Urban Designscapes and the Production of Aesthetic Consent

Guy Julier

Summary. Studies on the identity formation of urban centres and the use of aesthetic markers within that regeneration process largely fall into two camps that reflect their respective academic provenance. On the one hand, this effect is assessed by reference to urban planning and architectural processes. Here, the interest is firmly in the design hardware of buildings, streets and public spaces and how they are used to differentiate and communicate. On the other, this is reviewed by reference to the marketing strategies of place branding. Here the emotional software of brand identity programmes, as carried through literature, websites, the copywriting of slogans and other largely two-dimensional platforms comes into view. Within the remit of 'culture-led regeneration', the article considers a more extended version of the role of design in this process. Designers are implicated among networks of urban élites that decide strategies. But their involvement takes the process of design-led regeneration beyond buildings or leaflets to a loosely coherent, hegemonic network of signifiers to produce what I call 'designscapes'. The article takes a critical approach to three designscapes: Barcelona, Manchester and Hull. In doing so, it evaluates contrasting approaches while keeping in view the interactions of design élites and their public, the flows between individual and collective consumption and their roles in forming an urban habitus.

Introduction

Literature on place-making is, by now, copious. A body of publications emanates from architectural studies that considers the built environment in terms of urban forms and planning that differentiates and distinguishes locations. A more recent corpus is directed towards marketing, tourism and business management; this is preoccupied with the development of branding programmes to identify, articulate and mediate the 'unique selling propositions' of locations.

The central concern of this article is in the critical analysis of a wider range of design activities that take place in place-identity formation—those between 'landmark buildings' and beyond the branding programmes. It reveals the network of interests that link design production, regulation and consumption within urban locations and how place-specific design identities thus follow. In piecing these nodes together, the concept of 'urban designscapes' is presented as a term to express the network of activities and artefacts that produce place-identiy within cities. This is about the 'things' that make up their fabric as much as their representation through mediatory forms and the symbolic role of its participants. Thus the article

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moves beyond a-critical notions of culture-led urban regeneration to question *what kind of regeneration* is being foregrounded in specific instances. How is design mobilised to affect the urban habitus or, otherwise, both the individual and collective dispositions and practices that structure cultural capital? Thus the material objects of design come into view, but also the narrational cues that accompany these and give meaning to identity within regeneration. These may be programmatically organised through, for example, place-branding initiatives or may come about through a confluence of activities.

Three contrasting case studies are used to interrogate this process. While in each case design is mobilised within a response to post-industrial regeneration, this is done with varying degrees of programmatic, top–down direction. Barcelona is perhaps the most oft-cited example of design-led urban regeneration and yet its internal dynamics and meanings are, I believe, only very superficially understood and are invariably misrepresented as being far more programmatic than, in practice, actually happened. Nonetheless, the Barcelona example provides a rich case study of a fit between design production and consumption that was regulated through the interests of an hegemonic, avant-garde élite. It therefore provides a useful conceptual model to compare with the two more focused and shorter case studies of Manchester and Hull. Manchester is chosen as it demonstrates a much more self-conscious attempt to orchestrate place-identity through the appropriation, channelling and regulation of a specific aesthetic outlook for the city, drawing on pre-existing designerly and attitudinal resources. The case study of Hull is even more self-conscious and programmatic in its place-identity creation; it also draws on pre-existing circumstances but this attempts more overtly to *produce* an aesthetic aspiration for its own citizens. For Barcelona and Manchester, the role of a designerly élite is foregrounded in understanding the development of place-identities, both in terms of their influence and the symbolic capital they embody for those locations. The exposition

of Barcelona's designscape is considerably lengthier than that of Manchester and Hull. This is testimony to its density and extent of its design infrastructure, while by contrast, Hull's is largely nascent.

The research included close (and pleasurable) observation—or as design ethnographer Judy Tso (1999) terms, 'deep hanging out'—of the day-to-day activities, locations and artefacts of design production and consumption in the three locations. An archive of some 40 taped interviews I undertook with designers, manufacturers, retailers and design officials and commentators in Barcelona, 1988–92 revealed the informal networks between them and their interfaces with institutions and mediatory forms of the city's designscapes. Interviews, press releases and brand reports provided data in Manchester and Hull. Ultimately, though, my chief interest is in developing a critical perspective rather than in an exhaustive empirical account.

This article begins by challenging architectural criticism that relies on form alone to discuss place-identities. It is equally necessary to problematise the contributions of marketing and branding to this process. This in turn leads us towards the 'urban designscape' notion as a useful tool for analysing the dynamics of design within culture-led urban regeneration before its application to the three case studies.

Between Buildings

Within architectural studies, Kenneth Frampton's promotion of 'critical regionalism' in the early 1980s revived the issue of the relationship of built form to regional identities as an anti-centrist and anti-modernist/International Style conception (Frampton, 1986). In practice, while Frampton's position may have sparked healthy discussions around the issues of place-identity and architecture, the aesthetic outcomes continue to be sporadic and isolated. For example, the activities of the circle of Imre Makovecz and his circle or 'Hungarian Organicists' provided an engaging example of a self-conscious attempt to revive architecture within a place-making process. Makovecz's interest was in an

architecture that drew on the skills of local craftspeople and expressed the historical traditions of a location. But it is noteworthy that this movement's approach only came to international attention via their Hungarian pavilion for the Seville Expo of 1992. Indeed, consonant with the 150-year tradition of world expos (stretching from the 1851 Great Exhibition to the 2000 Hanover Expo), their national pavilions have perhaps been the only platform where place-identity is so clearly marked through the architectural signifier.

Beyond such occasions, the tendency—certainly in terms of 'landmark' new buildings—has been towards a globalised civic patronage by major urban centres commissioning global 'name' architects (such as Frank O. Gehry in Bilbao, Prague or Los Angeles, Daniel Libeskind in Salford, New York, Berlin, etc.). Thus a location is distinguished as much by its civic patronage (having the money and taste to engage a particular famous architect) as by the building itself. Needless to say, this consideration takes us rapidly to Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital. It is a location's disposition to employ a certain architect, for example, that is important. The buildings symbolise that disposition, that sensibility, that attitude. They are 'objectivated cultural capital' (Leach, 2002, p. 283).

