# Confronting Gentrification: Can Creative Interventions Help People Keep More than Just Their Homes?

**Amie Thurber, Janine Christiano**

ABSTRACT    Gentrification is changing the landscape of many American cities. As land values rise, people may lose their homes, neighbors, and sites of significance, along with their *sense* of place, community, and history. There is a critical need to build and preserve affordable housing, yet housing alone will not address the *more than material* losses. What role can the arts play in sustaining place attachments, restoring relationships, and building place knowledge in gentrifying neighborhoods? This paper explores this question through a systematic review of current research. We identify four prominent alternative interventions in gentrifying neighborhoods—creative placemaking, public pedagogy, community organizing, and public science—and explicate strengths and limitations of each approach. We find the strongest interventions bridge approaches—engaging artists as/and researchers, educators, and community leaders—and mobilize residents as participants in knowledge/cultural production. We note that initiatives that provide short-term benefit may simultaneously make the neighborhood more desirable—and thus more vulnerable to gentrification—in the longer-term. Finally, given the dearth of research in this area, we conclude with recommendations for future research that attends to issues of equity, process as well as outcome, and longitudinal effects of *more than material* interventions in gentrifying neighborhoods.

KEYWORDS    Gentrification, placemaking, popular education, PAR, community organizing

Gentrification is changing the landscape of many American cities. As land values rise, people may lose their homes, neighbors, and sites of significance, along with their sense of place, community, and history. There is a critical need to build and preserve affordable housing, yet people want to keep more than just their homes. What role can the arts and other creative interventions play in sustaining place attachments, restoring relationships, and building place knowledge in gentrifying neighborhoods? This paper explores this question through a comprehensive review of current research. To situate this review, we begin by introducing a *more than material* framework for conceptualizing gentrification. Drawing on a systematic review of the literature, we then catalog the types of alternative interventions taking place in gentrifying neighborhoods, and explore outcomes and limitations of those interventions. We conclude with implications for future study, policy-making, and practice.

## Thinking Holistically about Neighborhoods

Gentrification is commonly understood as the transformation of areas with relatively high levels of affordable housing into areas targeting middle and upper income uses (Hackworth, 2002; Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2013). Urban neighborhoods in the U.S. are now gentrifying at twice the rate of the 1990s, and 20% of low-income neighborhoods report rapid increases in median home values (Maciag, 2015). In Canada, low-income families and low and middle-income couples have been priced out of once affordable neighborhoods in Vancouver and Toronto (Sturgeon, 2016). Similarly, the cost of housing in many of London's previously affordable neighborhoods has skyrocketed, pushing low-income residents out of the city (Owen, 2015).

Although gentrification is often defined solely in economic terms, Curran (2018) reminds us that "class is gendered, raced, aged, and abled" (p. 2). It is not an accident that neighborhoods of colour are particularly vulnerable to gentrification (Brookings Institution, 2001), but rather the result of generations of policies and practices that have functioned to segregate, contain, exploit, and/or remove people of colour (Lipsitz, 2007). Given the continued gender-based disparities in income—which are more extreme for women of colour—women, those with children, are more likely than their male counterparts to be displaced by rising housing costs (Curran, 2018). As such, an intersectional analysis is imperative to understanding the impacts of gentrification.

Gentrification's effects on the built environment impact residential as well as commercial spaces. In immigrant communities and communities of colour, locally owned retail spaces often simultaneously meet critical economic, cultural and socioemotional needs (McLean, Rankin, & Kamizaki, 2015). Yet, a study by the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (2013) finds that as a result of the accelerated rate of gentrification in Chinatowns in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, these mixed-use neighborhoods are on "the verge of disappearing" (p. 2). Other scholars have observed patterns of "boutiquing" in gentrifying areas, as long-standing local retail stores are replaced by new boutiques catering to an exclusive price-point (Zukin, Trujillo, Frase, Jackson, Recuber, & Walker, 2009).

The transformation of residential and commercial areas provokes a constellation of losses, as people may be displaced from homes, family and friends, and familiar gathering spaces, along with their *sense* of place, belonging, and history. And importantly, residents of gentrifying neighborhoods may suffer social, cultural and/or political displacements even when they remain in place (Twigge-Molecey, 2013). As Betancur (2002) notes:

> There is an aspect of gentrification that mainstream definitions ignore…The most traumatic aspect…is perhaps the destruction of the elaborate and complex community fabric that is crucial for low-income, immigrant, and minority communities—without any compensation. (p. 807)

Such losses of community fabric are significant. For some time, scholars have argued for the need to think holistically about the stakes of gentrification, offering a variety of conceptual

models for doing so. For example, Hyra (2013) offers the three-tiered framework of residential, political and cultural displacements, and Twigge-Molecey (2013) uses the typology of social, cultural, and housing market displacement. Davidson (2009) suggests an epistemological shift away from equating the loss of abstract space with a lost of sense of place (Davidson, 2009). As R&B legend Luther Vandross croons, "a house is not a home…"; if we reduce gentrification to only a loss of space (houses), we miss the effects on place (a resident's feeling of being at home). However, these insights have been slow to be conceptually integrated into a framework that can inform public policy. In recent years there have been a number of highly cited policy reports on gentrification which focus almost exclusively on strategies to create or preserve affordable housing (Mallach, 2008; Brookings Institution, 2001; The Urban Institute, 2006, Urban Land Institute, 2007). While such approaches are critical, they fail to recognize and respond to other harms residents may be experiencing concurrent with, or independent from, a loss of housing.

