Gentrification In The Neoliberal World Order: A Study of Urban Change in the River North District of Denver, Colorado

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The River North Arts district in Denver, Colorado has undergone a rapid transformation in the previous two years. I claim that the transformations are not the normal development of a thriving city but instead a neoliberal reimagining of the cityscape. The literature of gentrification was studied in this thesis to synthesize an understanding of gentrification as a neoliberal urban strategy. Subsequently I connected the locality of River North to the larger processes of neoliberal place making through an aesthetic reading, study of maps, and quantitative study of tax assessment data.

Introduction

Over the past five years, various interests have dramatically restructured the River North district of Denver (Rino). At breakneck speed, the neighborhood has experienced rapid development moving from its industrial and working class roots to become the chic playground for the new Denverite. Meanwhile the city has introduced the River North Master Plan which will inject public funds into the streetscape with the aim of "promoting River North"(Denver, 2003) as an economic hub. I claim in this paper that Rino's rapid transformation is a paradigmatic example of neoliberal place making. I argue this through three avenues. First of all the architectural paradigm expressed in the River North district is ideologically postmodern which I argue is fundamentally tied to neoliberal logics. Secondly, the corporate construction of postmodern space reveals the new role of the city in the neoliberal world order. Finally I tie the transformation of River North to neoliberal place making through a geo-spatial and economic analysis of land value change. Studying River North is an opportunity to deconstruct the role of urbanization in social change especially in reference to the capitalist world system.

Theory Discussion

Before introducing the project, a summary of the relevant discourses are in order. The first question that needs to be addressed is why study the city? How does studying the city inform our understanding of global capitalism and the modern world? In the tradition of critical urban theory I understand the city as the place where the "broader contradictions and dynamics of capitalism are not just articulated but fought out" (Brenner, 2014). Borrowing this terminology of Brenner's, I argue that the urban is more than a place with definable boundaries; rather it is a force field of spatial transformations associated with capital accumulation, industrialization, and commodification.

Space in this schema, which builds upon the Lefevrian socio-spatial approach, is seen not simply as a geographical area but instead as a social product traversed by all aspects of human existence be it cultural, economic, or political. As a critical category, space is important not only because it is a human construct but also because it is the place where human experience is forged and contested. Space is a creation.

The developments in River North are not a *natural* expansion of a growing city, they are instead the result of conscious efforts undertaken by actors in the local real estate market to actively create a new space of consumption. The growth of River North is the result of actions of what Henry Lefebvre termed abstract space makers. A place is more than a Cartesian coordinate demarcating ones exact place on planet earth. Instead it is a psycho-geographical experience that is mediated by social systems and cognitive codes. Even when a person is in the "wilderness" that wilderness has been defined by its polarity from civilization. There are no neutral spaces. Space as a social structure, is produced and it is the arena where all power relations are expressed. Henry Lefebvre distinguishes two types of produced space – abstract and social space. Social space is the way that citizens think about the space where they experience the everyday. Abstract space is the space that is imagined by powerful interests for economic gain (Lefebvre, 1991). It creates a normalized representation of space in order to control the social relations. Mapping has historically been a key tool for abstract space makers to form the social space of its citizens. Abstract space making will be explored as a tool utilized by the city of Denver in it's effort to create River North as a neoliberal space.

Central to this discussion is the fact that the urban force field has been increasingly dominated and formed by neoliberal agendas. The contemporary American city has undergone a shift in priorities. According to David Harvey's formulation in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism,* one of the fundamental

shifts in the contemporary city is the retreat of government. Increasingly, according to neoliberal ideology the primary role of government is not to provide for or protect its citizens but to pave the way for the freedom of the market; in short to alleviate restrictions on capital accumulation. What was initially introduced as a fiscal policy under the Reagan era, has become a blanket of austerity that cuts social spending and protection in favor of market freedoms (Harvey, 2006). The capitalist system, as will be explained later, is fundamentally defined by instability and exclusion. Traditionally the role of the government has been to protect its citizens from the fluctuations of the market. However under the new neoliberal paradigm, buttressed by the myth of trickle down prosperity, the "freedom" of businesses and corporations is protected instead.

Symptomatic of the neoliberalism in American cities, is a phenomenon that Harvey calls "urban entrepreneurialism". Urban governance Harvey writes is "increasingly preoccupied with the exploration of new ways in which to foster and encourage local development and employment growth" (Harvey, 1989) which is in opposition to earlier governance regimes that focused on providing "services, facilities, and benefits to urban populations" (Harvey, 1989). The Rino district in Denver is a prime example of this phenomenon. Denver's private-public partnership is 'revitalizing' Rino in the interests of economic growth, which primarily accrues in favor of the corporate class, and ignores benefits to citizens. This paper will thus explore the changing role of urban governance in Denver. It is important to note that Denver is not unique in its priorities, on the contrary; urban entrepreneurialism is epidemic in its scope. This study is therefore applicable to most American cities.

Under the laws of urban entrepreneurialism cities in the United States compete to become the next Austin; the next hipster metropolis. Denver is no exception. The competition comes in the form of appealing to a certain audience, what Richard Florida has called the creative class. The character of the

new developments in River North will later be analyzed as symptomatic of this competition. Under neoliberalism creativity as Neil Brenner points out, is distressingly being instrumentalized as yet another commodity. The new business in River North are touted as local and creative nature. They are in fact ideological veils that conceal the mode of production through nostalgia and farce.

The urban, as outlined previously, can be thought of as a force field where processes of urbanization unfold. In the tradition of critical urban studies it is necessary not only to study the ways in which neoliberalism transforms the built environment through socio-political processes but also to deconstruct hegemonic neoliberal rationalities that colonize subjectivity. From the Fouclodian perspective I argue that neoliberalism is not only a problem of governance but a problem of the individual . Wendy Brown in Undoing the Demos, elaborates; " Rather the point is that neoliberal rationality disseminate s the *model of market* to all domains and activities – even where money is nota at issue- and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only, and everywhere as homo *oeconomicus"*(Brown, 2015). River North is therefore investigated as a landscape of the neoliberal subject.

