Deconstructing Gentrification

Amsterdam Museum Journal

Issue #2 Summer 2024

AM Journal

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Cover image
Joost Stokhof, 2024

About AMJournal

Amsterdam Museum Journal (AMJournal) is a (diamond) open access, peer reviewed research journal that is published twice per year on the Amsterdam Museum website.

As the city museum of the eclectic capital of the Netherlands, the art and objects we show, the stories we host, and the societal issues that occupy us are complex by nature. This complexity requires a polyphonic approach; not one field or research can, or indeed should, tell the whole story. As such, rather than disciplinary, AMJournal is thematically oriented. Each calendar year, we publish editions that center on themes relevant to the cultural domain, public discourse and urban spaces, such as War, Conflict and the City (edition 1; October 2023) or Deconstructing Gentrification (edition 2; current edition), or Reproducing Art, Culture and Society (edition 3; December 2024).

Whilst AMJournal strictly publishes contributions that meet its high standards, the aim is to make research publications accessible for both readers and authors. AMJournal therefore publishes peer reviewed contributions by scholars in all stages of their research careers, from outstanding master students to the most lauded scholar (and anyone in between).
In addition, we publish essays and research papers by authors from all disciplines, from legal scholars to sociologists and from historians to economists. By centering on a theme rather than a discipline, complex issues are approached from various angles; demonstrating that it is through a polyphony of perspectives that we advance academic discourses.
In short, multidisciplinary research is not merely encouraged, it is at the core of the Amsterdam Museum Journal.

To support scientific multivocality and offer a platform for various disciplines, AMJournal publishes various types of contributions:

1. *The Short Essays*: short form texts in which authors succinctly defend topical thesis statements with proofs.
2. *The Long Essays:* long(er) texts in which authors defend topical thesis statements with proofs.
3. *The Empirical Papers:* qualitative and/or quantitative data analyses, or research papers.
4. *The Dialogue:* a conversation between the guest editor and another renowned scholar in their field on questions relevant to the edition's theme.
5. *The Polylogue:* a thematic roundtable conversation with expert voices from various fields, from academic to artists, and from journalists to activists.
6. *The Polyphonic Object:* short complementary analyses by scholars from different disciplines of a single thematic object from the Amsterdam Museum collection.
7. *The Visual Essay:* a printed exhibition in which the analyses are based on images, which are then analyzed empirically and/or by means of a theoretical framework.

All contributions are published in English and written according to strict author guidelines with the broader academic- and expert community in mind. Each AMJournal edition and each separate contribution is freely downloadable and shareable as a PDF-file.
To further aid accessibility, for both authors and readers, AMJournal does not charge readers any subscription- or access fees, nor does it charge authors Article Processing Charges (APCs).

Artist Contribution

For the second edition of the AMJournal, the editorial board invited Joost Stokhof to create art that functions as a visual layer on gentrification. With his keen eye, he offers a subtle critical look on gentrification that complements the written contributions. He explains his work and process for the journal as follows:

"I'm always looking for the smallest details that tell more than they seem to at first glance. Small things that are often overlooked tend to play a huge part in my work. These details become the focal point of my attention, documented on paper I give them the space required for their narratives to unfold. I will submerge myself into a subject and look further than its surface to put it on paper. This way telling the bigger story by painting the smaller picture."

Joost Stokhof | Illustrator & Art Director

Editors' Note

Dear Readers,

We hereby present the second issue of the Amsterdam Museum Journal (AMJournal), which is dedicated to the deconstruction of the intricate dynamics of gentrification and how these dynamics have shaped, and continue to shape, the social and physical fabric of cities around the world.

As stewards of the city's narrative, we believe it is our responsibility to help clarify the patterns of urban change and displacement caused by gentrification. Building upon the museum's tradition of collaborative inquiry and exhibition, the multidisciplinary contributions in this edition provide a nuanced exploration of this urgent societal topic.

From the examination of artistic activism to the analysis of neoliberal urban policies, this special issue fosters a comprehensive dialogue that transcends disciplinary boundaries. By amplifying diverse voices and perspectives, we aspire to enrich our collective comprehension of gentrification as a multifaceted phenomenon. As such, this edition includes a tapestry of different contribution types, each adding a layer of depth to our understanding of gentrification's complexities.

As (academic) discourse plays an important role, this special issue includes a round table between academics, activists and journalists in which gentrification is further deconstructed, as well as a conversation between the guest editor of this edition, Dr. Tim Verlaan, and Prof. Dr. Suleiman Osman, in which they discuss how and why history matters when investigating gentrification processes. The written contributions concern research papers on site-specific theatre performances,

architectural models, postcolonial urban areas and social alienation. These papers investigate, amongst other things, the relationship between public space and community activism, the aesthetic of playfulness, the history of gentrification and how we might mobilize this history to counteract the process in the here and now. In addition, we are publishing two short essays by students who took the MA class ‘Wonen als Recht’ (‘Housing as a Right’) to showcase best practice examples of junior research on the issue. Lastly, we introduce the contribution type of a ‘visual essay’, which takes on the form of a written exhibition on a case or topic related to the special issue at hand.

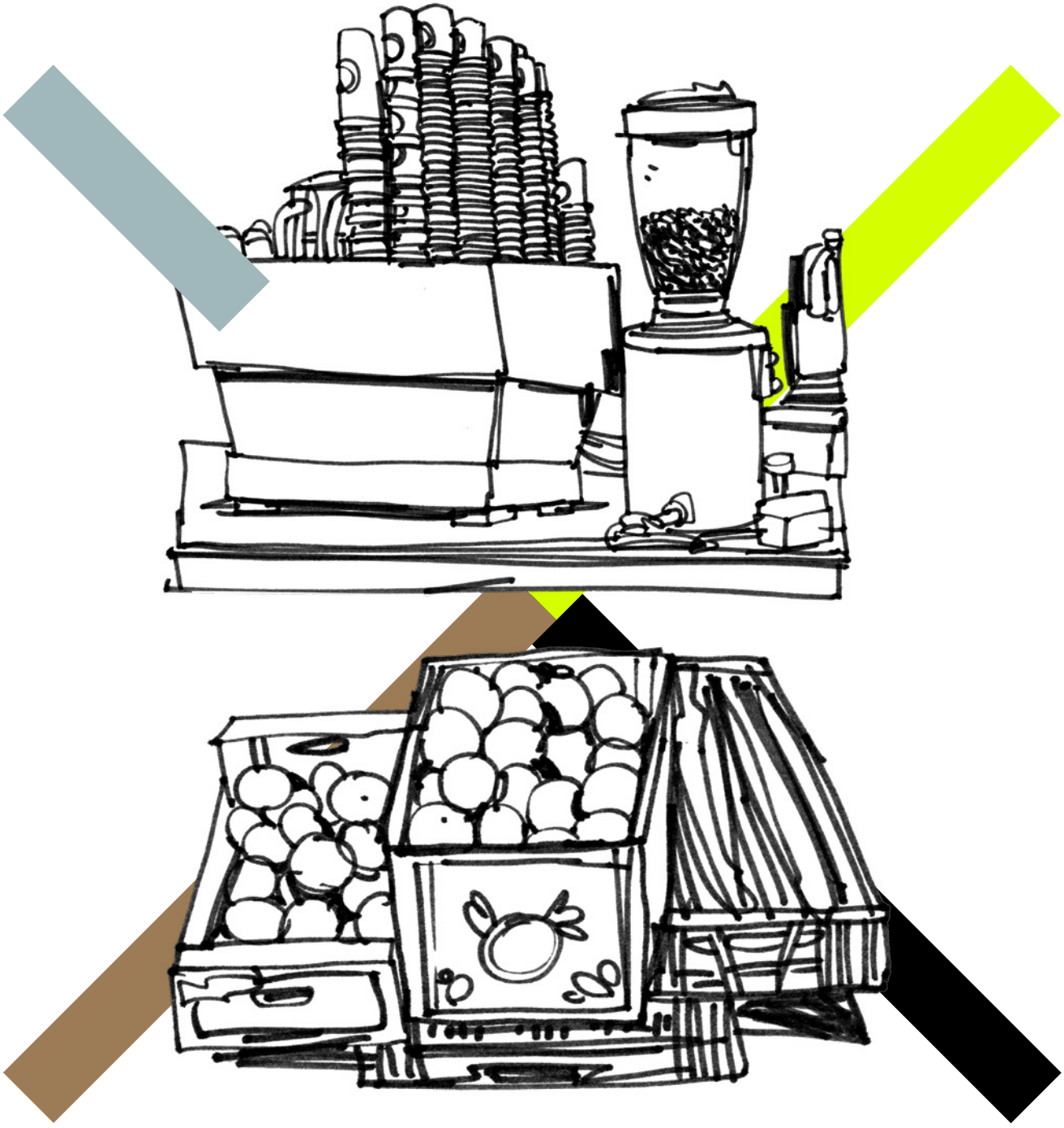
We thank all contributors, as well as our readership, for their engagement with this vital issue. Together, we embark on a journey of exploration and inquiry, as we strive to unravel the complexities of gentrification and its impact on our urban landscapes.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Tim Verlaan
Edition Guest Editor

Dr. Emma van Bijnen
Editor-in-Chief

The Dialogue



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Suleiman Osman

Prof. Dr. Suleiman Osman is Associate Professor of American Studies at George Washington University. His first book, *The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn*, was awarded the Hornblower Prize from the New York Society Library.

Tim Verlaan

Dr. Tim Verlaan is assistant professor in Urban History at the University of Amsterdam, working on the social, political and cultural history of European cities during the 1960-2000 period.

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A Dialogue on History and Gentrification between Suleiman Osman and Tim Verlaan

For the second edition, AMJournal introduces the section of the ‘guest editor conversation’ in the form of a dialogue between the editor and a(nother) renowned scholar in the field. For this edition, Tim Verlaan invited acclaimed scholar Suleiman Osman to discuss how and why history matters when investigating gentrification processes. Verlaan explains his choice for Osman as follows:

“I read Suleiman’s book when I was concluding my PhD dissertation on urban redevelopment. 'The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn' radically changed my view of post-war urban history and steered my research agenda into the direction of gentrification. Usually, historians describe the 1950s to 1980s as a period of urban crisis and decay, whereas Suleiman focuses on the rise of a new urban middleclass who ‘reinvented’ inner-city neighborhoods as authentic cityscapes that should be saved from demolition. He does so with incredible detail and rich source materials, which inspired me to investigate similar patterns of post-war urban change in European cities.”

Why does history matter in studying gentrification?

TV: Gentrification is a process first observed by sociologist *Ruth Glass* in 1964, who coined the term to describe the buying up and refurbishing of Victorian working-class housing by London's middle classes. Since then, the term has been mostly used by social scientists, geographers in particular, and not so much by historians. I am convinced a historical perspective on gentrification matters because historians bring in this long-term perspective and are well equipped to demonstrate its contingencies and temporalities.

SO: Historians have been slow to study gentrification, likely because many still perceive it to be a recent phenomenon. Most of the groundbreaking historical work about gentrification has been produced by geographers and sociologists, as Tim pointed out. Geographers and sociologists, for example, have made the first attempts to periodize gentrification into 'waves' that will be enormously useful for historians.[1]

So, there are actually two interesting questions embedded here. First, *why should gentrification matter to historians?* The second question is *why should history matter to people today, who are concerned about the gentrification of their cities?* One simple answer is that history can help us understand the origins of this contentious issue and how it has changed over time.

TV: Yes, gentrification is a long-term process; it does not happen overnight. In the classic definitions Suleiman is referring to gentrification unfolds in waves or cycles; you usually have a pioneering stage in which students or artists 'discover' a working-class neighborhood. Then, in the second stage, risk-taking individuals and couples from the middle classes begin buying up and refurbishing dwellings. In the third stage the property market steps in: developers, investors, and real estate agents.[2] So, as you can imagine, this is a process that takes years to develop and has lasting consequences, and I think that if you approach it from a historical perspective, you are more aware of gentrification happening in cycles and waves.

SO: Adding to that statement, let's say that historians generally ask unique sorts of questions. As opposed to social scientists, historians do not hope to develop generalizable theories based on research questions like *"What is a 'gentrifier?'"* or *"How does it happen?"* Historians tend to be allergic to generalization. They use archives and narratives to emphasize *idiosyncrasies*, *contingency*, and *change over time*.

Can You Give an Example of How Historians Approach Gentrification?

SO: Take the contentious scholarly debate about whether gentrification causes residential displacement. Historians would not try to answer that with a single yes or no answer – rather they would accept that it is complex and that it has changed over time.

TV: There is an ongoing discussion on the question: *Does gentrification lead to displacement?* The answer is complicated. Physically? Not always. You can stay in a certain neighborhood and still feel displaced. I think this emotional experience – a relative blind spot in gentrification studies – is often misunderstood. Gentrification might lead to displacement, but it can also mean that long-time residents, especially in Amsterdam where there is obviously still quite a large stock of social housing, can feel alienated from their immediate living environment, a kind of emotional displacement. Feeling at home is important, you should feel secure and safe in your own neighborhood. Historians can explore these emotional aspects over time through oral histories, newspaper articles, personal diaries and contemporary surveys.

How do you approach the concept of gentrification in your own work? And how do you define the concept?

SO: For a historian a protean term like gentrification presents serious challenges. Today *'gentrification'* is used by the public around the world is expansive. It is used to describe all sorts of urban change, from luxury development to historic preservation. The meaning has even expanded beyond urban space. Some describe the gentrification of the internet, fashion or even the mind. As a result, some think that the word has become too vague to be useful. Others are excited because its popularity shows that the word is offering a new generation of residents in cities like Amsterdam a powerful vocabulary to describe a global housing crisis and a concept around which to organize politically.

In *The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn*, I examined an era before gentrification had become part of American public discourse. I relied on terminology used by participants themselves in the 1960s and 1970s: *'Brownstoning'* and *'brownstoners'*. But in my current research about earlier and later forms of gentrification, I am grappling with this epistemological issue.

TV: I struggle with the term being coopted for *'good causes'*. The term means class struggle, it is literally the gentry taking over.[3] I think you should not use the term if you do not know what gentrification is about. If you talk about gentrification being good for an area or being good for the people living in a certain area, you overlook the fact that it is all about class struggle. That's what gentrification means. You can say *'uplifting'* a neighborhood or *'revitalizing'* a neighborhood is good, but saying gentrification is good does not make any sense. So, how does a historian resolve these definition issues?

SO: It is a dilemma. Gentrification history is still a relatively new field. *How does a historian trace into the past such a protean word with no clear definition?* I think there are *five potential approaches* available for gentrification historians – all of which have advantages and drawbacks:

A *'strict'* historian could stick closely to Ruth Glass's original definition of the

term. *'Stricts'* could even convincingly argue that what we are seeing today around the globe today is fundamentally different and needs a new name. A *'broad'* historian, in contrast, could embrace the more expansive version of gentrification used by the public today to offer a bold reinterpretation of the urban past, even in previous centuries. *'Developmentalists'* could draw upon the work already done by scholars about *'waves'* to trace how Glassian gentrification slowly metastasized into a more global and abstract phenomenon. A fourth *'discursive'* approach could examine gentrification as a cultural construct that has changed in meaning over time. Rather than a salient phenomenon on the ground, gentrification has always been a *'loaded term'* that has acted as a proxy for shifting cultural anxieties – anxieties about art and commerce, white-collar labor, modern tourism or urban authenticity, for example. I am exploring this in my new book project.[4] A fifth extreme approach would be to *discard* the overburdened word altogether and develop new terminology to analyze the past.

All these approaches have pitfalls that I could talk about in more detail. Future historians will hopefully mix them in innovative ways. There are young Dutch scholars, doing innovative theoretical work to draw from. *Freek de Haan*, for example, draws from particle physics, actor-network theory, as well as assemblage and postcolonial theory to offer a dynamic concept of gentrification. I recently saw an interesting article by *Marijn Knierem* examining gentrification as a *'moving target'* and drawing on *Ian Hacking*'s idea of *'dynamic nominalism'* to explore feedback loops between gentrification as an idea and concrete phenomenon. I would love to see historians experiment with approaches like these.

What do you mean by gentrification reflecting an anxiety about authenticity?

TV: The baby boom generation—who came of age in the late 1960s and early 1970s—grew up in a rapidly modernizing world. They found the old and supposedly more authentic world in the decaying working-class neighborhoods of the inner cities. They moved into such areas not *despite* their urban fabric but *because* of it, besides cheap rents of course. What added to the authentic experience was a very social and vibrant community life. But moving into such a community obviously causes social change. And if more of the same people that are striving for authenticity arrive, part of that same authenticity disappears. This is the tension between *authenticity* and *gentrification*.

The baby boomers were often the same people who opposed urban redevelopment in the 1970s and have been understood by contemporaries and historians as protesters. They were the people who opposed urban change, the romantic counterforces of modernity. But they were also advocating for a new understanding and experience of the old cityscape, as Suleiman exemplifies in his book on the gentrification of post-war Brooklyn.

SO: In addition to fears about housing, residents of gentrifying neighborhoods worried about neighborhoods *'losing*

their soul' as they became expensive, commercialized and touristic. This has often been an anxiety felt not just by longtime residents, but the 'gentrifiers' themselves.[5] In my book, *The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn*, I examine how a new middle class, often left-leaning, if not radical in their politics, reimagined lower-income areas of Brooklyn as sites of authenticity that they found lacking in downtown apartment towers and suburban tract homes. I call this *'historic diversity'*—a type of urban aesthetic celebrated by writers like Jane Jacobs. Yet from the start there was an anxiety in Brooklyn about that imagined authenticity disappearing, and the role of the new arrivals in destroying it. Because these *'brownstoners'* were heavily represented in the arts, journalism and academia, their anxiety had an outsized presence in the media.

The gentrification of countercultural districts of Brooklyn and Amsterdam presented a housing dilemma for the poor and a cultural dilemma for a new middle class. How did Brooklyn and Amsterdam transform from symbols of countercultural rebellion to some of the world's most expensive cities? A progressive urban ideal beset from the onset with unresolvable contradictions? Or was it a story of neoliberal cooptation?

TV: Yes, I think it is more about the latter, this systematic approach is really important. Individuals often feel guilty about gentrification, whereas it is actually about the system they are part of. Gentrifiers do not have much agency. Do not blame people for the choices they make within a system that limits the options. Look at real estate prices and dynamics. The ways our property markets are organized or even the algorithms behind realtor websites have a much greater influence on gentrification than any individual. We should stop blaming your typical hipster for neighborhood change and examine gentrification from a more systematic angle.

I think the agency gentrifiers do have is related to their immediate surroundings. It is limited but I think that is the little agency you have as a gentrifier. As a newcomer in a neighborhood, you should do your utmost to get to know your neighbors, to understand how they might feel about your arrival.

Endnotes

1 The seminal article proposing "waves" of gentrification is Hackworth, J., & Smith, N. (2001). The changing state of gentrification. *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie*, *92*④, 464–477; the best overview of the foundational scholarship remains Lees, L., Slater, T., & Wyly, E. K. (2008). *Gentrification*. Routledge/Taylor and Francis Group; see also Brown-Saracino, J. (2010). *The Gentrification debates: a reader* (1st edition). Routledge; for a short overview, see Osman, S. (2016, May 09). Gentrification in the United States. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*.

2 Aalbers, M. B. 2019. "Introduction to the Forum: From Third to Fifth-Wave Gentrification." *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie* 110 ①: 1–11. Hackworth, J., and N. Smith. 2001. "The Changing State of Gentrification." *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie* 92 ④: 464–477.

3 Smith, N. 1996. *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge.

4 The classic debates about how to define gentrification are well covered in Lees, Slater, and Wiley. For a critique of global definitions of gentrification, see Maloutas, T. (2012). Contextual Diversity in Gentrification Research. *Critical Sociology*, *38*①, 33–48; for a 'broad' definition, see Lees, L., López Morales, E., & Shin, H. B. (2016). *Planetary gentrification*. Polity Press; for an overview of potential historical approaches, see Verlaan, Tim, and Cody Hochstenbach. "Gentrification through the Ages: A Long-Term Perspective on Urban Displacement, Social Transformation and Resistance." *City* 26, no. 2–3 (2022): 439–49; for a discursive analysis of changing media coverage, see Brown-Saracino, J. and Rumpf, . (2011), Diverse Imageries of Gentrification: Evidence from Newspaper Coverage in Seven U.S. Cities, 1986–2006. Journal of Urban Affairs, 33: 289-315.

5 Brown-Saracino, J. (2010). *A Neighborhood That Never Changes : Gentrification, Social Preservation, and the Search for Authenticity*. University of Chicago Press; Zukin, S. (2010). *Naked city : the Death and Life of Authentic urban places*. Oxford University Press; Schlichtman, J. J., Hill, M. L., & Patch, J. (2017). *Gentrifier*. University of Toronto Press. Osman, S. (2011). *The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York*.

Empirical Papers

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Model/City: Architectural Models and the Aesthetics of Playfulness

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Discipline
Media studies and Urban Studies

Keywords
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Abstract

Between wooden blocks and miniature trees, open spaces and shared pathways, the architectural model of Sloterdijk (Amsterdam, the Netherlands) constructs a vision of green and collective living, which contrasts the lived reality of a neighborhood undergoing a rapid transformation from a largely industrial area to a 'desirable' urban neighborhood marked by luxury residential buildings. Architectural models are situated at a point of in-between, simultaneously charged with planning, representing, legitimizing, and – maybe most importantly – imagining an urban future. This article takes this special issue's call to 'deconstruct gentrification' literally by focusing on the material construction of better green urban futures through architectural models. Simultaneously referencing and abstracting the (proposed) construction sites, I argue that recent architectural models for three (re)developments in Amsterdam – Sloterdijk, Zuidas, and Bajeskwartier – draw on an aesthetic of playfulness to counter criticism raised against the gentrifying effects of 'sustainable' urban planning.

Introduction

Between wooden blocks and miniature trees, open spaces and shared pathways, the architectural model of the luxury residential building VERTICAL in *Sloterdijk*, Amsterdam, constructs a vision of green and collective living contrasting the lived reality of a neighborhood undergoing a rapid transformation from a largely industrial area to a 'desirable' urban neighborhood marked by luxury residential buildings. This tension between sustainability and gentrification has been traced in urban and cultural geography in diverse urban settings from Vancouver (Quastel et al. 2012) and Atlanta (Immergluck and Balan 2018) to New Delhi (Baviskar 2003) and Istanbul (Yazar et al. 2020), drawing attention to both the often economic imperative of residential (re)development projects and the – arguably less intentional – consequences of adding sustainability features like green spaces and walkable infrastructures. While emerging terminologies like 'green gentrification' or 'eco-gentrification' highlight "*gentrification processes that precede, accompany, or follow sustainability planning or urban greening efforts*" (Pearsall 2018, 330), the attention is frequently on either 'abstract' urban policies or their 'concrete' consequences. Rather than (just) tracing these critiques in the urban setting of Amsterdam, I propose to understand the negotiation between sustainability and gentrification as a process of mediation as well. As Michela Pace emphasizes, visual design – particularly images – plays a crucial role in shaping the imagined ideal of the city (Pace 2023), pointing to the ways that media intersect in 'visions' of both sustainability and gentrification. Architectural models, like the one of Sloterdijk introduced above, are situated at a point of in-between, simultaneously charged with planning, representing, legitimizing, and – maybe most importantly – imagining an urban future. This article takes this special issue's call to 'deconstruct gentrification' *literally* by focusing on the material construction of *better* green urban futures through architectural models.

As a medium, the model traverses the line between professional tool and playful representation. Featured in thematic exhibitions like "*Architekturmodelle*" at *Deutsches Architekturmuseum* in Frankfurt or "*Out of Office – Amsterdamse maquettes op reis*" in ARCAM in Amsterdam, as well as represention in historical museums like the *Victoria and Albert Museum* in London, the architectural model has long garnered attention beyond the professional settings of architectural practitioners. Architectural writer Jane Jacobs already referred to the increasing popularity – and increasing detailedness – of architectural models as a veritable 'miniature boom' in the late 1950s. And, of course, building models of cities – real or imagined

– can also be practiced in private, as a hobby with fluctuating popularity. What is striking for the analysis presented in this paper, however, is the increasing accessibility of architectural models of current (re)development projects, before and throughout their physical construction. In this article, I am interested in how these two uses of architectural models appear to move increasingly closer together, blurring the boundary between practice and pleasure through modes of play. If the architectural model can be "*sign, souvenir, toy, funerary object, didactic tool, medium, or muse*" (Mindrup 2019, 8), the increasing overlap between these – fundamentally different – understandings takes on a political dimension in the context of urban gentrification. Writing on architectural renderings, architecture critic Mark Minkjan argues that "*in order not to distort this fantasy, the social implications, political dynamics and internal problems of architecture and spatial production are conveniently left out of the picture*". In this article, I analyze how the playfulness of architectural models functions as a counter to criticism raised against the gentrifying effects of 'sustainable' urban planning. By examining the role of models in the presentation of architectural designs to both policy makers and interested publics, this study further highlights the potential consequences of strategically (re) presenting large-scale developments through small-scale models marked by natural materials and playful miniatures.

Expanding on previous discussions in both urban policies and urban redevelopment, turning to the mediation of green urban planning approaches through architectural models provides a new entry point into the aesthetic, material, and discursive negotiation of what 'greening' the city actually means. In his discussion of architectural models as representational media, architect Alexander Schilling proposes that the model creates a "*sense of space, aesthetic and materiality*"[1] (Schilling 2017, 8). Here, I aim to push this understanding of simultaneously sensing and making sense of urban visions further by highlighting the multiple dimensions of play at work in building, experiencing, and mediating contemporary architectural models. Following the definition of Miguel Sicart, play is a way through which "*we experience the world, we construct it and we destroy it, and we explore who we are and what we can say*" (Sicart 2017, 5) – pointing to both the imaginative and political potential of playing. Rather than understanding playfulness as opposed to 'seriousness', my discussion of playfulness draws on an understanding of play as contextual, as "*not tied to objects but brought by people to the complex interrelations with and between things that form daily life*" (Sicart 2017, 2). Playing, then, becomes a form of negotiating the relationships between the city's past, present, and future. The

architectural models of the three urban (re)developments discussed here are importantly not only engaged with by urban planners and architects but made available to the larger public both physically and virtually. In doing so, the role of the architectural model arguably shifts from practical tool (by and for 'practitioners') to something else: A medium with the capacity for playfulness, for "*an attempt to engage with the world in the mode of being of play but not playing*" (Sicart 2017, 22). This definition as a 'mode of being of play' makes playfulness such a productive conceptual lens to discuss the mediation of urban plans in and through architectural models: Architectural models on the one hand playfully engage with urban plans, and one the other hand – seemingly – invite to be playfully engaged with themselves. At the same time, this engagement is folded back into existing structures of power. Understanding play(ing) as a "*specific relation to the world*" (Raczkowksi and Hanke 2021, 10) points to the political dimension of playfulness in urban planning: In what ways do architectural models shape our understanding of the city – and our place in it? Recognizing "*the materiality of designed things and the material and discursive practices through which they come to matter*" (Kimbell 2012, 129), adds an additional dimension to the entanglement between sustainability and desirability, green imaginations and gentrified realities, as an aesthetic and discursive strategy.

Model(ing) Amsterdam

As exemplary case studies, this article discusses three neighborhoods in Amsterdam currently undergoing – but at different stages of – (re)development: (1) Sloterdijk in Amsterdam-West, (2) *Zuidas* in Amsterdam-South, and (3) *Bajeskwartier* in Amsterdam-East. Rather than discussing these examples individually, this article points to the similarities in the aesthetic and discursive construction of these neighborhoods in and through architectural models: All three models are publicly accessible in specific 'information centers' in addition to featuring prominently in promotional materials. Furthermore, all three models are entangled with the promise of greener, 'better' futures for the respective neighborhoods. My methodological approach for this article similarly brings together the material with the virtual in an attempt to engage with the architectural models in and through their different forms of mediation via *sensory ethnography*, *textual analysis* and *discourse analysis*.

As an emerging form of ethnography, sensory ethnography foregrounds the sensory experiencing body and its interdependency with the built environment (cf. Pink 2015). With an interest in how architectural

models are made accessible for interested publics, I have consciously conducted different types of visits to the three information centers of Zuidas, Bajeskwartier and Sloterdijk. The information center for Zuidas is situated in Amsterdam's World Trade Center, directly opposite the much-frequented train and metro station Amsterdam Zuid. Located on the first floor in the building's Tower 5, the information center is open on weekdays from 10.00 to 16.00 – but appears to be largely passed by. On my three visits, spread over multiple weeks in January 2024 and undertaken on different days and at different times, I have been the only visitor to the information center, with my visits only being interrupted by employees of the adjacent planning bureau taking shortcuts through the exhibition room. Divided into different 'phases' of development, Bajeskwartier – the site of a former prison complex undergoing a complete transformation – hosts recurring 'open days' loosely connected to the completion and/or availability of a new phase of the development. Together with prospective buyers and potential residents, I have attended 'open days' for Bajeskwartier in September 2023 and March 2024. As highly public (and publicized) events, these ethnographic visits allowed me to not only engage with the architectural model myself but also observe other visitors – as a contrast to my solitary visits to the Zuidas information center. To add a third dimension of engagement, my visits to the architectural model of Sloterdijk were virtual, tracing photographs and videos of the model online. Importantly, the architectural models discussed here are not only made physically accessible to the public but are also consciously operationalized in the framing of Bajeskwartier, Sloterdijk and Zuidas as building towards (more) sustainable neighborhoods. Through photos and videos of the models as a whole, as well as partial close-ups, complimentary materials (for example timelapses of the construction and renovation of the models), and 'virtual walks' through them, the architectural models are also extended into the virtual sphere – becoming a key component of the mediated construction of the three neighborhoods. In this article, I combine my ethnographic visits to the information centers as a form of sensory engagement with the architectural models and their physical exhibition with textual and discourse analysis of these virtual mediations. Tracing the ways that the models become embedded – and meaningful – in larger discourses of urban futures allows me to explore the visual and verbal language of 'sustainability' constructed in and across these different materials. Especially as the physical models appear to be either largely overlooked by busy commuters and passers-by or 'out of the way' except for specific organized visits like the open days mentioned earlier, their extension into the virtual sphere becomes an urgent site of

inquiry. Discussing the model as a medium on the one hand and pointing to the mediation of the model on the other hand, furthers our understanding of urban planning as a simultaneously material and immaterial process, changing and evolving with and beyond the physical construction.

Material Play: Producing Sustainability in Miniature

In a strict definition, Alexander Schilling argues that models are meant to be scaled representations of existing – or at least planned – realities (Schilling 2017, 44). At the same time, this representation is complicated by material concerns: In most cases, architectural models are not built with the same materials as their 'real' versions, but with and through materials approximating the actual construction. Glass, stone, wood, cement, steel, and other construction materials are rarely used in architectural models and instead replaced through paper, plastic, (lighter) wood-based materials polystyrene, and other synthetics meant to simulate the aesthetics – and characteristics/properties – of these materials. "*Every model is an interpretation*", Oliver Elser, architectural historian and curator of the *Deutsche Architekturmuseum*, suggests. In his historical overview of the architectural model, Matthew Mindrup continuously points out that making models was and continues to be a process of experimenting, of trying to "*find materials and methods for representing architectural ideas in ways that communicate their intended effect*" (Mindrup 2019, 173). Here, I am proposing to approach this experimentation with materiality through the lens of play: More than a practical concern, playing with materiality becomes a way to change not only the look but, more importantly, also the 'feel' of architectural models – and the urban plans materialized in and through them. Writing about modern architecture as expanding beyond itself, architects Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson argue that "*a building today is only interesting if it is more than itself, if it charges the space around it with connective possibilities*" (Smithson & Smithson 1974, 36) – an expectation that, arguably, already begins with the architectural models discussed here. If "*a building takes its impact not least from the sum of its materials*"[2] (Schilling 2017, 44), this play with materiality through abstraction and approximation inevitably holds the potential to change the impact, the affective charge, of the construction both in its miniature and built version. Through the production of nature within the model, its urban vision is charged with the sensory experience of sustainability.

As a material development, this shift towards a more playful use of 'natural' materials becomes particularly notable when approaching models as historical artifacts as well, documenting changing architectural practices

as much as public sentiments. For instance, Sloterdijk in the West of Amsterdam, has undergone previous phases of (re)development – most notable beginning in the late 1960s. Discussing the architectural models of the urban plans for the neighborhood side by side, 1968 next to 2023, highlights a striking shift in the materials used to build the models (see figures 1 and 2).

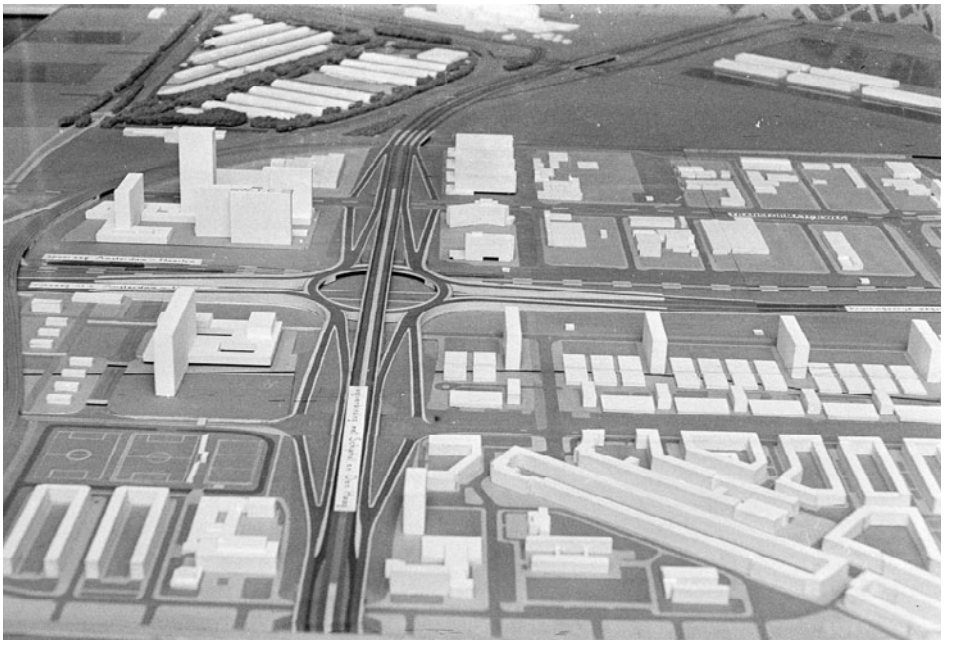

Figure 1: *The architectural models of Amsterdam-Sloterdijk from 1968.* Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau - Fotoarchief, 1963-1968. Photograph by: Jacques Klok.

Figure 2: *The architectural models of Amsterdam-Sloterdijk from 2023.* Photograph by: Uptown Sloterdijk.

"In their application to prospective residents, the idea of the 'green urbanite' constructs a particular – and apparently particularly desirable – resident of these neighborhoods that echoes other discussions of processes of gentrification."

Relying mostly on abstractions of buildings, cut from polystyrene, the earlier model of the neighborhood can be understood as a functional representation, a simplified three-dimensional visualization of urban planning (see figure 1). Similar to the buildings, the infrastructure is referenced but kept minimal in the architectural model. Importantly, I do not mean to imply that this model is less realistic, or even less detailed, than the newer one. Rather, the three-dimensional model of Sloterdijk in its current vision (see figure 2) brings together different materialities in a more playful way – that is, in turn, charged with meaning.

The architectural models of Amsterdam-Sloterdijk from 1968 (figure 1) and 2023 (figure 2) are strikingly different in their materiality – arguably following different objectives in their representation of the neighborhood. While different modeling materials have become typical as representations of different types of material realities, the increasing reliance on 'natural' materials does more than simulate, represent, the characteristics of the actual construction materials. To push this even further: The buildings represented through wooden blocks in the architectural model of Sloterdijk will – most likely – not be actually built out of wood. Instead, the material can be understood as a strategic aesthetic choice, charging the architectural model with a sense of sustainability. And, of course, the wooden blocks and transparent cubes, carefully arranged on the plan of the neighborhood, evoke associations of toy building blocks. Both their materiality and their positioning invite the viewer to imagine moving them around, turning them, stacking them, replacing them, removing them in an open-ended experimentation with ways of building a city. Returning to Miguel Sicart's definition of play as a way to "*experience the world*" (Sicart 2017, 5), the aesthetic reference to materials of play and playing adds a layer of potential to the architectural model. We might still build the city differently; the model tells us.

In their playfulness, i.e., their capacity "*to afford playful behaviors*" (Sicart 2017, 19), architectural models like the ones discussed here draw a connection between materiality and desirability – and point to larger

socio-political questions as negotiated in and through their playful aesthetics. More provocatively phrased: *Can we also playfully construct belonging?* All three (re)development projects discussed here formulate a discourse of a better, greener future – of a space charged with potential and possibility. For instance, Bajeskwartier – the site of a former prison complex – is presented as becoming an "*exuberantly green hotspot for genuine urbanites*", while Sloterdijk in the West – a former industrial hub for the telecommunications industry – is framed as a "*green, resilient and urban area*" on the official websites of the respective neighborhoods. In these formulations, the dual emphasis on 'green' and 'urban' as interconnected rather than oppositional is notable. In their application to prospective residents, the idea of the 'green urbanite' constructs a particular – and apparently particularly desirable – resident of these neighborhood that echoes other discussions of processes of gentrification (Bcf. Lindner and Sandoval 2021). Concerns that "'*green' may become a code word for safe, rich, professional, and privileged*" (Mehdizadeh and Fischer 2013, 6) have been raised in regard to both the design and implementation of urban policies centered on sustainability – and certainly resonate in these descriptions of desirable residents. In my discussion of the playful aesthetics of architectural models, then, the emphasis on potential and possibility becomes a way to negotiate criticism against the gentrifying consequences – if not necessarily intentions – of sustainable urban (re) development (cf. Pearsall 2018). The materials used in architectural models are, according to architectural theorist Matthew Mindrup, not just meant to make models representative but also – and maybe more importantly – "*comprehensible to an unfamiliar audience*" (Mindrup 2019, 174). By highlighting nature and natural materials in the construction of architectural models, I argue that the miniature versions of Sloterdijk, Zuidas and Bajeskwartier, quite literally, materialize sustainability. In other words: The material production of nature in the architectural model intersects with an imaginary production of these neighborhoods as green, sustainable, livable – while at the same time communicating an openness to further intervention, experimentation, change. Miguel Sicart similarly points out that a discourse of 'playfulness' can be appropriated, particularly by design (Sicart 2017, 2). Returning to an understanding of play as 'make believe', then, takes on a political dimension as well: Through material play, architectural models are charged with making sustainable urban policies not only comprehensible but also believable (and seemingly 'buildable') while further detaching them from the realities of gentrification. Here, this becomes further complicated when discussing who actually gets to materially, haptically, play with the architectural models – and the urban futures they aim to materialize.

Perspective Play: Between Proximity and Distance

The heart of the 'Bajeslounge' – the 'information and inspiration center' in and for Bajeskwartier – and the object first and foremost notable when entering through the center's glass doors is a miniature model of the neighborhood. Encapsulated in a glass case, the architectural model simultaneously invites closeness and distance. In both the promotional material available on the website and during my in-person visits, people are leaning close to the glass case, pointing at the miniature infrastructures and smiling at the playfulness of the representation – while at the same time keeping the model just out of reach, just out of touch. This is particularly noticeable because everything else in the 'Bajeslounge' invites touch, from suggested materials for floors and wallpapers in open drawers to potential finishes for appliances on display throughout the lounge. Understanding play as "*a practice, a way to position oneself opposite objects, the world, human as well as non-human beings*"[3] (Raczkowksi and Hanke 2021, 10) highlights the significance of positionality in countering concerns of gentrification. Playing with perspectives in a constant shift between proximity and distance, I argue that architectural models of on-going (re)developments complicate the spatial grounding of urban plans. Different to the exhibitions mentioned in the introduction to this article, the architectural model displayed in the 'Bajeslounge' – and similarly in the information centers for Zuidas and Sloterdijk – is not an artistic artifact that can be referenced, contrasted, compared along dimensions of representability or 'realisticness'. The stasis of the model suspends it between an abstract idea and a real construction, neither fully theoretical nor fully representation.

Noticing the very particular shapes of miniature buildings in the model that seemed – otherwise – still quite abstract, I asked the resident 'educator' during one of my visits to the Zuidas information center for the plans not just of the neighborhood but of the model itself. Continuously updated (and exhaustively renewed in January 2022), the architectural model of Zuidas changes, aesthetically and materially, as the neighborhood does. And yet, from the visitor's perspective, the status of these changes remains somewhat opaque: Some of the miniature buildings, spaces, and infrastructures are already completed, some are under construction, some are planned – and some are still waiting to be designed, planned, constructed. In the meantime, the 'space' to be taken up by these future constructions in the model is filled with placeholders. These placeholders, simultaneously abstract in their materiality and specific in their shape, complicate an understanding of the actual status of the urban development – and the potential for (public) intervention in these plans. The miniature shapes

Figure 3: *Promotional photograph used by Bajeskwartier, as a model to be experienced and explained.* Photograph by: Bajeskwartier Amsterdam.

Figure 4: *Promotional photograph used by Sloterdijk, as a model to be experienced and explained*. Photograph by: Uptown Sloterdijk.

might become physical shapes, or they might not. This suspension in time, apparently, necessitates further explanation – as all three (re)development projects discussed here offer educational tours that situate the viewer in relation to the modeled vision of the city (see figures 3 and 4).

This adds another dimension to questions of perspective: In the architectural models discussed here, the surrounding city disappears – creating the illusion of this better, greener neighborhood as detached and detangled from both the history and the present of the city. Underneath images of the *Zuidas* model on the development's website, the only one with an open comment function, this tension is also palpable as comments point out 'missing' references to existing residential areas (and their residents) in

the modeled area as strategic: "*It will certainly save a lot of difficult policy discussions about noise and particulate pollution, for example, if one can 'forget' these almost 600 residents of the area*" (@Sander, 10 March 2022). While exemplary, comments like this complicate the promise of 'integration' of these larger (re)developments into the existing urban fabric of the city. For instance, the description of the masterplan for Bajeskwartier on the website of the leading architectural firm OMA details the transformation of "*the former prison complex into a hub for sustainable living, well integrated with Amsterdam's urban fabric*". Beyond the practical reasoning to only 'model' the neighborhood in question, the representation of the surrounding urban fabric through abstractions, white cubes and empty spaces, arguably creates the illusion of the city as a blank canvas. A blank canvas that, in turn, is waiting to be developed towards better, greener versions of their current realities. In this regard, the architectural model as a – if somewhat passive – form of play resembles urban simulation games like SimCity, which Kenneth Kolson critiques as representing an "*urban tissue [...] completely cut off from the surrounding region*" (Kolson 1994, 8). Taking into account the consequences of sustainable urban development projects on the land and housing costs of surrounding neighborhoods[4] further complicates this distanced and detached view: Arguably, 'green gentrification' expands not just beyond the space represented by the architectural model but into the city as a whole.

At least for the physical models, the ways to engage with them remain – spatially and conceptually – restricted. The model for Sloterdijk can be visited – or rather seen through a glass window – in a separate annex of the train station *Station Sloterdijk*, the infrastructural heart of the neighborhood, while Zuidas presents its model in an information center in Amsterdam's World Trade Center in the middle of the transforming area. Maybe even more obviously than in the 'Bajeslounge', the architectural model of these (re)developments forms the heart of the respective information centers, functioning as a reason to visit the centers (and consequently discuss the urban planning vision with the resident 'educators'). At the same time, the emphasis on the aesthetics of playfulness also comes with a reference to play as "*parameterized*" (Pearce 2006, 69) – as having agreed upon rules. In the context of this article, the rules are simultaneously referring to the practical regulations of urban planning and the more subtle rules of engagement with these plans. What anthropologist Christopher Kelty calls "*formatted participation*" here determines the limits of play as it comes to the different models. For instance, the architectural model of Zuidas is the only one not protected by a glass casing – and yet still implicitly

keeps viewers at a distance. To engage with, to play, the model, viewers are steered towards digital touchscreens strategically placed around the model: Upon pressing 'play', the model begins to light up in different parts, while a screen on the wall behind the transports the viewer 'into' the model in virtual animations. Both the perspective of the viewer and the future of the neighborhood, it appears, are already determined, already written. In the carefully curated information centers, residents – present and future – are invited to approach the playful models, but remain still distant, still distanced in their forms of play. The rules, it seems, are made elsewhere.