Recently, Thurber (2017) offered a more than material conceptual framework that attends to three dimensions of residents' experiences of gentrification:

- *Material* concerns related to housing and changes in the built environment, which may include housing instability, residential and commercial displacement, and the loss of jobs for and amenities targeted to lower income residents.
- *Epistemic* concerns related to knowledge about, and the reputation of, neighborhoods, which may include long-time residents being dismissed as knowledgeable and marginalized from public life, lost historic knowledge about an area, and symbolic erasures of an area's cultural history (i.e., the changing of place-names).
- *Affective* concerns related to changing relationships between people and place, which may include diminished social bonds and sense of belonging, increases in stigma and discrimination, and a lost sense of place.

Thurber (2017) contends that although all long-term residents of gentrifying neighborhoods will not experience all of these harms, or only these harms, or experience these harms in the same way, a more than material approach to conceptualizing gentrification foregrounds the need to think holistically about intervening in gentrifying neighborhoods. Residential displacement is among gentrification's most serious harms, yet it is not the only harm. As such, in addition to efforts to build and preserve affordable housing, it is imperative to consider more than material interventions in gentrifying neighborhoods.

A simple internet search reveals numerous grassroots responses to gentrification led by artists, organizers, and scholars designed to effect changes beyond the built environment. But, what do we know about the efficacy of such interventions? What changes can more than material interventions produce, and what are their limitations? To answer these questions, we conducted a systematic review of the literature.

**Methods**
Recognizing that alternative interventions in gentrifying neighborhoods do not emerge from

a single discipline, draw from a single theoretical tradition, or use shared language, we utilized multiple combinations of search terms to acquire a sample that met the following criteria: (1) the article provided an empirical account (2) of an intervention (operationalized as any organized response to changing neighborhood conditions), and (3) focused on addressing the more than material effects (that is, effects that may include, but are not limited to, material losses) (4) resulting from neighborhood gentrification.[1] This search produced a pool of twenty articles by thirteen first authors documenting seventeen distinct projects, all located in changing urban neighborhoods. Although the majority of these studies explore projects in the United States, there are four in Canada, and one in Australia and the United Kingdom respectively. A summary of the articles included in this review is provided in Appendix A. Though a relatively limited sample, the seventeen projects provide a starting point for considering the applications of more than material interventions in gentrifying neighborhoods. The following sections first catalog the types of more than material interventions occurring, then synthesizes the outcomes and limitations of these interventions.

**Cataloging Practice: What Constitutes a More than Material Intervention?**
A survey of the studies included in this review suggest four general approaches to more than material interventions in gentrifying neighborhoods:

- *Creative placemaking* projects engage the arts to transform how people feel about, relate to, and interact in their neighborhood;
- *Public pedagogy* initiatives create opportunities for people to learn about their neighborhood;
- *Public science* projects engage people in studying and taking informed action in their neighborhoods;[2] and
- *Community organizing* efforts mobilize residents to build and exercise power to affect change in their neighborhood.

Each approach is associated with particular practices to achieve change, engages residents in different ways, and utilizes a distinct set of strategies to achieve their goals (see Table 1). That said, as reflected in Appendix A, a number of projects in this review incorporated more than one approach. These four forms of intervention can rightly be understood as approaches to community-engaged scholarship, wherein people working in academic or professional settings partner with local community experts to address a concern, question, or need (O'Meara,

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[1] We completed a simultaneous database search of all 59 Pro Quest databases, which index thousands of titles across multiple disciplines, restricting the search to peer-reviewed journals, and unrestricted with regard to geography and year of publication. We used the following search terms, as found in the article abstracts: Gentrification OR redevelopment OR neighborhood change, AND, Community Practice OR Participatory OR action research OR place-making OR dialogue OR memory OR public history OR cartography OR civic OR art. When an abstract met these inclusion criteria, we reviewed the article in full.

[2] Given disciplinary differences in how participatory modes of research are termed, we use 'public science' as an umbrella term to include projects conceptualized as Participatory Action Research, public archaeology, and collaborative ethnography, as examples.

2011). Indeed, all but one reviewed article are examples of community-engaged scholarship. That said, these approaches do not necessitate an academic partner to be effective.

