Icons and Identity: A Study of Two Museums and the Battle to Define Toronto

by

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Abstract

Iconic architecture has become a popular “hard-branding” strategy among urban policymakers hoping to elevate the global status of their city and attract outside investment, tourists, and skilled migrants. However, iconic architecture is more than just an economic tool; it is an attempt to create a symbolic representation of place which, in the process, physically reshapes the urban landscape itself. As such, iconic architecture offers an important opportunity to study the relationship between abstract notions of place and concrete urban development practices. Focusing on this relationship, this dissertation investigates two museum expansion projects in Toronto: the Royal Ontario Museum and the Art Gallery of Ontario. Both museums hired internationally-renowned architects to design striking, iconic facades and both projects became mired in political controversy that pitted the museums against members of the surrounding community. Focusing specifically on the role of culture and meaning, the dissertation offers three main findings. First, it reveals that public cultural institutions (the primary clients of iconic architecture) use this development strategy to generate political legitimacy and, by extension, attract outside financial support. By asserting themselves physically within the cityscape, they similarly attempt secure a central place within local public life. Second, the dissertation demonstrates how competing notions of place can emerge between different groups of urban
inhabitants and subsequently become the basis for urban political struggle. Employing cognitive mapping analysis, the dissertation demonstrates how the museums’ cosmopolitan vision for Toronto contradicted more locally-focused notions of place held within the community. Finally, in examining how this political conflict played out during development, the dissertation reveals the importance of “performative power” in forging community consensus and overcoming initial differences. More specifically, the success of the projects depended on how well the museum leadership conformed to existing cultural expectations held within the community. These findings, taken as a whole, provide important empirical and theoretical insights into how urban inhabitants understand place, and how these understandings inform their actions within the context of major urban development projects.
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Chapter 1. Introduction

I. The Postindustrial City: Searching for Distinction amid Homogeneity

The “death of life of great cities” has often depended on their ability to project an image of themselves well beyond their own boundaries. Such has been the goal of Roman triumphal arches, Islamic minarets, and even the ubiquitous Christian relics that appeared in towns and villages throughout medieval Europe. And yet, the symbolic dimension of the city has arguably never been more important than it is for the post-industrial world. The city of this world finds itself caught between two contradictory trends. One the one hand, global forces of isomorphism, mass production, and rationalization (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Ritzer 1993) have created a homogenizing effect on cities, meaning that no matter where you are in the world, you are never far from a suburban subdivision or a McDonald’s hamburger. Everything was made in Shenzhen, financed in New York, and everyone takes MasterCard.

On the other hand, in the symbolic economy of the post-industrial world, the rewards for those cities that are able to somehow rise above the homogeneity have never been greater. Amid the global flow of resources, people, and ideas (Castells 1991; Sassen 1991), cities that are able to distinguish themselves in some way stand to reap the spoils. Tourists, investment, business, and skilled migrants all seem to gravitate toward those cities that project the most dynamic, attractive, and authentic image. In sum, what was true of the citizens of Simmel’s (1950) “metropolis” is now true for the metropolis itself: caught within overwhelming forces they have no hopes of controlling, cities instead seek to simply express themselves as unique entities irreducible to noise that surrounds them.

Architecture and urban planning at the end of the 20th century have shifted to reflect this dilemma. In the postwar era, urban design embraced rationalization, standardization, and mass production (Guillen 2006). It sought to replace the chaos of the existing urban form with the harmony of neatly zoned neighbourhoods stitched together with expressways and dotted with Miesian black boxes. Today however, elite architects resist these forces even as they have
become trapped within them. Postmodern architecture is characterized by a variety of strategies designed to break out of the monotony of modernism and create buildings that are visually distinct (Larson 1993), from innovating unprecedented sculptural designs to embracing the traditional vernacular of the local.

Planners as well have attempted to turn against standardization, pursuing “place-making” strategies in order to introduce (or reclaim) unique cultural characteristics in urban spaces that are nonetheless thoroughly engineered according to standard modern principles (Julier 2005; Evans 2003). Thus, having already purged chaos and character from the urban form, planners have tried to reintroduce it as “controlled edge”, “riskless risk”, and through a variety of “themed” environments (Hannigan 1998; 2007). In practice, most strategies involve developing places for cultural consumption, such as shopping malls (Voyce 2006), art districts (Mommaas 2004), casinos (Hannigan 2007b; Sandercock and Dovey 2002), and uniquely designed infrastructure (Julier 2005) – referred to collectively as “culture-led” urbanization (Miles and Paddison 2005). These cultural development projects provide a means of “hard-branding” the post-industrial city (Evans 2003). That is, shaping the physical cityscape itself into a symbolic representation that conveys a particular identity of place.

And yet the urban form is not just some blank canvas on which architects and planners can paint any symbolic creation they dream up. Rather, cities are occupied by multitudes of people engaged in everyday social activities. As Henri Lefebvre (1991) argued, the city is both a space of representations and a lived space. Any attempt to construct a symbolic representation of place must contend with the material actuality of place: the real characteristics of how people actually live their lives and interact with the urban form. Hard branding strategies that do not resonate with how urban inhabitants understand their own city – or worse, that disrupt people’s everyday practices – are potentially doomed to become a source of division and conflict rather than leading to a coherent sense of place.

II. The Place-Making of 21st Century Toronto

The desire for place-making took hold of Toronto with particular fervor at the turn of the 21st century. After two decades of government austerity and economic recessions that had stagnated urban development, money from both the public and private sectors began to flow back into the
city in the early 2000s and much of it became tied up directly or indirectly with place-making and hard-branding schemes. A condominium boom, the construction of new parks and public squares, and ambitious transit expansion plans all seemed to offer the chance to make the Toronto of the new millennium a more functional, livable place as well as potentially distinguishing it – in the words of one prominent ‘place-maker’ – from “some mid-level Soviet city” (see page 152).

On its own, this trend is typical of many cities struggling to emerge from government cutbacks and the decline of the industrial economy that characterized the late 20th century. However, what potentially sets Toronto apart is that this period was also a time of dramatic social change and growth. Unlike other cities in the Great Lakes region, such as Detroit, Buffalo, or Hamilton, Toronto saw incredible growth in its service and cultural sectors. It also became one of the major immigrant destinations on the continent when Canada liberalized its immigration laws in the late 1960s. And the city itself was dissolved and reconstituted with its surrounding suburbs in the 1990s. The culmination of all of these trends transformed the city on a sociological level and threw existing notions of place identity into question. As a result, the place-making of 21st century Toronto not only involved the question of how best to project an image of the city aboard. It also involved a much deeper question: what kind of place is Toronto?

Debate over Toronto’s identity played out in very real terms as Torontonians grappled with all of the new development that arrived with the new century. Where was it appropriate or inappropriate to build skyscraper condominiums? Which neighbourhoods most deserved new transit lines? What kinds of civic and public spaces should be constructed to properly reflect and accommodate this new population? All of these questions involved the articulation – implicitly or explicitly – of some notion of place. That is, some overarching vision of how space should be ordered and how social life should play out within it.

III. The Expansions of the Royal Ontario Museum and the Art Gallery of Ontario

Among the many place-making initiatives of this period was a major building campaign aimed at furnishing the city with a set of new and expanded cultural institutions. The “Toronto cultural renaissance”, as it became known in the press (Hume 2001), combined public and private money to build new art schools, performance centres, and museums. With a combined budget of over
half a billion dollars (CAD) and involving two of the world’s most famous architects, the centerpieces of the renaissance were the expansions of the city’s two largest museums, the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) and the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO).

![Figure 1.1. Michael Lee-Chin Crystal, Royal Ontario Museum](image)

Photo by author.

In the spring of 2003, the ROM, a museum of natural history and civilization, demolished its modest concrete north wing to make room for the emergence of a jagged crystalline building that towered several stories over the sidewalk. Designed by architect Daniel Libeskind, the ROM “Crystal” is characterized by its aluminum skin and the fact that none of its walls meet at right angles. A few blocks away a similar transformation was taking place at the AGO, a fine arts museum, which replaced its brown brick façade with a curved glass “visor” and a bright blue titanium tower with spiraling staircases extending into midair. These attention-grabbing features were designed by Frank Gehry, perhaps the best known living architect in the world.
Introduction

Just as government policymakers were striving to make Toronto into a globally “competitive city” (Kipfer and Keil 2002), so too were the ROM and AGO attempting to position themselves at the public centre of that new city. The development of “iconic” architecture provided what seemed to be a perfect solution. However the construction of these aesthetically unprecedented buildings and the preceding fundraising and approval process set off a fury of debates over the character of the surrounding neighbourhoods and the city as a whole. In other words, they became a concrete event in which the larger issues of civic and neighbourhood identity could be articulated and contested. While the museum leadership and their major public and private donors saw the fate of Toronto and the museums tied to this form of global architecture, other stakeholders in the community had different views and priorities.

From the early 2000s, when rumours of the projects began to circulate, to the completion of the buildings in 2007 (for the ROM) and 2008 (for the AGO), the development process was plagued by controversy and, in some cases, overt opposition from members of the surrounding community. The AGO, which attempted to initially keep its expansion secret, faced immediate opposition from residents who feared, among other things, the project’s potential negative impact

Figure 1.2. North and south facades, Art Gallery of Ontario
North facade on left. Photos by author.
on a neighbouring park. Eventually, through a series of consultation sessions and by making several concessions, the AGO won over most the community. The ROM, by contrast, began its project with an open architectural competition that inspired both public interest and support. However, as community members watched the new building go up and learned of the ROM’s plan to incorporate a high-rise condominium into the project, support dissipated. Though the ROM eventually backed away from the condominium plan (under great public pressure), the expansion soured relations between the museum and the community.

The study I present in the following chapters is an investigation into the ROM and AGO expansion projects: the conditions that made these projects possible, the process by which the designs were conceived and then evaluated by outside stakeholders, and the tumultuous political struggles that took place during their development. The research was conducted between 2008 and 2011, just as the expansions were being completed, and involved a series of formal (N=41) and informal interviews with key stakeholders, including members of the ROM and AGO administration, their staff, financial supporters, and contractors, as well as members of the surrounding community that include local politicians, leaders of local organizations, and nearby residents who got involved in the expansion projects. Additionally, I undertook fieldwork in the surrounding community and at the museums, including attending public meetings. I also analyzed thousands of archival documents including news reports, museum publications, and municipal planning documents.

In this study, I investigate how one particular form of hard-branding – the “iconic architectural development” – serves as an opportunity for different groups of urban inhabitants to articulate and struggle over competing notions of place. In doing so, I examine each group’s position within urban life, their associated understandings of place, and their relative power and influence over the final projects.

IV. Iconic Architectural Development

While unprecedented in Toronto, the expansions of the ROM and AGO do fit into an international trend of iconic architectural development, or “starchitecture” (a term used perhaps more by its critics than supporters) (McNeill 2009; Rochon 2009). Iconic architectural development is distinguished by the construction of striking, sculptural forms that are designed
not only to stand out in the urban landscape, but also to project themselves into the global consciousness (Kaika and Thielen 2006:66; Plaza 2008). These buildings are arguably the quintessential form of culture-led urbanization and hard-branding more generally (Evans 2003). Indeed, when we think of the world’s best known cities, unique architecture is often the first image to come to mind: the Eiffel Tower and Paris, the Statue of Liberty and New York, and the Coliseum and Rome, to name just a few. Iconic architecture is “iconic” in both senses of the term (see Binder 2012:101): it offers a striking and distinct visual experience, but it also serves as a collective representation of some social grouping – in this case, a city or place and the people who live there.

Today, cities from Bilbao to Beijing have sought to build the next generation of iconic structures, and an entire industry has emerged to facilitate this goal (McNeill 2009). Leading this industry is a small, international group of elite (and almost exclusively white and male) “starchitects” that include names such as Frank Gehry, Daniel Libeskind, Norman Foster, and Rem Koolhaas. Relying on the “charismatic ideology of creation” (Bourdieu 1996), these architects have built their careers not on applying the cold rationality of modernism (Guillen 2006)\(^1\), but rather the unpredictable, creative power of the artist to break conventions and produce unique and compelling forms. The most famous example of these new architectural icons (an icon among icons) is Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, built in 1997. By popular account, the Guggenheim Bilbao, along with several other place-making projects, succeeded in transforming an ailing Spanish port town into a thriving international cultural hotspot. And despite reports of its death in the wake of the 2008 credit crunch (McGuigan 2010; Glancey 2009), there is no evidence that the popularity of starchitecture has waned.

Within urban studies, explanations of the rise and impact of iconic architectural development (and all culture-led urbanization for that matter) have tended to be narrowly focused on the political-economy of cities. As I will explain (in Chapter 4), both critics and supporters of iconic architecture tend to offer a “neoliberal thesis” that attributes iconic architecture’s popularity to the need to attract resources into a city in the face of declining public funding (Harvey 1989).

\(^1\) This rejection of modern rationality should be seen as purely aesthetic, since the unique designs of the starchitects are made possible only by advancements in the computing power available to the engineers tasked with giving those designs material form.
Build it and they will come: businesses, tourists, entrepreneurs and, of course, the fabled “creative class” (Florida 2002). According to the neoliberal thesis, municipal governments are increasingly dependent on these members of the private sector to sustain operating budgets and fund city-building initiatives. From this perspective, iconic architecture can be seen as just another fetishized commodity available on the global marketplace, and iconicity “simply a special and added quality that enhances the exchange (money) value of the icon and all that is associated with it” (Sklair 2010: 141). In this sense, putting “a Gehry” in Bilbao is like slapping a Louis Vuitton logo onto a purse.

The political-economic dimensions are essential for understanding culture-led urbanization in general and the ROM and AGO expansions in particular. Iconic architecture is a strategy for securing economic resources and political power. However, this is not the only way to interpret iconic architecture. Taken on its own, the neoliberal thesis is overly instrumentalist and economically reductionist. What we miss is an understanding of the symbolic properties of architecture. Iconicity may increase the exchange value of a building and all that is associated with it, but how exactly does this valuation take place in the minds of those involved in the process? How do people form meaningful interpretations to iconic architecture and relate those interpretations to existing notions of place? What exactly is an “icon” anyway, and what does it mean for a building to become “iconic”? To fully answer these questions, we need to extend our analysis beyond the political-economic dimensions of cities and investigate the symbolic processes that make up culture. To do so, the study adopts two important concepts that cut across distinctions between the material and the symbolic: place and iconicity.

V. Place

Place matters. Sociologists have been aware of this fact since the origins of the discipline. But just how and how much it matters has been subject to debate. Classical sociologists tended to take the role of place for granted, rooting modernity within the great European metropolises (Tönnies 1957; Simmel 1950), and treating community and neighbourhood as almost synonymous concepts (Park, Burgess, McKenzie 1925; Whyte 1943). However, by the late 20th century, the “rootedness” of social life was challenged on multiple fronts as sociologists turned from neighbourhoods to networks (Wellman 1979; Castells 1991), viewed geography as amorphous and constantly shifting (Dear 2002; Sorkin 1992), and observed a general contraction
of space and time under global capitalism (Harvey 1991). Amid the homogenizing force of the global (Ritzer 1993; Zukin 1991; Kunstler 1993), the challenge for sociologists interested in place is to reformulate exactly how it matters given our unprecedented levels of mobility, communication, and trade (Gieryn 2000).

One of the most compelling answers to this question was provided by Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulsen (2000) in a landmark study of Ventura and Santa Barbara. They argue that the many “surface” similarities of the two cities – their histories, climate and geography, demographics, and local economies – mask much deeper differences in the lifestyles of the inhabitants, the way they have built their respective cityscapes, and the way they react to similar events such as the rise of onshore oil production. These differences reveal that the impact of place on social life cannot be reduced to any one or set of causal factors. Rather, place is defined by its own unique “character”, which they define as “an array of physical and social elements [that] cohere in a given locale through a ‘lash up’ of co-occurrences” which results in social life playing out in one place differently than it would in another (p.793). Place character, they argue, is that “holistic” quality that makes Chicago the “city of broad shoulders” and Paris the “city of light” (p.791). Every place is defined by the unique mix of ingredients that make up its character, and this character cannot be understood out of its own historical “accomplishment”.

The Molotch et al. study has sparked a larger research agenda that has investigated how places emerge as historical phenomena (e.g. Kaufman and Kaliner 2011), how place character impacts social life (Lloyd 2005; Florida 2002), and also how place can be measured and typologized (Silver, Clark, and Yanez 2010; Mommaas 2004; Paulson 2003). However, one key area in which more work needs to be done is bridging the distinction that Paulson (2003) makes between “place character” and a “sense of place” (p.245). In other words, between the objective assemblage of elements that make up place, and the way in which these elements are interpreted and made meaningful by social actors. One of the major theoretical goals of this dissertation will be to investigate and theorize this relationship (particularly Chapter 5). Iconic architecture is especially well suited for this type of inquiry because it is designed both to objectively stand out from and meaningfully represent its spatial context.
VI. Icons and Iconicity

Beyond just acting as an advertisement for a city, the clients and designers of iconic architecture often aspire to create what Alexander (2012) calls “iconic depth” by turning their buildings into “collective representations”: pseudo-totemic objects embodying fundamental values that their respective societies hold sacred (Durkheim 1995). As I will discuss in Chapter 4, iconic architectural development is typically carried out by public or religious institutions who claim to represent such values: governments, museums, universities, and churches. As such, the buildings often serve as public spaces within which important social practices occur such as government deliberation, scholarship, the displaying of cultural artifacts, or religious worship.

Many classic architectural icons develop their iconic status over time. They come to represent place because they have been a visible and “lived” part of the landscape for so long that it is hard to imagine place without them. Their iconic status becomes rooted in “the eternal yesterday”, as Weber (1968) might say. The importance of time and tradition is revealed by the profane origins of some of the world’s most popular icons. The “Hollywood” sign was built as an advertisement for a housing development and then left to disintegrate before it eventually came to symbolize Los Angeles and was subsequently restored. The Eiffel Tower was designed to be disassembled, and was preserved only because of its functionality as a communications tower. It also served as a billboard for Citroen throughout the 1920s and ’30s. Today, however, the tower now has the sacred status of other Parisian structures like the Arc de Triomphe or the Louvre.

Contemporary iconic architecture, on the other hand, is intended to become instantaneously iconic². This presents us with an important sociological question: what does it take to build an icon from scratch? How does one crystallize the abstract identity of a place into material form? What are the steps involved in designing and building such a form? What cultural and aesthetic precedents are used to design the aesthetic surface? Who has the authority to make the final decisions, and what happens when that authority is questioned? And once the form has been

² It is useful to contrast iconic status developed through lived experience (e.g. the Hollywood sign or the Alamo) with architectural developments that are used to bring iconic status to places with no previous social significance. For example, Shoval and Strom (2009) have observed a trend in museum development in which iconic architecture is used to lend salience to new museums that lack collections of actual artifacts.
built, what determines whether or not it will be seen as authentic by those who reside within the locality it is supposed to represent and by those on the outside?

These questions are important from both a sociological and an urban planning standpoint. Since the foundational work of Durkheim, sociologists and anthropologists have been interested in the materiality of collective identity. Objects ranging from the currency, flags, and uniforms of “banal nationalism” (Billig 1995) to the embodied representations of political leaders (Alexander 2010) to consumer products (Zukin and Maguire 2004; Wherry 2006) have all been shown to influence the way societies and communities understand and structure themselves, and distinguish themselves from others (Lamont and Molnár 2002). Buildings and landscapes are particularly important in this respect since their initial designs embody certain social ideals, and their built form actually structures possible social practices (Molnár 2005; Gieryn 2002). Because of its high profile and public character, and the massive mobilization of power and wealth required to produce it, iconic architectural development provides an especially interesting example of the materialization of collective identity.

In terms of urban planning, the question of iconic depth or authenticity is particularly salient. Not only are post-industrial cities in a struggle to express themselves on a global stage, they must produce expressions that are seen as authentic. The most successful cases of hard-branding, such as the Guggenheim in Bilbao, are successful because people inside and outside the city believe in the meanings attached to the buildings – in this case that a real transition took place from a struggling port town to a cultural hotspot. However, as Zukin (2010) warns, it is often in the pursuit of authenticity and distinction that these very qualities are destroyed. Nonetheless, even amid the homogenizing forces of globalization, sociologists have demonstrated how particular places are capable of producing distinct cultural dynamics (Molotch 2003; Lloyd 2005). This raises a second question that brings us back to the core dilemma facing the post-industrial city: do iconic architectural developments create spaces that resonate with and enhance the distinct cultural characteristics of place, or do they further erode those characteristics and facilitate homogenization?
VII. Outline of the Study

The chapters that follow represent a series of independent essays with their own research questions, literature reviews, sources of data, and conclusions. However, in addition to being united by their substantive focus on the ROM and AGO expansion projects, they all share an underlying theoretical concern with the iconic representation of place and the questions posed above. Each of the chapters provides a partial answer to these questions by examining smaller, more concrete issues.

Chapters 2 and 3 provide necessary background to the study in addition to making their own smaller theoretical contributions. Chapter 2 provides a reflexive account of my methodological strategy for the study, in which I synthesize the urban political-economic tradition of studying “the interplay of relations of production, consumption, exchange and the structure of power manifest in the state” (Walton 1981:376) with cultural sociology’s focus on the production and reception of social meaning. In this chapter I offer a personal account of how I came to study the ROM and AGO, and reflect on my position as a researcher vis-à-vis my participants and the larger political issues at stake in the area of place-making and urban development. I also explain and justify my case selection, the methods I employed in the study and my overall strategy for data analysis on theoretical terms.

Chapter 3 provides the larger historical and geographic backdrop for the ROM and AGO expansions by recounting the history of Toronto between 1970 and 2000 and relating this history to the neighbourhoods surrounding the museums. In the first half of the chapter, I demonstrate how a combination of rapid social changes and stagnation in the urban environment confronted Torontonians with a “socio-spatial disjuncture”, or disconnect between the population of the city and the landscape that contained them. This disjuncture led to open public debates over how the city should be developed in the new century – a debate in which the ROM and AGO expansions factored prominently.

The second half of the chapter narrows focus on the museums themselves and their surrounding neighbourhoods both in terms of built form and population. I document how the museums have changed throughout this period and how the disjuncture of the early 2000s manifested itself in attitudes of the surrounding population and the politics of local development.
Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are the primary analysis chapters of the dissertation and each addresses its own distinct research question. Chapter 4 poses and answer the question *who builds iconic architecture and why?* While much research exists on the elite group of architects who design iconic buildings, far less attention has been paid to the actual clients who initiate and fund these projects. As I have mentioned, and will illustrate in this chapter, these clients are typically public institutions. This finding not only presents challenges to dominant explanations of iconic architecture development, it also necessitates a better sociological understanding of what a public institution is. Drawing on both my research into the ROM and AGO and existing literature in the area of culture and organizations more generally, I propose an organizational model of the public institution based on its need to attract donated resources by building “public legitimacy”, defined as a belief among outside groups that an organization represents the public good. Based on this model, I then explain how the ROM and AGO undertook iconic architectural development as a strategy for building their own public legitimacy.

Chapter 5 addresses my second research question: *What are the political stakes for iconic architectural development?* The ROM and AGO expansions were plagued by opposition from community members throughout the development process. Curiously, the fiercest opposition came from the types of people who we might have expected to welcome iconic architecture and expanded cultural institutions: members of the professional and creative classes, including architects, artists, government bureaucrats, and academics. In the absence of clear class and economic differences between the community members and the museum leadership itself, how do we explain the stakes of the conflict?

To answer this question, I present a detailed account of the cultural and geographic references that my participants used while discussing the ROM and AGO expansions. Qualitative and quantitative analysis reveals the existence of distinct “cognitive maps” that distinguished the museum insiders from community members. While the former group drew primarily on international cultural spaces while discussing the ROM and AGO buildings, constructing Toronto as a “global city”, community members were much more interested in comparing the ROM and AGO to local, more mundane spaces and saw Toronto as a “city of neighbourhoods”. I argue that these differences reflect each group’s unique spatial practices. Because they
experienced the local neighbourhood in different ways (as a place or employment versus a place of residence), the two groups developed a very different sense of place against which they evaluated the museum expansions.

Chapter 6 focuses on the development process itself and documents the reverse fortunes of each museum as the ROM went from a largely successful architectural competition to facing budget shortfalls, construction problems, and growing community opposition that eventually forced it to abandon a planned second phase of expansion. Meanwhile, AGO managed to appease initial opposition through community consultation and design changes and eventually produced a building that received universal praise from both in the community and the media.

In examining the development process, I focus specifically on the issue of power and influence, posing the question: *Who influences iconic architectural development, how, and to what end?* As has long been understood by sociologists, cultural production is a collective process (Becker 1982). It is also the site of political struggles that have material implications (Hall 1986). This is especially true of iconic architectural development, which occurs in established communities with a diversity of existing stakeholders. The results of iconic architecture, therefore, depend heavily on how power and influence is distributed and mediated among these groups. In this chapter, I trace the involvement of the various groups and identify the power and motivation behind their involvement. I use a comparative analysis between the ROM and AGO to reveal how different development strategies changed the power dynamics between the various stakeholders. The analysis identifies the importance of what Alexander (2008) calls “performative power” in the outcome of the development process. That is, in addition to economic wealth and formal legal-political position, the ROM and AGO’s ability to realize their plans depended on the extent to which they performed according to the expectations of the surrounding community. Though the community had less conventional control over the development projects, when sufficiently motivated, they could throw up formidable obstacles in the progress of development.

Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation by considering the implications of the previous chapters’ findings for our understanding of iconicity in the 21st century. These findings, I argue, refute the idea commonly held by social and architectural theorists that monumentality is somehow
incompatible with modernity. In fact, the meanings we invest in buildings and other physical objects are highly consequential in modern life. In making this case, I sketch out future research directions in the study of meaning and materiality that follow from this study.

The chapter ends with a normative discussion of the ROM and AGO, returning to the original problem of homogeneity and distinction. I argue that the AGO succeeded where the ROM failed in producing a building that was iconic in both surface and depth in that it stood out aesthetically from the surrounding cityscape, but nonetheless became recognized as an authentic symbol of its locality. I attribute this success to the openness of the AGO’s development process to community influence and the contingencies of local political dynamics. It was this openness, and not the individual genius of an architect, that produced an authentically iconic building.
Chapter 2. Methodology

I. Study Background

As a resident of Toronto in the early 2000s, it was hard to overlook the emergence of the Toronto “cultural renaissance”. Anyone who might have missed the flashy computer renderings that filled the pages of the local newspapers would eventually see the construction hoarding going up at prominent corners around the city, followed by the erection of large, eye-catching structures. Though not a regular visitor to either museum in those days, I do recall visiting the ROM just before its renovation and seeing the plastic model of Daniel Libeskind’s crystal displayed in the lobby. I also recall my doubts that such a radical structure would ever be built – a cynicism that I suspect was common in Toronto at the time (as I’ll explain next chapter).

A few years later, I became intimately familiar with an equally radical structure, working as an IT technician for the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD) just after they opened the “Sharp Centre for Design”. The expansion of OCAD was the first completed project of the cultural renaissance, and it was arguably the most radical. The Sharp Centre, design by British architect Will Alsop, was constructed on several brightly coloured steel “stilts” that allow it to hover above the rest of the college. From its eighth storey window, I was able to look down at the AGO, next door, which was in the midst of its own renovation.

Despite this exposure, I was only ever casually familiar with the ROM and AGO expansions in particular, and architecture in general. It was not until the spring of 2008 that I returned to the projects – now as a first-year PhD student with an emerging interest in both urban political-economy and the sociology of culture. Toronto’s massive building boom provided for me an immediate and tangible application of many of the urban and cultural theories that I was studying. Daily, on the pages of the local newspapers, I saw the effects of global capitalism manifest itself in local municipal issues as well as the power of cultural capital and aesthetics in the different ways that people understood their city. Downtown, anti-billboard activists railed against the development of Yonge-Dundas Square: a consumer-oriented plaza modeled after
New York’s Time Square and Tokyo’s Shibuya Crossing. In Leslieville, a group of residents and shopkeepers opposed the redevelopment of a local film studio into a big box store. In Corso Italia, a community was divided against each other in a heated dispute over a proposed streetcar line. And in Scarborough, many were taken aback as City Hall bestowed heritage protection on a 50-year-old suburban supermarket. All around the city, the politics of place were playing themselves out in diverse and often unexpected ways. However, in each case, issues of politics, economics, and aesthetics seemed to be deeply intertwined in ways that neither urban political-economy, nor the sociology of culture, seemed to completely address.

Working out this intertwining relationship, I decided, should become the goal of my dissertation. For reasons I will describe in detail below, I decided to focus specifically on a comparison between the recently completed ROM and the AGO, which would open later that year. At this point most of the political battles had been waged and settled and a general public narrative seemed to be unfolding about the projects: The ROM had attempted to go big and flashy. They held a large public competition. They selected a widely ambitious design. And, in the end, they produced a building that offended the local community and was denounced by several prominent architectural critics. The AGO, by contrast, had quietly met with community members while working out their design. Rather than producing compromised mediocrity, these consultations resulted in an entirely original Gehry building that was universally praised by critics and locals for its ability to blend new architectural expression with existing context.

This narrative, which I knew was a simplification, contained all of the elements that I was interested in: the mobilization of economic resources needed to construct the buildings, local political structures within which conflict and compromise occurred, and the aesthetic dispositions and cultural capital of the various parties. I decided the best way to proceed was to attempt to inductively generate a new narrative that better captured the relationship between these elements, drawing on as many methodological techniques I could: interviews, participant and non-participant observation, archival analysis. At first I proceeded without explicit research questions. However, as I progressed, questions emerged – some of which seemed so obvious

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3 Though, as I would learn, two issues remained unresolved: the ROM’s controversial plan to build a condominium on its property and the AGO’s promise to revitalize a neighbouring park.
that I wondered why I had not thought of them at the beginning of the process. For instance, why did the museums want to build iconic architecture in the first place? It was not until I grasped just how risky and costly iconic architecture is, and how many things can go wrong, that I thought to ask this question.

This question and others eventually formed sub-themes in my research which I explore in later chapters. In this chapter, I outline my general methodology for the study as a whole. I begin first by justifying my case selection of the ROM and AGO. Second, I discuss the basic epistemological orientation of the study, focusing specifically on how I combine the conventions of urban case study research with the constructionist orientation of cultural sociology. Third, I detail each of the specific methods I employed during the study and the data they yielded. Finally, I end the chapter with a reflection on my own role as the researcher including my ethical orientation and social positionality.

II. Case Selection

In the tradition of urban political-economy, this study adopts a comparative case study of two urban development projects. Comparative research has long be a strength of urban political-economy (Walton 1993), and one of the major strategies that urban sociologists have used to connect their individual cases to larger theoretical issues. This has been true in the study of place-making and culture-led urbanization as well (e.g. Shoval and Strom 2009; Julier 2005; Gómez 1998). However, almost all of this research has adopted inter-national or inter-regional comparisons. This level of comparison has yielded important insights into macro-level processes related to different political and economic systems, but it has done so at the expense of other levels of analysis. In particular, such case studies have not allowed us to hold political-economic factors constant and focus instead on meso-level variation across individual organizations or neighbourhoods.

One reason for the dominance of inter-city comparisons may be the problem of data availability. It is rare for one city or region to have two or more major place-making initiatives occurring concurrently. However, Toronto’s “cultural renaissance” presents us just such an opportunity. The ROM and AGO share remarkable similarities and a few key differences, as if they were purposely designed to be a social scientific experiment. They exist largely within the same
political-economic environment, right down to being situated in the same municipal ward. On an organizational level, both are public cultural institutions of similar size and with similar histories. They operate within the same international networks of academia, museum administration, philanthropy, architecture, and tourism. They receive their mandate and the majority of their funding from the Ontario government, supplemented greatly by private donations and self-generated income (See Appendix B). Finally, both museums undertook remarkably similar expansion projects during roughly the same time period. Both hired international celebrity architects for projects that cost about $300 million CAD each.

On the other hand, there are a few key sources of meso-level variation. The two institutions undertook expansion projects for largely different reasons (as I will explore in Chapter 4), and both adopted very different development strategies. Comparing the implications of these differences, as I do in Chapter 6, shows us the effect of the development process itself on iconic architecture.

In addition to the comparison between the ROM and AGO, the study also draws a comparison between members of museum staff and administration and members of the surrounding community (particularly in Chapter 5). While there are some differences between ROM administrators and AGO administrators (or ROM residents and AGO residents) the two are similar enough that certain generalizations can be developed across the two development projects – generalizations which might not be possible if I was comparing across cities, regions, or nations.

Though the study focuses specifically on local, meso-level processes, I address macro-level political-economic processes by adopting a strategy from Burawoy’s (1998) “extended case method”. Burawoy advocates “extending” local case studies by tracing how they are shaped by and contribute to extra-local processes. Chapter 4 in particular examines how the organizational characteristics of the ROM and AGO relate to the larger political-economic environment identified in the existing literature on culture-led urbanization. Identifying the unique role of public cultural organizations like the ROM and AGO allows me to “extend” and clarify existing macro-level theories on the relationship between global political-economic forces and the popularity of iconic architecture and other place-making initiatives.
Finally, a few points should be made about studying the city of Toronto itself. Toronto can be distinguished from two extremes that have arguably dominated the study of place-making. On one hand, it is not a leading ‘global city’ in the world economy (Sassen 1991) and has not traditionally been known as a centre of cultural production. Thus, Toronto differs in significant ways from cities like New York, Paris, or London. Emerging as node in the industrial economy of the Great Lakes region, Toronto is a relative latecomer to the cultural and symbolic economy (Patterson and Silver Forthcoming). On the other hand, Toronto did not experience the post-industrial decline of other Great Lake cities like Detroit or Hamilton. Its recent embrace of the culture is not a story of complete transformation as it was for cities like Bilbao, Spain. Toronto’s adjustment to the post-industrial economy was more gradual – evolutionary rather than revolutionary.

Toronto offers us a third model of cultural urbanization, falling somewhere in between the two extremes mentioned above. This is not to say that Toronto is “average” or more “representative” of other cities. Rather, it is a city of the “extreme centre”. As I will explain in Chapter 3, many of the trends that characterize post-industrial cities more generally have coincided all at once in Toronto and within a relatively narrow timeframe. Moreover, as the concurrence of two multimillion dollar museum expansion projects suggest, the city embraced cultural urbanization with particular zeal. Thus, Toronto provides fertile ground for extending our understanding of how mid- to large-sized cities adjust to the post-industrial economy.

III. Epistemological Orientation

My methodological strategy for this study mirrors my theoretical goal of bringing together case study research in the tradition of urban political-economy with conceptual tools of cultural sociology. The urban case study provides a strategy for studying social events or processes within the context of specific, bounded geographic areas, usually with a concern for “the interplay of relations of production, consumption, exchange and the structure of power manifest

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4 Small (2009) cautions against relying on such statistical concepts when undertaking case study research.
5 Here I borrow a phrase used by a British diplomat to describe the political leanings of the Canadian people in 1983 (Waldie and LeBlanc 2013).
in the state” (Walton 1981:376). By contrast, cultural sociology is concerned with meaning, including how meaning is produced, received or evaluated, what its relationship is to behaviour or action, and how it relates to the more concrete, contextual realities studied by the first approach.

Although these two approaches often use the same basic methods (interviews, observation, and the analysis of documents), the data they derive and the way that data is related to larger theoretical questions differ. Urban political-economists tend to be most interested in the “who, what, when, where, and how” of their research sites. Since the early community studies of Hunter (1953) and Dahl (1961), interview participants are often treated as “informants”: people whose positions give them access to valuable knowledge that the sociologist cannot access directly, such as how specific political decisions were made. Documents (including newspaper articles) are used similarly as records of actual events.

By contrast, sociologists of culture usually to look at interview participants and written documents as the objects of study in and of themselves rather than a lens into some other phenomenon. Interview-based studies tend to sample participants across time and place in order to observe trends or regularities in the enactment of cultural schemata or repertoires (e.g. Lamont 1992; 2000; Swidler 2000; Milkie 1999). Documents are subjected to content or discourse analysis not to find specific information, but rather the general “cultural meanings” (Thomas 1994) or discursive structures (Foucault 1970) that organize that information.

In more general terms, my study seeks to integrate realism, a perspective which posits a single, objective reality which the sociologist must unearth, with constructionism, a perspective which asserts “no social reality apart from how individuals construct it, and so the main task is to interpret those constructions” (Esterberg 2002:16). Integrating these perspectives poses some difficulties. When I conduct an interview with a museum staff member, for instance, am I getting a window into the inner workings of the museum itself, or only how the museum has been constructed by this particular staff member using pieces of cultural repertoire? If the answer is “both” (which it is) how do we organize these two types of data in a coherent way?
Thankfully, a great deal of theoretical work has been done over the past few decades to integrate structural and constructionist approaches to sociology, including Giddens (1984), Archer (1988), and Sewell (1992). However, the present study draws most directly on Bourdieu’s theory of practice (1977), which divides social reality into objective and subjective structures. I rely on this primary distinction to orient my methodological approach, without getting too bogged down in the more specific concepts and propositions of Bourdieusian theory.

Bourdieu used terms like “social space” and “fields” to describe the objective structures of the world. The notion of a playing field seems particularly useful to describe social life. The outcomes are never certain, but the play tends to unfold in a generally predictable way. An outside observer can usually develop a strong sense of how people, objects, and practices are distributed and move across time and space without ever having to get “into the head” of those directly involved. Part of the job of the sociologist is to map out these arrangements and how they are replicated or change over time. Within the study of cities (which are themselves objective structures) Molotch et al’s (2000) concepts of “character”, as the particular arrangement at a given point, and “tradition”, as the way the arrangement evolves over time, are useful in thinking about objective structures.

Thus, my first goal in this study was to map out the objective structures within which the ROM and AGO expansions took place. That included tracing the networks of actors and organizations that were implicated in the expansion projects, following the flow of money and other necessary resources, mapping out the geographic context of the neighbourhood, and constructing a timeline of the development processes themselves. For lack of a better term, we can refer to this information as the “objective data” of the study: the “who, what, when, where, and how” that is of traditional interest in urban case study research. Presenting and analyzing this information is the primary goal of Chapters 3, 4, and 6.

In addition to the objective structures of the field, Bourdieu’s theory of practice is based on the subjective, cognitive structures of the human mind – captured in his concept of the *habitus*. In order to explain human behaviour, it is not enough to know how actors fit within objective structures. We also must identify the cognitive schemata they have available to make sense of and react to the world around them (also see Sewell 1992; DiMaggio 1997; Swidler 1986). This
Methodology

A task introduces a second type of data: the “subjective data” of interpretive sociology that comes from understanding actors as they understand themselves, to paraphrase Max Weber (1949). To this end, Chapter 5 (and to a lesser extent, Chapter 4) focus on how the stakeholders involved in the ROM and AGO expansions understood and evaluated the new buildings and their surrounding context.