Mediated Play: Desirable Urban Futures

"*Everything in the image is a promise*", write architects Jan Knikker and Alex Davidson in their defense of using architectural renderings (and in response to criticism raised by Mark Minkjan) (Knikker & Davidson 2016). Oliver Elser points out the deep connection between models and media: According to the historian, the development of photography lead to more models built towards mediatization, towards "*that crucial moment a photographer presses the shutter button*".[5] In the increasing mediatization of the process of designing, writing, and building sustainable architecture, the model takes on an additional – and arguably even more playful – role. Both *Bajeskwartier* and *Zuidas* have extended their architectural models not only through visual materials but also audiovisual and interactive animations. Approached through the lens of play, the virtual experience becomes further entangled with what urban media scholars Christoph Lindner and Gerard Sandoval refer to as the "*aesthetics of gentrification*". Drawing on their understanding of aesthetics as strategically employed to actively produce "*spaces of desire and seduction*" (Lindner and Sandoval 2021, 15), architectural models become another site to visualize – and manifest – urban futures as always already there. For instance, the Zuidas information center features a 'virtual walk' that can be viewed via the development project's website as well as on a dedicated display within the center. While focusing on the infrastructural heart of the development – the redesigned Amsterdam-Zuid station – the 'virtual walk' presents an eerily empty vision of the neighborhood, featuring cars, buses, and trains traversing an empty infrastructural grid. Particularly for a (re)development project like Zuidas, which presents the vision of the neighborhood as 'living' and 'lively', this urban quietness is striking. Accompanied by dramatic piano music, the 'virtual walk' cannot be controlled, steered, by the viewer but rather functions as a predetermined film with a given conclusion for both the animation and the future of the neighborhood. However, the

animation ends with an invitation to visit the information center to "*walk through the future yourself*" [in Dutch: '*loop zelf door de toekomst*'], thereby promising a more interactive, playful exploration of the neighborhood. In the information center, the viewer is positioned in front of a touchpad that allows for turning (via a swiping motion), zooming (via a pinching motion) as well as selecting the part of the station to be displayed (via clicking). Yet, the interactive potential – the forms to engage with the present and future of the neighborhood's infrastructure – remains limited to the static position of a passive viewer. Playing with the affordances of different media, recent architectural models for 'sustainable' developments are simultaneously referencing and abstracting the proposed construction sites – thereby temporally suspending the urban futures envisioned in and through them.

Architectural researcher Lisa Moffitt highlights the potent ability for models, as both physical artefacts and mental ideals, "*to reflect prevailing cultural views about the world and to even go reshape those views*" (Moffitt 2023, 18). These understandings of both urban play and architectural models as containing the potential for change – for alternative visions and their realizations – are tied to an engagement with space. In turn, this engagement changes with the context of play, "*the environment in which we play, the technologies with which we play, and the potential companions of play*" (Sicart 2017, 7), which resonates with the different modes of engagement afforded by physical and virtual architectural models. The interactive map (figures 5 and 6) offered as part of the promotional material of Bajeskwartier follows a different logic from the 'virtual walk' through Zuidas, bridging the physical distance of the architectural model as miniature through interactive mediation. Starting with an aerial view of the neighborhoods around the Amstel, the map seamlessly blends photographic elements with virtual renderings of the development project and digital clickable overlays. In doing so, the interactive map appears to be suspended in time, between the present and the (possible) future of the city. In the background, sounds of birds chirping intersect with voices of people – and most notably children playing – surrounded by the soft lapping sounds of water. The sounds of the city have completely disappeared in favor of a playful version of communal life in and with nature.

In addition to 'information icons' as an added layer of orientation on the map, two of the four planned 'districts' of the Bajeskwartier can be clicked, transporting the viewer from the photorealistic map into the virtual version of the architectural model. Here, the presence of the city is further restricted: Once inside the model, this is all that exists. The streets and buildings beyond the model remain sketches, black lines drawn on paper,

Figure 5: *Virtual model of Bajeskwartier that positions the viewer outside of the model*. Photograph by: Bajeskwartier Amsterdam.

Figure 6: *Virtual model of Bajeskwartier that positions the viewer inside the model as one of its rendered – imagined – inhabitants*. Photograph by: Bajeskwartier Amsterdam.

two-dimensional representation of something that might or might not exist – which further underlines the previously discussed distancing between the development projects and the existing urban fabric surrounding them. In the closer view of the virtual model, the viewer is given further options to playfully engage with the model by viewing virtual renderings, entering into selected apartments for an impression of the interior, or watching an animated virtual tour of different parts of the model. These options are supplemented with two 360° views: The first one offers different perspectives on the model – similar to shifting one's position around the physical model exhibited in the information center. The second option positions the viewer inside the model, on the street level and – perceptually – as one of the rendered inhabitants. In the virtual model of Bajeskwartier, the emphasis lies on the construction being – and becoming – a neighborhood, conjuring associations of community and care, but also, maybe more critically, of 'sameness'. In the context of gentrification, this raises questions of inclusion and exclusion, of desire and desirability. Suspended in time and space, between the plan and the play, gentrification seems always possible – but never real.

Discussion and Conclusion

From an urban media studies perspective, paying attention to the multiple ways that urban planning is mediated allows for additional insights into the material and discursive production of urban futures as better and greener. More than giving a 'photorealistic' presentation of a proposed construction site, architectural models function as both materializations and abstractions in this process of mediation, as three-dimensional embodiments of urban plans between practices of sustainability and processes of gentrification. Rather than understanding playfulness as an inherent characteristic of all architectural models, playfulness in this article is understood as carefully constructed through materials, perspectives, and media. As a conceptual lens, playfulness allows for a teasing apart of the structures and dynamics of power that Bajekswartier, Zuidas and Sloterdijk (need to) negotiate in their public communication and representation. "*Play has the capacity to remain play while giving the actions performed political meaning*", Miguel Sicart argues (Sicart 2017, 80) – and yet, the distinction towards an aesthetics of playfulness, 'of being of a mode of play but not playing' as distinguished in the introduction to this article, arguably undermines the political potential of architectural models. Both the engagement of architectural models with urban plans and the engagement of visitors with the architectural models themselves remains restricted by the rules of engage-

ment of their form and setting. Applying Miguel Sicart's understanding of play as "*a movement between order and chaos*" (Sicart 2017, 3) points to the tension between the structured planning of urban policies and the lived messiness of urban realities. At the intersection between aesthetics and politics, Camilo Boano and Giorgio Talocci argue, we can find the "*depth of influence of urban design, which acts not as a benign product of development, but as a contested channel through which corporations, governments and urban inhabitants are involved in the shaping of urban spaces*" (Boano & Talocci 2014, 118). By approaching architectural models as material objects built, experienced, and mediated throughout the different sections of this article, I have argued that (re)development projects like Bajeskwartier, Zuidas and Sloterdijk increasingly draw on an aesthetics of playfulness to counter criticism raised against the gentrifying effects of 'sustainable' urban planning.

Drawing on Jacques Rancière, Camilo Boano and Giorgio Talocci suggest that urban play contains the potential to "*resist the givenness of the place*" (Boano & Talocci 2014, 112). Conceptually, play connects to ideas of openness, of experimenting with and through alternative versions of the urban. Through play, we enter into speculation, into the negotiation of possible futures (Raczkowksi and Hanke 2021, 14). In his discussion of a 'right to the city', critical geographer David Harvey emphasizes that changing the city is a collective endeavor, "*a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization*" (Harvey 2008, 23). Following visual anthropologist Luc Pauwels' suggestion that cultural imaginations can be acquired through "*observing, analyzing, and theorizing its visual manifestations*" (Pauwels 2010, 546), building architectural models can be understood as a discursive and collaborative practice in materializing these possible futures as and through alternative visions of the city. However, this requires a process that actively engages with communities, residents, neighbors. The forms of play afforded by the architectural models discussed here – as material, experienced, and mediated objects in both physical and virtual spaces – do not follow this promise. Rather, the strictness of the parameters around who can engage with the models, as well as in what ways and where, limits the creative potential of architectural models. This corresponds to Christoph Lindner and Gerard Sandoval's conclusion that aesthetics are increasingly employed to strategically preclude "*alternative and more inclusive ways of creating, inhabiting, or experiencing the neighborhood*" (Lindner & Sandoval 2021, 14). In doing so, the examples discussed here fall short of "*reclaim[ing] play as a way of expression, a way*

of engaging with the world – not as an activity of consumption but as an activity of production" (Sicart 2017, 5) and instead default to an aesthetic of playfulness as a discursive strategy detached from the political potential of play. The production of nature in architectural models thereby also expands into socio-political discussions of citizenship, participation, and 'ownership' of spaces. In other words: In the playful representation of green neighborhoods as better neighborhoods, the lived consequences of gentrification disappear in favor of a controlled urban vision of sustainability.

“In other words: In the playful representation of green neighborhoods as better neighborhoods, the lived consequences of gentrification disappear in favor of a controlled urban vision of sustainability.”

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Endnotes

1 Original Quote: "*Gefühl für Raum, Ästhetik und Stofflichkeit*" (translation by the author).

2 Original Quote: "*Ein Gebäude nimmt seine Wirkung nicht zuletzt aus der Summe der Materialien, aus dem es gefügt ist*" (translation by the author).

3 "*Spielen als eine Praktik, als eine Art und Weise, sich gegenüber den Dingen, der Welt, Menschen wie auch nichtmenschlichen Wesen zu positionieren*" – own translation.

4 See for instance Dan Immergluck and Tharunya Balan's discussion of the Atlanta Beltline.

5 Original Quote: "*Architekturmodelle, die für den entscheidenden Moment gebaut werden, in dem ein Fotograf auf dem Auslöser drückt*" (translation by the author).

Interrogating the First Signs of Gentrification in Postcolonial Kota Tua, Jakarta

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Urban housing development, urban heritage

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Abstract

Colonial remnants, like buildings, streets and canals, are the main attraction of *Kota Tua*, the historical inner city of Jakarta. Considering known gentrification theories, the restoration and reuse of historical buildings and revitalization of public spaces in the area indicates gentrification is starting to take place here. This article interrogates these first signs of gentrification in the historical inner-city of Kota Tua, and the extent to which four characteristics of the gentrification process manifest themselves in the area. This paper concludes that although some characteristics of the gentrification process are taking place in Kota Tua, there are also developments that counter this observation, adding to the academic discussion on whether the gentrification process in Kota Tua materializes, and what the future of this postcolonial urban area entails.

Introduction

Tourists visit one of Kota Tua's museums or stroll through pedestrianized streets lined with historical buildings, business executives have lunch at the popular colonial-style Café Batavia, students hang out at the side of a canal, and school children ride colorful bicycles rented out at *Taman Fatahillah* [translation: *'Fatahillah Square'*], a large public space which feels like a stony yet relatively peaceful oasis just a couple of hundred meters away from hectic car-clogged streets. Kota Tua is the historical inner city of Jakarta. It means 'old town' and encompasses the seventeenth-century city of Batavia. It was the capital of the Dutch East Indies, which was part of the Dutch colonial empire. Many colonial remnants in Kota Tua, in the form of buildings, streets and canals, have been restored and conserved, and are the main attractions of the area. It seems to indicate *"some preparedness, if only for financial reasons, to accommodate a Dutch legacy within the [Indonesian] collective memory",* as Jones and Shaw noted (Jones & Shaw 2006, 131-132). This colonial history of Kota Tua did not seem a barrier when the national government aimed for a UNESCO World Heritage nomination for Kota Tua in 2015; however, they withdrew the dossier right before voting started on its designation at the annual World Heritage Committee meeting in 2018 due to a critical assessment by ICOMOS (Nugteren 2020). In 2017 the local authorities commissioned the clearing, cleaning and transformation of the historical Kali Besar, the area's main canal in which the Dutch tamed the Ciliwung river 400 years ago, into an urban park (Fauzi 2018; Vermeulen 2018b). Then in 2022, public areas around train station (*Stasiun*) Jakarta Kota were pedestrianized to make Kota Tua more attractive for visitors.

This article investigates whether these developments are the first signs of gentrification taking place in the historical of Kota Tua, and the extent in which *four characteristics of the gentrification process manifest itself in the area*.

"A city's history is part of its identity, and even when buildings are demolished, it cannot be erased."

Postcolonial Shift in Perspective

Gentrification and heritage conservation have been intertwined ever since Ruth Glass first coined *'gentrification'* in 1964. She found that middle class families were attracted to the derelict nineteenth-century working class neighborhoods in the direct vicinity of the City of London, not only because of their central location and (still) low rents and property prices, but also because of the architectural appeal and historical character of its houses (Glass 1964). David Ley (1986) recognized the lure of what he calls *"character districts and heritage dwellings"* in cities in Canada. Sharon Zukin (1987) described that gentrifiers – artists, teachers, government employees, entrepreneurs – in New York City were looking for available and affordable buildings in historical neighborhoods. It is not just that historical buildings attract new inhabitants; the conservation or heritage designation of these buildings is also considered an improvement to a gentrifying neighborhood. Interestingly, existing and new inhabitants sometimes teamed up to achieve these improvements, whether or not they were aware that this may cause a new wave of gentrification, the rise of property values and possible unaffordability of the neighborhood altogether (Zukin 2008; Caulfield 1992; Zukin 1987; Ley 1986). Further research showed that the conservation, upgrading and increased popularity of gentrified neighborhoods indeed has a counter-effect: apart from becoming too expensive, they grow less diverse, they lose their distinctive character, edginess and they become sterile (Sudjic 2017; Ley 2003).

Jakarta is an example of a postcolonial city. In its most basic definition, a postcolonial city is a city that has been shaped by a colonial past and the empire it was part of, but which is currently independent. 'Post' has a double meaning here; it can refer to both a break and a continuity (Chambers & Huggan 2015, 786). Although these cities have become independent, their governance, bureaucratic, infrastructural or cultural structures did not transform from one day to the next. Postcolonial cities harbor a contradiction as well: they are at the same time a representation of a colonial, authoritarian and oppressive power, as well as the cradle of resistance and the struggle against this power (Kusno 2010; Yeoh 2005; Bunnell 2002). A postcolonial city has an ongoing dialogue with its colonial past, sometimes trying to erase it, and other times accepting and embracing it. Every postcolonial city is different, but each has in common with another an irreversible link with its former colonizer. A city's history is part of its identity, and even when buildings are demolished, it cannot be erased (Yeoh 2001; Chambers & Huggan 2015).

Previous studies have shown that different types of gentrification are taking place in postcolonial cities in East Asia and Southeast Asia, such as new-build gentrification and beautification for development and tourism purposes. New-build gentrification occurs in the context of the, often large-scale, new construction of residential or commercial areas, while beautification refers to the efforts of making a neighborhood more attractive, safe and clean for visitors (Zhu and Martinez 2021; Shin 2018; Clark 2005). Projects of these types are usually led by the state and implemented by powerful investors and developers, causing large-scale involuntary displacement of communities, the scale of which has not been seen in the Global North. Since such low-income communities usually have a weak legal position, displacement is inevitable (Waley 2015; Moore 2013). In George Town, Malaysia, the UNESCO World Heritage status of the historical city center has attracted many tourists and foreign investors, causing gentrification, as local communities are pushed out for the benefit of tourism facilities and high returns (Wu & Cao 2021; Lee et al. 2016; Mohamed et al. 2012). Gentrification in Singapore included the large-scale demolition of historical areas to make way for high-end condominiums and is heavily influenced by the state in steering urban change through planning strategies; presently, the conservation of the remaining heritage buildings is in fashion, in a curious attempt to (ab)use the city-state's history (Chang 2016; Hu & Caballero 2016). In Indonesia, examples of gentrification in peri-urban areas in Bandung (Hudalah et al. 2016), early signs of suburban gentrification in Semarang (Prayoga et al. 2013) and commercial gentrification in Yogyakarta (Sholihah & Heath 2016) have been noted. In Shanghai, China there is a direct relationship between a form of gentrification – middle-income families and entrepreneurs renting historical homes of lower-income owners – and heritage conservation and even the creation of a heritage illusion or 'heritagisation' (Arkaraprasertkul 2018).

These Asian cases show very diverse contexts, which complement the traditional understanding of gentrification, which includes new and different forms of gentrification, and contexts in which they occur, offering valuable insights into understanding global processes of urban change (López-Morales 2015; Lees 2012; Robinson 2011; Shaw 2008; Atkinson 2003). To understand global urban change and the effects on communities, a different and critical perspective in the gentrification debate is necessary. Lees (2012) called this a postcolonial approach, in which comparative studies are made between divergent cities anywhere in the world. Colin McFarlane underlined that this requires a *"constant process of criticism and self-criticism"* of scholars, urban planners and policy makers (McFarlane 2010, 738).

The widening of the traditional, Anglo-American definition of gentrification into a global one does require caution, as it is often stretched to include a more general explanation of the upgrading of an underdeveloped urban or rural area. This leads to confusion as to what extent it differs from terms such as 'urban renewal', 'urban development', 'modernization' or 'beautification'. A gentrification process, however, is typically associated with these four characteristics: (1) *the displacement of lower income residents by more affluent ones*; (2*) the appearance of new functions to cater to needs of new residents and visitors or tourists*, such as coffee places, hotels, restaurants and shops; (3) *the rise of rents and property values*, well above initial levels; and (4) *investments made by the public and private sectors* in the public space, infrastructure and the built environment (Vermeulen 2020; Hayes 2020; Zukin 2016; Čaldarović & Šarinić 2008; Atkinson 2004). This paper investigates the extent to which these four characteristics manifest themselves in Kota Tua.

Research Methods

For this article, several research methods were used to interrogate the first signs of gentrification in Kota Tua. Apart from the previous brief analysis of secondary literature on the main topics, a combination of methods has been employed to get a better understanding of the case study area. These are a *historical analysis* of the case study's past developments, *site visits* to the case study area in August 2016, November 2018, October 2019 and September 2022, and a *visual analysis* in which historical images of the case study area have been compared to contemporary ones. Several main sites within the case study area are mapped in figure 1.

Figure 1: *Map of Kota Tua today, with the 1669 situation of figure 2 indicated with the burgundy line.* In green: 1. Kali Besar urban park; 2. Taman Fatahillah; 3. Kampung Tongkol; 4. Pedestrianized areas around Stasiun Jakarta Kota; 5. Location of new underground MRT station (map via Google Maps, highlights by author)

Additionally, Jakarta-based heritage professionals were interviewed October 2019 and February 2023 to get a better understanding of the current practices. All interviewed experts hold key positions in the fields of heritage conservation, architectural documentation, urban planning, the arts and community empowerment: Fields identified for their relevance to this research.

In October 2019, eight heritage professionals were interviewed face-to-face. The interviews in February 2023 were done digitally: five of the interviewees of October 2019 were re-interviewed to verify observations made during the September 2022 site visit and to reconfirm or update the developments they mentioned in the October 2019 interviews. The other three either interviewees stated they had not visited the Kota Tua area in the past three years, or that they changed profession. One additional heritage professional was interviewed digitally in February 2023. All interviewees have been anonymized, and are only addressed by their profession.

The local experts shared their experiences and points of view on topics such as the reuse of colonial buildings in Jakarta, the different policies on heritage conservation, the city government's development plans for Kota Tua, the city government's capacity to address challenges related to heritage conservation and planning, the local stakeholders and power structure between them, the appeal of Kota Tua's historical ambiance for residents and visitors, Kota Tua's communities, and whether or not they think gentrification is happening in Jakarta. Sometimes the observations of the local experts substantiated the available literature, while some also provided additional insights. It may be possible that other or additional local experts would have provided different points of view relevant to this article: this can be considered in subsequent research. However, the interviews with the selected local informants did provide an understanding of Jakarta's current challenges and practices, which was indispensable for writing this article.

Jakarta, from Colonial to Postcolonial

In postcolonial Jakarta, Dutch colonial traces interact with Indonesian expressions of national identity. The colonial chapter of the city's history started in 1619 when the Dutch East India Company [In Dutch: *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, VOC*], the world's first multinational company, conquered and destroyed the small town of Jayakarta on the northwest coast of the island of Java to establish a new trading post. They called their new settlement Batavia, see figure 2.

The settlement would later grow into a major trading hub and the capital city of the Netherlands' colonies of Dutch East India. As the port

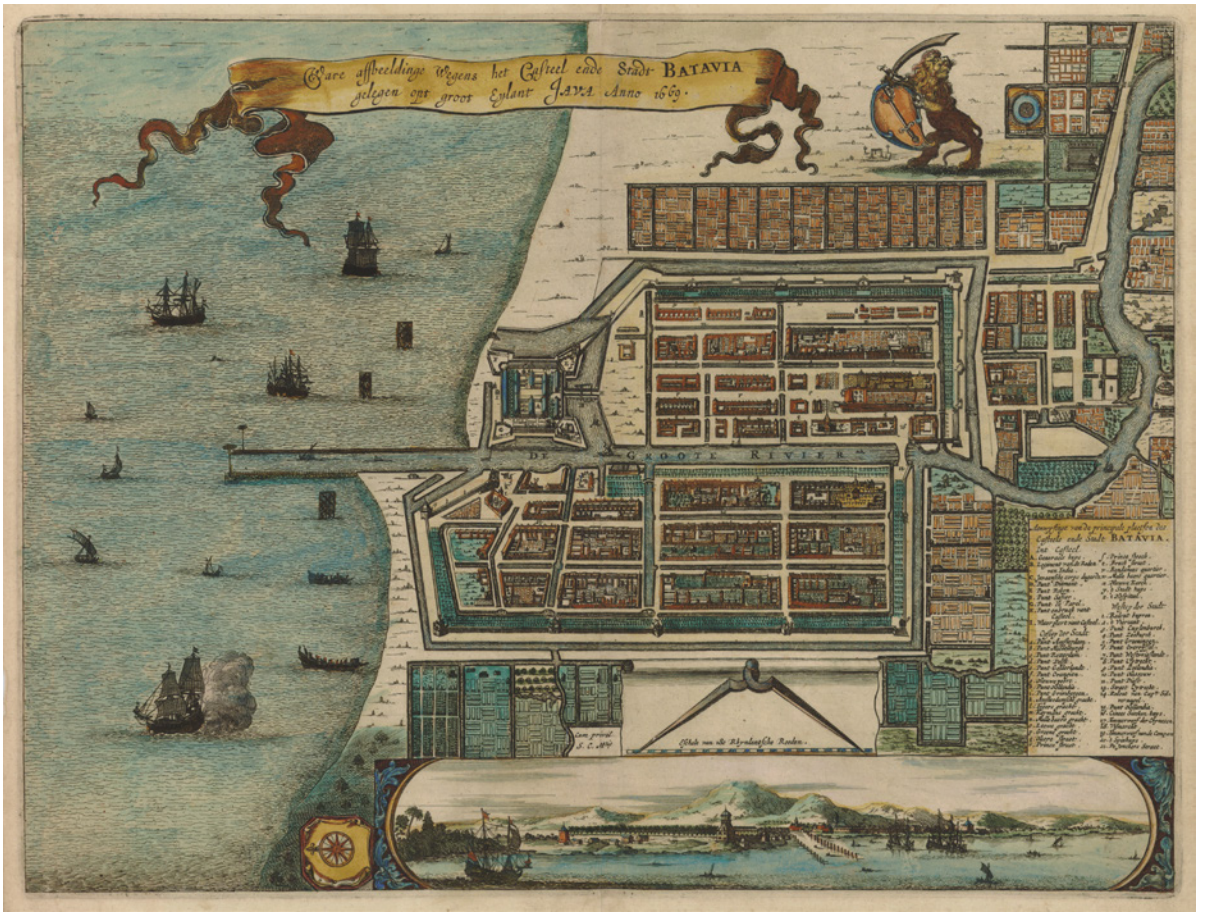

Figure 2: *Map of Batavia in 1669* (Arnoldus Montanus, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons).

city of the colonizing entity, Batavia's inhabitants consisted of Dutch bureaucrats, European sailors, Chinese merchants, and enslaved men and women from all over the Archipelago. These ethnic groups lived strictly segregated in, respectively, the walled-in city (present day Kota Tua), the Chinese quarter, and the local quarters (Hannigan 2015; Kwanda 2009; Rosenau & Wildsmith 2003).

In 1799 the VOC went bankrupt, and the national government of the Netherlands took up all its possessions, including Batavia. By then, the city was dilapidated, plagued by regular floods and diseases and no longer suitable for living according to contemporary standards. The authorities decided to seek higher ground and built a new, more fashionable administrative center south of Batavia, in an area they called *Weltevreden*. Around a large grassy square named *Koningsplein* [translation: *'King's Square'*] arose the palaces, clubs and mansions of the Dutch elite, as a symbol of the power of the Dutch East Indies. Yet, the old Batavia was not fully vacated and it remained a business district due to its close vicinity to the city's harbor (Hannigan 2015; Kusno 2015).

After the independence of the Republic of Indonesia, proclaimed by its first president Sukarno in 1945, and finally acknowledged by the Netherlands in 1949 after an unsuccessful recolonization war, Koningsplein became the center of the new republic, and the showcase of nation-building in an ironic postcolonial continuation, as referred to by Yeoh (2001). It was renamed to *Medan Merdeka* [translation: *'Victory Square'*] and former colonial governmental buildings were reused: the governor-general's palace became the presidential palace; the *Museum van Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen,* the new National Museum; and the *Hogere Hogere Burgerschool, Carpentier Alting Stichting,* the National Art Gallery (Vermeulen 2018a; Hannigan 2015; Kusno 2000). At the same time, the construction of modern Indonesian monuments took command of its colonial surroundings. On the northeast side of the square the gigantic Masjid Istiqlal (national mosque of Indonesia) was constructed, along with several ministries on the south and west side of the square. In the middle of Medan Merdeka, the new *Monas* [translation: *'National Monument'*] towered 132 meters over the new capital city that was now called Jakarta. Jakarta was a direct reference to the former, precolonial village of Jayakarta. In another strong symbolic gesture, Sukarno dictated that the annual national celebration of the country's independence on 17 August was held at Medan Merdeka (Hannigan 2015; Kusno 2015). Abidin Kusno noted that *"Sukarno's Jakarta was a manifestation of Indonesia in which the city, the state and the nation came together, their imagined spaces collapsed into simultaneity"* (Kusno 2000, 62). As a postcolonial city, Jakarta's colonial urban fabric was not erased, but rather became less significant among an ever-rising skyline.

While the colonial buildings around Medan Merdeka were reappropriated directly following Indonesia's independence, Kota Tua followed a little later and for a different reason. By the 1970s, the new president Suharto's economy-focused *New Order regime* was in full swing. One of the local heritage professionals interviewed for this article, an architectural curator, explained that Suharto wanted Indonesia to become one of the world's largest economies. The colonial buildings in Kota Tua were regarded by then-governor of Jakarta Ali Sadikin as assets to attract tourists.[1] He had a vision of making the city into a beacon of *"discipline, economic mobility and national honor"* (Kusno 2000, 109). But local heritage advocates saw the ongoing modernization of Jakarta, which included the planning of new main roads, as a direct threat to Kota Tua's distinct historical character. In 1970 Sadikin designated *Taman Fatahillah* (formerly *Stadhuisplein*, translation: *'City Hall square'*) and its surrounding buildings as a conservation area. In another wave of postcolonial reappropriation

several colonial buildings got a new function as Indonesian museums: the former City Hall was transformed into the *Jakarta History Museum*, former office buildings at *Taman Fatahillah* into the *Wayang Puppet Museum*, the former *Palace of Justice* into the *Museum of Fine Arts and Ceramics*, and former *Dutch East India Company warehouses* at the harbor became *the National Maritime Museum* (Eryudhawan 2017; Kwanda 2009; Jones & Shaw 2006; Kusno 2000). At the time, the heritage legislation in place in Indonesia was still the 1931 *Monumenten Ordonnantie* [translation: *'Monuments Ordinance'*] left by the Dutch colonial regime; an example of a colonial legacy still in use in postcolonial Indonesia. The Indonesian heritage legislation was updated in 1992 and again in 2010 (Fitri et al. 2016; Kwanda 2009). The interaction with colonial traces in a postcolonial city is pointedly described by Roy Jones and Brian J. Shaw (2006):

> *"Many historic icons of the built environment were inevitably viewed as imprints of an exogenous authority, a factor that heavily discounted their preservation value. Postcolonial reality frequently meant the negotiation of a new national psyche through the contested identities of a transplanted polyglot population and the heritage dissonance left by colonial masters" (Jones & Shaw, 123).*

After this initial boost, the conservation of colonial heritage was no priority for local politicians. Kota Tua gradually turned into a derelict, no-go area. In the Reformasi era, following Suharto's abdication in 1998, Indonesian interest in colonial heritage and its development potential started to grow. Rather than a celebration of Dutch-Indonesian relations, the main reason behind this was economic, as an echo of Sadikin's ambitions in 1970: Globalization was spreading its wings and tourism had developed as a major industry and source of income for Indonesia, and Jakarta wanted to be part of that (Sastramidjaja 2014; Kwanda 2009; Steinberg 2008; Rosenau & Wildsmith 2003). This led to the revitalization of Kota Tua from the early 2000s onwards. James N. Rosenau and Diane Wildsmith noted that "*The valorization of historic districts occurs for economic rather than historic reasons. Therefore, the resurrection of the postcolonial city occurs simultaneously with the futurist projections of the global city*" (Rosenau & Wildsmith 2003, 200).

Shaping Postcolonial Kota Tua

To give an impression of the revitalization of postcolonial Kota Tua, and to establish whether the area shows signs of gentrification, in the following visual analysis pairings have been made of several photos of this area. Sometimes these pairings include historical photos from Kota Tua, but mostly photos made during site visits to the area in 2016, 2018 and 2019 have been used. The photos have been selected mainly based on their perspectives, which were to be as similar as possible, as well as on the changes that can be seen within the photos.

“In sum, the visual analysis shows that the colonial urban fabric of Kota Tua is relatively intact and is being used, and that most changes to the area were made to its public space.”

Illustrative Images of Kota Tua

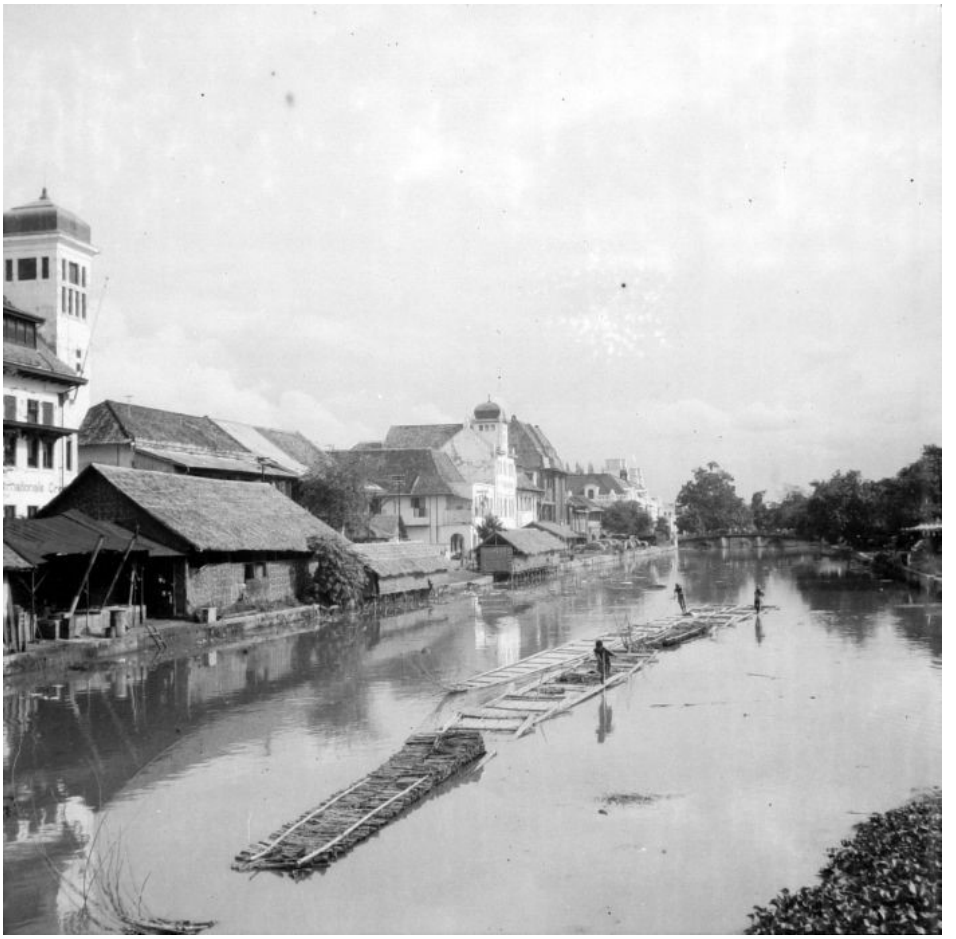

Image 1: *View on the Kali Besar to the south in 1947* (Tropenmuseum, now Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons).

Image 2: *View on the Kali Besar to the south in 2016*. Photograph by: author.

Image 3: *View on the Kali Besar to the south in 2018*. Photograph by: author.

Image 4: *View on the western side of Kali Besar in 1971.* (Tropenmuseum, now Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons). Photograph by: Boy Lawson.

Image 5: *View on the western side of Kali Besar in 2019*. Photograph by: author.

Image 6: *View on the corner of Kali Besar and Jalan Kali Besar Timur 4 in 2016*. Photograph by: author.

Image 7: *View on the corner of Kali Besar and Jalan Kali Besar Timur 4 in 2019*. Photograph by: author.

Image 8: *View on western façade of Taman Fatahillah in 1971* (Tropenmuseum, now Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons). Photograph by: Boy Lawson.

Image 9: *View on western façade of Taman Fatahillah in 2019*. Photograph by: author.

Image 10: *View on Taman Fatahillah and the former Batavia city hall in 1971* (Tropenmuseum, now Wereldmuseum Amsterdam, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons). Photograph by: Boy Lawson.

Image 11: *View on Taman Fatahillah and the former Batavia city hall in 2019*. Photograph by: author.

The main objective of the 2018 revitalization project of a part of the Kali Besar in Kota Tua to turn it into an urban park, was not to restore the canal or former colonial waterfront buildings in their original state or with authentic materials, but to create an attractive, modern, clean and structured public space for leisure. Original wooden beams which were part of the historical foundation of the canal and were found when a section was drained during the transformation works and replaced with modern materials such as concrete (Fauzi 2018). Quay walls were replaced with a repetition of curved seating areas, and a new pedestrian bridge was added. Images 1 till 3 show the changes of appearance of Kali Besar, from a 1947 photo to those taken during site visits in 2016 and 2018.

Facing south, from a slightly different position, image 5, taken in 2019, gives a clearer impression of the new developments at Kali Besar. On the water surface, floating walkways with railings, and even a planter with vegetation, have been added. There are no people on the walkways, so either the walkways were closed off, or it was a quiet time. The latter option is plausible as the photo was taken on a Wednesday, and Kali Besar, and indeed all of Kota Tua, gets busy in weekends. New palm trees and low bushes are lining the waterfront on both sides of the canal. The construction with the half cylinder roof on the other side of the canal is a new bus stop for major bus lines connecting the area with other parts of the city. Comparing the 2019 situation with the situation in 1971 in image 4, the buildings on the other side of the canal seem similar; apart from the new bus stop, no major changes can be seen, although it is impossible to assess the state of those buildings from these photos. The water of the canal in 1971 seems dirty, whereas the western quay shows a jumble of bushes and small structures made of wood and other materials. Quite possibly these are informal shops or even dwellings.

Images 6 and 8 were taken on the corner of the eastern quay of the Kali Besar, and the Jalan Kali Besar Timur 4 in 2016 and 2019 respectively, to give insight into the differences brought by the revitalization project. The corner building, which was restored or at least received a new layer of paint in 2019, has its ground floor boarded up. Most of the greenery in the 2016 image has been removed. Street vendors present in the 2016 photo are nowhere in sight in 2019. The entrance of the alley, which retained its decorative archway, has a fence to only allow access for pedestrians rather than cars or motor bikes; in the 2016 photo the alley seems a popular parking for motor bikes. The streets in the 2016 photo seem unpaved or covered with a layer of mud, whereas in 2019 the streets, or at least the Kali Besar quay, have been newly paved. The 2019 situation gives an overall

clean and neat impression, with designated sidewalks, parking areas and a one-way driving direction along the quay. However, it seems to miss some of the dynamics and characteristics of the 2016 situation. To refer to the introduction, the 2019 situation seems more 'sterile'.

Jalan Kali Besar Timur 4 leads to Kota Tua's central square Taman Fatahillah, just one block down. Images 8 and 9 show the buildings one would encounter on the right when arriving on the square. Image 8 was taken in 1971, and image 9 in 2019. The twin buildings with the spout gables seem quite similar. In 1971 they were still office buildings, but since 1975 they have been housing the Wayang Museum. The tree in front of the 1971 photo has been removed, but the 2019 photo shows a line of other trees closer to the building facades. The cars, trucks and cycle rickshaws (*becak*), which prominently featured in the 1971 photo, have been replaced by pedestrians, rows of colorful bicycles for rent, benches, wastebaskets and potted plants. The square in the 2019 photo has a different pavement, similar to the one on the eastern quay of Kali Besar in image 7.

The last pair of this visual analysis, images 10 and 11, gives a view on the former Batavia City Hall, repurposed in 1974 by Jakarta governor Ali Sadikin as the *Jakarta History Museum* (*Museum Sejarah Jakarta).* In the 1971 situation, the square was still in use as a transportation hub, hence the buses and minibuses. Right in front of the former city hall, three tall trees are standing. The cupola of the building is equipped with a couple of tall antennas; at the time it was in use as the offices for the local military command. In front of the central main entrance of the building there are no vehicles and considering the small guard house on the left of the photo, this part of the square may have been closed off by the military. In this photo too, the square seems to be unpaved or at least covered with dried mud. In 2019, the square is empty and is only used by pedestrians and youngsters on colorful bicycles. In the middle of the square, a fountain can be seen. The trees are gone, but on the right side of the photo still one trunk remains. In front of the former city hall two paintings have been set up. Behind the building, a new, taller building with a hip roof is standing. The pavement of the square is again the same as in previous photos and includes several diagonal lines crossing one another across the full length of the square.

In sum, the visual analysis shows that the colonial urban fabric of Kota Tua is relatively intact and is being used, and that most changes to the area were made to its public space. *Taman Fatahillah* has been pedestrianized, the new pavement and new street furniture invite people to gather. Greenery has been removed and the revitalized *Kali Besar* with its floating walkways and curved seating areas gives more the impression of a

heavily designed theme park than a historical site. Although the business and trading functions of Kota Tua have disappeared, the area still is a dynamic area aimed at attracting visitors and tourists. The observations from the visual analysis mainly indicate one of the four characteristics of a gentrification process, as mentioned previously: (4) *investments made in infrastructure, or public space*. To further analyze the situation in Kota Tua, interviews with local heritage professionals, were conducted.

Is Kota Tua gentrifying?

Not only Kota Tua's public areas have been transformed to attract local, domestic and foreign visitors. Particularly in the past ten years, new businesses have opened to cater to the needs of these new visitors. Already back in 1993, Café Batavia opened its doors in an 1805 former administration building. This restaurant overlooks Taman Fatahillah and offers a 1920s colonial décor to its guests. More recently, several other establishments were opened in historical buildings in the area, such *as Kedai Seni Djakarté* (opened in 2013), Historia Café (2014), Wonderlof Hostel (2017), and the Acaraki Jami Café and Magic Art 3D Museum in 2018.[2] As previously mentioned, the appearance of new functions for, in this case, tourists and other visitors, especially those who can afford to make use of its services, is another of the four characteristics of a gentrification.

The previous secondary literature consulted, however, is inconclusive. Sastramidjaja (2014) mentioned that the development of and activities in Kota Tua may lead to gentrification and eviction of residents in poorer neighborhoods. According to Diah Putri Utami and Mohammad Riduansyah Anza (2017), the local government has not done any research on the social-cultural impacts of the redevelopment in Kota Tua. In the establishment of new businesses, attractions or events, as well as the potential negative impact of large numbers of visitors walking through the area, local communities have not been consulted. In 2008, Steinberg already warned that without an integrated, inclusive redevelopment plan for a historical area like Kota Tua, local heritage may be wiped out. Kusno (2011) even stated that *"developers see opportunities to gentrify the neglected property of the past"* in Kota Tua. He later quoted a then-Minister of Housing, who stated that gentrification is key to solving illegal settlements and social housing issues; investments lead to private ownership and more responsible use by new owners for their own houses (Kusno 2012).

Two rounds of interviews were conducted with local informants in Jakarta in 2019 and digitally in 2023 to get a better understanding of the situation in Kota Tua. When initially asked whether they think

gentrification is taking place in Jakarta, the local informants responded differently. According to an urban planner working at the local authorities, the Special Capital Region of Jakarta (*Daerah Khusus Ibukota Jakarta*, or in short *DKI Jakarta*, or *DKI*), gentrification is happening all over Jakarta, with no direct relation to heritage conservation. They described the construction of apartment complexes next to new public transportation hubs and stations in less affluent neighborhoods, which are part of the city's expanding rapid transit network.[3] A cultural heritage professional pointed out that gentrification is a pressing issue in UNESCO World Heritage cities in Indonesia's neighboring countries, such as George Town, Penang and Melaka in Malaysia, Hoi An in Vietnam and Vigan in the Philippines. In those cities, gentrification is caused by an influx of tourists attracted to the cities' fame and branding. A process on the same scale they, in 2019, they did not observe yet in Jakarta.[4] A local community expert and an architectural historian described a form of gentrification taking place in North Jakarta, where fishing communities are being evicted for the construction of middle- and higher-income residential towers.[5]

Through the interviews and available secondary literature, six main developments connected to the gentrification process in Kota Tua were identified: *three of these developments can be considered as confirming gentrification*, namely privately initiated conservation projects, government investments in the public space, and the interest of young cosmopolitans in their history. At the same time, *three other developments seem to be disproving the process*, namely due to the lack of integrated master planning and long-term visions by the local government, the seeming absence of displacement and a case of a community that resisted eviction, and *Large-Scale Social Restrictions* (*Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar* or *PSBB*) imposed by the government during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each of these developments will now be explained in more detail.

