

The  
Public



ART, DESIGN &  
GENTRIFICATION:  
A PRIMER



The Public is an activist design studio specializing in changing the world.

This zine, a part of our *Creative Resistance How-to Series*, is designed to make our skill sets accessible to the communities with whom we work. We encourage you to copy, share, and adapt it to fit your needs as you change the world for the better, and to share your work with us along the way. Special thanks to Mercedes Sharpe Zayas and Zero Lab for their support in developing this zine.

For more information, please visit [thepublicstudio.ca](http://thepublicstudio.ca).

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#### **NOTE**

This zine is just a primer, a work in progress. Unpacking these issues is complicated, nuanced and should be an ongoing collective conversation. We hope that this zine can generate questions and lay the groundwork for further discussion so that we can build resources together. The Public Studio is located in Parkdale, Toronto on the territory of the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. The territory is the subject of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and Confederacy of the Ojibwe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. Because of this location, some of this discussion is Toronto- and Parkdale-specific.

Please contact us at [people@thepublicstudio.ca](mailto:people@thepublicstudio.ca) with suggestions for future iterations of this zine, or stop by our studio located at 58 Lansdowne Ave.

# Introduction

## WHAT IS GENTRIFICATION?

We've all seen neighbourhoods change. Sometimes it's watching your local discount grocer shut down in exchange for an upscale coffee shop. Sometimes it's opening up your door to find an eviction notice because your apartment is being redeveloped as a condo. Sometimes it's laying witness to the gradual uprooting of your surrounding community. The underlying process that tends to drive these moments of neighbourhood change is called 'gentrification.'

### But what exactly is gentrification?

Oftentimes, gentrification is described as the upscaling of a lower-income neighbourhood to accommodate a higher-income clientele. We at The Public Studio define gentrification as a racialized class project<sup>1</sup> rooted in settler colonialism that disproportionately impacts working class communities of colour and urban Indigenous populations.

This definition isn't static. Our understanding of the concept will grow and change as the needs of the community shifts and as our politics continuously form. That being said, we use this basis definition to recognize that although many of us have experienced the effects of gentrification, certain communities are subject to stronger forces

of displacement pressure than others. We also recognize that while neighbourhood change is inevitable, the way that a neighbourhood changes is not inevitable.

## WHAT IS THIS ZINE?

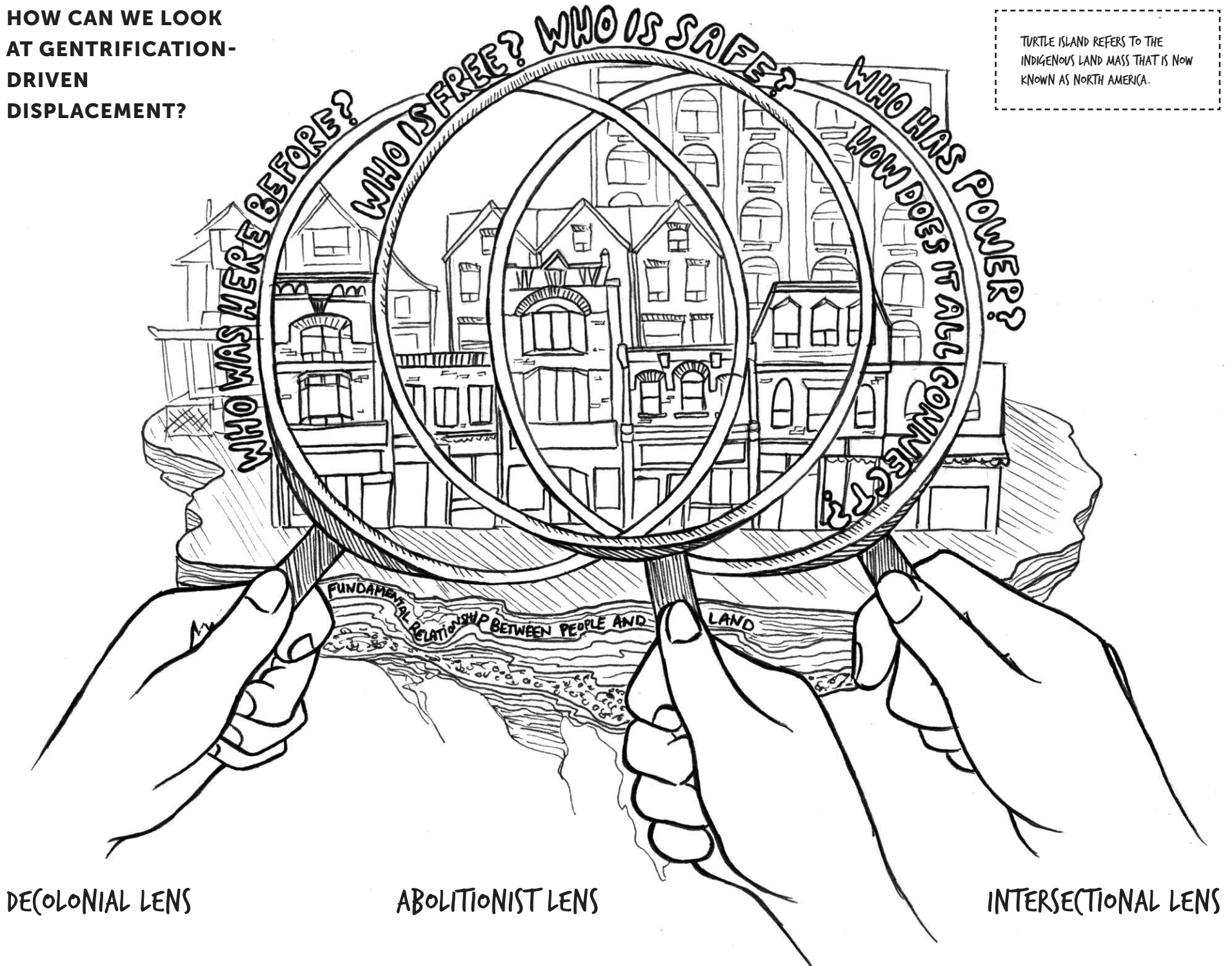
This zine is divided into three sections: an introduction to gentrification and the role of artists and designers in processes of gentrification, some examples of artful resistance to gentrification, and a toolkit with short- to long-term strategies for artists and designers to become active members of communities organizing against gentrification.

**We call upon cultural producers and curators to join in solidarity and fight back against false-choice gentrification, and instead harness the power of art and design to collaborate on practices and policies that honour and respect existing communities. To do so, we created this zine to challenge artists who may be complicit in processes of gentrification to hold themselves accountable, and ultimately tackle gentrification-driven displacement through the lenses of decolonization, abolition, and intersectionality.**

GEOGRAPHER TOM SLATER INTRODUCED THE NOTION OF 'FALSE (HO)KE' GENTRIFICATION TO UNRAVEL THE IDEA THAT NEIGHBOURHOODS WILL EITHER BECOME GENTRIFIED (GOOD) OR DISINVESTED (BAD). YOU CAN READ MORE HERE: <http://crisis-scape.net/conference/item/180-unravelling-false-choice-urbanism>

HOW CAN WE LOOK  
AT GENTRIFICATION-  
DRIVEN  
DISPLACEMENT?

TURTLE ISLAND REFERS TO THE  
INDIGENOUS LAND MASS THAT IS NOW  
KNOWN AS NORTH AMERICA.







## DECOLONIAL LENS:

Indigenous sovereignty and land struggles must be placed at the forefront of anti-gentrification movements and social justice organizing in the city. In the same way that settler colonial powers continue to treat Indigenous territories as vacant land, gentrification treats urban spaces as void of Indigenous sovereign presence and ready to be scooped up by capital<sup>2</sup>. From the Downtown East Sides of Vancouver to Toronto, a decolonial lens is integral to unravelling the processes of settler colonialism that perpetuate the erasure of urban Indigenous populations. These processes have also impacted diasporic communities that have migrated to Turtle Island only to be displaced once more. Building solidarity between migrant communities and Indigenous populations is therefore integral to decolonizing our current practices and interactions within urban spaces.

### SETTLER COLONIALISM 101

WHEN WE THINK ABOUT COLONIALISM, WE TEND TO THINK OF IMPERIAL PRACTICES OF LAND GRABS, RESOURCE EXPLOITATION, GENOCIDE, SLAVERY, AND WARFARE AS MECHANISMS TO ACQUIRE POLITICAL CONTROL OVER SOVEREIGN NATIONS. SETTLER COLONIALISM DRAWS FROM THESE MECHANISMS IN A MORE OBSCURED FORM BY SETTLING LAND AND ESTABLISHING AN INDEPENDENT, SEEMINGLY 'POST-COLONIAL' STATE ON INDIGENOUS TERRITORIES. THIS PROCESS RELIES ON COLONIAL VIEWS OF THE LAND AS 'VACANT' OR 'UNPRODUCTIVELY USED' AS A LENS TO ACCUMULATE LAND AND DISPOSSESS THE INDIGENOUS OWNERS AND COMMUNITIES FROM THEIR TERRITORY.

