

Blackpool Reverie: A Case Study into Why Gentrification Can Be Problematic to Working-Class Communities

David Sinfield, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

Abstract: This article examines the social and cultural impacts of urban regeneration and gentrification in Blackpool through a practice-led research approach grounded in narrative inquiry and visual analysis. Drawing on graphic design, typographic design, photography, and moving image, the study explores how working-class identity and cultural presence are reshaped or erased within processes of redevelopment. The research adopts the concept of palimpsest as a conceptual framework through which the city is read as a layered and contested space where historical traces coexist with contemporary economic and spatial interventions. Rather than positioning creative outputs as illustrative, the study frames design practice as an analytical method capable of articulating lived experience and social change. Typeface design functions as a form of visual narrative encoding the emotional and cultural conditions of place while photographic and moving image works document spatial transformation and absence. Through this interdisciplinary methodology, the research contributes to discussions on gentrification by foregrounding the experiential and affective dimensions often overlooked in policy-driven regeneration discourse. The article argues that artistic practice can play a critical role in making visible the cultural consequences of urban change and offers insights into how creative methodologies may inform more inclusive and socially responsive regeneration strategies.

Keywords: *Typography, Urban Regeneration, Blackpool, Victorian Britain, Gentrification, Marginalized Communities, Working Class*

Introduction

Urban regeneration has become a dominant strategy for economic renewal in postindustrial towns and cities. While often framed as revitalization, regeneration processes frequently coincide with gentrification, leading to the displacement of working-class communities and the erosion of long-established cultural identities. Blackpool, a former working-class seaside resort in the north of England provides a compelling case study through which to examine these dynamics. Once sustained by domestic tourism and industrial labor, the town has undergone successive waves of regeneration that have reshaped its social and cultural fabric.

This article examines the impacts of regeneration in Blackpool through a practice-led research approach that integrates graphic design, typographic design, photography, and moving image as methods of inquiry. Rather than treating creative outputs as illustrative supplements, the study positions design practice as a form of qualitative analysis capable of engaging with lived experience and cultural loss. The research is informed by theories of

gentrification and is conceptually framed through the notion of palimpsest and understanding the city as a layered site where identities and power relations accumulate and overwrite one another. Working-class communities are often discussed in regeneration discourse through economic metrics rather than cultural or emotional dimensions. By focusing on creative practice as both method and outcome, this article contributes to interdisciplinary conversations across design research and cultural geography. It argues that artistic methodologies can make visible the subtle and often overlooked consequences of regeneration offering alternative ways of understanding displacement and belonging and in doing so, the article proposes design practice as a critical tool for examining urban change and for engaging more ethically with communities affected by redevelopment.

The gentrification of Blackpool has reshaped the local landscape in ways that exacerbate existing socioeconomic inequalities, often creating new challenges for the people who have called the town home for generations. A key concern stemming from this shift is the unaffordability of housing. As more affluent families move into the area, property prices and rents inevitably rise. This surge in demand for housing forces property prices to increase, creating a situation where working-class residents struggle to secure affordable housing in their own neighborhoods. The growing demand for housing outpaces the availability of affordable options, causing long-standing residents to face the very real threat of displacement. In the face of rising housing costs, working-class families find themselves increasingly unable to remain in their communities, where they have deep ties and long-established social networks. This gentrification process drives established working-class families out of areas they have known for years, and in some cases, local businesses are forced to close their doors as they can no longer afford the rising rents and property taxes. These changes often result in the creation of “ghetto-like” areas where poverty is concentrated, while richer newcomers settle in areas once dominated by working-class populations (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Sorry We're Closed

Note: Closed and abandoned shops in Blackpool that were once a thriving and bustling area. Artistic response to the abandoned areas once occupied by local working-class communities.

Exhibited color print measuring 1,000 mm × 700 mm.

