



YVR, Vancouver (Elvin Wyly)

## Green Gentrification?

Kaua'i, oldest of the main Hawai'i islands, is known as 'The Garden Isle,' and is home to one of the wettest spots on earth.<sup>1</sup> In 2007, Kaua'i's mayor brought the County in to the U.S. Conference of Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, and joined the USA division of ICLEI. This is the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, a worldwide network of 1,500 "cities, towns, and regions committed to building a sustainable future."<sup>2</sup> Not long ago, on the North Shore of Kaua'i, seven hundred acres of a former sugarcane plantation were sold for more than \$US 100 million.<sup>3</sup> The buyer, Mark Zuckerberg, subsequently tried to use an obscure legal maneuver -- called "quiet title and partition" -- to extinguish the possibility of ancestral claims from more than 300 *kuleanas*, the small homesteaders with land rights passed down the

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<sup>1</sup> Office of Economic Development (2012). *County of Kaua'i, Government Operations Inventory of Greenhouse Gases, Calendar Years 2007-2011*. Kaua'i: Office of Economic Development, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> ICLEI (2017). "Frequently Asked Questions About ICLEI." [www.iclei.org](http://www.iclei.org), last accessed February 5. Bonn, Germany: ICLEI World Secretariat.

<sup>3</sup> Erin Carlyle (2014). "Confirmed: Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg Paying More than \$100 Million for Kaua'i Property." *Forbes*, October 11.

line of generational descendance after the Kuleana Act of 1850.<sup>4</sup> Despite ironclad non-disclosure agreements of the sort that Zuckerberg extracted from the contractors and laborers renovating his house in San Francisco, eventually someone talks, and so the accumulation by *kuleana* dispossession became public, making for some troublesome headlines. “Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg Suing Native Hawai’ians for Ancestral Lands,” reported the *Indian Country Media Network* -- and eventually Zuck backed off, so that his 700 acres may be interrupted by a few easements and small seasonal shacks. Meanwhile, in another ICLEI member city with a lot of rain -- Vancouver, British Columbia, which has been pursuing a ‘Greenest City Action Plan’ for several years now -- the city’s first entry into the world network of buildings in the “super-prime” luxury classification includes the latest trending accessory:

“Vancouver House residents will also be connected to the global community through World Housing, which helps build houses for Third World families living in garbage dumps. For every suite purchased at Vancouver House, a new home will be donated to a family in Cambodia. Strengthening the connection, each Vancouver House resident will be able to meet the family it assisted, either on paper or online.”<sup>5</sup>

Vancouver has the world’s second most expensive real estate market, as the rain sprouts mushroom towers like Vancouver House or our own local Trump Tower. At the same time that Vancouver has become what urban planner Andy Yan has called a “hedge city,” a safe place for people with savings who are looking for insurance against an uncertain global future, there’s a culturally distinctive yet economically identical real estate boom in Cambodia. Sylvia Nam, an anthropologist at UC Irvine, has mapped a “structure of speculation” in the new urban frontier of Phnom Penh: “enclaves that are built to remain vacant, as property being parcelized and packaged ... built by and sold to overseas investors and a minority of Cambodians looking to park their money in assets with attractive returns.”<sup>6</sup>

All of these things are related, and they offer lessons on how to measure the relationship between greening and gentrification. Specifically, we must constantly re-think space, class competition, and politicized perceptions of carbon.

### *Spatial Divisions of Environmental (In)Justice*

First, we must always look carefully to locate the complex spatial realities of contemporary gentrification. Gentrification is the upward class transformation of urban space, and we’re now at least a decade into the era of planetary urbanization. We’re at least a century into the Anthropocene, the era of humanity as a planetary geological force. This means that the relationship between greening and gentrification now involves constant reconfiguration of local

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<sup>4</sup> ICMN Staff (2017). “Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg Suing Native Hawaiians for Ancestral Lands.” *Indian Country Media Network*, January 20.

<sup>5</sup> F. Stone (2014). “Vancouver House Tower a ‘Living Sculpture.’” *Vancouver Sun*, September 13, G4, G6.

