

Superior Donuts: Digestive Resistance To Gentrification

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Abstract

In this article I analyze how the 2017 comedy series *Superior Donuts* handles a rather serious topic of gentrification. The show is based on real-life processes taking place in Uptown Chicago. An elderly Polish immigrant Arthur Przybyszewski and a young African-American Franco Wicks try to keep Arthur's donut store from closing, while also resisting gentrification. Despite its obvious flaws – after all it is a feel-good sitcom, in which problems need to be created, taken on and solved during the span of one 20-minute long episode – the series successfully presents the economical, social and cultural impact of this process, which is shaping modern cities around the world. Through this analysis I present how the show's creators and writers are able to successfully suggest ways of resistance, while simultaneously keeping *Superior Donuts* entertaining for the casual viewer. The most obvious conclusion that one might draw from watching the thirteen episodes that constitute the first season of *Superior Donuts* is that gentrification is inevitable, so the only way to resist it is to change. Still, the change has to be made on one's own terms, otherwise one risks being absorbed by the neoliberal economy. The most effective way to do so is to remain loyal to one's local community. No matter how diverse, the community allows for its members to form bonds that are beneficial to everyone. It is this sense of community that in a way enforces dialogue between the rich and the poor.

Otherwise scared of each other, once they learn that an actual dialogue is possible, they will at least try to understand one another, rather than immediately classify those poorer/richer as their opponents.

Keywords: Superior Donuts, Gentrification, Chicago, Series, Comedy.

Gentrification is No Laughing Matter?

In this article I analyze how the 2017 comedy series *Superior Donuts* handles a rather serious topic of gentrification. Despite its obvious flaws – after all it is a feel-good sitcom, in which problems need to be created, taken on and solved during the span of one 20-minute long episode – the series successfully presents the economical, social and cultural impact of the process which is shaping modern cities around the world. Through this analysis I present how the show’s creators and writers are able to successfully suggest ways of resistance to gentrification, while simultaneously keeping *Superior Donuts* entertaining for the casual viewer.

The term “gentrification” has been introduced in 1964 by Ruth Glass in her book *London: Aspects of Change*.¹ The book presents how the working class was gradually “bought out” by middle and upper classes in the districts of Hampstead and Chelsea. According to the Oxford dictionary, *to gentrify* means to make someone more refined or polite. In short, it can be understood as making a savage more humane. In the case of housing, Glass applies the term to poor neighborhoods suddenly “invaded” by rich people (often called *pioneers*), who brought in more rich people, until finally Hampstead and Chelsea lost their identities. Ironically, their distinct features were one of the main reasons people moved there in the first place.

¹ Ruth Glass, *London: Aspects of Change* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1964).

There are many definitions of gentrification, but I will only quote some of them. Loretta Lees, Tom Slater and Elvin Wyly characterize gentrification as “the transformation of a working-class or vacant area of the central city into middle-class residential and/or commercial use.”² This is a very simple definition, which is understandable when taking into account that their book is intended to serve as a core text. Simultaneously, they point out that gentrification is a mutating process, which is sometimes used too broadly and even risks collapse under its own definition.³ Rowland Atkinson and Gary Bridge especially stress the global aspect of gentrification. The process is no longer limited to historically ‘open’ cities like Amsterdam or Berlin, but also regional ones like Barcelona or Leeds: “In short, gentrification appears to have migrated centrifugally from the metropolises of North America, Western Europe and Australasia. This has happened at the same time as market reform, greater market permeability and population migration have promoted internal changes in the economies of countries not previously associated with gentrification.”⁴ One of the indicators of the global expansion of gentrification is that it has reached post-communist countries like Poland.

In the first book describing the process in Polish cities, Łukasz Drozda writes that gentrification is “based on a multi-faceted – spatial, social and economical – change of relegated spaces directed at improving the quality of life of some inhabitants, which simultaneously ignites other, often harmful, social transformations of the gentrified society.”⁵ The fact that this Western-born process has not so much reached, but actually became an issue concerning urban planners from countries which just 20

² Loretta Lees, Tom Slater and Elvin Wyly, *Gentrification* (London: Routledge, 2008), xv.

³ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁴ Rowland Atkinson and Gary Bridge, “Introduction” in *Gentrification in a Global Context*, Rowland Atkinson and Gary Bridge (eds.) (London: Routledge, 2005), 2.

⁵ Łukasz Drozda, *Uszlachetniająca przestrzeń* (Warszawa: Książka i Prasa, 2017), 13.

years ago would not even imagine it occurring in their cities, can be solely attributed to the global rise of neoliberal capitalism.

First applied at a large scale in the 1970s in Chile, the trinity of free market, privatization and regulations – or rather, deregulations – allowing for direct foreign investments, contributed to the legitimization of neoliberalism as the best solution to the crisis of the Bretton Woods system. The South American country prospered, even though it was the elites that were getting richer, while regular citizens found it hard to exist in these new conditions. Since the recipe turned out to be so successful – further legitimized by the Nobel Prize in economics given to its founders, Friedrich von Hayek in 1974 and Milton Friedman in 1976 – Western countries decided to implement it as well. Prime Minister of Great Britain Margaret Thatcher and John Connally, United States Secretary of the Treasury under president Richard Nixon, both provided quotes that epitomize the logic behind neoliberal capitalism.

Thatcher famously said that “there’s no such thing as society,” while Connally said to Nixon: “My philosophy is that all foreigners are out to screw us and it’s our job to screw them first.” Both quotes present, if not enforce, a me-first approach as the only way to function in the hostile free-market environment. Neoliberalism is based on individuals, however, as pointed out by one of its utmost critics, David Harvey, corporations are defined as individuals before the law as well. This means that my rights to my body and my thoughts are equal to those of the company I work for.⁶ The anthropologist and geographer writes that these rights may seem appealing, but because of their leveling, corporations make a stronger case for executing any debate in their favor, since they are better at one crucial aspect of capitalism – accumulating capital. It just makes more economical sense for the state to side with a corporation than an

⁶ David Harvey, *Spaces of neoliberalization: towards a theory of uneven geographical development* (Heidelberg: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005), 42.

individual. People are of course important, but the ties connecting them become irrelevant when they pose as obstacles to prosperity.

Simultaneously, this is the approach exhibited by gentrification, which pushes out communities in favor of productive and consuming units – understood as individuals, families and companies – that are supposed to gladly pay extra for gated settlements, which both, look nice, and protect them from the dangers of the outside world. In order for this transformation to occur, their nearest neighborhood must also undergo colonization – as evident with the appearance of universally-known franchises like Starbucks or Whole Foods in favor of family-owned, local cafes and stores.

Gentrification is based on the opposition between need and desire, the first rather objective, the latter purely subjective. As noted by Henri Lefebvre, “desire only becomes desire [...] when it is consciously confronted with ‘goods.’”⁷ Need is determined socially, desire is individual. When gentrification takes place, the need for housing is exchanged for the desire for *appropriate* housing. People who populate a neighborhood because they are placed there or arrive there by circumstance and with time form a community, are replaced by those who arrive there driven by low rent prices. They are referred to as *pioneers* and constitute the first wave of gentrification. The second is made of people driven to the neighborhood by the changes taking place there. It becomes “safe,” fashionable or both, which makes it desirable in the eyes of the middle and upper classes.

Lefebvre focuses on the relationship between repetition and habit, how they constitute everyday life. People are obviously driven by the two, as they desire to be surrounded by familiar, understandable objects. This is signified by IKEA furniture – which made moving around fairly easy and affordable, as it provides an individual with a set of easy to assemble

⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *A Critique of Everyday Life* (London: Verso, 2014), 302.

elements that always look aesthetically in any place – as well as by familiar cafe, restaurant and shopping chains. In his brief analysis of Lefebvre’s work, Jonathan Crary points out that: “it is in the nature of the everyday to adapt and reshape itself, often submissively, in response to what erupts or intrudes in it.”⁸ One of such intrusions is obviously caused by gentrification, as the gentrifiers invade the everyday of the lower-classes. Once the process takes place and rent prices start rising, the poor are pushed out and forced to search for another cheap place to live in. This means abandoning their habits, maybe even causing them to need an extra hour to get to work, which contributes to the lowering of the quality of their life standards.

