Postscript:
Towards a Critical Historiography of Gentrification

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This is the author's final version.

Abstract
This postscript to the   Special Feature   describes the explicit and implicit temporalities of gentrification in gentrification theory. It asks whether the papers in this collection   affirm or disrupt the accepted understanding of gentrification as a phenomenon that emerged in the postwar years in the context of urban deindustrialization. It argues that a robust definition of gentrification, which identifies the historicity of the phenomenon and its temporal boundaries, is required in order to avoid the co-optation of gentrification definitions and theories and the 'naturalization' of gentrification. And, lastly, it suggests that critical history writing and historiography can contribute to gentrification studies' project of denaturalizing the process by grounding it in long-term processes with a historical dimension.

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> [F]or those of us whose own personal history is entangled with London's post-war history, it may be rather difficult to recognize all the signs of ageing, as well as of rejuvenation, in the face of the city. But some of these changes are unmistakable.
> (Ruth Glass 2010, 19)

Gentrification studies and history
Gentrification studies have mostly revolved around gentrification theory and its key concerns: what is gentrification? Why is gentrification happening? What forces and processes shape it, and how? Books and papers in the field have contributed directly to theory or presented original case studies that confirm, develop or challenge existing theory. Most of theory's key concerns, referred to as 'the well-worn battlegrounds over explanations' (Lees 2018, 2), have hardly altered in the last decades, even while the definition of gentrification has evolved, certain concepts have been abandoned (e.g. the presumption that owner occupiers are central to gentrification) and new ones introduced (e.g. tourism gentrification). In more recent times, gentrification studies exited the Western inner city, expanding to discuss gentrification in the countryside (e.g. Guimond and Simard 2010; Phillips 1993, 2002), in the suburbs (e.g. Butler 2007), in the Global South (e.g. Rubino 2005) and beyond - 'planetary' gentrification, as it has been termed (Lees, Shin, and Lopez Morales 2016; see also Phillips 2004). Within the widening scope of gentrification studies and ongoing focus on the definition of gentrification and the forces that shape it, history, the editors of this Special Feature argue, is mostly absent.

Gentrification studies, however, have not been completely averse to historicizing: first-and-foremost, they have historicized their own formation, recording the trajectory taken by the field since Ruth Glass's seminal 1964 publication (Glass 2010; see, for example, Lees 2018). Overviews of the field's historical development are found not only in books and papers offering surveys of gentrification studies (e.g. Lees, Slater, Wyly 2008; Slater 2011; Brown-Saracino 2010b), but also in many interventions in gentrification theory, which typically open with a concise chronological overview of the development of the understanding of gentrification (e.g. Guimond and Simard 2010). History is also present in many case-study articles, relating discrete vignettes of urban change to wider societal, political and economic transformations. As gentrification is a process of change and transformation, any rigorous understanding of it requires addressing, at some level, historical processes and dynamics. And lastly, and more relevant here, is the presence, whether explicit or not, in most major gentrification theories, of historical trajectories and temporal boundaries. Such boundaries have been proposed between the emergence of gentrification and the preceding era (Ley 1996; Smith 1996) or between phases of gentrification (e.g. Hackworth and Smith 2001). History, then, already exists within gentrification studies. Yet it is folded into the seams of theory, as will be shown later, rather than the focus of history writing.

Bearing in mind the above, this Special Feature of *CITY* offers a much-needed expansion of gentrification studies into historical research. The editors argue in the introduction that its premise is to 'challenge common definitions, perceptions and stereotypes' of gentrification. The Issue expands the geographical focus of gentrification studies beyond the Anglo-Saxon world, studying five European cities – though it remains focused on the Global North. Race and racism hardly feature in the papers, despite the presence of immigrants from Morocco, Turkey, Senegal and elsewhere in three of the case studies here, in Amsterdam, Catania and Turin. Until fairly recently, gentrification studies addressed the racial dimension of gentrification, if at all, as a sub-category of class,

overlooking the multiplicity of manners in which race cannot be reduced to other forms of social relations (Wacquant 2008; Hall 2018). More recent scholarship has sought to rectify this omission, often by turning to other fields such colonial studies (e.g. Kent-Stoll 2020). Studies of gentrification in Europe, however, have mostly lagged behind (though see Kadıoğlu Polat 2018 and McCombs 2020). The presence of immigrants in the three papers' case studies suggests that racism played a role in the transformation of these areas, whether through stigmatization and de-valorisation, disinvestment, discriminatory housing policies or a re-valorisation through the exoticism of 'the Other'. It is disappointing that the papers have failed to address such a glaring lacuna.