In thinking about the role of architecture in the identification with space, architectural theorist Neil Leach takes us beyond the object to, "engage the subjective processes of identification" (Leach, 2002, p. 281). We can begin this analytical approach, Leach argues, by considering Bhaba's concept of nation as 'narration' (Bhaba, 1990). Here, the meaning of nation comes into life through the language and rhetoric that articulate it. This narration is not abstractly independent of objects, however. Instead, what is said is activated by objects, while narration also contextualises and gives meaning to them. Design objects and discourse are mutually dependent in generating belonging. In addition to this concept of 'narrating' place-identity, Leach also draws attention to how this is 'performed' by drawing on Butler (1990). Within this conception, identity is subjective. It can be played

out through the reiteration of a set of norms. These norms, then, can be adopted or appropriated, used, used up and relinquished.

In respect of the built environment, Leach provides a useful starting-point for thinking about how identity is produced, both internally for a community or population and for their external audience. His foregrounding of architecture as a dominant aesthetic focus within this process raises, however, an important question for this article. We are left wondering, first, what role other aesthetic forms such as urban furniture, city council or regional government websites, tourist literature or the retail and leisure infrastructure, play in this process? Stemming from this, we might ask what are the mechanisms by which narrations and norms for the playing-out (or, otherwise, performativity) of place-identity are generated, circulated and adopted? Is there a link between the two questions? In other words, how does design, beyond architecture, contribute to providing official or non-official 'stories' and 'ways of doing things' that, in turn, fashion specific aesthetic outlooks for a place?

Beyond Branding

Branding has become a central motif of contemporary design practice in recent years. Its application, largely through tourism marketing, to the definition and communication of the characteristics of locations suggests an alternative line of enquiry beyond architectural criticism. And yet, as a process it is beset with operational problems that require its analysts to regard it in concert with other design manifestations to understand its workings.

Place-branding is the process of applying the branding process—as applied to commercial products—to geographical locations and is a burgeoning activity within advertising and marketing (Olins, 1999). The relationship of product–country image is claimed as the 'most-researched' issue in international buyer behaviour; there are, it is calculated, over 750 major publications by more than 780 authors who address this theme

(Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002, p. 294). Specialist place-identity marketing and brand consultancies have emerged (such as Total Destination Management in the US and Placebrands Ltd in the UK). 'How to do place branding' books have been published (for example, Morgan *et al.*, 2002; Kotler *et al.*, 2002; Ashworth and Goodall, 1990).

Several authors recognise the inherent problems in directly applying the notion of product branding to places (for example, Anholt, 2002; Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002; Bennett and Savani, 2003). First, a place is not a primary, singular product, but an agglomeration of identities and activities. While identifying, articulating and nurturing these, they nonetheless often add up to the most generic of brand values in terms of place-wide marketing. Internally to a location—for its population, that is—these values may not necessarily reflect or promote their reality. Externally, to the rest of the world, they appear bland and undifferentiating. A web-survey of global locations' city authorities bears out the homogeneity of brand-value language that results. In 2004 Singapore, Brisbane and Birmingham all described themselves as 'dynamic' and 'cosmopolitan' or 'diverse'. Johannesburg and Manchester both came in with 'vibrant'. Birmingham, Glasgow and Johannesburg were 'cultural'; Santo Domingo and Brisbane, they claim, were both 'sophisticated'.

Secondly, the process is not simply one of 'rebranding' but more of 'brand management'. It is about the "slow moving husbandry of existing perceptions" (Anholt, 2002, p. 232). The branding of a location may be read as an attempt to create and nurture the narratives that give meaning to a place. Extending from Leach's approach to the interpretation of architecture, place-branding self-consciously provides linguistic cues to outsiders and citizens through and from which the material attributes of a place are perceived. Thus—for example, a brand-value of a place as 'vibrant and cosmopolitan' immediately appears to be implicit in the buildings or restaurants that are encountered. The job of the brand manager is to find ways

of orchestrating these pieces of pre-existing aesthetic information.

This nurturing of urban identities is not necessarily as programmatic as brand consultants would perhaps like. While clear, easy-to-understand narratives of a place may be easy to develop and communicate in themselves, they also require confirmation in the material circumstances to which they relate. This creates an uneasy relationship. It requires the participation and aquiescence of a range of stakeholders—the brand values have to be understood and reiterated by citizens. Policy implementation in the husbandry of a place-brand may be constrained so that it can only be undertaken in limited areas. Changes of local, regional and and national governments and their policies may impact on developments. Key personnel in the process may leave their posts, interrupting the brand management processes. Economic fluctuations and financial constraints may hinder developments—places may not be so 'vibrant' in a recession. Unforeseen circumstances in relation to the cultural or material fortunes of a place may sabotage the process: city football teams may have disastrous seasons (for example, Leeds in 2003–04); opera houses sometimes burn down (Barcelona, 1994; Venice, 1996).

In this context of uncertainty, 'hard-branding' the city is a precarious strategy. Evans (2003) uses this term, 'hard-branding', with reference to the impact of the creation of large cultural schemes—*grands projets* such as new museums, arts complexes, theatres or opera houses—on a wider strategy of regeneration and place identification. He sees this strategy as imposing clear signifiers of modernity into the post-modern cityscape. As with the above discussions in marketing, there is a similar alertness to the problems of these enterprises: the danger of a 'me too' copycat reproduction of signature architect-led projects across a range of global cities ultimately homogenises identities of global cities; the appropriation of public practice into a realm of private consumption effectively conspires to commodify culture further; the accompanying gentrification

processes of cultural quarters marginalises local residents; the threat of brand decay as attractions lose their shine makes them short-term investments; and the potentially crippling costs of such ventures makes them far from risk-free.

Evans does not fully explain his use of the term 'hard-branding'. However, the implication (by reference to Mommaas, 2002, p. 34) is that the development of contemporary cultural infrastructure is an inflexible and imposing strategy in which high coherence and order are sought through the creation of clear, readable messages which in turn make, for an audience, choosing an easier process. This usage does indeed have some resonance with its meaning within the design and marketing industries. Conversely, the term 'soft-branding' is used to denote a looser system in which a broader palette of options is available to carriers of brand identity (for example, M.R., 1998). This is sometimes found in tourism and leisure industries where, for example, a hotel or a campsite pertains to a parent brand, mostly for the sake of marketing, but retains its individual identity beyond this. The parent brand therefore denotes a particular level of service content and quality, but does not dictate to the operational systems of its parts as to how these are achieved or as to the more nuanced aspects of their aesthetic dimensions.

