Art, Repair, and Spatial Justice in Boston's Chinatown and Seattle's International District

by Lilian Xie

B.A. in Computer Science
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Authored by: Lilian Xie
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Department of Urban Studies and Planning

Certified by: Karilyn Crockett
Assistant Professor of Urban History, Public Policy & Planning

Accepted by: Ceasar McDowell
Professor of the Practice of Civic Design Chair, MCP Committee
Department of Urban Studies and Planning

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Abstract

There is a growing overlap between the fields of urban planning, art, and social justice. Projects within the realms of urban planning and socially engaged art seek to bring about changes that redistribute socially valued resources and opportunities, especially among racial and spatial lines. This thesis analyzes how socially engaged public art accomplishes these goals of spatial justice in Boston and Seattle's historic Chinatowns. Building off of planning scholars Rashad Akeem William and Leonie Sandercock's work framing the role of affect and emotions in healing planning conflicts, I will analyze how these projects support their community's efforts to repair past spatial harms, and what distinguishes their function from other forms of political and social activism. Using a case study approach, I present a series of research findings from interviews with individuals who facilitated, created, and/or participated in public art projects in Seattle's International District and Boston's Chinatown.

Through my research, I illustrate the unique capacity of public art to influence the important emotional and relational aspects of transformation, and the opportunity that public art presents for residents to directly shape the built environment. Public art, as a uniquely place-specific art form, offers an opportunity for communities pursuing spatial justice to shift the affective aspects of transformation and engage in the radial reimagination of how power is distributed in space. Art is an important and often underutilized strategy in the spatial justice toolkit, and this thesis presents opportunities for artists, community organizers, and planners to think creatively about how art can support their efforts to disrupt racial planning, dismantle White supremacy, and support the continued flourishing of urban communities.

Thesis supervisor: Karilyn Crockett
Title: Assistant Professor of Urban History, Public Policy & Planning

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Chapter 1

Introduction

What is the function of art in achieving justice for communities marginalized by structural racism? In the movement for social justice, what role do artists and culture workers play? These questions are especially relevant and personal to me, as an artist whose community and practice are closely intertwined with the residential and organizing communities in Boston's Chinatown neighborhood. Chinatown has a rich social and cultural ecosystem, nurtured by the care and commitment of its residents, community activists, and supporters, and like many other neighborhoods of color, it thrives today despite many historic attempts to destroy it.

In this thesis, I draw on the framing of "spatial justice" to describe the work of securing the continued presence and flourishing of neighborhoods of color, and to understand the role that art and artists play in support of this work. How does art accomplish the goals of spatial justice, and what attributes of art specifically contribute to the effectiveness of this work?

Spatial justice
"The fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them." (p. 2)
Edward Soja, "The city and spatial justice" (2009)

Spatial justice is "the fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them," as defined by geographer Edward Soja (2009, 2). Soja's framing of spatial justice is helpful for understanding the relationship between art and justice because of the situatedness of art in place, especially public art. Discussing the role of art in furthering spatial justice recognizes that it matters where art is produced, designed, and shared, and opens up a set of possibilities for artists and culture workers to recognize and respond to the distribution of justice across spatial lines.

These questions about art and spatial justice are increasingly relevant because of the growing overlap between activism, art, and urban planning. In each of these domains, there are different frameworks that describe how art brings about social change and spatial justice. Within the art world, art historians and critics tend to group artists working at this intersection into the genre of "socially engaged art". Socially engaged art, as defined by the Tate Modern, is a practice that treats the interaction between people as the medium or material of the work. Not all socially engaged art aims to further justice or improve social conditions, but many artists work with social or political goals in mind, with Rick Lowe, Theaster Gates, Jeanne van Heeswijk, and Wochenklasur being a few notable examples of artists and collectives addressing the spatial aspects of social transformation. Within this genre, artists operate under a philosophy that art can create change by proposing different ways to respond to current crises, shifting relationships with(in) political or social systems, and providing practical benefits for its participants (Helguera 2015). In the words of the "Arte Útil" ("Useful Art") collective, this type of art "draws on artistic thinking to imagine, create and implement tactics that change how we act in society" (n.d.).

Socially engaged art
Art that "draws on artistic thinking to imagine, create and implement tactics that change how we act in society."
Arte Útil

Within urban planning, there has also been an increase in the use of art to bring about social transformation. The extent to which planners would characterize these practices as being for the purpose of "spatial justice" varies and depends on context, but all of these practices incorporate art with some form of social impact in mind. This includes using

"Washing" (2021) by Lily Xie, Maggie Chen, Charlene Huang, Chu Huang, and Dianyvet Serrano
Image: Mel Taing

art in the design and maintenance of space to improve a community's well-being, otherwise known as placemaking (Project for Public Spaces, 2007). There has also been a growing practice of integrating artistic methods into community engagement in order to reach a more diverse set of participants, spark creative problem solving, and strengthen understanding of community values (Metzger, 2010; Beeck, 2016, Geekiyanage et al., 2020). Within community engagement practices, planning theorists have also proposed using art to support what planning scholar Leonie Sandercock (2004) termed "therapeutic planning". Therapeutic planning recognizes that past urban planning processes have caused harm in a way that informs and blocks the progress of present-day planning, and suggests that planners have a role in healing these historic traumas in order to improve conditions for affected communities (Sandercock, 2004). Scholars including Sandercock have explored the role that art practices (primarily filmmaking) play in facilitating therapeutic planning between conflicting groups (Sandercock and Attili, 2014). The field of urban planning instrumentalizes art within its own processes to influence the built environment, deepen community engagement, and facilitate conflict healing.

Much has been written broadly about the role that art and artists play in creating social transformation. However, the specifics of how art is actually used in reality varies greatly by place and time, and also depends on the type of social change that a community is trying to bring about. Some of what is lost in the broad claims made by artists and planners is the specificity and situatedness of each art project, and the strategic use of different art methods based on history, goals, and context. Additionally, there exists a lack of literature that critically engages the question of why art should be utilized for social change at all, rather than another form of social or political activism. The growing number of toolkits and resource guides that describe general art strategies for change are helpful, but fail to answer a more fundamental question about how one should decide the right type of art intervention based on the time, place, audience, and goal, and if art is truly the most strategic choice given those circumstances.
This thesis contributes a situated analysis of how art functions in the spatial justice ecosystem for two historic Chinatowns in Boston and Seattle. The choice to situate this analysis in historic Chinatowns is first and foremost personal: as a socially engaged artist working in Boston's Chinatown for the past four years, I deeply care about the residents and community advocates in this community, and want to understand how I and other artists can better support their efforts to improve their neighborhood. This comparative analysis is an opportunity to share learnings between historic Chinatowns, especially because many Chinatowns across the United States share similar urban histories, spatial patterns, and present-day populations that inform how their communities define spatial justice (to be described further in Chapter 3).

In this thesis, I will explore how public art projects contribute to spatial justice in Boston and Seattle's historic Chinatowns and analyze what distinguishes their function from other forms of political or social activism. In the chapters that follow, I present a series of research findings from six semi-structured interviews I conducted from May to August 2022 with individuals who worked on socially engaged public art projects that aim to further spatial justice. From these interviews emerge a rich set of strategies and frameworks for how to use public art to accomplish the community's self-defined goals. Interviewees from both cities tied their definitions of justice to the histories and present-day contexts of their neighborhoods, and described public artmaking as one of many tools for achieving the forms of spatial justice they wished to see. Interviewees emphasized the unique capacity of public art to influence the necessary emotional and social aspects of transformation, and described both the final art product and the artmaking process as important stages for enacting social change. Interviewees also saw public art as a distinct opportunity for residents to directly shape the built environment, which they took advantage of as a way to give power to residents typically left out of urban planning conversations. All of these methods were deeply tied to the histories of these two neighborhoods, and uniquely responded to the present time, location, and spatial justice goals of each place.

Prior to describing these findings, I will establish a conceptual framework around art, spatial justice, and repair in Chapter 2 and explain the selection of these two cases in Chapter 3. In Chapters 4 and 5, I will focus on the individual case studies of Seattle's Chinatown International-District and Boston Chinatown, before delving into the analysis and implications of the research in Chapter 6.

Chapter 2 Art, Repair, And Spatial Justice

This thesis takes a reparative lens to analyzing how art accomplishes goals of spatial justice in Boston and Seattle's historic Chinatowns. In order to frame the role of art in repairing spatial harms, I will briefly discuss the history and conceptual framework around reparative planning and relate the goals of this practice to the function of socially engaged art.

There is a growing body of literature that documents how the design, planning, and development of US cities have caused harm to communities of color. Planning practices that infamously include urban renewal and exclusionary zoning have encoded locational discrimination and structural racism into the built environment in order to maintain the durability, invisibility, and longevity of White supremacy (Goetz, Williams, & Damiano, 2020). These practices have well-documented and long-lasting negative impacts on the abilities of Black, Indigenous, and other people of color to protect their health, maintain relationships to the environment, and access opportunities for social and economic mobility (Thomas, 1994; Lipsitz, 2007; Rothstein, 2017; Morello-Froscha & Lopez, 2006).

There have also been profoundly negative impacts on the social and emotional wellness of these communities, and planning scholars have adopted the psychiatric language of trauma and healing to describe these effects. Psychiatrist Mindy Fullilove (2004) came up with the term "root shock" to describe the collective trauma that results from the disinvestment and destruction of Black neighborhoods through urban renewal. Other scholars have also used the language of trauma to describe the social, emotional, and embodied impacts of colonialism, segregation, and other racist practices that involve space and place (Berglund & Kitso, 2020; Poe, 2022). Just like how the access to resources, opportunities, and health are not distributed equally across geographic lines, the harmful social and emotional impacts on communities are also unequally distributed.

In addition to exploring the role of planners in shifting the spatial structures of privilege, urban planning scholars are also studying the need for healing, acknowledgement, and redress for past spatial injustices. Frameworks that include "advocacy planning" (Davidoff, 1965), "equity planning" (Krumholz, 1982), "therapeutic planning" (Sandercock, 2004), "planning for the just city" (Fainstein, 2010), "antisubordination planning" (Steil, 2018), and more propose different ways for planning to address social inequity, with different levels of attention placed on the social and emotional aspects. Leonie Sandercock's (2004) influential paper "Towards a Planning Imagination for the 21st Century" first proposed a "therapeutic" approach to planning that attends to emotions and relationships, which are frequently underlying planning conflicts but rarely surfaced, managed, and transformed (p. 139). Rashad Akeem Williams (2020) expands this idea and connects it explicitly to race and the Black reparations movement in "From Racial to Reparative Planning: Confronting the White Side of Planning". Williams proposes a conceptual framework that contrasts "racial planning", the current status quo of urban planning that upholds structures of White supremacy and racial capitalism, with "reparative planning", a proposed mode of planning that embraces the need for repair not only through resource redistribution but also the shifting of the "affective, epistemic, and moral schema that allow illicit white advantage to remain unchecked in the first place" (Williams 2020, p. 8). Like Sandercock, Williams underscores the need to repair emotions, relationships, and ways of being in order to achieve broader justice, while pointing out that therapeutic planning must more explicitly address race in order to disrupt the normative forms of racial planning.