In this postscript, I will contrast and assess some of the arguments arising from the papers in this issue vis-à-vis existing gentrification theory as a means of identifying how the new work confirms, disrupts or contributes to existing understandings of gentrification's temporality and timeframe. In particular, the postscript looks at the argument that the emergence of gentrification was a postwar phenomenon. Three means of explaining gentrification will be addressed in this paper: definitions, theories, and histories. The three overlap and intertwine, and relate to the use of case studies. And finally, the postscript calls for critical history writing and historiography as a means of developing and enhancing the historical dimension of gentrification studies. But before discussing definitions or the papers in this   Special Feature   , I will concisely outline the historical dimension in key gentrification theories, as this will be reflected in my later discussion   .

The history within gentrification theory
Most surveys of the field (e.g. Lees, Slater, Wyly 2008; Lees 2018)   begin with the work of Glass (2010) in London's Islington in 1964, in which gentrification emerges as the displacement of working-class renters by incoming middle-class owner-occupiers. Such an understanding emphasizes that (1) class is a vital aspect of gentrification; (2) gentrification is place-specific; (3) displacement is involved. Since then, this understanding has been developed, challenged and rethought (e.g. Hamnett 2009, 477), yet to a degree all three issues mentioned above remain today vital for comprehending gentrification. Glass (2010, 23) identified gentrification as an 'inevitable' outcome of the 'demographic, economic and political pressures to which London […] has been subjected'. 'What is this new pattern, and is it in fact new?', asked Glass (2010, 25). But could similar pressures have developed in earlier periods, and likewise caused gentrification?

The 'supply side' and 'demand side' theories by Neil Smith and David Ley – the likely focus of Lees's (2018, 2) 'well-worn battlegrounds over explanations' comment mentioned earlier –   developed two facets that were already present in Glass (2010, 23), with gentrification understood, on the one hand, as the result of the liberalization of the housing market, and, on the other, of 'the emergence of new occupations and pursuits' as well as changed aspirations. The critique of Ley's 'demand side' theory has focused on the weakness in the explanation of how the changes in the structure of labour (i.e. the emergence of a new social group of white collar employees) led to changes in aspiration – namely, the desire for inner-city living. Ley (1996, 7, 28) refers to Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* (Bourdieu 2003) in which the social theorist describes how taste is socially constructed, first and foremost through class. But Ley does not elaborate this relationship. Nevertheless, Ley's historical boundaries are conveniently identified: the Canadian researcher related   gentrification to the wider process of transition to a postindustrial, post-Fordist society. The period of 1965-75, he argues (Ley 1996, 12), 'coincided with the onset of gentrification'.

Smith's ingenious 'rent gap' (Smith 1979), taken at face value, that is, without the additional building blocks Smith used to develop a comprehensive theory, is dependent on conditions of potential land-rent value that are created through market dynamics of disinvestment and investment, and hence gentrification would hypothetically come into being with the modern housing market, increase with speculation, and decrease with the imposition of controls on the market. But Smith never argued, as

some of his critics seem to suggest (Hamnett 1984; Ley 1987), that the rent gap – and hence the modern housing market – is the one and only condition for gentrification. Postwar suburbanization, for example, was important for Smith from the outset (Smith 1979; 1996, 37). In a series of papers in the 1980s, including responses to critique by Ley and others, and leading to his book *The New Urban Frontier* (1996), Smith developed his theory in a manner that integrates gentrification into the transition from industrial to postindustrial, from Keynesian to neoliberal economics. He wrote that 'the emergence of gentrification proper can be traced to the postwar cities of the advanced capitalist world' (Smith 1996, 32).

