

WORTH THE WAIT AND HYPE? GENTRIFICATION, ANXIETY, AND THE HIPSTER  
GEOGRAPHIES OF BOUTIQUE ICE CREAM

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## Abstract

In the opening decades of the twenty-first century, gentrification continues to upscale city fabrics, including their retail landscapes, beyond recognition. Catering to the aesthetic tastes, social networks, and disposable wealth of new urban middle-class consumers, the ongoing expansion of boutique shops and cultural commerce displacing longtime stores and ordinary services increasingly signals new geographies of hipster retailing dominating the marketplace of local shopping streets in old inner-city areas. The qualitative analysis of this Master's thesis traces the socio-spatial articulation of new hipster geographies within retail gentrification processes by offering a cultural critique of an ice-cream boutique located on Ossington Avenue in downtown Toronto, attending to material and digital dynamics of urban production and consumption. Materially, hipster geographies are made legible through the cultural micro-entrepreneurship of urban retailing, manifesting in the making and selling of aestheticized ice-cream products. Digitally, the location-aware posts of popular Instagram users amplify and promote hipster gentrification processes by circulating images of the urban street through the endorsement of new food retail products. Visualizing the retail street as an aesthetic project, such urban representations on Instagram geotagging the site of the independent ice-cream store advertise the hipster geography of Ossington Avenue, rebranding the commercial milieu in the digital realm as a 'countercultural' locale for middle-class leisure and 'cool' cultural consumption. In the process, highly-visible social media images framing the 'alternative' streetscape naturalizes the disappearance of Little Portugal and filters out 'undesirables' from the area.

At the same time, this Master's thesis makes a unique contribution to the gentrification literature by locating the presence of anxiety within contemporary urban change. Shedding light on the phenomenon of retail lineup culture or "queuing" outside of the independent ice-cream shop, my digital and in-person ethnographic observations reveal how anxiety underpins popular identity performances on Instagram, and how anxiety animates the experience of actors involved in retail gentrification. This includes 'out-of-the-know' middle-class consumers on the street who express a sense of being 'left behind' from the novelty of the consumption event; food retail workers who have to constantly keep up with the seemingly unending flow of demand; neighbouring retail merchants who are forced to manage the embodied queue as it threatens storefront visibility; and for customers at the ordering counter who express insecurity over choosing the 'correct' flavour from the ice-cream menu following a sense of time pressure imposed by the queue.



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## Chapter 1 – I scream, you scream, we all scream: the social imaginary of ice cream

On October 11th 2021, at the generous age of 92, my nana passed away. Brought up in a small house on Grove Avenue located in what is now Little Portugal, Toronto, my nana was a kind woman and glamorous socialite who luxuriated in expensive fragrances and always sliced the crusts off sandwich bread. After her death on Thanksgiving day, I assisted in the commemoration of her life on Earth by digging up and assembling a collage of old family photographs to be exhibited at the funeral ceremony. As I traveled back in time looking through the family snaps, I happened upon one summertime photo taken in my grandparents suburban backyard in the mid-1990s depicting myself as a blissed-out blonde boy surrounded by family members, including my nana. As I paused, taking in the cozy



Figure 1. Myself as a delighted child eating a messy vanilla ice-cream cone surrounded by family members.

memory of this analog photograph, I suddenly realized that embedded in this precious middle-class memento was, of course, a vanilla ice-cream cone (Figure 1). Indeed, with the Breyer's brand name visible, the sentimental appearance of the photograph looks as if it were

produced as a corporate advertisement, associating ice cream with idealistic representations of childhood happiness and family leisure time. Yet, beyond my personal nostalgia, this family photograph struck me as significant because it reveals the aesthetic performance of ice-cream products, and how its halo of benevolence can saturate the subtext of memories of ‘the good life’.

As props of innocence, the sweet taste of ice-cream goods not only offers the sensation of refreshment but the cold desire associated with the consumption of ice cream forges a discourse of escape steeped in the trope of yearning. The mode of circulation solidifying the escapist discourse of ice-cream objects is disseminated through media images and its portrayal in forms of popular culture. For example, in romantic comedy films, it is conventional to see fictional characters seek temporary refuge in a fresh pint of ice cream as a means of coping with heartbreak. While in the present context of the climate crisis, ice cream increasingly appears as a psychic cushion for individuals to self-manage the existential threat of global environmental collapse under advanced capitalism. Recently, the *New Yorker Magazine* posted a humorous cartoon on their Instagram page depicting a distressed man positioned behind a mobile ice-cream vending cart with text reading “THE END IS NEAR HAVE A CONE. WHY NOT, YOU MAY AS WELL.” Meanwhile in the song “Black Bathing Suit”, the pop star Lana Del Rey draws on the normative symbol of ice cream to evoke her desire for social connection amidst the isolation of the global COVID-19 pandemic,

*Grenadine quarantine, I like you a lot  
It's LA, "Hey" on Zoom, Target parking lot  
And if this is the end, I want a boyfriend  
Someone to eat ice cream with, and watch television  
Or walk home from the mall with*

There is also a political deployment of the cultural benevolence of ice cream. In plain sight, elected state officials publicly consume the friendly facade of ice-cream objects as a way to

perform charisma, maintain power, and display ‘common sense’ leadership. For instance, on ‘national ice-cream day’ this year, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau tweeted out promotional images alongside the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food laughing, shaking hands, and ‘listening to the concerns of folks’ with the text of the tweet reading, “Can confirm: Nothing beats an ice cream cone on a day like today...spent some time with folks who were cooling off—and we couldn’t leave without trying some [ice cream] for ourselves”. Even the current President of the United States, Joe Biden, who once declared “every day is National Ice-Cream Day in my book” recurringly deploys the eating of ice cream as a strategy of disarmament to evoke an ‘average Joe’ persona. Also in the United States, the Ben & Jerry’s ice-cream brand endorsed politician Bernie Sanders by releasing a limited-edition flavour called “Bernie’s *Yearning*” encouraging and engaging ice-cream consumers to imagine a better national future through ‘tasting the Bern’.

In the twenty-first-century context of deepening socio-spatial inequalities, geopolitical warfare, and climate collapse, the cultural narrative of ice cream unifies, or distracts, acting as a universal symbol that *everyone* loves and solves *everything*. As the rhyming scheme goes, “I scream, you scream, *we all* scream for ice cream.”

Yet, as I suggest and as this Master’s thesis investigates, ice cream may not be so solidly benevolent. Indeed, in the context of this work, if the discourse of benevolence attached to ice-cream objects were accepted as inherent, such a narrative would justify and sugarcoat growing socio-spatial exclusion in the city. Adopting a critical urban geographical lens to the examination of ice-cream objects, this thesis interrogates the making and selling of ice cream, its consumers, and what these dynamics reveal about the changing retail landscapes of inner-city Toronto. Telling a story of urban retail change on Ossington Avenue at a particular moment in time through the lens of the aestheticized ice-cream commodity, the specificity of this case-study researching the micro-geographies of boutique ice-cream acts as

a microcosm for intertwining urban, cultural, and digital processes reclaiming and representing the local shopping street for middle-class belonging and entrepreneurial social media users. More particularly, this research traces the spectacle of new consumption lineups and argues anxiety represents the underlying motivating force driving this unprecedented display of conspicuous urban cultural consumption.

### ***1.1 Overview of thesis***

Situating the analysis of my case-study of an ice-cream boutique within broader scholarly conversations, chapter two reviews, appreciates, and bridges classic social and urban geographical literatures to conceptualize culture, anxiety, and gentrification. This theoretical chapter discusses how hierarchical class dynamics not only infuse the ‘legitimacy’ of dispositions, tastes, and lifestyles but also structure the social anxiety of cultural and symbolic capital accumulation influencing privileged middle-class consumption practices. Furthermore, the chapter traces relevant scholarly urban literature that has examined residential and retail gentrification, and sketches the dominant consumer figures spatializing urban commercial cultural change in contemporary retail gentrification processes: the hipster, the foodie, and the social media influencer.

Following the literature review, in chapter three I situate the site of the ice-cream retail boutique in the geographical context of Ossington Avenue, looking at ethnic changes in the neighbourhood as the street has ‘rebranded’ from Little Portugal to Lower Ossington, and also institutional changes following the redevelopment of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. Furthermore, chapter three triangulates the methodological approaches deployed for data collection, particularly retail-based ethnography, semi-structured interviewing, and netnography. Chapter four is an empirical investigation into the interior dynamics of hipster retailing processes, tracing the making and selling of new specialized



commodities and exploring how culinary and image practices animating the character of urban retail change emplace the elitist ‘aesthetic disposition’ of the self-employed artist store owner. Chapter five traces the social anxiety of urban cultural consumption practices in both digital and material contexts, examining the embeddedness of cultural and symbolic capital accumulation dynamics in highly-visible Instagram posts and the emergence of urban retail queueing as a new commodified form of conviviality and novelty. Chapter six looks at the digital placemaking in geotagged Instagram images, arguing social media representations push for the lifestyle of retail gentrification by branding and distinguishing the neighborhood as a ‘Bohemian’ and ‘fit’ place for cool cultural consumption. Yet, the chapter also emphasizes how the disorder of queue consumption and the labour of producing the instagrammable product are made invisible in online imagery along with retailer conflicts that are part of the negative externalities of consumer hype.

As the thesis shows, the social imaginaries of ice cream not only emphasize play, escape, and as my historical family photo suggests, idealized childhood. In the geographic context of urban change in the twenty-first century city, such ice-cream benevolence works to pacify the class exclusion of retail gentrification in both material and digital ways. Materially, independent ice-cream products reduce the economic and cultural accessibility of urban commercial landscapes because such boutique goods are inflated with high prices and aestheticized with codes of tastes that privilege ‘in-the-know’ consumers with cultural capital. Digitally, ice-cream products satisfy the identity performances of popular Instagram users but enable the erasure of Little Portugal and the ongoing disappearance of ‘undesirables’ and ‘spatial flaws’ of neighbourhood life.

## **Chapter 2 – Literature review: the scope of the scoop**

Examining dynamics of boutique ice-cream production and consumption on Ossington Avenue in downtown Toronto, this thesis investigates entanglements between gentrification, social media platforms, and anxiety as interconnected processes underpinning the formation of elite urban line-up culture as a new socio-spatial articulation of middle-class entitlement in the twenty-first-century capitalist city. In this conceptual framework chapter, I establish a scholarly foundation of ideas that inform and shape my empirical discussion and analysis.

Conceptualizing culture as an articulation of social identity and class inequality, I turn first to the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to appreciate and apply his influential concepts of the *habitus* and forms of capital. These classic concepts elucidate the relationship between boutique ice-cream commerce and the pursuit of distinction, and question who has the power—surplus time, money, and knowledge—to participate in new cultures of neighbourhood conviviality. Next, I theorize anxiety as an embodied emotion and social condition imbuing the ethic of modern consuming subjects. In the quest for novelty, middle-class consumer preferences attached to the pace of trendiness reveals a social anxiety of cultural obsolescence, or the perceived feeling of being left behind from ‘obtaining’ the ascribed aesthetic meanings and symbolic capital of ‘new’ and ‘better’ consumer products, such as hipster ice-cream goods. Following this, I draw on the gentrification literature and consider the emergence of retail gentrification to situate the study in urban geographical context, observing how scholars over the past decade awakened to the retail perspective in the study of consumption, culture, and spatial change in cities. Lastly, I trace three modern consumer subjectivities driving contemporary urban retail change in the gentrifying city: the hipster, the foodie, and the social media influencer.

### ***2.1 Theorizing habitus and culture à la Bourdieu***

This thesis employs the sociology of culture and aesthetics, particularly Bourdieu's (1984) theory of *habitus* and capital forms. Broadly, *habitus* refers to the everyday (re)formations of class identity demonstrating the ways in which conscious and unconscious manners of doing are shared by social and cultural groups who socialize together and, consequently, socialize each other in specific shared environments. Bourdieu (1990: 53) more precisely defines the *habitus* as a complex system of,

durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regular' and 'regulated' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor.

The matrix of *habitus* recognizes the autonomy of human agency to generate practices of resistance that accommodate improvisations and creative interventions, while also takes into consideration how the flexibility of those everyday practices are constrained by the tentacles of structure that impose change, expectations, and norms to shape taken-for-granted assumptions and normative understandings in the social world (Bourdieu, 2002).

As a time, practical action within the *habitus* embodies the accumulation of meanings from historical experiences "captur[ing] how we carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how we then make choices to act in certain ways and not others" (Maton, 2012: 51). Importantly, such perceptual frameworks through which people make sense of their world is neither random nor natural; common sense ways of seeing the world are governed through intergenerational social reproduction, correlating to the ways in which familial upbringing and educational training transmit class privilege and inculcate self-esteem. This inculcation of worldview indicates the learned dimension of *habitus* as a set of acquired characteristics personified as a set of predisposed *dispositions* or "manners of being, seeing, acting and thinking, or a system of *long-lasting* (rather than

permanent) schemes or schemata or structures of perception, conception and action” (Bourdieu, 2002: 27). Personal experiences and learned ways of being entrench lasting and transposable dispositions that not only inform present perceptions and appreciations but likely steer future interests, behaviour, and choices of social actors, “as people are more likely to encounter situations and interpret them according to their pre-existing dispositions rather than to modify their feelings” (Hillier and Rooksby, 2002: 6).

While *habitus* is a product of time, it also has metaphorical and material dimensions. For Bourdieu (1984), *the pursuit of distinction* within particular class *habitus* plays out across *fields* of practice whereby actors struggle to monopolize prestige and power in the attempt to grasp dominance in the cultural jungle of social hierarchy. As a symbolic zone of conflict, the classed domain of the cultural field is an arena of stratification shaped by competition and inequality, wherein ambitious actors jockeying for position and dominance “requir[es] constant awareness of and responsiveness to the play of all actors involved” (Hillier and Rooksby, 2002: 7). In this way, social class identity formation processes are steeped in power relations imbued with dynamics of surveillance, competition, and insecurity as agents evaluate the ‘weaknesses’ and emulate the ‘strengths’ of peers as a means of status affirmation sustaining cultural advantage and recognizable distinction. But, as noted above, actors' position and behaviour *in* a field and their view *of* a field unfolds in association to the uneven and highly unequal distribution of material and symbolic resources in society institutionalized through upbringing and schooling (Bourdieu, 2002).

Materially, the physical space of the *habitus* spatially weaves agents' lived practices into the locational fabric of the built environment, socializing a sense of place that creates geographical behavioural norms and visual expectations signalling who ‘belongs’ and who is ‘transgressing’ (Cresswell, 1996). Such a “geography of ideological expectations” bridging place and social practice shapes the taken-for-granted culture of neighbourhood life

(Cresswell, 1996: 27). For instance, norms and expectations in the “metropolitan habitus” of wealthy urban neighbourhoods territorialize the ‘lifestyle belonging’ of the gentrifying upper middle class (Butler and Robson, 2003), characterized by “a strong focus on the development of human capital, a high level of connectedness to global networks, and a strong sense of identity based on aesthetics and taste” (Webber, 2007: 182). Following Cresswell (1996: 9), it is critical to examine how spatial expectations and communal belonging associated with social relations in distinct neighbourhood milieux are never natural or random but rather a political process associated, in part, with the ongoing reconstruction of class membership and exclusion where “the geographical setting of actions plays a central role in defining our judgement of whether actions are good or bad.” Instrumental to the cultural maintenance of local norms is the accumulation, deployment, and performance of forms of capital, particularly cultural, social, and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1997).

Expanding Marxist understandings of capital as strictly monetary and economic, these ‘hidden’ types of capital reveal the ways social ties, aesthetic proclivities, and knowledge networks reinforce the ways the bourgeoisie deploy the sphere of culture as a form of capital *itself* endowed “with specific laws of accumulation, exchange, and exercise” (Swartz, 1997: 8). Such class domination manifests in the form of cultural capital, which refers to the embodiment, objectification, and institutionalization of privilege diffusing aesthetics of power that perpetuate subtleties of sociocultural exclusion (Bourdieu, 1997; Hillier and Rooksby, 2002). The first sub-form of cultural capital within the ‘cult of the beautiful’ is *embodied*, referring to the bodily inscription of socioeconomic privilege, whereby deportment and behavioural nuances performed through posture, facial expression, etiquette, manners, and speech signify bourgeois virtues of civility communicating the physicality of ‘appropriateness’ and the corporeality of ‘know-how’. Second, *objectified* cultural capital refers to the physical possession and/or material knowledge of ‘sophisticated’ cultural

artifacts, such as historically distinctive local architecture, gourmet food, and novel consumer products, whose ‘patina of authenticity’ signals precious economic value and seemingly transposes looks of charisma and finesse onto individual class members. Enabled by material wealth, such ‘connoisseurial sensibilities’ demonstrating the socialized capacity to know and choose speciality objects articulates the cultural capital of ‘taste’ maintaining lifestyle projects of the bourgeoisie. Yet, the deployment of taste symbolizes class violence, reinforcing hierarchical claims to ‘higher’ and ‘better’ standards that perpetuates negative aesthetic judgment over other cultural forms, and people, as ‘provincial’ and ‘inferior’. Third, *institutionalized* cultural capital manifests through forms of formal institutional recognition, such as educational degrees, professional certification, and academic qualifications that represent social authority through credentialed expertise and specialization (Bourdieu, 1997).

The second form of capital, social, refers to the cultural circuitry of personal recognition spreading and validating status, prestige, and glamour through peer groups, social networks, and interpersonal interactions. While the maintenance of social capital necessitates gaining material access to, and ongoing participation within, cultural scenes of class membership, such sociability of ‘nobility’ is spatially embedded into the stratified built environment, as particular neighbourhoods, public spaces, streets, and buildings locate and facilitate site-specific encounters socializing visibilities of status (Dovey, 2002). The final form of capital discussed here is symbolic capital. Symbolic capital refers to the ways in which cultural prestige is certified and accepted as legitimate through the rank of ‘expertise’ and ‘best practices’ (Dovey, 2002). In this cycle of power, symbolic capital legitimized through practices of consecration confers “a sort of ontological promotion akin to a transubstantiation” (Bourdieu, 2010 [1984]: xxix), in which exerts symbolic domination or the “power to frame the field in which symbolic mastery will be determined so that the criteria of taste favour those who have already imbibed a basic disposition towards it through

the habitus” (Dovey, 2002: 271). Monopolized by cultural professionals and design experts who have the educational training to establish legitimacy, symbolic capital blends into practices of domination asserting subjective aesthetic judgement as ‘objective’ and articulations of ‘superior’ taste as ‘transcendent’. Following Bourdieu (1984: 5–6), the symbolic capital of aesthetic distinction authorizing the legitimacy of taste is a social, rather than transcendental, process:

Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed.

As Swartz (1997: 87) observes, aesthetic classifications translating into symbolic representations of taste generates social stratification by culturally arranging class members into hierarchies of legitimacy. Consequently, subjective notions of ‘legitimate taste’ reflect the monopolistic possession of cultural knowledge used to express dominant class position and distinction.

This thesis deploys the tripartite Bourdieuan theorization of the cultural, social, and symbolic dimensions of capital to denaturalize the taken-for-granted assumptions, dispositions, and tastes working through boutique ice-cream production, consumption, and retail service work. Moreover, such thinking tools help interrogate how independent hipster retail is celebrated as a site of unprecedented middle-class struggle, as urban cultural consumers jockey for the accumulation of cultural capital. Yet, this aspirational middle-class contest to ‘secure’ ice-cream objects not only characterizes a pursuit of *distinction* but also reveals the quest for *perfection*, whereby the desire for the ‘new and improved’ manufactures the project of the modern consuming subject seeking social differentiation *and* individual wholeness through the ongoing consumption of the fictional qualities of novelty commodities (Cambell, 2018 [1987]; Falk, 1994). Expanding on the theme of modern consumer subjectivity, the next section theorizes anxiety in the social context and highlights its

relationship to the experience of the consuming subject, whereby attachment to the never-ending quest for ‘the new’ coincides with the perpetual feeling of being left behind from possessing commodified expressions of ‘the good life.’

## ***2.2 The urge within bourgeois: theorizing anxiety as consumer subjectivity***

As an individual subjective experience, anxiety is an embodied emotion defined “as a state of agitation, being troubled in mind and having a sense of uneasiness about a coming event” and which motivates particular kinds of action “as a response to situations of danger, whether real or imagined” (Jackson et al., 2012: 27; Hunt, 1999: 519). Signalling the temporal and spatial ‘transgression’ of boundaries of ‘norms’ securing the bodily self, the phenomenon of anxiety embodies the breakdown of feeling into a perceived state of insecurity and powerlessness in which the uncertainty of the future is experienced as a horizon of potential peril, while the foreignness of significant objects and subjects are felt as ‘unknowable others’ seemingly posing threat to control (Goldberg, 2018). Subsequently, the experience of anxiety relates to dynamics of change perceived as disturbances and disruption to embodied worlds of knowability and familiarity, engendering subjectivities of restlessness (Hunt, 1999).

Extending beyond the personal psychological experience of the individual, scholars have examined dynamics of anxiety in the social context as a shared condition and collective phenomenon that is constituted relationally through practices and routines spreading across geographies and scales (Jackson and Everts, 2010; Jackson et. al 2012; Goldberg, 2018). In the social context, expressions of anxiety are embedded within broader sociocultural dynamics of emotion, wherein the language of affect are “essentially communicative—they are expressions occurring *between people* and not expressions of something contained inside a single person” (Burkitt, 1997: 40). Anxiety is also political. As Goldberg (2018: 2) points out, anxiety is a form of logic rooted in capitalist social relations and normative structures of



modern bourgeois society, whereby ‘deviation’ from ingrained norms and conventional expectations awakens anxiety as an active political expression in support of the modern *status quo* seeking to ‘straighten out’ ‘endangered’ subjectivities through “initiating specific interventions in a world perceived as worrisome, [producing] interventions that aim to resolve the underlying cause of anxiety.” In this way, the normativity of anxiety functions as a pitchfork of productivity and a systemic form of institutionalized pressure mobilizing individual conformity to established social projects, such as work and consumption.

Jackson et. al (2012) observe the articulation of anxiety as a twofold social process. First, the presence of anxiety in social life maintains connection to moments of subjective corporeal experience, embodying the direct personal relationship between the ‘internal world’ of the anxious subject and the ‘external world’ of people, material objects, particular locales, specific institutions, and/or media representations (Jackson et. al, 2012: 28). Second, relations of anxiety can be traced as a collective force through the *consequences* arising in response to such moments of intersubjective anxiety. Such a relational collective condition underscores “anxiety is not some free-floating mental activity; it is embedded in specific (often complex) doings and sayings. Anxieties are embodied and social, practical, and practiced. Like other social practices, they are routinized, collective, and conventional in character” (Jackson and Everts, 2010: 2801).

Jackson and Everts (2010: 2802) suggest that anxiety materializes conspicuously and inconspicuously, and they typologize three interrelated practices “that accompany, frame, and are affected by social anxieties.” As an overt social happening, the conspicuousness of anxiety cuts into the consciousness of the world in the form of an *event* visualizing novelty that hijacks and ruptures the lived flow of everyday reality, whereby “the wholesome experience of one’s being-in-the-world collapses into subjects and objects of anxiety” (Jackson and Everts, 2010: 2798). The disruptive force of the anxiety-event manifesting

unknowability and uncertainty arouses *the shock of the new* for the embodied subject, bringing about the “realization of nothingness” that bursts the sense of familiarity, decomposing the continuity stabilizing the everydayness of cultural life (Jackson and Everts, 2010: 2798). Yet, the production of anxiety as an event relates to *framing* processes, whereby the economic, social, cultural capital of institutions and actors (i.e., the media, elected officials, and communications professionals and cultural experts) wield the know-how, resources, and symbolic power to legitimize the attention, optics, scale of events. As Jackson and Everts (2010: 2798) synthesize, “[w]hether an event arouses anxiety depends on its framing.” Through dynamics of circulation and amplification, such framing practices scale the event of anxiety, shaping “the social and geographical reach of a particular anxiety” (Jackson and Everts, 2010: 2802). As a consequence arising from such framing of eventfulness, the second social practice of anxiety manifests in the form of “practices of annihilation,” intervening as a destructive impulse motivated by the desire to contain and control, asserting power over objects and subjects of anxiety (Jackson and Everts, 2010: 2802). Such logic of annihilation rationalizes that by destroying the ‘old truth’—specific objects and subjects of anxiety—a ‘new truth’ is established, seemingly signifying the ‘elimination’ of the anxiety itself (Jackson and Everts, 2010). Yet in many cases, the ‘object’ of anxiety is symbolic, and the physical annihilation is ineradicable, and the anxious subject must constantly work to ‘contain’ the re-manifestation of threat.

The third practice of social anxiety signifies the covert ways anxiety undergirds the provisioning of everyday life as an inconspicuous social force institutionalized within, and embedded into, routine activities, demonstrating how “contemporary anxieties include some of the very practices that constitute our everyday lives and whose disruption further entrenches those anxieties” (Jackson and Everts, 2010: 2802). This “routinization and institutionalization of anxiety as a social force” signifies “[w]hat was, or could be,

subjectively experienced as anxiety becomes displaced to routine activities, which the anxiety and its negotiation have helped shape, and to the material and temporal arrangements which enable those activities” (Jackson, et. al., 2012: 30). Such “sedimentation” means social anxieties normalize into the scenery of everyday life practices, meaning the ‘forgotten’ anxiety can persist “even if the individual human is not subjectively experiencing the physiological or psychological symptoms of anxiety” (Jackson, et al., 2012: 30). Moreover as Jackson et. al. (2012: 31) observe, “[i]nsofar as routines, arrangements, technologies and institutions are shaped by responses to anxieties, the ‘after’ of some anxieties participate in the ‘before’ of new ones.” Such circularity signals the ways in which social anxieties are *perpetually displaced* rather than *permanently destroyed*, reinforcing the notion that ‘practices of annihilation’ deployed to finalize the end of subjects and objects of anxiety may serve to remobilize and amplify the scale of its social reproduction, serving to “embed, propagate and deepen the same anxiety through successive cycles of subjective experience and broader social response” (*ibid*).

Seeking to “clarify how social anxieties *work*, where they occur, how they develop, who they involve, and how they are dealt with” (Jackson and Everts, 2010: 2797), this thesis traces such practices of anxiety as a social force animating the formation of consumer subjectivity (Campbell, 2018 [1987]; Hetherington, 2008). Attending to “the social conditions within which that anxiety is generated” (Hunt, 1999: 514), this thesis situates anxiety within the structural power relations of symbolic consumption in which anxiety operates as a productive sociocultural pressure urging the consuming subject to ‘keep up’, ‘upgrade’, and continuously ‘adapt’ to the uncertainties of the changing marketplace, *or else* risk ‘cultural stagnation’ threatening the loss of social position, subsequently ‘falling behind’ into a perceived state of irrelevance and obsolescence.

In this way, such social anxiety of cultural obsolescence overlapping the consuming subject and the anxious subject reveals how the feeling of being left behind imbues the ethic of middle-class consumption, particularly the consumption practices of the new urban middle class, through processes of commodity fetishism that entangle the ongoing pursuit of distinction with the perpetual quest for the ‘new’ and ‘better’ (Campbell, 2018 [1987]; Hetherington, 2007).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, as subsequent chapters trace, manifestations of feeling of being left behind unfold across a “real/virtual dialectic” (Kidder, 2012), wherein immersion into the market-shaped mobile interface of digital platforms arouses the experience of restlessness. Following Kingwell (2019), swipe and scroll practices of technological touch fuse the social media subject into infinite loops of social happenings that seek the annihilation of boredom. This characterizes how the always-on world of digital technologies is a new human environment of anxiety itself. Importantly, such online experiences of feeling of being left behind from the experience of social happenings depends on complex processes of “mobile media embodiment” that emotionally entangle geographically distant embodied social media publics in a shared “feedback loop of socio-cultural inscription” (Farman, 2012: 58; Papacharissi, 2015), whereby the flow of communication enabled by locative social media technologies dissolves environmental boundaries to produce “electronic elsewheres” (Berry et al., 2010). At the same time networked ‘smart’ devices connect the embodiment of mobile users, social media technologies facilitate the transformation of geographical landscapes into informational interfaces that frame and filter a “presentation of location” (de Souza e Silva and Frith, 2012; Farman, 2012), including the ‘branding’ of gentrifying urban neighbourhoods (Zukin et al., 2016; 2017). Expanding on this spatial theme of urban change,

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<sup>1</sup> I understand commodity fetishism to not only obfuscate material relations of production, but also exemplify how capitalist actors of modernist innovation alongside the promotional rhetoric of visual advertising dream up promissory stories about new consumer goods that frame and ascribe cultural capital and emotional pleasure—imaginary value—to the figural status of commodities in ways that seemingly *go beyond* the physical utility of the consumer object, and how the consuming subject seeks to take possession of the shock value of novelty goods and the aesthetic properties and symbolic meanings as a commodified means of accessing ideals of ‘the good life’ (Hetherington, 2007).

the next section moves into the geographical realm of gentrification studies, and then critically highlights the spatiality of three modern urban retail change agents: the hipster, the foodie, and the social media influencer.

### ***2.3 Seeing the city through Ruth-coloured glasses: Conceptualizing gentrification***

Since the sociologist Ruth Glass introduced the concept of ‘gentrification’ almost sixty years ago (Glass, 1964), gentrification has dominated the postwar urban literature and damaged the liveability of cities across North America and around the world (Smith, 2002; Lees, et al., 2008; Lees et. al, 2016). “[N]othing more and nothing less than the neighborhood expression of class inequality” (Lees, et al., 2008: 80), gentrification classically refers to the contextual, uneven, and ongoing restructuring of place from lower to higher income status, as the affluence and culture of new residents and consumers territorializing old inner-city neighbourhoods subsequently trigger forms of displacement for long-time poor and working-class households, and historically vulnerable marginalized urban populations (Shaw, 2008; Valli, 2015). Scholars have theorized and debated the causes of such urban socio-spatial change in cultural and economic terms (Caulfield, 1994; Ley, 1996; Smith, 1979; 1982; Hackworth and Rekers, 2005).