Reparative planning
A mode of planning that embraces the need for repair, not only through resource redistribution but also the shifting of the "affective, epistemic, and moral schema that allow illicit white advantage to remain unchecked in the first place" (p. 8).
Rashad Akeem Williams, "From Racial to Reparative Planning: Confronting the White Side of Planning" (2020)

How exactly should planners attend to these relational and emotional aspects of repair? To answer this, some planners have turned to art, with perhaps the most visible example being Leonie Sandercock and Giovanni Attili's (2014) use of filmmaking as a methodological tool to uncover processes of colonization, healing, and reconciliation in the Burns Lake Band and the Carrier Cheslatta First Nations. Although this area of research and practice is very related to the work of socially engaged art, planners rarely ever pull from socially engaged art theory to inform their methods of art healing. There is a missed opportunity here for planners to learn from socially engaged artists, especially when it comes to reparative justice.

Like planners, socially engaged artists are also critically engaging the need for repair and dismantling White supremacy, including along spatial lines. Socially engaged artists have engaged in projects to address and facilitate healing around colonialism, environmental racism, the housing crisis, and other elements of spatial injustice (Black, 2010-2019; Schneider, 2016-present; "LA Poverty Department", 1985-present; "Design Studio for Social Intervention", 2017-2020). What distinguishes socially engaged art from other methods of art healing, such as art therapy, is the focus on social change. Whereas art therapy primarily seeks clinical outcomes for individuals, socially engaged art instead focuses on the non-clinical healing of relationships, attitudes, and ways of thinking for the broader purpose of social transformation, which aligns it more with the goals of reparative planning.

The study of socially engaged art can provide many lessons for urban planners seeking to engage in reparative planning. In this thesis, I will explore how socially engaged public art projects accomplish reparative goals around spatial justice, and what types of outcomes art is especially conducive to achieving. It is my hope that this thesis will illuminate the connections between a neighborhood's history of spatial harm and their present-day efforts to dismantle racial planning, and the role that art and artists play in this movement towards repair.

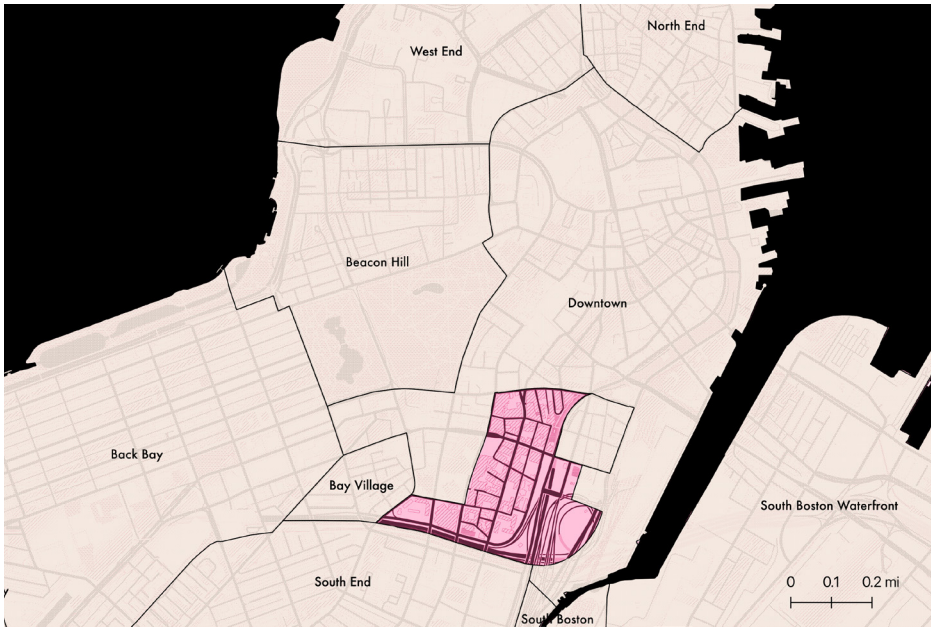
"Project Row Houses", a socially engaged art project based in Houston's Historic Third Ward
Image: Project Row Houses

Chapter 3 Context and Site Selection

This thesis explores how public art projects drive forward the reparative goals of spatial justice through the study of two historic Chinatowns in Boston and Seattle. Chinatowns are important sites for understanding spatial justice because of their origins as highly unjust geographies, created through locational discrimination and targetted segregation by political and social forces. In particular, Boston and Seattle's historic Chinatowns are worth examining in connection with one another because of the related histories, goals, and public art practices related to spatial justice between the two neighborhoods. This chapter will briefly discuss the motivation for selecting these two cases, and illustrate why they are useful sites for understanding spatial justice and repair.

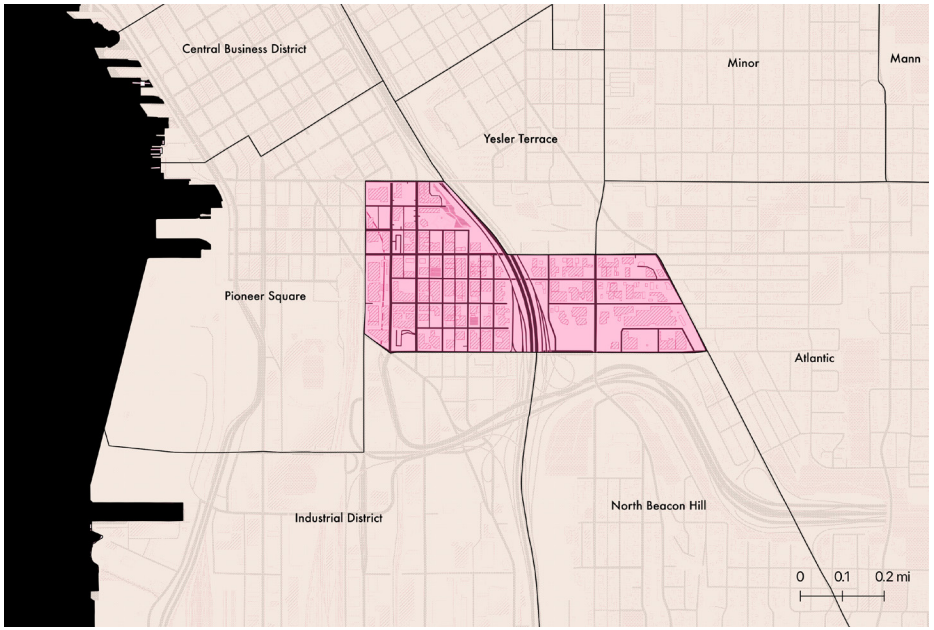
Despite the name, Chinatowns as geographic spaces have been racially and ethnically diverse for nearly as long as they have existed (although they have predominantly housed working class, immigrant residents, and hold important ethnic significance for Chinese people); for this reason, I will frequently refer to them in this thesis as "historic Chinatowns."

As a selection of case studies, Chinatowns across the United States have a set of shared spatial histories that are shaped by nationwide trends in urban planning, immigration laws, racially discriminatory practices, and



(above) Boston Chinatown
Source: City of Boston

(below) Seattle International District
Source: City of Seattle



community activism. Historic Chinatowns are places that were formed out of necessity and precarity–where immigrants were forced to live and subsequently targeted for eradication–that were simultaneously important sites of civil society, culturally relevant resources, and social networks for working class immigrants.

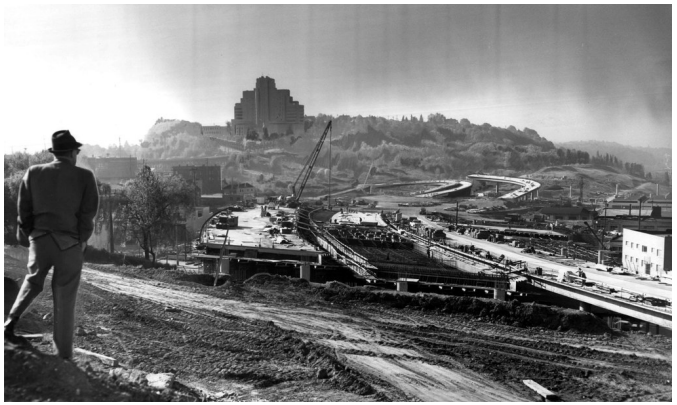
Not all Chinatowns are the same, and individual neighborhoods have distinct characters and pasts; however, a brief discussion of their shared histories is presented here, in order to illustrate the motivation behind analyzing these cultural enclaves in the context of spatial justice and repair. In their study of fifteen North American Chinatowns, urban historians Domenic Vitiello and Zoe Blickenderfer (2020) documented the "clear, widespread pattern" (p. 143) of urban planners and government officials attempting to destroy Chinatowns. Vitiello and Blickenderfer grouped these attempts into two distinct time periods: the City Beautiful era (c. 1890s-1930s) that aimed to destroy Chinatowns as sites of illicit businesses, cramped housing, and other perceived social and racial ills; and the Urban Renewal era (c. 1940s-1970s) that sought to replace Chinatown "slums" with civic infrastructure to attract middle-class, suburban Whites back into cities.

This history of distinctly place-based racial discrimination informs the present-day goals of spatial justice across many Chinatowns, where there is frequently an emphasis on the protection and preservation of cultural assets and the need for resident control and governance over land. While many of these racialized attempts throughout the 19th and 20th centuries were successful in destroying Chinatowns and dispersing the ethnic populations living there, other Chinatowns (primarily in larger cities) survived these attempts and, in the process doing so, strengthened community organizations, ethnic associations, CDCs, cultural centers, and other elements of civil society that continue to preserve and stabilize Chinatowns today.

Although many Chinatowns are alike in these ways, the motivation for specifically selecting Boston's Chinatown and Seattle's International District has to do with their similar sizes, histories, and existing practices of arts

activism. These neighborhoods are shaped by three shared factors: their proximity to the city's central business district, the mid-century construction of highways through the neighborhood, and the developments of large civic infrastructure projects, like the Kingdome in Seattle and the Tufts New England Medical Center in Boston. Each of these factors have caused displacement, decreased housing stock, ruptured social networks, and created long-lasting environmental issues and health impacts, and they have made both neighborhoods more vulnerable to the present-day pressures of gentrification and displacement (Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, 2013; Nelson, 2019).

