses long-time rock poster artist Mike King to make in mid-century kitsch posters of hikers on the Oregon Trail. They support many local showcases for old and new bands respectively. In response, the community, including the Beebe family who owns the Ecotrust space, combines green capitalism logics and that seamless incorporation, with the logic of the music scene as a
sharable commodity. I wandered into an ecofair in the opulent Pearl District to watch Laura Gibson play. We crowded in to a courtyard, unable to see. On the roof, watching form above was a corporate party of creative industry workers, staring down at us with black tie service in the new Portland constellation of spatial privilege unfolding.

**Greening and Engagement in Public Spaces**

Finally, there is a renewed view that the city government and the parks department and a civic sensibility can continually integrate music in the new city. Outdoor concerts, like the one’s in the Chinese Garden, plus the Ecotrust building shows, give many local bands the sense that the greater city wants them in their aural landscape. Furthermore, non-profit commitment to small artist grants, including musicians, has gone up through the Regional Arts and Culture Council (RACC). Historically, music stores have driven an economy that is now threatened with the changes in music production. However, non-profit groups, including RACC, which is contracted by the city and had been controlled by a high-art focused set of donors and managers, has warmed to rock and pop music. Twitter calls have been put out to get applications in for individual grants for producing conceptual and/or locally productive music. Holcombe Waller and Nick Jaina are but a few of artists who have obtained these grants. Cary Clarke, who was the mayor’s Arts and Culture co-ordinator, spoke about their role:

“They (RACC) do workshops around the city in geographically diverse areas. They do intro to grants writing and intro to copyright law for musicians. They are kind of unique because they do more and more individual artists grants….there is this bias against popular arts forms because people think about it as more lucrative, etc. We’ve also got the local musicians on hold program going where they all got paid.”

Cary also spoke in depth about the coordinated efforts from the city and non-profit ventures in the city to celebrate music in the expanding park spaces of Portland, plus a program called *Arts*
for All, that offers discounted tickets to families in need and otherwise might not participate in arts programming.

Cary then went on to talk about how there has always been a long running pride of place. People invested their personal capital, like Terry from Music Millenium, Todd Fadel from Meow Meow and Larry Crane of Jackpot (recording studio). He spoke about how Dead Moon is a poster child for Portland music, in terms of personal capital and social continuity. “You can’t get more DIY than owning your own lathe.” Eric Isaacson interviewed Fred and Tootie for a series called Northwest Passage, a product of the Dill Pickle Club, which is now called “Know Your City” the aforementioned Portland history non-profit. “We think of this as a new trend but Portland had the first Art Museum west of the Mississippi…One of the things we did when I was at City Hall to kick off Black History month in 2011 was to have a day honoring Portland’s jazz elders. Esperanza Spalding happened to be coming through (a Portlander) and had won a Grammy with Thara Memory and they played and talked and we had other icons form the Portland jazz history.”

For me, with PDXPop, I am most proud of it as a youth leadership organization, although that might not be a very punk rock kind of thing. There are not a lot of non-profit organizations where 20 year olds can serve. I actually met this one girl Christine who I originally met as a 13 year old volunteer, and watched her become more involved in the organization and grow. Participation in music community on its own terms is a form of civic engagement. It is also a doorway to other forms of civic engagement.

21 A lathe is the old cutting needle that puts down grooves into vinyl to make records. He has a collectible one from midcentury that he uses to manufacture some of the bands records still.
22 Actually the name of the original hipster historical society of Chicago Bohemia est. 1917, run by Jack Jones and serving as a speakeasy and anarchist press, *the Dil Pickle Press.*
Other collective strategies entailed a musician’s led movement to move your money (moveyourmoneyportland.com) from corporate banks to local credit unions, in late 2011/2012. This had in its genesis the idea to make one’s money more local, and less a part of the extractive and corrupt international banking conglomerates. Part of the intital manifesto/press release went as follows:

Portland musicians Rachel Blumberg, Sam Coomes, Neal Morgan, and Lisa Schonberg have formed a working group to encourage local musicians and music-related businesses to remove their money from Bank of America, Citi, Wells Fargo, and JPMorgan Chase and begin banking with a clear conscience at a credit union or local bank.

The working group formed shortly after the first march and assembly of the roughly 10,000 Occupy Portland demonstrators on October 6 following a discussion about what concrete steps they and others could take to help right an economic and political system in America that is increasingly shaped by the shortsightedness, recklessness, and greed of the me-first, country-second elites and their government cronies at the expense of the health and well-being of local economies and communities.