<sup>6</sup> Sylvia Nam (2017). *The Structure of Speculation: Phnom Penh as a Real Estate Frontier*. Advance promotion for February 16 lecture. Vancouver: Department of Geography, University of British Columbia.

and extra-local aspects of neighborhood change. We need to think about space as Doreen Massey taught us in her *Spatial Divisions of Labour*, when she analyzed how the job losses of deindustrializing blue-collar regions with coal miners and factory workers were caused by decisions made elsewhere, by the bankers, investors, and speculators in white-collar places of finance.<sup>7</sup> The same applies to human-nature relations. The environmental justice literature documents how concentrating toxic waste and pollution in some places creates wealth, protection, and environmental amenity in other places, and so this means that our present moment of planetary urbanization is shaped by *spatial divisions of environmental (in)justice*. The material benefits of humanity's carbon-intensive socio-nature are complex spatialities, with benefits for some people in some places made possible by displacing the emissions and risks to other places, other people, other species. But there is an equally intricate spatiality of human ideas about sustainability. One of my students wrote a great paper analyzing the advertising campaign developed by an upscale Vancouver restaurant, the Rain City Grill, promoting its sustainable "100 Mile Menu." The entire ad campaign, in print, local television, the works -- ran in Sydney, Australia. How do you like the scallops with the jet fuel reduction and the contrail confit?

The scalar complexity of gentrification, and its relations to urban environmental dynamics, present major methodological challenges. Anguelovsky, Connolly, Masip, and Pearsall take on these challenges in an extraordinary study of environmental gentrification of working-class spaces in Barcelona; their deployment of Geographically Weighted Regression (GWR) with census-tract level data reveals a fine-grained spatial contextuality in the exclusionary effects of green amenities at the neighborhood scale, a localized class partitioning of greening processes inside the metropolis.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, in Vancouver, Noah Quastel, Markus Moos, and Nicholas Lynch have developed precise hedonic real estate pricing model quantifications of the local consequences of the planning ideal of "sustainability as density," and its tight linkages with "the cultural and lifestyle characteristics of gentrification."<sup>9</sup> But as they repeatedly emphasize, these interrelations are multiply scaled processes that defy the traditional spatial definitions of gentrification. Last year, a home on the edge of the campus of the University of British Columbia sold for Cdn \$31 million -- the new owner's occupation is listed as "student" -- and elsewhere in the city an online, transnational crowdfunding operation led to a bidding war for an old apartment building valued at \$16 million up to a final price of \$60 million. The journalist Ian Young, who lives in Vancouver but writes for the *South China Morning Post*, excavated the details of the crowdsourced online bidding under the headline, "Stampede: The Inside Story of Vancouver's Wildest Property Deal, Gone in 7,200 Seconds."<sup>10</sup> Capitalized and potential ground rent are in the cloud.

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<sup>7</sup> Doreen Massey (1984). *Spatial Divisions of Labour*. London: Macmillan.

<sup>8</sup> Isabelle Anguelovsky, James J.T. Connolly, Laia Masip, and Hamill Pearsall (2017). *Assessing Green Gentrification in Historically Disenfranchised Neighborhoods: A Longitudinal and Spatial Analysis of Barcelona*. Barcelona: Barcelona Lab for Environmental Justice and Sustainability, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

<sup>9</sup> Noah Quastel, Markus Moos, and Nicholas Lynch (2012). "Sustainability-as-density and the Return of the Social: The Case of Vancouver, British Columbia." *Urban Geography* 33(7), 1055-1087.

<sup>10</sup> Ian Young (2016). "Stampede: The Inside Story of Vancouver's Wildest Property Deal, Gone in 7,200 Seconds." *South China Morning Post*, April 20.

Consider all these connections. Colonial land rights on the Garden Isle versus Zuckerberg's \$55 billion net worth, transnational crowdfunding bidding wars, the 'one-for-one real estate gifting model' that ties the luxury condos of Vancouver House to a garbage dump outside a Phnom Penh that is sprouting its own towers to house capital instead of people, and a sustainable 100-mile menu advertised on the other side of the globe. What we are seeing here are two inseparable dimensions of a socio-natural and urban evolutionary process that has been carefully theorized by Eric Clark. One facet is the intensification of urban rent gaps produced through centuries of industrial urbanization and now exploited through digitally accelerated cycles of investment and disinvestment. The other facet involves planetary-scale questions of humanity's capacity to participate in our own collective evolution,<sup>11</sup> which now directly connects planetary *urbanization* to the circuits of *capital* and the circuits of *carbon* in the Anthropocene. This means we need to connect local urban land rent and displacement trajectories -- of the kinds mapped by Eric Clark in Malmö,<sup>12</sup> Neil Smith, James Defilippis, and Jason Hackworth in New York,<sup>13</sup> Loretta Lees in London, Ernesto López-Morales in Santiago,<sup>14</sup> and Tom Slater's newly-minted Ph.D., Yunpeng Zhang, in Shanghai<sup>15</sup> -- with the constantly-shifting transnational circuits of carbon that sustain capital accumulation. These carbon circuits are materialized through the commodity chains of production, distribution, and consumption, etching a complex fluid dynamics that Luke Bergmann has explored with a postpositivist yet quantitative standpoint-epistemological analysis of millions of import/export and carbon-budget interactions across the planet.<sup>16</sup>