Because of these 3 factors, Boston and Seattle share a similar history of spatial injustice, in which certain planning and development decisions have disserved and caused harm to working class, immigrant communities.



Construction of Interstate 5 in Seattle, near present-day Yesler Terrace
Image: Seattle Times

Construction of Interstate 93 in Boston
Image: Boston Globe

These histories inform present-day activists and residents' definitions of repair and spatial justice. However, there are also a number of important differences that are unique to each city, which shape how each community sees the role of art in achieving spatial justice.

Compared to Boston, the International District (typically referred to as "the ID" by local residents) has a stronger history of centering spatial justice around cultural preservation. Among historic Chinatowns, the ID is unique because of its origins and continued presence as a pan-Asian community, which today is made up of a Chinatown, Nihonmachi (Japan Town), Filipino Town, and Little Saigon. In the International District, cultural preservation is important both because of the neighborhood's unique character, and also because of the ID's history as a targetted location for the destruction of Asian communities wholesale (which included, most significantly, the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II). Culture and identity are also at the center of the community's activism, and many of the neighborhood's successful campaigns for improved conditions have been won on the grounds of cultural protection. This includes the establishment of the ID as a special historic district in 1973, which gave a community-elected board the power to modify existing zoning for the protection and preservation of the ID (City of Seattle, n.d.).

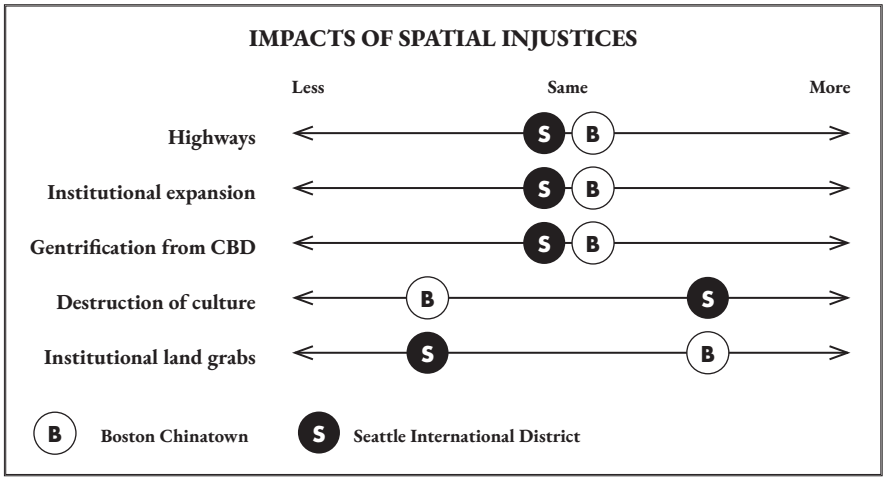
For these reasons, activists and community organizations in the ID frame the reparative goals of spatial justice around protecting the neighborhood's unique history, culture, and dignity (Santos, 2009).

Chinatown International District Coalition demonstration
Image: Chetanya Robinson

While activists and residents in Boston also value cultural preservation, the emphasis is significantly more focused on community control over land. The struggle around land plays a more central role in Boston Chinatown's history, compared to the ID. Major battles in the community's history were in response to institutional land grabs, including urban renewal, the expansion of the Tufts New England Medical Center, the construction of a parking garage on Parcel C, the Central Artery/Tunnel Project (otherwise known as the Big Dig), and more. In all of these cases, activists successfully reclaimed some portion of the land that was under threat, and redeveloped it for community use like affordable housing, community centers, and art spaces.

These events significantly shape how activists and residents today think about repair; today, activists and community organizations frame the reparative goals of spatial justice in Boston Chinatown around the community control and governance of land, and the need to stabilize the neighborhood for working class, immigrant residents. Boston and Seattle share important similarities in their urban histories that makes them important to study in relation to one another, while also having distinct differences that impact their present-day definitions of spatial justice. Individuals and groups in both neighborhoods have developed deep-rooted practices that combine art with planning and activism, and both neighborhoods have a history of investing in art as one of many strategies for social change. All of these shared conditions provide an ideal environment to understand how socially engaged public art projects contribute to spatial justice, and analyze what differentiates them from other forms of social and political activism.

Chinatown Community Land Trust celebrating their first homebuyer
Image: Chinatown Community Land Trust



Chapter 4 Seattle International District

Activists and community organizations in Seattle's International District frame the reparative goals of spatial justice around protecting the neighborhood's unique history, culture, and dignity (Santos, 2009). As discussed in the previous chapter, the past- and present-day context of the International District informs the community's conception of spatial justice and shapes how artists and activists mobilize public art for these purposes. To begin this chapter, I will present a more in-depth history of the International District in order to show how activists today arrived at their definitions of spatial justice, and lay the groundwork for how public art fits into the spatial justice ecosystem.

Presently home to around 4000 residents, the International District has been a hub for Seattle's diverse Asian American community since the turn of the twentieth century (U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-2016). Today, the neighborhood consists of Seattle's historic

Seattle International District
Image: J. M. Wong (top left), Friends of Little Saigon (bottom left), Trevor Lenzmeier (top right), Kamna Shastri (bottom right)

Chinatown, Nihonmachi (Japantown), Filipino Town, and Little Saigon. The uniquely pan-Asian origin of the ID was a byproduct of de jure locational discrimination that limited where Asians were able to live in Seattle. Throughout the twentieth century, Asians were barred from living in many parts of the city by legal means including restrictive covenants and Washington state's 1921 Alien Land Law, which together prevented the sale and leasing of land to immigrants and non-White residents. Riots, assaults, mass murders, and forced removals in the late 1800s and early 1900s further limited the places where Asians felt safe to live (Chin, 2001). Forced out of other areas of the city, the immigrant communities in the International District formed their own ethnic networks and organizations to support themselves, and these sets of culturally specific resources, services, and communities continue to flourish through the present day.

One of the most significant ruptures to the social and spatial fabric of the International District was the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans in World War II. This period was marked by the criminalization and targeted eradication of Japanese identity and cultural practices, and the long-lasting harms of this period continue to shape the ID's definitions of spatial justice today. Beginning in 1942, Japanese Americans in Seattle were forcibly removed from their homes and incarcerated in concentration camps by executive order of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Residents of Nihonmachi were forced to abandon their homes and were sent to the Minidoka Relocation Center in Idaho for the remainder of the war. Despite promises to protect the Japanese from losing their properties, most of these families found their homes and businesses repossessed when they came back, leaving them in financial, social, and psychological precarity. Although many chose not to return to Seattle, some residents were eventually able to buy back parts of the neighborhood and slowly rebuild Nihonmachi with great effort and care. Internment caused long-lasting harm on Seattle's Japanese American community, whose cultural identities, language, and practices were criminalized and discriminated against, long after the war officially ended.

The overtly racist targeting and segregation of Asian residents shifted into more covert practices in the 1950s, a time period that also saw the rise of a new wave of Asian American activists fighting for social and spatial justice. Beginning in the 1960s, a growing coalition of activists in the International District began to mobilize to resist large infrastructural and institutional projects that threatened to destroy the neighborhood. The construction of Interstate 5 in the 1960s physically divided the ID and destroyed homes and businesses, despite opposition from ID community groups (Chin, 2001). Only three years later, King County approved financing for the new Kingdome Stadium, which proposed taking land away from the International District to build 6,500 on-site parking spaces for the new stadium. Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino residents joined together to protest the stadium and call attention to the economic and physical deterioration of the neighborhood due to City neglect. This coalition negotiated with the City to secure resources for the community and produce a set of policies that protected the ID from the stadium construction. These policies also included the creation of the special ID historic district. These were historic wins that encoded into law the

community's need to preserve the International District's unique culture, which is especially significant given the long history of targetted destruction, racial segregation, and ethnic discrimination faced by the neighborhood.

This coalition of activists continued to grow, expand capacity, and fight to secure resources for the ID into the present day, where they currently focus both on achieving reparative justice as well as addressing the new challenges facing the neighborhood. While the fight for spatial justice in the International District was historically shaped by the need to protect the neighborhood's existence and culture from overtly and covertly racist actions, residents today face additional pressures including rising gentrification and increasing levels of institutional expansion from a growing downtown. Spatial justice in the International District is both reparative (seeking to address the past, where Asian culture, identity, and presence was criminalized and targeted for destruction) and forward-facing (responding to the present-day challenges of gentrification and institutional expansion).

The reparative aspects of spatial justice in the International District are oriented around the protection and preservation of the neighborhood's unique history, culture, and dignity, and a network of artists and organizers contribute to these efforts through socially engaged public art.

In my research, I observed three critical ways that public art supported spatial justice: by shaping the landscape to reclaim dignity and belonging for pan-Asian residents, by memorializing past harms, and by making space for conversations about cross-ethnic and cross-racial solidarity. These art projects deepen the legacy of activism in the International District by opening channels for residents to directly impact their built environment and reflect their own cultures and identities.

REFLECTING CULTURE THROUGH THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

As a visitor in the ID, you walk over crosswalks painted with lotuses and turtles and pass under highway I-5, where pillars are adorned with wood print wave designs. Artwork with traditional and modern interpretations of Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese designs are painted, sculpted, etched, and pasted onto the landscape: on walls, alleyways, lampposts, and windows.

Beyond beautifying the streetscape, these artistic efforts are part of a broader strategy to visually anchor the International District's identity and function as a pan-Asian neighborhood. This strategy, a form of "creative placekeeping", responds to the history of the ID, where visible Asian identity and culture was treated as a target for violence and discrimination in order to further the maintenance of White supremacy.

Creative placekeeping, as defined by cultural activist Roberto Bedoya, refers to the "active care and maintenance of a place and its social fabric by the people who live and work there" through the use of art and creative practice, which includes not only the preservation of buildings but also the preservation of culture and ways of life (Bedoya, 2016). In the ID, creative placekeeping asserts the presence, belonging, and inherent dignity of Asian

Little Saigon crosswalk at 12th and Jackson
Image: Seattle Department of Transportation

Americans by reshaping the built environment to reflect residents' identities and culture.

The purpose of reshaping public spaces in this way is to cultivate a shared sense of safety and belonging for Asian residents. Far from being a figment of the past, racism against Asian Americans today is on the rise: 2020 saw a surge in violence against Asian Americans, sparked by anti-Asian rhetoric around the COVID-19 pandemic. An ongoing nationwide survey documented 11,500 anti-Asian incidents between March 2020 and July 2022 (Stop AAPI Hate, 2020). This recent cycle recalls a longer history of violence, dispossession, segregation, and forced assimilation, much of which was spatial by means of controlling where Asians could live, work, and express themselves. The work of creative placekeeping in the ID seeks to repair these spatial injustices through cultural means: by rewriting the language of landscape to publicly assert the presence and belonging of Asian Americans.

