

Portland Oregon, Music Scenes, and Change: A Cultural Approach to Collective Strategies of Empowerment

Jeffrey London
CUNY- Hunter College

This article highlights the role of the independent music culture of Portland, Oregon, in establishing a productive culture of consumption and spaces that contribute to the place character of the city. Derived from an ethnographic research project of urban culture and social change in Portland, Oregon, guided interviews and extended participant observation helped to bring to light the cultural economy that artists and musicians make for the city. The cultural production of Portlanders in the indie music community, and those who work and produce in neighborhood settings, has served the city in the most recent period of rapid gentrification. Many scholars have focused on the way bohemian concentrations have led to gentrification; others have highlighted the contingent labor that art makers provide. What I argue here is as the city develops in these ways, artisanal workers and music makers work to use their established networks and situated meaning in the city to fend off these processes and extend their presence in space. Through these collective strategies of empowerment, culture and music move into political discourse and affect political action on the city level.

INTRODUCTION

In late 2015 Towne Storage, a symbol of the creative loft culture of the eastern riverside of Portland, was sold to developers. Many painters and photographers had studios there, and a few of them, like December Carson's Siren Nation Music, had wraparound skyline views. A mixture of emotions lit up Facebook as many artists and companies lost their spaces, and another beacon of art and music is acquired and upscaled. In this climate, there exists a solid core of producers and small business owners left to hold off the rising tide of development, in a city with an independent identity coming into conflict with the homogenization of its spirit. Spatial ingenuity and local practicality drive the persistence of the place character of Portland, even as space and time become rare commodities and creative energies are spread thin.

In the 21st century, there has been an influx of new residents flooding into American cities to acquire an urban cultural experience. After a period of revitalization and a repackaging of central cities, mid-sized cities have taken center stage as livable sites of

Correspondence should be addressed to Jeffrey London, Hunter College, Department of Sociology, 16th Floor Hunter West, 695 Park Ave., New York, NY 10065; jlondon@hunter.cuny.edu

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culture and new, creative economy jobs (Florida 2002). One of these cities is undoubtedly Portland, Oregon, a sleeper town in the Pacific Northwest. When magazines like *Forbes* and *The New York Times* christened Portland America's new frontier city, people flocked. They were attracted in part by its American craftsman housing stock and their affordable prices. Many transplanted urbanites were hot on the heels of a thousand mile process of gentrification, where artists and musicians moved into the most affordable houses and then, some years later, were displaced by buyers with cash and developers next in line.

The music and art scene of Portland are an indelible part of the fabric of the city. They inform the contemporary notion of being a part of the cultural community of Portland. The city has integrated this social and cultural scene into ad campaigns for travel and real estate promotional videos. People range from members of the indie music scene, lo-fi, and DIY (do it yourself), to vegan punks and artisanal makers of food, bikes, furniture, and environments. They look vintage and weird, ironic and earnest in bobby socks and 1960s handmade poster art. However, these "freaks" as they may call themselves, have been the drivers of an accelerated wave of development, crowned by the ironic satire *Portlandia*. The show creates fake characters out of real types to translate Portland's three-dimensionality for the flat screen. In achieving this successfully, it frames a consumptive face for the city and its quirky, intentional morality. As gentrification reaches a point where cultural producers and countless others are being priced out, people of color, working class homeowners, and the indie music community have begun to see each other and their homes as integral to new collective strategies against unchecked growth.

In order to follow the establishment of place through the music scene and into the modern moment, this paper will address the rise of indie music and the reputation of the "weird" in Portland culture. This established culture then feeds into the collective strategies of empowerment utilized in the maintenance of place that refer back to the cultural scene but serve the broader issues of gentrification, housing stability, and place character.

METHODS AND DATA

As a participant observer, I lived in Portland in late 2010 for two months and then in the summers of 2011, 2012, and 2013. I spent time in music venues, taking notes and observing the culture of music and collective engagement. I went to meetings concerning artists and musician empowerment and spoke with both small businesspeople and residents about development and new construction. I used the snowball to move from people I already had access to through my previous involvement in the music scene as an artist, and expanded my inquiry to real estate professionals and others who were involved with music producers by one or two degrees.

I participated in 47 purposive interviews with musicians, recording studio owners, filmmakers, art gallery owners, real estate agents, label owners, and anyone adjacent to the scene, in order to broadly define the cultural realm, the importance of place-based networks and community-based collective strategies of empowerment. I guided the conversation toward shifts in the texture of the city to focus on ways in which people saw themselves as rooted in the city. For other interviewees, I specifically focused on how their roles have changed through the new landscape of development and professionalization. These were open-ended interviews of just over an hour. Interviewees were guided through

questions pertaining to people, networks, and projects that had deep meaning for them. I coded the interviews by theme, according to issues such as place character and scene continuity, housing and upheaval, and political collective strategies.