Becoming aware of ones stake in investing in one’s city and one’s music is an emerging theme as the live/work balance is threatened by the rising cost of living. In parody such as Portlandia, and in the paradox of the hipster depicted in backlash campaigns including those celebrating “the death of the hipster,”23 one’s work ethos and economic service are cited as absent. Many of the people in this community, however, have learned to labor in the identity stabilizing cultural sectors of lifestyle cities, forgoing meaning at work at times for meaning in art and political action, valorized in subcultural systems.

23 This quote refers to an article written by online magazine Popmatters in April 2009 reviewing a panel hosted by n+1 magazine on “What was the Hipster?”
Artisanal foods and bands are being featured as almost seamless ads in the televisual texture of *Portlandia*, as spots on that show, through the *Travel Portland* tourism board and their advertisements. A 2014 ad featured a bearded man getting a tattoo of an old barrel keg while he was served a pint of beer from Hair of the Dog Brewery, a tiny micro-brewery that was basement bound in 2000 but now is winning national awards. As documented in the “Williamsburg” paradigm in *Naked City*, the symbolic economy has branched significantly, and potentially irrevocably, into food production, as a value and code of “authenticity” (Zukin 2010: 48). Chefs are being featured in these ads, as well as Luz Mendoza, lead singer of Y La Bamba and a Tender Loving Empire artist. Darena S. has worked in the service industry for many years, most notably at *Beast*, which has won James Beard awards and had its chef, Naomi, featured on the *Iron Chef*. This is a service role as professionalized as possible in the indie restaurant scene; in early 2014 she, a long time musician on HUSH records, was able to leave her day job for a recurring role on *Portlandia*.

“Bands are living and dying by licensing (in Portland),” said Ethan E. He added that most of the bands that tour regularly only survive by placing their music in ads and television. One of his earlier bands had songs in tampon commercials, car ads and the like and was able to make records and play regionally without having much of presence at all in Portland proper. Many respondents, often community characters of note in the scene, expressed concern about bands trafficking the Portland moniker without paying their dues within the social fabric of community life. There is still a “put in to get out” mentality about the social wealth of collective resourcefulness in Portland’s artisanal world, its new foodie economy and emanating from its music subculture. However, that doesn’t overshadow the fact that the social wealth accessed from being a part of a co-operative community can’t move from cultural to compensatory
capital, beyond the percent of a penny per play model being fought over for online digital rights. In other words, this is not a natural condition, and work that is playful is not an abdication of labor rights.

New Levels of Social Capital

In an ironic twist, the Care Oregon program has continued to use musicians as cultural icons for citizens that may now be valued as “health-worthy” under the new Obamacare state exchanges. Ethan E., who mentioned earlier his independent recording “chops” have enabled him to further remove himself from a place based work life, was chosen to pen a song for the program. Bill O’Reilly’s website, called out this particular song for its lyrical content:

“We fly with our own wings, dream all the big dreams, long live Oregonians, free to be healthy.”

And the response from the website was…

“As part of a multi-million dollar effort to promote Obamacare, the State of Oregon paid big bucks to create this 60's-like TV ad.”

Oregon musicians and their health care exchange are combining forces to project an ethos that has come to represent the city in its green, approachable, familiar and homegrown sense of purpose. Whereas this particular program is well funded, other potential avenues of cultural adjustment to the growing institutionalization of cool are not. In early 2014 the North by Northwest Festival, using new resident Fred Armisen in a mock punk pose, proclaimed that it would be moving to bandshells on the Waterfront Park. This is growth, but as one facebooker commented; “Not sure if I like this change. Not a fan of big outdoor festivals. There's something to "finding" the next big act in a small venue that I'm right down front, cocktail in hand.” The change to spokesperson and elevated statues is still a source of tension as the community adjusts to its status as a capital of lifestyle cities.
The collective potential of this community has been combining private and public successes to showcase what they can accomplish in making the creative city stay connected to its subcultural and egalitarian roots. Portlanders, at the forefront of the revolution in digital commerce and communitarianism, are experimenting with apps and opportunities that accelerate public digitalism and community investment in cultural production.