## ABOLITIONIST LENS:

Policing, incarceration, and displacement are interdependent processes that pave the way for gentrified neighbourhoods<sup>3</sup>. "Neighbourhood safety" has become synonymous with increased policing, racial profiling, and mistreatment of consumer/survivor communities. Abolition—a rallying action that has been central to the struggles against slavery, incarceration, and the overarching system of anti-Black racism—provides a critical framework for challenging racist and colonial practices of surveillance over property ownership. We echo the demands of

### ABOLITION 101

HISTORICALLY, THE ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT WAS A MOVEMENT TO END SLAVERY, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, AND SEGREGATION ACROSS COLONIAL TERRITORIES AND ENTITIES. SINCE THE SIGNING OF THE THIRTEENTH AMENDMENT IN THE UNITED STATES, THE MOVEMENT HAS TRANSITIONED ITS FOCUS TOWARDS MODERN DAY SLAVERY BY ERADICATING THE SYSTEMS OF RACIAL OPPRESSION ROOTED IN THE PRISON-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX. ANGELA DAVIS IS A KEY FIGURE BEHIND THE PRISON ABOLITION MOVEMENT. THE ABOLITIONIST LENS HAS ALSO BEEN APPLIED TO PRIVATE PROPERTY, TRACING BACK TO (HERYL HARRIS'S) LEGAL INQUIRY INTO RACIALIZED FORMS OF PROPERTY IN RELATION TO THE PARALLEL COLONIAL SYSTEMS OF DISCRIMINATION AND DEHUMANIZATION OF BLACK AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES.

### INTERSECTIONALITY 101

'INTERSECTIONALITY' WAS FIRST COINED BY BLACK LEGAL SCHOLAR KIMBERLE CRENSHAW IN 1989, YET THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE CONCEPT DRAWS FROM THE LEGACIES OF BLACK, INDIGENOUS, POC, POST-COLONIAL, QUEER, DISABLED, AND TRANS ACTIVISTS, FEMINISTS, AND SCHOLARS WHO HAVE COLLECTIVELY REVEALED THE COMPLEX FACTORS AND PROCESSES THAT SHAPE HUMAN LIVES. INTERSECTIONAL FEMINISM RECOGNIZES THAT INEQUITIES ARE THE OUTCOME OF INTERDEPENDENT SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION THAT AFFECT INDIVIDUALS DIFFERENTLY BASED ON THEIR SOCIAL LOCATIONS, POWER RELATIONS AND EXPERIENCES, AND THAT DISMANTLING RACISM, ABLEISM, CAPITALISM, AND OTHER SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION IS INTEGRAL TO ABOLISHING PATRIARCHY.

## INTERSECTIONAL LENS:

Real estate speculation and gentrification-driven displacement have contributed to the racialization, feminization, and geographic concentration of poverty in our urban margins. An intersectional lens is necessary in understanding how interlocking systems of oppression, such as race, gender, class, citizenship and ability, place disproportionate displacement pressures on individuals based on their social location. This lens provides a framework to reflect on your identity position and the role that you play in processes of gentrification, as well as the numerous angles and strategies for solidarity that are necessary to challenge processes of displacement.

the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project in the Bay Area, who have drawn clear demands for how an abolitionist lens must be applied to private property: "Our demand for the abolition of private property is a demand for public housing, collectively owned housing, eviction moratoriums, and land trusts. It is a demand that breaks down the exploitative relationship between landlord and tenant. It is a demand for our cities to be sanctuary cities. It is a demand that connects the rise of proto-fascist and white supremacist ideologies to the fundamental relationship between people and land."



SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA  
PUBLIC RADIO

## WHY ARE WE INTERESTED IN GENTRIFICATION?

As an art space that recently moved into the rapidly gentrifying neighbourhood of Parkdale, Toronto, on the disrespected treaty territories of the Dish with One Spoon, we are cognizant of the role we play as settlers on contested land, and as newcomers to a community fighting active gentrification. We created this zine as a tool to further examine the role of art in the process of gentrification, as well as a resource to contest these processes in a meaningful and collaborative manner. Parkdale is a neighbourhood that has been studied in great depth with regards to gentrification<sup>4</sup>.

Through dialogues with community organizers with the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust, we decided to have conversations primarily with artists and art spaces operating and living within the neighbourhood so as not to exacerbate the research fatigue of community members with lived experience of displacement and dispossession. We would like to thank Michael Burt of Making Room; Emily Gove, Genevieve Wallen, and Chanteclair of Xpace Cultural Centre; Gaetan Heroux of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty; Mr. Bittersweet and Ric Amis of the Parkdale Neighbourhood;

Deirdre Logue and Allyson Mitchell of the Feminist Art Gallery; PA System and Sean Martindale of the Parkdale Solidarity Flag; Joshua Barndt of the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust; and Hayden King of the Ogimaa Mikana Project, for your time and valuable contributions. We see this zine as a contribution to both a local and an international dialogue confronting the role of artists in the process of gentrification, and an invitation for more collaborative actions amongst artists, community members, businesses, and organizers to address neighbourhood change in Parkdale.

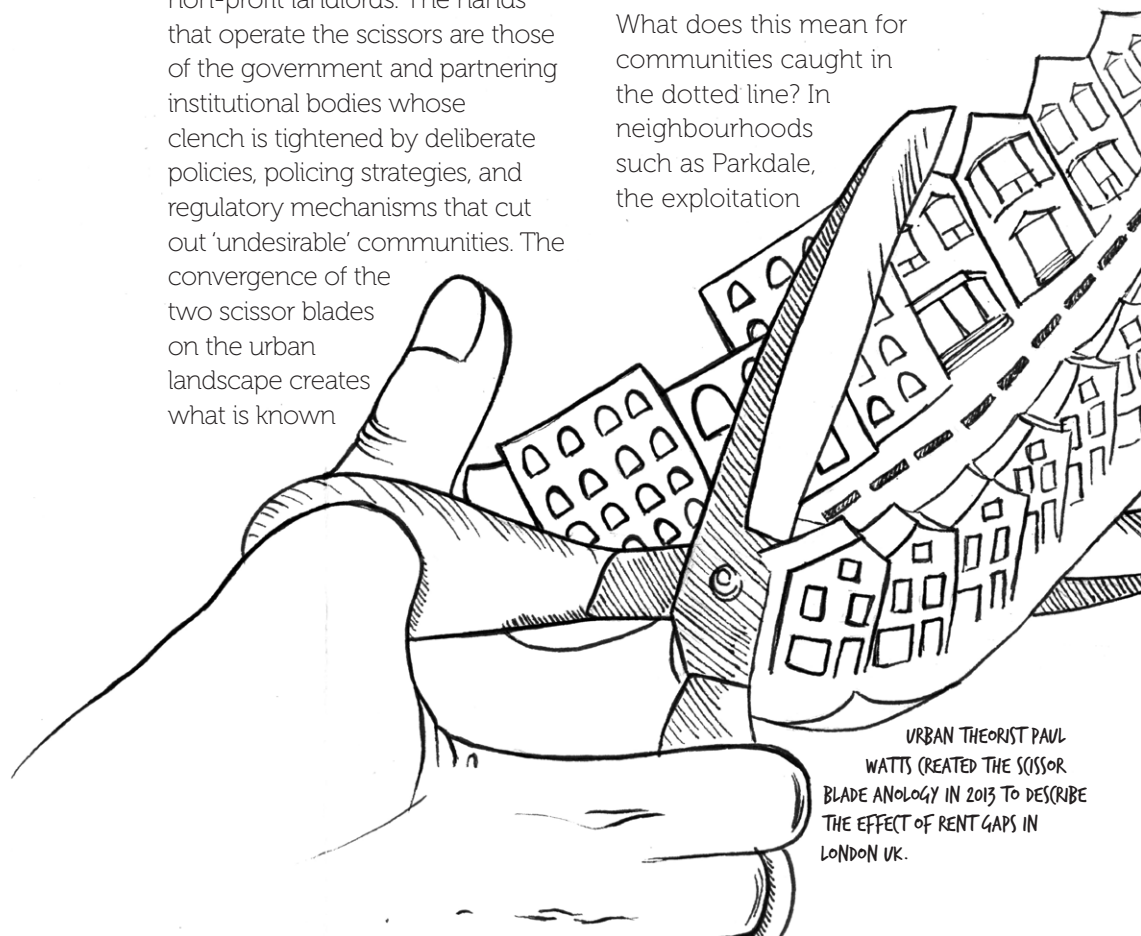
## WHAT ARE THE ECONOMIC PROCESSES THAT DRIVE GENTRIFICATION?