This cultural strategy complements the more material and political aspects of spatial justice, which secure safety and belonging for residents through other means that include improving housing, services, and health outcomes. Housing and community development organizations like InterIm and the Seattle Chinatown International District Preservation and Development Authority (SCIDpda) describe placekeeping as a natural counterpart to the material work of securing affordable housing: while housing and advocacy work cultivates the material conditions for quality of life, placekeeping and cultural work tends to the immaterial aspects of well-being and, as one interviewee described, "the soul of the ID". "We took a resident survey, and they told us that they don't just want housing. They want to feel safe and see art that reflects them," says SCIDpda Community Development Manager An Huynh. "We cannot only be fighting for our basic needs." Tom Im, the Deputy Director of InterIm CDA, reflected a similar sentiment:

> Social justice and equity are not just about getting more resources, in the form of housing and basic needs. It is also about fulfilling the top of the hierarchy of needs–expressing our own selves … [This] responds to and reflects our history and current circumstances, and it adds more character and soul to a neighborhood.

In order to ensure that these creative placekeeping efforts truly reflect the culture and character of current residents, artists and activists emphasize the need to involve residents in the creation and maintenance of these public artworks. SCIDpda and InterIm both convene community advisory committees to work with artists and direct the creation of public art projects. Rather than creating a display of Asian culture for tourists, these projects are created by and for the everyday people who live and work in the ID. The participatory nature of these curatorial processes ensures that new work reflects the spirit of the ID; additionally, these participatory processes are important forums for

Volunteers painting murals under Interstate 5 in 2022
Image: UrbanArtworks (left), InterIM (right)

"SLURP!" (2021) mural in Maynard Alley by artist Akira Ohiso
Image: Akira Ohiso

reasserting that this place belongs to the residents by creating an opening for residents to shape public space.

Beyond reflecting the culture of the International District and ensuring that the built landscape communicates the dignity and belonging of current residents, creative placekeeping art projects also strategically direct attention to the future uses of public space. Many of the creative placekeeping projects in the ID were intentionally installed in underutilized spaces, such as alleyways or under the highway, in order to "create place out of an area that is seen as a negative place," according to An Huynh. Artists and activists use creative placekeeping projects to improve current conditions, draw attention to underutilized places, and engage the community in reimagining the possibilities of these spaces. Tom Im described an example of this that came out of the I-5 pillar painting project. The art project generated conversations around the use of the highway underpass, which resulted in the creation of a design proposal that reimagined the area under the freeway at Jackson and King Streets to include a skate park, play elements, and community art (SiteWorkshop, n.d.). In addition to improving present conditions, creative placekeeping projects are also future-facing, and add fuel to the fire around how to reshape the landscape to reflect the evolving culture of the ID.

Renderings for I-5 underpass for a 2020 community meeting
Image: SiteWorkshop

Public art reshapes the International District's built landscape to reflect more pan-Asian cultures and stories in order to assert the presence, belonging, and inherent dignity of its residents. Although the original geography and location of the International District was shaped by forces of White privilege and power, activists, residents, and artists today are reshaping the landscape to publicly reclaim Asian culture. Creative placekeeping aims to cultivate feelings of safety and belonging for current residents by visually counteracting the "white spatial imaginary" encoded into the built environment, which is especially radical given the history of the International District as a place where Asians were forced to live, targeted for eradication, and discriminated against. Grassroots placekeeping efforts in the ID have the effect of reshaping these geographies of racism by creating an urban environment where Asian residents see their culture reflected around them.

SHAPING COLLECTIVE MEMORY

In addition to publicly reflecting residents' dignity, belonging, and culture in the present day, public art in the International District also plays a critical role in shaping collective memory: how groups remember the past. This contributes to the reparative work of spatial justice by reclaiming the memories and traditional practices that were erased through the forced removal and displacement of Japanese Americans in the International District.

Public art molds spaces into what historian Pierre Nora (1989) calls "sites of memory," or places where geography, history, and memory intertwine to create collective memory (pp. 7-24). Physical art forms, such as monuments and memorials, are a way to produce, legitimate, and reanimate collective memory in space (Mitchell, 2003). Memory is also created through intangible forms of art, such as oral storytelling, dance, and theater; these methods of producing collective memory are also spatially informed by where people are allowed to live and congregate.

The social production and authentication of memory is deeply intertwined with power, geography, and politics. Describing how memory shapes our understanding of the nation, geographer Katharyne Mitchell (2003) writes, "Memory is bound up with power, and both memory, and

its corollary, forgetting, are hegemonically produced and maintained, never seamlessly or completely, but formidably and powerfully nonetheless" (p. 443). As a spatial medium for memory, public art is deeply influenced by power, which affects both sites of remembrance (who gets to create memorials, what gets memorialized, and how) and forgetting (what sites of memory are lost or destroyed).

This is felt deeply in Nihonmachi, where memories of Japanese residents were erased when residents were forcibly incarcerated during World War II. Many former residents were permanently displaced from Nihonmachi in the aftermath of internment; those who were able to return carried the trauma of the camps. In addition to physical removal, Japanese cultural practices were also erased after being subject to discrimination, violence, and forced assimilation during this period. Today, artists and culture workers are using public space to memorialize spatial injustices while simultaneously reclaiming their traditional practices and celebrating Japanese culture.

Erin Shigaki installing "Never Again is Nowe" (2020) mural on the side of the Densho building
Image: Eugene Tagawa

Walking through Nihonmachi, you pass by an alleyway on Jackson Street where a wheat paste mural of black and white images draws you in. Created by artist Erin Shigaki, this mural shows photographed scenes from Japanese American internment. Collaged archival images of children and families are expanded to be larger-than-life, accompanied by the phrase "NEVER AGAIN IS NOW."

Erin Shigaki's work creates a world where these memories are not lost, but rather presented as publicly as the face of a building you see every day. Her murals make use of archival images, typically of people, and the scale of the work matters for this purpose: "You can't look away," Shigaki said, "It's at a scale where, even when you're driving by in a car, you can't help but see it. That has a special potency. It presents an opportunity for people to deeply witness." What Shigaki calls "deep witness" is an opportunity for memory to be viewed and transmitted across space and time, which is especially important for the memories of interned Japanese Americans, whose stories and presence were forcibly erased from the landscape.

Shigaki's artwork reclaims the culture, language, and memories that were lost when Japanese Americans were forcibly removed from their homes and incarcerated during WWII. In her other work, Shigaki has incorporated elements of Japanese culture such as Japanese writing, senninbari ("one thousand person stitches") and ema (plaques), on which hundreds of Seattle community members wrote their wishes for the future. "Through my art, I am figuring out what it means to be Japanese American given the history of assimilation, and because our identities were punished and erased," says Shigaki. By publicly honoring Japanese American history and

"Day of Remembrance" (2020) by Erin Shigaki, installed in Nihonmachi Alley
Image: Erin Shigaki

identity in space, Shigaki's public artwork turns areas of the ID into "spaces of memory" that hold space for memorialization and reclaim the memories and traditional practices that were erased through racial discrimination and displacement.

OPENING CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACIAL SOLIDARITY

In addition to protecting the neighborhood's unique history, culture, and dignity, socially engaged public art also creates an avenue for International District residents to discuss the shifting identity and values of the community. Culture is a living thing, and while many public art projects in the ID focus on the traditional cultures of Asian American residents, there is an important set of artists and activists working to expand these ways of being and tie them to the interests and cultures of other communities of color.

The decision-making process behind the placement and content of public art creates a forum for the Asian American community to discuss cross-racial dynamics, biases, and solidarity. In the United States, Asian Americans have historically been used as a "wedge group", mythologized within White supremacy culture as the "model minority" whose work ethic allows them to transcend systemic racism, functionally reinforcing the narrative that other people of color are deficient, notably Black Americans (Poon, OiYan, et al, 2016, pp. 469-502). By opening conversations about racial solidarity, public art elevates awareness of the shared struggle and "bound liberations" among marginalized groups (Watson, n.d.). This resists the dominant structure where marginalized communities are pitted against one another under White supremacy, and instead draws groups into discussions about their interdependence and interconnected destinies.

Lilla Watson, a Murri artist and activist, said: "If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

These conversations began gaining more visibility during and after the 2020 racial uprisings responding to the murder of George Floyd, which opened opportunities for solidarity while also shedding light on anti-Black sentiments within the Asian community. The 2020 Asian American Voter Survey found that 18% of Asian Americans surveyed expressed an unfavorable opinion of the Black Lives Matter Movement, while 11% did not believe the government needed to do more to give Black Americans rights equal to those of Whites. The racial uprisings sparked a movement for Asian Americans to confront anti-Blackness and reaffirm racial solidarity within their own communities.

Artists in the ID took up this call as well, translating these sentiments into murals on boarded-up shop windows. During the summer of 2020, many businesses in Seattle boarded up their shops, fearing property damage. While most of these coverings were gone in other neighborhoods when I visited two years later, many windows remained boarded up in the ID because businesses were fearful following recent anti-Asian attacks. Some businesses

Mural depicting history of Black jazz clubs in the ID, with "Black Lives Matter" written in Chinese
Image: Lily Xie

had taken down their boards, only to find their windows smashed again shortly after.

The first movement to paint murals on the ID's window coverings came when Corean American artist Che Sehyun convened 100 artists to paint 100 International District storefronts in June 2020 (Ng, 2020). Today, these boards remain covered in murals of all types. They include colorful advertisements of the businesses' wares and drawings with Asian motifs, as well as images related to racial solidarity, such as portraits of George Floyd and signs reading "Asians for Black Lives" or "Black Lives Matter" translated into Asian languages.

This process of creating storefront murals opened a space for community dialogue about racial justice and the intertwined struggle of Asian and Black Americans. Through the discussion of what would get painted over their windows, business owners affirmed, negotiated, and sometimes rejected the idea of displaying support for Black lives in public space. Dim Sum King co-owner Amy Eng saw this as an opportunity to express her values, saying, "I asked the artists to add 'Black Lives Matter' on the other boards. This shows we respect Black lives and racial equality" (Ng, 2020). Reflecting on her experience of this time, An Huynh from SCIDpda shared,

> I think it [the storefront murals] fostered a lot of important relationships between artists and business owners. There were conversations about 'what do you want on here' … and thinking about how this neighborhood has always been a home for all these different groups at the same time.

