

City as Medium and Stage for Encounters

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Abstract

There is a strong tendency in gentrification studies to start off our conceptualisation of gentrification from two distinct groups, the gentrifiers, who are moving in, and the original inhabitants, who are partly displaced. A relational approach to gentrification does not deny these groups but requires one to start off from a flat ontology and does not assume any pre-given categories beforehand regarding different groups of social actors or material aspects of what actually happens in gentrifying neighbourhoods. Instead, deriving these matters and identities from the empirical analysis of practices and networks is required. Nevertheless, these requirements are seldom completely fulfilled, and one often tends to stick to old habits, even in explicit relational studies of gentrification. Consequently, however, we seem to miss some of the opportunities of thinking about gentrification differently as a kind of assemblage of many factors, or to think of it as a singular actualisation of a virtual multiplicity. In this contribution, we equally cannot fully resolve this difficulty in the application of a relational approach to gentrification, but at least we want to address one specific hitherto rather neglected relationality, namely the (potential) relationality of different groups: gentrifiers, original inhabitants and others, beyond the inherent dualism of the concept of 'displacement'. We conceptualise the city as a 'joint performance' to depict this relationality in a more inclusive way.

Keywords: Performance, Relationality, Assemblage, Gentrification

This contribution consists of two major parts. Firstly, a brief introduction to the new relational approach to gentrification, which was the basis of this research. In this respect, Delanda's assemblage theory (2006, 2016) has been very helpful. Without fully elaborating the assemblage of gentrification in the neighbourhood under investigation, we, secondly, want to zoom in on one very specific aspect of the complex assembly of the gentrification process: How do different groups deal with each other while sharing the same neighbourhood space. The concept of performativity coined by Goffman (1956, 1967) and Butler (1993) provides us with a more inclusive view of what really takes place in the neighbourhood (Hellbrecht & Dirksmeier, 2013; Richardson, 2013).

A relational approach to gentrification

The main focus of this research is to understand the phenomenon of gentrification better. One might immediately object that it is rather a non-issue, because, after several decades of gentrification research, we by now already know, more or less, the crucial ins and outs of gentrification. So why is it necessary to look at it again?

Well, if we review the literature we see a number of things:

1. First of all, we have the well-documented almost classical debate about what actually causes gentrification, with, on the one hand, the ‘rent-gap’ hypothesis, stating that it is economic speculation which drives the process. One could say that is the “it is the economy, stupid” position with Neil Smith (1979) as one of its champions. On the other hand, we have the advocates of the “it is the culture, stupid” hypothesis (Barnes, 1995), championed by people like David Ley (1986) and others.
2. Secondly, we observe that many different versions of gentrification have appeared and have been described in the course of the gentrification research, for example, recently by Brian Doucet (2014) in the Dutch context, where he mentions: “new build gentrification”, “state led gentrification”, “rural gentrification”, “commercial gentrification”, “touristic gentrification”, “mega-gentrification” (in Global South and Far East) and “super-gentrification”.
3. Thirdly, the contextual and contingent aspects have been underscored through a lot of comparative research (Lees, 2012; Lees, Shin & López-Morales, 2016).

This results somehow in a situation in which the concept of gentrification has become very complex and fuzzy or has become almost an empty signifier and a very open concept.

From this perspective, we felt that it was necessary to have a fresh new look at what actually happens on the shop floor of gentrifying neighbourhoods, without too many preconceived views of what gentrification entails, and with a very open view of elements and aspects which might have been neglected in earlier gentrification research.

Consequently, we have adopted the so-called assemblage approach, derived from the work of Manuel DeLanda (2006, 2016) and his interpretation of the work of Giles Deleuze. This is a rather flexible relational approach focussing on how all the different possible building stones of the phenomenon under investigation are related to each other and how gentrification emerges as a phenomenon out of this network of relations and is assembled in a very contingent and contextual way.

Our approach takes as the starting point Doreen Massey’s contention that places are considered as full of potential for nondetermined, creative change that cannot be grasped by universal mechanisms or causal processes, nor by only local determinants. Rather, they are places emerging from the conjectures of multiple lines of development also called “trajectories” (Massey, 2005). Places emerge from a network of flows creating potentialities, which are actualised through processes of assemblage (McFarlane, 2011). Thus, they emerge from potential and ‘open’ spaces to actual and concretely structured places.