Imagine a pair of scissors cutting away at the last frontiers of an affordable neighbourhood. The rising blade of the scissors is sharpened by speculation and rising land values in the real estate market. The lowering blade of the scissors is formed by the long-term degradation and negligent management of affordable housing by state, private, and non-profit landlords. The hands that operate the scissors are those of the government and partnering institutional bodies whose clench is tightened by deliberate policies, policing strategies, and regulatory mechanisms that cut out 'undesirable' communities. The convergence of the two scissor blades on the urban landscape creates what is known

as a "rent gap," or the disparity between existing and the potential value of a property<sup>5</sup>. In other words, the gap represents potential profit that emerges between the existing properties and the highly valued land that it sits upon.

## IMAGINE A PAIR OF SCISSORS CUTTING AWAY AT THE LAST FRONTIERS OF AN AFFORDABLE NEIGHBOURHOOD.

What does this mean for communities caught in the dotted line? In neighbourhoods such as Parkdale, the exploitation



URBAN THEORIST PAUL WATTS CREATED THE SCISSOR BLADE ANALOGY IN 2013 TO DESCRIBE THE EFFECT OF RENT GAPS IN LONDON UK.

of rent gaps is part of a complex urban strategy that benefits real-estate developers, corporate landlords, and wealthier residents at the expense of existing lower-income residents and business owners. Most cities have done little to address intensified investment and pro-development urban policies because they generate more revenue for municipalities through property taxes and increased capital circulation<sup>6</sup>. Yet this logic has begun to negatively impact municipalities on a global scale.



ROCKY DOBEY

In the past five years, the growing speculative interest on behalf of international financiers has contributed to what has been called “planetary rent gaps”<sup>7</sup>. These global speculations have allowed for condos to sit vacant as housing crises boil.

In Parkdale, a Swedish “non-profit” real estate management

company, Akelius, began buying over number of affordable apartment buildings and aggressively evicting tenants in order to conduct renovations on the buildings. Many tenants and housing advocates have argued that the company’s process of “renoviction” is a strategic maneuver to displace existing residents in favour of increasing rental prices for wealthier tenants.

The capitalist models that drive gentrification can also trigger racist outlasting and classist notions of belonging. This brings us back to the importance of understanding gentrification through the lenses of decolonization, abolition, and intersectionality. For example, in Vancouver, the public reaction around international speculation by predominantly East Asian investors has been riddled with racial scapegoating that is rooted in histories of anti-Asian sentiment in Western Canada<sup>8</sup>. As historian Henry Yu notes, “Today a lot of people are undeniably coming to Vancouver with a lot of money, and they are investing in speculative housing, because there is a speculative housing market here. They’re not the problem, speculative capital in real estate is a problem. It is the structure of our city right now. Indeed, from the moment of colonial dispossession of

*Indigenous land this has been a speculative real estate market.”<sup>9</sup>* Considering the expansion of both residential and commercial displacement in lower-income neighbourhoods, a new proactive model is needed that views property not as a mechanism for channeling capital, but as a catalyst for social change.

## WHAT ROLE DO ARTISTS PLAY IN THE PROCESS OF GENTRIFICATION?

Let’s go back to the scissor blade analogy. When developers decide to take a stab at revitalizing a neighbourhood, what kinds of communities do they target? Developers and city builders tend to favour urban spaces that are accessible to the downtown core and, more often than not, have a strong presence of creative communities. Whether they are escaping the suburbs, moving from another city, or being displaced from rising rents of more centralized neighbourhoods, artists, designers, and students tend to relocate into traditionally working-class neighbourhoods with affordable housing and studio space options. As a result, artists and designers often play a contentious role in the transition of a neighbourhood’s affordability. Deirdre Logue and Allyson Mitchell from Feminist Art Gallery

described this dynamic as the “quiet gentrification” of upwardly mobile artistic and queer communities forging ties in a working-class neighbourhood that have the danger of leading to “monster gentrification”: an unwieldy machine of developers and corporations deriving profit off of the community. Ric Amis, a construction worker turned photographer, who founded two artist co-ops and was one of the originators of Artscape, implicated himself in the quiet gentrification of Parkdale that occurred in the 1980s, yet is now facing the repercussions of eviction from his artist-studio space of nearly 30 years.

**DEVELOPERS AND CITY BUILDERS TEND TO FAVOUR URBAN SPACES THAT ARE ACCESSIBLE TO THE DOWNTOWN CORE AND, MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, HAVE A STRONG PRESENCE OF CREATIVE COMMUNITIES.**

These urban processes have been happening for years, but have now been accelerated with the rise of political discourses around creative cities and placemaking



tactics (we'll explain this concept later). What is most surprising is that there have been very few attempts to hold artists accountable for their role—whether intentional or not—in displacing existing communities.

## HOW CAN ART SPACES RECONCILE THEIR POTENTIAL SYMBOL AS HARBINGERS OF GENTRIFICATION?

Hayden King, a Pottawatomi and Ojibwe language learner and educator from Beausoleil First

Nation, noted that “artists must recognize that they’re an active player in gentrification, and if they are committed to social justice, they should devote their energies to ensuring that people are not being displaced.” It is critical for artists and designers to assess their position in local economic systems, especially with regards to access to capital—be it cultural or financial—and how their presence can influence neighbourhood change. So how can we unsettle this pattern? How can art spaces reconcile their potential symbol as harbingers of gentrification?

In speaking with a number of artist-activists and art spaces housed in Parkdale, it became



THANKS TO TORONTO FREE GALLERY



clear that there is a distinct need for not only dialogue around this topic, but also targeted strategies and direct actions that are rooted in community demands. Artists need to begin this process by holding themselves accountable for the role that they play in gentrification-driven displacement. This is often difficult for many artistic communities to come to terms with, especially when they themselves have been displaced by increasing rents and unethical evictions. Artists tend to have limited choices in terms of where they can relocate. Genevieve Wallen of Xspace Cultural Centre noted that our current state of precarity is driven by the fact that not everyone can afford access, whether it be to decent housing, employment, or the production and consumption of artistic content.

Key to this dilemma is recognizing what effect your presence may have on communities who do not have a choice in terms of their accommodations. As Emily Gove of Xspace Cultural Centre noted,

there is a clear differentiation between being ‘poor’ and being ‘broke,’ and artists must not conflate the two states of financial (in)security if they wish to build solidarity with working class communities. Similar to how white and light-skinned people of colour need to hold themselves accountable for perpetuating racist systems of oppression, lower- to upper-middle class artistic communities need to challenge the role they play in attracting capital to communities at risk of displacement. Only then can we move forward an intersectional approach to anti-gentrification that can bolster equitable community building and staying power.

‘GENTRIFICATION’ WAS FIRST COINED BY RUTH GLASS IN 1964—YET THE UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES THAT PROPEL GENTRIFICATION PREDATE THIS NAMING. IF YOU APPROACH GENTRIFICATION FROM A DECOLONIAL LENS, THESE PROCESSES DERIVE FROM A FRAMEWORK OF SETTLER COLONIALISM THAT HAS BEEN OCCURRING FOR OVER 400 YEARS.

# From Complicity to Accountability

## HISTORIES OF RESISTANCE

Gentrification is one of those processes that many people oppose in theory, but contribute to in practice. Learning how to best be accountable for our nuanced roles in gentrification can take a lot of self-reflection, trust-building, and most importantly, time. We thought that the most helpful way to move forward is to learn by example. This next section, *From Complicity to Accountability*, addresses histories of resistance across Turtle Island, and provides examples of initiatives that have mastered the art of accountability.

### 1. BOYLE HEIGHTS, LOS ANGELES

Whittier Boulevard is a symbolic artery that carves a path through East Los Angeles, home to the iconic drag races that blaze through LA's predominantly Latin American neighbourhoods. During the freeway construction era in Los Angeles, Boyle Heights was one of the neighbourhoods that endured the demolition of thousands of homes and businesses to make way for five major freeways<sup>10</sup>. At the same time, countless residents of Boyle Heights were recruited to fight the Vietnam War amidst the blatant xenophobia that afflicted their communities. It was at this critical time that the Asco art collective emerged. Asco was a Chicana artist collective in East LA that performed living murals as a rejection of traditional Mexican aesthetics. Their work drew attention to how public

policies and urban planning create conditions of economic and geographic disparity. One of Asco's most iconic performances was the *First Supper (After a Major Riot)*, in which the collective staged a feast along Whittier Boulevard to commemorate the location where police had opened fire on an open crowd and to contest the paramilitary occupation of the barrio. Self Help Graphics & Art, an east side artist-run gallery and community space that opened in the 1970s, featured Asco's work and was an important outpost of artistic and community identity.