Among the numerous attempts by diverse scholars to reconcile the 'supply side' and 'demand side' explanations (e.g. Clark 2005; Bridge 2001; Phillips 2005), Peter Marcuse's is particularly succinct: he described the process of urban deindustrialization that was generated by the wide adoption of the assembly line in manufacturing in the postwar years, identified the abandonment and hollowing out of inner cities created by this process – and hence a rent gap, though he neither uses this term nor does he refer to Smith or Ley in his paper (Marcuse 1988). He outlined the process by which the new generation of white-collar employees, emerging with the reorganization of labour and the forces of production in the 1960s and 70s, was subjugated to exploitative work conditions. Culture, according to Marcuse, was the means of motivating these employees by offering 'compensation' through lifestyle – the ex-working-class neighbourhoods of the inner city as the 'playground' for self-realization through forms of cultural consumption, whether through loft living, access to restaurants, clubs and so on.[1]

The significance of the question of temporality and of the historic dimension of gentrification is therefore acknowledged by the major contributors to the field. Smith, Ley, and Marcuse agree that gentrification is a phenomenon that relates to the deindustrialization of cities; that urban deindustrialization, exacerbated by racism and other factors, was involved in disinvestment, deprivation and abandonment in inner-city neighbourhoods; that gentrification is the process in which capital and the middle class returned to the inner city. Hence, while urban deindustrialization began hesitantly in the interwar years, they argue, emergence of gentrification in the West squarely belongs to the postwar years.

Gentrification before deindustrialization?
A key aim of gentrification studies generally and gentrification theory in particular has been to denaturalize the phenomenon. In this sense, gentrification studies counter a common perception, found in the public sphere as well as in diverse corners of academia, of gentrification as 'the way cities are' (e.g. Ball 2014; Donnelly 2017; Venerandi, Zanella, Romice, Porta 2014), as though the processes of displacement and changes induced by gentrification are 'natural' facets of urban life. Such a perception of gentrification infers a cyclical conception of time, associated with the agrarian calendar and nature. The presumption that cycles of urban population shifts are a 'natural' phenomenon echoes, of course, the all too common equation of the dynamics of cyclical capitalism and its upturns and downturns with natural phenomena. In this context, history writing is an important means of denaturalizing current phenomena by demonstrating that they are not merely a fact of life, a 'given', but, rather, were constituted through a *historical* process.

Is the emergence of gentrification, then, necessarily related to the process of deindustrialization and the transition to a postindustrial, neoliberal society, i.e. capital's flight from and then return to the inner city? Theorists in the field identify a timeframe in their theories, but do not include one in their

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[1] Some of the terms used here are mine, not Marcuse's.

definitions.[2] In their contribution to this collection , Justin Kadi and Walter Matznetter quote Eric Clark's (2005, 263) definition of gentrification as 'a process involving change in the population of land-users such that the new users are of a higher socio-economic status than the previous users, together with an associated change in the built environment through a reinvestment of capital'. Tim Verlaan and Aimée Albers refer to the definition supplied by Lees, Slater and Wyly (2008, xv): gentrification as 'the transformation of a working-class or vacant area of the central city into middle-class residential and/or commercial use'. Neither of these, nor others, include a timeframe, as the definitions aim to capture the 'what' rather than the 'why', 'how' or 'when'. The timeframe discussed earlier emerges not so much from the definitions themselves, then, but through the wider writings by these scholars. The marginalization or absence of a historical grounding or timeframe in accepted definitions facilitates their co-optation as a means of providing legitimacy to perceptions that naturalize gentrification.[3] This is the research context in which the Special Feature intervenes through an array of history-driven papers.

Teresa Graziano's paper on Catania's deprived San Berillo neighbourhood traces a process of displacement and change, beginning with large-scale postwar demolitions and followed by more recent small-scale urban renewal projects. In particular, Graziano argues that touristification in 'peripheral European cities' such as Catania, in contrast to cities of the North, is a major driver of gentrification. The author maps three competing narratives that have shaped the area: one focused on decline and decay, one on a golden age of social intermixing, and a third, in which the other two established narratives are turned into a tourist-targeted exotic narrative. Bottom-up initiatives by locals, aimed at developing the district through the deployment of the third narrative to attract tourism, have contributed to the transformation. Gentrification derives here from direct displacement resulting from postwar demolitions and slum clearance, but is also described as 'soft' transformation – a transformation, which does not (yet) disclose displacement but is already experienced as a changing urban landscape.