Studying the built environment is necessarily interdisciplinary. Capital is embedded in the built environment through economic and political processes and must therefore be studied through both lenses. However the built environment is a fundamentally aesthetic realm as well. Architecture is the space where capital and art are most closely associated. Fredric Jameson explains "Of all the arts, architecture is the closest constitutively to the economic, with which, in the form of commissions and land values, it has a virtually unmediated relationship" (Jameson, 1984). I will therefore use a Postmodern framework to blend cultural and political geography in the form of an aesthetic reading of the built environment.

Gentrification in the Neoliberal World Order

Literature Review

This thesis will use the term gentrification generously and therefore a detailed account of the term is due. A brief literature review follows which contextualizes the various discourses surrounding gentrification. Gentrification is one phenomenon in a deck of symptoms associated with neoliberal place-making. It should not be understood as an anomaly but instead as a global process tied closely with capital accumulation. I set out to survey the literature on gentrification with the ultimate goal of building a framework useful for studying the kind of rapid changes I saw in the River North Arts district. As Loretta Less points out, interest in gentrification has gone in waves and we are now sitting in a trough where gentrification has become an unpopular academic subject(Loretta Lees, 2003). Regardless of meandering academic fashions, gentrification is a phenomenon that shows no deceleration. The study of gentrification thus remains in my view both vital and topical.

Gentrification is broadly understood as an urban phenomenon that is economic in nature and socio-cultural in its scope. My literature review reflects this broad base. First it situates gentrification historically and then it discusses theoretical explanations of gentrification. With respect to the latter, there are two opposing views, both of which are economic. The first is that 'demand' explains gentrification, the second is that 'supply' does. I will conclude by discussing which definition I find most cogent for gentrification, its meaning and causes, within the specific context of Rino.

Gentrification is a process of urban restructuring that shapes the contours of the urban landscape. It has been understood in many ways. I will define gentrification as a process of disinvestment and reinvestment that is fundamental to the neoliberal construction of cities. Gentrification is not an unintended byproduct of modernity but instantiates modernity's essential contradictions. It is not an exception to urban processes. Rather it is a strategy of neoliberal space making. My interest in historical and global examples of gentrification widens the scope of conceptions of gentrification and exposes gentrification as a byproduct of international capitalism. Gentrification, thus, is also a type of lens. By using it to view the modern city we expose fissures in the ideology of the built environment, revealing the contradictions of capitalism and the brutality of neoliberalism. I understand gentrification as a process of intersecting economic, political and social forces that refashion urban spaces; it is an ensemble of forces that play out in the global south, rural America, and not simply, as is commonly imagined, in privileged 'first world' cities such as Denver. Wading through the myriad interpretations of gentrification it is possible to extract commonalities, certain conditions, that must necessarily be in place for something to be considered gentrification proper. These conditions include an influx of capital resulting in social economic and physical transformation the more significant of which is the displacement of historical and working class communities. My synthesis of theories of gentrification will then be applied to the River North district.

Historical Background and Context

> One by one, may of the working-class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle classes —upper and lower, shabby, modest mews and cottages- two room up and two down- have been taken over, when their leases have expired, and have become elegant, expensive residences. Larger Victorian houses, downgraded in an earlier or recent period-which were used as lodging houses or were otherwise in multiple occupation- have been upgraded once again… Once this process of "gentrification" starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the

original working class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed" (Glass, 1964)

Figure 1: Paris Medieval Streets from Smithsonian Archive

The passage above written by Ruth Glass is the first use of the word 'gentrification'. Neil Smith notes how she "almost poetically captures the novelty of this new process". The etymology of the term comes from the word gentry referring to the landed aristocracy in early modern England who lived off the rental income of their estates. This term itself, poetical indeed, links gentrification to *landedness*. One of the persistent features of impoverished people throughout history has been their inability to own land. Without owning the land on which they live they can be displaced according to the whims of their landlord.

Although it was Ruth Glass who defined this term with reference to Notting Hill in 1964, the roots of gentrification can be traced earlier to the origin of the modern European city, of which Paris is often

thought to be the first. At the beginning of the 1800's Paris looked like many medieval cities. The streets were dark, narrow, and labyrinthine. Parisians lived and died within their own neighborhood, rarely venturing outside of their autarkic communities. However under the direction of Napoleon III Paris was transformed. Baron Von Haussmann, arguably the first city planner, was hired by Napoleon to "modernize" the city. In an effort to increase the flow of traffic, make Paris 'revolution proof' by preventing the buildings of barricades, and dazzle competing monarchs, Haussmann built the iconographic boulevards that Paris is known for. The effect of these boulevards was to expose the citizens of Paris to each other. The boulevards, "blasted their way through the medieval city". Idyllic and beautiful, the boulevards also had a dark underbelly. Without having the epistemic framework for correctly locating it, Marshal Berman describes an early interest of gentrification, detailing the effects of this modernization:

> They may contain idyllic material, but at the climax of the scene a repressed reality creaks through, a revelation or discovery takes place: 'a new boulevard still littered with rubble…. displayed its unfinished splendors.' Alongside the glitter, the rubble: the ruins of a dozen inner city neighborhoods - the city's oldest darkest, densest, most wretched and most frightening neighborhoods, home to tens of thousands of Parisians-razed to the ground. Where would all these people go? Those in charge of demolition and reconstruction did not particularly concern themselves [sic] check quote(Berman, 1982).

The boulevards became spaces where the bourgeoisie drink coffee at upscale cafes and the poor are moved to an elusive elsewhere. An influx of capital has transformed the cityscape and displaced the working poor. We will use this historical example? to study the reaches of gentrification.

Competing Narratives

In the literature there are two competing narratives about the causes of gentrification. Lorretta Lees summarizes this dichotomy well "A focus on supply versus demand, mapped on top of economics versus culture and/ or production versus consumption has been one of the mainstays

of the gentrification literature" (L. Lees, 2000). Shifting middle class desires, scholars in the "demand side" camp would argue, is the primary drivers of gentrification. Opposed to this view are scholars like Neil Smith, representing the "supply side" camp, who argue that gentrification is an urban strategy driven by the profit motive and developers *supplying* a reformation of the city in favor of the wealthy.