On the one hand, socio-cultural analyses have deployed ‘consumption-side’ explanations of neighbourhood change arguing causes of gentrification stem from individual choices in urban cultural lifestyle that connects to structural changes in the occupational makeup of advanced capitalist cities (Caulfield, 1994; Ley, 1996; Hamnett, 2000). Caulfield (1994) observes the social experience and aesthetic texture of old urban form ‘liberates’ the liberal middle classes from the standardization and alienation of modern post-war suburbanization, demonstrating the ‘emancipatory potential’ of urban gentrification to cultivate ‘authentic’ social interaction and facilitate ‘de-commodified’ forms of critical countercultural expression. For Ley (1996), the *embourgeoisement* of old urban fabrics into

playgrounds of conviviality reveals the structural degeneration of heavy manufacturing in city economies and the simultaneous emergence in the occupational dominance of the “new middle class”: the ambiguous ensemble of credentialed young professionals and managers—yuppies—working generally well-paid knowledge-based jobs in the ‘post-industrial’ globalized urban economy. The fortunes of the gentrifying occupational elite, reflecting increases in the proportion of financially independent well-educated professional women (Bondi, 1999; Kern, 2010), resettle the city for locational reasons of job convenience in inner-city neighbourhoods and proximity to the central business district, yet also pursue the culture of downtown urbanity as a spatial form of aesthetic taste in the quest for distinction, consuming local symbolic amenities—“stylish restaurants, art galleries and fashionable architecture” (Caulfield, 1994: 132)—as elite metropolitan sites facilitating the “aggressive pursuit of cultural capital” that seek out and perform “urban lifestyles” of prestige and sophistication (Zukin, 1998: 825). Such new middle-class employment in ‘prestigious’ realms and the concurrent decline in local heavy-manufacturing work bifurcates the income hierarchy between ‘upper’ and ‘lower’ tiers in the central city job market that in turn sharpens sociospatial division between affluence and poverty (Scott, 2008; Caulfield, 2014). Consequently, the rehabilitation of old housing stock in deindustrializing ‘liveable’ neighbourhoods shrinks urban affordability and erodes social service institutions (Ley, 1996; Walks, 2011).

On the other hand, such sociocultural interpretations of gentrification centring the aesthetic preferences and cultural tastes of gentrifiers has been opposed by ‘production-side’ explanations, which argues the economic revalorization of central city space is a product of uneven geographical development rooted in the circulation and accumulation of capital in the urban built environment, driven by the profit motive of local landlords and homebuyers, and the global real-estate development industry (Smith, 1979; 1982). Representing a “back to the

city movement by capital, not people,” such economic analyses theorize the production of gentrified landscapes through the lens of the rent gap thesis, whereby spatial redevelopment occurs when the gap between the present value of inner-city land (capitalized ground rent) and its imagined future ‘best’ use (potential ground rent) promises profit for the urban capitalist (Smith, 1979). While taking into consideration the role of competitive market structures, the rent gap thesis has been critiqued for dismissing expressions of agency, notably how the ‘sweat-equity’ of low-income cultural producers and creative artists ‘legitimize’ gentrification processes by aestheticizing urban decay. Such ‘avant-garde’ living habits reconceptualizes the territorial stigma of low-income neighbourhoods from ‘frightening’ to ‘interesting’ locales for the new middle-class, in turn pacifying the financial risk for real estate developers to invest capital in the built environment (Zukin, 1982; Ley, 2003).

The conceptual debate between these two scholarly “teams” and whether the roots of gentrification lie in production-or consumption-side explanations has been transcended, as scholars recognize both positions of culture and economics in the analysis of gentrification as “two sides of the same coin” (Lees, 1994: 144; Hackworth and Rekers, 2005; Lees et al., 2008). In this way, urban scholars seeking to deepen understandings of gentrification ought to consider the complementarity and relationship between aesthetic and cultural choices of the new urban middle class, and structural economic conditions of property markets in the advanced capitalist world, and how such a dynamic, aided by state policies and the media, interplays to shape neighbourhood change (Lees, 1994).

Yet, as the gentrification literature has mushroomed since the mid-twentieth century, scholars have prioritized the residential as the site of gentrification to the neglect of retail space. As Hubbard (2017: 2) observes, processes of *retail gentrification* have largely been overlooked, “with local shopping streets presumed to reflect the socio-economic character of

surrounding neighbourhoods rather than in a sense driving the changes in those spaces.”

Following Hubbard’s (2017) observation, this research seeks to contribute towards the scholarly growth of retail gentrification literature by taking spaces of urban retail seriously as dynamic sites of neighbourhood change (Bridge and Dowling, 2001; Deener 2007; Zukin et al., 2009; Sullivan and Shaw, 2011; Rankin and McLean 2015; Kern 2015; Zukin et al., 2016; Hubbard 2017; Parker, 2018). A “mutation” in the spatial form of gentrification (Lees, et al., 2008: 129), retail gentrification entails the displacement and replacement of local stores and long-time businesses retailing functional goods and necessity services to predominantly immigrant, working-class, and poor populations by new urban consumption spaces and aesthetic entrepreneurs selling expensive cultural commodities and high-end lifestyle services catering to symbolic tastes and pleasure-seeking (Bridge and Dowling, 2001; Hubbard, 2016; Shaker-Ardekani and Rath, 2019). Spatially, retail gentrification re-socializes the cultural geography of neighbourhood shopping streets into landscapes of distinctiveness and modern hedonism that produces a host of negative effects including decreasing the retail empowerment of lower capital merchants, such as new immigrants, from opening businesses (Zukin, et al., 2016); reducing access to affordable food, goods, and services (Bridge and Dowling, 2001; Burnett, 2014); thwarting long-time residents' comfort levels and established sense of ownership in the neighbourhood (Deener, 2007; Valli, 2016); and deepening racial exclusion (Sullivan and Shaw, 2011). Drawing out such geographic understandings of retailing in gentrifying neighbourhoods, Bridge and Dowling (2001: 96) point out new local urban retail actors contribute to “the construction of identities through [their] encouragement of particular sets of consumption practices”, while at the same time “alters us to the microgeographies of retailing, or locally distinctive ensembles of retail establishments.” Such infusion of new small-scale business capital privileging middle-class consumption practices and shaping the microgeographies of gentrifying local shopping streets reflects the boutique



commerce of new retail entrepreneurs shifting neighbourhood identity towards upscale consumption (Zukin et al., 2009; Zukin, 2010). For Zukin (2010: 19-20) such independent micro-retailers are economic, cultural, and social entrepreneurs. New retail store owners not only aim to profit off the disposable wealth of residential gentrifiers, but also contribute to middle-class identity formation by speaking to aesthetic tastes and simultaneously produce privileged consumption spaces of lifestyle belonging for the new urban middle-class to luxuriate as if ‘at home,’ in ways that conspicuously contrast and alienate the already-existing social life of the street and neighbourhood (Zukin, et al., 2016). In this way, while retail gentrification unfolds in and across commercial space, new urban retail change intersects with adjacent metropolitan lifeworlds as residential gentrifiers form the local consumer base shaping the clientele of gentrifying shops. As Shaw (2008: 1698) illustrates, such gentrification of the urban retail landscapes privileges “the metropolitan body” (Shaker-Ardekani and Rath, 2020), who performs the highly visible middle-class consumption practices that define gentrification: conspicuous cultural consumption:

Designer shops, art galleries, bars and restaurants form the background to a landscape of people in semi-public space (tables on the footpath they must pay to occupy) watching the passing parade and sipping chardonnay from a boutique winery, beer from a microbrewery, coffee from organic beans grown in the developing country *du jour*.

This depiction of the “ABCs of gentrification”—art galleries, boutiques, and cafes—(Zukin et. al., 2016), signifies the ways new retail businesses stage and enable conspicuous cultural consumption that perpetuates the ongoing “aestheticization of urbanity” (Ley, 1996: 299), forming “everyday social spaces of lifestyles where [the new urban middle class] can express, perform and practice their embodied and symbolic sense of class” (Shaker-Ardekani and Rath, 2020: 125). Yet, as Parker (2018: 440) writes, despite the emergence of retail gentrification scholarship examining the general impact of new businesses “there are still gaps in our knowledge about what role businesses play in gentrification, especially in terms of their role as entities acting *within* a neighbourhood, not just *on* a neighbourhood.”

Consequently, retail gentrification studies ought to acknowledge the capacity of businesses to create, rather than simply reflect, neighbourhood change. In the context of this study's examination of Ossington Avenue, for instance, the neo-artisanal production of independent ice-cream contributes to the festivalization of the public space of the street, as unprecedented retail queues of middle-class consumers put *the neighbourhood* 'on the map' as a local, regional, and global tourist destination—and focal point of social anxiety.

As Shaw's (2008) description of conspicuous urban cultural consumption above implies, numerous agents of change can be differentiated within the landscape of people who drive and perform retail gentrification processes. The following subsection disaggregates the broad category of the new urban middle class and specifies three agents of urban retail change active in the gentrification of the twenty-first century city.

#### ***2.4 Agents of retail gentrification: from the new urban middle class to hipsters, foodies, and social media influencers***

Urban scholars have identified diversity and variation in the actors complicit in the upscaling of the city (Lees, et al., 2008; Shaw, 2008), whereby change agents with varying degrees of economic and cultural capital dominate the gentrification scene at different times to shape various urban geographies of neighbourhood change (Lees, 2000). For instance, the stage model of gentrification identifies the low economic but high-cultural capital of artists as 'pioneers' who use sweat equity to initiate gentrification by occupying and individually renovating properties in disinvested neighborhoods alongside the working class (Zukin, 1982). In already gentrified neighbourhoods it is the global financial capital of the transnational ultra-rich who represent late-stage processes of "super gentrification" that displace and price out the upper middle-classes (Lees, 2003).

Following in the tradition of gentrification studies, three agents of change are highlighted in the "boutiquing" process of urban retail gentrification (Zukin et al., 2009): the

hipster, the foodie, and the social media influencer. Although these three identity labels are conceptualized independently, their subjectivity formation, consumption practices, and geographies intersect and overlap and resist such seemingly neat categorization. Indeed, the foodie can be a hipster, and social media influencers can project the image of a foodie and/or hipster as a self-branding strategy.

#### *2.4.1 Avatars of cool: the hipster in the city*

Provocative yet elusive, the first retail change agent figures in the modern urban imagination as a trendy folk devil whose bohemian urge is associated with ‘pioneering’ new frontiers of gentrification: the hipster. In recent years, urban and cultural studies scholarship has sought to resolve “the hipster dilemma” (Maly and Varis, 2015), investigating the networks, aesthetics, cultures, and geographies of the hipster (Zukin, 2008, 2010; Schiermer, 2014; Hubbard, 2016; Hill, 2017; le Grand, 2018, Parker, 2018). Contributing to the dilemma are the ways the hipster subjectivity has morphed in space and time.

First emerging in the urban fringes of the US jazz scene, the origins of the hipster figure were embodied by the musicality of the black Bebop player whose ‘hip’ artistry combined original creative instrumentation with visual idiosyncratic fashion (Hill, 2017). Over the post-war Fordist expansion of economic homogenization in mass production and mass consumption, the ‘offbeat moniker’ of the black hipster was racially fetishized into a look of angsty fashion and stylized into an individualized theme of ‘underground’ consumption within white American youth subcultures, embodied by the ‘rebellious’ figure of the “white negro” (Mailer, 1957), or the white hipster, “who at first sets out to represent hip resistance yet is unconcerned about their participation in the co-option of black culture or the commodification of their aesthetics” (Hill, 2017: 55).

Rooted in this colonial cultural history, Hubbard (2016) notes the stereotypical figure of the contemporary hipster is urban, personified as a ‘shabby chic’ lumbersexual who is

“[f]lannel-shirted”, “bearded”, and sips “flat white-coffee” (Hubbard, 2016: 2). Yet, in the twenty-first-century, hipster aesthetics instantiate across forms of ‘creativity’ expressed in “an enormous range of cultural things: craft beer, vintage floral dress, burgers in brioche buns, cocktails in jars as well as creative personifications such as DJ, film buff, art critic, curator and artist, all of which embody an ‘arty’ sensibility” (Hill, 2017: 2). Making claims to aesthetics of authenticity and styles of individuality within niche markets, hipster culture converges creativity and commerce through “alternative consumption practices” that ‘critique’ lifestyles of commodification and corporate institutions of mainstream consumer culture in global advanced capitalism (Zukin, 2008; Maly and Varis, 2015). From a global perspective, such ‘non-conformist’ hipster culture can “be best understood as a layered trans-local and polycentric phenomenon that rests on a complex network of infrastructures,” in which “[v]ery local styles, tastes and attitudes can become fully integrated into and dominant in a global hipster culture and vice versa” (Maly and Varis, 2015: 644). Paradoxically, as such individualized claims to distinctiveness and authenticity are made, the local globalization of hipster culture reproduces homogenization and standardization, as the performance of authentic creative uniqueness “forms the basis of a very collective style” and internalizes the cultural contradiction between “individualization and imitation” (Maly and Varis, 2015: 644; Schiermer, 2014). In this way, local lifestyles of global hipster culture are not separate from capitalist consumer society but rather are “compatible with neoliberal consumer culture and niched mass production—one could even say that hipsters are the product of this economy” (Maly and Varis, 2015: 650).

Geographically, spaces of hipster culture in North America materialize an urban *habitus* of “grittiness” within the deindustrializing heavy-manufacturing core and historically disinvested, materially deprived, and socially outcasted ‘ghettos’ (Lloyd, 2006; Zukin, 2010). Driven by the ‘alternative’ culture of experimental and entrepreneurial “outposts of

difference” (Zukin, 2008) that serve as cool cultural amenities for casual socializing and DIY collaboration among the “hipperati” (Zukin, 2010: 7), the symbolic grittiness of the hipster *habitus* recycles the residue of industrial economic decay and the spatial stigma of street crime into aesthetic experiences of “urban authenticity” (Lloyd, 2006; Zukin, 2010). Such capitalist aestheticization mythologizing the character of old built form as an experience of ‘urban danger’ without existential risk is occupationally embodied by new hipster retailers—‘real coffee’ shops, vintage clothing stores and bars serving microbrews” (Hubbard, 2016: 1)—whose symbolic entrepreneurship making tastes for ‘cool’ consumption “synthesize dirt and danger into new cultural commodities” (Zukin, 2010: 51; Ley, 2003; Ocejó, 2017).

Yet such urban geographies of gritty authenticity signalling the sanitization of the past and commodification of danger exemplifies hipster retail gentrification, as the spatiality of hipster urban commerce and cool consumption-led regeneration “represents the first stage of a more thoroughgoing retail gentrification process” as “the presence of one-off hipster stores marks out a shopping street as being up-to-date and on-trend, a form of distinction that is highly valued in consumer society” (Hubbard, 2016: 2, 5). At the same time, new hipster business and trendy clientele base may also produce class antagonism as the “cultural distinction of hipster aesthetics as emerging cultural capital...implies status differentials with working-class culture which serves to exclude working-class locals from gentrifying areas” (le Grand, 2018: 11). Paradoxically, again, as the ‘cult of the poet’ aesthetically appreciates—and claims—the ‘urban village’ look and feel of authenticity (Zukin, 2010), the *facade* of grittiness in hipster spaces tempts re-commodification, becoming vulnerable to corporate ‘luxury’ development and assimilation into ‘mainstream’ urban consumer culture, consequently triggering further commercial rent increases as the district is targeted by

“wealthy consumers, chain stores, and real estate developers—an emporium for tourists and shoppers” (Zukin, 2008: 734).

For Cowen (2006), such hipster gentrification more broadly corresponds to the aesthetics of urban liveability communicating “designer violence,” as stylish pedestrianized downtown neighbourhoods demarcate the exclusionary territory of hipster living. As growth-oriented schemes of civic leaders, planners, and real estate developers seek to ‘copenhagenize’ the entrepreneurial city building process with fashionable bicycle-oriented aesthetically-pleasing ‘liveability’ planning for knowledge workers (Stehlin, 2015), such “hipster urbanism” engineers the public realm of downtown neighbourhoods as prime nodes for “accumulation by good design” (Cowen, 2006: 22). Alongside the hipster, the foodie emerges as a distinctive actor driving consumption processes of urban gentrification.

#### *2.4.2 Devourers of distinction: the urban foodie*

Living to eat rather than eating to live, the foodie is a manifestation of “omnivorousness” whose culinary consumption and food preferences reject formality and high-brow snobbery and selectively embrace informality and diversity (Johnston and Baumann, 2015). Such foodie eclecticism cutting across genres and geographies encapsulates ‘ethnic’ foodscapes from the Global South and traditional cuisines historically associated with the working class and the urban poor (Johnston and Baumann, 2015). Although open to ‘anything,’ the foodie does not eat ‘everything’; tastes for distinction shape and permeate omnivorousness and conceptions of ‘good’ food. For instance, while objecting to formalized snobbery of fancy restaurants, omnivorous foodie taste preferences nonetheless discriminate negatively against the popularity of mass corporate and chain fast-food restaurants. But, as Johnston and Baumann (2015: 173) argue, “what restaurant could be less formal or less stuffy than a chain restaurant?” For Johnston and Baumann (2015) this speaks more broadly to the underlying ideological tension between democracy and distinction in foodie culture, indicative of how

the ‘inclusivity’ of food omnivorousness repackages hierarchies of exclusion and distinction more covertly: “[t]o belong to the foodie world is not simply a matter of what one eats, or where one eats, but the manner in which one approaches food—as a topic for serious aesthetic consideration, deliberation, and appreciation (Johnston and Baumann, 2015: 52).” In this way, virtues of openness and curiosity seasoning the foodie diet presupposes the cultural knowingness to see and consume food from an aesthetic, rather than functional perspective, and which deploys taste as a weapon of choice in the classification, sampling, and discussion of food. Thus, such omnivorous cultural consumption conceals the ways in which the consumptive palate of foodies exercise the pursuit of distinction in culinary form, aesthetically judging and culturally framing food as ‘good’ through gastronomical lenses of “authenticity” and “exoticism” (Johnston and Baumann, 2015).

Central to actualizing the foodie quest for ‘good food’ is spatial exploration into ‘hot’ urban neighbourhoods where new gourmet foodscapes and local modern restaurant scenes showcase culinary experimentation, ‘menu innovation’, and ‘fresh’ food knowledge (Zukin, 1991; 1995). Here, however, the classed spatiality of foodie culture overlaps with processes of food-led retail gentrification, as the patronage of culinary omnivores celebrating new chef-led inner-city restaurateurship as entrepreneurial venues for the cultural consumption of vegan-friendly, farm-to-table, seasonal, artisanal, and specialty food and drink feeds sociospatial exclusion by trivializing structural neighbourhood inequality and increasing food insecurity for the urban poor (Bridge and Dowling, 2001; Burnett, 2014; Hyde 2014; Matthews and Picton, 2014). As Hyde (2014) observes foodie restaurant consumers and reviewers drive “omnivorous gentrification” by generalizing the experience of urban poverty as an expression of culinary authenticity, framing ‘hole-in-the-wall’ dining establishments in low-income neighbourhoods as a form of ‘ethical’ and ‘authentic’ consumption for the intrepid foodie. As Burnett (2014) finds in the same low-income Vancouver neighbourhood,

foodie enthusiasm driving omnivorous gentrification and scenes of local restaurant development glorifies and fetishizes urban inequality as ‘delicious’, commodifying the space of concentrated poverty as an ‘ideal’ dining destination for culinary adventure in ways that, “worsens the poor[’s] access to affordable, healthy food options for low-income and marginalized residents” (Burnett, 2014: 163). Such urban poverty tourism and food-driven revitalization reinforces “the rise of omnivorousness as part of hegemony’s continuing evolution,” as bohemian foodie writers, journalists, and consumers romanticize the consumption of poverty as a marker of cultural and urban authenticity (Johnston and Baumann, 2015: 176; Zukin, 2010). In this way, the foodie world frames poverty and wealth as culturally co-equal, downplaying positionalities of privilege to the point of ordinariness (Johnston and Baumann, 2015).

#### *2.4.3 Beings of content: the social media influencer and the Instagram city*

The final agent of urban retail change sketched in this chapter is the newly imagined social media influencer (Marwick, 2013; 2015; Boy and Uitermark, 2017; Khamis et al., 2017). A creature of the “network society” enabled by global flows of communication and new information technologies (Lash, 2002; Castells, 2010), the social media influencer (SMI) is a highly-visible user of mobile online media platforms—YouTube, Instagram, TikTok—who strategically promotes an ‘authentic’ self-brand and correspondingly uploads aestheticized informational ‘content’ to digital platforms seeking to foster emotional ‘relationships’ with, and capture attention from, niche and subcultural audiences of ‘followers’ and ‘fans’ for the purposes of acquiring economic and cultural capital, and attaining potential corporate sponsorship (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Marwick, 2013, 2015; Khamis et al., 2017). Contributing data to social media companies, the mobile production of user-generated self-branded content signifies the promotional communication of “micro-celebrity” and “lifestreaming,” entailing “the ongoing sharing of personal information



with others through technology as a way of maintaining affective ties” (Marwick, 2013: 16). Seeking to maximize popularity and fame (Marwick, 2015), such online livestreaming labour publicizes and spectacularizes the sphere of private life, as mobile networked media technologies afford the celebritization of intimacy (Marwick, 2013). This internal extension of the capitalist marketplace into intimacies of private everyday life illustrates how the practices and mindset of the SMI subsequently normalize the ways modern entrepreneurial marketing strategies are applied to development of the individual and explanations of the self, merging the becoming of subjectivity with the becoming of value that not only collapses boundaries between public and private, but also blurs the line between brand strategy and personal identity (Arvidsson, 2006; Banet-Weiser, 2012). Consequently, for the social media influencer, “individual entrepreneurship is the conduit for self-realization and online spaces are a perfect site for realizing this entrepreneurship” (Banet-Weiser, 2012: 61). Such self-commodification thinking of oneself as an online ‘brand’ and using social media sites to circulate and promote ‘lifestyle activism’ reveals the ongoing permeation of the advanced capitalist economy as a totalizing economic form that “privileges forms of labour that are not generally recognized as labour by a more conventional capitalist exchange, such as affective relationships, emotion, and brand experiences” (Banet-Weiser, 2012: 71). Importantly, the rise of the social media influencer as a new entrepreneurial subjectivity is a testament to, and consequence of, the growing instability and uncertainty of labour security, “whereby workers are expected to be as adaptive and nuanced as all branded products (from sneakers and fast-food to smartphones and furniture) in post-Ford globalised economies” (Khamis et al., 2017: 201). But how does the social media influencer territorialize city fabrics and drive processes of gentrification?

As highlighted above, the social existence of the SMI depends on the relentless maintenance of visibility and the publicization of aestheticized information on social media

sites by either composing text, images, and short videos that ‘engage’ networked audiences. For the entrepreneurial social media influencer, the city is technologized into an archipelago of ‘instagrammability’ for mobile social media production and lifestyle-oriented content creation, privileging, amplifying, and targeting, namely gentrifying neighbourhoods, urban public spaces, and hipster retailers on local shopping streets, as specific sites of class ‘compatible’ with the ‘authentic’ self-brand (Bronsvort and Uitermark, 2021). Enabled by digital platforms, the social media influencer drives socio-spatial stratification in the twenty-first century city, as highly-visible social media posts influence the perception and image of gentrified neighbourhoods while invisibilizing poorer underserved locales (Boy and Uitermark, 2017). While not highlighting the social media influencer specifically, Zukin et. al (2017: 459) nonetheless observe the interaction between consumption-led urban change, user-generated content, and digital technologies finding those who publish online foodie reviews about local restaurants on the mobile app *Yelp!* “contribut[e] to taste-driven processes of gentrification and racial change.” Voicing their opinion and describing their experience about the perceived quality of the cuisine, service, and atmosphere, the cultural capital of online restaurant reviewers produce a “discursive investment” in the media image and consumer taste of gentrification, which serves to “conceptualize and represent the urban locality in which individual restaurants are located,” that may “lure readers to try unfamiliar cuisines and visit unfamiliar locales” (Zukin et. al., 2017: 461, 463).

In the context of the mobile photo-sharing application Instagram, Boy and Uitermark (2017) look more broadly at the urban geography of locative visual images across the city of Amsterdam and find “users of the platform elevate exclusive and avant-garde establishments and events, which come to stand out as hot spots, while rendering mundane and low-status places invisible” (612). As this Instagram class reassembles the city through the “aestheticization of everyday life” (Featherstone, 1991), such geotagged visual social media

images frame a “presentation of location” that strategically validates, and disproportionately promotes, the spatial identity of the gentrified city (de Souza e Silva and Frith, 2012: 162; Boy and Uitermark; 2017). As this thesis explores in further detail, the mobile production of the social media influencer exploiting the spatial aesthetics of hipster retail as a ‘self-promotional good’ also frames neighbourhood identity and visually invests in the image of gentrification.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has outlined key theoretical themes and academic debates central to the fieldwork, findings, and discussion of this thesis. The first part of the chapter drew from the Bourdieuan sociological tradition to highlight the ways culture involves competitive class struggle and the pursuit of distinction. From there, the discussion theorized anxiety as an unacknowledged driver by Bourdieu that informs the generation of symbolic and cultural, shapes the circulation of social capital, and as a social condition through which to view the ongoing formation of the modern consuming subject. Lastly, this chapter has highlighted classic urban literatures on gentrification and retail gentrification, and sketched the contours of three contemporary geographic change agents—the hipster, the foodie, and the social media influencer—who leveraged different forms of Bourdieuan capital and animate privileged urban consumption in new retail spaces. In the following chapter, the discussion moves forward to highlight the methodologies and research design deployed in the process of fieldwork and data collection, and grounds the research site empirically by tracing the spatial transformation of Ossington Avenue in downtown Toronto.

### **Chapter 3 – Neighbourhood context and research design: From auto repair to ice-cream affair**

This contextual and methodological chapter from my Master's thesis examines broader spatial processes of neighbourhood change and establishes the research design shaping my empirical case study of an ice cream boutique located on Ossington Avenue in downtown Toronto. Situating the geography of Ossington Avenue in a broader neighbourhood context, I first discuss the implications of shifting local social tectonics in Little Portugal and the imposition of non-Portuguese capital as a modern force of urban gentrification contributing to the de-ethnicization of the neighbourhood. Next, I excavate the roots of territorial stigmatization of mental health provision on Queen Street West at Ossington Avenue, from the institutional birth of the Toronto Lunatic Asylum in the nineteenth century, to its current twenty-first century manifestation as the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). I consider how the institution's contemporary post-asylum geography and large-scale redevelopment socially and aesthetically absorb CAMH into the gentrified milieu. Energized by the economic and cultural thrust of gentrification along West Queen West (WQW), historically "Toronto's main arts axis" (Bain, 2015: 270), the alleviation of such historic spatial stigma has run parallel to the commercial revival of Ossington Avenue, raising critical spatial questions concerning the ramifications of CAMH's redevelopment *beyond* its institutional boundaries, potentially giving rise to attractive conditions for new retail entrepreneurs to invest economic and cultural capital.

Following this empirical contextualization, I outline the three interpretive methodological strategies used to qualitatively collect data for this research study: retail-based ethnography, semi-structured interviews, and netnography of Instagram images, which together shape the inductive nature of my research questions. Lastly, this chapter overviews particularities of fieldwork, highlights my positionality as a former employee of

this independent retailer, and details the process of regaining access to this closed, private setting.

### *3.1 The retail gentrification of Ossington Avenue*

Located in west downtown Toronto, the section of Ossington Avenue under-investigation in this research study stretches approximately six-hundred metres from Dundas Street West in the north to Queen Street West to the south, cutting through the historical core of Little Portugal, once one of the most visible ethnic neighbourhoods in Toronto (Teixeira, 2007). Since the mid-twentieth century, this ethnic enclave has emerged as a diasporic outpost in the global network of Portuguese migrants, spawning a number of social, cultural, religious and commercial institutions and embedding the Portuguese national identity into the local urban environment (Murdie and Teixeira, 2011). But like other downtown Toronto neighbourhoods located near the central business district, gentrification has encroached Little Portugal. Murdie and Teixeira (2011) note the valourization of real estate in Little Portugal has produced two disparate outcomes, both linked to the loss of affordable housing. On the one hand, rising land values have shrunk the affordable rental housing stock, preventing new Portuguese immigrants and low income newcomers from gaining residential access into the neighbourhood. On the other hand, the sharp rise in housing prices and property values produces financial temptation for Portuguese homeowners to sell their ‘mediterraneanised’ home, capitalize on its lucrative value, and buy housing in the outer suburbs (Teixeira, 2007). But in selling, such market housing is vulnerable to renovation and gentrification.

Even for long-time Portuguese residents who have chosen to stay in place, the emerging pattern of gentrification has negative social and cultural consequences. Murdie and Teixeira (2011: 78) observe how the lifestyles of the new urban middle classes with their non-Portuguese tastes alienate long-time residents, “the gentrifiers come to Little Portugal in

search of cultural diversity, but they end up recreating their own cultural territory, ultimately leading to social distance and in some cases tension between the Portuguese and the gentrifiers.” Forecasting the looming *embourgeoisement* of Little Portugal, Murdie and Teixeira (2011: 75) signal, “more intense gentrification in Little Portugal is just a question of time since the process is well established east and west of Little Portugal—Little Portugal, sandwiched between the two areas, will be next.” Indeed, this time has arrived.

The gradual residential destabilization of this once “institutionally complete Portuguese enclave” (Murdie and Teixeira, 2011: 79) coincides with the erosion of white ethnic continuity in the local blue-collar Portuguese commercial landscape, slowly rendering industrial uses obsolete and quietly exterminating working-class job opportunities. Takahashi (2017) argues that non-Portuguese ‘pioneer’ retail gentrifiers’ cultural claim to commercial space disempowers longtime Portuguese entrepreneurs and enforces the de-ethnicization of Little Portugal. While neglecting retail change on Ossington Avenue and privileging Dundas Street West as the primary commercial axis and site of analysis, Takahashi (2017) observes how the emergence of cultural differences between non-Portuguese and Portuguese businesses on the local business improvement area (BIA) board has contributed to fractured social relations despite being spatially inseparable. The cultural friction and political disunity in the perspectives between gentrifiers and long-time Portuguese business owners is indicative of the social destruction of gentrification “transforming this transitional ethnic neighbourhood into a completely gentrified and homogenous area, leaving only traces of the history of the immigrants who had been deeply involved in this urban space” (Takahashi, 2017: 601).

Significantly, studies of residential and retail ramifications of gentrification in Little Portugal fail to acknowledge the spatial concentration of historic mental health facilities located just down the road on Ossington Avenue at Queen Street West, and how such a social geography of urban mental health care may impact dynamics of the local private property

market and the changing character of the retail landscape. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to historize the institutionalization of mental illness and spatial stigmatization of CAMH, it is important to highlight the link between place-based discrimination and mental health stigmatization in order to understand how the revitalization of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health has factored into Ossington Avenue's dramatic physical and reputational transformation from 'dangerous' to 'glamorous'.

Coinciding with the rise of urban industrial capitalism in the mid-nineteenth century, the proliferation of asylum institutions in Ontario birthed the Toronto Provincial Lunatic Asylum (TPLA) initially located at 999 Queen Street West. This Victorian state-led medical-residential institution came into existence in 1850, and sought to 'cure' psychiatric patients with 'moral treatment' by "instill[ing] the appropriate behaviour norms among the dependent classes" (Dear and Wolch, 1987: 29). As the deeply othering terminology of "lunatic asylum" suggests, this large-scale 'total' institution discompassionately perpetuated the pathologization and demonization of persons with mental and emotional distress.

