

## WHEN BOHEMIA BECOMES A BUSINESS: CITY LIGHTS, COLUMBUS AVENUE AND A FUTURE FOR SAN FRANCISCO

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**Abstract:** This article offers a study of the now clichéd Bohemian Index. I explore how Richard Florida's arguments flatten, homogenize and commercialize the radicalism and resistance of the cities validated through his criteria. Activism becomes a brand. San Francisco is important in such research because of its political and literary history, with North Beach's iconography tethered to the Beat Generation. The best known 'Left Coast City' in the world, San Francisco reveals the political paradoxes of creative industries and the city imaging literature. Bohemia creates an attractive city of coffee and conversation. San Francisco is a diverse economy, with developed service, tourist and hospitality industries. It is facing seismic challenges, as is the home state. In a credit crunch, the economies based around lifestyle capitalism and service industries suffer as international infrastructural and public sector funding retracts. My article proposes no causal relationship between bohemia and economic development through either tourism or the creative industries. Instead, the complexity of 'Bohemia' as a concept, trope and brand is revealed, spilling beyond the seemingly predictable, mappable and trackable Bohemian Index.

**Key words:** Bohemia, Bohemian Index, Creative Industries, San Francisco, Richard Florida.

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As I take my nightly walk in North Beach, down to City Lights, over to the Trieste or the Puccini, I am testing myself against history. Mostly I enjoy the smells and sounds, and the sense of being in a place I've known for a generation now, a happy, unhappy, and familiar place, complicated as the places are that one comes to know.

Herbert Gold (1993, 17)

To write a book about a city as storied and complex as San Francisco is a humbling task. Everyone has their own image of San Francisco, and even though it's a world-class city, it can be very provincial.

Helene Goupil and Josh Krist (2005, 9)

Herbert Gold's *Bohemia* is a well crafted and evocative narrative of bohemian life: walking, reading, drinking coffee and living a multi-

sensate urban experience. North Beach, if not San Francisco, seems a haven for the different, the defiant, the activist and the independent. Yet Helene Goupil and Josh Krist's corrective is important. Every city enfolds many cities, images and experiences. North Beach is not San Francisco. Similarly, City Lights Bookshop is not the archetypal urban commercial enterprise. It is certainly an unusual hub for tourism.

This article offers a study of the now clichéd Bohemian Index. I explore how Richard Florida's arguments flatten, homogenize and commercialize the radicalism, resistance and activism of the cities validated through his criteria. San Francisco, highly ranked in his Bohemian Index, is the hub of my study. Interwoven through this investigation is the complex and often contradictory theorizations of both capitalism and modernity. San Francisco is distinctive because of its political and literary

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history. The best known 'Left Coast City' (DeLeon, 1992) in the world, San Francisco reveals the political paradoxes in creative industries and the city imaging literature. Bohemia creates an attractive city of coffee and conversation. It is marketable and manageable. Activism is different. San Francisco is a diverse economy, with developed service, tourist and hospitality industries. It is facing seismic challenges, as is the home state. The cover story of *The Economist* for July 11, 2009 asked whether California or Texas is "America's Future" (2009). While California features an innovative cultural environment and outstanding universities, Texas maintains a more stable banking sector and lower unemployment than the national average.

After the credit crunch, the economies based around lifestyle capitalism, tourism and service industries suffer as international infrastructural and public sector funding retracts (Redhead and Brabazon, 2009). Kevin Doogan believes that this current recession "is not some ghastly aberration in the normal running of the new economy" (2009, ix). In his book, *New Capitalism? The transformation of work*, he argues that there is an extraordinary and damaging gap between "public perceptions" and "material reality" (2009, 17). He is particularly concerned about the fetishization of 'new technology.'

To focus on the transmission of information, and the chimera of weightlessness it conveys, to the neglect of the production and consumption of knowledge, can only serve to distort analysis of the transformativity of technological change (2009, 50-51).

Richard Florida's findings would find some agreement with Doogan, even though their political perspectives diverge. Both confirm the value of 'real' places and relationships rather than the weightless economy. While new media and communication technologies enable workers to live in more pleasant environments and use wireless and mobile platforms to complete daily tasks with efficiency, the location of production and consumption matters. While

Florida's research has confronted an array of critiques (Whyte, 2009), he has succeeded in returning place to policy, even through the excitements of mobility studies (Urry, 2007), telecommuting (Telework Coalition: 2011) and Second Life (Carey, 2008). Still, Doogan has argued that the relocation and displacement of work in leisure and online spaces have been over-played. Certainly, broadband and the reduction in costs for manufacturing and the purchase of computers for domestic use have ensured that relatively inexpensive hardware and software can complete many employment tasks in the home. However a causal link between technological and social change is unwise to draw in work, leisure or politics. The great service that Doogan has given scholars is that he reminds us amid economic instability that theories and approaches to capitalism require context, history and interpretation. Yet as shown by Eric Mielants (2008), the disciplinary basis for such a study – historical sociology – makes it difficult to formulate, activate and conduct a social-technological research project. A series of proxy social factors are required to either prove – or more likely assume – causality between variables. My article proposes no causality between bohemia and economic development, framed through creative industries' strategies. Instead, the complexity of 'Bohemia' as a concept, trope and ideology is explored, spilling beyond the seemingly predictable, mappable and trackable Bohemian Index. While activism is invented, it is also branded.

