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Surviving Supergentrification in Inner City Sydney: Adaptive Spaces and Makeshift Economies of Cultural Production

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Abstract

Artists and creative workers have long been recognized as playing an important role in gentrification, being often portrayed as forerunners of urban change and displacement in former industrial and working-class suburbs of ‘post-Fordist’ cities. However, as is well represented by recent research, the relationship between the arts, gentrification and displacement has been called into question. The purpose of this article, which draws on 30 case studies of creative spaces in Sydney’s inner suburbs, is to chart some of the strategies of spatial adaptation and makeshift economies of solidarity that cultural workers adopt in order to keep living and working in areas of ‘supergentrification’. We document how cultural infrastructure is transformed by the gentrification process and argue that these alterations are critical to the survival of arts and culture in the city. Such makeshift economies contribute, in a practical way, to preserving the diversity that gentrification is sometimes deemed to destroy or displace. While the survival of creative spaces is a much less researched phenomenon than other forms of resistance or displacement, we suggest that it has important consequences for both research and policy decisions around gentrification, infrastructural development and urban cultural economies.

Key Words: supergentrification, arts, culture, makeshift economies, cultural infrastructure, Sydney

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Introduction

As forerunners of urban change in former industrial and working-class suburbs of post-Fordist cities, artists and creative workers have long played an important role in gentrification research³. However, the relationship between the arts, gentrification and displacement has been increasingly called into question⁴. Current accounts point toward a more complex and historically situated network of causes and effects (see Davis, 2013; Moscovitz, 2017; Grodach *et al.*, 2018) rather than the familiar—and often politically expedient—trope of the artist as an actor complicit in gentrification processes that eventually displace lower-income residents. Moreover, in recent processes of urban change—which have been characterized as ‘supergentrification’ (Lees, 2003)—communities of low-income creative workers are themselves priced out of and displaced from inner-city suburbs (Stevenson, 2013).

Between 2016 and 2018, the authors of this article were commissioned by two inner Sydney councils (City of Sydney and Inner West), covering 60 square kilometres around Sydney's central business district, to study how artists and creative workers were surviving and adapting to rising rents and to the transformation of former industrial buildings into high-density residential stock. Figure 1 below indicates where these councils are located within Greater Metropolitan Sydney, and where most research was conducted within those local government areas (LGAs). Those regions, both in the City of Sydney and Inner West, have high cultural industry concentrations, and have been experiencing the pressures of progressive gentrification for several decades. As Figure 1 highlights, the two areas are located close to the harbour; they are also proximate to keystone cultural institutions such as the Sydney Opera House and the Australian Museum, several major universities, and key logistical and transport links: Sydney Airport, Central Station, and the radial road and rail networks that fan out through the city. Such affordances are both vital to many creative practices—supplying materials, labour, markets and customers—and equally attract competition for scarce space. The research consultancies (Ang *et al.*, 2016; 2018; Pollio *et al.*, 2018) were therefore motivated by accompanying concerns that, increasingly, artists and creative workers in these areas—viewed as central to the city's global cultural reputation—could not access affordable and suitable spaces to work. Both municipalities needed empirical evidence to understand how cultural infrastructure was adapting to and surviving the pressures of urban change.

A vignette drawn from our interviews with creative workers well illustrates some of these spatial strategies of survival.

Claire is a Sydney-based festival curator and decorator. Local councils and festival organizers hire her business to produce and embellish community arts initiatives and other cultural events. It is a niche creative expertise that Claire has carefully cultivated over many years. In the early 2010s, when she started her own company, Claire had just been forced out of one of the inner-city neighbourhoods of Sydney. The warehouse where she and other creative

³ In brief, a post-Fordist city (Lever, 2001) is conceived in this article as one that has undergone a substantial transition from having a rigid, concentrated, large-scale, factory-based system of mass commodity production to a more flexible, dispersed, smaller-scale, office- and workshop-focused urban environment that produces a wider but smaller range of image-intensive goods and services (Rowe and Lynch, 2012). This transition also involves the repurposing of former industrial and warehouse spaces as leisure and arts precincts (Stevenson, 2017).

⁴ In this article, as in the research underlying it, we use a very broad understanding of the creative sector, drawing on the insight, also acknowledged by UNESCO, that the arts span cultural production, creation, dissemination, consumption and education (UNESCO, 2009; Ang *et al.*, 2016).

workers had been based was poised to be demolished to build new apartments. Looking for a new venue, Claire finally found a new warehouse, signed a lease she could not afford by herself, and started to gather a community of artists and creatives who, like her, could not bear the expense of living and working in the inner city any longer. Located in Marrickville, some 7 kms away from Sydney's CBD, the new space was surrounded by other industrial facilities, including a large abattoir and a meat-processing factory.

Already a destination for artists and other creative workers looking for unused industrial space and cheaper rents, since then Marrickville has become progressively more expensive and desirable. Cafes have replaced migrant-owned corner stores. Many warehouses are now earmarked for redevelopment. Those that remain are being transformed into coworking spaces for high-end designers and IT workers. Although urban change intensifies around her, Claire's shared warehouse remains untouched in a pocket of surviving industrial space in the suburb. She still has to negotiate laneway access with the large trucks directed to other factories, but high-rise apartments have recently broken ground just off the road.

