Urban Dimensions of Creative Clustering:
Mix/Adaptation/Networks/Ambivalence

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Abstract: While it has long been understood that creative industries cluster within particular neighbourhoods in most cities, there has been little research on the particular urban characteristics and morphologies of those neighbourhoods. To what degree and in what ways do factors such as building types, public/private interfaces, density, mix, walkability and network permeability make a difference to the process of creative clustering? Why do creative clusters emerge within some specific urban morphologies and not others? This paper is based on a series of in-depth interviews with cultural producers in a range of fields including included design, new media, visual and performing arts, working in key creative clusters in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. It explores the ways these cultural producers experience and understand the urban dimensions of creative clustering. Within a framework of assemblage thinking we argue for a set of synergies that we summarize as MANA: mix, adaptation, networks and ambivalence. This is not a list nor a formula but a multiplicity of intersecting factors. 'Mix' involves the productive effect of juxtaposed differences – a mix of social, formal and functional mixes. 'Adaptation' is the capacity for both forms and functions to change incrementally and continuously. 'Networks' involve a capacity for connectivity at multiple scales from the walkable neighbourhood to the larger metropolis. 'Ambivalence' is a sense of a being driven in contradictory directions at once – a both/and condition, a double-logic where the formalities of urban governance co-exist with informalities of creativity and innovation. The creative cluster is a socio-spatial assemblage wherein these conditions work together and properties referred to as 'buzz', 'atmosphere' and 'character' are emergent effects of these synergies.

INTRODUCTION

There are not many large cities where one cannot find neighbourhoods within the inner city that can be characterized as creative clusters - creative quarters, districts or milieux that attract cutting edge activities of various kinds from studios, galleries, theatres and music venues, through fashion, architecture and design to film, media, technology and science. They often link to former industrial areas on the fringe of downtown. They may have a long history as artisan quarters or be near to major universities. Some have developed rapidly within a post-industrial landscape, others become gentrified and such industries and activities are displaced to other parts of the city.

Jacobs' (1961) most famous insights into how cities work are largely based on her neighbourhood of Greenwich Village which was at that time one of the world's most productive creative clusters. The sidewalks and morphologies she studied were home to some of the most creative figures of twentieth century art and culture from Dylan Thomas to Bob Dylan. Greenwich Village remains interesting but much of its creative activity has migrated to cheaper parts of New York and elsewhere, a result of the very forces Jacobs identified as the 'self-destruction of diversity'. In her later work on urban economics Jacobs (1969) provides a larger context for understanding the role of cities in a global economy. While geographic location as a port or major crossroads can be crucial to the economy of cities, import replacement through creative innovation is the engine of urban growth. In her 1985 book 'Cities and the Wealth of Nations' Jacobs takes this further to argue that the wealth of nations derives from the vitality of its cities (Jacobs, 1985).

The most popular theorist who has picked up and developed this strain of Jacobs' thinking is Florida (2002, 2005) who argues that as wealthier cities have moved to a knowledge-based information economy - from the manufacture of things to the production of information, branding and symbolic capital - creative producers come to occupy key economic roles in both technical and artistic fields. Creative industry sectors include music, theatre, fashion, design, advertising, architecture, graphics, painting, film, digital media, gaming, software, information technology, photography and science. They are linked to universities and scientific innovation in a range of industry sectors. These sectors are then seen to be attracted to some cities more than others and then to cluster around specific quarters within those cities. For Florida this attraction is at once

economic and social. With a penchant for slogans he talks about 'plug and play' communities where high-technology and lifestyle opportunities come together: creative classes are attracted to places that mesh the '3Ts' of technology, talent and tolerance. Tolerance of difference ensures that talent is recognized regardless of social class, race, age, gender or sexuality.