At the time in the mid-nineteenth century, the choice of Queen Street West and the 'Garrison Common' as the TPLA site was based on strategic geographic principles of relative accessibility to Toronto's urban centre, therapeutic location in the quiet countryside, and military potential as a post of defence in the event of an outbreak of war (Dear and Wolch, 1987: 29). Indeed, the asylum was never militarized and its peaceful seclusion in the fresh air of greener pastures was spatially asphyxiated by the rapid urbanization of downtown Toronto, swiftly swallowing the Toronto Asylum into the city's urban industrial fabric. Condemning the "undesirable" location of an asylum on Queen Street West, a medical superintendent at the beginning of the twentieth century remarked Queen Street West embodied the "antithesis" of health, as psychiatric patients suffered from the toxic spillage of industrial pollution from nearby factories (Dear and Wolch, 1987: 87). Yet this condemnation of the locational

‘unsuitability’ of the TPLA captures the concurrent stigmatization of both the urban spatiality of the mental institution and the psychiatric patients it accommodated. The *environmental* pollution of the industrial city and its urban detritus of toxic contaminants seemingly ‘mirrored’ the ‘*moral* pollution’ of the urban psychiatric institution and its ‘human detritus’ of extreme social marginality.

During the 1970s, physical and symbolic changes to the medical campus sought to ameliorate Queen Street West’s territorial aura of ‘moral disorder’ and distance itself from its dark past of demonization. In 1975, the main building was demolished and in 1979, the then Queen Street Mental Health Centre formally changed its address from “999” to “1001” Queen Street West. This period of the late 20th century also saw the prescription for large-scale mental health care ‘modernize’ from the spatial isolation of the ‘total’ institution towards the deinstitutionalization of psychiatric patients into a model of ‘community care’ (Dear and Wolch, 1987). Later into the twentieth-century as Queen Street West continued along the path of deindustrialization and following the creative genesis of the Queen West art scene during the 1980s and 1990s (Bain, 2003; Bain and March, 2019) the production of big chimneys and virulent black smoke had been replaced by the consumption of small boutiques and affluent white folk. With turbulent urban change swirling around the now Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, the institution soon decided it too needed large-scale change.

Seeking to further soothe its spatial stigma, the flagship 2008 master plan vision *Transforming Lives* (which makes no mention of Ossington Avenue) lays out CAMHs blueprint for urban institutional makeover. Espousing contemporary urban planning wisdom in favour of installing an ‘authentic’ Jacobian “urban village,” the plan, which has since been implemented, outlines sweeping redesign to its built environment including an integrated street grid, the construction of architecturally brilliant buildings, and introducing a panoramic



surveillance of “eyes-on-the-street” to “help to create a lively, safe and convivial public realm of streets and parks” (CAMH, 2008: 47).

Sewing CAMH into the urban fabric of Queen Street West and Ossington Avenue, this latest ‘modernization’ of the medical institution maintains the “site will not only support the de-stigmatized healing environment for the clients, it will also greatly contribute to the vibrancy of the community life in the neighbourhood. The vision is for CAMH to prevail as a civic presence not as a ‘monumental landmark’ but through ‘neighbourly’ gestures to engage and integrate with the community” (CAMH, 2008: 45). While contributing to mental health care innovation, the institutional redesign undertakes the broader spatial task of seeking to “greatly contribute” to the “vibrant” life of the WQW art world, “respond[ing] to the existing artistic community in the Queen West area” (CAMH, 2008: 52). But, such an alliance with “the existing artistic community in the Queen West area” entrenches the branding of the gentrifying neighbourhood as an ‘Art + Design District’ and justifies capital investment and processes of gentrification, including on Ossington Avenue. Indeed, as the pro-development media has urged, the fear of urban mental health and the institution’s historical aura of symbolic defamation has long discouraged local investment climate, “CAMH has been a dragging anchor on Ossington's development since its days as a Victorian asylum, and it was a huge psychological barrier for the artsy gentrification of Queen West earlier in this decade” (Chatto, 2008). But now, however, with the physical restructuring of CAMH, the institution no longer contributes to the ‘environmental wounding’ of the neighbourhood standing out as a “monumental landmark” or “blemish of place” (Wacquant, 2007), but blends into the ubiquitous vertical culture of new-build construction in downtown Toronto, making such buildings unrecognizable as a medical mental health centre. Such urban camouflage, *The Globe and Mail* has pointed out, “is just what the designers of CAMH were hoping for when they embarked on a sweeping, multi-year rebuild...airy new buildings have gone up to replace

the grim old institutional structures on the site. Streets have been extended into the CAMH campus to make it *feel* more connected to the neighbourhood” (Gee, 2016, emphasis added). But it is not just the ensemble of new buildings receding into the background; the pacification of territorial stigma has rendered the bodies of persons with mental illness seemingly invisible. While during the early 2000s there was seemingly “nothing scarier than the occasional outpatient from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health down on Queen Street asking for change” (Chatto, 2008), into the 2010s “[t]hose who were once demonized, *are now just part of the urban scene*” (Gee, 2016, emphasis added). In this way, the opening-up of the CAMH site may have produced the consequence of tranquilizing the economic anxiety and spatial fear of entrepreneurial capital, with the new CAMH serving to justify the risk of economic and cultural investment within Ossington Avenue.

Contributing to the structural redevelopment of Ossington Avenue as well is the toponymic birth of “Lower Ossington Avenue”, a new street running south into CAMH at Queen Street West and Ossington Avenue. The spatial inscription of this street name plays a critical linguistic role legitimizing and normalizing the place production of Lower Ossington as a distinctive neighbourhood *in contrast to* Little Portugal. Additionally, everyday speech and rhetoric circulating in the lifestyle media commonly deploy Lower Ossington and “the Ossington Strip” as synonymous shorthand terms for the spatial concentration of trendy cultural amenities on Ossington Avenue between Dundas Street West and Queen Street West. As new place names, both Lower Ossington and the Ossington Strip symbolize the cultural power of gentrification to produce new boundaries of place and demarcate spatial identity.

As CAMH has undergone institutional revitalization, Ossington Avenue has concurrently experienced intense retail change. Once a commercial landscape characterized by automobile repair shops, Portuguese businesses and karaoke bars, this “artery of crime” (O’Kane, 2016) has transformed into “a downtown west-end mecca for foodies and fashion

lovers alike” (Archer, 2015). The trajectory of retail gentrification on Ossington Avenue follows similar paths of upscaling found in Williamsburg, Brooklyn (Zukin, 2010), East Ninth Street in the East Village of Lower Manhattan (Zukin and Kosta, 2004; Zukin, 2010), Milwaukee Avenue in Wicker Park, Chicago (Lloyd, 2006; Parker, 2018) and Abbot Kinney Boulevard in Venice, Los Angeles (Deener, 2007; 2012). As key shopping streets in the ongoing regime of urban capital accumulation, these ‘bohemian’ locales share similar socio-spatial patterns of production and consumption marked by hipster aesthetics and the cultural practices of the new urban middle class.

Following the dissolution of the ‘pariah status’ of the old CAMH, the rent gap on Ossington Avenue exploded, sending property values soaring and enticing an influx of new retail entrepreneurs and restaurateurs into the area seeking to profit off the new lucrative ‘post-danger’ ‘Ossington lifestyle’. Legitimizing private market investment, the print media establishment wrote,

Ossington's evolution has vastly improved the local neighbourhood, raising property values and bringing in new business in the midst of a recession. Residents who used to avoid the street, site of murders and mayhem in the bad old days, can now stop for wild spring salmon and watermelon at Foxley, authentic Neapolitan pie at Pizza Libretto, ‘white-trash nachos’ at the Painted Lady or a beer at Baby Huey. (Gee, 2009)

But this sudden shift from “the bad old days” of “murders and mayhem” into ‘good new days’ of “white-trash nachos” overwhelmed the commercial street with capital and consumption, as Ossington Avenue got “too hip, too fast” (Wingrove, 2009). This trendy frenzy subsequently triggered anxiety amongst local residents and the city government who feared the speed of new retail change on Ossington Avenue was actually spiraling out of control. Consequently, Toronto city council ordered an unprecedented one-year moratorium on new businesses and restaurants opening on Ossington to ‘balance’ the speed and scale of retail gentrification.

To illustrate the rapidity of retail gentrification specifically at the microgeography of my case study, I include a ten year time-lapse sequence of photographs derived from Google Maps (Figure 3.1, 3.2, 3.3) to convey processes of physical, cultural and aesthetic upscaling. A former industrial working-class space servicing automobiles and rebuilding internal-combustion engines, the building has ‘flipped’ into a site of restaurateurship feeding the mouths of the “glitterati brigade” (Raymaker, 2006) and fuelling the new cultural engine of foodie consumption on the street.

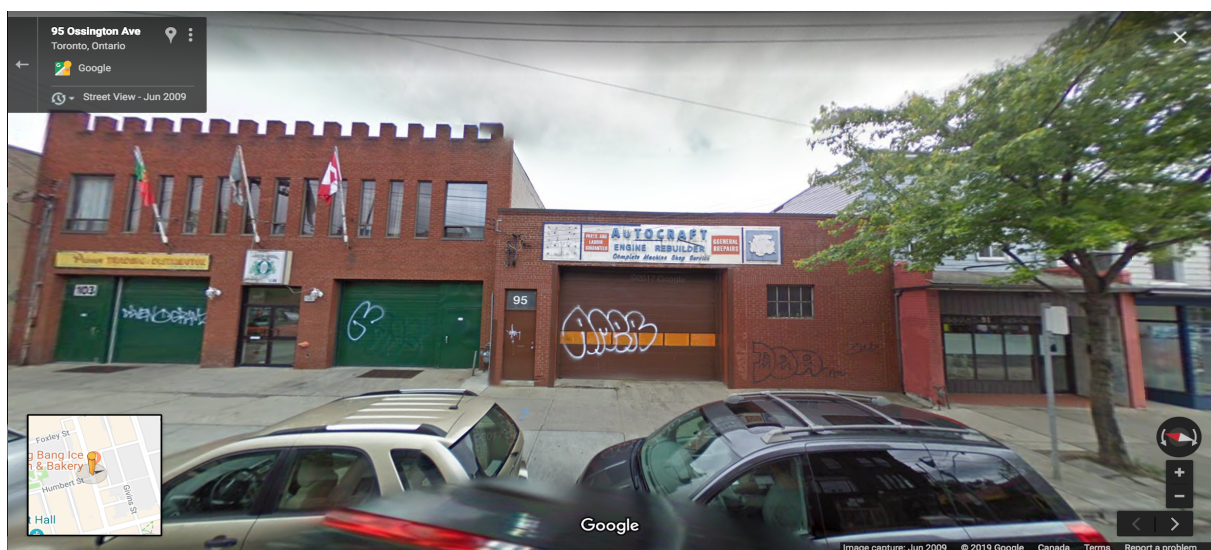


Figure 3.1: The former automotive shop at 103 Ossington Avenue.



Figure 3.2 By 2014, ‘loft-inspired’ living has entered Ossington Avenue.



Figure 3.3 By 2018, the new mid-rise condominium has been completed and the ice-cream retailer has opened.

As Google Maps’ gaze of the research site suggests, the place identity of Ossington Avenue has undergone an economic and cultural metamorphosis within a decade. As an inventory of the commercial street reveals (Figure 3.4), the Ossington strip on-the-whole

slants heavily toward forms of cultural consumption, including food, fashion, and alcohol establishments. Indeed, the retail profile of Ossington Avenue reflects broader socio-economic transformations of the residential neighbourhood as demonstrated in Figure 3.5 The surging average price of dwelling, rising education levels, demographic household structure changes together articulates the deepening inequality of the inner city as an enclave for higher-income people, particularly young professional urban parents or “yupps” (Karsten, 2014).

| Types of Use                  | Number of Establishments (N=120) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------|
| Food                          | 32                               | 26.6%          |
| Clothing/fashion              | 17                               | 14.1%          |
| Unknown use                   | 9                                | 7.5%           |
| Bar                           | 9                                | 7.5%           |
| Vacant                        | 7                                | 5.8%           |
| Personal grooming             | 6                                | 5%             |
| Home                          | 5                                | 4.1%           |
| Fitness                       | 4                                | 3.3%           |
| Cafe                          | 4                                | 3.3%           |
| Architecture and design firms | 3                                | 2.5%           |
| Real estate                   | 2                                | 1.6%           |
| Financial institution         | 2                                | 1.6%           |
| Healthcare                    | 2                                | 1.6%           |
| Social services               | 2                                | 1.6%           |
| Bottle shop                   | 2                                | 1.6%           |
| Eyewear                       | 2                                | 1.6%           |
| Music production              | 2                                | 1.6%           |
| Office                        | 2                                | 1.6%           |
| Storage                       | 2                                | 1.6%           |
| Bike Repair                   | 1                                | 1%             |
| Pet                           | 1                                | 1%             |
| Convenience store             | 1                                | 1%             |
| Theatre                       | 1                                | 1%             |
| Hardware                      | 1                                | 1%             |
| Laundry                       | 1                                | 1%             |
| Manufacturing                 | 1                                | 1%             |
| Pharmacy                      | 1                                | 1%             |

Figure 3.4. Mixture of retail establishments on Ossington Avenue (December 2018). Data gathered through observation of land use.

|                                                                                            | 2016<br>(N=3965) | 2006<br>(N=3912) | 2001<br>(N=3995) | 1996<br>(N=4387) | 1991<br>(N=4341) | 1986<br>(N=4561) | 1981<br>(N=4632) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Education<br>(university<br>certificate,<br>diploma,<br>degree at<br>bachelor or<br>above) | 34.4%            | 27.86%           | 19.14%           | 17%              | 8%               | 8%               | 3%               |
| Family<br>(average size<br>of census<br>family)                                            | 2.6              | 2.8              | 2.8              | 3.5              | 3.5              | 3.7              | 3.3              |
| Average<br>value of<br>dwelling                                                            | 950, 634         | 434, 142         | 247, 375         | 202, 882         | 252, 162         | 123, 791         | 101,900          |
| Average total<br>income in<br>households                                                   | 107,012          | 72, 232          | 56, 184          | 42, 824          | 42, 376          | 32, 419          | 23, 426          |

Figure 3.5. The socio-demographic changes of the neighbourhood.

### ***3.2 Cup or Cone? Developing research questions***

Considering this market-led retail gentrification of Ossington Avenue, this case study zooms into the geographical fabric of the new commercial landscape by investigating the independent commerce of boutique ice cream as an expression of hipster retailing. This investigation entails tracing ‘back-stage’ and ‘front-stage’ processes of making and selling ice cream, analyzing how the ‘aesthetic disposition’ of the proprietor draws symbolic boundaries of cultural capital, and high monetary prices, around ice-cream objects, reinforcing exclusionary class differentials and arousing middle-class aspirations for distinction. Moreover, this research explores how social media technologies—particularly on digital platform Instagram—frames the visual image and provokes the social anxiety of

cultural consumption in urban retail gentrification, tracing how locative aestheticized social media images stoke the perceived feeling of being left behind from ‘obtaining’ the ascribed modern meanings and symbolic capital of ‘new’ and ‘better’ foodie commodities. Moreover, I trace the spatial consequences of middle-class anxiety in the form of urban retail queuing, which subsequently reinforces and amplifies the socio-spatial entitlement of the new urban middle classes over the inner city. Building on Kern’s (2016) investigation into the temporal landscapes of eventfulness in the gentrified neighbourhood of the Junction in the west end of Toronto, I consider how the “slow violence” of gentrifying retail lineups hijacks the attention of the public life of the street by demarcating the territory of hipster cultural consumption.

Considering the illustrated points above, my research questions link these critical ideas asking: How do retail line-ups amplify and normalize retail gentrification and produce a social atmosphere of conviviality on Ossington Avenue? To supplement this central question, I ask two sub-questions: How do social media users who post images of ice-cream frame neighbourhood identity act as discursive and visual investors in retail gentrification? How does anxiety, namely the feeling of being ‘left behind,’ motivate cultural consumption and shape the experience of gentrification?

### ***3.3 Research design***

In order to answer these questions and gain insight into the production and consumption of retail gentrification and the exclusionary culture of the urban good life, I employ qualitative methodologies of ethnography, netnography, and semi-structured interviewing. Bryman and Bell (2016: 180) offer a basic definition of ethnography wherein, “researchers interact with the people they are studying, listen to what they say in conversation and ask them questions.” Through a process of immersing myself into the social world of an ice cream shop, listening to mundane conversations between customers and staff, directly observing body language, ethnographic research is critical to my understanding of “the



routine ways in which people make sense of the world everyday” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 2). At the heart of the ethnographic tradition is the practice of participant observation, characterized as the “observational component of ethnographic research” (Bryman and Bell, 2016: 180) In the discipline of human geography, Hoggart et al. (2001) note participant observation as a data collection tool has slowly gaining traction with human geographers who employ participant observation as a way to explore how built environments produce, and are produced by, social practices. Acquiring a lens of ethnographic inquiry, thus, allows me to describe and interpret the cultural behaviours and classed worldviews of gentrification in their social context. Bryman and Bell (2016) typologize ethnographic inquiry into a fourfold distinction consisting of open and closed settings, and overt and covert role of the researcher. The nature of the setting refers to accessibility of the research site, while the latter connotes the disclosure of the researcher’s status. In my attempt to paint a nuanced portrait of my research site and sketch its norms of behaviour, my ethnographic investigation in the field unfolds in both closed and open settings, working *inside* the small retail space serving ice cream as a covert researcher and observing social life *outside* from the perspective of Ossington Avenue as an overt researcher.

### *3.3.1 Research positionality, the process of gaining ethnographic access, and the nature of observational fieldwork*

The feasibility of working as a front-of-house (FOH) server and the potentiality of gaining access to conduct an ethnography from *within* the ice cream boutique stems from my previous employment working at this business from May 2015 to July 2017. I was introduced to this ice cream shop through a close friend who also worked at the business at the time, and my ice-cream employment ebbed and flowed between part-time and full-time as I completed undergraduate studies. These two years of working experience disciplined my body with the

muscle memory of repetitive ice-cream scooping, and allowed me to foster a trusting rapport with staff, including the proprietor. The diligence of my ice cream labour combined with the cordial relationship cultivated with the owner shaped the prerequisites granting me access to return the ice cream shop for this Master's research. My positionality in the research process—as a former loyal employee boosting the business—was a concern as I approached and conducted this critical social research. In the past, I benefited financially, socially, culturally from working as a front-of-house server; I earned wages and good tips, fostered meaningful friendships with staff, and obtained status working at a 'hot' ice-cream shop. Conducting this research, I had to confront and negotiate these personal biases, remaining cognizant of how my promotional role uplifting this business may empirically tinge knowledge production and weaken my critical perspective. As I reflexively wrestle with my own positionality and hold my own feet-to-the-fire contributing to the new beginnings of Ossington Avenue, the contradiction between my critical gentrification orientation and complicity in driving neighbourhood change is revealed.

But as I pause and take stock on the implications of my ice-cream retail labour in a gentrifying neighbourhood, I seek to leverage my lived work experience by translating my insider knowledge and personal connections into social science research, shedding light on the deeper urban implications of neo-artisanal ice cream production and consumption. Indeed, the potential of outside social researchers conducting the same study of this *private* social world is likely impossible, "if anyone else was asking me [to conduct this research], I would not participate, you probably know that, just being frank," the owner explained through text message. Yet, despite my prior employment and close relationship with this business, access to conduct this fieldwork was not guaranteed and required persistent negotiation and maintenance. And unlike larger, bureaucratic organizations whose corporate identity is maintained by trained public relations practitioners, this retailer, like many

independent merchants of gentrification, is controlled by *one* gatekeeper acting as the primary guardian of reputation, restricting and granting outsider access into this small business' closed social setting and circle. This process of obtaining access depended on the approval and consent of one social actor: the proprietor.

In February 2018, I began the process of obtaining and negotiating access as I met the owner in-person at the ice cream shop, having not been in contact for six months. After a moment of small-talk, I delivered a 'cold pitch' of my research project to gauge her interest in potentially allowing me to return to work under the conditions as a covert researcher during the summer months. These conditions included keeping a diary with me in the back-of-house where I would jot down relevant observations, and potentially engaging with the line-up as a greeter. Referencing previous working experience as incentive to rehire me, I also maintained the business would benefit from this research, particularly from my unique role working as greeter as I would offer a friendly customer experience, engaging in brief conversation and compiling a rich consumer profile from these interactions. But, the owner's reaction to my proposal was, understandably, skeptical. She was surprised by my unexpected walk-in proposition, and primarily concerned with the publicity and potential business harm of my research findings. I tried to reiterate my academic, rather than journalistic, intentions of acquiring further insight into the ice cream shop as a complex social world and the relationship between this ice-cream boutique and neighbourhood change.

After this initial proposition and receiving tentative consent from the owner, I remained out of contact for several months as I developed the research proposal for ethics approval. In May 2018, I touched-base with the owner via text message, reiterating my hope to return to work as a front-of-house server during the summer months. As days passed without a response, I visited the shop in-person for a second time. As she simultaneously processed customer transactions, the owner and I spoke very briefly and agreed I would print

out a document detailing the project aims, measures of confidentiality, and my work availability. The next day, I returned with the completed document and waited on Ossington Avenue patiently as the owner reviewed the file inside. Minutes later, she appeared with her baking apron fluttering in the breeze, seemingly not impressed. “The *title*,” she exclaimed, “Are you saying I’m a hipster?” This ‘not-me’ reaction was my first face-to-face engagement with the pejorative connotations with the term hipster, speaking to deep resistance against the moral, aesthetic, and intellectual elitism ‘hipster’ signifies. Before I could respond, she continued interrogating the title, “you’re not going to be asking people if it’s worth the wait, are you? I don’t want you asking them that.” Fearing my fieldwork chances were going up in smoke, I interjected to clarify my use of ‘hipster’ not as a demeaning insult towards her personally, but rather to refer to processes of cool urban change on the Ossington Strip of which her business is included. Additionally, I clarified the rhetorical question, “worth the wait and hype?” embedded in the title of this paper would not be asked during fieldwork, but rather is a rhetorical question and a social comment I have noticed circulating through the blogosphere and everyday discourse on Ossington Avenue. After quelling such terminological anxiety, the owner agreed to place me on the work schedule the following week. But it would be close to a month later in June 2018 before I would work my first shift as a FOH ice-cream scooper researcher.

I formally began fieldwork scooping ice cream in June 2018 ending in October 2018. I worked mostly Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, rotating afternoon shifts (12PM - 6PM) and night shifts (6PM -12:30/1AM). I strategically requested these days specifically for two reasons. Firstly, I knew these shifts—especially Friday and Saturday night shifts—were less desirable amongst FOH servers and securing a shift would likely be easier during these times. Secondly, the linear temporal structures of the capitalist workweek meant Friday, Saturday and Sunday shifts potentially promised more eventfulness and potentially richer observation

and data collection. Each week I would work a total of approximately twenty hours and was paid an Ontario minimum wage of fourteen dollars per-hour and received tips which averaged twenty six-dollars-and-eighty cents per shift.

While working as a covert researcher within the ice cream shop, I did not disclose my research status to each customer for practical and efficiency reasons. I did, however, reveal the observational nature of my employment to staff, who responded positively and inquisitively to the research project. Establishing and sustaining such a rapport and forging collegial relationships with the workers—most of whom I did not know before conducting this research—laid a foundation of trust and rapport, which was instrumental for the interviewing process later on. A practical reason why I disclosed my status as a researcher was also because of my use of a diary in the field. I kept this diary in the back-of-house, out of sight from customers but in plain view of staff, including the owner. The ongoing expectation of scooping to combat the seemingly never-ending lineup combined with the maelstrom of distraction and noise in the ice-cream shop exacerbated the frailty of my memory, which essentialized the manual recording of observations in the diary. Oftentimes, the notes recorded were semi-coherent rough and jotted scribbles, consisting of “little phrases, quotes, key words, and the like” (Lofland and Lofland, 1995: 30). At times, writing these ‘scratch notes’ was uncomfortable; the endless demand of customers meant there was never a ‘good time’ for writing field notes as documentation took *time away* from serving customers and ‘disrupted’ the collective flow of service work. If I were to jot a note, I would feel self-conscious especially under the gaze of the owner, who would watch as I took time away from serving customers, often questioning what I was writing. Even though keeping a diary had been agreed upon as a condition of my employment, I did feel at moments I was strongly encouraged to think twice about taking a field-note.

The second dimension of participant observation in the field included standing outside in public space on Ossington Avenue as an overt researcher, adjacent to the line-up and directly across the street on the sidewalk. Clipboard in-hand, I would observe the language and public behavioral aspects of ice-cream consumption during the evening after finishing an afternoon shift, and during the afternoon before an evening shift. Occasionally, I would visit the research site to strictly observe. Standing on the edge of the sidewalk with a pen and notebook—looking like an uncool social scientist—my visible status as a conspicuous researcher was questioned multiple times by passersby who were curious as to why I was notetaking. After disclosing my researcher status and briefly summarizing the purpose of the project, passerbys would often laugh, wish me well, and move on. I did experience unusual moments during overt observation where entitled pedestrians—namely white, middle-age men—would peer over my shoulder, read my notes, then press me to explain who I was and what I was doing.

### *3.3.2 Filling in the observation gaps: Semi-structured interviewing*

While working as a FOH server and engaging in participant observation can shed light on the nuances of cultural behaviour in this particular milieu, participant observation can not access the underlying thoughts, opinions, motivations, and ideas shaping the richness of social action. In order to fill this methodological gap, I turn to the conversational power of semi-structured interviewing to enable deeper narrative inquiry into how participants rationalize their behaviour and understand the socio-cultural meaning of ice cream. A staple of qualitative social research, in-depth interviews, “explore the worldview of the people being studied, rather than test the researcher’s own ideas about the world” (Bryman and Bell, 2016: 201). For this Master’s thesis, seventeen interviews were conducted in-total, fifteen of which were recorded face-to-face, while one interview with the public relations officer for the

Ossington BIA was conducted via telephone, while the interview conducted with the retail property developer, Hullmark, opted to kindly answer my interview questions via email. Further disaggregated and categorized, four interviews were held with neighbouring businesses, five with customers of the ice cream boutique, and six with staff, including the owner. The interviews took place in a host of locations, geographically ranging from the private benches on Ossington Avenue, to several cafes and diners around downtown Toronto, to inside the ice-cream shop itself. Interviews conducted with customers occurred in public on Ossington Avenue, either on a bench or leaning against the side of a building near the ice cream shop. All customer interviewees were recruited while waiting in-line for ice cream and were unknown to me prior to the interview. I followed Bryman and Bell's (2016: 92) ethical protocol for introducing oneself as a researcher, I firstly identified myself as a master's student at York University who was conducting a social study examining the relationship between ice cream, social media, and neighbourhood change. Following my brief introduction and with their verbal consent, I asked potential interviewees three short questions, namely "how did you hear about this ice cream shop? Do you eat or shop at any other stores on Ossington? And do you plan on documenting your visit to the ice cream shop on social media?" Following such preliminary introductory questions and seeking to avoid applying the pressure of expectation, I ask whether the customer would be interested and had time to participate in a longer, digitally-recorded interview. If the customer agreed to participate in an expanded interview, I would wait for them to complete their ice cream order after standing in line, which would take between forty five minutes to an hour.

In terms of interviewing neighbouring businesses, I met merchants and business actors within their retail space to ensure convenience. These interviews offered insight into the bourgeois retailscape of the Ossington Strip. For instance, the afternoon I arrived to interview the general manager of the restaurant conjoined to the ice cream shop, he and his

colleague were sampling a plethora of red wines while calculating a thick stack of customer transactions, the top receipt I noticed totaled over three hundred dollars (including tip).

Interviews conducted with staff of the ice cream shop were held in social gathering places namely cafes and diners across downtown Toronto. Conducting these interviews at food and beverage establishments granted me the opportunity to thank my interviewees for their time participating in my research project by paying for their meal and/or drink. The interview conducted with the owner of the ice cream shop took place in January 2019 after months of failed attempts, and a day before the owner left for a month-long vacation across Asia.

### *3.3.3 Netnography of Instagram images*

Finally, this research in-part deploys a digital methodology, specifically a netnography, to scrutinize the site specificity of consumption-oriented ice-cream imaging within the digital public realm, particularly on the digital platform Instagram. As the portmanteau suggests, “nethnography” is a methodological approach that combines the study of the culture of online communities with the observational and qualitative component of ethnographic research (Kozinets, 2015). Initially developed as a marketing research method that focused on communication through the digital realm of internet-based forums and websites, “netnography can be a useful, flexible, ethically sensitive, and unobtrusive method adapted to the purpose of studying the language, motivations, consumption linkages, and symbols of consumption-oriented online communities” (Kozinets, 2002: 70). I am less interested in investigating interactive forms of social exchange and dialogue between members of online communities, but rather trace how images produce an aspirational social media public on Instagram that frames a selective and consumptive visualization of place. Incorporating a netnography of Instagram into my research design is critical for tracing the social anxiety of middle-class consumption practices that visualize spatial aesthetics of



hipster retail, including ‘iconic’ food merchandising and gritty urban image of Ossington Avenue.

A visual social media platform, Instagram has become an instrument in the contemporary culture of personal photography for publically chronicling events and moments—both banal and spectacular—from private everyday life (Marwick, 2015; Ibrahim, 2015). Yet, despite the rise of mobile telephony and the imaging of everyday life, particularly by teenagers and young people (Carah and Shaul, 2016), and its subsequent reservoir of rich data, social research methods utilizing Instagram has lagged primarily because the app is a recent addition to social media software and the digital platform flies under the radar for the older socio-demographic profile of academics (Laestadius, 2017). Unlike other dominant social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, the visual nature of Instagram *requires* users to include at least one photo and/or a short video in their post, with text (i.e. captions or hashtags) not required. More likely to include geotag data in comparison to other social media platforms, images posted to Instagram acquire an element of place-specificity and location-based data (Manikonda, et al., 2014). In this regard, the generative capacity of Instagram images and the spatiality of geo-locative posts offer insight into the meaning and depiction of place. Moreover, the online visibility, searchability, and interpretability of Instagram posts afford researchers an innovative methodology for investigating how digital images perform social and cultural life (boyd, 2010; Laestadius, 2017).

The following netnographic discussion of this thesis draws from data collected in 2019 of the ‘top’ one-hundred images posted to Instagram using the geotag of the ice cream shop. The inclusion and embeddedness of geotags in an Instagram post promotes the cultural location of the image and spatializes the post by pinpointing its precise position on a digital map (Laestadius, 2017). To unpack the netnography of Instagram posts, I utilize Rose’s (2016: 56) approach of “compositional interpretation” which “offers a detailed vocabulary for

expressing the appearance of an image.” Utilizing this compositional modality does not mean I interpret these digital images in a vacuum without social context for, following Rose (2016: 57), “looking [at visual images] for ‘what they are’ neglects the ways in which they are produced and interpreted through particular social practices”. In this way, I bear in mind the “social modality” of Instagram images, taking into consideration the “economic, social, and political relations, institutions and practices that surround an image and through which it is seen and used” (Rose, 2016: 26). Scrutinizing Instagram ‘content’ from such an interpretivist perspective opens a new window into studying ‘common-sense’ behaviours in the gentrification process and how actors frame ice cream in relation to social media identity and neighbourhood identity.