Developments Confirming Gentrification in Kota Tua

Firstly, privately initiated restoration projects. Kota Tua as a heritage district has increasingly attracted private investment since the 2000s (Steinberg 2008). Jörgen Hellman, Marie Thynell, and Roanne van Voorst stated that private entrepreneurs stepped up to compensate for the lack of government capacity (Hellman et al. 2018). The development potential of Kota Tua, 'the colonial Batavia', has appealed to planners, heritage conservationists, historians and entrepreneurs for a long time, according to Yatun Sastramidjaja and Abidin Kusno (2011). Entrepreneurs are particularly attracted by the potential of touristification and attractive

profit margins (Sastramidjaja 2014; Kusno 2011). Private initiatives such as the Konsorsium Kota Tua Jakarta (legally as PT Pembangunan Kota Tua Jakarta and in short *'Konsorsium'*, previously known as '*Jakarta Old Town Revitalization Corporation'*) received a mandate in 2014 from then-governor of Jakarta Joko Widodo, the current Indonesian president, to play a pivotal role in the revitalization of Kota Tua (Sujatna 2018). In 2016, two years after its foundation by nine local companies, Konsorsium rented twelve buildings in Kota Tua from the state-owned companies who owned them and had restored nine of those. The main challenge for the consortium was to find new functions for the buildings and make business plans for their new use (Elyida 2015; Robertson et al. 2014). Apart from a focus on the built environment, the Konsorsium cooperated with DKI in restructuring and controlling street vendors in Kota Tua, to *"guarantee public interests"*, meaning cleanliness and safety (Sujatna 2018, 307). According to Yayat Sujatna, project director at Konsorsium, this multi-stakeholder project was successful in taking measures against illegal traders and relocating street vendors to another, centralized location elsewhere in the area (Sujatna 2018). The street vendors were relocated to Taman Kota Intan, close to a major bus station but a few hundred meters north of the main bustle of Taman Fatahillah. Konsorsium also played a major role in drafting the Kota Tua UNESCO World Heritage nomination; their different projects should be viewed in this context dossier (Nugteren 2020; Budiari 2015). The story of Konsorisum is not just a successful one. A heritage development manager described how Konsorsium managed and renovated Gedung OLVEH between 2015 and 2018, at the time owned by insurance company PT. Asuransi Jiwaraya. The agreement was up for renewal by the end of 2018, but after an appraiser assessed the renovated building, the annual rent was tripled. Konsorsium then only extended the agreement for one more year. Since the end of 2019, the building has been left empty and without function, despite Konsorsium's earlier efforts.[6]

The local community expert confirmed that private entrepreneurs are a major stakeholder in Kota Tua's development, apart from Konsorium also managers and owners of cafes, restaurants, shops and hotels catering to both affluent local and foreign guests. Yayasan Kota Tua, a foundation created in September 2019, received support from DKI's Centre for Conservation of Cultural Heritage to redevelop the historical Gedung Rotterdamsche Lloyd just off Taman Fatahillah into a community center. The building is managed by Konsorsium. Additional functions for this building include a tourist information center, shops, co-working space and a mosque.[7] This project addressed the call of the urban planner working at DKI for new func-

tions in Kota Tua especially for local communities.[8] The cultural heritage professional stressed that there is a strong communal sense among the martial arts performers, photographers, bicycle renters and living statues in Kota Tua. They observed that this informal sector is organized through close mutual contact, regular meetings and that they help each other out when necessary. Many are economic migrants who came to Kota Tua from other provinces or even other islands of the Archipelago.[9] According to the local community expert, those newcomers are not familiar with the history of Kota Tua or the fact that it is a designated heritage site; their focus is their livelihood. Sastramidjaja (2014) asserts that the current developments in Kota Tua and its popularity may lead to the loss of local history. The redevelopment of the new community center may be a first step in creating awareness of and preserving this local history for both local residents and visitors.

Secondly, government investments in the public space. The revitalization of Kali Besar and its effects have been described previously. The project consists of several phases. The first phase, between the bridges of Jalan Pintu Besar Utara and Jalan Kopi, was finished in 2017. During the site visits of 2018, 2019 and 2022, it was observed that the floating walkways were closed to the public, but that the other areas were well-used, with people sitting on the new benches, strolling around or playing music on the new pedestrian bridge crossing the canal. By the site visit of 2022 the second phase of the revitalization project had started, from the bridge of Jalan Kopi towards the historical Jembatan Kota Intan, a hanging bridge dating from 1628. According to both the heritage development manager and an architectural researcher, the project is supposed to contribute to improved connectivity between Taman Fatahillah and the sites of Sunda Kelapa, just to the north, including the Museum Bahari (Maritime Museum) and the operational harbor with traditional wooden ships. This project was initiated during the tenure of DKI governor Basuki Tjahja Purnama (2014-2017), popularly known as Ahok. Although officially the revitalization was meant to welcome tourists to Kota Tua during the ASIAN Games of summer 2018, it is commonly understood that the project was accelerated to be finished for the installment of the new governor, Anies Baswedan (2017-2022), in order for the outgoing governor to leave his legacy on the city (Fauzi 2018).[10]

Under DKI governor Baswedan, in 2021, the extension of the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) line from its current final station HI Bundaran to Stasiun Jakarta Kota was kicked off. The extension is intended to improve the connectivity of Kota Tua with the rest of Jakarta, and to contribute to

further revitalization of the area. Significantly, the official kick-off was held on Taman Fatahillah, with the Museum Sejarah Jakarta as background. As part of this seven years project, an underground station will be constructed with entrances at the Art Deco-styled Stasiun Jakarta Kota from 1870, and the renovated Pantjoran Tea House in the heart of Glodok, the historical Chinese neighborhood just south of Kota Tua. As part of this major infrastructure project, the square in front of the station (Plaza Beos), the street between the station and the Pantjoran Tea House (Jalan Pintu Besar Selatan) and the street between the station and Taman Fatahillah (Jalan Lada) will be pedestrianized. The newly pedestrianized areas of Plaza Beos and Jalan Lada were festively opened by Governor Baswedan in August 2022, who announced that the 'revitalization of Kota Tua' was complete. During the September 2022 site visit, it was observed that the Jalan Pinto Besar Selatan was closed off, since the underground MRT station is being constructed here. Particularly the Jalan Lada, main connection between Stasiun Jakarta Kota and Taman Fatahillah and during previous site visits still noisy and car-clogged, was a very crowded public space with street

Image 12: *Weekend crowds on the newly pedestrianized Jalan Lada in 2022*. Photograph by: author.

artists and selfie booths (see image 12). Baswedan finished his tenure in October 2022 (Purwantiasning & Bahri 2021; Firdaus et al. 2018).[11]

Thirdly, the interest of young cosmopolitans in their history. During all site visits to Kota Tua, it was observed that most people taking selfies, riding bicycles or just sitting down in small groups were young people. Particularly in the weekends, the area gets very crowded. Indeed, Sastramidjaja (2014) observed that cosmopolitan young people are engaging in activities of what she called *"heritage re-interpretation"* and *"colonial nostalgia"*, with historical re-enactments, heritage walks, exhibitions on the Dutch colonial period, festivals and sleepovers in one of the area's museums. The architectural researcher confirmed that many young people visit Kota Tua on the weekends to attend these activities, or just to meet up and hang out with their friends.[12] The architectural historian felt that Kota Tua's colonial buildings have a certain romantic appeal as part of Jakarta's urban fabric, just like the post-independent monuments and contemporary skyscrapers.[13] The cultural heritage professional confirmed that the colonial buildings are an obvious part of the city's history, but stressed a decolonizing perspective is needed to plan for the use and reuse of these buildings from a local or eastern, rather than a western, perspective.[14] Indeed, rather than dwelling in a nostalgic Dutch, or Indo-Dutch, sentiment of *tempo doeloe*, or longing for the former Dutch East Indies, Sastramidjaja (2014) described that the young people in Kota Tua are reinterpreting the local heritage by adding their own understanding of Jakarta's multi-layered history. One of the contributing factors is the fact that neither these young people, nor their parents, lived through colonialism. Another is the lack of education on this part of Indonesia's history in school curricula: Particularly during the regimes of the country's first presidents Sukarno and Suharto, close to no attention was given to the era of colonial rule. Now that young people can learn more about these 'hidden parts' of their history, not just at school but also through social media and the multitude of history-inspired activities, they can actively (re)discover their own history. A trend that goes hand in hand with the redevelopment of Kota Tua by local government and, mainly, entrepreneurs, into a postcolonial playground (Sastramidjaja 2014).

Developments Disproving Gentrification in Kota Tua

Firstly, the lack of integrated master planning and long-term visions by the local government. The Kota Tua area is legally protected by several regulations, and its future development has been included in several master plans drafted by DKI. Nevertheless, as the city is growing and urban expansion is pressing, the private restoration and redevelopment projects previously

described lack a coordinated, integrated approach, and the revitalization programs announced by successive Jakarta governors have often stranded due to a lack of management, allocation of resources and technical knowledge of the area's assets (Sulistyo 2019; Dila 2017; Utami & Anza 2017; Steinberg 2008).

A complicating factor, as pointed out by the cultural heritage professional, is the periodical changes in governor (Jakarta's equivalent of a mayor), as every governor has his own vision and priorities. This affects the implementation of the masterplans. Another challenge is Kota Tua's building ownership, as for many buildings it is unknown who the owner is. Other private owners that are registered either lack the funds, or the interest, to restore their buildings.[15] Sastrimidjaja stated that the local "*government owns less than 10% of the 283 buildings listed in the conservation zone*" (Sastrimidjaja 2014, 459). Partnerships between local government and local stakeholders and buildings owners have proved to be difficult due to a lack of trust and involvement from both sides (Sastramidjaja 2014). The urban planner working at DKI confirmed that planning in Kota Tua depends on who is in charge. They advocated for a more comprehensive development plan for the area, not just with a focus on the direct vicinity of Taman Fatahillah and Sunda Kelapa harbor to benefit tourism, but also on the communities living in the surrounding neighborhoods. For their benefit, the development plan should include a multitude of functions, particularly education.[16]

The local community expert and an urban heritage researcher both mentioned the autonomous status of DKI as a capital city as a challenge. This status gives DKI more power and independence from the national government. The Ministries of Education and Culture and of Public Works for example cannot impose any policies on Kota Tua if the DKI government does not agree, and at the same time DKI can implement policies not necessarily in line with national policy. The urban heritage researcher commented that although Jakarta was the first Indonesian city to adopt heritage regulations, a clear vision by the responsible departments is essential for the implementation of the relevant regulations.[17] The architectural researcher confirmed that these departments need stronger mandate as well as more knowledge and capacity through education or training in order to manage heritage buildings or districts of Jakarta.[18]

Secondly, the seeming absence of displacement and the case of a community that resisted eviction. Indeed, as pointed out by the urban heritage researcher, between 2015 and 2019, the number of inhabitants in Kota Tua's areas (Kelurahan) of Pinangsia and Roa Malaka have remained stable. Pinangsia covers the area east of Kali Besar including Taman

Fatahillah and Stasiun Jakarta Kota and their direct surroundings, and Roa Malaka covers the area west of Kali Besar. Pinangsia for example had 10.851 inhabitants in 2015; 10.855 in 2016; 10.859 in 2017; 10.861 in 2018; and 10.863 in 2019. In Roa Malaka, the number of inhabitants has changed from 3.224 in 2015 to 3.296 in 2019 (Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Administrasi Jakarta Barat).[19]

An interesting case is the community of Kampung Tongkol, which lives along one of the arms of the Ciliwung river, a ten-minute walk northeast of Taman Fatahillah. It is located close to the site of the former Batavia Castle, nestled behind a remaining chunk of the city walls and a seventeenth-century grain warehouse. Depending on the source a *kampung* can be described as a traditional village, informal settlement, or slum area. In Jakarta, many kampungs are built along water ways or the coastline. Kampungs are dynamic satellite settlements, with home industries in transportation, food business, logistics or administration. They typically emerged when migrants from other parts of the country came to the city and settled down on vacant plots of land. During the Dutch colonial rule these settlements were unofficially tolerated by the government but investments in facilities and infrastructure were few. It was not until the 1930s that kampung improvement programs were implemented to upgrade roads, construct gutters and bridges and provide public facilities such as toilets and street lighting (Irawaty 2018; Silver 2008).

Kampung Tongkol has a similar history, though it is only about seventy years old. A local community organizer explained that the first residents settling on the wetlands along the Ciliwung were administration staff working at a nearby army base since the base's dorms were overfull. Later, new industrial sites in Ancol further east attracted a lot of workers from all over Indonesia; a lot of them moved to Kampung Tongkol due to a lack of formal housing in the city. In 2014, DKI threatened to evict the kampung residents in order to widen the Ciliwung from 20 to 40 meters for water management reasons and to create a path for tourists along the historical castle wall. The kampung residents, led by the community organizer and aided by community organizations such as Urban Poor Consortium, started to negotiate with the government. Eventually DKI settled for a river broadening of five meters. The kampung residents rebuilt their houses themselves, making them five meters shorter on the waterfront side. They created a new, unpaved path along the river to access the houses and the river (image 13), and a paved path along the city wall. They cleaned the riverbanks, planted new greenery, set up a waste recycling system and placed information signs on the kampung and the former castle for visitors. The

Image 13: *View on the new pathway along the Ciliwung river at Kampung Tongkol in 2019*. Photograph by: author.

residents agreed to take good care of their kampung; not only of their own houses and public areas, but also of the colonial city wall they live next to. This initiative was widely supported by educational institutes, NGOs and community architects, and today Kampung Tongkol is still thriving.
During the site visit in 2019, it gave the impression of an organized, neat village where the rush of the surrounding city seems far away. According to the community organizer eviction currently is not a threat, although the residents are still vulnerable as they do not officially own the land on which their kampung is standing. They are in the process of formalizing their ownership as communal land. Dian Tri Irawaty (2018) and Rita Padawangi (2018) both describe and praise this initiative as an example of alternative development and community design, as opposed to market- or government-led development schemes. According to the community organizer, the initiative of Kampung Tongkol's community can be applied to other kampungs in Jakarta.[20] The architectural researcher noted that other riverbank development projects initiated by DKI along this arm of the Ciliwung river on the eastern side of Kota Tua, to the south of Kampung Tongkol, have not led to displacement of the several kampung communities living there.[21]

And thirdly and lastly, Large-Scale Social Restrictions which were imposed by the government during to the COVID-19 pandemic. On 14 March 2020, after the first COVID-19 infections in Indonesia were diagnosed, the tourist attractions under management of DKI Jakarta, including the Taman Fatahillah area and its museums, were closed to the public. Since Taman Fatahillah and the surrounding streets were a popular tourist destination, especially drawing large crowds in the weekends, these public spaces were completely sealed off to prevent transmission of the virus. The Kali Besar area remained largely open. Only sporadically, when the COVID-19 situation allowed, visitors were allowed on Taman Fatahillah in small numbers and with the necessary precautions such as the wearing of face masks. The area remained closed until November 2021, as tourism had a lower priority than the general public health, the business and industrial sectors and education. This had an enormous impact on the restaurants, coffee places, shops and other businesses in Kota Tua, as well as on the overall development the area experienced before the pandemic. Employees had their salaries cut or lost their jobs altogether, restaurants tried to find a different source of income such as food delivery, and shops were forced to close. According to the heritage development manager, Konsorsium lost a few of their tenants, including Locarasa, Mel's Dorm Hostel (both in 2020) and Mula in 2022.[22] Government income from tourism taxes evaporated. Since Indonesia had closed its borders to foreigners, and domestic transportation between different islands of the country was decreased, tourism mobility dropped dramatically. Amrullah et al. calculated that the number of local (Indonesian) tourists visiting the city of Jakarta went down from 21.683.578 in 2019 to 10.637.261 in 2020: A decrease of 51% (Amrullah et al. 2022). The number of foreign tourists even went down from 2.421.124 in 2019 to 421.247 in 2020: 83% less. Indeed, for most foreign tourists Jakarta is merely a transit city on their way to other, more popular destinations such as Bali and Yogyakarta (Amrullah et al. 2022, 327, 334). Numbers of tourists visiting the Kota Tua area throughout the pandemic, or data on the exact impact on the museums and businesses around Taman Fatahillah have not yet been published at the time of this research (Amrullah et al. 2022; Patnistik 2020; Soehardi et al. 2020).

Discussion and Conclusion

Despite its colonial history, Kota Tua is a popular gathering place, particularly among local and domestic visitors. The historical urban fabric has increasingly been recognized for its development potential by both local government and investors, as described by Jones and Shaw, Yeoh, Kusno,

and Chambers and Huggan. This tendency originally started under Jakarta governor Ali Sadikin in the early 1970s, with the opening of new museums in former colonial buildings and designation of Kota Tua as a conservation area. After this initial boost, the following decades the future of Kota Tua was no political priority. This changed more recently, with the founding of Konsorium Kota Tua Jakarta in 2014, the attempt to gain UNESCO World Heritage status in 2015, and recent revitalization projects of Kali Besar (2017) and the area around Stasiun Jakarta Kota (2022). All of these initiatives can be regarded as tangible legacies of subsequent Jakarta governors Joko Widodo, Basuki Tjahja Purnama and Anies Baswedan. Kota Tua was such a popular destination, that the area had to be closed off during the COVID-19 pandemic, to prevent people for gathering in its public spaces. As the restrictions are being lifted, the visitors are returning.

This article investigated the first signs of gentrification in Kota Tua, and the extent to which four characteristics of the gentrification process manifest itself in the area: (1) displacement of lower income residents by more affluent ones, (2) the appearance of new functions to cater to the needs of new residents and visitors, (3) the rise of rents and property values, and (4) investments made by the public and private sectors in the public space, infrastructure and built environment. To achieve this, several research methods were used.

The visual analysis mainly pointed to one of the four characteristics of a gentrification process: Investments made in infrastructure, or public space. Interviews with local heritage professionals, conducted in 2019 and in 2023, and the analysis of secondary literature, provided further insights. Six main developments connected to Kota Tua's supposed gentrification were identified: Three of these developments can be considered as confirming gentrification, namely privately initiated conservation projects, government investments in the public space, and the interest of young cosmopolitans in their history. At the same time, three other developments seem to be disproving the process: The lack of integrated master planning and long-term visions by the local government, the seeming absence of displacement and a case of a community that resisted eviction, and Large-Scale Social Restrictions imposed by the government during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on the findings of this research and referring back to the four characteristics of a gentrification process, some conclusions can be drawn. Displacement is not yet taking place in Kota Tua, despite recent revitalization initiatives: The number of residents in the area has remained stable between 2015 and 2019, and kampung communities living along

the Ciliwung river in the eastern part of Kota Tua were not evicted. In the past ten years, new businesses have opened their doors in Kota Tua, mainly catering to more affluent tourists. The longer-term impact of the COVID-19 restrictions on these businesses, however, still remains unclear. With regards to rising rents and property values, this research has proved less conclusive: the only example found is the OLVEH building which was leased and redeveloped by Konsorsium between 2015 and 2019, and which endured a rent tripling in the last year of the agreement. Investments made in public spaces may be the most visible and apparent characteristic of the gentrification process observed in Kota Tua. In the past five years, the main infrastructure of and around Taman Fatahillah, including the Kali Besar and streets leading to Stasiun Jakarta Kota, have received upgrades. Yet, these interventions do not always seem to be successful: During the 2022

Image 14: *Closed off access to floating walkways on Kali Besar in 2022.*
Photograph by: author.

site visit for this research, the revitalized part of Kali Besar was partly closed off and was relatively abandoned (see image 14).

The research shows that at the moment gentrification is not yet taking hold of Kota Tua. Although the first signs of gentrification such as the arrival of new functions, investments in public space and adaptive reuse of historical buildings are undeniable, they have not yet led to common gentrification effects, such as the displacement of communities, nor has the area become sterile, as addressed by Zukin, Caulfield, Ley and Sudjic. Therefore, it is recommended to continue studying the area for another five to ten years. This can include measuring the impact of the COVID-19 restrictions on businesses and on Kota Tua as tourist destination; analyzing whether tourists return to pre-pandemic numbers; establishing whether rents and property values are rising; keeping track of the number and backgrounds of residents in the area; as well as whether the Kali Besar revitalization project will be finished; and what effects the opening of the new MRT station at Stasiun Jakarta Kota has on the area in terms of accessibility from other parts of Jakarta and with regards to new developments in the station area. The move of Jakarta's political function to Indonesia's new capital city Nusantara in East-Kalimantan (under construction since 2022) may impact Kota Tua, although the effects may be limited since the financial and cultural functions will remain in Jakarta. As such, further research is needed to establish whether the gentrification process in Kota Tua really materializes, and what the future of this postcolonial urban area entails.

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Endnotes

1 Interview with architectural curator, 10 October 2019 in Jakarta.

2 Interview with heritage development manager by author on 14 February 2023 (online).

3 Interview with urban planner by author on 9 October 2019 in Jakarta.

4 Interview with cultural heritage professional by author on 9 October 2019 in Jakarta.

5 Interview with local community expert by author on 9 October 2019 in Jakarta and with architectural historian by author on 8 October 2019 in Jakarta.

6 Interview with heritage development manager by author on 14 February 2023 (online).

7 Interview with local community expert by author on 9 October 2019 in Jakarta.

8 Interview with urban planner by author on 9 October 2019 in Jakarta

9 Interview with cultural heritage professional by author on 9 October 2019 in Jakarta.

10 Interviews with heritage development manager by author on 14 February 2023 (online) and with architectural researcher by author on 15 February 2023 (online).

11 Interview with urban planner by author on 14 February 2023 (online).

12 Interview with architectural researcher by author on 10 October 2019 in Jakarta.

13 Interview with architectural historian by author on 8 October 2019 in Jakarta.

14 Interview with cultural heritage professional by author on 9 October 2019 in Jakarta.

15 Interview with cultural heritage professional by author on 9 October 2019 in Jakarta.

16 Interview with urban planner by author on 9 October 2019 in Jakarta.

17 Interview with local community expert by author on 9 October 2019 in Jakarta and with urban heritage researcher by author on 10 October 2019 in Jakarta.

18 Interview with architectural researcher by author on 10 October 2019 in Jakarta.

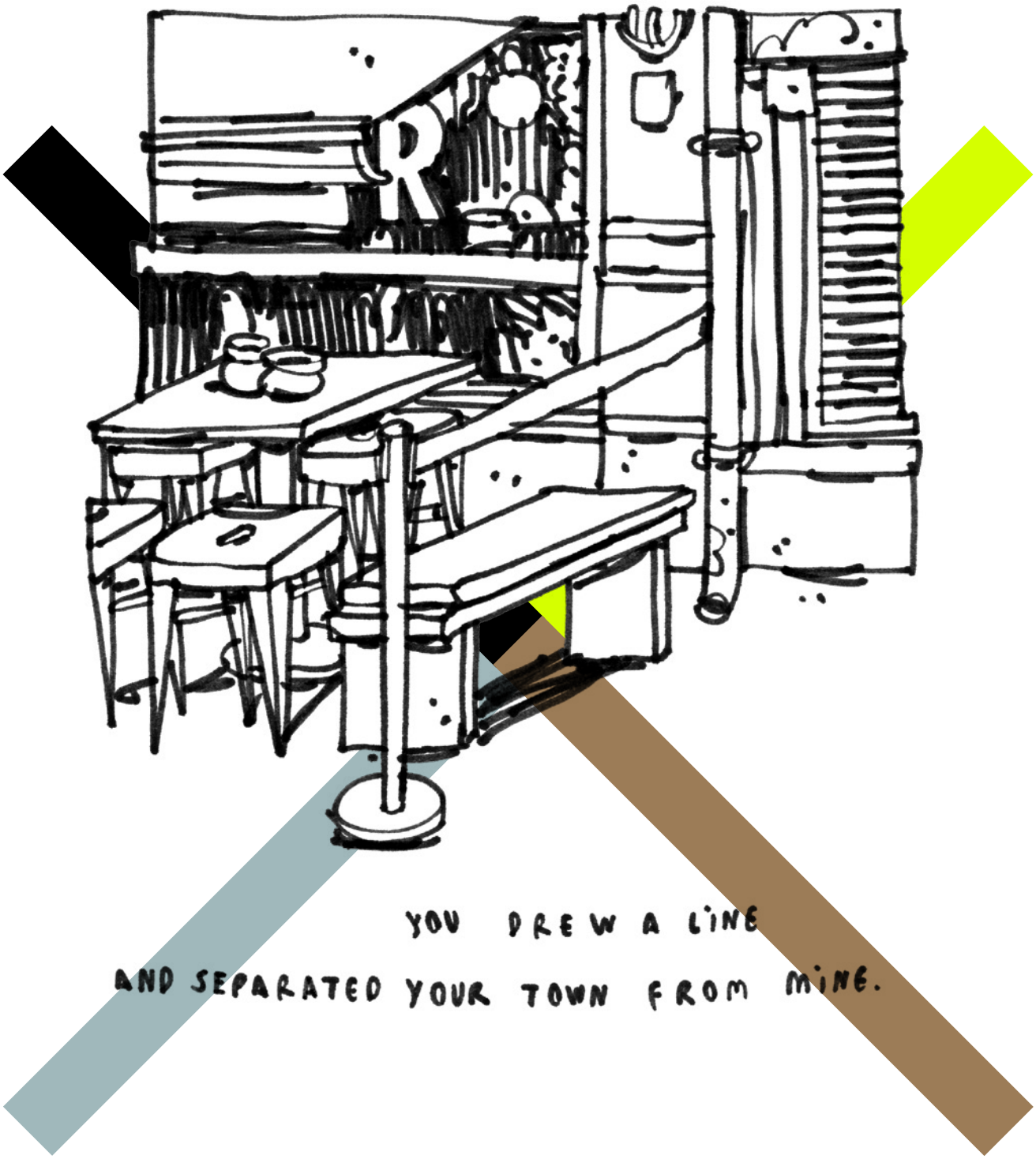
19 Interview with urban heritage researcher by author on 13 February 2023 (online).

20 Interviews with community organizer by author on 16 October 2019 in Jakarta and on 14 February 2023 (online).

21 Interview with architectural researcher by author on 15 February 2023 (online).

22 Interview with heritage development manager by author on 14 February 2023 (online).

The Visual Essay



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Capturing Gentrification

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Capturing Gentrification: The roles of Charles Marville and Eugène Atget in Capturing the Transformation of Paris in the Nineteenth Century

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Discipline
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Abstract

Between 1853 and 1914, Paris (France), 'the city of art', underwent enormous changes due to the urban development plans of Baron Georges Haussmann. Although gentrification was coined in the 1960s by Ruth Glass, this '*Haussmannization*' of Paris shows multiple convincing similarities with contemporary forms of gentrification. Artists have been ascribed a rather ambivalent role in the gentrification process, as their presence in old, decayed, abandoned, or low-income neighborhoods was and is often seen as the first step towards gentrification. However, artists have also used their art to reflect on or even question gentrification. Especially photographers, whose discipline allows them to consciously curate and depict real life situations, have played an important role in capturing gentrification and its ramifications. Photographer *Charles Marville* (1813-1879) was commissioned by the state to document the neighborhoods that were demolished during the '*Haussmannization*'. Some forty years later, *Eugène Atget* (1857-1927) began photographing Parisian quarters that would be lost in urban planning. In this visual essay, the agency of photographers in (de)constructing gentrification is researched through an analysis of the work of Marville and Atget, discussing their objectives and styles and how these reflect the radical changes in Paris. The motivation of photographers seems to determine in what way their works represent gentrifying processes.

Artists and Gentrification

Between the 1850s and 1920s, Paris underwent a huge transformation. *Emperor Napoléon III* (1808-1873) wished to establish a 'modern Paris', and he appointed *Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann* (1809-1891) to execute this project. Haussmann demolished huge parts of the old city center to be replaced with grand boulevards; and put canals to dry in order to install a sewage system. Besides the idea that this would benefit the Parisian economy and politics, the modernization project was meant to uplift Paris' international status and promote the idea of Paris as a prestigious city (Chapman 1953). Haussmann's plans would determine the fate of urban developments in Paris. In retrospect, we can even call Haussman's work in Paris a process of gentrification, mainly because of its social impact.

Guided by Ruth Glass in the 1960s, academics started to use the word 'gentrification' as a means to translate urban changes to papers and essays (Osman 2016). Gentrification was defined as a process with two characteristics: (1) The *"inflow of affluent residents and investment (also referred to as capital)"* and the (2) the "*outflow of the low-income population from the same neighborhood"* (Yeom and Mikelbank 2019). Artists have been ascribed a rather ambivalent role in the process of gentrification, as their presence in old, decayed, abandoned or low-income neighborhoods was and is often seen as the first step towards gentrification (Metaal 2007). They move to neighborhoods that are deemed decayed and poor because they can afford the low rents and it allows them to escape the traditional city life. Because of the presence of artists, the otherwise neglected neighborhoods become associated with creativity and authenticity, and this results in a sudden new interest from wealthier residents and entrepreneurs, which ultimately leads to the replacement of the original, lower income residents by new, affluent homeowners. However, this is not always the case and past and present artists have also used their profession to reflect on gentrification. Especially photographers, whose discipline allows them to consciously curate and depict real life situations, have played an important role in capturing gentrification.

In this visual essay, the agency of photographers in (de)constructing gentrification is researched through an analysis of the work by *Charles Marville* (1813-1879) and *Eugène Atget* (1857-1927). The visual essay, presented as a 'printed exhibition', was made possible by the *Metropolitan Museum of Art* and *Paris Musées: Museums of the city of Paris*.

“We could therefore define the urban space as a place where conflicts are expressed, reversing the separation of places where expression disappears, where silence reigns, where the signs of separation are established.”

Henri Lefebvre, quoted by Jacques Ranciere in *Disagreement* (1999)

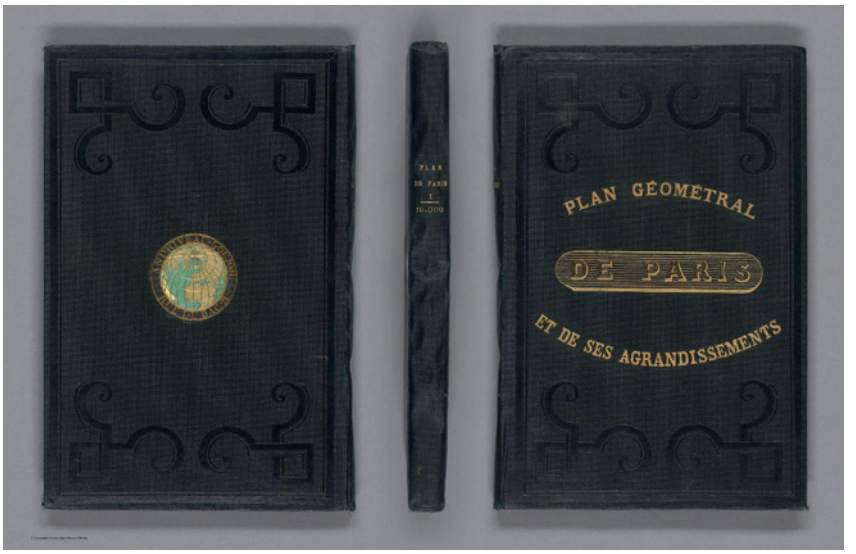
Haussmannization

In 1853, Haussmann was named the *'Prefect of the Seine'*, which he remained until 1870 (Chapman 1953). His influence on the Parisian landscape would later be called *'Haussmannization'*, which means urban renewal by demolition (Jordan 2004). To refer to the urban planning in 19th century Paris as gentrification might be considered premature, since the term was coined in the 1960s and usually refers to more recent changes in urban landscapes (Metaal 2007). However, it must be clarified that the actual manifestations of gentrification predate their academic title (Osman 2016). Several scholars, such as Andy Merrifield, have concluded that Haussmann's activities in Paris could be referred to as *proto-gentrification* because Haussmann commodified space and banned the working class to the city's periphery (Paccoud 2023).

Haussmann is often referred to as the *'monster of demolition'* because the removal of great parts of Paris was fundamental to his work (Chapman 1953, 191). This included the vanishing of neighborhoods that housed the economically weak residents of Paris, forcing the poor out of the city and into what we now call *banlieues* or suburbs (Nasir 2023). Both the lack of rehousing for the people that were pushed out of their homes and the increase in rents in the neighborhoods that were upgraded *"set the city on the unequal course decried today"* (Paccoud 2023, 277). This reflects the modern definition of gentrification, which requires actions of both people and capital (Zukin 2016). In 19th century Paris, the people inhabiting the old parts of Paris were deemed not important enough to maintain the neighborhoods' state at the time and the government's capital was used to move them away.

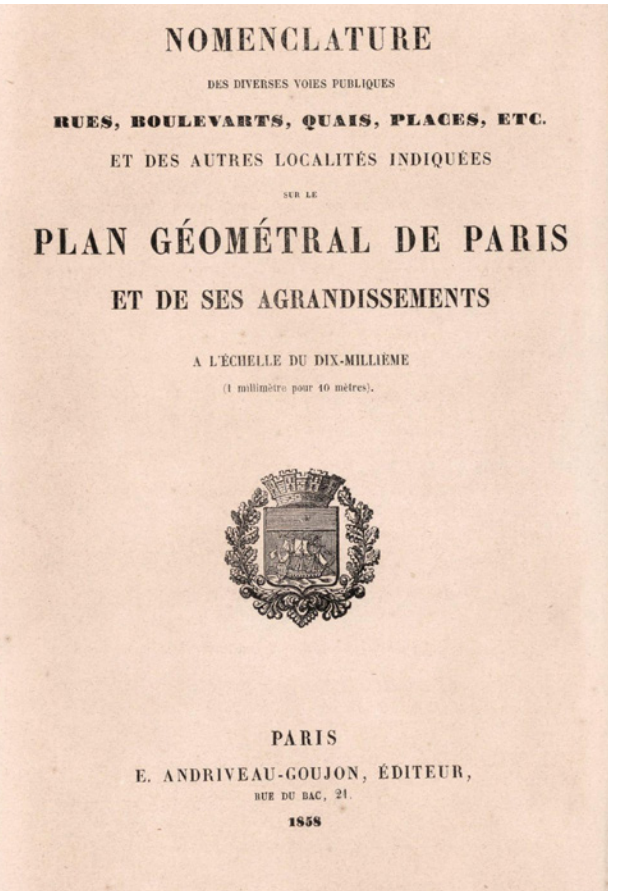
Plans for Paris

In this book from 1858, Haussmann's urban renewal plans for Paris are illustrated. As can be read on the title page, Haussman's project was to be materialized through the construction of streets, boulevards, quarters, and squares. With his alterations to Paris, Haussmann literally "*cut through the plans of the ancient city*" (David Rumsey Map Collection).



Object 1: *Covers: Plan Géométral De Paris et De Ses agrandissements* (*Geometrical plan of Paris and its enlargements*), 1858 (Andriveau-Goujon)

Object 2: *Title page: Plan Géométral De Paris et De Ses Agrandissements*, 1858 (Andriveau-Goujon).


NOMENCLATURE

DES DIVERSES VOIES PUBLIQUES

RUES, ROULEVARTS, QUAIS, PLACES, ETC.

ET DES AUTRES LOCALITÉS INDIQUÉES

SUR LE

PLAN GÉOMÉTRAL DE PARIS

ET DE SES AGRANDISSEMENTS

A L'ÉCHELLE DU DIX-MILLIÈME

(1 millimètre pour 10 mètres).

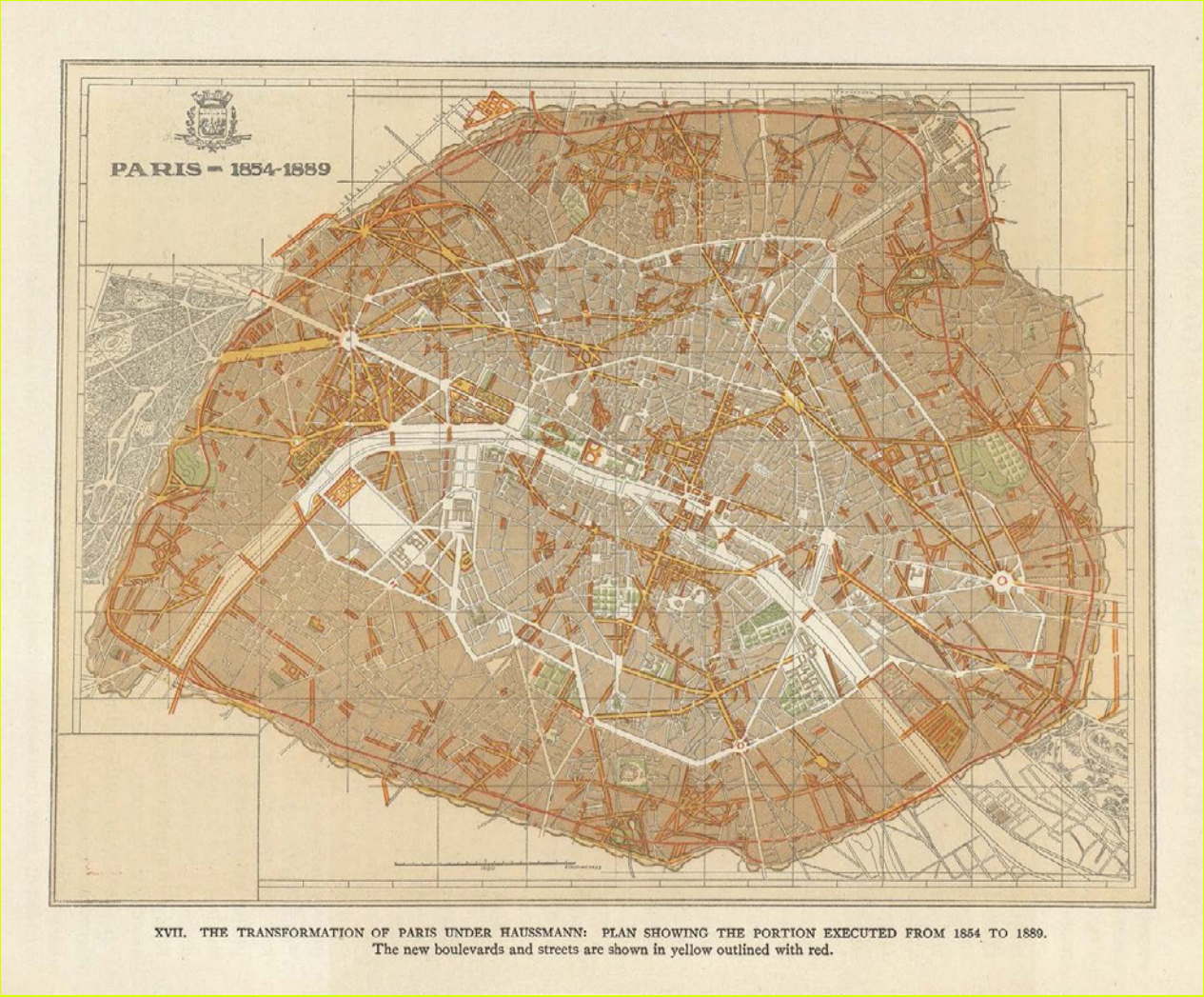
PARIS

E. ANDRIVEAU-GOUJON, ÉDITEUR,

RUE DU BAC, 21.

1858

Object 3 *XVII. The transformation of Paris under Haussmann: Plan showing the portion executed from 1854 to 1889*, 1909 (Burnham).

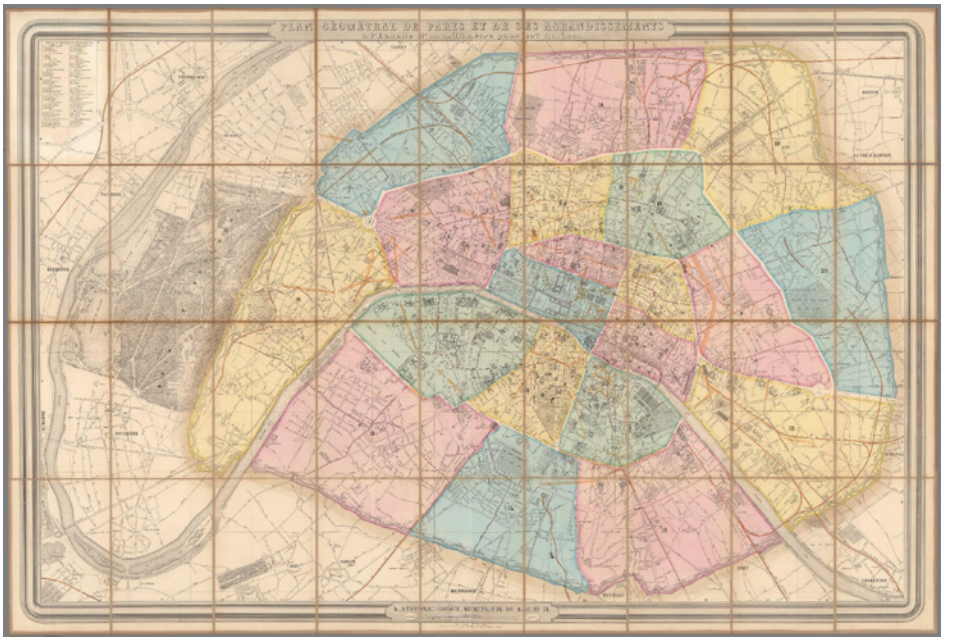


XVII. THE TRANSFORMATION OF PARIS UNDER HAUSSMANN: PLAN SHOWING THE PORTION EXECUTED FROM 1854 TO 1889.
The new boulevards and streets are shown in yellow outlined with red.

Mapping Urban Transformations

Napoléon III was keen to change Paris to streamline the economy, safeguard his military agenda and improve Paris' international reputation (Chapman 1953). These underlying motivations for the renovation of Paris are made clear in object 3, as it highlights all the streets and boulevards that were constructed to meet Napoléon's demands. The economic development of the city required a better infrastructure with easy connections between the city center and the outside world. This of course only benefited the wealthy Parisians whose economies were actually improving. Also, to naturally enforce the citizens' obedience, Haussmann removed all narrow streets and small courts as these intimate areas allowed revolutionaries to have secret meetings and plot uprisings. But those narrow streets were the result of a densely populated city, and their removal equaled the demolition of hundreds of homes. As a consequence of the new city structure, 350.000 people were forced to move (Nasir 2023). Object 4 dates back to 1860 and shows Haussmann's plans for urban renewal with some small adjustments by architect Alfred Pitoquet. The image illustrates the division of Paris in twenty arrondissements that were all divided into four quarters; creating a total of eighty Parisian neighborhoods. The orange marks represent the envisioned boulevards that Haussman proposed; they cut right through the traditional plans of Paris. Imagine all the houses that had to be demolished for these roads to be built.

Object 4 *Plan géométral de Paris et de ses agrandissements* (*Geometrical plan of Paris and its enlargements*) , 1860 (Andriveau-Goujon and Potiquet).



Curating the Day to Day

Photography is a form of storytelling in which photographers hold the power to control the narrative (Meadows 2020). This grants them the ability to carefully curate what their picture includes and excludes. As such, photographers contribute to the imagery of cultural discourses. Rather than being the instigator of gentrifying processes, photography allows artists to comment on gentrification and express their concerns.

In the context of the 19th century, when photography was just emerging as a technique, the repercussions of a photograph cannot be underestimated. At the time, photography was seen as a tool *"to make accurate and reproducible pictorial records of visual experience"* and as such it was not regarded as an art form (Osterman & Romer 2007, 3). It could be argued that the fact that people saw photography as a form of documenting, gave photographers even more power, because to document means to record the truth. Furthermore, documentation implies neutrality. The works of both Charles Marville and Eugène Atget are able to hide under a claim of objectivity, but research into their motivations and styles, exposes two unique underlying narratives that help to (de)construct gentrification in Paris at the turn of the century.

Charles Marville (1813-1879)

Charles Marville – born as Charles-François Bossu – was an illustrator of books and magazines before he became a photographer in the 1850s (The Met 2014). His main focus lay on capturing architecture, landscapes, and the urban environment (MoMa 2024). Marville's work is characterized by his centering of technical elements and architectural particularities. Although his pictures seem to target one thing in particular, Marville showed objects in relation to their surroundings.

In addition to selling his work to architects and artists, Marville took on state commissioned assignments on a regular basis (Barberie 2008). From 1862 onwards he proudly called himself *"the photographer of the city of Paris"* (Locke 2019, 252). This title required him to document all areas that would disappear with the modernization of the city. Consequently, Marville is often associated with the Haussmannization of Paris. This association is twofold: on the one hand, some critics see Marville's photos as *"potent tools for urban planning and architecture"* (Barberie 2008, 34), while others have discovered a hidden agenda of the photographer himself.