Shifting Middle Class Desires

The idea of a return to the city is a powerful one among proponents of the demand side view of gentrification. Indeed it is unwise to disregard the historical context in which the idea of gentrification was born. In the post war period of the United States there was a process of suburbanization. The middle class fled the dirty inner city in favor of the space of the single family home to live the "American Dream." Gentrification is thus seen as a return to the city. The middle class traded their manicured lawns for the grimy excitement and hustle of the city. An exemplary proponent of this narrative is Sharon Zukin, who, in her article *Gentrification As Market and Place* argues that the "new middle class" interested in propagating a cultural savvy class identity returned to the city in order to buy and renovate 19th century homes:

"Gentrifiers capacity for attaching themselves to history gives them license to "reclaim" the downtown for their own uses. Most of them anyway try not to mourn the transformation of local working-class taprooms into "ye-olde" bars and "French" bistros. By means of building stock, they identify with an with the existing lower-class population, with the "Ladies' Miles" of early twentieth-century department stores instead of the discount stores that have replaced them."

Another prominent scholar J. Caufield reiterates this ideology, but with the caveat that he sees gentrifiers as emancipators. By resettling the inner city the new middle class denizens subvert

modes of cultural hegemony that segregate the urban landscape according to class. Caufield, in the tradition of neo-Marxist urban theory, contends that the city is a space that generally enables such emancipatory social practices. Feminist urban scholars have further argued that gays and lesbians also create spaces of freedom through gentrification. Similar to Sharon Zukin feminist scholars such as Rothenberg (1996) later argue that in creating space, queer gentrifiers create their own identity. It is however questionable, as Loretta Lees noted, whether it is indeed sexual identity that is essential to this construction, or whether it simply reiterates class identity. Indeed one of the powers of capitalist system is its ability to re-purpose and commodify counter-cultural movements. Nullifying revolutionary ideology, and branding its symbology changes the conversation from anti-capitalist to pro-consumer. This will be further iterated later in the paper.

It is cogent to note that in addition to academic circles, popular discourse gives weight to the demand side argument. Gentrification in the media is often portrayed as a "yuppification" or a form hipster imperialism. In a recent "Rant to the Pratt institute in Brooklyn" that has gone viral and sparked lively debate in popular publications, Spike Lee reprises this ideology

People wanna live in Clinton Hill. The Lower East Side, they move to Williamsburg, they can't even afford fuckin', motherfuckin' Williamsburg now because of motherfuckin' hipsters. I mean, they just move in the neighborhood. You just can't come in the neighborhood. I'm for democracy and letting everybody live but you gotta have some respect. You can't just come in when people have a culture that's been laid down for generations and you come in and now shit gotta change because you're here? Get the fuck outta here. Can't do that!

The ideology of shifting middle class desires is an attractive one especially for those displaced by urban restructuring. However it creates an us-versus-them dichotomous picture of gentrification.

According to this argument gentrification is a form of class war, with the working class battling hipsters and yuppies for the right to the city. Of course there are winners and losers in urban restructuring. It would be misguided to ignore the fact that mostly white middle class residents are unharmed as minorities are forced out of neighborhoods and livelihoods they call home. Power is always exercised unevenly across social classes and although I do not believe it is the culpability of the middle class residents, they are the class that is chosen as the *right* kind of citizen. The working poor in turn are condemned by the city as the *wrong* people with the *wrong* values.

Demand Side Argument

Neil Smith one of the scholars who has written most about gentrification provides us with a good entry point into the supply side argument. This argument effectively views the demand side discourse as an obfuscatory ideology promoted in order to veil the real systemic forces that drive urban restructuring.

Smth begins with a radical view of gentrification as a kind of "spatialized revenge against the poor and minorities who 'stole' the inner city from the respectable classes" (L. Lees, 2000). This he calls the revanchist city. Smith makes an analogy between the violent expansion of the American frontier at the cost of the displacement and genocide of Native Americans to gentrifies who are acting as a kind of urban pioneer. Smith in “The Revanchist City” castigates "urban pioneers" for their role in displacement and then ridicules them for their pride in their own identity.

The Revanchist City was written in 1996. But by 2002 Smith, showing unbelievable intellectual flexibility, was arguing against his own magnum opus. According to Smith's revolutionary ideology, which would come to define the field and open up completely new lines of

thinking, gentrification only appeared to be a form of class-war. What Ruth Glass in 1964 saw as rare and isolated phenomenon, Smith argues has transformed into a global urban strategy that according to a market fundamentalism changes the role of the nation state into a facilitator of deregulation. Gentrification, Smith argues has been "generalized" and can be seen in cities from Sao Paulo to Hong Kong.

Gentrification as neoliberal urban strategy in a globalized world

Gentrification as Urban Strategy

In the following section I will synthesize the proceeding review and analysis to offer a theory of gentrification as an urban strategy of international capitalism. Increasingly connections have been made between globalization in the capitalist world economy and processes of urban restructuring. A 'third wave' of gentrification is unfolding. Mark Davidson writes about the reach of the new form of gentrification: "the latest forms of the process have often been described as consequences and manifestation of a host of global processes. This has included the identification of a global profusion of gentrification" As such a short explanation of how the capitalist world economy functions is crucial to this discussion.

The first component of discussion is Immanuel Wallenstein's World systems theory. In the world economy there is one market that is generalized across all human societies (Flint & Taylor, 2007). Self-contained national economies are subsumed under process of global capital. The world is instead composed of flowing networks of capital unshackled from any national loyalties. The system operates according to a profit motive where mobile capital flows to wherever it can accrue the most profit. This is the law of capital accumulation.

Neoliberalism comes into the equation as an ideology and economic system inaugurated under the tenure of Thatcher and Reagan in the late 70's (see Harvey) that eventually comes to dominate the increasingly deregulated globalized economy. It appeals directly to the ideology of 18th century liberalism (with its notion of the sovereign autonomous subject), the assumption that "the free and democratic exercise of individual self interest led to the optimal collective social good and that the market knows best" (Smith, 2002). This rhetoric of market fundamentalism is employed in neoliberalism albeit with a novel and "unprecedented capital mobilization" (Smith, 2002). Neoliberal capital accumulation is as Smith describes is "a process that is essentially driven by a search for profits and that is first and foremost expressed in the increasing mobility of capital". As neoliberal capitalism searches for new markets and profits it encircles in its market grasp over the entire purchasing planet, and as such drives and defines globalization.