Despite the fragility of the area as a workable site of cultural production, Claire emphasizes the resilience of the artists who work in the building. As it becomes more difficult for single artists to afford studio space, the spatial organization of the warehouse is changing. Some of the tenants are now sub-subletting their rooms to other creatives in order to alleviate the financial pressure of the rent. They do so by adding desks or additional partitions to their own studios. In this process, older, more established artists become mentors—not just sub-letters of studio space—of younger, low-income creatives. They share their expensive equipment and their knowledge. In fact, several mutual economies have blossomed in the warehouse, many of which are adaptive responses to the pressures of gentrification in Sydney.

Claire's story—one of 30 that inform this article—attests to the property cycle of a supergentrifying city in which artists, often regarded as precursors or 'vanguards' of urban regeneration, are then priced out of 'creative neighbourhoods' by new, wealthier residents. Claire's collective warehouse also shows the spatial strategies of survival that creative workers embrace to maintain cultural infrastructure that is endangered rather than driven by urban redevelopment⁵. Building on the insight that these spaces of survival coexist with displacement, as clearly recounted in Claire's tale of resilience, the purpose of this article is to chart strategies of spatial adaptation and enactment of makeshift economies that cultural workers adopt in order to continue living and working in areas of supergentrification.

In doing so, our contribution follows in the footsteps of recent gentrification research that has sought to interrogate the role that arts and culture are assumed to play in contributing to neighbourhood change (Grodach *et al.*, 2014; 2018; Foster *et al.*, 2016). Here, however, we shift the focus from questioning whether there is a causal relationship between cultural infrastructure and displacement, to exploring the ways in which creative spaces evolve when the pressure of supergentrification threatens their fragile existence. We argue that these adaptive survival strategies, both spatial and economic, are crucial for the preservation of the broader cultural and social diversity that gentrification endangers. This article thus offers a perspective—as seen through the eyes of artists, cultural and creative workers—on the informal spaces, practices and scales of resistance that Lees *et al.* (2018) have described as 'survivability'.

Our research deployed a mix of methodological tools, including quantitative geospatial analyses and interviews with government stakeholders. The insights reported in this article, however, emerged from the aforementioned 30 in-depth case studies of cultural venues/spaces, compiled

⁵ For a definition of cultural infrastructure, see Ang *et al.*, 2016.

through observational site visits and semi-structured interviews with 38 space managers and users. Where possible, ‘walking interviews’ (Evans and Jones, 2011) were held with participants, so that they could show us specific features of their buildings and surroundings. With their permission, we also took photographs of each venue. The artists and creative workers occupying these venues were diverse, and included film production companies, physical performance companies, puppetry show producers, music producers, an art school, an independent radio station, artist-run galleries, photographers, graphic designers, jewellery makers, costume makers, set builders, carpenters, sculptors, video-game makers, illustrators, printmakers and writers.

In the following section we locate our article within current gentrification research concerned with unpacking the relationship between the arts and urban change. In the third section, we set the scene, offering a broad overview of supergentrification in Sydney’s inner suburbs; in the fourth we describe the spatial responses to urban change, and in the fifth we analyse some of the makeshift economies of survival that emerge from these spatial transformations of the cultural infrastructure. We conclude with remarks on strategies of survival and adaptation, and also consider the reflexivity dilemma (Gibson, 2019) that is attached to urban research of this kind.

Engaging with cultural infrastructure

Current urban research on the relationship between cultural economies and gentrification is reassessing a longstanding narrative of neighbourhood change in which individual artists, creative businesses, and cultural infrastructure function as a ‘colonizing arm that helps to create the initial conditions that spark gentrification’ (Foster *et al.*, 2016). While both spontaneous creative clusters and policy-driven investments in cultural facilities might facilitate urban upgrading, increase real estate values, and contribute to the displacement of poorer residents, arts-led gentrification might be just one of the possible explanatory narratives of place change. For example, in their analysis of the effects of creative industries on US regions before and after the 2009 financial crisis, Grodach *et al.* (2018) have recently shown that the so-called ‘stage model’—in which artists and art-directed investments are forerunners of neighbourhood change and displacement—is not an accurate representation of what actually occurred in several locations. As they write, their research

demonstrates that fine and commercial arts establishments have varied, conflicting relationships with gentrification and displacement in different places. In particular, arts-led urban policy (the apotheosis of the stage model) breaks down because, as our results demonstrate, arts establishments by and large do not predict gentrification (*ibid.*: 822).

Grodach *et al.*’s work is one among a rich set of contributions that has sought to untangle the relationship between creative industries and urban displacement (see also Markusen, 2006; Glow *et al.*, 2014; Schuetz, 2014; Foster *et al.*, 2016; Murdoch *et al.*, 2016). In some cases, communities of cultural producers, having rediscovered the use of older buildings, themselves represent the low-income residents or tenants at risk of displacement (Stevenson, 2013). More recent accounts of ‘classic’ urban sites, such as Soho in Manhattan, have further sought to revise linear models of gentrification that commence with artists renovating abandoned industrial real estate in low-income neighbourhoods (Davis, 2013; Moscowitz, 2017). Conversely, Zukin (2020) highlights the role that a new coalition of tech, venture and real estate capital is playing in propelling forms of urban renewal in many of the remaining sites of creative manufacturing in Manhattan and Brooklyn.

