
MEDIA GEOGRAPHY AT MAINZ

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Comic Book Geographies

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For my father, Kenneth Dittmer (1927–2012)

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LIVE/WORK: PORTLAND, OREGON AS A PLACE FOR COMICS CREATION

People are nonplussed when they find out you draw comics here.

"Well, yeah. Who doesn't?"

Everyone does.

David Hahn (writer-artist, *Private Beach, The Allnighter*)
In *Comic Book City, Portland, Oregon USA* (2012)

INTRODUCTION

Over the past quarter of a century – give or take – Portland, Oregon (USA) has become a 'place to be' for comics creators. Unlike other such places, notably New York City, which is a center for the global publishing industry and home base for both Marvel and DC Comics, Portland's attractiveness for comics writers and artists is not grounded in a well-established industrial economy. That lack raises interesting questions as to why and how Portland is not only host to a critical mass of comics creators, but one that continues to grow.

In my documentary film, *Comic Book City, Portland, Oregon USA* (2012), I construct a representation of the city as a place for comics creation based on interviews primarily with writers and artists, but also publishers, editors, and editorial staff, who have chosen to live and work in Portland. In this chapter, I highlight key aspects of this representation and elaborate on the broader contexts for understanding the significance of the city for people in this field. While comics creation and comics creators can be located in relation to broad categories such as the creative class (FLORIDA 2002) or "neo-bohemia" (LLOYD 2006), in both this chapter and in my documentary I emphasize the particularity of the relationships between people and place in Portland. Indeed, the city's attractiveness for comics writers and artists is indicative of the ways in which Portland is deployed both as an exemplar of development models derived from broader discourses on cities and creativity (see, for example, FLORIDA 2005, PECK 2005), and as a cautionary case (RUSSELL 2011, SILPAYAMANANT 2012).

I begin with a brief discussion of how the documentary was conceived and made. In the section that follows, I look at the broader historical and geographic contexts for comics creation as an industry and for the (re)location of creators to Portland in particular. From this general overview, I move to a more specific examination of what my research suggests as to why writers and artists have been

relocating to Portland and why they choose to stay. In the conclusion, I consider the permanence or durability of the city's comics scene.

THE FILM

Comic Book City began as a way for me to intertwine my cultural geographic interests in place with my interests in film study. I began making short films in 2005, primarily as a way to experiment with concepts of the frame, the shot, and, especially, editing. These are aspects of filmmaking that DEAR (2011) would refer to as, "the creativity of place" in art, or, "the ways in which space itself is an artifact in the creative practice or output, as when a dancer moves an arm through an arc or a photographer crops an image to create a representational space" (9). In other words, I undertook these films as formal experiments related to film theory, and not with the intent of exploring and representing cultural relations of people in place. However, when I turned my attention to possible feature-length works, I sought to address those relationships as well.

I was doing this thinking in 2007, and likely as a result of looking for a suitable topic or theme, I started to notice the number of creative ties between comics I was reading and Portland, notably that publishers and many of the individual creators were based in the city. I also noticed that these ties crossed lines between kinds of comics: web and print, monthly serials and graphic novels, corporate and creator-owned.

My initial investigations suggested that comics in Portland would be a promising topic for documentary work. Press reports such as *Creativity and Comics Thrive in Portland*, by Chris ULLRICH at *Comic Book Resources* (2007), suggested that the city had an established reputation as a place where people go to make comics (cf. WATERHOUSE and JAMAN 2007). I also learned of the existence of Periscope Studio, an independent collective of writers and artists in downtown Portland with a current membership of twenty-seven. The presence of an independent work space like Periscope and the noted press reports, combined with what I had previously observed regarding publishers, which include Dark Horse Comics, Oni Press, and Top Shelf Productions, confirmed that there was a particular question about 'creativity in place' (DEAR 2011) to be explored between comics creators and the city of Portland.

Michael DEAR defines 'creativity in place' as, "the role that a particular location, or time-space conjunction, has in facilitating the creative process" (9). DEAR cites as examples, turn of the century Vienna, Silicon Valley and Hollywood, but his description also adheres to Portland in thinking about comics as a creative vocation and as an industry. *Comic Book City* is a representation of how comics creators understand the city as a place for making (or from which to make) comics.