“The works of both Charles Marville and Eugène Atget are able to hide under a claim of objectivity, but research into their motivations and styles, exposes two unique underlying narratives that help to (de)construct gentrification in Paris at the turn of the century.”

Object 5 *Countertype of a photograph showing the perspective of the Cité d'Antin, 9th arrondissement* by Charles Marville. Date unknown. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.

Illuminating Modernization and Looking into the Future

Marville's role as photographer of the city not only required him to photograph the parts of Paris that were destined to disappear, occasionally it also included capturing the modern facilities Haussman installed, such as the street lanterns featured in object 7 (The Met 2024). Their influence on Paris cannot be underestimated, as their presence transformed the otherwise dark, bleak and dangerous evenings in the city into charming moments. This picture illustrates how Marville's work quite literally illuminates how Haussmann upgraded Paris.

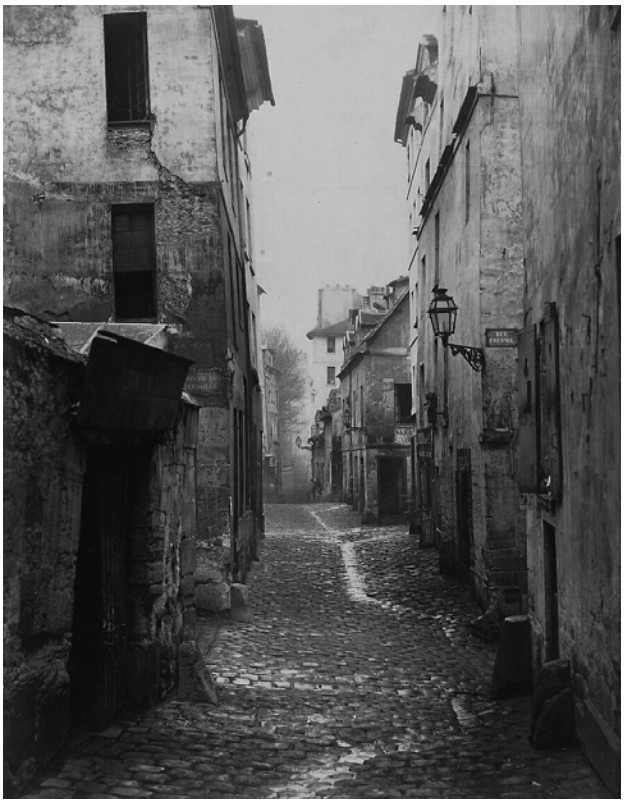
Object 8 also shows one of the modernizing facilities Haussmann brought to Paris. The intersection of Rue du Contract-Social and Rue de la Tonnellerie; a shopping area where people went to buy housold goods. Both streets would soon be removed as part of the urban development Haussmann introduced. Although the picture is named after the two streets, its alternate focus goes to *Les Halles*, the market building in the background. Between 1854 and 1866 Haussmann turned the existing market into an indoor market that fitted into his plans. This project became one of Haussmann's most famous additions to Paris. As seen in all of these pictures, Marville's work does not encourage any lingering over a building, street, or object. He always captured things in such a manner that their relation to their surroundings was highlighted (Light and Paper 2023). If Marville took a photo of a street, he made sure that both sides were clearly visible and that the street was leading to something else. It is almost as if he wanted to illustrate improvement by reminding people that their horizon was being broadened.

Object 6 *Cloud Study over Paris* by Charless Marville, 1856-1857. Property of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Object 7 *Arts et Métiers (Ancien Modèle)* by Charles Marville, 1864. Property of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Object 8 *Rue du Contrat-Social, de la rue de la Tonnellerie* by Charles Marville, 1864-1865. Property of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Object 9 *Rue Traversine (from the Rue d'Arras)* by Charles Marville, 1868. Property of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Object 10 *Impasse Briare (de la Cité Coquenard)* by Charles Marville, 1860s. Property of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Violent Renovations

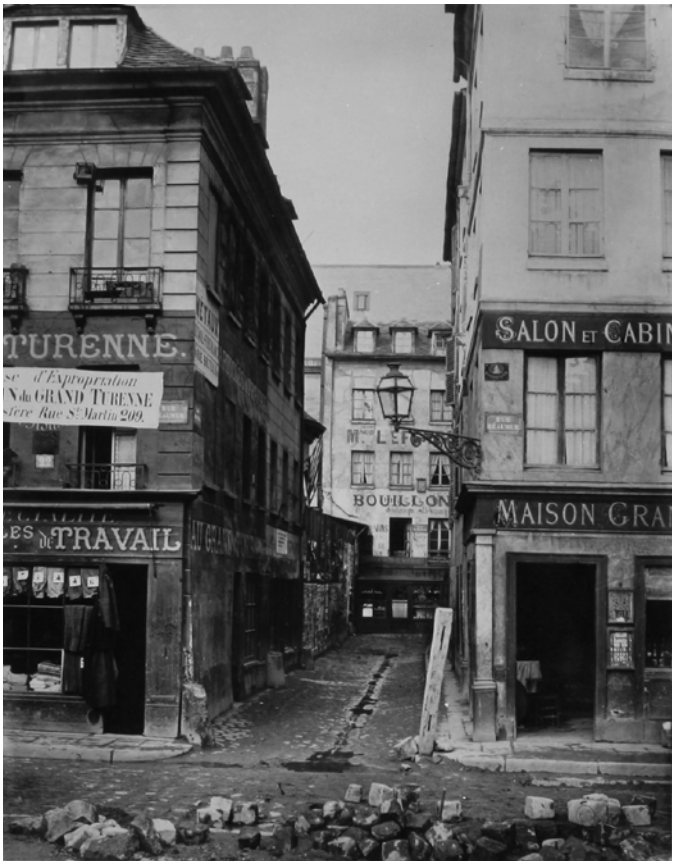
While some say that Marville's work clearly follows the political agenda of Napoléon III and Haussmann, others find that underneath what seems to be a glorification of modernization, hides a silent protest. When appointed *Prefect of the Seine*, Haussmann promised the Parisian citizens that his alterations to the city would be far from radical and revolutionary, merely modernizing and regenerative (Rexer 2023). Because of the chaotic political past of France, the citizens needed some calm and quiet and Haussmann claimed to act accordingly. But with their demolishing nature, his urban renewal plans proved to be the opposite of calm.

According to Raisa Rexer, an expert in French Studies, with photos like these, Marville showcased that Haussmann's actions were violent indeed and they would change the city drastically. The buildings in objects 11 and 12 are surrounded by bricks and the pavement and construction of the buildings prove that an upgrade is needed. Object 13 and 14 might have also fitted into the previous section, as both photographs present a view towards another street, which situates them in the urban context. But a closer look at object 13 reveals some serious damage to the pavement and in the background of object 14 we find piles of what seems to be sand and wheelbarrows, suggesting a more serious intention of the photographer. Could it be that with these works, Marville wanted to warn the Parisian citizens that Haussmann was being more drastic than he promised? Or is that a romanticization of the artist's intentions?

Object 11 *East End, Troyes Cathedral under Restoration* by Charles Marville, 1863. Property of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Object 12 *Countertype of photograph showing Jean-sans-Peur tower. 2nd arrondissement* by Charles Marville, date unknown. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.

Object 13 *Countertype of a photograph depicting the rue de Breteuil, from the rue Réaumur [panorama]. 3rd arrondissement*, by Charles Marville. Date unknown. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



Object 14 *Countertype of a photograph of the Passage Tivoli. 8th or 9th arrondissement* by Charles Marville. Date unknown. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.

Eugène Atget (1857-1927)

Eugène Atget started his career as an actor touring France (Gautrand 2016). In the 1890s he settled in Paris, where the artists who lived in Montparnasse taught him the value of photography as a form of documenting. This inspired Atget to capture the elements of Paris that would soon disappear from the street view because of the execution of the urban renewal plans Haussmann instigated.

Atget never called himself an artist, although he did sell his work to anyone who could use it as a source for their own profession, including painters (Rizov 2021). It could be said that with his work Atget saved *"for historical memory the image of a whole architectural and social heritage that was in danger of disappearing"* (Gautrand 2016, 38). This could be the reason why Atget's photos have a nostalgic essence, characterized by a focus on details that represent the human aspects of the Parisian streets.

Object 15 *Les Fortifications [translation: 'The Fortifications'] Porte d'Arcueil* by Eugène Atget. June 1899. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.

Street Professions

A common thread in Atget's work is the depiction of age-old professions. Street vendors, market traders, shoe shiners, and laborers alike play an important role in his documentation of the Parisian street view. Isolated, Atget's depiction of street vendors is not that extraordinary; to this day and age, photographers feel attracted to depicting the practice of traditional occupations. But when compared to Atget's other works and his motivations for photographing Paris, his series of 'workers' gains a more complex meaning.

Chances are that the male workers he photographed – women were not allowed to go out on the streets unaccompanied – were well known by residents of the areas they worked in. In other words, they belonged to the neighborhood. As Atget's main objective was to document all that was going to vanish, he must have realized that just like the shops, houses, parks, canals, and courts, these professions might lose their function in modern Paris. The Haussmannization of Paris coincided with the emergence of the first department stores, which undeniably contributed to the new prestige of the city Napoléon so wanted (Delhaye 2008). This made the presence of street vendors redundant and consequently, nowadays, street vendors have been reduced to tokens of the authentic Paris; instead of catering to the needs of actual Parisians, they cater to those of tourists. Thus, although the street vendors have never really left the Parisian street view, they now take on a different role that answers to one of the signifiers of modern gentrification: consumers and new residents seeking the experience of *"authentic urban life"* (Ji 2021, 222).

Object 16 *Jardin des Plantes- Marchand de jouets [translation: 'Toy Merchant']* by Eugène Atget. 1898. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.

Object 17 *Marchand [translation: 'merchant'] on Rue Lepic, Montmartre by Eugène Atget*. 1899. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.

Object 18 *Petit Marché [translation: 'Little Market'] at Place St Médard* by Eugène Atget. 1898. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.

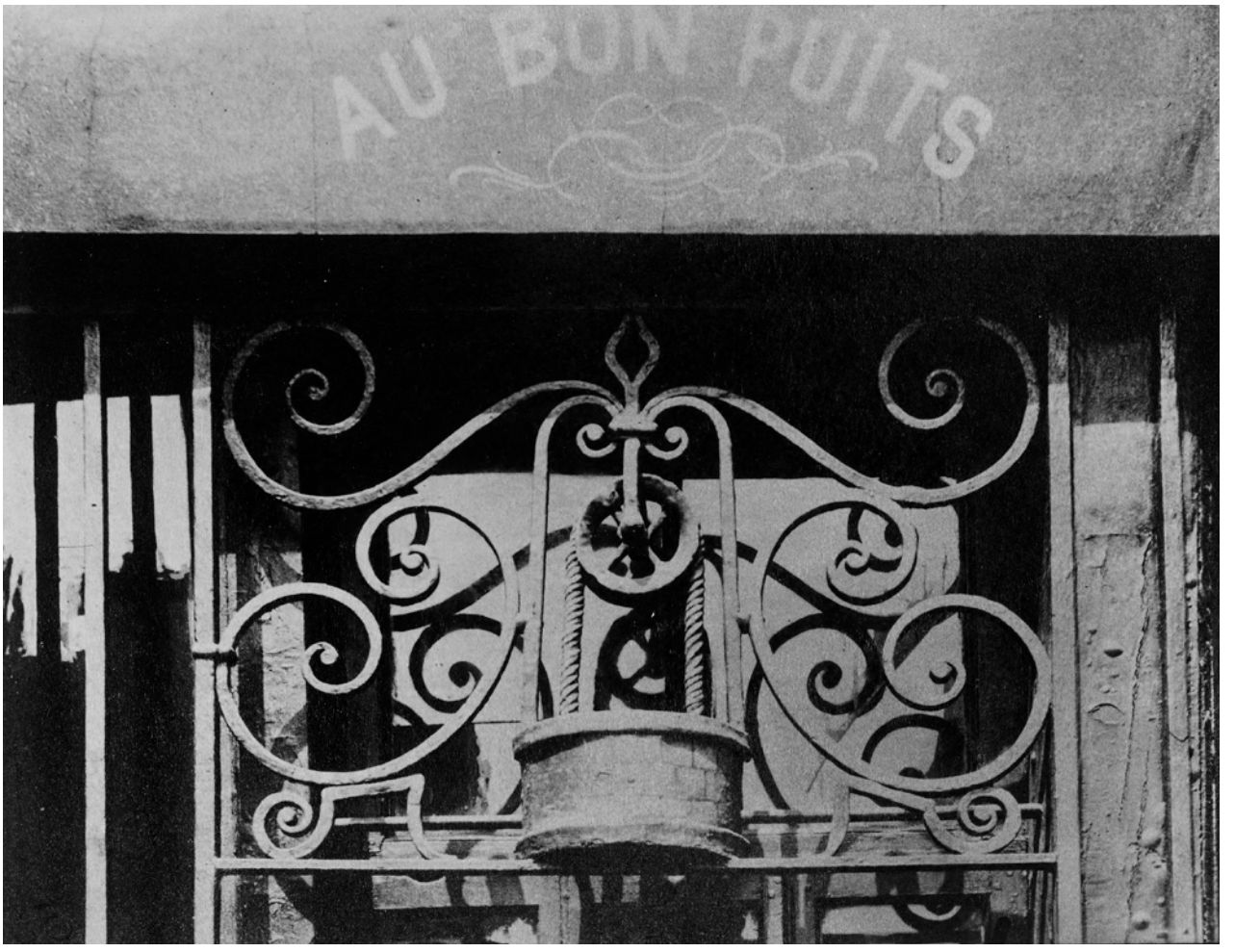
Object 19 *Marchand de parapluies [translation: 'merchant of umbrellas'] on Place Saint-Médard, 5ème arrondissement* by Eugène Atget. 1899-1900. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.

Object 20 *Marchand de paniers à salade et casiers à bouteilles [translation: 'merchant of salad baskets and bottle crates']* by Eugène Atget. 1899-1900. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.

The Devil is in the Details

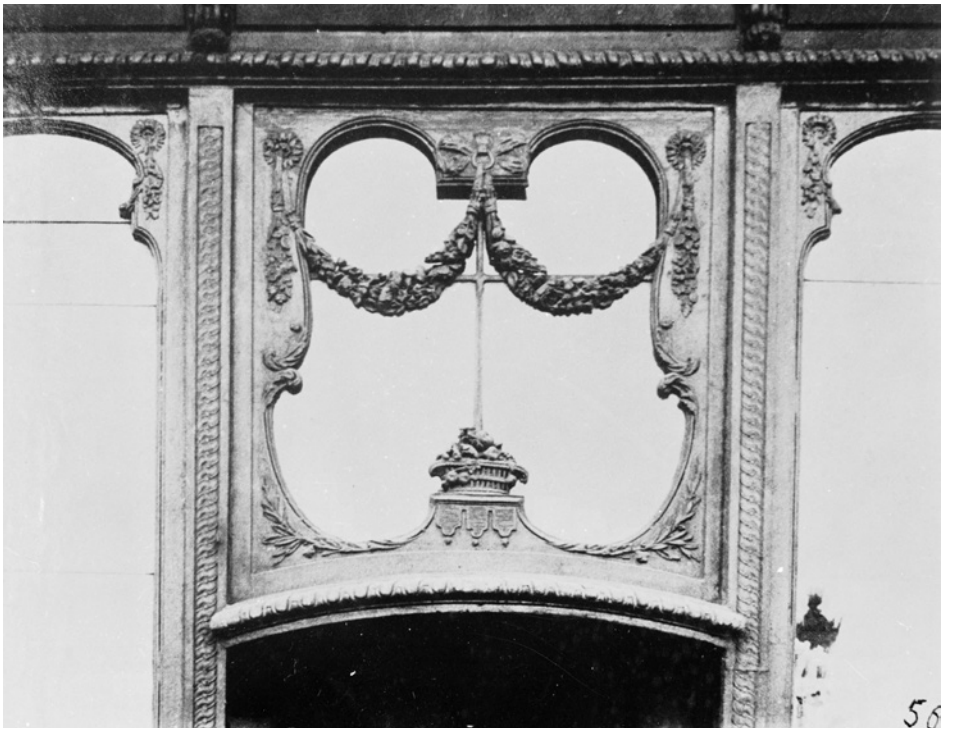
As part of his fascination for details and craftsmanship, Atget made numerous pictures of the peculiar details of Parisian street decors. He even made an ensemble called *vues du vieux Paris* [translation: *'sights of old Paris'*]: objects 21, 22, and 23 are part of this collection. The title of object 21 even refers to the Haussmannization of Paris, as *démoli* translates to *'demolished'*. Atget presumably realized that all of the small tokens in the city should be remembered, because they too did not fit into the 'modern Paris' Napoléon III envisioned. An important feature of gentrification as we know it now, is that the transformation of the things we take for granted, like mailboxes, street poles, and trash cans may have a crucial effect on those who are used to the old ones.

Object 21 *Au Bon Puits 36 rue Michel Le Comte (démoli), Vues du vieux Paris by Eugène Atget.* 1908. Property of Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



Object 22 *Hôtel des Ambassadeurs de Hollande 47 Rue Vieille du Temple,. 4e arrondisement* by Eugène Atget. 1900. Property of Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.

Object 23 *Boutique Louis XVI, 3 quai Bourbon, Vues du vieux Paris by Eugène Atget. 1910.* Property of Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



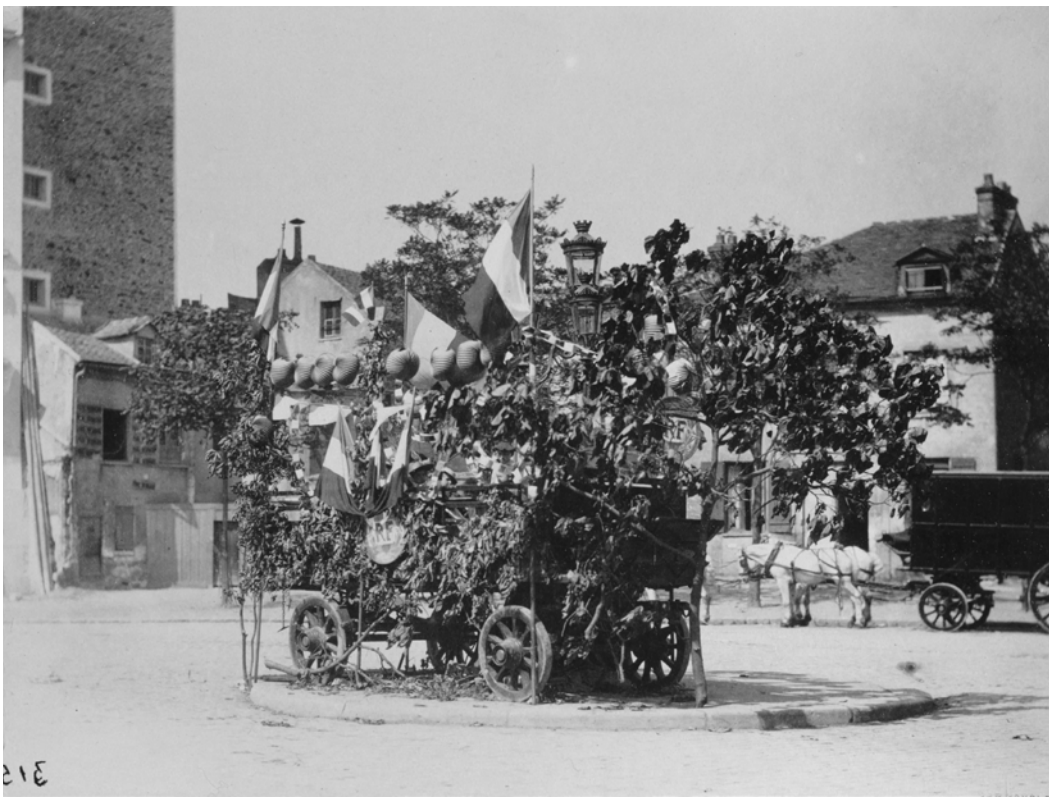
Presence and Absence

One of the most pressing differences between the works of Marville and Atget is the agency of people. Marville's photos rarely feature people and when they do these people are depicted as part of the decor rather than individuals with a particular purpose. Atget did the exact opposite with his work. Even in the photos that do not show actual persons, there is always a small sign of human activity, giving you the feeling that someone could walk back into the frame at any moment. In Marville's work, similar human utensils are present, but in a more deserted way, as if they have not been used in years and nobody would mind if they disappeared.

Marville's work shows the old, neglected parts of Paris and it could be used by the government to argue that the modernization of the city was necessary. Atget's work on the other hand shows the vibrant sides of neighborhoods that were about to be destroyed. This can be understood as a way to show that the urban developments affected the social and economic elements of city life. It must be mentioned however, that some critics consider Marville's work a warning for the 'dehumanizing city' (Rexer 2023).

Object 24 *Countertype of photograph showing La place d'Italie, façades sur rue pavée. 13ème arrondissement* by Charles Marville, date unknown. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.

Object 25 *Fête du 14 juillet. Un orchestre* [translation: 'Feast of the 14th of July. An Orchestra'] on Place Piznel by Eugène Atget. 1898. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.



Object 26 *Rue Estienne, de la rue Boucher by Charles Marville*. 1862-1865. Property of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Object 27 *Hôtel d'Isaac de Laffemas, lieutenant civil au châtelet, 14 rue Saint Julien le Pauvre, 5ème arrondissement* by Eugène Atget. 1899. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.

Object 28 *Countertype of a photograph depicting rue du Mail (from rue de Cléry), 2nd arrondissement* by Charles Marville. Date unknown. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.

Object 29 *Foire des Invalides* by Eugène Atget. June 1899. Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.

Object 30 *Rue du Chat-qui-Pêche (from the Rue de la Huchette)* by Charles Marville. ca. 1868.
Property of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Object 31 *Entrée de l'hôtel de Juigné Rue de Thorigny* by Eugène Atget. 1901.
Property of Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris.

Object 32 *Rue de Constantine* by Charles Marville. 1866.
Property of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Rue de Constantine, 1866
This is one of the few works of Marville in which people play a significant role. It is, however, important to note that they are street pavers and therefore part of the modernization project. Like most street views captured by Marville, this one vanished not long after the picture was taken. The Rue de Constantine was located on the *Île de la cité*, one of the most prominent examples of Haussmannization. Between 1850 and 1870, the number of residents on this city island went from 15.000 to 5.000, because Haussmann transformed the area into an open-air museum full of monuments and government buildings (Jordan 2004). Most of its residents were part of a so-called *"radical working class"* (Mccaughey 2014, 18). Presumably, they had to move to the banlieues. Historian René Héron de Villefosse even went so far as to say that Haussmann *"caused more damage than a hundred bombings"*, all in the name of Parisian prestige (Glancey 2022). And this prestigious city would no longer house the thousands of working-class residents it used to.

The Body and Soul of 19th Century Paris

While no one spoke of gentrification in the 19th century, what happened in Paris at the time can certainly be seen as one of the earlier forms of the process and it set the tone for all the architectural, geographical, and social changes that were to happen in Paris in the time to come. Just like in current gentrifying processes, neighborhoods that were considered poor, decayed, and worthless by the government were demolished and rebuilt in order to cater to the needs of more affluent residents and economies that Napoléon III wanted his modern Paris to house. And while the modernizing of Paris sounds like a noble and necessary objective, with Haussmann's demolitions and reconstructions, a great part of the Parisian population was treated as worthless as their former homes. They were banned to the outskirts of the city, and as such Haussmann did not only construct a modern city, but he also constructed a modern, geographical class divide.

If anything, the photography of Charles Marville and Eugène Atget serves as a historiography of the so-called Haussmannization of their city. But their pictures are far from objective and show the potential influence that photographers can have on people's views on gentrification. Although at first glance both Marville and Atget seem to have delivered neutral documentations on a specific period in time, their characteristic styles reveal underlying objectives.

By taking pictures of architectural innovations, neglected spaces, and modern facilities, Marville captured Paris' body, while by documenting people, professions, personal belongings, and craftsmanship, Atget captured Paris' soul. When combined, Marville and Atget's photos serve as a nuanced documentation of how urban renewal resulted in an early form of gentrification in Paris at the turn of the century. Marville shows us that after all, modernization is undeniably necessary and Atget reminds us of the price it comes with.

"By taking pictures of architectural innovations, neglected spaces, and modern facilities, Marville captured Paris' body, while by documenting people, professions, personal belongings, and craftsmanship, Atget captured Paris' soul."

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Curated Short Essays by Students

Amsterdam Museum Journal
Issue #2 Summer 2024

One of the main objectives of AMJournal is to incorporate the voices of junior scholars. For this issue, the board and I have curated and peer reviewed two short essays written by students who took the MA course ‘Housing as a Right: A History of Housing Crises and Protests in the Western World 1800-2000’. Based on several classic sources and recent literature on housing as a socio-political issue, students in this course examined how social movements and political thinkers have viewed the housing question since the Industrial Revolution, and what actions they took to bring about social change. Obviously, we could not leave the history of gentrification undiscussed.

Dr. Tim Verlaan

Resistance and Instigation: The Dubious Role of Squatters and Culture in the Gentrification of Amsterdam

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Discipline
Art History, Art, Culture, and Politics

Keywords
Artists / Squatters / Neoliberalism / Activism

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Abstract

This essay focuses on the question of whether artists necessarily contribute to government-driven gentrification or if they can also resist local government policies. It describes the development of Amsterdam, characterized by government-driven gentrification and examines the paradoxical role that artists play within this process, as they can both resist and contribute to this urban transformation. While the government uses creativity and culture to make neighborhoods attractive to the middle class, squatters, for instance, oppose this by creating alternative, autonomous art projects in squatted buildings. The essay also historicizes the complex relationships between squatters, artists and gentrification processes by referencing newspaper articles from the 1990s. The essay concludes by stating that through combining art with squatting, artists can resist the neoliberal strategies employed by the government to promote gentrification.

Over the past decades, Amsterdam has seen great transformations, which are reflected in political, social, and spatial changes (Boterman & Van Gent 2022). Between 1980 and 2010, the city developed from a relatively poor area with a (radical) left-wing government, to an urban space that is both socially and culturally dominated by the middle class and its centralist, liberal politics. This transformation can be seen in, among other things, the upgrading of neighborhoods such as the *Jordaan*, the *Pijp,* and *Amsterdam-Noord;* and the marketing campaign *'IAmsterdam'* that led to an increasing flow of tourism resulting in a tourist monoculture characterized by souvenir shops, waffle stores, and hotels (Visie bezoekerseconomie in Amsterdam 2035; van Zoest & Verheul 2020). Beneath the surface of these modern developments of the city hide new social and economic inequalities that are closely connected to gentrification.

In general, gentrification is often seen as a process of spatial transformation, in which working-class and run-down neighborhoods are renovated or renewed to meet the wishes of the middle class (Fiore 2021, 15-16).[1] But broader definitions of gentrification are also used. This essay uses Professor Elven Wyly's definition. She defines the essence of gentrification as *"the competition for urban space"* (Verlaan & Hochstenbach 2022, 442). This definition emphasizes the dynamics of power relations and conflicting interests underlying the practice of gentrification. It assumes that gentrification is not an individual, autonomous process because political decision-making and social interactions also influence the dynamics of urban renewal. Moreover, in this definition, gentrification is seen as government-driven (Hochstenbach 2017; 2022). Besides intervening in the housing market, the government steers the gentrification of neighborhoods in other ways. For example, by investing in the construction of green spaces and addressing safety issues (Rigolon & Németh 2020; Teernstra 2013). In addition, policymakers are increasingly using creativity and culture to attract middle-class residents to certain neighborhoods, this can be done for instance by introducing art and artists to an area (Hoekstra et al. 2018). This is reflected in the current *breeding ground policy* of the municipality of Amsterdam. The municipality defines cultural breeding grounds as *'studio buildings'* for start-up artists and creatives (Over broedplaatsen). These breeding grounds can result from an initiative from artists themselves, who apply for a subsidy from the municipality so they can rent a cheap studio place. In addition, the municipality and housing corporations search for suitable buildings (Beleid ateliers en broedplaatsen 2023 – 2026). According to Griffioen (2019) this results in a *'pop-up culture'* in which breeding grounds are given an operating period of less than a year and are

used to put a certain area on the map and in the market, contributing to the gentrification of the city. This leads to the following question: *Do artists necessarily contribute to government-driven gentrification, or can they also oppose local government policies?*

The squatting movement *Mokum Kraakt* [translation: '*Amsterdam Squats'*] is a collective that strongly opposes and speaks out against the process of government-driven gentrification in Amsterdam.[2] It is a collective of activists and artists that has been combining squatting with artistic projects since 2021 (Mokum Kraakt 2023). These squatters actively counter the neoliberal strategies employed by the government to bring about gentrification. For example, in 2022 they occupied a corner house in the center of Amsterdam, the building was renamed *Het Monument*, and a few days after the squat, an exhibition opened there. The purpose of this exhibition was to exhibit in a city that has no designated space for it. The book *Pak Mokum Terug* [translation: *'Take Back Amsterdam'*] writes about this exhibition and states that among other things by exhibiting in squatted buildings, an artist can exist without contributing to the gentrification of a neighborhood (Mokum Kraakt 2023). The squatting movement in Amsterdam illustrates the complex dynamics of gentrification and shows that art and culture play a paradoxical role in this. In this case squatter artists represent both a symbol of resistance to gentrification as well as a (unwanted) catalyst for social and cultural renewal in a neighborhood, because their alternative way of life and cultural input contribute to the attractiveness of a place.

This unintentional split between resisting and driving gentrification, in which the squatting movement finds itself, is no recent development. For example, Duivenvoorden (2000) writes that the commitment of artists in the squatting movement in the 1970s was expressed primarily in efforts to revive forgotten spaces in the city. *"Precisely because these initiatives came about outside the established art channels in unexpected locations, they constantly managed to stimulate the curiosity of the outsider and were eminently capable of presenting the squatters' contribution to the city in a favorable light."* (Duivenvoorden 2000, 251). From this, it can be concluded that squatters, with their artistic projects, were actually facilitating the upgrading of places in the city. However, it must be noted that this was a more autonomous, unconscious and rather unintentional process of upgrading a neighborhood than the government-driven way dealt with earlier.

On the other hand, the strong counterpoint from the squatting movement against gentrification, as expressed now by Mokum Kraakt, is also rather old. In 1991, the facade of famous squat *Vrankrijk* on Spuistraat 216 was daubed with the slogan *"Holiday out, hotel Vuckoff, casino No $"*,

written in big black letters. A clear anti-tourist message. In an interview, squatter Bert told the newspaper that by preserving Vrankrijk he was fighting against urbanization and the *veryupping* [translation: *'yuppefication'*] of the inner city (Volkskrant 1991; NRC Handelsblad 1991) (Image 1).[3]

Image 1: *Facade of squat Vrankrijk, 1987, prior to the graffiti.* (Stadsarchief Amsterdam/Potograph by Martin Alberts)

After this strong statement of the squatters, it is remarkable that Vrankrijk was still promoted in the tourist brochure as a unique pub and disco for the young traveler (Volkskrant 1991). Moreover, this contrast exposes the dual role of artists, squatters and their cultural projects. The complex relationship between artists, squatters and gentrification in Amsterdam reveals the complicated nature of government- and culture-driven gentrification. The artist and squatter movements have historically played a role in reviving forgotten spaces in the city, but today their activities are deployed as a government strategy.

This essay shows that it is too short-sighted to say that artists' cultural artistic projects necessarily contribute to gentrification. Especially if one assumes a form of gentrification that is government-driven. The squatter-artists of the present time are resisting this with radical action. For example, by exhibiting outside the places designated by the City of Amsterdam in squatted buildings like *Het Monument*. By combining art with squatting, artists can resist the neoliberal strategies employed by the government to promote gentrification. However, it remains important to note that many artists find themselves in a precarious position and squatting as resistance to gentrification does not work in favor of their vulnerable position.

“By combining art with squatting, artists can resist the neoliberal strategies employed by the government to promote gentrification.”

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1 The term ‘gentrification’ was first used in 1964 by sociologist Ruth Glass. Glass described the process of increasing housing prices in London and the displacement of the local working class as a result of the middle class buying up and renovating housing (Verlaan 2020).

2 *Mokum* is used as a nickname for Amsterdam.

3 The term ‘yup’ stands for ‘young urban professional’.

The ‘Discovery’ of Gentrification

Amsterdam Museum Journal

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Abstract

This paper examines the rise of gentrification in 1970s Amsterdam, based on coverage of the *Jordaan* neighborhood in *Het Parool* and a limited number of other Dutch newspapers. Although the term was not yet common at the time, newspaper articles from the 1970s already show a critical attitude toward social change in a working-class neighborhood. Far before policymakers were talking about it, journalists identified the negative effects of gentrification, such as rising rents and a loss of neighborhood identity. The resistance and criticisms of *Het Parool* and original residents bear striking similarities to contemporary criticisms on gentrification, as visible in the mocking and stereotyping of gentrifiers. Interestingly, developments in American cities were used as a frame of reference for Dutch newspapers in this regard. This exploration of the initial phase of gentrification in Amsterdam shows that both residents and journalists have always viewed the process of gentrification with suspicion.

Today, if you open up any newspaper to read about gentrification chances are that the reporting contains criticism. Policymakers have emphasized the *'benefits'* of gentrification for a long time and in doing that the negative effects of the process were ignored (Verlaan and Albers 2022, 497; Lees 2008; Slater et al. 2008, 234). While those negative effects have been under-reported, journalists have long known of their existence. Back in 2015, the Dutch newspaper *Het Parool* wrote *"The success of Amsterdam threatens to drive the unsuccessful out of the city. They regard the yupbakfietsmoeder and the hipster as the symbol of evil"* (Het Parool 2015).[1]

Has the reception always been negative? How did *Amsterdammers* regard gentrification when the process first emerged in the Dutch capital in the 1970s? Back then, the term gentrification was neither a loaded term in newspaper columns nor part of an official policy. When talking about a neighborhood that was doing 'better' due to the arrival of new residents, journalists were more prone to use positive or neutral terms such as neighborhood improvement, rehabilitations or sanitation (Het Parool 1979, 19712, 19701, 2).

In most cases, however, these articles were already written during the beginning phase of the gentrification process, at least if we use such calibrated definitions as formulated by Loretta Lees and her colleagues. According to them, gentrification is the transformation of a working-class neighborhood or vacant area in the city center to residential and/or commercial use by the middle class (Lees et al 2008, XV).

In order to examine how the Amsterdam press viewed gentrification in its early stages, this essay studies how Het Parool covered developments in the *Jordaan* neighborhood in the 1970s. This was probably the first neighborhood in the Netherlands where the process of gentrification manifested itself, which is why Dutch social scientists also speak of the *'Jordaan effect'*. To put the 'discovery' of gentrification in perspective, we will analyze the first mentions of the term gentrification in the Dutch press. Thanks to the digitization of *Het Parool* – the main newspaper of postwar Amsterdam – and national newspapers, it is possible to trace exactly when and how the term was first used. What is striking here is that Dutch journalists compared Amsterdam to the American context, especially to the context of the city of New York, where gentrification processes occurred earlier and had progressed further (NRC 1979; Het Parool 1979). Moreover, the Dutch press used American cities as a frame of reference to better understand and contextualize the gentrification processes at home, especially when it came to the Jordaan.

The term gentrification first appeared in the late 1970s in the liberal newspaper *NRC Handelsblad,* which described the situation in New York in a predominantly positive light: *"[G]entrification [is] an important turning point in the disastrous development to which New York City has been subjected since World War II"* (NRC 1979). The NRC reporter speaks of the *"renaissance of American cities"* and states that this process is characterized by the arrival of a *"new elite"*, which were mainly 'white', college-educated thirty-somethings who bought up the 'old, neglected neighborhoods'. While the tone of this reporting seems positive, it must be noted that the drawbacks – such as the expulsion of poorer and older residents and the disappearance of small convenience stores due to competition – were acknowledged as well.

Five years later, the tone was significantly different. From New York, the Dutch, predominantly left-winged *Volkskrant* reported on the abuses that occurred because of gentrification processes (De Volkskrant 1984). A correspondent describes how landlords are bullying away poorer and older residents to make room for new tenants who are able to pay much higher rents. *"The elderly, Puerto Ricans, blacks and less wealthy whites are literally threatened if they do not leave voluntarily"*, he notes. He describes gentrification as a euphemism and criticizes artists, who are often seen as the pioneers of the gentrification of a neighborhood: *"Manhattan is clearly becoming a park for the very rich; other people are being driven off the island."*

A 1986 edition of Het Parool subsequently highlights the dark side of the *'urban renaissance'* in America (Het Parool 1986). The article describes the two methods landlords apply to evict tenants, namely buyouts and intimidation. A New York woman tells the reporter of Het Parool about the intimidation: *"See that house over there? That burned down, just like that one over there, and that one over there"*. She points to three apartment buildings in her immediate neighborhood that burned down, whose residents left, and which were then renovated to make way for wealthier residents. The author concludes his article by stating that *"socially-minded people will hope that people with little money can find a place to live in Manhattan"*.

Around the same time the first signs of gentrification in Amsterdam's Jordaan neighborhood emerged, although without the sharp edges of expulsion and exclusion. The Jordaan was a working-class neighborhood close to the center with a strong cultural identity, but it was suffering demographic decline and degradation, especially after the Second World War. In the 1970s, the neighborhood was discovered by artists and students, and later by the affluent middle class. As a result, the Jordaan transformed from a working-class neighborhood into a *"bulwark of the urban middle class"*

(Verlaan and Albers 2022, 500). Given the scope of this study, we will not elaborate on the history of the Jordaan and its gentrification process. For that we refer to the work of Verlaan and Albers, who also studied newspaper articles on gentrification in the Jordaan, albeit from a broader perspective (Verlaan and Albers, 502-509).[2] Instead, our paper complements them by shifting the focus to Het Parool's attitude toward the process.

Image 1: *Repair and new construction on the Tuinstraat, 1973*
(Amsterdam City Archives, Archives of the Municipal Housing Department: 5293FO013146).

The reports in Het Parool indicate that there was criticism and resistance to the developments that took place in Amsterdam's working-class neighborhoods in the 1970s (Het Parool 1975; 1974; 1972, 19702). The positive effects of gentrification (if any), such as the mixing of social classes, the renewal of public space and the renovation of dilapidated buildings, did not outweigh the higher rents and feelings of alienation that resident felt towards their changing living environment (Hochstenbach, Musterd and Teernstra 2015, 754; Lees et al 2008, 196). Many residents complained that they did not benefit from the new constructions and renovations, but rather suffered from it (Het Parool, 1975; 1974;1972, 19701).

On the one hand, the criticism in Het Parool comprises a dissatisfaction with the fact that new constructions and renovations drove up rents, driving the *rasechte Jordaner* [translation: *'born and raised Jordanian'*] – as the original residents are called in the newspaper – out of the neighborhood (Het Parool, 1972; 19711). In some way, the working class, to which most of the original Jordanians belonged, were conquered by the new neighborhood residents, who generally had higher salaries (Het Parool 1972). On the other hand, there was criticism of the changing atmosphere and neighborhood identity. According to the Jordanian *ome* [translation: *'uncle'*] Kees Weyermans, by the mid-1970s the neighborhood had already been transformed into an *"open-air museum"*, *"an attraction for tourists with nice houses, restaurants, pubs and boutiques"* (Het Parool 1975). Consequently, in 1975, Het Parool wrote that the *oer-Jordaan* [translation: *'original Jordaan'*] was not pleased (Het Parool 1975). The romance of the neighborhood was said to have disappeared, as well as the togetherness, which was overshadowed by the individualism of the newcomers (Het Parool 1972).

This dissatisfaction and resistance were not necessarily directed against the new neighborhood residents, but rather against the municipality; especially the Urban Development Department; and the city council. They too, had plans for new construction and demolition that aroused resistance among Jordanians, although gentrification was not directly the goal here. In the early 1970s, it was mostly the new neighborhood residents, together with students and artists, that were part of the resistance against the municipality's demolition and construction plans. They organized themselves into action groups such as *Jordáád* [translation: *'Jor-deed'*] or *Volksfront Jordaan* [translation: *'Popular Front Jordaan'*], only getting backed by a *"handful of [original] residents and housing developers"* (Het Parool 1972, 19711). According to Het Parool, the many action groups, united in the *GAJ: Gezamenlijke Actiegroepen Jordaan* [translation: *'Collective Action groups*

Jordaan'] stood up for the *"preservation of the wondrous street-warren and its accompanying atmosphere*" (Het Parool 1972).

It is somewhat ironic that although original Jordaan residents felt that the new neighborhood residents were tarnishing the authentic character of the neighborhood, these new residents did stand up to preserve that same authenticity. Although the protests and resistance were mainly directed against the municipality and the city government, dissatisfied people also turned their attention to their new neighbors. This was done with the same derision and stereotyping with which typical 'gentrifiers' are treated today: people who take their children to school exclusively on cargo bikes and do nothing but drink oat milk cappuccinos all day (Het Parool, 1979, 19711; Het Parool 2015). In 1979, Het Parool describes the background of the fictional characters Simon and Marlise, who are portrayed as embodying the new wealthier Jordaan residents:

De nieuwe elite

OP het naamplaatje staat alleen maar: Marlise en Simon. Geen achternamen, want achternamen zijn maf. En waar wonen ze? In de Jordaan. Klein huisje natuurlijk, nauwe, steile trap, kleine kamertjes, zolder, keuken, — ja, ja, maar de boel is keurig gerenoveerd, doorgebroken, verbouwd, gestut, en dat heeft dan wel een aardige duit gekost, maar je hebt er een huis voor waar menige villabewoner jaloers op kan zijn. En in 't hartje van de oude stad met andere Marlises en Simons als je naaste buren, die je iedere avond ontmoet in het bruine kroegje op de hoek.

Ach ja, de stad veran-

Image 2: *Newspaper clipping from Het Parool depicting Marlise and Simon as the embodiment of the new Jordaan residents* (Het Parool 1979).

Marlise and Simon are described as follows:

> *“They both work, of course. Simon is a political science graduate and has advanced plans for his dissertation. Marlise is in welfare work. Since they have a double income, they are not short of anything and the bank will take care of the mortgage payment. Only Simon has some problems parking his Volvo and so does Marlise with her deux chevaux. Their sailboat is in Monnickendam and they have a cottage in the Dordogne” (Het Parool 1979).*

The same article uses the term gentrification literally, at that time still in English. The newspaper describes gentrification as the *“refinement”* or *“enrichment”* of an old residential neighborhood (Het Parool 1979). What had been taking place for some time in New York was now manifesting itself in the streets of the Jordaan as well: *“The new elite are beginning to repopulate Manhattan, and there are striking similarities”.*

Urban historian Vincent Baptist recently noted that gentrification is often interpreted too negatively. According to him, it is a process you are almost forced to be against because journalists and academics would not appreciate a more nuanced view (NRC 2023). Through an exploration of the historical perception of gentrification in Dutch newspapers – focusing on Het Parool in particular – this short essay has researched for how long this has been the case. Interestingly, the newspapers’ coverage paid considerable attention to developments in American cities, highlighting both positive and negative coverage of the gentrification process. Despite some positive reports about New York's *‘urban renaissance’* or *‘urban rebirth’* in the 1970s and 1980s, the coverage on the gentrification of the Jordaan area by Het Parool in the same period highlighted the fierce resistance and criticism of this phenomenon from the very beginning. Original Jordaan residents faced rising rents – at least of the renovated properties – and a loss of neighborhood identity. The resistance and criticism of neighborhood developments bear similarities to contemporary gentrification criticism, in which new residents are often similarly mocked and stereotyped.