Building on these insights, our article shifts the focus to a particular aspect of the relationship between rising real estate values and cultural infrastructure: the capacity of the latter to *adapt* to neighbourhood change, often aligning with other practices of resistance and survival (see Helbrecht,

2018). While much has been written about the role of culture—and about cultural production and consumption (see the foundational work of Zukin, 1987)—in processes of gentrification, including in Sydney (see Bridge, 2001), less has been said about how cultural infrastructure and creative work are themselves adapted and transformed in response to the gentrification waves to which they purportedly contributed.

Our article, articulated through the two working concepts of *adaptive spaces* and *makeshift economies*, thus mirrors a renewed attention to the strategies of resistance and survival to gentrification that currently informs urban research (e.g. Vasudevan, 2015; Lees and Ferreri, 2016; Lees *et al.*, 2018). These two concepts resonate with a key distinction voiced by participants between the application of these strategies to the organization of space—or *where* they situated themselves—and to their economic activities—or *how* their labour and energy were expended. Such a distinction echoes, to some degree, the Chicago School-inspired differentiation of urban structure and function (Park *et al.*, 1925). Without committing ourselves to the urban ecological determinism often implied in this type of analysis, the distinction between adaptive spaces and makeshift economies is useful in differentiating these related modes of survival that, both in our informants' and in our own eyes, resisted the colonizing force of supergentrification.

These physical, organizational and economic transformations of cultural infrastructure have important consequences for both research and policy decisions around urban cultural economies. As argued in our concluding remarks, paying attention to these strategies of maintenance allows the cultural economies of survival—as well as of displacement—to become visible both to researchers and policymakers, thereby creating the possibility of urban policies attentive to their preservation.

In this sense, our article is the product of an 'engaged research' (Ang, 2006) process in which an academic research centre and local governments joined forces to grasp the spatial consequences of urban change on cultural infrastructure. For this reason, we suggest that untangling the relationship between the cultural and creative arts industries and place change has the potential to inform research and policy strategies that seek to prevent further displacement, and to acknowledge and recognize the value of the various makeshift economies of survival that, in fact, already resist the pressures of supergentrification.

Supergentrification and the arts in millennial Sydney

Although Sydney does not often make the list of renowned Fordist cities and one-company towns, it was not immune to the industrial crisis of the 1970s and to the processes of spatial and economic restructuring that ensued (Murphy and Watson, 1990). Large swathes of land surrounding the central business district (CBD) lost their industrial functions and, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, became sites of the private and public investment that transformed the old harbour and waterfront into areas of consumption and cultural leisure (Stevenson, 2017). Inevitably, this shift corresponded with a first swell of neighbourhood change, which affected central suburbs formerly inhabited by stevedores and other factory workers (see e.g. Engels, 1999).

Such trends of urban change were accelerated by the New South Wales State Government's urban consolidation policy (pursued by both major political parties)—as exemplified by its 'Metropolitan Strategies' since the late 1980s—which have encouraged the rezoning of old industrial precincts in the inner-urban areas (Searle and Filon, 2010). Growing global ambitions in the late 1990s (McNeill *et al.* 2005; Baker and Ruming, 2015) also translated into fast-paced property cycles in many of Sydney's central suburbs, such as Paddington and Ultimo. These patterns were intensified by the market-driven neoliberal approach embraced by the State government to promote Sydney's competitiveness in the global real estate market (Hu, 2014).

Like many other cities across the world, such as London, New York and Paris, Sydney has undergone a ‘third wave’ of gentrification, characterized by a spatial expansion of gentrifying areas (especially inner-city neighbourhoods and beyond), the involvement of large developers, the financialization of real estate processes, the decline of community opposition, and the increasing involvement of the liberal-democratic state in the process (Hackworth and Smith, 2001; Uitermark *et al.*, 2007). Controversially, the New South Wales Government has been at the forefront of this most recent wave of urban change, with policies that included the sale of inner-city social housing (Morris, 2019), reclamation of planning powers from local councils traditionally opposed to densification policies (MacDonald, 2015), and investment in transport infrastructure to open new real estate opportunities through transit-oriented developments (Searle and Filion, 2011).

This third wave of gentrification relates closely to the concerns of this article, since it has affected areas that continue to function as Sydney’s creative neighbourhoods: Redfern, Chippendale and Green Square to the south, and Marrickville, Leichhardt and Stanmore in the inner west. It is estimated that about 12,000 creative workers, including many cultural producers, are employed in and around the inner city, making it one of the biggest creative clusters in Sydney (City of Sydney, 2018; Inner West Council, 2020). Hosting declining communities of Indigenous Australians and ever decreasing public housing stock, these areas are undergoing some of the most radical processes of urban change. As indicators of state as well as market-based infrastructural investment, new metropolitan train lines are being built alongside former industrial zones that are themselves being redeveloped as high-rise apartments. For instance, in Green Square, a former manufacturing area, industrial space decreased by nearly 30% between 2012 and 2017, while residential space surged by over 50% (City of Sydney, 2017), with many of these new residential developments driven by rapid growth in foreign investor demand for new inner-city apartments (Gerrity, 2015). Despite this increase, and although median income is higher than the NSW average, the postcodes of our research have the greatest housing affordability problems in the city (NSW Government, 2017).