What does this all mean for measuring the greening-gentrification linkage? Let me be blunt. To do it *well*, according to the requirements of mainstream science, requires a very special kind of infrastructure -- substantive biophysical and human-geographic expertise, funding, time, institutional cooperation, and, most crucially, access to the right combinations of data on human and non-human processes matching spatial and temporal resolutions. Enormous investments of labor and creativity were required to make possible Luke Bergmann's extraordinary studies, and so also with the Barcelona Lab for Environmental Justice and Sustainability. Yet in an era of accelerating competition, mainstream science is yet again under siege by a political Right that has learned to hijack all the powerful tools of the postcolonial, poststructural, postpositivist academic left.<sup>17</sup> Rigorous positivist science will become increasingly regressive without a vibrant movement of *critical, strategic positivism*.

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas L. Clark and Eric Clark (2012). "Participation in Evolution and Sustainability." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* NS 37, 563-577.

<sup>12</sup> Eric Clark (1988). "The Rent Gap and Transformation of the Built Environment: Case Studies in Malmö 1860-1985." *Geografiska Annaler B* 70(2), 241-254.

<sup>13</sup> Neil Smith (1996). *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*. New York: Routledge; Neil Smith and James Defilippis (1999). "The Reassertion of Economics: 1990s Gentrification in the Lower East Side." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 23(4), 638-653; Jason Hackworth and Neil Smith (2001). "The Changing State of Gentrification." *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 92(4), 464-477.

<sup>14</sup> Loretta Lees, Hyun Bang Shin, and Ernesto López-Morales (2016). *Planetary Gentrification*. Cambridge: Polity.

<sup>15</sup> Yunpeng Zhang (2014). *Better City, Better Life? The Fate of Displacees from the Shanghai World Expo 2010*. Ph.D. Thesis. Edinburgh, Scotland: Department of Geography, University of Edinburgh.

<sup>16</sup> Luke Bergmann (2013). "Bound by Chains of Carbon: Ecological-Economic Geographies of Globalization." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 103(6), 1348-1370.

<sup>17</sup> Elvin Wily (2014). "Automated (Post)Positivism." *Urban Geography* 35(5), 669-690.

## *A Strategic Positivist Approach*

What is a strategic positivist approach to gentrification and spatial divisions of environmental injustice? **First**, it is a bold, unapologetic embrace of what we know to be true: Anguelovski's hypothesis -- "greener cities are actually more racially and socially inequitable"<sup>18</sup> -- is absolutely correct under today's conditions of networked, carbon-intensive capitalism. **Second**, it recognizes that this inequity is statistically suppressed through the systemic spatial mismatch of globalized socio-nature. The places with the best, 'greenest' indicators are those best able to displace environmental damage elsewhere. The birthplace of Greenpeace, Vancouver now promotes itself as 'Green Capital,' with hybrids, Teslas, green-roof towers, 'Green Angel' ad campaigns for recycling, and a Winter Olympics aggressively promoted as the 'most sustainable ever.' But 70 percent of the world's mining companies are headquartered in Canada, and 70 percent of those are based in Vancouver, twenty million passengers pass through YVR each year, and just outside the city is North America's busiest coal export terminal. **Third**, it will maintain a dynamic, dialectical tension between material and ideological processes. Positivist measurement of the relations between gentrification and flows of energy, resources, commodities, and wastes is crucial; but so is the measurement of human ideas about gentrification, society, and nature. Indeed, the very notion of a separation between idealism and materialism itself begins to dissolve with crowd-funded real estate auctions, with the massive valorizations driven by wealth accumulated from Silicon Valley's technological harvesting of the human attention span: every city that pursues the creative commodification of ideas in Richard Florida's recipe, where "the mind itself becomes the mode of production,"<sup>19</sup> opens portals that connect *local* markets for land, housing, employment, and social reproduction into increasingly *planetary* circuits of competition. IBM's latest ad campaign for their 'Smart Cities' and Big Data services intones, "Welcome to the Cognitive Era": the grand capitalist synthesis of Lefebvre's planetary urbanization, David Harvey's theory of the urbanization of consciousness,<sup>20</sup> a neo-Gramscian false green consciousness for wealthy cities in the Global North, and a bitcoin smartphone epistemology of Tom Slater's analysis of the 'new geographies of structural violence' of planetary rent gaps.<sup>21</sup> But as Tom reminds us, the cognitive era demands the discipline of 'agnotology,' the formal study of the production of ignorance; Slater's analysis of British right-wing think tanks manufacturing consent for regeneration and endless housing privatization schemes has its counterpart in a new, geographically evolutionary mutation of violent American revanchist ignorance. In the early weeks of the primaries, a third of Trump supporters rejected the idea that the world's temperature has been increasing over the past century; when these denialists were asked about current debates over racial inequality and discrimination in the U.S., more than two thirds chose this option: "It's really a matter of some