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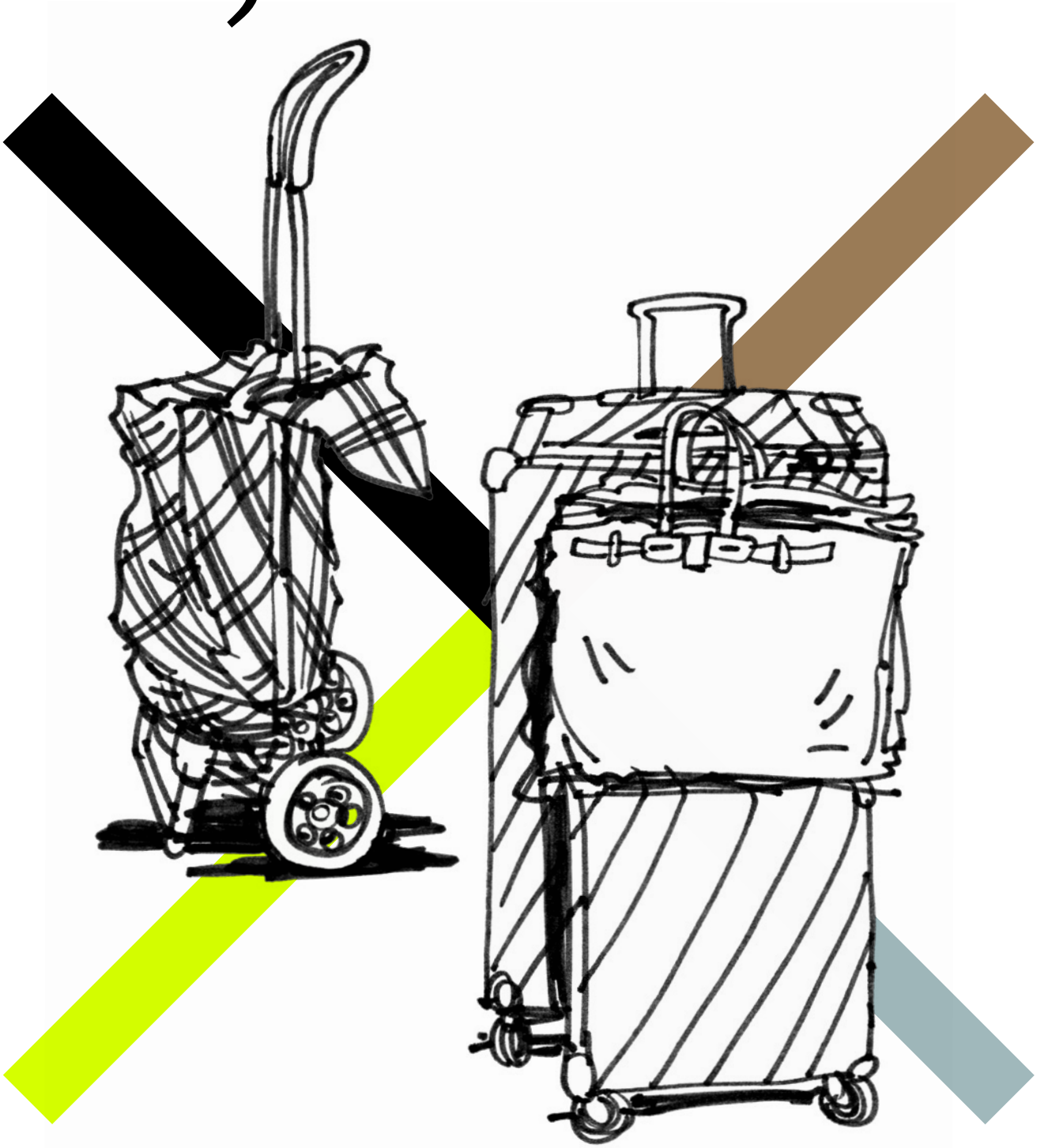
Endnotes

1 ‘Yup’ stands for ‘young urban professional'. *Bakfietsmoeder* is an informal term used in the Netherlands referring to the stereotype of a mother transporting her children in a *bakfiets*. A bakfiets is a bicycle with a large container in the front that can carry children, groceries or other goods.

2 Dr. Tim Verlaan guest-edited this issue of the AMJournal. For more on his research, see ‘*The Dialogue’* in which Verlaan talks about history and gentrification with Dr. Prof. Suleiman.

The Polyphonic Object



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Een Genrestuk

Amsterdam Museum Journal

In ‘The Polyphonic Object’ four analyses by scholars from different perspectives and academic fields show the layers of complexity a single object can hold. Through their (historical, museum studies, urban geographical, and argumentation/rhetorical) reconstructions, they uncover the different stories behind the painting Genrestuk [translation: ‘*A Genre Piece*’] by Albert Blitz (1975) (Stichting Genootschap Amsterdam Museum, 1985). The painting was made in response to the ‘Nieuwmarkt riots’.

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Albert Blitz (1938-2022)
Een Genrestuk, 1975
Stichting Genootschap Amsterdam Museum, 1984

From late March - early April 1975, the Nieuwmarkt neighborhood in Amsterdam (NL) witnessed evictions and the demolition of residential houses for the completion of the Central Station - Bijlmermeer subway line. This painting by Albert Blitz was bought by P. van den Berg at an auction organized by the Nieuwmarkt committee, for the benefit of the victims.

Billie Nuchelmans (historian)

Both Amsterdam mayor Ivo Samkalden and councilman Han Lammers were, throughout much of the 1970s, popular scapegoats for local activists protesting the city's urban planning policies. Samkalden, in his role as mayor, was probably an obvious choice as a focal point for negative attention. Lammers, councilman in charge of 'urban development' from 1970 to 1976, seems to have had quite a target on his back as well.

It should be no surprise then, that this painting by Albert Blitz portrays the pair as true personifications of bureaucratic evil. Both have a somewhat vacant look, and especially Lammers, who was 43 years old when Blitz painted this piece, appears quite a bit frailer and older than he actually was. Neither one of them seems to care at all about the neighborhood burning down in the background. As far as they are able to muster any active focus,

it is directed at their meal, and at the cutlery that they are grabbing at with their large, fleshy hands.

As stated, this artistic attack existed in a wider context of vitriol directed at government officials. Other instances of it could be spotted, for example, in graffiti and murals that graced the walls of the Nieuwmarkt area during the same period and that can still be seen in photographs. Some are generic threats of violence against demolition crews or city officials. Some single out people like, for example, Han Lammers. In photographs by J.M. Arsath Ro'is, taken in the late summer of 1974, we see the slogan *"Put Lammers in the ground"* written on a wall on the Zwanenburgwal, while just around the corner, in the Sint Antoniesbreestraat, passers-by were greeted by the rather morbid pun *"Hang Lammers"*, next to a depiction of a gallows. A picture of the same street by Wim Ruigrok also shows a wall covered in slogans; one of them is the popular slogan geen *buizen maar huizen* [translation: *'no tubes but houses'*] referring to the demolitions needed for the construction of a subway line through the neighborhood. It is accompanied here by a second, quite concrete pledge, promising that any further work on the subway would be answered with the demolition of Lammers' own house.

In september of 1974 the AAP, or *Amsterdamse Aktie Partij* [translation: *'Amsterdam Action Party'*], which had already, during the city council elections earlier that same year, campaigned on a platform of strict personal hostility towards Lammers, decided, as far as this pledge was concerned, to put their money where their mouths were. The party organized a demonstration in front of Lammers' personal residence. Pamphlets were distributed in which the councilman was referred to as a *'municipal Führer'*, his door was boarded up, and a group of demonstrators started to tear up the pavement in front of it, before being stopped by the police.

Lammers was not the only victim of protests like this. The *Aktiegroep Nieuwmarktbuurt* [translation: *'Action Group Nieuwmarkt Neighborhood'*] reflected, in another 1974 pamphlet, on a number of actions that it had recently carried out. Several city officials had been visited at their homes, to *"point out the error of their ways in a person-to-person conversation"*. The workshop of a contractor who had taken on demolition work in the area had been *"evicted"*. The home of Tjerk Westerterp, Minister of Transport and Water Management, had been covered in posters – and when Westerterp himself walked out to object to this, he also got a dab of wallpaper paste applied to his face.

As the municipality of Amsterdam, once so fiercely hated by activists, began to motivate many of its urban planning policies in phrases quite similar to those used by the protesters of the 1970s, both city officials and historians sometimes embraced a view of those protests as a disagreement that had since led to a new, widely held consensus, centered around ideas about mixed-use neighborhoods and the preservation of the existing *'urban fabric'*.[1] Housing in Amsterdam, however, has also rapidly been getting more expensive, especially in the city center, which has been substantially transformed through gentrification and a massive surge in tourism.[2] A growing awareness of this contradiction at the heart of the current consensus now brings a new relevance to the protests that preceded it. Any complete understanding of these protests should also include a look at the personal hostility that was very much a part of them.

One result of that might be some much-needed historical context to certain current debates about *'polarization'*, but apart from contextualizing recent debates, this also

helps our understanding of the past. The aggressive or sometimes even violent hostility towards city officials forms an important part, for example, of the circumstances in which Albert Blitz painted this *"genre piece"*. That this painting is, in its own way, an attack, should already have been clear. Being aware of the highly politically charged situation; the disruptive acts of hostility taking place at the same time, and towards the very people it depicts, however, might push this interpretation a little further, and perhaps make us see this painting as an even more radical commitment.

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Endnotes

1 This, perhaps, slightly rose-tinted view on the legacy of the Nieuwmarkt protests can be seen, for example, in popular books, such as Fred Feddes' otherwise quite informative outline of the history of urban planning in Amsterdam: A Millennium of Amsterdam: Spatial History of a Marvellous City. (Thoth, 2012).

2 See, for example, the most recent iteration of the International Rent Index by City, published by renting platform HousingAnywhere, in which Amsterdam is listed as the city with the highest average rents in Europe: https://housinganywhere.com/rent-index-by-city

Katerina Kalakidi (museum studies)

The massive demonstration that was organized by Amsterdam residents in the spring of 1975 in opposition to the Amsterdam City Council's plan to demolish multiple buildings in the *Nieuwmarkt* district is revitalized by Albert Blitz's *Een Genrestuk* [translation: *'A Genre Piece'*]. This pivotal event etched its place in the annals of the city's history, becoming a cornerstone in the ongoing debates on urban development and gentrification.

Despite the outcome of the protest, the Nieuwmarkt case offers a multitude of historical perspectives, particularly from a social standpoint. This short analysis investigates the protest's aftermath and graphs the evolution of Amsterdam's cultural legacy over the next few years. It offers a grassroots analysis that delves into the key players and underlying motivations. By examining these experiences, we can better educate Amsterdam's present-

day residents on how to engage with the legacy left for future generations. This bottom-up approach promises to enrich our understanding of the protest's significance and long-term effects on the city's identity.

From Resistance to Renewal:
The Rich History of the Nieuwmarktbuurt

In the wake of World War II, Amsterdam's urban tapestry accommodated a heterogenous population comprising activists, hippies, artists, students, and other progressives. Many of them found shelter in the apartments of the Nieuwmarkt area and they immediately made their presence and involvement in the neighborhood known. In cities across Western Europe, the 1970s saw a rise in resident resistance. In Amsterdam, where resident protests have a 45-year history, the rise of the squatting movement contributed to their intensification and radicalization. Their argument was straightforward yet compelling: demolishing their homes signified the beginning of a *'Manhattanization'* movement that sought to bring Amsterdam up to date for the 21st century, while also destroying centuries' worth of architectural treasures.[1] Amsterdam residents had a valuable tool at their disposal and they were passionate about and committed to the preservation of their neighborhood and city. As Justus Uitermark notes, their actions were framed within the broader narrative of *'saving the city'*. When viewed from the outside, these acts were attempts by locals to preserve the physical and social fabric of their communities and the city itself. Their resolute resistance succeeded in halting the municipality's plans, a victory for which Amsterdam today is indebted to them. This victory proves that the Amsterdam squatter movement could significantly alter the housing market and the urban landscape.

The Role of Activist Groups
in Shaping Society

The question of whether the residents of the Nieuwmarkt acted impulsively in their protest against the municipality's plans or if it was the result of careful planning, finds its answer in the historical context of the area. Over time, various forms of opposition to municipal plans emerged significantly, such as the *Nieuwmarkt Action Group*. Gradually, the neighborhood transformed into something akin to an autonomous zone where people took charge across various domains. In his work, Hans Pruijt emphasized the *New Social Movement*, a framework that allowed participants in the squatters' movement in Amsterdam to engage in activism without being bound by a specific agenda.[2] Communities were viewed by activist groups as vital hubs of well-being and as platforms for democratic action. The result was an urban conflict never seen before in recent Dutch history. The front page of the Volkskrant on March 25, 1975, captured the pivotal role that the media of the time played in this, leaving a lasting impression from the outset.


de Volkskrant

SLOOP EERSTE ONTRUIMDE WONINGEN BEGONNEN

levige slag om Nieuwmarkt-bastion

NA MISLUKKEN KISSINGER

Washington herziet hulp aan Israël

Image 1: *Front page of the Volkskrant of March 25, 1975.* Photograph by: Local authority Amsterdam website.

Blue Monday: The Vivid Legacy of the Nieuwmarkt Riots

After the Nieuwmarkt riots, also known as *Blauwe Maandag* [translation: '*Blue Monday*'], Amsterdam was left with long-lasting damage for many years. A city renowned for its serene and beautiful canals became a battlefield, with many people being hurt, and some even seriously injured. This movement represents the epitome of organized neighborhood resistance; it served as a model that other districts in Amsterdam would follow, ultimately saving the city from the impeding threat of being overtaken by enormous, soulless concrete office blocks. All things considered; the demonstrators emerged triumphant. In retrospect, all of us should be grateful that they were able to put an end to the demolition frenzy, even before the metro system was eventually introduced. The squatters' movement has been among the most influential groups in shaping Amsterdam's recent development, significantly transforming the city's housing, political, and cultural landscape (Owens 2008).

Significant changes in public opinion were brought about by the urban landscape's transformation. The struggle for the Nieuwmarkt served as a precursor to the violent squatter riots that would plague the city in the years to come. At the same time, the city of Amsterdam put heritage preservation at the top of its list of priorities. What lies ahead? How do we pay tribute to the people—some of whom are still among us—who made the decision to reshape the urban environment and redefine their role in the decision-making processes regarding projects that impact their neighborhoods?

Anti-Metro Art

Interestingly, the Nieuwmarkt metro station features *"anti-metro art",* as a commemoration of the riots and as a testament to the importance of the fight they fought, a collage of monuments of resistance and reminders of oppression, neglected by the numerous passers-by daily (Uitermark 2009). *"Living is not a privilege but a right"* is written in big white letters on the station's floor. This reminds us of the continuous fight for equitable urban development and social justice. Reading historical materials can help with reflection, nostalgia, and inspiration. It is a challenge, though, to transform these materials into an artistic narrative with coherence that captures Amsterdam's struggle against the relentless forces of modernization and gentrification. It requires a delicate balance between preserving the past and envisioning a future that embraces progress and inclusivity while honoring the rich heritage of the city. This is where the contribution of culture comes up, in the form of an open-to-the-public art project. The anti-metro art at the Nieuwmarkt metro station serves as a living proof of Amsterdam residents' resilience against the municipal plans for the reshaping of the urban landscape.

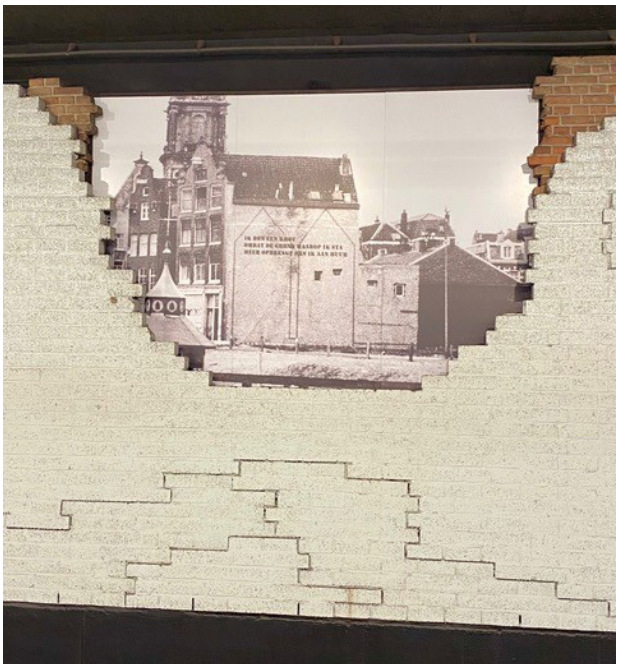

Image 2: *Debris of the Nieuwmarkt neighborhood showing the before and after of the riots*. Photograph by: the author.

Image 3: *Quote near one of the exits of the Nieuwmarkt metro station platform* [translation: *"We will continue to live here"*]. Photograph by: the author.

Protests and Activism in Today's World

In today's world, protests often take the form of anonymous statements on the internet, lacking the tangible collective action of earlier protests. The largely forgotten Dutch society's 1970s revolt against the demolition of urban centers serves as a poignant reminder of the role social movements play in raising issues and putting pressure on public officials to envision more positive, inclusive futures. Movements take a proactive approach to defining change-oriented paths, portraying injustice, and creating meaning (Uitermark 2004). In response to the ongoing conflict in Gaza, protests and demonstrations have recently taken place in several locations across the University of Amsterdam (UvA) campuses. The activists' and UvA delegations' ongoing communication demonstrates their dedication and willingness to have the discussion. The result is the saxme, whether it is 1975 or 2024: everyone in the neighborhood is accountable for participating in the community. When people treat each other and themselves with respect, it leads to a feeling of self-worthiness and self-esteem and transforms neighborhoods into venues of political activity aimed at ensuring a fair and just city.[3]

In the end, a city center ought to be a vibrant social hub that represents the various communities it is home to. Amsterdam can act as a role model in this regard, thanks to its rich history and continuous efforts to promote inclusivity. History itself bears witness to the power of collective action and the enduring impact it can have on shaping the trajectory of cities and societies.

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Endnotes

1 For more material related to Manhattanization, see Burgers *Urban Landscapes: On Public Space in the Post-Industrial City* and Greenspan *How to manhattanize a city*.

2 For more on this theme, see Pruijt *The Logic of Urban Squatting*.

3 For more on the theme of dignity, see Wollentz *Youth activism and dignity*.

Menno Reijven and Emma van Bijnen (argumentation/rhetoric)

Visual Rhetoric in a Genre Painting

The title of the work *'Genre Painting'* (*Genrestuk*) by Albert Blitz is a standard term used to describe *paintings about everyday settings of modest citizens* (e.g. Aono 2011, p. 15) by which the spectator is reminded of the difference between undesirable and correct behavior (de Vries 2005, 109). As such, a genre piece is not idealized but ideological in nature, proposing injunctive norms. As ideology and proposed morals are important aspects of genre paintings, they are interesting to analyze from a visual rhetoric and argumentation perspective. When doing so, we discover that a few visual contrasts are being exploited by Albert Blitz that firmly place this painting in

another genre, maybe even more so than that of a 'genre paining'...

First, is this really an everyday setting? A calm and composed dinner while flames are raging in the background? The construction of the metro line was considered catastrophic by the residents of the *Nieuwmarkt* neighborhood. There were riots and violent protests, but the neighborhood was not *literally* on fire. The raging fire (and its destructive properties) seemingly represents the neighborhood's then state, from the perspective of the locals. As such, we can consider the flaming background for the politicians' casual dinner to be a visual metaphor, in which properties of the source domain are visually projected onto the goal domain (Šorm and Steen 2018, 48). In this case: the raging fire (source domain) and the Nieuwmarkt (goal domain).

For the locals, this situation was certainly not their everyday; instead, they considered it an unacceptable disruption of their everyday lives. So, for whom is this an *everyday setting*? Like the painted fire, the mayor and alderman were destroying the neighborhood, and according to the locals, these politicians did not even care. The painting shows no emotional response or sign of regret; the mayor and alderman have turned their backs to the destruction and are carrying on with their dinner. Being part of a 'genrestuk', this apparently is everyday practice for these politicians.

Second, given the importance of this genre in portraying ordinary peoples' everyday lives, which are generally represented by unknown figures (see e.g. Johns 1991), it should be noted that the painting foregrounds *two prominent local labor politicians* instead. The use of formal wear such as suits points to the technocratic nature of the local politicians in charge, which contrasts with the typical modest citizen in a genre painting (Aono 2011, 15). Both the mayor and alderman were labor politicians; people who supposedly would stand with and for 'the people'. To show them, in formal attire eating a fancy meal with wine, while a neighborhood is burning (and of which the flames were lit by them) is an *ironic* use of this genre. They are technocrats, distinct from the local people; they caused destruction, and they could not care less. Overall, the selected contrast and visual metaphor clearly conveys the artist's critical stance towards the local government, presenting the undesirable behavior by the politicians befitting the 'genre painting'.

Reconstructing Visual Argumentation

In argumentation theoretical terms, Blitz is taking a stance on the issue and presents argumentation in support (see e.g. van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004; 2016, for more on argumentation theory). The standpoint advanced by Blitz is that 'the behavior by the politicians should be negatively evaluated', which is then defended by the fact that the plans were bad ('the extension of the Amsterdam subway was a bad plan') and that the government did not even care ('the labor politicians did not care about the consequences'). These premises are both defended by the visual décor. Specifically, that the plans are bad is supported by the visual metaphor of the neighborhood on fire (the metro line has destroyed the city like a fire), while the second premise is indexed by the mayor and alderman casually eating their luxurious dinner, looking like uncaring technocrats: they are unbothered by the fire that is destroying everything they ought to protect.

In short, the painting is an explicit critique on the local government, presented by means of visual argumentation with identifiable premises. This painting represents a skilled instance of visual rhetoric; metaphors, contrasts and indexes are used to establish meaning and delineate the possible inferences

that can be drawn from the painting. The only verbal phrase 'a genre piece' does not contain any premises, although it does initiate a cascade of inferences which result in the possibility to reconstruct the argumentation.

Genre Painting or Political Cartoon?

The visual rhetorical and argumentative reconstruction suggests a mixture of a genre painting with that of an *editorial cartoon*, as Blitz clearly makes a multimodal (i.e. visual and verbal) political point by means of the tension between the visual argumentation and the verbal title. Although it indeed shows undesirable behavior and a clear ideology (de Vries 2005), befitting of the 'genre painting', the contrasts and visual metaphor point towards a rhetorical genre: *the political cartoon* (subgenre of the editorial cartoon). Such cartoons are a known genre used to comment on political events or discourses by means of satire, caricature, or irony (see e.g., Dugalich 2018). This satirical commentary is usually done multimodally (visually and verbally) and often includes a visual metaphor (see e.g., Schilperoord and Maes 2009), as is the case in the 'Genrestuk' by Albert Blitz.

In short, a close analysis reveals how this painting is argumentative and contributes to a discussion in the public sphere. By playing with genre conventions and contrasts, a deeper message is being created. The painting has been produced as a political message: a critical reflection of the *state of affairs*. This suggests it is not a 'genre painting' in which the everyday lives of ordinary people are depicted through anonymous characters that represent larger communities (see e.g. Johns 1991), but instead something alike a political cartoon in which the behaviors of two painted (and known) politicians are being condemned by means of contrasts and metaphors.

For the research fields of rhetoric and argumentation, this painting offers some interesting insights as well. The painting reveals there are deeper underlying structures to the rhetoric in paintings, and cultural artifacts in general. Specifically, this example presents a beautiful prototypical example clarifying the possibilities of visual rhetoric and the importance of the study of art as (possible) persuasive communication.

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Wouter van Gent (geographer)

Two fancy men sit at a dinner table, grabbing their utensils and getting ready to eat. The well-dressed bald man sits straight up and looks at us warily. The other man sags in his seat, tieless and belly out. He leers hungrily as he stirs the soup. Their banket reminds us of a still life of affluence and vanitas. Behind them, the city is burning. We see a third figure, a nurse. She notices the fire and seems to rush over to the window to close the curtains so as not to disturb these important men. Maybe she cares for them.

Albert Blitz's *Een Genrestuk* [translation: *'a genre piece'*] is a throwback to the golden age of Dutch painting, when Amsterdam's canals marked a centre of trade and power, and talented artists would create their art not for kings or churches but for a burgher society of merchants and statesmen. These affluent individuals commissioned genre art to capture

a fraction of the everyday, often tinged with a hint of morality. Blitz did not paint his work for a bourgeois patron, but the piece was painted and auctioned off to support the *Nieuwmarkt* neighbourhood activist committee in the early spring of 1975 (Oehlen 2015).

At the time, Amsterdam was on fire, politically and socially. Like many cities in North America and Western Europe, the 1970s were a period of 'urban crisis'. As hard as it may seem today, cities were losing population to brand-new suburbs, manufacturing industries were struggling, and municipalities were scrambling for solutions to keep the city relevant. The municipality tried to turn the tide by transforming the city centre and the working-class neighbourhoods around it. Prewar housing was being destroyed to make way for modernist office buildings, infrastructure and roomy rental housing for families. The Nieuwmarkt neighbourhood in the city centre was planned for renewal. A broad new highway and a subway line were meant to improve connections, and to open up the poorer margins of the historic city centre for redevelopment (De Liagre Böhl 2010).

Yet, the plans proved to be a bridge too far. Residents, together with young activists and squatters, revolted against the demolishing. Amsterdam faced a housing shortage, particularly for young households flocking to the city. Why not build new housing for these new households instead of families? Riots broke out on March 24 and April 8. The *'battle for Nieuwmarkt'* was fought with rocks and parking meters against water cannons and nightsticks. The residents barricaded streets, fortified buildings, built air bridges and set up their own communications. The violence shocked the country. Ultimately, the subway was built, but the highway was not. Also, no new metro line would be built for thirty years, and fitting social housing was constructed on top of the new metro tubes.

The subtitle of Een Genrestuk translates as *"Mayor Dr. I. Samkalden and Alderman Han Lammers, dining against a backdrop of a burning Nieuwmarkt neighbourhood"*. It is a damning statement for these two Social Democrats who thought they were doing the right thing to save the city from squalor and gridlock. These two local leaders are small-time Nero's, unconcerned while their city burns. The work was auctioned two days before the riots broke out (Oehlen 2015), so the burning city represents the political tension that had been building up, the fiery sense of resistance and a spectre of things to come.

The Nieuwmarkt riots occurred during what has been labelled the *'twenty-year urban war'*, a period of social upheaval, protests, and disturbances that started with Provo in 1965 (Mamadouh 1992). The 1980s would see more violence between squatters and police. Yet, the social tensions would lead to a new direction in urban and housing policy in the late 1970s. Urban development would be aimed at housing residents and young newcomers in affordable and decent social rental housing (De Liagre Böhl 2010). After the dust settled in the early 1990s, the war was over, and Amsterdam had turned a new corner but was also on its way to become a middle-class city.

The young demonstrators and activists who were fighting the police and engaged in squatting, had grown up to become the *'new urban middle class'*. As their bellies grew, it was their turn to sit at the table. They were now advocating for more ownership housing so they could stay in the city. Later, new policy ideas dictated that housing policies should aim to accommodate knowledge workers and creatives. Gentrification was already a policy in the 1980s to accommodate galleries, squatted housing and bars and restaurants in the historic centre. In the 2000s, the entire prewar city had to be gentrified. Amsterdam

policymakers argued that there was too much affordable housing and that *'we'* should make this city more attractive for the middle class. Some planners even pointed to maps of housing prices and argued that raising prices everywhere means expanding the city. Also, the waiting lists for social rental apartments were getting a bit long. Ownership allowed the middle classes to jump the queue. Many of the sold apartments would fall into the hands of landlords who are now charging astronomic rents for the former social rental units. Gentrification became the state of things in Amsterdam (Boterman and Van Gent 2023).

Samkalden and Lammers failed to recognise that the city's demographics were already changing, and businesses were more interested in setting up their offices at the urban edge, near the ring road and suburbs. As such, they could not see what was ahead. Similarly, *Een Genrestuk*, the events in the Nieuwmarkt area and what followed also seem to be from a foreign city today. After a short period of radical city governance, the city has been gentrified after forty years. How would a genre piece look today? As the city's elders are dining, you would not see a fire in the background, but middle-class and upper-class people on busy terraces, sharing the wine and toasting their comfort. The nurse probably lives in Purmerend if she is lucky.[1]

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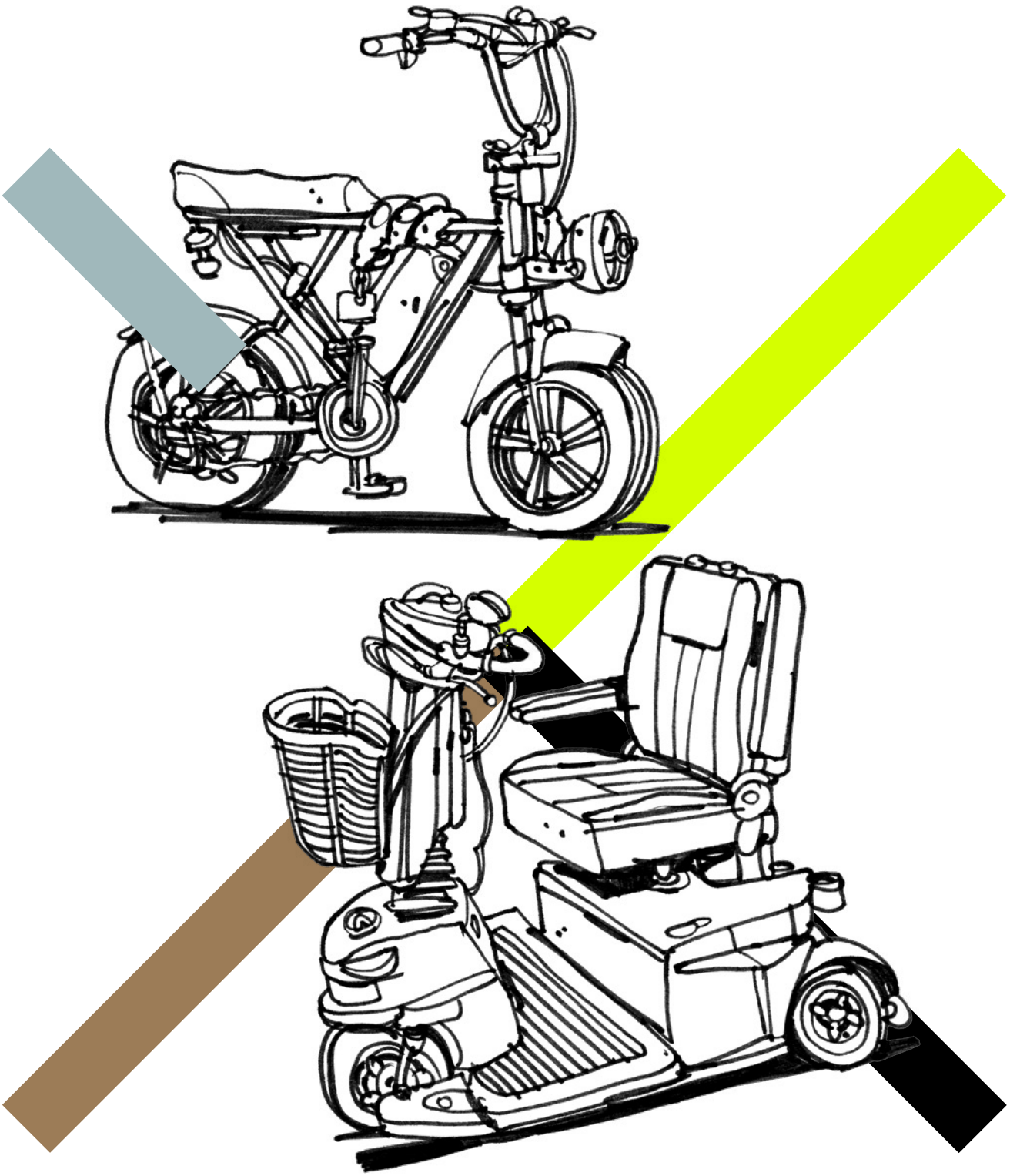
Endnotes

1 Pumerend is a small town just outside of Amsterdam, over the past decades a great deal of the population of Amsterdam was forced to move to places like Purmerend because they could not afford to live in the capital anymore.

The Long Essays



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Site-specific Performances and Community Activation: Participative Theatre in Florence beyond Overtourism and Gentrification

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Abstract

The presence of site-specific theatre companies in the gentrified and overtouristic city-centre of Florence (Italy) as a form of counter-gentrification and of re-discovery of public spaces for the community is a phenomenon related to the last twenty years. This essay focuses on two specific case studies, i.e. the two local cultural associations and theatre companies Cantiere Obraz and Genius Loci Performance. On the one hand, Cantiere Obraz is rooted in the Florentine area of Oltrarno and focuses its practices on public spaces, especially green urban areas, involving teenagers and young adults. On the other side of the river Arno, the site-specific projects of Genius Loci Performance aim at rediscovering public architectures in a social perspective through workshops and immersive performances. This study benefits from the interviews conducted with the directors of both theater companies and with some of the performers of Genius Loci Performance.

Introduction

In this essay the presence of site-specific theatre companies in the gentrified and overtouristic city-centre of Florence (Italy) is analyzed as a form of counter-gentrification and re-discovery of public spaces for the community through two specific case studies, which are the two local cultural associations and theatre companies *Cantiere Obraz* and *Genius Loci Performance*. Both based in the centre of Florence, Cantiere Obraz and Genius Loci Performance share the common goal of stimulating social awareness and collective memory in tourism-oriented, gentrified, forgotten, and re-qualified urban areas through site-specific performative practices, directly involving the inhabitants of Florence.

Both site-specific and participatory performance are rooted in the history of theatre itself, as Richard Schechner well explains in *Ritual Theater*, underlining the ritual, collective and therefore political potential of drama, from the Greek tragedy until the present[1]:

> *Many think that because participation is new to them, it is new to the theatre. These same people automatically participate in responsive readings at church, flag saluting, standing for the national anthem at sporting matches, cheering, and agreeing to umpire a few innings of sandlot baseball. In fact, participation in theatrical events is a very old, widespread practice. (Schechner 1988, 8)*

Coming to the post-modern (and post-dramatic) era, crucial have been the studies of Hans-Thies Lehmann (1999, 2004), who analyzed the works of some of the most important early authors of the so-called *terzo teatro*[2], such as Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook, Augusto Boal, *The Living Theater*, *La Mama*, and Eugenio Barba's *Odin Teatret*, as well as agit-prop actions of the 1960s and 1970s. He located these experiments of non-conventional performative actions in an artistic and socio-political framework. Florian Malzacher (2023) extended the research field to contemporary theatre. Together with Schechner (1988), Rancière (2009) and Bishop (2020), Lehmann and Malzacher underline the central role of the audience members, directly involved in the performative actions, and of the identity of the performers[3], more often than not non-professional actors[4]. The second deciding element emerging from the needs of post-dramatic performance is the perception and the experience of space.

> *"[…] Where then is the new political theatre? It is not absent. Today I can say that I have seen it, and that we have participated in it. The new political theatre, as Julian Beck cried out in the last scene of […] Paradise Now, is in the street." (Malina 2012, 289)*

We read in the *Piscator Notebook* of Judith Malina, where the efficacy of the performance and the specificity of the performative space immediately appear as intertwined. For this reason, in analyzing the nature of site-specific immersive performance, it is impossible to overlook the works of contemporary architectural and philosophical theorists concerned with the experiencing and perceiving of urban spaces, such as Henri Lefebvre (1974, 2009) and Bryan Lawson (2001), who suggest that environments, urban environments in particular, are perceived and 'constructed' in a variety of ways besides concretely and architectonically, according to social, personal, time-related, cultural, political and geographical factors: "Whatever space and time mean, place and occasion mean more. For space in the image of man is place and time in the image of man is occasion" (Aldo Van Eyck in Lawson 2001, 23). Drawing upon these references, the city of Florence, including its performing artists and its multifaceted identity, is the main object of investigation here.

> *Cities die in three ways: when they are destroyed by a ruthless enemy (like Carthage, which was razed to the ground by Rome in 146 B.C.); when a foreign people forcibly settles there, chasing away the natives and their gods (like Tenochtitlán, the capital of the Aztecs, which the Spanish conquistadors destroyed in 1521 and then built Mexico City on its ruins); or, finally, when the inhabitants lose their memory of themselves (Settis 2014, 10)*

Thus wrote the art historian Salvatore Settis in his book *Se Venezia muore* [translation:*'If Venice Dies'],* which is dedicated to the discouraging destiny of the Italian city of Venice, nowadays almost literally submerged by tourism and gentrification and progressively abandoned by its inhabitants. Like Venice, the city of Florence, and especially its city center, is now undergoing a social, ethnographic, and housing crisis due to gentrification and overtourism (Celata & Romano 2022).[5] Gentrification has been affecting Florence since at least the middle of the last century; however, this phenomenon, together with overtourism, has greatly intensified over the past

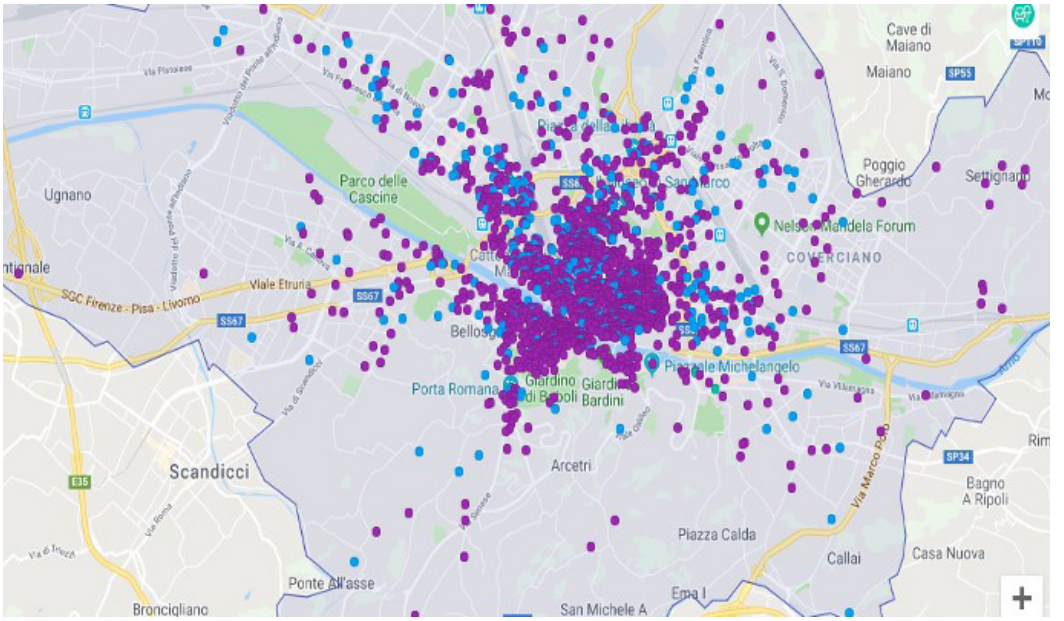

Figure 1: *Airbnb offer in the Municipality of Florence in 2019*
(Bortolotti 2019, 3)

two decades. According to data from the Florentine Municipal Archive, the city center has lost 30,000 residents since 1999[6], while the number of short-time rentals has massively increased, despite the *Testo Unico sul Turismo* of Tuscany (Regional Law 86/2016), recently updated, which forbids short-time rentals in the UNESCO-area of town. In the meanwhile, locals have started to protest and many associations and groups have been created which oppose gentrification and the decline of the city center, such as *Ma noi quando si dorme* (area around the church of S. Ambrogio) and the *Referendum Salviamo Firenze* (a political project connected to the Italian left, particularly with *Firenze Progetto Comune*, and the mayoral candidate Antonella Bundu).[7]

The center of Florence is UNESCO-World heritage and home to numerous international cultural institutions[8], whilst at the same time being a former working-class area. Regarding the status quo of performance and theatre companies in the city, the center has a long theatrical tradition that finds its roots in the 17th century with the Teatro Niccolini (1650), the Teatro della Pergola (1656) in the so-called *Centro Storico*, and the Teatro Goldoni (1807) in the area of Oltrarno. All of them are still active venues of the so-called 'classical theatre'. Concerning the recent history of participative theatre, the 'Cradle of the Renaissance', even without being one of the most relevant Italian venues in terms of contemporary art and performance, is the host of at least three historical and nationally renowned organizations, which opened the gates for many small local initiatives: (1) the *Chille de*

la Balanza, which is the Neapolitan theatre company founded by Claudio Ascoli and Sissi Abbondanza in 1998 in the former Florentine Psychiatric Hospital of San Salvi.[9] (2) The site-specific *Florentine Compagnia delle Seggiole*, founded in 1999 by Fabio Baronti. (3) The *Compagnia Virgilio Sieni*, which housed the internationally renowned dance company founded in 1992 by Virgilio Sieni at the Goldonetta in the Oltrarno district.

Involving the Florentine community has always played a crucial role for *Chille de la Balanza*, who, with the project *San Salvi Città Aperta* (San Salvi Open City), through theatre aim to socially (re)integrate and connect the history of the psychiatric hospital and its former patients, together with their illnesses and the related prejudices, following the model of the poet and dramatist Giuliano Scabia (1935-2021).[10] Today, Chille de la Balanza, who recently celebrated its 50th anniversary with a public event held at Florence's town hall, Palazzo Vecchio[11], is a nationally relevant theatre venue which offers drama and playwriting classes for children and adults, organises conferences, festivals (*Spacciamo Culture*) and lectures. Among the numerous performances that Chille de la Balanza regularly presents throughout the year, all related to human rights, some are specifically dedicated to the area of San Salvi. In particular, *C'era una volta il manicomio...* [translation: *'Once upon a time, there was a mental hospital'*] leads the audience through the area of the former mental hospital, while Claudio Ascoli tells anecdotes about its history and reads excerpts from letters and diaries of former patients, and *Siete venuti a trovarmi* [translation: *'Have you come to visit me?'*], which is a one-hour monologue based on the real life of a patient.

Compagnia delle Seggiole was also created with the aim to bring theatre out of the theatres, by presenting site-specific performances based on pieces dedicated to the city of Florence and its history, such as Niccolò Machiavelli's *Mandragola* (1518) and *Principe* (1513). After the first successes, Fabio Baronti and his company started 'animating' Florentine venues, such as the Teatro della Pergola, the Charterhouse in Galluzzo, and the Military Geographic Institute, by enacting their history on site.[12] The Compagnia Virgilio Sieni, instead, is famous for its events choreographed by Virgilio Sieni and performed by non-professional local artists chosen among the students from *The School of Gesture*[13], which often involve works of art of the Florentine Renaissance.

Under these circumstances it is extremely interesting to analyze the two case-studies of *Cantiere Obraz* and *Genius Loci Performance*, which are working hand in hand with the Florentine municipality in two different areas of the city center, respectively (A) *Quartiere*, or *'District 1, 3 and 4'*[14]

(Cantiere Obraz) and (B) '*Quartiere 1, 2 and 5*'[15] (Genius Loci Performance), and with different methods and backgrounds. It is interesting to observe that both organizations define themselves as a permanent learning- and research group and that they focus their theatre on the body and the fight against the 'memory loss' of the Florentine community.