One of the many features of this process has been the rezoning and redevelopment of warehouses that survived previous waves of urban change, and thus often hosted creative industries, art studios and various other workshop spaces for cultural production. It is in this sense that we use the term supergentrification to underscore the effect of this latest process of urban change in areas of Sydney that host large numbers of creative workers. Supergentrification displaces not only the remaining pockets of poorer residents (Morris, 2019), but also those who moved into certain areas because of the availability of relatively cheap industrial space. As in other of the world’s creative zones, such as those in the boroughs of New York City (Curran, 2010), Sydney’s inner-city artists and creative workers are being squeezed out of their neighbourhoods. Factors other than urban redevelopment have undoubtedly contributed to this state of affairs. Compared with the last decade, cultural funding from the federal government has dropped by 19% per person (Australian Academy of the Humanities, 2019). This reduction in public subvention has exerted further economic pressure on artists and creative workers, many of whom are in the lowest income brackets of Australian society (Stevenson *et al.*, 2017; Throsby and Petetskaya, 2017), and experience high levels of income precarity (Morgan and Nelligan, 2018) and housing stress (City of Sydney, 2018).

In recent years the NSW government has acknowledged the fast disappearance of industrial land in the city. A recent government report, for example, argued that planning for Sydney’s industrial and urban services land requires ‘a carefully considered and managed approach and, where appropriate, protection from competing land uses such as residential’ (NSW Government, 2018). Moreover, large warehouse redevelopments have often been compelled to include spaces for creative work that compensate for the loss of the original workshops. In practice, however, these new spaces have tended to accommodate consumption (such as commercial galleries) rather than the production of culture, or ‘clean’, office-based creative work (such as IT-based services), often because more

craft-oriented creative producers (such as sculptors or prop makers) deem them too costly, ‘polished’ and lacking in essential facilities like loading docks and triphase electricity (Ang *et al.*, 2018; Pollio *et al.*, 2018).

Despite this renewed attention (see Gibson *et al.*, 2017; Grodach and Gibson, 2019), we observed that, in practice, property leases for cultural venues in old industrial warehouses often either included demolition clauses or were already earmarked for redevelopment. Our informants, for example, would often point to surrounding blocks being demolished or that had already been transformed into lofts, apartment blocks, and new commercial buildings. This twin threat—lip service to creative space inclusion and the continued eradication of existing creative work sites and cultural infrastructure—informs the context of our research, which was originally commissioned to examine precisely these issues.

Adaptive spaces of survival

Supergentrification generates additional waves of displacement, but also strategies for survival. A focus on practices of survivability, as we discuss below, demonstrates how these strategies are in evidence across a variety of individual and collective scales, shades of visibility, and rates of momentum. For the artists and creative workers who informed our research, such strategies fall into two broad categories: the spatial transformation of cultural infrastructure and the enactment of makeshift economies that stem from these new configurations. In this section we chart examples of spatial transformation and, in particular, the artist-led alterations of cultural venues⁶.

In response to rising rents and the disappearance of warehouses from the inner city, the first and most visible spatial transformation of creative space is the orchestration of various forms of *colocation*—a term we contrast with the more general trend toward coworking. While these colocation patterns have much in common with an often institutionally facilitated practice of coworking (a trend that has long been observed, as in other major global centres, in Sydney’s CBD (O’Neill and McGuirk, 2003), the notion of ‘cowork’ fails to capture two key features of these spaces: that they house much more than work and that they are often not run according to formalized structures of management. Our analysis of colocation also challenges some normative readings about the ‘individualized’ and ‘mobile’ nature of knowledge labour that purportedly informs coworking spaces (see Gandini, 2015; Merkel, 2015). Our case studies confirm that colocation is neither entirely voluntary nor necessarily commensurate with the coworking vision of autonomous labour, functioning rather as an emergent practice that alters space and involves varying collective and situated, as well as individual and mobile, forms of labour. In this regard, these spaces of creative labour rather resemble what Avdikos and Illiopolou (2019) refer to as more informal and community-driven coworking spaces, as opposed to those that are typically entrepreneurial or profit-driven (see also Merkel (2019) for a different take on coworking).

For some creative workers in our research, the decision to colocate eventuated from being displaced from an earlier working space that was earmarked for redevelopment. As sketched in the Introduction, the case of Claire involved, first, the realization that she was not able to afford a space of her own, and then a decision to rent a large warehouse and to partition the space and share costs with other creative workers. Various colocation arrangements come to fruition not because of such decisions by single artists, but through the work of established creative companies. For example, a well-known Sydney-based theatre company which, in spite of its success on the global stage had lost its state-subsidized workshop space, found out that it too could no longer afford to rent the floor space that was required to maintain the same scale of production. The options were either to reduce their

⁶ For more details, see the research reports Ang *et al.*, 2018; Pollio *et al.*, 2018.

scope of operations or to sign a lease on a much larger industrial building. The company opted for the latter, rearranging the space to create workshops and offices for both freelancers and other theatre- and cinema-related crafts companies. However, juggling its core business as a theatre company and its new role as venue manager has not been without struggle. As one of the company's directors put it:

On having to come here, we had to take on a whole lot of other responsibilities that we hadn't had to think about—so things like security, telephone lines, internet, cleaning, you know, just general building maintenance. ... So you're not just thinking about running a theatre company, you're thinking about running a building! (Jennifer, a colocation venue manager)

Jennifer further detailed how her creative role in the organization had been sidelined by the management duties that ensured peaceful cohabitation of all the companies hosted in the warehouse. Although her organization did not formally operate as a coworking facilitator, it had become one through necessity.

