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# Geographies of Displacement in the Creative City: The Case of Liberty Village, Toronto

John Paul Catungal, Deborah Leslie and Yvonne Hii

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## Abstract

Creative industries are increasingly associated with employment, tourism and the attraction and retention of talent in economic development discourse. However, there is a need to foreground the interests involved in promoting the creative city and the political implications of such policies. This paper analyses new industry formation in Liberty Village—a cultural industry precinct in inner-city Toronto, Canada. The focus is on the place-making strategies at work in constructing Liberty Village. In particular, the paper explores a series of displacements associated with creative districts, focusing on three scales in particular—the level of the city, the neighbourhood and the precinct itself. An examination of these displacements foregrounds the contested nature of the creative city script.

## Introduction

Since the 1970s, cities in North America have confronted a number of problems related to deindustrialisation. These problems have particularly affected inner-city neighbourhoods, where light manufacturing activities were traditionally concentrated. In an era of neo-liberalism, cities have begun placing importance on inner-city neighbourhoods

as potential locations for the new economy. Urban governments have considered new methods for encouraging economic development in these areas; in the past few years, many have latched onto the discourse of ‘creative cities’. Drawing its legitimacy from Richard Florida’s work on the link between culture and economic development, this discourse-turned-policy focuses on the importance of attracting human capital to a city

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through the creation of authentic, diverse and tolerant communities (Florida, 2002). In practice, much of the emphasis in creative city programming has been on place-branding and especially on the design features of the urban landscape. Attention has been focused on mega-architectural projects, improvements to streetscapes and the creation of cultural districts or quarters. Often, the explicit goal of these initiatives is to encourage tourism and consumption rather than to support the production of culture (Bell and Jayne, 2003; Evans, 2003; Kearns and Philo, 1993; Miles, 2005; Zukin, 1995).

When the focus has been on cultural production, often it is creative industries such as film, new media and music that are targeted in creative city initiatives (Pratt, 2000). In such a calculus, culture is valued mainly for its economic contributions and its ability to rejuvenate deteriorating areas. However, even as these strategies are oriented towards the production of culture, it is noteworthy that the focus of intervention is often strikingly similar to that of consumption-oriented initiatives, particularly around improving the aesthetic dimensions of the urban landscape (Mommaas, 2004).

Along with these creativity-led urban regeneration schemes, there has been a reworking of governance structures, with a decreased emphasis on the provision of basic services, infrastructure and welfare by government and an increased emphasis on place-branding and security, often through the vehicle of public-private partnerships (Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Barnes *et al.*, 2006; Peck, 2005). These trends are not surprising if we consider Peck's point that the creativity script meshes well with

a development vision that is profoundly market-oriented (creative cities, assets, and actors, always in competition) and individualistic (creative subjects as hedonistic free agents) (Peck, 2007, p. 36).

In the case of Toronto's Liberty Village, the process of redevelopment has been shaped

not only by creativity-focused urban development policies (many of which pre-date the policy influence of Florida), but also by a number of key developers in the neighbourhood and by the Liberty Village Business Improvement Area (LVBIA). In this paper, we examine the discursive and material strategies utilised by these actors and their impacts. In particular, we highlight their mobilisation of two geographical imaginations of Liberty Village: as a distinct neighbourhood or 'campus'; and, as a 'securitised' neighbourhood. We argue that these geographical imaginations impact the redevelopment of Liberty Village in multiple ways: they 'brand' Liberty Village as a neighbourhood set apart from the wider city—an isolated 'urban village'—at the same time that they support strategies that displace both 'risky' peoples and behaviours and the pioneering creative population of artists and not-for-profit arts organisations. The effect, we argue, is that while the actors employ notions of creativity liberally, the more recent development phase in Liberty Village marks the antithesis of notions of creativity as defined by artists and not-for-profit arts organisations.

These geographical imaginations highlight tensions within this 'urban village'; they point to the complexity associated with overarching notions of the 'creative class' and the importance of disaggregating this class by occupation (Markusen, 2006). The example of Liberty Village also illustrates the need to consider the importance of spatial strategies in the mobilisation of creative city discourses and the impacts of the creative city script on the so-called 'non-creative' classes (Rantisi *et al.*, 2006; Donald and Morrow, 2003).

The main aim of this paper is to explore cultural constructions of Liberty Village. These constructions are part of broader entrepreneurial and creative city initiatives oriented towards the production of cultural districts, but in ways that mirror earlier urban development strategies that focus on renewal. In particular, we examine how the meanings tacked onto

Liberty Village by the LVBIA have material effects on artists, corporate creative workers, other land uses, residents and surrounding neighbourhoods. In short, our goal is to look at how contemporary constructions of cultural districts have inclusionary and exclusionary impacts on different actors. These concerns are of critical importance at a time when cities and neighbourhoods are racing to brand themselves as hubs of creativity, pursuing policies that privilege the formation of specialised cultural districts, quality-of-place attributes and the aesthetic dimensions of the landscape. We argue that the emphasis on creative quarters fragments the city, displacing the cluster from its broader urban and neighbourhood context, and also displaces diversity within the cluster itself.<sup>1</sup>

Organised into five main sections, the paper begins with an examination of the role of place-making in the creative city. The second section sketches a short history of the development of Liberty Village as a creative hub. Following this, we elucidate a series of geographical imaginations and material strategies associated with the development of the area. The third and fourth sections trace strategies to differentiate Liberty Village from the wider city of Toronto and from the adjacent neighbourhood of Parkdale respectively. We argue that new industry formation in Liberty Village constructs the site as an economic space set apart from the city—an isolated campus—and a secure space compared with the unruly surrounding neighbourhood. In the fifth section, we foreground how the two framings of Liberty Village—as a distinct and isolated urban campus and as a securitised space—work towards displacement within the district itself, focusing particularly on the marginalisation of artists, non-profit arts organisations and traditional manufacturers.

The paper is based on 31 open-ended interviews with actors associated with Liberty Village, including city planners and other

government officials, the business improvement association, creative businesses, artists, traditional manufacturers and non-profit organisations. Interviews were typically with owners of creative firms or directors of organisations, although in several cases owners referred us to creative employees. Because of the important role it plays in the cluster, several interviews were conducted at the Liberty Village Business Improvement Area, including the executive director, board members and representatives in charge of security, special events and infrastructure.<sup>2</sup> All interviews were conducted in July and August 2006 and ranged between one and two hours in length. Interviews were tape recorded, transcribed and coded according to theme.