The notions of hard- and soft-branding allow a useful tool to critique and understand the cultural role of design in urban regeneration. Hard-branding may come into play when inventing a place a-new. The Disney-created community, Celebration in Florida, might be an example of this. It may work in the context of a thoroughly compliant population and bottomless budgetry resources, but its limitations are not difficult to spot. This distinction is, in fact, more useful when thinking about audience and context. At a basic level, the hard-brand may be used to distinguish a location at 'entry point'. So 'Gaudì's Barcelona' becomes an associational trigger of expectation of what the city is about. Gaudì's Sagrada Familia may be an immediate shorthand to identify Barcelona, perhaps

as 'avant-garde' and 'creative'. However, beyond this are many other layers of activity that overlap with this, but also say other things too.

In considering the emergence or positioning of place-identities via the mobilisation of the symbolic capital of design, we must therefore not restrict the analysis to visual identity programmes and *grands projets*. Instead, the full range of design production and consumption has to be considered. In this way, the coherences and contradictions—and, indeed, the contradictions that form part of those coherences—within their practices and discourses add up to an extended field of consideration.

An early step in this direction was taken by Molotch (1996) in his essay on 'L.A. as design product'. Molotch recognises the difficulties in identifying a coherent design aesthetic within a freewheeling city such as Los Angeles. However, his quest was to show how local aesthetics are important to the business climate or 'industrial atmosphere'. In this, he ranged through the furniture design of Harry Bertoia and Charles Eames, the automobile design to come out of southern California studios of Japanese companies (such as the Isuzu Trooper or Toyota's Lexus), the effects of the movie industry, tourism and fast-food. His conclusions were that the LA style is not characterised necessarily by a particular 'look', but by a sheer volume of cultural producers and, perhaps, some shared sensibilities about being renegade but also versatile. Molotch's approach is far from being empirically tested. There is no real evidence that the examples he cites do add up to a self-identity. His account is production-led, with no reference to LA design's impact on the consumer culture of the location. While he mentions the importance of art colleges as a possible bonding agent within this system, there is little evidence of how or if any of these disparate design activities add up in any way. Neither is there any evidence of this being a reflexive process, either within the design industry itself (as in 'the deliberate designing of California-ness into artefacts') or through

any place marketing initiatives. Nonetheless, Molotch is hinting at the notion that an urban habitus is performed through a series of aesthetic platforms.

More recently, Bell and Jayne (2003) mobilise this approach in a more instrumental than analytical way. Drawing heavily on my own concept of a 'culture of design' (Julier, 2000), they map out their aspirations for north Staffordshire in terms of design-led regeneration. Thus they suggest that a nurtured co-existence of producers, consumers and designers in a coherent circuit of culture, can in turn generate economic, social and cultural value for a location. Their scope in terms of design ranges across crafts, product engineering, retail and entertainment, public spaces and architecture with the city as the cradle of resultant entrepreneurial networks and consumer practices feeding off each other. The interlocking of such processes within a densely operating, localised framework would create what I term an 'urban designscape'.

Barcelona is oft-cited as a beacon of regeneration and identity-formation through urban design (Hajer, 1993; Urban Task Force, 2000; Bell and Jayne, 2003; McNeill, 2003; Marshall, 2004). Throughout these studies, the regeneration of public spaces and services is analysed almost entirely as a functional activity concerned with delivering more efficient, cleaner and attractive environments. They do not connect these developments to a wider change in the taste patterns of a population, or at least, a change of aspiration. In short, public consumption is not connected to the private and vice versa. There is an assumption that the aesthetic element of these is neutral and that this does not play a distinguishing and defining role in the regeneration process (Crilley, 1993; Hubbard, 1996). A consideration of the term, 'urban designscapes' provides a conceptual model for looking at how public and private consumption are connected within the framework of design-led regeneration, how the actor networks of agglomerations produce aesthetic consent and what kind of aesthetic consent this might be.

Urban Designscapes

The term 'urban designscapes' is intended to convey the pervasive and multilevel use of the symbolic capital of design in identifying and differentiating urban agglomerations. Hence it exists through a variety of aesthetic platforms, ranging through brand design, architecture, urban planning, events and exhibitions. But it also extends to the productive processes of design policy-making and implementation, design promotion and organisation and the systems of provision of design goods and environments within these contexts. The actor networks that make up the design culture of a location therefore take on a symbolic role—they become a kind of 'meta-activity' that frames and explains urban social, environmental and economic identity. However, this identity-forming process also purports to extend into the consumption sphere of the city. Lifestyles, taste patterns and everyday practice supposedly become attitudinal markers of an urban habitus.

This notion of urban designscapes is adapted in the first instance from Chatterton and Holland (2003) who employ the term 'urban nightscapes' in their book of the same name. They analyse the interdependencies of youth cultural activities, urban nighttime economies and the corporatisation of the public sphere. Thus the 'fit' of productive and consumer interests in image-building is brought into view. Within marketing studies, we have seen the recurrent use of the term 'servicescapes' in terms of this notion of 'fit'. Originated by Bitner (1992), this has largely come to be understood as incorporating consideration of the built environment of a service delivery point but also the 'atmospherics' of the location. Thus ambient details such as furnishings, noise, music and air quality are factored into the appreciation of what facilitates effective service delivery. The judgement of effectivity of these is not just from the point of view of the ability of users to fulfil their tasks within an environment. It also means the delivery of a coherent and understandable message about itself and

its differentiation from other competitors through that environment. In other words, the design of a 'servicescape' engages both functional and symbolic demands.

This 'servicescape' concept may be common-sensical, especially to the seasoned retail interior designer whose brief is to orchestrate not just spatial form but lighting, soft furnishings, signage, background music or employee uniforms within the bounds of a brand identity. But the emergence of the term in the early 1990s signals several important shifts for how design has come to be played out. In the first instance, the interest of such academics in disciplines of retail and marketing reflects a growing more general design consciousness and ubiquity of reference to it. Secondly, it represents a shift in acknowledgement of design in the 1990s from being about the shaping of individual products, spaces and images to the wholesale aesthetic orchestration of systems. By extension to this argument, Lash notes that

> Culture is now three-dimensional, as much tactile as visual or textual, all around us and inhabited, lived in rather than encountered in a separate realm as a representation (Lash, 2002, p. 149).

He goes on to argue that we have become an architectonic, spatially based society and information is reworked in these planes. Culture is no longer one of pure representation or narrative where visual culture conveys messages. Instead, I would add, design culture formulates, formats, channels, circulates, contains and retrieves information through a number of channels. Design is more than just the creation of artefacts. It conspires in the structuring of systems of encounter within the visual and material world. Collectively, these add up to the creation of urban designscapes.