PLACE CHARACTER AND AESTHETIC CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Although capital forces and globalization are considered the main drivers of urban change (Harvey 1996), culture has been considered an agent of economic development for some time (Hracs 2015; Scott 2000; Zukin 1987). In addition, there is a pronounced presence of “culture from below” in certain isolated, mid-sized, or less-corporatized cities. In the case of Portland, it is the music scene—the vintage themed, 1950s inspired, oddly flamboyant underground that is part of a constitutive of a way of doing things that inspires a style of action. Place character in a city is “a set of patterns in meaning and action that are specific to a distinct locale . . . emphasizing action, including political, cultural, and economic practices” (Paulsen 2004). According to Gieryn (2000), place is characterized by the meaning imbued to it, the practices that constitute it, and is “lived and felt.”

Music scenes and indie scenes have been seen as connected to place (Kruse 2010), but not *necessarily* constituting its culture. In the context of place character and LBT identity in cities, elements of distinction, including cultural scripts, both “constitute and are constituted by place” (Brown-Saracino 2015). People are then connected to networks that are called upon to face existential threats to cultural identity during struggles to define place. According to Molotch et al. (2000), “places comprise an ensemble of forces,” and considered how unlike elements link up in an urban context. There are unlikely allies of class, style, race and taste in Portland as place character is challenged by commodification and upscaling. The indie music and art culture is a constitutive, practical aesthetic for place character and is a key part of the cultural landscape of Portland today.

The reacquisition of former commercial spaces, along the former shipping and trucking waterfront, has been germane to urban revitalization projects that build cool places to live and work that appeal to the creative class (Florida 2002). Music culture, and festivals, thriving tech sectors, and a growing creative economy all contribute to the economic engine of growing music cities (Wynn 2015). However, the “revanchist” thesis (Smith 1996) suggests that improvement can be a strategic maneuver to reclaim urban space from the poor. Through mutually enacted collective strategies of empowerment, citizens reassert and thus reproduce place character and belonging by unifying a broad spectrum of people affected by development (Borer 2006). This does include bohemians, who can be catalysts for both gentrification and collective attention. The establishment of *Anti-Displacement PDX*, which works to affect local legislation, the cultural history group called *Know Yr City*, *Portland Underground Graduate School*, and the Chloe for City Council campaign all represent collective strategies that overlap communities in the city.

URBAN CHANGE AND GENTRIFICATION

Change in the city, through the prism of gentrification, is often seen through a growth agenda that converts industrial or rental space into exchange value (Logan and Molotch

1987). Once neighborhoods are converted into amenities and dense housing, branding and media campaigns create rapid valorization, translocal consumption, and capital growth (Florida 2002; Greenberg 2010; Lederman 2015; Zukin 1987). The representational city is constituted through branding and a consumption identity that is exported to the neoliberal world stage for tourism and trade (Urry and Larsen 2011; Zukin 1995). This is undoubtedly taking place in Portland, Oregon. However, in the breadth of recent literature on urban gentrification there has been little focus on the strategies of actors to resist development anchored by a local community scene. There has been work on activist tenant's rights campaigns, but Portland is particular in the way in which culture sounds the alarms and supports resistant politics. Work on the East Village in downtown Manhattan takes into account the position of renters and artists as they are being pushed out (Mele 2000; Ocejo 2014a). To our purpose is the idea of small cities as future drivers of grassroots social initiatives (Oakley 2015) despite the example of deep aesthetic affinities leading to disinterestedness beyond the production of culture itself (Bourdieu 1984; Lizardo and Skiles 2008).

Central to this analysis is the connection between culture, urban development, and collective strategies. In the critical social work literature, recent work on Stockholm and Mumbai looks at marginalized populations in both cities and concludes that a common identity and a sense of belonging are the key components of collective empowerment (Sjoberg et al. 2015). Political, social, and ethno-racial constitute this set of cultural indicators of belonging. In Portland, the music scene, its folklore, and its biographies create the loose framework that many transplants and new initiates attempt to fit into. *Know Your City* is attempting to play a role in popularizing African-American history, integrating it into the folklore of the city; African-Americans have been displaced physically and culturally historically but are asserting themselves in both arenas now. Furthermore, people are telling their own stories to impact this most destructive stage of the remaking of place. This awareness, of collective disempowerment, is rising to the cultural and political surface as development overruns many neighborhoods.

CULTURAL PRODUCTION AND THE (WEIRD) CULTURAL SCENE

Before the cultural economy of music and artisanal life came to represent the city, Portland was an activist, post-lumber city in the throes of economic stagnation. Through its embrace of outsiders in architecture, film, literature, and music writers like Chuck Palahniuk, Katherine Dunn, and filmmaker Gus Van Sant contributed to Portland's status as a haven for odd misfits. 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 most cracked of crackpots. The misfits among misfits . . . all we are are the fugitives and refugees." (Palahniuk 2003: 14)

This misfit theory relates to a longer collective history of West Coast bohemianism. San Francisco was once the refuge of creative types, and a relaxed notion of time and work defined the city. As Silicon Valley workers became attracted to this bohemian

consumption culture it attracted new services and new wealthier transplants and is now too expensive for people to “bohabitate.”¹ Portland in this light is seen as taking its turn in a pilgrimage history.