Information provided from interviews was considered in relation to and triangulated with relevant policy documents, newspapers, websites and community and building newsletters (such as the Toronto Carpet Factory newsletter *The Shuttle*; the Liberty Village BIA newsletter *The Flame*; and the Liberty Market Building newsletter *Liberty Market Vox*). Government reports on the district and the Liberty Village Business Improvement Area annual general meeting minutes were also surveyed to identify dominant constructions of the district and key strategies and concerns on the part of the city, the LVBIA and local businesses and creative workers. The interpretations of the district in the interview quotes that are offered here reflect particularly prevalent constructions, perspectives and working practices among interview participants, as well as their pervasiveness in newspaper articles and government reports.

## The Creativity Script as a Place-making Strategy

While the ‘creative city’ has been heralded within policy circles as a unilaterally positive development for North American cities, there are clear gaps in our knowledge of how the

'creative city' materialises 'on-the-ground' through particular discourses and working practices and of the effects that these processes bring to inner-city structure. The creative city concept, developed by Richard Florida (see also Landry and Bianchini, 1995) and popularised in *The Rise of the Creative Class* (Florida, 2002), builds on earlier entrepreneurial models of urban governance centred on the provision of infrastructure, subsidies and amenities to lure highly mobile corporations (Harvey, 1989; Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Peck, 2005). This new wave of creative city initiatives still aims to attract investment, but is also geared towards attracting highly skilled individuals who, in turn, could lure mobile firms increasingly dependent on their specialised skill sets (Florida, 2002; Gertler *et al.*, 2002). In this sense, creative city initiatives are simply the latest phase in a broader set of policy imperatives.

In the creative city agenda, as in entrepreneurial regimes, the focus in policy-making is on particular forms of place-making that are geared towards the construction of spectacular spaces of consumption such as festival market-places, attractive streetscapes, bohemian quarters and flashy cultural infrastructures, ideally designed by world-renowned 'star' architects (Evans, 2003; Bell and Jayne, 2003; Hannigan, 1999; McNeill, 2007). Following the same logic as entrepreneurial initiatives, creative city policies view the city as a space of consumption and creativity, and have set out as their objective an interurban competitive strategy based on the marketing of their locales as distinctive destinations for work and play.

Thus, both entrepreneurial and creative city strategies recognise cultural attractions and a vibrant urban setting as characteristics that can help to attract knowledge industries and their workers. It is not surprising, therefore, that harnessing culture for urban economic development has become a preoccupation of policy-makers in recent years. Municipal

planning departments in Europe and North America have responded enthusiastically: organising conferences to discuss the importance of 'creativity' to urban economic health; making ideological and financial commitments towards building an image of the vibrant, 24-hour city; encouraging or leading the development of specialised cultural districts; zoning previously residential or industrial lands for live-work studios; calling for more flexible by-laws and regulations and a 'hands-off' role for municipalities in planning (Brown *et al.*, 2000; Indergaard, 2003).

The creative city script is sanctioned by the same growth coalition actors that have long dominated urban redevelopment—politicians, business interests and other élites (Peck, 2005; Rantisi *et al.*, 2006). The emphasis on entrepreneurial place-making is evident when we consider the strong focus of creative city policies on the production of cultural quarters. These districts are often separated and distinguished from other more marginal areas in the city, suggesting that entrepreneurial and creative city strategies produce uneven urban geographies with often negative impacts on the creative class itself as well as on long-standing working-class residents. Hence, for many commentators, this script is not about genuine creativity but about marketing, consumption and real estate development (Peck, 2005). Within this rubric, creativity is valued only when it contributes positively to economic growth (Gibson and Kong, 2005).

Surprisingly for a thesis that uses 'class'-based nomenclature, Florida's theory has little to say about the inequalities that are typically at issue in class divisions, such as wealth and income gaps. Florida (2005, 2004) has begun to respond to some of these criticisms, acknowledging the trend towards social and economic polarisation in creative cities, as well as some of the negative externalities associated with creative districts (such as housing unaffordability, gentrification, income polarisation, sprawl, environmental

degradation and political fragmentation) (see McCann, 2007). However, there is little acknowledgement of these externalities in policy initiatives based on the creative city. Hence, while reinvestment in the deindustrialised city can mean urban revitalisation of spaces that would otherwise fall into disuse, these conversions of property—both in usage and building form—often lead to a revalorisation of real estate which may in turn translate into the displacement of lower-income residents. This wave of displacement differs from previous rounds of urban renewal and gentrification in that it is triggered by creative entrepreneurs and firms, rather than by residents. It also differs from traditional patterns of gentrification in that a wider array of actors are displaced, including not only working-class residents, but traditional manufacturing uses and members of the creative class itself such as artists, crafts-makers, photographers and arts organisations.

We take up these issues of power hierarchies and uneven geographies of the creative city by focusing on conflicts over the meanings of revitalised inner-city spaces and the impacts of creativity-led urban regeneration in Toronto's Liberty Village. We focus in particular on the mobilisation of two geographical imaginations of Liberty Village—the distinct urban campus and the securitised neighbourhood—and point to the material impacts of these discourses and the policies they enable on competing land uses and economic actors in the inner city.

### Constructing 'Liberty Village'

Liberty Village<sup>3</sup> is a 45-acre brownfield site located on the western edge of Toronto's downtown core. It is bounded by King Street West, Dufferin Street, Strachan Avenue and the Gardiner Expressway (Figure 1). The area claims part of the former Garrison Commons and has been home to such manufacturing plants as Inglis (electrical appliances and

components), Massey-Ferguson (agricultural implements), the Toronto Carpet Manufacturing Company, Irwin Toys and Dempster's Bread (Artscape, 2004; PLEDC, 2002). Employment remains the primary focus; however, the area has changed drastically from its original employment base of manufacturing and heavy industry towards design, film, television, advertising and new media production. The area lies adjacent to the Parkdale neighbourhood. Parkdale is a low-income and low-homeownership neighbourhood, with a high proportion of immigrant residents and rooming houses (Slater, 2004).<sup>4</sup>

Interviewees generally agreed that the initial movement of creative industry into Liberty Village was not a planned process *per se* and pre-dated the recent interest in creative city initiatives in Toronto. A combination of the vacating factories, a bottomed-out real estate market (resulting in land prices as low as CDN\$ 5 per square foot), proximity to the downtown and a reluctance to tear down unsightly billboards left the land in a limbo state. Initially attracted by the size, aesthetics, availability and affordability of the industrial spaces, artists moved into the area in the 1970s and began to live and work illegally in the abandoned factories and warehouses. After the initial influx of artists, Artscape became one of the first organisations to take up residence in Liberty Village. Artscape is a non-profit development agency with a mandate to advocate for and maintain affordable space for artists. The organisation continues to manage 48 working studios for individual artists in the area (Artscape, 2004).