The clustering of particular trades, services and industries in certain urban neighbourhoods is as old as cities. Marshall (1890) was the first economist to argue for the economic advantages of industry clustering including a ready supply of labour, shorter distances and enhanced competition. Jacobs (1969) later suggested that innovation relies on spillovers between different industries and fields. The knowledge-based economy is not simply sustained by access to information but also by access to tacit knowledge – what Marshall dubs 'something in the air' - that can be gained only through intensive informal immersion in face-to-face communities. Tacit knowledge flows best in an intensive urbanity defined as random encounter with difference; one never knows which difference will make a difference. While formal knowledge is quantified and coded, transmitted in training and educational programs, informal or tacit knowledge is picked up on the streets and in coffee breaks (Storper and Venables 2004; Rantisi and Leslie 2006). The city becomes a school where knowledge spreads by osmosis.

Thus some cities and clusters within them become 'sticky' in the sense that creative firms become economically attached to the cluster (Markussen 1996). Creative neighbourhoods are also often claimed to be distinguished by their 'flavour', 'character' and 'authenticity' (Hutton 2006). Creative clusters have a creative 'buzz' which attracts talent and encourages innovative potential (Storper and Venables 2004) - an intensity of talk, heightened attention and expectation where ideas flow and germinate faster. Like the best universities, creative clusters are where cutting edge ideas are part of the informal ambience of the place. While often described as having the feel of a 'village' with high levels of safety and trust, creative clusters have an open sense of place where outsiders can easily be accepted (Massey 1993, Florida 2002, p. 227); the closed sense of place by contrast has a tendency to be intolerant of newcomers, new ideas and new practices.

There are many kinds of creative cluster from those primarily involved in production to those that mix production and consumption; from vertically integrated specialty clusters (such as fashion, film or science districts) to horizontally integrated districts spanning a multiplicity of industries (Evans 2009); and from bohemian sub-cultural clusters to elite institutional clusters (Indergaard 2009). However, clusters often mix production, exchange, consumption and recreation without clear divisions, and the live/work, production/consumption and sub-culture/high-culture connections are often crucial.

While words like 'buzz', 'atmosphere', 'sticky' and 'place' all describe emergent effects of creative clustering our key interest lies in articulating underlying socio-spatial properties and capacities. In a larger study we have identified and mapped creative clusters in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane (Dovey and Wood 2015, Wood and Dovey 2015). The suburbs where we identified creative clusters occurring were Surry Hills in Sydney, Fitzroy and Collingwood in Melbourne, and, Fortitude Valley in Brisbane. These study areas were identified as concentrations of creative industries. Figure 1 shows the extent of our study areas and relations to the central city, major educational institutions, public housing estates and access networks. As part of this larger study we conducted in-depth interviews with a total of 37 people working in creative industries including visual arts (painting, photography, galleries), performing arts (theatre, live music), design (fashion, architecture, graphic, furniture) and media (gaming, film, video). Interviews were subsequently transcribed and subjected to content and discourse analysis; the major themes to emerge are discussed below.