As systems of production, distribution and exchange fail, only the well-equipped workshops of experimentation stand a chance. Grassroots funding, in human and crowd sourced capital, plus creative informal cultural economies of exchange, are the threads that comprise Portland’s hand-stitched safety net for the creative precariat. With the overpowering flood of branding initiatives buoyed by the cult status of *Portlandia*, a chapter of the city of Portland, as a civically supportive, more sensitive Seattle, attuned to the decency of time, is challenged by imposed incorporation from the imperatives of the culture industry. The only way independent, community situated, music producers can survive in Portland is if they can develop new collective strategies to seize the economic value of their essential contribution to the city, while further developing their digital identities in a newly forming mode of production of the indie career.
Conclusion

Portland music makers: meaning in-action for the city

The purpose of focusing on the Portland music scene is to understand the way that a city grows into a representation of its cultural production, a place objectified within its own economic engine of culture (Harvey, 1983; Logan and Molotch, 1986). The affect this transition has on the neighborhood and on the individual is often overlooked in the literature on gentrification and cultural production. Often artists and musicians are seen primarily as stepping-stones to development or intermediaries in an economic production culture (Lloyd, 2006; Smith, 1996; Negus, 2002; Scott, 2011). The irony is that this lifestyle driven economic progress, modeled upon the culture of those embedded in the underground community, leaves many people in that community underutilized and underemployed.

The distinctions of cultural capital representative of a time in a place relative to a scene in a city create fields of power and prestige within a production community (Bourdieu, 1984). Focusing on Bourdieu’s idea of alternative capitals, actors in economically constrained positions generate “buzz,” meet identity desires and become cultural entrepreneurs in a new economy of exchange (Scott, 2011). In the field of cultural production, the general utility of any alternative capitals in the greater society still relies on a “mobilization and conversion” in order to become a general economy of practices of production (Scott, 2011: 252). This is often not the case in the scene in Portland, where most people engage in consumption and production as a part of a lifestyle and partly to make ends meet. As in the case of Williamsburg Brooklyn, tastemakers in the scene develop trust and attract attention, and build institutions through spatial practices in the community (Zukin, 2010).
The type of capital indie producers accrue is cultural capital or subcultural capital (Thornton, 1995), a currency transferrable into deeper network ties, cooperation and use in the DIY mode of production. This grass roots practice carries an aura of authenticity, in both the identity of the actors doing it (Fine, 2003) and in the way in which history and geography are attended to, even if there is some ‘inventedness’ in the history(s) that becomes their identity and the terroir of place (Zukin, 2011). Importantly, this valorization regime of culture is exceedingly becoming a model for cities to make claims about their candidacy as an aspirant city\(^24\).

Most of the literature has concerned itself with the complex role of the neighborhood as a site for new flexible cultural production, where there is a ready, bohemian pool of “creative” labor (Lloyd, 2006) or the exploitation of space through tropes of authenticity for cities, bars, and the cultural economy of nostalgia (Grazian, 2003). Other literatures point to the rising tide of creative actors in the repurposing of value in the city that will favor a vanguard creative class (Florida, 2002). In the city of Portland, in the wake of Portlandia the hit TV show parodying the city, and the politically correct and well-informed consumers of the scene, how has the right to one’s songs, a city’s iconic value, and its authentic charm, get reclaimed? A great many Portlanders are trying to reclaim city space, and the cultural moment for the Portland artists themselves, even as the forces of flexible accumulation threaten to overpower these small-producer initiatives to have a career, control the rights of their output, keep open a “mom and pop shop” and own property they have maintained. The city has opened itself up to intensive redevelopment by large scale companies over smaller ones, those who can provide housing units

\(^{24}\) In August, 2013 the Daily Beast online listed the top ‘aspirant cities’ in America. Many of them, including #7 Richmond, Va., are characterized by lower rents, artisanal art and music culture, etc. Portland, being post-aspirant, wasn’t there.
in bulk, but couple them with big box stores and higher end storefront design. In the language of maintain the urban growth boundary, the city becomes a growth machine upwards into the sky (Logan and Molotch, 1986).

In this mode, the subculture that gave rise to Portlandia, is at a crossroads where it has to decide whether it wants to change the system more permanently within structures that can become and are lasting, or “sell out,” pack up and move on. A third way is foretold in Neo-Bohemia where more and more musicians and artist continue through creative or service jobs to perpetuate a bohemian lifestyle (Lloyd, 2006). Nevertheless, the cultural development in and around this “Portlandification” (Jeffries, 2011), has led to the reclamation of city space in the image of the music scene, with precarious forms of work as a given.

In response, activists are empowering other artists by developing resources for getting grants and handling the business administration of the new digital millennium. In theis way artist and small producers are taking the pill of becoming more entrepreneurial. Others are developing cottage industries, publishing children’s books and playing in children’s bands, and occupying space in continuously localist ways. Colin and Carson, now the design and musical family team behind the Decemberists, are doing this by making a series of children’s books based in Portland’s famous city woodland, Forest Park, called The Wildwood Chronicles, making a public mural in St. John’s neighborhood, and by being cultural emissaries for the city.