Forty years later, the role of art as resistance has significantly shifted. The emergence of over a dozen new galleries in the span of three years has created concern around the impact that artists have on the affordability and cultural make-up of the working class barrio. The Boyle Heights Alliance Against Artwashing and Displacement is a coalition of resident-activists who have been militant in their demands for galleries to leave the neighbourhood. In 2016, the coalition led a march to distribute mock eviction notices stating: *"You are hereby notified by the people of Boyle Heights, who have fought for decades to preserve affordable housing for low-income families, that you must remove your business from the neighborhood immediately."* In an interview with the LA Times, Harry Gamboa Jr., one of the founding members of Asco, noted that the activism in Boyle Heights is drawing from a history of resistance rooted in the Chicano Movement<sup>11</sup>. When Self Help Graphics & Art held a town hall to address gentrification, they pointed to the systemic drivers of gentrification, yet eviscerated the role of artists and art spaces

in the process. Their statement, *"Artists Don't Gentrify, Developers and Planning Departments Do"*<sup>12</sup> incited a group of activists to occupy the gallery space and shut down the meeting. Boyle Heights is a living example of the need for artists to be accountable for their role in the transition of a neighbourhood, and recognize how the success of the artistic community can come at the expense of existing communities—even if they are longstanding members of said community. What is also critical is for artists to realize that if they do not resist speculative interest in the neighbourhood, their very success might lead to their own displacement.

ASCO COLLECTIVE





ARIEL APPEL

## 2. OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

Ever since San Francisco became the heart of the tech boom, the comparatively affordable City of Oakland has been the target of soaring property values, unethical evictions, and rampant displacement of African American communities. Oakland rents have been increasing at a higher rate than those in San Francisco, with low-income and Black residents being displaced at disproportionately higher rates<sup>13</sup>. These gross inequities have led to a rise in community-based coalitions that are committed to halt displacement and dispossession, such as The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, the Oakland Anti-Displacement Coalition; Fremont Residents Insisting on Social Equity (RISE); and Alameda Renter's Coalition. Most notably, the Oakland

Creative Neighbourhood Coalition (OCNC) has been organizing to emphasize the value of cultural equity over displacement. They define cultural equity as being inextricably linked to racial and economic justice, and envision an Oakland where policies preserve the cultural assets and institutions for communities of color. They firmly believe that immigrant and low-income communities are the drivers of culture, but are often the most under-represented and under-resourced.



One of OCNC's members, Betti Ono, is a cultural space for underrepresented artists led and operated by Black women in the heart of downtown Oakland. When Betti Ono's landlord, the City of Oakland, attempted to raise the rent by 60%, the space hosted an Arts Action Forum & People's Town Hall to advance the OCNC's action plan for the City of Oakland to adopt an equitable policy framework around cultural development. The Town Hall featured talks, performances, and an interactive Community Power Map facilitated by the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project. The Coalition has also been negotiating a Community Benefits Agreement in the heart of the Black Arts District with developers of a new luxury housing development. The agreement binds the developers to pay for the relocation of an iconic mural depicting Oakland's history and to support the sustainability of the City's oldest multicultural arts centre. Most recently, the City's planning department committed to develop social equity policies in the redevelopment of downtown Oakland in response to the

direct action of the Coalition<sup>14</sup>. The task for the Coalition is now to hold the planning department accountable to ensure that cultural equity becomes a lived reality.



### 3. CHINATOWN, NEW YORK CITY

New York City has long been a hot-bed of tenants rights organizing, from the squatter movement of the Lower East Side in the 1980s to the recent rise of anti-gentrification coalitions and networks throughout the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn, and Harlem. For years, cultural producers have been bound to a cyclical process of encroaching on working-class communities of colour, leading to the erosion of affordability and access due to the inevitable pursuit of speculative capital and placemaking processes hot on their tracks. The impact of these processes can also be violently experienced by artists driven to the margins of society. As Sarah

Schulman notes in her book *Gentrification of the Mind*, the erasure of queer and trans artists in Greenwich Village through the plague years of AIDS coincided with the state-manufactured processes of gentrification, which resulted in the loss of rent controlled apartments, the influx of speculative capital, and both the death and displacement of remaining communities. As artists and designers interact with urban spaces and community fabrics, it is critical that they foreground anti-displacement practices so as to protect the livelihoods of the communities they belong to and the communities they operate in.



New York's Chinatown has become a site of class contention as over one hundred contemporary art galleries have been moving into the borough and pricing out traditional businesses, bakeries, and herbal medicine shops. The Chinatown Art Brigade was formed in 2015 by Asian American social justice-minded artists, cultural workers, and media makers to question how artists and galleries can play a role in preventing displacement of longstanding residents and businesses, while also maintaining their artistic practices and operations. To turn this question into a reality, the Brigade created an eight-point pledge of resistance for artists, activists, and gallery owners to stand in solidarity with anti-gentrification efforts. This pledge was presented at a town hall, Chinatown Not for Sale, which was hosted by Artists Space, Chinatown Art Brigade and Decolonize This Place along with a candid dialogue about the impact of art-based gentrification in Chinatown. The Brigade also collaborates with CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities' Chinatown Tenants Union, a grassroots association that organizes low-income pan-Asian

communities, to create artistic projects that address eviction prevention, tenants rights, and community empowerment. Here to Stay was a community art project that screened a series of large-scale outdoor mobile projections addressing themes of gentrification, displacement and community resilience.

**Sites of Mass Displacement:  
A Chinatown Gentrified by Galleries**

**Advanced Clusters:**

**Chrystie Street- 11 galleries**  
Art is Piss, Buddy Warren, 118, CDS, Fitzroy, JTT, Lehmann Mauguin, Kristen Lavelle, Harton, Johannes Vogl, Roster

**Eldridge Street- 11 galleries**  
Shoot the Lobster, PracticeNYC, Bern, Essex Street, Woodward, Miguel Abreu, Company, David Lewis, Invisible Exports, yours, mine and ours

**Orchard Street- 10 galleries**  
Krause, Chinatown Soup, 33 Orchard, McKenzie Fine Art, Foley, Sacha Wolf, ARTFACT, Mark Miller, Maribel Guepin, Roster

**Grand Street- 8 galleries**  
Gavin Brown, 47 Canal, Four A.M., Anant, Goide LES, Feuser/Masler, Y Gallery, Shin Gallery, Ramiken Crucible



**Show solidarity and help us #decolonizethisplace**

(CHINATOWN ART BRIGADE)



(CHINATOWN ART BRIGADE)





#### 4. INDIGENOUS INNER-CITIES ACROSS TURTLE ISLAND

The inner-cities of urban centers across Turtle Island have long been coded as symbols of Indigenous dispossession. Canada's urban colonial geographies have been achieved through zoning and nuisance laws that have conceptually and materially delineated spaces of settler and native occupation<sup>15</sup>. With the rise of gentrification-driven displacement, the same pattern of violent expulsions that displaced Indigenous populations to reserves is now serving to displace many native communities from the urban spaces they have come to call home<sup>16</sup>.



VIA TWITTER  
@CAPDTES



Located on unceded Coast Salish Territories, the Downtown East Side in Vancouver has responded to gentrification with a strong history of resistance, from the occupation of Woodward Department Store in 2002, to tent cities<sup>17</sup> and yuppie gazing tours organized as a response to the frequent poverty tours of the DTES. The Alliance Against Displacement is a collective that unites the efforts of grassroots projects, such as the Carnegie Community Action Project and the Vancouver Network of Drug Users, under an accountability process that allows for transformative justice and reconciliation in the Downtown East Side. With the recent proposal for a new Artscape<sup>18</sup> cultural community hub in Chinatown, organizers are preparing for a new wave of resistance to preserve the cultural integrity of the neighbourhood and ensure that art-based development does not further displace existing communities.