It is important, though, not to get carried away into vague assertions on the state of aesthetics and the everyday lifeworlds of cities. The work of such sociologists as Lash and Urry (1994) and Featherstone (1991) is important in recognising the growth of cultural goods and the increased importance of the global sign economy. Scase and Davis (2000, p. 23) take this notion further to claim that the creative economy is at the "leading edge of the movement towards the information age [as] their outputs are performances, expressive work, ideas and symbols rather than consumer goods or services". They are paradigmatic of broader changes in economic life. These writers, however, provide little empirical evidence to demonstrate this or illustrate the mechanisms by which it comes about (Nixon, 2003). Equally, the term 'urban designscape' may signal an automonous state of being, somehow hovering over the city. It is important, therefore, to delve deeper and analyse how this designscape functions in terms of the interests that work within it and the dispositions that are foregrounded by it.

Any form of '-scape' involves a privileged position in terms of what it defines for viewing. Thus, drawing on Zukin (1991, 1995), we may regard a 'landscape' as requiring a hegemonic position that reflects economic, cultural and social priorities of power. A landscape has to be seen from a vantage-point. Zukin's chief interest was in the transformation of urban spaces and the absorption of either vernacular or avant-garde practices into a dominant value system. Within the term 'designscapes', I infer an extended system that engages not just spatial attributes, but also issues of taste, practice and the circulation of design that are nonetheless still inflected by power mechanisms.

Revisiting the 'Barcelona Paradigm'

The 'Barcelona effect' of the 1980s and 1990s came about through the interraction of several layers of design activity and consumption. These were all connected by both formal and informal networks that coursed between governmental policy-making, design promotional institutions, associations, civil society and the industrial and retail infrastructure for design. Furthermore, a range of mediative systems for design products and discourses existed, from local press and TV coverage, to design festivals, to emergent new bars and restaurants.

Thus while a certain designerly élite held some hegemonic power in the shaping of a new urban habitus, there was also a constant ripple effect outwards from it. Examples of how these networks functioned across Barcelona are too numerous to describe fully here, but a few may give a flavour of how they acted, the coincidences of personalities and their impact.

For the historian of Barcelonese design, the autobiographies by two key figures of its architectural and design milieu provide a stunning 'who's who' of its actor networks. Oriol Bohigas' *Combat d'Incerteses* (1989) maps his pre-eminent position within the development of a Barcelonese sensibility towards urban planning and regeneration. During the 1980s while the renovation of public space was orchestrated according to a city-wide plan, it was characterised by small, particularist interventions. This stemmed in part from an anti-modernist, totalising discursive position that was shared across design disciplines in Barcelona (Julier, 1990). But it was also the result of a considerable amount of interchange between the City Council's planning department—with Bohigas in charge 1980–84—and civil interest-groups such as neighbourhood associations (Calavita and Ferrer, 2000). It was also the result of long-standing, close relationships Bohigas had with other architects and politicians that facilitated swift implementation of his plans. *Combat d'Incerteses* thus tells the story of a dense network of architects, designers and politicians and their friendships, debates, informal and formal points of contact.

The second key figure whose autobiography we could plunder is André Ricard and his *En Resumen* (2003). Ricard occupies an historical position in the institutional and professional development of design. He more or less single-handedly introduced the concept of industrial design to Barcelona in the late 1950s. Through the 1960s and 1970s, he was at the hub of design promotion and the foundation of Barcelona's Design Centre, BCD, in 1976. He designed Barcelona's successful canditature presentation for the 1992 Olympics and its Olympic torch. He was also

chair of a steering committee that wrote a design policy for the autonomous Catalan regional government in 1984 (Generalitat de Catalunya, 1984). Thus, like Bohigas' autobiography, his book comes alive in its onomastic index. Here, we see the evidence of the networks of designers, politicians and industrialists that were engaged in his project to champion design in the lists of names and representatives that are familiar to either the historian of Catalan design or those already 'in the know'. In both Bohigas' and Ricard's accounts, we see the mechanisms of a cultural élite at work in a highly localised and dense framework of activity.

This largely upper-middle-class élite also extended its network outwards. For example, the creation of the Barcelona Centre of Design—a design centre to promote the profession within industry—is noteworthy for its implication into Barcelonese commercial and civil society. Its council included representatives of institutions ranging from neighbourhood associations, heritage lobbyists, savings banks, the press association as well as the city council and regional governments. Such connections took the institutional organisation of design promotion beyond its own élite.

At the level of consumer culture, Barcelonese designers were indeed closely connected into the fabric of the city. The more prominent emergence of design retailers in the 1980s such as Vinçon, Pilma, B. D. Ediciones de Diseño and Santa & Cole ensured the high-street visibility of Catalan design production. All four of these had their distinct approaches to retail. However, what binds them is the fact that the vast majority of their goods, in particular furniture, were dominated by Barcelonese design products. B. D. Ediciones de Diseño and Santa & Cole both produced their own commissioned new designs and also re-edited historical 'classics' by named designers such as Antoni Gaudì and Charles Rennie Mackintosh. In either case, these, along with Pilma and to a lesser extent Vinçon, provided important taste nodes of high design for citizens. As a

female Barcelonese primary school teacher once told me

> I go to Vinçon to see what there is, what's *in*, and then I go to the [the department store] El Corte Inglés to buy something a bit like what I see there but more affordable.

However, even if citizens did not visit these retailers, their effect spilled out into the streets in any case. B. D. Ediciones de Diseño provided many of the city's public benches (Oscar Tusquet's 'Banca Catalana') and Santa & Cole produced and sold much of its park lighting (Beth Galì and Marius Quintana's 'Lámpara Alta').

Design consumption could also take place at a spectacular and yet fleeting level. The plethora of new bars during the late 1980s all featured furniture, lighting and interior design by 'name' Barcelonese designers. The connections were taken a step further as several were owned or promoted by design figures. Best known of these was the Velvet bar which opened in 1986. It was the creation of Juli Capella and Quim Larrea who also founded and edited Spain's premier design magazine *Ardi* in 1988. Capella and Larrea went on to establish Barcelona's bi-annual design festival, the Primavera del Disseny in 1991. They also curated the 'Barcelona House' for the 1992 Olympic Games cultural programme—a house furnished with bespoke objects by Catalan designers that were subsequently put into production.