As I began to shape a narrative, one focusing on those directly involved in the creative process, I decided that it would be important for the film to include commentary on Portland in historical and geographic perspective, and for that I interviewed Carl ABBOTT and Charles HEYING, both faculty in urban studies and plan-

ning at Portland State University (PSU), and Shanna Eller, at the time, a PhD student in urban studies at PSU. ABBOTT has written a number of histories of Portland (for example ABBOTT 2001; 2011), while HEYING and Eller had been working on a project examining the city's 'artisan economy' (HEYING 2010).

I conducted the on-camera interviews between April and September 2008. In addition to recording interviews during this period, I also shot footage of places and events, including the Stumptown Comics Fest, 24-Hour Comic Day at Cosmic Monkey Comics, and Periscope Studio. I also collaborated with photographers Erin Marr and Patrick Huston to create a bank of still photographs of the city and collected work samples from the featured artists to be incorporated into the film.

The finished documentary is structured around eight writer/artist interviews. I selected interviews on the basis of a subject's camera presence and to show a range of experiences and the diversity of the community, particularly in terms of sex and gender and kinds of work, that is, writing, drawing, writing and drawing, working for hire, working independently, working in long form, working in serials, web publishing and print publishing. Artist and writer sections are connected by contextual segments featuring the academics from Portland State and also broader examinations of recurring themes, including the influence of Dark Horse Comics, living without a car, and Portland's 'whiteness'. Video of locations and events, still photographs, and art samples are used to signify different aspects of the creative process, particularly as practiced in place, and qualities or attractions of the city as discussed in the featured interviews.

HISTORICAL-GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

Comics creators can be fruitfully seen as participating in what Charles HEYING calls Portland's 'artisan economy' (2010). In a general sense, HEYING defines this economy as one in which the worker engages in productive activity with, "hands, head, and heart" (40). Salient characteristics of this activity include the production of objects made: by hand, for appreciation as well as consumption, and in egalitarian fashion, without regard to the lines between high and low culture (41-44). Artisan work is defined by flexible schedules and becomes both, "an identity and a vocation" (45). The artisan economy is organized on a small scale, commonly through 'live/work' spaces like the archetypal artist's loft, and through social networks and community interactions that promote cooperative or shared learning and recognition from within the artisanal social world (46-49). HEYING locates the artisan economy in opposition to the Fordist model of mass production, mass consumption, and large scale corporate organization, and sees the emergence of artisan economies as a grassroots and creator-led adaptation to post-Fordist conditions, notably decentralization and flexible production and specialization.

As noted by HEYING (2010), the culture of comics creators in Portland reflects and reproduces key attributes of the artisan economy, particularly in the way that artists, writers, publishers, editors, readers, and shop owners constitute a mutually

supportive community. It is also the case that as work and as a creative act, making comics takes place in small spaces, in home studios, at coffee shops, at individual desks and tables in workplaces like Periscope or Dark Horse, and entails work by hand, work that is meant to, “intentionally reveal the touch of the maker, and honor the inherent qualities of the material being shaped” (HEYING 2010, 41). Notably, even in popular monthly comics like those published by Marvel and DC, the style of the artist and voice of the writer are valued attributes (and commodities) to readers and publishers (cf. WOLK 2007). As an expressive form, comics are also on the edge between the fine arts and popular culture. Doing comics well requires some of the same skills as that of a painter or writer of literature, but results in a product that is egalitarian or accessible in the way HEYING defines artisanal work (cf. NORCLIFFE and RENDANCE 2003).

The importance of handwork is one reason that comics creators are better located among HEYING’s artisans than in Richard FLORIDA’s creative class, which primarily produces ideas or concepts that are then turned into objects, or put into use, by others (2002). Comics creators certainly do conceptual and intellectual work when designing characters or making stories, but, in the end, a comic is an object, whether in paper or on a screen, one crafted by the creators, and not by someone else. It is the rare circumstance when a writer or artist would be employed solely to create an idea or concept and not to also make the comic.