Other business owners challenged these additions. Erin Shigaki and artist Scott Méxcal's first attempt to put up a mural demonstrating Asian Americans' support of Black Lives Matter was met with some uncertainty and nervousness from local business owners. "I think I surprised people in drawing the connection between how our struggle is related to Black folks' struggles," observed Shigaki. "I just think it's by design of supremacy. These connections haven't been in mainstream conversation." The process of creating and installing these murals opened up conversations about the identity and values of the community that were otherwise difficult to access, and created opportunities for artists and business owners to name, negotiate, and publicly declare their commitment to cross-racial solidarity.

Beyond the creation process, the content of the storefront murals publicly draws connections between Black and Asian liberation and honors the influence of Black movements on Asian American activism. On the mural Shigaki and Méxcal were eventually invited to paint on the front of the Kobo Shop and Gallery, a signed and dated statement declares:

> BLACK LIVES MATTER
> The Japanese American community stands in unwavering solidarity with our Black, Brown and Indigenous siblings, who stood with us through the mass incarceration of our people during WWII. We acknowledge Asian Americans' legacy of complicity in White supremacy and commit to the ongoing dismantling of it. We acknowledge that Asian American activism is deeply influenced by and in debt to Black American activism. We commit to using our strength and privilege to achieve liberation for all people.

Black Lives Matter solidarity mural (2020) by Erin Shigaki and Scott Méxcal
Image: Scott Méxcal

Discussing this work, Shigaki shared,

> I think it's important for me as Nikkei, as a person who's benefited from actual redress from the government, that was definitely hard fought for. I have this really real understanding of, not so much the money, but just that the government apologized and made some kind of tangible action to say how wrong it was. And honestly that's why I'm so interested in the Black reparations fight too. If any other group should be pushing with Black Americans, it's us.

The deliberative process of creating public art opens an avenue for the community to discuss and negotiate their values, identity, and how they wish to express themselves. This is especially salient around the topic of race in the International District, a historically multi-ethnic and multi-racial neighborhood whose publicly pan-Asian identity is frequently contested by both internal and external stakeholders (Abramson, 2006). This is also responsive to the history and present-day context of the International District, an ethnic enclave that has been shaped by some of the same racially discriminatory forces that shaped other neighborhoods of color in Seattle. Reparative spatial justice in the International District means preserving the neighborhood's culture and identity for the broader purpose of dismantling White supremacy, which artists today are arguing must happen in solidarity with Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color. Socially engaged public art projects extend these conversations into the public sphere, creating a stage for the community to negotiate and declare its role in cross-racial solidarity movements.

CONCLUSION

Socially engaged public art projects in Seattle's International District illustrate how art can further the reparative goals of spatial justice. Repair in the ID focuses on protecting and preserving the neighborhood's unique history and culture, in response to the neighborhood's history as a target for the criminalization, destruction, and forced assimilation of Asian identity. Public art projects responded to these goals by asserting, reclaiming, and memorializing Asian culture in public space, while also creating forums to expand the discussion around liberation to also include solidarity with Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color.

One function of public art is to give residents an opportunity to shape the built environment to reflect their culture and identities. Artists and community organizers recognized the history of violence and danger associated with having visible markers of Asian identities in public space, and proactively sought to repair this by giving residents opportunities to assert their cultural identity through the production of public art. Community activists emphasized the importance of these creative placekeeping projects to cultivating a feeling of safety and belonging for residents, which was aligned with their efforts to secure material sources of safety and belonging, such as affordable housing. The installation of pan-Asian aesthetics and designs in public space produces a landscape that visually counteracts the White spatial imaginary by visibly signaling that this place is created by and for the Asian community.

Similarly, public art also plays a role in making public and visible the aspects of Asian history and culture that were forcibly erased. This is especially true in Nihonmachi, where many Japanese residents' presence, culture, and legacy were erased from the neighborhood due to internment. Although public art is not able to bring these residents back, it is able to support the reparative need for memorialization and the reclamation of Japanese culture. Public art creates "sites of memory" that produce, legitimate, and reanimate collective memory in place, while also offering opportunities for residents to publicly reclaim the traditional practices and cultures that were previously destroyed.

Beyond attending to the harms of the past, the reparative aspects of spatial justice also seek to strengthen the capacity of present-day communities to dismantle White supremacy. Part of this effort involves building cross-racial and cross-ethnic solidarities, and public art projects in the ID support this goal by creating spaces to talk about race. These projects demonstrate art's ability to bridge diverse groups and open spaces for community members to

discuss and negotiate the evolving values and identity of the neighborhood.

Socially engaged public art projects in the ID support the activist community's broader goals of preserving the history, culture, and dignity of the International District. Artists and activists work together to mobilize public art projects that meet the reparative goals of spatial justice and respond to the history and present-day context of the International District. These projects create opportunities for residents to shape the built environment to reflect their identities, history, and values, in a way that reclaims the "right to be" in public space as Asian individuals that were threatened and criminalized in the past (Bailey, Lobenstein, and Nagel, 2014). These projects also shift the collective conversation about the "right to be" to include other groups oppressed by White supremacy, and create important spaces to talk about racial solidarity. Public art projects in Seattle's International District respond to the neighborhood's unique history and present-day context to enact and complement the community's broader set of spatial justice goals.

Chapter 5 Boston Chinatown

The reparative goals of spatial justice in Boston Chinatown, as defined by activists and community organizations, focus on the community control and governance of land, and the need to stabilize the neighborhood for working class, immigrant residents. As discussed in Chapter 3, these priorities are highly responsive to the history of the neighborhood and its present-day strengths and challenges. This chapter will begin by briefly describing how Chinatown's history shapes the community's present-day definitions of repair and spatial justice.

Like many historic Chinatowns, Boston's Chinatown originated as a highly unjust geography formed through locational discrimination. Chinatown sits on land that was previously a cove of tidal flats that became developed through infill in the 1830s. When the first Chinese immigrants arrived to this area in the late nineteenth century, the neighborhood was mostly industrial and considered an undesirable place to live. Due to low rents and the racially exclusionary housing practices of the time, this area was Boston's entry point for new immigrants, including Irish, Jewish, Syrian, and Lebanese immigrants (Liu, 2020). Chinese immigrants in particular were confined to living in this area because of intense racial segregation and animosity, both legal and extralegal. This barred them from other parts of the city while also limiting their access to professional jobs, land ownership, and other avenues for social mobility. Nevertheless, Chinatown continued to grow as more Chinese immigrants arrived in Boston, eventually becoming an important place for new immigrants to access services, social supports, and safe harbor (Liu, 2020, pp. 13-27).

While the twentieth century brought about changes to immigration laws that allowed more Chinese into the United States, it also marked a period of intense urban change and development that threatened Chinatown's existence. In an effort to entice wealthier White residents back into the city, the development of the I-93 and I-90 highways

Boston Chinatown
Image: Maremagnum (top left), Angela Rowlings/ Boston Herald (bottom left), Jesse Costa/WBUR (top right), John Tlumaki/Boston Globe (bottom right)

destroyed approximately a third of Chinatown's housing stock through the seizure and razing of property through eminent domain. In the words of a former resident, this period of construction in the 1950s and 1960s effectively wiped out the "soul of Chinatown" (Liu, 2020, p. 42). At the same time, the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) set out to complete the South Cove Urban Renewal plan, which labeled Chinatown "a blighted community" in hopes of seizing the remaining land in Chinatown and redeveloping it into an expanded Tufts Medical School and New England Medical Center (T-NEMC), thereby displacing the existing working class, immigrant residents (Liu, 2020, p. 45).

However, a growing set of residents, radicalized and angered by these events, mobilized against urban renewal and built a coalition that would become Chinatown's present-day activist base. This group of younger Chinese activists fought against both institutional actors from BRA and T-NEMC, as well as groups within Chinatown that supported redevelopment. Eventually, Chinatown activists were successful in winning important concessions from these institutions, which included decreasing the proposed footprint of T-NEMC and the creation of subsidized housing developments; however, these concessions only represented a fraction of the housing units, community spaces, and businesses that were destroyed through urban renewal. Chinatown activists and their allies continued to fight to create services, housing, and other resources into the 1970s and beyond. This increasingly strong activist base managed to secure critical assets for the community that included increasing affordable and senior housing, cutting off the destructive encroachment of T-NEMC, developing a community center on Parcel C, reclaiming Parcel 24 from the Big Dig for affordable housing development, securing a permanent home for the Chinatown Public Library, and much more (Leong, 1995; Liu, 2008; Liu, 2020). In the present day, Chinatown's activist coalition is a known political force in Boston that mobilizes around issues of social justice, both in Chinatown and throughout the greater metropolitan area.

Today, Boston Chinatown's activist coalition continues to fight for a set of reparative and future-facing goals around spatial justice, which are informed both by Chinatown's history and the set of new challenges facing the neighborhood. While activism in Chinatown was heavily shaped by the movement against institutional development, residents presently face additional pressures that include the rise of speculative property development and gentrification, as well as the growing risks of climate change. Spatial justice in Chinatown is both reparative (seeking to address the past harms of institutional development, environmental racism, and locational discrimination) and future-facing (responding to the looming issues of speculative development and climate risk). Other priorities outlined in the community-written 2020 Chinatown Master Plan include increasing access to open space, cultivating a healthier environment, and preserving the historic and cultural character of the neighborhood (Chinatown Master Plan Committee, 2020). Responding to all of these priorities, spatial justice in Chinatown is oriented around community control and governance of land and the stabilization of Chinatown for working class, immigrant residents.

Socially engaged artists creating public art collaborate closely with activists and community organizations to support these efforts for spatial justice. In this analysis, I will focus on artwork addressing the reparative aspects of spatial justice, although many of the discussed artworks have scopes that extend beyond these aspects as well. Through conversations with community organizers and artists, I observed two primary ways that public art was functioning to support spatial justice: by strengthening social networks disrupted by displacement, and by prototyping more accessible and accountable political processes. These art projects create opportunities to influence the social and emotional aspects of social change, which uniquely contributed to the broader spatial justice goals of the Chinatown community.

STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE AGAINST DISPLACEMENT

Socially engaged public art in Boston's Chinatown creates

space for community members to repair the social, ideological, and cultural fabric that has been ruptured by displacement. These art projects strengthen the community against displacement by addressing not only the dispersion of people, but also the fracturing of social networks, shared culture, and collective ways of being that occur through displacement. In this section, I will discuss how art projects create repair and resilience along social, ideological, and cultural dimensions, by creating opportunities for residents to build relationships with one another, strengthening political solidarity between groups, and lending more symbolic capital to residents vulnerable to displacement.