## The Bohemian Index

There have been a few surprise academic success stories in the last decade. Zygmunt Bauman's liquid metaphors (methods or descriptions, depending on the interpretation) have reached a wide audience. Deleuze's followers have shaken off the Guattari fans to establish their own intellectual empire threatening the stature of Foucault's archaeology of admirers. The 2000s showed that Baudrillard was right. The Gulf War did not happen – again. Virilio has – at speed – scuttled from the bunker and broadcasted

from aerials. Bourdieu seems to have replaced Althusser's interpellation with cultural capital and gained academic stardom. The two major surprise packages of academic life are Richard Florida and Robert Putnam. There is little in *The Rise of the Creative Class* (Florida, 2002) or *Bowling Alone* (Putnam, 2001) to suggest that these would become the landmark texts in urban studies or theories of community. Yet these researchers found their historical moment and have an influence that extends beyond the United States, through Europe, Asia and the Antipodes.

There are many reasons for this success. What Florida's books *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), *Cities and the Creative Class* (2005a), *The Flight of the Creative Class* (2005b) and *Who's Your City?* (2008) have achieved is to prioritize questions of urban renewal for the purposes of economic development, along with a recognition of the 'competition' for well educated, hyper-mobile workers. A key concept in his argument is the Bohemian Index, which measures the presence of 'high bohemians.' This term describes a diverse social, economic and occupational grouping. At its most specific, Florida argues that particular social groups signify or – more debatably correlate – with economic development. This group, including a high proportion of gay and lesbian citizens, workers in technological sectors, musicians and artists, creates a web or tissue of social, political and economic connectiveness that assembles a dynamic, open and interesting environment for 'the creative class' in which they can conduct business and reside. Florida's focus is not on economic development, but creating the framework where the workers who enable economic development would like to live. That is why his attention is placed on architecture, shopping centres and portals for consumption and infrastructure such as museums, sporting facilities and galleries.

Florida took these assumptions and created a series of rankings. These included the "Diversity Index", the "Gay Index" and – of most interest in this paper – the "Bohemian Index." San Francisco dominated all these gradings, being the number one city of more than one million people for "creativity." The

"Creativity Index" aligned the creativity 'rank,' the 'high-tech' rank, the 'innovation' rank and the 'diversity' rank. San Francisco was number one in both diversity and 'high tech,' ranking second for innovation. Other cities to score well included Austin, San Diego, Boston, Seattle, Chapel Hill, Houston and Washington. Cities at the tail end of his tables include Memphis, Norfolk, Las Vegas, Buffalo and – more controversially – New Orleans. While New Orleans ranked highly on diversity, it gained a low score for technology and innovation.

What makes Florida's work interesting and controversial is that he is focused on cities retaining a group of workers – the self-styled creative class – believing that where they live, economic development follows. At its most basic, he shows, "places that succeed in attracting and retaining creative class people prosper; those that fail don't" (2002b). The focus is on the "labour-centred view of the arts economy" (Markusen and Schrock, 2006, 1661-1686). Such a view argues that older divisions of east and west coast, north and south, are too simple to understand the waves within social and economic change. There needs to be a mapping of cities and regions. Florida focuses on a "new geography of class" where there is a "sorting" and "re-sorting" of people within urban environments (Florida 2002b). The regions where new arrivals can connect with a community and express their identity are particularly attractive, along with strong recreational environments and active street cultures composed of cafes, restaurants and experiences. Indeed, the characteristic of this group seems to be a quest for authentic and authenticating experiences.

This authenticating desire is what makes the Bohemian Index important. The workable definition for this term was established by Gertler, Florida, Gates and Vinodrai in a 2002 paper.

The Bohemian Index is defined using employment in artistic and creative occupations. It is a location quotient that compares the region's share of the nation's bohemians to the region's share of the nation's population (2002, 3).

Politics, dissent and activism were not incorporated into the definition. The occupations included into this model include writers, musicians, actors, directors, craft practitioners, dancers and photographers. While the popular circulation of this phrase and argument is beyond the academic literature, a more subtle rendering of the concept was found in the Florida refereed article "Bohemia and economic geography" (2002c). In this piece, a more careful tether is offered between the geography of bohemia and the development of 'human capital' and high technological industries. Bohemians become 'human capital' that draws the creative class into urban centres. Further, Florida notes that the geography of bohemia is highly concentrated. Therefore, this theory and argument seems customized to not only understand San Francisco, but more specifically North Beach.

Such a concept and argument has been influential in the urban studies literature.<sup>1</sup> There is a reason for this impact. There is a generalizability of these variables, particularly showing relevance in Canadian cities and city-regions (Gertler, Florida, Gates, Vinodrai, 2002). There has also been an influence in Singapore policy making (Ho, 2009). Even the often labelled 'most isolated capital city in the world' in Perth Western Australia, there is a desire to invest in the central business district and create 'excitement' if not activism. Peter Newman diagnosed the 'problems' confronting the city: "if we're just suburban I think we'll be a very nice place to retire to and we'll lose our young people" (2009, 9). In an age of city modelling and Bohemian Indices, the suburbs are demonized as boring, old fashioned and antagonistic to 'our young people.' Such labels of 'young people' can overlap with the creative class. But K.C. Ho realized that the strategies and models for development have a "wide and unruly side" that provides both diversity in ungentrified parts of inner city Singapore and also creates the opportunity for new working styles (2009, 1187).