In a simplified way, you could think of this emergence as a movement from a world of flows to three levels: ‘practices’, ‘interpretations’ and ‘metrics’ of selective concretisation or actualisation. Practices emerge from flows, interpretations from practices and metrics from interpretations. And, of course, the reverse also takes place, and this is what we would call “counter-actualisation” (DeLanda, 2002).

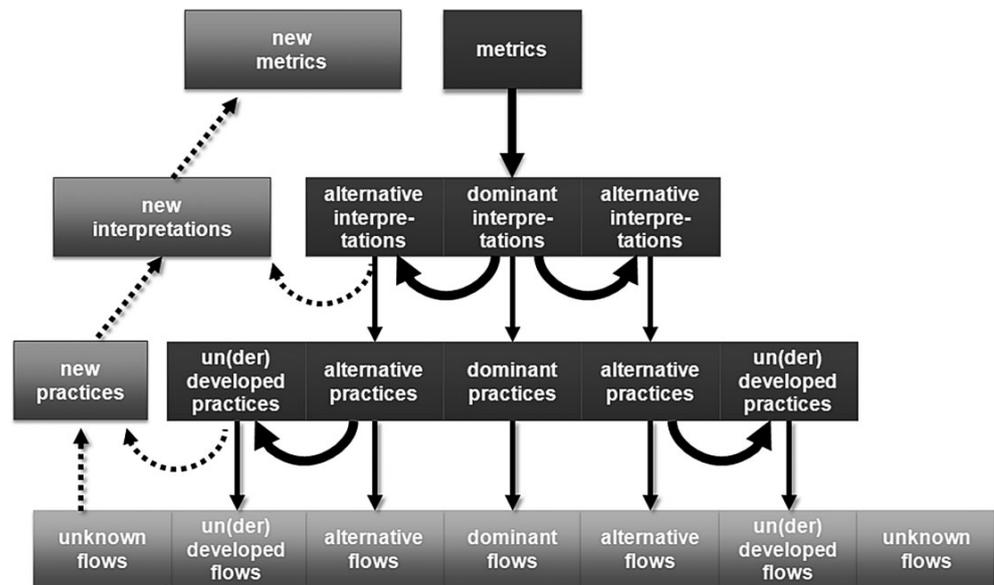


Figure 1: The process of actualisation and counteractualisation (Source: Lagendijk et al., 2014)

Practices result from the consolidation of flows into habitual but adaptable and, therefore, transformative ways of thinking and doing. Practices are only temporal and place-specific and resembles what has also been dubbed as “lived space” (Lefebvre, 1991). The practices might result in displacement in some situations of gentrification, and in other cases, they might result in social mixing. In many cases and situations, even the actors involved are not really aware of these practices on a daily basis and can only be derived by thorough ethnographic research.

Interpretations refer to representations of what takes place in the neighbourhood. These representations can take the form of identities, stories, images, role definitions, expectations and their projections to spaces. They selectively label and allocate discursive meaning to what is going on. This is especially relevant at the level of discursive interactions and decision-making at the level of public and private communities and organisations. They are often framed by deliberative normative views.

Metrics are the next step in objectivation or concretisation or, to stick to the assemblage terminology, in actualisation of the neighbourhood assemblage, resulting in formal fact sheets, statistics, and definitions and measurements of general concepts, which allow comparisons to be made to other neighbourhoods or cities and, thus, also allow these concepts to travel beyond the local situation. Of course, this is part of the language of not only government agencies and private companies, but also of official think-tanks and universities investigating gentrification. Therefore, hitherto theories of gentrification are typical examples of this kind of metrical language.

Table 1: *Aspects of actualisations or counteractualisations (Source: Lagendijk et al., 2014)*

	Metrics	Interpretations	Practices
Ontology	Metric properties	Projective possibilities	Differential capacities
Assemblage	Institutional properties	Organisational possibilities	Practical capacities
Examples	Demographics, real estate prices, income, migration flows	Stories of social mix, clustering, branding, policy visions	Everyday life, entrepreneurship, planning practices
Method	Comparative research, Discourse analysis	Discourse analysis	Ethnography

The result is, in correspondence with the assemblage approach, of course, not one single universal concept or theory for gentrification, but rather a view of the different aspects and configurations which could play a crucial role in the way gentrification establishes, realises and develops itself.