For another research informant—the owner of a small art school and gallery located in an industrial complex at the margins of the Inner West LGA—expanding her activities and responsibilities meant that she too needed to transform part of her warehouse to accommodate other artists. This was a strategy to increase the scope of her school, but also, through subletting studio space, a means to sustain the company financially by diversifying its income streams. Survival here meant that the owner became an unwitting venue and people manager, investing in new equipment and services to create functional additional work space for other individual artists in need of an *atelier*. For others, colocation was the result of a specific business decision to revitalize derelict or unused industrial stock, repurposing it for creative use. In such cases, coworking indeed functioned as a model, with these spaces featuring formalized organizational structures. However, as explained by two informants who ran several colocation spaces for artists and creative workers across Sydney, the commercial coworking model was not entirely applicable to the management of these spaces. For example, 'hot desking'—a common practice of mobile labour—clashed with the physical, spatial needs of these workers, who engaged in messy, equipment-heavy productions that required stable settings. In many instances, even the need for traditional desks came with the additional demand that transforming and adapting office space for other uses: ranging from dirty and noisy experiments, to storing artwork and material, to the organization of events such as exhibitions and workshops.

In response to these challenging circumstances, our informants had developed flexible spatial arrangements by building mobile, transforming interiors, with sturdy finishes and repurposed building material. As the physical infrastructure of these spaces was transformed in this fashion, the organizational role of the managers extended beyond the arrangement of workspace:

you can give [artists] space but that's actually a liability. You've got to create an environment that attracts innovation and you've got to facilitate programs, residencies, professional development and then you've also got to equip it with the right infrastructure. So, [...] 'artists by artists' is [the] key thing. (John, a venue manager)

As John further explained, embracing more creative colocation management models is a way to address requirements that often go beyond the basic demand for a space to work. Accordingly, sharing space was a specific response to the increasingly fragile and precarious financial circumstances of artists and creative workers, who need both affordable rents and the soft infrastructure essential to

creative production: support in finding and building the right networks of collaboration, and reliable creative supply chains in their specific industries and sectors⁷.

John's case highlights a more general feature and function of colocation arrangements: supplying a kind of threefold space that is adequate in size, pliable in form and connected socially to collaborators, suppliers and markets. Adaptability is a crucial characteristic, since the inadequate supply of purpose-built venues means that a variety of industries need space to accommodate work that spans activities as diverse as writing a play on a computer and building theatre sets. According to several informants, this was also a spatial response to a radical change in the arts funding landscape of Australia as a whole. In recent years, an overhaul of federal government arts subsidies (mainly from the Australia Council for the Arts) left several Sydney-based 'traditional' small-to-medium arts companies, in fields such as theatre, dance and performing arts, without core funding support (see contributions to Bennett *et al.*, 2020). In seeking to survive this loss of support, these companies had to become reliant on project-based ad hoc performers rather than long-term employed artists. Similarly, the film and television industries increasingly rely on casualized copywriters, writers, set builders, prop makers and costumers, leaving these professionals in need of space for their own equipment and desk space. Such creative workers have adopted flexible work arrangements similar to other freelancers, yet with spatial needs that are rather different, given the necessity of room for storage and light-industrial craftwork. It is for this reason that former industrial sites were seen by our informants as being particularly well suited to this kind of coworking. As one venue manager put it:

I'm intrigued by the sense of memory within a space and that feeling of a past life [...]. At [our venue], where there is significant cultural production that requires heavy machinery, high clearance, truck access and industrial zoning, the space is integral to our existence. (Jess, a venue manager)

This trend reflects a common account of gentrification research, which has long highlighted the connection between the adaptability of ageing warehouses and the needs of the 'creative class' (Lloyd, 2010; Mathews, 2010). What we aim to foreground here is that these industrial spaces are more than empty containers, being further transformed by gentrification processes. Flexibility, for example, was in many cases a way of fostering economies of scale and adapting to and for multiple uses, and it was a deliberate spatial choice that involved the physical restructuring of the original spaces in response to the danger of being priced out of supergentrifying urban areas.

Flexible and multi-purpose colocation is not, however, the only form of spatial transformation that responds to the pressures of gentrification and rising rent prices. Other spaces examined in our research were adapted to host multiple activities that served the purpose of increasing the financial resilience of creative organizations by accessing additional sources of revenue. Two kinds of activity were particularly notable in terms of their spatial requirements: educational and retail operations. In the first case, some creative organizations and individuals had transformed part of their working area into workshops and classrooms where they could teach their skills or enable the use of professional equipment by fee-paying students. In the second case, some of our informants were commercializing their production in order to create ancillary cash flows. Several of these retail examples used an established studio/gallery model (Molotch and Treskon, 2009), hosting arts exhibitions and sales. Many others used more experimental arrangements, such as temporary markets and pop-up stores, again leveraging the flexibility of these former industrial spaces.

⁷ Such a response is in line with the appreciation of proximity and colocation commonly associated with 'creative hubs' (Gill, Pratt and Virani, 2019).

Commercial activities, however, were not necessarily directed towards increasing revenue and boosting capacity to survive rising rents and other costs of supergentrifying urban areas. In some cases, commercialization was integral to the creative organization's broader mission: less in pursuit of profit and more to promote a specific cultural and social agenda. A performance venue run by a queer collective, for example, is rented out for corporate and other private events in order to support queer artists of colour, offering them both rehearsal space and the possibility to perform in a proper theatre that they could not otherwise afford. The collective used the carefully designed adaptability of its venue to self-fund a mission to make the performing arts more inclusive of queer minorities. In a similar manner, many other venue operators diverted some of their income related to building use to subsidize non-commercial operations, as we detail in the next section.