Cantiere Obraz: A Performative Reservoir in Oltrarno

Cantiere Obraz is a theatre company founded in 2008 by Nikolay Karpov and Maria Shmaevich, with a strong focus on theatre training, following Vsevolod Meyerhold's approach of Biomechanics (1922) and the playful and experimental approach of Anatoly Vasiliev, who is still a teacher at Cantiere Obraz's Summer Schools. Cantiere Obraz has been in residence at the Teatro del Cestello since 2010, offering theatre classes[16] to approximately a hundred pupils aged 5 to 99.[17] The Teatro del Cestello as venue was founded at the beginning of the twentieth century and is known for its tradition of vernacular prose, as the theatre of the Florentine working-class. In fact, the 'Cestello' is situated in Piazza del Cestello, in the heart of the area of San Frediano in Oltrarno, the most important working-class district of the city center[18], which is now suffering the progressive dismantling of its community life[19] as a result of increasing gentrification. The theatre,

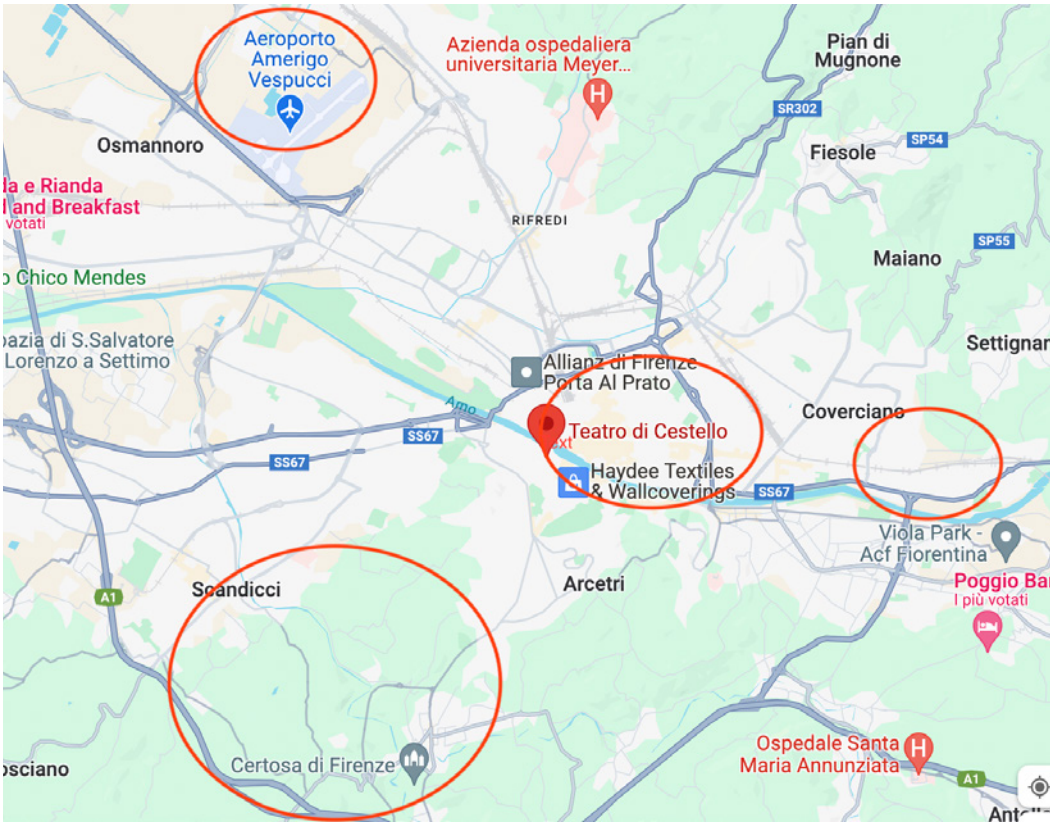

Figure 2: *Performing areas of Cantiere Obraz in Florence.*

together with the public library, the Biblioteca Pietro Thouar, located in Piazza Tasso, can be considered as the most important cultural institution for the community of Oltrarno, which is now multi-ethnic, extremely temporary – considering the number of students and tourists among the inhabitants -– and progressively ageing, like the rest of the city; the average age of the Florentine population (approximately 400,000 inhabitants) is 48 (ISTAT 2022). As Alessandra Comanducci, director, teacher, and actress from the association, explained in our recent conversation[20], the area of San Frediano is still alive because of the children who live there: "There are still children here, there are mothers, and they fight for a livable area". In fact, the Amici dei Nidiaci, born from a group of parents and residents who have been fighting to keep the public garden Giardino dei Nidiaci[21] open for their children, has been one of the most active social associations in Oltrarno since 2012.

Cantiere Obraz, led by Alessandra Comanducci, Paolo Ciotti, Michela Cioni and Alessandro J. Bianchi, has focused on theatre training and education since 2008, specifically targeting children and teenagers. There are theatre classes in residence at the Teatro del Cestello, and, at the same time, Obraz works in cooperation with several schools [22] in the area of Oltrarno. Crucial in their theatre, together with the physical approach, is the city as *"the*

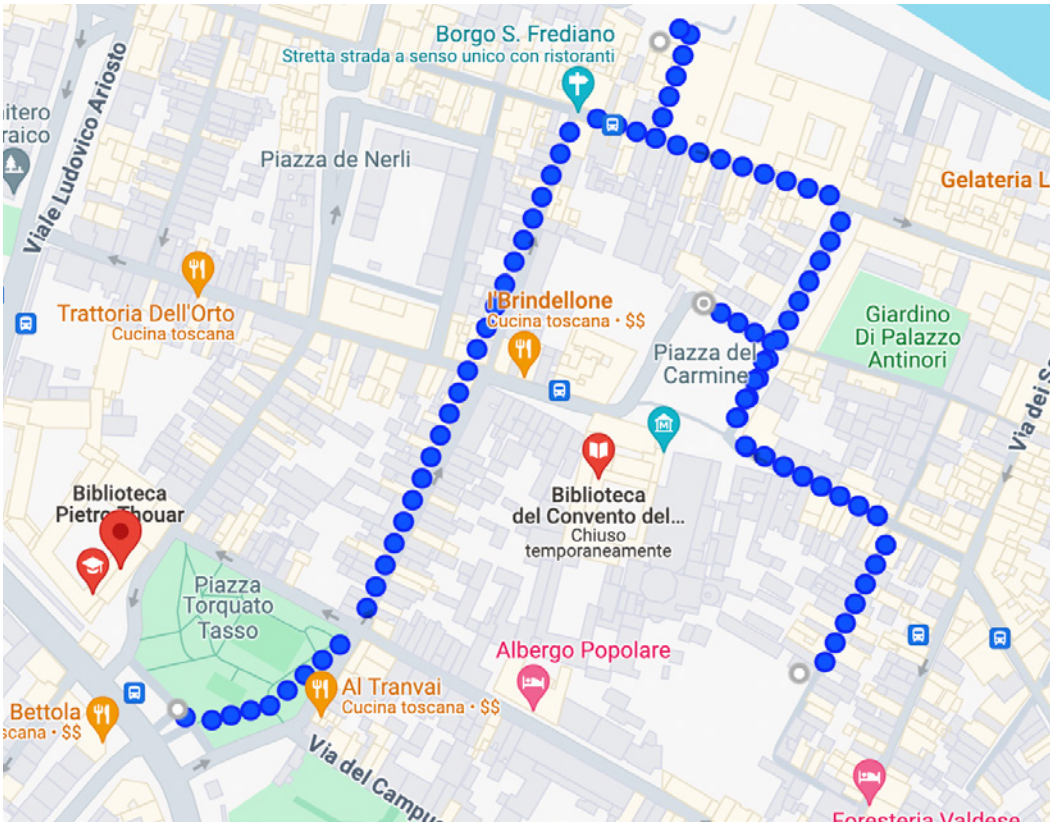

Figure 3: *Performing areas of Cantiere Obraz in Oltrarno.*

greatest invention of mankind" (Wilson 2020), which Comanducci quotes, thus confirming the civic, political role of theatre as necessary and unavoidable: *"We need to win back the political, participative value of the ancient choir. Theatre is first and foremost an assembly"*.[23] Nonetheless, the experience of participative and site-specific performances is quite recent for Cantiere Obraz, since it began because of the Covid-19 Pandemic, *"when theatres were necessarily closed"*. As Comanducci further explains:

> *"Our approach has always been bringing theatre to the people, this is what we are doing. Instead of bringing people into theatres. People who wouldn't go to the theatre, who don't know or even care about it, are the ones we want to reach, and that we find more interesting" (Comanducci).*

The first experiment of participative performance took place after the first 'lock-down', under the sign of Lewis Carroll. *Alice nella Firenze delle meraviglie* [translation: *'Alice in the Florence of Wonders'*] is an itinerant performance made by the characters of *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) through the area of Oltrarno: *"The area of San Frediano was literally invaded by the characters"* (see figure 4). The performance was devised to involve children and teenagers who had been isolated for a long time during the pandemic. At the same time, the performing spots in the neighborhood were chosen not among those which were most beautiful or artistically relevant (for

Figure 4: *Alice nella città delle meraviglie in Piazza del Carmine*, 2019.
Photograph by: Cantiere Obraz.

example *Piazza Pitti*, the *Chiesa del Cestello*, or the Boboli Gardens), but among the most inhabited and used by the locals.

Three of the chosen spots were (1) Piazza del Carmine, an historical, extremely gentrified, and strongly discussed square in the district of Oltrarno, (2) the Giardino dei Nidiaci, and (3) Piazza Tasso, which is both a children's playground and an urban dark spot at the same time[24]. *Alice nella Firenze delle meraviglie* was presented twelve times for twenty-four spectators at a time, without being announced or advertised in advance. Comanducci remembers as particularly relevant the scene performed in Piazza Tasso, inspired by the chapter of *Alice in Wonderland* which takes place in the croquet court of the Queen of Hearts. The square was invaded by 'playing cards' (the Queen's guard) running through the square and interacting with the young audience, with passers-by, as well as with the homeless people who were waiting for the shelter to open. Unexpectedly, the improvised and spontaneous interaction between the audience and the performers was a success, and it lasted longer than initially intended. Two further projects were born after this first experiment: *Il respiro del pubblico* [translation: *'The Audience's Breath'*], and *Urbano fantastico* [translation: *'Fantastic Urban'*]. As Paolo Ciotti, co-director of *Il respiro del pubblico* says in his editor's note:

> *"Nowadays, a participating spectator is necessary for a live performance, not only for his or her power of interrupting the performance itself at any moment, bus as essential frame for a living theatre. It is not only about participating in an art performance, but also about being part of a collective, a ritual, a political moment" (Ciotti).*

Il respiro del pubblico is a project initiated in 2020 and further developed throughout 2021, which recognizes the audience as the focal point of any theatrical action. Cantiere Obraz started to explore, both in theory and practice, the performative world from the perspective of the spectator, organizing: (A) a series of one-to-one performances (2020, 2021)[25]; (B) a class of history of dramaturgy from the point of view of the audience (2021)[26]; (C) a one-to-one 6-hour online performance with fourteen performers (2021); and (D) a series of participative story-telling actions for children (4-11) called *La fantasia va in città* (Fantasy is coming to town, 2021)[27]. Particularly relevant in the context of this essay is *La fantasia va in città*, which involved almost three hundred children in inventing the ending of one to four stories, focusing on the city as protagonist and told by the

actors in a one-to-one performance. The four actors and actresses, without being specifically introduced through any form of advertisement, positioned themselves in four plastic wheels on several of the Oltrarno's playgrounds (for example the Giardino dei Nidiaci, the Giardino dell'Ardiglione and the Giardino degli Allori), waited for the arrival of children and told them the beginning of a tale. The children could then invent and propose to the actor or actress an ending to the tales they had heard[28].

After the pandemic, *Il respiro del pubblico* became a festival, which is now in its third edition (2021-2023) and still expanding. It extends across various Florentine venues, transcending generations, and continues to focus greatly on dramaturgical education. Comanducci elaborates on this, emphasizing its aim to *"reach out to those who are completely unfamiliar with the theatre, while using theatre in order to involve them in moments which are significant for the community*". The festival is structured as follows:

Ciuchi mannari: a forty-hour workshop for teenagers and young adults (14-24 years old) dedicated to theatre criticism and theatre journalism throughout the fall of each year. At the end of the workshop, every young participant writes a review for three performances presented at the festival. The reviews are then published in the nationally renowned blog gufetto.press[29].

Site-specific performances in the Teatro del Cestello, on the streets of Oltrarno and in specific venues, such as the Cimitero degli Allori, Biblioteca Thouar, or the Associazione Progetto Arcobaleno. Among the invited performers, it is worth mentioning: the Apulian company Teatro dei Borgia (invited in every edition with La città dei miti and Antigone), the Florentine UBU-Prize winners Sotterraneo (Shakespearology, 2023), Catalyst (Non vorrei parlar d'amore, 2023), Teatro C'Art (Lei Lear, 2022), and the British-Italian pioneer of the so-called 'auto-teatro' Silvia Mercuriali (Macondo, 2023). Some of the performances, such as Ugo Chiti's three monologues entitled Bottegai (2023, Shop owners), are explicitly dedicated to the area of Oltrarno and tell the story of its inhabitants; some others, such as Cane by Cantiere Obraz (2022, inspired by Michail Bulgakov's Heart of a Dog) or Antigone by Teatro dei Borgia (2023, performed at the Cimitero degli Allori cemetery), are immersive events which connect past and present, fiction and reality. As said, and according to the numbers below, the festival is evolving and growing:

	Ciuchi Mannari	Lectures	Performances	Audience
2021	13 teenagers + 1 guest	40 hours / 11 teachers	7 (X 12)	460
2022	13 teenagers + 2 guest	40 hours / 18 teachers, dramatists, theatre critics	8 (X 10)	520
2023	15 teenagers + 2 guest	40 hours / 11 teachers, dramatists, theatre critics	8 (X 9)	680

Figure 5: *Table of Cantiere Obraz's projects 2021-2023*[30].

Beginning in 2022, another project, *Urbano Fantastico*, has been developed in parallel to the Festival. This project, which is dedicated to the city of Florence, has the specific aim of bringing fantasy into public spaces, following the path of previous experiences, such as *Alice* and *La fantasia va in città*. Part of the project is the series of four performances or immersive walks entitled *Fiorentini Fantastici* (2023, Fantastic Florentines) dedicated to four famous Florentines: the architect Giuseppe Poggi (1811-1901), planner of the current shape of the center of Florence; Antonio Meucci (1808-1889), best known for developing the first prototype of a telephone; the cinema-pioneer Filoteo Alberini (1865-1937), and the astrophysicist Margherita Hack (1922-2013)[31]. Even more relevant for the history of Florence is the second part of this project, called *Naturesimo* (Figure 6)[32]: In open contrast with the so-called Anthropocene, which is affecting the environment and the future of mankind as well, '*naturesimo*' literally means 'the Age of Nature' (the word does not exist in Italian and was made up by Cantiere Obraz, editor's note). In this way, Nature reassumes the role of the protagonist, even within urban spaces. The project was undertaken together with Gaia Bigiotti, researcher in biology at the *Centro di Ricerca Agricoltura e Ambiente*, and involves a series of lectures and performances dedicated to the re-acknowledgement of nature and public spaces in both urban and suburban areas. Indeed, with *Naturesimo,* Cantiere Obraz took its idea of site-specific performance far outside the city center and was able to involve the five biggest areas of Florence, choosing as venues both iconic places of natural beauty, such as the Garden of the Medicean Villa of *la Petraia* in the northern outskirts of town, and abandoned urban green spaces, such as the area around Peretola Airport or the public garden of Villa Rusciano in the southern part of town, wich is continuously under threat of closure. *Naturesimo* has already had two editions and the third is already in preparation. Both the editions of 2022 and 2023 had as focus a hidden presence inside the Florentine landscape: Florence's six monumental trees (officially collected) and their (forgotten) history. The 2022

edition consisted of six lectures-performances with the following topics: (1) *Plants and Cities*, (2) *Plants and Sex*, (3) *Plants and Migration*, (4) *Plants and Civil Engagement*, (5) *Plants and Theatre*, (6) *Plants and Magic*, and a conference called *Humans/Art/Nature*. The 2023 edition consisted of six lectures-performances with the following topics: (1) *Plants and Beauty*, (2) *Plants and Cities*, (3) *Plants and Sex*, (4) *Plants and Humans*, (5) *Plants and Water*, (6) *Plants and Migration*. Comanducci recalls how one aspect turned out to be particularly relevant and effective in the effort of involving the municipality in the performances:

> *"On numerous occasions, locals gathered to listen and unexpectedly joined the lectures, initiating a dialogue with the audience. For example, in Mantignano (a rural area in the northern outskirts of Florence, which has a monumental oak tree, editor's note), an elderly man approached us and began to tell us the true story of the monumental oak, drawing from his childhood memories. This was an important moment of connection among locals and potential tourists and between Florentines and their territory" (Comanducci).*

Similarly, in its second edition (2023), *Plants and Magic* sparked conversations among the audience on *Plants and War*: Indeed, during the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict the world biggest seeds-bank, the National Gene Bank of Plants in Ukraine was destroyed[33].

> *"Sometimes locals came around, or even wrote on our social networks, to criticise what we were doing, for example the idea of presenting an open-air performance in the abandoned area around the airport. Even in that case, we knew we were doing something useful, which directly involved them: To criticize also means to consider something as important."*

A final project that is worth mentioning, which connects *Naturesimo* to Cantiere Obraz's commitment to dramaturgical training for young people, is *Aria e i bambini cavalieri* (Aria and the children Knights, 2022)[34]. Here the young spectators (and *de facto* protagonists) of the performance find out they are the *Knights of the Round Table*. Their quest is to save the planet from the terrible grey fog which is slowly engulfing it. To achieve their goal, the children must interact with magical creatures and guides,

Figure 6: *Naturesimo at the Medicean Villa of La Petraia, Plants and Beauty:* Florence 2023. Photograph by: Cantiere Obraz.

such as Merlin, King Arthur, witches and fairies. At the end, they will find out that the magical element they have been looking for is clean, fresh air.

Genius Loci Performance: Ritual Theatre in Florentine Public Space

Differently from Cantiere Obraz, *Genius Loci Performance* is an emerging theatre company and cultural association. The director and playwright Francesco Gori and the percussionist and table player Francesco Gerardi rediscovered the physical and ritual approach of Schechner and Grotowski and made it the key to interact with specific urban spaces. The association was officially founded as a cultural association in 2022, although its co-founders had already been working together in site-specific performative projects in Florence since 2018.

This second case study is symmetrical and somehow complementary to the experience of Cantiere Obraz, starting from the method of bringing theatre to the people. In fact, it is possible to say that this company was born to perform outside of theatres and proper dramatic spaces: One of the main goals of Genius Loci Performance, as its Latin name already indicates[35], is indeed to take people (audience and performers) to specific urban and

natural places to re-generate and re-qualify them. So far, the most relevant venues for the performances have been (1) the *Manifattura Tabacchi*, which had been a tobacco factory until 1999 and is now re-qualified as a cultural centre in the northern section of town; (2) the *Parco del Mensola*, which is an almost abandoned green lung in the southern area of Rovezzano, Florence; and (3) *Grotta all'Onda*, which is a prehistoric cavern on the Apuan Alps. Although Genius Loci Performance has performed throughout the whole of the Florentine and Tuscan area, it may be said that it is deeply connected to a specific Florentine venue: The Murate Art District (MAD), which was built in 1340 to be a monastery and later served as a jail until 1984. The building has now been re-qualified as a public art space in the heart of Florence. The MAD is located in the area of the Sant'Ambrogio market, on the opposite site of the river Arno from the Teatro del Cestello. Additionally, for this reason, Genius Loci and Obraz can be considered as two complementary poles in the Florentine cultural offer regarding site-specific performances. The area of Sant'Ambrogio is in very close proximity to the heart of the Historic Centre (Piazza Santa Croce, Piazza del Duomo, and Piazza della Signoria are a ten-minute walk away). The area is suffering from overtourism, gentrification and the progressive substitution of retail shops by tourism-oriented restaurants and food stores, together with the invasion of temporary house rentals. But on the other hand, it keeps its identity and its peculiarities: for example, both Florence's Synagogue[36] and the Mosque[37] are located in this area, it is still populated by locals, which are being served by two large elementary schools. This is where Gori and Gherardi have been holding their weekly workshops over the past five years.[38] Taking forward the parallel analysis of Cantiere Obraz and Genius Loci Performance, it is interesting to observe

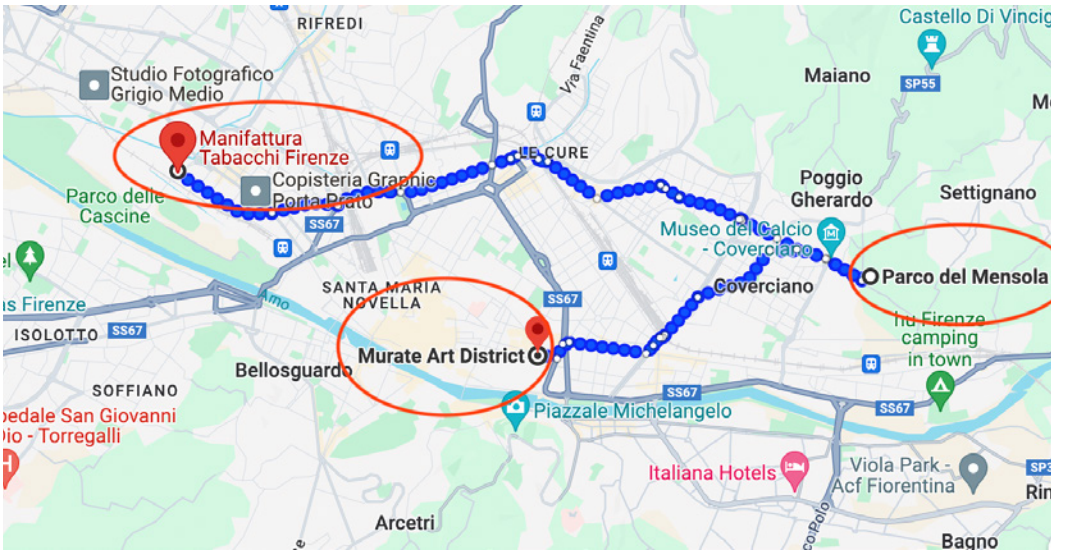

Figure 7: Performing area of Genius Loci Performance.

how both companies focus on training, but with different targets and *modus operandi*. The theatre of Genius Loci Performance is always participatory, since all its actions are the result of long-term performative workshops, or of a training group (normally six months long) called *Laboratorio di Teatro Rituale* [translation: *'Ritual Theatre Lab'*], which is open to the community and for non-professional actors and actresses/dancers to explore the ritual and binding potential of theatre.

The *Laboratorio* is addressed to participants aged 18-70 years old, ranging from proficient performers and dancers to absolute beginners. There is only one training group per year[39], under the direction of Gori and Gherardi, who aim to construct a site-specific and immersive performance to be presented in the summer, where the trained performers are a collective of 'conscious dancers and citizens', ready to involve the audience and make it part of a choral ritual, dedicated to a specific topic, or ancient myth. Bringing back theatre into the society as a civil and political practice, charged with the values and of the social function that it had in ancient times, is the main purpose of the collective, who aims to combine self- and body-awareness and social awareness in urban and extra-urban public spaces. This is the meaning of *Teatro Rituale* [translation: *'ritual theatre'*], the name given by Genius Loci Performances to describe its own productions, which often are reenactments inspired by Greek tragedy[40], such as the legend of Pentheus[41], son of the Queen of the Maenads Agave, who died after refusing Dyonisus, which is the referring point of *Penteo Un rito iniziatico* (2019). As Francesco Gori explains:[42]

> *"In ancient times, every year men and women, both free citizens and slaves, flocked to Athens from all parts of Greece to celebrate Demeter, the Mother Earth, goddess of fertility and nature. Through this practice they affirmed their belonging to the community both of human beings and of nature. The ceremony began in the centre of the city and culminated in nature, with a procession in honour of Dionysus, the god of vegetation, rebirth, and transformation". (Gori)*

The Eleusinian Mysteries are instead the inspiration for Mysteries, Mysteries 2.0 and Mysteries 3.0: An immersive, site-specific performance in the rooms and former prison cells[43] of the MAD, which leads the audience and the performers through an initiation journey through the underworld, aimed at the discovery of the self, of the individual's relationship with death, and of hidden areas of the Florentine public space. As Gori explains to the

audience in the short introduction to *Mysteries*: *"These are the last words you will hear"*. Very characteristic of the works of Genius Loci Performance is indeed the almost complete absence of spoken text[44]. As usual in rituals, discovery and disclosure are mainly achieved through the body and through the power of music (acoustic choir and percussions) performed live by Francesco Gherardi, the performers, as well as the audience. This is also the leading principle underlying *Body Revolution!* (Figure 8), an ecstatic dance in the yet to be restored areas of the Manifattura Tabacchi.
The site-specific performance of 2023, *Snake Dance. Un rituale per il pianeta* (Figure 9), was inspired by *A Lecture on Serpent Ritual* (1939) by Aby Warburg and from the Rain Dance of the Hopi Indians, and was performed in the recently re-qualified, and still abandoned, green area of the Parco del Mensola in the southern outskirts of Florence.

The number of participants to the annual training lab has been constantly increasing since 2019, from 15 to 60 in 2024, considering the break of 2020-2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 8: *Body Revolution at Manifattura Tabacchi*, 2022. Photograph by: Genius Loci Performance.

Figure 9: *Snake Dance at Parco del Mensola*, 2023. Photograph by: Genius Loci Performance.

	Ritual theatre performance	N. of performers	N. of participants (audience)
2019	*Penteo. Un rito iniziatico*	15	600[45]
2021	*Mysteries*[46]	25	60 (15 X 4)[47]
2022	*Body Revolution!*	35	450
2023	*Snake Dance. Una danza per il pianeta*	40	600
2024	*Le Baccanti alle Cascine*	60	Premiere in June 2024

Figure 10: *Table of Genius Loci Performance's projects and performers 2019-2024.*[48]

The project of interviewing the participants of the training lab and filming the trainings of Genius Loci Performance commenced in November 2023 and will be carried out throughout the upcoming season. So far, fifteen performers have been interviewed. The performers were asked to answer to the following questions, either with a written text (email or private message), in person (the interviews have been recorded) or by sending an audio fragment to the author:

1. *What does Genius Loci Performance mean to you? Why are you participating to the Laboratorio?* Feel free to answer with a text, a poem, a song or even an image.
2. *Which areas of the city do you live the most?*
3. *Has it changed after becoming a performer of the Laboratorio?*
4. *How do you live the Florentine city-centre?*
5. *How would you describe your group of performers?*

The participants to the survey have been pseudnonymized; they will appear with their first and last initials: LS, MM, MR, DT, FL, CC. Not all of them have given permission for their answers to be published.

The interviews show that in most cases the interest in Genius Loci Performance and the choice to become a performer have been aroused after assisting to a performance as a spectator. A few performers also underline the role of word of mouth. In both cases, it is interesting to notice the importance of direct experience. Furthermore, all the participants describe the *Laboratorio* as a nourishing experience, both at the personal and collective levels, as well as a playful experience. Some describe it as a hotbed of freedom of expression: *"As individual, as dancer, as mother, as citizen"*, says LS. MM and MR, on the other hand, underline the importance of proximity, of spatial and physical connection in a society that does not offer space and time for genuine sharing and gathering. MR explains:

> *"I moved to Florence in 2019 to study. Through the Laboratorio I have the chance of meeting people that I wouldn't get to know otherwise: everyone has his or her own very special story and path of life. Here everyone is special. We have different ages, different educations, and jobs, but a very strong energy flows through the room and what we share is intense" (MR).*

She also points out, that after becoming a participant of the *Laboratorio*, she started observing tourists *"as human beings, as real faces, real people: How may faces must I have seen only this year!"*. MM underlines the ability of the *Laboratorio* to encourage the coexistence of differences, of 'creating beauty' (an expression that occurred in many interviews) and teaching care. Many of the fifteen interviewees agree that the *Laboratorio* is a civil community and that taking part in it has changed their perception of the city itself.[49] LS speaks of a *"political seed to create an open, poetic, conscious and revolutionary community"*. FL tells us about his previous experience as 'classical, prose' actor and about becoming a performer of Genius Loci Performance for *"personal and civic reasons",* to have a real impact on the Florentine context. CC, instead, would not describe the *Laboratorio* as a community, but rather as a "*group of citizens who has learned a new language, which is transversal and non-judgmental"*. DT, who comes from Apulia, but has been living in Florence for many years, describes the Tuscan capital as a vibrating cultural centre, and the possibility of experiencing it through Genius Loci Performance as a further privilege. It is important to note how almost all the interviewed participants, even the native Florentines, describe the city center as an area with a high living and cultural potential, even though all of them chose to live in other Florentine districts. The empirical study that follows from the observations presented in this essay, will be developed and updated in the following year as part of a broader study about Florentine site-specific performances between 2000 and 2024. Further investigating will include interviewing:

1. The participants to workshops and annual theatre classes of Cantiere Obraz;
2. The audience of Cantiere Obraz's festivals;
3. The participants to workshops and theatre classes of Genius Loci Performance;
4. The audience of Genius Loci Performance' events.

Conclusions

The current results show two different approaches, which lead to interesting outcomes. On the one hand, Cantiere Obraz has been able to become a gathering point and a point of reference for locals, using Teatro del Cestello as residence, but also getting involved with activities in public and municipal spaces, such as elementary schools. On the other hand, Genius Loci Performance is bringing Florentines (meaning non-tourist inhabitants of Florence) to the city-center, and it is promoting public urban spaces

as artistic and social gathering areas, where the identity of the places is involved in the process.

In both cases, participatory and site-specific performance are the key to develop a new perception of the urban space, as an aspect that shows how these practices meet a specific need for the community, as well as social and historical re-acknowledgement of spaces in the central and suburban areas of Florence. Whilst engaging with re-acknowledgment, they also encourage the development of new, transcultural and transgenerational networks and forms of community and social interaction.

"[...] participatory and site-specific performance are the key to develop a new perception of the urban space."

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Endnotes

1 It is with Schechner's *Dyonisus in '69* (1969) that the contemporary performance emancipated itself from dance and theatre.

2 The so-called *terzo teatro* (third theatre) is a theatre field born in the second half of the 20th Century, based on the physical and social engagement of its participants. The actors of *terzo teatro* were often non-professional performers. The name *'terzo teatro'* was first used by the Italian actor and director Eugenio Barba in his *Manifesto del Terzo Teatro* in 1976 (Barba 1996, 174). Among the numerous relevant companies of *terzo teatro*: *Odin Teatret* (Italy/Denmark), *Living Theatre* (USA), *Teatro Nucleo* (Argentina/Italy), *Théâtre du Soleil* (France).

3 Richard Schechner recognizes in what he calls 'professionalism' a limit in the free experience of theatre as a collective ritual practice (Schechner 1988, 9).

4 The Berlin-based theatre collective Rimini Protokoll will call 'experts' (Rimini Protokoll 2012), giving the non-professional acting members of their performances the authority of whom is directly involved in the reality on which the performance is based. Rimini Protokoll, active in Germany since 1999, are one of the most important references of this study, especially with their works *100% City*, the *Cargo*-Series and *The Walks*, which focus on the interaction between the audience and urban spaces. rimini-protokoll.de/website/de/projects

5 The study of Celata and Romano is dedicated to Venice and Bologna.

6 According to the recent survey by Franco Bortolotti, chief researcher of IRES (Istituto Ricerche Economiche e Sociali), the prices of real estate in the city centre varies from 4700 to 5750 euro/sm (average 4900), compared to the 2800-4650 (average 3600, where the highest values are referred to the peripheral area of the Centro Storico) of the rest of Florence (Bortolotti 2019, 4).

7 A political project connected to the Italian left, particularly with *Firenze Progetto Comune*, and the mayoral candidate Antonella Bundu. For more information, see https://www.antonellabundu.it/.

8 The British Institute, the Kunsthistorisches Institut Florenz (Max-Plank-Institut), Villa Romana and the Institut Français are the most famous.

9 Active between 1898 and 1998. Following the Italian Mental Health Act (Legge Basaglia) of 1978, Psychiatric Hospitals have sincer been dismantled.

10 Giuliano Scabia, inventor of the sculpture Marco Cavallo and pioneer of the so-called 'pathological theatre' in Italy, together with the psychiatrist Franco Basaglia, was directly involved with Chille de la Balanza and took part in numerous events in San Salvi, such as the Festival Spacciamo Culture and the presentation of the book *Pazzi di libertà. Il Teatro dei Chille a 40 anni dalla legge Basaglia* in 2018.

11 For more information, see chille.it/chille-50/. Eliana Martinelli recently published *Stages of memory. Strategie per la rigenerazione dell'ex manicomio di San Salvi a Firenze*, a study on San Salvi and Chille de la Balanza as a social and architectural experiment.

12 For more information, see lacompagniadelleseggiole.it/la-compagnia-delle-seggiole/

13 For more information, see virgiliosieni.it/scuola-sul-gesto-generale/

14 Districts 1, 3 and 4 of the City of Florence, which include Oltrarno and Isolotto, in the North-West of Florence.

15 Districts 1, 2 and 5, which include Centro Storico (the historic city centre), Campo di Marte and Coverciano, in the South-East of Florence.

16 Since 2015 it also hosts the Summer Schools of Advanced Training in 'Theatre-School' held by Anatoly Vasilie'v.

17 Kids, teenagers, young, young advanced (60% of the pupils), adults, adults advanced, special trainings.

18 At the beginning of the 20th century the area of Oltrarno, overpopulated, with 23 factories, was the first working-class area of town. Particularly relevant was the "second fusion iron foundry", known as the Pignone Foundry, built in 1842.

19 Many small shops, grocery stores and newsagents have been closing, especially since the turn of the century, and most of the commercial activities are now restaurants, pubs and Airbnbs. See: Conte,

Rossella. “San Frediano, un altro negozio storico tira giù il bandone”, in *La Nazione*, 5.10.2019; Gori, Giulio. “Il grande silenzio di borgo San Frediano. Nell’ex via più «cool» crescono solo ristoranti e affitti per stranieri”, in *Corriere Fiorentino*, 23.02.2017.

20 Interview with Alessandra Comanducci of 13th November 2023, at the end of the latest edition of the Festival *Il Respiro del Pubblico,* curated by Cantiere Obraz.

21 The Giardino dei Nidiaci now partially borders with luxury rental apartments.

22 Cantiere Obraz cooperates with the following schools around Oltrarno: Middle School ARTIGIANELLI (since 2015, 20 pupils/year, 36 pupils in 2023); Elementary School ISTITUTO COMPRENSIVO OLTRARNO (2021, 96 pupils); Elementary School CAIROLI (since 2023, 100 pupils. Confirmed for 2024). Data collected by Cantiere Obraz.

23 Alessandra Comanducci's ethic and aesthetic values and point of view follow the tradition of the Brechtian *Episches Theater* and find support and confirmation in recent writings and works, for example those by the artist and director of NT-Gent, Milo Rau, such as *The General Assembly* (2017), *Why Theater?* (2021) or *Die Rückerhoberung der Zukunft* (2023). Here, the choral assembly power of performance is analyzed and promoted through the content of theatre pieces, through the actorial technique, and through the identity of the performers themselves, who often are chosen by the director because of their personal experiences.

24 Piazza Tasso, seat of the public library Biblioteca Pietro Thouar and of the public homeless shelter, is renowned in the neighbourhood both for its playground and for being the heroin market of Oltrarno.

25 *Azione artistica per spettatore solo*: 50 participants in 2020, 230 participants in 2021.

26 *Storia del teatro dal punto di vista dello spettatore*, 8 meetings for 10 participants each.

27 8 performances for 280 spectators.

28 A Facebook page was created for *La fantasia a in città*, which remained as a reference for Cantiere Obraz's children-tailored performances in Oltrarno until 2022. facebook.com/lafantasiavaincitta/about

29 For more information, see gufetto.press/articoli/gufetto-scuola/il-respiro-del-pubblico-21-cantiere-obraz-le-recensioni-della-scuola-di-critica-teatrale/; https://gufetto.press/articoli/gufetto-scuola/il-respiro-del-pubblico-22-cantiere-obraz-le-recensioni-della-scuola-di-critica-teatrale/ ; gufetto.press/articoli/gufetto-scuola/il-respiro-del-pubblico-23-cantiere-obraz-le-recensioni-della-scuola-di-critica-teatrale/

30 The data have been collected by Camilla Pieri of Cantiere Obraz.

31 The first edition of *Fiorentini Fantastici* welcomed circa 150 spectators.

32 For more information, see cantiereobraz.it/naturesimo/

33 For more information, see science.org/doi/10.1126/science.add4088

34 5 performances for 130 spectators.

35 ‘Genius Loci’ means the intrinsic identity of a place.

36 Completed in 1882 and recently restored twice: in 1950, after World War II, and in 1966 after the last flood, which submerged the Florentine city-centre in November 1966.

37 The centre of Florence still does not have a proper Mosque. The building rented in Piazza dei Ciompi by the Muslim community in 2008 will soon be dismantled and a temporary religious centre, again in Piazza dei Ciompi, should be available for the Muslim community after the summer of 2024.

38 In 2022 the 6-months’ workshop took place at Manifattura Tabacchi.

39 Usually meeting every week from January to June of each year.

40 Concerning the ritual function of theatre, it is worth mentioning Richard Schechner’s studies (see bibliography), which offer a historical and actual scientific perspective.

41 Inspired by Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (8 CE) and Euripides’ *Bacchae* (405 BC), of which Pentheus is the main protagonist.

42 The quotes refer to the interview between the author and Francesco Gori on 23rd November 2023.

43 The cells are not usually accessible.

44 Every performance is introduced by a brief presentation by Francesco Gori, who explains the mythological and/or theoretical background of the work.

45 4 performances at Murate Art District (MAD) and 1 at the *MythosLogos 2019* Festival of Lerici.

46 *Mysteries* is now in its third edition, *Mysteries 3.0* (2023).

47 One-to-one performance.

48 The data have been collected by Genius Loci Performance.

49 Concerning this aspect, it is extremely interesting to underline that most of the performers had had the experience of living in another city: almost 50% are not Florentine, while almost a 50% studied abroad and came back to Florence.

Stadtschmerz: Stories of Loss and Guilt in Times of Gentrification

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Abstract

This essay detects a genre of non-fiction, which it coins as *Stadtschmerz*. In this genre, middle class residents who experience alienation due to gentrification turn this experience into stories of loss and guilt (for being the target group of gentrification). This essay explores four canonical texts of Stadtschmerz from the mid-19th century to the present; the authors explore the gentrifying city as *flâneurs* and report on their findings in a feuilleton. As such, the essay shows through expressing Stadtschmerz the middle-class attempts to cope with the making of the middle-class city. In this way, Stadtschmerz neutralizes the positionality of the writer and his readership within processes of gentrification. Furthermore, it offers readers voyeurism into the lives of the displaced lower classes. Lastly, Stadtschmerz processes middle-class anxiety amid gentrification. A deconstructive analysis of Stadtschmerz tells us that the experience of gentrification is above all a hot topic for the middle-class itself.

Introduction

> *"The story started with love. A love that blossomed in a sky-scraper during this weekend, when we saw a perfect city, on days of perfect light." (van Veelen 2022, 11).*

In his 2022 bestseller *Rotterdam, Een ode aan inefficiëntie* [translation: *'Rotterdam, a tribute to inefficiency'*] journalist and writer Arjen van Veelen recounts how he fell in love with his hometown of Rotterdam after having been away for decades. Early morning, while the sun light beamed into the AirBnB rental on the 25th floor of a luxurious skyscraper, he and his wife slept the sleep of the innocents, he writes. The windows of the all-glass apartment offered a view of the stunning skyline of Rotterdam (the Netherlands), of a new city. During that weekend, they noticed that Rotterdam had become hip (13). They were amazed by the sight of new skyscrapers, museums, theaters, food halls, walking promenades, clubs and cruise ships (15). Soon after, they bought a double ground floor apartment with a garden in a former working-class inner-city neighborhood (21-22).

Van Veelen decided that his next book would cover a successful city: the rich and poor, progressive and conservative, people of all colors living together. He decided to become a *flâneur* like the poet Charles Baudelaire, who wandered the streets of 19th-century Paris (26) and published his observations of city life as feuilletons in daily or weekly newspapers, as van Veelen would do as well. While strolling, he wanted to observe how the city was changed since his year of birth in 1980 (26). Somewhere along the way, however, his view of Rotterdam lost its gloss. Now, five years later, he writes that if he would go back to that morning in the glass apartment, he could not wake them up without telling them what he had seen saw these past years (16):

> *"My gaze would now search between the towers for the facades of the working-class neighborhood that was still there at the time but has now disappeared. I would hear the sound of windows being smashed, the roar of police helicopters. I would tell those two that their window offered a great view of the latest migration stream: An internal migration, in which the less fortunate residents move out of the gates, to make way for well-off people with rolling suitcases – people like myself now" (van Veelen, 16).*

The story ends with feelings of loss and guilt. Feelings grown out of the experience of gentrification – in this essay defined as *"the transformation of working-class or vacant areas of central cities into middle-class and/or commercial areas"* (Hochstenbach & Verlaan 2022, 439).

I argue that this type of story belongs to a genre that I coin as *Stadtschmerz*: *middle class residents who due to processes of gentrification experience alienation from the city they live in and turn their experience into stories of loss and guilt.* On the one hand, these writers envision a break from the urban past through expressions of sorrow for a lost city, most often accompanied by appeals to a nostalgic urban past, including a previous raw and rough city culture, before the city became safer, cleaner and more efficient. Recent research has dubbed this latter urban development as the rise of the "*smooth city"* (Boer 2023), which severely limits the potential for urban experiment, democracy and emancipation. On the other hand, these writers feel discomfort, even sometimes guilt, for their own position within these processes as they are the target group for gentrification urban strategies[1]. The city is being transformed to their 'authentic' taste (Zukin 2009), meaning broad sidewalks, green squares, coffee bars, bistro's, museums, theaters, luxurious lofts, and so on. To serve their middle-class taste, lower classes are displaced. The experience of alienation stems from this ambiguity of Stadtschmerz; one consumes gentrification, and simultaneously one feels loss and guilt over gentrification . However, new expanding research emphasizes that displacement means more than an event of economic exclusion; it entails also the experience or understanding of *"loss of place"* (Shaw & Hagemans 2015), *"un-homing"* (Elliot-Cooper, Hubbard & Lees 2020), *"slow violence"* (Kern 2022) and *"symbolic displacement"* (Atkinson 2015) over a longer period of time. Within this broader definition of displacement, the Stadtschmerz experience of alienation is studied.

This essay explores four canonical texts of Stadtschmerz, arranged chronologically from Baudelaire's mid-19th century Paris to van Veelen's Rotterdam, in which the authors explore the gentrifying city as *flâneurs*. Writing on Baudelaire, philosopher Walter Benjamin described the flâneur as an urban spectator *"who traversed the city absently, as it were, lost in thought or worry."* (Benjamin 2023, 69). The absentmindedness of the flâneur generated the joy of watching city life go by while participating in it. From this strolling position, the revealing presentation of the big city stems, like in Baudelaire's *Spleen de Paris* (1869). The gaze of the flâneur, according to Benjamin, was the gaze of an alienated man, who wandered on the margins of the bourgeois class, as well as of the growing destitution of the modern industrial city (Baudelaire 1869, 170). In reference to Benjamin,

“[...] This type of story belongs to a genre that I coin as Stadtschmerz: middle class residents who due to processes of gentrification experience alienation from the city they live in and turn their experience into stories of loss and guilt.”

Matthew Beaumont argues in *The Walker, on Finding and Losing Yourself in the Modern City* (2020) that the pavement position of the flâneur is most favorable in the attempt to understand the contradictions of modern metropolitan life. He characterizes the experience of the various walkers he examines, from Edgar Allen Poe to Virgina Woolf, in terms of *"not belonging"* (Beaumont 2020, 19). The walker's absentmindedness is one of *"concentration in distraction"*, he writes (8). Or as Van Veelen puts it: *"the mission [was] to withdraw from all the rushing efficiency and in this way to tread on the soul"* (van Veelen 2022, 26).