One of the elements of everyday which permitted such social fluidity, allowing the lower-classes to coexist and intertwine with those better situated, is television. Crary writes that “television quickly redefined what constituted membership in society,”⁹ as it introduced inactivity and immobility on a global scale. Instead of looking for community, individuals are fairly pleased by separating themselves from others, spending their time staring at screens even when being outside the house, with other people. Watching is not an actual action, since it does not produce anything, yet it is one of the most primary activities of today’s society. Crary actually names television the first apparatus of such magnitude that made people willingly submit to its power. Television unites through separation, serving as a great replacement for actual social interaction.

One of the representations of its power was visible through the introduction of direct-to-TV programming, most notably the TV-series, which forced the individuals to stay at home at a specific time in order to watch episodes of their favorite shows. While now there is a way to resist

⁸ Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2014), 69-70.

⁹ Crary, *24/7*, 79.

the urge, provided by streaming of said shows on the Internet and TV-on-demand, these still need for the individual to remain in place in order to enjoy them. While television's physical control is an important issue as well, I would prefer to focus on its cultural and political aspects. There is no point in explaining how television is a tool of propaganda. We all know it is an integral element of what is known as the Fourth Estate, which is how the media are often referred to in regard to their role in political discourse. Through the years even television programming succumbed to the power of gentrification. This does not only refer to gentrification becoming the topic of television programming – which I will get to in a moment – but gentrification of television programming itself.

Dan Hassler-Forest analyses the process on the basis of the *Game of Thrones* television series, based on the fantasy novels written by George R. R. Martin. The author of the article claims that gentrification is a constant search for an authentic experience by the middle and upper classes, who feel separated from where actual life takes place. *Game of Thrones*' peculiar brand of nudity and brutality separates it from the rest of television programming, creating an aura of authenticity so sought after by the rich. Hassler-Forest concludes that "*Game of Thrones* has played a key role in the gentrification of the fantasy genre. While carefully working to remain inclusive towards the fan cultures that have traditionally sustained such texts, the HBO adaptation makes Martin's story-world accessible to a 'quality' audience."¹⁰ That way the show opens up new audiences to the types of programming which they would otherwise ignore.

¹⁰ Dan Hassler-Forest, "Game of Thrones: Quality Television and the Cultural Logic of Gentrification." *TV/Series* 6 (12/2014), 14.

How To Take On Gentrification

Superior Donuts, the American sitcom airing on CBS on Mondays, is also the direct consequence of gentrification of visual media, most notably its one aspect – serialization. It seems that nowadays everything is turned into a series, especially one that caters to the middle and upper classes. With gentrification affecting television in its form, it was inevitable that it had to reach its content as well. The series is supposed to take on the topic and discuss it with humor, which is no easy task, considering the aforementioned, very serious impact of gentrification on lower classes.

The sitcom is based on a 2008 play by Tracy Letts. The author and actor is no stranger to adaptation – his earlier plays: *Killer Joe*, *Bug* and *August: Osage County* were all turned into movies. In an interview posted on the Youtube site of *Chicago Tribune* Letts said the play was intended to explore his feelings about the city in which he has lived for twenty years. It was a dark comedy, with gentrification being not the main part of the story, just one of its elements. The play was characterized by critics as “something of a surprise,” earning comparisons to sitcoms written and produced by Norman Lear, who specialized in shows about working class characters like *All in the Family* and *Sanford and Son*.¹¹ The series however was not welcome with stellar reviews, although they were not bad either. It is probably fair to say that most did not give it much attention.