Stumptown coffee roasters has scaled up in a sector dominated by global corporations but as I have been told recently, by a former insider, “the quality is still prime, the terroir of the farm is preserved through the roasting process, and the workers are still pretty happy” (Anonymous source in conversation, 2013). However, the big investor in Stumptown is TSG Consumer
Partners, which has stakes in brands like Smart Balance and other boutique labels (New York Times, 2011). Although their process remains the same, the investment company has said privately that it intends to sell companies like Stumptown off to major companies like Coca-Cola or Starbucks (New York Times, 2011).

Musicians repeatedly referred to their commitment to the community and the people that enable them to be productive here. “Neighborhoods that offer opportunities for cultural consumption also play an important role in cultural production. The interplay of production and consumption creates a distinctive terroir that nurtures specific forms of originality and innovation” (Zukin, 2010: 236). Extensions of Portland practices range from the verifiable to the mythic; the pour over craze, where the barista pours water directly onto your single-origin coffee, was said to be invented in Stumptown Coffee shop as part of an interactive, ritualistic, way to slowly take part in your coffee experience. It is often true that the “authenticity of origins or of new beginnings” can be at odds with development imperatives and their “toolkit of cultural strategies that aims to reinvent authenticity” (Zukin, 2010: 235). Hipster districts, the tourist zones described and event culture are all part of the postindustrial plan to revitalize the city around “Destination Culture” and live/work space (Zukin, 2010: 237).

Artisanal Portland, its independent music scene, and experimental spirit have given it its added flavor and quirkiness. If not, it couldn’t be represented in such acute detail in parody in Portlandia. This only augments this stage of “late capitalism,” whereby “flexible workers create a production of leisure and an image of idleness that stage authenticity helping to make these neighborhoods a cultural destination” (Zukin, 2010: 237). The tensions in this dialectic amplify as density and growth become mantras, and the frontier myth illustrated by Smith, where the outside gentrifiers overrun embedded culture, finds less use for outposts of the music ecology
(Logan and Molotch, 1986; Smith 1996). The agent of local culture and creativity has to improvise, collectivize and innovate in order to stay in the scene.

**Agency**

The music community and its style did not at first link up with capital plans and the redevelopment of neighborhoods that already had musicians taking up residence pre-gentrification. In Alberta neighborhood residents were cautiously optimistic about the gang task force that was a part of community policing prerogative around 2000. As the audio identity of the city and early buzz making bands were stirring, people were relocating to Portland for its scruffy, affordable, inventive vibe. Contrary to New York City, where people came to become what they are in lights, more people seemed to come to Portland to get away from the rat race, and figure out their nature by looking inside. Yoga, meditation and experimental art events sparkle and fade, and the strange mix that is now Portland in music, and especially food, is this portable, low overhead, pastiche of things found along the way. Adam S.’s Type Foundry Studios and the Viking Soul Food cart are two perfect examples of unique combinations of things old and new that became authentically Portland together. The studio is housed in a warehouse with an equitable owner, and combines a new digital mixing studio, with a soundboard reclaimed from a 1970s studio that holds unique vintage appeal. The Viking Soul Food cart has nothing to do with either Vikings or Soul food but is served from an old steel van with a cutout and uses handmade wraps (lefe) to create a new scene authenticity.

Problems arise as cities stake their claim as “outposts of difference” (Zukin, 2010). The commodification of cool is often coupled with exclusionary codes; whether one is a hipster, a jazz musician, or hacker, a subculture is usually maintained by its argot, its insider knowledge,
and its way of knowing the world. The mapping of enclaves of exclusion, places where high-end stores replace low-end ones, and the transformation of the codification of the avenue towards a more reserved, conspicuous consumption goes hand in hand with race and class based displacement. According to a majority of respondents, they have felt the effect of the growth of a creative city out of lifestyle tourism, high-end consumption, but without strong job opportunities and housing protections.