In many cases, comics creators work in a way similar to those whom FLORIDA calls creative professionals, that is, workers tasked with solving particular problems, but without expectation for the origination of generally useful knowledge. That latter job belongs to those in the super-creative core of the creative class (2002). A writer or artist effectively works as a ‘creative professional’ in circumstances where they write or do art on a title owned by a publisher, or other rights holder, and where the characters are not original to the individual creator, or creators, but executing their job nonetheless requires devising particular ways of drawing a character (or characters) and their world, and placing them in new stories.

While there are writers and artists who only work on other people’s creations, and this would be common for specialists in fields like inking, coloring, and lettering, many comics creators also do original work alongside work-for-hire. As an economic class, then, comics creators are in-between the lines of stratification identified by FLORIDA, but more significantly, whether doing original work or working with others’ creations, making comics entails crafting an object, and does not stop with, or primarily involve, the production of knowledge or information meant to be transferred to other workers.

FLORIDA’s creative class is also notable for being part of the social elite and economic driving force in the cities where its members live and work (cf. PECK 2005). However, making comics is not, in and of itself, a pathway to even a comfortably middle class life, let alone a source of income that results in significant economic power. Most comics creators derive financial support and income from a variety of sources. Many do other kinds of writing or artwork, including writing straight prose or criticism, doing illustration, and making storyboards for film and

television. Some writers and artists teach part-time at colleges and universities. Sales of prints and original art is another supplemental income stream. Some have non-comics related jobs, or spouses or partners working in stable careers (cf. NORCLIFFE and RENDANCE 2003; EDROSO 2011).

While Portland features well in cultural terms from a creative class perspective – FLORIDA ranks the city at the top of a list of American cities that are ‘child-friendly’, and it also scores high on his ‘Creativity Index’ and ‘Gay Index’ (2002) – the city’s economic infrastructure does not demonstrate key qualities identified with a strong attractiveness to individuals in this class. In particular, as observed by Charles HEYING, the city lacks the “extensive venture capital system” that FLORIDA cites as critical for growing the creative economy (2010, 295–296; cf. ABBOTT 2001).

ABBOTT characterizes Portland as a “provincial city”, one where change and development happens more slowly than in comparable places such as Seattle and Las Vegas. He argues that the surrounding landscape of forests and mountains, and the frequent thick cloud cover, has cultivated “a sense of limits” (2001, 10, 12–13). This sense of limits is politically expressed in the city’s urban growth boundary and regional government, Metro, which is charged with measuring, planning, and managing the urban region’s expansion into the countryside (ABBOTT 2001).

Along the same lines, HEYING identifies a “less is more” ethic as part of the “complex moral economy” of Portland’s artisans (2010, 49–50). The limited economic prospects to be had from comics suggests not only that choosing to work in this field almost requires an embrace of ‘less is more’, but also that there are distinct advantages to living and working in a city that is, essentially, “a sort of poor person’s Bay Area” (ABBOTT 2001, 93). For example, at the time of my interviews in 2008, all but one of the eight writers and artists featured in *Comic Book City* owned homes, and the attractiveness of being able to afford the purchase of a house while still making comics is cited repeatedly by creators as a reason to be in Portland.

The need, and willingness, to live with limits, with less as more, is another characteristic that distinguishes comics creators, and Portland’s other artisans, from FLORIDA’s creative class, or, even, Richard LLOYD’s “neo-bohemians”, both of whom are defined by strong commitments to opportunity seeking and geographic mobility or to seeing locations like Portland, or Chicago’s Wicker Park in the case of LLOYD’s case study, as potential launching grounds for bigger and better places and things. In contrast to fields like the traditional visual arts, theater, or film, there is no place where comics creators go to ‘make it big’, at least not as comics creators. To the extent that Portland ‘works’ for individuals with aspirations or established careers in comics, there are seemingly few reasons to leave once roots have been planted.