Yet, we should not fetishize this popular urban figure. All examined authors here possess the privilege of money, time, and social entitlement to stroll the streets and to publish their findings. Beaumont rightly points (Beaumont 2020, 16) to Lauren Elkin who argued in *The Flâneuse, Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London* that *"if we tunnel back, we find there always was a flâneuse passing Baudelaire in the street"* (Elkin 2016, 11). Nevertheless, Beaumont refers (Beaumont 2020,16) to Erika Diane Rappaport who noted that for a bourgeois lady the freedom to wander alone through the city streets was extremely limited, not in the least by social conventions (Rappaport 2000, 7). Moreover, all studied middle-class male flâneurs express Stadtschmerz from a *white* male perspective, while we know people of color wandered the streets of European cities for ages, as Mark Ponte showed for mid-17th century Amsterdam (Ponte 2018). Van Veelen struggles explicitly with his whiteness. When in a documentary the writer Malique Mohamud calls out the *"rich white liberals"* who *"colonize"* the city through gentrification, Van Veelen gets upset (Van Veelen 2022, 57). He defends himself by claiming he comes from a poor socio-economic background: *"In the time of the East India Company, my ancestors [fishermen] were half-slaves"* (66). He sees himself as a class migrant (16), yet, he also has to acknowledge that certain gentrification policies in Rotterdam are racist (49) and wonders if he has *"status anxiety"* (60). Eventually he concludes that *"money rules the city"* (70) and points the finger at highly educated people, people like himself, according to whose wishes the city is gentrified (68-69).

First and foremost, this essay shows that through expressing Stadtschmerz the middle class attempts to cope with the making of the middle-class city. It demonstrates that feelings of loss and guilt are mediated through feuilletons of flânerie by and for the middle class. In this way, Stadtschmerz neutralizes the positionality of the writer and his readership within processes of gentrification. Secondly, it offers its readers unregulated voyeurism into the lives of those whose houses are torn down and

cannot consume the luxurious gastronomy and other products of the gentrifying city. Thirdly, Stadtschmerz processes middle-class anxiety amid gentrification, i.e. the fear of falling and of being deemed inauthentic. A deconstructive analysis of Stadtschmerz tells us that the experience of gentrification is above all a hot topic for the middle-class itself.

In the second section, poet Charles Baudelaire's experience of the state ordered destruction and rebuilding of mid-19th-century Paris will be scrutinized. The following section will investigate the observations of Dutch journalist and writer Marie Joseph Brusse who, in 1910s Rotterdam, reports on the demolition of a notorious Red Light maritime district, which was replaced by a newly built boulevard, a grand post office and a prominent city hall. The fourth section will delve into the memory of journalist and poet Jean d'Osta of bygone Brussels before the so-called 'Brussellisation' took hold of the city in its 1950s modernist urban planning scheme. In the fifth section we will arrive at Arjen van Veelen. But before we move to the primary sources, we first need to turn our attention to the concept of *Stadtschmerz* itself.

The Concept of Stadtschmerz

The concept of Stadtschmerz stems from the German term *Weltschmerz*, which literally means *'world-pain'*. Reportedly coined by the German author Jean Paul Richter in his pessimistic novel Selina (Richter, 1829), Weltschmerz *"signifies a mood of weariness or sadness about life arising from the acute awareness of evil and suffering"* (Breisser 2016, 1). From the early 18th-century use of the term for the mood of the Romantic poet, it became a public state of mind over the century, associated with melancholy and pessimism that arose from discontent with the contrast between physical reality and one's mental world, with the inadequacy of the world at large (Brittanica 2024). A variant of Weltschmerz is *'spleen'* – a term derived from the English word for the organ that at that time was linked to secreting 'bile' associated to melancholy. It denotes the *'suffering of the time'*, as famously cultivated by Baudelaire. Stadtschmerz refers to the suffering of the time, of the pain of the world around the us, but then specifically the suffering of the city due to processes of gentrification that causes feeling of loss and guilt, and the need for a story to process these, such as the famous French poet's *Le Spleen de Paris*.

The conceptualization of the Stadtschmerz feeling of loss builds on the theory of urban nostalgia, most notably, on the contemporary literature analysis by Tamar Katz. Expanding on the interpretation of nostalgia as the product of modernization (Boym 2001) – a longing for the time before

modern industrial capitalism, a pastoral yearning for stable, rural society – Katz argues that while nostalgia in the city is similarly accompanied by a rhetoric of loss and longing for authenticity, it is not based on a construct of consensus by a homogenous group. Instead, urban nostalgia is characterized by conflict through *"imagining lost communities as arenas of visible class and ethnic tensions"*, which has come to signify authenticity in the late twentieth century city, *"even when it is recast as a more palatable version of benign conflict"* (Katz 2010, 814; 810-815). As in the academic literature on the flaneur, also here, the social tensions of the modern city take center stage. The study of Stadtschmerz adds two layers to this understanding. First, its looks at the positionality of the examined authors within these tensions, which sheds light on the external as well as the internal struggles or ambiguities within city life. Whereas nostalgia could be seen as "history without guilt" (Kammen 1993, 688), the concept of Stadtschmerz rather understands the mobilization of history as a way to mediate middle class guilt. Secondly, while Katz briefly mentions gentrification as one of the drivers behind this late 20th-century upsurge of urban nostalgia (Katz 2010, 813), Stadtschmerz focuses explicitly on gentrification processes to historicize urban nostalgia, which brings another understanding of what loss and a longing authenticity signifies within this rhetoric.

Indeed, research shows how positions within gentrification are being legitimized by the mobilization of authenticity, or to be more specific, the idea of a loss of authenticity. Japonica Brown-Saracino shows that gentrifiers are often attracted to the historicity of space (Brown-Saracino 2009) or, to turn it around, marketeers, real estate agencies, and governments market authenticity for the sale of gentrification. Sharon Zukin demonstrates how protesters mobilize authenticity against gentrification processes, as long-time residents claim a position of seniority over newcomers (Zukin 2009). Stadtschmerz adds another position to this research; it focuses on middle-class residents who are not directly affected by, nor play a primary active role in gentrification, yet do *feel* alienated as the city is being remade for them.

Whereas urban sociologists and social geographers like Brown-Saracino and Zukin deal with the mobilization of history within gentrification, historians are slow to tackle the subject. Historian Suleiman Osman stresses the importance of historical research on gentrification, since gentrification is *"a phenomenon uniquely invested in history"* (Osman 2016, 216).[2] Osman, therefore, encourages scholars *"to examine the 'time' of gentrification with the same impressive depth that they have its 'space'"* (Osman 2016). The concept of Stadtschmerz aims to answer this call by

“Indeed, research shows how positions within gentrification are being legitimized by the mobilization of authenticity, or to be more specific, the idea of a loss of authenticity.”

shifting focus to history within gentrification; to the mobilization of history by residents; to the long history of Stadtschmerz, from 19th-century Paris up to present-day Rotterdam; and to the theory of history, especially the construct of historical time. It is based on the conviction that time is of as much importance as space when it comes to the lived experience of gentrification.

Stadtschmerz stipulates that a loss of physical space implies a loss of time. We could explain these intricate feelings of loss through the theory of modern historical time by historian Reinhart Koselleck. Due to the radical transformations of everyday life at the end of the eighteenth century – not in the least brought forth by the French Revolution – Europeans no longer could expect, Kosseleck argued, to live a life like their parents before them. Epitomized by the modern idea of progress, an unbridgeable gap was felt between, what he called, *"space of experience"* and *"horizon of expectation"* (Koselleck 1985, 269, 271). The future was no longer bound to the past, or so it felt. Furthermore, progress became a prerequisite for people to distinguish them as a class or group to catch up, overtake others, or to maintain a frontrunner position. "*Since then there has existed and does exist the consciousness of living in a transitional period that graduates the difference between experience and expectation in distinct temporal phases.*" (282). If we extrapolate Koselleck's theory of the modern advent of historical time to gentrification, we may ask ourselves how time is affected exactly amid the lived experience of gentrification, and perhaps more importantly: By whom? Who is understood to keep up with (the progression of) time amid processes of gentrification? Who is falling behind the times? For some of our white male middle-class writers of Stadtschmerz, the answer to these questions legitimizes the demolition of working-class neighborhoods and, in doing so, soften their feelings of class guilt.

Following a sense of loss of authenticity and loss of time, Stadtschmerz implies a loss of memory. Gentrification includes a process of urban amnesia. Contemporary redevelopment of industrial districts and buildings, for example, are more often than not aimed at another class that labored in those spaces, Wallace and Wright argue (Wallace & Wright 2017, 45). While the working class and minority historical experience of the postindustrial city is celebrated, sanitized and marginalized, *"[t]he idealized bourgeois urban figure who can move smoothly through, between and beyond the palimpsest of urban space is fetishized, emblematic of an amnesia city, which seeks to forget the foundational legacies of empire and industry, – slavery, environmental contamination, exploitation and industrial disease."* (45). The mobilization of industrial nostalgia within gentrification processes

provides the middle classes with a sense of connection to civic heritage, a sense of authenticity (47). The flâneur of Stadtschmerz is the mediator of such memory loss and longing for authenticity through its (hi)stories of loss and guilt.

Gentrification, moreover, affects the collective memory. Certain buildings, streets, squares hold meaning for a whole community. Historian Pierre Nora calls such 'sites of memory' or *lieux de mémoire*. Sites that tell a (hi)story and, accordingly, represent the community's identity. This function could be extended to a personal level, as, for instance, for Van Veelen. On when learning that his grandfather had a shop around the corner from where he just bought a house, he feels more at home than initially in the city that changed so drastically since he had moved away as an adolescent. This brings us to the question: When a certain space as a mnemonic device is demolished, what happens to that memory, and, consequently to one's identity, that is, sense of self? How to commemorate time without space?

The transformation of urban space, thus, may similarly affect the experience of time; when space is demolished, time is on the loose and in its slipstream, we find authenticity and memory. The question arises then, how to cope with these feelings of loss of time amid gentrification processes? For the answer we turn to Paul Ricoeur's philosophy of history in *Time and Narrative*; we must order all diverse experiences, from events to feelings, and integrating the relevant characters in a story with a beginning, middle and end. The technique of *"emplotment"*, he called this (Ricoeur 1984, 21). In doing so, time is caught in a clear and comprehensible story, understandable for the narrator but also, through using cultural scripts, for the listener or reader. For Ricoeur, historical time was narrated time.

The authors on Stadtschmerz, I argue, all used their writings in this fashion: to grasp the experienced loss of space and time due to gentrification processes they wrote (a) history. It functions on three levels: (1) to order the chaos of demolition, (2) to remember who they once were or would like to have been, and (3), perhaps more importantly, to claim a position in the present and for the future. To write on Stadtschmerz is to cope with the middle-class intricate experiences of loss and guilt.

In particular, feeling guilty of gentrification as one consumes it, is a driving force of the morality behind Stadtschmerz. According to Maurizio Lazzarato, a morality of guilt governs modern-day men. In *'The Making of the Indebted Man'*, Lazzarato shows how the debtor-creditor relationship shapes neoliberal society at every level. It is, he argues, a product of power relations between owners of capital and non-owners of capital. No distinction, therefore, exists between workers and the unemployed,

consumers and producers, working and non-working populations, retirees and welfare recipients. *"Everyone is a 'debtor' accountable to and guilty before capital"* (Lazzarato 2012, 7). This economy of debt is internalized – much like the original sin – by a 'morality of guilt' (164). He theoretically traces this idea back to Friedrich Nietzsche's '*On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings'*, who showed that the central concept of Morality, *Schuld* [translation: *'guilt'*], originated from the very concrete notion of *Schulden* [translation: *'debts'*]. The making of the indebted man is optimized, Lazzarato writes, when individuals have to pay off their debt not in actual money, but rather in conduct, attitudes, ways of behaving (104). So, media, business leaders and politicians did not find, according to Lazzarato, the causes for the financial crisis of 2008 in fiscal and monetary policies but in the excessive demands of the governed (especially the Southern Europeans) and in the corruption of the elites (8-9). In the context of gentrification, this morality of guilt is often explicitly felt not so much by the policy maker or the real estate entrepreneur per se, but by the so-called gentrifier, the one who buys that overpriced house in a working-class district and sips his oat cappuccino in that specialty coffee bar that replaced a former neighborhood café. Stadtschmerz offers the gentrifier a way to pay off his debt.

If we view Stadtschmerz through Lazzarato's lens of the making of the indebted man and through Koselleck's lens of the modern birth of historical time, we could argue that to honor one's debt and keep up with time is a perquisite to live in a gentrified city. For those 'aspiring class' mobilization (Currid-Halkett 2017), one way to secure one's position is through lifestyle, or, to say it in the words of Pierre Bourdieu, to distinguish oneself through cultural capital (Bourdieu1984, 152). Bourdieu identified three levels of taste: (1) *highbrow* (e.g. intellectual), (2) *lowbrow* (e.g. popular) and (3) *middlebrow* culture. The middlebrow culture, practiced by the petty bourgeois *"embraces aspects of both high and low culture but does not feel as at ease with high culture as the dominant class"* (220). The process of distinction arises from showing tastes usually in opposition to others. Part of a 'good taste' (152) is a disdain for a bad taste, or ironically judging one's own consumption. As Van Veelen does, when he tries to defend going to his favorite restaurant that was criticized as classic gentrification (Van Veelen, 2022, 57), since it was the only predominantly white-serving new bar in his superdiverse neighborhood. *"We mixed quite nicely, so please give me my hipster beer with shades of grapefruit"* (58). He reckons later on that his feelings of discomfort, of wanting to defend his particular gastronomic consumption, probably arises from his middles class status anxiety (60). Out of the fear of falling and of being deemed inauthentic, the middles class distinguishes themselves

“It is in the eyes of the other, one sees one’s riches and the other one’s poverty or *vice versa*. And it is gentrification that brought them to see each other more closely and clearly than before, when the poor were sealed off in the old medieval slums.”

to stay ahead by constant maneuvers between highbrow and lowbrow culture, expressions of disdain for certain tastes and ironic reflections on their own display of taste. This practice is central to Stadtschmerz, wherein the discomfort and struggles of middlebrow taste is meandered.

The examined feuilleton flânerie targets predominantly the middle (and high) class. Van Veelen's writings on Rotterdam were published, firstly, on the journalistic platform *De Correspondent*, whose own reader survey concluded that its reaches only a limited part of the population, namely *"highly educated and progressive"* (Rosen 2017), and, secondly, in *NRC* (called *NRC Handelsblad* until 2022). In the 1910s, Brusse wrote his feuilleton *Onder de menschen* [translation: *'Among the people'*] for the predecessor of *NRC,* that was the bourgeois liberal *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* (*NRC*). D'Osta's feuilleton was titled Notre *Bruxelles oublié* [translation: *'Our forgotten Brussels'*] and published in the French-speaking Belgium *Le Soir*, which profiles itself as a progressive quality newspaper (D'Osta 1977, 47). Baudelaire wrote arguably one of the first feuilleton flânerie of Stadtschmerz. His prose poems of Paris' spleen first appeared separately in *La Presse* in 1862, followed by a further six, titled *Le Spleen de Paris*, in *Le Figaro* magazine two years later.

Since 1836, the feuilleton had become a popular urban genre sold on the streets in the new mass circulation dailies, like *La Presse.* It targeted a more general audience, not in the least the upcoming bourgeois. Just like nowadays, it implied a steadier income for authors than simply publishing a book. One could write shorter fictional works specifically for serial publications and the bulk of the material could always be published later (Gubbins 2023,135), like all examined authors did with their feuilletons. The feuilleton was usually published on loose sheets or the paper's first or center page, cornered off with a heavy black line, wherein the author reflected on city culture from an outsider's view (Berman 147). 'Physiologies' took a central place in the genre; the investigation of a diverse range of urban types, from the dandy to the street vendor. These particular feuilletons, Benjamin claimed, gave people a friendly picture of one another amidst the social tensions of the gentrified city, and, therefore, often a view of one's fellow man so remote from experience (Benjamin 37-39) . Baudelaire's poetic prose of Paris, however, was no pictorial folklore (Benjamin 170). Baudelaire stood on the margins of the bourgeois class and the great city looking in. As he dwells in the fault lines of gentrification, he is not only an observer but a participant and reporter, that is a flâneur on Stadtschmerz. From this position all examined writers here recounted of the rapidly shifting

environment caused by gentrification to which he and his fellow citizens were exposed.

Le Spleen de Paris (1869) by Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867)

Mid-19th-century Paris is a city in turmoil. The liberal and socialist revolutions of 1848 were mercilessly crushed by governmental troops, followed in 1851 by a coup d'état of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte who afterwards proclaimed himself Napoleon III and installed the conservative Second French Empire. Napoleon III commissioned the prefect of the Seine, Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann, to renovate Paris. The renovation entailed a grand-scale demolition of medieval inner-city neighborhoods and their crowded narrow streets. These had to make way for broad boulevards flanked by imposing buildings, for vast squares and parks, fountains and monuments amongst other prestigious bourgeois urban planning. To put it differently: the lower classes had to make way for the middle and higher classes to flaunt their riches on the broad pavements of the boulevards and the terraces of the new cafes under a lush of trees and the novel streetlamps. Benjamin even argued that the broad boulevards had to prevent street barricades – erected during earlier civil rebellions and revolution – and move troops swiftly through the inner-city, from the barracks to the working-class neighborhoods. He called it *"Hausmann's efficiency"* and *"Hausmannisation"*, and according to him, contemporaries dubbed it *L'embellissement stratégique* [translation: *'strategic beautification'*] (Benjamin 174, 175). In this essay, we view it, in line with Neil Smith, as early processes of gentrification, as the making of bourgeois Paris (Smith 33). [3]

This the background against which the poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867 wrote *Le Spleen de Paris*. Posthumously published in 1869 but written between 1859 and 1867, it is a collection of fifty poetic prosaic stories of his encounters and experiences while strolling through Hausmannized Paris. In the book, we observe Stadtschmerz; a sense of alienation due to the radical transformation Paris underwent, which Benjamin claims was felt by most Parisians at that time: "*They felt no longer at home in (...) the inhumane character of the great city"* (Benjamin 174). However, Baudelaire mediated these feelings of loss – and, as we later will see, of guilt – by writing about Stadtschmerz.

In the preface to *Le Spleen de Paris* Baudelaire states that he ideally aims to describe *"our more abstract modern life"* (Baudelaire, 1869, ix) through prose poetry. He copied this technique from *Gaspard de la Nuit* by poet Aloysius Bertrand (1807-1841), who wrote about the *"the old days, so strangely pittoresque"* (x). Baudelaire explains *"it was, above all, out of*

my exploration of huge cities, out of the medley of their innumerable interrelations, that this haunting ideal was born" (x). Marshall Berman argues Baudelaire needed a new language to describe the rise of the modern city or modern city life. He calls him a first modernist (Berman 148, 132-133). This essay rather views the use of the embellished technique as a way to soften the spleen he felt while walking through gentrifying Paris.

This is not to say that modernity is no fitting context to understand *Le Spleen de Paris.* The modern advent of historical time is fundamental to the analysis of Stadtschmerz and is a recurring theme in *Le Spleen de Paris*. The transformed city signifies the modern experience, so distant from the old days, as he tells us in the preface. Besides an experienced rupture in time, another part of this theme is the modern idea of progress. In the prose poem *'The Generous Gambler'* the idea of progress is linked to a new crowded boulevard, understood as the symbol of gentrifying Paris under Hausmann. Here, he meets the devil and follows him to a luxurious subterranean bar, where *they "talked of the universe, of its creation and of its final destruction; of the big idea of the century, that is, the idea of progress and perfectibility, and in general of all forms of human infatuation"* (Baudelaire 1869, 61). The devil reveals that he fervently supports the enlightened scientific development and its inherent idea of progress because it makes mankind believe that he does not exist and that they are indebted to constantly optimize themselves into perfection. It makes up for a perfect playing field in the market for souls. In similar vein, mankind's new obsession *'progress'* took hold of the city. It is arguably one of the core values of gentrification, the idea that a city must optimize itself to keep up with the times through constant redevelopment of the city. Gentrification is therefore often seen as a natural and inevitable process, – a claim Leslie Kern convincingly debunks in her recent *Gentrification is Inevitable and Other Lies* (2016).

In *Le Spleen de Paris* gentrifying Paris is illustrated through the intersection of newly lit places and the 'shady retreats' to which poets and philosophers are attracted, such as public parks visited *"by disappointed ambitions, frustrated inventors, abortive glories, and broken hearts, by all those tumultuous and secret souls still agitated by the last rumblings of the storm, who withdraw as far as possible from the insolent eyes of the gay and the idle."* (Baudelaire 1869, 22). We already learned from the devil that it was Enlightenment that brought mankind this new obsession of progress. We could turn this easily around to claim that backward people cannot keep pace with the progress of the gentrifying city, and, thus, they live in its shadows. Notably, almost nowhere in his stories, we will find an explicit

description of a demolished building or street, rather he put his focus on people, on the interrelations in the modern city. No ruins of buildings, yet mentions are found of ruined people, who cannot keep up with progressive time of gentrification. Like in *'The Old Clown'*, who Baudelaire pitied: *"bent, decrepit, the ruin of a man (...) mute and motionless"* (26), for whom the world no longer cared to come.

Besides the rise of modern historical time, and its intrinsic idea of progress and imagery of ruined faces, another recurring element in writings of Stadtschmerz is the sheer visible gap between the rich and poor in the gentrifying city. In *'The Poor Child's Toy'* a rich boy ignores his own new, magnificent toy and, instead, looks through the iron gate of his immense garden to the toy of a poor child – *"pitifully black and grimy, one of those urchin-pariahs"* (35). He held in his hands a living rat locked in a small chest. Although they are equally captivated by this particular toy, they are divided by class. *"Through the symbolic bars separating two worlds: highroad and mansion"* (36), the class divisions are in plain sight. Like in the public park where Baudelaire watched an orchestra play amid a crowd of bourgeois people:

> *"Here nothing that is not rich and happy; (...) nothing except that rabble over there leaning on the outside enclosure, catching a snatch of music gratis at the wind's pleasure, and gazing at the sparkling splendor within. The reflection of the joys of the rich in the eyes of the poor is always a curious sight" (Baudelaire, 36).*

It is in the eyes of the other, one sees one's riches and the other one's poverty or *vice versa*. And it is gentrification that brought them to see each other more closely and clearly than before, when the poor were sealed off in the old medieval slums. Now, through the modern avenues, the long street vistas, the modern city lights, they are brought out into the open and into the light (Berman 153).

This brings us to the last element of Stadtschmerz we should discern in *Le Spleen de Paris*, namely the embarrassment and guilt of riches that could emerge from interlocking with the eyes of the other, as in *'The Eyes of the Poor'*. Here he sits down with his lover *"in front of a new cafe forming the corner of a new boulevard still littered with rubbish but already displayed proudly its unfinished splendors"* and modern gas light – the modern transition from oil to gas lamps – *"burned with all the ardor of a début"* (Baudelaire 1869, 52). Yet, across the streets he looks into the eyes of a family in rags,

a father of about forty *"with a tired face and greying beard, holding a small boy by the hand and carrying on his arm another little thing, still too weak to walk"*. With absolute admiration they look to the new café.

> *"The eyes of the father said: 'How beautiful it is! How beautiful it is! All the gold of the poor world must have found its way onto those walls.' The eyes of the little boy: 'How beautiful it is! How beautiful it is! But it is a house where only people who are not like us can go.' As for the baby, he was much too fascinated to express anything but joy – utterly stupid and profound." (53).*

Not only does Baudelaire feel touched, he also feels a little ashamed of his luxurious consumption on the brightly lit terrace of the new café. Yet his lover thinks differently: *"Those people are insufferable with their great saucer eyes. Can't you tell the proprietor to send them away?"* (53). This is the reason, he tells her, he hates her today. In the end, it is the boulevard that forces them to deal with their class privilege, which crushes the joy of their romantic rendezvous (Berman 154) . Or as Benjamin states: *"As spleen he shatters the ideal (...) through the ambiguity which is peculiar to the social relations and events of this epoch."* (Benjamin 171) . This essay rather argues the ideal is shattered through his middlebrow taste. He is a consumer on that terrace, not only of fine wine and food, not of the Hausmannian renovation itself. It is in his liking that these boulevards, cafes, street lanterns, terraces, broad pavements are erected. It is his place to shine. To realize this, means that the ideal of his romantic rendezvous is shattered. Love is lost and feelings of loss and guilts take over.

We should not, however, misunderstand these feelings of Stadtschmerz for being anti-modernist or against gentrification. Or that he, as Benjamin thought of Parisians at that time, did not feel at home in Hausmannian Paris. Rather, it seems he truly loves to stroll the Parisian streets. As he writes in the Epilogue: *"Happy of heart I climbed the hill / To contemplate the town in its enormity, / Brothel and hospital, prison, purgatory, hell / (...) Infamous City, I adore you! Courtesans / And bandits, you offer me such joys / The common herd can never understand."* (Baudelaire 1869,108). It appears he needs the ruins of Paris to live for his art. The city is as a muse to him*: "Away, academic muse! I'll have nothing to do with that pedantic old prude. No, I invoke the friendly, lively muse of cities."* (104). Pain and pleasure, ruins and riches collide constantly in the city; within this ambiguity that spirals his spleen, he not so much makes himself at home, as Berman

thought (Berman 45). It seems he constantly tries to make himself at home in the gentrifying city. This constant struggle of mediating a sense of loss and guilt represents the core experience of the writers on Stadtschmerz.

The Life and Death of the Zandstraat Red Light District (1912; 1917) by M.J. Brusse

As a flaneur, journalist M.J. Brusse (1873 - 1941) reported on the demolition of the Zandstraat neighborhood in Rotterdam (the Netherlands) in the 1910s. First published between 1910-1911 in a feuilleton in the liberal newspaper *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* (*NRC*), the fourteen stories were collected in a publication issued by the publishing company of the Brusse family in 1912, the year the demolition began. It was titled: *Het rosse leven en sterven van de Zandstraat – De Rotterdamsche 'Polder' gesloopt* [translation: *'The life and death of the Zandstraat Red Light District – The Rotterdam 'Polder' demolished'* MBK]. While people generally referred to the area as the 'Polder' – i.e., rural space encircled by dykes – it was by no means a rural landscape. This area was infamous for its dance houses, (night) bars, and illegal brothels. It amassed a multitude of people working in its informal economy and visiting it places of amusement, sea farers amongst many others. Historically, the Zandstraat was a neighborhood for migrants of all sorts, including a Jewish community that, as Brusse writes, *"was separate from the Polder vices and customs"* (Brusse, 1917, 68). Housing conditions were notoriously bad, as journalist Louis Schotting and socialist municipal councilor Hendrik Spiekman wrote in *Arm Rotterdam: Hoe het woont! Hoe het leeft!* [translation: *'Poor Rotterdam: How It Is Housed and How It Lives!'*]. They viewed the Zandstraat as the center of poverty, pollution and fornication. The majority of the 170 homes they visited consisted of one room, usually housing entire families in unsanitary spaces. Its overpopulation can be understood within the context of the expansive population growth Rotterdam experienced in the late 19th century, not in the least due to the construction of the ship canal Nieuwe Waterweg in 1869. The city transformed from a merchant town to an industrialized port city, and in its slip stream radical urban planning took hold of the city (Van der Laar 2004). In 1909, the city government decided to demolish the Zandstraat neighborhood and erect in its place a prestigious city hall and a grand boulevard, fitting to the rising bourgeoisie of Rotterdam. The inhabitants had to make way, while no alternative housing was offered. A total of 700 homes and 150 business premises were demolished, resulting in the displacement of 2,400 official residents, – the exact was most probably higher ('Zandstraatbuurt').

Brusse was a well-known journalist, famous for his investigative journalism (novel to the Dutch media at that time) and his reports based on his personal observations that carried with them a great sympathy for people who lived on the margins of society. Since 1903 he wrote the feuilleton *Onder de menschen* [translation: *'Among the people'*], in which he also wrote about the Zandstraat. His book on its demolition became a bestseller, especially after the public-friendly second edition of 1917 accompanied by drawings of acclaimed Dutch artist Kees van Dongen. It reads like a physiology, describing typical residents like sex workers, seafaring customers, petty criminals, factory girls, pimps, police officers. Yet, similarly to Baudelaire, it entailed no idealistic folklore. First and foremost, he wrote about the ambiguities of pleasure and poverty in the Zandstraat Red Light district.

The experience of a rupture in time by gentrification, a key feature of Stadtschmerz, is omnipresent in *Het rosse leven*. In the first chapter 'Zandstraat memory' we read Brusse viewed the Zandstraat in earlier times as *"the most spirited and authentic neighborhood of the city"* (Brusse 1917, 4). It was *"an old love of his, especially because of her fierce temperament, and the generous genuineness that greeted you everywhere you went, when, tired of the boring pretense around it, you sank down the dike into the Polder and knew where you were at"* (3). After the demolition, there is only *"nostalgia"* left among the people, Rotterdammers and foreign seafarers alike; the neighborhood lies *"in ruins with all their soggy memories"* (3). However, Brusse already witnessed earlier decline of the neighborhood with the coming of the 'cold gaslight'. Much like Baudelaire, he uses modern light as an allegory: *"the bar owners and the madams [of sex workers] did not grant each other another evening in the new light"* (5-6). The modern light dispels the charm of the neighborhood: *"The atmosphere was gone, the buzz was gone, and in that sober pale light above dance halls, pubs and little bars [knipjes] you immediately saw how meagerly sad it all actually looked there, and how poignant the faces were"* (6).

Likewise, the idea of progress is prevalent in Brusse's book. We can understand the gentrification of the Zandstraat as part of a bigger urban development, which Brusse called the *"modernizing and so swiftly progressing city"* (8) in the following chapter titled '*The Amputation*'. It is the making of modern middle-class Rotterdam: *"The seat of the daily administration, the Council, the municipal offices, posts and telegraphy, with all their activity, bring a completely different life to it"* (17). With a flair for the dramatic, he calls the demolition an amputation. However, *"[f]ar too many of the diseased organs are cut away for the organism to survive"* (16), since the streets that remain, will be flanked by busy roads filled with traffic,

the music license will be withdrawn, and the buildings that are going to be demolished will be soon left vacant. In other words: The Zandstraat will die. For Brusse, it seems the end of era: *"What a memory of centuries will be taken from the living history of old Rotterdam by the demolition of those two miserable housing blocks!"*. Feelings of loss of time and space are drenched over every page of this work on Stadtschmerz.

In order for time to be caught in a story, the story needs, after the beginning, a middle section to lead the reader to the – here expected demolition – end; or, as Ricoeur explains: *"The temporal aspect characterized by the integration, culmination and closure owing to which the story receives a particular configuration."* (Ricoeur 1984, 22). He begins with his sweet memories of the neighborhood, infused with a language, which we may call 'colonial' in line with what Neil Smith referred to as *"the imagery of wilderness and frontier"* (Smith 1996, preface). Frontier imagery implies the claim that the middle class civilizes land and people, and, in this manner, it is often used to justify gentrification. At first sight, Brusse views the Zandstraat festivities as 'primitive' (Brusse1917, 6) and those working in the informal economy of prostitution and crime almost as *noble savages*: *"So purely sincere in their feeling of sin, so melting in the sweet passion of one's own depravity"* (7). They lived a backward life *"according to their own manners and customs in the heart of our modernizing and so swiftly progressing city"* (8). Brusse compares the residents with *"inlanders"* (14), a *"foreign tribe"*, and the Zandstraat with a *"overseas hamlet, of which the citizens of Rotterdam and of the entire country probably know less than about the lifestyle of the man-eaters in New Guinea, for example, which they can find in the ethnographic manuals"* (13). As an explorer in the colonies, he therefore "*went on new research trips, day and night*". (13). No curiosities or rare specimen did he bring back, instead, his 'loot' was of great importance for the general welfare. His self-proclaimed 'ethnography' and 'ancient urban' investigation (13) would show *"the terrifying slum-maze"* (14) of the Zandstraatbuurt. Much like Danish-American journalist Jacob Riis did in *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Amongst the Tenements of New York* (1890) and Christian social reformer William Booth in *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890). But perhaps more importantly to the reader, it would demonstrate the consequences of the forced distribution of residents over the city for the 'safety and salvation' (Brusse 1917, 14) of Rotterdam. Here, we see no sympathy for the residents, but, first and foremost, for his 'own' people, his fellow bourgeois townsmen. The residents of the Zandstraat are understood – much like the people who live in the colonies in those

days – as backward living people, who cannot keep up with the time in the gentrifying city.

The culmination of Brusse's story begins when he takes a look *"under the surface of the swamp"* (31) that is the Zandstraat. Through a local 'guide' (32), a police detective, he sees beyond the outsiders' gaze and is granted a look inside. The chief constable of police appointed him the guide; he supported Brusse's investigation since he thought that knowing the 'psychology' (30) of the Zandstraat population could prevent crime and prostitution. Brusse also got support from the director of the building police and a doctor of venereal disease, who agreed *"distorted representations can be corrected, and above all it can serve as a warning"* (30). From the moment he takes a look inside, we will find the ambiguity of loss and guilt, the intersections of pain and pleasure, that characterize Stadtschmerz writings. *"I immediately started to see everything differently than when I had just wandered around in the past with eager painter's eyes and a mild sensitivity to the moods of the situation"* (32).

The following chapters deal with the poor fate of 'girls' who were tricked into prostitution by lover boys (Ch. V 39-46), with the petty crime of runaway boys looking for means to simply survive (Ch. VI 47-57), with the dodgy café 'Lindeboom' turned into a hunting scene when Brusse walks in with his guide, and with the evils of the souteneur, the only type for whom Brusse feels little empathy (Ch. VII 58-66). These midsection chapters could be understood as a Baudelarian physiology of the shadowy urban types, but contrary to Baudelaire, Brusse somewhat moralizes the actions of certain types.

Brusse furthers his gaze into the mentalities of the Zandstraatbuurt in the next six chapters that recount a calm Sunday night, on which he met the infamous pub owner, informal brothel-madam and sex worker, Toos. The story of Toos – Brusse sometimes calls her Toosje – is saddening to read. The father of her three children, her (unofficial) husband, who is serving a sentence, lured her into sex work at the age of fourteen when her mother suddenly died and she could not live any longer at home with her alcoholic and abusive father. Her current lover – also a criminal and her souteneur – just got arrested. In the back of the shady bar, Brusse witnesses a child of four in a shakedown bed. Childcare took the child away from Toos, but feeling extremely sad over the arrest of her partner, she went to get her. Whereas the child, Toos tells Brusse, was born in prison, and therefore, properly taken care of, she *"made sure the other two died quickly"* (94). Toos is full of contradictions: the love and care she shows for one child, while she, with seeming nonchalance, states she killed the others; or the love she

feels for the man who forces her to work in prostitution. Why is Toos such an ambiguously moral person? With exceeding empathy, Brusse explains to his gentlemen reader and, simultaneously, points his finger partly to them:

> *"Is it any wonder – you wonder – that such girls become the way they are? When the world from outside the Polder often reveals itself to her in a confidential manner as cruel and monstrous, as doggish as Toosje roughly spoke of, – especially among those so-called gentlemen, who also follow her stealthily and search for her in the dark, poverty-stricken streets in front of her, their depraved debaucheries and their diseased perversions? – When her moral conscience, her natural tenderness is mercilessly chewed, abused and blunted (...)?" (Brusse, 104).*

Contrary to Baudelaire, Brusse reports of no explicit personal shame or guilt. His Stadtschmerz, instead, is infused with great empathy for the lower classes, who try to make something from the little they got. He tries to transport his empathy to the bourgeois readers of the *NRC*, most of them came from the mercantile elite of Rotterdam. Where you are born, determines the opportunities you get in life. In fact, already from the beginning of the book, Brusse targets his readers' class privilege including the women: *"How many of the women, who now often despise her so much, would have risen to that higher level if they had grown up in the same miserable conditions as most prostitutes?"* (4). He even calls out the role gentlemen play in publicly denouncing sex workers, yet frequently visiting them (5). Brusse, moreover, attempts to uncover the deceit of the higher classes in the role they play within gentrification. Like Baudelaire, he questions who is more civilized:

> *"Because were they really so much worse, so much meaner, there in the Zandstraat, where they openly and faithfully peddled their indecency, than in the other, 'neat' neighborhoods of the city?" (3-4).*

In light of this, we should read the first chapters, in which Brusse exoticizes the Zandstraat population who had to make way for progress. His old friend, the artist, Kees Van Dongen called him an *"aristocratic socialist"* (qtd. from Baptiste 2022, 1312) for this reason. Historian Vincent Baptiste instead thought that Brusse wanted *"to express the pure and authentic character*

of people who lived on the margins of society" (Baptiste 2022, 1312). This essay argues that he rather used the entertaining colonial trope to lure in the reader, before he revealed what was under the surface of the swamp: the shattering ambiguities of Stadtschmerz, of which the reader was to some extent even guilty.

The book ends with New Year's Day of 1912. The day before residents masqueraded a funeral procession with ladies in black weeping on a car that drove through the Zandstraat neighborhood. At midnight, the fun was over, the music stopped and within ten minutes, Brusse reports, the streets were cleared by the police (129). The first of January was a day of doom. In front of the windows residents hanged an obituary, which Brusse reprinted in his feuilleton in the NRC: *"Today, after a long and joyful existence, the Zandstraat died"* (132).

Our Forgotten Brussels (1977) by Jean d'Osta

In *Notre Bruxelles oublié* [translated: *'Our forgotten Brussels'*], journalist and poet, Jean d'Osta recalled personal memories combined with memories of his family members of Brussels before the so-called 'Brusselisation', the modernization of the city in the post-war period, or *"the destruction of a city by profit-driven developers and architects"* (Doucet 2022, 106). And even before that period, Brussels experienced large scale urban planning that demolished parts of the city. In the second half the 19th century, inspired by Hausmann's Paris, Brussels set out to erect grand-sweeping vistas, grand boulevards, and Parisian apartment buildings. However, the bourgeoisie of Brussels did not take a great interest in the boulevards or the appartements, many remained living in the affluent suburbs. The building of the megalomanic *Palace of Justice* by architect Joseph Poelaert was considered the climax (Schaepdrijver 1993). At the beginning of the twentieth century another project demolished forty acres of urban space for the construction of a railway connection between Brussels northern and southern stations, straight to the heart of the city. All three urban renewals were deemed a failure by the wider public (Schaepdrijver 1993). Within this long-term historical context of gentrification d'Osta's stories of forgotten Brussels were edited and collected into a volume, published in 1977 under the same title as his feuilleton. Heavy feelings of Stadtschmerz drip from the pages of *Notre Bruxelles oublié*, as the editors write in the preface: *"Each [story] narrated with so much tenderness, poetry, color, so much smiling simplicity, that one can hardly read them without emotion"* (d'Osta 1977, 5).

The book begins with recollections from his childhood in Brussels, such as the memory of the music kiosk at square Brugmann (later called

Marlow), close to his house. The little promenades he took with his mother usually ended there to watch the concert. His mother rented a chair for herself and asked little Jean if he would prefer a chair or an ice cream. He always chose the ice cream and after eating it he would sit on the ground against the knees of his mother. It's a true lieux de memoir, heavily infused with what we may call a reversive Proustian experience of memory; a place recalling a taste and sounds. The kiosk closed, *"[r]ust and melancholy took hold of him"* (37). So, when he was a young teenager, he was allowed to take tram 11 to the kiosk at Schaerbeek. He takes the reader with him on the tram, shows her the difference between the first and second classes, the Sunday crowds going on an excursion, how he sits next to the driver feeling free. Like a Russian doll, d'Osta gives us memory within memory. Within his recollection of taking tram 11 through the city he describes a past memory culture of the Bruxellois, commemorating a soldier from the Great War when passing the place du Congrès: *"The workers a cap, the gentlemen a felt hat during winter, straw in the summer (panama or boater hat). I was entitled to a flat ribbon beret, or a soft, wide-brimmed straw hat, depending on the season"* (37). Here, he gives us an insight into the class society of Bruxelles and to which class he belongs, namely the bourgeoisie. He ends this tale with feelings of loss over the demolished kiosks, and this one in particular. *"But today, after so many years, I cannot see Marlow Square again without feeling nostalgic for its kiosk and its displays from another age. And I wait in vain for the sweet and cacophonous prelude of the violins being tuned"* (37).

Notre Bruxelles oublié, however, goes beyond sweet personal memories of a bygone era. A history of modernization is plotted throughout the text, for instance, the inventions of the telephone (105-110), radio (39-42), television (43-45); and not only happy histories of progress, but also of the pollution of earlier times (56-57). Almost as if to say, modernization also includes good works and Brussels dealt with the rest. Yet, we must say *almost*, since d'Osta criticizes the radical demolition of urban space too.

A fine example is the story of the demolition of the Marollen district in 1866, which was replaced with the Palace of Justice. It reminds us of the history of the Zandstraat area. The district likewise was an old medieval working-class neighborhood of slums with *"a very disreputable state for a long time (...) a sort of ghetto for filles publiques"* (124). Since the 16th century, it was celebrated as picturesque and authentic, and it was razed to the ground for the bourgeois state institutions. D'Osta, however, seems to be far removed from picturesque labels. *"Yes: Those who were going to be expelled from their old Marolle by the Rotten Architect were very poor people, who undoubtedly cared very little about the 'picturesque' aspects of*

their neighborhood, sacrificed to this majestic, colossal, overwhelming Justice". To speak of the loss of the authentic seems to be a privilege of the bourgeois, not for those residents who lived under conditions of sheer poverty. D'Osta was rather concerned with the loss of memory: *"This working-class district that Poelaert's grandiose work wiped off the map and which no one has remembered anymore"* (124). He refers to 'a last concrete memory', a letter in the possession of Mr. Jean Copin, the well-known pharmacist-folklorist to which one Joseph Nolot (or Nolet), 12, rue des Sabots, begs for help, in February 1848:

> *"We sleep on straw, without blankets. My wife has been ill for a long time. I had to leave work because of a feeling of trouble in my head. It's a little better now. I could find work again, but I don't have any boots. To buy bread for my children, I sold my only iron pot for cooking soup. But it's already spent. We are all in famine." (d'Osta 1977, 125).*

In one of the last stories, '*The pilgrimages of the Bas-Fondistes'*, we can observe how the demolition of place affects quite synchronically the experience of time. The term pilgrimage has a double meaning here, namely the procession to erect the Maypole. Secondly, it means a pilgrimage to the time before the demolition of the neighborhood in 1955. "*But we talked less about the day's celebration than about memories of gooien taaid that happy time when rue de Schaerbeek and rue Pachéco still existed, when we knew almost all the inhabitants (...) – that already distant time (before 1955!).*" (151). A rupture in time is felt through celebrating the ancient tradition of the planting of the 'Meyboom' at the same spot as always, yet its surroundings changed. It means that the past is closed off as is also attested by an outcry of one of the organizers: *Dân taaid komt nuut nemi wie* [translation: *'Those times will never come again'*] (151). Secondly, in the story of the Meyboom, time is experienced as fleeting, of going too fast, and, consequently, some people cannot catch up. Historical time of progression is running away. *Den taaid lupt te rap weg* [translation: *'Time flies too quickly'*] as the president of the organization says.

The outcries are accompanied by a photo of wreckages; La rue des Denrées and le Marché-du-Parc during the demolition of neighborhood Bas-Fonds in 1956, captioned as follows:*"An immense and deserted promenade now obstructs the panorama that we saw from the Place de Congrès (which was formerly called Place du Panaroma)."* (151). While d'Osta in other stories glosses over demolitions, here, he goes on explicitly criticizing gentrification.