In this respect, the concept of relations of exteriority, which is central to the assemblage approach, is important. It tries to look at assemblages as relational networks in which the relations are often not internally necessary and elements do not only exist for the purpose of the whole, or are defined by the whole, in this case the ‘gentrification assemblage’, but can also be part of other assemblages. Assemblages are, thus, really the coincidental coming together of a number of flows or trajectories leading to what we tend to describe as gentrification.

From a policy perspective, this may sound disappointing, but naturally the complexity of the current general situation just does not allow rigorously simplified and one-dimensional instrumental ways of policy-making (Healey, 2007; Sanderson, 2009). Therefore, many urban government agencies are nowadays searching for much more participative and concerted ways of policy-making, and for sensitive and contextual knowledge about ways in which they can, at best, (marginally) support the alignment of certain trajectories towards what they wish to attain. It is to this kind of knowledge that we aim to contribute.

In the following part of this contribution, we do not intend a full assemblage of the gentrification of one of the cases we investigated, nor do we seek to synthesise the results of all cases, because that would exceed the space available for this contribution. Rather, we want to focus on one specific often neglected element in these assemblages, namely the practices of encounters or social mixing of different groups within the neighbourhood, which, especially from the relational perspective on gentrification, comes back into the equation again as one specific building-block in the assemblage of gentrification. A building-block which is a core element of all occasions of gentrification (Lees, 2008), although it takes different forms and might have different effects in each of these cases, and as a consequence of the relational view, none of these cases can be reduced to this core element.

In this contribution, therefore, we want to focus on exactly these aspects which we tend to summarise under the motto of ‘Gentrification Beyond the Dualism of Displacement’, which also clearly addresses the issue of an alternative way of conceptualising and practicing gentrification.

The relationality of urban encounters

The case we have been investigating from this relational perspective is a small neighbourhood in the mid-sized city of Arnhem in the Netherlands. We have deliberately chosen this specific case because it is not a classic paradigmatic case of gentrification and not a big city, as in most of the well-documented cases of gentrification. We, thus, attempted to maximise the probability of finding new aspects, conditions, trajectories and settings exemplifying the contingent relationality of gentrification. Arnhem is also a typical case representing the ‘Dutch way of governing’ gentrification, namely by embracing it and using the phenomenon in a very deliberate way to manage and sustain neighbourhood revitalisation (Uitermark & Bosker, 2014). Although, from a relational perspective, we should be very careful in qualifying too quickly what is really going on and rather observe how these different aspects actually emerge from and take form in the daily practices. In the same way, we should not distinguish and qualify too easily the different groups within the neighbourhood. We should not even assume the boundaries of the neighbourhood as pre-given, because what does this neighbourhood really make to a ‘neighbourhood’? However, we, nevertheless, needed to start somewhere. Therefore, the ambition to start our empirical analysis from a “flat ontology” (Bryant, 2011; DeLanda, 2002) should be taken pragmatically with a grain of salt. We already had an awareness of what we were looking for and where we wanted to look for it. Instead of also looking at this neighbourhood as a phenomenon emerging from a network of relations we have explicitly chosen for this predefined unit of analysis, but assumed the boundaries to be fuzzy and for the moment rather hypothetical to enable the exploration of what really distinguishes this neighbourhood, or better: what constitutes the specific revitalisation and re-assembly of this neighbourhood. For the time being, we describe it as an example of gentrification, but, of course, you might want to contest the concept used to describe this process. Let us first zoom in (Nicolini, 2014) on our case so that we know that we are talking about.