Urban processes are increasingly caught up in this system. However globalization does not make the local irrelevant. Instead globalization has constructed new scales of existence. The human experience is organized according to differential scales; the scale of experience, ideology, and reality (See figure 2). The scale of experience is the scale of the everyday where we live our lives and yet, our communities are almost never sustained locally (Flint & Taylor, 2007) Instead as Flint and Taylor explain, "In the current world-economy, the crucial events that structure out lives occur at a global scale. This is the ultimate scale of accumulation, where the world market defines values that ultimately impinge on our local communities. Gentrification exposes succinctly how "In the current world-economy, the crucial events that structure our lives occur at a global scale" (Flint & Taylor, 2007). The scale of ideology is the broker between the local scale and the scale of reality. Ideology mediates our local experience to obfuscate and distort the reality of the world system. (Flint & Taylor, 2007). In the

urban force field it is neoliberal ideology that pits the middle class against the working class and poses gentrification as a battle for the city all the while silently consolidating profit and power.

Crucial to the understanding of the way capitalism engenders neoliberal place making are the intrinsic cyclical patterns described by Kondratieff. The capitalist system is dependent on the continual accumulation of capital and therefore requires perpetual growth. However at a certain point markets reach saturation wherefore disinvestment becomes an integral part of the flow of capital. We see this in the world system as cycles of growth and recession. In cities disinvestment is expressed through decay and renovation. For surplus capital accumulation to continue, there must be periods of investment and disinvestment. However in "the built environment capital is immobilized in a physical form thereby preventing the investment, speculation, and reinvestment" (Brenner,2014). Gentrification solves this problem. Gentrification is the expression in the urban sphere of capitalism's contradiction. In order to produce profit, capital must be invested and then it must later be destroyed in order to reinvest. This is often called creative destruction. This is the scale of reality; this is gentrification's true expression in the transnational playing field, with devastating consequences for actual human lives.

In the 1980's gentrification was a sporadic event occurring only in a few global cities like London and New York. However if the world economy is dominated by neoliberal logics an ideologies, and neoliberalism drives gentrification, then gentrification must be experienced and reproduced in urban spheres all over the world. And indeed gentrification has now been recorded all over the world from Tokyo to Sao Paulo, and from Brooklyn to Mumbai. It is indeed as Smith surmised, generalized. Neoliberalism I argue is the force that propels gentrification. In a system with hyper-mobile capital, money becomes imprisoned in land. Therefore in order to re-mobilize it and create space for reinvestment and new profits there must be a way to inject money back into the built environment.

Gentrification is this injection. These are the scales of gentrification the scale of reality, ideology, and experience.

It is when we imagine gentrification as a broader urban process that the reaches of the phenomenon become important. If gentrification is driven in the United States by desire for 19th century homes and a new middle class identity, why do we see a phenomenon that has a striking resemblance to United States urban restructuring in places like Mumbai or Calcutta? When we extend the horizon of gentrification, Haussmann's renovation of Paris comes to look like a paradigmatic instance of the processes we see today.

River North : Technologies of Power

Figure 2: Cocktail Bar and Gallery at The Source, photo taken by author

Introduction to River North

The earlier sections provided a framework for understanding the global processes that shape gentrification and neoliberal visions of space. The second section focuses on a single locality to connect the experience of gentrification at the local level to the global process of neoliberal capital. I have put forth a hypothesis of normalized gentrification and the following study of place making in Rino will seek to test this theory. Through an quantitative and qualitative study I seek to connect the threads from global theory to localized reality. By studying mapping, three River

North businesses and new construction projects in the area I argue that River North has been restructured according to a neoliberal agenda.

River North arts district provides a ripe opportunity to study neoliberal urban change. It is a "neighborhood" contrived by policy makers and vested interests in order to foster a new economic hub in Denver. Developers discovered the value of the previously industrial and working class area and a land grab is currently underway. My proximity to the neighborhood over the last couple of years has allowed me to witness first hand the frantic change that "Rhino" has undergone. Going to the neighborhood week to week I have seen the urban fabric expand so rapidly it seems it may burst. It is because the change in this area is so temporally compressed that I am using it to study gentrification. The River North arts district is an anomaly in Denver's urban fabric which is why it is an opportune area of investigation. A gold rush in the neighborhood has begun and now developers race to buy and develop land like a boomtown without a goldmine. River North was created in 2001. The area that is now Rino was previously the intersection of four neighborhoods Globeville, Four Points, Elyria and Cole . All are working class communities - primarily Hispanic with heavy industrial uses throughout. In the late 90's artists started moving to River North, taking advantage of the plentiful warehouse spaces and cheap rents. This was the time when the term 'River North' first started being used. However in the psycho-geography of Denver the area was still perceptually peripheral. The story of River North's creation as such stems from the expansion of Downtown Denver itself. Throughout the late 90's LoDo was developed by a real estate developer named Mickey Zeppelin. The area transitioned from a fairly vacant and underdeveloped neighborhood into the center of Denver's restaurant and bar scene.

The northern edge of LoDo ends at what is now River North. The development of LoDO shortened the perceptual distance of Cole, Elyria, Five Points, and Globeville to the Denver's financial center. In 2001 Mickey Zeppelin the same Real Estate tycoon who developed LoDo expanded his vision of Denver to include the previously mentioned industrial neighborhoods – and Denver followed suit. In 2001, a bellwether arrived in the area; Zeppelin built "Taxi", a mixed use campus that includes condos and "creative business'". Reusing a defunct taxi terminal, the space initiated Rino as the chic spot for the creative entrepreneur. Immediately after its construction, Denver released the River North master plan which incorporated River North as a new neighborhood and earmarked millions of dollars to renovate and green the street scape.

Methods

In the following section I will discuss in detail the transformations that are dramatically reshaping River North. The research is based on both qualitative and quantitative studies. Firstly I examine maps and public documents provided by the city of Denver in order to argue that the city has acted as an abstract space maker. Secondly through a series of cite visits I analyze three River North business to investigate how neoliberal subjectivity is created in the urban context. Finally I conducted a quantitative analysis of construction projects in River North from 2012-2014.

Qualitative Research

The qualitative data methods are based on cite visits I conducted over the previous 6 months. Three main business of interest are included in the study including The Source, Industry, and Dada Art Bar.

