

Helbrecht, Ilse 1998: The Creative Metropolis. Services, Symbols, and Spaces.  
In: *International Journal of Architectural Theory* 3, H. 1, Electronic Journal,  
[http://www.tu-cottbus.de/BTU/Fak2/TheoArch/wolke/X-  
positionen/Helbrecht/helbrecht.html](http://www.tu-cottbus.de/BTU/Fak2/TheoArch/wolke/X-positionen/Helbrecht/helbrecht.html)

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**Ilse Helbrecht**

## **The Creative Metropolis**

### **Services, Symbols and Spaces**

Paper presented at the Jahrestagung der Gesellschaft für Kanada-Studien (GKS), Grainau 1998

#### **1. Introduction: cities as cultural construct**

<sup>1</sup>The 'city' is a very powerful word (Williams, 1975, p. 9).<sup>1</sup> The city is one of the central discursive sites of society; e.g. cultural theorists might refer to the city as the center of civilization (Mumford 1995, 23), politicians can use the notion of urban decline when they mean to speak about social fragmentation, or economic stakeholders will deploy the rhetoric of the metropolis when they talk about economic growth or the concentration of political power. Thus, it is through the discourse of the city that a society articulates itself. To speak of the city is to articulate who we are, how we want to live, and what our society does or should look like (Beauregard, 1993, p. 322).

<sup>2</sup>Cities are cultural constructs and, thus, part and parcel of changing historical and geographical realities (Domosh, 1992, p. 475). In recent years more and more urban researchers are deeply convinced that we are witnessing the emergence of profoundly new types of cities and urban developments (Sorkin (ed.) 1992, Zukin, 1993, Watson/Gibson (eds.) 1995). Modernity has created its very own type of cities and the shift towards postmodernism, postindustrialism, and postfordism will do so, likewise. Whilst there is broad consensus about the occurrence of intense ruptures in metropolitan development, there is less communality amongst urban researchers how to frame and analyze, how to describe and imagine the manifold changes in urban landscapes today. Some researchers have stressed the tendency towards decentralization and the dissolution of the traditional city and engage in the discourse on edge cities (Garreau, 1991) and „Zwischenstädte“ (Sieverts 1998) as new types of urban sprawl. Another strand of literature points into the opposite direction and detects a revival of the urban, a renaissance of inner city life and, thereby, a strengthening of the central position of the metropolis within postindustrial societies (Ley 1996, pp. 350ff). Are cities gaining in importance or are they losing their central position in society? For what economic, political and social/cultural reasons do particular segments of a society engage in the discourse and material realities of cities? And how are we to grasp the role of cities, metropolis, and suburbia in Canada?

<sup>3</sup>The city offers a reality too complex and diverse, too disparate and plural, in order to be represented as a whole. This observation was valid for the modern industrial metropolis, already. And it holds all the more true, nowadays, due to the accelerating

trends of divergence and difference in regional and national pathways of urbanization. In the North American context, for example, the notion of the Canadian city has emerged only recently as a new and inspiring way to think about urban features in contrast and comparison to American urban forms (Helbrecht, 1996). Furthermore, new urban developments seem to transgress the traditionally neat ordering of spaces in the city. The kaleidoscope-city, the city of contrast via processes of fragmentation and polarization has been the object of much debate. Therefore, the tendency towards urban differentiation makes it ever more complicated if not impossible to speak of the city in a broad general sense.

<sup>4</sup>In this paper I will focus on the rise of a very particular new meaning of the urban in Canada that is in the state of nascence. I would like to argue that we can observe a new city in emergence, the rise of new urban spaces, symbols and discourses on the city: the creative metropolis. This creative metropolis is, of course, like any other representation of the city a partial one. But it has become a strategic site within the city because it is situated at the centre of the postindustrial/postmodern economy and culture. The creative city is striving for hegemony in the discourse on the urban due to its particular position in the workings of power. In what follows I would first like to situate my argument within the literature on the contemporary role of the urban. Secondly, I would like to discuss some empirical results on the locational pattern and urban constructs of creative services in Vancouver. Finally, I will try to discuss the meaning of the creative metropolis in a more general context of postmodern identity formation processes.