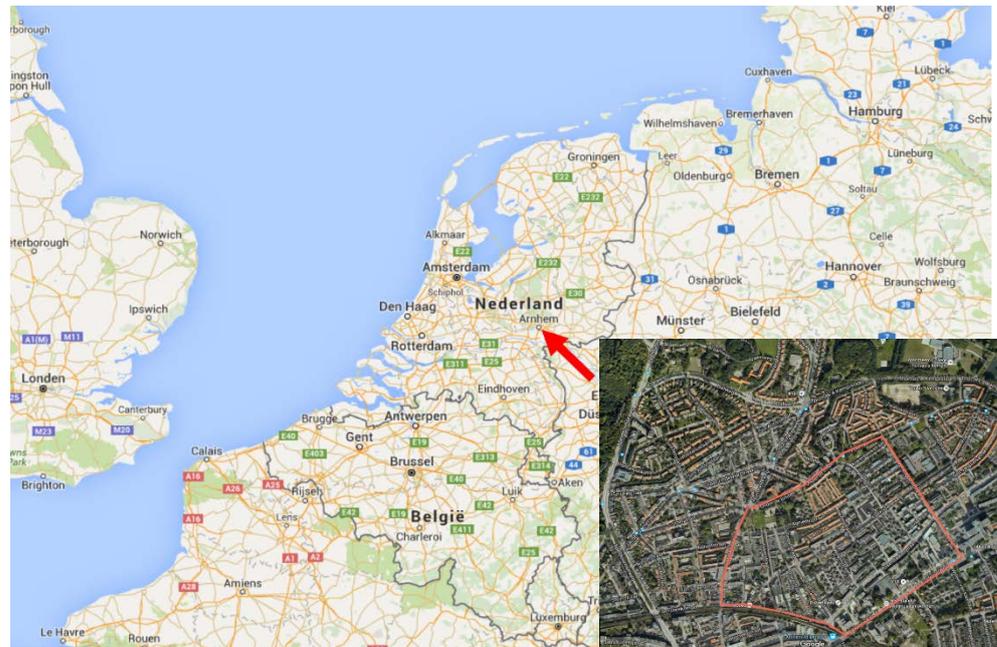


Figure 2: Klarendal, Arnhem, Netherland (Adapted from Google Maps)

This neighbourhood was built around 1830 after the fortifications and city walls around the centre were torn down. Klarendal was the first extension outside the former city walls but still close to the city centre, where poor workers mostly settled. After 1850, in the face of the poor living conditions in this part of town, some philanthropic, or you might say, ‘social housing’ was erected in this area. In the 1960s, the inhabitants of Klarendal were successful in resisting plans to turn the whole area into a high class residential area. But problems were still unsolved. In the 1970s, again after civil protests against the ongoing degradation, and in the 1980s, further rounds of neighbourhood improvement were implemented. Nevertheless, it continued to be a deprived area with a lively drug scene and, in 1989, this caused the inhabitants to riot against the nuisance caused by the drug scene, demanding that effective counter-measures would be taken. Since 1997, this part of the city was also officially classified as highly problematic and run-down, which mobilised a ten-year funding programme from the central government for revitalisation. However, all the money had already been spent after three years, and new ways of dealing with this problem had to be found. From 1997 onwards, the municipality in close co-operation with the housing association owning a large part of the social housing in Klarendal developed and implemented the plan to make use of the local University of Applied Sciences excelling, among other things, in fashion design and producing many start-up companies, to direct these people and businesses connected with this new creative class into Klarendal, thus, setting in motion a state led process of gentrification (Uitermark & Bosker, 2014). This is what we are currently investigating from the perspective of a relational assemblage approach.