**Table 1. More than material interventions**

|  | CREATIVE PLACEMAKING | PUBLIC PEDAGOGY | PUBLIC SCIENCE | COMMUNITY ORGANIZING |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Looks to:** | Place-based artistic/humanities practices | Facilitated teaching/ learning | Systematic inquiry | Mobilization of community members |
| **Engages residents as:** | Artists and/or audiences | Teachers and/or learners | Researchers and/or research subjects | Community Leaders |
| **Sample strategies:** | <ul><li>media campaigns</li><li>dance/ performance</li><li>installation art</li><li>street festivals</li><li>alternative tours</li><li>counter-mapping</li></ul> | <ul><li>skill-building workshops</li><li>public history workshops</li><li>portable exhibitions</li><li>resident story-sharing sessions</li></ul> | <ul><li>participatory or street surveys</li><li>focus groups</li><li>participatory excavation</li><li>archival, policy, web-based analysis</li></ul> | <ul><li>door-knocking</li><li>networking</li><li>leadership development</li><li>policy analysis</li><li>power-mapping</li><li>public events and/or social actions</li></ul> |

### Creative placemaking

Creative placemaking is broadly understood as the deliberate integration of the arts into community revitalization initatives. A white paper released by the United States National Endowment for the Arts claims that creative placemaking, "animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired" (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010, p. 3).

As evidenced in this statement, though creative placemaking projects may produce material outcomes, such as a public art installation, the goal is often affective change: to transform how people feel about, relate to, and interact in a particular place. Although creative placemaking practices are not necessarily designed to achieve social justice, the arts can and often play critical roles in advancing social justice movements. As educational scholar Lee Anne Bell (2010) notes, "The creative dimensions opened up by aesthetic engagement help us envision new possibilities for challenging and changing oppressive circumstances" (p. 17). More specifically, Brookfield and Holst (2011) suggest five functions of the arts: to sound warnings, build solidarity, empower, present alternative epistemologies, affirm pride, and teach history (p. 152). However, creative placemaking practices have been criticized for treating places as

blank slates ready for artistic intervention rather than as sites layered with histories, meanings, and experiences (Wilbur, 2015). In the words of cultural leader Roberto Bedoya, a "politics of belonging and dis-belonging" can be traced through the "troubling legacy of 'placemaking' manifested in acts of displacement, removal, and containment" (2013, p. 20). In contrast, Bedoya (2013) and community activist/artist Jenny Lee offer the concept of creative place-keeping, which refers to the practices of residents to preserve the material, cultural, and social aspects of their neighborhood they cherish. Despite these distinctions, the term placemaking is often used as an umbrella term, regardless of whether the project has place-keeping goals.

Nine of the projects (50%) in this review used creative placemaking as a response to gentrification. These included a choreographed dance performance engaging themes of displacement and home (Somdahl-Sands, 2008), a series of political art installations (Dutton & Mann, 2003), a photo-voice project (Burke, Greene, & McKenna, 2017), and a street festival (McLean & Rahder, 2013). Across the creative placemaking projects, residents were at times engaged as artists (McLean, 2014b; Cahill, 2007) and at times as audience (Somdahl-Sands, 2008). In either case, a core assumption of creative placemaking projects is that the arts and humanities can catalyze community engagement and galvanize commitments to restorative place-based actions.

### *Public pedagogy*

Public pedagogy can be broadly understood as facilitated learning that take place outside of formal schooling environments (Sandlin, O'Malley, & Burdick, 2011). This might include bike maintenance classes offered at a local bike shop, gardening workshops hosted by the library, or a lecture at a coffee-shop. In the context of gentrifying neighborhoods, many public pedagogy projects draw on the tradition of popular education (also referred to as critical education, or critical pedagogy). Popular education is often traced back to two famous educators: Brazilian educator and theorist Paulo Freire, and Highlander Folk School founder and community organizer Myles Horton. Working in different geographies and contexts, both Freire and Horton reimagined the educational process from one that indoctrinates people into an existing social order, to one that mobilizes people towards liberation from systemic inequality. Popular education intentionally brings together people who have been marginalized, and, with the help of a facilitator, creates conditions for people to teach and learn from one another; to critically reflect on their lived experiences, to imagine alternatives, and to take action to affect change.

Public pedagogy approaches in gentrifying neighborhoods often have epistemic and affective aims, seeking to transform what and how people know about a place, as well as how they feel about their neighbors and/or neighborhood. Eleven of the sixteen projects (69%) in this sample deployed public pedagogy strategies to address gentrification in their neighborhood. These included skill-building workshops for resident activists (Darcy, 2013), participatory democracy trainings (Nam, 2012), youth-led neighborhood tours (McLean, 2014), public history projects (Chidester & Gadsby, 2016; Thurber, 2018), and resident story-sharing sessions (Drew, 2012).

The reviewed public pedagogy projects varied with the regard to who occupied teaching

and learning roles. In some cases, longer-term residents took on the role of expert/teacher (Drew, 2012; Thurber, 2018), while in others, outside professionals served as teachers to residents of all tenures (Chidester & Gadsby, 2009). Despite these differences, public pedagogy projects share an assumption that educational practices can raise consciousness regarding the consequences of gentrification, which may in turn activate social action.

### *Public Science*

Public science can be understood as knowledge generated with and for the public. The movement towards publicly engaged scholarship is rooted in a number of critiques of research which locates expertise exclusively within the academe (Torre, Fine, Stoudt, & Fox, 2012). Too often, such scholarship ignores the grounded expertise of everyday people in everyday places, and produces work that is irrelevant and/or illegible to the people it purports to be *about* or even *for*. As indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) famously concludes about expert-driven research in indigenous communities, "It told us things already known, suggested things that would not work, and made careers for people who already had jobs" (p. 3). Such disengaged scholarship often takes final form as journal articles intended to be read by and influence others in academia, and are, in the words of bell hooks, "…highly abstract, jargonistic, difficult to read, and containing obscure references" (p. 64). In contrast, in public science, academics leverage their particular tools and resources in partnership with community members to understand and address issues of mutual concern, and produce research products that are meaningful and relevant to the community.