While the complex realm of social media research may offer a treasure trove of potentially rich social data and observation, ethical considerations of social media research including questions of informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity, must be ensured to avoid potential harm to participants, and scholars have struggled to address such ethical concerns (Laestadius, 2017). For example, Marwick (2015), who scrapes Instagram posts in her analysis of the multiscalar dimension of social media celebrity and fame, is unconcerned with the de-identification of research data and does not mention whether consent was obtained from participants. Rose (2016: 302) notes two fundamental ethical dimensions when working with digitally scraped data: online users have not explicitly given their consent to social researchers for the use of their images and any data collected by the researcher, “should be anonymised so that no individuals can be identified.” For this research, all Instagram posts have been anonymized and de-identified to ensure confidentiality. Moreover, for this research, a ‘clean’ Instagram account was created (@researchicecream).

### **3.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has situated the case study of an ice cream boutique in a broader spatial context. As the redevelopment of the Centre for Addiction and Mental health has ‘lifted’ the reputational and spatial stigma of place and created an attractive business climate for capital and culture, Lower Ossington has risen as a distinct enclave for cultural consumption. Moreover, this chapter engaged in the triangulation of methodologies, highlighting retail-based ethnography, semi-structured interviews, and netnography as core dimensions shaping the research design and the nature of fieldwork. Operationalizing these methodologies and building on theory presented in the literature review above, the following chapter steps inside the independent ice-cream boutique, investigating the work of hipster retailing, and the making and selling of new urban commodities.

## Chapter 4 – Hipster Entrepreneurship and the Aestheticization of Urban Retailing

Examining the advancing “omnivorous gentrification” of Ossington Avenue from the inside (Hyde, 2014), this empirical chapter analyzes socio-spatial dynamics of making and selling urban foodie goods aestheticizing the shop floor of hipster ice-cream retailing. I argue small-scale entrepreneurial processes of production and merchandising not only ventriloquize the learned ‘aesthetic disposition’ of the self-employed proprietor, but such culinary and image practices of distinctiveness embody and reflect the occupational emergence of the working hipster as a new local micro actor dominating the output and outlook of postindustrial inner-city retailing (Scott, 2017). The chapter investigates aestheticizing dynamics of hipster retailing from viewpoints of making and selling. On the production side, the aesthetic agenda of the proprietor draws symbolic boundaries, and high monetary prices, around new ice-cream products by encrypting the making of goods with omnivorous tendencies that privilege the high cultural capital of foodie subjectivities who can ‘unlock’ schemes of classed taste. Such aestheticization of ice-cream making deploys strategies of ‘alternative production practices’ that ‘reframes’ the novelty of ice-cream objects by weaving tropes of foodie authenticity: personal connection, craft production, neighbourhood locality, and exoticism. On the merchandising side, the selling of ice cream staging of the new urban consumption space aestheticizes the personality of Ossington Avenue from within, shifting the look of local retail towards an exploitable consumer spectacle that invites the new hipster middle classes to network and fetishize on social media platforms. The retail design of the shop curates a commercial *mise-en-scene* staged by the look of the industrialized ice-cream menu, the craft display case of baked goods, and the performance of the food retail servicescape.

Yet both ‘back-stage’ and ‘front-stage’ aesthetic food production introduce new forms of spatial and class inequality into the retailscape of Ossington Avenue. Gentrifying the

Ossington shop floor for the tastes and incomes of networked privileged consumption practices, the hipster entrepreneurship of ice-cream commerce and the special character of alternative novelties transforms the space and status of old inner-city shopping streets into an elite urban marketplace of distinctiveness and uniqueness.

#### ***4.1 “It was very much about the way something looked”: the aesthetic disposition and the shop floor of urban hipster retailing***

Each flavour of ice cream sold over the counter at the Ossington Avenue retailer is made in small individual batches on-site, processed by hand one tub at a time through a single industrial ice-cream machine, and kept frozen solid in the deep walk-in freezer (except for gluten-free flavours Vegan Chocolate and Raspberry Sorbet which are purchased and sourced from outside suppliers). The menu of ice-cream flavours is open-ended and changes constantly, not only rotating based on demand over the course of the workday but also fluctuates based on the seasons of the year. As the proprietor explains, “we have maybe ten rotating flavours that will change... There are anywhere between sixty to one-hundred flavours [in total]. Twenty-five to thirty is what is put out everyday. And maybe ten of those are what would be seasonal.” This temporal character of ice-cream flavours means new flavours are introduced and others ‘hibernate’ as the ingredients ebb and flow in and out of seasons of the year. In addition to ice-cream making, the food retailer specializes in the making of gourmet baked goods to pair with ice-cream products. The assortment of baked goods sold centers on the ‘house-made’ production of cookies, including the b’day (lemon-sugar dusted with cookie crumb and rainbow sprinkles), the everything (chocolate chip with oats, peanuts, pretzels, and potato chips), the rococoa (seventy-percent dark *Callebaut* chocolate sprinkled with pinch of sea salt), the old fashioned oat (raisins and dates), the captain peanut (candied peanut brittle and Cap’n Crunch cereal), the ginger

molasses (cardamom and topped with coarsely ground black pepper), the stay classy (browned butter chocolate chip), and two vegan and gluten-free cookies, one espresso-based and the other blueberry. In addition to such precious cookies, other baked goods on the menu include daily piped French choux pastries (plain or chocolate hazelnut), cream-cheese frosted cinnamon buns, and Hong-Kong waffles, a made-to-order octagon waffle peeled by hand off the grill and curled into the shape of a sphere. As enforced by the proprietor, each baked good can be sold *à la carte* except for the choux profiteroles that *must* be served with ice-cream because they taste ‘bad’ without. Similar to the rotation of ice-cream flavours and depending on the busyness of the proprietor, seasonal speciality goods—*macarons*, mochi, pie, doughnuts, bread pudding, butter tarts, and chiffon cake—are sold with ice cream.

The on-site production of local ice-cream and baked goods is accounted for in the expensive pricing of food products. The price range in 2018, not including gratuity, include: single scoop (four ounces) of ice cream \$4.15, double scoop (six ounces) \$5.90, half ice-cream sandwich \$4.95, full ice-cream sandwich \$7.75, choux pastry (with ice cream) \$5.00-5.50, cinnamon bun ice-cream sandwich \$7.50, and Hong-Kong ice-cream waffle \$7.96. All vegan products are marked up by additional \$1-2 and small hand-packed ‘to-go’ containers (fourteen-sixteen ounces) are sold for \$12-14. In 2022, prices are more expensive. \$4.75 for a single scoop, \$6.75 for a double scoop, \$5.65 for a half-cream sandwich, full ice-cream sandwich \$9.25, choux pastry \$5.75-\$6.30, cinnamon bun ice-cream sandwich \$8.50, Hong-Kong ice-cream waffle \$8.25, and small hand-packed ‘to-go’ containers (fourteen-sixteen ounces) are still sold for \$12-14. Sprinkles are ‘free’.

Such inflated prices in part reflect the cost of ingredients and labour but also are inextricably tied to the ongoing gentrification of Ossington Avenue as a new playground of affluence as well as increasing rent prices for the storefront retail. The business owner suggests the symbolic capital of an Ossington Avenue address ‘justifies’ the high cost of

products, noting the prices could be even higher, “I’ve had people say to me, ‘oh you’re on Ossington? You could be charging a lot more for what you’re serving’. Because the people who come down here have money and have that money to spend.” Hence, the cost of products in gentrified retail are informed by spatial transformation and erect economic barriers of price.

Yet in addition to the price of goods, it is critical to examine the subtle dynamics of cultural exclusion embedded into ice-cream making that draw and reinforce class differences and social hierarchical boundaries through foodie taste (Johnston and Bauuman, 2015). Instrumental to this process is the socio-spatial expression of the ‘aesthetic disposition’ underlying the entrepreneurial worldview of self-employed hipsters and in turn shapes the material production and consumption of retailing. For Ley (2003), following Bourdieu (1984), the ‘aesthetic disposition’ refers to the symbolic power of the working artist to materialize new forms of value, articulating the learned capacity and classed propensity to objectify high cultural capital from an accumulated stock of knowledge that transforms the aesthetic status of commercial products and geographical spaces. More specifically, Ley (2003: 2531) clarifies the sociological dimension of the aesthetic disposition as a “class-based temperament” conveying the transposability of ‘competence’ across cultural forms and the aesthetic exploitation of the privileged historical possession of “[m]iddle-class origins, and/or high levels of education” (Ley, 2003:). At the same time, and connected to the ‘first waves’ of gentrification, geographers have noted the spatial dimension of the aesthetic disposition that represents the locational tendency of the working artist to collectively situate in low-rent and deindustrializing buildings in seemingly forgotten yet ‘raw’ neighborhoods (Ley 2003; Bain, 2006; Matthews, 2010). Overtime, however, the geographical consequences of the aesthetic disposition valorizing urban space manifest, drawing the calculating eye of real estate capitalists and corporate investors commodifying the ‘margins’ of inner-city artistic

space into the expanding core of the downtown luxury property market (Zukin, 1991; Ley 2003; Zukin, 2008).

Identifying as an artist and possessing an educational background specializing in the manual production and design of visual images, the entrepreneurial practices of the proprietor exerting connoisseurial control over making and selling dynamics speaks to socio-spatial dimensions of the elitist aesthetic disposition enacted in the context of hipster retail gentrification processes. A brief biographical account of the proprietor reveals the flow of the aesthetic disposition across elite cultural forms. Before entering urban retail commerce, the business owner professionally *learned* an aesthetic disposition, acquiring specialized technical knowledge and creative visual training in illustration and received institutional degree certification from an art university in Toronto. Following professional visual illustration work in the graphic design world, and recycling the learned intellectual dispositions of art school education, the proprietor migrated aesthetic domains into the realm of avant-garde culinary fashion specializing as an ornamental sugar worker shaping the visual design of sculptural cakes. Following the high-brow purveyance of edible sweet spectacles, the disposition of ‘cultural competence’ morphed into neo-artisanal urban production and the specialized making of pastries, desserts, and other precious sweet goods, as the proprietor became the independent shop owner of a *pâtisserie* in inner-city Toronto. Carrying this *patissier* experience over to ice-cream commerce on Ossington Avenue, the proprietor highlights how artistic training informs the particularity of aesthetic commercial practices,

I think it [artistic training] might come across more in the baked goods, or the aesthetic of the baked goods. Or how it’s presented. More presentation than anything. Um, I mean illustration *turned into* cake decorating, which is very *particular* and very *aesthetic*. It was very much about the way something looked. It was very much a visual thing. Um, in terms of ice cream, I don’t know. There are products that we have that people like to Instagram [and] put out on social media [which reflects] the detail to aesthetic and the way something looks. (02-01-2019)



This “economic valorisation of the aesthetic disposition” generalizing the practice of illustration into an entrepreneurial means of commercial presentation reveals the mobilization of the symbolic power of educational training into the aestheticization of the ‘look’ of new urban products (Ley, 2003: 2540). As I highlight below, the entrepreneurial visuality of the aesthetic disposition is legible in selling and merchandising processes of hipster retailing. As the proprietor suggests, the transference of cultural knowledge informing the aesthetic disposition extends beyond the realm of design as “a visual thing” imbuing the *making* of ice-cream. More broadly, this making outlook of the self-employed proprietor exemplifies the new manual service work of hipster entrepreneurship materializing new forms of fashion-oriented neo-artisanal urban production in the gentrifying inner city reflecting the simultaneous aestheticization of working-class professions and retail shopping streets (Scott, 2008; Ocejo, 2017; Scott, 2017). Following Scott (2008: 67), such socio-spatial character of hipster retail entrepreneurship reaestheticizing ordinary commercial products and geographical spaces with cultural capital reinforces the ways in which

workers with well-honed artistic and intellectual sensibilities make up an increasingly important part of the labour force, for contemporary capitalism is also the site of a remarkable efflorescence of cultural-products industries in the broadest sense, that is industries whose final outputs are permeated with at least some degree of aesthetic and semiotic content, and where such matters as fashion, meaning, entertainment value, look, and feel, are decisive factors in shaping consumers’ choices about the products that they buy.

Indeed, as the biography and profile of the proprietor illustrates, the distinctive occupational identity of hipster entrepreneurs assimilates into this elite fraction of the urban labour force, infusing “well-honed artistic and intellectual sensibilities” and the charismatic authority of the aesthetic disposition into new inner-city retail production processes catering to omnivorous consumption practices and disposable middle-class incomes (Hyde, 2014; Scott, 2017; Ocejo, 2017; Shaker-Ardekani and Rath, 2020). Encoding cultural knowledge into the light manufacturing of ice-cream retail products, the making process reflects the social

incorporation of the aesthetic disposition into the production of urban hipster retailing, as the business owner leverages the omnivorous impulse of ‘cultural openness’ and aesthetically exploits eclectic experiences of food consumption to render new flavour,

It [ice-cream inspiration] comes from *anything* I eat...it’s often from a savory meal and *I’ll take that and turn it into* something sweet. And see how I can *change it up* or turn it into something sweet like an ice cream flavour. I’m often *converting* savoury to sweet. At least that’s what my goal is, or at least that’s what it has been. Usually ends up in an *interesting* flavour.

Manipulating the metaphorical character of savory cuisine, the reinterpretation of the taste of umami into a new form of sweetness objectifies the cultural capital of culinary omnivorousness, representing how urban foodie production evokes the artistic identity and class orientation of the proprietor who encrypts the privileged disposition of aesthetic appreciation and knowledge acquisition into the making of small-batch ice cream.

Conceptually consistent with patterns of trendy cultural consumption, this aesthetic twist of the savoury quality drawing from food forms such as craft beer, avocado, black sesame, fig and *chèvre* (Grey Owl, surface-ripened goat's milk cheese), cream of corn, and, in the past, double smoked bacon (now out of vogue), frames “interesting”—esoteric—flavour from classifications of taste, subsequently attaching symbolic barriers of cultural distance onto ice-cream products. This omnivorous framing of ice-cream flavour signal bourgeois distinction enact local cultural exclusion by privileging the ‘competence’ of consumers who can ‘see’ the complexity and decode the ‘literacy’ of the proprietor’s aesthetic interpretation of “interesting” flavour. This gastronomical palate and omnivorous tendency shaping food production processes of hipster entrepreneurship materializes the objectification of cultural capital in the form of ice-cream objects, which are achieved through motifs of foodie authenticity (Hyde, 2014; Johnston and Bauuman, 2015). Diving deeper into the new retail milieu of hipster entrepreneurship, the next subsection excavates the foodiescape of

aestheticization objectifying the aesthetic disposition: personal connection, craft production, neighbourhood locality, and exoticism.

#### ***4.2 Alternative production practices: making foodie authenticity***

A subjective, discursive, and relational aesthetic construction that changes across space and time, authenticity is not an inherent feature but rather is continuously recontextualized, remade, and mutually agreed upon by social actors in positions of power who get to ascribe ‘the authentic’ as an intangible ideal and symbolic meaning that ‘goes beyond’ material qualities (Zukin, 2010). In the context of foodie consumer culture, Johnston and Baumann (2015: 65) note the ascription of authenticity connects to aesthetic categories of culinary signifiers in which attributes of personalized connection, sense of place, scale of manufacturing, ‘simplicity’ of cooking methods, romanticized history, and ethnicity typologize markers fabricating the ‘real identity’ of food objects. Following Johnston and Baumann’s (2015) typology of foodie authenticity and adapting Zukin’s (2008) concept of alternative consumption practices, the aestheticization of ice-cream making perpetuating “omnivorous gentrification” is based on the deployment of ‘alternative production practices’ that contrast mass forms of corporate capitalist production and reflect the role of hipster entrepreneurs as new occupational agents of change reproducing cultural and class exclusions within inner-city shopping streets (Hyde, 2014).

##### ***4.2.1 Personal Proprietary Connection***

As suggested above, inspiration for new ice-cream flavour identifies with the subjective taste of the art-school educated proprietor, who expresses personal identity and cultural desire into the engineering of food objects. As she notes, when thinking of new flavours she reflexively asks herself, “what do *I* like, what do *I* want to eat, and how would that translate to people. It’s [producing new flavours] basically what I want to eat and what

I've discovered or what inspires *me*. And then I just go with that and start experimenting.”

Informed by the aesthetic disposition, such a direct relationship to the making of the good fabricates the ‘recognizable signature’ of the unique food product by mixing a sense of class identity with omnivorous urges into the experimentation process. Yet, such micro-production processes depend on the employment of a small but highly-trained team of educated culinary labour, led by the head ice-cream maker and de facto manager, Cheyenne, who not only routinely executes the everyday inventory and making of ice cream but also contributes to the development of new flavours. Schooled in the practice of engineering and formally trained in the craft of pastry arts, Cheyenne notes that the potential for experimentation and the personal expression of culinary tastemaking attracted her to the job of ice-cream maker: “I have full freedom. I get to make whatever I want. I discuss it with [the proprietor] that I want to *make up* this flavour and she agrees to work on it together in a very small batch” (07-11-2018). But, Cheyenne’s “full freedom” to “make whatever she wants” faces the aesthetic judgment of the proprietor who asserts ultimate control over culinary processes of experimentation, development, and production, authorizing which flavours make and do not make the final cut onto the menu. Moreover, such experimentation in practice happens in the temporal cracks between batches of production during the busy workday, as Cheyenne notes, “I tend to experiment while I’m doing work. I’ll put [experiments] on as a side project [while] I’m waiting for something [to process] in the machine...I’ll make it in-between.” Working on shift, it was not uncommon to see Cheyenne and the proprietor coalescing around the ice-cream machine to *privately* discuss and sample flavours under development. When testing batches ‘fail’, ice creams would be melted down at room temperature and flushed down the toilet. In this way, the profit-oriented experimentation of new flavours expresses not only personal connection but also personal control, as the making of new flavours is not a shared, collective, and collaborative process among all workers but a closed, asymmetrical, and

hierarchical process of taste-making that works to maintain power structures of proprietary authority.

#### 4.2.2 *The small scale of production*

‘Authentic’ expression in the urban entrepreneurial kitchen also relates to the scale of alternative production practices ‘humanizing’ the making of ice-cream. This *ascription* of the symbolic value of foodie authenticity stands in opposition to the anonymity of machine automation technologies and mass production practices manufacturing impersonal commodities in the oppressive global factory. The preciousness of the small scale and small-batch goods perpetuates the notion that craft production “has traditionally been regarded as expressive of the more humane, creative and authentic aspects of human nature”, which revolves around the alternative figure of the craft producer, “who exercises personal control over all the processes involved in the manufacture of the good in question” (Campbell, 2005: 27). In this way, the ‘boutique’ aspect of making relates to the intervention of trained human labour establishing ‘back-to-basics’ craft-based techniques in the hipster marketplace, in which bakers and makers manually preparing artisanal ingredients for ice-cream and baked-good production implement the vision of the proprietor as a craft food producer. This scale of manufacturing translates into ice-cream makers manually extracting ‘raw’ materials to register the simplicity of ‘real’ flavour. For citrus and herb-infused ice-cream flavours, such as orange cardamom, *Tarte au Citron* (lemon tart), key lime pie, pink lemonade, fresh mint, vegan mojito, and London fog (earl grey tea *caffè* latte) workers zest the rind of bulk quantities of ripe fruit, individually pluck herbal leaves from bushels of produce, and squeeze the juice from large nets soaked with liquid marinade. This scale of ‘house-made’ manufacturing process signifies the preparation of ice-cream ingredients ‘made from scratch’. For instance, Belgian dark chocolate chips are melted down over a pot of simmering water for chocolate drizzle, sugar is carefully scorched into burnt bitter syrup, the

tops of mini marshmallows are charred with the flame of a portable blow torch lighter to convey smokiness, and individual trays of whole almonds, peanut brittle, gram cracker crumb, kyoto miso cherries are toasted and roasted in the professional oven. Such specialized labour crafting ice-cream products reinforces inflated pricing associated with the cost of culinary omnivorousness. Indeed, the on-site preparation of food production produces the aesthetic smell of craft, emitting an invisible element that contributes to the specialness of the small scale.

As Cheyenne notes, such manual labour processes aestheticize the taste of authenticity through the ongoing presence of simplicity, “we want everything to taste the same. We want all the oranges to taste the same, we want all the lemons to taste the same. It’s funny to say it but there’s different types of oranges, different types of limes...and it’s not me who’s saying that, *it’s actually customers.*” Facing the pressure of high standards from the Lower Ossington customer, Cheyenne keeps a watchful eye over each flavour during the production process, tasting the product at the beginning, middle, and end of development,

C: I have to try the product three times. I have to try it once it’s made, once it comes out of the machine, and then the next day when someone pulls it [from the freezer]. Because it changes every time.

B: What changes every time?

C: the flavour. I have to check the flavour and the consistency. Make sure it’s not icy, make sure the flavours are all *there*. So in those three stages, I have to make sure they’re all fine. So, I am eating ice cream every day.

Other craft-based technical skills demonstrate specialized training to realize more sophisticated multi-step recipes. This includes the making of “chunky” ice creams, flavours with “multiple inclusions” such as MUD (espresso, roasted almonds, and fudge), rocky roadkill (roasted almonds, roasted marshmallows, and caramel) and PB&J (peanut butter and jelly—yes, my favourite), which require differentiation into multi-tiered thermal layers, posing higher risk for culinary error. As Cheyenne explains, “[chunky flavours] have a

temperature...anything drizzled in pretty much that has to be a different temperature than the actual ice cream. I have to make sure it [the temperature of the drizzle] doesn't affect it [the ice cream]. If not, and depending on the ice cream, the whole ice cream can be garbage.” As Cheyenne’s practical knowledge suggests, such craft work must validate the precious sensitivities of the product in development to avoid producing “garbage” ice cream.

#### *4.2.3 The local taste of gentrifying place*

Overlapping dynamics of personal connection and craft production is the geographical distinctiveness of place, fabricating the uniqueness, originality, and particularly of urban foodie authenticity (Molotch, 2002; Zukin, 2010; Harvey, 2012). As suggested, on-site processes of neighbourhood production embeds the signal of locality into the making process, representing how “goods contain—in the details their fabrication and outcome—the place of their origin” (Molotch, 2002: 665). In this way, the aestheticization of ice-cream making reflects a trace of place, geographically embodying the “new beginnings” of the gentrifying identity of Ossington Avenue, in which the spatial introduction of new forms of neighbourhood cultural consumption serves as an elitist expression of urban authenticity (Zukin, 2010). This culinary characteristic of new elite urban authenticity emphasizes the operation of local ice-cream products as a form of “geographical knowledge” wherein the “cultural meanings of places and spaces” are “deployed in order to re-enchant food commodities and to differentiate them from the devalued functionality and homogeneity of standardized products, tastes, and places” (Cook and Crang, 1996: 132). Such ‘geographical knowledge’ informing the aesthetic of ice-cream commodities extends beyond the site of the ice-cream shop and incorporates the local identity of new retail gentrifiers, as the business owner ‘collaborates’ with proximate independent neighbourhood store owners who supply specialized ingredients for ice-cream making, “I try my best to use what we have locally,” the proprietor notes, enlisting “local artisans, coffee roasters, and beer brewers and other

restaurants on the [Ossington] strip. We borrow and buy things off of them and incorporate them into our ice cream...We've been talking about using jams from local jam makers." This incorporation of local goods products includes locally-roasted, but globally-sourced, dark coffee beans sourced from the local hipster cafe chain Sam James Coffee Bar (SJCB), 'experimental' craft beer brewed from the small distillery Bellwoods Brewery, and goat cheese from *Côte de Boeuf*, an upscale butcher shop 'inspired by the neighborhoods of Paris'. Such geographic proximity incorporating the tastes of the new food retail elite is advertised directly onto the menu of ice-cream flavours to indicate the local identity of inner-city goods, suggesting commodities are 'original artifacts' 'native' to the 'hip' locale of Lower Ossington.

Indeed, the ice-cream retailer reciprocates in the local exchange of goods, making classic flavours (i.e. vanilla and chocolate-based flavours) for chef-led restaurants on the shopping block as well as other selective food retail establishments. The mutual exchange of artisan products works to consolidate and insulate an inner circle of taste membership amongst a small elite network of food retail gentrifiers whose social and cultural capital presides over the retailing of authenticity in the inner city, recognizing and validating each other as entrepreneurial arbiters of 'real local taste'. But speaking about the depth of 'collaboration' between local businesses, the proprietor (02-01-2019) acknowledged, "I'm not so sure it's a collaboration as much as it is buying things off people and using it in our ice cream." Consequently, the stamp of collaboration advertised on the product performs the facade of neighbourhood camaraderie.

#### 4.2.4 'Exotic' flavours

The final category signaling the aesthetic trope of foodie authenticity in hipster ice-cream retailing is the flavour and form of 'exoticism'. Within the context of foodie culture, Johnston and Baumann (2015) contextualize a duality of impulses underpinning food



practices of culinary exoticism in the urban West. On the one hand, eating outside the eurocentric culinary mainstream promotes a discourse of democratic openness “representing a cosmopolitan interest in broadening the culinary canon and forming intercultural connections” (87), while on the other hand, more critically, ‘food adventuring’ augments social power dynamics of desire that “builds on and reproduces certain neo-colonial inequalities” as middle-class consumers seeking to eat the ‘exotic other’ exploit ‘foreign’ foods as an edible form of knowledge in the acquisition of cultural capital (Johnston and Baumann, 2015: 87).

Internalizing this duality, the ice-cream products characterize two ‘exotic’ dimensions: the ‘ethnicity’ of flavour and ‘foreignness’ of form. Firstly, the globality of ice-cream flavours in particular relates to ethno-cultural flavours of Asia including taro (purple yam and coconut), ginger milk, and mango coconut with warm sticky rice, matcha genmaicha, matcha tiramisu, yuzu citrus, miso mon *cheri*, boba papa milk tea with tapioca pearls. While working as a server, customers did not explicitly use ‘ethnic’ to directly describe such flavours, but instead encoded the language of exoticism in more subtle terms such as “different”, “interesting”, and “weird”. Indeed, the act of sampling ice-cream flavours was deployed as the means through which ‘curiosity’ was exercised. Customers would often request samples *after* placing their order, noticing an ‘unusual’ flavour that ‘caught their eye’. For instance, the flavour avocado was frequently sampled rather than ordered, often referencing authenticity by noting the simplicity of flavour the tastes ‘just like’ an avocado. This desire of curiosity expressed in the sampling recalls Johnston and Baumann’s (2015) distinction in taste between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ forms of exoticism, referring to the culinary spectrum of social distance that shapes the subjective foodie interest in foods from the Global South. On the one hand, ‘strong’ culinary exoticism is devalourized and stigmatized, associated with “poor, rural people of colour in developing countries” and “attached to foods

that are discursively constructed as foods of people who are socially, economically, and geographically most distant from the American foodie” (Johnston and Baumann, 2015: 100). In contrast, weak culinary exoticism is valorized, referring to the ways ordinary food commodities are tweaked with exotic ingredients, producing new omnivorous cuisines seemingly closer to the classed dispositions and social comfort levels of foodies (Johnston and Baumann, 2015). This ‘exotic hierarchy’ reveals a politics of palatability sewn along lines of class, race, and geography, in which foods of ‘extreme’ social distance from the foodie *habitus* are devalued on the basis that they are too unfamiliar, too unrecognizable, *too exotic*. Indeed, the weak exoticism of ice-cream flavours sits in cultural proximity to foodie taste, celebrated as a form culinary cosmopolitanism, as noted by front-of-house worker Lisa,

There are people that come from all over the GTA [Greater Toronto Area] specifically to have our ice cream. And that means there’s a lot of people from different backgrounds. I think [this ice cream shop] is also especially frequented by people of so many different races, it’s very diverse in its flavours as well. Definitely the Iranian community comes for lychee rose-water, definitely you know, like soursop speaks to the Caribbean community and people really come out of their way for it. (29-10-18)

Such cultural variety of global flavour that appeal to different ethno-racialized groups suggests privileged eating practices in private consumption spaces are open and democratic. But this worldly celebration of ice-cream commerce as a diasporic space of harmonious urban ethnic relations represents an edible form of aesthetic multiculturalism reserved for the economic and cultural privilege of the middle class (Kipfer and Goonewardena, 2005). Moreover, and ironically, the gentrified ice-cream boutique spatializes the ongoing *de-diversification* of local shopping streets from ordinary sites of social difference to extraordinary enclaves for performing the ‘difference’ of class distinction (Zukin, 1995; Zukin, 2008; Hall, 2012).

Moreover, the appeal of the exotic underscores the geographies of global supply chains putting into place the making of ‘ethnic’ flavors, as the biography and meaning of globally-sourced food products change as they reworked into the production of small-batch

ice-cream (Hughes and Reimer, 2004). As the proprietor notes, “a lot of ingredients are also brought in overseas, so a lot of that stuff isn’t or wouldn’t be considered ‘fresh’...we use such large quantities. In terms of bringing in soursop you know, we would bring in a frozen soursop paste that you can’t find in the city fresh.” Passing through large-scale food systems, imported international products such Boba (cassava root), taro, soursop, and Yuzu (Japanese citrus fruit) move through global chains of production and distribution to reach the ‘terminus’ of the ice cream boutique for final consumption, recontextualized as precious commodities ascribed with the symbolic value of ‘exotic’ food fashion (Pratt, 2008).

Adding to the ‘exoticism’ of flavour is the interplay of colour and shape assembling the visual and material form of ice cream novelties as a type of spectacle. The commercialized colour of the ice-cream product floods the object with an array of saturation, ranging from deep hues to pastel tones, and circular patterns, including swirls and drizzles. In particular, the rich violet colour of the taro ice-cream flavour was consistently recognized as ‘visually exotic’ by customers who would regularly ask the question: “what’s the purple one?” (Many customers would guess the flavour was grape). Indeed, retail workers make recommendations for flavour combinations based on compatible colours (i.e. pairing soft pastel flavours such as pink lemonade and avocado). Moreover, the ‘alternative formats’ of ice-cream products served not only in the classic paper-cup or wafer cone, but in pastries, cookies, cinnamon buns, and the most noticeable of all novelties, the Hong-Kong style waffle. In this way, the making of ‘norm-breaking’ ice-cream goods do not resemble mainstream and conventional material product forms. Raj, a customer in his late-twenties, noted (02-09-18) he purchased the waffle for nostalgic reasons, noting the food product reminded him of childhood experiences growing up in the inner suburbs of Toronto in the 1990s. As he says, Hong-Kong waffles were “*a very Toronto thing, but not a very downtown thing...I would have [paid] a dollar growing up in Scarborough.*” “Now,” he says, “I’m

paying probably ten times.” As Raj suggests, new hipster retail gentrifiers appropriating and transposing traditional ethno-cultural products into the upscaling marketplace of the inner city inflate their price, as the goods are perceived and purchased as ‘exotic’ by cultural consumers.