The above slice through the Barcelona designscape illustrates the density of actor networks and the close relationship between individual *animateurs* of design and the institutions of civil society but also how these were materialised into the urban fabric. This density was highly visually evident within the city but also insitutionalised into the everyday relationships of practitioners within the design milieu. As one Madrid-based designer told me in 1990

> I have had plenty of opportunities to set-up my practice in Barcelona, but, really, I'd find it too claustrophobic. In Barcelona, if you haven't been in touch with other designers for a couple of weeks you have to make up some excuse like your wife has been ill or you've been away on holiday! (P. Miralles, industrial designer; personal interview 25 September 1990).

Thus, this milieu displayed those features of 'network sociality' redolent of the creative industries that McRobbie (1998, 2002) identifies. In Barcelona, this was to some degree about a closed institution in which its actors were constantly required to maintain their social capital. The creative workers that McRobbie discusses are directed towards maintaining their value in a globalised marketplace. The milieu under discussion here, though, was directed towards Barcelona first both in terms of their marketplace and their social horizons, and Catalonia/Europe secondly.

Figure 1 shows the networks that made up Barcelona's designscape, taking into account key individuals, locations and organisations. It illustrates how the interests of individuals and organisations were materialised and mediated, providing specific points of encounter for a wider public. It is noteworthy, following the diagram, that few of the mediatory forms and sites of consumption for such encounters had direct relationships with the institutions of governance and civil society. This may seem an obvious point; after all, one would expect the designers themselves to develop their formal content. But the diagram also locates the role key designers and design institutions as interlocutors between these points. Meanwhile, it reveals that the most public of sites of encounter, urban design and design exhibitions, provided interfaces between both designers and local government. These were key moments in the shaping and mediation of aesthetic content. What were the nuances and meanings of this content and how it was converted into specific narrations of place require further consideration.

While the designerly aspirations of these professionals became more pervasive in Barcelona through the 1980s, these were also fixed at a refined level (Narotzky, 2000).
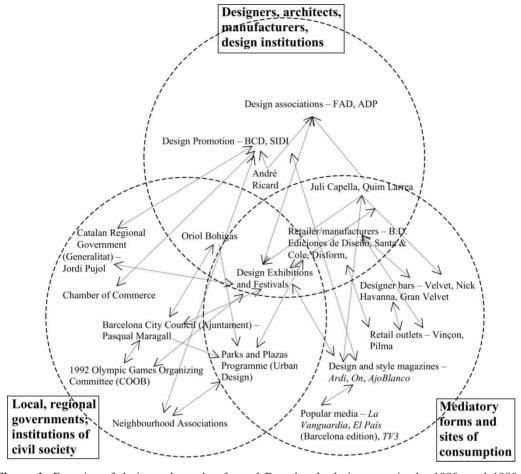
Figure 1. Domains of design culture that formed Barcelona's designscape in the 1980s and 1990s. Arrows denote lines of *direct* relationship and influence.

There was little watering-down of its content for a wider, popular audience. Modern Catalan design emerged from the late 1950s with a clear focus on exclusive, modern design for domestic consumption—in particular for the furnishing of trendy Costa Brava villas or Barcelona penthouses (Julier, 1990). In the 1980s, a broader marketplace was found for it, but the design artefacts and the milieu that produced them maintained an air of exclusivity. The increasing ubiquity of design in 1980s Barcelona reflected certain ambitions of the Barcelonese upper middle class. Here, design

> expressed the taste and aspiration of [this] social élite, based on an idea of modernity

distilled from the creative energy of turn of the century *modernisme* . . . [that displayed a] quintessential spirit of modernity, democracy, progress and avant-garde culture (Narotzky, 2000, p. 241).

Needless to say, the emergence of this new designscape coincided with the revindication of Catalan bourgeois identity within the context of the post-Francoist transition. As already highlighted, a designscape implies a dominant construct of habitus. But it engages a criss-crossing of activities that are impossible to co-ordinate in any programmatic way. Instead, they are all actioned within a binding, but not necessarily overtly articulated, ideological and aesthetic framework.

From this élite, this particular designscape rippled outwards into the individual and collective consumption practices of Barcelona's citizens. Consumption studies have, to date, focused primarily on its private, domestic and individual modes (see, for example, Campbell, 1987). This is particularly so within design history and design studies (Julier and Narotzky, 1998). Where perhaps this individual expression has been linked into collectivities has been in terms of the consideration of communities around particular leisure pursuits (Hebdige, 1988), lifestyles or brands (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001). Narotzky (2000) skilfully demonstrates, though, that an effective interaction between private and public systems of provision existed in the Barcelonese context. She draws on Kopytoff (1986) who wrote of the 'singularisation' of non-commodified collective goods that are placed beyond the sphere of exchange. This is achieved, for example, through their taste-brokers such as historical commissions, neighbourhood associations or panels deciding on public monuments. But this could also take place in the frequent exhibitions of Barcelona design or even in the display of individual pieces in design retail spaces. In Barcelona, this process was also manifested in the public sphere of urban design and designer bars where the tastes of this élite were placed as what Narotzky calls 'secondary commodities'. These spaces provided a backdrop to consuming other things, "such as food, drinks, leisure services or public spaces" (Narotzky, 2000, p. 234). Thus new bars would feature Catalan design objects—the higher cover price on drinks would subsidise this ephemeral design consumption. So whilst this new design originated in the framework of high culture and bourgeois taste for the modern domestic interior, in the 1980s it expanded its sphere of influence into the public sphere. New public spaces and leisure services became pervasive and sometimes (but not always) persuasive loci for the incalculation of a new urban habitus.

Such events and the personalities attached to them were unavoidable in the city. If missed on the street or the bars, they were accessible via front-page reporting in Barcelona's media outlets of *La Vanguardia, Avui* or *TV3*, or more consistently the newly established or re-established design and style magazines such as *On* (1979), *DeDiseño* (1984), *Ardi* (1988) and *Ajoblanco* (1988). Domestic taste and modernity were also linked to the changes in the fabric of the city via a soap opera in 1992. 'Poblenou' featured a family who, having won the lottery, moved from their run-down home in the Gothic Quarter to a brand-new designer apartment in the Vila Olímpica (Campi, 2003).