ROCKY DOBEY

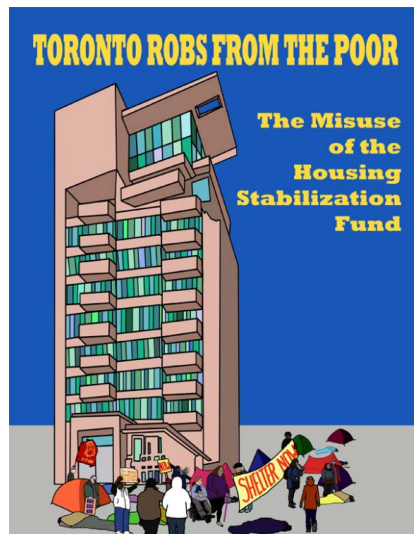


The Downtown East Side of Toronto is located on the territory of the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. Home to the infamous 'skid row', Toronto's DTES became subject to revitalization efforts and encroaching development. Gaetan Heroux, an anti-poverty activist with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, has been organizing in the neighbourhood since 1988 and has led guided walking tours to take a critical look at the popularization of social-mix neighbourhood redevelopments<sup>19</sup>. Heroux traced the origins of skid row to the construction of the first poor house in 1837, and the emergence of flop houses, single room occupancy housing (SROs),

and a network of non-profit and private services—Good Will, legal clinics, Money Marts, drop-ins, and 24-hour coffee shops—that catered to low-income and working class communities. 10,000 urban Indigenous peoples lived in the neighbourhood in 1965. The 1970s and 1990s were key turning points in the direction of the neighbourhood, tracing back from when the municipality began buying up rooming houses to when Harris' "Common Sense Revolution" made significant cuts to welfare. Activist art and design has been central to many of OCAP's actions, from the concentrated postering of walls throughout the neighbourhood to protest the closure of the George Street School House, to the sculptural memorials of Indigenous community members and sex workers who passed in the area surrounding a squat at 88 Carlton. The Toronto DTES is also home to Street Patrol, a group of Indigenous women, two-spirit people, and allies, who offer burning sage, bottles of water and food, drug-use kits, and clothing, as well as alert the community about instances of violence and police activity. These efforts are integral for artists and designers to understanding solidarity movements that commemorate and honour Indigenous livelihoods.

THE COMMON SENSE REVOLUTION REFERS TO THE PERIOD OF TIME WHEN MIKE HARRIS, THE CONSERVATIVE PREMIER OF ONTARIO FROM 1995 TO 2002 ISSUED INNUMERABLE CUTS TO THE PROVINCE'S SOCIAL WELFARE SYSTEM.

ONTARIO COALITION  
AGAINST POVERTY



POPE SQUAT

## 5. PARKDALE, TORONTO

The conditions that paved the path for gentrification in Parkdale follow a complex history of deindustrialization, deinstitutionalization, and displacement. Parkdale was once an affluent lakeside community that transitioned to a blue collar neighbourhood following the construction of the Gardiner Expressway. By the late 1970s, the closure of two nearby residential psychiatric centres and the loss of stable manufacturing jobs disrupted the neighbourhood's social fabric and placed it in critical need of supportive structures. The neighbourhood transitioned once more in the 1980s, when an influx of artists and middle-class families began to re-inhabit

the older Victorian homes, lofts, and warehouse spaces. These class-based transitions have been intertwined by inundating waves of newcomers from the Caribbean, Vietnam, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, China, Hungary, and most recently Tibet and Syria. The neighbourhood is now home to a unique forging of communities that is predicated on values of inclusivity, diversity, affordability, and equity. Yet the threat of rising rents and displacement pressures have had significant consequences on the residents of South Parkdale, wherein 90% of the residents are renters and 34% live in poverty. Despite these ongoing challenges, the community has been far from complacent.





Organizing and direct action have been integral to community activists, as evidenced by the Pope Squat<sup>20</sup> in 2002 to the rent strikes of 2017. Yet most recently, the rallying cry against gentrification has been informed by a community-driven planning project that challenges the very systems of ownership and control that have contributed to displacement from the neighbourhood. The Parkdale People's Economy centers on how the redistribution of assets and shared wealth are key to building an equitable neighbourhood. The Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust (PNLT) is a critical tool for advancing this strategy due to its ability to remove land from the speculative market and place it under community control. Yet a strategy is only successful insofar that it can be communicated clearly. In order to ensure the accessibility of the 2016 Parkdale Community Planning Study, the Parkdale Solidarity Flag was created to visually translate rigorous research into public art. The Parkdale Solidarity Flag was a distillation of the rigorous research from the community plan into a replicable graphic

collaboratively designed by PA System and Sean Martindale. The image was collectively designed by PA System and Sean Martindale through design and colour consultations with diverse community members, such as the Tibetan and Roma communities. This process aimed to ensure that the visual representation evoked the neighbourhood values of inclusivity, diversity, affordability, and equity through nonverbal elements. PA System also wanted to ensure that the mural could create impact beyond two-dimensions, so they came up with the idea to make the mural into a flag that could hang from business windows and residences to line the streets of Parkdale with the message of solidarity.



PARKDALE SOLIDARITY FLAG



On August 7, 2015, 27 tenants were illegally evicted from a Parkdale hotel that operated as a rooming house with less than two weeks' notice. The

Queens Hotel was sold to a developer who converted the space into an Airbnb Hotel with a gallery operating on the main floor. The gallery refused to be held accountable for the role the space played in the illegal displacement of vulnerable tenants, and instead operated the space as an afterhours. Eventually the gallerist was fired and relocated in response to the community backlash, which spurred the following collective statement amongst local artists:

## ACTING ETHICALLY IN THE CITY 10 CRITICAL TIPS FOR ARTIST BY ARTISTS

- 1** The questions is not only about what do we create art, but by whom and for whom?  
- Deborah Barndt (Toronto)
- 2** Pay close attention to context. Nothing we create is neutral.  
- Sean Martindale (Toronto)
- 3** Seek to understand the impact of your actions by beginning all projects with research. The artist too can perform due diligence. - Kirsten McCrea (Toronto)
- 4** Learn the history of this neighborhood.  
Step 1. Learn about it online or at the library.  
Step 2. Learn about it from the people & organizations who were and are a living-breathing part of it.  
Step 3. Respect this history by acting upon its many lessons  
- Joshua Barndt (Toronto)
- 5** As artists, if we want to explore spaces beyond our own narrow consciousness, we need to be prepared to humbly explore these worlds. If we want to communicate with, and seek support of, communities beyond our circle of friends, it is necessary that we become aware of struggles, challenges and hopes of those individuals and communities. In concrete terms, this means learning about the struggles and challenges of those living and working in the neighbourhood where we live and work.  
  
The age of the artist working in isolation, celebrated for their individual imagination is over. - Michael Burr (Toronto)
- 6** Be passionately aware that you can be completely wrong  
- Dian Marino (Toronto)
- 7** Bear a sense of responsibility for their actions, regardless of whether the impact was intended.  
- Kirsten McCrea (Toronto)
- 8** The artist will have to decide whom to serve  
- Jeanne Han Heeswijk (Netherlands)
- 9** Avoid deals with the devil.  
- Carole Condé & Karl Beveridge (Toronto)
- 10** Tell the truth!

ARTISTS IN TRUST

# ART OF ACCOUNTABILITY

The Ogimaa Mikana Project has been installing billboards across Anishinaabeg territory to draw on Anishinaabemowin, the Anishinaabe language, to challenge, reflect on, and operationalize the concepts of reconciliation and decolonization. Susan Blight and Hayden King, the language learners behind the project, started the

serious about the reconciliatory movement, then we have to get back to the symbols and original language used to communicate about diplomacy and peace on this land. The billboard centers the Dish with One Spoon wampum belt, a peace treaty between the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas, and Haudenosaunee to agree that despite their diversity, they can share the land's resources—as long as the dish never runs dry. Hayden King saw this as a useful metaphor for how we live in the city. As a former resident of Parkdale who witnessed the rise of gentrification, he wanted the sign to be a reminder that we have to learn how to share if we want a decolonial, reconciliatory future.



OGIMAA MIKANA PROJECT

billboard campaign in Parkdale to emphasize that it is still Indigenous land. In the 1970s and 1980s, Parkdale was a gathering place for a large Indigenous community, yet with the pressures of gentrification, the presence of urban Indigenous peoples is becoming invisibilized. The billboard challenged Canadians by asserting that if we're

FIND THE PARKDALE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN AT  
[parkdalecommunityeconomies.files.wordpress.com/2016/11/20161121\\_pced\\_final.pdf](http://parkdalecommunityeconomies.files.wordpress.com/2016/11/20161121_pced_final.pdf)

## From Accountability to Action

So you've learned how to be accountable for the role you play in gentrification. Now what? When it comes to gentrification, it's important not to stop at the point of allyship. Instead, if you plan on being an active member of your community, you must be ready to become an accomplice in the direct action and organizing in your neighbourhood. What does this look like? The following section, From Accountability to Action, provides a toolkit for artists and designers that offers frameworks for developing practices and policies that honour and respect existing communities. Feel free to pick, choose, and adapt from the following options based on the context of your neighbourhood, and always keep in mind that these interventions should be developed through collaborative partnerships rather than inserting yourself as an unappointed leader.

### SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES

**Before you even consider moving into a gentrifying neighbourhood, ask yourself: Do I have any other options?**

As we mentioned before, a key differentiation between people's experiences of gentrification is their access to choice, which is predicated by privilege and capital. If you were raised in a lower to upper middle class household, if you have access to light skin privilege, if you have significant access to cultural capital that may lead to upward mobility, it is critical that you reconsider what impact you might have on the neighbourhood you are moving into. Even though the rent might be affordable, is it

necessary to move there? Do you need a physical space? What is your reasoning and how will you engage with community? These are all important considerations before you decide to make a move.

when u agonize over apartment listings bc u don't want to be complicit in gentrification by inserting urself in a traditionally working-class neighborhood but still salivate at the thought of inhabiting a tastefully-decorated one-bedroom mere steps away from both a very positively yelp-reviewed gastropub and a new minimalist concept café



INTERNET MEME BY @40THSHAKIRA



**If you're new to the neighbourhood, make sure to learn about the history and ongoing struggle of the space that you are occupying.**

As a first step, acknowledge the land and property upon which you are operating. Who lived or worked there before you started renting the space? Did you displace these tenants or did they move for other reasons? If you are an unwelcomed settler on the land, how can you acknowledge, respect, and build solidarity with the Indigenous populations that have been displaced? For example, the Tibetan community in Parkdale has been at the forefront of battles against evictions and displacement, yet integral to their approach as a group in exile is connecting their struggle in solidarity with the Indigenous peoples upon whose land they are organizing.

As a next step, educate yourself about the ongoing struggles in the neighbourhood. What organizing is happening? How can you collaborate and offer support in a non-intrusive manner? While the internet is a great resource, you can often learn even more by engaging in conversations with people at the local corner store or coffee shop, reaching out to a community-based organization, or becoming

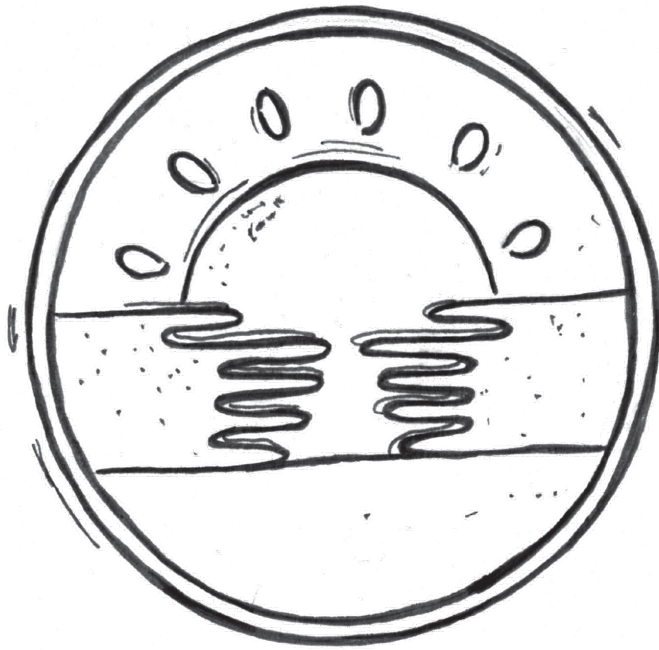
an active member in local organizing efforts. For example, if you're an art space newly operating out of Parkdale, inform yourself about Parkdale Organize, the Parkdale Land Trust, and the Parkdale People's Economy! Seriously, put this zine down right now and read the Parkdale Neighbourhood Plan. You can also support the organizing efforts of the local tenants' association and other major grassroots coalitions by offering your assistance with designing material content for outreach, providing space for organizing, or connecting them with your social networks. For example, Michael Burt, the artistic director of Making Room, claimed that artistic practice must be closely liaised with community-based organizations to ensure that art and community are not seen as two separate entities. Mr. Bittersweet, a resident "shit disturber" and organizer of Mad Pride, also noted that artistic communities need to look internally at the assets that a community holds rather than looking externally to attract cultural and capital resources. Most importantly, remember that building trust takes time! You might not be invited into spaces right off the bat, but try your best to nurture and forge connections for future engagement.

**Call your local politician and advocate for policy strategies that can alleviate gentrification.**

Organize around citywide efforts to fight for zoning laws and housing policy that support inclusive local economies and preserve affordable spaces for future generations. Examples at the municipal level include localized no-net-loss policies, development without displacement policies, inclusionary zoning, tax breaks and subsidies for affordable commercial spaces that can house inclusive and community-based artist-run spaces, equity impact assessments for land use decisions, and more. All of these policy mechanisms can be leveraged to ensure that neighbourhood change occurs in an equitable fashion.

**Incorporate simple but effective signs of inclusivity.**

In speaking with Xspace Gallery, they noticed that a simple but surprisingly effective gesture was placing an 'Open Sign' in the window of their gallery space. Emily Gove observed that, "As soon as I put the open sign up on the door, a bunch of teens from the highschools nearby ran up and were like 'What is this place? You're finally open! You're never open.' Since that day, the same group of 5-10 teens come in and hang out in the library space for hours." Genevieve Wallen also added that because they do not police users of the space, community members feel more welcome. This is reinforced by their use of signs in the window—Refugees are Welcome, Black Lives Matter, No Bans on Stolen Land—to reinforce their politics as people enter the door. If you are an art space operating in Parkdale, think about hanging a Parkdale Solidarity Flag in your window. Another simple gesture recommended by Joshua Barndt from the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust is to advertise your events in accessible spaces to the community, such as libraries, laundromats, and other inclusive convening spaces.



PARKDALE SOLIDARITY FLAG

## MID-TERM STRATEGIES

### Archiving Erasure

We live in a data-rich society. Yet so often, the data that is collected—or rather, accessible—cannot account for what has been lost. The lack of data on the erasure of racialized, queer, trans, and housing insecure communities is partially due to the lack of institutional mechanisms that account for invisibilized status, as well as value-laden biases regarding what is or is not deemed necessary to record. Two unique initiatives that attempt to counter these trends are the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project in the Bay Area, and Marvellous Grounds in Toronto.

The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project is a data visualization, analysis, and storytelling collective that has been documenting the evictions and displacements of Bay Area residents in the wake of the 'Tech Boom 2.0.' The project calls attention to systems of global capital investment in real estate, high tech, and the political economy through digital mapping matched with oral history. The collective also explores these topics through interactive film projects, murals, and community events. The project has offered a number of workshops on how to replicate their initiative in your

own localized context, so make sure to check out their website and learn from their strategies.

Marvellous Grounds is a web-based project that envisions the ways that QTBIPOC (queer and trans Black, Indigenous and people of colour) create communities and foster connections within Toronto/ Three Fires Territories and beyond. Their interactive story map collects narratives of joy and grief, archives meeting places and spaces from the past, and allows for a meeting space of its own for community dialogues to be shared and discussed. The first edition of their writing, Archiving the Unarchivable, gathers the work of artists and photographers to document activist movements, decolonial and ancestral teachings, and QTBIPOC culture.

ANC - ANTI-EVICTION MAPPING PROJECT



## Town Halls and Citizen Salons

Town Halls offer a unique opportunity to develop or maintain an ongoing dialogue amongst artists, art spaces, activists, businesses, and community members around gentrification. These collective visioning sessions can take many forms.

**Town Halls:** A number of art galleries and arts coalitions have hosted Town Halls to develop action plans that address the most pressing needs in arts and culture communities. As aforementioned, the Oakland Creative Neighbourhood Coalition hosted an Arts Action Forum & People's Town Hall to advance cultural equity policies that address racial and economic justice. Likewise, the Chinatown Art Brigade in New York hosted a town hall, Chinatown Not for Sale, with Artists Space and Decolonize This Place to present their pledge and hold a discussion about the impact of art-based gentrification in Chinatown. There was even a town hall held in Toronto by the now-defunct Toronto Free Gallery, Tired of All this Creativity Blah Blah Town Hall, to address the City's Creative City Policies and its impact on precarious livelihoods. If you run an arts space in a gentrifying neighbourhood, you should consider holding a

Town Hall to initiate a dialogue between community members and arts spaces around creating a collective mandate for concrete strategies that contest false-choice gentrification.



TORONTO FREE GALLERY

**Citizen Art Salons:** Citizen Artist Salons are video-based gatherings that allow artists from multiple jurisdictions to share ideas and highlight strategies for building inclusive creative communities. For example, the United States Department of Arts and Culture held a Citizen Art Salon to address the debate between placemaking and placekeeping. Feel free to reach out to us if you're located in another neighbourhood undergoing gentrification and are interested in collaborating on a Citizen Arts Salon to discuss strategies for addressing the role of artists and art-based interventions in gentrification-driven displacement.