## **2. Urban transitions - Urban assets**

<sup>5</sup>The city is back on the societal agenda. Whilst the urbanist literature of the 1970s and early 1980s was deeply sceptical about the future role of cities in postindustrial societies and some researchers even have assumed that cities might become obsolete altogether due to the new transport and communication technologies, in recent years, a renaissance and rediscovery of the city has been observed (Amin/Graham, 1997, pp. 411ff). The urban revival poses the question why postindustrial societies in spite of locationally liberating technologies still produce and foster city life? What are the assets of the urban, today? How is the urban discourse organized? For the purpose of this paper, three major strands of literature can be identified, putting different arguments for the continuing vitality of metropolitan areas to the fore.

### **The productive city of agglomeration economies**

<sup>6</sup>First, an economic literature focuses on the transition of cities from a place of industry and commerce to a place of advanced services, banking, administration, and global control (Sassen 1991). In cities like Toronto, Vancouver, or Montreal most of the producer services are highly concentrated in the Central Business District (CBD). Indeed, Canada is a very good example for the growth of service-based urbanization processes where head offices and producer services make for a corporate complex that consists of closely interwoven economic networks downtown (Hutton/Ley 1987). The evolving formation of a globalized, service-oriented production complex is increasingly leading urban growth. Economic explanations for the concentration of the corporate complex in the inner city conventionally emphasize the significance of linkages and face-to-face contacts as the main rationale for the persistence of cities

in postindustrial societies. Thus, externalities of co-location are considered to be essential (Schwartz, 1992, p. 18). Agglomeration economies still matter. Especially with globalisation on the rise knowledge-based economic activities like strategic face-to-face transactions, interfirm linkages, etc. continue to represent a main economic asset of cities.

### **The city of consumption**

<sup>7</sup>A second strand of literature focuses on the cultural assets of cities in these new times. With the emergence of postindustrial society a new class has been in the making to which quality-of-life-factors are of growing importance. The notion of the liveable, convivial city indicates a transformation in the meaning of the urban, a change from a place of residential segregation to a city of consumption and spectacle, where affluent professionals occupy the inner city and display an urban culture of consumption (Ley 1996, pp. 298ff). Gentrifiers are the epitome of the city of consumption. And it can well be argued that in this regard, too, Canadian cities are at the forefront of postmodern urbanization processes. Cities like Vancouver pursue a cumulative growth strategy, where the service-based economic growth induces and fosters the cultural transformation of the city into a convivial city - and vice versa. Indeed, Vancouver is an almost perfect example for these new urban developments of complex interplays between economy and culture (Ley 1979, Helbrecht, 1998). Here, in the context of a boom town on the West Coast the combination of the productive city and the city of consumption has already been translated into public policies. The vision of the regional planners in the Lower Mainland is to create the epitome of the convivial metropolis. „By becoming the first urban region in the world to combine economic vitality with the highest standards of livability and environmental quality, Greater Vancouver can represent in history what Athens is to democracy or Vienna is to music" (Greater Vancouver Regional District 1993, p. 5).

### **The cultural economy of cities**

<sup>8</sup>Situated somewhat inbetween the two frameworks of the 'productive city' of agglomeration economies and the 'city of consumption' a third literature on the „cultural economy of cities" is on the rise (Scott 1997). This literature has only recently evolved and points towards the growing interconnectedness and even convergence between the spheres of cultural and economic development. Two distinct discourses have emerged which try to outline new recompositions of cultural/economic assets of cities. First, a consumption-side argument is made for a cultural economy which emerges out of the needs for the production of the convivial city. A convivial city does not only consist of consumers, aestheticized urban landscapes and gentrified neighbourhoods. Moreover, it requires a complex arrangement of entertainment and cultural industries in the sports, arts, media and education that provide for and produce the leisure facilities, activities and events in the city. At the turn of this century, tourism has become one of the biggest industries worldwide and with it a complex set of urban cultural infrastructures has come along (Urry, 1995). Thus, the arts, entertainment and cultural industries have come to play an important role in urban restructuring (Bianchini et al., 1988). They attract people to come downtown, enhance tourism and convention attending (Whitt 1987). Even in declining old industrial districts fostering the arts has become a strategy for economic revitalisation.