Of course, this designer version of Barcelona did not go uncontested. For example, the appearance of the highly minimalist Plaça dels Països Catalans in 1984 provoked considerable, vehement objections from local neighbourhood associations for its cold, hard and overmodern aspect. Calavita and Ferrer (2000) trace the political origins to the renovation of public spaces during the early 1980s in the pressure exerted by urban social movements of neighbourhood associations in the city dating back to the early 1970s. Indeed, Bohigas himself and many of his circle were closely involved in these. The neighbourhood association objections to the design of this plaza may appear, then, an ironic twist. Moreover, this underlines the contingency of this élite on popular engagement with their project, whether it be critical or accepting.

By revisiting the emergence of a design-led urban identity that existed within a discourse of regeneration, we can see in the first instance how it emanated from a specific urban élite. This upper-middle-class élite promoted its take on modernity and avant-gardism through design practices that confirmed prevailing ideological currents. These involved the grooming of a specific form of Catalan modernity oriented towards its place in Europe. This project was characterised by its 'network sociality' that extended beyond the operational interactions of designers in their everyday professional lives into local and governmental policy-making and to the institutional representatives of civil society. Equally, then, the aesthetic tastes that

materialised the élite's ambitions were carried from the private sphere of design for domestic consumption to the public sphere of design for civic engagement, from individual to collective consumption. Their mediatisation through exhibitions, news reporting and style magazines but also proclamations of support made by politicians helped to develop a narrative to contextualise them. In turn, this process produced an urban designscape that, at least from the outside, appeared to have remarkable coherence. The activities added up to a design-led urban identity.

Given this density of design activity, Bell and Jayne (2003, p. 127) admit that it is not possible to say that there was a programmatic ambition to promote design or even a particular form of design on the part of local authority policy and planning in Barcelona. Those engaged at the nub of design promotion regarded politicians' interest in their activities largely as opportunism (A. Ricard, personal interview 7 June 1988; M. Felip, Director of the Barcelona Centre de Disseny, personal interview 7 July 1988). Politicians in themselves were at least keen to be seen to be in the design-fray. However, the range and extent of design activities was too varied and widespread for any centralist organisation, as they belonged to individuals, small companies and professional associations as well as local government departments.

Barcelona has never, in fact, been subject to any place-branding exercise internally or by any external design consultants on the scale that is prevalent today in other locations (and as we shall see in the cases of Manchester and Hull). Indeed, much of the development of the Barcelona paradigm took place before the notion of branding places took hold in the later 1990s. If any specific 'Barcelona brand' is discernible, then this evolved out of the designscape through a shared understanding. It was these various activities that produced a 'soft-brand' or, otherwise, 'aesthetic consent'. A popularisation of the design élite's sensibility into a broader aesthetic may have been translated into a more reflexive, self-conscious value of 'Mediterraneanism'. This is evident in the *ad hoc*

campaign originated in 1984 by Pepe García, 'Barcelona Més Que Mai' (Barcelona more than ever). Here, a Mirò-esque pastiche of painterly primary colours on a white background signals both a local artistic heritage and a brightness and clarity. This kind of motif was repeated in Josep Maria Trias' 1992 Barcelona Olympic logo. Equally, signifiers of Mediterraneanism were laced into the urban design of the Vila Olímpica. For example, the main street axis, the Ronda, included columns set between palm trees, suggesting the city's Mediterranean connection with ancient classicism (Campi, 2003).

The 'Barcelona paradigm' is highly specific to an historical moment that mustered both internal and external cultural, political, social and economic forces in the production of design-led regeneration and urban identity. To understand it fully, one must delve into the micro-networks of everyday relations between designers and others, as well as between design production systems and the reception of design. By doing so, we can gather a nuanced understanding of the politics and practices of design and their relationship to urban identities. We can see how expectations of the new Barcelona were articulated and disseminated and how regeneration was performed by élites and citizens alike. The design artefacts that signified urban generation were set in their place, but these also required a discourse of modernity, avant-gardism, democracy and regeneration to contextualise and filter them. In reviewing the development of urban identity in Manchester in more recent years, we can use the features that were prevalent within the Barcelona paradigm as a lever to understand the actions and uses of its own particular designscape.

Designing 'Manchesterness'

In March 2004, Peter Saville was appointed as the 'Creative Director' of Manchester. He was selected, according to the Manchester City Council's head of the Marketing Co-ordination Unit, for his, "capacity to envision Manchester as an internationally competitive city" (S. Hunt, personal interview 14 July

2004). While his brief as Creative Director was fairly open, it begins with, "images, words, typefaces, colour and all forms of presentation and he will advise Manchester on all aspects of creativity" (Manchester City Council, 2004). It would also extend to reviewing the city's urban environment and architecture. Acting as a part-time consultant, this was the first time a British municipality had appointed a senior creative with a broad-ranging and long-term remit (*Design Week*, 2004). As such, his job was to give material form to a brand strategy for the city that had been developed over a three-year period.

Saville's appointment was the outcome of a process undertaken by Manchester City Council's Marketing Co-ordination Unit that began with a review of the city's assets stemming from and as a follow-up to the Manchester 2002 Commonwealth Games. A Manchester brand identity had been created in 1998. This was commissioned by Marketing Manchester, a private–public partnership established in 1996 to promote the city and create partnerships in securing projects, events and investment. Hemisphere Marketing and Design undertook the creation of this brand identity which was synthesised into a 'Manchester Primer'. While the primer admits that, "noone wants a Draconian 'style guide'", it nonetheless provided, "joined up thinking" in terms of, "flexible toolkit elements" that give "a sense of mood . . . [to embody] . . . the Mancunian spirit". This included a 'Manchester font' that was intended to reflect Manchester's unrivalled skill at merging the old and the new, from Stockport's towering railway viaduct to the new, organic form of Urbis (Marketing Manchester, 2002).

While the Manchester Primer displays all the cues of hipness contemporary to its design historical moment—retro-1970s neo-modernist forms, photographic stock images of chilled citizens, chatty copywriting—it was loudly contested by a group of Manchester-related figures within the creative industries who called themselves The McEnroe Group (as in, "You cannot be serious!"). They dismissed the efforts of Manchester Marketing

as, "dull, mediocre and worthy of a cycling proficiency badge" and challenged the City Council to improve on this (Shaughnessy, 2004). As a result, a fresh brand strategy was commissioned from Hemisphere Design and Marketing and a Creative Panel was formed by the City Council's Marketing Co-ordination Unit to advise on its further development and implementation.