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<sup>18</sup> Isabelle Anguelovsky (2015). *Green Locally Unwanted Land Uses*. ERC Grant Proposal. Barcelona: Barcelona Lab for Environmental Justice and Sustainability, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Florida (2003). "Cities and the creative class." *City & Community* 2(1), 3-19.

<sup>20</sup> David Harvey (1989). *The Urban Experience*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

<sup>21</sup> Tom Slater (2017). "Planetary Rent Gaps." *Antipode* 49(Supplement 1), 114-137.

people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites.”<sup>22</sup>

This is exactly the same kind of angry, anxious gentrification consciousness that gave us welfare reform, HOPE VI, stop and frisk, and all the other components that defined the emergence of the revanchist city more than twenty years ago. Today, in the cognitive carbon emissions of the capitalist Anthropocene, that revanchist gentrification frontier is at once planetary and localized. Charles Drevna, a former vice president at the company behind the Dakota Access pipeline, is now president and chief executive of Fueling U.S. Forward, a public relations front for fossil fuels funded by the billionaire Koch brothers; money and propaganda convinced delegates at the National Black Political Convention, meeting in Gary, Indiana a few months before the U.S. election, to adopt a statement declaring that “Policies that subsidize electric vehicles and solar panels for the wealthy raise energy prices and harm the black community.”<sup>23</sup> Back in Vancouver, another billionaire developer’s son, Joo Kim Tiah, prepared for the opening of the Trump Tower. One of the advertised features: allotted private jet hours and a chauffeured bespoke Rolls Royce to take you directly to the airport. Capitalized and potential ground rent take flight. And on November 8, the developer who transmogrified a debt-leveraged real estate empire built from the revanchist city of the 1990s into a reality-television global brand for tacky, gold-plated American excess, marched through an Electoral College of deindustrialization, white nationalism, and a seemingly infinite supply of unhinged conspiracy theories.

Elvin Wyly (ewyly@geog.ubc.ca), version  $\lim_{x \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{x}$ , February 12, 2017

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<sup>22</sup> Figures are weighted estimates tabulated from the microdata files of the 2016 Pilot Study of the American National Election Studies (ANES). The sample included 1,200 U.S. citizens age 18 or over from the ‘YouGov Panel,’ more than one million respondents who volunteer to complete online surveys. The 2016 ANES Pilot Study was conducted in January, 2016, when Republican discourse was dominated by strong ‘Never Trump’ contingents that drove support to many other contenders; the estimates for global-warming denialism are therefore considerable under-estimates of the true extent of the right-wing denialist sentiment that was part of the coalescence of support for Trump through the summer of 2016. Stanford University / University of Michigan (2016). *Codebook and User’s Guide to the ANES 2016 Pilot Study*. Available at <http://www.electionstudies.org>. Contradictions abound in the public polling landscape, shaped by variations in the wording of questions and various dimensions of sample selection bias. A joint survey by Yale’s Program on Climate Change Communication and the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication found that 56 percent of Trump supporters accepted the reality of global warming, compared with 93 percent of Bernie Sanders supporters and 92 percent of those backing Hillary Clinton. Mollie Reilly (2016). “Majority of Trump Voters Believe Global Warming is Real, Poll Finds.” *Huffington Post*, May 4. When asked whether human activity has led to rising global temperatures, 85 percent of self-described Democrats agreed, versus only 38 percent of Republicans. Lydia Saad and Jeffrey M. Jones (2016). *US Concern About Global Warming at Eight-Year High*. Press release, March 16. Washington, DC: Gallop.

<sup>23</sup> Hiroko Tabuchi (2017). “Sensing Gains Ahead Under Trump, the Kochs Court Minorities.” *New York Times*, January 5.