In their study of North American comic book production, NORCLIFFE and RENDANCE find that the mainstream comics industry has undergone a transformation in the organization of production, dating from the 1980s, wherein centralized ‘bullpen’-styled production has been replaced by a more dispersed model of

employing freelancers who may be located in different parts of the world from each other and from the companies that employ them. These individuals are not only not kept in-house, but may never meet face-to-face or directly with editors and publishers. Major publishers, notably Marvel and DC, have become, essentially, “marketing operations” (2003, 252), selling products that are, more often than not, actually produced by strings of individuals who likely also work on titles from other companies and on their own independent and creator-owned projects. NORCLIFFE and RENDANCE note that these changes have simultaneously enabled the deconcentration of comics production from major centers like New York, and also the clustering of producers in new locations, including smaller towns and cities. The accretion of writers and artists in Portland clearly demonstrates these trends. My conversations with creators in *Comic Book City* offer a picture of why Portland has become a prominent place in the contemporary geography of comics creation.

MOVING TO PORTLAND

The individual creator featured in *Comic Book City* with the longest term of residence in Portland, writer-artist Paul Guinan (*Heartbreakers, Boilerplate*), moved to the city from Chicago, Illinois in 1992. For Guinan, and other longer term residents like Kevin Moore, (writer and artist, *In Contempt* and *Wanderlost*, moved from Buffalo, New York in 1995), a central influence on their relocation to Portland was the presence of Dark Horse Comics. This influence can be direct, in Guinan’s case his spouse had been hired as an editor by the company, or indirect. In Kevin Moore’s example, the location of Dark Horse in Milwaukie, a suburban town adjacent to Portland’s southeast side, was confirmation of his developing impression that Portland was home to an emergent comics community.

As LLOYD notes in his Wicker Park study (2006), specific artistic and intellectual scenes come to be represented to wider publics by selected examples of success. For Portland and comics, Dark Horse is the original example. The publisher is repeatedly noted and made notable in media reports for its longevity (founded in 1986), and, depending on the measurement, for being either the third or fourth largest U.S.-based publisher after Marvel and DC. Dark Horse is also noted for having pioneered a business model based on both creator-ownership and licensed properties. In terms of the local scene, many reports also note the shaping influence of Dark Horse both in terms of recruiting talent to the city and spinning it off (cf. ULLRICH 2007; TURNQUIST 2008; CRAWFORD 2009; ARNOTT 2010; MIRK 2011).

The basic elements of this narrative are recapitulated in my documentary, not just by Guinan and Moore, but also by Dark Horse owner and publisher Mike Richardson, and by Dark Horse editors Scott Allie and Diana Schutz, and former editor, Shawna Gore. This recapitulation affirms the company’s significance not just from media reporting but also in terms of how those within the community of comics creators understand the history of the local scene.

One detail worth adding to this story is the fact that Richardson, unlike every other individual interviewed in *Comic Book City*, is a Portland-area ‘native’, and his attachment to the city is a particular reason for why Dark Horse is, and remains, in Milwaukie. He cites the city of Portland and its environs as assets for recruiting and retaining creative people. In a recorded interview segment that I did not include in the final film, he describes a “grand tour” for prospective employees and potential creative partners designed to showcase the city’s urban amenities, as well as the ready access to mountains and coast. This strategy echoes FLORIDA’s emphasis on “quality of place” for the creative class (2002, 231–234; cf. ABBOTT 2001).

From my interviews with writers and artists, Dark Horse now appears more in the background than in the foreground of reasons for setting up in Portland. Younger and more recent residents featured in the documentary, including Sarah Oleksyk (creator of *Ivy*, moved to Portland from Portland, Maine in 2001), Dylan Meconis (creator of *Bite Me!* and *Family Man*, moved to Portland from Seattle in 2005), and Graham Annable (creator of *Grickle*, originally from Sault-Ste. Marie, Ontario and moved to Portland from the San Francisco Bay Area in 2005), do not cite the company when discussing their reasons for moving to the city, nor do they note the publisher in their personal geographies of Portland’s comics culture.

Rather than a particular entity or institution serving as a draw, more recent residents note the presence of other creators, both individually and en masse, and including those already considered to be friends and colleagues, as a primary reason for choosing Portland. Carl ABBOTT touches on this dynamic in the documentary when he remarks:

It’s kind of interesting how some cities become hot, exciting places that people begin to talk about, and the fact that people talk about them makes them interesting and then interesting people come and visit or decide to settle down, and then it becomes more interesting because there are more interesting people there.