This Creative Panel was partly made up of figures from The McEnroe Group. Its chair was Tom Bloxham, Group Chairman of Urban Splash. This company was a key to urban property developments in city-centre locations with a high design profile in Manchester and nationally. Other members were Scott Burnham, director of Urbis (Manchester's visitor attraction dedicated to the exploration of the city) and Rachel Haugh, director of Ian Simpson Architects who designed this Mancunian visitor attraction. Indeed, these and the other 12 members make up a veritable 'who's who' of the city's élite in architecture and design.

The shortlist that the Creative Panel put together for a city Creative Director represented a 'broad palette' of approaches (S. Hunt, personal interview 14 July 2004). It included Michael Wolff, a long-serving London-based brand strategist; Alan Fletcher, co-founder of Britain's long-standing and best-known interdisciplinary design consultancy Pentagram; Will Alsop, the renegade architect known for his masterplans for Bradford and Barnsley; and Javier Mariscal, the Barcelonese creator of the 1992 Olympic mascot. If this shortlist was to encompass a broad range of approaches to design, then its singular distinction is that all of its members were recognised and established 'name' designers. They connected the Manchester brand development into an international milieu of creatives, boosting the process's *caché*. This resonates with what Florida (2002, p. 200) calls, "the co-opting of Bohemia" in the way that renegade figures are used to provide another marketing tool in the selling of Manchester. As a surface observation, this may well hold. But a more interesting question arises in considering

what *kind* of renegade fits this specific process.

To the design *cognoscenti*, the choice of Peter Saville as Creative Director may seem unusual. He is noted for his renegade approach. He is famous for his inability to make deadlines (Shaughnessy, 2004), is often highly critical of corporately or commercially driven approaches to design and noteworthy for his dedication to the personal interest of a project rather than its potential commercial gain (Poynor, 2003). Indeed, his biography reads almost like the archetype of a brilliant but unemployable designer.

But to the design *cognoscenti* in the context of Manchester's creative milieu, the choice of Peter Saville is utterly understandable. Saville was born in 1955 in the affluent Manchester suburb of Hale. He studied graphic design at Manchester Polytechnic (1975–78) where he began to design posters for the recording-label Factory, conceived by Tony Wilson (who 25 years later was a member of The McEnroe Group). Saville went on to design some of Factory Records' seminal record sleeves, including Orchestral Manœuvres In The Dark's 'Architecture and Morality' album (1981) and Joy Division's 'Blue Monday' single (1983). Indeed, the ever-sartorially dressed Saville was portrayed in the 2002 biopic feature film of Tony Wilson and Factory Records *24 Hour Party People*. Thus, Saville is implicated into the mythology of Manchester's most-known popular cultural history. During the following 20 years, Saville was noted for his rollercoaster yet flamboyant career as an art director, mostly in the fashion and music industries. His 'return' to Manchester was marked in March 2004 by a retrospective exhibition of his work—previously seen at London's Design Museum—at the Urbis centre.

A 'reading' of Saville's appointment would therefore take these biographical credentials to make him the embodiment of the Manchester brand. Of the brand values established by Hemisphere in its strategy for Manchester, the first was 'respect' that encompassed the features of 'attitude/edge/enterprise'. This is evidenced in their brand strategy report by reference to the city's music history and, "its desire to not wear what everyone else is wearing, but to wear what everbody else is going to be wearing in six months time" (Hemisphere, 2003, p. 9). Within this narrative, Saville, or any style-conscious cultural intermediary for that matter, and Manchester the brand become interchangeable. In its need to communicate a designerly 'up-to-the-minuteness' as the city's heritage, an exchange of meaning takes place between Manchester the brand and Saville the creative. Saville's hand is deployed across the city's designscape, not just through the Urbis exhibition but, for example, through his historical association with Factory Records, to inflect this tradition of modernity with the desired notions of 'attitude' and 'edge'.

Hemisphere undertook and commissioned extensive research in developing the brand strategy. This included primary research with residents, businesses and visitors, a "reputation audit with key opinion formers", consultation with 92 "stakeholders, council members and members of Manchester's creative community" (Hemisphere, 2003, p. 2). Despite this impressive roster, a notable self-referentiality is evident in parts of its strategy in terms of the milieu the consultancy itself inhabits and how this was written into the brand strategy. The clue to this is in its expansion on its 'Respect' brand value. The report continues

> Market Street may be the economic engine of Manchester's retail scene but it is the independent and quirky Northern Quarter that is seen as most epitomising 'Manchesterness' (Hemisphere, 2003, p. 9).

Manchester's city-centre creative cluster, the Northern Quarter has evolved as both a site of design production and consumption, with its rich network of creative businesses supporting and supported by a designerly leisure infrastructure of bars and cafés (see Wansborough and Mageean, 2000). Hence it contains all the features of an urban designscape. The habitus it fosters may be very different from Barcelona's. It is not characterised by a core upper-middle-class élite to

champion a refined modernity, but by a clustering of entrepreneurial creative workers spanning a range of aesthetic and operational practices. While shaping stuff for sale or use is the core of its business, it also exists, to a degree, as the hub of cultural planning and identity for the city. Hemisphere (who unsurprisingly also has its own offices within the Northern Quarter) claims a central role for the Northern Quarter's milieu in the shaping of an urban identity for Manchester.

A more extended enquiry into the symbolic role of creative quarters in anchoring the cultural capital of a location is considered in a separate paper (Julier, 2004). But it is clear that the Northern Quarter is appropriated and corralled as a signifier for 'Manchesterness' within an official version of the city. 'Manchesterness' is mediated through design outcomes but also by design practice itself. Its network sociality, its louche avant-gardism, its inhabiting of liminal spaces are made to symbolise that identity. Thus, the Manchester case ultimately exhibits an attempt to produce a more programmatically defined identity as a pre-existing designscape is articulated into an officially sanctioned marketing ploy. In shifting the city's brand towards this identity, an attitudinal marker is layed down that mirrors Manchester's conversion from municipal socialism to an entrepreneurial location, backed by a political shift towards 'élite consensus' (see Quilley, 1999, 2000). A network of interests links a designerly élite (The McEnroe Group), a symbolic location (the Northern Quarter), a key designer figure (Saville) and the city council's government marketing strategy to produce a particular version of Manchester for local and global consumption. Specific sites of public consumption, such as the Northern Quarter and Urbis, and everyday practice help to mediate these values.