#### ***4.3 Aestheticizing retail vision: the selling of ice cream***

The dynamic of aestheticization in hipster retailing not only shows up in the ‘back-stage’ processes of making but also in ‘front-stage’ forms of selling. Informed by the aesthetic design disposition of the proprietor, the theatrical staging of *mise-en-scene* of merchandising is performed by the industrial bucket-list menu of ice-cream flavours, the display case of baked goods, and the conspicuousness of the food servicescape merchandise. Such optical theatrics shaping new hipster retail aesthetics consequently frame the vision of the changing internal identity of Lower Ossington.

This aestheticizing of the private commercial interior signifies the changing geography of private property on Ossington Avenue, in which the visual remaking of the space marks the displacement of the former automobile repair and the installation of a new shop floor of making and selling. This process of retail gentrification involved the investment of ‘sweat equity’—time, labour, and entrepreneurial capital—into renovating the retail site, including the process of ‘retrofitting’, particularly upgrading infrastructures of plumbing, and electricity to realize ice-cream production, as the proprietor noted (02-01-2019) “there is no basement so there isn’t a drain. We<sup>2</sup> needed to be smart about how we were going to do that because we run an ice-cream machine and a walk-in freezer. We had to run pipes along the wall to the back...We had basic plumbing for sinks and toilets. Just not for larger equipment, which we managed to install”. In addition to the installation of ‘hard’ infrastructure of

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout the interview, the proprietor uses the pronoun “we” to imply that business operations once consisted of a familial partnership primarily between her and her brother, who is a specialized credential ice-cream maker. He abruptly left the business in 2017 and the proprietor does not acknowledge him nor his contributions over the course of our interview.

production, the retail gentrification process also reflects a ‘soft’ infrastructure of design informed by the learned visual aesthetic disposition of the proprietor who wields an ‘alternative commercial vision’. The interior retail designscape is dominated by materialities of whiteness, white paint, tile, and cylindrical pendant lights. Such whitewashing displaces the historical connection of the space to ‘heavier’ manufacturing roots, as the ‘lightness’ of the new hipster commercial aesthetic imitates the gallery-esque ‘white cube’ of the art world to convey values of ‘purity’, ‘neutrality’, and ‘humility’ (O’Doherty, 1999). The proprietor connects this minimalist aesthetic with her personal design orientation, “*this is me*. I don’t know if this is anything different than anything else out there. Or whether this is appealing to people,” she briefly pauses gesturing towards the ice-cream menu, “I mean this has sort of become *iconic*. I know this wall of ice-cream flavours has become iconic. I don’t know, maybe that’s just my aesthetic...I mean even the design of the shop is very minimal. There isn’t a lot going on. It’s pretty *humble*...No? I mean, I want *the food* to be *the focus*.” Like the elite presentation of commercial artwork within gallery spaces, the purpose of the visual minimalism of the retail white-box aesthetic is juxtaposition, acting as a ‘sober’ and ‘plain’ surrounding that frames the look of food merchandising as “the focus” of the gaze of consumer attention.

As the proprietor suggests, the “iconic” imposing structure of the industrialized ice-cream menu acts as a core element in the ‘Insta-proof’ commercial *mise-en-scène*. In contrast to the mainstream ice-cream shop where the variety of ice-cream is conventionally presented upfront for the customer to see and identify, the hipster orientation of ice-cream merchandising abstracts the method of ordering ice cream by invisibilizing the physical tubs of ice cream and forcing the customer to order from the text of flavours and imagine the product. Indeed, the text of the ice-cream menu is aestheticized. Showcased across five standardized rows of symmetrical stainless steel buckets, the cold aesthetic of the metallic

menu symbolizes neo-artisanal small-batch production processes while interfaces the product and the consumer through the glamour of austerity. Moreover, the typography of individual flavours are manually *illustrated* on sheets of white paper, designed with a thick slanted-edge black Sharpie, calligraphed *only* with the proprietor's stylized penmanship. In addition to the calligraphy of the 'retail gentrification font', the proprietor hand draws playful pictorial images for particular flavours, sketching an open-faced avocado for the avocado flavour and a skewer of a hot roasting marshmallow for the campfire marshmallow flavour. Workers are discouraged from manually producing and sketching flavour signs themselves as the proprietary control over commercial writing and drawing seeks to establish the value of visual coherence by endowing the graphic design of the business with the distinctiveness of a learned and consistent aesthetic disposition.

Along with the imposing architecture of the ice-cream menu, the display of baked-good commodities spectacularizes the sight of food merchandising. Such aesthetic image practices of the proprietor express the taste of classification by orchestrating the entrepreneurial presentation of speciality baked-goods into a panorama of sweetness, sorting and grouping collections of abundance, 'curating' uniform rows of baked 'house-made' cookies, chubby cinnamon buns, flaky choux pastry, and upside-down ice-cream cones contained inside a custom-built wooden-case shielded with transparent glass. This "landscape of glass" not only acts as a technology of enticement affording a visual commercial environment that encourages goggling and promotes consumption (Leach, 1993), but the display case of commodities showcasing classification and exhibiting ornamentation consolidates relations of urban neo-artisanal production under glass to frame an encyclopedia of local goods (Hetherington, 2008). Indeed, part of front-of-house server duties is not only taking customer orders but also regularly maintaining the aesthetic enticement of the display case of baked goods by relentlessly cleaning the glass surface spotless and perpetually

restocking the panorama of products to replenish the image of abundance showcasing the edible spectacle of sweetness. This *tableaux* of the gourmet local foodscape advertises the banquet of baked goods with ‘identity labels’ indicating their individualized ‘name’ with ‘customized’ taste recommendations for ice-cream pairing. Moreover, a set of product props modeling the ice-cream puff, ice-cream sandwich, and waffle are staged on a decorative tray at the ordering counter as frames of reference for the consumer to admire.

Lastly, contributing to this montage of merchandising selling aestheticized goods is the embodied visibility of front-of-house retail service labour. Such visibility highlights how the layout of the retail store involves the “dissolution of regionalizations of frontness and backness” (Crang, 1994: 700), wherein specialized stations for waffle-making and ice-cream sandwich-making are fixed in the front-of-house in plain sight of the point of purchase. This spatial dynamic structuring the visibility of aesthetic service work organizes a geographical relationship of fetishistic display between the ‘guest’ and worker, showcasing the labour of workers *finishing* the production of the commodity as they slather ladles of ‘house-made’ egg batter over the searing hot waffle grill and cut cookies with professional kitchen knives to shape the form of the ice-cream sandwich. As the customer ‘sees before their very eyes’ the commodity ‘transform’ from a series of parts into a customized ‘coherent whole’, the fetishistic display of food preparation subsequently assimilates the service work of ice-cream retail into the face of merchandising, commodifying the ‘culinary transparency’ of food practices as an ‘experience of craft’. For the ice-cream service worker, however, such fetishization of labour create power dynamics of surveillance and exploitation as the networked customer captures and documents the ‘exotic’ performance of retail servicescape on digital devices. As Lisa observes, the emotional labour of workers “sacrifice” for the visual experience of craft, which the proprietor enables,

It's a sacrifice I'm willing to do. I'm not comfortable with being filmed without knowing...a lot of times if I'm on waffle, I don't realize someone is just standing there

[filming]. But you know it's okay, it's not about me. It's about them and their *experience* and I'm a part of the service that *delivers* the experience. I'm mature enough to be okay with it, I guess. And [the proprietor] is okay with people taking pictures and filming, so as a reflection of [the proprietor], *I have to be okay with that* (29-10-18).

Yet, as another front of house worker, Kacey, (03-11-2018) notes, such 'craft aesthetics' are a performance workers learn under the gaze of customer surveillance, "Everyone's watching you. That's one thing I don't like actually...when I'm doing waffles and they're filming me or everyone's watching me. Especially when there's an issue with the waffle machine, I'm like," she gasps to suggest disaster, "this person's waffle is going to get messed up and they're like watching me...*I've learned to not have the bad reaction on my face* if I see there's something wrong with their waffle." She continues after a moment of laughter, "I'm just like 'oh yeah, [the waffle] is fine' but in my head I'm like 'shit'...And then I make it work." As Kacey, suggests, making it work means concealing the "messed up" quality of the product, delivering the waffle spectacle with the look of aesthetic beauty that masks signs of blemish. Together, the montage of the white-box aesthetic, the metallic ice-cream menu, the glass display case of goods, and the visible service work preparation visualize 'alternative' style of selling in hipster retailing.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

Tracing the gentrified shop floor of hipster retailing, this chapter has explored the material and symbolic dimensions of aestheticization informing the making and selling of ice cream. Excavating the profile of the self-employed proprietor as among the new occupational elite in urban micro-retailing, this chapter detailed how the articulation of the aesthetic disposition informs making processes, wherein strategies of alternative production practices objectifies the cultural capital of foodie authenticity in the expensive form of ice-cream products. Moreover, the dynamic of aestheticization spreads to the 'front-stage' character of



merchandising, representing how the selling of new goods embodies the shift of the gentrifying street from provisioning ordinary commercial products and services to enabling the visual consumption of commodified pleasure. The next chapter shifts to the perspective of the consumer, locating the force of anxiety within urban middle-class consumption practices.

## **Chapter 5 – Good Things Come To Those Who Wait?: Instagram, Distinction, and Anxiety**

Examining material and digital dimensions of privileged urban middle-class consumption practices, this chapter argues that the quest for novelty and the accumulation of forms of capital driving retail gentrification processes at an ice-cream boutique on Ossington Avenue signals the spectacle of anxiety. Drawing from verbal and visual qualitative datasets, this chapter first examines narrative accounts of customer participants from semi-structured interviews to elucidate how the cultural capital of foodie objects resonates with the shared elite disposition seeking to perform “an aggressive assertion of ‘difference’ which becomes a building block of ‘distinction’” (Zukin and Braslow, 2011: 134). Next, and utilizing Rose’s (2016) critical visual methodological framework to take into account the class dynamics and social meanings of the image across sites of production, circulation, audiencing, and at the image itself, I interpret dominant Instagram optics of urban lifestyle, tracing the embeddedness of forms of cultural and symbolic capital encoded in the aesthetic framing of highly-visible geotagged images. Lifestyle influencers and Instagram elites seek the unique look of the local foodie product as an accumulation strategy and attention-getting technique in the promotional pursuit of visibility and popularity that is measurable and quantifiable in the form of ‘likes’. In the process, the search for novelty and accumulation of forms of capital is essentialized as a dominant consumption norm and imparted to specific networked audiences as an imperative of deliciousness that ‘should’ be achieved. Making the performance of ‘difference’ and the ‘achievement’ of consumption visible on and across digital platforms institutionalizes a collective condition of normative anxiety for social actors in the cultural field of new urban middle-class consumption. The aesthetic geotagging of images not only flaunts the possession of deliciousness as a special artifact of symbolic capital, but suggests the imposition of a perceived sense of lack on aspirational audiences who are

‘missing’ from the ‘necessary’ symbolic and cultural capital accumulation. Articulating “the dialectical connection between the virtual and real world” (Kidder, 2012: 230), this chapter goes on to argue the monopolistic edge of Instagram images circulating and amplifying anxiety on digital platforms physically emplaces itself materializing in the corporeal form of the unprecedented urban retail lineup. Spatializing the “eventfulness of anxiety” (Jackson and Everts, 2010: 2804), the presence and formation of the embodied consumption queue on the gentrifying street dominates local public attention and introduces rupture into hipster urban space, while at the same time, suggests the emergence of an elite networked urban cultural form in the twenty first-century capitalist city.

### ***5.1 “You can’t have that at Baskin Robbins”: the performance of ‘difference’***

As the last chapter highlighted, the learned artistic disposition of the self-employed proprietor controlling ‘alternative production practices’ endow small-batch commodities with symbolic values of culinary omnivorousness that objectifies the cultural capital of “foodie authenticity” (Hyde, 2014; Johnston and Baumann, 2015). As the experiences of interviewed actors suggest, the allure of ‘expert’ aesthetic practices of the proprietor ‘reframing’ the making and selling of ice-cream with strategies of distinctiveness subsequently appeals to the elite cultural dispositions, and disposable incomes, of alternative consumption practices seeking the ‘vanguard’ in the quest for novelty (Zukin, 2008; Shaker Ardekani and Rath 2020). For interviewed consumers, the ‘difference’ of urban hipster retailing enables and upholds the performance of distinction. For instance, Jazmine (18-09-18), a customer in her late twenties who lives downtown and works as a corporate manager for a women’s fashion retail boutique, describes an intimate sense of personal connection with the independent retailer while signaling how boutique ice-cream goods fit into a broader ensemble of ‘bohemian’ cultural consumption,

Five years ago, we discovered [the proprietor's already established bakery]. We went there for ice cream after going to *Starving Artist* for breakfast...one of my managers was friends with the owner. And then her story kind of touched each one of us. Obviously we don't know whether it's true or not but, you know, *when you hear it from someone then you tend to believe it*. So when she [the proprietor] opened this [ice-cream store], we all came and [the line up] was huge, always. People would talk about it all the time. You'd see it on social media. You'd see it like even in, what's that thing, *Toronto Life* [Magazine].

Although it is unclear what exactly about the business owner's "story" left her feeling "touched", Jazmine's social capital facilitates the impression of closeness knowing the independent retailer personally. Additionally, Jazmine cites an "emotional attachment" to the ice-cream shop by imagining the backstory of the local product,

I think because I'm a woman listening to [the proprietor's] story gave me a little more emotional attachment to the ice cream. And I think [the ice cream] is a little bit *different*, because you really get to know the *background* of everything that you eat. Say you go to an ice cream truck, you don't really share that, that relation. *You don't really build a relationship with them*, you know? You just feel like ice cream trucks are just a dime and a dozen, 'cause they're *everywhere* right. Whereas *this place*, you have to come here and line up if you want that ice cream.

Jazmine's celebration of the "background" of ice-cream objects attaches biographical value to symbolic goods, in which the site-specificity of local small-batch production fabricates a dynamic of uniqueness that makes the product seem precious, nonconformist, and personal *in relation to* the mass ubiquity of ice-cream trucks that drive around "everywhere" and are "just a dime and a dozen". Front-of-house retail workers too underscore the quality of transparency represented in the "background" of local commodities as they witness culinary production processes and subsequently impart this social narrative of intimacy to customers. As front-house-house worker Kacey (11-03-2018) points out, "it's really cool actually to *see* how everything is made. Like seeing my boss cook...getting to see the bakers do their stuff...Because now I know what it's like *behind* the ice cream." Yet, as Jazmine observes, the backstory of goods intertwines with the tastes for particularity,

The hazelnut actually tastes like hazelnut. It's not like Nutella, you know what I

mean? I know, so specific, I understand. And then like nothing is too sweet. If you have two bites of it and it's too sweet you're going to toss it out. Because during summer time you don't want something that's too sweet, [but] that's just the right flavour. I sound crazy!

Marsha and Liz (18-09-18), two customers in their early forties who both live in inner-city Toronto and work as an office manager at a dermatologist clinic and a marketing coordinator for a theatre company respectively, perform cultural difference in terms of consuming the aesthetic originality of hipster retailing that contrasts ways of eating ice-cream at mainstream food retail chains. As Liz notes, “[this ice-cream shop] is different. The whole *concept* of having a cookie and ice cream. And [Hong Kong] waffle in ice cream or a cinnabon and ice cream. You can't have that at Baskin Robbins. Or any of those quicky ice-cream places.” Kyle (14-09-2018), a first time customer in his mid-twenties who recently moved to the gentrified condominium neighbourhood of Liberty Village from China by way of Montreal to start a new white-collar job in downtown Toronto, reinforces the ‘conceptual difference’ of the retailer, “[the ice-cream shop] is different because I noticed everything is homemade, made in the store, so they have quite some interesting flavours to choose from. They also don't use typical cones, they use cookies, which I find very interesting. They also have other options like waffle cones, which you don't see in many other places.” Furthermore, Marsha romanticizes the ‘difference’ of hipster retailing in terms of environmental sustainability, it's nice to know they put a lot of homegrown [ingredients] into their product... We've become a throw-away society. We eat a lot of stuff and we eat out a lot. So it's nice to go somewhere, even to a restaurant, you know that someone's actually making...that homegrown. You know? And I get that from [the ice-cream shop].

Liz adds to this praise of locality, connecting on-site production processes to the cultural preference for ‘freshness’, “[the product] tastes fresh. Like it was *just* made. Like it hasn't been sitting in a freezer for like a week or two until someone picks that flavour kind of thing. It's fresh.” Such “homegrown” freshness reinforces the ‘difference’ of hipster

ice-cream retail by bathing the aesthetic consumption environment in the smell of nostalgia, seemingly transporting consumers to a space and time of uniqueness,

Marsha: [the ice cream shop] smells sweet.

Liz: It smells like home-baked cookies.

M: home-baked cookies. And waffles.

L: like you almost feel like you're in another town. You know, a small town. And you walk in and the ambience of [the ice-cream shop] makes you feel like you're in Mayfield or somewhere that's very tiny and small, you know. Like there's *one* ice cream [store] in the whole town kind of thing.

M: It's like what you smell at grandma's house when she's baking a cake.

L: yeah or a pie or something.

M: That's what it reminds me of.

In sum, such customer narrative accounts illustrate how the 'difference' of hipster retailing enables performance of distinction, whereby the alternative consumption of cultural consumers intersects with an inherent critique of franchised standardized brands and formulaic commercial outlets fostered by corporate business regimes in mainstream consumer capitalism. On the surface, then, the distinctiveness of unique local products ascribed a "special authenticity to a market jaded by the banality of mass consumption" suggests the 'emancipatory potential' of the hipster commerce of inner-city retail gentrification to 'liberate' middle-class consumers from the bland homogeneity and corporate conformity of 'suburban' retailing forms (i.e. Baskin Robbins and mobile ice-cream trucks) (Ley, 1996: 300; Caulfield, 1994; Lees, 2000). This backs up Hubbard's (2017: 214) claim that hipster retail spaces marks the territory of freedom for 'alternative' young urban elite clientele, "[a]esthetically and practically, bohemian businesses hence exude a lazy, emancipatory 'urbanity'—albeit a form of urbanism highly valued by those consumers who place a premium on scarcity and the 'one-off.'" The appeal of

“bohemian businesses” enabling the consumption of distinctiveness and “the ‘one-off’” reinforces Shaker Ardekani and Rath’s (2020: 125) observation that “[w]ith their high cultural and economic resources, the new urban middle classes reject mass-produced, standardised and impersonal commodities and embrace goods and services that are designed to cater to a personal sense of worth.” Yet, this case study of a hipster ice-cream retailer puts forth a different view, observing that the “embrace” of symbolic products and services “designed to cater to a personal sense of worth” within a “lazy, emancipatory ‘urbanity’” also reveals processes of anxiety formation within the urban middle-class *habitus* attached to the cultural ambitions and promotional norms of entrepreneurial social media subjectivities and technologies (Marwick, 2013; 2015). Tracing highly-visible self-branded geotagged Instagram images, the next section illustrates how networked consumers performing ‘difference’ confirms the common assumption the pursuit of hipster ice-cream retail is a ‘necessary’ and ‘obligatory’ imperative for the accumulation of capitals, that in turn, institutionalizes anxiety in the cultural field of urban middle-class consumption.

## ***5.2 Instagram eats first: the imperative of deliciousness***

Visualizing the verbal sentiments of interviewed customers, the tone and language of spatially-embedded ‘top tier’ Instagram images of high-follower users display the lifestyle of gentrification by essentializing the possession of new foodie retail commodities as a ‘priceless’, ‘obligatory’, and ‘delicious’ imperative.<sup>3</sup> Feeding the appetite of Instagram first before themselves, social media blogs and digital actors

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<sup>3</sup> While this visual social media analysis follows in the critical tradition of interrogating the ways digital technologies reproduce and pronounce social power relations and class inequalities between high-and low-status urban groups (Marwick, 2013; Zukin et. al, 2017), it should be noted popular social media technologies and the online connectivity of digital platforms are deployed in a number of contexts in myriad ways, including affording and enabling local political organizing and active social participation in anti-authoritarian protest movements (Papacharissi, 2015; Tufekci, 2017).

attribute agency to—fetishize—foodie commodity aesthetics. The cultural capital of the ‘authentic’ good seemingly “lives an independent existence as an experiential product” that promises a point of entry into the commodified ‘urban good life’ that mediates “access to an otherwise inaccessible, immaterial cultural realm of significance and meaning” (Falk, 1994: 157; Hetherington, 2008: 155). Such mobile lifestyle food photography capturing and uploading the specialness of ice-cream objects is exemplified in the imperative tone of textual captions, which for instance read that is “forever necessary to visit (cat with heart eyes emoji)” the ice-cream retailer, while consuming gourmet sweet goods ‘guarantees’ an “improved” quality of daily life (Figure 5.1 and 5.2). Fetishizing products as ‘superstar commodities’, Instagram posts treat hipster ice-cream goods as a work of art endowing the value of the product with symbolic capital. For instance, Jazmine points out how in the past she has ‘Instagrammed’ the ice-cream product within the independent retail space to express taste, individuality, and ‘creativity’,

The tiles [of the ice-cream interior] are very minimalistic—black and white. [Juxtaposed against the tiles] [p]eople can see the definition of the ice cream, how *creative* it looks, therefore it’s really good. And then the cans [of the ice-cream menu]—it’s more like original...that shows all of the flavours but this is what I chose. And in the picture I’ll comment, hazelnut and london fog [as chosen flavours].

Contributing to the ‘creative’ look of food glamour in the visual image are the ways individual social media actors accessorize the possession of deliciousness with conspicuous status symbols, including manicured fingernails, hand jewelry, expensive-looking watches, and beauty products to indicate the riches of high-end consumption. This aesthetic framing of high-profile and well-liked products, particularly the Hong-Kong style waffle, serves to legitimate the value of hipster ice-cream retail products as a particular form of capital in the field of lifestyle as a whole, as the conspicuous consumption of influencer consumers perform the



“instafame” of urban summer leisure as victorious (Marwick, 2015).



Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2. Disembodied Instagram posts hold new urban products as 'evidence' of 'improvement' and 'necessity'.

Such 'victoriousness' is evident in the ways the happy experience of Instagram consumers arming themselves with the urban distinction of food fashion frame the omnivorousness of products as a form of achievement, that in turn, classifies the symbolic hierarchical position of the subject with the taste of success in the winner-take-all cultural field. For instance, an embodied portrait post with two-hundred-and-forty-one likes depicts a slender young white woman on the quest for deliciousness, gazing at and clutching a Hong Kong-styled ice-cream waffle as if grasping a torch of knowledge with the caption, "I'll be spending the majority of my summer *searching* Toronto for the most delicious ice cream. So far [the ice-cream boutique] is *winning*. (ice-cream cone emoji)."

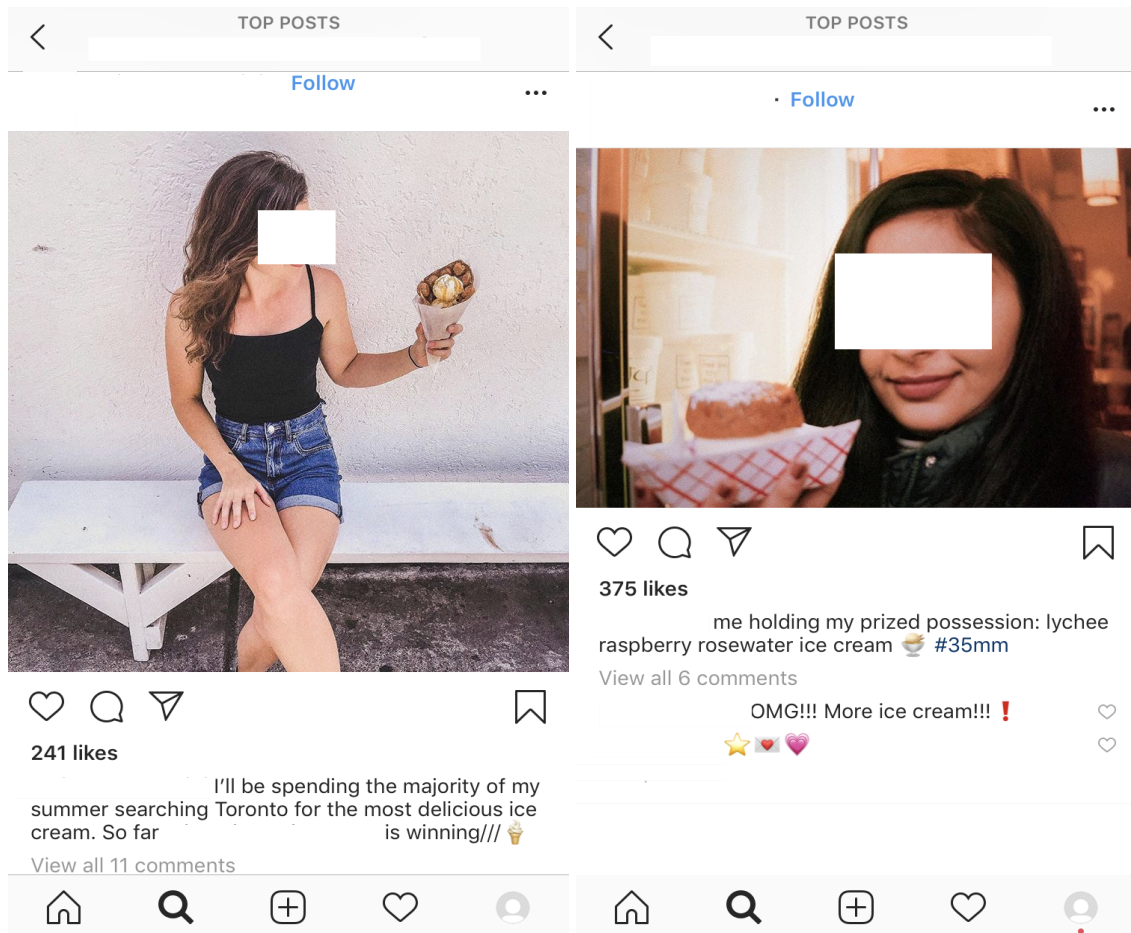


Figure 5.3 and Figure 5.4. Instagram users pose with local ice-cream goods as souvenirs of victory.

Similarly, a young woman of colour posts an ‘analog’ luxury selfie with three-hundred-and-seventy-five likes. Holding ‘the stay classy’ ice-cream sandwich, the omnivorous taste of the product is flaunted as ‘award-winning’, signalling cultural capital accumulation, “me holding my *prized possession*: lychee raspberry rosewater ice cream (ice-cream bowl emoji) #35mm”. Additionally, Instagram consumers frame the fetishistic character of ice-cream objects in the romantic light of ‘authentic love’, admiring and cherishing the preciousness of cold commodities as a form of fellowship cradled in ‘intimate embrace’. For instance, a young woman smiling at the ice-cream product captions an Instagram photo, “find yourself someone who looks at you the way I look at ice cream and waffles,” while another poses with the ice-cream waffle smiling with the

caption, “True love (red heart emoji) #IceCream”.

In addition to embodied posts, disembodied Instagram images dramatize the food fashion of novelty goods as theatrical objects by magnifying the proportions of the ice-cream. Boosting the scale of the product, the composition of close-up food fetish images visualizes flamboyance by isolating and stressing dynamics of texture and colour. Additionally, the disembodiment of Instagram imagery abstract the visual aesthetic of foodie products as if possessing solid forms of permanence and certainty. This is sharply demonstrated in Figure 5.5, in which an anonymous arm reaching in from the right side of the frame is positioned against a black background, grasping an ice-cream waffle that appears to illuminate a halo of truth. Juxtaposed against an abyss of darkness, this portrait of permanence aesthetically frames the possession of individual symbolic capital as a metaphorical image of ‘solidity’ that overlays the ‘void of nothingness’. Such aesthetic framing hyping urban ice-cream novelty as ‘fundamental’ is reinforced in the caption, “There are three things certain in life: death, taxes, and me obsessing over [@the ice-cream shop] (ice-cream emoji, sparkles emoji)”.

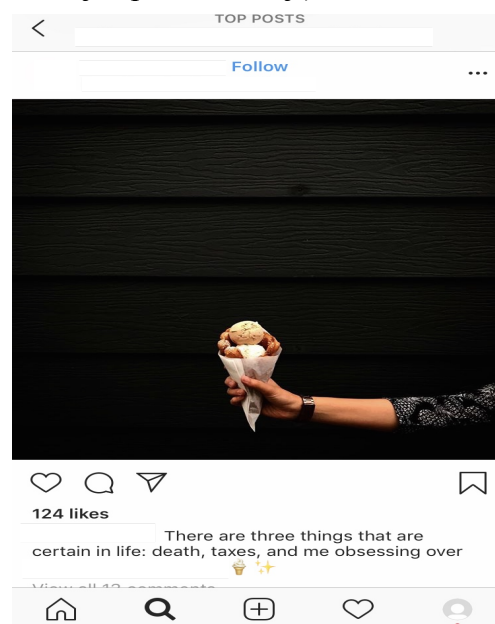


Figure 5.5. An Instagram user frames the possession of the Hong-Kong waffle as if armed with 'enlightenment'.

As this online self-presentation of Instagram imaging suggest, the widespread acclaim of local ice-cream goods bathing products in the radiance of deliciousness attempts to shed the commodity status of specialized culinary products. Such acts of ‘decommodification’ “singularize” retail commodities into ‘material artifacts’ (Kopytoff, 1986; Heatherington, 2008), whereby the saturation of the foodie object with cultural capital appears ‘natural’ positioned ‘outside’ the parameters of the market. Such elite commodity fetishism singularizing products as artifacts is reinforced by the ways Instagram consumers erase socially necessary labour processes and invisibilize the suggestion of work (Figure 5.6 and 5.7), maintaining the exchange value of the commodity object is autonomous and acts independently from the real social relations of production at both the local and global scale.