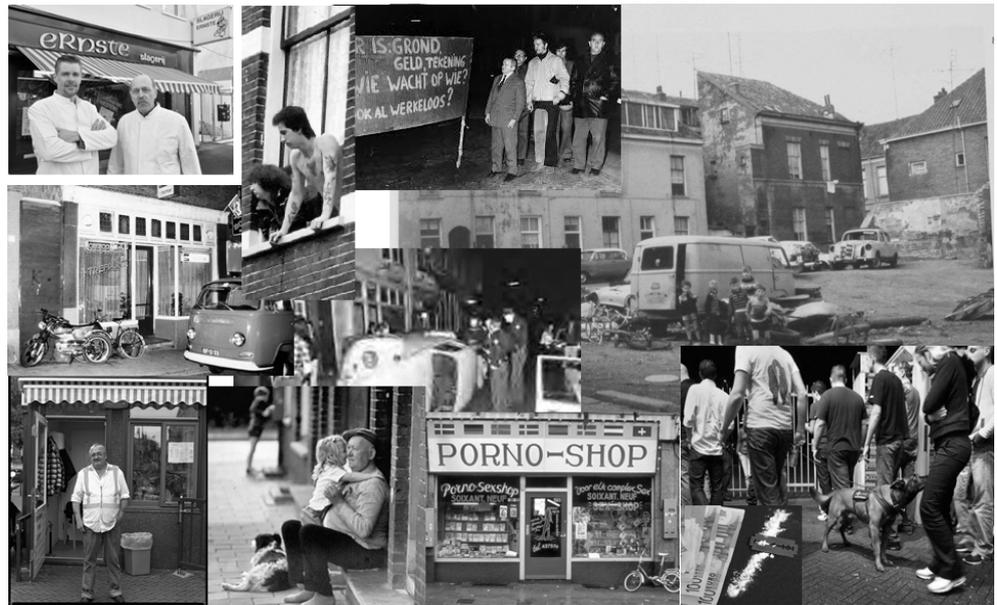


Figure 3: Collage of Old Klarendal (assembled by the author)



Figure 4: Collage of New Klarendal (assembled by the author)

A crucial aspect of all cases of gentrification is the relationship between the middle-class newcomers and the original inhabitants in this part of the city. If we delve deeper into what is happening in this neighbourhood regarding the social relations between the ‘gentrifiers’ and the ‘others’, we again noticed that this is a kind of pre-given categorisation and dualism, which needs to be questioned from a relational perspective and possibly also deconstructed or reconstructed in a different way, or to use the assemblage vocabulary: It needs to be disassembled and reassembled. This is also related directly to the issue of how to define the process of urban revitalisation taking place in Klarendal in Arnhem. The classical way of describing gentrification is to make a clear distinction between the middle-class gentrifiers and the original working-class inhabitants of the neighbourhood. This is a usual way of looking at it in the case of Arnhem. In doing so, however, we immediately forget that the diversity in Klarendal is much more complicated. In the 1970s, for example, large numbers of Turkish labourers moved into the neighbourhood with their families and by now, are almost as much part of the established

‘autochthonous’ population in Klarendal as the original Klarendal people; the former now comprise almost 25 % of the inhabitants. This complicates the usual dichotomy between the middle-class newcomers and the original working-class inhabitants. However, a more detailed look at the population in Klarendal shows an even greater diversity beyond these larger groups. This implies that we need to investigate the nitty-gritty diversity and interaction between these people at an almost individual level. We are challenged, especially from a relational assemblage approach, to not accept the usual categories in advance, but rather study how these emerge from the assembly and, thus, also allowing other groups and personalities with their specific roles and effects in the process to emerge out of the situation. We are invited to think beyond the usual dualities and, thus, also beyond the hitherto interpretations of gentrification, without also dismissing such an assemblage in advance as ‘non-gentrification’.

So how do we deal with this diversity, the different groups and the way in which they mix or do not mix in the neighbourhood? How are these relations and interactions conceptualised from a relational perspective in assemblage theory?

If we want to know what diversity we are talking about, not only by looking at pre-given categories of inhabitants, but also by means of a random sample of inhabitants of this neighbourhood, or one might say from a flat ontological perspective, it is worthwhile having a look at the results of a project by photographer David Jonathan Jagersma to depict the everyday Klarendaller¹.



Figure 5: Diversity in Klarendal (source: David Jonathan Jagersma¹ and Hanneke van de Pol²)

This is always a bit difficult and easily ‘forgotten’ in the post-structuralist tradition in which the assemblage approach is embedded, because it also brings in the subjectivity of the actors involved, which many researchers tended to have done away with in the post-humanist thrust of initial post-structuralist theorising. In many respects, post-structuralist and similar schools of thought have also moved ahead and, to a certain degree, have overcome or at least twisted the post-humanist tendency into another direction. Assemblage theory and Practice theory seem to be examples of such a new phase in our thinking.

¹ <http://www.davidjagersma.com/klarendallers/overzicht.html>

² <http://www.hannekevandepol.com/portfolio/meer-werk-in-portfolio-volgt/>

As such it is not amazing that Manuel Delanda suggests that these interactions between different groups in the neighbourhood can and need to be conceptualised and empirically investigated as assemblages of actors (2006, p. 5). Delanda describes the subject or person emerging from the assembly of sub-personal components (impressions, ideas, propositional attitudes, habits, skills) has the capacity to act pragmatically (i.e. match means and ends) as well as socially, that sometimes does, but sometimes also does not need to involve conscious rational decisions. In addition, the situation in this assemblage in which the interactions take place also plays an important role (Ibid. p. 52).