The spatial geography of Portland has played an indelible role in shaping and being shaped by this process of music making, rain, and creative isolation. 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. Musicians spent endless hours indoors in basements and bedrooms creating the music scene out of punk, California pop, and a down to earth unambitious creativity. The music scene thrived in filthy bars such as Satyricon in Old Town, which historically held bars for sailors, underground opium dens, and the city’s Chinatown. The all-ages scene and its DIY (Do it Yourself) ethos had at its heart the X-Ray Café, on the edge of Old Town, where all the biggest bands in the indie and punk scene played to players and fans. The subculture used style, noise from overdriven guitars, and eccentric characters to demarcate space through alternative meaning separate from corporate culture (Frith 1983; Hebdige 1979). Down to earth, working-class aesthetics dominated, in response in part to the metal scene of the late 1980s and through the creative western and 1950s fashion available for cheap at local thrift stores.

Portland always welcomed misfits but was wary of the overflowing of the “Californification” of the 1970s. Hippies looking for a less hectic life inspired a billboard on the highway that read, “Welcome to Oregon, a Nice Place to Visit, But Please Don’t Stay.” The most recent influx of newcomers came on the bandwagon of creative culture and “livability.” This comprised the cultural branding of a city in competition with other creative cities for creatives on a world stage (Florida 2002; Lederman 2015). Portland signals to its initiates, “Keep Portland Weird,” as a battle cry against cultural normalization. Even though the moniker belongs to Austin, Portland wears it well. As the bands, microbrews, and green city living made Portland the *New York Times* Travel section darling, both post-college grads and creative economy elites increased their rates of arrival. By the time *Portlandia* became a hit on television, young people and lifestyle connoisseurs worldwide felt they knew the city intimately. Documentaries chronicled the lives of Portland and Olympia based artists of the late 1990s.² However, scene based markers of value and commitment to affordability, collectivism, and humility are put under pressure when corporatized notions of youth culture, technology, and the consumable city enter a small city like Portland. The city establishment promotes culture through, for example, commercials featuring bands on Travel Portland’s commercials (run during early episodes of *Portlandia*) and festivals, but the stressors of development undermine many of the gains by artists.

CULTURAL PRODUCTION AND PLACE CHARACTER: AN INDIE HUB

The indie music culture of Portland is a part of a spatial archipelago in the region connected by small institutions and micro-scenes a car ride away. Mike, a producer and distributor of CDs and related media in a new modern building on Lower Burnside, talks about living in Salem an hour south of Portland in the 1990s.

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 Schizophonic records and that's where all the I-5 Killers records were recorded. We recorded the Dharma Bums (an early influential Portland band)... They were still living in (small towns) Scotts Mills and Silverton.

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

I would come up here (Portland) 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. Then, 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 an example of the way the city developed its character of place as a center for underground cultural production. Work, performance, and distribution opportunities were developing in Portland, leading people there. Mike's band practiced in the building which he ran a small business out of, which also doubled as a label warehouse. Larry C., who was in the band Vomit Launch in central California in the early 1990s, became one of his first Portland salesmen. He later went on to run Jackpot recording studios, where he recorded many well-known albums from the nineties indie music scene, including Elliot Smith.

Cultural production and the place character of Portland had outposts throughout what is called the I-5 (Interstate 5) corridor. To the north of Portland, the Riot Grrrl scene developed as a signature movement in DIY culture in Olympia, Washington. Kathleen Hanna and her band Bikini Kill, one of the core early leaders of the movement, had lived in Portland for a spell and Corin Tucker had moved from Olympia to Portland and joined Sleater-Kinney. Olympia, Washington, was an outpost of Portland culture an hour away on the freeway. The Riot Grrrl movement, discoverable in the magazine racks of Reading Frenzy, taught girls how to protect themselves from predatory guys, instructed girls how to make their own bands, and informed a collective politics of anti-glossy magazine girl power. They called for revolution, lust, and solidarity in songs like "Rebel girl," and infused a political collectivism into the mellow, misty northwest air (Marcus 2015). For many in the movement, the music was secondary to the mission, and the conferences they created built a brand of feminism that surfaced around places like Evergreen State College in Olympia, but evolved outside of the university. It led to strategic organizations like Rock Camp for Girls, which was born out of the meeting of minds in Portland, but derived from the spirit of places nearby. They have run this camp, by and for girls, in a meeting hall in the Mississippi neighborhood, and the showcase, as of late in the Alberta Rose Theater in Portland, mixes girls sharing the stage with big-time bands headlining.

MEMORIALIZING PLACE

As Portland became established as a regional and then a national epicenter for neighborhood, small city, cultural production, the lore of houses and venues that made the

scene developed. One interviewee pointed out to me the Dharma Bums house, from the early nineties band, and the venue La Luna, which is now an office building for design and culture companies. Historically relevant sites within neighborhoods that pertain to the scene are difficult to memorialize because they are a part of recent history and may, from an architectural point of view, be nondescript. Because they don't have a long enough history, it is difficult to establish their value in the city. Pierre Nora calls this *the acceleration of history*, where "There are sites of memory (sites where a sense of historical continuity persists) because there are no longer real environments of memory" (Nora 1989).