**Future Frontiers for Research**

I’m sitting next to an advertising guy at the hip artisanal roasted coffee shop in the new hot industrial district in Scott’s Addition in Richmond, Virginia. He worked at Weiden and Kennedy in Portland but no longer does. He just moved here from Portland; his wife is in education and apparently she couldn’t find a job. They sold their house in Portland, and he laments the fact that they could have asked for more. The housing shortage for reasonably priced houses in the city is acute. He is in the process of looking for more work, a freelance opportunity. Startups he’s worked on include blackdot, out of Portland, which is a turnkey so all of your stuff that you put up on tumblr goes right to sales. He’s taking about a new one, where Pinterest dumps photos at 4am (to chirpify and then to puller), or maybe I really just can’t follow. “We have this roll out with Nike in August where we will totally sell out,” he said to rapt friends/clients, newly graduated 20 something girls looking to be a part of the next indie app startup. He talked about how in Portland there’s almost nothing to startup off of anymore, as micro-businesses piggyback on the iconography of the scene and the city and get pushed to their extremes. By the time I left they were talking about a wallet made of duct tape with the map of Portland as its design. This is post-artisanal, pre-fabricated flexible production built to be as disposable as the next Internet meme.
The city, at once both being made from below by artists and cultural producers and a capitalized and generalized cultural economy, is potentially being reframed. Forces of capital reimagining public spaces force higher end stores and production companies to pay the higher rents. The recent spate of television shows filmed here cast the bright light of the televisual upon the scruffy landscape. Currid’s *Warhol Economy* bears witness to a cultural landscape of glitz and glamour and getting in the know through the velvet rope of the nightlife in New York City. In Portland, the barriers to entry have shifted but a unique distinction about this process in this city, as compared to Chicago or New York, is that the latter’s subcultural histories create a deep wellspring of cultural memory from which to draw from for the modern imaginary. Portland has a long-term, fringe culture of poetry, jazz and other cultural forms that are not readily apparent on the modern landscape. These tropes, from rootless seamen and cowboys, to the fellaheen man described by eastern looking beat Gregory Snyder, combine with the local history of music to form practices of production and inclusion that hold the urban imaginary in place.

**Local economies, lifestyle authenticity and social reproduction**

*Self-Reflection #3: I’m having a coffee at Stumptown downtown. The loft space is open and bustling. BDP, a late 80s hip-hop group from New York City pumps bass from the turntable. Lionel Ritchie, ironically, is the artist on the record sleeve atop a sack of Indonesian single origin coffee. Two women and two men in their 20s run around happily behind the long showcase counter. Two people enter with huge pink boxes from Voodoo Doughnuts. It’s raining and people are discarding a layer of raintreated overgarments to reveal t-shirts and rolled up jeans. Homeless people stare in from outside…*  

*Field Notes 5/27/2013*
This study makes a unique contribution to the growing literature on gentrification, the capitalization of land-rents (Smith, 1996) and other directives of capital in “hipsterizing” urban settings while keeping housing for service workers (Lloyd, 2006). The symbolic economy in the post-fordist economy of flexible production, has led to multiple and contradictory sites of geographic consumption cultures. These ideascapes can be whisked around the globe via shows like *Portlandia* and twitter feeds. Therefore, a production culture, even as its authentic core players and hallmark institutions dissolve, lives on as the real imaginary of the city. Adam S. and Larry C. and Jackpot Studio continue to record on analog equipment and carry on the stories of enchantment, peopled by M. Ward and Elliot Smith, who have occupied their spaces previously, respectively.

Organizations and collectivities pay a distinct role in preserving the cultural memory of Portland bohemian history and the recently discovered music scene. *Know Your City*, dedicated to historical memory through one’s embodied presence in the city, ran a “sound of the city” sung walking tour of places related to songs written in Portland. Books, like the recent one by Mark Baumgarten on K Records have begun to do the work of building a cultural history. The city uses local music in many ways, and indie artists are now playing with the Portland Symphony Orchestra via Holcombe Waller’s RACC sponsored indie/symphony collaboration.

My students in Richmond, Virginia, are talking about moving to Portland; my neighbor’s daughter vowed not to, since it was too hip. She went on a cross-country road trip and is now a renter, bike advocate and server at a tiny coffeeshop there. In Richmond today there is a home roasting operation called “Tall Bike,” named after the post-apocalyptic welded together bike upon a bike anarcho-punk assemblage of metal detritus turned into spectacle art for city travel. They house the corkboard that is the announcement center of the alternative network of music,
art and natural healing of the Fan district of Richmond and beyond. One of them trained in
Portland at Stumptown, building bikes, “zoo bombing” from the top of the hill where the
Portland zoo is to the river, challenging the city to drive to the rhythm of the cycler. Critical mass
has begun as the city begins to give lip service to improve the bikeability of the city of
Richmond. Portland now transmits the cultural ideology and habitus of spatial practices of
locating cultures of cool.