The creative economic activity that now characterises the site began in earnest in the mid 1990s, during the rise of the so-called dotcom industry, a technology-driven period of economic boom. In 1995, for example, York Heritage Properties bought the Toronto Carpet Manufacturing site, adding fibre optic wiring to attract technology-oriented firms.

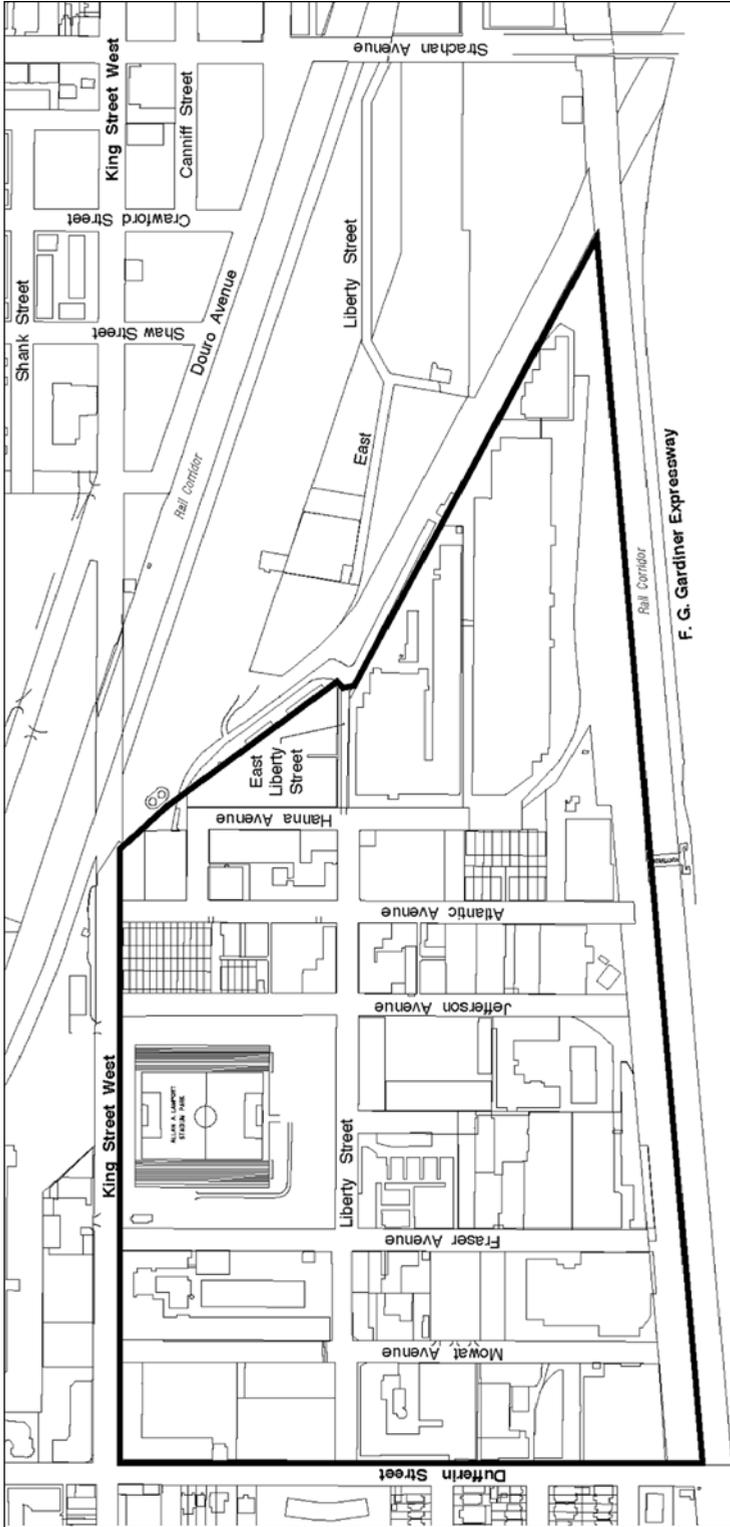


Figure 1. Liberty Village boundaries

The redevelopment of the site for new creative businesses took on added momentum when the City of Toronto decided to pursue a policy agenda aimed at recycling abandoned factories and warehouses for new uses through the deregulation of municipal zoning laws. The government's decision to demonopolise local telecommunication services in 1999 also meant that local developers could offer sophisticated Internet connections to tenants, further attracting new media firms (Wieditz, 2007, p. 5). In the late 1990s, developers assigned the area a new label and identity. The notion of 'Liberty Village' was manufactured and the slogan 'Championing and nurturing a creative and vibrant community' was adopted. In January 2001, Liberty Village became one of 48 officially designated Business Improvement Areas in Toronto (TABIA, 2003) and the first non-retail business improvement area in North America (Liberty Village Business Improvement Association, 2003).

Currently there are over 500 businesses operating in Liberty Village, employing approximately 6000 workers.<sup>5</sup> The majority of these firms are creative and high-technology businesses.<sup>6</sup> The area is one of the fastest-growing employment hubs in the city, with the number of employees growing 30 per cent between 1995 and 2003 (City of Toronto, 2006, p. 3).