Due to cultural acceleration, past environments of memory like bars and music venues can be swept aside as mere blips on the screen of city culture. Nostalgia narratives can serve to imbue sites of memory with an air of meaning relative to the commodification and newness that permeates the nightlife (Ocejo 2011). Tour companies like *Know Your City* walk and bike patrons around the city with academics and storytellers, bringing a grassroots, networked, people's history to the appreciation of places in the city. For instance, they have a singing tour that commemorates defunct rock places like the Satyricon club, supposedly the first place Kurt and Courtney kissed.

Especially closer to downtown, places have become elevated beyond their situated meaning to serve as symbolic tourist destinations as gentrification changes the consumer landscape. *Tender Loving Empire* serves as a walk-by storefront while doubling as a music label and screen-printing shop. More music makers and scene-based actors are forced to ratchet up the commercial element of the work/play distinction in their DIY production set up and turn their musical art into a small business as more aspirants arrive. Musicians in the indie scene in general, and specifically in Portland (London 2014), have developed an unprecedented amount of freedom from control with the advent of digital technologies and the fall of labels and the recording industry (Hracs 2015).

Although few musicians make their money in music making, the persistence of a particular urban culture comes to play a significant role in maintaining collective identity (Markusen and Shrock 2006).

WORK, ARTISANAL CULTURE, AND "THE AMENITY PARADOX"

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. Many baristas here worked as musicians in the music scene. 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 a following without risking joblessness.

Cultural production and artisanal production here worked hand in hand. The more I probed the more it appeared that management, echoing the sentiment of the ownership, was willing to allow 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. People learned to work on in a collective environment, which complements the local DIY circuit that grew from basements and warehouses.

According to Heying (2010), coffee, beer, and music all embody this handmade, artisanal craft place culture in Portland. Echoing Matthew Crawford's *From Shopclass as Soulcraft: An Inquiry Into the Value of Work* (2009), people are buying into the challenges and satisfactions of community bound, manual work. 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. Older generations of musicians and cultural producers expressed the stress and cultural strain and the pleasure in integrating an influx of art makers into the community.

There has developed a notable backlash against the "hipster" culture, in part due to its desirability, costliness to consume, and trendiness in the general zeitgeist. Mark Grief in *n + 1* magazine described it, to paraphrase, as Gen X jealousy. The lampooning of the artisanal way in *Portlandia* has led some to accuse it of causing the disneyfication of the lifestyle or place character of the city. One can also point to what Schrock and Jurjevich (2012) call the "amenity paradox" which has occurred when the artisanal culture begins to attract speculative, consumption based economic activity, including both young and 60-something residents, as the number of jobs remains flat and housing costs rise precipitously. Portland's "Young College Educateds" (YCEs) work disproportionately in the service economy versus other metro areas, in an amenity culture that grows more and more costly (Schrock and Jurjevich 2012). The system of renewal of the scene and the culture of place is stressed due to crowding and corporate opportunity (Lloyd 2006).

NEIGHBORHOODS, GENTRIFICATION, AND CHANGING PLACE CHARACTER

Many neighborhood-centered institutions and activities make the city culture unique, from the tiny local café to the backyard barbeque spot. These spatial practices help place character persist and are posited against larger forces such as street fairs and big development initiatives, and the aforementioned commodified versions of Northwestness. Neighborhood culture, which housed many dive bars, community theaters, and impromptu spaces, has become harder to invest in and control. The inner northeast was a predominantly African-American neighborhood that saw bohemians flock to it for its grit, affordability, and housing stock of American craftsman homes. This first wave of gentrification displaced black residents in the Albina district who moved to neighborhoods further east from the city center. At first the neighborhood was eclectic, and still many residents try and help retain the diverse character of the community. Many bohemian enclaves and their inhabitants shift their perspective as the more difficult aspects of the community, in this case crime and drugs, are a "push" factor to either upscale the neighborhood, or leave (Hracs 2015; Lloyd 2004, 2006).

December is someone who has always been in and around the music community; associated with the alternative Americana sound in Portland. She has run a booking agency called Siren Nation Music, a music festival for women called Siren Music Festival, and has bought a home in the Albina district.

I always knew this would happen to Portland because Portland is the last city in the west to blow up. . . . San Francisco and Seattle and Los Angeles were unaffordable . . . but Portland just kind of was a sleeper city. When we bought our house in 1995 there was nothing here. This was an Asian minimart and a used video store and all the storefronts on Freemont were boarded. The New Seasons, well now the Whole Foods was an empty PGE building. The real estate was still so affordable and 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.”

She was talking about Colin Meloy, a local musician who is a transplant from Montana and worked at American Dream Pizza with other artists in the scene. His band the Decemberists later became well established worldwide, but not before he and others lived in warehouses on the inner eastside and played the local small venue circuit that is the feeder stream to broader notoriety. To her, much of what was worth investing in was mutual support by community networks, low cost commercial and home pricing, in order to have a home and be in music, despite financial shortfalls.