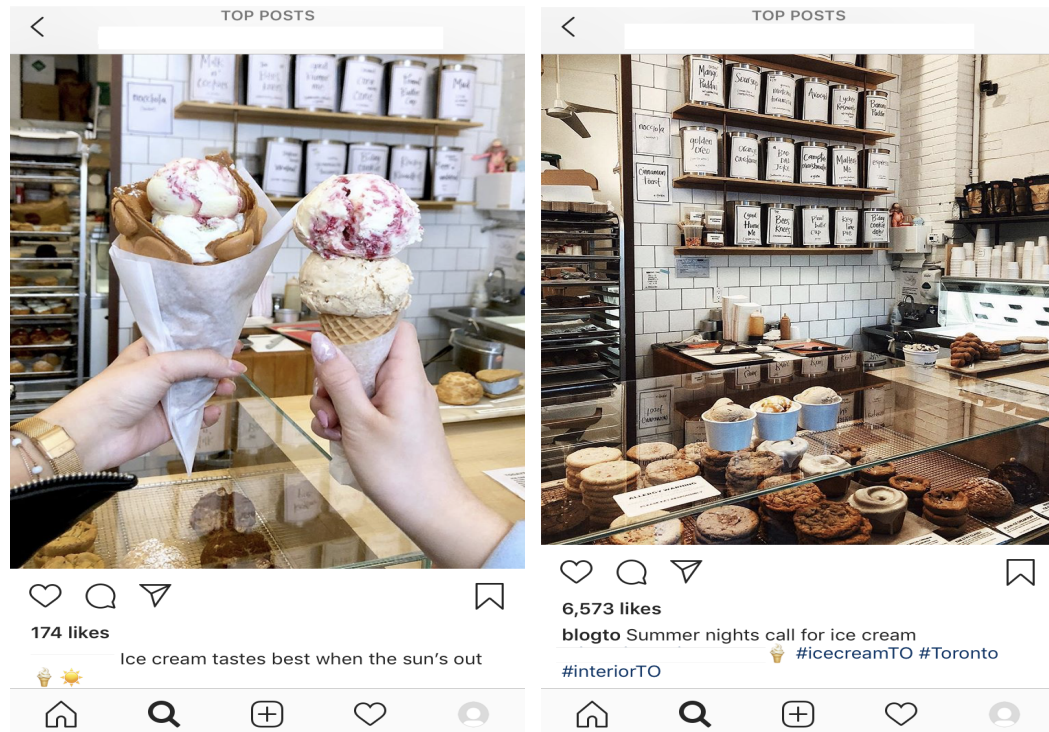


Figure 5.6 and 5.7. Depicting the interior of the ice-cream shop as ‘empty’, Instagram posts invisibilize labour processes.

Yet, in this process of disposing aestheticized products of their commodity status and maintaining the symbolic performance of neo-artisanal goods as ‘priceless’ and ‘timeless’, promotional social media images conceal resources of economic and cultural capital as precursors to purchasing and ‘appreciating’ the novelty of urban foodie goods. Moreover, the association between the look of products and the aura of ‘success’ signals prevailing power relations of consumptive competitiveness, in which the acquisition of foodie goods classifies the urban Instagram subject as a ‘winner’ in the class struggle to obtain the scarcity of finite resources of symbolic capital.

The promotional language of social media images underscore the influence of class *habitus* membership to structure ambitions and values of consumption patterns according to schemes of distinction, as elite Instagram subjects network the perception and circulate the expectation audiences ‘*should*’ seek out the distinctiveness of the foodie object as a consumption duty. Importantly, as interviewed participants suggest, such perceptions and expectations produced and shared on Instagram are a part of a broader condition of media “convergence” in which the circulation of images and discourse flows across multiple digital platforms and communications outlets (Jenkins, 2008). For instance, after searching for ice-cream businesses from his location in Liberty Village online, Kyle notes “because it’s so hot today, I was looking for an ice cream spot nearby. And then this [ice cream shop] was showing on Google Maps. I clicked on it, it had a four-point-five rating [out of five] and I thought I would check it out...most people say it’s a *must see*...because [the ice cream shop] is so close to me, I walked by.” Marsha and Liz also note, “We heard [about the ice-cream shop] on the radio—the Roz and Mocha [morning radio show]. Roz said you *have to* go to Ossington [Avenue] and Queen [Street West] for the most delicious ice cream ever...if [Roz] said it’s good, *it’s good*.” The cultural authority of media hype framing the specialness of boutique commodities as an



‘objective demand’ subsequently institutionalizes the imperative of deliciousness as a dominant sociocultural prescription for accumulating cultural capital that achieves the maintenance of position in the social hierarchy by exercising distinction.

Yet, there is an implicit flipside of the imperative of deliciousness. Conversely, *lacking* the ‘non-replicable’ extraordinary resource of “the most delicious ice cream ever” within such a competitive social milieu of class distinction suggests ‘misalignment’ for the conventional urban middle-class consuming subject. Being in excess to the ‘obligatory’ experience implicitly reflects an *undifferentiated* subject position located on the outskirts of the hierarchical symbolic order, situated outside of the space and time of new ‘necessary’ knowledge. As the next section highlights, this perceived absence of the urban cultural consumer signifying symbolic class threats of peripherality and obsolescence indicates anxiety formation processes realized in physical form at a key site: the hipster urban retail queue.

### ***5.3 Getting in line: urban retail queuing and the anxiety of distinction***

As Daniel (10-12-2018), a former front-of-house worker, outlines, the emergence of the consumer retail lineup attests to the dynamic between the aesthetics of local foodie production and visual social media consumption,

At the beginning when I was introduced to the position, [the proprietor] explained to me that [social media] is a big part of this ice-cream place...things need to look pretty. Towards the end of my time there, you know, when I would supervise trainees, I passed that [instruction] onto them as well. Explaining that [products] need to be nice looking, this needs to be *eye candy* because people enjoy it—*people want to take pictures with it*. And if you make a scoop, or when you pour syrup on something, make it look nice. It’s very important because that’s where the customer base comes from—it comes from social media. So the best advertisement is a beautiful product...*So if you want the lineup to stay long, you need to make a beautiful product. It’s on you as the maker. You know what I mean? It’s not like there is an advertisement department that’s in charge of getting the customers. It’s you who are getting the customers while you’re scooping.*

This quote demonstrates that the “eye candy” look of the material “beautiful product”

interfaces the digital visual economy of glancing and scrolling as an attention-getting technique, wherein the ‘artful’ look of the foodie product is instrumentalized into a valuable commodity of ephemeral mesmerization on digital platforms, serving as a promotional means of being noticed and maintaining dominant visibility (Zulli, 2018). Yet, as Daniel also suggests, the social media production and consumption of aestheticized visual images intersects with the spatial rise of hipster retail queuing as a networked urban cultural form and geographical focal point for the performance of ‘difference’ on the gentrifying Ossington Avenue (Figure 5.8).



Figure 5.8. Expanding north on Ossington Avenue, the retail line-up governs urban sidewalk space (photo by author, August 2018).

The commercial anonymity of the hipster store and the lack of storefront signage contributes to the anxiety of the retail lineup. Marking differentiation from ‘corporate’ branding and ‘mainstream’ enterprise yet also “engages gentrifiers in a voyage of discovery” (Zukin, 2008: 736), the proprietor expresses aesthetic preference against storefront signage,

I'm not one for pushing big logos and names. That's it. Again, I'm going to go back to that word ‘humble’ or something. If people want to find you, they will. If

they enjoy it, they'll return and *know* where you are. And I think it's also that *discovery*. Like maybe they've discovered you, that's, you know, maybe *unique*. And they'll have to tell their friends about it.

Yet, paradoxically, the 'anonymous' character of the independent shop is shattered by the eventfulness of the queue. As the proprietor notes, "people know of us as *that place* with the lineup and *aren't really sure* what the lineup is *for* or what it's *about* because there is no sign on the store". Consequently, the conspicuousness of the unadvertised retail lineup fabricates a scheme of unrecognizability privileging the cultural and social capital of insiders, and the "friends" of insiders, who 'know' the identity of the unidentified shop and can decode "what the lineup is for" and "what it's about". As the proprietor suggests, there are 'outsiders' who do not 'know' what the line-up 'means' and aesthetically perceive the novelty of the lineup as a sign of value. As Catherine emphasizes, middle-class audiences interpret the queue as a cue of meaning that interfaces 'common-sense' information about the "quality of the product...a long line would indicate something worth trying". Yet, such information and expectations transmitting the queue as a signal of 'value' reveals the unconscious cultural force of the *habitus* of gentrification to shape taken-for-granted dispositions towards the lineup, wherein the regenerated urban fabric of Lower Ossington geographically structures the locational perception the unadvertised retail lineup is a marker of 'cool' lifestyle. Would an unprecedented lineup of poor consumers in a low-income, racialized neighbourhood in the postwar inner suburbs immediately signal the "quality of the product" and symbolically associate those queuing with "something worth trying"?

In the postindustrial inner-city context, the eventfulness of the retail lineup is a form of spectacle signaling aesthetic strangeness, producing a micro-environment of cultural rupture within the social consciousness of the gentrifying street for middle-class consuming subjects who upon encountering the 'mystique' of the queue "aren't really



sure”. Indeed, without knowing visible storefront signage, proximity to the lineup stokes the curiosity of ‘unknowing’ subjects to unearth the ‘meaning’ of the cultural consumption event and approach those waiting. Catherine and Raj note they were approached while waiting in line, “there was a woman who came up to us and she's not from around here...she asked us if it was worth the wait.” While observing the queue on the street, passerbys audibly witness the queue with statements of disbelief such as “what are they waiting for?”, or “is this the line-up? Is it that good?” or “is that an actual lineup for an ice-cream place? That is insane.” As these public soundbites of the street suggest, the retailing enigma of the consumption queue thwarts understanding and externalizes a new visible focal point of curiosity that disrupts and dominates the flow of local attention on the gentrifying street. This is again underscored by Raj and Catherine whose awareness of the site of the ice-cream shop became known to them while driving on Ossington Avenue after “seeing the line and *wondering what that was*”. Furthermore, after learning about the retailer over the radio, Marsha and Liz observe that they had the cultural capital to identify the business after they “drove up and down the street two or three times. [The business] doesn’t really have a sign that says [the name of the ice-cream shop]. I couldn't see it. And we saw the line and said, ‘I bet you that’s it’. And sure enough, and we’ve been coming ever since.” Kyle also reinforces a sense of disorientation of being ‘out-of-the-know’, “[the ice-cream shop] was hard to find. I couldn’t find the sign anywhere outside. I only saw the line, but I thought that was for some other *event*. I actually walked past the place first and then I checked on Google Maps again to make sure that’s the spot then I came back.”

Contributing to the sense of eventfulness is how the public hedonism of the private lineup embodies and emanates the collective rhythm of middle-class anticipation. As Raj claims, such an urban landscape of commercial leisure signifies how the

anticipation of the lineup produces aesthetic expectations centered around the imagined pleasure and ‘high standards’ of the new ice-cream product that promises an immediately ‘better’ and ‘improved’ future for the middle-class subject, “your expectations are high if you have to wait a long time...if you wait in a long line you’re like, ‘I need something that blows my mind, ice cream I’ve never tried before, the creamiest of creamy, like really interesting’.” Patronizing the ice-cream shop with a group of friends before attending a *matinée* at a local performing arts theatre, Alfred, a customer in his early fifties, notes waiting in the lineup and the anticipation of extraordinary deliciousness orients the queue towards the future,

People are really *looking forward* to what they’re getting...waiting in line for your passport, which you have no choice but to do, is a different experience than waiting in line for something you’re looking forward to and you’re *going to* enjoy. So people [here] *seem* quite happy and they seem friendly.

Similarly, Jazmine, emphasizes the prerequisite of surplus leisure time needed to participate in the consumption of conviviality,

I would not wait for anything else. Really, I wouldn’t. I come here for [ice cream] because I know we’re going to line up, so we give ourselves a little bit of a buffer...Today we didn’t have to wait for that long even though we technically waited for an hour. It didn’t seem like an hour. I don’t think I’ll wait for anything else...But you’re here, it’s here, it’s open, it’s a nice day, so you might as well...you’re lining up for something that you like to eat, you know. You’re in a good mood *after* you eat it.

As these quotations suggest, the collective anticipation and subjective tastes embodied by the presence of the privileged lineup spatializes the commodification of conviviality and erosion of the liveability of central urban public space by cultural landscapes of gentrification, shifting the festive potential of everyday retail street life towards private spectacles of conspicuous cultural consumption (Ley, 1996; Shaw, 2008). Indeed, the proprietor notes, “when there’s a street festival, we don’t really partake—we *open our doors and essentially we are the street festival*.” Moreover, the eventfulness of the queue signals the “slow violence” of retail gentrification (Kern, 2016), displacing

non-spectacular forms of urban life out of view as the privileged surplus time of consumers publicly waiting an hour for ice-cream imposes new dominant aesthetic rhythms of leisure and recreation on Ossington Avenue, exercising the temporal power of the middle-class to perform urban conviviality and synchronize with the slow flow of cultural capital accumulation. Such a connection between anticipation and taste mediated by the private retail lineup communicates the aesthetic consumption norm of the new urban middle class “adopt[ing] an investment orientation” and “learning mode to life”, performing the expectation of continuous knowledge acquisition and cultural capital accumulation “in the field of taste, style, lifestyle” (Featherstone, 1991: 90-91).

Consequently, the middle-class anticipation of the retail queue emplacing conspicuous conviviality represents an embodied site of consumer struggle for distinction in the collective urban middle class *habitus*. Moreover, the unprecedented scale of the retail lineup embedding social power relations of urban cultural consumption outwardly displays a dominant landscape of geographical peer pressure. As Kyle illustrates, this environment of ‘difference’ evokes the productive structural force of social anxiety informing the generation of, and desire for, cultural capital by ‘realigning’ and conforming the ‘out-of-the-know’ middle-class subject with the establishment of the urban consumption project,

It’s the first time for me to come here, so *I didn’t really know* what to expect. I was waiting in line for something that could be over-hyped, so I was just looking at the people who just came out with their ice cream, and trying to gauge whether it’s going to be worth the wait. To be honest, if I saw that everyone was just holding like a very generic soft serve ice cream I could have just left. But, I saw many people had many different coloured ice creams with different sandwiches, like the cookies. Yeah, [that is why] I decided to stay and because I saw so many good reviews. So, I just thought, I *should* check it out, I *should*. Yeah, it’s *going to be* worth the wait.

This quote demonstrates how the novelty of the consumption event establishes a subjective perception and expectation of value rendering a ‘newcomer’ position for middle class actors

distant from the legitimacy of the aestheticized good already circulating in the material and virtual possession of “many people” in the cultural field. Identifying with tastes of “many different coloured ice creams” and the rhetoric of “many good reviews”, Kyle reflexively chooses to remain in-line after acknowledging he “could have just left”, suggesting how lacking the aesthetic ice-cream object as a new form of cultural knowledge engenders a perceived sense of deficiency embodying a consuming subject position located outside the space and time of distinction (Falk, 1994). Such a moment of undifferentiation constitutes spatial and temporal threats of anxiety in the cultural field of privileged urban middle-class consumption. Spatially, Kyle’s newcomer standpoint in the queue suggests that leaving the queue would risk a ‘provincial’ subject position of cultural disconnectedness peripheralized outside the cultural capital of the central consumption event, while temporally, not pursuing the value of the unique product seemingly risks the obsolescence of ‘falling behind’ from future distinction ‘out of sync’ with sociocultural expectations and aesthetic norms of the ‘new’ and ‘improved’ urban lifestyle in the present *zeitgeist*. Moreover, the expression of the pitchfork of “should” offers a fractal representation of the productive peer pressure of social anxiety as a motivating force for accumulating cultural capital, operating as a “technique of boundary management” for the new urban middle-class consumer (Goldburg, 2018: 23). Intervening as a “practice of annihilation”, the normative force of social anxiety seeks to *consume* perceived cultural threats of peripherality and obsolescence, thereby ‘realigning’ the privileged consuming subject with the symbolic boundaries of class distinction that maintains ongoing ‘higher’ cultural awareness through the acquisition of elite product knowledge (Jackson and Everts, 2010).

Subsequently, Kyle expresses the performance of cultural capital accumulation informing his specific networks on the instant messaging app Snapchat with a site-specific image of the retail storefront. Enabled by his wireless digital smartphone

device, Kyle clarifies his decision to ‘snapchat’ the ice-cream retail storefront,

In Montreal or in China where people would usually line-up for anything—well in China people will line-up for anything. But back in Montreal, people would line up for spots that were advertised online, I guess, like the cool spots. So I thought this could be one of them...I just snapchatted that to show my friends, it happens in Toronto, too.

This quote demonstrates how Kyle leverages social media platforms to publicize local insider knowledge of urban ‘hipster’ consumption and in turn perform social position.

Yet, in disclosing the cultural capital of knowing “the cool spots” in gentrifying inner-city Toronto, such digital image-making declaring the presence of lineup consumption to “friends” serves as a routine framing practice reproducing and amplifying the geographical expansion and social distribution of the eventfulness of anxiety (Figure 9) (Jackson and Everts, 2010; Jackson et. al., 2012).



Figure 5.9. A blurry still of a video clip from a popular lifestyle blog contributes to the circulation and eventfulness of anxiety, receiving over eighty-thousand views on Instagram.

In this way, as the visual informational image flows across the digital platform, the circulation of anxiety “stretch[es] beyond the personal biography of the individual

concerned (and beyond the immediate time and place of that subjective experience)” (Jackson et. al., 2012: 28), landing with elite dispositions of like-minded global networked audiences that resonate with “the social identities of those doing the watching”, thereby amplifying to the scale of anxiety (Rose, 2016: 40; Jackson and Everts, 2010). Following Kingwell (2019), the digital circulation of consumption imagery generates anxiety in the form of “wish I were here” images, in which the aesthetics of experiencing ‘the good life’ provoke yearning for bored networked audiences. The social media anxiety embedded in “wish I were here” image relies on the “social proprioception” of digital users, in which an embodied relationship to the mobile interface conveys a subjective experience “of the self’s place as that which [is] always already situated in relationship to the location of others” (Farman, 2012: 27). Kingwell (2019) critically connects the interfacing of mobile media embodiment on location-aware digital platforms to contemporary forces of capital accumulation, arguing market-shaped haptic practices of technological touch indicate the cognitive immersion of everyday cultural life into a structural technological condition of “neoliberal boredom”, producing a social media subjectivity as “a natural extension of the unease and restlessness generated in the economic sphere, everywhere exacerbated by upgrade imperatives, frenzied claims concerning speed and satisfaction” and produces “perhaps worst, [a] constant generation of happiness-destroying envy for a form of existence that always seems to be elsewhere, enjoyed by someone else, or just past the horizon of the present in a future that never arrives” (Kingwell, 2019: 42-43, emphasis added). In this way, visual platformed practices displaying ‘I am here’ mobile images of cultural capital accumulation makes visible the currency of high-status participation in popular sociocultural happening, while at the same time produces an “electronic elsewhere” (Berry et al., 2010) that for scrolling audiences may signify the restlessness for a “form

of existence that always seems to be elsewhere enjoyed by someone else”. Such social media anxiety suggests the metaphorical and physical distance of the social identities encountering visual content are ‘removed’ from, and ‘in excess’ to, the imperative of deliciousness located at the ice-cream boutique, consequently situated at the geographical and symbolic ‘periphery’ ‘lacking’ the foodie artifact as a new essential form of conventional ‘lifestyle improvement’.

At the same time, the production of mobile image-making also suggests how the normative logic of social anxiety intervenes in new urban middle-class consumption practices through the imperative of updating on digital platforms, emerging as a consequence to the perceived threat of invisibility (Bucher, 2018). For Bucher (2018: 66), “the algorithmic logics structuring the flow of information and communication” produces a “regime of visibility”, in which being seen on social media platforms “is not something ubiquitous but rather something scarce” (85). In this way, online visibility on digital platforms becomes a form of symbolic capital, whereby “the problem is not the possibility of constantly being observed but the possibility of constantly disappearing, of not being considered important enough” (Bucher, 2018: 84). This perceived threat of invisibility shows up implicitly in Instagram imaging, as social media users instrumentalize the spatial aesthetics of hipster retail as a ‘reason’ for ‘checking-in’ with ‘followers’ that gains algorithmic exposure, maintains dominant visibility, and marks aesthetic taste. As Figure 10 shows, one user notes that they are “back from an unplanned Instagram break” after being “locked out for a week (three upsidedown smiley face emojis) ” and “just wanted to let you know that banana pudding is the best ice cream flavour to ever exist. that is all.” Such an electronic update underscores the centrality of social media platforms like Instagram in the performance of taste.



Figure 5.10. Holding approximately twenty dollars worth of product, a geotagged Instagram post images ice-cream goods to reproduce cultural taste and reannounce digital existence.

This ongoing maintenance of visibility through the immediacy of updating personifies the existential state of being for digital social media users, what media scholar Chun (2016: 2) characterizes as, “creatures of the update” wherein “to be is to be updated”. This habit of social media updating reinforces Lash (2002) who argues the technological configuration of cultural life in a global capitalist information society is marked by perpetual newness, wherein the duration of the *content* of information carried by the transmission of signs and flow of communications is ephemeral. Corresponding to the paradigm of information, social media influencers and Instagram personalities updating audiences with site-specific images of ice-cream not only manages the glowing appearance of the self-brand identity



on digital platforms, but also signifies the normative force of anxiety attending to the ongoing ‘existential threat’ of online invisibility.

#### **5.4 “2 minutes later our icecream turned into soup”: The paradox of anxiety**

The empirical discussion of this chapter reinforces claims made by gentrification scholars who note the cultural commerce of new urban retail entrepreneurs aestheticizing novelty ‘emancipates’ the middle-class consumer from the banality of chain outlets and the impersonality of mass-produced commodities (Caulfield, 1994; Ley, 1996; Zukin, 2008, 2010; Hubbard, 2017; Shaker-Ardekani and Rath 2020). Yet, the novelty entrepreneurship of new urban micro-enterprises feeding the ‘emancipatory promise’ of retail gentrification expresses a contradiction of anxiety; control over materialized commodity ideals is an intangible form and an “unrepresentable representation” (Falk, 1994: 142) attached to the competitive restlessness of the “modernist market dynamic” encouraging a “constant search for new fashions, new styles, new sensations and experiences” (Featherstone, 1991: 86). Consequently, the social relations of anxiety intervening as a force of ‘stabilization’ through the metaphorical language of symbolic capital and commodified values of specialness, including authenticity, certainty, originality, intimacy, and uniqueness, paradoxically perpetuates destabilization by entangling the consumption practices of new urban middle-class into an endless mode of cultural capital accumulation defined by the perpetual cycle of valuation and devaluation (Campbell, 1987 [2018]). Following Campbell (1987 [2018]: 145), this ongoing dissatisfaction and disillusionment of the modern consuming subject reflects the evaporation of the imagined perfection of the idealized commodity following the manifestation of the sobering visible imperfections materializing in the private possession of personal ownership. Such fragility of value suggests how the consummation of cultural capital accumulation and symbolic capital acquisition is impermanent, out of control,

and constantly ‘melting into air’ (Berman, 1983). Indeed, the primary visible imperfection of ice-cream is how the physical form of the culinary object is literally *melting* in the possession of the consumer. This undertow of change materializing ruin is exemplified in Figure 10, which acknowledges the impermanence of the image-based good life recognizing that “2 minutes later our icecream turned into soup :-()”, and in Figure 11, illustrating the transformation of novelty into detritus.

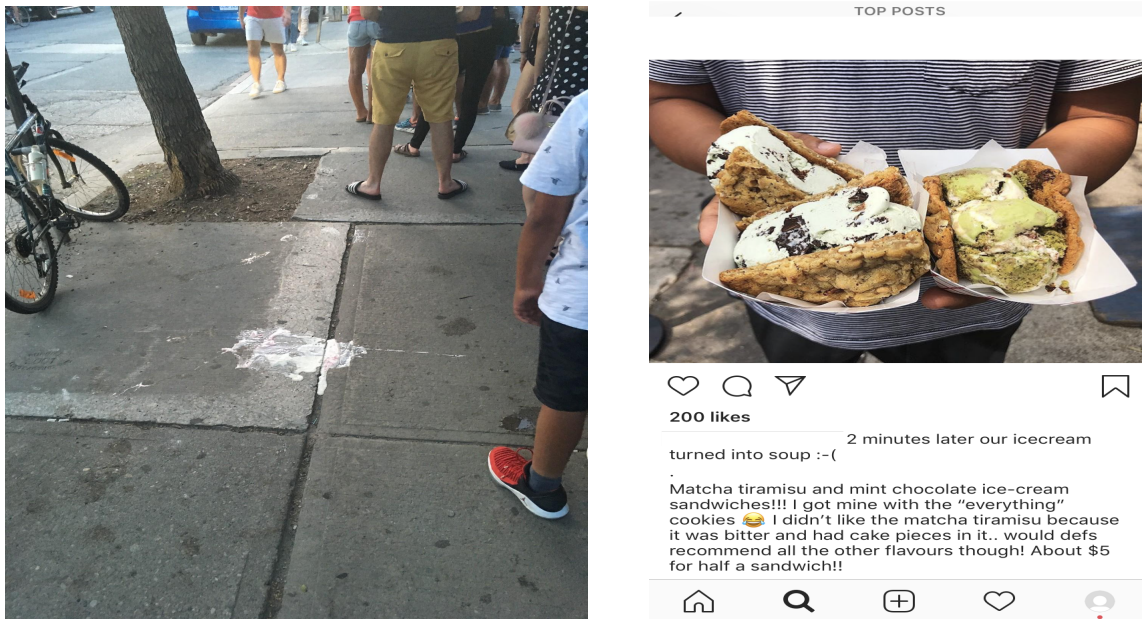


Figure 5.11 and 5.12. An Instagram post admits the ephemerality of the commodity, while a puddle of ice-cream mortality marks the remains of the good life (Figure 12 photo by author, August, 2018).`

Consequently, the normative force of social anxiety institutionalizing the ongoing maintenance of symbolic boundaries of class distinction “speaks to a broader and more metaphysical set of problems that goes beyond one group’s economic and cultural capital” representing and mobilizing an “inability to grasp the shifting meanings of space and time, as well as the search for sources of our own ‘real’ identity” (Zukin, 2009: 545).

### 5.5 Conclusion

Drawing from semi-structured interview and visual social media datasets, this

chapter has examined digital and material dimensions of new urban middle-class consumption practices at a particular independent ice-cream boutique to argue the force of anxiety as a social condition informs the accumulation and acquisition of cultural and symbolic capital, that in turn, animates retail gentrification processes on Ossington Avenue in inner-city Toronto. Hype urban foodie consumption as an ‘imperative of deliciousness’, highly-visible locative Instagram images and privileged social media influencers circulate and frame the hipster ice-cream retailer as a ‘essential’ and ‘obligatory’ site, serving to amplify the social and geographical reach of the independent business. Such networked eventfulness interconnecting new urban middle-class consumption practices with social media technologies cuts into the inner-city lifeworld in the spatial form of the retail queue, manifesting a new urban cultural form on the gentrifying local shopping street. Furthermore, this chapter highlighted the enigmatic character of the unprecedented lineup fabricates a site of curiosity that signals a perceived ‘cultural unknown’ for the urban middle-class consuming subject. This landscape of curiosity stoking anxiety has geographical consequences, driving new commodified forms of conviviality and eventfulness that cater to, and synchronize with, the performance and rhythm of cultural capital accumulation (Ley, 1996; Kern, 2016). Yet this chapter traced how the production of anomalous retail queue embodies material and digital dynamics of the condition of social anxiety, signaling the productive force of ‘realignment’ conforming aesthetic ambitions and cultural dispositions with symbolic boundaries of class differentiation. The next and final empirical chapter further traces the “amplification of gentrification” investigating the unanticipated spatial consequences of urban retail queue (Bronsvoort and Uitermark, 2021). This chapter will look at how the queue impacts neighbouring businesses, producing conflict and a ripple effect of anxiety for actors involved in urban consumption.

## **Chapter 6–Representations and Reverberations: the Fragmentation of Ossington**

### **Avenue**

This final empirical chapter unravels dominant Instagram representations of neighbourhood change and the spatial consequences of the “amplification of gentrification” that create cascading ripple effects of anxiety for actors involved in new urban consumption (Bronsvoort and Uitermark, 2021). Investigating aesthetic themes and promotional norms of neighbourhood representations articulated from the geotag of the ice-cream boutique on Instagram, the chapter begins by scrutinizing the place-branding strategies of influencer imaging that filter, frame, and consume the gentrifying retail street as a marketable spatial image that aligns with ‘Bohemian’ and ‘fit’ identities. Connecting the netnographic analysis with qualitative interview data sharing lived experiences and personal memories of Ossington Avenue, the discussion examines neighbourhood representations of Bohemian identities by Instagram elites. Investing in the hipster narrative of the retail street, such visual social media images mythologizes the local reputation of danger into an urban symbol of cool cultural consumption. Following this, the discussion traces dominant Instagram users taking private geographical interest in promoting, performing, and circulating the spatial brand of Lower Ossington as a cosmetic enclave of aspirational lifestyle. This, however, depends on the erasure and forgetting of Little Portugal and the ongoing disappearance of ‘undesirables’ from the neighbourhood frame. Coupling urban gentrification processes with the trope of ‘fitness’, such packaging of the appearance of the streetscape not only commodifies the look of Ossington Avenue from the perspective of commodity spectacles but the spatial display of retail leisure disseminates the ‘getting into shape’ of the neighbourhood, showcasing the ice cream boutique as a lifestyle amenity marking the new urban commercial physique of the street as ‘fit’ for conspicuous cultural consumption.

From here, and following Bronsvoort and Uitermark (2021), I trace the spatial consequences of the amplification of gentrification observing reverberations of anxiety flowing from the unprecedented retail lineup into the subjective experiences of new local retail actors. Manifesting anxiety for merchants, workers, and consumers, the concrete effects of the amplified retail lineup are demonstrated in merchant social relations of conflict between new retail entrepreneurs, the speeding up of taste-based service work, and the intensification of insecurity for customers choosing ice-cream products at the ordering counter.

### ***6.1 The land of Oss: representations of neighbourhood change on Instagram***

Extending urban studies literature interrogating entrepreneurial state imperatives of urban boosterism and city branding as ‘top-down’ schemes of representation vying for mobile capital investment in the global competition for local economic development (Harvey, 1989; Short, 1999; Greenberg, 2008), contemporary critical urban scholarship has begun recognizing the spatial implications of digital platforms as new ‘bottom-up’ means of place promotion and location commodification selling positive images of postindustrial neighbourhoods and concealing urban social ill by filtering out ‘undesirable’ information, including marginalized spaces and groups (Souza e Silva and Frith, 2012; Zukin et al., 2017; Bronsvoort and Uitermark, 2021). Gentrification scholars Bronsvoort and Uitermark (2021) have recently developed the concept of the “amplification of gentrification” to refer to how the street-level perspectives of popular social media users on location-aware digital platforms brand and control ways of seeing urban life in ways that prioritize consumption in gentrifying locales, that in turn, materialize physical consequences at the neighbourhood scale. For Bronsvoort and Uitermark (2021: 13), following Zukin et al., (2017), the visual location sharing of influencer imagery on digital platforms (Instagram) makes a “discursive investment” in the narrative and image of changing central urban neighbourhoods. It

promotes an individualized, idealized, and specialized way of life that other middle-class people may want to join, but simultaneously excludes the existence of low-profile, working-class, and ordinary forms of urban social life from the public picture. Promoting gentrification by “shaping the image of the places they depict, such representations partake in the construction of place and define who belongs” (Bronsvoort and Uitermark 2021: 3). In this way, the discursive investments of influencer representations splice together individual images of central city life into a collective middle-class montage of “advertisements for hip and high-class establishments” (Bronsvoort and Uitermark 2021: 1), over-representing and generalizing the image of gentrification as the dominant frame of reference through which to experience urban belonging.