<sup>9</sup>Second, in the postmodern age of commodity design, the production of images, symbols and style take up an ever increasing part of economic activities. Economic goods are not only merely material. Rather what becomes increasingly important is the sign-value of what Allan Scott (1997, p. 321) has called „cultural products" or Lash and Urry coined „postmodern goods" (Lash/Urry 1994, p. 4). Cultural or postmodern goods are infused with culture in that they have a highly aesthetic content, identity, and function. Based on this trend towards the postmodern „economy of signs" (Lash/Urry, 1994) manufacturing has become more and more design-intensive. Not only traditionally design-oriented sectors like jewelry, clothing or furniture embody sign values and are dependend upon cultural capital and aesthetic competence for their economic success. Industrial design has also grown in importance as a key component for the marketability of consumer goods like cars, telephones, etc. Design has become a point of sale (O'Connor, 1996, pp. 241ff). Thus, a whole range of cultural acitivities has emerged „within" the economy, from the sound designer in car manufacturing to the advertising agency, that circulates and bombards the consumers with messages about the meanings of consumption. A design industry with a whole range of 'creative services' is on the rise.

<sup>10</sup>Both literatures on the cultural economy (of cities) are part of an intriguing debate on postmodernism, consumer societies, the rise of the aesthetic, the refiguring of the economic (Thrift/Olds 1996), politics of identity, individualization, the reenchantment of the world, etc. (Beck, 1986, pp. 121ff, Maffesoli, 1996). While most of these discourses are based on a subtle consens that some drastic changes have occured in the ways we perceive of the interplay between economy and culture, in my opinion, within the research on the cultural economy of cities a rather traditional view of the economic and the cultural still prevails. The argument I would like to establish is that while striving for a merging of culture and capital, nevertheless, both conceptualizations of the cultural economy, the production and consumption-side arguments briefly presented above, are still based on the binary of economy and culture. Although it has become quite apparent that the complexity of postmodern/postfordist/postindustrial production does not allow for a strict separation of culture and capital, anymore (Thrift/Olds 1996, p. 317), a satisfactory change of perspective has yet to be achieved. So far, the cultural economy of cities continues to be analyzed in dualist ways. Either the economic structures of the cultural industries are scrutinized, i.e. interfirm relations, employment structures, etc. (Scott 1997, pp. 327ff), or the consumer culture and consumption side of the arts and entertainment industries are put into focus. Hence, the dichotomy of culture and economy is being reproduced. Especially the cultural industries which products are considered to be predominantly cultural in every way, are often treated as just another sector of the economy. Thus, vertical disintegration, flexible specialization and somewhat diffuse synergy effects are often considered to be the only and predominant economic rationale for the immense concentration of cultural-economic activities in metropolitan areas.

<sup>11</sup>In sum, I would like to argue that it is within this third literature on the cultural economy of cities that a major re-invention of the urban is in the making. The discourse on what a metropolis and a city mean today is based more and more on the fusion of economic and cultural categories. Therefore, if we are to understand the assets of the urban within the postmodern economy of signs and aestheticized consumer idenities, it would be useful to take a closer look at the workings of cultural capital within the cultural economy. If the infusion of the economy with cultural meaning is on the rise, if product differentiation, and economic success are ever

more based on the cultural competence of cultural services, then it should be the production of cultural capital itself that ought to be scutinized. How is cultural capital being produced and put to work? And what are the relationships between the production of cultural capital and an urban environment? Why is it that the cultural industries are highly concentrated in metropolitan regions and more specifically in the inner city? What are the hybrid cultural/economic assets of cities within the economy of signs?