The importance of subjective data is underscored by the fact that objective structures cannot be studied directly. Rather, they can only be measured and analyzed from particular “standpoints” within (Smith 1987). Thus, in my quest to map out the “who, what, when, where, and how” of the ROM and AGO expansions, I can only rely on the accounts of particular actors (including my own account as a sociologist). Working with these accounts necessitates reflecting on where they came from. Thus, throughout the study, I continually mediated between thinking of the information in front of me as either objective or subjective data: using the subjective accounts of my participants to produce an objective map of the expansion process, and then using that map to make sense of the perspectives represented in the accounts.

As Latour (2005) has argued, producing objective, scientific findings does not mean ascending from our particular standpoint to adopt a ‘God’s-eye view’. It does, however, require that we find ways of continually moving between multiple viewpoints. If each viewpoint provides us with different information, it means that we are observing a phenomenon that is “highly complex [and] intricately folded”, but not that the phenomenon is purely subjective. To this end, my “objective data” relies on the triangulation of multiple participants and several data gathering techniques that allow me to look at the expansion process from many different angles. The result of this is the single account of the expansion projects that I present in this study.

Figure 2.1 provides a visual representation of how I conceive of the relationship between the objective structures of social and physical space and the subjectivity of social actors. Each actor was positioned slightly differently within objective space, taking on a slightly different perspective and providing me with a slightly different account.

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6 There are significant differences between the way Bourdieu and Weber conceptualize and study human subjectivity. My own approach will be outlined in chapter 5 when I discuss cognitive mapping.
IV. Data Gathering and Research Process

i. Archival and Document Analysis

Once I decided to undertake the study in the summer of 2008, my first step was to familiarize myself with the basic story of the expansion projects by consulting the volumes of documents that had been published in the years prior. This was achieved through an exhaustive search of archived, online press releases from the ROM and AGO’s official websites and of media reports between 2000 and 2008 using the Factiva and Canadian Newsstand databases. The search was also extended to specialty architectural publications, including Architectural Record, Canadian Architect, Azure, Metropolis, International Architecture and Design, and The Architect’s Journal. Selecting only those relevant to the ROM and AGO expansions, this initial search turned up 361 documents.

This first wave of document analysis allowed me to put together a basic sketch of the expansion projects, their timelines, and a roster of potential informants which I used to plan my next wave of data collection (including human-based methods). Adopting a constructivist mindset, I also
noted and reflected upon the particular viewpoints that I was being limited to in these documents. The vast majority of documents were articles written in Toronto’s three major newspapers: the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe and Mail*, and the *National Post*. Of those articles, most were written by the papers’ respective art and architecture critics: people who presumably had a vested interest in the fields of architecture and art and who probably shared similar sensibilities with those who worked at the ROM and AGO. On the other hand, as journalists, they seemed to be particularly interested in the drama and controversies that unfolded over the course of the projects. And as columnists (rather than reporters) their articles tended to have an explicit normative position on issues ranging from the aesthetics of the architecture to the decisions of the museum administration.

Meanwhile, the international magazines such as *Architectural Record*, were primarily concerned with evaluating the architecture and documenting the basic design and construction projects rather than the local politics. Most of the articles were not explicitly normative except for architectural reviews written once the buildings were complete. Other than their reviews, the magazines tended not to provide any original information on the projects that had not already been reported in the local newspapers. I suspect that this is evidence that the magazines get their information either directly or indirectly from the local newspapers.

As the study progressed and human-based methods took priority, I continued a second wave of document collection that focused on newspaper reports and press releases as they were produced. New documents were collected using Google Alerts\(^7\), as well as periodic searches of the aforementioned databases. Additionally, I made targeted searches for documents based on emerging data and research questions. For instance, when participants told me about attending city council meetings, I searched for copies of the minutes for those meetings. By the end of the study, these two waves of data collection resulted in over 500 documents (493 electronic documents, and dozens more in hardcopy), and included newspaper articles, museum documents, government reports, architectural blueprints, video recordings of public events and more.

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\(^7\) Google Alerts is a service that provides weekly e-mails with links to any new web documents relating to particular phrases. I subscribed to two Google Alerts based on the search terms “Royal Ontario Museum” and “Art Gallery of Ontario”.
ii. Interviews

With a basic outline of the development projects provided by my first wave of document analysis, I was in a position to begin tracking down my own participants. “Small-N”, semi-structured interviews have become a standard methodological tool in the study of culture and evaluation (Lamont 1992; 2000; Swidler 2001). Interviews allow the researcher to elicit the cultural schemata that people use to understand and evaluate the world around them. Thus, it was an ideal method to study how people evaluated the ROM and AGO expansions, particularly in relation to the surrounding neighbourhood and city as a whole. Employing interviews also allowed me to move past the media-centred perspective contained in my document analysis and see the museum expansions from the eyes of those who actually participated.

The focus of these interviews was on a group of people I refer to as “stakeholders”: those who were demonstrably involved in the expansion process. Though people all over the city held strong opinions on the new architecture (and were happy to share them with me anytime I mentioned my research), the decision to focus only on stakeholders is inspired by pragmatist theory which argues that people’s views must be understood within the context of action (Mead 1934; Joas 1996). I was not interested in people’s opinions on architecture in general, but rather how these opinions became realized as action in the expansion projects.

In order to identify and recruit prospective stakeholders, I employed snowball recruitment (I use the term recruitment rather than sampling – see Small 2009). Though some have criticized this strategy as a last resort (Harding 2013:18), it proved to be particularly useful for my study since stakeholders tended to belong to relatively small, somewhat formalized networks. Local residents who attended community meetings often signed up for mailing lists. Members of the ROM and AGO, as well as their contractors and financial backers, belonged to even more formalized networks. Thus, identifying a few initial nodes allowed me to expand quickly to dozens of people involved in the expansion projects from both inside the museums as well as out in the community.

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8 This is not to dismiss the importance of voices that have been silenced in the political process, which is also an important area of sociological inquiry. However, it was not the central focus of this particular study.
Ten initial stakeholders were identified in my analysis of documents. All ten were highly-visible figures with publicly available contact information, and included museum public relations figures, municipal politicians, and community leaders. This group also happened to be very well connected with many of the other stakeholders, allowing me to extend my recruitment out to less visible stakeholders in the community and deeper within the internal offices of the museums.

In addition to this formal recruitment process, I also came to realize that some members of my own extended social network were involved with the ROM and AGO. This was a reflection of the larger formal and informal connections between the University of Toronto and the two museums. Upon learning about my research, colleagues and friends would often provide me contact information for potential informants. I kept track of them and followed up with anyone I thought might be relevant to my emerging research questions. For example, a friend of a friend worked at a local architectural firm that partnered with Studio Daniel Libeskind to design the ROM. She gave me a tour of the firm’s office and described its role in the expansion. I also met a former ROM curator at an academic conference who described what it was like to work at the ROM before and during the expansions.

Through the formal and informal recruitment process, I ended up with a total of 41 participants by the time I reached “theoretical saturation” (discussed below)\(^9\).

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* Three public officials participated in both the ROM and AGO developments.

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\(^9\) Absent from my list of participants were the architects themselves or any members of their firms (I did interview someone from a local firm involved with the ROM). The decision to not pursue interviews with either Gehry or Libeskind reflects the reality of the case: despite their central role in shaping the form of the new buildings, neither architect was accessible to anyone but the top museum administrators nor were they directly involved in the political conflict occurring between the museums and the surrounding community, which was my main interest. This social distance between the architects and the community shaped the political conflict in itself – a point that I will expand upon in later chapters. While my own research focus was on the local political conflict and not the architects or field of architecture, my analysis draws on existing sociological research on architecture (e.g. McNeill 2009; Larson 1993).
While early in the process I attempted to contact anyone I thought had relevant experience, eventually four distinct groups of stakeholders emerged (see Table 2.1). Internal stakeholders worked for or with the ROM and AGO during the expansion projects. This group included the directors of each museum, senior staff in charge of the expansions, board members, junior staff and volunteers, and one member of an architectural firm that had been hired by the ROM. Residents included those who lived in the neighbourhoods surrounding the museums and had participated in the expansion projects either by attending community and consultation meetings, or by participating in opposition activity. A third group of stakeholders were representatives of local organizations that had engaged with the ROM and AGO during the expansion projects (but not through commercial transactions like an architecture or construction firm). These organizations included universities, local non-governmental organizations, and a church. Organizational stakeholders tended to speak formally for their organization rather than personally. Finally, public officials included three city councillors and a government bureaucrat who were involved in the expansion projects. Because both the ROM and AGO are located within the same municipal ward, three of the four public officials were contacted with regard to both projects.

As the study progressed, I recruited new participants through what Small (2009) calls “sequential” case selection. Completed interviews gave me a clearer sociological understanding of the expansion projects: who the major players were, what issues were at stake for those involved, what sociological concepts would be most relevant in interpreting the data. This knowledge allowed me to see more subtle variations among stakeholders that were initially hidden from me, even after completing my initial discourse analysis. For instance, it eventually became evident that AGO residents were split between those who considered themselves to be generally supportive of the gallery and a smaller, more politically aggressive group of residents that were sometimes referred to as “the activists” (see page 62). Once I learned of this distinction, I made sure to interview members of both groups.

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10 This strategy is also called “theoretical sampling” (Harding 2013:17). However, Small (2009) argues convincingly that the term “sampling” should refer to statistical research designs that attempt to create a representative selection of a much broader study population. Qualitative interview studies, on the other hand, follow the logic of “multiple-case studies”, in which specific participants are chosen for theoretical reasons with the purpose of achieving saturation (i.e. when new cases yield no new information for theoretical analysis).
The interviews themselves tended to last about one hour and were conducted in a casual, conversational manner. Most were conducted in person, often in offices when speaking with museum staff, organizational representatives or public offices. Interviews with residents usually occurred in private residences or coffee shops. Whenever possible I audio recorded and fully transcribed the interviews (some participants refused to be recorded). For both recorded and unrecorded interviews, I took extensive written notes.

During interviews, I relied on prepared, semi-structured questionnaires. Following the logic of sequential, multiple-case studies, the questionnaires were modified to address the unique position of each participant. In general, however, the questionnaires were all designed around two topics: (1) the participant’s own account of the expansion process, including details of their own participation, and (2) the participant’s evaluation of the architecture (see Appendix C for a composite questionnaire). The questions were broad, encouraging my participants to be as expressive as possible without directing them toward any particular issues. This was particularly useful in order to gauge what my participants found important (or not worth mentioning). I saved more specific questions for the end of the interview. For example, none of the ROM staff mentioned their plan to build a condominium without eventually being prompted, despite the fact that it was often one of the first things mentioned by local residents.

The end of the participant recruitment process was determined by “theoretical saturation” (Strauss and Corbin 1998). In this case, saturation was reached when I had a vivid account of the expansion projects, and new interviews and documents yielded little or no new information. Saturation also meant that I was observing the same general opinions and viewpoints among the various stakeholder sub-groups. Another consideration in ending the interview process was based on the relevance of my participants’ role in the expansion process. While I did not interview every resident who attended every public meeting, I did interview all of the involved politicians, all of the museum directors, and most of the involved senior staff and residents who others identified as being “leaders”. Once these interviews were completed, not only were new participants yielding less new data, their personal roles in the expansion process were increasingly tangential.
iii. Observation

The final method that I employed for the study was direct observation. The usefulness of observation was somewhat limited by the fact that the expansions were almost completed by the time I began my research. Thus, much of the events reported in this study come from the triangulation of multiple oral and written accounts. However, observation still provided two important sources of data that extended the study beyond what was possible within interviews and document analysis.

1. **Spatial observation.** The systematic observation of physical space has proven to be an important methodological tool in both qualitative (e.g. Griswold et al. 2013; Molotch et al. 2000) and quantitative (e.g. Sampson and Raudenbush 1999) sociology. Research has shown that social actors take their environment into consideration when evaluating cultural objects (Babon 2006). Thus, in addition to speaking to my participants about the spatial characteristics of the museums and their surrounding neighbourhoods, I undertook my own observation of the neighbourhoods surrounding the ROM and AGO, as well as within the new buildings themselves. In addition to providing me with useful data for my own analysis, this spatial knowledge became an asset during interviews since my participants often made spatial references under the assumption that I was equally familiar with the local area.

2. **Participant observation at public meetings and events.** I was able to attend and observe several events at the end of the AGO’s expansion process. These included three public meetings held to discuss the revitalization of the local “Grange Park”, which borders and is technically owned by the AGO. I also attended public lectures and events held just after the re-opening of the AGO. My attendance at these events was largely covert (except to those attendants who I had previously interviewed). I recorded the events using an audio recorder and took extensive “jottings”, which I later expanded on by writing fieldnotes (see Emerson et al. 1995). I also remained a passive member of the audience, not participating in any discussions or question and answer periods.
iv. Data Analysis

Combining three methods of data collection provided me with two advantages: coverage and triangulation. To the extent that each of the methods gave me access to data that could not be provided by the others, I was able to extend the coverage of my methods. For example, interviews provided me with a larger range of perspectives than was available in the document analysis. However, document analysis gave me access to historical perspectives, whereas interviews were restricted to participants’ present memories of historic events. In terms of triangulation, I was able to verify different data sources against each other. Public meetings, for instance, provided me with an opportunity to corroborate the concerns that my participants raised during interviews with what others were saying in public.

No matter which method was used, most of my “raw data” took the form of lengthy written documents (e.g. newspaper articles, interview transcripts, fieldnotes). In general, all the data was analyzed by identifying seemingly relevant quotes or passages and marking them with codes and/or brief memos. Additionally while coding I wrote numerous procedural and analytic research memos to help develop emerging thoughts on the data and the overarching research question (Emerson et al. 1995).

Data analysis was not strictly “grounded” or inductive, since it was done in constant dialogue with a parallel literature review. In some cases new ideas emerging from the data would motivate me to search out relevant academic literature. In other cases, a new question or hypothesis suggested by the literature would cause me to review and re-evaluate my data.

The same data was analyzed several times with different questions in mind. Specific coding and analysis techniques varied according to the question. In some cases, codes were strictly standardized and converted to quantitative data (see Chapter 5). Sometimes data was organized into abstract typologies (e.g. Chapter 5), in other cases it was organized into a chronological narrative (see Chapter 4 and 6). The chapters that follow contain more specific methodological discussion based on their respective questions and analysis.
V. Reflections on the Role of the Researcher

Following feminist theory (e.g. Smith 1987) and other perspectives (e.g. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), I will conclude this chapter with a reflection on my personal standpoint within the field of research itself. In particular, I will address two issues: my relationship with my informants and my normative orientation as a researcher.

i. Relationship with Informants

As I will discuss in the next chapter, my participants tended to be professional class and employed largely in the social and cultural sectors. This description not only includes those who worked at the museums, but also members of the surrounding community as well. As a result, many seemed to be quite comfortable speaking with a PhD student working on a dissertation. In fact, I emphasized my status as a student in order to put them ease during interviews.

Many of my participants (particularly the politicians and museum leadership) were used to speaking with the press. They were careful with their words and often insisted that they be audio recorded. A few participants from the community were less comfortable with being interviewed. One community participant was suspicious of the ethics form I handed him at the beginning of the interview and refused to sign it (though he was happy to participate in the interview). A few more were uncomfortable with being audio recorded.

In general, however, my participants seemed generally appreciative of the opportunity to express their opinions about the buildings (if they were from the community) or recount the long days and nights spent orchestrating the enormous task of expansion (if they were from the museums). Though I invited my participants to contact me for updates on my research, only one took me up on this offer and never responded to the research report I sent in reply.

ii. Normative Orientation of the Study

Something that initially attracted me to urban political-economy was the strong critical lens that characterizes much of the research in this area. Scholars such as David Harvey and Sharon Zukin expertly combine rigorous empirical research with a normative critique of capitalism and its effects on the modern city. Their work provides a normative perspective that identifies social problems that characterize contemporary urbanism. It is a perspective that guides my own work
as well. Underlying this study is my own view that urban space is not inherently private property divided up among individual parties, but rather a collective resource that must be democratically managed in such a way as to ameliorate the living conditions of all of its inhabitants.

Despite this normative orientation, however, I explicitly chose a case study that fell into an ideological grey area: culture-led urban development. On the one hand, there is, in the words of Markusen (2014), “intrinsic” value to public investment in the arts and culture, particularly at the municipal level:

Arts and culture contribute to quality of life; foster civic engagement; beautify and animate neighbourhoods; and offer tools for problem solving, protest, and community celebration... They may also increase understanding and collaboration among distinctive groups: immigrants and long-time residents; people by age, race, ethnicity, and gender; and subcultures. (p. 569)

Indeed, after a decade of public funding cuts under the neoliberal regimes of Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and Ontario Premier Mike Harris, any re-investment in the city’s public cultural institutions seemed like a reason to celebrate\footnote{This feeling was exacerbated when Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper targeted the arts community during the 2008 election, arguing that “ordinary people” were turned off when they saw artists at “a rich gala all subsidized by taxpayers claiming their subsidies aren't high enough” (Benzie et al. 2008).}. The ROM and AGO expansions were seen by many inside and outside the museums as a return to publicly-minded governance.

On the other hand, culture-led development has come under fire among urban scholars, particularly as it relates to “creative class” and “creative city” policy discourse (e.g. Peck 2005; Catungal et al. 2009). According to this critique, cultural policies are no longer seen as an end in themselves, but rather a means for attracting wealthy professional-class (or “creative class”, Florida 2002) residents into formerly poor and working class neighbourhoods. As such, these policies provide ideological cover for “‘neoliberal’ development agendas, framed around interurban competition, gentrification, middle-class consumption and place-marketing” (Peck 2005: 740-1). This critique has been extended specifically to iconic architectural development by scholars such as Sklair 2005 and Kaika and Thielen 2006 who argue that such development reflects the interests of global capitalism.
Thus, while I began my research with a clear normative orientation, I had no clear interpretation of how the ROM and AGO might fit into that orientation. Readers of this study will discover that, with a few exceptions, the chapters that follow do not adopt an explicitly normative tone. This is not because I am attempting to provide a politically “objective” account of the expansion projects or that I do not support the project of critical sociology (Calhoune 2002). Instead, it is a reflection of the state of political ambiguity in which I carried out this study. I found myself unable to politically align myself with any of the groups I studied. It was not until the research was completed and the chapters written that I was able to go back and reflect on the normative and political implications of my project. I present this reflection in the concluding chapter.
Chapter 3. Toronto’s 21st Century Identity Crisis
Examining the Historical and Geographical Context of the ROM and AGO Expansions

In order to understand what was at stake in the expansions of the ROM and AGO it is necessary to examine the broader social and political context of Toronto at the turn of the millennium. The projects were, after all, about far more than just creating new gallery space. For the provincial and federal governments, they represented a strategy for reengineering the urban economy for the 21st century. The municipal government used the projects to kick start larger plans for rebuilding and re-branding the surrounding public realm. Residents saw the projects as an opportunity to confront longstanding grievances with the museums and the city. Finally, the museum leadership wanted the expansions to turn their museums into modern day agorae, reorienting public life in Toronto and putting their institutions firmly at the centre. In sum, the expansions were really about redefining the city as a whole.

This chapter explores the unique historical circumstances that made the ROM and AGO expansions so salient to people’s understanding and relationship to their city. In the decades leading up to 2000, Toronto underwent a dramatic social transformation brought on by a combination of economic de/post-industrialization, waves of non-European immigration, and a major reorganization of the municipal government. As a result of these changes it is fair to say that the city of 2000 bore little resemblance to that of the 1970s. However, economic recession and government austerity measures meant that Toronto’s built environment and public realm had changed very little during this time, creating a situation in which a new generation of Torontonians inherited an urban landscape designed for a very different city at a very different time.

These contradictory trends created what we might call a “socio-spatial disjuncture” in which the identities, lifestyles, tastes and needs of the population are increasingly disconnected from the structure of the surrounding landscape. In contrast to Molotch et al.’s (2000:816) argument that localities create their own “rolling inertia” where the previous developments establish precedents...
that structure and limit future development, socio-spatial disjunctures create ambiguity where no clear precedents exist. The Toronto case demonstrates two potential consequences of this situation. First, issues of place and civic identity, which are able to operate implicitly under inertia, become explicit topics of public debate as stakeholders struggle over multiple possible development options. Second, urban development may take radically new directions in contrast to the more stable process of inertia.

This chapter proceeds in four parts. First, I describe Toronto’s dramatic social transformation between 1970 and 2000, focusing specifically on the economic, cultural, and political dimensions of this process. Second, I contrast these changes with the relative stagnation of Toronto’s built environment, discussing the socio-spatial disjuncture that eventually forced issues of civic identity into public debate as development returned to the city in the mid-2000s. I also demonstrate how the ROM and AGO expansions came to be seen as watershed events with the potential to set important precedents for city building. Third, I narrow in on the museums themselves and their immediate surroundings, offering a description of the neighbourhoods and the people who live there. Finally, I end the chapter by relating the case of Toronto and the concept of socio-spatial disjuncture to the larger literature on place and urban development, comparing it to existing models of urban change.

1. **Toronto’ Social Transformation**

The last three decades of the 20th century marked a period of dramatic social change for the Toronto. Some of these changes were part of larger trends occurring within the Great Lakes region, Canada, or the Western world. Others were unique to Toronto. This was not a change that can be characterized exclusively by the terms “decline”, “expansion”, “growth”, or “displacement”, but a larger transformation that includes all of these factors. By 2000, the population of Toronto bore little resemblance to the Torontonians of 1970 in terms of their social identities, their lifestyles, their work, and their relationships. In 1970, the majority of Torontonians were White, English-speaking Protestants, and almost half were employed in traditional blue-collar jobs. Thirty years later, city had absorbed one of the largest immigrant populations in the world (McIsaac 2003). Two of every five Torontonians was non-European in ancestry and spoke a language other than English. Protestants made up only a quarter of the population, and the traditional working class had shrunk significantly. Furthermore, the city
itself was legally a different entity, having been dissolved and reconstituted with new borders and a different governing structure. In the following section I discuss the causes and consequences of this social transformation, focusing specifically on its economic, cultural, and political dimensions.

i. Economic Changes

Toronto’s economic shift in the late 20th century shares some things in common with the textbook cases of deindustrialization that occurred throughout the Great Lakes region. Yet it also has certain characteristics that set it apart. Toronto was never a fully industrial city, and factory workers never outnumbered those employed in the service sector (Caulfield 2010:329). Nonetheless, the city’s emergence as a major population centre is fundamentally tied to shipping and industrial production. Its early development depended on the link it provided between the colonial hinterland of southern Ontario, and the international shipping routes throughout the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River (Hiller 2010; Desfor and Laidley 2011). In the late 19th century, with the expansion of Canada’s railway and the imposition of trade policies designed to prioritize Canadian production, Toronto and its satellite cities soon emerged as the industrial centre of the nation (Hiller 2010: 21-24).

Though signs of deindustrialization existed well beforehand, the late 1960s marked an important tipping point in Toronto’s economic transformation. Shipping activity in the port of Toronto reached its peak in 1969 (Ramlalsingh 1975). As well, Toronto’s labour force, which had been nearly evenly divided between the service and industrial sectors, began its rapid transition to becoming almost exclusively service-oriented by the 21st century (see Figure 3.1).
The rise of the service industry is an important development that distinguishes Toronto from other cities in the region. For Toronto, deindustrialization was not synonymous with decline. On the contrary, the late 20th century proved to be a period of significant economic and demographic growth for the city due to some important economic advantages. Paramount among these advantages was Toronto’s place as the capital of Ontario, a province that was emerging as one of the largest welfare states in the Western world. The city benefited substantially from growth in healthcare, education, and other related government services. This growth was paralleled in the private sector as the city became the undisputed financial and corporate centre of Canada, overtaking Montreal in the process.\(^\text{12}\)

In addition to the rise of the service sector, the late 20th century also saw the emergence of the cultural and knowledge-based economy in Toronto. In terms of employment, the so-called

\(^{12}\) The late 1960’s and early 70’s was also a tipping point in Toronto’s rise as the financial and corporate centre of Canada. The separatist movement in Quebec – particularly the 1976 election of the Parti Quebecquoï – sparked a migration of businesses and affluent Anglophones from Montreal to Toronto throughout the 1970’s and 80’s (Newbold 1996).
“creative class”\textsuperscript{13} (Florida 2002), or knowledge-based workforce, rose steadily as a percentage of Toronto’s labour market, eventually overtaking traditional blue-collar occupations by 2000 (see Figure 3.2). Beyond the raw employment figures, however, the cultural impact of this transition was significant – particularly in reshaping Toronto’s civic identity. Nicknames like “Hollywood North” and “T-Dot” began to replace “The Big Smoke” and “Hogtown”, reflecting the increasing number of films shot in the city, the rising profile of the events such as the Toronto Film Festival, and the thriving music scheme – as well as the cultural irrelevance of waterfront smokestacks or the city’s once renowned pork processing industry.

\textbf{Figure 3.2. Occupations in Toronto, 1961-2001}
Percentage of Toronto’s labour force (CMA) by occupation type as reported in the Canadian Census.

The cultural sector also became a fixation among policy-makers who, by 2000, had all but abandoned the idea of shipping and manufacturing as a source of economic prosperity and turned instead to arts and cultural production (Grundy and Bourdreau 2008). Richard Florida himself was wooed to the University of Toronto with a new multi-million dollar research institute funded by the Ontario government. It is within this move to make culture a centrepiece of Toronto’s

\textsuperscript{13} The creative class is operationalized here as occupations related to arts, culture, research and development, and the sciences (social, natural, health). They can be distinguished from the more traditional service related jobs in management and administration, retail, trade, and social services.
economic strategy that the ROM and AGO received government grants supporting their expansions. As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, this new understanding of the link between culture and the economy among policy-makers is essential to explaining the origin of these projects (also see Jenkins 2005).

Although Toronto was able to shift to a post-industrial economy, and hence avoid the problems typically associated with deindustrialization in neighbouring cities like Buffalo or Hamilton, this transition came with its own challenges. Inequality rose significantly in an economy increasingly split between low-wage service jobs and high-paying skill-based jobs. In the 1970’s income inequality in Toronto was not significantly different from the country as a whole. By the first years of the 21st century, inequality in Toronto had not only increased in absolute terms, it was also much higher than the rest of Canada (Walks 2010)\textsuperscript{14}. Furthermore, in addition to being a more unequal city by 2000, it was also one in which inequality was growing at a faster rate than at any point in the late 20th century (\textit{ibid}).

Toronto’s increasingly economically polarized population was also becoming more spatially polarized as well. As Hulchanski (2007) demonstrated in a study that made newspaper headlines, poverty and wealth were spatially distributed quite differently by the 21st century than they had been in the decades prior (see Figure 3.3 and Figure 3.4). Not only were neighbourhoods sorting themselves between wealthy and poor, the actual locations of wealth and poverty had also changed. Just as the wealthy began to gentrify once poverty-stricken neighbourhoods of inner-Toronto (e.g. Slater 2004), the historically middle-class suburbs were becoming a refuge for immigrants and other low-income populations looking for cheaper rent (Fong et al. 2008). Furthermore, by 2005, far fewer neighbourhoods had either enough middle-income residents, or the right mix of high- and low-income residents to qualify as middle-income. The economically mixed neighbourhoods that once distinguished Toronto from other North American cities, and that attracted Jane Jacobs to the city in the late 1960’s, were, by the start of the 21st century, passing further from reality to myth.

\textsuperscript{14} “To get an idea of the scale of the increase in social inequality in the City of Toronto between 1980 and the mid 2000s, we can compare it to the change in inequality in Canada as a whole. In 1980 the Gini for Canada as a whole was 0.28, only slightly less than the 0.299 for Toronto. However, with a Gini of 0.456, Toronto’s level of inequality in 2006 had become 42 percent higher than Canada’s overall level of inequality of 0.32.” (Walks 2010:2)
Figure 3.3. Income distribution in Toronto, 1970

Figure 3.4. Income distribution in Toronto, 2005.
Image from Hulchanski (2007:5).
ii. Cultural Changes

While post-industrialization changed Toronto’s class structure and workforce, equally dramatic changes were occurring to Toronto’s cultural make-up. For most of the 20th century, “Toronto, the Good” was known for being a city of White, Protestant, conservative Tories. Until the election of Nathan Phillips in 1955 (the city’s first Jewish mayor) political and economic power was held firmly by members of the infamous Orange Order, a fraternal organization whose members often wielded their power to enforce strict Protestant values (and to oppress religious minorities as well, see Strauch 1999). As a result Toronto had notoriously strict laws restricting alcohol consumption and business hours (which is perhaps one of the reasons why Toronto never developed the thriving jazz or bohemian scenes of surrounding cities like Montreal, New York, or Chicago).

In the early 1970s, Toronto was still very much characterized by this strict Protestant conservatism. Some of the best cultural analysis of this period comes from the small but influential group of American war resisters who migrated into the city during the Vietnam War and were able to compare Toronto with other large North America cities. Writing in 1972, one American described the city as follows:

> The subways are clean, and efficient. The side walks are safe after dark… Toronto is a nice city. One wonders whether its blandness is the price exacted for remaining nice. It is not the New York of Canada. It’s the Indianapolis of Canada without the blacks, the war, and the unhealthy attachment to the flag.

(quoted from Churchill 2010:35, original Gutknet 1972)

However, the bland, conservative city that these Americans encountered in the early 1970s was about the change entirely. Among these changes, none are more dramatic that the influx of immigrants that arrived in the city in the late 20th century. In the 1960s and ‘70s, the federal government took several steps to liberalize Canada’s immigration laws, end the implicit “white’s only” rule, and eventually passed an official policy of “multiculturalism” in 1988. As Canada’s biggest city, Toronto became the obvious destination for newcomers. Table 3.1 illustrates the impact of immigration on the cultural characteristics of the city’s population.
By 2000, very little memory remained of Toronto’s culture of conservative Protestantism (other than perhaps a tendency toward politeness). Instead Toronto took on the cultural profile more akin to traditional immigrant-welcoming cities such as New York, Los Angeles, and Montreal. In fact, by 2000 Toronto had eclipsed all of these cities with the highest number of immigrants in North America (McIsaac 2003). As with the rise of the cultural sector, multiculturalism changed the image of the city and became enshrined in Toronto’s current official motto: “Diversity, Our Strength”\textsuperscript{15}.

\textit{iii. Political Changes}

Capping off this period of rapid social change was a massive political reformation in which Toronto’s municipal government was dissolved by the province in 1998 and then amalgamated into a “megacity” with its five closest suburbs. As a result, the population officially governed by

\textsuperscript{15} Ethnic diversity should not overshadow other forms of cultural change that occurred in the city during this period, particularly those changes associated with the gay rights movement. While the memory still remains of brutal police raids on gay bathhouses in 1981, in 2003 Ontario became the first jurisdiction in North America to legalize gay marriage. The municipal government as well has aligned itself strongly with the gay community in promoting and subsidizing events such as the annual Pride festival.
the City of Toronto was almost quadrupled from under 700,000 to 2.4 million people and the land area was expanded even more from 97 to 630 km² (Canadian Census 2001). Amalgamation set off a string of major political changes, including the collapsing of existing political districts (called “wards”), which pitted incumbent city councillors and their pre-amalgamation neighbourhoods against each other (e.g. see Silver 2012). Additionally, the new municipality was given a series of expenses that had previously been the responsibility of the province, including daycare, public housing, and transit. Receiving no new equivalent sources of income (or the authority to create new sources), and being prevented by law from running a deficit, Toronto’s fledging government was forced into a debate over what services should be spared and what should be cut.

As with the economic and cultural trends, political amalgamation radically changed Toronto’s civic identity. Although residents in the surrounding suburbs may have always thought of themselves as Torontonians, for the first time both urbanites and suburbanites found themselves fighting over the same meagre municipal budget and forced to decide whose lifestyle and interests should take priority. With a majority of city councillors representing suburban wards, and the election of suburbanite Mel Lastman as the new city’s first mayor, downtown residents of “Old Toronto”, such as those I interviewed for this study, felt particularly embattled. Jurisdiction that had once been governed exclusively by downtown residents – everything from urban planning to policies on homelessness – now came under the influence of the suburbs. This sense of embattlement was evident in the way residents responded to the ROM and AGO expansions. The projects heightened an already fierce debate over whether downtown was primarily a place to live or a place to visit.

II. The Socio-Spatial Disjuncture and Civic Identity

i. Civic Stagnation

The aforementioned trends transformed the city of 1970 into a very different place by the turn of the millennium. And yet ironically, while all of these social changes were occurring, Toronto’s built environment – particularly its civic spaces – had changed little. An unprecedented period of civic investment in the 1950s, ‘60s, and ‘70s gave Toronto many of its most prominent public spaces and landmarks including York University (1959), Nathan Phillips Square/Toronto City
Hall (1965), Ontario Place (1971), and the Eaton Centre (1977). The centrepiece of this period of investment was the CN Tower, which upon its completion in 1976 became the world’s tallest freestanding structure and held that title for over three decades. The tower’s dominance on the city’s skyline has made it Toronto’s most recognizable landmark to this day. And yet its exposed concrete exterior and space age aesthetic date it as quintessential product of the post-war period.

By the 1980s, a combination of economic recessions and government austerity measures brought this trend to a virtual standstill. Like the rest of North America, Toronto was hit by twin recessions at the beginning and end of the 1980s (see Figure 3.5). A housing bubble in 1989 was particularly damaging for the city, sending home prices crashing and leaving abandoned half-built skyscrapers and empty lots that would be untouched throughout the 1990s. In the public sector, municipal issues became collateral damage as both the ruling federal Liberal and Ontario Conservative Parties focused on debt reduction and instituting a series of neoliberal policy strategies. The Ontario Conservatives under Premier Mike Harris were particularly damaging, imposing Toronto’s amalgamation and canceling infrastructure projects (including filling in a partial dug subway tunnel). Meanwhile, Toronto’s new municipal government, barely able to keep up with existing expenses, had no ability to undertake any serious city-building initiatives.

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16 According to the Canadian Census, the average home price in Metropolitan Toronto fell from $424,702 in 1991 to $335,740 in 1996 (prices adjusted to 2013 values).
The result of this stagnation was the emergence of what we might call a “socio-spatial disjuncture” in which the needs, lifestyles, tastes, and identities of a population are increasingly disconnected from the physical landscape that contains them. With amalgamation, the new government of Toronto moved into the downtown City Hall. While still a popular landmark, the building and its surroundings were decaying and in desperate need of renovation – perhaps an appropriate representation of the dysfunction of the new government, but a rather embarrassing focal point for the civic centre of Canada’s largest city\textsuperscript{17}. Meanwhile the suburban city halls, once the centres of their respective communities, sat in a state of decay and uncertainty while city council decided whether to use them as municipal office space or sell them off altogether. The decline of the industrial sector had also left large swaths of land abandoned and contaminated, including much of Toronto’s central waterfront. And, just as the city was expanding in terms of area and population, investment in mass transit was cut back dramatically (see Figure 3.6).

\textsuperscript{17} In justifying his development project, ROM director William Thorsell said of Toronto’s City Hall, “Look at Nathan Phillips Square and vicinity: it’s so degraded now you’d think you’re in some mid-level Soviet city” (Adams 2005, September).
The few attempts at city building during this period were often seen as half-hearted and ultimately unsuccessful\(^{19}\). It is telling that when the ROM and AGO began their expansions in the early 2000s, their first steps were to completely demolish earlier expansions from 1982 (ROM) and 1991 (AGO).

\textit{ii. A Return to City Building}

By the early 2000s the tide slowly began to turn. The new municipal government began to work out its most immediate funding problems, assisted by renewed investment from the federal and provincial governments. David Miller, a city councillor from “Old Toronto”, replaced Mel Lastman as mayor in 2003 and undertook an ambitious city building agenda. A series of new

\(^{18}\) Figure 7 is based on transit stations that were either built or under construction at the point of writing. Proposed stations are not included.

\(^{19}\) The one major exception in terms of city building was the construction of the SkyDome sports stadium in 1989, which remains a major Toronto landmark. However even this apparent “success” needs to be qualified. Despite its initial fanfare, which was elevated by the Toronto Blue Jays’ back-to-back World Series victories in 1992 and 1993, attendance figures dropped sharply after the 1994 baseball strike and stadiums themselves fell out of style in Major League Baseball. Additionally, the SkyDome had suffered from severe financial problems since the time it was built (“The Money Pit” 1999).
public agencies were created by all three levels of government to oversee everything from the redevelopment of the industrial waterfront (Waterfront Toronto), to the state of the sidewalks and street furniture (Public Realm Office), to an ambitious expansion of regional public transit (Metrolinx). Among some of the most notable investments in the first decade of the 21st century, subway expansion started to ramp up from an all-time low 1990s, a new public square was created in the middle of Toronto’s downtown, and the city experienced an unprecedented condominium boom that seemed virtually unaffected by the 2008 credit crunch.

However, reinvestment in Toronto’s built form faced a major obstacle. As a result of the socio-spatial disjuncture, there were few obvious precedents for urban development in the city. “Rolling inertia” was significantly weakened in a city that’s built environment had failed to keep pace with rapid social changes. Public officials had long abandoned the idea of maintaining an industrial waterfront, for instance, but there was no clear alternative plan. Transit expansion – still officially guided by a plan from 1985 – also presented a series of questions. Which neighbourhoods deserved new stations? Should the city stick with existing subway technology or adopt something new? And perhaps most importantly, the condominium boom put constant pressure on officials and residents to decide where it was appropriate to put a 50-storey building, what could be demolished to make room, and how to best accommodate the influx of new residents.

While the force of inertia can keep people “going through the motions” without having to think explicitly about what they are doing, Toronto’s socio-spatial disjuncture produced something of an identity crisis. The existing urban form and development plans were clearly designed for a city that no longer existed. But what exactly had the city become? In order to proceed with new plans, a new notion of civic identity was required to inform decisions made between several equally plausible development choices. The implicit character of Toronto that had rapidly developed in the previous decades therefore needed to be made explicit in planning documents, new bylaws, and even – as mentioned – a new city motto (to cite only a few examples). Accompanying these institutional changes were newspaper editorials, public consultation meetings, and other arenas that provided Torontonians with an opportunity to debate the identity of the city and how it should be translated into concrete development goals.
The election of David Miller in 2003 became something of a rallying point among (mostly downtown) intellectuals, writers, activists and artists who were already churning out blogs, magazines, and books on the topic of Toronto and its civic identity. For example, a collection of essays entitled *uTOpia: Toward a New Toronto* (featuring a forward by Miller) was published in 2005. The essays, which received a significant amount of press, captured this particular moment of optimism, ambiguity, and anxiety over Toronto’s potential in the 21st century. In one of the essays journalist Edward Keenan (2005) summed up the entire collection by writing about “the feeling that this is an important moment in Toronto’s history, that we’re in the midst of shaping what the city will become, of defining what Toronto will come to mean” (p. 24).