The displacement of working-class families is one of the most significant consequences of gentrification, with far-reaching effects on the social fabric of Blackpool. Displacement disrupts established communities, undermining social cohesion and eroding the sense of belonging and stability that long-term residents once enjoyed. When families are pushed out of their communities, they often find it difficult to secure affordable housing elsewhere, leading to further instability. Many are forced to relocate to less-desirable areas, where they may be far removed from their jobs, schools, and the support networks that once sustained them. The fragmentation of these communities can create an emotional and psychological toll, as people are uprooted from their homes, friends, and familiar surroundings, leading to a sense of isolation and loss.

Moreover, the closure of emergency housing initiatives, such as temporary accommodations in local hotels, further exacerbates the housing crisis. These measures were once a lifeline for families in need of immediate housing, but with their closures, even temporary relief is increasingly out of reach. This shift not only impacts families who are directly affected by the housing crisis but also places additional strain on local communities and the tourism industry, which depends on the influx of visitors to the area. As the housing situation worsens, the town's reputation as a welcoming destination becomes increasingly tarnished, affecting both residents and tourists alike (Figure 2).

In summary, the combination of unemployment, gentrification, and the lack of affordable housing in Blackpool has created a perfect storm of challenges for the working-class community. The resulting displacement has far-reaching consequences, not just for the families forced to move, but for the social and economic health of the town as a whole. The long-term impact of these changes could reshape Blackpool in ways that diminish its sense of community and make it more difficult for future generations to build stable, fulfilling lives within the town.



Figure 2: No Vacancies. Abandoned Hotels on the Seafront of Blackpool Promenade

Note: Artistic response to the abandoned hotels that were once a stable workplace for local working-class people.

Exhibited color print measuring 1,000 mm × 700 mm.

Methodology: Practice-Led and Narrative Inquiry

This article is situated within a qualitative, practice-led methodological framework that draws on narrative inquiry, visual observation, and reflective analysis. The study is grounded in the dual positionality of the author as both designer and researcher where creative practice operates not as illustration but as a primary mode of inquiry and knowledge production (Candy and Edmonds 2018). Practice-led research enables the exploration of complex social conditions through making, allowing insights to emerge through iterative cycles of observation, production, and critical reflection.

The article focuses on Blackpool as a case study through which to examine the impacts of urban regeneration and gentrification on working-class communities. Data is generated through sustained visual and spatial observation, photographic documentation, typographic design, and written reflection. These methods are informed by heuristic inquiry where understanding develops through embodied engagement with place, memory, and material culture (Moustakas 1990). Rather than relying on interviews or surveys, the study foregrounds lived experience and creative response as legitimate forms of qualitative data, aligning with broader movements in visual and arts-based research (Pink 2013).

Central to the methodology is the use of typography as an analytical and interpretive tool. Typeface design functions as a means of encoding social narratives, reflecting processes of cultural erosion and displacement. The resulting typographic forms are treated as research outputs with similar outputs to photographic imagery and moving image that operate as visual records capturing traces of working-class identity within an evolving urban landscape. This approach reflects an understanding of design practice as a form of critical cultural production rather than a neutral representational activity (Newbury 1996). Narrative inquiry supports this methodological approach by enabling the research to be structured around stories, both personal and collective, that emerge from the environment itself. The concept of the palimpsest is employed as both a conceptual and methodological device allowing the city to be read as a layered text in which past and present coexist. Through this framework, regeneration is examined not as a singular event but as an accumulation of interventions that occasionally reveal earlier social histories.

This methodology acknowledges subjectivity as a strength rather than a limitation. My personal engagement as a designer with lived experience of working-class culture informs the research perspective while reflexive practice ensures critical awareness and analytical rigor. Together, these methods enable a nuanced and ethically grounded exploration of gentrification.

The History of Blackpool

Blackpool, a seaside town in Lancashire, United Kingdom, boasts a rich Victorian heritage that has shaped its identity and established its reputation as a beloved holiday destination.

Originally a small fishing village, Blackpool underwent rapid transformation during the nineteenth century, driven by industrial advancements, the rise of the railway, and the growing popularity of seaside tourism. This period marked the town's evolution into one of the UK's most iconic resorts, particularly appealing to the working classes seeking leisure and relaxation.