MELBOURNE: Fitzroy and Collingwood   SYDNEY: Surry Hills

BRISBANE: Fortitude Valley

KEY

- Major Education Institution
- Major Public Housing Estate
- Train line, station and 400m catchment
- Light Rail
- Freeway
- Arterial Road
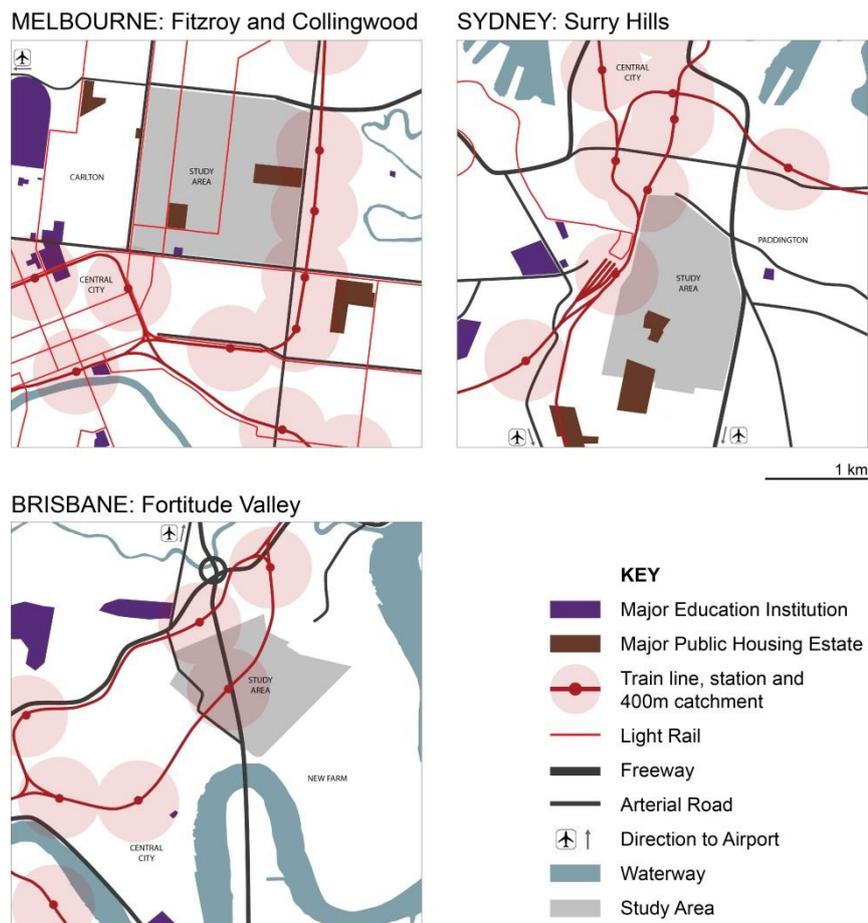- Direction to Airport
- Waterway
- Study Area

Figure 1: Study Areas in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane

The spatial characteristics of creative clusters cannot be separated from the social – this is a socio-spatial assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). It is important to note that there are many ways to cut this cake and the interconnected mix between ingredients is fundamentally important. Our goal is to make sense of the complexity in a manner that makes the interconnections coherent. While there are many possible ways to organize this data we frame it as MANA: Mix, Adaptation, Networks and Ambivalence. This is not a list nor a formula but a multiplicity of intersecting factors. 'Mix' involves the productive effect of juxtaposed differences – a mix of social, formal and functional mixes. 'Adaptation' is the capacity for both forms and functions to change incrementally and continuously. 'Networks' involve a capacity for connectivity at multiple scales from the walkable neighbourhood to the larger metropolis. 'Ambivalence' is a sense of a being driven in contradictory directions at once – a both/and condition, a double-logic where the formalities of urban governance co-exist with informalities of creativity and innovation. The creative cluster is a socio-spatial assemblage wherein these conditions work together and properties referred to as 'buzz', 'atmosphere', 'stickiness' and 'character' are emergent effects of these synergies.

MIX
Mix encompasses the ways alliances are created when differences are juxtaposed. While drawing upon Jacobs' identification of mixed-use as a primary condition of urban efficiency and productivity, here we encounter a mix of mixes – socio-economic, functional and morphological.

Social Mix
Each of the neighbourhoods we studied has a relatively high level of mixing of social classes, evident in the co-existence of public housing with gentrification but also in the range of shops and services. Residents can be loosely, if simplistically, categorized into gentrifiers, bohemian/youth and welfare/disadvantaged. Into this mix come visitors of various ages and classes who are primarily

consumers of the place and its products. The arts based community (including our interviewees) spans the bohemian/gentrifier divide. Interviewees suggest a population that is tolerant of difference and values the differences of class and ethnicity on the streets. These neighbourhoods are former working class areas associated with industrial production; the public housing and their social support networks have been added. Attitudes among interviewees towards both social mix and public housing were overwhelmingly positive yet they are seen as under threat: '*I find it a great relief that there are still a range of people here rather than just a homogenised set of latte drinkers …*'

The interviews revealed a widespread sensitivity to social disadvantage and a commitment to help. Many arts enterprises run programs designed to integrate disadvantaged populations yet there is seen to be very little integration. The social mix can produce an edginess in public space: '*You know how to protect yourself, how to interact with what is going on … like looking over your shoulder periodically, trying not to make eye contact with certain people at certain times of the day.*' One interviewee says: '*I don't think it [public housing] makes a difference at all. With the café culture… I don't think it matters at all.*' This is a discourse of tolerance rather than mutual benefit, where the 'café culture' is presumed to be central. There is a widespread view that the presence of public housing dampens property values: '*it's great because it keeps the rent down… thank God for the public housing.*'