While this group of writers and amateur urban theorists represents a small (but growing) slice of Toronto’s population, the debates that took place within *uTOpia* and other forums had meaningful implications for the direction of municipal policy. It was here that many of the new planning ideas that were implemented in the first decade of 21st century first appeared, such as light rail transit, building parks under elevated expressways, or “sharrow” bike lanes. Even for people who were not actively involved in the abstract discussions ongoing in the press and blogosphere, it was still easy to get pulled into debate over Toronto’s future. New skyscraper condominiums, transit lines, or any of the other hundreds of development projects going on at the time (the ROM and AGO included) produced scores of public meetings and debates that revolved around the identity of place.

### iii. Toronto’s “Cultural Renaissance”

Given the scale and cultural significance of the projects, the expansions of the ROM, AGO, and the other institutions involved in the “cultural renaissance” became important focal points during this period of redevelopment and civic debate. The fact that the projects represented an opportunity to establish precedents for city building in the 21st century was not lost on the various stakeholder groups who got involved. This was particularly true of the ROM and AGO administration who were well aware of the larger social context as it has been described in this chapter. As the director of the ROM explained to me in an interview:

> You have to remember that the ‘90s were a terrible decade for Toronto. First half were in terrible recession and the second half we just crawled out of that economy. Nothing much had happened. The city was just deteriorating
physically and otherwise. There was a great sense that we just had to get a few points of light out there to stop this trend. [An expansion project] became kind of irresistible.

The idea that the ROM and AGO were capable of making a significant contribution to redefining Toronto was also embraced by the local press, including the Toronto Star’s architectural critic Christopher Hume who wrote:

If this city ever attains the credibility, cachet and confidence it craves, credit will be due above all to its cultural community. No other institutional group - religious or corporate - has succeeded in making itself the focus and substance of Toronto's civic dream. We no longer build cathedrals, bank towers or sports stadiums. Instead, we look to museums, art galleries and concert halls to express the spirit of the time and leave our mark on the future. After 2002, that future looks a whole lot brighter (Hume 2002).

Yet the exact content of “Toronto’s civic dream” was far from certain. While the stakes of the expansion projects were heavily influenced by this unique moment in Toronto’s history, the projects themselves would be shaped by the immediate context within the surrounding neighbourhoods. Within these neighbourhoods lived a diverse cross section of Torontonians who had their own views on city building. Throughout the planning and construction of the museum expansions, these views would vacillate between conflict and compromise.

III. The Museums and their Surroundings

To understand how this debate over identity unfolded between the museums and the surrounding community, we need to understand the unique social ecology of the neighbourhoods. While both projects represented radical architectural breaks from the past, they nonetheless had to contend with the existing character of place.

Given that the projects were expansions and renovations rather than brand new buildings, the architects were first required to work within the context of the existing architecture. Doing so required making decisions of what needed to be saved, what could be demolished, and how existing spaces could be repurposed for new uses. Beyond this, the expansion plans also needed to be designed with reference to the surrounding built form and activities in the neighbourhood. On which street should the main entrance go? How much taller could the new museum be than
its surroundings? How should the museum be oriented to neighbouring parks, sidewalks and other public spaces?

These decisions were not made in isolation, but depended on a whole series of external constraints such as heritage and zoning laws, building codes, and the preferences of different stakeholder groups, from major donors to local residents. Each of these groups would have their own views about how the expansion should have been oriented within their existing context.

To better understand this context and provide necessary background for subsequent chapters, I turn now to a descriptive examination of the museums and their physical surroundings. I begin first with a discussion of the built form, including the architecture of the existing museums and the layout of the neighbourhoods, then move to an overview of community, focusing specifically on the types of people who became most involved with the expansion projects.

i. The ROM

The ROM sits at the intersection not only between two of Toronto’s most well known streets (Bloor Street and Queen’s Park Avenue), but also between several distinct neighbourhoods. Founded as part of the University of Toronto, the ROM itself is located at the northern end of a historic institutional zone that is home to the university, the Ontario legislature (known as Queen’s Park), and several cultural institutions including the Royal Conservatory of Music, the Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art, and the Bata Shoe Museum. The “Queen’s Park district”, as this institutional zone is often referred, is characterized by stately Victorian buildings and leafy green spaces that stand out amid the concrete jungle of downtown Toronto. One of these green spaces, Philosopher’s Walk, boarders the ROM to the west and is particularly loved by the surrounding community.
To the immediate north of this zone is a high-end retail strip along Bloor Street filled with designer clothing stores, condominiums, and luxury hotels. At the time of the ROM’s expansion, and as part of the wave of redevelopment occurring all over the city, the local business improvement association was undertaking an extensive redevelopment of Bloor street inspired Chicago’s “Magnificent Mile”. In an effort to make the street reflect the businesses located there, the redevelopment would see the cracked and patchy pavement replaced with granite sidewalks, extensive flowerbeds and trees, and the overhead electrical wiring buried out of sight.

Just to the north of Bloor and around the western side of the Queen’s Park/University district are several residential neighbourhoods filled with pre-war detached and semi-detached houses. Among these neighbourhoods are Yorkville (best known for being a hippy enclave in the 1960s, but now gentrified), Harbord Village, and the Annex. The Annex, which is to the immediate north of the ROM, was built as a Victorian bourgeois suburb in the 1880s and filled with grand houses (some of which were replaced with apartment buildings in the 1960s). It is these neighbourhoods that supplied most of the community members involved in the ROM expansion.
The ROM’s original building reflected its place as part of the University of Toronto. Completed in 1914, the first wing is a long rectangular structure built well back from any of the surrounding roads and designed according to the revival Romanesque style that was popular in Toronto at the time (see Figure 4.3). In 1933 a second, parallel building was constructed along Queen’s Park Avenue and connected to the original wing in order to form an “H” shape. At the centre of this new wing was a large rotunda that would serve as the museum’s main entrance up until the Libeskind expansion. The rotunda’s golden mosaic ceiling made it one of the most recognizable and loved architectural features in the city.

![Figure 3.8. ROM’s 1933 wing from Queen’s Park Avenue.](image)

Queens Park Avenue in the foreground, looking West. Photo from City of Toronto Archives (fonds 1244, item 3058).

From the late-1960s to the early-1980s the ROM began the most aggressive expansion plans in its history. In 1968, the McLaughlan Planetarium was built on Queen’s Park Avenue, just to the south of the 1933 wing. Then two additional wings were added that filled in the gaps of the “H”: the curatorial centre to the south (completed 1981) and the Queen Elizabeth II Terrace Galleries to the north (completed 1984, see Figure 3.9). Though these wings were designed according to the modern, brutalist style that was popular in the late 20th century, the heavy brown facades blended in and hid behind the original historicist wings. And though the ROM officially split
from the University of Toronto in 1968, it was still spatially oriented toward the Queen’s Park
district, where its main entrance was still located. The Terrace galleries essentially turned their
back to Bloor street, which was separated by a fence and a strip of green space.

Figure 3.9. Queen Elizabeth II Terrace Galleries, ROM
Bloor street is in the foreground, looking south. Photo from City of Toronto Archives (fonds 200, series 1465, file 280, item 23).

Like the city as a whole, the ROM followed twenty years of aggressive building with another
twenty years of stasis. When this period of stasis came to an end with the Libeskind expansion
in 2002, the ROM embraced radical change. To make room for the expansions, the modest
Terrace galleries were demolished. In their place, Libeskind designed a five story, jagged
“crystal” that looked as if it was exploding out of the historicist wings. And in contrast to their
stone facades, he clad his building in shiny aluminium and glass. Furthermore, the expansion
reoriented the museum itself by moving its main entrance from the sleepy Queen’s Park side to
the busy retail stretch along Bloor Street. Rather than looking across at the Gardiner Museum
and Victoria College of the University of Toronto, the ROM now faced the Park Hyatt and Four Seasons luxury hotels.

ii. The AGO

Unlike the ROM, the AGO did not begin with a custom-built gallery. Instead, in 1909, the newly incorporated organization inherited the Georgian estate of one of its benefactors (known as “the Grange”). When the Grange was built in 1817, the surrounding neighbourhood was filled with large country estates owned by the colonial elites of Toronto. By the 20th century, however, these estates were being partitioned into smaller lots and sold off to an incoming working class population made up largely of Jewish (and later, Chinese) immigrants. As part of the bequest to the AGO, the Grange’s spacious front yard was to be preserved and maintained as a public park. To this day, the “Grange Park” serves as an important geographic centre to the neighbourhood and a rare green space in the downtown core.

Figure 3.10. Aerial view of the Art Gallery of Ontario 
North is to the right. Picture from Google Earth (©2015 Google).
Today the AGO and the Grange Park sit at the centre of a dense residential neighbourhood filled with narrow pre-war houses and mid-century apartment buildings. The AGO itself is sandwiched into the northwest corner of its block, bordered to the south by the Grange and Grange Park, and to the east by OCAD. The proximity of the AGO and OCAD reflect their entwined origins, but they are now independent of each other.

The Grange neighbourhood (as the area around the Grange and AGO is often called) is surrounded on all four sides by very distinct districts. To the north is the University of Toronto campus (and the Royal Ontario Museum). To the east is Toronto’s main institutional thoroughfare, University Avenue, lined with hospitals and tall office buildings. To the south is Queen Street West: a popular and long gentrified retail strip of Victorian storefronts where you can still find a few concert clubs and vintage clothing shops amidst corporate brands like GAP and HMV. Finally, to the west is downtown Toronto’s main Chinatown district. Thus, the Grange neighbourhood is at the centre of sharp contrasts: public institutions, corporate retail, and small, ethnic businesses.

Like the ROM, the AGO has expanded several times over the past century (see Reid 2006 for full history). Due to the lack of space, these expansions have tended to occur not as separate wings (as with the ROM), but rather as a series of concentric rectangles. While the interior of each building was preserved (more or less), their façades were demolished in order to accommodate the next expansion. The Gehry renovation added yet another concentric rectangle. The result is that the AGO’s main entrance on Dundas street has changed frequently over the past hundred years, but its centre has remained relatively constant (see Figure 3.11).
Figure 3.11. Walker Court, AGO
Walker Court was built as part of the 1926 Beaux-Arts expansion of the AGO. Though the building around it has changed frequently, it remains the nucleus of the gallery. Photo from City of Toronto Archives (fonds 200, series 372, subseries 41, item 199).

The AGO’s first purpose-built galleries were constructed in the Beaux-Arts style just north of the Grange estate between 1914 and 1935 and were designed by the same architects responsible for the ROM’s 1914 and 1933 wings. A second major renovation planned in 1968 saw the AGO expand to occupy almost every last piece of land between Dundas and the Grange estate. Completed in two phases (1974 and 1977), this expansion surrounded the gallery in windowless concrete walls and a moat, giving it the look of a fortress (see Figure 3.12). A third planned phase would have expanded the gallery south into Grange Park, but it was thwarted by a lack of finances and community opposition\(^\text{20}\). The memory of the fight to save Grange Park in the 1970s was still fresh for some of the community members I spoke with.

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\(^{20}\) Though Grange Park is administered by the Toronto Parks department like any other public park, it is technically owned by the AGO. This has made it tempting for the AGO to use this property for further expansions. In the fight between the AGO and residents in the 1970s, it was agreed that the AGO would never extend south of the Grange estate (Reid 2006:30).
After a decade of delays, the third phase of the 1968 plan eventually got underway in the late 1980s, though it was completely redesigned in the post-modern style of the time. In an attempt to soften the gallery’s street presence, the moats were built over and the gallery facade was brought out to meet the sidewalk directly. As well, brown brick was used to replace the pre-cast concrete. However, the expansion was never fully completed according to its original design. As in the 1970s, money and conflict with local residents continued to dog the expansion. In fact, relations with local residents became so strained that the AGO was pressured into an agreement that it would never expand again. This agreement was further reinforced in a bylaw passed by the (old) Toronto City Council.

As Gehry worked on his own expansion in 2003 and 2004, the lack of available space was one of the major challenges. One solution was to extend the gallery’s north facade even further out so
that it hung over the sidewalk on Dundas street. This overhang resulted in one of the most
distinct galleries of the new building: the Galleria Italia, which resembles the hull of an
overturned boat with wooden ribs and glass cladding. The other solution was a tower that was
built on south side of the building, looming over the Grange estate and the park. In order to
lessen its impact on the park, it was clad in sky blue titanium. Despite these changes the Walker
Court sculpture gallery continues to be the centre of the museum, though Gehry gave it a
signature modification by adding a winding staircase protruding out of its roof and connecting to
the south tower.

iii. The People

Like the physical environment they inhabit, the populations that live nearby the ROM and AGO
are diverse. Toronto’s urban core has traditionally been known as a haven for mixed-income,
urban living, particularly in contrast to major American cities that experienced an out-migration
of white and middle class residents in the mid-20th century. This reputation was bolstered when
Jane Jacobs settled in the Annex in 1968 (and lived there until her death in 2006). While there is
still some truth behind it, the actual populations that inhabit the Annex and Grange
neighbourhoods in the 21st century are more complex than their reputation might suggest.

______________________________________________
21 Among the many residential neighbourhoods surrounding the Queen’s Park/University district, I will focus
specifically on the Annex, which is the closest physically to the ROM and home to most of the residents I
encountered in my research.
Toronto’s 21st Century Identity Crisis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2006 Canadian Census Category</th>
<th>Annex East (CT)</th>
<th>Grange (CT)</th>
<th>Toronto (CMA)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>5,523</td>
<td>4,505</td>
<td>5,113,149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density (per km²)</td>
<td>10,739</td>
<td>11,723</td>
<td>866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median individual income (CAD)</td>
<td>$30,093</td>
<td>$20,169</td>
<td>$26,754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average value of owned dwelling (CAD)</td>
<td>$812,018</td>
<td>$318,569</td>
<td>$403,112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of dwellings owned (rather than rented)</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average monthly rent</td>
<td>$1,043</td>
<td>$951</td>
<td>$926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% English as a second language</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% immigrant/non-permanent resident</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% visible minority</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% with university degree (among those aged 25-65)</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% working in cultural or social occupations</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2. Neighbourhood demographics
2006 Canadian census data for census tracts closest to the ROM and AGO, and for the Toronto CMA

Both the Annex and the Grange share many characteristics that distinguish them from the Toronto region as a whole. Made up of tightly packed Victorian houses and mid-century apartment buildings, both neighbourhoods are densely populated. Though the single-family houses command high property values, the neighbourhoods themselves are overwhelmingly populated by renters rather than homeowners, inhabiting both the apartment buildings and Victorian homes that were converted to rooming houses. Furthermore, reflecting their proximity to the University of Toronto, both neighbourhoods have much higher rates of post-secondary education (particularly the Annex).

The neighbourhoods are also distinguished by the relatively high number of “creative” class workers (Florida 2002). Though still a minority in each neighbourhood, residents employed in the cultural or social sector made up a much larger proportion of the Annex (38%) and Grange (23%) than of the city as a whole (12%).

Despite their commonalities, the Annex and the Grange also have some significant differences. The Annex in particular is known for its wealthy and politically powerful residents. Among them are many of Canada’s intellectual elite, which (in addition to Jacobs) include figures such as Margaret Atwood and John Ralston Saul. And though homeowners make up a small minority of the population, those who do own homes hold some of the most expensive property in the city.
Also contributing to the Annex’ reputation as a privileged neighbourhood is its relative lack of ethnic and racial diversity.

In contrast to the Annex, the Grange better conforms to the Jacobsian ideal of a diverse urban neighbourhood. The Victorian houses here are smaller and tend to be more rundown. More of them have been turned into boarding houses (often illegally according to some of the residents I spoke with). There are also public housing developments within the neighbourhood boundaries. Thus, the Grange has both a lower average home value and a much lower median income than both the Annex and the Toronto region as a whole. Additionally, overlapping with Chinatown, the Grange is more ethnically and racially diverse than the Toronto region. A majority of its residents are visible minorities, immigrants, and speak English as a second language.

As might be expected, the actual community members who became involved in the ROM and AGO expansion projects tended to be older, wealthier homeowners (though not exclusively). While they were not an ethnically homogenous group, and several were immigrants, they all spoke fluent English. In terms of occupation, most of those I spoke with were middle-class professionals, and almost all held jobs associated with the “creative” or symbolic economy. My participants included government bureaucrats, journalists, academics, architects, and artists (both highly successful and more marginal).

As is characteristic of the professional/creative class, the political power of this group of residents derived primarily from their combined social and cultural capital rather than their economic wealth (Bourdieu 1984). As we will see in Chapters 5 and 6, the residents possessed a collective skill set that made them formidable opponents to developers. They were well versed in city bylaws, in the history and geography of their own neighbourhoods, and had important connections inside City Hall and the press. They were also very skilled at organizing community meetings and events. This level of social capital is obviously related to the high level of education within the neighbourhood. However, it is also explained by the unique history of the neighbourhoods themselves.
iv. “The Activists”

When it comes to urban development, both the Annex and the Grange have a long history of forceful activism. Throughout the 1960s and ‘70s, the neighbourhood resisted many schemes by developers and the government to replace the aging the Victorian housing stock with modern apartment buildings and infrastructure. Most famously, a group of neighbourhood activists that included Jane Jacobs successfully opposed a plan to turn Spadina Avenue (which runs along the western border of both the Annex and the Grange) into an expressway. Stories such as these contribute to what Small (2004) calls a “neighbourhood narrative frame”: a discursive framework that residents tell to themselves and each other in order to understand who they are as a community. Annex and Grange residents who got involved in the museum expansions saw their participation not as an anomaly, but as part of the local culture of rebelliousness and activism22. While the actual residents who were engaged in the battles of the ‘60s and ‘70s are dying off, new residents learn these narrative frames through their own involvement in community meetings and residential groups. As one new Grange resident explained to me:

It’s always been an activist [neighbourhood]. Apparently this was like the centre, in the ’60s, where the anti-Vietnam war resisters, the draft dodgers, came originally. They came here and Kensington Market and so forth; all of these areas being so close. Which is actually a big plus. As some of our neighbours say, “this ain’t the Rosedale neighbourhood.” Which is a good thing! [laughs]

Here the resident draws a contrast, which was made by several of my participants, between her own neighbourhood and Rosedale23. Rosedale is one of Toronto’s wealthiest neighbourhoods and home to winding, leafy streets filled with multi-million dollar mansions. In this quote, as in most of the Rosedale comparisons, the intent is to present the Grange neighbourhood as being full of scrappy, rebellious middle-class residents who have to fight for their neighbourhood. Unlike the millionaires and billionaires of Rosedale, they do not control the system; they fight it.

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22 Taylor (forthcoming) provides a useful counter example of a neighbourhood in Toronto (the Junction) that mobilized against a development project, but lacked an existing narrative frame of activism.

23 Another telling example can be found on the Annex Resident’s Association website, which contrasts their own wealthy neighbourhood with Rosedale: “...the [Annex] area reflects Toronto’s multicultural diversity, and it includes a mix of residence types and income levels that differentiates it from, for example, Rosedale...” (Annex Residents Association 2013).
The commonality the resident draws between the Grange and Kensington Market (home to Toronto’s counterculture scene) serves a similar discursive purpose.

Even people who did not personally identify with the neighbourhood’s activist history still accepted and even valued it as a basic part of the neighbourhood identity. Another Grange resident distinguished himself and others as basic “community members” who were separate from “the activists”:

I participate [in community meetings] more as a community member. Whereas there’s some people, I call them the activists. Not to be insulting, it’s just a term. ...Sometimes they are very necessary because the large mass of residents don’t know what’s happening or don’t care. So it’s nice to have some people keeping an eye on things. ...At one point the area was going to be all broken down and built in big towers like the tower that exists just south of the park [see Figure 5.1]. And luckily there were people like [the activists] who rose up in arms and said, “whoa, stop it.” And it’s the same movement that was against the Spadina expressway.

It is unsurprising that the Annex and Grange have spawned these local cultures of activism, given that they constitute a frontline between the residential neighbourhoods to the northwest of Toronto’s downtown core, and the collection of institutional buildings and skyscrapers in the core itself. The residents I spoke with felt that they were under constant pressure by public and private organizations in the core that seemed to have an insatiable hunger for more space. As she discussed the history of the AGO’s expansions, one Grange resident expressed frustration with the constant need to expand:

So when [the AGO] came along in 1989 [with a plan to expand], we said “Hello? What do you mean? You’re contemplating another expansion? Just go away and leave us alone!” Which is when I really got into a huge neighbourhood campaign. And when they came back this time [in 2002] with another expansion, we just said “are you ever going to stop expanding?” And that’s sort of why it’s a series of broken promises, lying, misrepresentation, egomanias.

From the perspective of these residents, the Libeskind and Gehry expansions not only need to be put in the context of all of the previous museum expansions, but also the expansions of the University of Toronto, the hospitals lining University Avenue, and the condominium boom that began ramping up in the early 2000s.
This frustration over the constant expansions should not overshadow how most residents felt about the museums themselves. Despite their disagreements with the ROM and AGO leadership, many residents expressed a deep connection to the institutions. Lifelong residents told me stories about going there as children. Newer residents talked about how the museums factored into their decision to settle in the neighbourhood. Several of the most active residents had also served as volunteers for the museums. In fact it was this personal closeness to the institutions themselves that often seemed to inspire a sense of vigilance over how the museums were being run, including how they were to be renovated. For instance, one Annex resident complained about the admission prices of the ROM by reflecting on her own childhood experiences:

You know how much I used to pay to go to the ROM when I was a little kid? Nothing. My babysitter would take me to the ROM because it would cost nothing and that’s where I learned to love the ROM. ...To go with a family now as a one-off it’s almost $100 for the day, if you add it up.

As we will see in Chapter 6, some of the concessions that the AGO made to the neighbourhood in order to gain approval for its expansion was to make the gallery more accessible through free passes and more neighbourhood programming. Thus, the museums were seen as communal resources that, while valued, could be poorly managed by the specific individuals put in charge of them.

IV. Conclusion: Accounting for Urban Change

Before moving onto the analysis of the ROM and AGO expansions, it is worth considering this period in Toronto’s history within the larger context of urban studies and the “accomplishment of place”. As mentioned earlier, Molotch et al. (2000) have shown how the characteristics of place create a “rolling inertia” in which the existing assemblage of people, objects, institutions, etc. within a given locale structure the future possibilities of its development. This inertia, they argue, is what makes places distinct:

Both within the context of big events and mundane happenings… interactional routines ratify differentiation and carry it forward. This is the blood of conjuncturace and the life of what Becker (1995) calls the "inertia" of social organization. At least in regard to place, people know what to do, and in so
do, give identity to cities and regions; to use language that is neither active nor passive but both (what White and others call a "third voice"), places make themselves up (see White 1992:48). The resulting stabilities are neither preordained nor frozen in content. A kind of rolling inertia allows for continuous flux within a stable mode of operation. (p. 819, italics added)

The underlying mechanism of this theory is that “people know what to do” within particular contexts. This Goffmanesque (1959) approach to place not only emphasizes the power of unique sets of cultural cues within particular localities to structure social life, it also presents urban change as a relatively stable process.

By contrast, the urban political-economic perspective tends to emphasize a very active (even revolutionary, e.g. Harvey 2005) process of urban change in which powerful interest groups enter a locality and use their influence to make changes that help to reinforce their privileged position. Although many political-economists have highlighted local contingencies (e.g. Wilson 2004), the general emphasis is on outside processes overpowering and ultimately homogenizing local culture (e.g. Ren 2008; Ritzer 1993). The cultural character of place, therefore, is understood less as being a structuring force in itself and more as the outcome of external power struggles. The important role that Molotch et al. place on cultural cues directing development activity tends not to be the central concern of political-economic analysis. The type of development and its relationship to the local culture is typically seen as less important than the development’s role in reinforcing the power of capital.

Rather than having to choose between two competing models of urban change, identifying the existence of socio-spatial disjunctures helps to bridge the gap. We can continue to account for the power of place character and rolling inertia to shape social life and make localities distinct while also acknowledging the variability of this power and the conditions in which it is either strengthened or weakened. The Toronto example identifies a situation in which inertia was significantly weakened, creating ambiguity over how urban development should proceed and opening the door to more radical changes characteristic of the political-economic perspective. However, this does not mean that development proceeded in a cultural vacuum. The neighbourhoods surrounding the ROM and AGO had distinct characteristics in both their built form and their population. As we will see, these characteristics served as cultural cues that guided the development process. However, rather than an implicit agreement over which cues
mattered and how, open public debate emerged over multiple possibilities for museum expansion.

These dynamics have been captured in Swidler’s (1986) theory of settled and unsettled times. During settled periods, social life unfolds under the influence of a set of common, implicitly agreed upon cultural repertoires. For example, in post-war North America, the development of sprawling suburbs became a ‘natural’ way for cities to develop. It is during settled times in which inertia is at its strongest; not that cultural norms are coercively enforced, but that the path forward is usually clear and unquestioned. However, when cultural precedents break down, such as when the gridlock produced by that sprawl becomes unbearable, we enter a period of unsettled times. During these times, there is no ‘usual way of doing things’. Instead people begin to break down into opposed camps, explicitly debating the most appropriate way forward.

Thus, Toronto at the turn of the millennium was in the middle of unsettled times in terms of urban development, producing an open debate over whose vision of Toronto would become crystallized in the “usual way of doing things” as development became more commonplace and the power of inertia strengthened once again.

It is important to note that the Toronto case is not unique in producing a socio-spatial disjuncture. Forms of urban change familiar to urban political-economists such as gentrification or deindustrialization also potentially create disconnection between the characteristics of a resident population and the physical structure of a locality (e.g. Brown-Saracino 2009). Therefore, the issues that I will be taking up in the following chapters – namely the question of how different groups construct and mobilize different notions of place within the context of urban development, and how these notions eventually become crystallized in the built form of the city – are applicable well beyond the context of Toronto or to iconic architectural development in particular. They are crucial dynamics in a broad range of urban and spatial phenomena.
Chapter 4. Why Build an Icon?

The Role of the Public Institution in Iconic Architectural Development

Why did the ROM and AGO want to build iconic architecture in the first place? It was only after months of research, when I discovered just how much financial and organizational stress the projects had placed on the museums, that I even thought to answer this question. Prior to that point, I, like many of the people I spoke to about my research, just seemed to assume that it was perfectly rational that if one could, one would build large, expensive, eye-catching buildings. As I began to press the “why” question, I found the available answers unsatisfactory. “Ego”, was the response of some of my cynical colleagues. “Greatness” was the response I read among architectural critics and other urban boosters in the local newspapers.

Turning to the academic literature, the motivation behind iconic architecture has often been explained as a consequence of the rise of neoliberalism. This “neoliberal thesis” states that global political-economic trends such as the decline of the welfare state and the advancement of a market logic into the governance of cities has led to civic leaders to gamble on ambitious, aesthetically unprecedented architectural projects as a way to draw attention and hopefully tourism and capital investment toward their financially struggling cities (Kaika and Thielen 2006; González 2011; Sklair 2005; Evans 2003). The “Bilbao-effect” of the Frank Gehry-designed Museo Guggenheim is the quintessential example of this phenomenon: a single architectural structure that supposedly turned a declining industrial town into a global cultural hotspot (Evans 2003)24.

However the neoliberal thesis is a macro-level theory that based is primarily on an assumption of economic rationality. As I began to undertake my own research at the meso-level of organizations, the limitations of this approach quickly became evident. Very rarely did anyone

24 The dominance of the neoliberal thesis is due in part to the global orientation of iconic architecture. Central urban political-economic perspectives, such as regime theory (e.g. Mossberger and Stoker 2001), that are more local or regionally-focused have been more marginal in the study of iconic architecture. While relevant and worth further exploration, the application of regime theory will only be occasionally considered in this dissertation in favour of more global perspectives.
at the ROM or AGO, from the volunteers to the directors, talk about the economic renewal or growth that is so central to the neoliberal thesis. In fact, the more I learned about the ROM and AGO, the more I realized how economically irrational iconic architecture was for them. The economic returns of these types of projects are notoriously unpredictable. Even the success of the “gold standard” Guggenheim Bilbao is subject to intense debate (see Gómez 1998, Gómez and González 2001, Plaza 1999, 2006, 2008). Furthermore, even if iconic architecture consistently brought about the economic growth promised by the Bilbao-effect, it is unclear why a public cultural institution like the ROM and AGO would be willing to bare almost all the costs and risks (from deficits to the temporary closure of galleries) in order to gain what would at best be an indirect benefit.

In light of the limitations of the neoliberal thesis, we need to rethink the motivations behind iconic architecture from the perspective of the client. As I will demonstrate, the ROM and AGO are typical clients of iconic architecture in that they are public cultural institutions. What explains this affinity between public institutions and iconic architecture? What are the stakes that make this type of development so attractive? And how do these stakes relate to the larger macro trends of neoliberalism? To answer these questions, I turn to insights from both the sociology of culture and the sociology of organizations. I argue that what makes public institutions distinct from other organizational forms is their reliance on “public legitimacy”: a belief among an outside population that they represent the public good. It is only by achieving public legitimacy that public institutions are able to acquire voluntarily donated resources (e.g. government funding, private donations, voluntary labour, etc) that they require in order to sustain their existence.

This chapter proceeds in four main sections. In the first section, I focus on the motivation behind iconic architectural development, exploring the neoliberal thesis in more depth, and then demonstrating the primary role of the public institution with a dataset of iconic architecture. In the second section I undertake an organizational analysis of public institutions in general. I examine four existing perspectives (legal, normative, economic and class-based) before proposing my own perspective based on the concept of public legitimacy.
Who Builds Icons?

The third section roots my perspective on the public institution in a brief historical account of the ROM and AGO. Drawing on and extending DiMaggio’s (1982) famous study of Boston’s cultural institutions, I demonstrate how the founding of the ROM and AGO depended on the ability of elite art and artefact collectors to successfully reframe their private hobbies as a public good in order to attract donated resources and public funds. However, their success also meant that their activities became increasingly subject to government control and tied to a mandate of public education.

In the final section I return to the question of iconic architecture, examining why two organizations facing very different dilemmas would turn to the same solution. While the ROM was facing a crisis in legitimacy, the AGO was attempting to secure a major art donation. Yet, both decided to address these problems by undertaking iconic architectural development. To answer this question, I combine the neoliberal thesis with my own perspective on public institutions. The popularity of iconic architecture can be explained by the need to establish and maintain public legitimacy within a set of contextual factors that include neoliberal government policies, and a web of global political networks that foster competition.

I. Why Iconic Architecture?

i. The Neoliberal Thesis

The term neoliberalism is ubiquitous in urban studies and refers to several related phenomena. Most commonly it describes a series of concrete economic and political reforms undertaken in the United States, United Kingdom, and elsewhere in the 1980s aimed at bringing about the liberalization and deregulation of economic transactions, not only within national borders but also – and more importantly – across these borders; the privatization of state-owned enterprises and state-provided services; the use of market proxies in the residual public sector;... [and the] roll back [of] “normal” or (or routine) forms of state intervention associated with the mixed economy and the Keynesian welfare national state. (Jessop 2:454)

Additionally, neoliberalism is also used to refer to the ideological belief that justified those reforms: “that open, competitive, and unregulated markets, liberated from all forms of state interference, represent the optimal mechanism for economic development” (Brenner and Theodore 2002:350). Finally, neoliberalism has also been used to describe a particular state of
human subjectivity that “normalizes the logics of individualism and entrepreneurialism, equating individual freedom with self-interested choices, making individuals responsible for their own well-being, and redefining citizens as consumers and clients” (Leitner et al. 2007:2, also see Johnston 2008). However, to group all of these elements together, it might be best to define neoliberalism generally as a set of beliefs and practices designed to “bring all human action into the domain of the market” (Harvey 2005:3).

The rise of neoliberalism as a historical phenomenon has been particularly consequential for the governance of cities. City governments have historically played an important role in the administration of welfare state services initiated and funded by upper levels of government (Mollenkopf 1983). Thus, as neoliberal reforms were implemented at the national level, cities found themselves saddled with the responsibility of administering essential social services but lacking necessary funds. The result, according to Harvey (1989), was that urban governance began to shift from a focus on “managerialism” toward “entrepreneurialism”. Having only the private sector to turn to for possible funds, cities have increasingly had to tie service provision toward speculative investment opportunities and “public-private-partnerships”. Though Harvey’s argument is primarily based on the American experience, the concept of “urban entrepreneurialism” has been usefully applied to cases all over the world (e.g. Doucet 2013; Sandercock and Dovey 2002), including Toronto (Kipfer and Keil 2002).

For the analysis presented in this chapter, it is useful to rephrase Harvey’s arguments using Friedland and Alford’s (1991) concept of “institutional logic”, which they describe as “a set of material practices and symbolic constructions which constitutes [the] organizing principles” of an institution (p.248). Institutional logics provide individuals and organizations with acceptable paths of action and cognitive tools required to make sense of their situation (Vaughan 2002). Neoliberalism, therefore, represents a trend where more and more areas of social life get reordered according to the logic of the capitalist market. The transition from managerialism to entrepreneurialism described by Harvey should be understood as a shift in urban governance away from the logics of democracy and state bureaucracy toward that of the market.

The actual strategies of entrepreneurialism vary across time and between places. However, due to the decline of the industrial sector, most western cities have targeted the cultural or symbolic
economy, which includes tourism, retail, or cultural production (Zukin 1995). Culture plays a central role not only because it is a growing sector (Markusen 2006; Scott 1997), but also because it is thought to stimulate local economic growth on a larger scale (Florida 2002; Miles and Paddison 2005). City governments have sought to revive their declining industrial landscape by investing in speculative development projects that produce spectacular and cutting edge cultural destinations, which include shopping malls, art districts, casinos, and even uniquely designed urban furniture (Voyce 2006; Mommaas 2004; Hannigan 2007b; Sandercock and Dovey 2002; Julier 2005).

Even within the cultural sector, the definition of “cutting edge” changes over time. Hannigan (2007a) has documented the decline in popularity of family-friendly shopping malls and sports stadiums in favour of places dedicated to the consumption of high culture and aimed at attracting the so-called “creative class” (Florida 2002). In this move toward high culture, starchitecture is perhaps the most high profile form of development. The Guggenheim Bilbao is held up by urban planners, media commentators, and business interests as an exemplar of how investment in landmark cultural sites with unique and compelling architecture can act as a catalyst for general economic growth within an entire city (i.e. the so-called “Bilbao effect”, Rybczynski 2002) (Plaza 2008; González 2011; Evans 2003).

The appeal of starchitecture within cities can only be fully understood in the context of global networks of corporate, state, professional, and media actors that form an international organizational field, encouraging cities to get involved in global competition over producing the best architectural icons (Sklair 2005; McNeill 2005; Gonzalez 2011). The role of these networks highlights the fact that starchitecture is a fundamentally global phenomenon (Evans 2003). Starchitecture, perhaps more than any other cultural urbanization strategy, tempts struggling cities with the potential to tap into the powerful networks of global trade and investment.

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25 As we will see, the ROM itself conforms closely to Hannigan’s (2007a) thesis, having embraced a strategy of “edutainment” and “themed” environments in the 1990s under director Lindsay Sharpe. However, the Libeskind-designed expansion under director William Thorsell represented a dramatic step in the opposite direction through the adoption of a modern, minimalist aesthetic reminiscent of an art gallery.
ii. Who Builds Iconic Architecture?

While the neoliberal thesis and existing literature have focused more on the macro political-economic conditions that underlie iconic architecture, it is important that we do not lose sight of the immediate parties that actually hire celebrity architects and finance their unique buildings. As mentioned, from a client’s perspective there are many reasons to believe that starchitecture is a particularly unattractive form of development. So who exactly are the clients supporting this global trend?

To answer this question, I have compiled a dataset of iconic buildings categorized by development type (e.g. public art museum, private residence, corporate headquarters, etc). These buildings were gathered from the selected works listed for all of the winners on the official Pritzker Prize website (Hyatt Foundation 2011). Though not an exact measure, the prize is a concrete indicator that is often used to operationalize the vague concept of “starchitect” (Fuerst, McAllister, and Murray 2011; McNeill 2005:502). Figure 4.1 provides a breakdown of the buildings by development type, dividing them into public, commercial, and other. Table 4.1 provides a list of the individual prize winners and the percentage of their portfolio that is non-commercial.
It is evident from the data that iconic architecture is clearly a public sector activity, particularly among cultural institutions that commission museums, performance halls, and other cultural spaces. However, starchitects are also hired to design more mundane public spaces like government offices, housing, and transportation hubs. The much lower number of commercial
developments is also notable given the central role of the market in the neoliberal thesis. If the popularity of starchitecture was directly tied to the rise of a market logic in urban governance, we might expect a larger portion of buildings designed for retail, corporate headquarters, or condominiums. At least among Pritzker Prize winners, there is little support for this claim. What these results tell us is that private sector’s involvement in iconic architecture is indirect.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Winner</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Winner</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Philip Johnson</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Tadao Ando</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Luis Barragan</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Rafael Moneo</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>James Stirling</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Sverre Fehn</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Kevin Roche</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Renzo Piano</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>I.M. Pei</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Norman Foster</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Richard Meier</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Rem Koolhaas</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Hans Hollein</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Jacques Herzog &amp; Pierre de Meuron</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Gottfried Bohn</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Glenn Murcutt</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Kenzo Tange</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Jorn Utzon</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Oscar Niemeyer</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Zaha Hadid</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Gordon Bunshaft</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Thom Mayne</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Frank Gehry</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Paulo Mendes da Rocha</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Aldo Rossi</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Richard Rogers</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Robert Venturi</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Jean Nouvel</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Alvaro Siza</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Peter Zumthor</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Fumihiko Maki</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Kazuyo Sejima &amp; Ryue Nishizawa</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Christian de Portzamparc</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Eduardo Souto de Moura</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.1. Proportion of non-commercial buildings by Pritzker Prize winners, 1979-2011**

The average proportion of non-commercial buildings is 68%.