There are also critiques. The Bohemian Index is a proxy, making a case for a correlation between the number of artists in the city and the capacity for growth rates. The

creative class is too generalizable a phrase to create a causal relationship between the presence of a particular group and economic development (Markusen and Schrock, 2006, p. 1661-1686). Certainly there is a casual connection. Causality is much more difficult to prove. Ann Markusen and Greg Schrock in particular have configured a strong probe of the link between "arts and culture as an economic panacea" (2006, 1661). Because of an inability at worst, or difficulty at best, to measure the economic impact of artistic and cultural products in terms of import and export capacity, it is also difficult to map over actual or predicted trends of growth. Obviously there are a range of fascinating and important casual relationships between ethnic and racial diversity, employment and housing. Gianmarco Ottaviano and Giovanni Peri found "a very robust correlation", showing that "US-born citizens living in metropolitan areas where the share of foreign-born increased between 1970 and 1990, experienced a significant increase in their wage and in the rental price of their housing" (2006, 9). Such links are important to note, but are often self-evident and commonsensical, or the variables are so diverse and dispersed that they are impossible to isolate for a causal study. The critique of this body of literature on economic and urban development is that it tends to be descriptive, rather than analytical. The interpretation built – and the models developed – on the foundation of these descriptions are based on correlations that may be correct or inaccurate. Certainly the attraction of Florida's arguments is clear. They appear, particularly in their reified form, intoxicatingly simple and easy to apply. For example, Emily Eakins from the *New York Times* asked crucial questions that stem from his work: "Should Pittsburgh recruit gay people to jump-start its economy? Should Buffalo another fiscally flat-lining city give tax breaks to bohemians?" (2002).

Bohemia as an ideology is larger, wider and more complex than Richard Florida's 'Bohemian Index.' There are particular attributes that enable the creative industries, but radical politics, dissent and activism against particular models of modernity and capitalism are not as relevant to his modelling

of economic development. The gay community, coffee drinking and the music industry create a pleasant and conducive environment for the 'supermobile' creative class to live. The demonstrations, dissent and question of corporatization are less marketable and malleable in theories of economic and urban development. For example, the posters in the upper windows of City Light Bookshop convey a more dissenting bohemia.

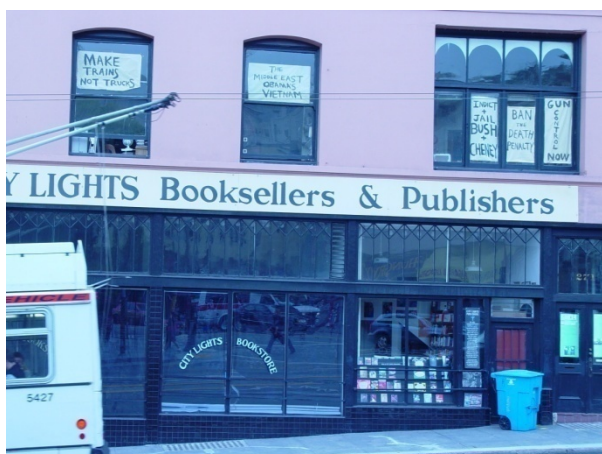


Photo 1. City Lights and its windows

While recognizing this more uncompromising and unpredictable element of dissent and activism, San Francisco maintains all the characteristics of the Bohemian Index: high population diversity, sexual diversity, ethnic diversity, a well educated population and a highly skilled community of workers and entrepreneurs. Yet bohemia is an ideology, not a category or a checklist. The bohemians of New York, Paris and London have featured as characters in opera and soap opera, but second tier cities are the enablers of a distinctive urbanity. The disconnection from 'the main game' of global cities encourages difference and values alternatives. Nancy Peters realized that,

San Francisco has always been a breeding ground for bohemian countercultures; its cosmopolitan population, its tolerance of eccentricity, and its provincialism and distance from the centers of national culture and political power have long made it an ideal place for nonconformist writers, artists, and utopian dreamers (1998, 199).

Importantly, the most successful second-tier cities are those that are disconnected geographically from the global cities. That is why Brighton in the United Kingdom has a higher Bohemian Index than Luton. Both are close to the capital of London, but Brighton's location slightly further away than Luton is able to resist the pull of the global city. A more independent identity can be formed. This is a significant area of further study. The American equivalent would be Dayton in Ohio, where its development is hampered by its proximity to Cincinnati. The talent, money and businesses are drawn into the larger capital.

While the Bohemian Index focuses on cities, such a connection overplays the scale and reach of bohemia. Actually, there are micro-regions in cities that are the focus of attention. In San Francisco, North Beach is the home of bohemia. It also has the customary characteristics: a great bookstore, coffee shops, restaurants, bars, public open space and galleries. Ray Oldenburg's *The Great Good Place* is a catalogue of such locations (1989). He is interested in those places that are not home, but create opportunities for communities to form. Specifically, Oldenburg noted that "the bulk of social scientific writing in the area of informal public gathering places consists of ethnographic descriptions that await integration into more abstract and analytical efforts addressing the place and function of these centers of the informal public life of the society" (1989). While the edges of the bohemian district are difficult to determine, in San Francisco the boundaries are clear. Columbus Avenue is the spine of the district, with Washington Square the heart and City Lights the metaphoric mind of the denizen's body politic. The irony is that the relationship that built San Francisco's bohemian reputation – between the Beats and North Beach – only lasted for a short period (Morgan, 2003, 1-13). By 1956, Burroughs and Kerouac had left San Francisco. Their legacy survives to this day in Columbus Avenue, symbolized by a short lane and a piece of pavement.

A key to understanding bohemia is realizing that a city can never 'be' bohemian. Instead,



particular places encourage and facilitate distinctive forms of social, economic and political relationships. Richard DeLeon described this formation as “enclave consciousness” which becomes “a natural defense against forces that work to flatten places into spaces and to dissolve communities into aggregates of individual citizens” (1992, 139). The obvious home in North Beach that undulates, curves, lifts and rallies against a flattening of difference is Washington Square. Part of popular culture, it is featured in both the lyrics of Joan Baez’s “Diamonds and Rust” (1975) and the *Word Wars* (2004), the documentary on the competitive scrabble community. It is also a space for walking, talking and sitting.