While additional revenue was necessary for the survival of our informants' artistic and cultural practices, they did not necessarily translate into financial resilience. As many respondents stated, diversifying into colocation, commercial or educational services often added to rather than subtracted from the precarity and financial risk of an arts organization. The investment of money and time in renovating, refurbishing, sound-proofing or otherwise transforming their spaces to enable subletting to or colocating with other creative workers, was usually a large financial burden for budget-tight businesses or not-for-profit associations. Such risks meant less financial freedom for creative work itself. Should an unexpected (yet also quite predictable) event occur—a rent increase or a lease not being renewed—their existence was more imperilled than ever. Many of the warehouses in our research were, indeed, in danger of being redeveloped into more profitable apartments or commercial real estate. Essential for survival, the costs of refurbishing these spaces to be fit for a creative purpose had left many of our informants in an even more vulnerable position—an irony not lost on many of them.

Further complicating the relationship between fast-transforming areas and creative businesses, some of our informants had become reliant on the presence of wealthier residents who could afford non-primary products and services such as art classes or purchases. Even these new economies, however, are contingent on the infrastructural capacity and availability of space. Pop-up sales and markets, for example, depend on the suitability of these spaces to host crowds and exhibition materials. Charting and detailing the spatial affordances of urban form—whether and how a given building or venue can serve both productive and consumptive functions—is as important as exploring the arts-gentrification nexus from cultural and economic perspectives. On the one hand, our research disclosed the fragility of cultural infrastructure and precarity of cultural workers in the neoliberal city. On the other, though, it revealed spatial strategies of survival that, in the context of inner Sydney, had been 'off the radar' of urban cultural policy and local government intervention. This observation holds true even in cases where local governments recognize and seek to foster local cultural industries. In this regard, we stress the importance of studying and understanding the actual work that artists and cultural/creative workers perform, and the kinds of space that they require to do that work (see Ang *et al.*, 2018; Pollio *et al.*, 2018). Too often, the work of artists is stereotyped, which makes for poor spatial outcomes when urban industrial precincts are redeveloped. Attending to such work and its locational demands has a broader purpose beyond sustaining creative industries alone. As we argue in the next section, the spatial practices of survival documented thus far enable multiple, informal and eclectic economies that underpin the neighbourhood diversity conducive to social equity that arts-led gentrification is often judged to endanger (see e.g. Chaskin and Joseph, 2013).

Makeshift economies

In this section we describe some of the economic activities that emerged alongside the spatial transformation of cultural infrastructure in Sydney's inner city. Our analysis is based on what we term 'makeshift economies': the practices that artists and creative workers combine to sustain cultural infrastructure and, in the process, their own survival⁸. Both cause and effect of colocation patterns, these activities are responses to the supergentrification of the inner city and the casualization of creative work. Beyond their instrumentality, however, these makeshift economies involve a multiplicity of spatial and organizational schemes, and diverse forms of transaction and labour.

The most practical consequence of colocation, for instance, is the opportunity to share expensive tools. Pottery wheels, kilns, welding machines, milling cutters and melting pots are some of the shared practical cultural infrastructure that we encountered. Colocation rendered this costly equipment more affordable, our informants stressing that their availability helped support lower-income artists. The possibility of sharing depended, of course, on arranging colocation venues to sustain these additional economies, both spatially and organizationally, through management devices such as rosters, shared calendars and house rules. Tool-renting offset the financial outlay of purchasing, but it also produced further networks of creative production by enrolling wider circles of freelance, amateur or less established artists and craftspeople. In many cases, our informants stated that these networks now extended beyond the individuals formally subletting creative space and included temporary users and neighbours.

Serendipitous neighbourhood economies were seen to emerge, in turn, from practical equipment needs. Maya, the art school owner, observed how these communal economies were inseparable from the venues themselves, as her school was located in a larger complex of small industrial buildings hosting other craftspeople:

We kind of look out for each other. You know, there's a styling company: they popped in. They said, 'We need to do a photo shoot. Can we use your beautiful white walls and photograph some of our objects?' Absolutely. The boys that [make] cabinet[s] and kitchens and everything, if I need wood for anything or something cut, they look out. And some of the people here, they send their kids to our classes. So there's that kind of informal friendship ... that we have.
(Maya, art school owner)

Other unexpected opportunities for collaboration and creative crossover develop internally, even when the same venue is used by creative organizations working in different fields. As two informants explained:

Everyone here is pretty well established as their own independent company, so it's just if a happy accident happens where we can combine our forces for good, then we do. [However], there was a company here that couldn't cope with the extremes of temperature because in winter it's very cold and in summer it's quite hot, and they had to leave. And one of the things that they said they used to notice was the feeling of community and shared ideas, that they felt that prior to that they'd felt quite isolated and alone, and so they really enjoyed that feeling here. (Mike, a colocation venue manager)

It [establishing a colocation model] was the only way that we could justify the rent So we had to make a decision to make it bigger and better with the rent and build a space that other people might want to use as well ... we want to create a space where we could expand and

⁸ By using the term 'makeshift' we acknowledge recent research which has charted the emergence of urban economies and practices in response to the entrenchment of neoliberal austerity. Like the makeshift transactions that we describe in the article, the 'makeshift city' is tenuous and provisional, but also a space of survival (see Tonkiss, 2013; Vasudevan, 2015).

contract and also have a whole bunch of collaborators in there that we might be able to work with. We don't want to own their business, we want them to run their own clients and fill their own gaps, but we want opportunities to cross-collaborate... (Jack, a colocation venue manager)

In other words, these creative coworking spaces or venues can be regarded as collaborative survival platforms, or 'third places', where the degree of cooperation can range from simple colocation to work collectivization, which may result in expanding networks that might cross over into the neighbourhood (Advikos and Iliopoulou, 2019).