For example, Sophie Gilbert of *The Atlantic* said that *Superior Donuts* would have potential “if the show could relax on the gentrification jokes,” which clearly shows that she is completely missing what is making the

¹¹ Sophie Gilbert. “Superior Donuts Tries to Update an Old Classic.” *The Atlantic*. Feb 2, 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/02/superior-donuts-cbs-tracy-letts-judd-hirsch-jermaine-fowler/515469/>

show so unique.¹² Daniel Fienberg of the *Hollywood Reporter* mentions gentrification just once in his review, when stating the premise of the show.¹³ Both critics focus on how – on the basis of three episodes – the series handles humor, almost completely ignoring the uniqueness of its premise, which is the only reason this rather regular, feel-good workplace comedy is worthy of a deeper analysis in the first place.

The show is based on the real-life processes taking place in Uptown Chicago. In 2000 whites made up about 42 percent of the population, while now, because of the jump in property values, they make up about 54 percent.¹⁴ For a long time considered the most diverse neighborhood in the city, it seems that Uptown has lost its status. Just three years earlier, in 2013, a Reddit discussion noticed Uptown's ability to resist gentrification.¹⁵ The participants actually criticize this part of the city for embracing SRO's and low-income residents, which positions them in the rather unflattering position of potential future gentrifiers. A SRO – single room occupancy – houses people in individual rooms within multiple-tenant buildings. Instead of praising the community area for allowing those worse-off to stay off the streets or in shelters, the discussion's participants blame it for Uptown's struggles to lure in "proper" tenants.

This presumably refers to the representatives of the creative class, whose appearance in a gentrified neighborhood, as pointed out *inter alia* by Drozda, is seen as one of the few positives regarding the process. Engineers, actors, singers and writers contribute to the creation of what

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Daniel Fienberg. "Superior Donuts": TV Review." *Hollywood Reporter*. Feb 2, 2017. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/superior-donuts-review-971121>

¹⁴ Tanveer Ali. "How The Racial Makeup Of Chicago Has Changed In The 21st Century (MAP)." *DNAinfo*. May 16, 2016. <https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20160516/logan-square/how-racial-makeup-of-chicago-has-changed-during-21st-century-map>

¹⁵ Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/chicago/comments/112ly5/i_would_like_to_learn_more_about_why_uptown_has/

Drozda refers to as the Creative City.¹⁶ This is achieved thanks to establishing a cultural infrastructure, allowing for a rather free flow of ideas between classes. The problem is that gentrification pushes out the lower classes, those deeply rooted in the reality of the day-to-day existence. Instead, the creative class seems to prefer life in a bubble. SROs do not seem to fit this picture, at least according to the participants of the discussion. However, in countries like Poland, SROs are more often housed by members of the creative class, because they are affordable, and provide them with enough safety to do what is expected of them – create.

Nowhere is the bubble and the process of gentrification presented better and with more humor than in the *South Park* animated series. In season nineteen the series mocks neoliberal capitalism and PC culture. As I have noted earlier, gentrification is an integral element of neoliberalism, which explains the series' relevance to this article. It will not be analyzed excessively though, because gentrification is the main subject of just one episode, while *Superior Donuts*' whole premise is based on the process. Still, it is important and hopefully beneficial to shed some light at how the process is presented and made fun of.

In the episode “The City Part Of Town” to counter bad publicity, the town of South Park decides to save its image by opening a Whole Foods Market. However, before it can be built, the town needs to prove that it is progressive and worthy of this supermarket chain. In other words, it has to be gentrified. The most rundown part of town undergoes a complete change – fancy shops and restaurants suddenly appear around the house of one of the central characters, Kenny. Instead of improving the situation of the poor living there, the city officials create an artificial arts and entertainment district. The poor living in the district are supposed to remain in the neighborhood in the name of class mixing, but they are

¹⁶ Drozda, *Uszlachetniając*, 81-83.

separated from the rich shopping and eating there, with planned lofts and villas about to make the separation almost complete.