The Victorian Transformation

Blackpool's development as a major tourist destination began in earnest during the early nineteenth century. Prior to this period, it was a relatively obscure village with its primary economic activity centered around fishing (Goss 1988). However, the arrival of the railway in 1846 marked a pivotal turning point. The opening of the Preston and Wyre Railway connected Blackpool to major industrial cities such as Manchester and Liverpool, making the town far more accessible. The advent of affordable train fares allowed working-class families from these industrial towns to visit the seaside, significantly broadening the town's appeal and initiating its transformation into a popular holiday destination (Robinson 2001).

During this period, the town saw a rapid arrival of working-class families, not only as tourists but also as residents seeking employment in the growing hospitality and service industries that catered to visitors. The mid-nineteenth century was a time of significant urban development aimed at accommodating the increasing numbers of tourists. One of the most notable developments was the construction of the promenade, a picturesque walkway along the coastline that became a central feature of Blackpool's leisure and social activities. The promenade was designed with seating areas, shelters, and gardens, ensuring that visitors could relax and enjoy the sea air in comfort (Goss 1988).

Another milestone in Blackpool's development came with the opening of Blackpool Tower in 1894. Inspired by the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the tower became an iconic symbol of the town. Beyond providing panoramic views, Blackpool Tower housed a range of entertainment attractions, including ballrooms and live music venues. The Tower Ballroom became renowned for its elegant décor and vibrant musical performances, cementing Blackpool's status as a leading entertainment hub (Robinson 2001). The tower's design and its subsequent popularity served as a testament to Blackpool's emergence as a key tourist destination during the late nineteenth century, attracting visitors from across the country and beyond.

The Rise of Entertainment and Attractions

Blackpool Pleasure Beach, founded in 1896 by entrepreneur William George Bean, played a pivotal role in the town's appeal. Initially, a modest collection of rides and attractions on the sandy beach, the Pleasure Beach grew into one of the largest and most renowned amusement parks globally. Its thrilling rides and entertainment options made it a cornerstone of Blackpool's tourism industry. By the early twentieth century, iconic attractions like the Big Dipper rollercoaster were drawing thrill-seekers from across the country.

The Victorian era also saw Blackpool become a hub for vibrant entertainment. The town's theaters, music halls, and venues offered a variety of performances, including plays, concerts, and variety shows. The Winter Gardens complex, which opened in 1878, emerged as a central venue for cultural events, hosting renowned artists and acts. The Opera House, part of the Winter Gardens, became a significant venue for theatrical productions and concerts, attracting audiences of all social classes. Blackpool Illuminations, a tradition that began in 1879 with eight arc lamps lighting the promenade, became synonymous with the town. Over time, the Illuminations evolved into a dazzling spectacle featuring intricate light displays, sculptures, and themed sections. By the early twentieth century, the Illuminations had expanded significantly, incorporating cutting-edge lighting technologies to create breathtaking displays. This annual event continues to attract millions of visitors, solidifying its place as one of Blackpool's most cherished traditions.

Social Dynamics and Class Divide

During the Victorian era, Blackpool's growing popularity as a tourist destination highlighted a distinct social divide, with different classes experiencing the town in vastly different ways. Working-class visitors typically enjoyed day trips or short breaks, making use of the affordable attractions and entertainment options available (Robinson 2001). These working-class tourists could access budget-friendly leisure activities such as the famous promenade, arcades, and public gardens, which were designed with affordability and mass appeal in mind (Goss 1988). Meanwhile, the wealthier middle and upper classes opted for more luxurious accommodations, seeking an exclusive, refined experience. This social divide was mirrored in the types of accommodation available, with guesthouses and boarding houses catering primarily to the working class, offering budget-friendly stays, while opulent hotels such as the Grand Hotel and the Imperial Hotel attracted affluent visitors seeking luxury and elegance.