Since Liberty Village's initial development as a creative cluster, the City of Toronto has pursued a more conscious and co-ordinated creative city agenda. In 2003, for example, the City released its *Culture plan for the creative city*, a 10-year strategy designed to position Toronto as a leading international centre of culture and creativity (City of Toronto, 2003). The recommendations of this report focus on expanded cultural facilities, façade improvements, museums, heritage preservation, community festivals and public art.<sup>7</sup> This agenda was further extended in 2008, when 'Creative Toronto' was one of four pillars outlined in the Mayor's *Agenda for Prosperity*

(City of Toronto, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c). A key priority in this agenda is to establish creative hubs and districts (City of Toronto Agenda for Prosperity, 2008b, p. 42). To this end, the city has initiated a study of creative clusters in the city; Liberty Village has emerged at the centre of the city's policy analysis of distinct ecologies of creativity (City of Toronto Consortium, 2007).

### **The Politics of Priorities: The Emergence of a 'Creative' Lobby**

Liberty Village has changed with the influx of creative professionals in new media, advertising, film, television and design. In particular, some of the priorities of these new tenants differ substantially from those of the artists who preceded them—namely, the desire to attract investors and improve access to lifestyle amenities (interviews). These new businesses have lobbied for improvements to the site, including basic infrastructure, improved road and transport access, and the addition of sidewalks, lighting and street furniture (interviews; LVBIA, 2004 annual report; City of Toronto, 2006). While City decision-makers were sympathetic, the City was unable to guarantee adequate funding for these projects (interview, Liberty Village Business Improvement Association). The Liberty Village Business Improvement Area (LVBIA) emerged as a channel through which local creative businesses could advocate for these capital improvements. It is financed through a levy on municipal business taxes which is collected by the city but administered by the LVBIA. The ability of BIAs to raise funds is clearly one of the major selling-points for becoming a Business Improvement Area, both from the City's point of view and from that of the potential BIA.

Fiscal independence has given Liberty Village strong leverage when voicing their concerns to the City. Once established, a consultant was hired by the LVBIA in 2001 to write a capital improvement plan for the area,

emphasising aesthetics, business functionality and safety. Subsequently, several capital improvement projects have been completed in the area, co-funded by the city and the LVBIA (PLEDC, 2002). Among these projects are improvements to street lighting and a local parkette, and the installation of new street signage with ‘Liberty Village’ branding (Figure 2).

On the surface, private, public and third-party partnerships appear to provide a structure for making planning decisions that are more efficient for economic development and potentially more equitable for all stakeholders. However, the Liberty Village case also demonstrates that not all groups and actors have an equal say in the new entrepreneurial-style governance regime. For example, the artist community, arguably the early ‘gentrifiers’ of the area, has dwindled considerably (Cash, 2006; Kuitenbrouwer, 2000). Citing

the displacement of artists, one interviewee noted that

People live in a community and help build it and then get displaced—which is what happened to the artists. And the accommodation for the people who made it attractive just wasn’t there. It just goes to show how difficult it really is—I mean Artscape was right there in the community, and it wasn’t able to manage or to get land set aside or developed in some way for artists (interview, director of a non-profit arts organisation).

Comments like this lend credence to arguments by local activists (Blackwell, 2006) that artists are finding it increasingly difficult to remain in Liberty Village.

The lack of support for independent artists suggested in this quote is further exacerbated by property value increases that result from the LVBIA’s concerted effort to upgrade the area’s profile via place-making discourses and



**Figure 2.** Street sign and creative industries in Liberty Village

strategies. The capital improvements already accomplished by the LVBIA illustrate the way in which private actors increasingly steer not only the nature and form of urban investments, but also the spatial discourses that underpin these material changes. In her work on conflicts over images of the inner city, Martin (2000) has argued that the ability of actors to mobilise selected framings of inner cities affects which political responses to urban ‘problems’ are implemented. In Liberty Village, the discourses and working practices that shape the image and landscapes of the neighbourhood are tightly controlled by the LVBIA, whose strategic use of two place framings of Liberty Village (‘distinct urban campus’ and ‘securitised space’) is crucial to their civic boosterism. These place framings are further mobilised in marketing materials of individual businesses and property owners, in media coverage of the site and in city policy documents. As we show in the next sections, these framings have uneven impacts on Liberty Village actors. On the one hand, they are productive in that they affect particular actions from government and private businesses. However, they also often have negative impacts on independent artists, not-for-profit organisations and manufacturers—actors who oppose the politics of these place framings.

### **Displacing Liberty Village from Downtown: The Formation of an ‘Urban Campus’**

Discourses surrounding Liberty Village emphasise its difference from the city and downtown. The LVBIA places particularly strong emphasis on delineating the boundaries of the site and on constructing it as an ‘urban village’ (Barnes *et al.*, 2006, p. 344; Pollard, 2004). The very act of naming the area ‘Liberty Village’ is meant to convey ideals of community in ways that dislocate the area from the traditional spaces of the central

business district and from the alienated professional subject of ‘downtown’ Toronto. This is evident in the City of Toronto area study of Liberty Village, which argues that

From its previous life as an industrial area, Liberty Village contains a mixture of historical commercial and manufacturing buildings that were built in the late 19th and early 20th century. Today, Liberty Village is transforming into a ‘creative class’ employment centre that is built on the significant number of historical industrial buildings, providing a distinct character. Businesses in Liberty Village are able to take advantage of being close to downtown, yet they also have the advantage of being in a ‘community’ quite different from an office tower in the downtown core. Liberty Village is close to downtown, yet is *separate*, which adds to its attraction for creative businesses who favour the area’s *campus feel* (City of Toronto, 2006, p. 3; emphasis added).

In 2006, the City held a series of community consultations designed to gather information on public concerns relating to Liberty Village. Among the major findings of these community meetings, the City determined that one of the most positive attributes about the village was its ‘artist/independent feeling’ and its ‘campus environment’ (City of Toronto, 2006, p. 5). This construction of the area as an isolated campus recurs repeatedly in newspaper articles and publicity materials associated with the site (Eisen, 2007; *The Shuttle* (LBVIA, Toronto), Fall 2001, Spring 2002; *The Flame* (LBVIA, Toronto), 2006; see also LBVIA, 2004). This sentiment is also reiterated by creative workers and firm owners themselves who allude to a sense of flexibility and freedom in the district

The difference between ... here and a lot of the downtown core area is that in the downtown, there is a corporate feel. There are a lot of suits ... and here it is actually a lot more ... laid back ... There are a lot of people in the area that are ... creative (interview, owner of new media firm).