Photo 2. Jack Kerouac in San Francisco

One of the consequences of this ‘enclave consciousness’ – of denizens rather than citizens – is that small business is invested with radicalism, difference and defiance. Anti-corporatism, instead of initiating a socialist critique, leads to the support of small businesses as fount of critique, activism, distinctiveness and opportunity. Actually, this

is not a critique of consumerism or capitalism, but offering an alternative capitalism through independents. Richard DeLeon realized the intricacy of this mode of activism, stating, “for many progressives, small business is the answer to build a progressive urban regime in San Francisco” (1992, 154). There are social and economic benefits to emerge from this programme, including jobs for residents, organic and sustainable commercial development and a responsiveness and responsibility to the environment.

The independence of San Franciscan bohemia continues the legacy of the Beats and enables the entrepreneurship that propels the creative industries. This distinctive history adds both difference and complexity to Richard Florida’s models. The branding and influence of this short period of Beat notoriety has had an impact on the long-term city imaging. Bill Morgan wrote *The Beat Generation in San Francisco: a literary tour*. He argued that,

If any city in America deserves the title of home of the Beat Generation, it is San Francisco. Although New York can rightly boast to be the birthplace of the Beats, the literary group came to maturity and national prominence in this most beautiful city by the bay (2003, ix).

Tourists still come to follow in the footsteps of the beats. City Lights is one of the few bookshops in the world that is a hub to tourism. A political magnet and tourist beacon at 261 Columbus Avenue San Francisco, the shop is a rare example of both a bookstore and publishing house that has remained independent and unchained from an increasingly vertically integrated publishing industry. It is unique, as one of the few examples in the world where a shop – let alone a bookshop – is a hub of intellectual and educational tourism. Alcatraz, the Golden Gate and the Bay Bridge are spectacular. However, it is the cultural cluster at North Beach that gives the city distinction and fame. Founded by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, he maintains independence, stating, “I figure it is important to lead the kind of life where you don’t have to take grants from any

organization. You have to make it on your own without any help" (Ferlinghetti in Meltzer, 2001, 72). Such an ideology is not only part of the bohemian project but also converges with 'the independents' of creative industries (Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999).

There is a final and wider critique of the Bohemian Index, which is instructive of concerns with the wider creative industries literature. Much of the creative industries research is based on one assumption: that the policies, principles and strategies that operate successfully in one city can be modeled, translated and transferred to another place. Mobilizing and globalizing web-based communications enable such movement (Howkins, 2001). In response to this assumption of trans-city and trans-national movement, the algorithm of social and institutional change is "policy transfer", where consultancy firms take the concepts and strategies applied in one location and move it to another (Landry, 2000). The degree of ideas transfer and policy application of local ideas in the creative industries can be overstated. Instead, many *creative consultants* move between *creative cities* for *policy transfer*. Yet the policies and clusters developed for content industries – or "cultural products industries" (Scott, 2000) – are most frequently derived from very specific local conditions. Andy Pratt recently confirmed the limits to policy transfer (2009). While Richard Florida has built a career tracking the mobility of the creative class (2005a), the 'political' class – the policy makers – are embedded into much more local networks and cycles of patronage.

It is an attractive solution for post-industrial cities to assume that culture can solve the injustices of capital (Harvey, 1989). Sheffield's Cultural Industries Quarter is the clearest example of this strategy (Oakley, 2009). There is an under-researched link between 'city image' and attracting foreign investment, urban and mobile professions and the development of a tourism industry. Indeed, as Myerscough realized as early as 1988, 'arts impact' studies were declining the through 1980s (1988). The assumptions about arts-led urban regeneration have increased as the studies of the causal and casual links

declined. Certainly the attractiveness and marketing of a city increased through place branding and event management. However, as digital convergence and the hyperbole about the information society has increased, an intellectual and policy leap between 'art' and 'economics' has promoted and perpetuated a contradiction (Pratt and Jeffcut, 2009, 1-19). While the supposedly geographical 'constraints' of a city are 'liberated' and 'transgressed' through digitization, creating a post-manufacturing economy, there is a concurrent reinvestment in place. How these two discourses dialogue remains the challenge of the next decade. Part of an answer in how these arguments about hyper-localism, mobility and post-manufacturing align and conflate is found in San Francisco.

### Why San Francisco?

I had the sense that the continent had tilted up, with the whole population sliding to the west. San Francisco had been founded, not by bourgeoisie, but by prospectors, sailors, railroad workers, gold diggers, ladies of good fortune, roustabouts and carney hustlers.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti (in Morgan and Peters, 2006, xi)

A 2004 survey logged San Franciscans as the Americans who spend most on alcohol and books (Goupil and Krist, 2005, 127). This seems an odd but fundamentally appropriate combination. The commitment to independent book shops, rather than chains, along with the publishing base for *Mother Jones*, *Salon* and *Wired*, has meant that reading matters in San Francisco. Concurrently home to a range of technological start ups, it is also the base of Current TV. Creative industries scholars such as Andy Pratt have studied the relationship between 'new media' and the 'new economy' in the city (2002, 27-50). Less visible in his work has been the role and function of event tourism and festivals such as Litquake, which started in 2002, the Annual Bay Area Anarchist Bookfair, Porchlight and the Writers with Drinks variety programme, all of which

operate in San Francisco. These events confirm a distinctive cultural ecology. There are corporate, governmental and financial sectors in the inner city, along with a great diversity of educational institutions and universities. There is money to spend on the lubricants of intellectual and social life: alcohol and books.