The second establishment developed by Mickey Zeppelin in River North is called The Source. The Source is located on Brighton Boulevard – the main drag of River North. According to Zeppelin the source is "a new generation urban market that combines some of the most accomplished independent artisan food and beverage producers in the region. " (The Source, 2014). Originally a brick foundry building, the Source now houses 15 "artisan food merchants". Exposed brick and remnants of the foundry's industrial past are highlighted. "The industrial design with clear layers of new materials complementing the original shell conveys the integrity and edginess both of the tenants themselves and of this new marketplace". The source houses a " traditional French bakery, an artisanal beer project, a flower shop specializing in local seasonal flowers, and a single cup coffee roaster". The Source is frequented by Denver's foodies' and upscale clientele, it is not frequented by historical residents of the Elyria, Cole, Globeville, or Five Points. The second establishment I will analyze is Industry. Industry which sits just across Brighton boulevard from the source is, according to their website, "The groundbreakers, the innovators and the visionaries"(Industry, 2015). Industry, despite the name, is actually an office park that houses 120,000 square feet of office space. The building houses a myriad of creative entrepreneurial companies who work in together in an open-office style setup.. The décor is hyper minimal and houses a cocktail bar and espressoria The complex was completed in September of 2015.

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative analysis included in this study investigated the amount of new construction and renovation projects created in River North in the previous two years. Each property in River North was included. The study compares the current year value with the previous year value and is therefore comparing a two-year period from 2012-2014. The data was collected from the City of

Denver's tax assessment data available on their website and from the Denver Open Data Catalogue. Tax assessments occur every two years and include the assessed value of every property in the Denver Metropolitan Region. Denver assesses separately the "land" and the "improvements". Improvement are the physical structures built on the land; apartment buildings, houses, warehouses etc. Tax assessments do not consider the real estate value of the property and are therefore not subject to fluctuation of the market. Instead they are based on only the physical structure itself. A property will only be assessed at a greater value if there has been a significant renovation or destruction to the "improvement". The results of this study reflect only where new buildings have been completed or where there has been a significant renovation. It is essentially an analysis of construction in the River North area. The final strategy used in this investigation was GIS mapping. Using both the assessment data and open source land use and neighborhood maps from the City of Denver I constructed a series of Maps to better illustrate my argument.

Mapping Abstract Space

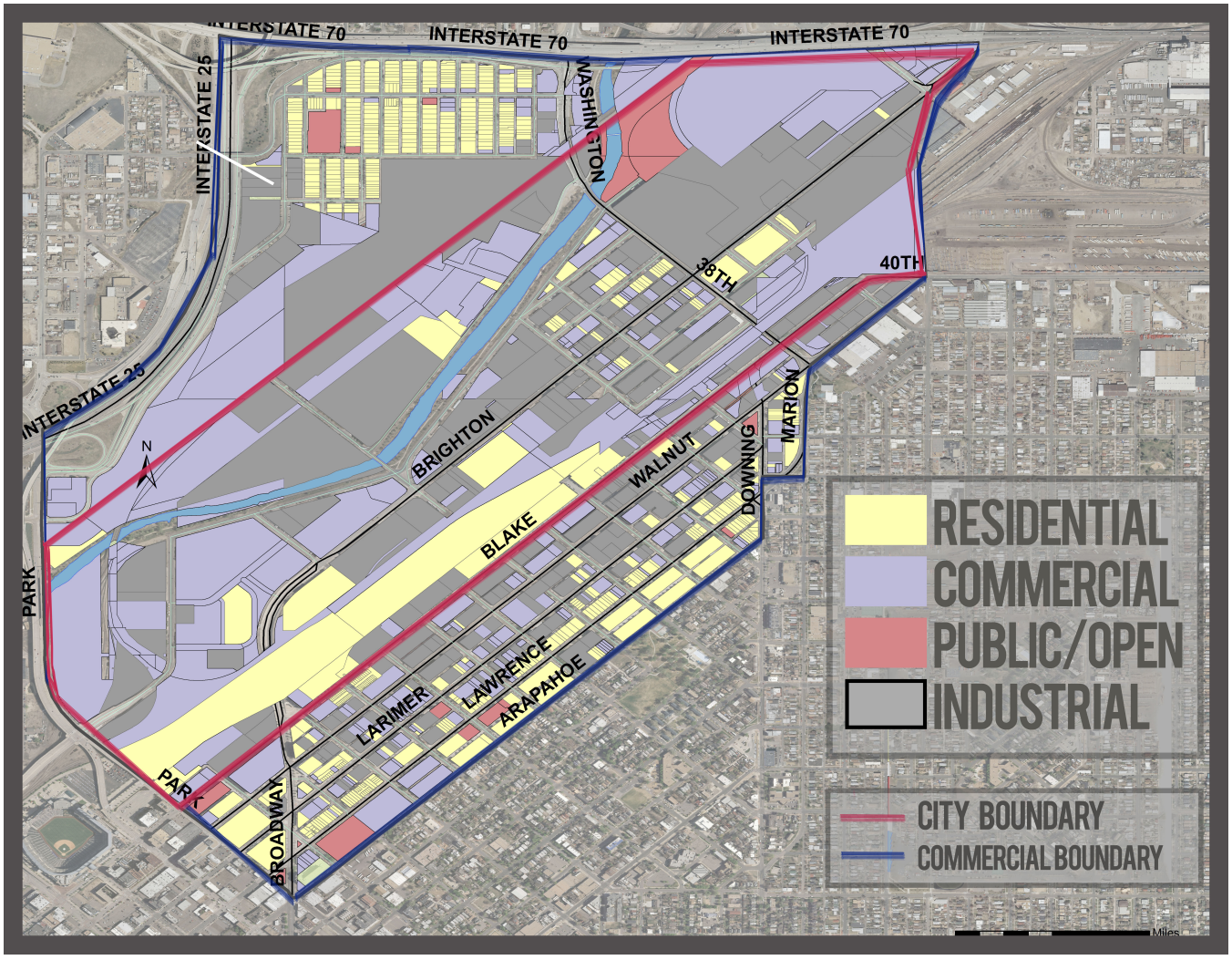

Figure 3: River North Boundary

The River North Master Plan announced Rino as an "area of change" (Denver, 2003) which can accommodate growth. The intended purpose of the plan is to "create River North as one of Denver's great places" and to promote the area. With this plan the city of Denver drew the boundaries of what they deemed to be River North (see figure 3) . However this is not the only perception of the boundaries of River North..The boundary of Rino used in this study is the boundary drawn by the River North Arts District. They River North Arts District is a business association comprised of organizations with

commercial stake in the area. The association drew the boundaries of River North based on the proximity and similarity in character of the business in the area.