I found this pattern reflected in the stories of many of the comics creators I spoke with for the documentary. More than one recalled becoming aware of Portland as a possible place to live after talking to other writers and artists at conventions – for example – and noting how many of their friends and colleagues were already in the city.

In the film, Dark Horse editor Scott Allie also makes note of the way in which Portland’s comics culture has become in some sense detached from the publisher as the population of writers and artists has grown.

I went into Guapo Comics, this comic book shop on Foster [Road in southeast Portland], for the party the night before Stumptown [Comics Fest; more on this below]. I walk into this party and the store is crammed full of people. It’s shoulder-to-shoulder, and I barely recognize anybody. They’re all doing zines, or maybe better production than that, and to them, they’re the world. They know there’s this Dark Horse thing out here, but, like, “Oh yeah, those are color comics, I really don’t like color comics.” And that’s amazing. That’s so great, that they have this really vibrant scene that’s totally independent of us, that has nothing to do with us.

While Dark Horse may be at the base of Portland's development into a 'comics town', the continuation of that development appears to be more dependent on wider word-of-mouth and media reputation than on a single institution.

Sarah Oleksyk expresses the significance of being with other creators as providing "validation" for her choice to work in comics, something she did not find in other places, including her hometown of Portland, Maine and New York, where she attended art school.

I grew up in Portland, Maine ... There's support for the arts out there, but it's not my kind of art ... And then I came to New York, and I went to art school, and I didn't hardly know anybody else who was doing comics there. They didn't have a comics program, and every teacher told me it was a waste of time. I was still doing it, but I was doing it despite everybody else, instead of because of everyone else. I just didn't get any validation for what I had chosen to do, and it wasn't until I came out here that I got tons of validation from others .. Even if I don't show my stuff to other people, knowing that other people are doing and taking it as seriously as I do is really motivating ...

This resonates with HEYING's observation about the significance of internal recognition within the artisan economy, but in way that reads as distinct from the dynamic in LLOYD's Wicker Park, where the neo-bohemian milieu seemed to breed competition as much, or more, than camaraderie. Oleksyk continues:

When there's a show people will invite me to be in it, and when there's a party going on where other cartoonists are going to be, and I'm there, I get to converse with people and talk about the business, and this just shows me that this is something beyond a shared hobby. And for a profession that is incredibly solitary, I've never had so many people that I've been working with, or working alongside ... If ever I have a problem, I can just show my friends – "What am I doing!? Help me out!" – and get more perspective on it. And getting congratulations when people get whatever milestones they reach. I never felt like I had peers until I moved out here.

These sentiments are clearly echoed by others in the documentary, including, in the case of writers and artists, by Kevin Moore and Sara Ryan (writer, *Me and Edith Head, Orienteering*, moved to Portland from Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1997), and by Shawna Gore, in the case of editors and publishers.

The 'validation' of the choice to work in comics is also understood by the creators I spoke with as being embedded in a larger culture of acceptance or openness for being different or doing things outside of the cultural mainstream. As Steve Lieber (artist, *Whiteout, Alabaster: Wolves*, moved from Ann Arbor in 1997), puts it:

Portland, as I'm sure other folks have said, is maybe the geekiest city in America right now ... I grew up ... in Pittsburgh, and that was not a place for someone like me. I'd carry my sketchbook out and sit in diners and start drawing. I'd get threats for just being there doodling in my sketchbook. In an environment like that, a geek, someone who likes to cartoon, that's one of those nails that sticks up that gets hammered down. Here, everyone is sticking up in some weird configuration.

Similarly, Sara Ryan sees Portland this way: "There's just a lot of openness in general to ideas and ways of living ... I like that it's okay to be sort of wonky in Portland. There's definitely a lot of sort of wonky, wonky and geeky, people and

that seems to be good". Extending this line of thought, Dylan Meconis describes the city as a place where:

There's the stereotype of everybody in Portland does at least three things. You know, you have your day job, and then you have your side passion, and then you have all the things you volunteer for, or all the things you serve on the board of, that you go to on Saturday nights ... I've met very few people who have just their one thing, and ride it to the end of the rails. And every time I think I've found somebody normal, I find out how horribly wrong I am.