This tolerance of a welfare class can be contrasted with a valuing of bohemian youth cultures: '*It is kind of on the cusp of where everything is happening. The creativity, the drugs, the sex, the nightclubs, everything is a bit more, a bit more intensity - I think it is pretty intense here…*' The bohemian cohort is identified with the young and with risk taking, often seen to be the fount of new ideas: '*The kids are the backdrop, they are the interesting ones, the dynamic ones who are providing the music, the art and stuff like that, and it is just nice to be around that*'. While the 'kids' add the edge to gentrified consumption, there are also tensions, especially around live music: '*drunk, crazy partying people, that's good but it is also bad - you don't want to be right in the middle of that with a contemporary art gallery*'. It is between these cultures of edgy production and creative arts consumption that art gallery proprietors want to be: '*we like being between those two cultures*'.

The social mix is linked by some to authenticity: '*you feel like you are part of a real part of the world*' and '*… it is not totally renovated and all the [poor] people have been kicked out and condos put up. It is still a real area.*' The displacement of creative activities due to gentrification is a big issue for many interviewees. There are many dimensions to the gentrification process: consumption displaces production, restaurants and food culture displaces everyday retailing; commercial firms displace start-ups; up-market housing displaces cheap housing; large new buildings displace small derelict ones; tourists and visitors displace locals.

> '*it is a never ending cycle of the artists find somewhere to go; they create the art, then the area gets gentrified. But the artists will find a way, they'll move, create a new vibe somewhere else. It's cyclic, it moves around.*'

The cluster is seen to attract those who want to be near the bohemian creativity but only at arms length:

> '*You do get these somewhat snobby property developers, they love being around here because they live in their fantastic warehouse conversion with all the high-tech equipment, and they love the area because it is so cool and funky and edgy, but behind closed doors they can't stand the young tattooed artists - I was a guest in a house and heard that!... they loved the food, the shops, but didn't want the people.*'

A consumption lifestyle replaces a production lifestyle with both competing for the same building types.

> *'Even little daggy pubs … are now kind of filled with… white-collar workers. We talk about this a lot and we decided that they work in HR and property development, that was the type of people that they are.'*

In general terms our project supports the literature that suggests creative clusters are formed of richly interconnected but weak ties in networks that are open to outsiders. However, there is some evidence here of more closed forms of social capital:

> *'I think everything in this area happens by word of mouth, like if you need to find a house, I just got my room by word of mouth. I think creative people stick together, keep to themselves and are less likely to let other people in.'*

Functional Mix

These clusters embody a very high level of functional mix incorporating residential, retail, industrial, commercial, education and community uses – often within the same streetscape. There is a widespread view that the functional mix has a synergy that becomes an attraction for both producers and consumers; for one gallery owner the functional mix is:

> *'the basic stuff that makes art precincts work. In terms of attracting your customers they can come here have a look, go and get a coffee, go the bookshop, do that. It makes the mix far more attractive, more of a destination.'*

The attraction of such a mix is also linked to the sociality of the place:

> *'people like to cluster together because they feel like they belong to a community, they feel like they are part of something… The offspring of that clustering is that you'll get things associated with the things that these people like, furniture shops, bars, interior shops, restaurants, design shops… What brings all these people together is the like-minded tribe, the like-minded taste.'*

Note that in this quote all of the examples of the 'offspring' are sites of 'like-minded' consumption – the functional mix has become detached from social mix and services social conformity. The valued mix is not just any kind of mix but excludes certain ingredients; there is an opposition to chain stores and shopping malls where the ingredients of the mix are dependent components of a global hierarchy:

> *'When you walk down the street and you go and get a coffee, you are getting a coffee from the person who owns the place, it is not homogenised, there's no Macca's around here.'*