The first indication that Rino is an act of pure profit motivated space making is in the use of mapping as a tool for social control. The city in Denver in conjunction with real estate developers has acted as a powerful abstract space maker. The drawing of the boundaries of the River North neighborhood served as a way for the city to justify transforming the area. River North according to the city of Denver maps (see image) is drawn cutting the eastern and western edges with the railroads. Given that River North is a new creation and has none of the commonalities that usually tie a neighborhood together such as social communities or historical character why did the city of Denver decide to draw this seemingly arbitrary boundary? The answer lies in the demographics of their rendering.

With the current boundary the city of Denver can exclude from their demographics any residential communities that will be affected by Rino's planned gentrification. Figure 3 show the land use of each parcel in River North. Noteworthy is that most of the residential units are in the Southeast and Northwestern corners. Figure 3 shows that the city boundary (drawn in red) purposefully excludes the residential units in the southeast and northwestern corners. The River North Arts district on the other hand includes them in their map. In the Rino master plan the city explicitly mentions that River North "has only 78 single family homes with occupancy in the hundreds" (Denver, 2003). In stating that Rino has *only 78* homes, policy makers in the city protect themselves from culpability for displacement that will inevitably occur as rents rise in the neighborhood. Denver uses the prescriptive abilities of abstract space and making of maps to shape the perception of social space so that eyes are not raised as Rino continues its frantic development. Indeed the map has been powerful in its affect of the perceived

geography of the area. When I told city planners, and real estate agents that I was studying gentrification in Rino, a common response was: “its not gentrification, no one lives there”.

One must question weather the drawing of a neighborhood boundary will truly prevent the market from raising rents in the adjacent neighborhoods. Does the boundary act as a wall protecting lower income renters in Globe Ville and Elyria? Or does it instead act as a wall protecting the city of Denver from criticism. Real Estate does not operate according to the lines drawn on neighborhood maps. Instead “the value of any one property is very much affected by the value of neighboring property rights” (Harvey, 1973). Harvey explains how, as the spatial form of the urban field morphs, proximity to a particular use disadvantages certain individuals. This is called the cost of proximity. For example as values rise in River North, the cost of proximity for residents of Elyria, Cole, Globeville, and Five Points is a comparable increase in property values. A common feature of poverty as explained in relation to Haussman’s Paris is landlessness, as such in the working class neighborhoods adjacent to River North it can be assumed that there are more renters than homeowners. As property values increase in River North residents of adjacent neighborhoods will face displacement due to rising property values and rents.

Through deconstructing the mapping technologies used by the city of Denver, we begin to see the new role of the city in urban governance. The city in this case veils certain externalities certain to occur with the planned development of River North. The city serves as a mitigator for developers by pouring public funds into redeveloping the River North streetscape. Simultaneously the city acts as an ideological purveyor offering a vision of River North absolved of social justice concerns.

Visions of Change: Aesthetic Reading of River North

It was Walter Benjamin who first proposed investigating buildings as fetish objects that mask the relations of production. Following from Walter Benjamin, David Harvey, and Frederic Jameson I will seek to unravel the dreamlike quality that the modern capitalist city creates by deconstructing the socio-political ideology embedded in the buildings of Rino. By using this lens we can see that the social structure expressed in the built environment of Rino is ideologically postmodern and that the neoliberal project is constitutively tied to this postmodern ethos. Reading the architectural paradigm expressed in the River North district unravels the ways that postmodern symbologies such as nostalgia and symbolic capital are used as ideologies that conceal neoliberal modes of production.

Figure 4: A historic home is pictured across from a new Condo development

Freedom to Consume and Symbolic Capital

The connection of neoliberalism and postmodernism starts with the emphasis on individual liberty. David Harvey makes this argument in A Brief History of Neoliberalism. Neoliberalism depended on utilizing the ideals of individual freedom so valued in America to turn public opinion against the interventionist Keynesian state. Harvey explains how in the 80's a concerted effort morphed the radical ideals of the 60's and 70's into a conservative agenda. However it required an ideological arm that could weaponize the American love of the idea of freedom. In postmodernism neoliberal interests could equate individual freedom with freedom to consume.

"Neoliberalism was well suited to this ideological task. But it had to be backed up by a practical strategy that emphasized the liberty of consumer choice, not only with respect to particular products but also with respect to lifestyles, modes of expression, and a wide range of cultural practices. Neoliberalization requires both politically and economically the construction of neoliberal market-based populist culture of differentiated consumerism and individual libertarianism. As such it proved more than a little compatible with that cultural impulse called post-modernism, which had long been lurking in the winds could now emerge full-blown as both a cultural and an intellectually dominant ideology"(Harvey, 2006).

The counter cultural movement of the 60's and 70's therefore morphed into the commodification of individuality, lifestyles, and cultural practices. The production of the neoliberal subject, as Foucault has suggested, is part and parcel of this process, and sustains its logic. Just as neoliberalism reconfigures all democratic ideals, so it reconfigures the subject. The neoliberal subject as articulated by Focoult and Wendy Brown operates in all spheres of existence according to a market logic. I will explore how in River North under the regime of neoliberalism individuality and genuine community are commoditized.

The commodification of individuality is striking in the business models of River North. The Source writes that "The industrial design with clear layers of new materials complementing the original shell conveys the integrity and edginess both of the tenants themselves and of this new marketplace" while industry on its website boasts "we are the ground breakers, the innovators, the visionaries" claiming that the project is like "a well organized art collection". The language above is a classic example of what Bourdieu defines at symbolic capital or " a collection of luxury

goods and experiences attesting to the taste and distinction of the owner". Instead of buying a product, postmodern consumers buy an identity. The claim made by the source and industry is that working at Industry makes one creative, and shopping at the source makes one edgy. Shopping at the source is an experience, with the limitless possibilities of true spontaneity " The openness of the building speaks to its community-oriented philosophy." The ideological task of postmodernism grants the consumer individuality when they buy an artisanal beer.