The episode mocks the town's efforts to create an image of self-consciousness and advancement by rewarding it with a Whole Foods Market on the sole basis of said efforts. Creating an artificial neighborhood, or sitting handicapped and homosexual children in the front row of the class, are not enough to convince the firm's representative of the town's worthiness – it is only when he notices the town's willingness to change that he decides to award it with a supermarket. This creates other issues, like the aforementioned bubble, the consequence of which is the separation of the poor from the middle and upper classes. Instead of giving money to the homeless in front of Whole Foods, the progressive inhabitants of South Park prefer to help “starving children” in third world countries. As long as the poor are not an element of everyday life, it is okay to support them, but once they appear near us, they start to be a problem that needs to be dealt with either through successful separation or hiding.

Zygmunt Bauman writes that it is very human to kill the messenger for the message he is delivering.¹⁷ This applies to mass migration as much as to poverty or hunger. As long as the children stay in third world countries, it is perfectly fine to feel good about oneself by sending them money. Once they arrive at our door, this is obviously not enough to keep up the good spirits. The nineteenth season of the show masterfully presents the complexity of neoliberalism, mocking all of its aspects in an over-the-top, ruthless way. In comparison to it, *Superior Donuts* can be characterized as digestive. Not only because of its simple formula, but the way in which the series tackles gentrification.

¹⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *Strangers out our Door* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016).

Digest and Resist

Arthur Przybyszewski is a Polish immigrant, who runs a donut shop in Uptown Chicago. Arthur, just like his store, is a relic of the past. Having owned the store for 47 years, he is not flexible enough to adjust to the changing economic environment, nor is he interested in doing so. He gets angry at customers ordering soy-based products, pastry hybrids or Grande Mocha Macchiatos. For decades he has just made donuts, people were happy with his products and the shop prospered. Now, he does not understand why his store is no longer appealing to the new generation of customers.

Enter Franco Wicks, a young African-American with a head full of ideas. Just as all of Arthur's customers, he is nostalgic about the place and wants to save it by advertising it on social media pages like Instagram or Yelp. Franco believes that by saving this place, he will be able to save the neighborhood from its new inhabitants, who do not really care about the community that was established here before their arrival: "those people moving in, they're not coming to join us, they're coming to push us out." This observation actually gets Franco the job at Superior Donuts. Other notable characters include: Fawz – a real estate developer from Iraq, who wants to make money on the gentrification of the neighborhood, Randy DeLuca and James Jordan – woman and man police officers, who stereotypically visit the place for coffee and donuts, Carl Tushinski – a laid-off factory worker who treats the store as his office, and Maya – a graduate student, who is one of the first gentrifiers as well.

Gentrification itself is named explicitly two notable times in the series. In the third episode Arthur and Franco, as well as reoccurring characters visiting the shop, consider how is it possible that the neighborhood is visually nicer, but is experiencing an actual spike in crime. Maya makes the observation that a spike in crime is a byproduct of the early stage of

the process. The unwanted, core residents are still in the neighborhood, so obviously they have to clash with the rich white people coming in. The second important time when the word is mentioned is in the title of Maya's thesis, which is revealed in the final, thirteenth episode of the first season: "Superior Donuts – A Case Study On The Effects of Gentrification on Interclass Social Bonding." Excerpts from her work do not sound like an academic thesis, but seem rather taken from a regular newspaper article, or, to put things specifically, a human interest story. What is more, after it is revealed what she was writing, Maya seems more like other gentrifiers than an actual positive character. The fact that she was sitting there like a tourist, observing all those low-class characters while she herself is twofold privileged – white and rich – is however not condemned by other members of the community organized around Superior Donuts, nor does the series comment explicitly on her actions. This is a sitcom, so the problem is easily resolved and all is forgiven – there is no development nor analysis, since Maya is a background character anyway. In a way she is even praise-worthy, since she comes to Superior Donuts because of the place's original character and unlike other gentrifiers, does not want to change it.