So that was kind of when I saw, was just when there were these little really interesting creative businesses started and they employed musicians and the musicians knew they could get work. The real estate was still really cheap and you could either rent really cheaply or own really cheaply.

In *Loft Living*, Zukin refers to the fact that artists had lived in lofts since the 1930s and no one had ever found that romantic until the 1970s; therefore, something must have happened to our values in relation to the aesthetics of living in the city in the 1960s (Zukin 1982). 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). She goes on to cite a post-modern and postindustrial investment in lofts as *revalorization* of physical, built capital in the inner city. The rush to invest in the modest housing stock of Portland represents a new “aesthetic conjecture” of midcentury suburban-style living in the urban setting. It led to a ballooning of the property values of homes, after artists gentrified neighborhoods to the extent that some homes on certain streets, in some northeast Portland neighborhoods were rehabilitated.

Chad C. is a furniture builder, house fixer upper, musician, and painter. Chad worked with Colin and the Decemberists as well as other local Portland bands establishing a local music label, HUSH records that started in 1995. He now places music in commercial and televisual contexts. He has gutted a few homes, poured in sweat equity, and shared those spaces for music work and play with people surrounding HUSH in the local scene. As a native of Oregon he has his own perspective on the new overheated, speculative economy.

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 none. It’s really a seller’s market. Things are a jumble. . . . I think it’s time for a shift out of the music industry. It’s dormant right now as well.

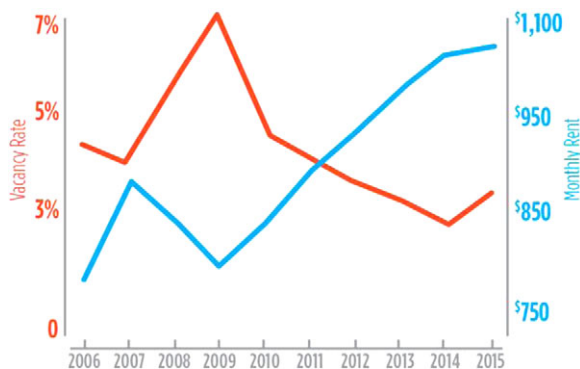


FIG. 1. Vacancy rate and monthly rent, Portland, 2010–2015 (WWeek, 2016). [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Chad is entangled in all three of the slowing independent economies: home rehabilitation, the loss of value of music things in the music industry, and the artisanal production culture. These pressures are creating the conditions for local action.

December C. reiterates 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, it was strange because 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.

The surge of “pioneer” behavior is a part of the process of discoverer settlement, which drives the need for additional amenities (Smith 1996). However entangled many long-time cultural producers are in setting the stage for large-scale gentrification (with new construction) they are often precariously balancing cultural production and rent in a hot real estate climate with aggressive landlord tactics (including no cause evictions). Rental costs have also skyrocketed (Figure 1) as the collective social capital of a diverse set of community groups and cultural producers are aligning in the city to address the full-throttle development initiatives such as the Interstate Transportation Corridor. Portland has always been known for its progressive Metro growth boundary, which draws a ring around the city and keeps sprawl from overwhelming its rural edges. This now serves as an incitement to build as densely as possible in the city, and neighborhoods become overwhelmed with hodgepodge skinny towers, cultural upheaval, and parking issues.

CONFLICT AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE CULTURE CITY

This article, published in *The Oregonian* in April of 2011, highlights the already tenuous peace between the ideal culture of progressive Portland, and the new real culture, which is characterized by displacement due to gentrification:

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

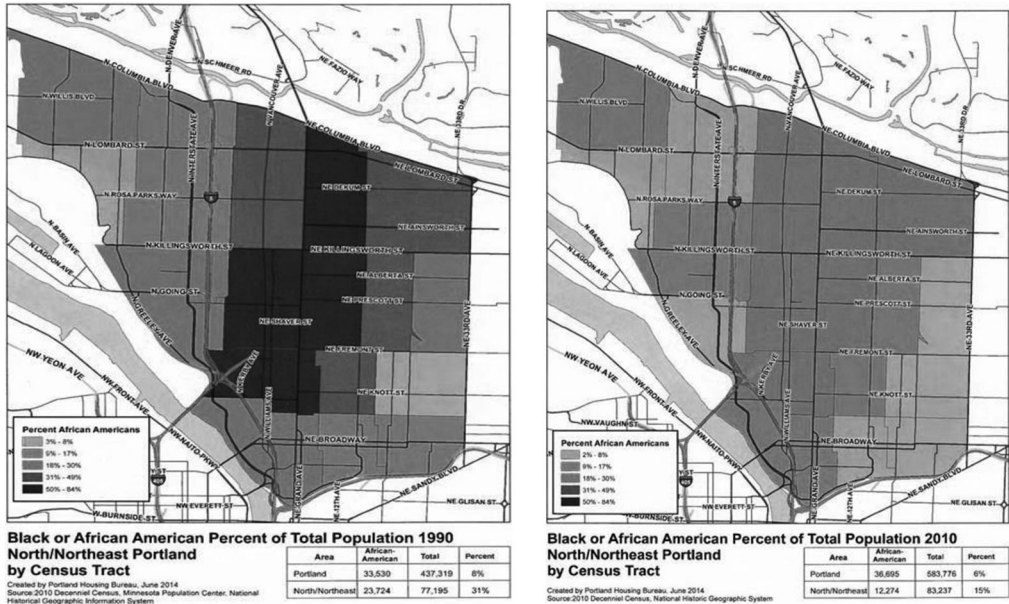


FIG. 2. Change in African-American percent of population in Northeast Portland Census Tracts: 1990 and 2010.