The three narratives described by Graziano are associated with consecutive, even if somewhat overlapping phases. Magda Bolzoni and Giovanni Semi's paper introduces three phases in the gentrification of Turin: one phase, which arguably can be associated with Jamie Peck's 'roll out neoliberalism' (Peck and Tickell 2002), is described as post-industrial and growth-focused (1993-2006). It was followed by an 'austerity urbanism' phase (2006-2014), and more recently by an amalgam of platform urbanism, touristification and studentification (2014-). These three phases are not grounded, like Hackworth and Smith's (2001) 'waves', in a gentrification-specific trajectory, but in larger urban processes. But the kernel of this paper is the local condition and its shaping of particular forms of gentrification – balancing the typical emphasis in gentrification literature on the 'bigger picture', i.e. the overarching descriptions and explanations, the presumption of a universally chronological series of 'waves', with local path dependencies and contingencies. Turin is here posited as an 'ordinary' city – a case that differs from familiar global cities' case studies, framed as a 'Southern European entrepreneurial city'.

Tim Verlaan and Aimée Albers study of changes in Amsterdam's Jordaan and de Pijp neighbourhoods searches for the origins ('genesis') of Amsterdam's gentrification, for a local Islington of sorts. It

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[2] I am referring here narrowly to 'definition' as a concise explanation that is expected to distil the key characteristics of a term. Influential definitions of gentrification are referred to and operationalized by a wide array of academics and non-academics, too often in disregard to other criteria, conditions or explanations that accompany such definitions.

[3] In a 2014 working paper, for example, a group of researchers argued (Venerandi, Zanella, Romice, Porta 2014, 31) that 'Urban gentrification is here [in the working paper] seen as a natural and cyclical force underpinning the evolution of cities' – despite consulting key gentrification literature.

demonstrates that a tentative alliance of (conservative) heritage groups and (progressive) bohemian artists and students, which 'saved' the Jordaan by blocking Fordist wholesale demolition only to gentrify it, was identified already in the 1960s as a vehicle of gentrification. The paper highlights changes in patterns of consumption among a younger generation of urban incomers since the 1960s and, similarly to Bolzoni and Semi, emphasizes the disjunction between local specificities and the gentrification wave model of Hackworth and Smith's (2001).

These three papers as well as the two that will be discussed below, work with accepted definitions of gentrification. The papers of this Special Feature emphasize the specificity of the local primarily as a means of questioning the applicability of accepted universal phase and wave models. The three papers concur with the accepted timeframe in which gentrification is seen as a postwar process: Graziano's paper outlines a process of decay and abandonment since the 1950s until the 2000s, followed by touristification, cultural-led regeneration and new retail; Bolzoni and Semi study Turin from 1993 onwards; Albers and Verlaan's paper investigates working-class neighbourhoods in Amsterdam in the 1960s onwards. In these three contributions, gentrification emerged as a postwar process.

The other two papers, however, posit challenges. Of the two, Giacomo-Maria Salerno's piece on Venice is ostensibly the more provocative, stretching the periodization back to 1800. The main trajectory of the paper develops historically the correlation of tourism and gentrification, beginning with the Enlightenment fascination with antiquity establishing Rome, Venice and Florence as primary destinations of travel. Salerno's paper is organized around a dialectics of 'modernization' versus 'heritagization'. Gentrification in this narrative 'shadows' touristification. This allows Salerno, following Semi (2015), to associate gentrification with modernity, suggesting a much broader canvas than the accepted framework of postwar urban deindustrialization.

Stretching back to the fascination of neoclassicists and early Romantics with the antique world makes sense as a means of developing a historical account of 'heritagization'. The particularity of Venice shines through – as an early travel destination circa 1800 and unable to rival Torino or Milano as an industrial centre in the 1900s. The early reconstruction of historical places in Venice and the displacement it caused, discussed in Salerno's paper, certainly shares characteristics and features with gentrification, yet gentrification 'proper' (more about this below), in this narrative, does not enter the picture until the postwar era, once the 'small exodus' of the interwar years is supplanted by the 'large exodus' of the 1960-70s. The exodus included primarily skilled labourers and middle-class residents, hence very similar to the postwar middle class suburban relocation in North American cities. At the end of the day, and despite several 'red herrings', this paper does not question the postwar focus of gentrification. Instead, it embeds gentrification within long-term economic and cultural processes specific to Venice.