Building on the argument of the previous chapter, such Instagram representations branding the place identity of Ossington Avenue extend from, and are structured, by the anxiety of the in-the-know consuming subject seeking novelty and maintaining ongoing social advantage through waiting for, purchasing, and networking aestheticized ice-cream. Following Bronsvoort and Uitermark (2021), this chapter adopts a geographical perspective to critically investigate the neighbourhood dynamics of Instagrammable products, attending to the ways influencer imagery discursively invests in the image of urban retail change and the subsequent consequences as triggered by the production of the retail queue on Ossington Avenue. More specifically, such framing of new retail products in the dominant geotagged image amplifies gentrification by showcasing the aesthetic image of Lower Ossington with two specific spatial narratives: as ‘Bohemian’ and ‘fit’.

#### *6.1.1 Glamorous grit: investing in bohemian neighbourhood identity*

Aspiring towards ‘authenticity’, Bohemian identity personifies the romantic genius and aesthetic performance of the urban avant-garde whose experimental living and working habits criticizes, and marks distinction from, the prevailing social order (Wilson, 2000). This

elitist artistic disposition of the bohemian personality not only expresses an oppositional attitude to mainstream values of the status quo, but embodies broader cultural crisis of “a myth that seeks to reconcile Art to industrial capitalism, to create for it a role in consumer society” (Wilson, 2000: 3). Wilson (2000) also highlights a spatial dimension to the expression of new Bohemian identities. Providing the grounds for escape from the rigid structures of traditional community life, the modern industrializing city and its offbeat commercial amenities—streets, shops, cafés—enticed the Bohemian, projecting a romantic landscape of “raw material” that inspired and nurtured the staging and performance of alternative ways of life. Wilson (2000: 33) observes such bohemian consumption spaces evoked magical character “suggestive of genius and individuality, craziness and camaraderie”. Following Wilson (2000), I understand Bohemian identity as a lifestyle myth of aesthetic dissent that not only endorses the ‘artistic genius’ of hipster commodities as a middle-class alternative to mass mainstream products, but is framed within social media images as a place branding strategy investing in the promotional staging of Ossington Avenue as an ‘oppositional street’ of glamorous grit (Zukin, 2010).

The spatial storytelling of Instagram investments promote a mythic narrative of Lower Ossington as ‘Bohemian’ by conjuring up historical imaginaries of local danger and social disorder, as influencers and entrepreneurial social media profiles “fold the representation of neighborhood decay into their picture of authentic urbanism” (Lloyd, 2010: 78). This idealized resurrection of neighbourhood decay through Instagram images can be contextualized and linked back to the perspectives and words of interviewed participants who give voice to the stigmatized reputation of Ossington Avenue during the end of the twenty-century and early twenty-first century, observing a marginalized neighbourhood that spatialized perceived existential alarm. Sandra (6-12-18) is a practicing psychotherapist, wellness clinic manager, and commercial landlord of the building next to the ice-cream

boutique. The upstairs psychotherapy office previously functioned as the residential home for Sandra's grandparents. Spending her upbringing on Ossington Avenue, Sandra connects her childhood memories of the commercial street to images of danger that are characterized by the local drug trade and back alley sex work,

[Ossington Avenue] was dangerous. Maybe 20 years ago, it was really quite dangerous. There was a lot of gang-related stuff going on the street. The alleys were not safe to be in. There was a lot of like prostitution and drug use back there. And that as a child, as a small child, I wasn't exactly witness to, but, you know, remnants of things would be around so that would be apparent that way.

Not a former resident of the neighbourhood, Meg Marshall (17-01-2019), a local booster and staff member with the Ossington Business Improvement Area who "execute[s] the vision and direction of the board" of building owners and business owners, attributes the former street as arena of gloom that was dark, 'family-unfriendly', and "very seedy",

It was a very seedy area in the 90s and early 2000s...A lot of gangs and crime type activity. And in the mid 2000s it really decided to turn itself around, clean its act up, and now it's become a, you know, destination... from what I understand [in the 1990s and early 2000s] basic lighting infrastructure wasn't up to snuff to what it is now. It wasn't inviting. It wasn't friendly.

Like Meg, Cheyenne, the head ice-cream maker, was also not a member of the local Little Portugal community and recalls Ossington Avenue from the perspective of a middle-class outsider, viewing the urban working-class social character of Ossington Avenue as "sketchy",

It was not a good area to be in. It was really sketchy. I would come while I was in high school [in the mid 2000s] and it was not a safe area, especially around Dundas and Ossington...a lot of beggars, a lot of panhandlers, older drunk men being really aggressive, just not a place you would think young people would just hang out. Or young people would be. Or just larger groups of people.

More specifically, the social geography of institutional mental health provision on Queen Street West informs the historical character of local marginality on Ossington Avenue, wherein the geographic proximity of psychiatric survival and neighborhood affiliation with drug-related addictions served to inscribe spatial stigma on the formerly ethnic industrial retail street. Voicing spatial denigration rhetoric, Cheyenne signals how the geography of



embodied mental distress would govern perceptions of the urban night on Ossington Avenue in the past as a threat, “I don’t remember [Ossington] being that kind of scene. I just remember it not being a good area to be in at the end of the night only because of the CAMH (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health) [with] all the crazy people at the bottom.” Yet in contrast to pathologizing attitudes, which reinforces the prejudice of mainstream lifestyle journalism ghettoizing Ossington Avenue and demonizing local psychiatric outpatients as a collective ‘Other’ (Chatto, 2008), Sandra (6-12-18) highlights a counternarrative noting personal encounters with the local community of persons with complex mental illness were trivial and fleeting,

Yeah there was much more presence [of persons with mental illness]. For instance—so this [the wellness clinic] was a family home—so we would often have people coming in if the door was left unlocked. Coming in and just kind of, not being harmful in any way, just kind of using the space as a little nap area (Sandra laughs). This happened a handful of times. It was much more prevalent—the community of CAMH...[These encounters] never felt dangerous though. It was more like ‘they’re around’.

With the exception of Sandra’s counter narrative, interviewed participants construct a spatial memory of Ossington Avenue with stigma, referencing the state of the locale in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century as an anti-social underworld marked with real danger and attached to the perceived environmental blight of urban psychiatric social service provision. In more recent years, and coinciding with the large-scale redevelopment of the Queen Street CAMH site and encouraged by the spread of artistic forms of gentrification throughout west inner city Toronto during the late twentieth century (Bain, 2006; Bain and March, 2019), the spatial regeneration of Ossington Avenue not only purges the middle-class perception of existential fear but foregrounds new agents of capital investment and retail consumption. Bohemian hipsters exploit the street identity of urban marginality into a symbolic image and geographical memory of cultural cool. Urban scholars observe how such spatial commodification of local marginality characterize postindustrial geographies of

hipster gentrification, as the flow of capital by new ‘alternative’ market actors into old disinvested, ‘dangerous’ working-class neighbourhoods maintains an ideological commitment to the enduring myth of bohemian authenticity that romanticizes the memory and idealizes the trauma of poverty as a trope of ‘raw’ inspiration and association of ‘real’ urban space (Lloyd, 2010; Zukin, 2010). Abstracting urban history from risk to asset, such gritty authenticity of hipster gentrification and the encroachment of anti-corporate capital investment deploys an entrepreneurial strategy of street dissociation disneyfying the spatiality of stigma into a theme of cool cultural consumption that appeals to “the bohemian disposition to value the drama of living on the edge” (Kern, 2014; Lloyd, 2010, 80). The networking of locative Instagram posts reflects and accelerates this symbolic strategy of hipster gentrification recycling the fabric of grit into a logo of danger, as the geotagged place branding of influencer imagery encourages and promotes the cultural consumption, aesthetic presentation, and spatial transformation of Ossington Avenue as a material site and local symbol of Bohemian identity (Lloyd, 2010; Zukin, 2010). Such digital place branding is synthesized in Figure 3, an Instagram post with two-hundred-and-eighty-four likes depicting a body-length portrait of a young black man positioned in front of a newly constructed condominium building who, while biting down into an ice-cream sandwich, includes at the bottom of the frame a manhole cover reading, “DANGER”.



Figure 6.1 and Figure 6.2. Instagram posts narratively invest in the ‘edgy’ quality of bohemian neighbourhood identity.

Such a trace of the surface of fear can be interpreted in geographical context as signaling the cultural consumption of the cool image of urban danger, amplifying and filtering the image of Ossington Avenue as a spatial brand of aesthetic grittiness. This Instagram representation of commodified danger making a visual investment into the digital perception of Lower Ossington as ‘bohemian’ can be further traced in cultural consumers' appropriation of the historical ‘seediness’ of local alleyway graffiti as an ‘edgy’ urban aesthetic setting for the background of images of ice-cream consumption. Such imaging perpetuates the absorption of graffiti within new entrepreneurial urban rebranding strategies that commodify the ‘ruggedness’ of spatial stigma: highly-visible social media users build associations between neo-artisanal ice-cream products and the aesthetics of ‘dirt’, reinforcing the abstraction of graffiti into an outdoor advertisement for the gritty authenticity of bohemian neighbourhoods by displaying “‘the street’ not merely as a location or space, but as an idea, an aesthetic, and a potential” (Cronin, 2008, 75). Indeed, the anxiety of fear and the threat of crime once pervading the perception of graffiti-laden inner-city back alleys as Sandra highlighted above

has been cannibalized by the anxiety of the urban middle-class consuming subject using the ‘rebellious’ background of wall paintings to showcase distinction that achieves ‘defiance’ and signifies ‘disobedience’ from the mainstream.

#### *6.1.2 Place cosmetics: Investing in fit neighbourhood identity*

In addition to disseminating images of gritty hipster cool, the cosmetics of Instagram posts discursively invest the appearance of gentrification by filtering the place identity of Lower Ossington as an aesthetic locale of fitness and wellness (Kern, 2012). As Kern (2012) points out, lifeworlds of gentrification are made legible in the micro-dynamics of new health spaces (i.e., the urban yoga studio, catering to embodied practices of individual emotional wellness for middle-class clientele). For Kern (2012: 34), new entrepreneurial spiritual sites reproduce the socio-spatial exclusions of gentrification at the scale of the body by reserving embodied therapies of human touch and physical contact in the central city as a privilege for middle-class flesh, and also at the neighbourhood scale as the membership orientation of new urban wellbeing clubs drive the local “expulsion of undesirable bodies and undesirable embodied contact from spaces undergoing revitalization”. In the specific context of Lower Ossington, it is the institutionalized mental health consumer in particular whose ‘undesirable body’ has faced collective invisibility and socio-spatial expulsion from the retail street and new local lifestyle of ‘wellness’. As Sandra (6-12-18) suggests, the retail gentrification of Ossington Avenue has shrunk the lifeworld of low-income mental health subjects using and accessing the street socially and as a survival strategy,

It was much more prevalent—the community of CAMH...they weren’t really shopping or consuming anything. They were like hanging out on the street and finding warmth in the crevices of the front entrances of places...[today] there is no more presence of CAMH patients that are walking around. You just don’t see them come beyond Jimmy’s [Coffee] [at Queen Street West] even.

As Sandra suggests, and as her boutique mental and physical health clinic represents, new expensive health spaces signal the displacement of institutionalized mental health consumers

from the retail landscape of the street and subsequent replacement with the new *paying* health consumer who can afford, or is covered through private insurance, to access services of individual psychotherapy, massage therapy, acupuncture. Indeed, while working on shift at the ice-cream boutique, it was common to serve CAMH *professionals*, who would patronize the shop in groups wearing official lanyards and sporting medical and administrative access badges. Moreover, the changing retail street ‘flexes’ new recreational forms of physical culture, spawning a number of members-only health clubs including commercial ‘fitness boxes’ that cater to high-intensity time-intensive sports, such as cross-training and indoor ‘spin’ cycling, in addition to the ‘holistic’ commerce of private wellness clinics. Sandra (6-12-18) mentions that during previous ‘Ossfest’ in 2017, an annual commodified street festival organized by the local Business Improvement Area (BIA), in which the lower stretch of the street practiced the exercise of urban yoga,

Prior to the Ossfest this year, we had this mindful health-related wellness segment ...where myself, a couple of other spaces, Misfits, the crossfit gym, all kind of collaborated on creating free sessions and free classes on the street. So we had a streetful of yoga mats. And you know I led the meditation prior to it. And they had, you know, yoga sessions and paired activities from this.

As new boutique health merchants reorient the use of neighbourhood retail space into a corridor of mindfulness, the spatial promotion of Instagram representations communicate and drive such cultural values of consumer wellness by investing in the narrative of Lower Ossington as an aspirational locale of lifestyle maintenance. More specifically, such place

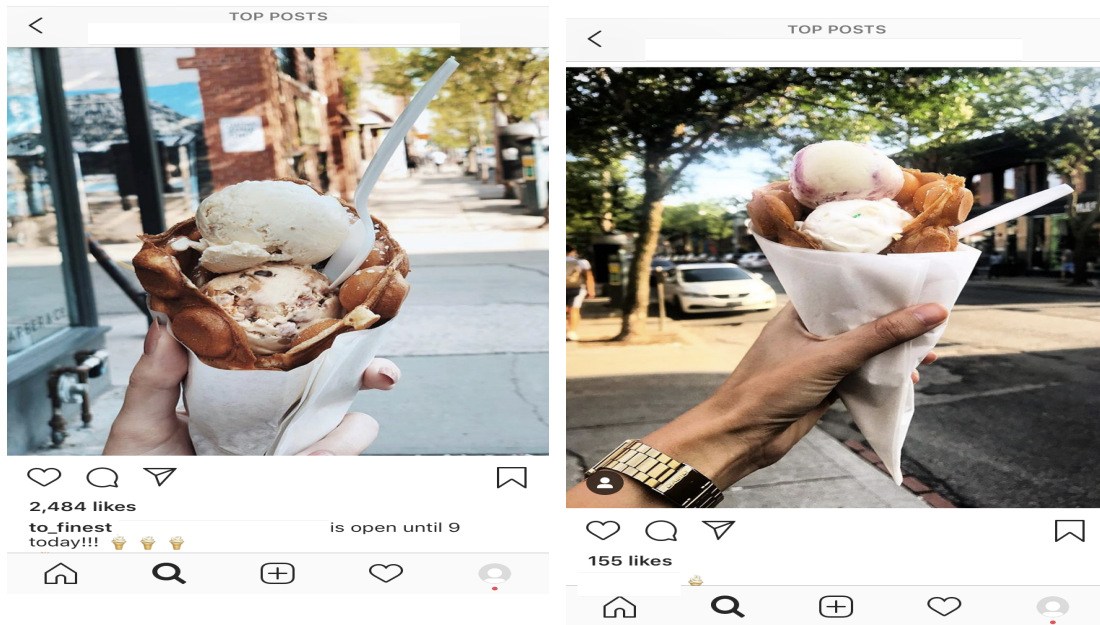


Figure 6.3 and Figure 6.4. Disembodied Instagram posts take control of the place identity of the neighbourhood by prioritizing ice-cream commodities as a street icon.

branding of influencer images connects the aesthetic orientation of fitness as a cosmetic category of idealized appearance (Featherstone, 1991; Smith-Maguire, 2007) with the promotion of gentrification as a spatial strategy of local disappearance, advancing aspirational images of the street that ‘trim off’ the excess of ‘undesirable’ objects and bodies ‘incompatible’ with the themed experience of consumer lifestyle (Zukin, 1995; Kern, 2015). Reproducing commodity fetishism dynamics highlighted in the previous chapter, such place cosmetics of Instagram posts framing the ‘fitness’ of the neighbourhood involve the decorporealization of the indoor and outdoor public realm of Ossington Avenue, stripping space of bodies to prioritize new hipster retail products as a hero of geography (Figure 3 and 4). Such dominant Instagram representations signifies a type of “differential space”, representing how location-aware digital platforms and mobile cameraphone interfaces enable “users to filter their surroundings and to develop a more individualized experience of public space” (de Souza e Silva and Frith, 2012: 156). Such mobile interfacing of Instagram users aggregate individualized experiences of Ossington Avenue by managing the impression of

the street as a territory of exception and uniqueness for the new urban middle-classes, branded as an aspirational enclave for ‘cheat day’ and ‘lifestyle rehabilitation’ (Figure 5 and 6).

This aesthetic Instagram framing aligns and resonates with the dominant vision and shared interests of private development, particularly the inner-city real-estate actor Hullmark. Hullmark’s local proprietorship actively seeks to commercially ‘refurbish’ Ossington streetscape from the inside out, aestheticizing the architectural look of old buildings and the tenants occupying their properties. Owning fourteen residential and retail properties in the old inner-city street in 2018, the property actor began roaming the ‘frontier’ of the formerly economically risky Ossington Avenue in 2014 following the purchase of a building at the base of the street at 1000 Queen Street West (directly across from CAMH). As a representative of the property developer noted in an email interview (12-21-2018), “Hullmark saw the opportunity to invest in an area that was becoming a *destination street* in Toronto and that benefitted from surrounding residential intensification”. Exploiting the neighbourhood rent gap and targeting the street for portfolio expansion, the downtown property developer realized the neighbourhood was ‘getting into shape’ becoming an attractive “destination street”. Encouraging and accommodating processes of retail gentrification, the developer seeks to establish Ossington Avenue as a hip entrepreneurial retail zone through “activat[ing] vacant spaces with short-term pop-ups or art installations”, renting and leasing out commercial space to *particular* retail tenants whose products and services validate and support the aesthetic tastes and shopping preferences of local residential gentrifiers. As the developer noted (12-21-2018), they

aim to work with progressive, creative, and unique tenants that will bring strong foot traffic and are interested in being a part of the community for the long term. Recently, Hullmark received feedback from local residents that a *boutique* grocer would be beneficial. Hullmark successfully worked with Fresh City Farms, opening their first bricks and mortar location in 2018.

As the quotation demonstrates, the work of the property developer deploys the strategy of curation to gentrify the retail corridor with “progressive, creative, and unique tenants” who conform to the developer’s urge to upscale Ossington Avenue so the corridor “will continue to evolve as a unique street that is as diverse as the architecture that populates it.”

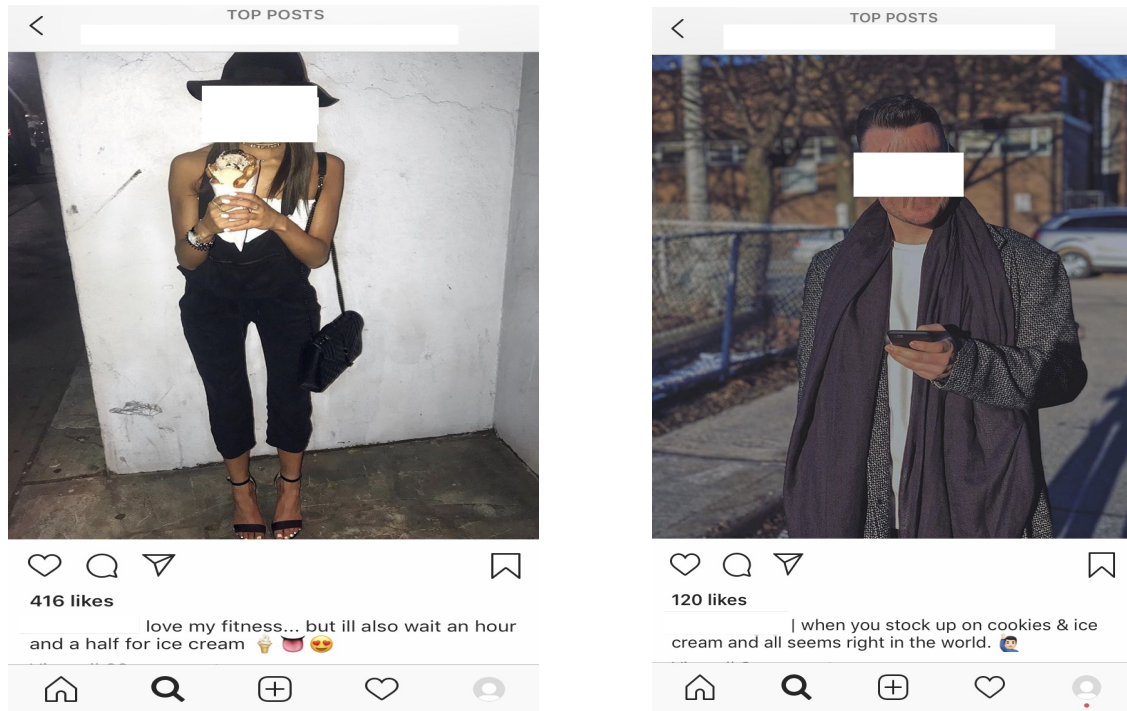


Figure 6.5 and 6.6. These promotional Instagram posts invest in the aspirational narrative of Ossington Avenue as a neighbourhood with aesthetic amenities and food services of ‘cultural fix’.

At the same time, the location sharing of Instagram images idealizing and individualizing the look of place identity operates in alignment and visually invests in the classed criteria of commercial real estate. Depicting the developer’s rhetoric of ‘evolution’, the spatial aesthetics of popular social media images invest in the ‘fitness’ of place by producing site-specific consumption vignettes “that encourage contextually appropriate expressions of conformity and distinction” (Boy and Uitermark, 2020: 4). By promoting the inner-city street as a newly ‘fit’ playground for new hipster urban middle-class leisure habits, the privileged



consumption of lifestyle Instagram posts epitomize how mobile cameraphone image-making practices on digital platforms “allowing individuals to directly filter the information they access from their environment, leads to different forms of social exclusion and fragmented perceptions of public spaces” (Souza e Silva and Frith, 2012: 140).

Yet, in combining the “presentation of location” with the “aestheticization of everyday life” (Souza e Silva and Frith, 2012; Featherstone, 1991), the place branding of Instagram images shared on the digital platform is asymmetrical, downplaying material realities of middle-class consumption on the street. For instance, idealized depictions downplay the crowdedness of the queue, edit out mentioning the stench of decomposing milk, the sight of the overflowing public garbage bin, and micro-environment of sticky messiness on the sidewalk<sup>4</sup> (Figures 6 and 7). Indeed, as a result of the production of garbage littering the street with plastic spoons, paper napkins, and used food trays, and at the behest of a neighbouring restaurant forced to deal with consumption blight, the ice-cream boutique stationed a single trash can adjacent to the shop, effectively becoming private custodians of the street. In this way, the utopianism of popular Instagram posts idealizing an individualized appearance of urban public space cosmeticizes a ‘spatial facelift’ of the street that exemplifies processes of “amplified” gentrification through invisibilizing the ‘wrinkles’ of experience to makeover the appearance of the neighbourhood in ways “that look much more gentrified than they do in reality” (Bronsvort and Uitermark, 2021: 13).

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<sup>4</sup> The odor of decomposition is very strong. During fieldwork, I was conversing with a man from Vancouver whose partner was inside ordering ice cream and told me she would be interested in speaking with me for the project. But when she finally came outside after purchasing an ice-cream waffle she declined to participate because the stench emanating from the municipal garbage bin was too overwhelming and needed to exit the street.



Figure 6.7 and 6.8. An Instagram post with over fifteen-hundred likes filters neighbourhood vision, while the photograph of the micro-landfill illustrates how the presence of environmental flaws exist on the street but are ‘incompatible’ with the spatial ‘brand’ of Lower Ossington (Figure 7 photo by author, 2018).

This discussion has shown how geotagged Instagram posts of ice-cream products sharing local identity invest in, and push for, a reconstructed narrative of place reframing Ossington as ‘bohemian’ and ‘fit’. Following Bronsvoort and Uitermark (2021), the distinction orientation of social media representations idealizing and advertising the appeal of gentrification materializes consequences for neighbourhood change, that in context of this research, corporealizes in the concrete manifestation of the retail lineup. The second part of this chapter traces the spatial impact of the lineup as a material result of the amplification of gentrification, which includes the production of negative relations between retail gentrifiers, the acceleration of retail work, and the destabilization of the customer at the food ordering counter.

## *6.2 Reverberations of anxiety: the consequences of the amplification of gentrification*

Takahashi (2017) observes the retail gentrification of Little Portugal has entailed the production of friction in the social relations among local entrepreneurs. As new young non-Portuguese business owners territorialize the street, such cultural entrepreneurial

commerce de-ethnicizes the retail landscape and marginalizes established neighbourhood traditions and rituals maintained and supported by older Portuguese store owners and immigrant clientele. Furthermore, as the ‘pioneering’ agendas of new retail gentrifiers dominate leadership positions on the local Business Improvement Area board and take governance control over planning the future priorities of the commercial corridor, particularly through rebranding and de-ethnicizing the annual pedestrian street festival, the combination of political difference and spatial inseparability among new and old local entrepreneurs in Little Portugal institutionalizes sociocultural division within the shared landscape of the shopping street and minimizes the collective identity of the local Portuguese community (Takahashi, 2017). Augmenting Takahashi’s (2017) discussion and moving from Dundas Street West to Ossington Avenue, the following section argues the consequences of the amplification of gentrification, materializing from the unique situation of the middle-class retail lineup, reinforce and deepen the social tectonics of territorial friction in the gentrifying local retail landscape. This deepening of the local social fissures in commercial street relations manifests between dynamics of conflict between merchants at the site of the case study, as new retail entrepreneurs experience the queue as an omen of profit damage that vandalizes storefront visibility and blocks commercial accessibility.

#### *6.2.1 “Please keep your scoop off our stoop”: the sidewalk politics of retail gentrifiers*

Emily and Georgina are independent co-store owners and the commercial tenants occupying the ground floor retail space immediately south of the ice-cream boutique. Specializing in the craft of cuteness, the new retail entrepreneurs design and make local iconographic products in material forms of screen printing, silkscreening, sewing, and miniature buttons. The commercial space Emily and Georgina work and sell out of has previously been used as office space for an engineering construction firm, travel agency, and driving school. Retail gentrifiers themselves, Emily and Georgina note Ossington Avenue

initially was a desirable street to locate and develop business operations because of the ‘affordability’ of rent and the close proximity of the store to the fashion of the West Queen West art scene. Yet, Emily and Georgina (16-11-18) note the geography of the store has been ‘cursed’ by the ongoing embodiment of the retail queue. For these business owners, the persistent lineup blocks the enticement of the storefront window designed to persuade pedestrian shoppers on the street into the store and obstructs the accessibility of entrances and exits into the private shop.

Forced to look after “someone else’s customers” the cultural entrepreneurs describe stewardship of the queue as an unpaid responsibility and harbinger of anxiety. As Emily says (16-11-18), daily business operations particularly in the warmer months of the year were marked by vigilance and shaped by the

anxiety, stress, dread knowing that one of us would have to go out and talk to someone else’s customers in a way that’s obviously not aggressive or mean. But somehow controlling a line we didn’t really feel we had to take responsibility for but had to [in order] to get the results we needed to keep our store accessible.

Sandra, the commercial landlord for Emily and Georgina and whose boutique wellness clinic shares the same the building but is located on the upper level, describes the collective presence of middle-class bodies as a “human barrier” jeopardizing future business patronage and force of intimidation for prospective mental health clientele,

[In 2015] that’s when the battle began...because we were still developing [the clinic storefront], and I didn’t like the idea that my clients had to face this human barrier. But they [pointing downwards to suggest the commercial tenants] really had a problem because that’s their store and if there’s a line up going right across their store, everyone’s crossing across the street...if people are crossing the street to avoid this huge line, then nobody is noticing these shops exist. So that was the battle.

Classifying the character of negotiations over the lineup as a “battle”, Sandra highlights clients of the private clinic confronting the consumption queue face the forced anxiety of “exposure therapy”, which she suggests attests to a broader conflict of values and spatial “incongruence” of the services offered by new entrepreneurial actors on the gentrifying street,

it [the ice-cream boutique] happens to be the opposite therapy that we offer (Sandra laughs). We help people with, you know, food therapy issues and reaching for that kind of stuff. Which, I mean, an ice cream here and there in moderation is not going to cause a big problem. If people are reaching for ice creams to dissipate their issues and forget about them—I guess that is one incongruence of the whole health conscious aspect of the street... We went as far as just kind of making a joke [written on a sandwich board] and being like, “is ice cream therapy not working for you? Come on upstairs” ...not to be jerks about it, but almost to shed light in a humorous way...there was another sign, it was like, “two hours from this point (Sandra laughs) is it worth it?” You know? Face things in a different way. Just witty little jabs that I think are very fitting for this street...a lot of people that come here come because they have social anxieties...it’s like exposure therapy. They have to face this huge crowd [arriving at] and leaving the clinic [while] having all these eyes kind of on you.

Georgia and Emily also reinforce how middle-class clientele experience the queue as a sense of entrapment restricting mobility and engendering anxiety,

E: [we would] witness strollers or wheelchairs not being able to cross fully [the sidewalk]. And even walking people—having trouble walking on the sidewalk.

G: And even just people coming in saying, “oh god, I can’t get out now,” and stuff like that.

These quotations demonstrate how consequences of the lineup externalizing middle-class



Figure 6.8. A ‘homemade’ sticker animating the frown of an anthropomorphized ice-cream cone with text reading “PLEASE KEEP YOUR SCOOP OFF OUR STOOP” (Photo by author, 2018).

consumption reverberates anxiety among cultural entrepreneurs and their customers who experience the queue as a negative present moment with an uncertain future, forced to engage with the entitlement of the queue dominating the sidewalk. Yet as Sandra also suggests, the lineup motivates counteraction and births new forms of street antagonism from business owners who display playful advertisements with “very witty jabs” that lampoon the legitimacy of the lineup and question the ‘worth’ of the ice-cream products. Such direct criticism, Sandra notes, is “very fitting” for the new competitive social character of the gentrifying neighbourhood (Figure 8).

Indeed, the direction of the lineup runs south on Ossington Avenue despite increased sidewalk space for pedestrians and fewer obstacles northward (there is a municipal garbage can, a tree, and electric wiring in front of Emily and Georgina’s store). This positioning of the queue reflects dynamics of commercial property ownership, as the culinary establishment connected to the ice-cream shop is the landlord of the building and has the power to control the queue and forces the lineup to run away from the restaurant during operating hours. Gordon (15-11-18), the over-six-foot tall general manager of the chef-led restaurant and former professional competitive hockey player, notes the spotlight of the lineup passing in front of the elite establishment would demoralize and upstage the “vibe” of the elitist streetside patio as an “*al fresco*” amphitheater for the urban performance of conspicuous cultural capital,

I’ve got a patio and our patio is very rare in Toronto in that it’s a streetside patio. It’s got the European vibe, it’s got the New York vibe. Patios and cafés in New York and Europe are ‘see and be seen’. It’s people watching. It’s dining *al fresco* on the sidewalk, you know. There’s beautiful people walking by—that’s what our patio is. So I want my guests to have the street visual. At the same time, *I want the street* seeing my patio and people having bottles of wine and dining and having great food on that patio...Once we got our patio permit, that line was going that way [Gordon points south]...I want my frontage seen.