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 (Figure 2).

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, its walkable streets and abundant bike paths—increasingly belongs to affluent whites” (Friesen 2011).

There is a loss of space and a decline in available places to live in close-in neighborhoods contiguous to transportation and community culture. African-American and Latino neighborhoods in the inner Northeast became bohemian and owner-centric through gentrification in the nineties. The coffee shop on Mississippi Avenue, Fresh Pot, began a wave of change and artists and creatives moved in. The next effect on the neighborhood was a steep incline on rental and purchasing prices.

The Boise section of the Albina neighborhood, which Mississippi Avenue straddles, has the highest appreciation rate for any neighborhood in the city since 1990. On both sides of the 2008 market crash, this persistent price increase was a shock that is pushing creative people, people of color, and working class Portlanders out beyond 82nd Avenue (Schmidt 2012). Now the areas around 82nd avenue are becoming less white, with the inner core becoming packed with transplants armed with cash, capital, and cool economy jobs.

In *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Richard Florida (2002) suggested there would be a *big morph* that would merge the talent and intellect of artistic producers with the more technical workers of the burgeoning knowledge economy. In a conversation with Joel Kotkin in *The Atlantic*, Florida commented on the urban policy effects on the potential for creative egalitarianism:

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. (Kotkin 2013)

The “Creative City” thesis implies that growth will help creative work be rewarded if one’s skills are connected to the new economy. The downside is that many talented musicians and key agents of local knowhow are becoming the creative precariat due to rising rents and the upscaling of cultural production overall (Morgan 2014). More and more transplants are likely to be telecommuting Silicon Valley workers relocating from the Bay Area, rather than the bohemian crowd providing musical content and wanting to be a part of the scene. The real estate boom and hip consumerism turn cultural value, local practices, and collective memory into an exchangeable commodity that profits makers less than those in the elite cultural economy.

According to Schrock and Jurjevich (2012), “since 1980, more (young college educated) migrants moved to and remained here than predicted with the region’s level of employment growth.” It is a unique struggle in Portland, where some kind of creative autonomy stands as a reachable possibility, but the explosion of *Portlandia* culture and a kitschy, amenitized landscape have made the represented lifestyle hard to have. People here are rooting themselves in an affective economy of home—11.2 percent of those living in the Boise neighborhood work from home, one of the highest rates for a neighborhood in the country (Schrock and Jurjevich 2012). People make things at home and hold onto their homes in neighborhoods that have already changed beyond recognition. Even so, the neighborhoods that anchor those practices are changing in ways that shift underneath the landscape of makers on the ground.

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.

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 favors elite common spaces in the place of dark neighborhood ones. There was once an area near the East side of the Burnside Bridge where drugs were dealt, music was made, and youth culture was left alone. Today they call it LoBu and it’s a clubbing, vintage-themed hotel strip.

DEVELOPMENT, DEVELOPERS, AND THE ALBINA DISTRICT

In May 2011, the Portland City Council began a Neighborhood Economic Development Strategy. Its three point plan had these goals in mind: Profitability of businesses in

priority neighborhoods grows by four percent; real median family income for communities of color increases by three percent; and annual one percent net job growth in priority neighborhoods. Urban renewal areas were created around transportation corridors as an example. Despite these goals, the profitability imperative, combined with an urgency to create more housing and jobs, has led to an influx of big development projects in the Interstate Corridor Urban Renewal Area, just alongside the Mississippi Avenue corridor—a hip enclave that is now dotted with new condos. The plan says that the city wants to “optimize the light rail investment through the creation of catalyst projects.” In other words, develop the big ticket projects to maximize value.

Eli H., 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 work on a smaller scale. In the Mississippi corridor, bigger developers used their capital and bureaucratic acumen to navigate the process, or circumvent it all together. Eli essentially wove 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. The Trader Joe’s location 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.

The 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 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 “it’s just PDC giving away money to the fat cats again.”

The defeat of the Trader Joe’s on that location was due to African-American outcry, but it is a small victory in an area where displacement has moved most blacks to the east of Portland. The loss of space due to development has led to increased neighborhood negotiation with greater economic forces. In some cases *preservationist gentrifiers* attempt to make good in a neighborhood by preserving what is old (Brown-Saracino 2009). In the Albina district, residents moved a house a few blocks to save a piece of authentic local architecture. In addition, a public debate has taken place about the old basketball stadium, the Veterans Memorial Coliseum, being put on the National Register of Historic Places. Both of these acts of preservation took place in and around a neighborhood with the highest declining rate of black residency in an already white city (McKenzie 2013). Most of these families have moved east, toward the city limits and into the neighboring city of Gresham. The tracts east of 82nd Avenue are some of the poorest in the city, and Section 8 housing has been assigned there in violation of the federal Fair Housing Act (Goodling et al. 2015). First time homebuyers and now big-scale developers are changing the face of the inner northeast, pushing up the cost of housing as hip amenity shops continue to line the avenue.