More radical in its temporal challenge is Justin Kadi and Walter Matznetter's paper on Vienna. The earliest of the six periods in the process they delineate predate the postwar era, beginning approximately with urban industrialization. These are 'imperial Vienna' of 1850-1918, described as a period of gentrification; 'Red Vienna', in which gentrification was arrested and 'reversed'; and 'Nazi Vienna', in which gentrification did not take place. They are followed by 'postwar Vienna' (a period of upgrading); 'urban renewal' from the late 1960s to 1989 (gentrification); and 'globalising Vienna' (depicted as a period of 'commodified gentrification'). The processes described for 'imperial Vienna' – the key argument for gentrification preceding the postwar era – include 'social upgrading' and the demolition of working-class housing stock, and are presented here as gentrification *par excellence*.

Whereas the processes of population changes the paper highlights in this early period were not typical of cities in this era, they were not completely unique, as the authors acknowledge, pointing

to Haussmann's projects in Paris. In this, they echo Neil Smith's discussion of nineteenth century proto-gentrification and of Haussmann in particular (Smith 1996, 32-38, see below). That Vienna experienced particular circumstances and conditions, a major argument of the paper, is nevertheless clearly visible. The population shifts in imperial Vienna, however, while certainly demonstrating many characteristics of postwar gentrification, are perhaps best considered 'proto-gentrification' or 'significant precursors' of gentrification, if to follow Smith's position, as will be outlined below.

This Special Feature, then, does not posit a *temporal* definition of gentrification, nor, in fact, does it directly question existing definitions. First-and-foremost, it challenges the universality of existing wave or phase theories through local specificities. By avoiding the universal and generalizable, it limits its own potential to develop an in-depth understanding of gentrification processes, which could be applicable and relevant to other cases. It infers a piecemeal whole that is construed of an amalgam of discrete cases and contingencies, echoing post-modern and poststructuralist theories that eschew the universal (for a critique of such theories, see McLennan 1996).

Critical history
Smith's 'Short History of Gentrification' (Smith 1996, 32-38), included in his *The New Urban Frontier*, adds detail to his positions regarding the temporality of gentrification. Similarly to several papers in this volume, he identifies Haussmann's boulevards projects as 'significant precursors' of gentrification. Following Marshall Berman – and reflecting Salerno's argument in this Special Feature – he associates the boulevards projects with modernity. He writes that 'something more akin to contemporary gentrification made an appearance in the middle of the nineteenth century, whether known by the name "embourgeoisement", "Haussmann" or the "Improvements"' (Smith 1996, 33), though he qualifies this by adding that '[e]ven as late as the 1930s and 1940s, gentrification remained a sporadic occurrence' (Smith 1996, 34).

The existence in the nineteenth century of a modern housing market that facilitated disinvestment and investment, coupled with evidence of displacement, are here a clear reason for considering these pre-postwar cases to be 'precursors'. They fall short of gentrification 'proper' for Smith because of their sporadic, unique nature, the lack of systemization in their application and their limited extent compared to the 1960s and later, in which 'gentrification represented a wholly unpredicted novelty in the urban landscape, a new set of urban processes that took on immediate symbolic importance' (Smith 1996, 38). Smith's 'Short History of Gentrification' therefore offers a defence of the postwar years as the moment in which gentrification in its full sense emerged, yet also opens the door to studies of historic 'precursors', such as the Viennese demolitions of 1890 or the Venetian reconstruction of historical places in the 1800s. While these earlier cases all stress the particularity of their circumstances, the two papers by Kadi and Matznetter, and Salerno do suggest broader processes in which the cases can be anchored.