Richard Florida logged San Francisco at the top of the high-tech index, gay index and creative class index and fifth on the Bohemian Index. One of the weaknesses in Florida's indices is that they overemphasize technology as a self standing variable. Actually, the characteristic of technological platforms over time is that they disappear, weaving into our social lives. There are many cities and industries that show a high level of economic growth, yet do not gain their impetus from digitization. For example, Las Vegas was 47<sup>th</sup> out of 49 cities on the "Creativity" index, but it also had the fastest growth rate for employment through the 1990s. Again the issue of determinants for economic growth is questionable. Bookshops and software development always seem 'cleaner' than gambling and strip clubs. Yet a more intricate understanding of economic development, without the attendant morality that is masked by technology, may provide a different narrative of urban regeneration.

Another attribute of San Francisco which not only makes it distinctive in the history of cities but also amongst second tier cities is the role of poetry in developing its reputation. James Brook stated, "the city has been hospitable to poets – their presence has even contributed to an aura of popular and rebellious culture to the image of San Francisco" (1998, 128). The Beats gave the city its notoriety, yet it provided only one chapter in its development. The long term presence and activity of Lawrence Ferlinghetti, a writer and publisher who gained fame with the Beats but transcended the moment, has provided the foundation and platform for this distinctive history of San Francisco. Ferlinghetti arrived from Paris in 1950 and formed City Lights Bookstore in June 1953 with Peter Martin, a sociology academic at State College. While Martin moved to New York to start a bookshop, Ferlinghetti

continued and built not only City Lights and a publishing house, but a brand. The development was rapid. Within two years of opening the bookshop, he released his first collection of poems and launched City Lights Publications.

City Lights has become known as a home of Beat poets. A literary tour book, *The Beat Generation in San Francisco*, starts at the Bookshop (Morgan, 2003, 1-13). The Beat Generation was born in New York City but became part of popular culture in San Francisco (Meltzer, 2001). Like the narrative of *On the Road*, the Beats were always heading towards Frisco. While Kerouac lived fast, drank faster and died too early, Lawrence Ferlinghetti has enacted the greatest revenge on his critics by outliving them (Redhead, 2010). City Lights Bookstore gained international fame and notoriety in 1956 when Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems* was labelled 'obscene.' From the *Howl* trial, City Lights became bigger than the Beats and remains a hub for a diversity of thinkers, writers and intellectuals. Lawrence Ferlinghetti became San Francisco's first Poet Laureate (Ferlinghetti, 2001). Even amid this institutional recognition, dissent has always been a key to the City Lights' project. It is important to note that besides moral conservatives, establishment literary critics also criticized *Howl* specifically and the Beats more generally. As Nancy Peters realized, "establishment intellectuals disliked beat populism and the lack of respect for tradition, the latter a complaint that continues in academia today in new guise in the debates over multiculturalism, curriculum, and the canon" (1998, 209). While the Beat 'moment' at the level of writing collaborations was concluded by 1956 when Ginsberg, Burroughs and Kerouac left San Francisco, their legacy on North Beach and City Lights Bookstore was important. Their anti-establishment, popular culture-infused intellectualism incited the quirky, innovative, difficult and defiant cultural history of San Francisco. A range of researchers has realized that a combination of "social movements, policy innovation ... urban populism and local economic democracy" (DeLeon, 1992, 2) makes the city unusual in the history of intellectual culture and



activism. City Lights' publishing programme continues this legacy by commissioning works on colonialism, South American history, multiculturalism, gay and lesbian politics and Marxist and feminist theories. They take risks with their publishing list, with a dozen titles being added each year.

There is a reason for this rapid growth, branding and success of City Lights and the urban environment that houses it. Geographically, San Francisco has incredible advantages. Compact and locked at the geographical tip of the peninsula, what makes and keeps San Francisco distinctive is beyond landscape. The long-term promotion of anti-development strategies has – ironically – enabled creative industries development through tourism and a high Bohemian Index. As one example, when literary tourists are looking for the Beat Generation, there are a greater range of buildings to visit than in New York (Morgan, 2003, ix). Importantly, Richard Walker confirmed that “such cultivated urbanity is founded on political economy and political culture more than on natural scenery and urban design” (1998, 1). In other words, architecture and landmarks remain of intellectual history because a particular mode of urban development has been resisted.

San Francisco has been destroyed and rebuilt through an array of booms and catastrophes, including the discovery of gold, earthquakes and a volatile economy enabled by technological innovation and decimated by dot com bubbles. The transportation and urban infrastructure spans from the Golden Gate Bridge through to Alcatraz. The capacity to move around the city is enabled by not only two airports, but the Bay and Golden Gates bridges, the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system, cable cars and buses. One hundred wineries flow through to the Napa Valley, along with an intellectual history continued to this day by free walking tours of the city guided by the San Francisco Public Library. Even symbols of diversity and activism originate in the city. The rainbow flag first appeared in the San Francisco's Gay and Lesbian Freedom Day Parade, designed by Gilbert Baker and first appearing in 1978.