A simple internet search reveals the cross-disciplinary scope of contemporary public science, including public anthropology, public archeology, public history, and public sociology. In the health and social sciences, publicly-engaged scholarship often manifests as Participatory Action Research (PAR). Better understood as an epistemological approach to inquiry and action than a research method, PAR draws on diverse lineages and has produced varied strands (see Torre, Fine, Stoudt, & Fox, 2012). At the core, however, participatory action researchers share a commitment to engage those who are directly affected by social problems in studying and intervening in those problems (Greenwood, 2002). Although PAR projects differ in how that engagement manifests, all PAR projects require reassessing traditional notions of who is involved in designing research questions and data collection instruments, collecting and analyzing data, and determining the purpose and design of dissemination materials. Public science projects often have multiple objectives, including: to improve living conditions, to generate new understandings of social phenomenon, and to include more people in the process of knowledge production.

Nine of the seventeen projects (53%) in this sample engaged in public science as a response to gentrification. Seven were self-described as Participatory Action Research (PAR) projects. For example, four different projects involved residents of public or socialized housing conducting research in order to effect public policy (Darcy, 2013; Hodkinson & Essen, 2014; Sinha, 2013; Thurber, Collins, Greer, McKnight, & Thompson, 2018; Thurber & Fraser, 2016). Another took aim at commercial gentrification, engaging residents of a "major

immigrant landing area" in studying the planned redevelopment of their community (McLean, Rankin, & Kamizaki, 2015, p. 1299). All the public science projects in this review reflected partnerships between academically trained researchers and community groups, although some were initiated in the community (Sinha & Kasdan, 2013), and others by academic researchers (Chidester & Gadsby, 2009). There was also variation in the degree to which community members participated as research collaborators and/or research subjects. Nonetheless, these projects shared an assumption that the tools of scientific inquiry can be used to leverage, legitimize, amplify, and extend efforts to improve public policy and civic life.

### *Community organizing*
Broadly defined, community organizing refers to the processes associated with mobilizing a constituency that can exercise power to achieve social change (Speer et al, 2003). There are many similarities in strategy between popular education, PAR and community organizing. As Speer and Roberts (2017) note, community organizing—like popular education—leverages existing knowledge in communities, and—like CPAR—engages the tools of research to inform social action. However, the target of community organizing is transformational rather than educational or ameliorative; the goal is to address the root causes of problems, not simply to develop an analysis or to make bad conditions better. Christens and Speer (2015) suggest that community organizing is characterized by a set of processes, which include relationship development, research, social action, and evaluation (p. 194). While the goals of community organizing vary by context, they may involve material, political, cultural, and social targets.

Five of the projects (29%) in this sample engaged a community organizing approach to intervening in gentrifying neighborhoods. In three sites, residents of public and socialized housing organized for material and epistemic goals. They sought to prevent displacement of low-income residents while at the same time working to transform the deficit-based representations of their community that were used to legitimize displacement (Darcy, 2013; Sinha, 2013; Thurber, Collins, Greer, McKnight, & Thompson, 2018; Thurber & Fraser, 2016). In these three projects, community organizers partnered with academic researchers to help achieve their goals. The fourth project, Huntington Park NO SE VENDE!, involved youth-led community organizing to resist gentrification within a Puerto Rican community in Chicago, and did not appear to involve academic partners (Nam, 2012). In all cases, community organizers deployed a number of strategies, which included door-knocking to outreach and mobilize communities, networking sessions to share best practices, leadership development and skill-building, policy analysis, power-mapping, and public events and/or social actions intended to educate and agitate around specific goals. The core assumption behind community organizing is that those directly affected by social problems can come together to work toward and achieve positive changes that would be impossible to achieve alone.

### Evaluating Practice: What Differences Can More than Material Interventions Make?
Evaluating the effectiveness of more than material interventions requires studies that are not only descriptive—providing an accounting of how an intervention took place—but are also

evaluative—using systematic analysis to explore the effects of the intervention. Significantly, only four of the reviewed studies were designed with the express porpose of evaluating the intervention itself: to understand what the intervention did to and for those who participated, and how those effects took place. That said, most of the studies included evidence of intervention outcomes. Synthesizing results across studies suggests four central findings. First, more than material interventions can effectively disrupt and respond to the more than material harms of gentrification. Second, creative placemaking and public pedagogy interventions can spark individual and collective development, though are limited in fostering collective action. Third, public science and community organizing initiatives can facilitate collective action, though face difficulties in sustaining change. And fourth, an equity lens is necessary to evaluate the effects of any intervention. In the following pages, each of these findings is explored in turn.