This quotation underscores how the presence of the lineup is negatively experienced by neighbouring establishments by posing a threat of invisibility to the storefront and status

performances of taste, yet is unevenly experienced as a result of property ownership privilege. Describing how the line-up factors into merchant relations with the ice-cream retailer, Gordon notes, “I think it is as good as any [other]. It’s different because we’re the landlord (he laughs). It’s a totally different thing. I mean [the businesses immediately south] may have a totally different answer to that one.” Indeed, they do. As Georgina observes, the lack of mutual support and the issue of queue management has boiled over into an escalation of conflict leading to amplified disputes,

A couple of times, [ice-cream shop representatives] came into our store loud and aggressive towards us...I think we had maybe moved a stanchion, or moved the line or something to that effect. And got an angry response to that...And they were very adamant about not listening to our concerns really. Like they basically came to a point where they said, ‘We don’t care. And you deal with it.’

Speaking limitedly about the neighbourhood relations with cultural entrepreneurs, the ice-cream boutique (02-01-2019) suggests merchants ‘taking matters into their own hands’ to reposition the lineup as efforts “causing trouble”,

We have agreed on times in which the line can run across the front of their store. So we agreed on timing so we just know to move the line accordingly. And if we’re in the way of a neighbour, I get that. I mean, I don’t appreciate them moving the line or causing trouble but I understand that.

From Sandra’s perspective, the lack of cooperation suggests the role of the profit motive acting as a barrier impeding conflict resolution, noting the idea to have paid ice-cream workers outside as a private authority overseeing and managing the queue “endured a lot of resistance”: “that was the issue. [The proprietor] said she wasn’t willing to pay anyone to man the line-ups because heaven forbid she have to afford that for all the ice cream that’s being sold. That was the resistant point and that’s where we were like, you know, it’s just not fair.” As Figure 9 shows, how when left to its own devices, the retail lineup spreads uncontrollably, even veering onto the road shared with vehicular traffic.





Figure 6.9. Without oversight, the wild consumption of the lineup expands off the sidewalk and moves onto the street with vehicular traffic (Photo by author, 2018).

As a result of the ongoing conflict between retailers, the local Business Improvement Area intervened as a governing body to civilize retail relations seeking to “try and encourage good neighbourly behaviour”. As Meg Marshall observes (17-01-2019),

From what I understand, at a certain point, [the ice-cream shop] is not responsible for the line. Like, outside of their door, they’re technically not allowed to put stanchions, but they do anyways, which I am in agreement with to be able to control the lineup. But as per right of way management and transportation services you can’t technically have them. We had even suggested getting a line painted down the sidewalk so that people knew where to stand, and the city transportation department said no. [There are] only a certain amount of things that can and can not be done, and sometimes you just have to go ahead and do things.

Indeed, during the 2018 Street Festival, the BIA hand-chalked a colourful path on the asphalt as a “spontaneous successful solution” “for the benefit of everybody” so as to avoid contact and conflict between the lineup and the exhibits of neighbouring businesses, particularly the free massage sessions offered by the wellness boutique. As Meg notes (17-01-2019),

We had to kind of mitigate in the moment to create way-finding to make sure people know where to line up for the benefit of everybody. I wouldn’t say it was special treatment, [the chalk path] was just practical logistics that needed to happen to ensure everyone had a pleasurable experience at the festival.



Yet, as Emily pointed out, the impact of the queue has led independent businesses to seek out state intervention and by-law enforcement to manage and regulate the consumption lineup,

[the lineup is] a weird thing to deal with. And a new thing. Very new. Starting with maybe Uncle Tetsu's cheesecakes, [that] is when I first heard about lines. I think it's like a new phenomenon happening in the city. And something that I think there should seriously be bylaws for. Which is what we came to find out through talking with the city, talking to the BIA, knowing there are no specific bylaws addressing the situation.

In the meantime, local retail actors improvise, deploying, as Meg suggested, guerilla tactics placing unregulated moveable stanchion posts as informal temporary fixtures on the sidewalk to organize the consumer flow of 'foot traffic' and categorize the pavement between paying and non-paying subjects (Figure 10).



Figure 6.10. The bifurcation of the sidewalk making legible new patterns of spatial commodification separating paying and non-paying publics (Photo by author, 2018).

At the same time actors' attempt to organize public inner-city sidewalk space to enable accessibility and pedestrian transportation, the introduction of "way-finding" objects serves to accommodate the "slow violence" of "right-of-way gentrification" as the installment of everyday sidewalk infrastructure legitimizes access to the leisure retail practices of conspicuous cultural consumption (Kern, 2016; Langegger, 2016; Shaw, 2008).

Deeming who belongs and norms of legitimate behavior on Ossington Avenue, the use of public street space for the middle-class leisure of the urban retail lineup perpetuates the continued erasure of Little Portugal (Murdie and Teixeira, 2011). As Sandra notes, the presence of the lineup not only represents how the retail gentrification of Ossington Avenue produces conflict but also erodes a sense of ethnic cohesion and social generosity,

Before when we would walk out onto the street, I pretty much knew everybody. My grandmother was really quite a socialite, she was the spokes[person] of the community. She basically brought everyone together. As you're aware, *this is* Little Portugal, Little Brazil area. So, she knew everybody and everybody knew us. And you'd go out and there was this kind of communal feeling. Although multitudes of people are here now, that communal is gone. There is no camaraderie, there is no—you know, people don't smile at each other, they don't greet each other as they used to. And I think that comes with the kind of saturation of all kinds of people. You know the population is increasing and people wanting to come here. It's almost like a tourist site now, as opposed to this familiar warm place that it used to be.

This quotation demonstrates how the arrival of new economic and cultural investment injecting capital, consumption, and competitiveness into socio-spatial dynamics of the local gentrifying built environment—of which Sandra's new private wellness clinic contributes to and profits from—the “familiar warm place” where “you'd go out and there was this kind of communal feeling” chills into an alienating “tourist site” for long-time residents, where now, the orientation of the neighbourhood smile shifts from the public to the private realm, as subjects increasingly grin with new retail commodities rather than greet each other with a long-time sense of camaraderie.

### *6.2.2 Haste over taste? The acceleration of retail work and cultural consumption*

In addition to stoking negative merchant relations between new retail gentrifiers, the concrete effects of the amplification of gentrification can be registered in the lived temporal servicescape of hipster ice-cream retail, as the retail lineup demands an acceleration of front-and back-of-house food service work and destabilizes the food ordering counter.

Throughout interviews, and as I felt scooping on shift, front-of-house workers experience the queue acts as a force of haste triggering an increase in the embodied speed of service tasks

and work activities that accelerates the delivery of the commodity. Awakened and enamoured by the allure of speed, front-of-house scooper Lisa (29-10-18) evokes how the queue injects the pace of work with the character of acceleration, “[the line up] wakes me up and I love it. I love it. I love it...I prefer to be busy, busy, busy, busy, busy, nonstop, nonstop with my one-point-five minute break and my speedy cigarette in between every three hours.” Maria, also a front-of-house scooper, observes how working fast represents an attempt to control the queue, “[the lineup] does effect how I work quickly...I’ll step out [of the ice cream shop] and [see] the line up is super long and I’ll come back and be like ‘guys, we got to pick up the pace because the line up is way too long’”. Serving the retail lineup, Robert conceptualizes the temporal condition of ice-cream labour as “microwave time”, noting during product microwave preparation he would feel pressure to maintain the hustle of productivity,

If I have, like microwave time, I would rinse [dirty ice-cream] buckets...*in the context* of working at [this ice-cream shop] a minute is really long...you can do a lot in that [time]...I wouldn’t feel comfortable taking a longer than minute standing and not doing anything. I would say that. So interesting, eh? *Like it’s only ice cream but it holds so much in it.* I always tell people, I never thought there was so much to ice cream.

The lineup is welcomed by some workers as the increase of consumers translates into an accumulation of gratuity. But, other retail workers express how lineup-induced pressure ‘justifies’ the guilt of pausing and taking a break on shift. As Jasmine notes,

you don’t get a break unless you really ask for it...No one really says, ‘take a break’...when it’s really, really busy. I don’t take a break because I feel kind of guilty taking a break...I’ll just take it at the very end for like 10 minutes.

Yet, as front-of-house workers also note, such acceleration of ice-cream retail work is a labour expectation normalized and internalized through service training and disciplined by the oversight of the business owner who bakes in the commercial production space. As Lisa describes,

[The pace of work] definitely the way I was trained. In February, [the proprietor said] “Lisa, now we’re taking it easy but you have to hustle when it’s summer. It has to be

in and out, in and out (snapping fingers)...Why do I need to be fast? Because I find it thrilling. It's a service that's line-up related as well...Why not make it faster versus making it slower?

Former front-of-house worker, Robert (10-12-18), also reinforces the 'commonsense' "in and out" imperative of work acceleration,

R: It was explained in the beginning that this is a fast-paced place and we need to keep the line moving...Sometimes I would take the decision [of ordering] from [indecisive customers]...the experience people have outside is that it takes so incredibly long...sometimes I would see the line up and say, 'these poor people they have lives to live! They can't line up for so long'.

This quotation, victimizing the privilege of cultural consumers as "poor people", demonstrates how the introduction of time pressure into the elite retail food servicescape produces a hierarchy of priority in which the haste of work takes precedence over the transmission of taste, wherein the 'slow' communication of cultural capital teaching consumers about the uniqueness of the food product is abandoned in order to "keep the line moving" that gets the customer "in and out".

Yet, as a result of such front-of-house acceleration of the delivery of ice-cream products, the making of ice-cream commodities consequently must also keep up or else risk the worst case scenario for consumers: product shortage. Alarmed at the sound of slamming ice-cream buckets, Cheyenne, the ice-cream maker, associates the ongoing retrieval of new tubs of ice-cream from the deep freezer by retail workers with the shock of uncertainty and the destabilization of control over the consumption lineup,

[the lineup] does freak me out a bit and gives me anxiety. I tend to get paranoid and freak out when I hear the buckets slam on the table...[and if that flavour] wasn't on my [production] list that day, and I notice it's getting pulled more, it gets added to my list. So the longer the line, I'm like, 'oh my god, I don't know what flavour's going to go first'. Or if I see them pulling a frequent one and the line is longer, I'm like, this flavour is going to keep going...It terrifies me.

In addition to the acceleration of making and selling labour processes, retail workers enforcing the shutdown of the lineup at the end of the shift at 10:30 PM manifests an

additional legible consequence of the amplification of gentrification. At the end of the shift, not during, one worker is dismissed from the serving floor to manage the closure of the queue and stands at the end of the lineup tasked with the job of refusing new customers (otherwise the lineup would seemingly never end and the proprietor would in turn have to pay more wages to workers). However, the process of asserting boundaries with consumers and denying the consumption of ice cream produces moments of tension. During times when I acted as the lineup bouncer, customers would plead for empathy and seek acceptance into the queue noting they were global tourists who were departing the following day or had journeyed on foot, often from other inner-city neighbourhoods, and deserved to gain admittance into the ice-cream shop because of their pilgrimage. As a white man with a medium build, I was privileged with positive experiences with customers who would accept my boundaries. But other workers, particularly young, female-identifying workers, noted closing down the lineup would turn mean-spirited and confrontational, as consumers resisted being denied access to consumption. As Kacey experienced,

One time, we had this regular customer, it was like 10:31 [PM] and we closed at 10:30 [PM] so I get it...But she didn't respect my 'no'...And the worst part was that there were other customers who had gotten their ice cream [who agreed with the resistant customer]. This big, giant buff guy [was] with his family and [drove] his little Tesla thing, he's like standing there eating his ice cream. He's like [to me], 'you're a horrible person, blah blah blah, let her in'...They literally hassled me to tears. Like, you have to respect people and they didn't understand that. We ended up letting her in because I didn't want to get a bad [online] review.

This quotation demonstrates the lack of respect and empathy towards the ice-cream shop worker and exemplifies how class processes of retail gentrification spreading patterns of middle-class consumption into the commercial landscape of Ossington Avenue promote new forms of neighbourhood incivility rooted in the elitism and spatial entitlement of class privilege. Indeed, cultural consumers begging retail workers on the sidewalk to allow for the purchase of small-batch ice-cream products signals urban gentrification 'legitimates' and

‘civilizes’ behavioural forms of disorderly conduct and street solicitation historically associated with survival strategies of the urban poor. Who has the power to solicit and beg on the postindustrial retail street?

### *6.2.3 Customer anxiety and destabilization at the food ordering counter*

The last material consequence related to the dynamic of the lineup is the destabilization of the ordering counter, whereby cultural consumers facing the escalation of time pressure at the point of purchase sharpens the anxiety of choosing the ‘correct’ flavor of ice cream. The uniqueness of the hipster retailer subjects customers to a number of pressures that the force of the queue compresses. For instance, customers choosing from the ‘omnivorous’ menu and seeking out the taste of distinction through ice-cream goods requires the luxury of time that the compression of the lineup interrupts. As Maria (10-26-18), a front-of-house worker notes,

I’ll be honest, most of the time people come in and they’re the ones that are uncomfortable. Like they don’t know. Like there’s a lot going on. Like all the flavours, the crowd, sometimes I do see a lot of people come in and they can’t decide. They have anxiety. [Speaking as the customer] “I don’t know what to get. I’m just not going to get anything.” ...because [the ice cream shop] is so quick and fast paced, I think a lot of people don’t take their time to order things. They feel so rushed, like the line up in the back. The lineups go all the way down the street...there’s so much pressure to choose something quickly and there are so many different flavours. Sometimes I quickly ask them, “what do you guys like? Vanilla, chocolate, fruit flavours?” And I’ll kind of break it down really quickly for them, help them out that way.

This quotation demonstrates how the looming presence of the lineup acts as a force of destabilization for the consumer compressing the scope of the worker-customer interaction.

As Maria suggests, the alternative style of selling in hipster retail contributes the anxiety of the ordering counter. Oftentimes while serving, customers would approach me at the ordering counter and ask how to choose ice cream, not knowing the bucket of stainless steel buckets lining the wall represented the menu of flavours. As Robert observes, the hipster retail style of selling particularly disadvantages and creates anxiety for child customers and their guardians whose ordering processes requires more accessibility, time, and care,

[this ice cream shop] is not a 'kids' ice cream place...kids come and they want to see the ice cream because they choose visually...They can't just read off a menu so they want to try a few of them. And that's really not what [this ice cream shop] is about. The worst would be when a family comes in and the parent would ask the kid what do you want. And the kid would honestly say, "*I don't know, I can't see it.*" ...And the parent feels uncomfortable *because there's a line up behind them*. And the whole situation becomes stressful for everyone. And I would feel so bad.

This quotation demonstrates how the combination of the layout of selling and the compression of the lineup negatively effects customers with children as these consumers require additional time to process the unorthodox menu of ice-cream flavours. Yet as Maria noted, because "there are so many different flavours" to dwell on, adult consumers would experience anxiety of choice and admit overwhelmedness. Indeed, it was common for customers to arrive at the ordering counter and make an advanced disclaimer that this was their 'first time' at the ice-cream shop, oftentimes expressing high expectations and admitting to feeling overwhelmed. During shift work, I would try to perform 'retail therapy' with anxious first-time indecisive customers. This 'customer care' service attuning to individual tastes as a means of fostering 'consumer well-being' represents the labour enabling social media users performance of lifestyle health. by helping them arrive at a suitable flavour but this work ethic was 'reality checked' a number of times by fellow co-workers who suggested my pace of customer service was too slow for the environment of speed.

#### **6.2.4 Conclusion**

Investigating Instagram representations of retail gentrification, this chapter has argued popular geotagged social media images sharing the location of Ossington Avenue invest in the image of the neighbourhood by positively framing spatial change as bohemian and fit . Following Bronsvoort and Uitermark (2021), the aesthetic investments of Instagram images idealizing the digital placemaking of the gentrifying street amplifies the perception of the street as belonging to the high status of cultural consumers, reinforces the disappearance of non-gentrifiers from the street, and invisibilizes the detritus that this consumption produces in

the form of garbage and queues. This middle-class entitlement over urban retail space was shown to not only occur on digital platforms but also manifests materially in the corporeal form of the cultural consumption queue, which in turn, materializes negative consequences between merchant relations of new store owners who struggle to control the negative externality of the lineup. Lastly, this chapter traced how the amplified consumption demand of the retail queue impacts labour processes of retail workers by ‘justifying’ the acceleration of the pace of work and destabilizing the process of choosing ice cream for the customer at the food ordering counter. While highly-visible Instagram imaging perpetuate the fragmentation of the inner city congealing Ossington Avenue into a distinct Bohemian and ‘fit’ “lifestyle zone” (Boy and Uitermark, 2020), the ramifications of the queue reveals the concurrent fragmentation of lived experience for retail gentrification subjects, as social relations for merchants, workers, consumers express an anxiety of losing control over the immediate future.



## Chapter 7: Conclusion—A Geographer’s Journey

Unlike previous trips commuting to the ice-cream boutique, I am not traveling to ‘the field’ by bicycle from within the inner city but by public transportation from the outer suburbs. At 5:49PM on a Saturday evening in July, I board a local Mississauga transit bus running twenty minutes late at the intersection of Steeles Avenue and Chinguacousy Road in Brampton. As I tap my Presto card, I enter a suburban transitscape marked with racialized, feminized, and classed ridership seeing that the majority of passengers are young South Asian food retail service workers and security guards wearing their labour uniform. As we travel south, I gaze out the window at the bloated automobile-dominated landscape and as we stop at major intersections, visible signs of suburban poverty manifest. Economically disadvantaged populations, many whom are Muslim women, walk up and down the centre median asking drivers of private automobiles for spare change.

An hour and half later, moving across municipal boundaries and paying a second fare to use the Toronto Transit Commission, this suburban scene feels galaxies away as I am now geographically situated in the walkable gentrified urban core. The regional difference in the class makeup of space between the outer suburbs and the inner city continues to reveal itself as I approach the ice-cream boutique. This is made clear as I pass a fashionable older white man on the sidewalk on Argyle Street dressed in tight white slacks, ankles exposed, talking on his smartphone about meeting for dinner on Ossington. “Let’s meet at Bohmer”, he says, asking about the restaurant next to the ice-cream boutique, “but there are many spots on the street though”. As I arrive on Ossington Avenue in-between Dundas Street West and Queen Street West, the commercial street is vibrating with the pulse of outdoor food consumption. I am engulfed by young athletic-looking middle-class adults and the flood of music pouring out from jam-packed restaurant patios. Having not been on Ossington in two years, I notice the retail gentrification of the street persists, as previous functional commercial spaces

catering to ordinary consumer needs have transformed into special aesthetic uses. For instance, a coin laundromat on the street has closed and morphed into a pop-up wine lifestyle store. The Lower Ossington Theatre, once located across the street from the ice-cream boutique, has shut down.

With few masks and massive crowds, it feels as if there is no global pandemic here—or that there ever was one. Importantly, there is a new policy contributing to the scale and volume of patio consumption on the street. The CaféTO program, a COVID-19 economic development initiative launched by the city government in summer 2020, is in place on Ossington Avenue. The state initiative, aiming to support the recovery of the ‘hospitality industry’ and independent restaurateurs, permits space and provides infrastructure for the expansion of private outdoor dining sites on public property, including the sidewalk and curb lanes. While this new economic and public health strategy enables safer collective consumption within open air settings so as to minimize the highly contagious respiratory transmission of SARS-CoV-2, the local state policy appears to have the consequence in gentrifying locales of amplifying the spatiality of aesthetic tastes, casual privilege, and middle-class consumer capital. In previous years on Ossington Avenue between Dundas Street West and Queen Street West, the urban ice-cream retail queue reigned as the dominant aesthetic feature of conspicuous consumption on the foodie commercial corridor. At this moment, the outdoor realm of the street is lined with spatial claims of culinary omnivorousness. Up and down the street, a fashionable workforce of restaurant servers transform the sidewalk into a ballet of elite food service.

Now at the ice-cream shop, I join the queue to purchase a product at 7:57PM. I feel anxious and immersed in a crowd of bodies and decide to put a cloth face mask on. In front of me are two young women chaperoned by an older woman who plan out their order by accessing the ice-cream menu online with their smartphone. As I wait in the queue, I hear

passersby on the sidewalk comment familiar sayings, “is this the lineup for ice-cream? I would never” and “are they seriously waiting for ice-cream? *Wow.*” Such aesthetic judgements, which were present during fieldwork observations in 2018, reveals the contradictory and multi-layered meanings of hipster consumption. As Michael (2015) observes, participation in hipster consumer culture is paradoxical; hunting for an individuality of authenticity and conspicuously seeking out an ‘in-the-know’ status of aesthetic coolness falls into the conformity trap, fitting-in with style formulas and taste scripts. As the scornful undertone of the “wow” comment implies, there is a loss of distinction that is associated with conformist sensibilities and the identity consumption of hip indexicals in competitive cool urban scenes (Maly and Varis, 2016). Such sidewalk dialogue subtly reveals how following popular lifestyle developments and adopting new products faces the aesthetic disapproval of ‘trying too hard’ by ‘natural’ cultural authorities.

In this way, ‘alternative’ urban retail consumption practices engaging in the performance of ‘difference’ does not fully escape the moniker of the mainstream. Lineup consumers seeking foodie authenticity become susceptible to symbolic ridicule and negative classifications by the street gaze of urban cultural consumers who make verbal signals to classify themselves as different from the conformist queue.

As I register the soundbites of the street from the standpoint of the line up, I feel the strain of standing on my body. This sense of fatigue makes me aware of the ableism of the lineup and the type of physical body privileged to secure specialized ice-cream products. As time continues to pass, ice-cream customers pass by with products and queue members point and comment as if spotting a celebrity. This temptation creates an expectation of pleasure and contributes to the heightened anticipation of ice-cream as a ‘one-of-a-kind special treat’.

Three young women of colour, dressed in nightclub attire, stop the flow of sidewalk traffic as one takes a birds-eye-view photo of her friend holding the Hong-Hong ice-cream waffle. I

noticed the smartphone used is the new iPhone 13 Pro, which possesses new triple-lens camera tech. This new digital technology increases the high definition of image-making for social media users and influencers, and in this case, advances the picture of capitalist reality by supporting the fetishization of products and the branding of the neighbourhood.

As I inch forward moving with the lineup, I see the mature tree once standing in front of the ice-cream boutique has been chopped down and Georgina and Emily's independent store has been displaced. The ground floor retail space has been re-occupied by Sandra's wellness clinic: "Mindful Maelstrom". The business operations of the ice-cream boutique have changed as well. During pandemic times, customers are not allowed to enter the retail space and order products. Rather than selecting a flavour from the specialized bucket list at the food ordering counter, customers now choose from a small printed out paper menu taped to the municipal garbage bin and walk up to the retail doorway where front-of-house workers process the order and payment. The consumption of ice-cream products, from ordering to eating, now happens entirely on the street. As the line-up advances towards the ice-cream store, the queue redirects off the sidewalk onto the road where there are concrete blocks and formal municipal stanchions forming a 'safety barrier' for consumers. I also notice there is a second, shorter line-up that is forming on the sidewalk and this queue consists of customers waiting for waffles, likely adding an additional twenty to thirty minutes.

After selecting an ice-cream flavour, Miso Mon Cherry, from the garbage bin menu, I walk up to the door and place my order. The store no longer accepts cash—credit and debit cards only. Surrounded by endorsement stickers from local blogs, there is a graphically designed sign on the front door reading, "It's a privilege to lose interest in dismantling racism." The time at this point is 8:20PM and I have *spent* twenty-five minutes queuing. Now an anonymous consumer on the other side, I am served by a front-of-house worker I do not recognize who is wearing both plastic gloves and a face mask. After placing my order, a

single scoop of Miso Mon Cherry in a sugar cone, the ice-cream retail worker turns the iPad-based payment system towards me and asks how long I waited in the line. “Twenty five minutes,” I say, as I opt to tip fifty cents on the \$5.25 ice cream cone, bringing the total to \$5.75. She replies, “oh wow. Well, I hope it’s worth it.” “Indeed,” I say.

As I take my ice-cream cone and walk away from the retail shop after years immersed in thought about the processes of production and consumption at this ice-cream boutique, I feel a sense of humility as I lick the product. The ice cream flavour is just as I remember—salty from the miso, sweet from the roasted cherries. To mark this moment of conclusion, and in front of the crowds of cultural consumers, I take a selfie with my beautiful ice-cream cone (Figure 7.1). Licking steadily, the ice-cream product lasts nine minutes before I take the final bite at 8:31PM.



Figure 7.1. No longer with blonde hair, I pose with my ice-cream cone as the sun sets over Ossington Avenue.

Examining material and digital dimensions of the production and consumption of boutique ice-cream retail, this thesis makes a unique contribution to studies of retail gentrification through its spatial snapshot of Ossington Avenue at a particular moment in time at the end of the 2010s. Through an empirical site-specific investigation, my research reveals the production practices, consumption logics, and digital processes involved in the exclusionary restructuring of the retail shopping street for the well-connected new urban middle-class classes. Contributing analytical clarity to the spatiality of hipster labour practices (Scott, 2017; Ocejó, 2017), my research examines culinary dynamics of cultural capital-oriented micro-entrepreneurship that participate in the ongoing project of aestheticization ‘upgrading’ the look and feel of retail products and geographical spaces in the privileged postindustrial inner city (Ley, 2003; Zukin, 2010; Zukin, et. al, 2016). Further geographical academic research would benefit from interrogating other forms and behaviours of hipster retailing, attending to the socio-spatial relationships between aesthetic micro-entrepreneurs, urban neighbourhood change, and spectacularized retail products as interrelated market dynamics structured by advanced neoliberal capitalism. Also within these independent commercial spaces, the scholarly literature may benefit from investigating labour relations within hipster retail and how gender informs the spatial practices of hipster retailing in the metropolitan core.

Additionally, this research makes a unique contribution to the study of retail gentrification processes by emphasizing the inflow of consumption on Ossington Avenue as an articulation of anxiety formation attached to the ambitions and values of the modern urban consuming subject on the perpetual hunt for novelty and distinction. Bringing the class struggle for symbolic differentiation to the fore, this research augments consumption-side explanations of gentrification by examining the socio-cultural force driving and maintaining ‘hipster’ consumption relates to perceived material and digital threats of obsolescence,

peripherality, and invisibility for the ‘in-the-know’ urban consumer. Materially, as alternative middle-class consumption practices seek out the ‘difference’ of Instagramable products as a performance of taste, such signalling of symbolic capital acquisition and cultural capital accumulation socializes the experience of ‘absence’ for ‘in-the-know’ subjects in the hipster *habitus* whose ‘lack’ motivates the urge to consume the anxiety of undifferentiation. As chapter five discussed, such signalling circulates in the promotional form of media endorsements disseminated through communications outlets and digital platforms. Furthermore, scrutinizing the spectacle of the urban commercial lineup as a marketing scheme and promotional product for the proprietor, this research examined how the externality of queue corporeality breeds anxiety and institutes consumption by saturating the subjective vision of the gentrifying street with the shock of novelty. At the same time, there is a digital anxiety attached to and motivating alternative consumption practices of the new urban middle-class: the threat of invisibility and the mobile imperative of updating. This observation points to the emergence of the social media influencer as a new urban change that is worthy of additional scholarly attention.

Lastly, this research makes a contribution to gentrification studies’ examination of digital platforms as a form of investment. The emergence of new social media platforms and algorithmic media, such as TikTok, may be of interest to gentrification scholars. As digital commercial platforms interact with people through the algorithm by recommending, suggesting, and providing users with the most relevant and ‘hot’ information, there is scope for future scholarship to investigate how the power of the algorithm to “make the world appear in certain ways rather than others” may subsequently influence the “amplification of gentrification” and consumption patterns and social life in changing urban neighbourhoods (Bucher, 2018: 4).

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## Appendix

### Informed Consent Form

**Date:**

**Study Name:** Worth the wait and hype? Gentrification, anxiety and the hipster geographies of boutique ice cream.

**Researcher name:** Bryan Mark, Geography, Master's, York University. I am the Principal Investigator for this project. I can be reached by email at [bmark@my.yorku.ca](mailto:bmark@my.yorku.ca)

**Purpose of the Research:** This research project investigates the role of 'home-made' ice cream and its relationship to neighbourhood change. I explore how social media may be encouraging people to visit Ossington Avenue and consume goods sold on this street, specifically ice-cream. Additionally, this research examines how persistent retail lineups extending out from Bang Bang Ice Cream and Bakery may be creating an atmosphere of 'excitement' on the street, changing the rhythm and character of Ossington Avenue. This research will be conducted through participant observation, netnography (online ethnography), and semi-structured interviews. Its findings will be presented and reported in a thesis paper submitted to the Department of Geography at York University.

**What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:** As research participants, you will be of asked series of questions in a digitally recorded interview. Questions asked will concern your experiences and impressions of Bang Bang Ice Cream and Bakery, including waiting in-line and how you discovered the ice cream shop. The interview will range from thirty to forty-five minutes in length. I do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.

**Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff, or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible. Should you wish to withdraw after the study, you will have the option to also withdraw your data up until the analysis is complete.

**Confidentiality:** All information provided from participants will be held in confidence and your name will not appear in any report or publication of this research. Data will be collected through handwritten notes and digital audio recordings, safely kept in a locked facility and securely stored on an electronic device. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to this private information. Data will be stored until September 2020, when the research project is complete and all identifying data will be destroyed. Collected data will not include identifying factors except age and gender, and confidentiality will be held to the fullest extent possible by law.

**Questions About the Research?** If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact me at [bmark@my.yorku.ca](mailto:bmark@my.yorku.ca) or my supervisor, Dr. Alison Bain at [abain@yorku.ca](mailto:abain@yorku.ca) and/or 416-736-2100, extension 66192. You may also contact the Program in Geography at [gradgeog@yorku.ca](mailto:gradgeog@yorku.ca) and/or 416-736-5106.

This research has received ethics review and approval by the Delegated Ethics Review Committee, which is delegated authority to review research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board, and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact

the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail [ore@yorku.ca](mailto:ore@yorku.ca)).

### **Legal Rights and Signatures:**

I \_\_\_\_\_, consent to participate in “Worth the wait and hype? Gentrification, anxiety and the hipster geographies of boutique ice cream” conducted by Bryan Mark. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

### **Additional consent (where applicable)**

#### **1. Audio recording**

☐ I consent to the audio-recording of my interview(s).

#### **2. Consent to waive anonymity**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, consent to the use of my name in the publications arising from this research.

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Name:

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_