At the end of the day, then, gentrification remains in this Special Feature a phenomenon that emerged in the postwar years in the context of de-industrialization, even while 'significant precursors' have been identified and unpacked. Arguably, it is the current conditions rather than pre-1950s cases that offer the strongest evidence against a narrow conception of gentrification as a specific process related to the transition from an industrial, Fordist and Keynesian society to a postindustrial, post-Fordist and neoliberal society: the ongoing gentrification, sometimes identified as 'super gentrification' (Lees 2003) or 'fifth wave gentrification' (Aalbers 2019), of already gentrified inner-city neighbourhoods in global cities.[4] These are areas in which abandonment and dereliction

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[4] The gentrification of already gentrified neighbourhoods suggests a continuous process without disinvestment and points to rent gaps no longer premised upon *local* housing markets. This could

no longer exist and from which the working class and poor have already been expelled. They have no available brownfields or workers' housing. Their transition was   completed years ago. And yet their gentrification continues at pace, if not accelerated. The postwar hollowing out of Western industrial cities may have given rise to gentrification, but the process has not ended with the completion of the transitional phase. The common explanation (see Hackworth and Smith 2001) is that gentrification has mutated; it has been recognized by local governments and developers as a means of societal engineering and upping real-estate values; it has been integrated into urban regeneration plans; it has been applied to diverse contexts, ranging from suburban to rural areas. Gentrification, if to spell out a truism (Hackworth and Smith 2001; Aalbers 2019), is a significantly different process today than that of the 1960s or 70s. It has evolved.

This apparent 'messiness' of gentrification as a concept can be addressed through critical history writing, not by further refining the definitions, a task for which theory is better suited, but by identifying the manner in which gentrification is embedded in large-scale, long-term, historical processes such as societal restructuring: developing, in effect, the historical trajectory of the temporal questions gentrification theory has already acknowledged as significant.

Critical history writing, if to transpose social theorist Luc Boltanski's (2013) discussion of critical sociology to history writing and historiography, is a means of unveiling societal processes that are implicit, difficult to discern, sometimes veiled, processes that despite their intangibility shape daily life. Similarly to other fields shaped by critical theory, such as critical urban theory, critical history writing includes value judgements and maintains a somewhat tenuous relationship with actors' 'ordinary critiques': It 'can or even *must* […] grasp the discontents of actors, explicitly consider them in the very labour of theorization, in such a way as to alter their relationship to social reality and, thereby, that social reality itself, in the direction of *emancipation*' (Boltanski 2013, 5; original emphasis   ). Critical history writing is invested in affecting current conditions through the explanation of historical processes and identification of the laws of 'historical dynamics'. The literature critic and historian Hayden White   wrote that 'knowledge of these laws of process makes it possible for us to distinguish between realistic and delusory programs for effecting social change   ' (1987, 142).

Following Boltanski, critical history writing and historiography can be described as 'metacritical' due to their focus on societal meta-processes and 'laws'. As a result of this 'metacritical' character they are often dismissed, as such work appears overtly constructed in comparison to uncritical empirical historic research. Yet critical history writing is arguably one of the few critical fields to benefit from a process of academization, which has typically elevated empirical research at the expense of critical work. Academization within history writing, in contrast, has relegated the type of uncritical 'survey' history writing popular some decades ago in universities. It requires researchers to anchor their discrete vignettes of particular case studies within a larger narrative – a narrative that could be the type of societal process in which critical historiography is interested.

Robert Beauregard (1986) memorably called gentrification 'chaotic' – but, to an extent, it is gentrification theory that, through its own growth and success, and despite its best intentions, has created 'chaos' by its ever more detailed and intricate descriptions driven by its reliance on case studies. These have provided a better representation of reality, but at the expense of clarity of explanation. Such a process of 'enhanced decoding' leading away from its aims is reminiscent of the protagonist of Michelangelo Antonioni's film Blow Up (1966), Thomas, magnifying photographs in order to discern evidence of a possible murder. The magnified images become blurry, limiting their

also imply a broadening of the term, which, combined with reducing gentrification's association with deindustrialization, ostensibly enhances the relevance of the term to non-Western cities.

ability to shed light on the events. History writing may be a construction, an artifice, and critical history writing more explicitly so; but operating alongside gentrification theory it can nevertheless add explanatory prowess to gentrification studies. Critical history writing and historiography add a much needed, different, and more distinctively temporal dimension of ordering to the comprehension of processes such as gentrification. The Special Feature is a much needed first step, even if tentative, in this direction.

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Notes