The primary role of public cultural institutions is corroborated with a brief consideration of some of the most famous works of starchitecture: the Museo Guggenheim in Bilbao, the Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, the Sydney Opera House, and the Centre Pompidou in Paris. How do we understand the affinity between public cultural institutions and this trend in architecture? What is at stake for these institutions that motivates them toward building iconic structures, given the noted drawbacks? The neoliberal thesis provides us with some contextual information, but not the full answers to these questions. Public cultural institutions do not generate profit for investors. The hope of stimulating the local economy through a “Bilbao effect” may provide public institutions with some indirect benefits, but it would be a stretch to think that it is the primary concern of their leadership. Thus, to better understand the role of the public cultural institution in supporting the starchitect phenomenon, we must go beyond the neoliberal thesis and examine this unique organizational form in more detail.
II. The Public Cultural Institution

The role of public institutions in the production of culture is extremely important within Western society. Major public museums, galleries, symphony and theatre companies, broadcasters, and other organizations have often played central roles in shaping their respective fields. It is unsurprising, therefore, that a tremendous amount of research has been conducted by sociologists of culture that examines this organizational form. We know, for instance, about the historical development of public institutions (DiMaggio 1982; Peterson 1986), about their sources of funding and its impact on their programming decisions (Alexander 1996a, 1996b; Useem and Kutner 1986), about the audiences who consume such programming (Gaav and Potapova 1996; DiMaggio 1996; Verdaasdonk et al. 1996; Kraicman 1996; Smith and Wolf 1996; Kirchberg 1996; Glynn, Bhattacharya, and Rao 1996), and about the different management styles and internal structures within public institutions (Peterson 1986; DiMaggio 1986b; Glynn 2002; Oakes, Townley, and Cooper 1998). Sociologists of culture have, therefore, developed a strong understanding of specific aspects of public institutions and of many of the activities in which they are engaged. However there has been very little work done on theorizing a general model that tells us exactly what public institutions are, and how they are sociologically distinct from other organizational forms.

Public institutions are extremely variable in their histories, mandates, resources, and internal structures, so it may be tempting to doubt the usefulness of a general model. Yet, in the study of private, for-profit cultural producers (which are at least as diverse as public institutions) we do have such a model. We acknowledge that they all share an underlying profit-motive. Whether we are studying art dealers (e.g. Becker 1982) or television executives (e.g. Bielby and Bielby 1994), we are able to draw a commonality in the fact that both are generally interested in investing in pieces of art/culture (whether buying a painting or financing and broadcasting a television show) with the intension of extracting surplus value (through resale at an auction or selling advertising time). This organizational model has been extremely useful within the

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26 Comparing the role of the critic in the art world and in broadcast television reveals the importance of having a baseline organizational model for for-profit cultural producers. In the art world, critical reviews offer the most reliable prediction of which paintings are likely to become the most economically valuable. Thus, the art critic plays a central role in the valuation of art (Becker 1982). However, because broadcasters and their advertisers have direct
production of culture perspective as an alternative to cultural producers’ own “misrecognized” explanations of their practices (Bourdieu 1984; Peterson and Anand 2004). However, as non-profit organizations that are relatively insulated from the market, public institutions are a poor fit for this profit-oriented model. Thus a second model is required specifically for non-profit, public cultural producers.

i. Existing Perspectives on the Public Institution

Though few sociologists of culture have attempted to theorize a general model of the public institution, we can identify at least four existing perspectives on what public institutions are, how they work, why they exist, and what makes them unique from other organizational forms. I call these perspectives the (1) legal, (2) normative, (3) economic, and (4) class-based approaches to public institutions. Though none of these perspectives are completely sufficient for sociological analysis, they do provide a good starting point.

First, from a legal perspective, we can say that public institutions exist as separate legal entities that are distinct from other organizational forms (most notably the for-profit corporation). While public institutions can be quite diverse on paper (even within the same polity), there are a few common legal characteristics that can be identified. First, they are incorporated without share capital. Thus, they are not privately owned by shareholders. Second, like a for-profit corporation, they are run by a board of governors. As there are no shareholders to vote for these governors, methods of selection are quite diverse. The ROM and the AGO were both established by acts of provincial parliament which outline exactly how the boards of governors are selected and by whom. Finally, in the absence of a clear for-profit motive, public institutions also typically have a legal mandate that provides some basic direction for their leadership. However, as DiMaggio (1982) has argued, these mandates are often ambiguous enough to “accommodate a range of conflicting purposes and changing ends” (p.39).
The economist Thomas Piketty (2014) distinguishes two types of public institutions: “foundations” which are “financed primarily by gifts from private individuals” and “government organizations” that “depend primarily on public subsidies” (p.182). As he admits, however, it is difficult in practice to make this distinction since many public institutions are financed through a combination of public subsidies and private gifts and the balance may fluctuate widely over time (as is the case for both the ROM and AGO). Furthermore, it is difficult to distinguish foundations from the “various legal structures… used by wealthy individuals to manage their assets and further their private interests” (p.183).

While understanding the laws that govern cultural production is important (Griswold 1981; Peterson and Anand 2004:315), the legal perspective leaves many unanswered questions. What public institutions look like on paper tells us little about why they exist or the overall logic by which they operate. Furthermore, we must avoid collapsing the distinction between de facto and de jure organizations. The legal status of an organization is just one of the factors contributing to the logic by which it operates. Some organizations that are legally public may nonetheless operate very similarly to private organizations, and visa versa. Thus, a sociological model of the public institution cannot limit itself to what is outlined in law.

Though the legal perspective may provide the clearest definition of the public institution, the vast majority of academic and popular literature adopts a normative approach. The normative approach is not so much interested in explaining what public institutions are or how they work, but rather how they should work. This approach takes for granted that public institutions exist to serve important social functions and, following from this assumption, addresses questions such as how well public institutions are fulfilling their function and how they can be strengthened. A significant amount of research looks at contemporary challenges that face public institutions such as the emergence of new technologies, scarcity of government funding, demographic shifts, and other disruptive social changes (Murdock 2004; Collins et al. 2001; Rowland and Tracey 1990; DiMaggio 1986b). Other research takes a critical approach by evaluating how well public institutions live up to certain democratic ideals such as transparency, accountability, and inclusivity (Hetherington 2003; Sandell 2003; Pieterse 1997). The normative debates surrounding public institutions are important and sociologists have a lot to contribute. However there are risks involved with linking a research agenda to the assumption that public institutions
exist to represent the public good. Most importantly, such an assumption may limit our ability to think critically about the origins and sociological role of public institutions and consider possible alternative explanations that have nothing to do with the ‘public good’.

Unlike the normative perspective, the economic perspective does not make any assumptions about the public good. Instead, public institutions are understood to represent the most economically efficient means to a desired end. Hansmann (1986) argues that public institutions amount to voluntary price discrimination where some consumers elect to pay more than others by providing donations in addition to the cost of admission. Given that certain forms of cultural production have high fixed costs and low marginal costs (e.g. museum exhibitions or theatrical performances), voluntary price discrimination is more efficient than distributing the cost of production equally across all consumers (See Hansmann 1986 for a more detailed explanation). Historical sociological accounts have offered some support to this line of argument, particularly as it applies to the early formation of classical symphony orchestras in the United States (Dowd et al. 2002:39-41).

While providing some economic justification for the feasibility of public institutions and their affinity with certain forms of cultural production, the economic perspective still leaves some unanswered questions and problematic assumptions when examined from a more sociological perspective. First, the economic rationality assumed in this perspective is a poor model for how the leaders of public institutions actually think. Second, we cannot use issues of economic efficiency to explain why some consumers would be willing to pay more through donations to accommodate freeloaders who reap the benefits while contributing nothing. Nor could we use efficiency to explain why some forms of cultural production attract donations while others do not. To answer these questions, we require examining issues of meaning, status, and legitimacy.

The last perspective, which I term class-based, places the logic of the public institution squarely within the interests of the upper class. This perspective is perhaps best exemplified in DiMaggio’s (1982) classic study of the formation of public institutions in 19th century Boston. Like the economic perspective and unlike the normative perspective, DiMaggio does not assume that there is any larger public good that underlies public institutions (at least not during their founding). Instead he argues that public institutions facilitated class reproduction by enshrining
the cultural tastes of the upper class as naturally superior and more refined. The phenomenon is also identified by Bourdieu (1984; 1993) who refers to it as “misrecognition”. Though I will not outline them here, DiMaggio points out various characteristics of public institutions that made this organizational form particularly useful in fulfilling the function of class reproduction (see DiMaggio 1982:38-39).

The connection that DiMaggio and Bourdieu identify between public cultural institutions and class interest has been highly influential within the sociology of culture. However there are some significant problems that arise when we reduce the organizational logic of public institutions to class interest. DiMaggio (1986a) himself admits that public institutions have changed substantially since the 19th century. Two historical developments in particular have created some separation between the interests of the upper class and the activities of public institutions. First, a class of cultural and managerial professionals now exists that run the day to day (and often long term) operations of public institutions (Glynn 2002; Peterson 1986; DiMaggio 1986a). This class must be seen as having their own interests and practices and they cannot be reduced to either members or puppets of economic or political elites. Second, the financial support for contemporary public institutions comes from a diversity of sources including governments, private foundations, admission prices, and membership fees. These two developments do not mean that class interest has become marginalized in the operation of public institutions, only that class interest can no longer stand in as a model for how public institutions work.

On their own, none of these existing perspectives provide a full sociological model that defines what public institutions are, how they work, and what makes them distinct from other organizational forms. Instead, each of them reduces public institutions to some external factor: a set of legal guidelines and a mandate, some abstract notion of the public good, economic efficiency, or class-interest. Without a doubt, each of these factors is important to the overall logic by which public institutions operate, but we should see them as environmental factors rather than actually constituting public institutions themselves. Thus, we need to re-examine what makes the public institution unique. I begin this examination with the question of interest provoked by the normative perspective: do public institutions have different interests than private organizations?
ii. The Question of Interest

According to the normative perspective, and the way public institutions present themselves, public institutions are distinct because they serve more communitarian or selfless interests that are associated with the public good, whereas private organizations are motivated primarily by self-interest (e.g. profit-making). This focus on interest presents some difficulties for sociologists, however. The most immediate problem is that it would be difficult to determine exactly what the public good is (both for the sociologists and for the public institution itself). Even if we were to overcome this difficulty, it is generally misleading to reduce the workings of complex organizations to a personalized “interest” anyway. Rather, as DiMaggio and Powell (1991) assert, the way complex organizations work “represents collective outcomes that are not the simple sum of individual interests” (p.9). Public institutions, like all other organizational forms, are made up of a collection of actors with different job descriptions, facing different sets of constraints, resources, and goals. Though we might be able to identify particular interests driving the practices of particular organizations within a given time and place (e.g. like an interest in building an architectural expansion), interest in general is too vague and poorly defined to serve as the defining feature of the public institution.

Even when we move down to the level of individual actors within organizations, interest still presents a problem. Though we may be tempted to believe that members of public institutions are more selfless than those in private organizations, this is also too weak and unfounded an assertion to stand as the basis of a model. It is unreasonable to assume, for instance, that a museum curator is significantly less interested in advancing his own career than a computer programmer. Or that a computer programmer is less interested in the success of her organization or the public as a whole than a curator. Therefore I would agree with both the economic and class-based perspectives in rejecting any assumption that public institutions are necessarily more selfless and communitarian in their interests, or more willing to place their own survival in jeopardy than private organizations.

iii. Donated Resources

So if public institutions cannot be distinguished based on the interests that direct them, then what makes them unique? I would argue that it is actually the resources available to public institutions that distinguish them, and it is these resources that should serve as a starting point for
building a theoretical model. In particular, public institutions have the unique ability to motivate voluntary support from outsiders with no formal expectation that they will provide anything directly in return. In other words, public institutions are unique in receiving *donated* resources. The most important of these resources are economic. Public institutions only exist to the extent that they receive government funding or grants, or private donations. Almost as important, though perhaps underappreciated, is the role that volunteering plays as a form of economic support. Both the ROM and the AGO benefit enormously from voluntary labour, in many cases from highly educated people engaging in high-skill work such as administration and public education. Overall, volunteers make up roughly 50% of the labour force for both institutions. Without these economic resources – offered voluntarily and for no immediate or significant trade-off – public institutions could not be sustained.

Certain political resources are also provided to public institutions that are unavailable to private organizations. The ROM and the AGO received important political support, for instance, from Toronto City Hall. While they did not offer any significant economic support, City Hall did contribute to the expansion projects by providing a series of bureaucratic shortcuts and exemptions. By-laws that apply to usual development projects were quickly overturned for the ROM and the AGO, and others were not enforced. In one of the more contested moves, a municipal committee forced street vendors off the sidewalk in front of the ROM by modifying their vending licenses, thereby allowing for an unobstructed view of the new architecture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Organization</th>
<th>Method of Resource Acquisition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For-profit business</td>
<td>Resources acquired in exchange for goods or services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private club</td>
<td>Resources acquired in exchange for access/social inclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public institutions</td>
<td>Resources donated under the assumption that they will be used for a public good.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2. Research acquisition by type of organization

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27 DiMaggio (1982) uses the term “voluntary association” rather than private club, but defines a similar concept: “close associations of individuals (sometimes incorporated, sometimes not) to further the aims of the participating members, rather than of the community as a whole” (p.37).
Other than a few cases of economic self-sufficiency, almost all organizations need to acquire external resources in order to sustain themselves. However, where and how these resources are acquired differs across organizational forms. Table 4.2 contrasts public institutions with other organizational forms. For-profit businesses attain resources through commercial activity: extracting surplus value through the exchange of goods and services. Private clubs on the other hand sell access to prestigious social networks. Without a doubt, actually existing public institutions employ these two strategies regularly. Public institutions rely increasingly on commercial activity to sustain themselves by charging admission prices, running gift shops, or investing endowment funds. Likewise, public institutions often maintain stratified levels of accessibility and will open up the most exclusive levels only to their highest donors. Therefore, public institutions do act like for-profit business and private clubs under certain circumstances. Nonetheless, I would argue that what is distinctive about the public institution in general, and what defines it as an organizational form, is the third method of resource acquisition: the voluntary donation that is made with no immediate or substantial trade-off. Neither of the other organizational forms can claim to have the ability to inspire support without offering something immediately in return. Thus, we may think of this definition of a public institution as a Weberian “ideal type”, created by abstracting certain analytically-useful characteristics of a phenomenon even though actual reality may never confirm perfectly to that phenomenon (Weber 1949).

iv. Public Legitimacy

If public institutions are distinct in being able to attain these donated resources the question then becomes: what is the unique characteristic of these organizations that provides this access and that is missing from private organizations? I would argue that this characteristic is not necessarily observable within the public institutions themselves, but rather in their relationship to the outside population – a belief shared by a sufficient segment of that population that motivates them to support the institution. I term this characteristic public legitimacy. Public legitimacy can be defined simply as a belief among outsiders that an organization represents the public good. However, it is worth examining both the term “legitimacy” and “public” in some more detail.

Originally introduced to sociology through Max Weber’s (1968) discussion of “legitimate domination”, the concept of legitimacy has since been abstracted beyond its association with
political leadership. Organizational theory defines legitimacy more broadly as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman 1995). In the case of public legitimacy, the “socially constructed system of norms” is the institutional logic of democracy (Friedland and Alford 1991). Democratic systems are based on a series of assumptions about reality, including the existence of a “public”, and the notion that this public can form its own collective goals and interests that are independent of any one particular individual (Habermas 1991). Public institutions can be seen, in principle, as the vehicles through which public interests are pursued.

While we can distinguish the private interests of individual actors and collectively produced public interests, we must also acknowledge that the public is fragmented and stratified. Publics are made up of various constituencies, each with their own unique vision of the public good, and with different levels of power available to realize these visions. This is also true within the cultural sector, since cultural preferences differ greatly across various lines of social cleavage (Bourdieu 1984). Public institutions are as much defined by who accepts their legitimacy as they are by the establishment of that legitimacy in the first place. As their main sources of their support shift, so too do the perceived mandates of public institutions.

Support for public cultural institutions in North America can be traced from their founding by the urban bourgeoisie in the 19th century (DiMaggio 1982), to the welfare state in the early 20th century (DiMaggio 1986; Peterson 1986; Cavendish 1986), and finally to the corporate sector and non-governmental foundations as government funding has been cut back (Alexander 1996b). Internal changes within public cultural institutions have mirrored their shifting support base. The early charismatic impresarios were eventually replaced by a professional class of arts administrators (Peterson 1986; DiMaggio 1986), and more recently cultural institutions have been pressured to adopt more business-oriented practices (Oakes, Townley, and Cooper 1998). Furthermore, because notions of the public good vary across social groups, public legitimation is

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28 The debate over the ontological and epistemological existence of a public interest as distinct from individual private interests is well known (see Calhoun 1998), but it is not the concern of this study. For my purposes, it is enough to accept that the notion of a public interest is an underlying assumption of democratic institutions – part of their “logic”.
necessarily a contested process that often forces public institutions to reconcile or select among competing expectations (Cavendish 1986; Alexander 1996a), such as between a commitment to high culture and democratic inclusion (Zolberg 1986). However, despite their reliance on outside funding and support, evidence suggests that public institutions do maintain a significant level of organizational autonomy (Alexander 1996a). Therefore, it is important that we regard them as independent players, actively managing their public legitimacy in a changing environment (Alexander 1998).

One possible objection to the notion of public legitimacy may be the observation that many of the donations made to public institutions are done in order to derive personal prestige rather than to contribute to any perceived greater good. In other words, donations are motivated by private interests rather than public. Nonetheless, in order for a donor to derive personal prestige from supporting a public institution, that institution must still be seen as contributing to the public good. For example, one can derive personal prestige from donating to a children’s hospital because people generally accept that the hospital represents a public good. Thus, public legitimacy is still a central part of the picture.

The necessity of public legitimacy to the functioning of public institutions is clear even if we adopt class-based approach. As mentioned above, a class-based approach argues that public institutions exist to recreate class divisions by fostering a sense of misrecognition that leads all classes to accept bourgeois tastes as superior (Bourdieu 1984; DiMaggio 1982). However, misrecognition is dependent on the fact that the activities of the public institution have achieved some widespread legitimacy. Without legitimacy, public institutions are revealed as bourgeois organizations serving their own interests. At this point they cease to be public institutions and, sociologically speaking, become little more than private clubs. The existence of legitimacy allows social inequalities to become acceptable, naturalized, and therefore reinforced (Johnson et al. 2006:69-70).

Though far more could be said to flush out the concepts of “public” and “legitimacy”, it serves the purposes of this chapter to assert that the organizational logic of the public institution revolves around strategies dedicated toward building public legitimacy. Public legitimacy is to public cultural organizations what profit is to private cultural producers: it sustains the
organization’s ability to continue to act as a cultural producer. Without legitimacy, public institutions must either transition to another organization form (i.e. privatize), or cease operation. Fully understanding why public cultural institutions produce the types of culture they do, therefore, needs to be understood as part of their broader task of building and renewing public legitimacy.

v. Building Public Legitimation

Studies of social institutions typically depict legitimacy as being taken for granted or habitualized (Boin and Christensen 2008; DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Berger and Luckmann 1966). Processes of legitimation are also seen as generally moving from explicit beliefs held by a few to implicit beliefs held by many (Johnson et al. 2006). This assertion, however, masks the constant negotiation that public institutions must engage in order to maintain and build their public legitimacy. There are a few reasons for why organizations within the cultural sector in particular should not be seen as riding a silent wave of established public acceptance.

First, the legitimation of most public institutions is tied to a claim that they address important societal problems (Boin and Christensen 2008:275). Many public institutions make claims that are unambiguous and subject to large consensus. It is clear, for instance, why we need a medical or transportation system. However, the justifications for public cultural institutions are typically unclear and continually shifting. Cultural institutions are often required to jump from one justification to another depending on their current projects, or even balance multiple justifications at once. The ROM and AGO expansions were supported by both a Liberal federal government and Conservative provincial government, but their support was justified for two different reasons. While the federal government was concerned with building national identity, the provincial government saw the projects as an economic development tool that contributed to tourism (Jenkins 2005)29.

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29 Public cultural institutions in Toronto and elsewhere have increasingly pointed to the public good that cultural production can bring by stimulating tourism and economic development. This justification has been a response on the part of the institutions to the popularity of Richard Florida’s (2006) “creative class” thesis, which argues that cities with cutting edge cultural opportunities attract high-skilled migrants (i.e. the creative class).
Second, most public institutions, once established, gain a monopoly over the particular societal problem that they were designed to address. There is, for instance, only one police service or subway system. These public institutions can rely on the fact that they provide the only tangible or “lived” option for fulfilling their societal function, and possible alternatives are always speculative and risky. Cultural institutions cannot claim such a monopoly. Not only do they compete against market-based and informal/amateur producers, they also compete against each other. Although public cultural institutions tend to fit into separate niches, their activities do overlap and they compete for visitors, exhibitions, and donations or grants.

Finally, the funding structure of public cultural institutions has changed substantially over the past few decades as annual government funding has been replaced with one-time grants and donations from a variety of sources. In the United States, the strong government backing of cultural institutions under the New Deal of the 1930s was largely scaled back in the 1980s (DiMaggio 1986b). As a result, cultural institutions turned to public foundations and for-profit corporations for assistance (Alexander 1996b; Useem and Kutner 1986). In Canada as well, annual government funding for operational costs has seen a decline relative to one-time grants for special projects (Jenkins 2009). The implication of these funding changes is that public institutions often have to move from one funding source to the next, making explicit cases for why they deserve support. Funding is tied to applications, which means that it is also tied to evaluation. This arrangement contrasts with other public institutions that receive funding mainly in the form of annual operating budgets. Institutions such as these need only protect their existing budget and do not have to actively request funding from different sources.

For these reasons, the public legitimacy of cultural institutions cannot be seen as only implicit, habitual, and self-reinforcing. The need to constantly build and renew public legitimacy must be seen as part of the regular work that public cultural institutions do. It is also work that must be integrated into the general activities required to maintain a complex organization. This presents what Boin and Christensen (2008) call a “double challenge: [institutions] must build an effective way of working while maintaining (or gaining) the support of [their] stakeholders” (p.275). Public institutions are faced with many of the same practical challenges that face private cultural producers: meeting budgetary constraints, providing satisfactory service to clients, competing with other organizations over finite resources, etc. In many cases the solutions to these
challenges can be construed as anti-public (e.g. raising admission prices or maintaining secrecy). Therefore, public institutions must maintain a careful balancing act between convincing outsiders that they are serving the public good, while adopting strategies to serve their own organizational needs. Identifying this dilemma suggests that research into public institutions would benefit from a dramaturgical approach (Goffman 1959). The organizational logic of public institutions involves balancing their front stage work designed to continually build public legitimacy and attract public resources (the work that makes them unique from private organizations), with the back stage activities of sustaining a complex organization (which they share in common with private organizations). In Chapter 6 I will take up such an analysis by examining the ROM and AGO’s development process.

III. A Brief History of the ROM and AGO

A brief examination of the history of the ROM and AGO highlights the importance of public legitimacy. Like DiMaggio’s (1982) study of the origins of Boston’s public cultural institutions, the ROM and AGO’s history begins with a small group of urban bourgeoisie. In fact, the founding of both museums was made possible largely due to the efforts of one wealthy financier from Toronto: Sir Byron Edmund Walker (1848-1924). But Walker was not the Toronto equivalent of an old-money Brahmin. Rather, he was born to English immigrants on a farm in rural Ontario and was schooled only until the age of 12 (Robertson 2006; Marshall 1971). Nonetheless, Walker managed to secure a job with the upstart Canadian Bank of Commerce and would eventually rise to become its president. Along the way, he spent several years working for the bank in New York City. There, he developed an interest in the collection of art and artefacts and made enough money to support those hobbies.
Walker’s interest in collecting continued when he returned to Toronto and led him into partnerships that would eventually form the basis for the ROM and AGO. One of these partnerships was with a young archaeologist named Charles Currelly who had been working on an excavation in Egypt. During his time in Egypt, Currelly had been acquiring artefacts for wealthy collectors in England and Canada. Eventually his collection work eclipsed his archaeological work and he expanded his hunt into the antique markets of Europe. This was a period where cultural artefacts were flooding into Europe from the colonies and no international laws had been established restricting their sale or relocation (Cruise 1978). Correspondence between Walker and Currelly during this period reveal that the opportunities available to acquire new artefacts always surpassed the funds available to the group of wealthy Torontonians who had started to collectively finance Currelly’s activities (Dickson 1986). It was due to this financial pressure that Walker turned to the Government of Ontario and the University of Toronto (where he was a member of the board of governors) for economic support. After years of lobbying other members of Toronto’s elite and the provincial legislature, Walker’s efforts were finally met with success when the Ontario government announced the formation of a Royal Ontario Museum in 1912. Two years later the ROM’s new building opened on the outskirts of
the University of Toronto campus, having been jointly financed by the university and the Government of Ontario.

Figure 4.3. Original ROM building
Completed 1914. Photo from City of Toronto Archives (fonds 1231, item 134).

The early history of the AGO follows a similar pattern to the ROM. For decades the Ontario Society for the Arts, a private club for amateur artists, had been looking for a permanent gallery in which to house their artwork. Walker, a patron of the society’s work, eventually joined their campaign. By March of 1900 the “Art Museum of Toronto” (AMT) became an officially chartered corporation, though it still lacked a permanent building. For almost a decade Walker attempted to raise the required funds through Toronto’s network of economic and intellectual elites, but was ultimately unsuccessful. The AMT eventually acquired its building in 1909 by inheriting the Grange after the death of Harriet Smith, wife of Goldwin Smith (an intellectual and professor who sat with Walker on the University of Toronto’s board of governors). As with the ROM, the acquisition of the new building opened up a closer relationship between the AMT and the government. In this case it was the City of Toronto that gave the fledging AMT an annual operating budget and exempted it from property taxes. Over the years, as it expanded into purpose-built galleries surrounding the Grange, the AMT became increasingly dependent on
government subsidies, particularly from the province. Reflecting its dependency on the Government of Ontario, the AMT was renamed the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1966\(^\text{30}\).

**Figure 4.4. The Grange**
Built in 1817. Photo from City of Toronto Archives (fonds 1244, item 304).

What is important to note about the early history of these museums is the transition of a particular set of social practices that were originally the private hobby of a small group of elites to the jurisdiction of newly formed publicly-chartered, publicly-funded institutions. Often historical accounts of museums and other public cultural institutions adopt the normative perspective, taking for granted that a basic public need for these institutions has always existed and were just waiting for the arrival of particularly ambitious founders to fulfill that need. However, as Kimmel (1992) notes, it was not at all obvious in late 19\(^\text{th}\) century Toronto that the State had any business establishing museums and galleries. Instead, “cultural entrepreneurs” (DiMaggio 1982) like Walker needed to make a case for why art and artefact collecting was a public good rather than a private interest. In other words, Walker needed to build public legitimacy for what was at the time just a personal hobby. Whether or not Walker was actually

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\(^{30}\) For a full description of the AGO’s early history, see Kimmel (1992).
sincere in claim to represent the public good (all evidence points to the fact that he was), the history of the ROM and AGO makes clear that what really motivated the first concrete steps toward establishing these institutions was the need to acquire donated resources – not only from Walker’s immediate social networks, but also from the public as a whole. Had Walker been unsuccessful in convincing anyone of the public legitimacy of his activities, the ROM and AGO might have ended up looking more like private golf or yachting clubs than the public institutions we see today.

How does this history of the ROM and AGO compare to DiMaggio’s study? There are some clear parallels between the circle of Toronto elites to which Walker and Goldwin Smith belonged, and the Boston Brahmins. Both groups constituted “organization-forming status groups” tied closely together through social networks, business ventures and a university (the University of Toronto and Harvard) (DiMaggio 1982:45). However, there are also contextual factors that distinguish the two cases. DiMaggio was primarily interested in demonstrating how the founding of non-profit cultural institutions in the late 18th century resulted in the establishment of a strong division between high and popular culture where one had not previously existed. By the time the ROM and AGO were founded in the early 20th century, this division was already well established. Walker and his associates did not need to carve out a cultural genre for veneration. They simply modeled themselves on the museums and galleries flourishing in the northeastern cities of the United States. Another important difference is that the ROM and AGO were primarily concerned with collection rather than production – an activity that was already confined to the economically well-off.

However, the most important difference is the role of the State. Whereas the Brahmins commanded enough economic clout to finance museums and symphonies on their own, Walker and his colleagues needed to appeal to the general public in order to support their activities. Of course in practice this meant appealing to cabinet ministers and members of parliament, many of whom were elites themselves. Nonetheless, in order to justify the spending of public funds on the activities of Currelly in Europe and Egypt or on a new gallery for the Ontario Society for the Arts, their activities needed to be discursively repositioned from the private realm to the public. In this transition, access to art and artefacts became a right rather than a privilege. Their “use-value” transitioned from entertainment or personal curiosity to public education and
enlightenment. And, discursively at least, figures like Currelly ceased to be private connoisseurs and became public servants.

While the central role of the State in the ROM and AGO’s history highlight this private/public dichotomy, it is visible in DiMaggio’s study as well. Though the Brahmins were not dependent on the State, in founding their cultural institutions they still felt the need to emphasize the public nature of their activities and established certain organizational strategies designed to convey this emphasis such as free admissions and a mandate of public education. As mentioned earlier, the hegemonic qualities of high culture depend on its acceptance as a universal – that is, public – good.

The decades that followed the founding of the museums would be characterized by what Zolberg (1986) calls a “tension in mission” between the private collection and study of objects by the founders, and the democratic mandate toward public exhibition and education (see Dickson 1986, Chapter 6)\textsuperscript{31}. However, the development of the two museums over the course of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century follows the general transitions described earlier. The founding generation of impresarios and connoisseurs retired and were replaced by a new generation of professionally trained curators and museum administrators. The museums themselves became increasingly entwined in the expanding provincial welfare state which financed ambitious, multi-stage expansion plans for both institutions throughout the 1960s, ‘70s, and ‘80s. As we saw in Chapter 3, both institutions were in a constant state of growth during this period, as was their audience. Annual attendance figures for the ROM reached one million by the late 1970s.

By the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century a new “tension in mission” had arisen. By this point the museums’ commitment to public education was no longer a matter of debate. The content of public education, however, was increasingly the source of a philosophical divide between curators who

\textsuperscript{31} The secondary status of education in the early days of the ROM was evidenced by the division of labour. While the “keepers” of the collections (they were not yet referred to as curators) were male professors from the University of Toronto, it was female volunteers who – through their own initiative – began to establish educational programming with the reluctant acceptance of the board. In particular, Ruth Home was instrumental in shaping many of the early educational policies for the ROM during the 1920s and ‘30s. In a cruel irony, when the ROM decided to formalized the role of education in its organizational structure, they appointed a male director to be Home’s superior. In response, she resigned and moved to the AGO-affiliated College of Art (now OCAD).
preferred serious, challenging, and academically rigorous educational programs and museum administrators who favoured attracting larger audiences with more entertaining (and perhaps “dumbed down”) programming. Hannigan (1998) calls the latter strategy “edutainment” and describes it as “the joining together of educational and cultural activities with the commerce and technology of the entertainment world” (p.92).

For the ROM, the rise of edutainment happened gradually. The first major step occurred during the creation of new galleries accompanying the expansions of the 1970s at the hands of professional designers and others whose job description related specifically to visitor experience rather than academic research. The ROM’s Mankind Discovering plan called for galleries to be organized not according to the museum’s research departments, but around a visitor-centered narrative. Not hiding his own nostalgia, the historian Lovat Dickson (1986) describes these changes:

In the plans of the designers and others charged with the task of devising the exhibits for the Museum, galleries were no longer regarded as places to muse, to wonder, to allow the imagination free range, or simply to learn about the past. Now the visitor was to be taken firmly by the hand and conducted through what has come to be called a ‘learning experience’. ‘Story-line’ became an increasingly common part of the terminology of gallery design. Though there were many who deplored the new didacticism as intellectual authoritarianism and as an attempt to channel rather than to expand the viewer’s thinking, the new approach to museum exhibits was, in part at least, a response to public demand. Audiences served by museums were now huge compared with those of fifty years earlier. (p.172)

Gone were the days of large rooms filled with glass cabinets holding neatly laid out artefacts (see Figure 4.5). In their place were narrow, darkened hallways leading from one diorama to the next, complete with special effects and multimedia displays.
The ROM’s embrace of edutainment peaked in the late 1990s under the tenure of director Lindsay Sharp, who advocated hands-on visitor experiences, cartoon mascots, and even brought in a LEGO exhibit (Harris 1998). After decades of friction between curators and directors over the continued direction of the ROM, Sharp seemed to have gone too far. Highly public conflicts broke out between the administration and the staff and some curators quit in protest (Hume 1998; Oziewicz and Mitrovica 1999; Ross 1999). By the end of 1999, Sharp decided to leave the ROM after less than three years as director.

As for the AGO, edutainment has not been as much a factor in fine art museums as it has in history or science museums. Nonetheless, the AGO has still been subject to the same tensions between a commitment toward serious, scholarly exhibitions and the need to attract a wider audience with more spectacular shows. For instance, one of the most popular shows in the AGO’s history was the 1979 King Tut exhibition (which returned in 2009 just after the Gehry expansion opened). According to one AGO curator I spoke with, these blockbuster shows reflect the emergence of a “business model” for running an art gallery:
[Dealing with the business model] is very hard often for curators who have grown up with a different model. And there were times when that was the case with me, and some of my colleagues much more than me. It obscures the values of the institution. So, those values that scholars embrace (some room for pure research of a speculative nature, a distance between product and effort, etc, etc) tends to get lost. And I know there is resentment among some curators, and some who have left recently who feel that they don’t have the opportunity anymore to do what they think they should be doing. It’s all kind of dictated from on high. Okay, we need a big AB/EX [abstract expressionism] show from the [Museum of Modern Art in New York] and that will sell. But that doesn’t employ any AGO curators.

The adoption of a business model means more than just a shift in style. The ROM and AGO, like museums across the western world, now supplement the donated resources they receive with commercial activities in retail and hospitality, and through the management of large financial portfolios. In the legitimation of contemporary museums, their traditional role in the production and preservation of culture now competes with a new expectation of financial self-sufficiency, efficiency and entrepreneurialism (Oakes et al. 1998).

Thus, while the origins of the ROM and AGO may have been in private social clubs dedicated to the shared hobbies of Toronto’s elites, in recent times these organizations have shifted more toward the logic of market-based, for-profit organizations. Despite this fact, both museums continue to rely primarily on the public legitimacy first established by Sir Edmund Walker in the early 20th century, and the donated resources that have flowed as a result of that legitimacy. Appendix B demonstrates that donated resources continue to make up the majority of the ROM and AGO’s revenue, and the government continues to be their primary source of donations (though it has declined over the past 20 years).

IV. The Decision to Build Iconic

With a better understanding of what a public institution is in general and how the ROM and AGO fit that model in particular, we can now return to the original question of this chapter: why do public cultural institutions choose to undertake iconic architectural development? The ROM and AGO make excellent comparable cases because they demonstrate how the popularity of iconic architecture rests on its perception as a cure-all solution to a variety of organizational
problems faced by public institutions. At the start of the 21st-century, the ROM was facing a crisis in its legitimacy while the AGO was trying to secure a major art donation. Despite the different nature of their dilemmas, both institutions turned to iconic architectural development as a solution. In order to understand their decision, I will examine the unique dilemmas they faced within the context of neoliberalism and the international field of museum administration. I argue that these macro-level, contextual factors created an “opportunity structure” that gave iconic architecture its perceived panacea-like qualities.

i. Confronting Dilemmas

By 1999, there was a general sense among ROM board members and other observers that the museum was in a state of crisis (Hume 2001, October; Ross 1999). In addition to the revolt among its curators and the early departure of Lindsay Sharp, the ROM had suffered government budget cuts and saw its attendance rates stagnate throughout the 1980s and ’90s (See Appendix B). It was even forced to close the McLaughlin Planetarium in 1995. Sharp’s edutainment strategy was seen largely as a failure, and the ROM leadership decided it needed to take radical steps in order to reassert the relevancy of the museum in the city’s public life.

In 2000 the board of trustees took the unprecedented step of hiring a former newspaper editor as their new director (the first director in the history of the ROM without prior museum experience), handing him a broad mandate to boost the public profile of the institution. Even before he was hired, director William Thorsell told the board that a high profile architectural project would help bring public attention back to the ROM, exciting both potential visitors and donors. From the very beginning, therefore, the ROM’s expansion project was explicitly oriented toward building public legitimacy.

Thorsell immediately distanced himself from the Sharp’s edutainment strategy, stressing that the ROM should operate as a traditional museum and rely on the strength of its collection rather than creating themed and narrative-based exhibitions. As Thorsell put it himself “[the ROM] is a

32 It should be noted that the ROM did commission a master plan in the 1990s that provided a prototype for the expansion Thorsell proposed, including the suggestion that the entrance should be moved to Bloor Street. However, much of the plan focused on the reorganization of backstage operations, which Thorsell postponed in favour of renovating the public galleries.
Who Builds Icons?

collection-based museum. Not a theme park” (quoted in Nuttall-Smith 2008:60). Echoing the sentiments of Dickson (1986), Thorsell proposed stripping down the historic wings of the ROM to their original interior and creating “jewel galleries” for prized objects, which Thorsell described as “small rooms designed for quiet contemplation” (Hume 2000, October). These early statements by Thorsell foreshadowed the minimalist galleries that would eventually be designed by Daniel Libeskind.

Having undergone an expansion in the early 1990s, new architecture was not a priority for the AGO. Nor was there similar dissatisfaction over the position of the AGO in public life as there was at the ROM. Though the AGO did suffer from the same government cutbacks as the ROM, it had been experiencing a steady increase in attendance, donations, and self-generated revenue throughout the 1990s. In 1994 the gallery broke its all time attendance record when it secured the Barnes Exhibit (see Appendix B).

However, throughout the 1990s, senior AGO staff members had been cultivating a relationship with billionaire media mogul Kenneth Thomson. At the time, the aging Thomson was pondering the fate of his extensive personal art collection, valued at $300 million (CAD) and containing hundreds of works by the Canadian Group of Seven and Cornelius Krieghoff, as well as Peter Paul Rubens’ *The Massacre of the Innocents*. Eventually Thomson entered into a formal agreement with AGO to donate his collection to the gallery and provide an additional $70 million toward the construction of a new building to accommodate the artwork (Adams 2002, November). AGO director Matthew Teitelbaum took this opportunity to plan a far more extensive renovation project that would rearrange all of the AGO’s existing galleries and address some perceived shortfalls from the early expansion.

Thus, the two institutions faced very different dilemmas, but nonetheless turned to the same strategy: iconic architectural development. On their own, neither of these dilemmas required signature buildings designed by internationally-renown architects. The ROM could have attempted to raise its public profile in any other number of ways. The AGO could have created more space inline with its recent expansion, designed by a local firm. To understand the appeal of iconic architecture for the two institutions, we need to look at the broader context.
ii. **Opportunity Structure**

As mentioned before, the macro-level trends such as neoliberalism and culture-led urbanization should be seen as contextual factors that facilitate iconic architectural development rather than acting as a primary motivator. These two forces contributed to an “opportunity structure” for the ROM and AGO. Opportunity structures “are comprised of specific configurations of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents for social mobilization” which facilitate and constrain collective social action (Kitschelt 1986:58). Though this concept has been criticized for being used too broadly (Gamson and Meyer 1996), I use it to refer to two very specific arrangements that made iconic architectural development a particularly appealing strategy. First, it refers to the mimetic isomorphic effect of the Guggenheim Bilbao and other works of starchitecture that have provided a highly visible model of “success” for public cultural institutions around the world. The second component was the neoliberal policies being implemented by the Ontario government that made subsidies available for privately-funded projects.