This identity or distinct feature of a place, which allows Manchester to be characterized as industrial or Las Vegas as colorful, is crucial in truly appreciating cities. It is a product of communities, not corporations or planners. Even though Las Vegas is artificial, as it is basically a city in the middle of a desert, this artificiality is the basis of its identity. Uptown Chicago has been generally characterized as rough or scruffy. The area is rather associated with crime and poverty. However, the per-capita income is actually bigger by \$5,000 than in other parts of the city (\$32 to the average \$27), the number of unemployed is smaller (7.7% to 11.1%) and the number of those without a high school diploma is smaller than the average (13.6% to 20.6%). The numbers should therefore signify an actual improvement in life conditions of Uptown's residents, however,

there are two troublesome demographic categories that do not allow for the acceptance of said assumption: the percentage of those living in crowded housing (4.6% to the average of 4.7%) and those living below poverty level (a staggering 22.7% to the 18.7% average).¹⁸ Both signify large economical discrepancies, which are one of the main effects of gentrification taking place in a specific neighborhood.

Early on Franco states that he has worked in Pete's Liquors and Salvation Army, which have been turned into Whole Foods and Old Navy respectively. But the company that epitomizes gentrification and globalization in the show is naturally Starbucks. Fawz, an Iraqi real estate developer who is a regular customer of Arthur's – which does not stop him from trying to buy out his place all of the time – admits that he developed a crush for Caramel Frappuccino's back in his home country. He is happy that the coffeehouse chain opened up in this location, because not only will he get to enjoy his favorite coffee, but the "rich white people" will eventually move in, allowing him to raise rent prices in the buildings he owns.

Starbucks opens across the street in the first episode of the series. Even though the series does not dwell much on the rivalry between Arthur's store and the popular coffee chain, that one episode is enough to make the viewer understand the changes taking place in Uptown Chicago. Superior Donuts is empty, while there is an actual line in front of Starbucks. Tired of waiting, some of the gentrifiers arrive to Przybyszewski's store. They make strange demands, at least by Przybyszewski's standards, and eventually leave, since they cannot get the same things as in Starbucks. That one scene perfectly sums up the intentions of gentrifiers, who may be at first lured in by the sheer authenticity of the place – they complement the décor of Superior Donuts

¹⁸ Chicago Tribune. Jun 1, 2017.
<http://crime.chicagotribune.com/chicago/community/uptown>

– but in the end they want the exact same thing they are used to. Authenticity is embraced and welcomed, but only to some extent. Drinking regular coffee with milk, instead of the kinds offered by Starbucks, is definitely out of their comfort zone.

Superior Donuts offers just donuts and coffee. Even though Arthur finally agrees to selling experimental pastry with Sriracha or installing Wi-Fi, other than that, he remains true to what his store used to be for the past 47 years. The formula worked, so he sees no point in changing it, since most customers come to his store because of nostalgia. At one point Franco calls the store: “the soul of the neighborhood.” Starbucks on the other hand offers a simple system, that allows for its product to be delivered the same way all over the planet. In *The Language of Cities* Deyan Sudjic compares the Starbucks model to a Kalashnikov assault rifle, which also works in any circumstances.¹⁹ Opening a Starbucks is profitable, but only short term, since because of it the city is not able to renew itself. Instead of adapting to the changing economy, it is actually submitting to the capitalist model, which sucks dry places and local economies, while profits are transferred abroad, leaving local store owners eventually out of business.

This is probably the fate awaiting Superior Donuts, which is no longer appealing to aforementioned “new” customers, who can be characterized as a new type of people. Instead of going to a coffee shop for a cup of rare coffee and a rare donut to a donut shop, they want both in one place. The neoliberal economy makes them believe that they can have everything in one place, just the way they like it – for them stores should be more like shopping malls with unlimited options rather than places specializing in just one product. This way of thinking is a symptom of the new spirit of capitalism, which guarantees us finding ways to truly

¹⁹ Deyan Sudjic, *The Language of Cities* (London: Penguin Books, 2016), 181 (in Polish translation).

express ourselves, for the cost of financial safety.