A second problem arises when a "philosophy of community" is created through an open building design. One of the great projects of neoliberalism has been privatization. In the city this is enacted through the privatization of public spaces. So while the source looks like an open air artisanal market that might have existed in one of the great European cities, it is substantially private. Are non-shoppers aloud to use the facilities at The Source? Of course not. Can the people who historically occupied Rino afford to "source" their food from artisanal bakeries and charcuteries? Of course not. The Source is a private space selling an aura of public space in order to project a genuine community experience. Experience is the commodity sold at the Source.

In the neoliberal project the instrumentalization of the values of individual freedom walk hand in hand with the changing role of the city. Cities just like people are consumers of images. The postmodern city is self aware of its own image. Writing about Las Vegas Stefan Johanes Al provides us with a elegant way of understanding this new urban vanity: "Rather than providing services, cities attempt to promote a marketable image, designed by architects who are complicit in supplying images in the media saturated symbolic economy. Cities have turned into an

ontological subject?, self consciously aware of their image"(Al, 2010). As an ontological subject cities increasingly act as a self-aware subject actively cultivating their own image. Cities competing for prosperity in the post-Fordian world system are involved in a beauty pageant. Cities compete in the symbolic capital market for the hearts of American consumers.

The Aura of Nostalgia on Brighton Boulevard

Driving down Brighton Boulevard into the heart of Rino, the first marker that signals you are in a new place is "Industry". Settled next to a few furniture factories and storage buildings is a giant complex – what looks like a renovated warehouse is instead a completely new structure built to replicate an industrial site. A large sign in front of the buildings says "Welcome Back: Industry". As to what welcome back means, I do not know. Welcome back to our industrial roots? Welcome back to this gigantic new building? The significance of labeling an office space – what is undeniably white collar work and most definitely not industrial – "industry " however is worth reflecting on. Deconstructing the semiotics in River North we can unpack how sign and signifiers act as anti-historicizing agents.

Paramount within postmodern theory is the problem of representation in late capitalism. Postmodernists argue that the contemporary world is in a state of hyper reality that is comprised of pure signs. Signs in this context refer to nothing but copies of realities. Instead of consuming products for use value, people buy for sign value. Images are simulacra that are "copies of originals that * just been created for the purpose of becoming sings" (Chernus, 2010). Industry is the eradication of authentic place for the making of a standardized landscape. Industry of course does not refer to a building being used for industrial purposes, instead it is a simulacra ; a

projection of what industry once meant. One must ponder then why use this alias? What does the sign 'industry' offer?

Industry as a title offers nostalgia. Nostalgia is a common term and aesthetic in modern culture. Fredrick Jameson in his seminal work "Postmodernism and the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" attacks the "colonization of the present by nostalgia" (Jameson, 1984). Nostalgia, Jameson argues, is not a mere representation of the past, instead it is the creation of an image of "pastness". We have reached according to Jameson a crisis of historicity where real historical thinking is replaced with glorified echoes, and a desire to return to what we never experienced. Industry semantically veils the true story of industry in America such as the labor movement and histories of exploitation. Meanwhile the ruination of history eradicates any possibility of understanding our present. By calling a white-collar office park 'industry' we ignore and mock the continuing exploitation of the working poor that have simply been moved elsewhere.