The notion of a ‘village’ signifies a ‘school-like’ campus setting where workers can carve out an alternative and free-spirited existence. Many of the firms we interviewed had either moved from downtown or consciously avoided a downtown location (see also Galt, 2004). A distinctive business culture separates firms in Liberty Village from the downtown. The first issue of *The Flame*, the LVBIA’s newsletter, makes this very clear

Liberty Village has been described as a funky mix of high tech and high art; non-conformist, entrepreneurial, *a different drummer*; a highly creative, plugged-in business community, where businesses are small for the most part, and the colour of choice for residents is Black (*The Flame*, 2002; emphasis added).

The emergence of an alternative business culture in the area can be seen as part of a larger strategy to rebrand Liberty Village as a creative hub. Private actors, especially local property management firms, were particularly instrumental in promoting an alternative environment of socialisation and collaboration. York Heritage Properties, for example, organises street parties and ‘hall crawls’ that double as networking opportunities (*The Shuttle*, 2001–06). As one owner of a creative business argues

It has been good for us because we have done a lot of work with our neighbours ... We have pretty much done design work for everyone in this hall and then other people in this building. There is a company upstairs that we do a lot of work for ... and also the property management is really good. They throw a lot of social events for the building. ... Everyone from all the other floors comes down, mingles and meets everybody (interview, owner of a design firm).

The emphasis on creative co-mingling is present in all of the official materials associated with Liberty Village and the campus analogy is also promoted by the business association.

There is also a strong emphasis on lifestyle amenities such as the need for more cafés and restaurants in the priorities set by the LVBIA. Peck (2007) argues that a key problem with the creativity script concerns its privilege of middle-class attributes and mentalities such as self-indulgent forms of overwork, “plug and play communities” and conspicuous consumption. Within the discourse of creativity, all of these attributes are elevated to the status of economic development policy.

The creative city discourse thus privileges the neighbourhood or ‘village’ scale as a principal site of intervention, ignoring a ‘residualised majority’ of residents in the city. In the case of Liberty Village, the creative cluster is literally isolated from the downtown core, constructed as a distinct, campus-like setting divorced from mainstream business practice. This isolation serves as a competitive advantage for firms in the district which benefit from the density of creative enterprises and from the localised culture of networking and collaboration (interviews). Local property management firms also benefit from the construction of Liberty Village as an isolated campus because of the income their buildings earn with the rebranding of the area. However, this policy focus on discrete pockets of the city marks a departure from more comprehensive urban-economic development strategies dominant during the post-war period.

### **Securing the Creative Inner City: Removing Unruly Elements**

The ability of the BIA and property developers to dislocate Liberty Village from the downtown core’s staunch business culture through its emphasis on liberal attitudes and flexible spaces serves to make it a different economic space. Yet, not unlike traditional business-led urban transformations, the successful reconfiguration of Liberty Village as a ‘creative hub’ also relies on the LVBIA’s concerted attempt to keep out unruly elements that are

seen to undermine creative businesses and property values. The area's association with crime is particularly troubling for the LVBIA, as this works against the business-friendly image that they are promoting. To combat this association, criminological strategies such as privatised security and crime prevention through environmental design have been adopted by the LVBIA as part of its governance of the creative hub.

A majority of participants cited crime, or more specifically, the threat of crime, as a major concern in the neighbourhood (interviews). Safety is also a major issue highlighted in the City of Toronto's planning study of Liberty Village (City of Toronto, 2006, p. 6). The City of Toronto report notes that Zoning By-law Exception 298 does not permit retail and service shop uses in Liberty Village. One of the consequences of this restriction is that Liberty Village is fairly quiet outside normal working hours. The report concludes that a greater variety of land uses would result in

eyes on the street in Liberty Village in the evenings and on weekends, increasing its liveliness, potentially improving the safety of the area and enhancing its attractiveness to employees (City of Toronto, 2006, p. 6).

The report also recommends further improvements in pedestrian lighting and streetscape design to counter crime (p. 10).

In an attempt to attract and retain business in the area, the LVBIA is quick to point out that the problem of crime, while it does happen, is mostly situated in the past. As a BIA official notes

I heard crime was a problem ... but I think there was probably a bit of a drug trade on some of these abandoned streets. So potentially *that's what it used to be*. But that would be, you know, 80s, early 90s (interview, BIA board member and property management firm employee; emphasis added).

Another BIA official notes something similar, that crime is more perception than lived reality

(interview, BIA board member). She notes that this perception is especially common amongst new firms in the area who have learned to associate drugs and criminality with this particular inner-city neighbourhood because of its adjacency to Parkdale. Parkdale has been heavily portrayed as a ghettoised area with a dense concentration of people associated with drugs, prostitution and mental ill health.

This reputation has translated to what amounts to a very real divide between Parkdale—epitomising a space of degeneracy—and Liberty Village—an emerging creative space. This has even led to a commonly shared discourse of Dufferin Street (the boundary between Liberty Village and Parkdale) as an

impenetrable wall ... It may as well be a hundred miles away ... We don't go over there, they do not come over here (interview, high-tech firm co-founder).

The perception of danger is further strengthened by people's avoidance of Parkdale. For instance, a female designer and business owner says that "at night, I wouldn't hang out at the intersection of Dufferin and King" (interview, owner of a design firm).

Whether perceived or real, and certainly whatever the cause, the idea of crime and disorder as described by some workers in Liberty Village has certainly attracted the attention of the LVBIA. To mitigate the potential impacts of this perception on business, LVBIA officials point out that whatever crimes happen in the neighbourhood, they are distinct from the violent and criminal ones that have been associated with Parkdale. Nevertheless, the source of the problem is still widely perceived to be Parkdale

You ... have the adjoining Parkdale, with some great people, great homes, but a bad *reputation*. [There are] a lot of rooming houses ... and crime, so I think as much as people want to be down here [Liberty Village], there is still that element of fear associated

with [adjacent areas] (interview, employee of an entertainment firm; emphasis added).

Addressing this sort of reputation for crime in adjacent areas and, by association, in Liberty Village, a BIA official notes that this is a flawed assumption among people who do not know the area

They [many of the new employees] come from the 905 [suburban telephone code] area ... I say you know, you're hearing the media's take on it. It's not like that. We walk our streets. We're very comfortable. I've never felt unsafe here ... Go out to the suburbs and you're walking alone, you know to me that's scarier (interview, BIA board member).