**3. The creative metropolis**

**3.1. Creative services in downtown Vancouver**

<sup>12</sup>Creative services<sup>2</sup> are a unique subdivision of producer services (Hutton, 1994, p. 2). Services like advertising, graphic design, photographers, industrial design, etc. can be classified and identified as creative services because they share important respects in the production process. Their products are predominantly images, styles, and signs. Creative services operate at the heart of the symbolic economy, therefore, cultural capital is central to their success. As Clarke (1991, p. 68) put it their "focus [is] on creativity (as the production of difference), and the promotion of lifestyle as the purpose of consumption". Their employees are not only exemplary consumers, they also play a crucial role in the construction and transmission of messages about the meaning of consumption. People who are engaged in the creative services are cultural mediators and do "the work of symbolic manipulation" (Clarke, 1991, 67). Creative services construct signifiers in an attempt to produce the signified. Indeed, as cultural mediators they try to predispose and define lifestyles and identities of broad segments of the new middle class. This makes them an interesting group to study for cultural geography per se. Moreover, what makes them even more intriguing from an urban geographic perspective is the fact that they are highly concentrated downtown. In my research I concentrate on the production of cultural capital in selective creative service industries in Vancouver, i.e. advertising agencies, graphic design, interior design and apparel design. These design services are highly dynamic and clearly concentrated downtown (fig. 1).

<b>year</b>	1990	1990	1980	1970
<b>creative services</b>	% downtown	total	total	total
advertising agencies	68	171	110	46
apparel-designers	57	28	17	23
graphic-designers	56	228	54	0
interior-designers	42	163	108	70

Fig. 1: Growth and location of selective creative services in the City of Vancouver 1970 - 1990

<sup>13</sup>The over-representation of creative services in the central city is a fairly consistent spatial pattern across Canada. In various years in the 1980s 71% of the advertising agencies in Toronto were located in the central city, in Montreal 90% and in Ottawa even 95% (Gad, 1991, p. 448). The question that I would like to ask, then, is why are specific creative services concentrated downtown? What is the relationship between the cultural production of images and the urban imaginary of these image-producers? Why and how is an urban environment an asset for the production of cultural capital? And how is the urban, being urbane, perceived and constructed by employers and employees in the creative services? In order to address these questions about 50 in-depth interviews with employers and employees and a survey of the advertising, graphic design, interior design and apparel design companies (total: 415 firms, return rate: 47%) in Vancouver were conducted.<sup>3</sup> Three issues have shown to be significant in order to understand the webs of connection between the urban imaginary of the creative service people and their work of cultural production: a) constructions of the self that these people hold, b) the relationship between urban identity and their creativity at work, and c) the assessment of neighbourhoods and urban spaces.

### **3.2. Politics of identity: creativity and vision**

<sup>14</sup>Creative service people are many things. There is as much that separates them as unites them. However, from the in-depth interviews there appear to be two distinct cultural practices that link their work and subjectivities and are significant for their urban imaginary: creativity and vision.

#### **Creativity**

<sup>15</sup>The notion of creativity holds a very special meaning for people employed in the creative services. Most of the interviewees do not only consider her- or himself as just being creative. Moreover, creativity appears to be one of the most important identities these people hold about themselves. Creativity is not considered simply a skill they bring to the workplace but rather an all encompassing lifeforce on a very intimate, deeply personal level. Being creative is what they consider they stand in for and what makes for much of their personality and individuality. Therefore, almost all the interviewees claim to be creative in everything they do be it professionally at work or in their private lives. Thus, it seems to be plausible to argue that it is mostly the discursive site of creativity where production and consumption issues are mediated. It is the creativity that enables them to detect the spirit of the time and transform it into cultural messages about the meaning of consumption. The invention of images, styles and design is born out of the creative dealing with the social, cultural and economic context. Hence, creativity and to be creative are cultural and economic values at once. Creative service firms produce cultural capital via the creativity of their employees. Based on the sources of creativity creative service people fuel their sense of subjectivity and identity. They are entangled in an almost mythical belief-system of creation. And more importantly, it is the discourse of creativity that allows for a fluid sense of the self that is based on a process of constant re-invention of the self. The mythical and almost dramatic function of creativity in the identity formation process is expressed appropriately theatrical in the following quote from an interview with an apparel designer: „If I ever lost my creative side I might as well just die, cause that's what inspires me".