New Construction in River North : Data Analysis

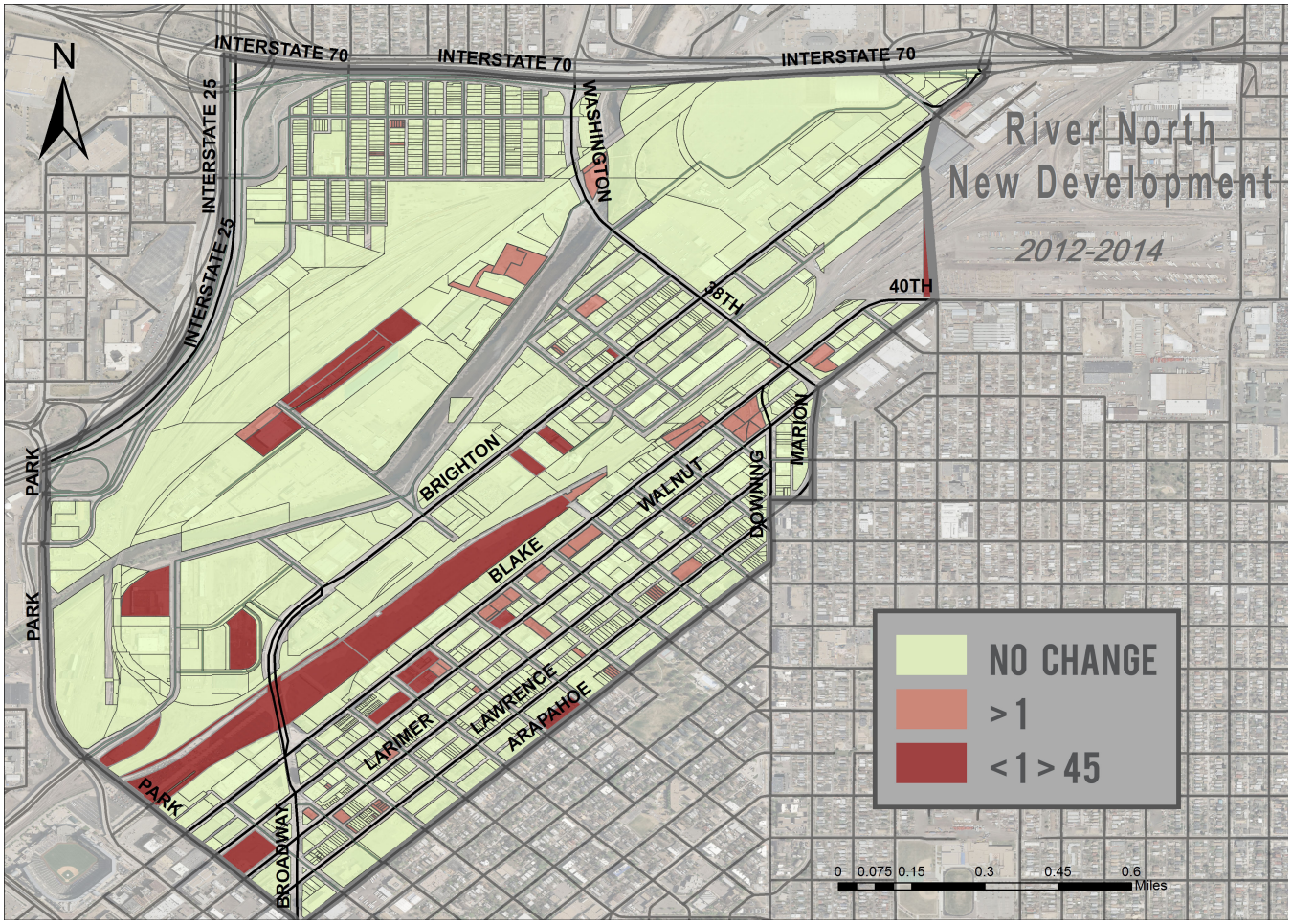

Figure 5

In this final section I will analyze the results of the quantitative study of new construction projects in River North. As stated in the methods section the study quantifies the amount of new construction projects in millions of dollars completed in the last two years in River North. The intention with this study was to compare River North new developments with new developments in other neighborhoods in Denver in order to prove that River North is experiencing a speculative real estate market. A speculative real estate market would be characterized by an investment climate centered around developers purchasing property because other developers are buying it

rather than because of the inherent use value of the property. Therefore when I analyzed the data I expected to see a much greater increase in the value per acre of River North than in any other neighborhood. I compared River North with Downtown Denver because the city of Denver has more information about Downtown Denver than any other neighborhood due to its financial importance to the city. Figure 5 shows the area difference in River North and Downtown Denver graphically. Important to this comparison is that the data given for Denver's new construction projects was also based on the assessors land and improvement values.

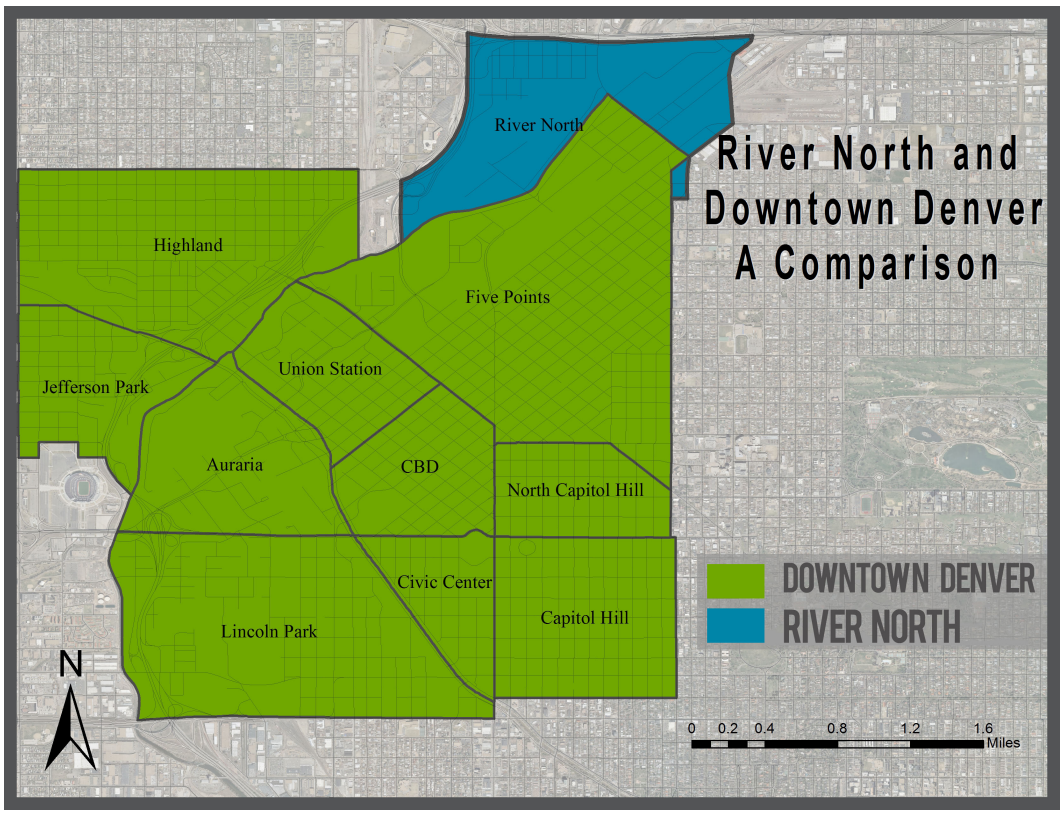

Figure 6: A comparison of River North and Downtown Denver

The results of this study are represented in the graph (see figure 6) as well as in a map made by the author (see figure 5). The map Increase in Value in River North represents spatially

the parcels which underwent new construction projects. Parcels that increased in value are pictured in red.

The results of the study were ultimately inconclusive. River North gained an additional 188 million dollars of new construction projects in the period between 2012-2014. That 188 million represents the construction of 68 new buildings. Downtown Denver, by comparison gained an additional 636 million dollars of new construction projects in the same 2-year period for only 10 buildings. When neutralized for area River North had an increase in improvement value of $345,600 per acre while Downtown Denver experienced an increase of $353,300 per acre. This increase is not substantial enough to ultimately prove that River North represents an anomaly in the Denver Real Estate Market.

Neighborhood	Total Value of New Construction	Percent Increase	Number of Buildings Represented	Acres	Increase in Dollars/Acre
River North	188,000,000	22%	68	543	345,600
Downtown Denver	636,000,000	Not Available	10	1,800	353,300

Figure 7

Conclusions

This thesis sought to understand the ways in which River North has been reconfigured. I argue that behind Rino's reinvention as a cultural center is a process of gentrification forged through a system of global neoliberalism. Imagining gentrification not as an anomaly but as a symptom of new processes of urban governance reveals the ways in which the ideals of democracy have shifted. Those shifts are a de-emphasis of the citizen and a prioritization of the market in all spheres. I used River North as a way of studying the technologies of power deployed In neoliberal governance namely the re-organization of space and the use of postmodern and neoliberal

subjectivities. When the market dominates all human realms including our psycho-geography we see individuality and community replaced with their commoditized specters. In studying a locality I hope to have shed light on a troubling turn away from humanism and democracy in favor of an all-powerful market dominance.

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