## Pledge of Resistance

Artists and galleries can resist becoming weapons of mass displacement. The Chinatown Art Brigade in New York City created this pledge of resistance to gentrification as a first step for artists to express their solidarity and support:

(CREATE YOUR OWN PLEDGE OF RESISTANCE! USE THE WORKSHEET ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES TO IDENTIFY THE HISTORIES, PEOPLE, AND SITES OF RESISTANCE TO GENTRIFICATION IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD: WHAT ARE SPECIFIC WAYS YOU CAN PUT THIS PLEDGE INTO ACTION? MARK IT WITH A SIGNATURE, RITUAL, CELEBRATION OR EVENT TO HELP. MAKE YOUR PLEDGE ON YOUR OWN AND SHARE IT OR CREATE ONE AS A GROUP.)

**Gentrification is a crisis, and frontline communities are fighting back:** from Boyle Heights in Los Angeles to Bushwick, the Bronx, and Chinatown in New York. Can artists and galleries resist becoming weapons of mass displacement? Can they become allies of the grassroots struggle against gentrification? Yes, they can. A first step in expressing your solidarity is to take this pledge of resistance to the fine art of gentrification:

### I PLEDGE TO:

1. Get to know my neighbors. Learn about the history and contemporary situation of the place I am occupying. Find out which people I have displaced with my gallery, studio, cafe, or bar. Come out to community meetings to learn what is going on.
2. Support the businesses that are essential to low- and middle-income people in my neighborhood.
3. Share information, resources, space, and skills with any community advocates who are working to prevent landlords from mistreating tenants, illegally raising the rent or harassing tenants to make profits.
4. Support my neighbors who are fighting to save their homes. Understand that gentrification and police harassment go hand in hand. Report police harassment and stop the NYPD from violating the civil rights of my neighbors.
5. Agree not to rent or buy any unit that is owned by a publicly known slumlord. Support tenants who are fighting against foreclosures, forced evictions, buy outs and price outs.
6. Call out, and inform on, developers who are using "Trojan horse" tactics-pop up shops, galleries, cafes, and trendy retail kiosks-to stimulate real estate interest in neighborhoods.
7. Support ongoing efforts to get the city council and mayor to endorse and pass the community-led Chinatown Working Group's Rezoning Plan that reflects the needs of Chinatown's residents, protects current and future affordable housing, preserves the neighborhood and discourages displacement.
8. Provide language accessibility. Translate my mission, my press releases and any notices of evening events into Chinese and Spanish.

CHINATOWN ART BRIGADE

# 's Pledge of Resistance to Gentrification

## I PLEDGE TO:

### 1) GET TO KNOW MY NEIGHBOURS

These ethnic group(s) or communities were historically present where my space currently is:

These communities are still present:

These communities are no longer present or their presence has changed significantly:

I will attend the following community meeting \_\_\_\_\_ hosted by \_\_\_\_\_  
[name of group, person, organization] [event name]  
\_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_  
[date, time] [location]

### 2) SUPPORT BUSINESSES THAT ARE ESSENTIAL TO LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME NEIGHBOURS

I will support these businesses that are essential to low- and middle-income people in my neighbourhood. These businesses are vital because of price, necessity, culture, or accessibility (name the business and the ways in which they are essential):

### 3) SUPPORT COMMUNITY ADVOCATES WORKING TO PROTECT TENANTS

I will support the following community advocates working to prevent landlords from mistreating tenants, illegally raising the rent or harassing tenants to make a profit:

I can share the following information, resources, space, and skills:

BASED ON THE PLEDGE OF RESISTANCE TO GENTRIFICATION BY CHINATOWN  
ART BRIGADE IN NEW YORK CITY. YOU CAN ACCESS THIS PLEDGE AND CHECK  
OUT THEIR WORK AT [www.chinatownartbrigade.org](http://www.chinatownartbrigade.org)

### 4) SUPPORT NEIGHBOURS FIGHTING TO SAVE THEIR HOMES

Understanding that gentrification and police go hand in hand, I will report police harassment and stop them from violating the civil rights of my neighbours. Depending on the context of the situation, these are some avenues of action I will take to protect my neighbours from police surveillance or violence:

### 5) AGREE TO NOT RENT OR BUY ANY UNIT THAT IS OWNED BY A PUBLICLY KNOWN SLUMLORD

These are properties that currently house tenants who are fighting against foreclosures, forced evictions, buy outs, and price outs:

### 6) CALL-OUT AND INFORM ON DEVELOPERS WHO ARE USING "TROJAN HORSE" TACTICS

Pop-up shops, galleries, cafes, and trendy retail kiosks to stimulate real estate interest in neighbourhoods. These are possible avenues [media sources, council meetings, campaigns, protests etc.] that I can use to bring attention to the impact of these businesses in my neighbourhood:

### 7) SUPPORT ONGOING EFFORTS TO GET THE CITY COUNCIL AND MAYOR TO ENDORSE AND PASS THE COMMUNITY-LED POLICIES

List of upcoming City Council meetings or local policies that are community-led:

### 8) PROVIDE LANGUAGE ACCESSIBILITY

I will translate my mission, press releases, and any notices of events in the following languages:

Signature

Date



## Interventionist Art Projects

Interventionist art and design projects directly intervene with unjust urban practices through material and social disruption. Internationally, we can draw on examples such as the community-scale interventions of Theaster Gates in Chicago and Rick Lowe in Houston, to the supportive work with land trusts by Caroline Woolard and Jeanne van Heeswijk.

“Art communities” are often used as a tool to advertise condo development. To counter this phenomenon and draw attention to the housing disparities in Toronto, Sean Martindale repurposed illegal condo ads as temporary living structures that were installed in public spaces throughout the downtown core. Using real estate techniques, he created a mock campaign for TENT: Life-Like Living in 2010, complete with scale architectural models and promotional pamphlets.

Making Room—a radically inclusive inter-disciplinary arts company—is currently collaborating with Toronto Public Health and Edmond Place to create a project addressing the intersections of health and housing in a way that integrates complex understandings of ownership and intimate notions of what makes a home.



OR (SEAN MARTINDALE)

READ ABOUT VALENTYNA ONISKO'S EXHIBIT  
WHERE THEY TALK ABOUT RADICAL HOSPITALITY  
AT [http://openresearch.ocadu.ca/id/eprint/1686/1/Onisko\\_Valentyna\\_2017\\_MFA\\_CCP\\_Thesis.pdf](http://openresearch.ocadu.ca/id/eprint/1686/1/Onisko_Valentyna_2017_MFA_CCP_Thesis.pdf)

## LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

### Abolition of Private Space for Cultural Production

One of the most common themes throughout our interviews with Parkdale artists and art spaces was the need for collective spaces that are accessible, affordable, and inclusive to cultural producers. A number of intriguing models were set forward that disrupt normative notions of private and public space.

**Radical Hospitality:** The Feminist Art Gallery is an intentional interruption into institutional art spaces. Deirde and Allyson have offered their home as a gathering space for artists who were not being seen or heard in institutional settings, whether they be racialized, Indigenous, trans, queer, emerging, or invizibilized. By opening up their private space and making it public, they offer a critical gesture that explores an alternative to the art system and navigates their relationship with being white middle class settlers who own land on disrespected treaty territories. Deirdre borrowed the notion of ‘Radical Hospitality’ from Valentyna Onisko to frame FAG’s positioning of domestic space as a cultural, critical, and feminist environment open to the community. This gesture does not

come without costs—their guests witness their lives in intimate ways and this opens them up to vulnerability. That being said, the gesture allows for them to explore the difference between inviting people versus collaborating with and quietly supporting artists in a manner that does not demand attention or spotlight.

### Community and Cooperative Ownership:

The Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust is another key example of disrupting normative standards of private and public property by placing land under community ownership. Ric Amis, a board member of both the Parkdale Residents Association and the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust, noted that “We live in a capitalist system that is about ownership, and if you don’t own, you don’t have a lot of control.” He advocated for collective ownership models such as the land trust and artist coops (which he helped build back in the day<sup>21</sup>) as mechanisms for equitable cultural development. This sentiment was echoed by Chanteclair, who envisioned cooperatively-owned artist spaces that are accessible and inclusive as a key way to address gentrification-driven displacement.