The first aspect of the opportunity space relates to impact of the “Bilbao effect” on the organizational field of museums. This field is highly international in character, with museum administrators and staff moving from city to city throughout their careers, and being plugged into transnational academic and professional networks. Furthermore, museums also compete nationally and internationally for exhibitions, visitors, and even funding. As a result, the ROM and AGO leadership evaluate their organizations and plan strategies with reference to international rather than local trends. This characteristic of the field means that there is an affinity between museums and iconic architectural development which, as argued earlier, occurs at a global level.

Along with famous artefacts or works of art, new forms of iconic architecture can be used as a resource by museums to distinguish themselves on an international level. Although the ROM and AGO leadership made a great effort in their public statements and in my interviews to avoid giving off the impression that they were chasing trends, it was nonetheless apparent that they were both evaluating their own museums according to the perceived success of the Guggenheim Bilbao and other recent iconic structures from Europe and the United States. This globally-focused orientation among the museum leadership will be demonstrated in depth in Chapter 5.
Given that the mandates of public cultural institutions tend to be ambiguous enough to “accommodate a range of conflicting purposes and changing ends” (DiMaggio 1982:39), museums like the Guggenheim Bilbao or MOMA provide a highly visible and compelling model for the ROM and AGO to evaluate their present condition and plot out their future goals – a phenomenon that DiMaggio and Powell (1983) call “mimetic isomorphism” (also see Gonzalez 2011:1411).

What is even more important is that in addition to museum leadership, major stakeholder groups are also subject to the same isomorphism. Those members of the outside public that tend to be most visible to museum leadership – their board members, people who attend cultural events, journalists – also tend to follow international trends in architecture. These groups reinforce the pressure that museums are under to pursue starchitecture. In this environment, hiring celebrity architects to design iconic buildings becomes useful for winning the support of these outside groups. As Teitelbaum recounted in explaining his decision to hire Frank Gehry:

A group of Toronto citizens, some of whom were on our board, wanted Frank [Gehry] to do the opera house and that fell apart. There was a big story in Toronto Life [magazine], maybe six months before Thomson and the AGO got really into the conversation. There was profile for Frank. He came to give a talk, 1200 people came. This was even before we got involved with him. There was just a feeling around him. You have to remember of course that when we started it was only 5 years after Bilbao opened.

Though its actual achievements are the subject of debate (Gómez 1998, Gómez and González 2001, Plaza 1999, 2006, 2008), the social construction of the Guggenheim Bilbao as an international success story provides a model for all other public institutions. It is this isomorphism that is perhaps the real “Bilbao effect”.

The second element of the opportunity structure was the neoliberal policies implemented by the government of Ontario during the rule of the right-wing Progressive Conservative Party under Premier Mike Harris (1995 to 2002). These policies fit the “roll-back”, “roll-out” process described by Peck and Tickell (2002) whereby severe funding cuts to public programs are
followed by new state-building initiatives designed to extend and promote the capitalist market. Following this process, the Conservatives first imposed strict budget cuts across the public sector. As a result, the ROM and AGO saw their basic operational funding cut back during the late 1990s (Jenkins 2009:334, and see Appendix B).

By 2000, the Conservatives shifted to a “roll-out” strategy by founding the Ontario SuperBuild Corporation which was tasked with building public infrastructure through partnerships with private sector investors. Described as “an approach anchored firmly in the belief that public-private partnerships can help build public infrastructure in the province in the most cost-effective and productive manner possible” (Ontario SuperBuild Corporation 2000), the program directed public subsidies toward projects with major private financial support.

Having extensive networks of private donors, Toronto’s major public cultural institutions were in a position to conform to SuperBuild’s requirements for private-sector partnership. OCAD was the first to take advantage of the opportunity, securing $24 million in 2000 toward the $42 million Sharp Centre for Design. For the Centre, British architect Will Alsop designed a checkered building lifted eight stories off the ground on a set of multicoloured stilts (completed in 2004).
Following OCAD, the ROM and AGO submitted their own applications to SuperBuild in 2001. As did several other cultural institutions including the Canadian Opera Company, Roy Thomson Hall (home to the Toronto Symphony Orchestra), the Royal Conservatory of Music, the National Ballet of Canada, and the Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art, all requesting funding for new or renovated buildings. The flood of applications eventually led the Federal government to get involved as well by matching the Ontario government’s funding commitments. On May 2003, a joint funding package was announced with roughly $250 million that was to be split between the seven institutions (Jenkins 2005:175). From this pool, the ROM and AGO received $60 and $48 million respectively. The resulting building boom came to be called the “Toronto Cultural Renaissance” by members of the local press (Hume 2001, June; Adams 2002, March; Knelman 2002).

It is important to make a small but significant distinction between the public-private partnerships (PPP’s) often associated with neoliberalism, and the more traditional model of private funding
that characterizes public institutions like the ROM and AGO. PPP’s under neoliberalism are typically described as consisting of a public agency and for-profit investor combining their funds into a single project that will produce some public good (e.g. a public park, or a rehabilitated neighbourhood) as well as a profitable return for the private investor. This form of development has been criticized for tying public assets to private profit, and for relying on speculative schemes that leave the public sector holding the bill in the event of failure (Harvey 1989; Hannigan 1998). The role of profit is central to this model of the PPP since it provides both an incentive for private investment as well as an avenue for the marketization of the public sector under neoliberalism.

By contrast, the ROM and AGO conformed to a more traditional funding arrangement for public institutions where government subsidies are combined with private support ranging from multimillion dollar gifts from wealthy philanthropists to much smaller donations from broader segments of the public. As described earlier, a defining characteristic of public institutions is that this private sector support is rooted in public legitimacy rather than profit. This distinction is important because it means that the ROM and the AGO were relatively insulated from the market logic driving the provincial government’s policies. At the same time, they were heavily dependent on the logic of public legitimacy. The implications of this dependency on the development process itself will be discussed in Chapter 6.

While the neoliberal policies of the government did not significantly marketize the internal operations of the ROM and AGO, it did create an environment where iconic architectural development became more strategically useful for the two institutions. This was due primarily to the replacement of annual operations funding with one-time grants for specific projects (Jenkins 2009). The requirement that these projects receive private sector support put additional pressure

33 The ROM and AGO were not completely insulated from the market. As mentioned earlier, the museums rely partially on commercial activity that includes running gift shops, restaurants, and event spaces. The expansions provided new facilities for all of these activities. As well, the ROM unsuccessfully attempted to incorporate for-profit real estate development into its expansion (discussed in detail in Chapter 6). It should also be pointed out that the nature of the public-private-partnerships differed among the other five cultural institutions. The National Ballet of Canada integrated their project with the development of condominium skyscrapers, and the Canadian Opera Company sold the naming rights of their new opera house to a corporation.
on the ROM and AGO to do something spectacular with which private individuals would want associate themselves.

Thus, the combination of a new model of success for public museums associated with the “Bilbao effect” as well as the availability of government funds for privately-backed infrastructure projects made iconic architecture a compelling solution to many different dilemmas confronting public institutions; not just for the ROM and AGO, but also for the six other cultural institutions that sent in applications to Ontario SuperBuild. While the media hailed this series of building projects as a “renaissance”, it is important to see the situation in proper historical context. The funds provided for the projects were not a return to the funding that predated the Mike Harris government. Instead, it represented a new stage in the long and shifting relationship between the government, private citizens, and public cultural institutions.

V. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been threefold. First, I identified public cultural institutions as the primary clients of iconic architectural development and argued for why that fact exposed limitations of the dominant neoliberal thesis. Second, I developed an organizational model of the public institution based on their need to attract donated resources by building public legitimacy. I supported this model with a brief history of the ROM and AGO, arguing that their formation as public institutions depended on reframing the collection of artwork and artefacts from private hobby to public service. Finally, I examined the motivations behind the ROM and AGO’s decision to undertake iconic architectural development. I demonstrated how the contextual effects of neoliberal government policies, combined with the global field of museum administration made iconic architecture an appealing solution to disparate organizational problems. In the case of the ROM and AGO, these respective problems were a decline in public legitimacy and the accommodation of a major art donation.

The organizational perspective adopted here is useful not only because it provides a missing link for neoliberal thesis, but also because it presents insights that help us to clarify existing accounts of culture-led urbanization. The chapter demonstrates, for instance, that neoliberal policies and global networks of elites do not necessarily provide underlying motivations behind iconic architecture, but rather contribute to an opportunity structure that makes these development
projects seem advantageous to individual public institutions driven by motivations that are quite independent of those identified by the neoliberal thesis.

A second major insight that can be drawn from this chapter relates to the concept of public legitimacy. While I have developed this concept to explain the organizational characteristics of public cultural institutions, its application need not be limited to these types of organizations. Just as public institutions are ideal types that can be more or less dependent on public legitimacy in reality, so too can we find examples of organizations other than public institutions relying on public legitimacy to extract donated resources. One well-known example is the ideological association between the public good and economic growth. As Logan and Molotch (1987) argue, a belief in ‘value-free’ growth has been used to justify public subsidies of private, for-profit corporations. Canadians in particular are familiar with private corporations justifying requests for government protections and subsidies by appealing to a sense of national sovereignty. While these organizations can exist even without succeeding in their attempts to build public legitimacy (unlike public institutions), the concept is still useful in explaining their actions.

Finally, a third insight of this chapter relates to the role that ideas play in urban development in addition to political-economic forces – an issue which recent scholarship has called attention to (McGovern 2009; De Frantz 2005; Molnár 2005). The analysis presented here advances this line of inquiry by focusing on ideas as they relate to notions of acceptability and the public good (represented through the concept of public legitimacy). No development is truly “value-free” because they all depend on existing organizational fields and symbolic systems that establish definitions of acceptability and success. In the next chapter I focus more closely on this ideational dimension to iconic architectural development by examining how the design and evaluation of architecture relates to people’s general sense of place.
Chapter 5. The Global City vs. the City of Neighbourhoods  
Cognitive Maps, Spatial Practices, and the Aesthetics of Urban Conflict

The initial decision to expand the ROM and AGO was made largely within the administrative offices and boardrooms of the museums. In the last chapter, I referred to this space as the “back stage” of the public institution, a space wherein the museum leadership could focus primarily on addressing the organizational needs of the institution. However, once the decision to expand was made, the museums were forced to go public with their plans in order to raise funds and secure municipal approval to begin construction. In doing so, the expansion projects ceased to be internal matters to be dealt with solely through back stage practices, and became public political issues open to the potential influence of a whole series of external parties.

While many of these external parties embraced the expansions from the beginning, including members of provincial and federal governments and local newspaper columnists, the projects received a much colder response from the surrounding community. In fact, throughout their development, the museums were plagued by opposition from residents who held public protests and denounced the projects in the press and during public meetings. The strained relations between the two sides plunged the projects into controversy at a time when the museums were attempting to generate enthusiasm and financial support. In the years after the projects were completed, resentment and mistrust continued to exist among some residents. In this chapter, I examine the origins and nature of this conflict.

Urban political-economy, long the dominant perspective in the study of urban conflict, tends to conceptualize place as a resource over which different groups struggle (Walton 1993; Hannigan 2010). From this perspective, conflict is typically framed in terms of competing economic interests, particularly between interests in the “exchange-value” of a place, with interests in its “use-value” (Logan and Molotch 1987). Political-economists studying iconic architecture in particular have argued that it is driven largely by the interests of urban elites and the “creative” and professional classes (Sklair 2005; Kaika and Thielen 2006; Peck 2005) who benefit from the use-value of these projects, if not directly from the exchange-value.
From a political-economic perspective, therefore, we might expect these projects to be embraced by local residents who, as I discussed in Chapter 3, are largely members of the professional and creative class themselves. Instead, they led the opposition against the ROM and AGO. Absent a strong class or economic divide between the two sides, how do we explain the stakes of the conflict?

The answer to this question requires us to recognize that place is more than just a resource. In addition to representing exchange-value or class interest, urban development projects, be they museums, casinos, or housing projects, are imbued with a diversity of meanings related to issues such as civic identity, progress, prosperity, morality, and the good life. Furthermore, these meanings must be interpreted vis-à-vis the cultural “character” and “traditions” of the surrounding urban form (Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulsen 2000).

As I will demonstrate, the stakes of the conflict between the museums and community lie not in competing economic interests, but competing notions of place. The museums and surrounding community held strikingly different views on the cultural character of the neighbourhoods, and therefore disagreed on the appropriateness of the new architecture. Adopting ideal types to represent their perspectives, I demonstrate that the museums saw Toronto primarily as a “global city”, the qualities of which could be judged by how well it stood out on the international stage of architecture and tourism. The community, on the other hand, thought of Toronto as a “city of neighbourhoods” in which elite architecture was less important than preserving and respecting the surrounding Victorian houses and green spaces. I call this dynamic the “aesthetics of urban conflict”, with “aesthetics” referring to the process by which actors perceive and interpret the qualities of social objects (Martin 2011).

In order to explain these conflicting interpretations, and to theorize the aesthetics of urban conflict more generally, I identify two elements which, though analytically distinct, are fundamentally entwined: cognitive maps and spatial practices. The former refers to the unique sets of geographic reference points that the two groups used to understand and evaluate the projects vis-à-vis their spatial context (Garrido 2013, Lynch 1960). The latter refers to the distinct “constellation[s] of pathways, routes and trajectories” that brought each group into same
locality (Saunders and Moles 2013:27; Lefebvre 1991; de Certeau 1984; Bourdieu 1977). Thus, the “aesthetics of urban conflict” describes a process in which the distinct practices of urban inhabitants give rise to unique cognitive maps that they use to evaluate the urban space around them. Conflict emerges when two groups develop separate and competing visions for a single site.

To conclude this chapter, I argue for the applicability of the aesthetic approach beyond the ROM and AGO and discuss broader potential research directions. These include expanding cognitive mapping studies to new groups and contexts in order to build more general theories about the relationship between institutions, spatial practices, and how people make sense of place, and re-integrating interpretive studies of place sense-making into a traditional political-economic analysis of power and resources.

I. Place as a Cultural Object

Throughout this study, as an alternative to a strict political-economic approach to place as a resource, I have made reference to Molotch et al.’s (2000) theory of place as a cultural object with a distinct “character”. Recall that the character of a place matters because it provides cultural cues that establish precedents within a given locality. Actors draw on these precedents to generate and evaluate paths of action. The way in which physical and social space is arranged in any given locale, for instance, will suggest whether or not it is appropriate to build a freeway or an art museum.

The idea of place “character” has gained attention and empirical support. At a micro level, Babon (2006) and McDonnell (2010) have documented how actors draw on elements within their immediate physical environment in order to interpret and evaluate other cultural objects. At a macro-level, Silver and Clark (forthcoming; Silver et al. 2010) have shown that the unique clusters of amenities within particular neighbourhoods, which they refer to as “scenes”, influence everything from economic productivity to political preferences. Amenities such as Wal-Marts, gun stores, coffee shops, or dance clubs are not purely economic entities that supply goods and services wherever there is sufficient demand; they also signal the cultural character of place, encouraging certain behaviour but not others. These cultural characteristics can in turn be transformative by attracting or repelling new residents through a process of “idio-cultural
migration” (Kaufman and Kaliner 2011; Florida 2002). Finally, the study of deviance has long been attentive to the role of environmental cues, particularly as they relate to social disorder (Sampson and Raudenbush 1999; Wilson and Kelling 1982).

More recent studies have sought to bring this cultural approach into a traditional political-economic analysis of urban conflict. For example, Zukin (2010) and Brown-Saracino (2009) have documented the way in which changing notions of “authenticity” are tied up in processes of gentrification. McGovern (2009) has shown how new planning ideas can propel new regimes to power. Douglas (2012) demonstrates the role of “cultural sensitivity” in the success and failure of new development projects in existing neighbourhoods. What these studies tell us more generally is that the origins and outcomes of urban conflicts can hinge on different interpretations of place. Even if the economic system pits “use-value” against “exchange-value”, there is still a universe of possible ways to “use” and to “sell” space. Within this universe, some combinations will be complementary and others will spark fierce conflict.

II. The Aesthetics of Urban Conflict

If culture does play a role in urban conflict, then we are required to explain how people perceive and evaluate the urban landscape and why different groups may develop competing understandings of the same space. Without a theory of this process, we risk slipping back into economic reductionism and assuming that interpretations only reflect or justify pre-existing class or economic interests. Thus, we require opening the “aesthetics of urban conflict” up to sociological inquiry.

I take the term “aesthetics” from Martin (2011) who uses it to describe the process by which actors intuit the qualities of the social world around them. Applied to the topic of this article, an aesthetic approach would examine how actors perceive and evaluate the defining qualities of place, as well as the qualities of new development proposals, and formulate some kind of response. Martin conceives of a social aesthetics as involving a consideration of both the objectively structured world that actors inhabit, and the subjective dispositions used by those actors to grasp the qualities of that world. The former has been addressed by both the cultural and political-economic perspectives in urban sociology. Exploring the latter is the focus of this
chapter. To accomplish this goal it is necessary to first introduce two concepts and associated empirical questions that guide my analysis.

i. **Cognitive Maps: How do actors perceive and evaluate space?**

If place matters because it provides cultural cues that actors draw on in order to generate and evaluate paths of action, then an aesthetic approach to urban conflict should attempt to empirically record the way these cues are perceived and cognitively ordered. One analytically useful way to think about this organization is as a *cognitive map*. Cognitive maps have a long and variable history in the study of space and place. One of the first cognitive mapping studies was done by urban theorist Kevin Lynch (1960) who sought to compare the geography of cities to the “mental image” of that geography formed by the cities’ inhabitants. The study involved asking people to describe their city, draw maps, and provide directions, as well as observing people in the streets. Lynch reasoned that meaningful and well-designed cities would produce the most vivid and accurate cognitive maps.

Among contemporary sociologists, the term ‘cognitive map’ may be more familiar as a loose web of associations between abstract information or “schemata” (DiMaggio 1992). Compared to this contemporary usage, Lynch’s notion that we carry around a fully-formed picture of the city seems too literal and simplistic. However, recent studies have productively married the abstraction of the new concept with the more literal take of Lynch. Studying artwork, Griswold, Mangione, and McDonnell (2013) demonstrate that the “cognitive location” of an object – that is, the set of schemata that are triggered during interpretation – is shaped by its “physical position”. As well, a recent discussion by Garrido (2013) injects a much needed dimension of power and social difference into the conceptualization of cognitive maps. Focusing specifically on segregation, Garrido points out how spatial characteristics such as a mowed lawn can symbolically mark the difference between a “good” neighbourhood and a “ghetto” (also see Small 2004). He also draws on Bourdieu (1977) in order to highlight the close relationship between the way in which actors “draw” their cognitive maps and their position within social structure. Thus, cognitive maps not only give us a sense of how a place is spatially organized (in Lynch’s sense). Cognitive maps also suggest meaningful interpretations of place such as which areas are for “us” and which are for “them”, or how some places are categorically more similar than others.
Representing the perception and organization of spatial cues, cognitive maps help us to connect the physical elements of place with higher-level forms of spatial sense-making such as “neighbourhood narrative frames” (Small 2004), “place discourse” (Bridger 1996; Hannigan 2007a), or “urban imaginaries” (Johansson 2013). That is, before actors can articulate complex narratives about the qualities of place, they must perceive and categorize cues that allow them to apply one narrative over another.

For the purposes of this chapter, the notion of cognitive maps provides a useful empirical focus: identifying and recording the way actors perceive and categorize the spatial elements of the urban form. What elements become relevant to which actors, and how do they combine these elements into meaningful evaluations?

**ii. Spatial Practices: How do actors encounter and experience space?**

As Mead (1967) argued, sense-making occurs within the “act” rather than as a “state of mind” (p.23). Joas (1996) expands on this by arguing for a conception “of perception and cognition not as preceding action but rather as a phase of action by which action is directed and redirected in its situational contexts” (Joas 1996:158; also see Swidler 2001; Bourdieu 1977). Therefore, we should examine the “real-life problem situations” in which cognitive maps are constructed and implemented (Joas 1996:128).

Though Lynch (1960) conceptualized cognitive maps as being stable, rigid, and collectively imposed, he did briefly speculate on the importance of practice in their formation. An expressway, he argued, would become a pathway and a central point of orientation for the motorist. To the pedestrian, however, it might be the edge of the map or a border separating two neighbourhoods (p.48).

Expanding on this illustration points to the importance of “spatial practices” (Lefebvre 1991; Bourdieu 1977; de Certeau 1984). Though the exact definition of spatial practice varies between different theorists, the concept typically refers to the spatial ordering of everyday life. Spatial practices are the habitual “constellation of pathways, routes and trajectories” that brings us into contact with objects, people, and events on an everyday basis (Saunders and Moles 2012:27). It
is through this ordering that seemingly abstract social institutions produce and are reproduced (Lefebvre 1991). Different institutions have different ‘footprints’ in the sense that they provide differently ordered environments that people move through in specific ways. Institutionalized spatial practices assemble the situational contexts (or “problem situations”) in which perception and cognition take place.

As an empirical example of how spatial practices influence spatial cognition and the development of cognitive maps, Oishi et al. (2012) have documented how people who experience high residential mobility over their lives are more likely to seek out familiarity. Thus, places with highly mobile populations also tend to be places where corporate chains like Wal-Mart and Best Buy thrive (ibid). Put another way, Oishi et al. suggest that, for people engaged highly mobile spatial practices, corporate chains become both meaningful and positive markers of place. In studies of segregation, spatial practices result in the normalization of social difference by maintaining physical separation between groups, even in very micro settings (Garrido 2013).

Spatial practices therefore provide a second empirical focus for the analysis: what are the various practices that bring actors into contact with the same geographic locality? How do these practices explain the spatial elements that actors employ in making sense of place (e.g. in how they “draw” their cognitive maps)?

III. Methodology

The analysis below is based primarily on the 41 interviews that I conducted for this study, though my other data sources provide important supplementary information. To simplify the analysis, I break these informants into two basic groups. “Museum insiders” refer to those involved in the expansions as representatives of the museums themselves. They include museum leadership, staff, volunteers, board members, major donors, and contractors. “Community stakeholders” refer to everyone else who participated in the expansion projects as members of the outside public. This group includes local residents who were involved in consultation meetings or by organizing opposition initiatives, leaders of local organizations who were consulted during the development process, and local political and public representatives. As mentioned in Chapter 2, all informants were selected based on snowball sampling.
The findings I present below were developed inductively and are analytically organized in the form of two ideal types which provide a comparative-descriptive account of the way museum insiders and community stakeholders discussed the context of the expansion projects and used this context to evaluate the projects directly. Ideal types are abstract, unified constructs created by identifying what is analytically useful from an otherwise complex collection of empirical data (Weber 1949). They are also one of the most common strategies for organizing and presenting interpretive, qualitative data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Internal</th>
<th>Residents</th>
<th>Organizations</th>
<th>Politicians</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ROM</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGO</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1. Informants included in the quantitative dataset

In support of these findings, I also provide a quantitative analysis of the spatial references made by my interview participants. In coding and counting these references, I used a broad definition of geography (ranging from spaces as general as “Europe” to those as narrow as a single tree). In order to avoid any biases from selective listening or note-taking, I did not include in the database any field observations or interviews that were not recorded fully in audio or any responses to questions that I judged in hindsight to be leading (i.e. questions that may have explicitly or implicitly suggested certain spatial references in their response). Table 5.1 indicates the informants who were included in the database.

IV. Discussion: A Tale of Two Torontos

One of the first comments that alerted me to the importance of spatial references was made by a resident who criticized the ROM’s expansion project as being “more of a New York strategy than a Toronto strategy”. The point she was making was familiar to me: that the ROM was more interested in being flashy and outrageous than with fitting in to the local milieu of stately Victorian buildings. However, the fact that she conveyed this point by distinguishing Toronto and New York as two different kinds of places intrigued me. And, as I went back to consult my notes from previous interviews, I realized that this resident was correct in characterizing the strategies of the ROM. Members of both the ROM and AGO had cited precedents in New York
repeatedly in discussing their own expansions, and the ROM leadership had even traveled to New York’s Museum of Modern Art on a fact-finding mission early in their development process. Instead of emphasizing the differences between the two cities, museum insiders tended to see Toronto and New York as similar kinds of places – or at least saw New York as the kind of place to which Toronto should aspire.

Thus, just as an expressway can serve as a different kind of landmark to the motorist and the pedestrian, New York became a reference point used by this resident and museum insiders to evaluate the expansion projects in very different ways. To understand this difference we need to look at the larger cognitive maps that both groups drew on throughout the development process, and the spatial practices through which those maps were drawn.

Supporting the notion that place matters because it provides cultural cues, my participants made constant reference to space and place as they discussed the museums expansions. Among the 30 informants included in the quantitative database, I coded for a total of 313 references. This count ranged from one person who made 31 references in an interview to two who made no references at all. But while there was significant variation among all of my informants, there was very little difference between museum insiders and community stakeholders. Both groups averaged about 10 references per interview.

References to spaces were made for a variety of reasons. Most commonly my informants brought up other spaces as comparative examples to make statements about the ROM and AGO. These references ranged widely from world famous museums like the Louvre to local playgrounds. The purpose of these comparisons also varied, but included evaluation (citing spaces that were better or worse than the ROM or AGO), and justification (e.g. pointing to a precedent). In addition to comparisons, my informants (particularly community stakeholders) referenced spaces for descriptive purposes (e.g. in describing the local neighbourhood) and when raising concerns over the impact of the expansion projects (see Table 5.2).
In order to make interpretive sense of the way my informants used geography to understand the museum expansion projects, I turn now to the two notions of place that underlay the conflict between the museums and the community.

1. **The Global City**

Sassen’s (1991) concept of the “global city” captures the way museum insiders understood their expansion projects. Global cities are defined by their position within a series of complex global networks that largely bypass the system of nation-states which have traditionally mediated all cross-border activities. Though Sassen was primarily interested in the corporate sector, the ROM and AGO are also tied into global networks of museum administration, academia, artistic production, architecture, and tourism and understood their expansion projects primarily from within this context. As museums are few and far between, curators and administrators tend to have careers that take them from city to city. Traveling exhibitions and international tourism also add to the global orientation of museums.

In undertaking their expansion projects, museum insiders entered into a series of new networks, including those associated with their “global architects” (McNeill 2009), which meant that most of the design work was occurring in places like Germany, New York, and California and being balanced with other projects for cities all over the globe. Museum leaders also engaged in what González (2011) calls “policy tourism”: the well choreographed practice of policymakers traveling to other cities to view examples of “successful” urban development projects like the Guggenheim in Bilbao.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Uses of Spatial References</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Museum</th>
<th>Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.2. Uses of spatial references as a percentage of overall references**
Averaged across the sample, insiders, and outsiders.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographical Level of References</th>
<th>Museum</th>
<th>Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local (within Toronto)</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National (within Canada)</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International (outside Canada)</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.3. Geographical level of spatial references**

Mean proportion of references made to local, national, and international spaces for museum insiders and community stakeholders.

This international orientation was expressed in the types of spaces that museum insiders referenced in interviews (see Table 5.3). The majority of these references were extra-local, and most often international. Providing some evidence for Sassen’s argument of the decline of the nation-state within the global city (and affirming stereotypes of self-centred Torontonians) very few references were made by either group to Canadian spaces outside Toronto.

Furthermore, insiders referenced mostly other cultural institutions like museums, concert halls, and art galleries (see Table 5.4). Among the museum leadership (directors, upper management, board members, and major donors) these references tended to be made as a way of defining success and establishing institutional goals. They took inspiration not from local or national trends, but from the major landmark museums across the world that had captured international attention:

“I was at the Beaubourg, the Pompidou Centre in Paris in ‘78 just after it opened. It was the big new hot breakout of what museums were at its time – the Beaubourg in Paris. So I went to all of the openings. So you know, the new Louvre, everything that was going on in London, and of course in New York… So I guess that’s why when I looked at the ROM, it was pretty easy for me to look at it and say ‘oh, here’s something that’s 15 years behind the time’. You know sort of what needs to be done.”

ROM Director

“You have to remember of course, that when we started [planning the AGO expansion] it was only 5 years after [the Guggenheim] Bilbao opened. And I had seen Bilbao and I had seen many of [Gehry’s] other buildings and I loved them.”

AGO Director

It is important to note how both of these directors are referencing personal experiences. Unlike most of the community stakeholders, the familiarity that museum insiders demonstrated with the Guggenheim Bilbao or the Louvre was not limited to travel brochures or magazines. They had firsthand knowledge of these museums and the people who run them. Their careers have been
spent not only visiting museums around the world, but – in some cases – periods of employment at those museums.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Space</th>
<th>Rate of references(^a)</th>
<th>At least one reference(^b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Museum</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green space</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heritage building</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entire city or country</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Street</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<td>Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>Government Building</td>
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<tr>
<td>Playground/Recreation</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apartment/Condominium</td>
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<td>House</td>
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<td>Commercial Building</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Art</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nature (e.g. climate)</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.4. Types of spaces referenced

a. The mean proportion of references to a specific type of space for the museum insiders and community stakeholders.
b. Proportion of museum insiders and community stakeholders who made at least one reference to each of the types of space.

The influence of international networks was also evident in the intended audience of the expansion projects. While a thriving museum was seen as an unambiguous asset for the people of Toronto, some museum insiders noted that one of the main goals of building an iconic structure was to appeal to the international tourist market (local visitors, by contrast, were targeted through programming and events). Both development projects were designed to create photogenic facades that would stand out on postcards and in magazines. The ROM went so far as to lobby Toronto City Hall to remove hotdog vendors in front of its new entrance. The move, though successful, created a minor controversy in the press. When I asked the ROM director about this issue, he framed it not only in aesthetic terms, but also by international standards:

“You would never see this in any serious city. If you have a major arts institution like this, an art gallery, opera house, or something, they wouldn’t park a great big hotdog vendor right outside the front door. They would never allow it… Everyone is taking a picture of the [ROM] building. Tourists are coming from… that’s where they stand at the corner. They take a picture. There are billions of pictures on Flickr[.com] of that building.”
Here the ROM director exemplifies what Urry (1990) called the “tourist gaze”: a perspective that emerges from the experience of traveling into a city from outside to visit destinations that have been designed to attract and cater to international visitors. To experience time and space as a tourist is to inhabit what Maffesoli (2000) called “pointillist” reality: life as a series of disconnected bursts of meaning (also see Bauman 2007:32). As we will see, this experience of space is quite contrary to that of the community stakeholders.

The tourist gaze is not just about the experience of space, however. It is also implicated in how space is managed. To apply a tourist gaze means to privilege some spatial practices over others, and prevent some altogether. Thus, the streetscape in front the museum becomes constructed – first cognitively in the minds of ROM leadership, then materially through the enactment of bylaws – as a place for photography rather than selling hotdogs.

**ii. Architecture Through the Modern Eye**

There was a distinct affinity between the global city sensibility of museum insiders and the curatorial disposition that many of them had cultivated over their careers in studying and exhibiting cultural objects. Both of these perspectives lent themselves to a view of the new ROM and AGO buildings divorced of their immediate context, placing them instead within a collection of culturally significant buildings scattered across the western world – much like how objects are experienced in a gallery. Galleries, with their white walls and minimalist decor, present objects outside the mundane context of everyday life and position them instead in relation to each other as part of a larger oeuvre or cultural history.

Modern curation and gallery design is based on experiencing cultural objects through what Peterson (2003) calls “the modern eye”, a perspective that emphasizes the values of formalism, artistic autonomy and originality. Integral to the modern eye is a sense of detachment or disinterestedness, both between the object and its surrounding context as well as between the object and the viewer (ibid; Bourdieu 1984). The gallery can be seen as the spatial organization of the modern eye: presenting objects in a context-free, detached environment. When applied to architecture, the modern eye encourages a perception of buildings as objects-in-themselves.
Sociological studies of architecture have shown the prevalence of these modernist values, particularly among the most elite architectural firms (Larson 1994; Stevens 2002).

Several of my informants pointed out that for people who study cultural objects professionally the idea of an ambitious architectural expansion was inherently appealing. The new buildings would become new and original object for study and contemplation. One ROM manager summed up this professional interest:

“I’m interested in shapes and engineering. So for me, [the Crystal] was great. I kept watching this thing being built. I had no comment on whether I like it or not.”

This manager captures the modern eye in a few ways, expressing pleasure in the creative process while distancing his personal and subjective feelings. Others echoed this sentiment by suggesting that creative and groundbreaking architecture was an end in itself and a more worthy goal than building something predictable in order to be crowd pleasing:

“Some people don’t like [the Crystal] and never will like it. Like those that still hate the Pyramid in the Louvre, or Guggenheim in New York. Still they are saying all of these things are ugly.”

ROM Manager

The modern eye was also evident in development strategies employed by both museums, which sought to enshrine the design process and link it to the individual creative genius of the architects. Prior to renovation, both museums presented the works of their respective architects in a gallery setting. They also saved and framed the original sketches of their new buildings in an attempt to capture that initial moment of inspiration and creativity. The AGO went so far as to take down and frame the entire whiteboard that Gehry had used to sketch out some early ideas. For the ROM, Libeskind’s first sketch was on a cocktail napkin which now hangs prominently in the museum.

It would be unfair to claim that museum insiders did not account for local context. As Table 5.3 shows, almost half of their spatial references were local. Both the ROM and AGO directors repeatedly stressed the important relationship between their buildings and the city of Toronto.
Nonetheless, the use of the modern eye as a cognitive lens from which to view the development project was something that distinguished insiders and revealed the influence of their shared professional background. They were more comfortable shifting to an “object-in-itself” discourse and did so more frequently than community stakeholders. Furthermore, as we have seen both quantitatively and qualitatively, insiders were far more concerned with how their buildings fit into the larger, international field of architecture.

iii. The City of Neighbourhoods

In contrast to a global city, the way community stakeholders discussed the qualities of place finds a parallel in the work of Jane Jacobs (1961) which depicts cities as a collection of neighbourhoods. Like Jacobs, the stakeholders I interviewed were mostly interested in how the new ROM and AGO fit into the context of the neighbourhood. They were less interested in competing with landmark museums in other cities, than with the desire for the new buildings not to compete with their immediate surroundings and the everyday activities that played out in the neighbourhood. In fact, most community stakeholders mentioned neighbourhoods at least once, whereas no museum insiders made such references (see Table 5.4).

However, the connection between Jacobs and the community runs deeper. Jacobs herself lived close to the ROM, and a few of my participants claimed to have known her personally. Even among newcomers to the neighbourhood, the legacy of Jacobs was alive and well. As one recent immigrant explained to me,

I kind of have heard about Jane Jacobs and completely agree with her way of thinking. I’m interested in both architecture and urban development. Having a city as a human scale. So that’s also why I got involved [in the AGO consultation process].

AGO Resident

In addition to her writings, Jacobs is known in Toronto for the successful opposition movement she helped lead in the late-1960s against an expressway that would have cut through a series of downtown neighbourhoods that include those around the ROM and AGO. Many of the stakeholders I spoke with saw themselves as continuing this tradition of urban activism and preservation. They pointed to the concrete apartment and office buildings that loomed over parts of their neighbourhoods as a reminder of what happens when development is allowed to occur unchecked (see Figure 5.1).
Yet, the ROM and AGO expansions were quite different from the development of private high-rises or expressways. Community stakeholders felt a great deal of connection to the museums. Some of the newer residents spoke about being attracted to the neighbourhood specifically because of them. Older residents told me stories about their years of volunteer work or going to the museums as children. The stakeholders, like museum insiders, were interested in how well the new buildings accomplished functional goals like providing additional gallery space or better circulation – though their points of reference tended to be the buildings prior to expansion rather than museums in other cities. They heaped praise on the ROM and AGO when they felt that the new expansions improved how visitors experience the collections and directed criticism toward the museums when they felt that these goals had been sacrificed to accommodate either flashy architecture or budgetary constraints.
As part of this sense of connection with the ROM and AGO, community stakeholders had an expectation that they should be consulted during the development process, not only because the expansion might affect life in the neighbourhood, but also because the museums were public institutions. Many pointed to precedents set by other public institutions that had consulted with locals in previous development projects (such as the neighbouring University of Toronto and OCAD). As one resident put it, the ROM and AGO were in a “privileged position”, having been given their land and collections in “public trust”, and were therefore required to consult the public in times of major change. In addition to the residents, local politicians, city bureaucrats, and leaders of neighbouring public organizations all expressed the view that public institutions should support and consult each other and, when possible, coordinate goals.

Focusing primarily on local spaces provided community stakeholders with a very different set of comparative reference points to evaluate the expansion projects than those used by museum insiders. However, stakeholders used comparative references far less often than insiders (37% vs. 57%, respectively). Instead, they spent more time describing the geography surrounding the museums and pointing out areas that were either positively or negatively impacted by the expansions. Among the spaces referenced, trees and green space best illustrate the level of detail in which stakeholders spoke about their neighbourhood. Many made reference to individual trees and the treatment they received throughout the expansion. One ROM resident recounted a battle that occurred over ventilation ducts that had originally been installed to empty into a neighbouring park.

I don’t know if you know about trees, but I do. I took botany [in university]. So these fans blow out… Did you ever smell the exhaust from those fans? French fries! So we have air that’s laden with oil blowing out. So it blankets the trees like a wind storm. And what happens is you create desiccation. And then trees are under tremendous stress.

ROM Resident

My discussions with residents were filled with similar stories, not only relating to trees, but also to the sidewalks, bicycle lanes, playgrounds, and many other seemingly mundane spaces in the neighbourhood.
The above quote illustrates another important characteristic of community stakeholders: their diverse range of backgrounds. While this resident’s background in botany directed her attention to the conditions of the trees, other residents had backgrounds in chemistry, engineering, journalism, art, geography, and other disciplines. As such, community stakeholders, as a whole, were also much more diversified in the kinds of spaces that seemed relevant compared to museum insiders (see Table 5.4).

Community meetings provided an opportunity for stakeholders to share their perspectives with each other. At one AGO community meeting, for instance, a geographer presented a website that documented each tree within a park neighbouring the AGO, categorizing their age, species, and health – further inculcating a sensitivity to the local among the community. In addition to making them a formidable political force, the combined social capital of the stakeholders also distinguished them from museum insiders who, as we have seen, took a narrower perspective on the expansion, drawing mostly on their background in art and archaeology.