Graham Annable finds that, "Every artist here just kind of follows their own beat, and it's sort of encouraged. The city's sort of built a reputation on that from what I can see ... I think people are kind of allowed the space and time to find themselves up here." The quote from David Hahn that opens this chapter, in effect that no one is surprised to hear that you make comics, also emphasizes the extent to which people with non-mainstream vocations are accepted by others in Portland.

Statements such as these can be read as suggestive of 'quality of place' as defined by FLORIDA, particularly in regards to the desire of people in creative fields to be in locations where there is, "an openness to diversity of all kinds, and above all else the opportunity to validate their identities as creative people" (2002, 218; see also 13–14 re: "the experiential lifestyle"). However, in Portland, and with this particular group of 'creatives', desires for openness and validation are clearly related to a specific sense of outsidership that comes from working in a culturally marginal form like comics, and not from a general wish to be affirmed as 'creative' or valued for one's creativity in an abstract way.

STAYING IN PORTLAND

In a sequence before the opening titles to *Comic Book City*, the writers and artists I feature share their answer to the question, "Would you ever consider leaving Portland?" In different ways, and to different degrees, each says, essentially, "no".

As suggested previously, there are probable structural economic reasons why comics creators, particularly those who work as creative professionals in the industry, may find a city like Portland, which is "good for entrepreneurship, less so for income" (ABBOTT 2001, 203), to be a suitable, and, notably, affordable, place to establish and make a career. However, the feeling of community referenced in the section just prior also appears to play a vital role in grounding the writers and artists who have established themselves in the city.

The sense of "validation" that comes from being in a place with a critical mass of comics creators is not simply a matter of seeing others do what you do, but also lies in the cultivation of a sense of community with those individuals, what HEYING (2010, 48–49) calls the "soft infrastructure and learning communities" of the artisan economy (cf. LLOYD 2006, NORCLIFFE and RENDANCE 2003; Carl ABBOTT also makes a similar point in the film). For virtually all of the creators I spoke with for *Comic Book City*, the Stumptown Comics Fest serves as a primary expression of that sense of community and is a key feature of the 'soft

infrastructure' that supports making comics in the city through active forms of communication and exchange.

The first Stumptown Comics Fest was held in 2004, as an artist-led and volunteer-run festival, which it remains. The event features panels on art and industry, portfolio reviews for aspiring creators, signings, and vendor tables for publishers, individual writers and artists, and comics stores. David Hahn explains how the festival originated this way:

There were people here, like "The Little Rascals".

"Hey, let's put on a show!"

"Yeah, a comic book show!"

Well, okay, let's go rent this space, and do some advertising, and I'll make the fliers and you call artists up and see who wants to buy a table. And people make it happen, like the Stumptown Festival. That's, wow, people get up and they do things here.

This view is also reflected in Kevin Moore's explanation of what makes Stumptown different from other 'cons':

It's not like San Diego [Comic-Con International], which is pretty much taken over by Hollywood, but it's not like A.P.E. [Alternative Press Expo], which is a great convention unto itself, but which is much more alternative press oriented, obviously in its name. But it's not like your kind of flea market, basement thing that goes on with a lot of comic cons. It's a real great blend of artists and publishers, most of them very independent, but some of them corporate, but we're getting together and we're sharing our ideas, and our perspectives, and our artistic sensibilities.

What both creators are touching on here is a spirit of community, of cooperation and sharing, as exemplified by Stumptown.

For many of the individuals I spoke with for the documentary, the festival represents this community ethic, the *learning* community (see HEYING 2010), that makes being in Portland meaningful, and not just a matter of convenience or economic rationality. Shawna Gore sees the event this way:

The Stumptown Comics Festival is sort of the perfect Portland thing to me because it's a great showcase for all this local talent and local publishers, artists, crafty people, arts and crafts ... It's not like we're [Dark Horse] – a great big corporate sponsor who just writes a check. We have people on our staff in editorial who make their own mini-comics and who have comics-related blogs and they set up their own tables at Stumptown. So, we have people who work for Dark Horse set up there in an entirely different capacity, and we have people set up behind the Dark Horse table.