Manuel Delanda denotes the work of Erving Goffman (1956, 1967) as most important in this regard. This, in the first instance, seems a daring endeavour of Manuel Delanda, as with this proposition he combines a conceptualisation from a very different philosophical background with his Deleuzian assemblage approach. Steven Brown (2009, p. 113), for example, has criticised this by suggesting that Delanda does not recognise the singularity of the classic social scientific territorialisations. In our view, however, we think this actually makes this attempt interesting; as it also acknowledges the assemblage character of the conceptual theorising of these interactions itself. It keeps an openness to possible emergent relations between different conceptual traditions and the potential for translation and transformation of the theoretical assumptions.

Delanda even goes further and states that Goffman's research is exemplary for an assemblage approach focusing on the relations of exteriority. The interaction between different individuals and groups within the neighbourhood also creates a situation intendedly or unintendedly which is more than the sum of its deliberative parts, leading to a disruption of the relationship and maybe to displacement or sometimes leading to a kind of equilibrium.

The interactions in the neighbourhood perform both material and expressive roles.

Delanda describes the material aspects as the co-presence of human bodies, close enough to be noticed and corporeally oriented towards one another in a specific material situation in the same way as Luna Dolezal recently in a 2017 article describes the phenomenology of self-presentation by means of structures of inter-corporeality. These people are also physically involved with each other, making sure that living together in one neighbourhood is possible or, at the other extreme, is leading to segregation and displacement. These interactions might consist of simple and superficial or shallow contacts on the street or in the supermarket, in which a local moral order is produced or reproduced, as one possibility of a multiplicity of different ethno-moralities (Brown, 2009). Or they can be very much more direct and deeper.

The interactions are also territorialized by the behaviour of the actors defining its borders in space and in time. The spatial boundaries of these interactions are typically defined, partly by the physical requirement of co-presence, but also because the participants themselves accept each other as legitimate interactors and exclude others from it (Delanda, 2006, p. 54). These interactions

also have boundaries in time, defined by conventional ways of initiating and terminating an encounter (Goffman, 1967, p. 34). In the same way, of course, these interactions can also be destabilising and de-territorialising. The process of displacement in gentrification, might find its origin in these kinds of destabilising and de-territorialising events, but should certainly not be framed as a pre-given necessity. In the terminology of Erving Goffman, we can distinguish a number of relevant aspects of these interactions from the perspective of our assemblage approach.

At this stage of our research we can only tentatively highlight some examples of a Goffmanian look on these interactions and the role they might play in the assemblage of ‘gentrification’, or rather if one insists to stick to a pre-relational essentialising view on gentrification as ‘displacement’, the assemblage of ‘urban revitalisation’.

Essential in Goffman’s approach to interaction is that people always perform and express who they are, what can be expected of them, who they think their counterpart in the interaction is and what they expect of them in these interactions. This is done partly through direct verbal communication, but also in a less direct sometimes even unintended way through nonverbal signals and gestures, styles of presenting oneself or ways of doing. A fashion designer, as a typical ‘creative classer’, will present him- or herself in a totally different way than a Turkish woman with a head scarf or an ‘old Klarendaller’, each marking and performing their specific position and role in the neighbourhood community. Through these means, people are mutually co-ordinating their activities and are negotiating the meaning of the current situation. The differences and communalities are played out in these performative interactions, communities are created and demarcated and different roles and functions in the daily life of the neighbourhood are constituted. One of our interviewees, for example, who through a divorce, unintentionally ended up in the neighbourhood in a street which is dominated by a number of very expressive ‘old Klarendal’ families. In the everyday interactions, he clearly felt that he was not part of their community.



Figure: 6: Google Streetview, May 2014 (left) and April 2016 (right) (source: Melik, 2018)