While functional mix at the neighbourhood scale is now widely understood and promoted, in creative clusters production, consumption, exchange and recreation are often mixed within the same building or space, perhaps with different time rhythms. A mix of home/work is relatively common in the form of residential/production or residential/retail. The home/work mix often has an economic justification, particularly with creative start-ups: '[it is] *difficult to afford to pay rent at home and studio when just starting out, so a lot of it is clandestine…*' A good deal of creative production is hidden within what is ostensibly housing and housing is also hidden within spaces that are ostensibly commercial: '*lot of shops off the side streets where kids have got studios, and they are probably living there as well.*' This can become vital to creative production:

> *'Most of my team lives in the warehouse! That is what makes it happen. It is a collective community. It means that we always have time, it is always in our face. No one can slack off and go and live their own life with their boyfriend, or girlfriend, or their job and forget about it!'*

ADAPTATION

The existence of post-industrial building types has long been a noted characteristic of creative clusters and is affirmed in this study. Warehouse and factory shells are widely seen as attractive, especially for the visual arts and design industries due to their flexibility and adaptability:

> *'I just love those warehouses, even though they are just a few walls and a tin roof, you can do so much with them, especially when it comes to showing art …they are easily dividable into artist spaces'*

The aesthetic attraction is partly that of spatially open interiors flooded with natural light:: *'I like to feel spacious - spaciousness, light, openness, where there is a flow of openness – I like that'*. The flows of space can also be linked to the flow of ideas: *'The high ceilings give you a sense of space and you can think within it.'* This sense of spatial openness is also seen to carry over to forms of social and professional life:

> *'The internal layout here is very important, having the big open space. And this was about everyone having access to (natural) light, all being on one level and avoiding being hierarchical; it suits our office structure, for talking socially and professionally with each other.'*

The practice of adaptive subletting is closely associated with post-industrial buildings: *'People take up entire floors under one name then sublet for lots of different other companies… Subletting is huge in warehouse spaces...'* This enables creative firms to emerge, expand and contract as well as connect with like-minded firms:

> *'Here we rent studio spaces out… there is three spaces that we sublet and a creative hotdesk… We like subletting because it helps the productive environment.'*

> *'…the space was constantly shifting… someone would move out, and then the person next to them would get an extra metre.'*

Subletting can connect different creative industries; one property owner curated a creative cluster involving live music, café, guitar shop, recording studio, gallery and offices. A gallery owner says: *'Here we have the three separate rooms, and we can have three artists, and you make sure that each show links, but there are different voices within the space'*.

There is a crucial economic dimension to the adaptation of post-industrial buildings which are often somewhat derelict with cheap rent: *'We initially moved here because [it] was pretty grotty... This in fact was a burnt out shell, this building. It had been a squat…'* Some interviewees are on constant lookout for new cheap spaces: 'As soon as you see five shops for lease in a row, that is the area that you want to be in.' Dereliction is often valued as a capacity for physical adaptation:

> *'What I quite like about the space is it is quite robust. It has a concrete floor that you can drill into, if you drill holes in the wall you can repair them, so it is quite flexible in that way… it hasn't been… developed in a very beautiful polished wooden floors way, it is a robust space that you can take an axe to if you need to, and we do!'*

The grunginess of the building can be a part of the image that is cultivated by some cultural producers: *'we've got that beautiful big rusty iron door that slams shut and is hard to open, the stairs are nice, clunky metal, you can hear people coming up... I feel like I am part of a funky design firm'.* Yet as cultural producers move up-market the dereliction becomes less attractive: *'We outgrew it, not in size, but in level of finish. You have to have a certain standard for some clients, and this place is a lot cleaner.'*

Street Interfaces
A major focus for adaptation is the public/private interface – generally to open up the entrance of industrial buildings to become more visible from the street. One gallery owner says *'…this new glass entrance… made it less intimidating, because you could see in'.* In another the loading dock

has become the reception. Different creative industries value different kinds of interface with public space networks – some need the shopfront while others value privacy. There are a significant number of arts-related events that take place across the public/private interface as one music promoter puts it: *'If we have a big night, everyone is out on the street out here, and it is very visible that the place is doing good business, so I think that is really important.'* The street is often deployed as part of a gallery opening or event: *'…we wouldn't have the roller door open all day. But we do have it open for openings at night, which means a greater social dynamism, that flow through from smokers on the street to inside.'*