With all these advantages, differences and distinctions, what makes San Francisco 'bohemian' is tethered to North Beach. Lawrence Ferlinghetti remember that “when I arrived overland by train in January 1951, it didn't take me long to discover that in Italian, bohemian North Beach, I had fallen into a burning bed of anarchism, pacifism, and a wide open, non-academic poetry scene, provincial but liberating” (Ferlinghetti in Morgan and Peters, 2006, xi). The combination of words - 'provincial but liberating' - is odd, but captures the arc of success for not only the Beats, but North Beach. City Lights is important to the bohemian history of San Francisco. Helene Goupil and Josh Krist termed it “ground zero for the nascent movement, serving as publishing house, hangout spot and reading space. It is still the matriarch of independent bookstores in San Francisco” (2005, 117). The first all paperback bookstore in the United States, it has a courageous history (and popular cultural fame) derived from the publication of Alan Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems*. While the first edition was printed in England, the second edition was taken by US Customs in March 1957. After printing the next edition in the United States to remove Customs from control over the publication, Ferlinghetti and City Lights Bookstore manager Shigyoshi Murao were arrested for selling 'obscene' material. Judge Horn confirmed that the book was not obscene, but the trial brought fame to City Lights Bookstore and a reputation of edgy and challenging literature emerging from San Francisco. This fame was mobilized, honed and developed by Ferlinghetti. Nancy Peters realized,

Ferlinghetti, who never considered himself a beat writer, saw the group as part of a larger, international, dissident ferment. His idea was to encourage crosscurrents and cross-fertilizations among writers and thinkers from different cultures and communities both in the books sold at the store and in its publications programme (1998, 212).



Photo 3. Activism and Commerce

Ferlinghetti has verified Peters' point, attacking the easy nostalgia of the San Francisco beats. He wants difference, defiance and innovation. He stated, "it's such an old story now. You know, I think people ought to stop resurrecting this dead decade from thirty years ago" (Ferlinghetti in Meltzer, 2001, 97). There is a reason for Ferlinghetti's critique and it layers new modes of bohemia over the Beat history.

A dissenting history enables bohemia, but it requires continual renewal of energy and denizens. Richard DeLeon recognized that

San Francisco is an agitated city, a city of fissions and fusions, a breeder of change and new urban meanings. It is the spawning ground of social movements, policy innovations, and closely watched experiments in urban populism and local economic democracy (1992, 2).

City Lights remains unchained and the business continues to develop through a series of events organized by Peter Maravelis.<sup>2</sup> The

top floor is still used for poetry readings, matched by the basement's innovative selection and presentation of nonfiction. Bill Morgan described City Lights as "the head, heart, and undersoul to literary San Francisco for half a century" (2003, 1). This bookshop provides the fodder, context and information to think about democracy, activism and social change. Even the exterior of the shop is an urban skin that conveys ideas to pedestrians walking along Columbus Avenue. The nod to the beats remains on the windows of the lower floors

The link between old and new, history and political renewal dialogues, clashes and creates the spark of innovation and development. It is seen from the public windows of City Lights, but it runs along Columbus Avenue. The next section questions how this history and ideology of bohemia is branded and how activism is commodified through strategies for city imaging and creative industries.



Photo 4. City Lights remembering and selling the Beats

## I'm with the brand

The etymology of the word brand – ‘brandr’ from the ancient Norse – captures a strand of this complex history. Branding was a mechanism to confirm ownership and difference. Clifton and Simmons stated that, “early man stamped ownership on his livestock and with the development of early trade buyers would use brands as a means of distinguishing between the cattle of one farmer and another” (2003, 13-14). Hallmarking laws branded objects made of particular metals, furniture, pottery and tapestry. This tendency to brand – and to increase the consumerist value of the brand – increased through the 19<sup>th</sup> century with Quaker Oats, Kodak, Coca-cola and Singer sewing machines all emerging (Clifton and Simmons, 2003, 15). Brands started to form through a combination of names, logos and designs. These three factors are described by Holt as “material markers” (2004, 3). The key is to connect these elements of material culture with

history, ideology and identity. The goal of the branding ‘strategy’ through the twentieth century was consistency, to ensure a tether between an ideology of Fordist mass production and mass consumption. Local markets extended into a national and then global profile. Branding was a mode of international differentiation to increase profits. Holt confirmed that,

“in the past 20 years, neoliberal globalization has brought about a shift in the economic role of branding ... multinational companies now view branding as a more consequential strategic activity that can have an enormous impact on their bottom line” (2004, 299).

Branding began as a way to mark production. By the end of the twentieth century, it became a way to market consumption. Through the twenty first century, the alignment between identity and branding increased. Moor confirmed that, “brands and logos are all around us, from the



clothes we wear and the objects we put in our homes, to the hoardings that line our streets and the adverts that cover buses, taxis and trains" (2007, 1). It is important to distinguish between branding and advertising. Branding is an enabler of effective advertising, or can destroy an effective campaign. Advertising can enhance a brand, ensuring that it connects production and consumption. Levine confirms that, "it is sometimes difficult for people outside the business to understand [branding], because they confuse it with advertising" (2003, 9). Instead, branding and advertising dialogue. They are not synonyms. Celia Lury's work on branding for example, shows the complex engagements between producers and designers, the manufacturing process, technological development and consumers (2004). She describes it as "not a matter of certainty, but rather an object of possibility" (2004, 2). The brand coordinates a series of relationships between an idea, object and a consumer. How such a theory and history operates in urban environments is a productive new area of research. In the case of branding cities – and creating a city imaging strategy – the process requires much more than advertising. It necessitates a whole of government approach to policy making, media, tourism, sport and popular culture.

Randall's categories to evaluate a successful brand are best suited to city imaging strategies. He locates five characteristics of a well configured brand.

1. It must be clear and unambiguous so that it can be legally protected.
2. It operates as a summary, memory trigger and historical shorthand for the consumer.
3. It is familiar.
4. It is different from other brands.
5. It adds value, enhancing a generic product (2000, 12).

Each of these variables operates effectively in constructing city imaging strategies. They enable tourism, Florida's 'creative class' and the development of 'clusters' or 'hubs' for businesses. Branding a city not only creates expectations, but aligns a particular version of urban history with future development.