Many studies in the field of urban planning, psychology, and sociology have demonstrated how displacement disrupts the social ties and feelings of belonging that individuals attach to their neighborhoods. Socially, public art projects in Chinatown create opportunities for residents to build relationships and strengthen social ties. Building the social network that has been ruptured by displacement is important because a strong social infrastructure supports a community's resilience against the pressures of gentrification. Such place-based social networks are especially vital for low-income people of color, who depend on their social fabric to access opportunities and resources that they are otherwise blocked from, for reasons of race, class, immigration status, language, and more (Betancur, 2009). Various community development organizations in Chinatown fortify these networks, and artists support these efforts by creating spaces for people across social groups to connect.

We see many of these elements at play in "Hudson Street Stoop" (HSS), a rotating program where artists conceptualize and activate public artwork with tenants from AsianCDC's mixed-income apartment buildings. HSS responds to Hudson Street's history as a vibrant community space that was razed for highway construction, and aims to turn One Greenway Park into an active, inclusive, and lively neighborhood "stoop". The first iteration of HSS commissioned artist Gianna Stewart to facilitate a number of storytelling and design workshops with local writer Cynthia Yee and residents from the 66 and 88 Hudson Street apartments. Stewart used information from these sessions to create a set of swings, which were laser cut with snippets of stories from the resident workshops. The final installation, "Storytell and Sway", provided a much-needed public gathering spot for neighbors on Hudson Street.

"Storytell and Sway" (2021) on Hudson Street Stoop by Gianna Stewart
Image: Aaron John Borque Photography

Art projects like "Storytell and Sway" create much-needed spaces for residents to come together and build relationships, which strengthens the social infrastructure of the neighborhood. Despite being a racially, ethnically, and economically mixed neighborhood, Chinatown still has many siloed spaces where residents coexist, but do not intermingle. Public art projects like "Storytell and Sway" create spaces for residents to encounter one another and develop relationships, which is key to the maintenance of social networks and the goals of spatial justice, which seek to fortify communities in the face of displacement pressures.

The social dimension of stabilizing the neighborhood for working class, immigrant residents is complementary to other efforts to secure political or economic resources, such as affordable housing. Jeena Chang describes the synergy between AsianCDC's public art and affordable housing work, saying,

> Developing a building is not enough to make a neighborhood and community. It's belonging, people, connections that make it a home. Social infrastructure is so important when you're just trying to survive. You need a neighbor to help with childcare, someone to help pick up groceries, to meet the day-to-day needs of your family. What public art allows is a structured platform for people to make their own organic relationships and build out their social infrastructure.

Chang draws a parallel between material resources like housing and immaterial resources like community and social networks. Spatial justice in Chinatown means not only providing these communities with material resources, but also providing resources to protect people's social and psychological well-being, like cultivating a sense of community, neighbors you can call on in times of need, and spaces to come together.

In addition to creating social transformation, socially engaged public art projects in Chinatown also create ideological transformation that strengthens the neighborhood's resilience against displacement. These projects raise social consciousness about the history and present-day issues of displacement. The aim of this work is not just to preserve the past, but also to educate current residents and visitors about Chinatown's unique character and widen support for stabilizing the neighborhood for working class, immigrant residents.

"Washing", a public art project I co-created with Chinatown residents Maggie Chen, Charlene Huang, Chu Huang, and Dianyvet Serrano, used oral history and film to tell the stories of displacement, protest, and community organizing around the construction of the Interstate 93 and Interstate 90 highways. This project was strategically installed in various sites along Hudson Street, a vibrant street that was razed and whose residents were displaced to build I-93. "Washing" pairs the stories of these residents with present-day interviews with tenants living next to the highway, who describe the traffic noise, heat, and pollution, and also pose questions about what life would be like if the highways weren't there.

Public art projects like "Washing" uplift the history and voices of Chinatown residents, thus building empathy among participants and connecting residents' present-day concerns with the histories of spatial injustice. "Washing" activated public spaces to tell the story of a neighborhood threatened by urban renewal but ultimately saved by community action. By doing so, it transformed buildings, parks, and parking lots into temporary sites of memory that exposed the history and culture of activism that shaped the built environment. Public art educates and activates newer community members around the issues facing the neighborhood and the role of collective action in strengthening the neighborhood against displacement.

Finally, socially engaged public art projects create transformation in the cultural dimension. In the movement to protect residents from displacement, art projects shift symbolic capital in order to confer more cultural value to residents who are typically devalued and more vulnerable to displacement. Public art accomplishes this by affirming

"Washing" (2021) by artists Lily Xie, Maggie Chen, Charlene Huang, Chu Huang, and Dianyvet Serrano
Image: Nohemi Rodriguez

the dignity of working class, immigrant residents, and creating physical reminders that they belong in Chinatown.

Artist Wen-ti Tsen spoke to this dynamic when describing his Worker Statues, an ongoing project that will install five permanent bronze sculptures that pay homage to Chinatown's working class. Tsen, a painter and sculptor who has worked with the Chinatown community since the 1980s, had been working with community members to finance these sculptures for many years before receiving a pledge of $1 million from the City of Boston in 2022. "They [the statues] are for the people. They celebrate working people," said Tsen. The project, which was in the process of being prepared for casting when I visited Tsen's studio in August 2022, comprises five separate statues that depict a grandmother and child pair, a laundryman, a butcher, and a garment worker.

In our conversation, Tsen described his practice as "giving a voice to people who are deprived of a voice," and that the Worker Statues project specifically "communicates the radical idea of celebrating the working class." Tsen's Worker Statues aim to publicly honor Chinatown's history as a working class community and confer symbolic capital to workers more broadly. Symbolic capital, defined by sociologist Pierre Bourdeiu (1990), refers to the value

"Worker Statues" (ongoing) clay model at Wen-ti Tsen's studio
Image: Lily Xie

and resources one can access when they are perceived as legitimate or prestigious within their culture. Symbolic capital is embedded in the landscape, through built symbols such as memorials, street names, and public art. Describing the power of the "memory landscape" to legitimize certain groups over others, geographers and memory researchers Derek Alderman and Joshua Inwood (2013) write,

> The social power of landscapes of memory is often realized through the broader political economy of cultural symbols and place promotion. Associations with the past can confer prestige, privilege, and status on social actors and groups – providing them a form of symbolic capital – while also having economic value. (p.189)

Capitalizing on the power of such cultural symbols is one method of "redefining the lines of belonging for marginalized groups," which is especially valuable in gentrifying neighborhoods where marginalized residents' feelings of belonging are challenged by the changing value of their neighborhood (Alderman & Inwood, 2013, p. 195). While symbolic capital does not replace the economic capital that would actually save residents from being priced out, it does contribute to advocacy efforts for more financial support and stabilization by further legitimating the inherent value and dignity of working people, and by reaffirming that Chinatown is a neighborhood where they belong.

Artists, culture workers, and community organizations in Chinatown have made many efforts to repair the social, ideological, and cultural fabric threatened by historic and ongoing displacement. Anti-displacement work is about stabilizing neighborhoods for lower income residents, which includes both political and economic forms of stabilization (e.g. expanding affordable housing) as well as social, ideological, and cultural forms (e.g. strengthening support networks and helping residents understand their "right to be"). In Chinatown, these efforts happen in three ways: by bringing people together to strengthen social ties,

by strengthening solidarity with groups most vulnerable to displacement, and by reaffirming the dignity of working class, immigrant residents. These projects respond to Chinatown's history of resisting institutional expansion and present-day fight against gentrification, and serve to complement the efforts of other forms of political and social activism towards spatial justice.

SPHERES OF RESILIENCE TO DISPLACEMENT

	More vulnerable to displacement →	More resilient to displacement
Socially	Neighbors are disconnected	Neighbors are connected and have support networks
Culturally	Belief that struggles of marginalized people are only the problem of those people	Believe that struggles of marginalized people are shared struggles
Ideologically	Working class, immigrant residents are not valued or respected	Working class, immigrant residents are valued and respected

TRANSFORMING METHODS OF RESIDENT PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

Socially engaged public art in Chinatown supports the reparative aspects of spatial justice by reimagining more accessible, engaging, and empowering processes of political participation. This effort is deeply tied to the broader goal of deepening resident governance and control in Chinatown, which is informed by the neighborhood's history as a place shaped by institutional actors that sidelined residents in their pursuit of growth and development. Although many processes that govern the built environment have significant impacts on the lives of Chinatown residents, their public engagement processes are often inaccessible or ineffective. Spatial justice in Chinatown involves repairing these processes of engagement by creating more accessible methods of community participation and governance, and public art projects offer an opportunity for testing and actualizing these approaches in the public realm.

In Chinatown, many residents are unable to participate in traditional public engagement forums because they are not fluent in English, have precarious immigration statuses, are working long hours for minimal pay, or are otherwise balancing many responsibilities that make it difficult to attend public meetings. At the same time, these residents are often the same ones who are the most affected by policy changes, as well as the ones who potentially have the most to gain given their vulnerability to the ongoing housing and environmental crises.

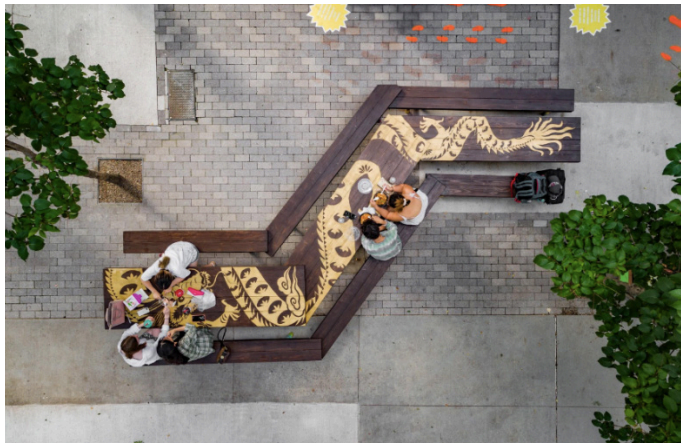
Socially engaged public art projects upend the traditional ways of doing public engagement, particularly around urban planning, by changing everything from how people are invited to participate, where feedback is requested, and who controls the outcomes of the engagement. An example of this is Residence Lab, a public art program co-organized by AsianCDC and Pao Arts Center, where I was a participant as an artist in 2019 and co-facilitator in 2021. Every summer since 2019, ResLab has invited artists and Chinatown residents to co-create site-specific, temporary public artworks that "reimagine the possibilities

Residence Lab workshop in Mary SooHoo Park in 2021
Image: Lily Xie

for underutilized spaces in Chinatown", with a particular focus on open space (Asian Community Development Corporation, 2022). This topic is important because Chinatown is one of the neighborhoods in Boston with the least amount of open green space, which limits the places where residents can play, be active, and breathe fresh air. In recent years, this has made Chinatown especially vulnerable to climate change, including rising temperatures and increased heat risk (Selig, 2022). Spatial justice in Chinatown involves ensuring that residents (especially those vulnerable to development and climate risk) have a say in the future of their neighborhood, and ResLab moves towards these goals by using public art as a vehicle for prototyping more democratic engagement strategies.