#### **Vision/space**

<sup>16</sup>Due to the highly visual component of their work employers and employees in the creative services have a heightened aesthetic reflexivity. Most of the interviewees are visual producers and consumers. At work an advertiser described himself as: "I am the client's eye ... I bring a face to people's ideas". More importantly, this visual and aesthetic attitude at work shapes the ways the interviewees assess the spaces that surround them, be it at home, in their neighbourhoods, or around the city. The layout and design of space matters a great deal to them because it is part and parcel of their personal and professional vision. Creative people are „space people" who resent to live or work just anywhere. Instead, creating a space at home and at work that they feel comfortable with is extremely important. Therefore, interior designing at home, painting, etc. are widespread private complements to their creative worklife. In sum, it is through the transformation of the material world, the creative and visual process of putting into form, the design of objects and signs that these people make a connection between the notion of a creative self and the materiality of the world. Michel Maffesoli (1996) has long argued that we are living in an age of „tribalism" where the aestheticization of the material world is accompanied by a revival of archaic elements. Material objects, spaces, and appearances, he argues, are treated as totems and attached with meaning. While I would reject the notion of the reenchantment of the world and even more so the return of archaic elements or his interpretation of an animated materiality, I would agree that creative service employees are engaged in a new discourse on the transcendental materiality of the physical world. And it is not only through objects, the design of consumer goods, ads or graphics where the new discourse gets articulated. It is exactly at this point of convergence between creativity and vision, where the discursive power of the urban as the central material and imaginary site for the production of signs and images comes in. It is especially in the realm of the urban, where the intricate connectivity of identity politics, material design and cultural production get played out.

### **3.3. Urban identity and creativity**

<sup>17</sup>Why does being in an urban environment foster the creativity of highly visual and aesthetic professionals? Most of the literature on cities and innovativeness conceptualize the relationship between urbanity and creativity in terms of an "urban milieu" that creative people can thrive on (Zukin, 1989). The city is considered a somewhat diffuse, yet, inspiring incubator or think tank for the production of fresh ideas. The empirical findings of the Vancouver case study supplement this rather airy and conventional explanation in that they point in a different direction. The main rationale why creative people opt for particular neighbourhoods at the fringe of downtown is neither a direct inspirational relationship between city life and creativity, as one might assume. Interviewees seldomly claim that streetlife, the urban landscape, or urban encounters offer direct inspiration and guidance for the creation of new images, styles, or design. Nor do employees in the creative services necessarily feed their creativity from accidental encounters in the streets. It seems like the downtown economy of creative service people seldomly operates like a think tank or incubator. If the city is neither an inspiration nor a think tank, what then is the meaning of a downtown location? From the interviews two main interpretations become apparent: the look and feel of the location in general and the importance of particular spaces within the city.

#### **Look and Feel**

<sup>18</sup>The most dominant reason for choosing a downtown location addresses something rather intangible and inarticulate: for the interviewees being downtown in a certain

neighbourhood predominantly "feels good". The statement from an interview with a graphic designer tries to articulate the importance of the locational 'look and feel':

<sup>19</sup>*"You know how you just kind of get a sense of it? ... You know if you feel good about where you are you're obviously going to be more productive and happier and more creative ... so the space feels good ... Why do you feel really good when you live in a house that overlooks the ocean? Because it feels good."*