### *Beneficial outcomes*

First, in all but one project, the authors provided evidence of the beneficial outcomes of the intervention. Those outcomes included: raising neighbors' collective consciousness about gentrification and the processes of neighborhood change (Cahill, 2006; Drew, 2012; McClean, 2014; McLean2014b; Thurber & Fraser, 2016; Thurber, 2018), strengthening relationships among residents (Chidester & Gadsby, 2009; Thurber, Collins, Greer, McKnight, & Thompson, 2018; Thurber, in press), and transforming residents' relationships to place (Somdahl-Sands, 2008; Thurber, 2018).

Interventions that engaged residents as artists, teachers, and researchers had the additional benefit of democratizing knowledge production. This has both individual effects, as residents increasingly value their own knowledge and abilities to theorize (Cahill, 2006; Drew, 2008; McLean 2014), and community-level effects, as residents use their knowledge to to influence neighborhood change (Darcy, 2013; Hodkinson & Essin, 2015; Thurber, Collins, Greer, McKnight, & Thompson, 2018; Thurber & Fraser, 2016; Sinha, 2013).

### *Contributions of creative placemaking and public pedagogy interventions*

The greatest contribution of both creative placemaking and public pedagogy approaches is its ability to catalyze consciousness-raising among potentially large groups through relatively short-term interventions. The Mission Wall Dances—a multimedia performance responding to gentrification in San Francisco's historically Latino Mission district—serves as an example. Designed by choreographer Jo Kreiter, the project included a commissioned three-story mural depicting the 1975 Gartland Apartment arson, which many believe was intentionally set to evict low-income residents from the district. In recent years, this disturbing pattern of evicting-by-arson has re-emerged in the Mission, displacing residents and eliminating affordable rentals, most of which have not been rebuilt (Somdahl-Sands, 2008). Kreiter staged an aerialist dance performance against the mural. The piece was choreographed to evoke the legacy of arson and displacement, as well as resident resistance to removal. The performance drew 1000 attendees over several days. Somdahl-Sands (2008) surveyed the attendees immediately after the event,

and distributed a follow-up questionnaire a year later. She concluded that the performance cognitively and affectively transformed the attendees' relationships to the Mission district by creating a "communal memory of the neighborhood" which "made the displacement of Mission District residents an intellectual, physical and emotional reality for the audience" (p. 349). While the Mission Wall Dances used aesthetics to foster communal memory, other projects, such as the Restorative Listening Project, used the power of narrative.

Sponsored by the city of Portland and sited in a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood on the city's east side, the Restorative Listening Project invited newer, predominantly white residents to attend facilitated community gatherings to hear stories of long-time African American residents. The project aimed to raise white neighbors' consciousness of how the changing neighborhood was affecting black residents' sense of safety, community, and belonging (Drew, 2012). Sessions were held monthly, and attendance varied from 20 to 100 people. Through a multi-year study of the intervention, Drew (2012) found that the experience was transformative for many white participants, who described a deepening of their understanding as to how race and racism impact their community. In addition, some African American residents also reported positive effects. For example, one speaker reflected that "it is healing for us to acknowledge the pain…instead of holding this stuff inside our whole lives, with no outlet, causing all kinds of mental and physical anguish" (2011, p. 110). Drew concludes that the Restorative Listening Project sparked critical consciousness-raising among many attendees (though not all, as will be discussed below). Further, by positioning longer-term residents as experts, the project validated their experiences and knowledge. However, given that the project by design was limited to story-telling and story-listening, it did not foster collective action to address structural racism.[3]

These two examples illustrate the potential of stand-alone creative placemaking and public pedagogy projects to spark important changes to individuals and collectives, as well as their limitations. In the tradition of memory-work advocated by geographer Karen Till (2012), creative placemaking and public pedagogy approaches can bring attention to the history of racial struggle, help residents make connections between the past and the present, and engage residents in reflecting on their responsibilities as neighbors in gentrifying neighborhoods. However, given their ephemeral, one-off nature, these approaches are limited in terms of fostering action—either individually or collectively.

### Contributions of public science and community organizing interventions

In contrast, public science and community organizing approaches, which require a greater investment of time, are effective in fostering both consciousness raising and collective action. Studies find that in addition to having positive developmental effects on those involved (Cahill, 2007; Thurber & Fraser, 2016), both approaches offer the potential to effect systemic change by developing a pipeline of leaders (Nam, 2012; Thurber, 2018), creating organizing networks (Darcy, 2013; McLean, 2014b) and producing materials that can be used to organize

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[3] As an interesting postscript, in 2012 the City of Portland changed the name of this project to the Restorative Action Project.

for better neighborhood conditions (Darcy, 2013; Hodkinson & Essin, 2015; Sinha, 2012; Thurber, Collins, Greer, McKnight, & Thompson, 2018). This is not to suggest that public science and community organizing activities achieve all of their goals. In contrast, each of the projects included in this review document ongoing sites of struggle. However, the projects were designed to advance those struggles by creating tools, relationships, and networks that feed into civic action work.