This dynamic underscored the diverse appeal of Blackpool, which was able to accommodate a wide range of tourists, from working-class families seeking affordable recreation to wealthy individuals seeking exclusivity and luxury. Such diversity played a central role in the town's early popularity as it became a destination for people from all walks of life, reflecting broader social and economic trends in Victorian Britain (Goss 1988).

The Victorian legacy laid a firm foundation for Blackpool's growth as a thriving seaside resort. The town's distinctive architecture, entertainment venues, and cultural traditions, such as the renowned Illuminations remain integral to its charm and identity as a coastal destination (Robinson 2001). The continued celebration and preservation of this heritage have made Blackpool a historically significant and captivating place to visit, keeping its Victorian past alive while adapting to the needs and interests of contemporary visitors. Today, Blackpool remains an enduring symbol of Victorian-era tourism and entertainment, with many of its iconic structures and cultural practices still central to the town's appeal.

Shifting Economic Landscapes

Northern seaside towns like Blackpool have historically relied on industries such as tourism, manufacturing, and mining. However, shifting economic landscapes over the decades have led to the decline of these traditional sectors, resulting in high unemployment rates and economic challenges. This decline has profoundly impacted working-class families, undermining financial stability and overall well-being.

Economic Decline and Its Effects

The loss of jobs in traditional industries has created a ripple effect of interconnected social and economic problems. Unemployment often leads to increased poverty levels, limiting access to healthcare, education, and essential services. Communities face rising crime rates and a cycle of economic stagnation, further exacerbating the challenges. In Blackpool, the decline of manufacturing and the seasonal nature of tourism have left many residents grappling with job insecurity and financial hardships.



Figure 3: Stamped Out. Closed and Boarded Up Post Office, Central Blackpool

Note: Artistic response to the closed post office that was part of the main infrastructure in central Blackpool district. Exhibited color print measuring 1,000 mm × 700 mm.

The impact of unemployment extends beyond economics, affecting community morale and individual well-being. Long-term unemployment has been linked to mental health issues, substance abuse, and family breakdowns, highlighting the complex and far-reaching consequences of economic decline.

Regeneration and Gentrification

In response to economic challenges, Blackpool has embarked on various regeneration initiatives to revitalize the town and attract investment. These efforts include redeveloping the Blackpool Central area, introducing a new conference center, and modernizing iconic

landmarks such as the Blackpool Tower. The redevelopment of the promenade has also focused on creating a more welcoming and aesthetically pleasing environment, with public art installations, upgraded seating areas, and improved pedestrian access. However, regeneration efforts have also brought about gentrification, particularly in areas close to the seafront. As property values rise, some working-class residents face displacement due to increasing housing costs. This demographic shift has altered the social fabric of certain areas, with wealthier residents moving in and changing the character of these areas. While gentrification has brought economic benefits and improved infrastructure, it has also raised concerns about social inequality and the loss of Blackpool's traditional working-class identity.

Cultural Evolution and Connectivity

Blackpool's cultural landscape has evolved significantly over the years, reflecting a broader commitment to diversifying its appeal beyond traditional seaside attractions. The town now hosts an array of festivals, exhibitions, and cultural events that celebrate arts, music, and theater. Notable events such as the Blackpool Dance Festival, one of the most prestigious ballroom dancing competitions globally, and the Rebellion Punk Festival, which draws punk enthusiasts from around the world, demonstrate Blackpool's ability to cater to a wide range of interests (Shields 1991). These events not only celebrate the town's rich cultural diversity but also position it as a key player in the global arts and entertainment scene.

The Winter Gardens complex continues to play a central role in Blackpool's cultural identity, hosting a variety of activities and events that reinforce its reputation as an entertainment hub. From international conferences to music festivals and theatrical productions, the complex attracts audiences of all ages and backgrounds. Similarly, Blackpool's theaters, such as the iconic Grand Theatre, remain essential to the town's cultural vitality. The Grand Theatre, known for its architectural elegance and historical significance, offers a diverse program of traditional and contemporary performances, making it a cornerstone of Blackpool's artistic identity (Walton 2000).