The use of security as a marketing mechanism requires that BIA officials change this perception of Liberty Village not only by disproving its past reputation, but also by dislocating itself from its association with Parkdale

We have to be careful about the message that we give because that's not the way to attract business or to attract investment in the neighbourhood (interview, BIA board member).

With the recognition that these perceived or real problems could hinder the economic development of Liberty Village, it becomes clear that the many security strategies that the LVBIA has adopted are as much about keeping area business owners successful as they are about dislocating threats of disorder from the neighbourhood. After all, safety "was right up there in terms of things we wanted to accomplish" when the LVBIA first started (interview, LVBIA board member).<sup>8</sup>

Considered in this light, it is not surprising that the LVBIA has established its own security committee to look after the issue of safety and has spearheaded several security enhancement projects, the most important of which is the hiring of a private security guard to patrol Liberty Village from dusk

until dawn (Mackenzie, 2006). This service to the area is

[the LVBIA's] largest item ... in terms of the money we spend on any project. The majority of [the operating budget] goes to the patrol service, but he's the eyes on the street (interview, BIA board member).

The LVBIA official's invocation of Jane Jacobs' (1961) classic crime control tactic—'eyes on the streets'—is echoed by an employee of an entertainment company as well, who notes that

[the patrol officer] is our neighbourhood watch and ... neighbourhood ambassador is what we call him (interview, employee of an entertainment firm).

Yet, there is something ironic about the invocation of 'eyes on the street' to refer to the use of a privatised security service to police the (quasi) public spaces of Liberty Village. In her iteration of street-level community surveillance, Jacobs (1961) notes that the safety of the streets rests on a sort of mutual understanding among particular groups of people to look out for their space. Unlike this communitarian vision of public space, the mobilisation of security in Liberty Village transfers the onus of responsibility from the collective public to a private security force that not only deals with deterring crime—"patrolling all the streets ... laneways and dead-end streets [to] make sure that they are safe"—but also acts as a "safe walk escort" for employees to parked cars or transit waiting areas (interview, LVBIA board member).

BIA officials promote this service as a place-making strategy to assure local business owners that the area is safe. The security patrol is one of the most advertised services of the LVBIA, featured regularly in *The Flame*, the LVBIA's official newsletter (*The Flame*, June 2003, September and November 2004, June 2005; see also *Liberty Market Vox*, Issue 1,

2006; *The Shuttle*, Summer 2003). To assuage fears that new tenants might have, the LVBIA and several property management companies in the area distribute pocket-sized cards detailing the security patrol and safe walk service as part of their welcome package to the neighbourhood (interview, LVBIA officer; interview, property management employee).

In addition to escorting workers to transport, the private security guard also monitors the area for burnt-out lights, abandoned vehicles, *graffiti* and vandalism (Mackenzie, 2006). He liaises with local police and reports back to the LVBIA on area improvement issues (LVBIA, 2005). This is coupled with attempts by the LVBIA to keep buildings and public spaces in constant repair and management, as this is seen as necessary to prevent the perception of vulnerability or disarray (interviews, LVBIA). Hence, LVBIA officials and individual property development companies in the area have adopted strong pre-emptive strategies that closely resemble crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) principles, which see spatial design, planning and beautification as deterrents to crime (Newman, 1996). As one LVBIA official notes, these CPTED strategies are *directly* related to the feeling of safety among employees of Liberty Village

If you don't have proper lighting or you've got crumbling streets or litter and all that around, it's given that you [and] I wouldn't feel safe ... Even our staff mentioned [that] with that pedestrian lighting, it gives them a better feel of ... a more secure place. [With] more lighting, [there is] less chance that potential crime would happen (interview, LVBIA board member and employee of an entertainment firm).

Hence, the beautification of Liberty Village's public spaces is tied to concerns over security and can be seen as a strategy towards fixing the *image* of Liberty Village as a business-friendly, safe inner-city hub. This is summed

up by an LVBIA official who, in the following quote, notes the intricate link between Liberty Village's creative identity and the look of its public spaces. Referring to a problematic series of dead-end streets in the southern edge of the LVBIA, she laments

You come along the corner there and up over the hill and all of a sudden, you look over on the left and you see this derelict site. There's *graffiti*, there's weeds, there's abandoned cars, there's broken windows. That's Liberty Village, one of the most creative and amazing business communities in the City of Toronto? (interview, LVBIA board member).

Fixing this road is seen by several LVBIA officials as an important strategy towards ensuring that the *entirety* of Liberty Village is a safe and beautiful space in which creative business can thrive.<sup>9</sup>

Critics of CPTED strategies argue that these place-based security strategies serve to facilitate the privatisation of public space (Blomley, 2004; Herbert and Brown, 2006). Herbert and Brown (2006, p. 769) note, for instance, that the (re)turn to security discourse in the neo-liberal city clearly reveals the underlying class-based politics of revitalisation, since "signs of disorder are more potent to middle-class homeowners and property developers". In the case of Liberty Village, the classed politics of securitisation is felt intensively in surrounding poorer neighbourhoods, especially Parkdale.<sup>10</sup>

### Liberty Denied? Displacement within the Village

In a recent article, Markusen (2006) calls for an occupational approach to the creative class, highlighting the need for a careful unpacking of the concept. In particular, Markusen argues that individual segments of the creative class may hold radically different political values. Artists, for example, are unlikely to share common cause with new

media workers, advertising executives or other members of Florida's creative class. While artists often enjoy patronage by urban élites, they are generally not directly connected to the economic development agenda critiqued earlier. They are typically located at opposite ends of the political spectrum from élites, who tend to be politically conservative.