Piecemeal attempts of preservation stem the tide of full-scale homogenization, but community culture is still affected by displacement under city driven gentrification. The

last time Williams Avenue was slated for revitalization was during President Johnson's Great Society program, which led to the razing of the thriving African-American cultural scene, with notable Portland jazz clubs. The hospital extension slated for that location was never built. Before, the goal was to make these neighborhoods productive with institutional jobs. Now, real estate and consumption spaces, promulgated through out of town developers, take hold.

In Portland, neighborhoods matter and people maintain their homes and their presence; the longstanding lifestyle of Portland subcultural production persists. Carye Bye, who wrote for "Hidden Portland for the Curious," and is a printmaker, listed the *Shift Bike Club and their Pedalpalooza*, the *Independent Publishing Resource Center (IPRC)*, and other local culture clearinghouses as things she will miss when she wrote an article about having to leave Portland because as an artist she was priced out (Bye, 2016). In a time where culture industries are extracting profit from both spatial and conceptual imagery that is the legacy of a grassroots cultural community, these strange bike rides with odd costumes, personal hand pressed printing, and quirky self-identity connote autonomy and retention of place character.

CULTURAL PRODUCERS AND COLLECTIVE STRATEGIES OF EMPOWERMENT

As the cultural economy booms and gentrification expands, space between the patches of new construction in the Southeast and Northeast districts makes it harder for producers to control their own destinies. The force of change is now forcing residents into a collective conversation about the future of their city. The testimonials of Portland producers attest to the enduring quality of their modes of action, codes of value, and routines, even though the pace of development quickens. Collective strategies of empowerment include self-empowerment, a libertarian second craft mentality, and persistence in managing home and neighborhood place character. There is of course despair. Some areas that are east fifty blocks from the riverbank of the Willamette, that denotes east from west, are changing to slick, consumption districts. The west side was where this mostly began in the mid-1990s; the expensive Pearl district opulence still represents a Portland transfigured and out of reach. Rebecca commented on Portland's Mt. Tabor neighborhood, further to the east:

I walked 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 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. Rents have been raised freely and housing prices on the average have risen. Portland has had the highest percentage of eligible Census tracts gentrify since 2000, at 58.1 percent of its eligible tracts (Governing.com).

The Community Alliance of Tenants (CAT) was formed in 1996 and serves as a clearinghouse for information about housing, and for community and educational outreach. This summer they are running the Portland Underground Graduate School. This is an \$85, month long set of classes on tenant’s rights in Portland. This is a subcultural price point, due to small city affordability, and supported by SE Uplift, which is a neighborhood organization funded by grants. Pictured on their website is Justin Cain, a bearded white instructor, and Katrina Holland, the interim director and an African-American woman, holding a sign that reads #renterstateofemergency.



Anti-Displacement PDX is a coalition of community groups against displacement. In a major victory in May 2016 the group helped put a dozen anti-displacement provisions into the 20-year comprehensive plan for the area (Portland.gov). The comprehensive plan has been a catalyst for growth in the past, as well as a receptacle for initiatives that fall between laws and goals. Anti-Displacement PDX is calling for “(an) eviction moratorium, rent controls, and inclusionary zoning, and then . . . inclusionary housing doesn’t have a multi-year waiting list” (Facebook, June 2016).

Homeownership in and of itself has proven a bulwark to the erasure of the art scene and music community; people who bought small homes in different quadrants of the northeast district now rent to other artists and make local culture from home, even as consumption avenues house increasingly expensive shops and restaurants. Other threats to affordable space include the rezoning of the Central Eastside Industrial District to allow buyers to remake and repurpose old industrial buildings for condos. Developers want to recreate the space to fit technologically based companies as well, where traditionally there were warehoused goods destined for the bridges above it. This will wipe out more spaces of production of art and culture in a city whose idea of itself is attached to those things. The IPRC, the publishing art and culture center that serves as a space to work in a city that is losing its spaces, is using kickstarter to ask for funds as it has been asked to pay a 300 percent increase on its southeast Portland location. It is a constitutive hub for the culture of place that is representative of Portland. It has developed outreach to correctional facilities and beyond to expand its mission.

Mayor Adams, of the *Portlandia* cameo fame, once called out musicians in a city held forum for artists. He questioned why such a force of leadership couldn’t address issues affecting them politically. Leadership on the ground in the music scene in the city has

been various and at times personal. Fundraisers have raised money for people's health care bills, testimonials have been gathered to defend neighborhood clubs from noise complaints, and the extension of access for artists to funds has been achieved through organizations like PDX Pop, once a festival based group but now a diverse nonprofit.