The new landscape of consumption, where the artisanal craft culture is mobilizing to
commodify cool from the ground up, is through the food scene. In ten years, this thinly
populated restaurant town has blossomed into a breeding ground for experimental culinary cool.
Now, the city, as in music, stamps representations of value onto its practitioners. One of the
earlier restaurateurs, Chef Kathy Whims, is now a national star at Nostrana. When one leaves the
city from the airport, a photo exhibit profiles the chefs of note for you to remember (or sample if
you are entering.) Naomi Pomeroy from Beast rose from a communal supper in a warehouse
space, by invite only, to elite local chef. Wine, locally grown, has led to urban winemaking fever.
Sausage creators, jam makers, and butcher’s like those at Nicky’s, call themselves purveyors of
artisanal things. Former rocker Andy Ricker, found his culinary identity on a trip to Thailand.
This is the new frontier of reinvention; it also fits the new position in the social formation of the
lifestyle economy. The chef, like the rocker, is close to the consumer in an open kitchen, but
more approachable in a craft-centric exchange of higher cultural capital across a wider cultural
field. This has been key to the rise of the artisanal economy, where companies like Stumptown
Coffee and PokPok have scaled up and out of Portland, without compromising the time and
training component of craft production as a value.
Shared History and Emplaced Biography

Part of the particular bohemian landscape of the underground culture of Portland has been its shadowy dark past. The culture has always had an underbelly, represented in the dirty tourism surrounding Voodoo Doughnuts, Shanghai tunnels and to some extent, the rock enchanted dark spots where drug-infused romances swelled and sputtered. Courtney and Kurt met here, and Elliot Smith’s melancholy tale of punk rock and poetry, bar fights and blissed out ballads, orchestrated Beatles styled pop and nodding off needle shuffle sulk, all compose the collective memory of routine self-defilement, boozing, and drugs. Nevertheless, this accrued social wealth underpins the collective consciousness and is converted into social action; there has been continuous growth in benefits to help musicians without health care, aid homeless youth, and address issues important to culture citywide.

To point at deeper, resonant examples of lived, authentic, emplaced expression, the cult of the memoir and biography in general has become the lingua franca of authenticity; in terms of cultural memory, “biography is the market” (Miller, 2003). In this manner, places and collectivities endeavor to inscribe their better angels of history onto the spirit of place. Cities in the postindustrial setting are continually being forced to elevate their stock via characters that bellow their names rather than build good networks of inclusion. This is the production of “seeing the city” exacerbated by the coming tourist gaze of monetized attention worldwide (Urry, 1990). Carrie B. is now representing Portland at large (including on American Express commercials during the 2013 U.S. Open tennis tournament, transplanted into New York City) ironizing the hipster elitist orthodoxy, and the Decemberists appear as history teachers on the Simpsons.
In August of 2013, commemorating Elliot Smith’s 44th birthday, concerts are being staged in four cities to benefit local homeless shelters and LGBT youth. Portlanders such as Larry Crane and Rebecca Gates teamed up with singer-songwriter Jolie Holland and others to pay tribute to his songs, hosted by film director Gus Van Sant. There was a Los Angeles tribute concert for him was put together by his friend and collaborator, Jon Brion, who has scored numerous films (and even attempted a charmingly un-televisual variety show with him). In Austin and New York City, where he lived for a short time. In the end, Elliot’s legacy is moving towards serving a surviving community of cast out young people feeling uprooted, funding these agencies and teleporting his songs to a new generation of kids that need perfect melancholic companion to move through the travails of our culture with.

In October of 2013 Portland marked the 10th anniversary of Elliot Smith’s death, classified as suicide, under mysterious circumstances in Los Angeles where he was living. He was discovered with a knife to his chest. A local academic in psychology published Torment Saint, documenting Smith’s struggles with isolation and melancholy. Some journalists seem to be conferring sainthood upon him through a hagiographic post-script; a look back at someone who I would see alone at bars, sometimes engaging in frivolous fights. J.J. Gonson has come back into town with pictures of the Elliot years and her own authentic story as the girlfriend who was the lost love on his early records. To quote Lisa Wells of the Portland Mercury on his ascension:

I asked the schoolteacher why she'd come to Portland. She was sun-struck and tipsy. The question seemed to make her woozier. "Well..." she said, in a small voice, "I love Elliott Smith so much... I just wanted to live in the place that inspired that music." She'd said aloud what a lot of us suspected: Elliott Smith was in the city.
Elliot on the other hand was trying to get away from the conflation of himself with qualities of the city, something biographical rather than collectible.

"I love having conversations with people about music, but not necessarily similar ones over and over again or only about my own music…the questions are constantly redirected back to yourself and who you are. I don't think it's important who I am" (Wells, the Portland Mercury, 2013)

The Willamette Week piece, was less generous, but in full acknowledgement of the periodization of Elliot Smith’s impact on the culture of the city:

Before Portlandia branded our city, Elliott Smith did the same—except his Portland was about self-loathing, set among the cracked sidewalks of Alameda. He told stories about addicts getting off the bus at Southeast Powell Boulevard and 6th Avenue to cop, and chronicled the absurd ritual of the Rose Parade, with its “ridiculous marching band” playing “some half-hearted victory song.”