<sup>20</sup>The enormous degree to which place gets attached with feelings („the space feels good") is clearly extraordinary. In order to understand the importance of the 'look and feel' of the location it is important to remember the workings of cultural capital. In the creative services, employers and employees are dependent upon their creativity and visual reflexivity. They are heavily inclined to be extraordinarily sensitive towards the appearance and character of the physical environment, and furthermore, to choose those locations and spatial settings that will foster, enhance, and unleash their creativity. Thus, it seems reasonable to argue that the creative service firms' dependence upon the 'look and feel' of the location is inextricably linked with the notions of creativity and vision discussed above and, thus, the preconditions of a culturally driven production process. Apparently, the personal convictions these people hold about creativity and the importance of vision significantly affect the ways they perceive the spaces that surround them. For their clients many interviewees claim it is the same. Especially advertising agencies are extremely sensitive to their clients' perceptions and expectations about what an advertising agency should 'look and feel' like. Thus, the location of an ad agency is an integral part of the corporate identity. Creative firms try to make a statement with where they are located. Space reflects and reinforces the image of the companies, and thus, particular spaces and neighbourhoods become an important factor for the success of the business.

<sup>21</sup>*"I don't really think it's inspiring, just that it's a nice feeling walking around ... There's an emotional component, you see. I mean, when you walk into this place, or you walk down the hall ... right away it goes through your head 'Neat Place'. It has to!" (advertising: creative director)*

<sup>22</sup>While it is generally argued that in the postmodern age of the commodity objects have been emptied out of meaning, in contrast, the broken chain of the signifier and signified seems not to be part of the everyday experience of graphic designers, advertisers, apparel designers, or interior designers - who are as cultural meditators at least in part to be held responsible for the postmodern inflation and deflation of meaning. Although theorists like Baudrillard (1994) or Lash and Urry (1994, 14f) claim that postmodern 'sign-value' -- compared to traditional use value or exchange value -- is ever more abstract, the interviewees have the most concrete, direct and spontaneous relation to the material world of offices or the urban environment. The urban is approached from a strictly aesthetic perspective, that is an aesthetic which is closely intertwined with affective notions, indeed, emotions of well-being and the perpetual construction of the self. The urban identity these people hold consists of a quintessentially aesthetic-affective complex.

**Spaces inbetween**

<sup>23</sup>Which spaces in the city do creative services companies prefer? And why?

Although urban environments are generally assessed by the look and feel of it, creative services are clearly attracted by very specific sets of urban environments. It appears like creative services thrive on the dynamic energy of the neighbourhoods they are located in. The interviewees find it stimulating (not inspiring!) to be in a particular urban environment, that provides for a general level of energy, a pulse, as well as visual and social stimulation. Creative service employers and employees are intrigued by those neighbourhoods who „feel good" because they feel they can charge their creative batteries. In Vancouver, one particular place downtown that serves these needs is Yaletown. Yaletown is a young, dynamic design district with a small but rather dense community of artistic people. It is a very bounded, finite area in downtown Vancouver in as it consists of four blocks of distinct warehouse architecture. The open architecture with bricks, high ceilings, etc. allows for loft living and, thus, makes it a very special place in downtown Vancouver. In the early to mid 1990s it has been this very distinctiveness of the architecture which attracted many businesses to Yaletown and start the process of economic and social upgrading. The cultural mix of activities and the landscape features of Yaletown, which has turned incredibly fast into a gentrified shopping district, is described in the interviews in terms of "funky, groovy, a sense of fun, colour, energy". The cultural characteristics of the neighbourhood put the employees in the right mindset to perform their creative work. Thus, creative services are at the forefront of the gentrification process and often pioneering new urban areas for social upgrading. Their societal role as cultural mediators for broader segments of the new middle class is mirrored and mediated in their spatial practices. The neighbourhood reinforces the creativity and the concentration of creative services reinforces the dynamic and stimulating character of the neighbourhood. Society and space form a conspiracy where one is constructed through the other. Because their creativity is so much geared towards shaping the material world, the ability to be creative is also very much dependent upon a material environment and particular notions of the urban, that provide for a context in which they can unleash their creativity.