## Branding Bohemia

Bohemia is an intricate formation capturing histories of urbanity, the underground, political resistance and the avant garde. Cities tell alternative histories of artists, singers, poets, coffee drinkers and musicians. Building a relationship, tether or model between these bohemian cities is almost as complicated as ascertaining the role of bohemia in developing creative industries. Herbert Gold argued that

You can start a sentence in North Beach in San Francisco, continue it in Greenwich village, finish it in Chelsea, Saint-Germain-des Pres, or at the Blue Bird Café, and be speaking a common language (1993, 7).

A beautiful metaphor, Gold's statement also asks researchers to explore the vocabulary of this common language. Creative industries policies and strategies have a particular set of requirements for bohemia, in offering a quirky and attractive lifestyle for super-mobile, well educated creative workers. It provides a hub for innovative shopping and a cluster of interesting landmarks for tourists. But there are elements of bohemia that are more disconnected from formal education, involving "drinking, loafing, idling, and freaky" (Gold, 1993, 7).

Such connections between bohemia and urban development were sourced in the early urban regeneration research from the 1980s. The goal was to concentrate and conflate cultural production and consumption to create a hub or cluster (Bell and Jayne, 2004). A range of writers, such as Granovetter (1985), Piore and Sabel (1984), and Powell (1990) studied how the environment of a city – the specificity of place – facilitated a productive economic environment that could be marketed, branded and enable further development. In the next stage, researchers such as Hall (2000), Pratt (2000) and Scott (2000) started to differentiate between creative industries 'clusters' and other forms of industrial clusters. They researched much more ambiguous, floating 'creative' infrastructure, anchored by words such as 'quarters,' 'precincts,' 'hubs' and 'clusters.' Such studies attempted to align the



Photo 5. Building history, or history on buildings

ambiguous definitions and applications of 'art,' 'culture' and 'creativity' with urban environments and create a tether to economic development. The characteristic of this research was recognition of the blurring between public and private, work and leisure, production and consumption, image and regeneration.<sup>3</sup> The way to make this argument – and provide evidence for it – is to spatialize it. As Zukin's research confirms (1982; 1991; 1995), gentrification only captures part of this story. It is not a question of loft conversion or the opening of coffee shops. Bohemian regions of a city have a much longer history beyond their transitory use as physical evidence of social difference in the creative industries literature. Lloyd realized this longer history is being used in new ways, exhibited in Manchester's Northern Quarter, Chicago's Wicker Park and Nottingham's Lace Market. These areas – through intentional policy making rather than accidents of history – conflate cultural businesses with goals for social improvement (Lloyd, 2006).

Brands for all products, even if that product is a city, are a form of economic, social and marketing shorthand. They are a way to translate a local and specific case into general and applicable knowledge. A brand is an organizing social grammar that – at its most economically productive – connects consumerism with identity. Brands differentiate between ideas and goods and

become part of a communication system. Clothes are just fabric. Mobile telephones are plastic and metal. Cities are chrome, concrete and transportation systems. Branding attempts to align a product with an experience, while simultaneously enabling differentiation from other products and experiences. To be able to link bohemia to a particular space or city requires not only a particular history and geography, but the marketing of these differences in a continual and self-referential fashion.

A branded city through bohemia situates the streets, buildings and citizens into a semiotic system that markets dissent, play, resistance and quirky capitalism. It is much less tethered to activism and political action. Instead, it is self-referential, creating markings and signs on trains, bus shelters and public buildings. The surfaces of the landscape transform, creating an odd relationship between the lived experience of a city and the branded aspiration for tourists.

Joseph Heath and Andre Potter, in *The Rebel Sell* (2005), showed how 'alternative' culture was not a threat to the system, but is the system. A convincing argument, this monograph has been underutilized in the creative literature and offers an innovative alternative reading to the Bohemian Index. The function of dissent and resistance to capitalism and economic development becomes clearer. North Beach – and its