Today, local bands like the Decemberists sing about dirigibles, shipyards and CIA operative Valerie Plame, while Menomena mounts ironic album-release parties set to Pink Floyd laser shows at OMSI. These bands tend toward the conceptual, not the personal. And those bands emerged around 2003, the same year Smith died and Voodoo Doughnut opened. It was the end of gloomy, earnest Old Portland and the birth of whimsical New Portland, the “youth magnet city” of craft beer and chickens with names.

Smith tapped into the same existential gloom explored in the ’80s by the Wipers’ Greg Sage, who once described Portland as “Doomtown.” It wasn’t obvious back in 2003, but it’s clear now: Elliott Smith was the last man living in Doomtown (Singer, 2013).

Portland celebrates its history today through nostalgia for the recent and distant past. The “Hidden Book Club” group is exploring Portland’s lost waterfront unearthed by author Barney Blalock. In the Facebook announcement he mentions that Darcelle, the preeminent Portland drag queen, used to run a beatnik coffee shop called “Trieste” where they smoked imported cigarettes and listened to Donovan. The doomtown history, the skid-row history, and the New Portlandia
consumptive utopia all coexist and are pulled together by a driving force of bohemian tradition and networks of production. The imaginary moment of pre to post Elliot Smith marks a turning point in the gradual upsurge of a particular type of cultural gentrification - “Portlandification.” This force is now sweeping other underground scenes and presenting a template imaginary of Portland for Brooklyn, Pittsburgh and even Richmond Virginia. In late 2014 an Elliot Smith documentary begins to make the festival rounds.

The soundtracks of Portland reverberate around the world now. In the summer of 2012 cultural entrepreneurs in Paris booked the Pompidou amongst other places to put on the “Keep Portland Weird Music Festival.” There were some glaring inauthenticities to begin with – hot dogs stood in for the gourmand food carts and some of the artists invited had only lived in Portland for a few years, and not anymore. Nevertheless, those invited, which included film artists, percussionists, singer-songwriters and various bands, were asked to create a boisterous Portland Orchestra (The Cascadia Ensemble) and they did.

When economic pressures force artists and working class people and the culture of cities into receivership, most people tend to look for a way to save oneself. In many cases here people are looking around trying to figure out a way to save each other. Many music people and arts initiatives are focusing their attention on rapidly defunded schools, including getting a ballot measure passed for the arts in the schools (Measure 12-246). To see if they can stay constant within the perpetual rising tide of capitalizing companies and uninitiated east coast refuges will be based on the collective empowerment of the network to stabilize lives in the transitional city. The artisanal economy serves as a loose knit subcultural chamber commerce serving to promote each other, often as local and self-promoting hawkers of a green and value driven mode of consumption.
Portland Oregon’s underground players, after its rise as a creative city and the increased wealth that followed, has not witnessed the full ascendancy it was promised to see. Yet indie networks of cooperation and the effervescence of music shows in rock spaces and new, shared, outdoor places have continued to prop up the latent, authentic feel of the urban community. Some people have intimated that they miss the old Portland; the beautified and elegant, expensive Pearl district opulence represent a Portland transfigured and out of reach.

Rebecca C., who proclaimed that she is off the grid in Pittsburgh the day before, a more affordable, cool, city, commented on Facebook on Portland today:

走了 around Hawthorne and Division today. Wow. For 15 years my nickname at The Fresh Pot was "Neighborhood", but now I say to all my maker friends feeling the squeeze here...Abandon ship! This is no place to be a poor of any kind. Get yourself to an edge of the city where rent is kind. Bike a couple miles for coffee or a drink. Do your work and thrive. Don't cry for what's already gone.

Whether those who have made the music scene, such as Rebecca C., decide to move on to more affordable places to earn modestly and work furiously, it is certain that the creative landscape here, born of fair rent, space, community and time, is altered by the influx of development and the commodification of space. Even with the potential agency offered by Internet commerce to independent creative artists and distributors of local things, it is an adaptation to the present circumstances of economic strain that serves a connected few in the bifurcated cultural economy.