<sup>24</sup>Surprisingly, although Yaletown is located downtown, the interviewees construct the identity of the neighbourhood as something different. Yaletown is perceived of as being neither downtown nor suburban. It is a space inbetween. Being on the edge of downtown people perceive of the corporate culture downtown as the 'other', the constitutive outside of their own identity. By associating downtown with ties, highrises, anonymity, fear, and alienation, Yaletown is discursively distinguishable as a creative community with feelings of belonging and ownership, i.e. an almost countercultural site. This urban imagination of Yaletown as a very special place beyond downtown and suburbia is accompanied by a particular, indeed very selective perception of Vancouver's urban landscape. The visual focus of their work clearly shows in their urban imagination. Vancouver is perceived through the lens of very specific sites. Favourite places in the city are situated along the picturesque scenery of the waterfront and mountains (Granville Island, Stanley Park, Venier Park, Seewall). The metaphor that people in the creative services most often refer to is strictly visual. As an interior designer put it: "I always think of it as jewel-like, and that's more a visual metaphor than anything, because of the crispness of the colours, and its overall cleanliness. I think it has a sparkle. There's a lot of reflection ... so I think of it as a jewel". Vancouver is considered to be a jewel because of its shiny, rather polished aesthetic qualities. The urban imaginary, the spaces employers and employees in the creative services prefer and materially shape are directly linked to

the aesthetic production they perform at work. People in the creative services not only look for creative spaces within the urban environment. It is partially through this aesthetic lens that they assess the whole of urban environments. A final quote from an interview with a graphic designer gives the most plastic account:

<sup>25</sup> *".. when I go back to Toronto, I feel visually deprived. You know, being in a creative business, visual stimulation is very important, and you take that away ... I was so depressed last time I was in Toronto, really, I came home early"*

#### 4. Discussion

<sup>26</sup> Robert Park (1984, p. 1) said the "city is a state of mind". What a city means clearly depends upon the social, cultural, and economic context. In the postmodern age a new cultural economy of urban spaces is in the state of nascence. With the rise of consumer society and the economy of signs, a new physical and symbolic gestalt of the metropolis is striving for hegemony in the societal urban imaginations and spatial practices. Authors like Saskia Sassen (1996) have argued for the dual character of contemporary metropolitan regions, a tendency towards the simultaneous development of a metropolis of both, capital and culture. Alan Scott (1997) tries to conceptualize the merging of culture and capital in terms of the cultural economy. But in my opinion these notions still bear tremendous shortcomings. I would assume that we have yet to develop a new vocabulary and a new language, that does not perpetuate the dichotomy of culture and capital. Therefore, in order to grasp the role of cities in the postmodern economy of signs I find the nexus of urbanity and creativity to be a helpful starting point. Because urbanity and creativity can be looked at from both sides: as assets of cultural production and means of constructing subject identities. And in their mutual constructedness new modes of production and consumption shine through in what Maffesoli (1996, p. 4) might call a „style of an epoch". To spur some further debate and open up spaces for imaginative thinking on the future of cities I would suggest that the nexus of urbanity-creativity has become a strategic discursive site that mediates between cultural and capital in the city. Thus in an era where the myth of creativity dominates production and consumption, the creative metropolis emerges.

<sup>27</sup> The rise of the creative metropolis is inextricably linked with the emergence of a creative service economy. Creative services capitalize culture and culturize capital. In doing so, they are strategically situated between production and consumption. The visual orientation inclines employers and employees in the creative services to consider the physical environment as nothing less than fundamental for their personal and professional well-being. Advertisers, graphic designers, and interior decorators want a lot from space and they try to build a space around them that facilitates their creativity. In order to attach the material world of consumer goods with aesthetic values and meaning, they thrive on very specific notions of urbanity, embodied with emotions and aesthetics. Moreover, these urban imaginations and material spaces provide for a language and an arena which enables creative people to produce cultural capital and attach meaning to their lives. Thus, urbanity and creativity form two sides of a coin and the links between them are rather emotional and affective than tangible or articulate. In much the same way that designers or

advertisers claim that they just recognize a good advertisement or an excellent design when they see it, they approach and engage with the city as something to be perceived of in strictly emotional and aesthetic categories, i.e. the of 'look and feel' of it. And it is through the usage and perception of very specific sites in the city that they suit their needs. And in the end, particular urban places of the creative city get overrepresented and overgeneralized as „the city“.