If the cognitive maps of community stakeholders were more geographically limited than they were for insiders, focusing predominantly on areas within Toronto, they were far broader in a temporal sense. Some of the residents I spoke with boasted about living in the neighbourhood for several decades. As a result, they tended to put the recent expansions in a more historical perspective, particularly when it came to evaluating architecture. Rather than competing with the most recent trends going on in other parts of the world, many community members placed importance on fitting into Toronto’s local architectural heritage – even if that heritage fails to distinguish Toronto internationally. For instance, adorning the AGO community association’s website is a 19th century painting of the original mansion that first housed the gallery (know as “the Grange”), rather than the building as it exists today (see Figure 5.2).
The Global City vs. the City of Neighbourhoods

Figure 5.2 Grange Park (painting), 1875
This watercolour of the Grange by Henri Perre captures the bucolic origins of the building. The image is featured on the front page of the Community Association’s website (http://grangeparktoronto.ca/).

Over the years the AGO has expanded to the point where the Grange is a tiny wing at the rear of the building. During the Gehry expansion, the Grange was converted from a heritage museum into a coffee bar furnished in modern design. This change was a common source of criticism among residents:

“[The Grange] was a piece of history! It was also the first art gallery, and the owners left the house to the art gallery. And now… Have you been in there? That cheesy coffee shop with that crappy Ikea furniture? Excuse me, but where are the antiques? They’re upstairs piled on the floor!”
AGO Resident

“[The AGO] paid no attention to heritage issues… [The Grange] is a shell of a building and the ground floor is full of modern furniture… There’s no sense that this was actually a home and the kind of activities that went on in the building.”
AGO Resident

The “crappy” furniture that drew the ire of these residents was not actually Ikea, but rather a gift from the Royal Danish Consulate – similar to a gift made earlier to the MOMA in New York, as one AGO manager proudly informed me. This same manager dismissed concerns about the antique furniture: “Very little of the furniture in those rooms were the original of the house. Very few pieces. We like people to think it was period but it wasn’t real.”
Though a marginal issue in the expansion projects overall, this disagreement over furniture demonstrates vividly the larger misaligned perceptions of the museum insiders and community stakeholders. Embedded within the international field of design, the AGO manager valued the modern Danish furniture over the “fake” antiques. The residents, who saw the Grange as a way of connecting with local history, came to the opposite conclusion. Distinctions that seemed so important to the manager (between the Danish furniture and Ikea, and between original and reproduction antiques) were imperceptible, or at least unimportant, to the residents.

There was general agreement among stakeholders that the architectural heritage of the city had largely been sacrificed in a constant effort to keep up with the new. With this view in mind, the expansions of the ROM and AGO were inherently risky. As a local politician described:

> [The heritage] buildings that we have created are already being destroyed. Those that remain, I think we have a responsibility to make sure they… aren’t continually vandalized with spur of the moment renovations.

When I asked residents about their biggest fears upon first learning about the expansion projects, respect for heritage was a common response:

> One fear was that the stately original buildings [of the ROM] would lose their aesthetic appearance. [I] hoped the expansion would more or less seamlessly interface… My humble opinion is that shards of the crystal mere inches away and cutting into the original building is incongruous, mars the pristine heritage character of the original buildings.

ROM Resident

While the museum leadership made bold claims about how the new buildings would revitalize the institutions and the city, it was hard for long-time residents to get excited. They had witnessed successive waves of modernist architecture get built and then demolished around the museums’ original heritage buildings which led them to be sceptical about the permanence of the new architecture and even more protective over the original heritage buildings.

V. Conclusion

Museum insiders and community stakeholders came into contact within the same physical space, but were brought there from very different institutional positions (and therefore with different
associated social networks, resources, and cognitive schemata). The position of museum insiders was within a set of formal organizations connected to each other through contracts and sharing an explicit overarching mandate. They were also a relatively homogeneous group who shared similar career backgrounds, and this was reflected in the homogeneity of their cognitive maps.

Community stakeholders, on the other hand, were positioned within the much less formal institution of the neighbourhood. Though some organizational formality emerged during the development process as opposition movements were formed, the group was much more heterogeneous and tied together by little more than the location of their homes, their willingness to engage in community activism, and background demographic similarities such as age and class. Likewise, their cognitive maps were also quite heterogeneous relative to the museum insiders (see Table 5.4).

However, understanding the stakes of the conflict between the two groups requires us to go beyond the institutional positions themselves and understand how those positions are materialized through spatial practices with associated cognitive maps.

The spatial practices of the museum insiders were greatly influenced by the “isomorphic” pull of the international fields within which they were situated (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). For a vision of how to develop their museum, they looked to Europe and North America. They spoke with colleagues in other cities. They engaged in “policy tourism” by visiting other museums around the world. They hired foreign architecture firms that had gained international stardom. And they promoted their new buildings on the global tourist market. Furthermore, their shared background in the study of art and artifacts inculcated museum insiders with a unique way of understanding space and material objects.

In contrast to these spatial practices, community stakeholders experienced the museums mostly within the course of everyday, domestic life and throughout long term habitation. They did not see the ROM and AGO through the tourist gaze, as someone who visits from afar, takes a picture, and leaves. Instead they saw the museums from every angle, at every point of the day, and over the span of decades. They noticed every tree and could tell if the air coming out of the ventilation smelled like french fries. And while the expansion projects became an opportunity for
museum insiders to reach out and strengthen their international networks, the projects prompted community stakeholders to turn inward and forge local connections and organizational capacity. They exchanged contact information with their neighbours, organized community meetings, and shared stories about the neighbourhood and its history.

Their distinct spatial practices sensitized each group to a different set of spatial cues both local and extra-local, and influenced how these cues were cognitively ordered. I adopted the concept of a “cognitive map” as an analytic tool for describing the set of spatial cues that were salient to each group and how they were used to interpret the expansion projects. The relationship between these cognitive maps and each group’s spatial practices is mutually reinforcing. Just as spatial practices sensitize actors to certain cues over others, the way in which actors cognitively construct place also informs their practices. Throughout the development process, each group attempted to impose a material order that conformed to their own sense of place: as a global city or a city of neighbourhoods.

However, the struggle over place need not be a zero-sum game. As we will see in the next chapter, while the two projects were similar in that they represented a confrontation between the global city and the city of neighbourhoods, the ROM’s project exacerbated these differences while the AGO managed to find common ground and produce a building that generally satisfied both groups (with some important exceptions).
In this chapter, I examine the development process itself, and in doing so address the question of how iconic architecture gets built in terms of power. What kind of power does it take to build a major iconic architectural project? Who has influence over the project and to what end? How does power differ both quantitatively and qualitatively across different stakeholder groups? As with the previous chapters, I will be building on the existing political-economic perspective which typically depicts urban development as a process contested by different groups of stakeholders distinguished by pre-existing interests and sets of resources (Hannigan 2010). As we have already seen and will continue to see in this chapter, this perspective does partially capture the dynamics of the ROM and AGO expansions. Museum leadership and staff, major donors, governments, and community members all had distinct reasons for involving themselves in the expansion projects and drew on variable sources of power in order to influence its outcome: property ownership, political office, economic capital, social capital, etc.

However, interests and resources are only part of the picture. The ROM and AGO present us with a case in which two very similar projects on a political-economic basis with similar sets of stakeholders produced different outcomes in terms of both architecture and community relations. Examining these differences reveals the importance of the symbolic and social interactive dimension of the development process. Here the ROM and the AGO make an excellent comparative case because they employed very different design and development strategies which in turn provoked different responses from the surrounding community. Some of these strategies inspired support or acceptance among outsiders. Other strategies aroused opposition.

In theorizing this symbolic, interactive dimension of the development process, I adopt the notion of “performance” which, from Mead to Butler, has long played an important role in sociological theory. Despite this fact, performance has rarely been the focus of studies of urban development. To conceptualize the development process as a “performance” that is permeated with meaning, I draw on the work of theorists such as Irving Goffman (1959; 1974) and Harold Garfinkel (1967),
as well as many of the related concepts that have been introduced earlier in this study: public legitimation, front and back stage practices, institutional logic, and aesthetic sensibility. Bringing the notion of performance back into an analysis of power, I also build on Jeffrey Alexander’s (2010) work on “performative power”, which can be defined as power and influence that is derived from conforming to ideal expectations within a given social context.

The chapter is structured around a chronological narrative that I divide into two “Acts”. Act One examines the selection of the architects and the designs. I contrast the ROM’s strategy of holding an open public competition with the AGO’s decision to hire an architect and finalize a design in secret. While the AGO began this process in a far more economically advantageous position than the ROM, by the end it was the AGO and not the ROM that was scrambling to save their expansion project. To explain this turn of events, I apply and develop the concept of performative power, contrasting it with traditional interest-based perspectives on urban politics.

Act Two focuses on two moments of “legitimacy crisis” (Suchman 1995) that marked turning points for both the ROM and the AGO. While the ROM found it difficult to live up to the expectations created during the initial competition, and encountered outright opposition when they revealed their plan to build a condominium, the AGO successfully rehabilitated its public legitimacy by opening up the design and development process to public consultation and partnering with the community to revitalize Grange Park. Much like the breaching experiments of ethnomethodology, these moments of crisis and rehabilitation give us a window into the underlying logic of public legitimacy.

The chapter ends with an analysis of the relationship between performance and public legitimacy. I argue that the performances of the museums throughout the development process constituted a form of “symbolic boundary making”. Those practices which emphasized the social divisions between the museums and the surrounding community inspired mistrust and opposition. At these moments the museums were perceived to be outside invaders imposing their development upon the community. Whereas the museums attracted the most support when they were able to portray themselves as agents of the community, drawing on an existing sense of collective ownership that many community members have historically felt toward the museums.
Before beginning the analysis, it is worth asserting that the performative approach I adopt is not intended to be an alternative to the political-economic perspective or to suggest that interests and resources are unimportant. Rather, I intend to show that interests and the uses of resources depend on how they are integrated into an ongoing interaction between various stakeholders (or “players” to continue the performance metaphor), which occurs within symbolic systems that establish expectations and attach meaning to practices. Economic resources, for example, may go a lot further when used in ways that are considered legitimate. Furthermore, I do not intend for the term “performance” to suggest that interactions between players are superficial. Players do not passively follow a pre-determined script. Rather, they are constantly evaluating each other and the development process itself according to sets of expectations which (as we saw in the last chapter) may vary significantly from player to player. The outcome of the development process depends not only on who has the power to assert their expectations even against the opposition of others, but also how these expectations shift throughout the course of development.

I. Act 1: Selecting an Architect and Design

i. Ownership and the Power of Initiative

Property ownership is one of the most important social divisions within modern capitalist society and it is a primary focus of the political-economic perspective. Within urban studies the division between the propertied and propertyless is further reinforced by the distinction between the use-value and exchange-value of the urban landscape (Logan and Molotch 1987). While all inhabitants rely on the use-value of space, property owners have unique access to its exchange-value. And development that may raise the exchange-value of a property may not improve its use-value (at least not for certain populations).

As has been discussed in Chapter 4, public institutions present some complications for traditional political-economic analysis. Exchange-value did play some role in the ROM and AGO expansions, but it was of secondary importance. Property ownership was more significant in providing the museum leadership with what we might call the power of initiative. In their role as de facto property owners, it was the museum leadership that formally began the development process itself. In doing so, they alone were able to establish a basic framework within which the
expansions would take place. To use the language of performance, the power of initiative enables one to set the stage and establish some basic rules for how the performance will play out.

The choice to pursue iconic architectural development in the first place was made largely independently by museum leadership and their closest associates. Most people in the community were given no say over what kind of expansion should take place, or even if an expansion was warranted in the first place. One Annex resident, who was generally supportive of the ROM’s expansion, lamented the fact that the community was only able to provide input once the process was already underway:

There wasn’t a point where the community was called in initially to say “is this the process?” Are you part of the process of deciding whether a building should be built here, whether there should be some other resolution to finding an expansion, whether what was there was appropriate and could be altered or expanded, modified, reused in some way? …

Q: Would you have liked to have input earlier on in the process?

…I guess in an ideal world, if you’re a developer in a community, you come to the community first. You say, “These are what our goals are. These are the challenges. How can we work together?”

Without the power of initiative, community members were put into a position of constant reaction. In some cases these reactions were to pre-planned moments of consultation. In other cases they were attempts by the community to assert themselves into the process against the will of the museums.

While the power of initiative is important, it does not guarantee that things will work out as the developer (in this case the museum leadership) envisions. As the process unfolds, it becomes subject to numerous sources of contingency and contestation that are difficult to predict and manage ahead of time. This is particularly true in cases of iconic architectural development where those involved are typically going through the process for the first time and building something that has never been built before. Even the architectural firms who may have built

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34 For an example of community members who lacked property rights but still attempted to take the power of initiative when it came to planning the redevelopment of an abandoned track of industrial land, see Silver (2013).
similar projects elsewhere are working with new clients in new cities and attempting to develop original designs. As we will see throughout this chapter, the ROM and AGO projects were characterized by unpredictability on a variety of fronts.

Though the power of initiative granted the museum leadership some important initial decisions, the consequences that followed from these decisions depended on a complex web of relationships and competing interests and sensibilities. To gauge these consequences, we can compare the ROM’s plan for a competition with the AGO’s plan to choose their architect and design in private. As will become clear, once the development process is underway, even property owners shift from a position of initiative into a position of reaction.

ii. ROM: The Competition

An architectural competition is not an obvious development strategy to undertake. It is expensive, time consuming, and unpredictable. Yet facing a decline in public legitimacy and having secured no initial sources of funding, a competition seemed to be a risk worth taking for the ROM administration. These two dilemmas – the need for both financial support and public legitimacy – are reflected in how director William Thorsell justified his decision to hold a competition:

Q: When you began this process, you started with a big open competition. Why a competition? Why not just recruit some specific architect that you liked?

A: Well, partly because we just had to generate awareness and enthusiasm. Second of all, it’s a public institution on a major public corner in a major city of the country. It’s not a private institution. My view was that this should be a public competition. There should be lots of public engagement. There should be debate... We were obviously dealing with a public asset and a public spot, so why not have a public competition?

As Larson (1994) explains, the very nature of the architectural competition is tied to the notion of “public-ness”:

[The architectural competition] is there to underscore the importance of the project about to be undertaken. The competition in itself helps turn the desired building into a monument before the fact: Publicity and public-ness, the fact of being public, becomes an integral part of the project’s extraordinary symbolic essence (p.478).
However, it is not just the open spectacle of a competition that helps it to attract the attention of the public. The competition also helps to reposition the architectural process as an artistic endeavour. The practice of architecture has been historically constructed both as a profession built on applying practical expertise to solve a problem for a client, as well as an art form that must celebrate the unrestrained genius and creativity of a single individual (Stevens 2002). The competition provides an opportunity to emphasize this latter dimension. Because anyone can theoretically win, competitions pay homage to the transcendent nature of art by suggesting that “artistic talent can be found anywhere, among the humblest members of a profession as much as among its elites” (Larson 1994:476). Furthermore, competitions allow for the “denial of economics” that is so central to the field of art (Bourdieu 1993) by putting some distance between the abstract creative process and the immediate material restraints of a budget and the demands of the client (Larson 1994:478). Because of these characteristics, the competition amounts to a ritual that transforms the architect into an artist, the client into a patron, and the building into a piece of art with qualities that far surpass its actual material form or functional purpose.

The ROM’s competition was supplemented with public lectures and exhibitions that were intended to lay the design process out in the open and draw the public in (symbolically, at least) as participants. Thorsell wanted to create what he called a “landscape of desire” that would excite people and attract their support. In his public statements he encouraged Torontonians to see the future of the city tied to the success of the ROM’s expansion. “Architecture is the most public of the arts, durable, conspicuous and unavoidable, a condition of building anything — symphony halls and libraries, opera houses, museums, police stations and banks,” he wrote in a Globe and Mail editorial. “Cultural institutions, more than any other, have a duty to produce great architecture: It is part of their mission” (Thorsell 2004).

After posting an announcement for the competition in national and international newspapers in June 2001, the ROM selected 12 firms whose initial designs were displayed in a public exhibition. The exhibition helped to underscore the equivalence between architecture and art and allowed the ROM to portray itself as transparent and open to public scrutiny. Comment cards and question and answer sessions with the architects gave members of the public the opportunity
to evaluate and pass judgement on the competing designs – ritually acting out the same process that would actually be occurring behind closed doors by the ROM administration.

At this early stage Daniel Libeskind had already begun to distinguish himself with what the \textit{Globe and Mail} called at the time “the cheekiest presentation” of the group (Adams 2001): crystalline shapes scribbled onto napkins from the ROM’s restaurant. Even as the competition narrowed to three finalists, it was clear to the ROM administration that Libeskind was generating the most attention both within the press and at public meetings. From \textit{Time} magazine:

The trio of finalists can be summed up simply: the local guy (Vancouver-based Bing Thom); the preservationist guy (Turin’s Andrea Bruno); and the famous guy (Berlin's Daniel Libeskind)... Libeskind's ideas are the most interesting in the race. The inscrutable scribbles showed intriguing crystal-shaped galleries jutting out onto the corner of Bloor and Avenue Road. While it's unclear where Libeskind will put all the requisite parts, his plan definitely has the potential to become an icon. And that's what the ROM really needs. (Luscombe 2001)

Libeskind has been described as the quintessential celebrity “starchitect” (McNeill 2009:59-62). His eccentric personality, all-black wardrobe (from his cowboy boots to thick-framed glasses), and distinctive deconstructivist architectural designs all serve as cultural capital that positions Libeskind firmly at the “architecture as art” end of the field (Stevens 2002). In his writing and public statements, he emphasizes the creative, artistic elements of the design process: being overcome by inspiration, having the “perfect form” emerge after weeks of failure, etc. (McNeill 2009:59). In fact the use of napkins in his initial designs became part of an elaborate creation myth that both Libeskind and the ROM heavily promoted throughout the expansion process:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[35] In opposing “local” and “preservationist” to “famous” and “icon”, Luscombe (2001) provides further evidence how deeply this project was characterized by the dichotomy of local and global sensibilities identified in the previous chapter.
\item[36] Following Bourdieu (1983), Stevens (2002) divides the field of architectural production between two competing logics: one based on “professional capital” which favors the largest firms who dominate the business of architecture and produce relatively predictable designs, and another based on “cultural capital” which favors the smaller, avant-garde firms who dominate the art of architecture.
\item[37] Further adding to Libeskind’s persona as an artist is his unmatched penchant for what Davey (2007) calls “theoryspeak”. In describing his design for the ROM, Libeskind was quoted as saying “the clarity of circulation and access creates a transparency in which the inherited architecture and new construction form an equilibrium of imaginative unity” (Nuttall-Smith 2008:58).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
“It all started on a napkin … Architect Daniel Libeskind’s initial concept for the ROM’s expansion was sketched on paper napkins while attending a family wedding at the Museum. Because the shape of the new building was inspired by specimens from the Museum’s gem and mineral collection, the design was quickly dubbed ‘the Crystal’.” (Royal Ontario Museum 2008:1)

Figure 6.1. Libeskind’s “napkin” sketch

The napkin story also exemplifies Libeskind’s ability to draw on identity discourse in order to emphasize the cultural significance of his designs. This is a strategy that he has proven particularly adept at in projects designed to memorialize tragedy such as the Jewish Museum in Berlin and the Ground Zero site in New York (McNeill 2009:60-61). Even without the weight of a tragedy, Libeskind weaved together family connections (the wedding) and local aesthetic inspiration (the mineral collection) in order to present his building as a Toronto icon rather than just another entry in a German architect’s portfolio. Libeskind’s command over this discourse was perhaps matched only by Thorsell who drew on his journalistic background to reinforce the public significance of the design.

By the time shovels entered the ground in May 2003, it was clear that the ROM’s strategy of using an open, public competition and selection of Daniel Libeskind was a success – at least initially. This success can be evaluated against the initial dilemmas of attracting financial support and building public legitimacy. First, the ROM exceeded its initial fundraising goals,
raising $115 million of what was originally projected to be just a $200 million budget (Royal Ontario Museum 2003). $30 million of this money came from Michael Lee-Chin, a self-made billionaire immigrant from Jamaica who, in sharp contrast to old money families like the Westons and the Thomsons, seemed to radiate the “new Toronto” discussed in Chapter 3.

Second, the project generated exactly the kind of public support that the Thorsell was looking for. The ROM became a mainstay in the pages of the local newspapers and also received significant national and international coverage (see Figure 6.2). Within the press, the ROM was seen as the crown jewel in this period of cultural investment. The “Renaissance ROM” brand was co-opted by the media as the “Toronto renaissance” and used to refer to all of the expansion projects taking place that decade (e.g. Hume 2001, Adams 2002).

![Figure 6.2. Newspaper references to “Royal Ontario Museum” and “Art Gallery of Ontario”, 1990-2012](image)

Data generated using the Factiva Database.

Equally important, the ROM’s strategy seemed to succeed in generating support – or at least tacit approval – of the surrounding communities and their powerful residents associations. The significance of this accomplishment is notable particularly in light of the different cognitive maps identified in the last chapter. In choosing a German architect to design a radically
unprecedented building that would involve the removal of green space and the obscuring of heritage architecture, the ROM put itself on a potential collision path with the community. And yet the plans initially faced no major opposition.

To the actual architecture, community reactions seemed to have ranged from mildly positive to indifferent. This is contrary to the assumption of some in the press that Torontonians were too conservative to tolerate Libeskind’s design (e.g. Rochon 2002). Some of my participants recounted that they were supportive of Libeskind’s design. Others preferred some of the alternatives. Almost everyone I spoke with had ideas for how the project could have been designed better. In most cases these suggestions were not about the overall architecture, but to ways in which the new building would relate to the surrounding cityscape: creating more continuity between historic buildings and new buildings, incorporating a water feature to symbolize the historic creek which used to run to the west of the museum, a more engaging public square, etc.

Yet, no one seemed particularly bothered by the fact that their opinions had no noticeable impact on the eventual development process – at least not enough to try to intervene. For every resident who criticized the level of consultation (see example on page 130), there were others who praised the ROM for giving them an opportunity to voice their input:

> The relationship [between the ROM and the community] was excellent. Mr. Thorsell was very gracious and listened to all our comments, including criticisms. He wanted the best for the ROM and recognized local residents, many of whom, myself included, are long time devotees of the ROM.

ROM Resident

Thus, while many community members could think of ways in which specific things could have been done better, the open nature of process seemed to have inspired a sufficient level of trust among the community and removed any potential red flags that might have led to overt

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38 Here it is worth re-emphasizing the fact that the ROM’s global sensibilities and the community’s local sensibilities were not necessarily contradictory. Rather, they constituted a different set of criteria upon which the project was evaluated. The qualities which attracted the ROM to Libeskind and his designs were not especially important to the community who seemed more fixated on the local qualities associated with a lived space (as their design suggestions indicate).
opposition. By putting their design process on public display, the ROM successfully met the expectations for how public institutions should behave. Community members saw themselves as stakeholders in the process whose opinions mattered, and the ROM acknowledged this fact by keeping them up to date on the development process and providing them an opportunity to express these opinions. By contrast, there seemed to be no expectation among community members that the ROM necessarily needed to follow any specific ideas in particular.

**iii. AGO: The Negotiation**

In contrast to the ROM, the AGO kept its expansion plans as quiet as possible as it undertook a series of delicate negotiations: first to confirm the shape and size of Ken Thompson’s donation, then to convince Frank Gehry to take on the project, and finally to come up with a design that fit the needs and financial constraints of the gallery. For AGO director Matthew Teitelbaum, the public seemed to be an unwanted intruder into this process. As with Thorsell, I asked Teitelbaum to justify his decision not to hold a competition or even publicly announce the expansion project. He responded by contrasting the AGO’s starting position with that of the ROM:

> I think that both William [Thorsell] and I did what we had to do. He needed a public process. He needed the conversation about architecture. He needed the excitement about changing the public institution as part of a public dialogue. And so the way he went about it was terrific. The way he brought architects into the process, had them do public talks, created those audiences was exactly what he had to do. We didn’t have to do that. In fact the longer we could figure out what we needed to do, the better. Without public scrutiny. So we were almost completely opposite. In the end, he had a public process that led to a competition that led to the selection of a plan, and we had the development of a plan in private, out of the public eye, until such time as it was necessary to share it. You know if I could have waved a magic wand I would have kept it private – that is to say internal – even longer.

Much of the differences between the two institutions in these early stages can be attributed the towering presence of Ken Thomson. It was Thomson’s donation that led to the AGO’s expansion plans, so the entire process depended on his continued support. Having devoted much of his life to collecting art, Thomson had his own views on the significance of the collection he was about to donate and how it should be displayed. These views needed to somehow be
integrated with the AGO’s existing scheme for organizing and displaying their collection. As a result of this situation, the AGO’s expansion process unfolded from the “inside out” in two senses. First, the internal issues of how to organize the collection needed to be sorted out before the form of the building could be designed (in contrast to the ROM which began with the external crystal and fit the galleries in afterward). Second, the AGO leadership devoted their time and energy to internal negotiations with Ken Thomson, and later Frank Gehry, rather than the outside public (as with the ROM). As suggested in the quote above, the AGO tried to withhold any public relations work until these internal negotiations had been finalized.

A major benefit of having Thomson on board from the beginning was that it gave the project a level of certainty that did not exist for the ROM. This certainty allowed the AGO to ambitiously pursue whichever architect they wanted. As Teitelbaum recounted, Gehry was the obvious choice:

[Thomson’s representative] and I had a conversation that probably lasted 15 seconds... It was “well if we’re going to do this who should it be?”

“It should be Frank Gehry.”

“Yeah, I think that’s right.” …I mean it really wasn’t more complicated than that.

Frank Gehry is arguably the most famous living architect in the world today – perhaps the most famous since Frank Lloyd Wright. His career highlights do not need to be recounted here other than to point out again the significance that the Gehry-designed Guggenheim Bilbao played in both the AGO and ROM expansions. Beyond his fame, Gehry also appealed to the AGO because of a very important local connection: he was born and raised in Toronto. In fact, as the

39 The Thomson collection was extremely diverse, containing everything from paintings by baroque masters, to the Group of Seven, to antique model ships. A major dilemma, therefore, was how to maintain the Thomson collection as a distinct entity while also creating continuity with the rest of the gallery. In the end the solution was to break up the Thomson collection into three major sections that could be displayed in galleries adjacent to comparable sections of the AGO’s existing collection.

40 Thomson’s presence in the expansion complicated the AGO’s power of initiative. Thomson’s donation was a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for the expansion to occur, so the AGO required his continued approval of their actions. Nonetheless, the AGO leadership was still in primary control of the expansion itself and even rejected some of Thomson’s curatorial suggestions. Had Thomson wanted the power of initiative for himself, he would have had to found his own gallery – an option he initially considered but ultimately rejected in favour of working with the AGO.
AGO so often pointed out, Gehry’s grandmother’s house was just a few doors south of the Grange Park (see Figure 6.3). As a child, he had even visited the gallery. This gave Gehry and the AGO a local narrative that sounded far more authentic than Libeskind’s talk of weddings and napkins.

Because their personalities weighed so heavily on the expansion projects, it is worth briefly comparing Libeskind and Gehry. In some ways, Gehry, like Libeskind, fits the mould of the starchitect: an eccentric with a knack for self-promotion who built his career on avant-garde, deconstructivist designs. However, while Libeskind tends to rely on “theoryspeak” and making grandiose statements about the significance of his buildings (Davey 2007), Gehry is characteristically plain spoken and self-deprecating, often describing his designs as “silly” or even “mud pies”. Despite being a celebrity architect, Gehry portrays himself as somewhat of a populist, jumping at opportunities to discuss hockey, for instance. In some cases, these personality quirks seemed to work against the interests of the AGO, as in one episode recounted to me by a staff member:
It was some news conference when [Gehry] was coming in to open an exhibition of... all the projects he had done in other places. And we really wanted to hammer this because it’s kind of hard to get people to come in and look at [architectural] models. …Frank shows up wearing a Roots jacket with [Wayne] Gretzky’s number on the back. He’s apparently a big fan of hockey and a big fan of Wayne. The whole news conference turned into Wayne Gretzky. We were just furious… None of the news stories said anything about the AGO! They all talked about Wayne Gretzky and his relationship with Frank.

However, long before he ever made a public appearance, Gehry’s contributions to the eventual expansion project were being planned away from the public sphere. To better understand the significance of the AGO’s strategy and how it contrasted with the ROM, we can reintroduce the concepts of “front stage” and “back stage” practices from Chapter 4. Recall that front stage practices refers to those strategies undertaken by a public institution to manage and reinforce its legitimacy. Back stage practices, by contrast, refer to the necessary requirements of managing any complex organization. The expansion projects presented the ROM and AGO with a new series of back stage requirements that needed to be met: securing financial support, finalizing a realistic design, meeting necessary legal requirements for expansion, etc. Without meeting these requirements, the expansions would not proceed.

When it came to the front stage, however, the two institutions took opposite approaches. Through the competition, the ROM managed to unify both front and back stage practices. The process by which they selected a design and accumulated the necessary financial and political resources was the same process by which they attempted to insert the museum into the centre of civic life in Toronto and build trust within the community.

As is evidenced in the quote on page 137, Teitelbaum and the AGO administration perceived front stage and back stage practices as contradictory. Thus, the AGO devoted itself entirely to back stage work and attempted to keep the plans out of the public sphere completely. Even as rumours of the expansion hit the press in early 2001 (see Posner 2001), the AGO’s strategy was to offer no comment. In sharp contrast to Libeskind and Thorsell’s flair for public showmanship, some AGO staff lamented that their institution simply did not know how to engage the public or the surrounding community:
[The AGO’s] idea of community relations was really donor relations. I.e., the people they listened to, the people they talked to…by and large effectively, they were all kind of breathing their own air. That was their definition of community relations.

AGO Manager

Whether the AGO leadership was simply unaware of the importance of legitimacy management, or believed they could put it off until later in the development process, the issue was soon taken out of their hands. Learning of the project through the press, members of the community realized that a possible expansion – particularly one by Frank Gehry – had the potential to dramatically change the neighbourhood. Put in the context of the previous expansion project of the late 1980’s, and the bylaw that prevented the AGO from expanding again (see page 58), residents assumed the worst. Why else would the AGO be so secretive about its plans?

Referencing specifically the bylaw, one resident complained to me:

There was a trust question here. That is, no matter what they say, are they going to do it? And why aren’t they obeying the law here? What kind of hanky-panky are we going on here? They seem to be lawless!

Grange Resident

Many of the same residents who had clashed with the AGO in the 1980s began to mobilize. Demonstrating the social capital at their disposal, one of the leading residents described their first steps:

[The AGO] never contacted us. What we did, was we immediately decided to… We called a public meeting. We called it “Imagining Grange Park”. And we fired a leaflet out to the neighbourhood. And we invited the Gallery to come and speak at the program. We invited John Sewell, former mayor [of Toronto, 1978-1980], to chair the meeting. The other speakers at that meeting were ...a heritage architect. ...We invited [OCAD] to send a speaker. And we organized it to actually have people talk about the park and what the Gallery was trying to do. And I think that they were kind of actually afraid to tell us what they were planning to do, or they didn’t think we were entitled to know what they were planning to do.

As the dispute with local residents played out in community meetings, protests, and in the pages of the local newspapers, the AGO’s list of enemies just seemed to grow. In preparation for the expansion project, staff had to be laid off, which caused labour disputes and a narrowly avoided
strike. In another cost-saving measure, the Canadian galleries were temporarily closed, including those displaying the popular “Group of Seven” – a move decried in the press. Furthermore, a prominent member of the AGO’s own board resigned in protest over the Gehry plan, telling the press that the project would cost $60 million more than was budgeted (Adams and Milroy 2004) – a claim that Gehry angry rejected (Adams 2004). To cap it all off, priceless ivory carvings from the Thompson collection were stolen out of the gallery in January 2004 (though they were returned by a lawyer two weeks later).

Relations were even breaking down with OCAD, which was undertaking its own expansion project with British architect Will Alsop. While their relationship is too complicated to summarize here, the two institutions did initially enter into negotiations over how they might coordinate their expansion projects. In the end, these negotiations collapsed. A senior OCAD administrator I spoke with voiced the same kind of mistrust as Grange residents and accused the AGO of treating OCAD as “the lesser partner”. Publicly, the architects Gehry and Alsop traded insults.

In a March 2004 editorial, the *Toronto Star* summarized the AGO’s position:

> The Art Gallery of Ontario should be on a high, having obtained architectural legend and hometown boy Frank Gehry for a major expansion. Instead, confidence in the AGO is badly shaken. The neighbours are unhappy. So are volunteers and donors - both those who have written multi-million dollar cheques, and those who pay their $85 annual membership fee. Even people who might never visit the gallery but happen to think the Group of Seven is pretty special have been offended. In fact, the AGO is facing its biggest public relations mess in years (“AGO must rebuilt trust,” 2004: A18)

Describing the same problems, the *Globe and Mail* blamed “the Kremlin-like secrecy of the process” (Milroy 2003). As evidence that the media’s interpretation of the situation was shared

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41 During the expansion of OCAD, architect Will Alsop personally held a series of consultation sessions that helped build goodwill between him, the college, and the local residents. As mentioned in Chapter 5, from the perspective of local residents, these consultations created a precedent that the AGO failed to meet. Alsop himself was not shy in making the comparison either: “I think [the AGO and Gehry] are so secretive, the people in the community nearby are already lining up to hate that building… By and large, the people [of Toronto] still invite me into their homes for a cup of tea – and sometimes something stronger” (quoted in Cowan 2004; also see Building Design 2004). These remarks were made in part as a response to Gehry’s criticism that Alsop’s building “hadn’t succeeded” in respecting Grange Park (Building Design 2004).
by the AGO administration itself, this is how one manager described the situation to me during an interview:

The AGO was going through an almost ruinous period of bad PR. This is back in late 2003 and early 2004 where everything the AGO tried to do seemed to blow up in its face. Much of it led by angry community members who had heretofore been largely ignored by the art gallery’s administration. So they were picking a tough time to grow this behemoth in the neighbourhood. You know, considering there had been no cultivation of the community as far as I could tell in the last 30 years.

In comparison to the ROM, the AGO’s back stage strategy had proven to be a major failure. Rather than building public legitimacy, the AGO was facing a legitimacy crisis. It is impossible to say whether this crisis might have eventually derailed the entire expansion project, or at least forced the AGO to scale back its ambitions (as it had in 1989). What we do know is that the emergence of this crisis – particularly as it became framed in the pages of the local newspapers – led the AGO to radically shift its attention from the back stage to front stage strategies of public engagement. In the next section we will examine these strategies and how they helped to successfully rebuild the AGO’s legitimacy.

iv. The Power of Performance

Contrasting the positions of the ROM and AGO in this initial period of the development process reveals a curious finding. From a political-economic perspective, the AGO seems to have had the more advantageous position. With a major donor already in place, the AGO did not need to appeal to the general public for support the way the ROM did. They were therefore able to exercise far more control over their development process than the ROM. And yet it was the AGO and not the ROM that was forced to make compromises: to residents, to OCAD, to rogue board members, and others. The ROM, by contrast, had retained firm control over their project.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, property ownership was extremely important because it gave the museums the power of initiative. They were uniquely able to establish the

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In fact, it was not until construction began in June 2005 that the AGO even kicked started a public fundraising campaign. At that point it had already secured $180 million in what was called a “whisper campaign” primary among its wealthy board members (Art Gallery of Ontario 2008; Adams 2005, January).
framework within which the development process would occur. However, once that process was initiated, a different sort of power became salient: the power of performance. If we define power as the ability to realize one’s will, even against the opposition or potential opposition of others (Weber 1946:180), then it is clear that the ROM retained more power than the AGO at this point in the development – a fact that can be attributed to the way in which the two institutions managed their projects in the public eye. Quite simply, the ROM put on a better performance. In structuring its expansion around an open competition with several opportunities for the public to learn about its plans and voice their opinions, the ROM conformed to existing expectations of how public institutions should behave. This allowed the ROM to legitimate itself and build support for its agenda. The AGO, on the other hand, violated these expectations and its legitimacy and agenda suffered as a result.

The power dynamics observed here reinforce the “performative” theory of power that Alexander (2010) develops in his analysis of the 2008 US presidential election. As he argues, dominant theories of how power operates in modern western democracies tend to stress the importance of uniting independent, demographically-based interest groups around a common agenda and political movement. The same characterization applies to dominant theories of urban politics, including growth machine and urban regime theories. Both theories describe power as being held by coalitions of interest groups who work together as long as their individual interests are aligned (Molotch 1976; Mollenkopf 1983; Mossberger and Stoker 2001).

However, as Alexander argues in the context of American electoral politics, these traditional approaches...

...have muted the voice of civil society and its citizens—the hopeful discourses about courage and conviction, honesty and integrity—that subject candidates to moral scrutiny. Reducing democracy to demography, students of politics have focused upon interests, making broad correlations between political opinion and stratification position... In the first place, one’s “objective” or “structural” position is always subject to subjective interpretation. What does it mean, in this time and this place, to be a working man, woman, black, Catholic, or Southerner? In the second place, parties and candidates struggling for power must present themselves not as slavishly serving a particular demographic but as speaking and acting on behalf of democratic ideals that go beyond circumscribed interests to embrace the aspirations of society.
There are some important parallels between electoral politics and major public architectural projects. Like candidates in an election, the ROM and AGO had to win the support of a broad group of citizens – too broad to win over in a series of private agreements with individual actors. Also like an election, major architectural projects are speculative. No one quite knows how a candidate will perform in office, nor how a new piece of architecture will impact a neighbourhood. Support is therefore premised on trust that things will work out for the best. In order to address both of these challenges, those seeking power must achieve a status of public legitimacy. That is, a widespread belief that they are capable of representing the public good.

Achieving public legitimacy is inherently a symbolic process and one that depends on performance. Just as Alexander documents candidate Barack Obama effectively portraying himself as a representation of American ideals, so too did the ROM convincingly portray itself as a representative of the public good during the early stages of its development process. The competition signalled not only that the ROM was willing to be open and truthful with the public, but also that its proposed building would become a special public monument; something deserving of iconic status. But what exactly is involved in a successful performance? What did stakeholders expect of the museums before they were willing to let the expansions proceed without a fight, or even to offer support? In Act Two we turn to two turning points in the development process that provide some insight into these questions.