However, Jess, the manager of a shared studio space, argued that such emergent networks, while undoubtedly beneficial, also intensified the risk of being displaced or priced out. These cooperative relationships are intrinsically linked to the venues themselves, as well as to the neighbourhoods where they are located. As a result, relocating becomes very hard, as she noted:

[Being in an industrial park] is not going to work. We know this because it's been tried by other groups—it doesn't work and people and spaces fragment. There is a sense of community that's inherent with a place like [ours]—it is a collaborative space where we bounce off our neighbours, we bounce off the locals; that's part of who we are and what we do. (Jess)

Moreover, as Claire's initial vignette shows, these collaborative economies are fundamental to younger creative workers. Not only do more established artists and cultural practitioners allow them to sublet parts of their larger studios and workshops (making their practice more affordable for both), they also supply various forms of mentorship, reciprocal relationships of artistic influence, and other forms of solidarity. These benefits also depend on the spatial arrangements of colocation. Some of our informants would, for example, reserve part of their warehouses to host emerging artists through dedicated incubation and residency programmes or would offer free or subsidized workshops to talented creative workers belonging to disadvantaged social groups. In other cases, the management model of the venue was predicated upon expanding opportunities for emerging artists. A performing arts company entrusted with a government-owned rehearsal facility, for example, ran its space on the principle of supporting up-and-coming physical theatre companies in the early stages of their careers.

To maintain this role of subsidizing and supporting their creative networks, several of our informants, we observed, had adopted hybrid business models, combining a range of profit- and community-oriented economies. Some would purposefully integrate a for-profit structure—for example, in the management of colocation facilities—with shared-ownership operations, such as artist-run collectives. Others would register as charities or not-for-profit organizations, but maintain entrepreneurial activities that allowed them to pay the rent. These arrangements, as detailed above, included offering space for corporate events, running educational programmes, selling crafts, or simply subletting sections of existing venues to private tenants. Even fully commercial organizations were often involved in sustaining philanthropic activities intended to benefit their broader creative communities. Each of these hybrid models needed to be tailored to the particular spatial features of each venue, and thus depended on the fragile alignment of availability and affordability of warehouse space in inner-city suburbs.

These neighbourhood economies and hybrid enterprises may seem marginal when set against the macro-economic property cycles of a city like Sydney. Even our informants saw their networks as extremely vulnerable to new waves of neighbourhood change. However, these economies can also be understood as vital to the diversity of the creative sector in the city. Low-income artists, Indigenous arts groups, small artistic start-ups, and non-profit artist-run collectives rely on these marginal forms of mutuality. As Morgan and Woodriff (2019: 47) observe, this kind of cowork 'represents not just the flexible provision of workplaces for freelancers, but also an ethic of collaboration—the idea that

art and enterprise flourish when people pool skills and ideas, and form communities of practice'. As our research revealed, these makeshift economies exist below the surface of what local governments know about these forms of salvaging cultural infrastructure in the city⁹. They are also mostly unknown in arts–gentrification research which, as Grodach *et al.* (2018) acknowledge, seems often to equate falsely the neoliberal idealization of the creative class as a sum of individuals each freely exercising entrepreneurial talents with the actual practice of cultural labour in creative environments. Such practice, as highlighted in our analysis, is underpinned by diverse, collective and unpaid forms of labour and multiple mutual transactions.

Focusing on the spatial patterns and complex interdependencies of these makeshift economies has important consequences both for urban research that desires to be attentive to the structural conditions and lived experiences of creative workers, and to the policy decisions that, in part, define those conditions. In a pragmatic way, our research allowed these economies to become visible to decision-makers at various levels of government. Making these makeshift economies and adaptive spatial practices visible as interrelated, mutually enabling strategies of survival facilitates the formulation of new policy options; for example, by providing public support for creative practice (Morgan and Woodriff, 2019). But, as we argue below, its implications for urban policy and research also extend beyond the politics of visibility.

Conclusion

Gentrification scholarship has sparked a long series of debates around the causes—cultural, economic, political, or inextricably entangled—of neighbourhood change. Urban scholars have also debated what ought to be the focus of gentrification research: the gentrifiers, the displaced, social class, the state, and so on. The relationship between gentrification and displacement, in particular, has been a contested topic of discussion (see Helbrecht, 2018). Easton *et al.* (2020:287) have lamented the fact that the absence of a rigorous history of displacement in the literature has allowed governments to pursue gentrification policies unchallenged by clear evidence of its most negative consequence: the forced removal of long-term residents (see also Bernt and Holm, 2009). Concurrently, interest in the creative class contributed to the neglect of the often violent processes of ejection engendered by creative city policies. However, as Helbrecht concedes (2018), the survival strategies of those who resist displacement may, too, be important research objects that, we suggest, are not captured by a sole focus on displacement. Future research on survivability and resistance to gentrification, as Lees *et al.* (2018: 351) propose, 'needs to extend much more toward individual, as well as collective, actions that are not organized, formal, or necessarily public or even intentionally political, actions that are linked to configurations of power in everyday life'. Tactics facilitating the adaptation of space and which diversify income streams exemplify such actions undertaken at the micropolitical scale, and warrant consideration no less than formal interventions via policy input, organized protest or by other means.