<sup>28</sup>What are we to make of this new city? How do we interpret, evaluate and even deal with the rise of the new urbanity-creativity-nexus as a way of constructing identities, a social value, an economic asset and the emergence of new spaces, symbols and services of the creative metropolis, that come along with it? From what I can understand so far, there seems to be a positive and negative side to it. The problematic aspects of the creative city are to be found in its highly elitist, exclusionary, unpolitical, and self-indulgent material and symbolic realities. The urbanism of the creative metropolis is based on the formative powers of the affluent consumer. Therefore, the creative metropolis serves the needs of the new middle class who has the power to define a new form of urbanity that serves their needs for constructing an identity through the means of consumption. In terms of social justice the „creative city“ is, thus, clearly an exclusionary notion that, furthermore, embodies a many dangers of a reductionist, fetishist consumerism.

<sup>29</sup>Yet, at the same time the identity politics of the myth of creativity and the creative metropolis behold some positive aspects. Creativity and the creative metropolis might provide for an answer to a question that has deeply troubled modern societies from the very beginning. More than fifty years ago, in 1941, Erich Fromm (1990) wrote a book on the „Escape from Freedom“. Being fundamentally shocked and frustrated with the devastating politics of Hitler-fascism in Germany, he developed an argument, that should help understand and maybe even prevent or stop the fatal consequences of totalitarianism. Later on his thesis reappeared in various forms in the literature on postmodernity (Betz, 1992). Released from the iron cage of meta narratives the individual in the postmodern age enters a new stage of individual freedom. This freedom is accompanied by the luxury and burden of making her or his own choices, to follow one's own personal rules and ethics. But it seems like ever since the disenchantment of the world, the tumbling of religion and science as bedrocks of society there has been disorientation and insecurity, fear and escapism. I would like to argue that the rise of the discourse of creativity is yet another new way of trying to find an answer to the question 'freedom what for'? The contemporary notion of creativity is based upon and strives for a process of permanent reinvention of the self through the projection of the self onto the material world. Instead of fixing identities and finding finite answers, all there is (left) is a desire to produce -- subjectivities, the self, and most importantly meaning. Hence, creativity is about processes and not results, it is about emotions, about feeling comfortable and constantly re-inventing the self. And it appears to be the city which offers the sites and the sights in order to produce this ongoing cultural/economic production. It is in this context of postmodern identity politics of individualized subject positions that the downtown/creative city/suburban- distinction has become a powerful signifier. The private and professional concepts of the city people in the creative services hold are therefore not merely descriptive. Indeed, they are expressive and refer to much broader, fundamentally humane issues and concerns. Because, to give meaning to the city is not only a way of establishing one's own identity, it is even more so a way of making sense of the world. What place signifies is important.

<sup>30</sup>Whether you or I agree with the notion of creativity and the creative metropolis as a solution to the problem, an answer to the escape from freedom, depends solely upon yourself and myself. Because, the city will always become, what we want it to be. In the words of Jonathan Raban (1994, p. 1): „Decide who you are, and the city will again assume a fixed form round you". So, do you want to be creative - for economic and cultural reasons? Then what you get is a creative metropolis with its very own services, symbols, and spaces.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the Jahrestagung der Gesellschaft für Kanada-Studien, Grainau 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Since the geographical inquiry of the tertiary sector has only recently turned its attention towards the symbolic economy of signs a proper terminology and conceptualization of this new field of study has yet to be developed. Therefore, the term „creative services" is only a provisionally one that tries to identify and cluster those producer services which are design-oriented and geared towards the production of images, styles, and identities (Hutton, 1994, pp. 1ff).

<sup>3</sup> I am very grateful to Anne-Marie Bouthillette, Hayley S. Britton, and Andrew Hamilton for their extraordinary skillful research assistance.