For example, the Neighborhood Story Project is a three-month action research intervention engaging residents as researchers in their gentrifying neighborhoods. Through a multi-case study of three Neighborhood Story Projects, Thurber (2018) finds that participants deepened their place-knowledge and place-attachments, strengthened social ties, and developed an increased sense of agency to advocate on behalf of their community. As one participant reflected,

> These past, you know, 10-15 years, I have been watching the neighborhood… It's like 'what can I do, what can I do? How can I get involved?' Then all of a sudden, it's like I'm involved and this is just, I'm just so blessed…even though I don't know, I don't feel like I've done anything that outstanding so far, but I just feel, I feel some sense of empowerment. I just feel like I'm not just sitting around watching all of this happen and doing nothing about it. (Thurber, 2018, p. 115)

Although the Neighborhood Story Project is designed to effect change at the small-group level, other reviewed projects were designed to have broader reach.

The Residents' Voices Project (Darcy, 2013), which blends community organizing and public science, offers a particularly robust example. This international collaborative research project was co-located in Sydney, Australia and Chicago, U.S., and involved residents of public and socialized housing, as well as community workers and scholars in both settings. Michael Darcy (2013) and collaborators designed the project to counter the ways that resident perspectives are "systematically devalued or excluded from the so-called 'evidence' deployed to justify redevelopment of public housing and sometimes destruction of communities" (p. 370). The organizing agenda was simultaneously multi-local and global. Using a shared web-space and connecting via technology allowed collaborators to learn and share best practices that built local capacity, while also drawing connections across contexts. As Darcy (2013) explained, "This project aims to create a space where tenants are able to express, exchange and theorise about the impact of the places they live on their lives, to validate their own knowledge, and to use it in ways which best suit their interests" (p. 371). Although the potential contributions of Residents' Voices appear to be significant, it is unclear whether these efforts have been sustained. The project web address is no longer functional, and little additional information is available online. Indeed, only one of the public science and/or community organizing efforts included in this review appears to be ongoing: the Right to the City Alliance,

a national coalition of organizations working for racial, economic and environmental justice.[4] Interventions need not, and indeed cannot, last forever. Among the projects included in this review, the conditions of social inequality outlasted the intervention strategy. But attention to sustainability does raise questions about the life-span of public science and community organizing initiatives, and how such initiatives can be crafted to collectivize and share learnings, best practices, and resources when their efforts come to a close.

A second related challenge in PAR and community organizing initiatives concerns how success is measured. In their compellingly titled essay, "Youth voice, civic engagement and failure in participatory action research", Burke, Greens, and McKenna (2017) explore the "promises that are made and broken" (p. 585) in the course of their work with youth. Bridging creative placemaking and PAR approaches, their project spanned six years and engaged eight cohorts of middle-school aged co-researchers with the goal of transforming a neglected, underutilized park located on the edge of a gentrifying neighborhood. Through photovoice projects, guided walks, and systematic observations, the first cohort assessed the current and potential uses of the park and developed a proposed redesign. Subsequent cohort researchers worked with the parks department and landscape architects to develop a detailed plan for the park, engaged in a fundraising campaign and won support from city leaders. While some progress has been made, the park project has largely stalled. Reflecting on the value of PAR, the authors note that though they "have long been proponents of that process, one that encourages youth to take on democratic responsibility and social participation…the product also matters as do promises made to kids, implicit, explicit or otherwise" (Burke, Greens, & McKenna, 2017, p. 594). Given their collective inability to achieve the goal of revitalizing the park, the authors conclude that "though our youth partners might have learned the value of telling stories, of doing research, and something about their own agency they might also have learned that though they had voice, ultimately they didn't have much power" (2017, p. 594). Thus, although community organizing and PAR interventions can be effective in fostering both consciousness raising and collective action, there are no guarantees that such actions will accomplish participants' stated goals. This is not to say that their efforts cannot produce significant gains (as noted, participation in community organizing and PAR projects have been shown to build capacity, skills, and knowledge that can fuel other social justice efforts). However, it does speak to the importance of transparent deliberation among participants about how success will be measured, and encouraging honest assessments of the gains and limitations of interventions.

**The Need for an Equity Lens**

The final finding from this systematic review is that effective interventions in gentrifying neighborhoods require explicit attention to equity. An equity lens is better understood as an approach than a rigid set of practices. As Grantcraft (2012) describes, applying an equity lens means "paying disciplined attention to race and ethnicity while analyzing problems, looking

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[4] See www.therighttothecity.org

for solutions, and defining success" (p. ii). More broadly, applying an equity lens implies asking questions about who can participate in a given intervention, and who is left out; who benefits and who is harmed; and/or whose interests are prioritized and whose are ignored or secondary. One study of a neighborhood-based intervention in Toronto, Canada demonstrated the importance of bringing an equity lens to bear when addressing gentrification.

Concerned about rapid redevelopment and concurrent loss of street-level interaction in their neighborhood, a group of residents and business-owners began hosting monthly pedestrian-only street festivals as a tool of resistance to gentrification. However, as McLean and Rahder (2013) find, organizers failed to consider the impact that blocking car-traffic had on some of the working-class residents and businesses, and designed the festival activities to appeal to middle-class residents and tourists. Businesses that require traffic for deliveries and pick-ups (such as the meat and hardware store) suffered, while niche coffee shops and gift stores profited. Further, the festival increased interest in the neighborhood among middle and upper-class residents, likely accelerating the rate of gentrification. Although the initial impetus of this initiative was to resist perceived negative effects of gentrification—in particular, diminished social ties—McLean and Rahder conclude that "uncritical and unquestioned ideals of public involvement, community, and creativity may reproduce the very exclusions, both symbolic and material, that they claim to challenge" (2013, p. 95). Absent a comprehensive analysis of who the street festival was designed to benefit, and who might be harmed, this creative placemaking intervention deepened rather than diminished the social damage it attempted to address, thus perpetuating the troubling legacy of placemaking Bedoya (2013) cautions against.