Social Wealth in the Age of the Digital

This work contributes to the sociology of cultural production, and the sociology of culture concerning frameworks of identity in the new post-industrial city. What we make can in turn make us, through the values and traditions that we produce within. The mode of norms and procedures in an art world evolve and bend with larger cultural forces, but work to maintain
careers as well (Becker, 1983). Codes of authenticity are built up, in folk art, furniture making, and in the tone, technology and practices of the production of musical sound (Fine, 2003; Manuel, 2000). However, the object created has been circumscribed by an affective culture that has repackaged that process of production into a thing, now returned in the form of distorted representations. Through market scapegoating, the bohemian culture of consumption and production are framed as a real social problem, as opposed to potential innovators of localist values and consumer agents of artistic communities.

Interviewees painted a picture of doggedly keeping together the patterns and structures that have sustained the music scene and propelled the city. Some of the neighborhood cultures have elevated beyond the small rooted affairs to “in the city” tourism, but still a sense of community, connected by networks of work, knowing each other, and an attachment to places and historical faces, has proven to be what Richard Sennett asserts is contained in Simmel’s notion of sociality: “…(S)ociality is not an active reaching out to others; it is mutual awareness instead of action together. Sociality thus contrasts to solidarity…sociality asks you to accept the valued stranger as a valued presence in your midst” (Sennett, 2013: 38).

According to this concept of cultural sociology, it is not a resounding collective conscience that builds connection and cohesion in the city. Rather, it is an individual experience of sociality and then an experience of sociation, which lends itself to new formations of community. This is important adaptively as the social conditions change rather rapidly in the information based cultural economy. Food cart players, television crews, new festivals, emergent historical organizations and a new outlook from the major institutions in the arts (PICA and RACC), have given proof to this flexible quality in the Portland zeitgeist. This is both useful to global flexible cultural production, and to building local/glocal enterprises from the ground up.
People in the music community are acting as lending agents and real estate agents within music related circles in efforts to perpetuate music communities. Projects to help first time homeowners are on the rise.

Concurrently, capital forces, real estate developers and box stores have made major inroads in exploiting the paucity of apartments and large shopping in a city planned to have a restricted urban growth boundary. Tax abatement deals to build a certain volume of housing units, and the picture of the new downtown Target store, are evidence of Portland’s continuing struggle to fend off capital expansion into shared productive and consumptive space. As Logan and Molotch (1987) contend, “the pursuit of exchange values so permeates the life of localities that cities become organized as enterprises devoted to the increase of aggregate rent levels through the intensification of land use” (p.13). There is no candy coating the reality that residential segregation is growing, as Mayor Sam Adams attested to during his mayoral term. With the use of cultural attractiveness, music culture and the new food revolution, place is stratified “according to the ease in which it can attract capital” (p.13).

Near the end of the book *Portlandia: A Guide for Visitors*, there is a printed checklist comprised of cities and neighborhoods accompanied by the question: “which one do you think will be the next Portlandia?” The reader is instructed to tear it out, give it to a friend, ask them to guess, and smile when they open it. Parody serves to unmask the play of surfaces to reveal a hidden meaning, perhaps in this case that the arbitrariness of hip desire could have considerable impact on their culture of place. Gentrification accelerates an economic boom in neighborhoods that may leave them clean and well to do but often with parents opting for private schools. Commodification of local creativity may make a few people rich but also turns the life of a place into a disneyified version of itself (Zukin, 1996; Bryman, 2004). Through cooperation, people
are asking the question, where can we assist each other, fight the right fights, and keep the spirit of the city humming.

The social formation termed Portlandification stands in for a larger social phenomenon, characterized by the rise of an amenity culture, artisanal production, and indie music. This formulation, once isolated and part of gentrification processes in specific urban centers, is becoming a more generalized force transnationally. Cities are piggybacking on this cultural strategy to lure businesses and cultural industries in the manner described in *The Rise of the Creative Class* (Florida, 2002). Within this often homogenizing and disneyfied upheaval that recapitalizes space and place, one aspect of social practice plays a specialized role in resisting. The music scene, with its social networks, places of memory, and unique biographies is the grounding force for both a situated identity and an authentic localism. Indie music has served as a both a localizing source for authenticity, and for self-reflexivity. Portland is in the midst of the homogenizing process of becoming a consumptive *New Portlandia*, but residents are simultaneously forging social ties that bind themselves to a unique Portland social history embedded within the underground music scene.
References


Congdon, Lisa. 2013. (http://lisacongdon.com/blog/2013/10/my-art-was-stolen-for-profit-and-how-you-can-help/#sthash.iSQJXvXr.dpuf)


Frank, Thomas. “TED talks are lying to you: The creative class has never been more screwed. Books about creativity have never been more popular. What gives?” *Salon.com,* Retrieved October 14, 2013. (http://www.salon.com/2013/10/13/ted_talks_are_lying_to_you/).