In the case of Liberty Village, while artists and photographers were the first tenants to occupy abandoned industrial space in the area and were certainly seen as vanguards of the economic success of the village, they are rapidly being displaced by new media, television, advertising and design firms (Boyle, 2005, p. P1; *The Shuttle*, Spring 2002). Rising rental rates for residential, commercial and live-work space are an indicator of property value increases: market rents for office and industrial space in Liberty Village have increased dramatically since the late 1980s; at CDN\$ 16–25 per square foot (LVBIA, 2004), current rates rival those of the average rent in the GTA (CDN\$ 24 per square foot) (Royal LePage, 2004). While many artists have simply moved away because of rising rents, others have been more forcefully extracted from the area. In 2000, for example, 50 artists were evicted from a building known as 'The Castle' at 55 Fraser Avenue to make way for the expanded offices of Nelvana, a large Toronto-based animation studio (Kuitenbrouwer, 2000, p. A15). Some artists contested their evictions, but eventually were forced to leave.

That same year, artists were also evicted from 9 Hanna Avenue, a 'mythic' building where artists, artisans, musicians and other activists lived and worked, often illegally. The building was redeveloped as a wired high-technology complex. Before its redevelopment, there was little concern with security; the front door was never locked. According to one former tenant, people came and went at all hours and unicyclists and dirt-bike riders practised outside the front, generating a

truly diverse and unexpected atmosphere (Cash, 2006).

Artists we interviewed cite a shift in the atmosphere of the neighbourhood with the increase in corporate cultural industries, noting that, today, the area has become more and more about profit-based creativity. As an independent multimedia artist notes

There are artists of course who work in different places like animation houses or places around here like Nelvana or YTV. But those kinds of activities are much more linked to commercial gain ... I think an artist is someone who must create something regardless of cost attachment to it. Regardless or not whether you are going to sell their painting or sell their film ... It is a creative outlet. It is an expression. Not for cash (interview, independent filmmaker).

While this sentiment obscures the economic logic underpinning the art world (Bourdieu, 1993), there are differences between segments of the creative class in terms of the particular nature of the relationship between culture and economy, and in terms of politics and social values (Markusen, 2006). Artists also have different needs for space. Recent transformations in Liberty Village have created a shift towards more upscale and closed rental spaces. One artist notes

Artists don't really have a lot of money and we need rough spaces ... we don't really want something fancy because we have to worry about floors ... There is a lot of interaction if it is allowed. But when you have to make sure your doors are closed and you can't ... put a couch in the hallway. You are told that it can't be there. Well, how are you supposed to provide interaction between artists? And if you start kicking out artists, like the landlords did out of the area, well then you can't go to the café and talk to other artists because there is nobody around (interview, independent artist).

There are still artists in Liberty Village, but they tend to occupy spaces managed by Artscape,

a non-profit developer of artist workspaces in Toronto. There are thus powerful rifts within artists as a group, between artists and other members of the creative class, as well as between the creative class and other classes. Policy adaptations of the creative city script, while acknowledging these tensions, ultimately remain mute about how to address them in policy initiatives.

Ironically, as artists are being evicted from the area and *graffiti* have been systematically removed, token markers of art are being inserted into the landscape through the establishment of a public art programme by the business improvement area. In this programme, the LVBIA invited selected artists to make art works on local street benches (see <http://www.lvbia.ca>; Terefenko, 2006; *The Shuttle*, Winter 2006). In this case, carefully sanctioned and prescribed art takes the place of unofficial random art.

Outside this participation, artists are not really incorporated in the agenda of the business improvement association (interviews; see also Kuitenbrouwer, 2000). One artist notes that

The LVBIA is not really interested in keeping us here because they don't see us as commercially viable in the same way a business in this space would be (interview, director of a not-for-profit arts organisation).

The lack of a voice in the BIA and other forums has led artists to contest the consultation process. Artists were recently asked to participate in a study being conducted by the City of Toronto to improve streetscapes, lighting and landscaping. However, some artists refused to participate, believing that they were "designing [their] way out of the neighbourhood" (Kuitenbrouwer, 2000, p. A15; interviews).

Similar processes of displacement are being felt by non-profit arts organisations in the area. There is question as to how long they will be able to remain in the neighbourhood.

The loss of related supporting services and institutions for art, film, design and new media workers is ironic since it jeopardises the formation of a functionally coherent cluster. As one employee in an arts association in the area argues, the redevelopment of Liberty Village

is not a plan that can accommodate not-for-profit organisations that are specific to a certain cultural milieu ... This [building] was full of artist studios and not-for-profit organisations ... and basically we are the only two that are left. We pay \$10 per square foot for this space. They can easily get double and have somebody like [a media firm] ... who will renovate and pay ... and have a million years in their lease. That is what they want. They want the money this building could generate (interview, non-profit arts organisation).

Like artists, non-profit organisations complain that, in the past, buildings were fairly open and creative types could come and go without restrictions. They describe a transition from an 'artist-run centre' model to a corporate model where buildings have security and where washrooms are no longer public. In the case of one artist-run co-operative, large numbers of members use their services on a regular basis but the building management has a hard time understanding organisations that are not made up of a defined group of employees

They just assume we are a company and that there are [x] people working here. That is it. They do not understand the concept of a public membership. It is difficult (interview, director of a non-profit arts organisation).

Traditional manufacturing uses are also increasingly marginalised. While historically there were a number of different industries in the area, there is only one remaining factory, Canada Bread. This company continues to draw much of its workforce from the surrounding neighbourhood of Parkdale. However, it has

faced increasing pressure in recent years. As one employee with the company argues

It is probably ... the last industrial ... establishment in this area, so-called Liberty Village ... There used to be quite a few other factories but this is the last one. Now I believe it's all either artists or small businesses or office... We have run into some situations where we are told that we are noisy. The noise and the environmental issues. Our noise ... [makes] it difficult to operate in this vicinity ... and of course we use big transport trucks so we got big tractors going around here so some people don't like trucks (interview, Canada Bread employee).

This employee goes on to note that new property owners, who dominate local decision-making processes, often have different priorities

The people who own other properties such as the Carpet Factory, they might have an agenda which is not totally in line with ours, because I mean they don't like to see big trucks. They love to have just small offices here (interview, Canada Bread employee).

Thus, while attracted to the aesthetics of industrial architecture, there is the perception among some participants that new creative businesses ultimately do not value economic diversity in the area. These tensions are likely to be heightened as more residents move into lofts and condominiums in the village (see also Pollard, 2004).

## Conclusion

Many critics of creativity-led urban policy have voiced their concerns over gentrification, inequality and social exclusion and have called on other scholars to foreground the politics of the creative city (Peck, 2007; McCann, 2007; Rantisi *et al.*, 2006; Markusen, 2006). This paper contributes to a critical assessment of the creative city by looking at the role of place-making strategies in the making of Liberty Village, a creative hub in Toronto's inner city.