Improvements in transportation and connectivity have also played a pivotal role in Blackpool's transformation. The town's well-developed road and rail networks ensure a steady influx of tourists and residents, making it easily accessible from major cities across the UK. Investments in the electrification of railway lines, have further enhanced the town's connectivity, positioning it as a convenient and appealing destination for both leisure and business visitors (Hunter 2016). These infrastructural developments not only support tourism but also reinforce Blackpool's status as a vibrant, modern, and accessible cultural hub.

A Town in Transition

Blackpool has experienced significant changes over the years, navigating economic challenges and shifts in its social fabric. Despite these hurdles, the town continues to adapt and evolve.

Through regeneration projects, economic diversification, and cultural and environmental initiatives, Blackpool strives to maintain its status as a vibrant and appealing destination. Its rich history, combined with its resilience and innovation, ensures that Blackpool remains a unique and cherished part of Britain's seaside heritage.

As Blackpool moves forward, it faces the dual challenge of honoring its Victorian past while embracing modernity. By balancing tradition with progress, the town can continue to captivate visitors and provide a sense of pride for its residents. Whether through the glittering Illuminations, the lively Pleasure Beach, or its thriving cultural scene, Blackpool's enduring charm ensures that it remains a vital and dynamic part of the UK's coastal landscape.

The Effects of Gentrification on Working-Class Communities

Beyond the ongoing issue of unemployment, Blackpool is also grappling with the effects of gentrification and the effects it has on the local community. While it may bring about some positive outcomes, such as upgraded infrastructure and boosted economic activity, the process has substantial negative consequences for working-class communities, including displacement, rising housing costs, and the erosion of social cohesion (Smith 1996).

One of the most immediate effects of gentrification is the surge in property prices and rents. As wealthier individuals move into the area, the demand for housing increases, pushing up costs and making it increasingly difficult for long-standing residents to afford a place to live (Bridge 2006). What's more, as newcomers settle into the area, it can disrupt the social fabric of the community, weakening the sense of identity and cohesion that working-class communities have nurtured over generations. Gentrification, therefore, not only raises housing costs but also causes an overall rise in the cost of living in the area. New businesses, restaurants, and services often cater to this new demographic, which leads to price hikes for everyday goods and services. This shift can make it harder for working-class families to cover basic living expenses, further exacerbating economic stress and potential hardships. Moreover, the job market for the working-class also suffers as gentrification reshapes the local economy. As areas gentrify, the types of businesses and services available shift to reflect the tastes and needs of the newer residents. Higher-end boutiques, cafes, and businesses may replace local shops and services that previously provided employment opportunities to the working class. This transition often leaves a mismatch between the skill sets of the existing workforce and the demands of the new businesses, reducing available job opportunities and increasing unemployment for long-standing residents. The arrival of wealthier individuals often creates exclusive social spaces and amenities that are inaccessible to the working class. With the area's character and culture shifting to accommodate the new demographic, the working-class community may feel marginalized and excluded. This can lead to feelings of powerlessness and social isolation, as long-standing residents witness the erasure of their cultural touchstones and communal spaces.

The loss of familiar landmarks and the gradual disappearance of local businesses can be emotionally painful, leading to a loss of identity and community.



Figure 4: End of the Line

Note: Artistic response to the abandoned iconic tram system that was once the cornerstone of transportation for the local community. Exhibited color print measuring 1,000 mm × 700 mm.

As neighborhoods gentrify, long-standing residents often face displacement, either because they can no longer afford to live in the area or because their homes are redeveloped. This displacement has a significant impact on social networks, as the bonds formed over years, even decades, are strained or severed (Lees et al. 2007). The absence of these support systems can affect mental health, leading to a rise in feelings of alienation, anxiety, and even depression. The psychological toll on the working class is a critical but often overlooked aspect of gentrification (Dutton 2005).