Yet even in interventions deeply committed to centering marginalized knowledge, as with PAR projects, tensions emerge between equity values and outcomes. In their insightful reflection on an action research project within an immigrant neighborhood, McLean, Rankin, and Kamizaki (2015) consider how "racialized and classed dynamics also infused our collaboration between university-based and community-based researchers" (p. 1299). Reflecting on a PAR project involving residents of a public housing project and academic partners, Thurber, Collins, Greer, McKnight, and Thompson (2018) note:

> While the academic researchers sought to counter the marginalization and powerlessness of residents, these Team members also wielded significant influence in shaping the research process. Even as academic partners encouraged dissention and alternative explanations within our meetings, we (Amie and Leslie) may have inadvertently advantaged our own thinking at times, and resident partners may have unknowingly deferred to our assumed professional expertise. (p. 13)

Thus, even when an intervention is explicitly designed to interrupt relationships of inequality, differences in power and privilege cannot be erased, but rather must be continuously interrogated, both inside the research partnership and between scholars with shared values and commitments (de Leeuw, Cameron, & Greenwood, 2012).

While the previous examples foreground the role of those who design and implement

interventions, other studies suggest that those who participate must also bring a critical consciousness around issues of equity, or develop that consciousness along the way. For example, while Drew's (2012) account of the Restorative Listening Project highlights the consciousness-raising potential of this intervention, another major finding in her study is the prevalence of white denial. Indeed, though many white listeners reported being transformed by the stories of their neighbors, others simply dismissed these accounts, and refused to consider their own complicity in creating conditions where black residents felt unwelcome, unwanted, and unsafe in their own neighborhoods. Furthermore, Drew (2011) was concerned about the potentially exploitative nature of an intervention that relies on people of colour's stories of pain in order for white people to (potentially) learn about injustice. McLean (2014) reaches similar conclusions in her analysis of a youth-led tour of a gentrifying public housing neighborhood, which in some cases reified, rather than challenged, distancing and exploitative social relations between lower-income and higher-income residents. As these findings make evident, despite the best efforts of those involved, not all participants will be transformed.

It is likely, then, that results of more than material interventions will always be mixed, and the gains always partial. The intervention will hopefully interrupt injustices in some aspects, and inevitably re-inscribe inequities in others. As such, it is critical that collaborators in efforts for change discuss expectations of the intervention's goals, how success will be measured, and reflect critically on the successes, challenges, and failures along the way.

## Implications and Conclusion

In neighborhoods experiencing and/or vulnerable to gentrification, *more than material* interventions can complement efforts to build and preserve affordable housing. For those scholars seeking ways to collaborate with communities in responding to gentrification, this literature review identified four prominent alternative interventions—creative placemaking, public pedagogy, community organizing, and public science—and explicated strengths and limitations of each approach.

Although there are important distinctions between these approaches, as highlighted above, there are also marked similarities in the potential contributions of more than material interventions in gentrifying neighborhoods. First, as all four approaches are place-based, each reflects a commitment to context. By exploring spatial relationships within a neighborhood over time, more than material interventions—particularly those that adopt an equity lens—can attend to legacies of displacement and racial struggle that have shaped neighborhoods, and inform resident's experiences of present day gentrification. Second, each approach relocates authority and experience from institutions into neighborhoods. By bringing art out of museums and theaters, learning out of schools, science out of labs, and social change out of city hall, each approach claims neighborhoods as critical sites for experiencing, knowing, and acting in response to gentrification. Finally, each approach reflects a commitment to widening the lens of what is seen, known, and felt about gentrification. More than material interventions reveal losses caused by gentrification that can be concealed by a singular focus on loss of housing. Relatedly, each approach (albeit to a differing degree) engages people cognitively, affectively,

and experientially. These approaches reflect a recognition that human development—and by extension, social development—requires changing what people think about gentrification, changing how people relate to their neighbors and their neighborhood, and increasing their capacity to care for one another and the places they live.

As described above, creative placemaking and public pedagogy interventions can be used to spark individual and collective development, though these approaches are limited in fostering collective action. Public science and community organizing initiatives are designed to foster collective action, though they can face difficulties in sustaining change. And importantly, the effectiveness of any intervention often hinges on the degree to which intervention designers and participants attend to issues of equity. In particular, initiatives that provide short-term benefit may simultaneously make the neighborhood more desirable—and thus more vulnerable to gentrification—in the longer-term. We find the strongest interventions bridge approaches—engaging artists as/and researchers, educators, and community leaders—and mobilize residents as participants in knowledge/cultural production. This is a key finding for community engaged scholars, as it suggests the need for partnerships across disciplines, as well as between campus and community.