In particular, we discuss the discursive and material strategies mobilised by the Liberty Village Business Improvement Association to rebrand a formerly industrial inner-city space into a space that “[champions] and [nurtures] a creative and vibrant community” (LVBIA, 2009). In identifying the ‘urban campus’ and the ‘securitised space’ as particular framings of the neighbourhood, we also highlight how these geographical constructions serve to privilege a particular population over another, displacing artists, arts organisations and manufacturers from the district. We suggest that, by nature, place-making entails displacement—of particular images, peoples and behaviours from an area in order to forge a unique identity for a space, set apart from the city.

Past and present initiatives designed to foster the development of Liberty Village have been successful in stimulating the creation of a cluster of cultural industries and a culture of networking and collaboration. A majority of participants interviewed foreground the economic dynamism and vitality of the area.<sup>11</sup> However, the city, the LVBIA, property developers and other actors involved in constructing the space focus on more commercial cultural industries generating high revenues and paying substantial rents, such as television, advertising, film and design firms. A result of this is that traditional manufacturers, artists, photographers and non-profit arts organisations—who add diversity and creativity to the site—are increasingly being displaced, illustrating the dominance of economic rationales in many policy agendas and the absence of genuine economic and social diversity and experimentation in the area. Alternative, non-capitalist definitions of creativity such as those proposed by artists and non-profit organisations are increasingly displaced in the official discourses and policies of the LVBIA, suggesting that the idea of a ‘creative hub’ is one produced through the strategic and sometimes violent eviction of alternative meanings and actors from the

site. In the case of Liberty Village, what counts as creativity is often 'corporate' creativity, save for token artistic presences in the form of sanctioned public artworks. Hence, in reality, the 'creative city' is often really for just a portion of the 'creative class', often those in corporate firm-based creative industries.

The corporate firm-based nature of the creative city is especially cogent if we recognise that creative city initiatives, while successful in facilitating inner-city renewal and the formation of business clusters, actually fail to address attendant urban problems such as gentrification, inequality, working poverty and racialised exclusion. A recent report by the City of Toronto cites pressures relating to gentrification and displacement as a central problem which increasingly "threaten[s] the unique labour market needs and creative and cultural habitats characteristic of" cultural industries (City of Toronto, 2008a, p. 3). A further report on 'the status of the artist' in Ontario highlights the need to create affordable living and workspaces for artists (Status of the Artist Sub-committee, 2006). These findings, and evidence from city area studies and our interviews, raise questions about how creative city planning can proceed, taking into consideration questions of exclusion, displacement and the sustainability of these districts.

Liberty Village exists as a creative cluster in the heart of one of Toronto's most diverse and polarised communities. Although marketed as a creative and liberating space, we argue that the 'hype' attached to the area revolves more centrally around real estate development, property values and corporate co-mingling. The development of Liberty Village is associated with a series of attempts to isolate the cluster from the surrounding city and neighbourhood, and to expunge unruly elements within the precinct itself. The production of an artificial, homogeneous and secure site for business represents the

antithesis of the ideal of liberty in which it traffics. The loss of economic and artistic diversity, and supporting cultural institutions, poses challenges for the future viability of the site. The redevelopment of Liberty Village also illustrates the gulf that often divides creative workers who are often assumed to share common values, as well as divisions of class, race and age that separate creative communities from other long-term residents and workers.

The case of Liberty Village foregrounds the growth of new models of urban governance that emphasise public-private partnerships and new scales of intervention such as the neighbourhood or 'village'. The failure of creative city initiatives to forge truly open and creative spaces raises questions about how mutually supportive relationships between art, culture and local communities might be forged.

## Notes

1. In this paper, we use the notion of displacement to refer to more than just the spatial relocation of individuals and classes. Displacement is interpreted broadly to refer to an understanding of a place as open to and constituted through connections to networks and representations which extend beyond the delimiting boundaries of a particular site (see Crang, 1996, p. 47). Following this conceptualisation, we are concerned with how representations of Liberty Village mark its difference from other areas of the city. We also explore how constructions displace other possible meanings and uses in the cluster.
2. For reasons of confidentiality, these positions are not differentiated in interview quotations.
3. There are different theories as to how the name of the area surfaced. Some argue that Liberty Village draws its name from the many penal institutions that once occupied this space, including the Central Prison for Men which operated from 1874 to 1915 and the Andrew Mercer Reformatory for Women which opened in 1878 (Boyle, 2005, p. P1). Upon release from

prison, Liberty Street was the first taste of freedom for inmates. Others suggest that the name is related to the presence of military forts in the area or the American ownership of local branch plants (the US being equated with notions of 'liberty') (interview, BIA representative).

4. Parkdale is also the site of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, an institution of significant size. Province-wide Conservative strategies set in place since the mid 1990s have resulted in the mass deinstitutionalisation of patients into the rooming and boarding houses in this and other surrounding neighbourhoods.
5. See <http://www.lvbta.com>.
6. See <http://www.lvbta.com>.
7. In addition to these policies, the City of Toronto has been undergoing a broader process of transformation funded by the federal and provincial governments. These projects are designed to beautify the city through mega architectural renovations and constructions, including the Royal Ontario Museum, the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Ontario College of Art and Design, a new Opera House and a state-of-the-art headquarters for the Toronto International Film Festival.
8. See also [www.lvbta.ca](http://www.lvbta.ca).
9. This strategy is in keeping with Kelling and Coles' (1996) 'fixing broken windows' thesis. This thesis promotes the idea that disorderly spaces, such as broken windows in a house or graffiti in public space, are evidence of a space's vulnerability to crime. They advocate the upkeep of building façades, parking lots and other private and public spaces in order to deter criminals from descending on vulnerable spaces (see also Wilson and Kelling, 1982). Although this particular theory has been criticised for its functionalist approach, illusory promise of order and relationship with neo-liberal urban change (Herbert, 2001), it and other security measures remain popular among many business improvement associations.
10. However, Parkdale is now undergoing a process of gentrification as well.
11. This was also a major finding in a City of Toronto report on the district (City of Toronto, 2006).

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