The difference was performed also in the form of spatial and territorial claims, which even made it to Google street view (see Fig. 6). There was no way that he could park his car on this parking space in front of the house of the family living here, who, for example, chose explicitly to sit outside in front of the house instead of in the back yard of their house. Goffman describes this spatiality as the “front region”, where they make use of standard equipment,

standard semantics and norms for expressing who they are, what they stand for and what their claims are. This front region is divided into a ‘setting’ (furniture, physical layout, décor, etc.) and a personal front (gender, age, insignia of rank, clothing, size and looks, posture, speech patterns, body gestures, etc.). We clearly see some of it here, but in the interviews, for example, the typical dialect used by the old Klarendallers was also mentioned, and being part of the fan club of the ‘right’ soccer club clearly signalled that our interviewee was not one of them, and that he should not be expected to be welcome at this table to drink coffee or to park his car there. At the same time, this also performed as a community to another audience, namely to the fellow ‘old Klarendallers’. One could observe the caring solidarity between them in this officially forbidden use of public space. However, as the interviewee also expressed, it was this same solidarity which gave him access to them, because once, when one of the children of these families had a health problem, the newcomer could perform his care by driving her to the hospital and, on another occasion, to be present at the funeral of one of the community members. As such, these were unimportant events, but they destabilised and de-territorialised the opposition between newcomer and old Klarendaller and created a new role pattern and a new territorialisation.

In a similar way, in a number of interviews, when asked if the newcomer interacted a lot with the ‘other’ group, we often received the answer that this was hardly the case. One politely greeted the other on the street but otherwise they all did their own thing. Joint activities were mostly conducted together with other newcomers of their own kind. But when we asked newcomers why they came to live there, they almost all mentioned that they were attracted by the diversity and multiculturalism, and the bustling activities in the neighbourhood as a result of this diversity. Does this imply that they would be happy if the others were evicted from the neighbourhood and they could take over and be among themselves? No, of course not. Here we notice again, in the terminology of Erving Goffman, that ‘the others’ were, nevertheless, part of the relationship with the situation and neighbourhood. One might say that this social and physical environment served as a kind of decorum for performing their cosmopolitan lifestyle. This actually made them into who they are and living there is a performance of their lifestyle and preferences.

It needs to be noted as a side-remark that this kind of ‘passive’ interaction tends to be neglected in many studies on social mix in neighbourhoods, and it is then too easily concluded that no interaction takes place and that the social mix policies are a failure. The conceptualisation of these interactions as an assemblage or, in the case of Goffman, as a theatre play, taking into account the many other material and immaterial aspects of the situation of the interaction, reveals that this does not have to be the case at all. In addition, “civil inattention” (Simmel, 1950) is part of the assembly of the relationship between different groups in the neighbourhood. Adapting an expression by the Berlin-based Dutch urban geographer Talja Blokland (Blokland & van Eijk, 2011), we would like to call this “*meeting without mating*”, which is nevertheless not the same as ‘displacement’.

The ‘audience’ for the above example of passive interaction and performance against the background of this décor is probably not to be found in the neighbourhood itself but among the colleagues, friends or family living elsewhere,

but by situating themselves in this neighbourhood it provides them with a certain identity and recognition. Here we also see that different assemblages overlap and they have relations of exteriority to other assemblages. Thus, this is not just *place* making but also *identity* making on different scales (Marston, Jones & Woodward, 2005).

This sounds perhaps rather elitist, and one could ask oneself how far this is also the case or an opportunity for the less privileged ‘other’ groups in the neighbourhood. However, one specific interviewee was mentioned in several of the interviews. She runs the local cigarette shop but is also a pivotal person in the gossip in the neighbourhood. There is a small back room in her shop where one can enjoy a cigarette and assess the ‘state of the world’. In terms of Irving Goffman (1959, p. 111), we could describe this as a concealed “back stage” room, where one can be who one wants to be without the peaking eyes or ears of an audience. This is where the role of the other non-public self of that group can be played. This is also a place where, according our interviewee’s, for example, the legend that the municipality unjustifiably subsidises the creative class fashion design start-ups originated, stigmatising the ‘newcomers’ in the neighbourhood, which expresses the us-against-them duality and simultaneously strengthens the solidarity within the group and the difference to the other group (Valentine, 2013).

At some stage in our research, one of my colleagues shared a YouTube sequence³ with us in which a few ‘old Klarendal’ women, having a small tea party in the living room, were lamenting to the interviewer in a similar way about the new developments in the neighbourhood, but when they were outside showing the interviewer the changes that had taken place, they showed how proud they were that many of the former problems of the neighbourhood were solved and that it all looked nice again. This despite the fact that they would never go shopping in one of these atelier-shops of these fashion designers or go to one of these hipster restaurants which have emerged in the neighbourhood. In this different setting, although with the same audience, namely the interviewer, they performed another role exemplifying a passive interaction with the others in the neighbourhood again. The fashion quarter also provided a nice décor for their group life in the neighbourhood.