Chloe Eudaly has been the proprietor of tiny Reading Frenzy, the 'zine store downtown since 1994. She housed the IPRC before it found its own home, above her little store. It was a place where one could walk inside and talk with her all day, browsing and reading about politics, all-ages legal ins and outs, and underdog nerd comics. New initiates into Northwest punk could read about Dishwasher Pete or Riot Grrrl bands like Bratmobile. It was a visitor center for commitment to the cultural scene around Kinko's copy culture and a slow, live precursor of the rapid-fire online communication community to come. Reading Frenzy has been forced to move due to rent increases. After a kickstarter campaign Chloe was able to move the store to Mississippi Avenue, where music venue Mississippi Studios is and many residents have been displaced due to gentrification. The scene here is mixed in with higher-end new construction with the requisite Thai restaurant or two peppering the mini-malls in the newly constructed buildings. It also features a food cart lot with bike spaces that has its own recycling and shared use of bathrooms with adjacent restaurants. There seems to be an acceptance of what the city gives, in terms of the neighborhood retaining its character among boutique food stores and condos. How to force change beyond this is the bigger challenge.

Chloe has stepped up into the arena of housing rights and social justice well beyond the community of indie producers. She has become a force for anti-displacement policies, and against city funding for lightly regulated density development. She is running for city council using the aesthetics of the music scene and 1950s vintage banners, and an online funding campaign, in order to become one of six councilmembers making decisions for the city. As this is written she has achieved a runoff in October with the incumbent Novick. An incumbent has not lost in the city council since 1992. Last year, the city lost 24 percent of its affordable housing and replaced none of it. Eudaly is pressing for a rent control bill that would institutionalize caps on rent increases and control legal eviction procedure, and provisions for the homeless. She has used her cachet in the underground, and connections with the Adams administration to further a progressive agenda in city government.

Mel F. recently exclaimed: "So, the guy I met at the Aalto Lounge in 2003 ... who later became my husband just successfully managed into the November runoff the campaign of the woman who sold my zine in her shop when I was 22 in 1997 and later became my friend. Portland is officially still Portland. I love my city." Marshall R. worked in the Adams administration and has worked toward greening homes and protecting the diversity of the Mississippi neighborhood. Now he is a campaign manager for Chloe's improbable run for the city council, where a public historian's punk politics clearinghouse of a 'zine store is now part of the practical politics of the administered city.

CONCLUSION

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, light rail expansion, and the promotion of local bands at the afternoon concerts at the swank Ecofair of the Ecotrust group in the Pearl district of downtown. Much of this set of cultural practices pertains to the setting in motion of new traditions of art and music events that may use the growing professional creative population. Kids' music and fundraising concerts that address housing and school funding have been a boon in raising the profile of the music scene.

In the case of Portland and other mid-sized cities, the attitudes and aesthetics of the music scene are more than coinage for development, especially when development displaces their culture. Vital to economic and cultural health, scenes are paying dividends as depositories for the constitutive meaning of place in the city from below. This identity and practical connectivity is a conduit for place character and defense of the city. Rent control initiatives, art pranks that try to scare off new residents on Youtube and the persistence of yearly rituals such as the naked bike ride attest to the necessity of a cultural approach in understanding the way meaning in place functions for engagement in the context of place character, development, and gentrification.

A commitment to collective strategies of empowerment binds people in music and artisanal production to practices, codes of value, and a sense of localness embedded in place. Spaces that are part of the collective memory of the underground culture of the city confirm its character through action that conforms to a constitutive spirit of place. These tenets of value are part of an ongoing culture of engagement and revision in the face of external economic forces, which include forces of the culture industry at large. The connection of various communities of place character, and the historical work that is being undertaken at the grassroots level to build inclusive struggles, have led to the emergence of legislative action on displacement. The music scene and its DIY cultural aesthetic are useful in their own struggle to face down a capital intensive restructuring of the city. At this extreme stage various cultural networks are meeting to engage in an important project of preservation in a historically political mid-sized city.

Postscript: As this final iteration of this piece goes to press, Chloe Eudaly has done the seemingly impossible. For the first time in Portland history, a sitting city councilmember has been unseated by a challenger. Chloe has been preparing to take her seat on the Council; she has prepared to give up her private business holdings that include the Reading Frenzy 'zine store. As one chapter ends another begins. She has vowed to continue her fight for tenant's rights, and, in the wake of the Oakland "Ghost Ship" warehouse fire, she is participating in a forum about how to better support artists and their live/work habitats in the city. She is already receiving calls asking for her help to fight evictions, before she assumed the power of her office.

Notes

¹"Bohabitate" is my term that refers to a key functional necessity to the persistence of a local DIY production scene—houses or large apartments to live collectively to make affordable.

²Documentaries on Kathleen Hanna ("Punk Singer"), Elliot Smith ("Heaven Adores You"), and the Rock n' Roll Camp for Girls ("Girls Rock") amount to a hagiographic text in film of the late nineties renaissance in the Northwest.

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