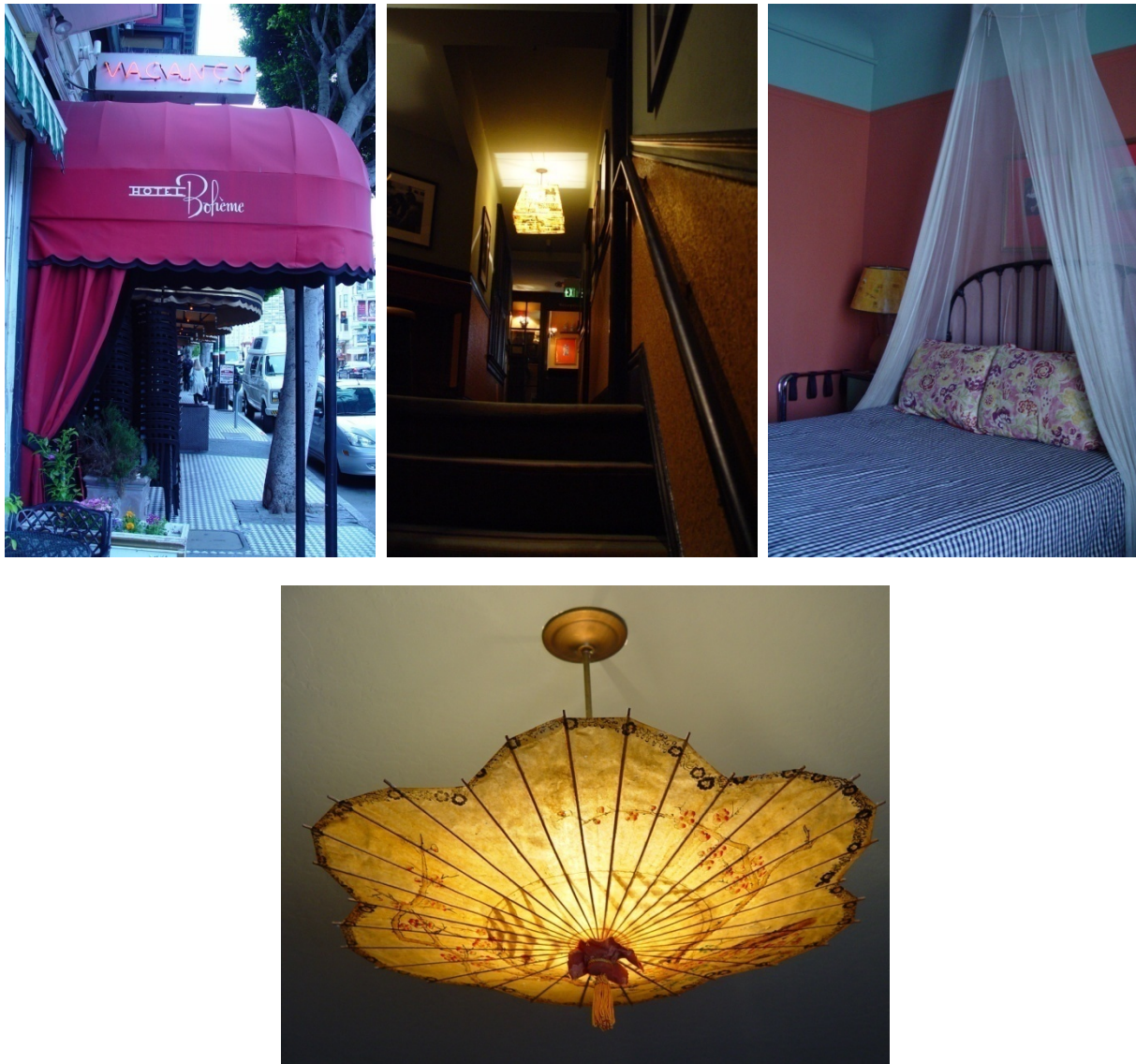


Photo 6. Hotel Bohème

marketing for tourists – is probably the best international example of the ‘Rebel Sell’ of bohemia in city imaging. City planners are able to transform the innovations and differences derived from the creative industries, the Beat literature and alternative music, to create a distinct city image.

The reason that branding and anti-branding in city imaging is increasingly important is because other modes of building and reinforcing an identity have declined. Family structures change, peer groups are increasingly socially mobile and work is more unstable. While John Urry created a powerful portfolio of ideas around mobility studies, after September 11 and the security rituals and immigration restrictions in place to counter

terrorism, immobility studies may be more appropriate. Such a realization increases the role of a branded bohemia. While mobility for all workers and citizens declines – or at least becomes more arduous through restricted immigration processes – bohemia becomes a marketing device, a place to visit and a product to consume, rather than a location in which to live. This is a different deployment of bohemia, when compared to Richard Florida’s determination in 2002. This is the Bohemian Index 2.0. It is not about attracting and holding the ‘super mobile creative core,’ but enabling a branded city image for tourists and consumers. The bonds of class, race, gender, sexuality and age are tenuous and unstable. Modes of inclusion and exclusion



become increasingly volatile. Sharing a logo or brand signifies shared social environments or social interests.

Bohemia is a brand that is built on ideologies of authenticity. In North Beach, there are authentic connections between history, location, politics and culture. There is also a marketing of this environment and a branding of bohemia, rather than a reconstruction of activism. For example, within a short walk of City Lights Books is the Hotel Boheme. Throughout the building there are nods to the Beats. The design is moody, brooding and re-configures a 1950s of a nostalgic imagining. The advertising brochure is clear in its location "in the heart of North Beach" (Hotel Boheme, 2010). It is not tethered to San Francisco or the United States. Nostalgia for the 1950s is better with backlight. Hotel Boheme has capitalized on its location in the heart of North Beach, in the heart of Columbus Avenue. The nation, or even city, is less relevant.

In an age of terrorist fear, concerns about immigration, the rise of nationalist groups, branding Bohemia is more important than living (in) it. As the spaces of acceptable differences retract, and discussions about multiculturalism are decentred, it is safer to advertise histories of difference rather than create new ones. North Beach remains a place where the myriad definitions and applications of bohemia live and dialogue. Capitalism operates differently on Columbus Avenue, but it is still capitalism. The key to North Beach's success - and exemplified by City Lights - is that the contradictions of 'The Rebel Sell' have been managed. The management of these contradictions is due to the efforts of Ferlinghetti who had the commitment to publish *Howl* and defend it, but was able to capitalize on that courage for over half a century. Any Index - Bohemia or otherwise - will trail behind such innovation, vision and courage.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For examples of this influence, please refer to Florida and Mellander (2009); Isserman, Feser and Warren (2009); Ho (2009); Knox-Hayes

(2009); Weller (2008); Florida, Mellander and Stolarick (2008); Sands and Reese (2008); Wojan, Lambert and McGranahan (2007); Thomas and Darnton (2006); Markusen and Schrock (2006); Ottaviano and Peri (2006); Polese (2005); Pollard (2004).

<sup>2</sup> A sonic documentary, including an interview with Peter Maravelis and his objectives for event management at City Lights, was constructed by Tara Brabazon (2009).

<sup>3</sup> To view this type of work, please refer to Mommaas (2004), Mommaas (2008), Montgomery (2007) and Roodhouse (2006).

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