One way that ResLab accomplishes this is by modeling more accessible ways for Chinatown residents to participate in long-range planning conversations about their neighborhood. The program is designed specifically for working, immigrant mothers, who were one of the most underrepresented groups in urban planning engagement circles. Thus, the program included many elements that were not always present at formal planning engagements, including childcare, food, and language interpretation. A portion of ResLab takes place through workshops that invite residents to share their hopes and concerns around open space and engage with speakers on topics of urban planning and Chinatown history. The program took place with the same group over the span of several weeks (as opposed to the typically one-off format of public meetings) to allow more time for relationship building and shared learning. Finally, ResLab provides stipends for all participants, in order to recognize the real contributions and sacrifices they make to take part in the program. All of these aspects make ResLab a more accessible and engaging space for residents to participate in discussions about their neighborhood, which models a version of urban planning engagement that prioritizes inclusion and equity.

For the mission of furthering spatial justice, another important outcome of ResLab is its ability to illustrate the value of giving residents shared leadership and control over the public realm. By tying residents' visions for their neighborhood to the goals of the final artwork, ResLab demonstrates what creative solutions become possible when residents are given more access to the tools of reshaping public spaces (in this case, the tools of public art). In 2019, artist Ponnapa Prakkamakul and residents Henry Ko and Warren Wong created "Sampan" on the 8 Hudson Street lot, which reimagined the space that had been vacant for over 30 years as a place for play and rest. "Sampan" included a set of boat-shaped rocking chairs and a giant Chinese chess set. In 2021, artist Sheila Novak collaborated with resident Cass Li to respond to a lack of seating space on the eastern edge of Mary SooHoo Park, and installed a large, winding table with a painted surface. Novak and Li were given permission to keep their artwork installed beyond the original project timeframe because of the popularity and utility of the work.



"Abundance Among Us" (2021) by artists Sheila Novak and Cass Li for Residence Lab
Image: Chris Rucinski

ResLab illustrates how a public art process can invite residents to give input on and shape their neighborhood, in a way that is accessible, engaging, and values their time. The program inverts the traditional community engagement dynamic, whereby residents give feedback to policymakers who ultimately hold all the decision-making power. Instead, these projects give control to residents to shape what happens in a public space (albeit temporarily). In these ways, public art models a different way to engage community members in political process, and engages

in the reparative work of testing new approaches to community governance.

Public art projects prototype different ways to make public processes more accessible and accountable to residents. These projects respond to a history of spatial injustice in Chinatown, where decisions about land were made without the participation or consent of residents. Participatory public art projects in Chinatown model democratic strategies for public engagement and reimagine the power dynamics between "planner" and "planned" in the microcosm of the art project, modeling a world where the most vulnerable residents are able to design and create what they want to see.

CONCLUSION

Socially engaged public art projects in Boston Chinatown illustrate how art can be mobilized to further the reparative goals of spatial justice. The projects described in this chapter responded to the history of Boston Chinatown as a space shaped by racist laws and practices, which governed where people could live, find community, and put down roots. Present-day activism seeks restorative justice for the institutional land grabs, forced displacement, and rupturing of social networks caused by historic planning and development projects.

"Sampan" (2019) by artists Ponnapa Prakkamakul, Henry Ko, and Warren Wong for Residence Lab
Image: Tarik Bartel

Public art projects contributed to these goals in two distinct ways. One function of public art in Chinatown is to repair the social and cultural erosion caused by displacement, by mending and strengthening social and cultural infrastructure. Many of these art projects recognized Chinatown residents' vulnerability to displacement, which historically had been caused by institutional actors and is presently being spurred through gentrification in the private market. In response, public art projects serve a dual function: to re-inject important cultural memories back into public places, and to strengthen the neighborhood's social infrastructure to be more resilient to the pressures of displacement in the future. These projects aim to repair the social and cultural fabric previously fractured by displacement, while also continuing to fortify these networks for the future.

Public art projects in Boston Chinatown also play an important role in testing new approaches to doing public engagement, especially around urban planning and development. Boston Chinatown's spatial history is shaped by repeated land grabs for purposes that didn't benefit (and frequently harmed) the residential community, and present-day public art projects aim to repair the mechanisms that enabled those actions by testing and creating new channels for resident decision-making and leadership. These projects created more accessible ways for residents to weigh in on decisions around open space, experimented with resident-led leadership models, and offered opportunities for residents to directly shape public space.

Socially engaged public art projects in Boston Chinatown support the activist community's big-picture goals of strengthening community control over land and stabilizing the neighborhood for working class, immigrant residents. These artist and activist groups work towards shared goals that are reparative in nature and responsive to the history and present-day context of Boston Chinatown. Public art projects tackle the social and emotional

aspects of reparative justice by mending Chinatown's cultural and social fabric and implementing more democratic forms of resident decision-making, which serve to complement other political forms of spatial justice in the Chinatown community.

Chapter 6 Analysis

In the movement for spatial justice, what does public art accomplish that other forms of planning, activism, or social service cannot? In my analysis, there are two key things that public art is uniquely equipped to do: influencing the emotional dimensions of spatial justice, and enabling marginalized residents to reshape the built environment. In all of these instances, it is not that it is impossible to achieve these goals without art, but rather that the communities I observed took advantage of the especially potent way that public art made these things possible. Boston and Seattle's historic Chinatowns had distinct community goals and challenges, but there were notable similarities in how they mobilized public art for the needs of their neighborhood. In all of these instances, public art filled an observed gap or need, and worked in tandem with other forms of activism to move the community towards their own definition of spatial justice and repair.

INFLUENCING THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS OF SPATIAL JUSTICE

When planners talk about repairing the harms of urban planning, the tangible and material aspects are often discussed first, such as financial reparations or giving land back. While achieving material change is vitally important, spatial justice is also immaterial, and involves the transformation of social dynamics by recognizing wrongdoing, mending relationships, and redistributing power (Efan, 2016). Achieving the full spectrum of spatial justice requires not only the transformation of systems and structures, but also the transformation of how people feel and how they relate to one another. Public art is particularly suited for this because of art's ability to touch and shape affect, which refers to people's emotions as well as their attitudes and perceptions. In Boston and Seattle, public art was used to target the affective dimensions of spatial justice, which were interdependent with and synergistic to achieving other tangible forms of spatial justice. Creating public art not only allowed communities to address their own emotional and cultural needs with emotional and cultural solutions, but also catalyzed the sometimes grueling movements for other material forms of spatial justice.

Despite the gentrification pressures in both communities, developing and stabilizing affordable housing was not enough by itself to meet the social and emotional needs of the community and public art, as an affective practice, could uniquely fill this gap. An Huynh from SCIDpda said, "We took a resident survey, and they told us that they don't just want housing. They want to feel safe and see art that reflects them." Jeena Chang from AsianCDC reflected a similar sentiment, saying, "Developing a building is not enough to make a neighborhood and community. It's belonging, people, connections that make it a home." With these statements, Chang and Huynh are articulating a gap in the work of community development corporations to fulfill their community's needs with the tools of development alone. It takes more than housing to create a sense of safety, recognition, and belonging, and organizations in both Boston and Seattle lean on public artmaking as one way to fill this gap. Public art's ability to operate in the realm of the heart makes it uniquely well-suited to address these emotional and social needs.

What is illuminated by analyzing public art across Boston and Seattle is how the tangible aspects of spatial justice (such as the need for housing) and the affective (safety, recognition, and belonging) are deeply interconnected and synergistic, and fulfilling one increases a community's capacity to fulfill the other. Community-engaged public artwork and activism worked together in Boston and Seattle's historic Chinatowns to create affective outcomes that enabled tangible outcomes, and vice versa. AsianCDC's Hudson Street Stoop brought residents into meetings

where they met their neighbors to co-design a new piece of public art, which made their shared public space more inviting both socially and physically. The process of painting the I-5 columns in the International District improved the experience of walking under the highway, which prompted conversations among residents on how they wanted to redesign the underpass in the future. The goals of these community-engaged public art projects were deeply interwoven with the community's other political or social priorities, and accomplishing one increased the community's capacity to accomplish the others. As Chang put succinctly, "Public art is complementary to building affordable housing."

Part of this synergy between affective outcomes and tangible outcomes comes from the different scales and costs of public art versus other forms of activism. While developing affordable housing or pushing new policy can take years or decades before a community can reap the material benefits, a smaller piece of public art can be produced in a few months or a year, and is relatively more affordable. These aspects of smaller public art interventions make it well-suited for achieving targeted, immediate goals and delivering short-term wins. Multiple interviewees discussed the benefits of public artmaking for keeping up energy during the long and sometimes grueling battles for other material outcomes. Besides delivering shorter-term wins, public art also tends to people's emotional and social needs, which is necessary for continued interest and optimism through the lifespan of a longer-term initiative. The low-cost, faster aspects of public artmaking are akin to other interventions like tactical urbanism that provide more acute, targeted outcomes. The way that artists and community organizers in Boston and Seattle interspersed larger-scale campaigns with smaller-scale public art projects illuminates the ability of public artwork to boost morale and enable the sustainability of longer-term forms of spatial justice.

Hai! Japantown festival celebrating artist Amy Nikatani's artwork
Image: Hai! Japantown

The use of public art projects in Seattle and Boston demonstrates the unique function of public art in social and political movements to attend to the affective aspects of spatial justice. The transformation of emotions, attitudes, and perceptions is entangled with and catalytic for the transformation of systems and structures, and both categories of change are needed in the movement towards spatial justice. In Boston and Seattle, public art was integral to cultivating feelings of belonging, safety, recognition, and conviviality–feelings that could not be fulfilled by providing tangible resources alone–which both fulfilled a need in the community while also enabling other political and social outcomes. Additionally, public art projects provided a morale boost for movements to secure housing, infrastructure, and policy changes because of their relatively short turnaround times and capacity to provide short-term wins. Interviewees in both cities emphasized the unique ways that public artmaking operated on an affective plane, which supported and catalyzed both the tangible and intangible aspects of spatial justice.

ENABLING RESIDENTS TO RESHAPE THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

A valid critique of the therapeutic framing around "spatial justice" is that overly focusing on historic harms traps us into a pattern of defining our goals relative to the actions

of the past. This critique points out that centering our definition of "justice" around repairing past harms limits our abilities to imagine radically different futures independent of an oppressor. If we could move beyond repair, how would we practice liberation on our own terms?