II. **Act 2: Changing Fortunes**

1. **Performance Breakdown: Encountering Moments of Legitimacy Crisis**

Sociologists have long understood that many of our strongest social norms are implicit and function without our awareness (Berger and Luckman 1966; Mannheim 1949). Garfinkel’s (1967) famous “breaching” experiments were premised on the view that in violating norms we can make them explicit and open to observation. This insight, developed in the study of micro-sociological interactions, can also be applied to the study or meso- and macro- institutional analysis. Institutional logics, defined earlier as the “set of material practices and symbolic constructions which constitute [an institution’s] organizing principles” (Friedland and Alford 1991:248), govern the behaviour of organizations and individuals much like the implicit social norms of micro-interactions. Research in organizational sociology has shown that the success or
failure of organizations is directly related to their ability to conform to expectations (Zuckerman 1999). In fact, one of neo-institutionalism’s great insights is that organizations often depend more on putting on a good performance in a Goffman-esque sense than they do in rationalizing their practices in the Weberian sense (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Thus, there is important common ground between neo-institutionalism and Alexander’s concept of performative power.

As with the breaching experiments, the phenomenon of a “legitimacy crisis” can provide a useful focus in the study of institutional logics. Drawing on Suchman’s (1995) definition of legitimacy (introduced in Chapter 4), we can define a legitimacy crisis as an infringement upon or the failure to meet expectations of appropriate practices within a particular institutional arena that leads to the withdrawal of support or explicit opposition of outside parties. Another way to think of legitimacy crisis is as a “performance breakdown”. The actions of an organization may be perfectly in line with some desirable – even legitimate – end, but in undertaking those actions, they violate institutional norms. In other words, legitimacy crises arise from insufficient “front stage” practices, rather than back stage practices.

Empirically, legitimacy crises can be operationalized based on a change in the behaviour of outside parties. We know when an organization is facing a collapse in legitimacy when the previously supportive or neutral parties around it begin to withdraw support or mount opposition. To better understand the expectations at work during the ROM and AGO expansions, we can examine their behaviour in the moments leading up to periods of legitimacy crisis as well as the practices involved in repairing legitimacy.

As a comparative case, the ROM and AGO allow us to control for contextual factors and focus in on the different practices they employed throughout the development process. In this section I examine a particularly important point of comparison between the two museums. After the architects and initial designs were chosen, the two development projects took strikingly different paths. Following a successful competition and fundraising campaign, the ROM became mired in construction delays, unpopular redesigns, and an opposition campaign that caused them to cancel the second half of their expansion project and sell off part of their property. By the end, community members were distrustful of the organization and unenthusiastic about the completed building. The AGO, on the other hand, managed to win over many of its harshest critics by
adopting a new strategy of community engagement. Those who had once threatened to take
legal action against the gallery were now calling it a positive force in the neighbourhood, and the
building itself received almost universal approval. Given the similar contexts of the two
projects, these competing outcomes give us a clear window into the role of performative power
and underlying institutional logics on the outcome of iconic architectural development.

ii. ROM: Struggling to Live Up to the Hype

By the time the ROM began to construct the Michael Lee-Chin Crystal in March of 2004, $150
million had been raised toward what was still believed to be a $200 million project. That was the
good news. The bad news was that due to a series of emerging complications the real cost would
eventually balloon to $320 million, construction would take more than a year longer than
expected (the start of construction was already five months late), and the resulting building
would differ in some significant ways from the design that was presented to the public during the
competition. As Toronto Life magazine described, “the story of the Crystal’s selection, design
and construction didn’t unfold so much as lurch from excitement (with reservations), to
disappointment, to setback, to 18-month delay and to staggering overrun” (Nuttall-Smith
2008:58).

The complications began with the structural engineering needed to produce Libeskind’s unique
design. As it turned out Studio Daniel Libeskind had significantly underestimated the number of
steel beams required to support his structure. The solution required both shrinking the overall
size of the crystal and greatly increasing the amount of steel in its structure. To make matters
worse, the global commodities boom of the mid-2000s meant not only that the price of steel had
almost doubled since the ROM initially set its budget, but also that steel was simply hard to find
on the world market, forcing costly delays. As one senior ROM manager described:

When the project started, everything went nutty. The construction market got hot.
Steel went up. Every stage of the project was a challenge. I recall that the storm
in the south of America happened, and that flooding that happened. It sucked all
of the drywall out of Canada and into the States. So every time we were going
out we were getting higher prices: 15% higher, 20% higher. And also the
building was quite a challenge. You couldn’t build it in the normal way. When
you build a box, you build a box. It’s easy to put up scaffolding. But even
putting scaffolding on those slanted walls, it was a challenge. It was new frontiers
for the construction industry in Toronto.
In addition to unforeseen difficulties with the structure and interior of the crystal, the external skin presented a new set of complications. Although it had never been officially specified, initial models and computer renderings of Libeskind’s design depicted a translucent, glowing building, leading many to believe that it would be covered primarily in glass. However, the amount of glass and windows that the building could support were limited by a few important factors. One main concern was the preservation of artefacts sensitive to UV light, which meant that the building needed to have fewer windows, many of which would still need to be covered by shades.

Structurally, the building also needed to contend with the incredible weather variation experienced by Toronto and the possibility of ice and snow build up within the indents of the crystal. As Thorsell reported to the press: “We ran 30 tests for heavy snows and frozen rain... We got 30 avalanches” (quoted in Ross 2006). The solution to this problem was provided by a complex cladding system made up of aluminum panels that would drain and direct snow and ice toward a series of gutters. As a result of this system and the concerns about light, only 30% of the final building was clad in glass. The aluminum panels that covered the rest of the building became a frequent point of criticism among community members and architectural critics, and the subject of mockery in the press:

This just in, in the “managing expectations” category: the Michael Lee-Chin Crystal, the angular addition to the Royal Ontario Museum taking shape on Bloor Street, is not a crystal in the sense you might expect. In fact, like many a suburban bungalow, the five-pointed structure will be largely covered with aluminum siding.

(Kuitenbrouwer 2006)

Construction of the Michael Lee-Chin Crystal was finally completed at the end of May, 2007 – 22 months later than originally anticipated. In an effort to open the building as quickly as possible, Thorsell decided to hold a two-week “architectural opening” at the beginning of June before the installation of any of the new galleries. Though it was well attended, this strategy was interpreted by many members of the press as an act of desperation. Among the community, it was seen as evidence that Thorsell and Libeskind had sacrificed the ROM’s function as a
museum in order to build an ambitious piece of architecture. One Annex resident summarized this view by comparing the ROM to the AGO’s expansion:

Matthew Teitelbaum would never publicly say that I’m opening the gallery empty so that you could see the gallery before all of the, quote, stuff goes in. Stuff goes in! That’s what Thorsell said... And Libeskind has publicly stated that he didn’t care what the building was used for, he didn’t build a museum. That’s the big difference between him and Gehry. Gehry looked at the collection, loved the collection, came up with a building that flattered the collection and made visiting the collection a comfortable experience. Libeskind built a big thing. A big, overpriced thing!

In the end, it would take another year before the last of the galleries in the Crystal were opened to the public, making it a total of five years after demolition began on the old Terrace galleries. The final cost of the project came out to $320 million, leaving the ROM $50 million in debt.

The case of the ROM gives us a clear look into why mega-projects are notorious for delays and cost overruns (Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius and Rothengatter 2003). In addition to the amount of political and economic resources they require, the complications that arise during their development is directly related to the fact that they are designed by definition to resist the “rolling inertia” that makes up the character of place (Molotch et al. 2000). Instead of relying on well-established methods of development, iconic architectural developments attempt to do the very opposite. In building ambitious structures with no local precedents, they enter into unfamiliar and unpredictable territory. Neither the construction contractors, nor the architects, nor the museum staff had any experience with a development project quite like the Michael Lee-Chin Crystal. Thus, it is not surprising that they ran into so many unforeseen complications and were continually having to revise designs, budget estimates, and the construction timeline.

One unanticipated consequence of the ROM’s competition was that, in creating a vivid and ambitious image of a particular building in the minds of the outside public, it also created a set of expectations that would be very difficult to meet as the building took concrete form. When the ROM failed to conform to these expectations, the failure itself became a central part of people’s interpretation of the new building. Witnessing the aluminum cladding going up after seeing the original translucent models seemed to be a near-universal source of disappointment among local
residents. Although, this disappointment was expressed in a variety of ways, from a sympathetic account:

While the ROM did attempt to meet expectations, the crystal evolved from one that was transparent to what we see today. We understand there were various reasons why the original ideas could not be accomplished. For example, textiles needed to be shielded from sunlight. And 100% glass crystal was not practical from a weather standpoint... [However] the vast expanse of sidewalk on Bloor is rather bleak and the entrance I find rather small and dull in that it does not beckon one to step inside to discover all the wonderful exhibits.

To abstract reflection:

I was really captivated by the sketches. I was captivated by the idea of a crystal... So what I’m thinking about, a crystal building meant that it had an inner soul that projected energy out. And that’s what I read into all of this. So when the building started to become not translucent, but opaque; what is it? Is it just a piece of aluminium that’s all bent in weird ways, or what? How does it keep its inner fire?

And finally outright frustration over another building in Toronto that failed to meet its potential:

This city has always been cheap! It’s always looking for shortcuts. It’s always looking for an easy solution. It’s always looked for band-aids. And it’s always been thus!

As the above quotes also suggest, people who were more familiar with the design process itself, and the complications that led the ROM to make certain changes, were more likely to sympathize with the ROM. This point will be illustrated more strongly when we look at the AGO expansion, which had a design process that was more open to public scrutiny.

While the design changes dampened enthusiasm for the multi-million dollar expansion, these challenges on their own did not really constitute a full blown legitimacy crisis for the ROM. By far the most fundamental challenge to the ROM’s legitimacy – and the most significant violation of expectations among the local community – came when it was revealed gradually in 2005 that the Michael Lee-Chin Crystal was only phase one of a two phase expansion project. Phase two involved the demolition of the shuttered McLaughlin Planetarium and its replacement with a 44-
storey condominium that would include space for new museum offices and revenue to pay for phase one.

In contrast to the roll-out of the Michael Lee-Chin Crystal, the ROM had been quietly working with a private developer on the condo proposal. It began in April 2004 when the ROM put out an invitation for anyone interested in partnering in the redevelopment of the planetarium site. Though it was reported periodically in the press, details were scarce and the plan attracted little public attention. Eventually the ROM chose to partner with a private developer with whom they devised plans for the condominium. Privately Thorsell had been receiving significant resistance among those in the know, including members of the city’s planning department, the University of Toronto, and even members of his own senior staff.

When the ROM officially submitted its plans to the planning department in September 2005, opposition to the project shifted from private corridors to the public sphere. Local residents, politicians, and even major donors saw the condominium as a clear violation of public legitimacy that would transfer public land into private hands, place a modern skyscraper into the middle of the historic Queen’s Park district, and (most importantly) open up the possibility for this to become common practice among the many public institutions situated within that district. City Councillor Adam Vaughan (elected in 2006) summed up local sentiment:

> You’re seeking a massive public concession. In other words you’re selling institutional land for private wealth and for private use… You can’t create a short-term existential solution for an institution that has such a profound responsibility to the future and to the past. And so it’s a very problematic proposal. It shouldn’t have even seen the light of day… It’s not going to happen. Get over it.

The secrecy around the ROM’s condominium (and the AGO’s entire expansion for that matter) highlight what Freudenburg and Alario (2007) call the “dark side of legitimation”, which they define as a strategy that involves obscuring certain details and distracting the audience with others. In this case the ROM’s competition offered a distraction from the planning of the condominium going on behind closed doors. The ROM demonstrates that the effectiveness of this strategy can vary widely depending on the practices being legitimated. The ROM was only able to keep its condominium project in “the dark” for so long before it would need to be brought before the public. On the other hand, the museum expansions themselves can be seen as more effective distractions for the Ontario government’s larger agenda of cuts to both the cultural sector and social programs more generally (Jenkins 2009).
Many of the community members saw the condominium project as an outright violation of public trust. “They’re given a privileged position,” said one resident to me. “They don’t have to pay tax. And so what you do is you say you have to take this [land] in trust and protect it. You can’t give it away!” The fact that the ROM was a public institution allowed opponents of the condominium proposal to frame the issue as a matter of public interest rather than competing private interests. As another resident stressed, “it was not a not-in-my-back-yard (NIMBY) issue. The ROM belongs to everybody. It was in everybody’s backyard.”

In the face of this emerging legitimacy crisis, where community members were beginning to question not just the ROM’s judgement, but also its commitment to the public good, Thorsell attempted to offer what Suchman (1995) calls a “normalizing account” of the condominium. Normalizing accounts are strategies of managing legitimacy crises, and include attempts to justify actions perceived as illegitimate by “redefining means and ends retrospectively, in order to make the disruptive events [in this case the proposal of a condominium] appear consonant with prevailing moral and cognitive beliefs” (p. 598). For Thorsell, justification meant attempting to reframe the issue from as a matter of aesthetics and architectural excellence (as he had for the Crystal itself), rather than a matter of public and private space.

Clearly demonstrating the “global city” sensibility that had guided Renaissance ROM from its very beginning, Thorsell boldly called the condominium a “great gift to Toronto” and a “fitting bookend and balance” to Libeskind’s Crystal (quoted in Adams 2005, September). The architect of the condominium (not Libeskind) compared his design to famous international buildings such as the bell tower in Venice’s Plaza San Marco and the residential tower connected to the Museum of Modern Art in New York (ibid).

Thorsell further attempted to frame opposition toward the condominium as evidence of Toronto’s conservatism and willingness to accept mediocrity. He compared the building favourably to the state of Toronto’s existing public spaces: “Look at Nathan Phillips Square and vicinity: it’s so degraded now you’d think you’re in some mid-level Soviet city” (ibid). And in a 2006 public lecture, he blasted the city for what he perceived was a fear of heights:
The city’s general hostility to height... has survived as a kind of subtext to urban development here... Proposals for tall buildings are almost always equated right off the top... with horror and greed, rather than anticipation and beauty... The fear, I believe, is fundamentally of height itself... the energy of the reach, the wealth of the developer, the opulence of the vision, the scope of the ambition, the immodesty of the thing, the claim to notice, the cloak for anonymity, the break with the status quo... Something has been missing in our souls here, something that includes wonder and adventure, which is apparent in many other dimensions of Toronto's environment. (Quoted in Boyle 2006)

This attempt to reframe the condominium issue in terms of aesthetics was undermined by the conflict between this global sensibilities, and the “city of neighbourhoods” sensibility dominant in surrounding community. While Thorsell might have seen the condominium as a way to distinguish Toronto from a “mid-level Soviet city”, community members focused on the context of the immediate Queen’s Park district. One local resident told me, “Queen’s Park is one of the last intact historic precincts in the city. The reason they call it Queen’s Park precinct is because the focus is supposed to be on Queen’s Park, not on a condo!”

Hostility toward the proposal came to a head during a public meeting in November 2005, attended by hundreds of local community members. After presenting the proposal, Thorsell and other ROM staff members listened to dozens of audience members denounce the condominium. At the end of the meeting Thorsell was met with a loud round of applause as he announced that he would withdraw the proposal (Cowan 2005). In addition to the meeting, opposition had been coming from the City, the University, and even donors who were calling in with threats to withdraw financial support. Unable to successfully reconcile the condominium project and its public legitimacy, the ROM instead was forced to retreat.

In the years that followed, the ROM continued to make revisions and adjustments to its development plans, but none attracted any support among local stakeholders. Finally in early 2009, long after the Michael Lee-Chin Crystal had opened, the ROM sold the planetarium property to the University of Toronto, effectively putting an end to phase two of Renaissance ROM. By this point, I had already been conducting research in the field and several of my participants within the community contacted me with the news, expressing relief that the land was now in the hands of a public institution that they saw as more trustworthy than the ROM. The deal provided the ROM with the same financial gain they were looking for with the
condominium ($20 million), but they forfeited new office and educational space, direct connection to the subway, and a large section of their property.

On strictly political-economic grounds, there was no reason for the ROM to back down from its proposal. It had both the economic and the legal power to carry on with the project. If the city council refused to approve development, the ROM could do what many private developers do in same situation: take the matter to the Ontario Municipal Board (a pseudo-judicial body with the power to overrule municipal governments, and which is often seen as being pro-development in orientation). And yet the ROM decided to wield none of this potential power over its own property and instead accept economic loss.

In my interview with him, Thorsell reflected upon what he saw as the lost potential of the condominium and his reasons for withdrawing the proposal:

The whole bottom of that tower was more ROM. The first five floors were museum and linked into the museum. The big new education centre. And it all linked down into the subway as well. There was a big plaza and a big entrance to the subway system and a new pedestrian walkway overtop of the garbage trucks behind us into philosopher’s walk. So there was a big pedestrian plaza and all the rest. And I just thought it was a wonderful proposal. But, you know, I certainly had people saying that that would have been great and you should have fought for it, but I know when not to fight... You know, as I said, I went around with my colleagues to all the main actors and none of the main actors were going to support this. So you just say it can’t be done. Again, we’re a public institution. And I said we’re not going to go out there without support for this.

The condominium proposal represents a clear instance of a neoliberal public-private partnership tied to profit (see Chapter 4), and the intrusion of market logic into internal operation of the public institution. However, by introducing a for-profit scheme into their expansion project, the ROM undermined the very resource on which they were most dependent: public legitimacy. Engaging in commercial activity such as real estate development or retail has and continues to tempt public institutions that struggle to meet the budgetary constraints. Nonetheless, the events surrounding the condominium incident demonstrate how the democratic logic under which these institutions operate – that is, their need to appeal to the public good in order to attract outside support – structures and restricts possible commercial activity. The proposal of a condominium represented a performance breakdown: an exposure of naked economic self-interest appropriate
for private real estate developers, but (at least among members of the local community) a violation of the acceptable behaviour expected of a public museum\(^{44}\).

### iii. AGO: Opening Up to the Public

At the beginning of 2004, the AGO found itself in a position similar to that of the ROM after the announcement of the condominium: facing opposition on multiple fronts and a deficit of trust and legitimacy. However while the ROM’s expansion was well underway by the time it countered a major legitimacy crisis, the AGO had not even finalized a design.

Feeling somewhat forced by mounting criticism over the secrecy of their project, the AGO held a press conference with Gehry in late January 2004 in order to release a preliminary design for the expansion – though they stressed that the design process was not over and that the final building would look different from the designs presented. Once revealed, the design took many in the architectural world by surprise. Unlike the Guggenheim Bilbao or the Disney Concert Hall, the design for the AGO was uncharacteristically conservative. Responses to the unexpected design were mixed – ranging from criticisms that the building was boring to praise that it put function over form and showed commendable restraint. *Globe and Mail* architectural critic Lisa Rochon (2004) dismissed the building “uninspired” and urban affairs reporter John Barber (2004) called it “a Volvo of a building.” At the *Toronto Star*, architectural critic Christopher Hume (2004) offered muted praise: “for once, even Frank Gehry might agree, less can be more.”

One senior AGO manager told me that Gehry himself was not satisfied with the response:

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\(^{44}\) It is important to note that the democratic logic of public institutions does not preclude them from engaging in any commercial activity. Both the ROM and the AGO used their expansions to provide more prominent locations to their restaurants, gift shops and private event spaces. Even real estate development seems to be tolerable within a particular context. In fact, concurrent with the ROM and AGO’s projects, the publicly-owned Sony Centre for the Performing Arts supported its own renovation by building a condominium on its property (coincidentally designed by Daniel Libeskind). In contrast to the ROM, this condominium saw little opposition. The different reactions toward the ROM and the Sony Centre highlight the importance of understanding the aesthetics of urban conflict. People evaluate objects, people, and behaviour within the context of spatial landmarks they consider to be important. Unlike the ROM and Queen’s Park, the Sony Centre is situated in the skyscraper-filled financial district. Also relevant to note is that the ROM and AGO depend far more on government funds and private donations than the Sony Centre, which supports itself mostly commercial activity and corporate sponsorship and is therefore less dependent on public legitimacy.
The response to [the first design] in the press, there was a lot of references. One of the ones was hockey rinks. And number two, airport hangers. Neither one of which tickled Frank’s fancy at all… That’s not what he wanted. He said, ‘if that’s the connotation, that’s not what I want’.

Despite the underwhelming response, the designs had the positive effect of offering a release valve to the local press by providing them with solid information about the project, the design, and the people involved. Rather than exclusively reporting on rumours, leaks, and angry residents, reporters were able to tell the story behind the project, which was exactly what the AGO had hoped for.

Among the local community – some of whom protested the Gehry press conference – the new design provided additional reasons to fear the project and its impact on the neighbourhood. In particular the design included a 10 storey tower hovering over the Grange house and the park to the south. Other than its massing, very little details had been established on how this building would look. When I asked one staff member what the community members’ main concern was, she immediately mentioned the tower.

Q: So what kinds of concerns did you hear [from community members]?

The tower. Absolutely. I would say that was the flashpoint. [The community’s] fear was that… Anywhere from put the park into shade constantly… Another concern was that the sun was going to bounce off the glass and fry the park… I would say that people who were opposed to the tower being there simply because it did have an impact on the park. It did create sort of a north wall to the park. There was that fear that it was going to close in the park.

By mid-2004, however, things began to slowly turn around for the AGO. It became apparent to the gallery’s administration that their inability to prevent or pacify public opposition stemmed in part from basic organizational deficiencies within the AGO. As mentioned earlier, much of their public relations resources were dedicated primarily toward donor relations. And while they had an office of government relations (in some sense the AGO’s biggest donor), they had no one focusing on community relations. Additionally, while the ROM had been carefully shaping a public narrative around its expansion, the AGO had neglected this kind of front stage management altogether. As a result, community members and reporters shaped their own narrative of the gallery as an insular and elitist institution unconcerned with the public good. As
one resident put it, “the problem with that gallery is that it’s a private club for the rich of Toronto and it’s a place where at the openings and at special events, they show up with their wives to show that they’re still married!”

In response to these problems, the AGO made some small, but significant organizational changes. They created a new community liaison position, someone who could speak directly with neighbours about their concerns rather than have these conversations play out in the press. They also hired outside public relations staff to try to create a counter-narrative around the project:

We needed to start telling a story and getting people to talk about this art museum as a place that isn’t a behemoth and an isolated ivory tower. We needed to change the way we talked about who we are... We needed to change the tone, we needed to be more accessible. We needed to stop using “art-speak”. We needed to change our tone and get out there and tell the story as broadly as possible. Because people knew very little about the place. And when people know very little about something, then when something bad happens people assume the worst.

AGO Staff

In addition to these reforms, the AGO took other steps to try to reform their image. They re-opened the Canadian galleries, settled contract negotiations with their staff, and – after some design changes and a personal conversation with Frank Gehry – managed to convince the rogue board member to return and support the expansion.

Relations with the surrounding community would not be so easily repaired, however. The first step in this process was the establishment of a “working group” in April 2004 made up of representatives from the AGO, Gehry’s firm, surrounding organizations like OCAD, and local community members. The group met several times throughout the design and development process in order to get updates from the AGO and make suggestions. The actual influence of the working group is a matter of debate among those involved. According to the local city councillor at the time, Olivia Chow, the group made several significant contributions to the final design of the building, particularly in contrast to the ROM:
The architect actually changed the design quite a bit as a result of the participation. So the entire back [of the building], it didn’t have the staircase. The materials were changed. The colours were changed. They changed more. More got discussed than the ROM... There were some minor things [with the ROM], but in terms of AGO, they did some major things. And the architectural firm actually had conference calls with the working group. So there was an interactive thing. So it wasn’t just the working group going “waaah, we don’t like this”. It was actually interactive. Okay, we don’t like this, we’ll put this together. And then the next meeting they’ll welcome them back. So there was a process where the design evolved.

Other residents I spoke with had a less favourable impression of the working group, dismissing it mostly as a formality. What does seem to be clear, however, is that the working group played a similar role in generating public legitimacy that the competition did for the ROM. While individual community members disagreed on the aesthetic merits of the design and the influence of the group, the fact that the development process was put out in the open and that they were given opportunities to express their views fulfilled certain expectations that they had of the AGO from the very beginning, but until now had been unmet. Because it was the design process that was open to the public, not just the initial design, the AGO had fewer surprises like the ROM’s unexpected choice of cladding – creating expectations that could be met when the building was actually constructed. As well the working group provide a forum in which community members were able to articulate certain non-starters such as the extension of the gallery’s footprint into the Grange Park.

Furthermore, though the exact influence of the working group itself is hard to determine, the design of the AGO did change over time in response to public reactions in general. Addressing concerns that the building was too conservative, Gehry attached sprawling wings and spiraling staircases onto its façade. Comparisons to hockey arenas and airports also disappeared when the silver titanium used on the north façade was replaced with wood. Meanwhile, the southern tower went through a variety of revisions, shifting through various materials and colours until Gehry finally settled on blue titanium cladding designed to minimize the impact on the park. This process of publicly presenting designs, listening to the public response, and then making revisions differed significantly from the ROM and is at least part of the reason why there was general consensus in both the press and the community that the AGO’s new building was more sensitive to its local context than the ROM.
By most accounts the working group and the AGO’s more open, responsive strategy significantly reduced local opposition to the expansion. With a better understanding of the AGO’s project and the building that would result, many local residents came to embrace the project. However, even as the final design was unveiled in the fall of 2005 and the project went to Toronto City Council for approval (the bylaw that prevented the AGO from expanding still needed to be repealed), dozens of residents still opposed to the project made deputations against the AGO. This group of opposed residents failed to keep the project from being approved by Council, but they did file an appeal with the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB). Though most people I spoke with had no doubt that the OMB would side with the AGO, a case could delay the expansion by months, cost millions of dollars, and compromise the AGO’s attempt to reposition itself as a publicly-minded institution. It seemed as if the events that marred the 1989 expansion were repeating themselves.

In the end, a last minute agreement was reached to avoid an OMB hearing. The agreement rested mostly on how the AGO would treat the Grange Park both during the current expansion project and after the project was completed, including a promise not to create an entrance directly into the park or put up billboards. There was also more general wording in the agreement that the AGO would be “consultative with the neighbourhood”. In part reflecting this statement and in part reflecting its new public attitude in general, the AGO joined with the neighbourhood to form the “Grange Park Advisory Committee” (GPAC) in the spring of 2006. The committee was formed to oversee the revitalization of Grange Park. However rather than going it alone, the AGO would work in coordination with local residents, the City of Toronto, and other local organizations, and lend its fundraising capabilities to help finance the initiative. In contrast to residents’ initial fears that the park would become colonized by the AGO as a sculpture gallery, or with cafe patios and public entranceways, the initial work of GPAC focused on issues that greatly concerned the community: the health of the trees and the cleanliness of the park.

The founding of GPAC not only helped the AGO avoid a costly legal fight, it also became a major source of public legitimacy within the community and evidence that the gallery was not a private club of rich elites, but an organization interested in pursuing the public good. Elected shortly after its formation, councillor Adam Vaughan explained GPAC’s effect:
[The Grange Park] has given us something we can work on together instead of something to argue about. So this shows that the AGO’s presence in the neighbourhood can be a force for good not just a force for change… The AGO has blazed a trail for large institutions in the city for how to do community engagement, for how to look beyond its four walls to further that engagement and actually make its presence in the community help not just themselves but help the entire community.

From the very beginning of its expansion process, the AGO had been confronted with intense opposition from community members, a barrage of negative news stories, and revolts among its staff and on its board. By the time the expansion opened in late 2008, however, even the AGO’s fiercest critics (those who had led the OMB appeal) admitted to me in interviews that the gallery was now acting in the public interest. And the vast majority of the community members I spoke with were very happy with the architecture itself (though concerns about the south tower and frustration over the redesign of the Grange house persisted).

One local resident perfectly captured the change in both the AGO’s attitude toward the community, and the community’s attitude toward the AGO:

In the beginning they [the AGO] were terrible. They just could ignore it and go ahead and do what they wanted to do, and tell the people afterward: ‘this is what we’re going to do’. But they did change… The community did signal very loudly and very clearly to the AGO: ‘you are not going to do this on your own. You’ve got to listen to what we’re saying’

And after the AGO’s change in attitude:

So the AGO and their attitude, the councillor insisting on public meetings, led to a pretty damn reasonable outcome. And I mean look at the building. It’s absolutely beautiful. And I don’t think that’s a trivial outcome at all.

What is important to note about the above statement is not only the satisfaction with the outcome of the project, but also the sense that the community had an active role in reaching that outcome. There was no comparable attitude that existed toward the ROM, even among those who liked the Crystal aesthetically. To the extent that residents saw their own contribution to the ROM’s expansion, it was in purely negative terms. That is, they had kept the ROM in check by preventing it from building a condominium or by destroying the trees in Philosopher’s Walk, but
the Crystal did not represent a collaboration between the museum and community the way that Gehry’s AGO and the redevelopment of Grange Park did. By changing its development strategies, the AGO managed to transition from an outside invader imposing its development project on a resistant community, to an agent of that community.

III. Curtain Call: Performing Symbolic Boundaries

If we are to use the various legitimacy crises and their aftermath as a sort of “breaching experiment”, what general observations can be made about performative power and the public expectations faced by the museums? What should be clear from the shifting attitudes and interactions described above is that the distinct spatial practices and associated cognitive maps which caused friction and mistrust between the two sides throughout the development process did not completely preclude the possibility of compromise. Instead, the interactive performance of the museums vis-à-vis the external players worked to either exacerbate or marginalize those existing differences.

It is useful to understand this dynamic in terms of symbolic boundary making. Lamont and Molnar (2002) define symbolic boundaries as

> conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space. They are tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality... [and they] separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership (p.168).

In the last chapter we saw the clear differences in the way museum insiders and community stakeholders drew symbolic boundaries around Toronto. For the former group, starchitecture was indicative of Toronto’s identity as a “global city”. For the latter, the very same architecture threatened the local amenities and architectural heritage that made Toronto a “city of neighbourhoods”. These differences made the expansion projects an inherently risky proposition for community stakeholders. While not necessarily opposed to starchitecture in principle, the style did not represent what community stakeholders valued about their neighbourhoods and actually stood the chance to degrade those features.
In this chapter, we have witnessed the establishment of symbolic boundaries not in the type of architecture proposed by the museums, but in the actions they took in proposing, designing, and actually building that architecture. A successful performance drew symbolic boundaries around the two groups, whereas an unsuccessful performance drew boundaries in between them. Thus the ROM’s competition and the AGO’s consultation process created the opportunity for open interaction, which brought community members into the process even if their participation did not fundamentally change the type of architecture being produced. An iconic building – even one designed by a foreign celebrity architect – became a local icon when it was designed in consultation with the surrounding community.

On the other hand, symbolic boundaries were exacerbated when community stakeholders felt that they were being intentionally left out of the development process. The more insular the development process, the more the buildings seemed as though they were being imposed upon the community for the enjoyment of outsiders. When discussing moments of tension between the museums and the community, my participants would often slip into a discourse of “us” versus “them”: of outsiders “coming into” the neighbourhood (even though many of the museum insiders lived in the area or very similar neighbourhoods in Toronto), or referring to museum insiders as “the rich” (even though many community stakeholders were professional class themselves). Thus, actions which exacerbated symbolic boundaries between the two sides led community stakeholders to emphasize social boundaries – even if those social boundaries were mostly imagined.

Symbolic boundaries between “us” and “them” are a basic dimension of the institutional logic of democracies, signalling who should be involved in establishing and representing the public interest (Alexander 1992; Habermas 1991). Thus, the “legitimacy work” of the public institution (see Chapter 4) can be judged in part on how well a public institution is able to position itself firmly on the “us” side of the divide. Recall that public legitimacy itself is the extent to which an organization is seen as legitimately representing the public good. Making a claim to legitimacy becomes harder – if not impossible – if an organization is not an accepted member of the public itself.
The importance of symbolic boundary making extended beyond community relations. Despite the fact that scholars often draw distinctions between the aesthetic views of the general public and of specialists in the field (e.g. Bourdieu 1993; Stevens 2002), many of the themes evident in my discussions with community stakeholders also appeared in the architectural reviews that followed each museum's opening.

Once both museums were completed, a clear contrast emerged between the ROM, which received mixed reviews, and the AGO, which was universally acclaimed. According to critics, Gehry had painstakingly attempted to fit his design into the local context of Toronto and the result was a highly original building. Libeskind, on the other hand, was criticized for putting his personal ego before the needs of his clients and their city and compromising both the aesthetic and functional merit of the resulting building. Put in the language of symbolic boundaries, architectural critics christened the new AGO a distinctly “Torontonian” building, whereas the ROM was the building of a foreign architect that happened to be built in Toronto.

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Table 6.1. Architectural reviews of the ROM and AGO
Organized by local and international newspapers, and specialty architectural publications. Neutral reviews refer to those with no clear normative conclusion.

Lisa Rochon of the *Globe and Mail* was particularly harsh in reviewing the ROM. Rather than an iconic representation of the city, she called the new building an “exaltation of one architect, one man, one individual” (Rochon 2007, June 2) and an “indulgence of a silver-tongued architect” (Rochon 2007, December 23). Even her praise of Gehry’s AGO further sharpened her critique of Libeskind:

[The AGO] is not a stylistic flash in the pan by another architect in designer glasses. Thankfully, for Toronto and the rest of Canada, Gehry's transformation of
the AGO is inspired not by personal ego but by allowing for a journey that goes deep into art and the city. (Rochon 2008, Nov 8)

Gehry, Rochon argued, cared about Toronto and about the AGO’s public role in the city. Libeskind cared only about his own career.

Other critics highlighted similar contrasts. In Canadian Architect magazine, Libeskind was criticized as “arrogant” and for attempting to overshadow the museum’s mandate as a cultural facility. In the National Post, prominent local architect Daniel Payne called the ROM a “commodification of architecture, where the expression of the architect dominates all. [The ROM] is not about an architecture that’s struggling to deal with its context” (Liebenberg 2008). Payne and others cited the similarities between the ROM and other Libeskind-designed buildings such as the Denver Art Museum and the Berlin Holocaust Museum. The very same design features which had been attributed to a crystal collection for the ROM were attributed to mountains in Denver and metaphorical scars of the Holocaust in Berlin. Even the Toronto Star’s positive editorial called these similarities “uncomfortable” (“Museum as artefact” 2007, May 26).

In contrast to Libeskind’s “could be anywhere” design, the most common argument in praise of Gehry (of which there were many) was the attention he paid to the local context of Toronto. In a review that made the front cover of the New York Times’ Arts section, critic Nicolai Ouroussoff singled out the “interrelationship of art and the city” as one of the greatest strengths of the building. As part of this interrelationship, critics pointed out how the new AGO worked within and even elevated its local context, from successfully integrating the Thomson galleries with the existing collection in the gallery’s interior to improving the streetscaping on the exterior. One oft-cited example of how well the new design integrated with its surroundings was of all the new vistas that allowed Torontonians to look out toward the rest of the city in new and interesting ways:

45 Had it opened earlier, Daniel Libeskind’s “Crystals at CityCentre” – a luxury shopping mall on the Las Vegas strip – would have almost certainly been cited as more evidence for the unoriginality of the ROM. I consider the implications of this building for the iconicity of the ROM in Chapter 7.
As I look out across Dundas Street West at the Victorian rooftops that seem to sit just below my feet, I realize I’m taking in a view that, someday soon, will be familiar to any Toronto resident or visitor. (McDowell; NP; 2007-May-31)

Many critics contrasted the AGO with Gehry’s more famous building in Bilbao – a design that has more in common with Libeskind’s crystal in terms of breaking from its context. The restraint demonstrated in the AGO’s design led several critics to speculate that, in addition to being exceptional, the building represented the beginning of a new trend in iconic architecture, or at least a new chapter in Gehry’s career. Writing about the AGO, Philip Kennicott (2008) of the Washington Post speculated that Gehy’s “best work may turn out not to look much like him”.

Of course, we have no way to know how much or how little each architect actually cared about the city while designing their respective museums. Like the architectural critics, and the community stakeholders, we have only the expressive, performative qualities of the buildings themselves and of those who built them on which to pass judgment.

Existing literature on iconic architecture has often been critical of its ability to meaningfully represent the “shared memory, identity and solidarity” of a community (Ho 2006:91, also see Friedmann 2007, Kaika and Thielen 2006). Ho (2006) developed the concept of a “community iconic structure” specifically to distinguish those buildings that are seen as meaningfully representing the local community to those imposed from the outside by either the market of the State. However, as we have seen from the above analysis, iconic architecture development is not inherently anti-community, though it certainly has the potential to turn out this way. Depending on how it has been developed, iconic architecture can actually inspire a heightened sense of solidarity, authenticity and collective ownership.

i. Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to examine the structure of the development process as a series of meaningful interactions between various stakeholder groups. In doing so, I have attempted to trace the relative power of each group in terms of the influence they were able to exercise on the development process itself. Classic political-economic sources of power like property ownership and economic capital played important and necessary roles in the expansion projects. However, I have also argued that the way in which these resources influenced
development depended on how they were incorporated into the various practices employed by the museums. For instance, by leading the AGO to keep its expansion secret, an early economic advantage had the adverse consequence of sparking political opposition. Furthermore, social capital gave community members influence over the museums, but typically in a reactive role. It was not until the formation of GPAC that they began to play more of an active role in the redevelopment of their neighbourhood.

In theorizing the role of meaning and interaction in the outcome of the development projects, I adopted the concept of “performative power”, which I defined as power and influence that is derived from conforming to ideal expectations within a given social context. More specifically, the ability of the ROM and AGO to complete their expansion projects in the way they originally planned depended not only on the resources they were able to mobilize, but also on how the practices they employed were interpreted within a political arena of stakeholders with their own expectations of the development process.

Examining the practices employed by the ROM and AGO that led either to crises in legitimacy, or rehabilitation of their legitimacy, I argued that the logic underlying the performative power of the ROM and AGO can be interpreted as a process of symbolic boundary making. Those practices which emphasized commonality and collective ownership of the galleries inspired the most support among the community, whereas those that emphasized exclusivity provoked the strongest opposition.
Chapter 7. Conclusion

I. The Continuing Iconic Power of Place

I write this final chapter in the days following the 2014 shootings on Parliament Hill in Ottawa which resulted in the death of Corporal Nathan Cirillo, a Canadian soldier standing guard at the Canadian War Memorial. His killer, Michael Zehaf-Bibeau, was shot dead shortly afterward as he entered the Centre Block of the Canadian Parliament buildings wielding the same rifle that he used to kill Cirillo. The shootings sparked wall-to-wall media cover in Canada and abroad. CBC dubbed it the “attack on Ottawa”, and news anchor Peter Mansbridge suggested that it represented Canada’s “loss of innocence”. World leaders from David Cameron to Benjamin Netanyahu issued statements of condolence to Canada. Few questioned the consensus that the incident was an act of terrorism.

The shootings occurred just two days after an eerily similar incident that took place in a parking lot in the town of Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu. In this case, Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent was killed when he was intentionally hit by a car driven by Martin Couture-Rouleau. Like Zehaf-Bibeau, Couture-Rouleau was killed shortly afterward after by police. Despite its similarities to shootings on Parliament hill, however, the Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu incident received only a fraction of media coverage and virtually no international reaction. Unlike the “attack on Ottawa”, no one called the death of Vincent an “attack on Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu”. Furthermore, press coverage was ambivalent as to whether the incident should be considered terrorism or homicide.