Those who do not depend on a shopfront often prefer to be close to the street without being directly on it:

> *'I like being up here and away from it… If I am working on a project I am not very good with being interrupted, and I certainly don't like being watched while I am working. … I like to be up high and observe, to be able to look out and see people moving around ….'*

There are few high-rise buildings in these districts and there is something of an aversion to being more than 4-5 floors from the street. Those in the music business sometimes prefer to be slightly hidden from the street, whether above or below it:

> *'… it is an attraction because it is a basement. It adds to the mystique, to walk downstairs and walk into a cavern like existence is an attraction to people.'*

> *'no one could see it or knew where it was, you had to know someone to come up, and it created this kind of buzz'*

> *'It's a mystery kind of thing…. All along these streets you don't know what's going on behind those walls, but you know that something interesting is happening'*

NETWORKS

Access networks are a crucial component of these creative clusters with a primary focus on walkable proximity to a broad range of attractions.

> *'our graphic designer is just up the road, a whole lot of the agents are just around the corner, the union [arts industry] is just down the road, there is a sense that our sort of community is very much around here'.*

> *'We don't really need to go anywhere else… everyone who works in the club scene, DJ's, promoters, designers, they all live around here.'*

Walkable access networks are seen as an economic benefit to both production and consumption:

> *'more than ten galleries would be in walking distance… it means that you get a demographic flow through, it is really good for art tours.'*

> *"[the fashion designer] whose studio is here, he lives [nearby], the photographer is up the street, his friends who are his models live around, so it is just so fantastic. It could be detrimental if you moved out."*

Note the repetition of phrases such as 'around the corner', 'up the street' and 'down the road'. Walkable networks are often described in terms of an overlapping mix of suppliers, peers, clients and friends with food and drink playing a key role:

> *'If we can take prospective clients, or current clients to a coffee shop, to coffee shops that feel like they are part of the same culture that we are, that's really important.'*

> *'I had friends in the area… And I saw how they had opened shops, and they are the same generation as me and they had also started with limited funds and built them up slowly, but I had seen how their businesses had thrived and they were able to open other shops, and I thought there is something about opening a shop in this area'*

Figure 2 shows a mapping of these networks across each of the case studies (Wood and Dovey 2015). Our interest in the walkable connections between these activities led us to develop what might be termed walkable intensity maps - or WIMs - formed by lines connecting all activities closer than 400 metres as the crow flies. Thus, clusters were represented by the roughly walkable interconnections between activities. While pedestrians are not crows, in these highly permeable neighbourhoods this is a loose correlate for five minute walkability. What is at stake here is a visual understanding of spatial clustering and potential networks, rather than exactitude. These are maps of potential (rather than actual) face-to-face contact, of the intensity of spatial clustering at the walkable scale, of potential accessibility. This network connectivity extends to larger scales beyond these walkable neighbourhoods –they are connected into public transport and road networks at metropolitan scales (Figure 1) and are all within about 20 minutes of major international airports.
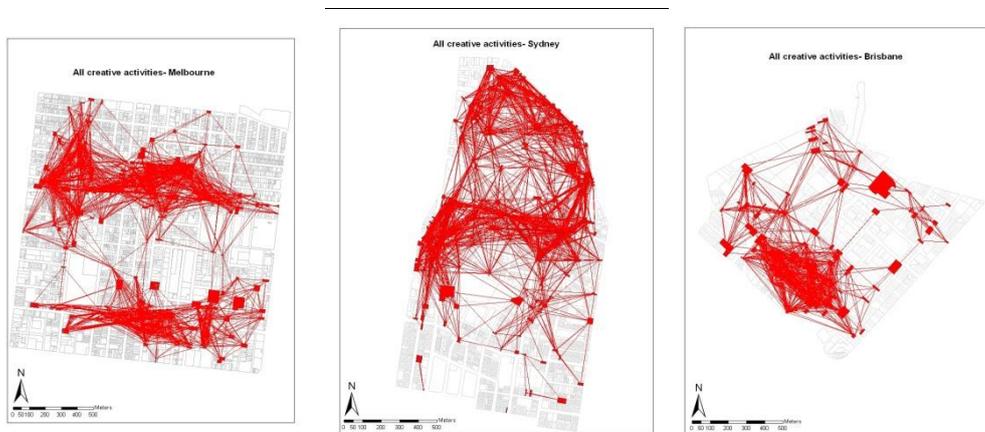