Of course, the conversations about repair and liberation are not separate and are, in reality, deeply intertwined and interdependent. I make this distinction only to draw focus to the capacity of public art to experiment with and implement ways of being that go beyond responding to the harms of the past and instead reshape the built environment around visions of the future. Artists making socially engaged public art have the capacity to experiment with different modes of governance, participation, and democratic decision-making in the public realm, that other social and political actors typically cannot. This type of work is also reparative in the sense that it reimagines and proposes how public decision-making can better involve marginalized residents. In Boston and Seattle in particular, artists experimented with new forms of community control by giving residents a direct channel to influence public space through their artmaking processes.

Public art creation offered a unique opportunity in both Boston and Seattle to flip the traditional power dynamics that govern the public realm, and demonstrate the possibility for residents to reshape public space. Interviewees in both cities named a gap in urban planning to sufficiently address the neighborhood's needs, which included increasing affordable housing and access to open space. Part of the problem is the lack of opportunities for meaningful community governance: interviewees in both cities described their frustrations with traditional public engagement dynamics that demanded a lot from residents while failing to address past concerns or give them any real decision-making power. There is a need in both cities for more equitable and democratic forms of community governance, and the collaborative capacity of public artmaking makes it conducive for testing and enacting these methods.

What makes participatory public artmaking unique from other democratic forms of governance is the level of shared control that is possible and the highly visible nature of impact. Like other public realm projects, public art impacts the built environment in a visible way, but unlike the other projects, major elements of the creation, design, and execution can be controlled by "non-experts" (in this case, residents). The process of public artmaking has a lower barrier to participation than other physical projects, like housing or open space development, because it can be executed in a way where participants are not required to have any specialized skill sets to influence the project's outcome. For example, Erin Shigaki's Senninbari Shrine invited participants to write on ema (plaques) that were hung across trees to create the final artwork. Other projects like Residence Lab in Boston engage a smaller group of residents to jointly control the design and production of public art alongside artists. These projects demonstrate a spectrum of collaborative approaches that range in how deeply residents are invited to participate, which is generally in accordance with how much control and authorship they are given over the project. While acknowledging that much of this depends on the artist's process and their ability to facilitate a democratic process, it is clear that the form of public art creates the opportunity for shared authorship.

Residence Lab participants
Image: Ashley Yung

The final outcomes of these collaborative processes are also highly visible, which is important both because it allows participants to see their fingerprints (sometimes literally) in public space, and also because it publicly demonstrates the possibilities and real outcomes of collective governance. Participatory public art projects test alternative approaches to decision-making over the public realm, and the results of these experiments are visible in the final art projects themselves. AsianCDC's Jeena Chang spoke to this when she said, "Public art grows our capacity to imagine beyond the limits and current challenges that we see in our environment." Participatory public art projects function as living counterexamples to the traditional power dynamics that govern the public realm, and serve to open the imaginations of residents and advocates as well as planners and outside actors.

Participatory public art projects not only create an avenue for residents to reshape their neighborhood, but also serve as templates for how to give residents control over public space, and examples of what benefits and outcomes can come out of that process. While there is certainly potential for this type of work to also create a sense of place attachment, pride, or agency for participants, there needs to be further research to confirm this. Nonetheless, we can see that public art is uniquely suited for reimagining and proposing alternative ways for residents to participate in and control the process of shaping their built environment. More than other processes that influence the built environment, public art makes it possible to redistribute power to residents who are excluded from other areas of public influence. Participatory public art processes create opportunities for people typically pushed to the margins to experience firsthand what controlling their physical environments feels like. These projects make the impact of community governance visible on the built environment, which serves as a tangible reminder that shifting power relationships is possible and has been done before. In this way, public artmaking creates an avenue for radically imagining new forms of governance and control, and shifting the collective consciousness around what more equitable engagement could look like.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

In the study of Boston and Seattle's historic Chinatowns, it is clear that socially engaged public art plays a unique role in the movement for reparative spatial justice. Public art has the capacity to access and transform people's emotions, attitudes, perspectives, and relationships, which is integral for repairing what Rashad Akeem Williams (2020) calls the "affective, epistemic, and moral schema that allow illicit white advantage to remain unchecked in the first place" (p. 8). Achieving spatial justice requires not only the transformation of systems and structures, but also the transformation of how people feel and how they relate to each other, which public art is particularly suited to do. Public art also offers a unique stage for testing and enacting more democratic modes of governance, participation, and decision-making in the public realm. This is enabled by public art's capacity to facilitate participatory decision-making and redistribute control to residents, who are able to use public art as a channel to directly influence public space. These aspects of public art serve purposes that are otherwise difficult to achieve via other forms of political or social activism, while simultaneously catalyzing these other forms of activism by providing hope, engaging people, and serving as living proof of the power of movement organizing. Public art plays an important role in the social justice ecosystem, and has been strategically mobilized for accomplishing the reparative goals of spatial justice.

Although these are promising outcomes, there still exist plenty of areas for study in the realm of art for reparative planning. At a high level, many studies of socially engaged art (including this one) struggle to rigorously evaluate the claims of change and transformation made by artists. Do the actual outcomes of these public art projects match the claims set out by the artists? This question is notoriously difficult to study because of the ability of art projects to elude traditional evaluation methods, due to the transient nature of the audience, the unknown duration of impact, and the difficulty of selecting an appropriate measurement methodology. While this analysis focuses on the possibilities that public

art creates for spatial justice, it does not evaluate how successful the projects were in achieving those goals.

This analysis also does not distinguish between the many different forms of socially engaged art. Besides being composed of a multitude of mediums (film, sculpture, murals, sound art, etc), socially engaged art is also made up of a variety of artmaking philosophies, methodologies, approaches to collaboration, and orientations to justice. All of these aspects have differing effects on the quality of the practice and how strategic it is in the movement for spatial justice. Furthermore, there is an implicit assumption in this thesis that all creative producers are equally resourced for and interested in creating just, collaborative, and non-exploitative projects; however, this is very far from the truth, and much has been written in the field of art history about the harmful impacts of socially engaged art, when produced by artists who intentionally or unintentionally exploit vulnerable communities for their personal gain (Helguera, 2011). This analysis is deliberately handwavy about the many forms of socially engaged art for the purposes of being legible to urban planners, but further study could and should tease out these important distinctions.

Besides pointing to other areas of analysis, I also want to name what public art is not doing in my study of Boston and Seattle's historic Chinatowns, that artists and activists in these neighborhoods could consider for the future. I want to point out that my thesis did not set out to perform a comprehensive scan of the public art landscape in these two neighborhoods, so any observed gaps could also just be holes in my chosen domain of study.

One area of artwork that is missing from these public art practices is the production of what art historian Claire Bishop (2004) calls "antagonism", or artwork whose aim is to create, interrogate, or expose relationships of conflict and friction. "Antagonistic" art in the context of reparative spatial justice might seek to hold a mirror up to power and critically grapple with the mechanisms and systems of racial planning. Much of socially engaged art today focuses on producing positive outcomes for marginalized communities; while this is valid and necessary, it misses an opportunity to problematize and create potentially generative friction with the structures of White supremacy. Rashad Akeem Williams (2020) puts this succinctly in his writing about reparative and racial planning, when he implores future researchers to "shift even further from problematizing black communities … to explicitly focusing on the more causally significant challenges of opportunity hoarding, racial animus, and discrimination endemic to exclusionary white communities" (p. 8). Besides doing the needed work of generating care, repair, and power for marginalized communities, artists and activists should also consider what producing more antagonistic projects against White supremacy could do for their work to further spatial justice.

The other underexplored area of public art is around the question of how to include and attend to residents who have already been displaced from their neighborhoods. Many projects in Boston and Seattle's historic Chinatowns address issues of displacement, but they usually focus on improving circumstances for current residents. What good do these projects do for those who have been displaced? Even projects that explicitly invite the participation of displaced residents, such as my own project "Washing" in Boston, stop short of articulating a vision of how those residents will be benefitted by the artwork. This is a critically important aspect of reparative spatial justice because residents displaced from their neighborhoods and social networks are often the ones who suffer the most from spatial injustice. As gentrification and displacement continues to rise across the US, I hope that future art projects will center these residents and come up with creative ways to meet their needs and desires.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

Socially engaged public art projects contribute to the reparative goals of spatial justice in Boston and Seattle's historic Chinatowns in ways that are distinct from and complementary to other forms of political and social activism. In each neighborhood, artists worked closely with residents and community organizers to create art projects that responded to the particular history, context, and political goals of their community.

Seattle and Boston's historic Chinatowns characterized repair differently due to their distinct histories and present-day contexts, which significantly influenced their strategic use of public art. In Seattle's International District, artists responded to the neighborhood's history of fortifying itself against targeted racial violence, and emphasized the importance of preserving and protecting the unique culture and history of the neighborhood. In Boston's Chinatown, residents and activists pushed for more community control and governance in response to the neighborhood's history of fighting off institutional encroachment, and artists supported these efforts by mobilizing public art projects to rebuild social networks and test new approaches to resident leadership and participation. While both neighborhoods share similar spatial histories, the study of their public art practices surfaced distinct sets of approaches and methods that were informed by their local histories, populations, and present-day conditions. This comparative analysis illuminates the specificity and situatedness of socially engaged art and emphasizes the continued need to study "arts for change" strategies in context.

Beyond characterizing how socially engaged public art projects contribute to reparative spatial justice in their local communities, this analysis also highlights the distinct role that public art plays in the spatial justice ecosystem. Across Boston and Seattle, public art was conducive to influencing the affective dimensions of spatial justice because of its ability to access and shift people's emotions, attitudes, and perspectives. This type of transformation is especially important because it catalyzes and enables the long-term movements for material outcomes, like open space and affordable housing. Public art projects also enable the possibility for deep collaboration between artists, activists, and residents, and participatory public art projects in particular provide a stage for reimagining, testing, and actualizing approaches to collective governance over public space. Participatory public art projects offer a way to reimagine how public decision-making can better involve marginalized residents while also providing a channel for residents to directly influence the public realm through the artmaking process. All of these aspects of public art uniquely attend to the need for healing and repair in the movement for spatial justice, in ways that complement and catalyze other forms of activism.

I hope that this study of socially engaged art projects can provide a set of provocations and inspirations for artists, activists, and urban planners who want to engage the emotional and relational aspects of reparative planning. Public art, as a uniquely place-specific art form, offers an opportunity for communities pursuing spatial justice to shift the affective aspects of transformation and engage in the radial reimagination of how power is distributed in space. Art is an important and often underutilized strategy in the spatial justice toolkit, and there are many opportunities for artists, community organizers, and planners to think creatively about how art can support their efforts to disrupt racial planning, dismantle White supremacy, and support the continued flourishing of urban communities.

Installation from Hai! Japantown festival (2019) by Erin Shigaki
Image: Densho

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