This discrepancy provides a particularly grim example of the power that place continues to play in the 21st century. An act carried out in the parking lot of a small city becomes a homicide commit against an individual. Virtually the same act carried out on the steps of the National War Memorial is transformed into terrorism commit against an entire city and its people. The difference here was the “iconic power” of the War Memorial – its ability to represent something greater than itself (Alexander et al. 2012). Iconic structures are not simply receptacles for social
meaning – passively reflecting meanings as they already exist. Instead, the iconicity of these structures imbues them with a causal power to shape social life itself.

In their own way, the iconic power of the Royal Ontario Museum and Art Gallery of Ontario transformed what were just two of thousands of development projects occurring in Toronto first decade of the 21st century – justifying elaborate (and expensive) architectural forms and becoming an opportunity for different groups of inhabitants to articulate and struggle over competing notions of place.

II. The Death of Monumentality?

Evidence of “iconic power” flies in the face of a dominant vein of social and architectural thought that extends back to the classical era of sociology. The “death of monumentality” thesis suggests that the power of objects to authentically represent strongly held beliefs and values is incompatible with the conditions of modernity. A monument – a structure which is erected explicitly to commemorate a person or event – can be seen here as a subcategory of icons.

The death of monumentality is evident in the works of classical theorists such as Marx and Simmel. It is difficult to see how monuments could survive in a world in which “all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned” (Marx and Engles [1848]:63), or, alternatively, a world in which objects are experienced “in a homogeneous, flat and grey colour with no one of them worthy of being preferred to another” (Simmel [1903]:414). Of all the classical theorists, however, Weber (1946) was most explicit on the topic. The “disenchantment of the world”, he wrote, meant that “the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life”, and with those values the very thing that gave architectural monuments their power: “It is not accidental that our greatest art is intimate and not monumental” (p.155).

In the era of iconic “starchitecture”, contemporary architectural theorists have attempted to preserve the death of monumentality thesis by drawing a distinction between the icons of today and the monuments of yesterday. The former, they argue, is in fact a negation of the latter. For example, the Spanish architect Josep Lluís Mateo writes:
In the past, buildings and other constructions represented singular moments for the community were called monuments… They drew together the world around them; they established relations with their surroundings (or forced others to)…. In the contemporary world, a project that aspires to be exceptionally expressive (almost all) is commonly called an Icon… The Icon frequently serves no purpose: the museum has no collection or the auditorium has no orchestra. (Mateo 2009:4-5)

This view is supported by American architectural critic Charles Jencks (2006) who argues that while the monument requires a society with strong social coherence and hierarchy, cultural homogeneity, and widespread belief in some greater good (such as Christianity or socialism), the icon thrives in a society in which all of those things have been destroyed. “Today, anything can be an icon,” and an icon represents nothing in particular (p.4).

There are important parallels between belief in the death of the monument and the political-economic perspective. Stripping architecture of any authentic meaning reduces it to an empty vessel: characterless widget that is determined *in toto* by external systems of modern capitalism. When, as Jencks argues, icons could be anything and represent nothing, we have nothing left to make sense of them except their exchange value. Recall Sklair’s (2010) contention that iconicity is “simply a special and added quality that enhances the exchange (money) value of the icon and all that is associated with it” (p.141).

On a purely empirical level, there is good reason to doubt the death of monumentality thesis. The construction of monuments, memorials, and iconic public buildings is arguably occurring more frequently under late capitalism than ever before. We currently live in a “culture of commemoration” according to Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz (1991:379), whose analysis of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial offers a strong retort to the notion that an icon can be anything and mean nothing. Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz demonstrate just how emotionally-charged and politically-fraught the architectural design process can become in mediating between cultural meanings and material form. Furthermore, they show how this process is made even more important when cultural homogeneity does not exist – as was the case with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.
In addition to newly built icons, we have also witnessed the rise of the historic preservation movement which has coincided almost exactly with the rise of neoliberalism. Whatever the relationship between these trends (causal, counter, or coincidence), the consecration of existing structures calls into question Marx’ argument every “solid melts into thin air”. Moreover, the world heritage movement has elevated what was once a primarily national-level process into a global phenomenon (Elliott and Schmutz 2012).

As I have maintained throughout this dissertation, these discrepancies do not call into question the important role of economics and power in the development of iconic architectural development. They do, however, force us to take meaning and sense-making seriously as a causal force that interacts with economics and power. We cannot fully explain the rise of iconic architecture, the way it is built, nor its impact on communities without understanding how abstract cultural meanings attach themselves to material form of place.

III. The Importance of Meaning: Public Legitimacy, Aesthetics, and Performative Power

My analysis of the ROM and AGO expansions has identified three board mechanisms by which social meaning relates to place: public legitimation, aesthetics, and performative power. Identifying these three mechanisms can be seen as a direct refutation of the notion that icons can be anything and represent nothing. In fact, icons emerge out of very specific social relations and the meanings they represent are highly consequential.

In Chapter 4, I considered the motivation behind the expansion projects. Explaining why the ROM and the AGO undertook iconic architectural expansions revealed the limits of the economic rationality at the heart of many political-economic analyses. As DiMaggio and Powell (1983) have argued, “organizations compete not just for resources and customers, but for political power and institutional legitimacy, for social as well as economic fitness” (p.150). Certainly organizations require resources to sustain themselves (a point that was central to my analysis in Chapter 4) but the competition for resources must be understood within the set of social relations that make up an institutional field, and the set of practices and cognitive tools that make up the “logic” of the field (Friedland and Alford 1991). Moreover, social and economic fitness are deeply connected, since the ability of an organization to secure resources depends in
By focusing on the institutional position of the ROM and AGO and other public cultural institutions, we were able to recognize iconic architectural development as a strategy for generating public legitimacy – or a belief among outsiders that an organization represents the public good. Throughout history public cultural institutions have utilized different strategies for generating public legitimacy, including providing public educational services. A combination of neoliberal governing policies which have shifted funds from annual operations subsidies to one-time grants, as well as the highly visible model of “success” provided by the Guggenheim Bilbao and other stararchitectural projects has made iconic architecture a particularly attractive strategy in the early 21st century when the ROM and AGO began planning their own expansions.

Thus, icons are meaningful to the extent that they are created and promoted by actors (individual or organizational) who seek to establish or shore up widespread belief in their public legitimacy. Iconic buildings are built to symbolize and reinforce the public legitimacy of organizations – not (only) because of ego or greed, but because this legitimacy is essential in order for the organization to sustain itself (at least as a public institution).

The desire to achieve public legitimacy is only the beginning, however. Successful legitimacy work requires an organization to convince outside stakeholders that it represents the public good. In the development of iconic architecture, this means constructing a building that will be interpreted as a positive contribution to place. However, as I demonstrated in Chapter 5, different groups can hold widely divergent interpretations of place and, as a result, evaluate new buildings in strikingly different ways. In other words, in order to understand how developers design buildings and how those designs are evaluated by outside groups, we need to understand how actors develop and apply their own particular aesthetic orientations (Martin 2011).

Using cognitive mapping as an analytical technique, I demonstrated how the museum insiders tended to think about the expansion projects within the context of international networks of cultural institutions, whereas community stakeholders evaluated the projects with regard to the immediate context of the local neighbourhood including more mundane and domestic spatial
Conclusion

elements such as trees, houses, and apartment buildings. Furthermore, I traced the development of these distinct aesthetic orientations to the ways in which the two groups experienced the neighbourhood through the spatial practices associated with their institutional positions. Finally, I argued that these competing aesthetic orientations led to frequent political clashes between the two groups. At stake in these conflicts was not necessarily a particular use-value, but a more general question of which notion of place would become realized in the final buildings.

Thus, not only is iconic architecture highly meaningful, but their meanings – interpreted from divergent aesthetic orientations – can be a major driver of urban political conflict.

Finally, meaning is not only important to the buildings themselves, but also to the process in which they are developed. In Chapter 6, I demonstrated how the power to build iconic structures depended not only on having the necessary resources or legal property rights, but also on the symbolic and interactional dynamics of the development process. Architectural development is a collective process, requiring the coordinated actions of various stakeholder groups. However, it is also a very speculative endeavour and it can be difficult for these groups to predict how well the final product will live up to expectations or what impact it might have on the surrounding context. Without a concrete building to evaluate directly, outside stakeholders judge the merits of the project based on their interactions with the developers. Throughout the ROM and AGO development process, support and opposition from outsiders ebbed and flowed depending on the actions taken by the museum insiders and the way those actions were interpreted.

I adopted the term *performative power* from Alexander (2010) to describe the power and influence that actors derive from conforming to ideal expectations within a given social context. For public institutions, a successful performance means convincing relevant stakeholders that you represent the public good (i.e. generating public legitimacy). In cases where a public institution fails to meet the expectations of stakeholders, they enter a period of legitimacy crisis in which previous support is withdrawn and replaced in some cases with overt opposition. In the development of iconic architectural development, we saw that a successful performance hinged on developers minimizing symbolic boundaries between themselves and the surrounding community.
Thus, meaning is also important to iconic architectural development because the development process itself depends upon meaningful performances put on by a small group of insiders who must inspire support among relevant stakeholders while avoiding overt opposition.

While shifting focus to issues of culture and meaning, these concepts also extend the work of urban political-economy. Public legitimacy is a strategy of securing economic resources and political power. The success of legitimation strategies depend in part on the political and economic systems within which public institutions operate. The aesthetic disposition of actors is rooted in their spatial practices and, by extension, their position within institutions. The cosmopolitan group of elites who drive iconic architectural development (Sklair 2005; McNeill 2009) possess their own aesthetic dispositions which may or may not harmonize with those of other groups. Finally, performative power occurs in the acquisition and deployment of resources within political and economic systems.

IV. Future Research Directions

Where does this meaning-centred approach to urban development leave us? According to Small (2009), qualitative case studies should follow a “sequential” selection method in which “the first unit or case yields a set of findings and a set of questions that inform the next case” (p.25). This “theoretical replication” (as opposed to statistical replication) means that new cases should be selected because they may be expected to yield different results according to the initial theories. Thus, new cases should be chosen in which we might expect to observe different processes than were observed with the ROM and AGO due to notable sources of variation.

One source of variation would be to look at iconic architectural development in the private sector. Much of my findings focus on the organizational characteristics associated with public institutions – a focus that is justified by the fact that the majority of iconic architectural projects are developed by this type of organization. Nonetheless, private for-profit organizations do occasionally build iconic structures as well. These include some high profile projects such as Norman Foster’s Swiss Re skyscraper in London and Frank Gehry’s DZ Bank building in Berlin. The existence of these privately-built iconic structures raises several important questions. Under what conditions do for-profit businesses decide to undertake the additional costs and risks associated with iconic architecture? One possible hypothesis is that these are also attempts to
establish some level of public legitimacy, as private businesses may also seek to extract “donated” resources in the form of overturned bylaws or government subsidies in addition to their primary for-profit activities. If this hypothesis is true, it raises the additional question of whether friction is created when a single organization attempts to behave as both a for-profit business and a public institution, and how these competing logics are negotiated. As we saw with the demise of the ROM’s condominium scheme, it can be extremely difficult for a single organization to attempt to straddle two institutional fields at once. Such a case would help us better understand the under-studied phenomenon of institution-switching among organizations (e.g. DiMaggio 1982).

Another source of variation would be to test the findings of this study against less high-profile, more utilitarian development projects such as shopping malls or suburban subdivisions. Iconic architecture may stand out as an extreme case when it comes to public legitimacy, aesthetics, and performative power, but that does not mean that these factors are not present in more mundane development. Douglas (2012) has observed how a developer overcame opposition to the construction of a ‘big-box’ retail outlet by incorporating features such as bicycle locks and trees that reflected the surrounding community’s value of environmentalism. Though he does not use these terms, Douglas’ findings demonstrate the presence of both social aesthetics (the use of environmentalism to judge the qualities of a building), and performance (the ‘big-box’ developers ability to minimize its corporate identity and fit in with the environmentalist identity of the neighbourhood). Nonetheless, how these factors arise, and their impact on the final outcome of urban political struggles will almost certainly depend on the type of project being developed.

The same could be said for developments in different cities and neighbourhoods. How widespread are the “global city” and “city of neighbourhoods” aesthetic orientations outside Toronto? What other types of orientations dominate populations in other areas? Oishi et al. (2012) demonstrate how highly mobile populations tend to favour an urban landscape dominated by corporate chains – whereas this was exactly the type of development initially opposed by the environmentally-oriented community studied by Douglas (2012). Meanwhile, corporate chains were completely absent from either of the orientations studied in Chapter 5. Extending the cognitive mapping analysis presented in this dissertation to a greater variety of groups and
development projects would allow for the establishment of more general metrics (as opposed to the interpretive ideal types presented in Chapter 5).

One potential concern with this study is that my participants were largely cultural elites and professionals – a social class distinguished by their tendency to aestheticize the world around them (Bourdieu 1984). As such, the concerns of my informants revolved around trees, heritage, and elite architecture rather than seemingly “harder” economic concerns such as employment or eviction. Though the class characteristics of my informants proved empirically useful for observing how people make sense of place, how can this meaning-centred approach be expanded to other groups of urban inhabitants – particularly those in less stable economic positions?

Certainly the privilege of my participants meant that they engaged in different spatial practices and interpreted place differently than those in more disadvantaged positions. However, a great deal of research exists that has documented the various and consequential ways in which disadvantaged groups experience, perceive and evaluate place (e.g. Brown-Saracino 2009: 213-249; Auyero and Swistun 2008; Small 2004; Howarth 2002). To be disadvantaged comes with its own set of spatial practices and associated cognitive maps – even if these groups are rarely given the opportunity to articulate an explicit sense of place like those in my study.

Thus, another research direction would be to further integrate interpretive studies of place sense-making with traditional political-economic analyses of how groups struggle over access and control of space. If urban development represents the physical reordering of space that privilege certain practices and notions of place over others, urban sociologists should examine not only who loses control of space, but also what spatial practices and notions of place get disrupted or stamped out.

i. The Materiality of Culture

There are important implications of this research beyond the study of urban development and urban politics. The study of iconic architecture is the study of how abstract social forces such as identity and meaning become crystallized in the concrete material form of a building. As such, this dissertation contributes to a broader shift in social theory toward developing a more materialist understanding of culture (e.g. Coole and Frost 2010; McDonnell 2010; Griswold et al.
A basic premise of this work is that culture does not exist outside embodied practices and material objects that occupy particular positions within time and space. The challenge for the “new materialism” in cultural research is to establish the analytical tools to connect abstract cultural forms to these concrete positions.

One particular area in which the materiality of culture has been advanced in this dissertation relates to the question of how abstract institutional fields are rooted in concrete space. In Chapter 4 we saw how institutional legitimacy is established through the creation of physical objects – in this case, buildings. The broader implication of this finding is that struggles over field position can also be understood as struggles over physical position. The ROM and AGO attempted to shore up legitimacy by establishing a more prominent position within the built form of the city. Future research on cultural valuation could benefit from examining this process as competition over space: which restaurants manage to get established in which neighbourhoods, which paintings get put in which rooms in which galleries, etc.

The fact that institutional fields must be organized physically in time and space brings up another insight explored in this dissertation: that in any given position, multiple unrelated fields will come into contact. Conventional Bourdieusian field theory (e.g. Bourdieu 1993) acknowledges cross-field interaction only between nested fields (e.g. the field of cultural production and the field of power). However, the interaction between the museums and the neighbourhood associations occurred not because they are positioned within a nested institutional hierarchy, but rather because they happened to lay claim to the same place at the same time. The concepts of spatial practices and cognitive maps were developed to understand what occurs when actors from different institutional fields lay claim to the same objects in the same places. These concepts join existing research on the importance of place in bringing together otherwise unrelated fields in highly consequential ways.

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46 Powell, Packalen, and Whittington (2012), for example, demonstrates how the situation of multiple organizations within the same physical locality resulted in the growth of the biotech sector.
V. Imaginability and the Right to the City

Throughout this dissertation, the meaning-centred approach I have adopted has been focused primarily on empirical problems rather than normative ones. In identifying the role of legitimation, aesthetics, and performance in iconic architectural development, I sought only to offer explanations for what I observed with the expansions of the ROM and AGO, not prescriptive evaluations.

However, one of the major strengths of the political-economic perspective is the normative orientation that it inherits from Marxism. This orientation is perhaps best captured in Henri Lefebvre’s concept of the “right to the city”. Expanded on by scholars such as Harvey (2008) and Purcell (2003), the right to the city is a rebuke of neoliberal urban governing regimes in which the cityscape is developed and governed primarily to produce economic value for a small group of elite capitalists. Under neoliberalism, the property rights of individual actors reign supreme – particularly for those who use their property not for use-value, but to extract surplus exchange-value (which allows them to accumulate further property).

The right to the city is not an individual right but a collective right: a right of urban inhabitants to democratically decide how the city should be shaped and governed, and how the economic surplus created within the city should be reinvested (Harvey 2008). This perspective provides an alternative to the traditional individual rights associated with national citizenship (e.g. voting, free speech, etc). It is rooted in inhabitancy and entails the “right to appropriate urban space [which] involves the right to live in, play in, work in, represent, characterize, and occupy urban space in a particular city. These are rights of use rather than rights of exchange” (Purcell 2003:577-78).

While Lefebvre himself conceptualized the right to the city in aesthetic terms, calling the city an “oeuvre” created by the artistry of its inhabitants’ collective daily lives (Lefebvre 1996; Purcell 2003:578), this dimension has tended to be overshadowed in the literature by a utilitarian emphasis on inequalities of access and control of space. While scholars may focus on whether or not marginalized groups have access to a certain space such as the homeless (Mitchell 1995) or youth (Lees 2003), there has been far less consideration of whether the designs of particular urban spaces privilege certain experiences and identities over others. This inattention to design
may be why political-economists have tended to categorically dismiss iconic architecture rather than attempting to critically distinguish good architecture from bad (e.g. Sklair 2010; Kaika and Thielen 2006).

To help us evaluate iconic architecture with regard to the right to the city, it is useful to return to the work of Kevin Lynch (1960). Recall that Lynch’s cognitive mapping studies were motivated by a desire to maximize congruency between the mental image that inhabitants have of their own city with the actual physical geography of the city itself. He used the term “imageability” to refer to this quality, which he saw as an attribute of the city itself. A well designed city, Lynch reasoned, would be designed in a way that was both intuitive and mentally engaging for its inhabitants, as both these factors would result in vivid and useful cognitive maps. And since divergent spatial practices and associated cognitive maps are a fundamental element of the urban landscape, imageability also requires bringing this diversity into harmony.

The concept of imageability allows us to connect the normative orientation of urban political-economy with the design concerns of architecture. The right to the city is about more than just democratic control and access – it is also a right of all inhabitants to an urban environment that is intelligible and engaging. Where Lynch went wrong in his theory of imageability was his assumption that this goal could be attained by smart designer who would somehow stand above the fray and bring the competing cognitive maps of various urban inhabitants into harmony. Even though his interpretive empirical work represented a major departure from the patriarchal notion of the architect as a god-like technocrat, in the end Lynch never fully escaped this perspective.

We have seen throughout this dissertation (particularly in Chapter 5) that developers and architects are limited by their own spatial practices and cognitive maps which may diverge from other groups of stakeholders. But while this was true for both the ROM and the AGO developments, we saw in Chapter 6 how the final buildings were received very differently by the surrounding community. While the ROM continued to be seen as a building imposed from the outside that poorly reflected the qualities of the neighbourhood, the AGO managed to win the approval of community stakeholders who eventually saw it as a positive contribution to the local neighbourhood despite the fact that it was, like the ROM, a work of global starchitecture.
The AGO became more imageable to community stakeholders to the extent that it integrated more closely with existing mental representations of the surrounding neighbourhood. While the ROM often seemed to be at war with its surroundings (the elements, the heritage architecture, the surrounding green spaces, and the hotdog carts) the AGO in many ways improved the experience of existing spaces.

Speaking initially about the ROM’s attempt to remove hotdog vendors from in front of its new entrance (see page 92), one local politician contrasted the ROM and AGO’s respective failure and success to integrate with the local context:

We tried to get the ROM, you know: “why don’t you try to redo the hotdog cart, and get Libeskind to design a hotdog cart, and it would be part of the street furniture”. So you knit the two together a phrase them it. There was sort of a nod and a wink, but I think building a hotdog cart would bankrupt them. I’m not sure Libeskind has the ability to design a hotdog cart anyway. But contrast that with Gehry, how he actually wired the [streetcar cables] into the gallery. That’s not the act of an architect on a whim. That’s the act of an architect who is paying attention to the context. And there’s some really brilliant components that the two buildings do and don’t interact with the streetscape. The snow problem landing on the sidewalk is still a problem for the ROM, because Libeskind never figured it out. But if you take a look at the lower visor that wraps around the [front of the AGO] that angles down toward the street: when you’re walking down the street, it’s actually pitched at a particular angle to reflect the houses, so it actually looks like you’re walking down a Victorian street. And the curve of the building brings the sky in. So you’ve got the Victorian streetscape mimicked and he let the sky in. So he’s actually built a big building, but he’s returned the Victorian roots to the city itself and knit the building into the transit system, and he’s dealing with issues in the [Grange] park. So the building is continuing to support the neighbourhood.

While this politician seems to attribute these differences to the relative skill of the two architects, nothing in my research indicates that Gehry himself was personally more knowledgeable or sensitive about Toronto than was Libeskind. While Gehry’s childhood in Toronto was frequently cited by the AGO in order to promote the project, Gehry’s professional career has had little to no connection with Toronto prior to the AGO expansion. By contrast, Libeskind was actually a faculty member of the University of Toronto in the 1970s and likely made more trips to Toronto during the development of the ROM than Gehry did for the AGO. Moreover,
Gehry’s other projects have long been criticized for their inattention to local context. Why then did the AGO’s design end up being so much more sensitive to local context than the ROM (or many of Gehry’s previous projects)?

The answer, also provided in Chapter 6, is that the AGO’s success was the result of the design process rather than the designer. While the AGO initially attempted to keep the public out of the design process, this had the ironic consequence of sparking a much more activist response that eventually led to consultation sessions and multiple design revisions. In the end, the AGO did not look like just another “Gehry”. The design process, which was open to the influence of local political struggles, produced a building that reflected many of the unique contingencies and characteristics that make up the AGO’s surrounding locality.

The ROM, on the other hand, chose a design early on and stuck with it. There was very little evolution that occurred in interaction with outside stakeholders or other local influences. Unlike the AGO, the ROM is very much “a Libeskind” – so much so that it bares an uncomfortable resemblance to many of his other buildings. In fact, just two years after the ROM opened, the Libeskind-designed “Crystals” luxury shopping mall opened on the Las Vegas strip. While many iconic buildings are represented on the strip, contra Baudrillard (1995), the difference between the original and the copy has always been quite clear; the division between the sacred and the profane remains in place. It is in the relationship between the ROM’s Crystal and “The Crystals” shopping centre in which Baudrillard’s theory is realized. In fact, comparing The Crystals’ sleek titanium skin to the aluminum of the ROM, one could argue that the ROM is really the inferior copy. Toronto’s largest public museum was merely a prototype for a shopping centre in Las Vegas.

If, as mentioned in the introduction, the major challenge of iconic architecture is to provide meaningful and authentic representations of place against the tide of global homogenization, then the AGO is clearly the more iconic building. At the moment it was completed, both the surrounding community and the architectural press recognized in the AGO a building unique to Toronto. The ROM, meanwhile, appeared contrived and out of place. This is not to say, however, that the ROM Crystal may not one day become a beloved representation of Torontonian identity. However, like the Hollywood sign which began as a real estate
advertisement, the iconicity of the ROM will need to come with time as it becomes part of the lived experience of the city. Iconicity never emerges from the mind of an individual, but rather from the collective lives of a public.
Bibliography


Hume, Christopher. 1987, April 25. “ROM at 75 has Little to Celebrate.” *Toronto Star*, J3.


Taylor, Judith. Forthcoming. “No to Protests, Yes to Festivals: How the Creative Class Organizes in the Social Movement Society.”


# Appendix A. Project Timelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Larger Context</th>
<th>Royal Ontario Museum</th>
<th>Art Gallery of Ontario</th>
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</table>
| 1960s | • Shipping activity peaks at the Port of Toronto (Ramlalsingh 1975). | • McLaughlin Planetarium opens (Cruise 1978).  
• ROM fully separates from University of Toronto (Cruise 1978). | • Architect John Parkin conceives of a three-stage expansion for the gallery. |
| 1970s | | • *Mankind Discovering* is published, outlining a new visitor-centered layout for the ROM galleries as opposed to the previous layout based on research departments (Dickson 1986) | • Stages one and two of Parkin’s plan are completed. |
| 1980s | | • The ROM completes construction on the Curatorial Centre (1981) and the Queen Elizabeth II Terrace Galleries (1984)  
• To accommodate the renovations, the ROM closes for 20 months in 1981. Even when the museum opens again, it takes almost a decade to complete all of the galleries. Attendance figures recover slowly after the closing (Hume 1987) | • Barton Myers wins a competition to design stage three of the plan, departing from Parkins original vision significantly. Construction on the $34 million project begins.  
• The project is initially delayed for several months after local residents file an appeal with the Ontario Municipal Board.  
• City of Toronto passes bylaw 156-89 which prevents the Art Gallery of Ontario from expanding further. |
<p>| 1993 | • Jean Chrétien becomes Prime Minister after the Liberal Party of Canada party wins a majority government. | | • Construction finishes on the Myers expansion. Total costs grow to $60 million and the original Myers design is never fully implemented. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Events</th>
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</table>
| 1995 | - Mike Harris becomes Premier of Ontario after the Progressive Conservative party wins a majority government.  
      - McLaughlin Planetarium closes as a result of a provincial budget cuts. (Hume 1995) |
| 1997 | - **April**: Government of Ontario passes Bill 103 (The City of Toronto Act) which dissolves Metropolitan Toronto and amalgamates its six constituent cities into the single City of Toronto (effective January 1st, 1998).  
      - **October**: Frank Gehry-designed Guggenheim Museum opens in Bilbao, Spain.  
      - **November**: Suburban Mayor Mel Lastman defeats old Toronto Mayor Barbara Hall to lead the new City of Toronto.  
      - Lindsay Sharp is appointed director. He adopts an “edutainment” model of museum management.  
      - Ken Thomson lends artwork to the AGO as part of a special exhibition. This initial loan eventually leads him into discussions with the AGO about making a larger, permanent donation. (Burtynsky 2009) |
| 1998 | - ROM begins to undertake a “master plan” which evaluates the current building layout and makes suggestions for future renovation, including moving the main entrance from Queen’s Park Avenue to Bloor Street.  
      - Matthew Teitelbaum promoted from Chief Curator to director.  
      - AGO and OCAD enter into informal discussions over land swaps and creating a “cultural precinct” in the area. |
| 1999 | - Sharp’s edutainment strategy comes under fire from ROM curators and staff (Ross 1999). Rumors of his early departure swirl by December (Oziewicz and Mitrovica 1999). |
### Appendix A. Project Timelines

#### 2000

- **Government of Ontario** establishes the SuperBuild Corporation, which funds public works projects that are able to secure matching private sector funding.
- **May**: SuperBuild provides $24 million toward the expansion of the OCAD – the first major infrastructure project of the so-called “Toronto cultural renaissance”.
- **June**: Sharp officially steps down as director under pressure from ROM staff.
- **August**: Newspaper editor William Thorsell is hired as director. He immediately attempts to distinguish his own vision for the ROM from Sharp’s and advocates for an architectural expansion that will adopt only some of the recommendations from Sharp’s “master plan” (Hume 2000).

#### 2001

- **May**: The governments of Canada and Ontario enter into an infrastructure agreement that will see them offer matching funds for select culture and arts projects (Adams 2001).
- **April**: The ROM submits an application to the SuperBuild corporation to request funding for its expansion project.
- **June**: Advertisements are placed in local and international newspapers calling for “expressions of interest” for its expansion project (ROM 2001).
- **July**: The ROM receives 50 expressions of interest.
- **September**: 12 firms are invited to provide sketches for the new ROM building.
- **November**: 7 firms provide sketches which are publicly exhibited in the museum.
- **December**: ROM selects three final firms: Andrea Bruno (Italy), Bing Thom
- **January**: Thomson and Teitelbaum fly to Los Angeles to meet with Frank Gehry about a possible AGO expansion project (Posner 2001).
- **May**: Kenneth Thomson enters into formal talks with the AGO about donating his personal art collection.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Government Funding</th>
<th>Architect Selection</th>
<th>Design Updates</th>
<th>Staff Protests</th>
<th>Artistic Impacts</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td><strong>June</strong>: After months of antagonistic debate, the governments of Ontario and Canada agree on a $232 million funding deal that will support new or renovated facilities for the ROM, AGO, Canadian Opera Company, National Ballet School, Royal Conservatory of Music, Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art, and Roy Thomson Hall (Errett 2002).</td>
<td>$232 million</td>
<td>Daniel Libeskind (Germany)</td>
<td>Renaissance ROM</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>February</strong>: The designs from the three finalists are exhibited in the ROM.</td>
<td>$232 million</td>
<td>Daniel Libeskind is selected as the architecture for Renaissance ROM.</td>
<td>Renaissance ROM</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>June</strong>: ROM receives $30 million each from the Ontario and Canadian governments toward its expansion.</td>
<td>$30 million</td>
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<td><strong>November</strong>: Updated design for Renaissance ROM publicly presented.</td>
<td>$30 million</td>
<td>Former Ontario Lieutenant Governor Hilary Weston appointed chair of project.</td>
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<td><strong>May</strong>: OCAD finalizes the designs for its expansion, effectively ending any chance of a land swap with the AGO.</td>
<td>$30 million</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>June</strong>: AGO receives $24 million each from the Ontario and Canadian governments toward its expansion.</td>
<td>$24 million</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>July</strong>: Gehry officially signs on to design the AGO’s expansion (Toronto Star 2002).</td>
<td>$24 million</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>November</strong>: Press conference held with Gehry and Thomson to officially announce Transformation AGO. Thomson’s donation finalized as $300 million in artwork and $70 million in cash.</td>
<td>$300 million</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td><strong>November</strong>: Urban city councilor David Miller elected Mayor of Toronto</td>
<td>$300 million</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>January</strong>: ROM Board approves phase one of Renaissance ROM.</td>
<td>$300 million</td>
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<td><strong>February</strong>: Third update of Renaissance ROM designs presented.</td>
<td>$300 million</td>
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<td><strong>March</strong>: Some galleries close as internal renovations begin in the existing wings.</td>
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<td><strong>April</strong>: Billionaire Michael Lee-Chin donates $30 million toward the expansion. The new wing is named “The Michael Lee-Chin Crystal”.</td>
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<td><strong>May</strong>: External construction begins with the demolition of</td>
<td>$30 million</td>
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<td><strong>July</strong>: AGO announces staff layoffs, program cuts and gallery closures.</td>
<td>$30 million</td>
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<td><strong>July</strong>: AGO staff hold protests in front of gallery during Gehry visit</td>
<td>$30 million</td>
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<td><strong>November/December</strong>: AGO closes Canadian galleries, including those holding the popular Group of Seven paintings. The move provokes widespread criticism in the media.</td>
<td>$30 million</td>
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<td><strong>December</strong>: AGO signs 3-year contract with staff, narrowly avoiding a strike.</td>
<td>$30 million</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td><strong>September</strong>: OCAD finishes its expansion project, opens the Will Alsop-designed Sharp Centre for Design.</td>
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<td><strong>March</strong>: Construction begins on Michael Lee-Chin Crystal.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Weston family donates $20 million to Renaissance ROM, bring total fundraising to $150 million (Yourk 2004).</td>
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<td><strong>April</strong>: ROM issues call for expressions of interest for the commercial redevelopment of the planetarium site (Knelman 2004).</td>
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<td><strong>January</strong>: AGO unveils first completed model of its new building.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A group of community members stage a protest in front of the AGO during the announcement.</td>
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<td>Five ivory statues from the Thomson collection, valued at $1.5 million, are stolen from their display cases in the AGO. They are returned by a lawyer two weeks later.</td>
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<td><strong>March</strong>: Joey Tanenbaum quits board in protest over the planned demolition of a Barton Myers-designed atrium (which bears the Tanenbaum name) as part of the Gehry expansion.</td>
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<td><strong>April</strong>: City Councilor Olivia Chow sets up a “working group” made up of representatives from the AGO, Gehry’s firm, and the surrounding community. The group will evaluate the design process and offer suggestions.</td>
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<td><strong>May</strong>: AGO reopens Group of Seven galleries and restores some canceled programs.</td>
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<td>After consultation and design changes that will preserve some of the Tanenbaum atrium, Joey Tanenbaum rejoins</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td><em>February</em>: Project budget is adjusted to $211 million.</td>
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<td><em>ROM</em> enters into a partnership with Graywood Developments in order to build a high-rise condominium on the site of the planetarium.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>July</em>: The steel structure of the Crystal is completed.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>September</em>: ROM applies to city planning department for approval to demolish the McLaughlin Planetarium and</td>
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<td><em>January</em>: AGO and opposition group reach tentative agreement and narrowly avoid initiating a formal OMB hearing. Local television reporter Adam Vaughan negotiates on behalf of the opposition.</td>
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<td><em>February</em>: AGO lays off 71 staff in anticipation for construction.</td>
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<td><em>March</em>: AGO readjusts costs projections from $195 million to $207 million.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>June</em>: Construction begins on Gehry expansion.</td>
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</table>

AGO board and endorses the Gehry expansion project.

- **June**: AGO releases new designs for its expansion.
- **August**: The final design for the expansion is revealed.
- **September**: City of Toronto planning department ignores previous no-expansion bylaw and endorses AGO expansion.
- **October**: Toronto City Council unanimously approves expansion, though dozens of local residents make deputations in opposition.
- **December**: Local residents file five appeals with the Ontario Municipal Board in order to block the AGO expansion.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>replace it with a 44-storey condominium (Adams 2005).</td>
<td>AGO announces it has raised $180 million of the expected $254 million for its expansion.</td>
<td>AGO announces it has raised $180 million of the expected $254 million for its expansion.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• <strong>November</strong>: At public meeting held by the ROM, community members overwhelmingly oppose planned condominium. Thorsell agrees to withdraw the proposal.</td>
<td>• <strong>December</strong>: New galleries open in renovated heritage wing.</td>
<td>Full public fundraising campaign begins (previous fundraising was done privately).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>November</strong>: At public meeting held by the ROM, community members overwhelmingly oppose planned condominium. Thorsell agrees to withdraw the proposal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>• <strong>June</strong>: Budget adjusted to $211 million.</td>
<td>• <strong>June</strong>: AGO announces it has raised $180 million of the expected $254 million for its expansion.</td>
<td>AGO announces it has raised $180 million of the expected $254 million for its expansion.</td>
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<td>• <strong>November-December</strong>: New galleries open in renovated heritage wing.</td>
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<td>AGO announces it has raised $180 million of the expected $254 million for its expansion.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• <strong>November-December</strong>: New galleries open in renovated heritage wing.</td>
<td>• <strong>December</strong>: New galleries open in renovated heritage wing.</td>
<td>AGO announces it has raised $180 million of the expected $254 million for its expansion.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• <strong>November</strong>: AGO meets its fundraising goal of $254 million ahead of schedule.</td>
<td>• <strong>October</strong>: AGO closes completely for renovations.</td>
<td>AGO announces it has raised $180 million of the expected $254 million for its expansion.</td>
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<td>• <strong>May</strong>: The Grange Park Advisory Committee is</td>
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<td>AGO announces it has raised $180 million of the expected $254 million for its expansion.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• <strong>June</strong>: Ken Thomson dies at 83. His role in the expansion process is taken over by his son David Thomson.</td>
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<td>AGO announces it has raised $180 million of the expected $254 million for its expansion.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Past layoffs lead to another strike threat which is narrowly avoided.</td>
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<td>AGO announces it has raised $180 million of the expected $254 million for its expansion.</td>
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<td>• AGO begins program that will offer free one-year passes to new Canadian citizens.</td>
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<td>AGO announces it has raised $180 million of the expected $254 million for its expansion.</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>• <strong>June</strong>: “Architectural” opening gives visitors access to the interior of the Michael Lee-Chin Crystal for two weeks before the galleries have been installed.</td>
<td>• <strong>October</strong>: AGO closes completely for renovations.</td>
<td>AGO announces it has raised $180 million of the expected $254 million for its expansion.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• <strong>December</strong>: The first galleries within the Crystal open (dinosaurs and ancient mammals).</td>
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<td>AGO announces it has raised $180 million of the expected $254 million for its expansion.</td>
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<td>2008</td>
<td>• <strong>April</strong>: AGO citizenship program is expanded to several cultural organization in Toronto, including the Royal Ontario</td>
<td>• <strong>April</strong>: Additional Crystal galleries open (Africa, Americas, and Asia Pacific).</td>
<td>AGO announces it has raised $180 million of the expected $254 million for its expansion.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>December</strong>: New galleries open in</td>
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<td>AGO announces it has raised $180 million of the expected $254 million for its expansion.</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td><strong>January</strong>: ROM sells planetarium property to U of T, effectively ending their attempt to develop it through a public-private partnership (Barber 2009).</td>
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<td><strong>November</strong>: AGO reopens to the public. Opening ceremonies include the swearing in of new citizens.</td>
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Appendix B. Attendance and Revenue

ROM Annual Attendance

AGO Annual Attendance
Attendance and Revenue

ROM Revenue (2013 dollars)

AGO Revenue (2013 dollars)

Government
Private Sector
Self-Generated
Appendix C. Sample Questionnaire

The following is an actual questionnaire that was prepared for a resident who participated in community consultation meetings over the AGO expansion.

Opinions and Evaluations of the AGO

1. Now that the AGO is finished, what is your opinion of the building itself?

2. What were your initial feelings about an AGO expansion? Did you have any particular fears? Was there anything in particular that you hoped the expansion might accomplish?

3. Since the AGO is a public institution, we have certain expectations of how they will conduct themselves, particularly during a major architectural expansion. These expectations relate to issues such as transparency, accessibility, outside consultation, etc. How well do you think the AGO met these expectations?

4. What do you think were some of the things that the ROM and AGO did well in attempting to meet these expectations?

5. What kinds of mistakes do you think were made by the AGO?

6. How would you describe the relationship between the AGO and local residents?

Recounting Personal Involvement in Expansion Process

7. How were you personally involved in the expansion?

8. Are there any issues that we haven’t discussed yet?