**Develop policies and mandates committed to disruptive, community-engaged, anti-racist, feminist, decolonial, and queer work critiquing gentrification politics**

When thinking about key policies and mandates, it is useful to draw inspiration from models you respect. For example, the Radical Design School of Toronto has an incredibly strong mandate:

*As the Radical Design School, we aim to:*

*Cultivate a community of skill-sharing and collaboration that supports our allies in grassroots social movements*

*Build on our existing relationships in an intentional way with queer, trans, people of colour, Indigenous and otherwise marginalized communities that have been historically excluded from mainstream art and design institutions*

*Challenge traditional notions of art and design that are informed by capitalism by supporting community-based artistic resistance that is exciting and effective*

*Adapt art and design processes and practices to creatively challenge and undermine intersecting systems of oppression*

*Engage in a process of dialogue, self-reflection and community feedback in order to recognize the complexities of the communities with whom we work*

To read the rest of the Radical Design School's basis of unity, visit [radicaldesign.school/basis-of-unity/](http://radicaldesign.school/basis-of-unity/)

One other untapped opportunity for Toronto is to create a cultural equity policy, in a similar capacity to the Oakland Creative Neighbourhood Coalition.

**Placekeeping rather than Placemaking**

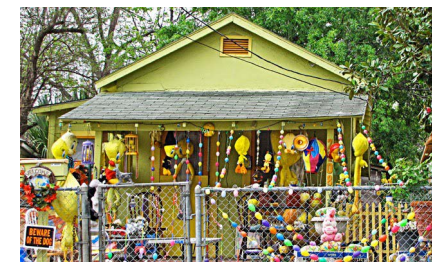
**Placemaking:**

Creative Placemaking is a community development project that aims to strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood using arts and cultural interventions<sup>22</sup>.

The practice has been critiqued for supporting gentrification, structural racism, and real estate speculation in the name of "neighborhood revitalization." Yet there are also ways of subverting placemaking practices. In an interview for Marvellous Grounds, Syrus Marcus Ware talks about murals as source of community vitality, but one that also reigns potential to be leveraged for gentrification. He noted that, "My personal reasons were to try to use this moment to change the trajectory and do something that could be really beneficial in terms of archiving queer of colour history. I think that the city had very different reasons for doing it that probably had everything to do with gentrification."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, he adds, "you must look for little moments of a lot of subversion."

**Placekeeping:**

Creative Placekeeping is that moment of subversion. As a direct response to the movement for placemaking, placekeeping is the active care and maintenance of a community by the people who live and work there<sup>24</sup>. Placekeeping preserves the cultural memories associated with a place and supports the social fabric based on the community's style and discretion. For example, "Rasquachefication" is the use of a Chicano aesthetic built on an attitude of resourcefulness that messes with the white spatial imaginary and offers a symbolic culture of creative reuse<sup>25</sup>. Likewise, the Ogimaa Mikana project used street signs—markers of place, orientation, and direction—to reclaim landmarks through Anishinaabemowin in a way that brings the discussion back to Indigenous place names and reconciliation. In some ways, the Parkdale Solidarity Flag could also be seen as a unique symbol of placekeeping that is embedded in values of anti-displacement and equitable development.



RASQUACHIFICATION – ROBERTO BEDOYA

# Conclusion

While this primer provides a starting point for thinking about gentrification, it is by no means exhaustive. We need to continuously imagine decolonial, abolitionist, and intersectional approaches that counter displacement so that we can continue to create new forms of community-engaged, anti-racist, feminist, decolonial, and queer work that disrupts processes of gentrification. We hope that this zine can serve as a working document to unite artists committed to social justice and collectively build strategies that honour communities through collective action.

# Notes

- 1 "Racialized class project" was termed by urban scholars Katharine Rankin and Heather McLean in 2015 to refer to the process by which redevelopment planning reinforces a white spatial imaginary through the erasure of racialized livelihoods.
- 2 In *Red Skin, White Masks*, Yellowknife's Dene scholar Glenn Coulthard (2014, 176) writes that, "through gentrification, Native spaces in the city are now being treated as *urbs nullius*—urban space void of Indigenous sovereign presence."
- 3 You can read more about the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project's call for abolition here: <https://abolitionjournal.org/in-the-time-of-trump-housing-whiteness-and-abolition/>
- 4 You can read the Parkdale Community Planning Study here: [https://parkdalecommunityeconomies.files.wordpress.com/2016/11/20161121\\_pced\\_final.pdf](https://parkdalecommunityeconomies.files.wordpress.com/2016/11/20161121_pced_final.pdf)
- 5 Urban geographer Neil Smith first coined the term 'rent gap' in 1979.
- 6 Vacancy decontrol is a clear example of a policy that allows for above-guideline rent increases in Toronto. As soon as a residential unit is vacated, landlords are legislated to raise the rent to whatever rate they deem to be market-rate.
- 7 You can read more about what Tom Slater calls 'planetary rent gaps' here: [http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article\\_comments/there\\_is\\_nothing\\_natural\\_about\\_gentrification](http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/there_is_nothing_natural_about_gentrification)
- 8 In a small victory, Vancouver adopted a speculation tax in an attempt to halt the rising unaffordability of the City's housing stock. The implication that this might have on the affordability of Vancouver's housing stock, and the impact that it might have on other cities that do not have this tax in place is yet to be seen.
- 9 You can read more about Historian Henry Yu's discussion of white supremacy and the foreign investment debate here: <http://themainlander.com/2015/12/10/white-supremacy-and-the-foreign-investment-debate/>
- 10 You can read more about the Asco collective here: <http://www.bagtaazocollection.com/blog/2015/10/28/performance-study-asco-and-the-displacement-of-mexicans-in-los-angeles>
- 11 You can learn more about the feud between the Boyle Heights community and art spaces here: <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-self-help-graphics-20160718-snap-story.html>
- 12 You can learn more about the Boyle Heights direct action: [http://defendboyleheights.blogspot.ca/2016/07/defend-boyle-heights-statement-about\\_6.html?view=flipcard](http://defendboyleheights.blogspot.ca/2016/07/defend-boyle-heights-statement-about_6.html?view=flipcard)
- 13 For further background on Oakland's stats, visit here: <https://www2.kqed.org/news/2017/02/09/how-many-are-being-displaced-by-gentrification-in-OAKLVAND/>
- 14 Watch the video about the OCNC made by Anti-Eviction Mapping Project member, Ariel Appel, here: <https://vimeo.com/204263931>
- 15 For more information about urban colonial geographies, read Sherene Razack's (2002) book, *Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society*.
- 16 To learn more about Glen Coulthard's (2014) concept of *urbs nullius*, read his book *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*.
- 17 VANDU, the Vancouver network of drug users, made huge gains when they organized a tent city in an empty lot zoned for condos in East Hastings. Their actions incited the mayor to visit the camp and, in a surprising twist, got him to sign a contract saying that there will be 100% social housing built in its place. You can read more about it here: <http://www.metronews.ca/news/vancouver/2016/08/02/mayor-commits-tent-city-social-housing-in-downtown-eastside.html>

**18** Artscape is a not-for-profit urban development organization that purchases and retrofits buildings to create 'affordable' spaces for arts organizations. In conversation with Ric Amis, one of the co-founders of Artscape, he claimed that Artscape has lost its creative and activist spirit, and instead has become a developer for development's sake.

**19** Development jumped over the 'skid row' boundary – marked by Queen to the South, Jarvis to the West, Carleton to the North, and Parliament to the East – largely due to Regent Park redevelopment that began in 2005 and the recent George Street Redevelopment.

**20** According to Gaetan Heroux and Mr. Bittersweet, the Pope Squat began during the Pope's visit to Toronto in the summer of 2002 when thousands marched to 1495 King and occupied the building for 3 months. It was a very successful squat action – activists lived and occupied, but within weeks it was people who were living on the streets. In the end, the building still stands. Although the property was not preserved for social housing, the Federal government provided funds to renovate the building for affordable rental units.

**21** Ric Amis founded the Beaver Hall Artists Coop and the Lakeshore Village Artists Coop.

**22** This definition is inspired by the definition created by the United States Department of Arts and Culture: <https://actionnetwork.org/events/usdac-citizen-artist-salon-creative-placemaking-placekeeping-and-cultural-strategies-to-resist-displacement>

**23** You can read the transcript of Syrus Marcus Ware's interview with Marvellous Grounds here: <http://marvellousgrounds.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Syrus-Marcus-Ware-Interview-Transcript.pdf>

**24** This definition is inspired by the definition created by the United States Department of Arts and Culture: <https://actionnetwork.org/events/usdac-citizen-artist-salon-creative-placemaking-placekeeping-and-cultural-strategies-to-resist-displacement>

**25** Read more about Rasquachification and Roberto Bedoya's work on placekeeping here: <http://creativetimereports.org/2014/09/15/spatial-justice-rasquachification-race-and-the-city/>