To mitigate the negative impacts of gentrification, it is essential to prioritize the needs of working-class communities. Efforts must be made to ensure that affordable housing remains available and that existing residents are protected from displacement. Furthermore, it is crucial to foster inclusive development that takes into account the aspirations and needs of all members of the community (Bridge 2006). Policies such as affordable housing programs, community engagement initiatives, and equitable economic development can help ensure that gentrification does not come at the expense of the working-class residents who have long called these areas home.

The City as Palimpsest: A Conceptual Framework

The concept of the palimpsest provides a critical framework through which to understand urban regeneration as a layered and cumulative process rather than a singular act of renewal. Traditionally referring to a manuscript that has been written over but never fully erased, the concept of palimpsest is employed here to describe the city as a space where historical, cultural, and social traces persist beneath successive waves of redevelopment (Corboz 1983).

In the context of Blackpool, regeneration operates not by removing the past entirely but by selectively overwriting working-class histories and identities leaving residual marks embedded within the urban fabric.

Reading the city as a palimpsest enables an analysis of regeneration that accounts for absence as well as presence. Closed shops, altered signage, repurposed buildings, and erased social spaces function as material indicators of cultural displacement. These visual and spatial traces reveal how working-class life is not simply replaced but rendered increasingly invisible within dominant narratives of progress and economic revitalization (Miller 2009). The palimpsest, therefore, becomes a means of exposing the power relations embedded within urban transformation highlighting whose histories are preserved and whose are marginalized.

Within this research, typographic design operates as a method for engaging with the palimpsestic nature of place. Typeface forms are developed in response to observed layers of history, decline, and renewal, embodying tensions between permanence and erasure. Typography functions as a visual register of cultural memory encoding social narratives that are otherwise overlooked or excluded within regeneration discourse. Through this process, design practice becomes a form of spatial and cultural reading rather than purely aesthetic production. By situating the palimpsest as a conceptual model rather than a descriptive metaphor, the research aligns with broader theoretical discussions in urban studies and cultural geography that view cities as contested and historically sedimented spaces. This approach acknowledges the city as a dynamic archive shaped by social struggle and lived experience. As Sinfield (2014) argues, visual and typographic practices can play a critical role in revealing these layered narratives, allowing design to function as both analytical and cultural intervention tools. This framework enables a nuanced understanding of regeneration as a process that reshapes not only the built environment but also identity and sense of belonging.

The Critical Role of the Artist

Artists play a critical role in engaging with and responding to their communities. Through collaboration with local residents, organizations, and institutions, artists can uncover hidden stories and perspectives, offering a platform for voices that might otherwise remain unheard (Sinfield 2023). The community's input becomes an essential part of the artistic process, infusing the work with diverse viewpoints and enriching its meaning. The sense of ownership and inclusivity that results from this collaboration strengthens the connection between the artist and the community. One of the ways artists engage with communities is by exploring and expressing cultural identities. By immersing themselves in the customs, traditions, and artistic practices of the community, artists are able to weave these elements into their work. This cultural layer celebrates the uniqueness of a community and its place within the broader cultural fabric, preserving its identity while highlighting its contributions to the greater cultural landscape.

Artists also respond to the social challenges faced by communities. Through their work, they raise awareness about pressing issues, stimulate critical thought, and initiate important dialogues. This layer of social commentary in their work reflects contemporary struggles, as well as hopes for the future. By addressing the community's aspirations and dreams, artists contribute to a narrative of possibility, signaling potential for change, growth, and renewal. Artistic responses to communities are not static; they are dynamic, evolving with each interaction and collaboration. Each moment of engagement adds another layer to the artistic "palimpsest," contributing to the shifting and growing narrative of a place. This ongoing process enables the exploration of multiple perspectives, making the artwork a powerful tool for understanding the complexities of a community (Basu 1997).