Thus, the same kind of relationalities are developed by each group through the process of ‘audience segregation’, ensuring the person that those in front of whom she performs her role are different from others for whom she plays a different part in a different setting (Missana, n.d). Instead of ‘groups’, Goffman prefers to speak of “teams”, who co-operate in staging a routine. But talking of teams also coins another aspect of these groups. They are not homogeneous and like in any team, there is a division of labour and different people play different roles within the same team. Some people from each group penetrate and get involved in a much more direct sense with people from the other group and perform direct interaction in specific situations. Certain actors, for example, play a forefront role in the neighbourhood committee, for example, organising joint activities and developing further plans, in collaboration with others in the neighbourhood and, thus, somehow also balancing, stabilising or territorialising the total assemblage of the neighbourhood. As such, they leave their personal comfort zone and start playing a role

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CB31evN6Xg4>

which is a bit out of character and takes aboard some parts of the typical role of others, negotiating new meanings.

One of our middle-class interviewees as a newcomer fitted seamlessly into the situation described earlier in which they, as an inhabitant, hardly did anything together with the ‘old Klarendallers’ or with the Turkish community in the neighbourhood. However, as an entrepreneur and consultant for start-ups, his interest in the local diversity on a professional level was much more than just passive. He runs a small restaurant and coffee shop combined with a space for art exhibitions and multicultural events. He deliberately looked for the other and integrated them into his activities, also establishing business relations with them and making the territories of these groups overlap, enabling and conducting direct interactions, thus, also allowing a penetration into what would otherwise be the ‘backstage’ of their own separate group. In a similar way, certain events, such as the ‘neighbourhood for art’ event, where people perform or exhibit their own art work to all who are interested both in public space and in their own living room, allow an insight into the otherwise backstage scene or activities (Wessendorf, 2013).

We could continue with many more examples of this kind of performative assemblage of social interaction between groups and individuals in the gentrifying neighbourhood, determining how the neighbourhood will develop further. Instead of assuming displacement to be pre-given, one needs to investigate how these social interactions are *enacted*, take *place* and are part of the performance of the assemblage of neighbourhood development.

In a recent book chapter on state-led gentrification in the Hamburg Harbour City, Jürgen Bruns-Berentelg (2011) makes the management of these performative encounters within the city a strategic priority, not in the sense of social engineering, but by developing the *encounter capacity* necessary for these performative acts to take place. One might see this as an example of how this aspect of the assemblage finally reaches the level of the metrics, although a different kind of metrics than is used in the hitherto literature on gentrification. Given the situated character that these performances have, there is good reason to believe that this can have an effect, but, as Goffman reminds us, the assemblage of the neighbourhood is partly the result of these performances but is not the single cause of it. If this leads to displacement or not is then still an open question.

Conclusion

We can conclude after these illustrative examples that the interpretation and conceptualisation of gentrification hitherto needs to be rethought in a relational way, which brings to the fore alternative practices, interpretations and metrics which go beyond reducing gentrification or urban revitalisation to mere ‘displacement’. The relations especially between the different groups within the neighbourhood and beyond the neighbourhood are much richer. They have a virtual multiplicity of potential outcomes, the actualisation of which is an intricate and complex play of many different forces and tendencies, which the actants and policy-makers involved can only try to align in such a way that they will lead to the results envisioned. A well-reflected relational approach to these processes can provide the practical knowledge for balancing these processes on a daily basis.

What this contribution also implicitly showed is that we do not need to defy all earlier work on urban development and urban encounters, as some of the current post-structuralist thinkers in the framework of their own scientific performativity in the political economy of doing science tend to do. As a consequence of relational thinking, it seems more valuable to de-essentialise and de-territorialise earlier schools of thought and re-territorialise, reassemble, or realign them in such a way that we can better understand the complexity of gentrification and can stimulate ‘alternative’ urban practices. Earlier thinkers, such as Erving Goffman, or similar ideas in the more contemporary guise of the concept of ‘performativity’ can be of great use to understand the complexity of today’s urban life. In this contribution, we tried to show, for example, that the work of Irving Goffman can really help us understand the human and non-human, reflected and unreflected, discursive and non-discursive relationality of urban encounters and of living together in a gentrifying neighbourhood.

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