This apparent freedom is mocked in the series with Carl Tushinski, a laid off factory worker, who is now working in what he calls “gig economy.” Tushinski is proud of the fact that he has the freedom to do whatever he likes, but in reality he has to take odd jobs, like being an assailant in women’s self-defense class, just to make some money. The man is such an optimist that he presents losing a stable source of income as the best thing that has ever happened to him. This approach is most notably criticized by Carl Cedestrom and Andre Spicer in *The Wellness Syndrome*, where they write how to remain a member of this new productive society, you not only have to present your job as something that defines you, but even when you are unemployed or broke, you still have to look like you have a bright future ahead of you.²⁰ In her thesis, Maya praises Tushinski for being so happy, despite the man’s obvious struggles to stay financially stable.

Arthur is the exact opposite of Carl. He is constantly reminiscing about the past, surrounding himself with the same people, in the same place, preparing the same donuts every day. In *The Condition of the Working Class in England* Friedrich Engels is nostalgically watching how the separation of home and workplace is shaping the divisions in English society. Coming from Germany of the pre-Industrial Revolution era, Engels is shocked that the rich no longer live above their stores, while city centers empty once work is over. He is appalled by the way the city is organized – there is almost no space between the buildings, everything is dirty and in need of restoration. Yet, these are the living conditions of the poor, who are relegated to districts in relative distance from the rich, so that they will not spoil their perception of the city.²¹

²⁰ Carl Cedestrom and Andre Spicer, *The Wellness Syndrome* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016).

²¹ Friedrich Engels. *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. 1845. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

While gentrification might be characterized as a process that should reconnect the two, it actually contributes to the separation, as it creates divisions specifically in one neighborhood.

In one of the episodes Franco paints a mural in honor of his dead friend. The man, known as Bam-Bam, was a gangster, who also helped his local community. The younger, original residents praise the mural, while the Uptown Business Council orders for it to be painted over, because it presents, as noticed by Fawz, the freshly-voted president of the council: “the Uptown that we want to leave in the past.” Just like the poor relegated to neighborhoods filled with excrements and stench of rotting meat in Engels’ Manchester, in the series the original inhabitants are accepted only if they do not express themselves and their views publically.

For Arthur the aforementioned separation between work and home is impossible – his work and his life are closely connected. He lives above his store, plus is a creature of habit. This applies to his reluctance to change donut recipes, as much as to his lifestyle. Even when the neighborhood is experiencing a higher crime rate, he still heads out alone for his newspaper at dusk. Fawz constantly urges Arthur to sell him the store, but the man is too rooted in the neighborhood to do that – he just cannot imagine living somewhere else, the store *is* his life.

Thanks to people like Franco, as well as his customers, who are lured to the place because of nostalgia, but more so by the sense of community, Arthur will – hopefully – be able to fight back not only gentrification, but also the neoliberal imperative of flexibility and adaptability. This hope that the series provides makes it something more than a feel-good comedy. While it might be too early to call it a voice of defiance, it is definitely an important and understandable one.

Conclusion

Despite its flaws, *Superior Donuts* is able to present the general problems caused by gentrification in a very simple, universally understandable manner. Because the show is produced and transmitted by one of the three major commercial broadcast television networks in the United States – referred to as the Big Three – it gives exposure to the process. The fact itself underlines the show's importance. The most obvious conclusion that one might draw from watching the thirteen episodes that constitute the first season of *Superior Donuts* is that gentrification is inevitable, so the only way to resist it is to change. Still, the change has to be made on one's own terms, otherwise one risks being absorbed by the neoliberal economy. The most effective way to do so is to remain loyal to one's local community. No matter how diverse, the community allows for its members to form bonds that are beneficial to everyone. It is only after Fawz learns that Franco is one of his tenants that are suffering from raising rent prices, that he even stops to reconsider his actions. It is this sense of community that in a way enforces dialogue between the rich and the poor. Otherwise scared of each other, once they learn that an actual dialogue is possible, they will at least try to understand one another, rather than immediately consider those poorer/richer as their opponents.

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