These actions were evident from the outset of our research into the changing spaces of Sydney's creative infrastructure in its inner-city suburbs. Several of our informants had altered their venues, as described in the fourth section of this article, and assembled several economies of survival, as described in the fifth section, while many other artists and creative workers had been forced out of similar spaces in the same areas of the city. The two councils that commissioned the research were interested in both of these patterns: the forced abandonment of industrial buildings repurposed or redeveloped for more profitable uses, and the forms of survival of those spaces that were resisting the pressures of supergentrification. In a practical way, making these spaces into objects of qualitative

⁹ For an overview of informality in Australian cities, including cultural spaces, see Iveson *et al.* (2019).

research—attentive both to tendencies and their exceptions—allowed them to become visible to policymakers who were interested in avoiding further displacement. As Gibson (2019: 805) has argued, researchers in these urban spaces are the ‘active agents in making concrete manifestations of the economy known’ to local decision makers. Without belabouring the function and force of engaged scholarship, which can no less readily serve other agendas or be buried in bureaucratic process, we note that it can forge alliances with artists, creative industries and motivated local government actors to contest what at times appears to be an irresistible tide of gentrification¹⁰.

Beyond the practical dimension of visibility, our experience in documenting the transformations of these spaces revealed supplementary materials of political and research relevance. A detailed description of their fragility, situatedness and spatial dependence, for instance, allowed what we termed ‘makeshift economies’ to become objects of policy. Without replicating here the policy proposals in our reports (Ang *et al.*, 2018; Pollio *et al.*, 2018), it is worth highlighting creative workers’ strategies of survival in gentrification research, especially if we consider that the latter has material consequences regarding who and what is given a voice. Beyond the fact that creative workers are probably not, as Grodach *et al.* (2018: 822) have recently demonstrated, the forerunners of gentrification, and that ‘fine and commercial arts establishments have varied, conflicting relationships with gentrification and displacement in different places’, the longstanding notion of artists as ushers of neighbourhood change lends itself to seeing these workers as intrinsically mobile. Much gentrification literature assumes that creative workers, once priced out of a supergentrified neighbourhood, will simply find another suburb to move into, repeating the process in an urban-scale, wave-like movement of people, capital and labour. This assumption is problematic.

First, it neglects the physical, infrastructural, and spatial needs and patterns of creative work in the inner city. We have shown how colocation, for example, entails careful and costly adaptations that are deeply dependent on the spatial features of surviving warehouses. Undercapitalized artists or creative enterprises have little capacity to move elsewhere. Alternative location options are limited, if not decreasing, in cities that are still experiencing a fast-paced property cycle, and across whole metropolitan regions (Stevenson *et al.*, 2017). Second, research into the makeshift economies of survival that emerge from the spatial responses to supergentrification demonstrates that these economies are place-dependent and so cannot be easily moved or transferred. They encompass multiple social networks of solidarity, hybrid forms of entrepreneurship, and forms of volunteering and mutual care that should not be neglected because creative industries (or the creative class) encompass diverse kinds of work and enterprise. Some are, as in Richard Florida’s (2002) influential, highly contested account, profitable, mobile and flexible, while others are situated, fragile, barely making a living, and yet fundamental to low-income and minority creative workers. The importance of foregrounding these economies lies in the possibility of making them more viable as objects of policy protection. Moreover, and not coincidentally, several of our informants had been or were currently involved in grassroots and community movements fighting against the displacement of social housing and Indigenous residents from the suburbs covered by our research. In fact, as Lees *et*

¹⁰ For both Sydney and the Inner West, report publications coincided with public launch events, promoted and run by their respective councils and well attended by local artists—small occasions that nevertheless can galvanize diverse actors with busy schedules and sometimes competing agenda. As evidenced by email and personal communications between the authors and city officials, both councils used the reports to reconfigure their policy in support of the cultural sector and to advocate policy changes at the supralocal level. Following the reports’ publication, and sharing similar concerns about the survivability of the arts in their respective LGAs, other councils approached our team, and with them we developed new modes of research engagement to address the specific issues affecting cultural infrastructure in less central, yet fast-changing areas of metropolitan Sydney. Since then, the advent of Covid-19 has refocused attention on fundamental issues of cultural production against a backdrop of lockdowns and social distancing. It is uncertain whether the acute sense of cultural deficit experienced during this time may result in a renewed recognition of arts and culture, or if the consequent, temporary reduction of demographic and economic pressures on inner city land use may produce unanticipated relief for the creative sector.

al. write (2018), haphazard and small-scale practices of survivability might spark collective forms of resistance beyond survival itself.

To conclude, we suggest that these spaces and makeshift economies of survival in a supergentrifying city such as Sydney protect, however precariously, the diversity of cultural production that urban change otherwise endangers. Such perils affect not only the livelihoods of cultural producers themselves, but have flow-on implications for the *kinds* of culture that continue to be created and consumed in cities, which are inevitably oriented towards those that are non-local, easily transported and displayed, and cater to a market that, through volume or price, can subsidize high retail costs. Disentangling creativity from displacement is thus a first step in making gentrification research more critically engaged with the actually existing urban and cultural geographies of survivability that deserve research attention and policy protection.

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