Kevin Moore adds this understanding:

I met a bunch of cartoonists who, ironically enough were coming from the east coast ... And we've learned a lot from each other, whether it's new things to read, new developments going on in the industry, new techniques. We all do different things. We're not just underground cartoonists, or superhero cartoonists. We're everything. Most of my friends, we just have huge, diverse interests in comics and cartooning, and we come together with our different sensibilities, and I think have a really positive and enriching effect on each other. And I think you'll see that reflected in the Stumptown Comics Fest.

This sense of exchange, of variety and cooperation, is indicative of a community of creators who see each other as colleagues more than as competitors or as models for the 'right way' of 'making it'.

As an event run by creators, and without a conventional corporate structure, Stumptown, even though it brings in exhibitors and guests from other places, clearly benefits from the density of writers and artists in Portland. It is possible to stage the event relying solely on panelists, speakers, and vendors who are locally convenient. Not surprisingly, as expressed by Paul Guinan, the Fest is one of those 'only in Portland' things he would miss if he were to leave the city.

While Stumptown appears to be a common touchstone in the expression of community around comics in Portland, other signs of the city's 'soft infrastructure' for sharing knowledge, ideas, and opportunities noted in the film include: Periscope Studio, the variety of publishers, the city's wealth of comics shops, formal and informal events like 24-Hour Comic Day, and a general cooperative and collegial spirit amongst writers and artists that leads to hanging out and working in people's homes and at places like pubs and coffee shops (cf. HEYING 2010, NORCLIFFE and RENDANCE 2003).

Beyond comics and community specific reasons for staying in Portland, the individuals I interviewed for *Comic Book City* cite a variety of 'quality of place' reasons for not just moving to the city, but putting down roots. A primary example of these reasons is the ability to live and work without owning a car, which not only figures into how individuals understand the comparative cost of living in the city, but is also reflective of the way in which the Portland is broadly seen as supportive of different or alternative ways of living, particularly ones that are locally-driven, 'progressive', and 'sustainable' (cf. HEYING 2010).

CONCLUSIONS

Over the closing credits to *Comic Book City*, I play excerpts from my interview with Dylan Meconis wherein she reflects on the present moment and looks to the future.

Somewhere like Seattle back in the '90s was a really huge comics scene, and now there are still a lot of people up there, but all of a sudden Portland is the new focus town. So I recognize that the scene is not going to be this crazy forever. People are going to move. Some other town, you know, Tucson! is going to become the next big independent comics town, but for right now it's really remarkable to have all of these people coming here at the same time. I think that Portland's current oddball attitude and the vibrancy of the scene are very connected. It's not permanent, but it's wonderful to be here while it is that way.

Read one way, these comments can be seen as part of what Richard LLOYD refers to as "the structural nostalgia", or the "sense of being always already over", in neo-bohemia (2006, 237). This is particularly true of Meconis's implication that there are those moving to Portland right now just to 'make the scene', and who will be gone as soon as there is a new scene to make.

On the other hand, her reflection suggests more of a slowing down in growth than a fading or decline. Furthermore, whereas the 'structural nostalgia' observed by LLOYD is rooted in a feeling that neo-bohemian places are ruined by too much attention, Meconis is celebrating the current 'craziness', not bemoaning it, while also expressing that there is more to than city than its current fashion. As I highlight in the opening to the film, this confidence in Portland as 'home' is shared by other creators.

HEYING speculates that Portland's artisan economy, particularly in the making of things, exists not in spite, but because, of the city's high unemployment since 2008. Even though the region has shown one of the weakest job markets in the U.S. during the current recession, people continue to move to the city (HEYING 2010), and local media continue to report more specifically on the movement of comics writers and artists to Portland (for example, LIPSKI 2012). Whether in the thoughts and feelings of current residents, or in stories and data about migration to the city, Portland persists as a place for comics creation, perhaps becoming another historical example of an urban region, like Hollywood or Silicon Valley, that is culturally identified with a particular form of 'creativity in place'.

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