> *"Let us instead think about what 'they' did with the Market Square, the Park and the monumental double staircase of the Place du Congrès, from where we could admire the entire panorama of the lower town: 'they' did make up of five floors of car parks supporting an esplanade that is too high, which hides the panorama, and whose immense surface is so bare and desolate that no one ever walks there. It is therefore not without nostalgia that the Bas-Fondistes evoke the colorful animation of their old district"(D'Osta 1977, 153).*

Through writing a history about Stadtschmerz, D'Osta is able to confer feelings of loss of time amid gentrification processes. Feelings of shame or guilt we do not come across in the book. He is rather pointing the finger to 'they', i.e., those urban planners, politicians, and architects like Poelaert, who demolished his Brussels over and over again. By recounting a genealogy of demolitions, d'Osta seems not only to remember what he and Brussels once were, but he also protests against the wrecking balls of gentrification: *Lest we forget*.

Why do we tend to forget earlier waves of gentrification? Perhaps because the experienced rupture in time, brought forth by gentrification processes, creates a break from the past so vividly, then one only can think in terms of Then & Now, like d'Osta did, when he made the photo book *Bruxelles hier et aujourd'hui* on Brussels before the Brussellisation and afterwards (d'Osta). The past becomes a faraway land; we have to go there, to see it with our own eyes.

Rotterdam, an Ode to Efficiency (2022) by Arjen van Veelen

As his predecessor Brusse at *NRC*, van Veelen plots a story of awakening through book on Rotterdam. In the first two chapters, he recounts his amazement by the urban renewal of Rotterdam when he came back in 2017. Rotterdam suddenly had become hip, *"as if not only I, but also the city had become a class migrant, so that we suddenly fit together wonderfully"* (van Veelen 2022, 16). Together with his partner, pregnant with their first child, he bought a house in former working-class inner-city district. He decided to be *"like Baudelaire, an urban stroller who moved haphazardly and inconspicuously into the noise of the crowd"* (26). Like d'Osta, he attempted to write a history of urban change, similarly moved from personal childhood memories of a city which was changed. Yet, he felt that it was undoubtedly for the better. That Rotterdam – the poorest city of the Netherlands – was finally 'catching up'. In this, we witness again the idea of progress, of urban development as a process of improvement. Without progress, a city falls behind.

Van Veelen begins to explore gentrification. At first, he is rather positive. The radical transformation of the former Red-Light District of Rotterdam, Katendrecht, led by the city government and executed by social housing corporations and a real estate developer, already began in the late 2000s with the campaign *Kaap Jij De Kaap Aan?* [translation: *'Can You Handle The Kaap?'*]. At van Veelen's arrival the gentrification of Katendrecht was in its final stages. The apotheosis was the completion of *'The Box'*, reportedly the most expensive house of the Netherlands. It was a glass box of thousand square meters with ceilings of eleven meters and a total view of the Rotterdam skyline. The real estate developer of The Box told him that she saw herself as the representative of people who do not yet live in Rotterdam. *"There is always some hesitation to talk about the most luxurious market segment, but I also find it great to see that South-Rotterdam has apparently become so attractive that buyers are willing to pay large sums for a house next to a neighborhood that until recently was seen as second-rate"* (31). Van Veelen writes that he thought she had a point. He just bought a house himself on a street that was considered a no-go area by many twenty years ago. He was convinced that 'mixing' a working-class neighborhood with more affluent people would be better than segregation, that investments were better than disinvestments: *"The most expensive house in one of the poorest neighborhoods, why not?"* (32).

It reads like a rhetorical question, since the reader expects – through the emplotment – that Arjen van Veelen will soon uncover what lies beneath the gloss and glitter of gentrified Rotterdam. And so, he does in the next chapter called *'What the postman sees'* on the demolition of the district of Tweebosbuurt, which made headlines worldwide due to a report by the United Nations declaring it a violation of human rights (Rajagopal 2021).

The Tweebosbuurt is close to gentrified Katendrecht. Yet, here, it looked like he walked into *"a 19th century slum"*, with "*boarded up buildings. Rotting window frames. Children playing among the garbage on the street"* (35). He read in the newspaper that better, newer housing would be built and that the residents would be offered alternative housing; perhaps all for the best, he thought. At the hearing of the housing corporation against some 'refusal movers', van Veelen witnessed the enormous crowd of residents protesting against the demolition. There he met resident and postman, Ahmed Abdillahi who invited van Veelen to go with him around town, to show him the bigger picture, and hopefully to motivate him to write critical pieces about Rotterdam. Here the story begins, the story of awakening for van Veelen, of seeing what displacement does to people. Not from reading a newspaper, or from afar, but led by his guide *par excellence* (345).

“By recounting a genealogy of demolitions, d’Osta seems not only to remember what he and Brussels once were, but he also protests against the wrecking balls of gentrification: Lest we forget.”

Together they went into the working-class districts, inside the homes of residents of the Tweebosbuurt, who shared their stories of poverty, racism, discrimination, precarisation and displacement with him. Or about, as he quotes Abdillahi, the authorities *"not fighting poverty but fighting the poor"* (39). At the end of the chapter their bike ride comes to an end, at Katendrecht.

> *"Less than a hundred meters from the broken toilet, the hip world of Katendrecht shone, the terraces looked out over the skyline of the new city, the block tower of De Rotterdam shone in the sun. (...) Ahmed pointed to the terraces full of young people in a setting of post-industrial rawness. 'What do you think that does to me?' He asked rhetorically" (44).*

Here, we find important Stadtschmerz tropes: the fault lines in the gentrified city between the rich and poor, the local guide, who is needed for the middleclass observer as van Veelen and Brusse before him to see the entire picture of gentrification. Processes for which he was to blame. Because he is the target group, he is the gentrifier: *"This city was recreated for people like me"* (69).

Conclusion

All four examined authors wrote stories of loss and guilt in times of gentrification. *A loss of space signifies a loss of time*. The latter explained in terms of a rupture in time, the idea of progress, nostalgia, memory loss. Feelings of guilt over gentrification stem from a middle-class distinction of taste that is said to drive gentrification, from middle class anxiety. Their feuilleton flânerie enables these authors to expose, criticize but also soften the class divisions in the gentrifying city and their position within these. Most of all, this genre processes all of that for its middle-class readers. To read on Stadtschmerz is perhaps similar to serving a penance, after which one could carry on with the ambiguous position of a bourgeois citizen living in a city demolished and reconstructed for your type. Gentrification brings the need for stories to comfort the discomfort of the middle class.

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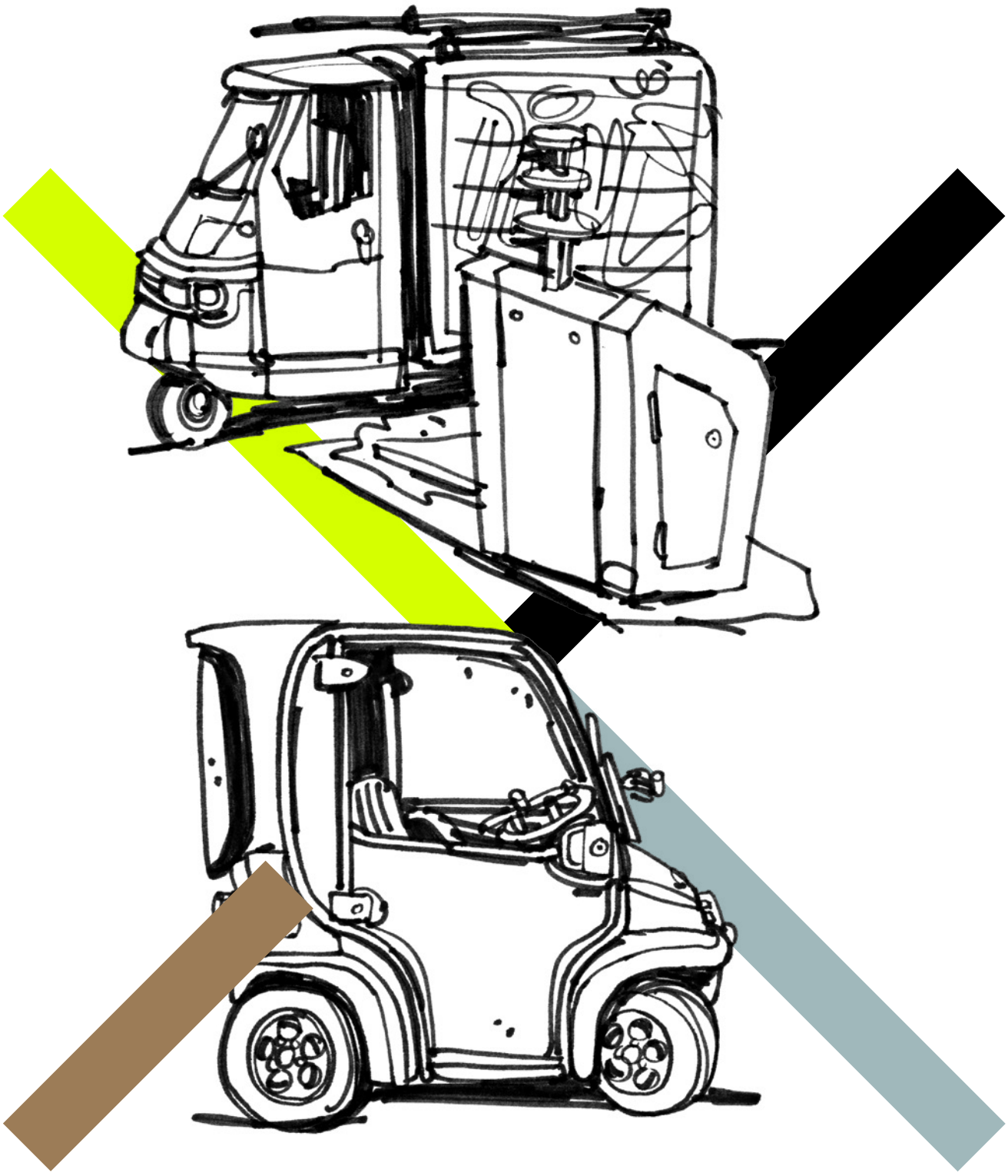
Endnotes

1 Boer is part of the round table conversation on gentrification in this AMJournal issue. Learn more about his insights on the theme in 'The Polylogue' on page 208.

2 For more on Osman's pivotal notions on history and gentrification, you can read the conversation guest editor Tim Verlaan has with the known scholar in 'The Dialogue' on page 8 of this AMJournal edition.

3 For more on the Haussmannization of Paris, and more specifically, the role of photographs and photographers, see the 'Visual Essay' by Sigi Samwel on page 76 of this AMJournal Edition.

The Polylogue



Amsterdam Museum Journal

Issue #2 Summer 2024

Tayfun Balçik

Journalist, historian and activist born in Amsterdam. Balçik is specialized in Turkish history and part of 'The Hague Peace Projects', which aims to improve discours between opposing groups of people. Through knowledge and personal experience, he is vocal about racism and institutional discrimination in the Dutch housing system.

René Boer

Critic, curator and organizer in and beyond the fields of architecture, design, heritage and the arts. He is a founding partner of *Loom* – practice for cultural transformation, and author of *Smooth City*.

Sophia Holst

Architect and researcher, active within the architecture fields of Belgium and the Netherlands. She currently works on the foundations of an independent architecture- and research practice, in which critical urban theory and applied design are interwoven.

Melissa Koutouzis

Housing activist and co-founder of 'Woonprotest'. She also works at the Transnational Institute where her work includes citizen collectives, campaigners, researchers, social movements and local governments working globally on democratization, deprivatization and a just energy transition.

Elaine Michon

Independent literary agent and a member of the residents committee 'Kleine Die'. For over five years, she has been working to keep the garden village in Nieuwendam livable, humane and quirky, despite the demolition plans of the company Ymere. And with success. Michon is also affiliated with 'Woonprotest' and the working group of 'Lokaal FNV Amsterdam'.

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A Polylogue on Deconstructing Gentrification

Amsterdam Museum Journal

In this roundtable, five speakers from various disciplines and perspectives talk about the process of gentrification in Amsterdam. In this engaging polylogue, Tayfun Balçik, René Boer, Sophia Holst, Melissa Koutouzis, and Elaine Michon, reflect on the term 'gentrification' and how it is used, the relationship between gentrification and racism, the political and economic elements of gentrification, and the question of agency and activism.

Issue #2 Summer 2024

Gentrification is Displacement

SH: When talking about gentrification, it is important to talk about the label itself as well. The term gentrification is often used in a hollow way, both overused and misused. I try to avoid using it because we are not getting to the crux of what we want to talk about, which is the effects of gentrification: The creation of unequal urban environments, where not everybody has the same rights to housing or access to the centers of cities. It is important to ask the question: *What happens before these processes become visible?* And then we start to understand that urban planning, urban politics, housing politics, and all these issues on local, urban, regional, and even national levels affect how we live.

RB: The term became hollowed out because it came to stand for neighborhoods being renewed. So, what happened in Amsterdam is that right-wing council members[1], for example, said gentrification is something good because things were going to look nicer. I think we should use the term, but we should emphasize that gentrification is about displacing people and for that reason it is a problematic phenomenon that we should oppose.

So, I would suggest being very clear in defining gentrification. Because what you often see is that gentrification is used for a lot of different things and this broad term is being applied to things that people roughly associate with gentrification. Because what we are actually talking about is the active displacement of lower income groups by higher income groups, as well as the active displacement of businesses that make less money by businesses that make more money.

EM: I prefer not to use terms like gentrification that are general, because my situation is personal. But I do think it is helpful to know how people use it in order to reappropriate it and make it more activistic and talk about the real issues it brings with it. And then it is important to question the officials who use terms like these: *What do they mean when they talk about gentrification?*

MK: I agree, gentrification is a difficult term because the process of gentrification is so often framed as a positive thing, in local politics as well as real estate. In politics, both right-and left-wing politicians can frame rejuvenating neighborhoods as a good thing. So, I consider it our task to make sure that it can never be mentioned in a non-problematic way, ever again.

RB: I wonder if it has ever been a good thing. I think it has—by right-wing politics—been used as something positive, but I think gentrification has always been a class war against people with lower incomes. So, I do not think there has ever been a good time of gentrification; I think it has always been problematic.

EM: For me, the problem with the term gentrification lies in the idea that gentrification is a natural and not a consciously institutionalized process. The people from the municipality who put gentrification into practice do not live in the neighborhoods that they decide over, they also have no connection to the people living in these places. And this blind spot brings with it a dehumanization of the people living there. The distance between the people making policy and the people living in social housing and living in these neighborhoods is so big and it is getting bigger. That is something that really cannot be problematized enough.

SH: Yes, as an architect, what I often notice is during the process of urban development the building becomes personified, the building becomes the person instead of the people in the building. And I find it very important when talking about architecture to always include: *What does it mean for the people living there?*

MK: Yes, gentrification is a process of policy meant to drive out certain people. In the age of austerity, municipalities increasingly see people with lower incomes as a problem. Municipalities make previously disadvantaged neighborhoods more attractive for companies, investors, and people on higher incomes. Then the original inhabitants become displaced. Either they are forced to move out or they are priced out of their own neighborhoods.[2]

TB: For me, it is a bit of a luxurious and deceptive term for displacement. The act of gentrification is developed, defended and institutionalized by city-planners and lawmakers who would never use the term *'displacement'*, but use euphemistic terms like development, mixing and even diversification instead. My definition of gentrification is a group of trapped, packed, and disadvantaged people surrounded by a changing city. When they look out their windows, they see a city that was not and is not built for them.

"The term gentrification is often used in a hollow way, both overused and misused. I try to avoid using it because we are not getting to the crux of what we want to talk about, which is the *effects* of gentrification."

Sophia Holst

Gentrification is Racism

EM: There is another issue in gentrification and that is *racism*. In Amsterdam, and other European cities, you have these neighborhoods that were reserved for immigrants in the 70s and 80s. Now, these neighborhoods are subject to urban renewal and gentrification and these original inhabitants have to make space for others. Again, there is no relation between the people organizing the gentrification and the people having to live it.

TB: The gentrification of Amsterdam Nieuw-West, my neighborhood, is racist. We were placed here because of our migration background and the reason we are evicted from our homes is also our migration background. And therefore, we should have a broader definition of gentrification and not reduce it to class only.[1] Because it is not only class, but also about race and a political discourse which uses terms like *'conquering back our cities'* and *'giving the Netherlands back to our own citizens'*. Dutch citizens with a migration background, especially of Turkish and Moroccan descent, are not included in that *'our'* or *'we'*. So, yes, when we talk about gentrification it is about racism, it is about replacing migrants and people with a migration background with middle class white citizens. And I think that discussion is important, that we talk acknowledge it is a class thing, yes, *but it is also a race thing*.

SH: Yes, often it is easier for people to talk about class as to avoid the conversation about race. Within the urban development of Amsterdam, there were spreading policies put in place in the 70s and they have an effect on what the city looks like today. Meaning people coming to the city as guest-workers or from former Dutch colonies like Suriname or De Antillen first often lived in the city center but later ended up in areas on the edge of Amsterdam. If you look at the urban policies of city renewal you see politicians started in the center and expanded out. From here, you can start questioning: *Are these things related? Does urban renewal affect similar groups?*

TB: I think it is also important to say that a lot of policy was based on the divide between *autochtonen* and *allochtonen*,[2] these terms were used to refer to respectively, people without and people with a migration background. In 2016 the Dutch government stopped using the terms because they were deemed too broad, and they had gained a strong negative association adding to discrimination. The fact that

policies were based on this division is in its essence a racist thing. Whole generations are influenced by this divide. It is no coincidence that Turks and Moroccans live segregated in Amsterdam Nieuw West and that there are *'little Turkeys'* and *'little Morroccos'* in Amsterdam neighborhoods like Slotermeer, Geuzenveld, and Osdorp. Consequently, other places in Amsterdam (and other cities) remain or become white.

RB: Yes, because this history of gentrification continues today. It has this history of the past few decades, but I think disadvantaged groups are still being displaced from the city. People with migration backgrounds are predominantly living in specific neighborhoods in Amsterdam, like Nieuw-West, as Tayfun mentioned; they were forced into these neighborhoods and now they are also being pushed out of these places. This process of social cleansing with an ethnic component is still happening in the city today. And if we do not change our policies, it will continue to happen.

MK: We need to look into the specific institutionalized racism within government-driven gentrification. Racism is denied as a part of policy. Often, it is implicit, so, it is important to call it out when it occurs. Additionally, we need more research into processes in which it appears that the white Dutchman is the standard and anyone who deviates from that is a problem. Years ago, the *Leefbaarometer* (measuring and monitoring how pleasant and livable neighborhoods are)[3] had the indicator 'non-Western' as a *negative score*. This indicator has since been removed because it is discriminatory. Could they have not thought of that earlier? This also shows that the instruments used by the state or in science are not always perfect and are also subject to, and determined by, cultural assumptions that may be racist, as well as social debate, because it can also change.

EM: There is a constant denial of these policies being racist. While it is this cleansing aspect of gentrification that is central to the issue of gentrification. Now we are seeing the repercussions of treating certain people as moveable or dispensable to a city.

"There is a constant denial of these policies being *racist*. While it is this cleansing aspect of gentrification that is central to the issue of gentrification. Now we are seeing the repercussions of treating certain people as moveable or dispensable to a city."

Elaine Michon

Gentrification is Political

SH: Within the discussion about gentrification processes in the Netherlands, I think it is important to split up gentrification into two parts: (1) the part that happens within the free market; and (2) the part that happens through social housing and renovations . Often, politicians refer to the social housing arrangements as a protection against gentrification. But it is interesting to look at how renovations and demolishing projects, organized by the public housing sector, affect neighbor-§hoods. I think you can say that in the Netherlands, gentrification is now also happening through the transformation of public housing.

EM: That goes along with the privatization of the corporations that used to provide social housing. Basically, they have been asked by the government to act like landlords and to build new projects that are not social housing, and in some cases to even sell buildings that used to be social housing. Therefore, I think this term of public housing or social housing in the Netherlands should be redefined in a quite large way, because the corporations are not actually fulfilling only a social agenda right now. Consequently, the original idea of public housing and a public sector that organizes housing for all people, whoever they are and wherever they come from, is something that I do not recognize as a social construction in the Netherlands at the moment.

MK: The underlying value in this whole process is the idea of home ownership being better than public housing or renting. And that is not only an economic thing it is also very much a cultural phenomenon where home ownership has been very well promoted as something that is better than renting. And this has been internalized by us and by an increasingly larger part of the population; everyone wants to be a homeowner eventually. And this adds to the assumption that renting a house or living in public housing should just be a temporary thing which also forces a temporariness and flexibility on tenants that is not part of what we consider to be normal for homeowners. Owners can stay, tenants should be flexible. The laws are organized in such a way that you can demolish a public house much easier than you can demolish a house that somebody has bought. And this adds

to the process of pushing out certain people and keeping other people in.

RB: I think what you are all referring to is that in the Netherlands specifically, gentrification is, to a large extent, *a state led project*. It is not like in the States for example, where gentrification is just a result of an unregulated free market. In the case of The Netherlands, it is the active policy of the state, how they organize these housing corporations, how they organize the tax systems, how they formulate the laws, that is really making an impact on how gentrification plays out. Maybe the bright side is then that these policies can be opposed.

“In the Netherlands specifically, gentrification is, to a large extent, a state led project. [...] Maybe the bright side is then that these policies can be opposed.”

René Boer

Gentrification is Stoppable

SH: Coming from architecture and urban planning, I can see that within that field issues like the agency of existing residents are not always recognized. Within urban planning it is important to hear alternative voices so you can weigh all sides of a debate. What I try to do is visualize these voices towards the public and towards politics. When making publications or lectures, I try to visualize other approaches, other urban strategies, and taking the existing environment and existing residents as a starting point for urban design and transformation.

TB: Gentrification is an attack on our privacy, our freedom, and our liberties. I believe that telling our personal stories of how this affects us is a form of activism. For example, I am now 39 years old, and I only got my first house two and a half years ago. When I talked about living at my parents', there was a lot of shaming by peers and other people. But I think we should talk shamelessly about humiliating anecdotes, about our problems, and about what is happening to us and our cities. Our lives are on hold because of gentrification because social and public housing is being destroyed. By telling these stories, we can say to every struggling individual*: No, it is not your fault that you do not have a house.* It is a structural problem, caused by decisions of politicians disconnected from our reality. It is not shameful to talk about these social failures. No, we should shame *them* for attacking our liberties by selling and destroying our social houses to the market.

RB: I think this idea of story-building is very crucial. Listening to the stories of pain and trauma caused by the process of gentrification is an important step in understanding the effects of gentrification. We should include in that all the unseen and unheard stories, so the people who have already been pushed out of the city and who are excluded from the current conversation because they are not part of the city anymore. They do not even have a say in these policies anymore because they can no longer vote in the city they were pushed out of. We should also include young students and young migrants who really need a city to grow and develop, and who, through this process of gentrification, will never be able to access the city. They will remain excluded and will remain invisible because of gentrification.

And adding to that, I think it is also important to combine local knowledge and activism with nationwide protests

such as the *'Woonprotest'*.[1] Smaller forms of activism have so much knowledge about local rights, whereas nationwide movements address these larger tax policy systems that result in gentrification. If these movements manage to scale up and go in tandem, that would be very powerful.

EM: For me, organizing on a local level, I believe we have to inform each other about our rights. Because there are rights for tenants, and too often those rights are denied by landlords and housing corporations. There are two strands of knowledge that I think are of importance now. (1) Tenants and inhabitants need to develop their own narratives about their housing or neighborhoods. This will make them resilient to what either the municipality or the corporations write or say about where they live. By building these stories, we can take control of how these places are understood. (2) We need to talk about the reality of social housing and housing in Amsterdam to the people behind these policies. More and more I see how badly informed they are about the current situation and fundamental things like the rights we have. In turn, they frame stories or underpin policy based on these assumptions and that just does not reflect the actuality.

MK: It is important to talk about this agency and the role of activism. First of all, as a main point we should not deny the fact that it is really hard. It is a struggle to identify and find enough capacity to build this counterpower, which is necessary to fight the bigger capitalist structures, like the power of the state, the power of the municipalities, and the power of money. They are much more powerful than we are, but we do have power, *we have collective power*. For this we need to find a way to get more people involved on a neighborhood level and on a national level. Through collectivity and finding cooperative spaces, we can find new ways of negotiating this imbalance with the state and with housing corporations. It is not something we can do in a year or in a day, but through this kind of resistance, such as the organization of rent strikes, and alternative thinking you can bring about change.

“Gentrification is an attack on our privacy, our freedom, and our liberties.”

Tayfun Balçik

“They are much more powerful than we are, but we do have power, we have collective power.”

Melissa Koutouzis

Endnotes

Gentrification is Displacement

1 The city of Amsterdam is a municipality which is governed by the mayor and nine *wethouders* [translation: '*deputy mayors*'], who are monitored by the a municipal council.

2 For more on displacement read '*The Dialogue*' between this editions guest editor Tim Verlaan and Associate Professor Suleiman Osman [link naar artikel].

Gentrification is racism

1 The term gentrification was coined by the sociologist Ruth Glass in the 1960s. It refers to the process whereby the 'Gentry' move into working class neighborhoods. For more on this definition read 'The Dialogue' in this edition.

2 In the 1990s, the term *'allochtoon'* was coined to reference a person of whom at least one parent was born abroad. The antonym of allochtoon was *'autochtoon'*, referring to someone of whom both parents were born in The Netherlands. Over the years, *'allochtoon'* gained a negative connotation, the term was often mentioned in negative reporting on people with a migration background, whereas the term '*autochtoon*' was never mentioned in the same context. In addition, people with a western migration background were never called '*allochtonen'*, which made it a discriminating term. Therefore, in 2016, the Dutch government decided to refrain from using the words '*allochtoon'* and '*autochtoon'* and the description 'person with a migration background' became the norm. For more on the decision to end use of the term see: migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/news/netherlands-government-re-examines-use-term-allochtoon-alien_en

3 For more on the '*leefbaarometer*', see: leefbaarometer.nl

Gentrification is Stoppable

1 The *'Woonprotest'* is a demonstration on the housing crisis in the Netherlands. For more on the 'woonprotest', see: woonprotest.nl/english?lang=en

About the Contributors

Tayfun Balçik
Tayfun Balçik is a journalist and historian. He was born in Amsterdam and from the age of eight he lived in Amsterdam Nieuw-West with his Turkish-Dutch Parents. There, he had to wait 36 years to be appointed social housing. Out of principal, Balçik refuses the annual rise in rents and blames political parties such as the VVD and the PvdA of destroying the social housing system in The Netherlands. Photo by Zsara Grünfeld.

René Boer
René Boer works as a critic, curator and organizer in and beyond the fields of architecture, design, heritage and the arts. In his practice he seeks to articulate new perspectives on spatial matters and facilitate fertile ground for imagining and materializing alternatives. He is a founding partner of *Loom* - practice for cultural transformation, a driving force behind the transnational platform Failed Architecture, and affiliated with various urban social movements.

Benedetta Bronzini
Benedetta Bronzini (she/her) has a PhD in *Germanic and Comparative Studies* (Florence-Bonn), focusing on media and performance. Currently, she serves as an Adjunct Professor in *Germanic Studies* at the SSML Carlo Bo (Bologna) and *Digital Theatre* in the Master Dialogue program at the Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia, and she is part of the European MSCA-Project *Spatial Practices in Arts & Architecture* for Empathetic Exchange (SpacEX). Her research specifically explores political and site-specific theatre, participative performance, and digital humanities.

Sam van Donselaar
Sam van Donselaar obtained a bachelor's degree in *Landscape and Environment Management*, where he focused on future-proof cities. He is now pursuing a master's degree in *Urban and Architectural History* at the University of Amsterdam. He aims to better understand cities to contribute to their sustainable development. Alongside his studies, he works as a sustainability policy officer at a local government.

Wouter van Gent
Wouter van Gent is a *geographer* and associate professor at the Universiteit van Amsterdam. His works focus on the politics and processes of immigration, housing, segregation, and urban transformation. Last year, he published his book '*Making the Middle-class City*' with Willem Boterman on the gentrification of Amsterdam between the 1980s and 2010s.

Sophia Holst
Sophia Holst (1988) is a Dutch architect researcher, active within the architecture fields of Belgium and the Netherlands. She obtained a Master's degree in both *Visual Arts* at the Sandberg Instituut in Amsterdam and as well as in *Architecture* at the KU Leuven in Brussels. She collaborated with architecture offices like Studio Anne Holtrop (NL), Nu architectuuratelier (BE) and CRIT architects (BE). In 2021, Holst completed her residency at the Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht. Supported by Creative Industries Fund NL, she currently works on the foundations of an independent architecture- and research practice, in which critical urban theory and applied design are interwoven.

Katerina Kalakidi
Katerina Kalakidi, from Athens, Greece, is pursuing an MA in *Museum Studies* at the University of Amsterdam. With an academic background in history and archaeology, she focuses on themes of social diversity and cultural awareness, aiming to engage critically in promoting the field of archaeology to the public.

Marianne Klerk
Dr. Marianne Klerk is a senior lecturer in *Humanities* at the Erasmus University College in Rotterdam. She obtained her PhD at the Erasmus University Rotterdam and worked as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Oxford. Her research interests include *Intellectual and Urban History*.

Melissa Koutouzis
Melissa Koutouzis is a housing activist and co-founder of '*Woonprotest*'. She also works at the Transnational Institute where her work includes citizen collectives, campaigners, researchers, social movements and local governments working globally on democratization, deprivatization and a just energy transition.

Sanci Koper
Sanci Koper (23) is a student at the University of Amsterdam. After her bachelor's degree in *Art History* at Utrecht University, where she specialized in art dating until the 19th century, she started her master's degree in *Art, Culture and Politics* in 2023. In her current master's, the focus is mainly on the different perspectives around cultural policy, politics and especially the social impact of art and culture. Her master's thesis is about the way artistic interventions by squatters relate to the practice of gentrification in Amsterdam.

Linda Kopitz
Linda Kopitz works as a Lecturer in *Cross-Media Culture*, bringing together her professional experience as a creative director and writer in the arts and cultural sector with her interdisciplinary academic work. Situated between urban and media studies, her research explores the entanglement between real and virtual environments in sustainable architecture.

Elaine Michon
Elaine Michon is an independent literary agent for authors, illustrators, and publishers and she specializes in children's books. In addition to her work, she is a member of the residents committee '*Kleine Die*'. For over five years, she has been working to keep the garden village in Nieuwendam livable, humane and quirky, despite the demolition plans of the company Ymere. Michon is also affiliated with '*Woonprotest*' and the working group of '*Lokaal FNV Amsterdam*.'
Photo by Ineke Oostveen

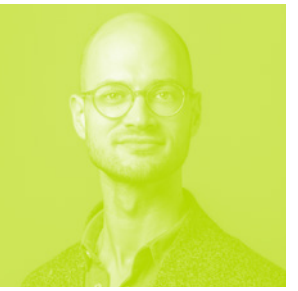
Billie Nuchelmans
Billie Nuchelmans is a *historian of architecture and urban planning*. He is specialized in the *urban history of Amsterdam*, and interested, amongst other things, in the relationship between political movements and urban design. (The point, however, is to change it.) He recently contributed a retrospective on the Nieuwmarkt area squatting movement to the book *Pak Mokum Terug: Woonstrijd in een krakende stad* – of which an English translation is forthcoming.

Suleiman Osman
Prof. Dr. Suleiman Osman is Associate Professor of *American Studies* at George Washington University. His first book, *The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn*, was awarded the Hornblower Prize from the New York Society Library. He has received grants and fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), and the Graham Foundation. In 2023-2024, he was the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Fellow at the Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers at the New York Public Library. He is currently working on a history of gentrification in the United States from the late nineteenth century to the present.

Menno Reijven
Menno Reijven, PhD 2022, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, is an assistant professor of *argumentation and communication* in the Department of Dutch Studies (Speech Communication, Argumentation Theory and Rhetoric) at the University of Amsterdam. He is a discourse analyst focusing mainly on *argumentation and rhetoric in political discourse*.

Sigi Samwel
Sigi Samwel obtained her bachelor's in *Cultural Studies* at the University of Amsterdam in 2023, with an honorary degree and a cum laude distinction. In the same year, she started her master's degree in *Museum Studies* at the University of Amsterdam. Samwel specializes in analyzing museum practices connected to co-creation, postcolonialism, and reception. As part of her master's program, Samwel interns at the Research and Publication department of the Amsterdam Museum.

Simon Serné
Simon Serné completed his Bachelor's degree in *History*, focusing on the history of Ukraine, particularly the Holodomor. Currently, he is pursuing a master's degree in *History*, with a specialization in *International Relations*. His interest in urban history, especially how cities evolve and affect their inhabitants, motivated him to explore the topic of gentrification. For the journal, he co-authored with his best friend since middle school, Sam van Donselaar.



Remco Vermeulen
Remco Vermeulen is coordinator for international cooperation on collection management at the *Cultural Heritage Agency* of the Netherlands, working on knowledge exchange and capacity building programmes in the context of the *International Heritage Cooperation* programme, which is part of the *International Cultural Policy* of the Netherlands, as well as for the *Consortium Colonial Collections*. Remco is an external PhD candidate at the Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences. His research focuses on colonial heritage engagement, particularly by young people, in postcolonial Indonesian cities.

Editorial Board

Tim Verlaan
Dr. Tim Verlaan is assistant professor in *Urban History*, working on the social, political and cultural history of European cities during the 1960-2000 period. After finishing his master degree in European Urbanisation at the University of Leicester and Berlin's Technische Universität in 2012, he wrote a doctoral thesis on the politics of urban redevelopment in Dutch cities.

Emma van Bijnen
Dr. Emma van Bijnen is a lecturer at the University of Amsterdam, as well as an independent researcher and writer with a doctorate in discourse and argumentation. She specialises in *inter- and multidisciplinarity* with a focus on common ground and communication in conflict (resolution), as well as in/exclusion and multimodality in persuasive communication. In addition, she is the research and publications officer at Amsterdam Museum, and the current editor-in-chief of Amsterdam Museum Journal.

Vanessa Vroon-Najem
Dr. Vanessa Vroon-Najem is a researcher, curator, writer, lecturer, and moderator. She obtained a PhD in *Anthropology* at the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research, and is currently a member of the Academic Staff, Educator Co-Creation, as well as Post-Doc Researcher at the University of Amsterdam. In addition, she is Director of Diversity and Inclusion at the Amsterdam Museum.

Judith van Gent
Dr. Judith van Gent is an experienced *Dutch art historian*, curator and author. On top of her broad knowledge of art history, she specializes in the Dutch painter Bartholomeus van der Helst. In addition, she is the head of Collections and Research at Amsterdam Museum.

Special Thanks

Tim Verlaan
Who shared with us his invaluable knowledge as a guest-editor. In fact, he has gone beyond providing expert input; he has made this edition truly special.

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Who has been invaluable in all stages of this edition and is also the lead editor of 'The Dialogue' and 'The Polylogue'.

Sigi Samwel
Who has not only authored the first ever double peer reviewed 'Visual Essay' but has also been the key editorial support and copy editor over the last five months, during which she has provided important conceptual and procedural insights.

Isabelle Vaverka
Who is ever flexible, clever, and creative. As the designer of the editorial formula, she is responsible for the innovative design of the AMJournal.

Joost Stokhof
Who provided the illustrations for this edition, providing it with a critical visual layer.

Patrick de Bruin
Who, through his hard work, keen eye and visual knowledge, was able to marry all the academic content with the journal's design, and who has provided valuable input on the overall visual look and feel of the journal.

Julia Bakker
Who helped this edition get off the ground. With her knowledge of the theme, she helped edit the CfP and suggested Dr. Tim Verlaan as guest editor.

Katharina Klockau
Who managed our budget and proved herself to be a gifted trouble shooter.

Finally, the internal board of editors would like to thank the external board of editors for their continued support and involvement in this special thematic journal:

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Pablo Ampuero Ruiz; Rowan Arundel; Sruti Bala; Markus Balkenhol; Christian Bertram; Stephan Besser; Carolyn Birdsall; Cristobal Bonelli; Pepijn Brandon; Petra Brouwer; Chiara de Cesari; Debbie Cole; Leonie Cornips; Annet Dekker; Christine Delhaye; Karwan Fatah-Black; Maaike Feitsma; Wouter van Gent; Javier Gimeno Martinez; Sara Greco; Suzette van Haaren; Laura van Hasselt; Gian-Louis Hernandez; Pim Huijnen; Julian Isenia; Paul Knevel; Gregor Langfeld; Mia Lerm-Hayes; Virginie Mamadouh; Julia Noordegraaf; Esther Peeren; Gertjan Plets; Menno Reijven; Jan Rock; Noa Roei; Bert van de Roemer; Margriet Schavemaker; Steven Schouten; Irene Stengs; Eliza Steinbock; Dimitris Serafis; Sanjukta Sunderason; Rebecca Venema; Tim Verlaan; Janessa Vleghert; Daan Wesselman; meLê yamomo; Mia You; Emilio Zucchetti

For more on...

Collecting the City #4

At Amsterdam Museum
Open until January 5th, 2025

For more on gentrification and Amsterdam's neighborhoods, as talked about in 'The Polylogue', and 'The Dialogue', see 'Collecting the City', which is on view at Amsterdam Museum, Amsterdam until the 5th of January 2025. For the exhibition series "Collecting the City" the Amsterdam Museum works with communities in Amsterdam to create meaningful and personal stories about the city from multiple perspectives. The collaborations result in realistic representations of the city's dynamics, through the stories of its inhabitants.

Manahahtáa-nung or New Amsterdam & Unceded

At Amsterdam Museum and Museum of the City of New York

For more on gentrification and displacement as talked about in 'The Polylogue', see "*Manahahtáanung or New Amsterdam*" on view at the Amsterdam Museum, Amsterdam until the 10th of November 2024 and "*Unceded*" (The Museum of the City New York), in fall 2025. For these two exhibitions, the Lenape community collaborated with the Amsterdam Museum and the Museum of the City of New York. They show that gentrification is as old as humans are, as colonialism all over the world has resulted in urban transformations and displacement. Here, Manhattan's history is shown through the eyes of the Lenape. Their main message: *we are still here*.

I.M. Pei: Life is Architecture

At M+, Hong Kong
Open until January 5th, 2025

For more on gentrification, modernization, and architecture, as described in 'The Visual Essay', see the exhibition on view at M+, Hong Kong until the 5th of January 2025. "I.M. Pei: Life is Architecture" is the first retrospective exhibition on the work of the famous architect I.M. Pei. His career shows a connection between power dynamics, geopolitical complexities, cultural traditions, and most important: the character of cities all over the world.

The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn

For more on the research by Prof. Suleiman Osman as discussed in 'The Dialogue' and various written contributions, read Osman's seminal work "*The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York*" (2011), in which he investigates the origins of gentrification in Brooklyn, New York and the social upheavals that occurred in the city during the 1960s and 1970s, and argues that gentrification begins with a longing for authenticity.

Smooth City

For those whose interests were sparked by René Boer's contributions to 'The Polylogue', read René Boer's *Smooth City: Against Urban Perfection, Towards Collective Alternatives* (2013). After years of research, René Boer published this book in which he introduces the term 'smooth city' which refers to the urban condition that constantly seeks new levels of perfection, efficiency, and control. Boer offers a critical analysis of the origins, characteristics, and consequences of what he calls the smooth city.

Gentrification and Other Lies

For those interested in an intersectional approach on the gentrification discourse, read Leslie Kern's *Gentrification and Other Lies* (2022). In "Gentrification and Other Lies" Leslie Kern argues that gentrification is marked by the physical displacement of people and caused by violence based on class, gender, sexuality, and race. In this intersectional approach to the subject, Kern not only describes gentrification and the problems it comes with, but also offers a decolonial, feminist, queer anti-gentrification theory.

Making the Middle-Class City

For more insights on the urban transformation of the city of Amsterdam by Wouter van Gent, as shared in 'The Polyphonic Object', we recommend reading Willem Boterman and Wouter van Gent *Making the middle-class city: The politics of gentrifying Amsterdam* (2023). Here, the authors describe the relationship between the changing demographics of Amsterdam and its local politics. The book provides both a historical overview of the urban development of Amsterdam and an explanation of how and why these developments came about.

The Roots of Urban Renaissance

For more on community-based activism, as discussed in 'The Polylogue', read Brian D. Goldstein. *The Roots of Urban Renaissance* (2017), in which Goldstein researches the famous 'Second Renaissance' of Harlem. The book demonstrates that gentrification was not imposed on an unwitting community by profit seeking developers or opportunistic outsiders. Rather, it was grassroots, producing a legacy that benefited some longtime residents and threatened others.

Green Gentrification

For those interested in gentrification and sustainability, we recommend Kenneth Gould and Tammy Lewis. *Green Gentrification: Urban Sustainability and the Struggle for Environmental Justice* (2016), in which the authors look at the social consequences of urban 'greening' from an environment justice and sustainable development perspective.

Push

For those who are curious about the intersection between human rights and gentrification, watch *Push* (directed by Frederik Gertten, 2019). Housing is a human right, but all over the world, people are forced out of their towns because they cannot afford to live there anymore. In this documentary, Frederik Gertten follows the United Nations researcher Leilani Fahra in her quest to understand why gentrification happens.

The Street

For those who want to learn more about individual, personal stories regarding gentrification, watch *The Street* (directed by ZED Nelson, 2019). From 2015 until 2019, Zed Nelson filmed people living and working in Hoxton Street, London. This area was originally populated by the 'working class' and has seen huge numbers of immigrants coming in since the 1950s. However, in the past few years so-called hipsters have moved into the neighborhood, bringing with them expensive restaurants and corporate homeowners. The people Nelson interviewed reflect on the impact of both the 'Brexit' and gentrification on the street they live and or work in.

The Last Black Man in San Francisco

For those interested in a personal, dramatized story on how gentrification influences private lives, see *The Last Black Man in San Francisco* (directed by Joe Talbot, 2019). In this movie, that is partially based on real life events, we follow the story of two friends who witness gentrification happening to their city San Fransico. Aside from paying homage to the power of friendship, this movie illustrates the connection between gentrification and racial segregation.

Upcoming Editions

AMJournal #3:
Reproducing Art, Culture and Society
Guest edited by Tom van der Molen and Liselore Tissen
Reproductions are omnipresent. As people we share memes, copy trends in fashion, design and speech, and value the reproduction of acts as meaningful rituals and traditions. At the same time, reproductions provoke criticisms on authenticity and originality. Advances in reproduction make it possible to extend museums beyond their walls, whereby digital museums become increasingly common.
To be published in December 2024

AMJournal #4: Co-creating our Cities
Guest edited by Vanessa Vroon-Najem
Coexistence, coproduction and cooperation are integral ingredients of (contemporary) cities. As such, from processes to products, and from art to activism, every element of the urban experience is born out of collaboration. Essentially, every city is a product of co-creation, as the city-life is a collective life. This edition of AMJournal seeks to reflect on collectivity, collections, and representations of community.
To be published in July 2025

AMJournal #5: Our Future Cities
Looking back at a city's history to learn from it and create a better present is a common narrative, especially in museums. But looking into the future of those cities is a must as well. How will we inhabit urban spaces in the future? What will city economies look like? How will we build? Will there be more green or more concrete? What will the differences be between cities in, for example, Norway versus Nigeria? How will we dress? How will we eat? Furthermore, how will we co-exist and co-create? AMJournal #5 will feature investigations into the possibilities and struggles of our future urban spaces, including projections, prognoses, hypotheses, as well as hopes and fears.
To be published in December 2025

Women and Cities/Cities and Women
The stories of cities are often told through the men that help(ed) make them, literally and metaphorically. However, men did not, and do not, inhabit or make the cities by themselves. Even now, the influence and presence of women in our urban spaces is still underrepresented. This issue will focus on how women have shaped cities, in the past, the present and future, whether in politics or architecture. And, in turn, how cities have shaped what it means to (live as/be) a woman, from the challenges to the opportunities. From power to spirituality, from intersectionality to biology, from science to resistance, from sex to economy: All urban aspects that shape women and have been shaped by women will be explored.
To be published in July 2026

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