Figure 2: Mapping walkable networks

AMBIVALENCE

The property of ambivalence that we identify in these creative clusters - the double logic or both/and condition of embodying contradictory forces – has a range of dimensions but is most closely geared to regimes of control where the formalities of urban governance co-exist with informalities of creativity and innovation. Interviewees often suggest that government should do more to encourage and protect creative enterprises, to stop the displacement of creative start-ups and even to impose rent control. Yet there is opposition to formal regulations that inhibit creativity and impose prohibitive costs.

> *'I think there is over regulation. I don't think they understand what contemporary art making is about.'*

> *'Let us self-govern a bit I guess. If you … have a place that is a shithole, and a group of artists have moved in and made it a beautiful place, well let them do that… it is not anarchy, it is community.'*

Some interviewees called for what amounts to different rules for creative activity, and there is evidence of what might be called ambivalent governance within these creative clusters.

> *'We have a big festival coming up at the end of the year… It won't be council sanctioned, it will be in the lane, we want to shut it off. There will be alcohol in the street, but I will be inviting the CEO of (local Council) and other people, and they will come, and they won't say anything, and they will enjoy it.'*

> *'Council turns a blind eye - they enjoy what I am doing and are keeping an eye on it. This is community building right here, and I think they just want to see what happens, because they like it.'*

Here the double logic of flexible governance means 'keeping an eye on it' while turning a 'blind eye'.

Ambivalence is a tension between contradictory forces and there are a range of other examples in these clusters. They are heavily gentrified but remain somewhat seedy; relatively dense yet low-rise; well connected but also embody protected walkable streets. They have high levels of adaptability yet resist transformational change. They are edgy places, literally on the edge of, yet identified as other to, the central city - not slick enough for the suits. These clusters are at once transparent and hidden – much of the production, exchange and consumption is on conspicuous display, yet much is also hidden or camouflaged in spaces that need no signage or may be illegal. They are marked by a slippages of function between home/work, work/play and production/exchange/reproduction. In these ways and many others these neighbourhoods become incubators of creative activities that transgress boundaries and embody twofold conditions: informal/formal, rich/poor, local/global, identity/difference.

MANA

The understanding of creative clusters is a highly problematic enterprise, we can't claim any more than a few steps here and there can be no easy or clear conclusions. MANA is an acronym for the synergies and intensities that emerge when such urban assemblages are mixed, adapted and networked in ambivalent ways. All of the ingredients in MANA are 'between' categories – mix is a mix between different people, practices and buildings; adaptation is a process of one form or practice becoming another; networks are connections between people and places; ambivalence is between contradictory forces. The 'buzz', 'atmosphere', 'stickiness' or 'character' of creative clusters emerges when these alliances and liaisons between spaces and social practices do their magic. Of course 'Mana' is also a Polynesian word that identifies a form of magic power embodied in both people and the material world.

From our conceptual framework of assemblage thinking these clusters are multiplicities of people, practices, buildings, spaces, networks and forms of governance. These dimensions clearly cannot be seen in isolation from each other because they are in loose alliances and synergies – they co-function. The creative cluster is clearly not a singularity or totality that can be mobilised and reproduced through a Creative City policy nor any kind of urban design or planning formulae. The 'atmosphere' or 'character' of the cluster is an intensity produced by the multiplicity. These are places where creativity becomes contagious, they are at once incubators of new ideas and practices and rhizomic networks that spread them. The important relations are those of co-functioning rather than causation; creative practices do not derive from these urban morphologies any more than the morphology derives from the creativity. To focus on the 'buzz', 'atmosphere' or 'character' is to describe the emergent effect or 'sense' of the place but it does not show how it works. It works through the intensive co-functioning interconnections between different people, practices, identities, spaces and built forms.

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