The City of Hull: An Aspirational Habitus

What happens, however, when very little aesthetic value exists that can be appropriated and corralled into a set of brand-values? Can a location with a much more limited design production and consumption infrastructure or identity create its own kind of designscape? We have seen an example of a culturally rich city where a specific but largely unplanned identity of regeneration emerged (Barcelona). We have seen how a very specific version of a city's creative resources is appropriated into planned marketing of place-identity (Manchester). The City of Hull presents a reverse challenge in that a planned and articulated identity is mobilised, in effect, to 'jump-start' a system of cultural capital for the city.

Hull, a northern UK city with a population around 250 000, had suffered severe deindustrialisation from the 1980s with the loss of its shipbuilding and fishing industries and was blighted by its drab reputation in comparison with other UK centres. During mid 1990, informal discussions began among its city leaders as to the problem that Hull had in its poor external image. As a result, Wolff Olins were commissioned in 1997 to review Hull's image—then a highly unusual move on the part of a Labour-controlled local authority—which they did by a visual audit of the city and, following this, a brand strategy for the city. Wolff Olins, the London-based multinational design and branding consultancy, were at the time building a considerable reputation in place-branding (see Julier, 2000, ch. 6). Wolff Olins' findings were that the city suffered from a lack of consistency and coherence in its identity, as much in its design details—signage, city literature, architecture—as in the way civic interests organised and communicated themselves (D. Tate, Head of Marketing, CityImage, personal interview 1 September 2004).

The resulting brand that Wolff Olins developed stemmed from the notion of 'Pioneering Hull', itself partly drawn a recognition of the city's historical reputation in scientific discovery. From this flowed the five brand values of 'challenging', 'discovering', 'creating', 'innovating' and 'leading' (Pywell and Scott, 2001). However, while a brand promise was in place, Wolff Olins' key finding was the lack of aspiration and confidence of Hull's population. Thus it developed the 'Top Ten'

goal for the city as an objective for all areas of everyday life within the city. The aim was to engender this notion into the everyday parlance of Hull's citizens and institutions.

This brand was taken further into the creation of the city's private–public sector Local Strategic Partnerships in 1998. Initiatives under the unified heading of 'CityVision' were created—CityEducation, CityEconomy, CityHealth and so on. City-Image was established to manage and develop the implementation of the brand and image-related issues emanating from this. Through a bond system, local companies bought stakes in this image enhancement programme, the money for which was used to lever further funds from the UK government and the European Union for urban regeneration programmes. This process also engendered a united front on the part of corporate and political élites in selling the city (Davies, 2003).

This brand strategy evolved in concert with a regeneration strategy for the city rather than, as in most city cases, a tourism strategy. It has been implemented, for example, through targeted communications towards the attraction of greater levels of external funding and investment on the one hand, and 'spreading the word' within the city on the other. As a result, CityImage has been anxious to avoid any use of the traditional jargon of marketing and branding in its activities. Conscious that its primary audience is both Hull's city leaders and its rank-and-file population, the 'Top Ten' aspiration had to be normalised and articulated within the terms of these stakeholders rather than by employing the specialist languages associated with, for instance, advertising or product launches. Implementation of the brand was not 'campaign led'. There was no advertising budget or straplines and slogans (D. Tate, Head of Marketing, CityImage, personal interview, 1 September 2004).

The Wolff Olins brand scheme for Hull was developed and managed in order to overturn aspirations of Hull. In doing so, it attempted to provide an aspirational narrative for everyday practice and a new vector in the urban

habitus. On a highly visible level, it was directly responsible for the architecture of two significant buildings. Following a Wolff Olins presentation of its brand strategy to city leaders, architecture was 'recommissioned' in 1999 for the Arco National Redistribution Centre in Hull. It went on to win a national Civic Trust Commendation for its design in 2002. The Wolff Olins presentation also led to Terry Farrell and Partners being commissioned to design 'The Deep', £45 million visitor attraction (Tate, 2004). Farrell subsequently developed a masterplan for the redevelopment of the city centre. Key figures have thus been directly influenced by the programme which in turn has impacted on the built environmental quality of the city.

Without an extensive qualitative survey of attitudes and practices of Hull's population, it is impossible to demonstrate empirically the end-effect of this programme in terms of ordinary lives. However, it is clear that it has been developed and implemented not just to lay down atittudinal markers of the city, but to adjust its own sense of cultural capital.

We have seen a clear relationship between the aesthetic dispositions of an élite, collective consumer aspirations (beyond, merely, the built environment) and urban identity formation in Barcelona. In the case of Manchester, a similar dynamic has been more self-consciously experimented with. The transferability of this analysis to other locations is of course tempered by the specific contextual circumstance of each one. However, the concept of various 'urban designscapes', particular to distinct locations and historical moments, is worth pursuing, analysing and critiquing.

Conclusion

By conceptualising urban agglomerations in terms of designscapes, we are able to reach beyond the superficialities of branding or built form in our pursuit of an understanding of the role of culture in urban regeneration and identity formation. Here, prominence is given to the dynamics of taste formation

through an appreciation of the roles of the multiple actors and locations within this process. It is necessary to trace the flows of aesthetic information between stakeholders while bearing in mind the possibility that these carry specific values and meanings that are framed by specific élites of respective locations. These élites create the narrations by which artefacts are interpreted and articulated. These narrations link the meanings of both private and public design consumption within the metropolis and, indeed, provide cues for the performance of everyday life.

An understanding of designscapes reveals them as more haphazard than branding theorists would perhaps like. The recognition that, as we have already seen, any development of place-identity is one of nurturing pre-existing information resonates with the possibility that this is a process of appropriation and reappropriation rather than invention. This is both slow-moving and swift. On the one hand, given the multiciplicity of stakeholders that constitute a designscape, it takes time for coherent messages to be formed and moved through its system. Equally, they can lose their coherence as they are received, used or even contested by its various nodes. On the other hand, while traces of urban heritage exist within these messages, they are principally about modernity, avant-gardism and the symbolic capital of creativity. Hence this requires the constant harnessing of an image of 'up-to-the-minuteness' and therefore the rapid appropriation of creative activities as signifiers of this image.

We have seen the ubiquity with which messages of 'vibrancy' and 'cosmopolitanism' are deployed across global cities. Beyond these, it seems that the élites that are firmly embedded within creative industries will forge more nuanced identities within these broad categories. These identities are nonetheless contingent upon their effective circulation through their respective designscapes for them to have relevance and interest to a wider population. For many, life continues untouched by these ambitions. For others, a new and different enthusiasm begins.

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