While advocating for an immediate uptake of more than material interventions in gentrifying neighborhoods, there is also a need to concurrently expand the research of these interventions. Systematic inquiry can assist to catalogue the various modes of intervention, to understand their differing effects, and to consider whether particular intervention approaches are more appropriately suited to communities at different stages of gentrification (Mallach, 2008). For example, community organizing might be best deployed when neighborhoods are in early stages of gentrification, as building power at this point increases the likelihood that neighbors can shape the trajectory of change. Relatedly, public pedagogy interventions might be most effective in neighborhoods that are already incorporating a critical mass of newer residents, who may lack place knowledge and neighborhood-based social ties. Research in this area can help practitioners better match interventions to their specific contexts. Furthermore, longitudinal study is necessary to evaluate the contributions of more than material interventions in gentrifying neighborhoods. Ultimately, the more we understand what more than material interventions can offer, the more strategically and effectively they can be utilized.

Findings from this review have implications for policy and practice in gentrifying neighborhoods. At a policy level, this review suggests that alongside the continued need for mechanisms to create and preserve affordable housing, cities ought to attend to and invest in more than material dimensions of place. This could involve creating a program similar to Percent for Art, in which a percentage of overall redevelopment cost is designated for community development.[5] Local organizations could then submit proposals to fund place-based projects addressing community concerns related to gentrification. To be clear, we are not suggesting funding for arts-based, educational, research or organizing efforts in place of resources for affordable housing. Such funding should occur alongside investments in housing.

[5] Many jurisdictions have 'Percent for art' programs that mandate a designated percent of the cost of large scale development projects be earmarked for public art.

Funding for housing alone is insufficient to addressing gentrification's harms, just as investing in place-making projects that honor a community's cultural heritage without committing resources for housing would be grossly negligent to the community's needs.

Practitioners working in community development (such as city staff who focus on housing, development, and health, or staff of community-based non-profits) can strategically draw on creative placemaking, public pedagogy, public science, and/or community organizing approaches—in addition to traditional housing development, case management, advocacy, and referral services—to meet community needs. For example, if residents face displacement from homes and businesses, rental evictions, and rising property taxes, community organizing and public science interventions may help residents mobilize to study and take action in their community. If the knowledge of long-time residents is being dismissed, there are diminished opportunities for their civic engagement, or there is disregard for culturally significant places, creative placekeeping interventions may amplify residents' place-stories, create spaces of resident representation, and commemorate important places, moments, and/or people in the neighborhood. Where residents mourn disrupted social ties, escalated social stigma, and ruptured place-attachments, public pedagogy projects might serve to build relationships among neighbors, reduce bias and discrimination, and create contexts for people to care for and enjoy their neighborhood. Ultimately, more than material interventions have the potential to multiply the ways that residents of gentrifying neighborhoods might come to know, care for, and fight on behalf of, one another.

## Acknowledgements

## About the Authors

**Janine Christiano** is a committed advocate for the arts and economic justice. She is completing graduate study in Community Development and Action at Vanderbilt University.

**Amie Thurber** (*corresponding author*) is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at Portland State University. Her research and practice interests involve transforming social inequality in neighborhoods, amplifying resident-led resistance to gentrification, and developing best practices for community-engaged scholarship. Email: amie.thurber@gmail.com

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**Appendix A. Summary of studies in review**

| Project Name | Author (Year) | Project Design | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Creative Place-making | Public Pedagogy | Public Science | Community Organizing |
| 1. "Reilly Park" Photovoice Project | Burke, Greene & McKenna (2017) | ▓ | | ▓ | |
| 2. The Fed up Honeys | Cahill (2006), Cahill (2006), Cahill (2007) | ▓ | ▓ | ▓ | |
| 3. Hamden Community Archeology Project | Chidester & Gadsby (2016) | | ▓ | ▓ | |
| 4. Residents Voices Project | Darcy (2013) | | ▓ | ▓ | ▓ |
| 5. Restorative Listening Project | Drew (2012) | | ▓ | ▓ | |
| 6. Over-the-Rhine People's Movement | Dutton & Mann (2003) | ▓ | | | |
| 7. Myatts Field North | Hodkinson & Essin (2015) | | | ▓ | |
| 8. Toronto Free Gallery | McLean (2014b) | ▓ | ▓ | | |
| 9. Manifesto Community Projects | McLean (2014) | ▓ | ▓ | | |
| 10. P.S. Kensington | McLean & Rahder (2013) | ▓ | | | |
| 11. Action for Neighborhood Change | McLean, Rankin, Kamizaki (2015) | | | ▓ | ▓ |

| 12. | !Huntington Park NO SE VENDE! | Nam (2012) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13. | Rebuild Foundation | Reinhardt (2014) | | | | |
| 14. | We Call These Projects Home | Sinha & Kasdan, (2013) | | | | |
| 15. | Mission Wall Dances | Somdahl-Sands (2008) | | | | |
| 16. | Cayce United | Thurber, Collins, Greer, McKnight & Thompson (in press); Thurber & Fraser (2016) | | | | |
| 17. | Neighborhood Story Project | Thurber (in press) | | | | |