Blackpool's Artistic Community

Blackpool is home to a vibrant and diverse arts scene, supported by a growing network of local artists. The town's creative community encompasses various artistic styles and practices, enriching Blackpool's cultural landscape. Local artists such as Liam Spencer, David Jacques, John Marc Allen, and Robin Ross each bring their own unique perspectives and styles to the town's creative identity.

Liam Spencer, for example, is known for his distinctive painting style, which often captures Blackpool's landmarks, landscapes, and people. His work highlights his deep connection to the town, garnering both national and international recognition. David Jacques, a contemporary artist, uses multiple mediums like installation, photography, and drawing to explore themes of history, memory, and social commentary, often drawing on Blackpool's unique identity. John Marc Allen, a pop artist, explores themes of nostalgia, entertainment, and humor, incorporating influences from films, television, and street art. Robin Ross, a photographer, captures the essence of Blackpool through his lens, focusing on its landmarks and people. The Blackpool Art Society is another key contributor to the town's artistic landscape. This collective brings together local artists who share a passion for art and community. Regular exhibitions and events provide an opportunity for these artists to showcase their work and engage with local residents. The society fosters creativity, supports artistic expression, and ensures that Blackpool's cultural fabric continues to grow and thrive. These artists, along with many others, contribute to a diverse and evolving creative community that is at the heart of Blackpool's cultural life. Through their work, they not only reflect the town's past and present but also help shape its future, providing a rich and meaningful way for residents and visitors alike to engage with the town's vibrant arts scene.

Blackpool Reverie: The Design of a Typeface

Blackpool Reverie is an evocative typeface that beautifully merges the ornate principles of Victorian design with the clean, sleek sophistication of the twenty-first-century contemporary

aesthetics. Inspired by the grandeur and intricate details of the Victorian era, it reinterprets these historical design elements in a way that feels both nostalgic and forward-thinking. The Victorian era was known for its opulence, with a focus on ornate detailing, curves, and embellishments that communicated a sense of luxury and elegance.

Blackpool Reverie reimagines these features through a modern lens, balancing the beauty of the past with the minimalism and functionalism of the present. The result is a typeface that reflects the opulence of the Victorian era but is unmistakably relevant to modern design sensibilities. One of the defining innovations in Blackpool Reverie is its structural shift toward a more perpendicular stance. Traditional Victorian typefaces often feature a pronounced slant, giving them an almost cursive quality.

In contrast, Blackpool Reverie introduces a more upright, robust appearance, positioning the letterforms in a way that emphasizes strength, stability, and resilience that are seen as a reflection of the resilience of the working-class communities (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Blackpool Reverie

Note: It is a typeface design in response to the resilience and historical working-class community of Blackpool.

This shift away from the traditional slanted strokes allows the typeface to maintain its Victorian elegance while presenting a stronger, more confident silhouette. The interplay between rigid vertical uprights and delicate, intricate curves creates a dynamic tension that is both visually striking and versatile. This tension enables the typeface to stand out in a wide range of contexts, from high-end design projects to more casual, everyday applications that can be used within the community (McMillan 2015). The blend of solid structure with decorative flourishes strikes a harmonious balance, giving the typeface a timeless appeal that remains adaptable to contemporary design needs.

A particularly distinctive feature of Blackpool Reverie is found in its lowercase letters, specifically in the characters “d,” “b,” “p,” and “q” (Figure 6). These letters each feature a unique floating ball detail, an elegant and playful touch that recalls the Victorian era’s penchant for intricate, ornamental designs. These small yet striking elements serve as a modern reinterpretation of Victorian ornamentation, infusing the typeface with a contemporary twist that makes it stand out from other historical revivals (Spiekermann 2006). The floating balls lend a sense of fluidity and whimsy to the letterforms while maintaining an air of refinement. This subtle nod to Victorian aesthetics enriches the design, grounding it in tradition while signaling its forward-looking approach. These playful elements are not simply decorative; they

imbue the typeface with personality, offering a visual experience that feels both historical and contemporary, inviting the viewer to engage with it on multiple levels.



Figure 6: Example of the Typeface Blackpool Reverie Showing the Design Form of the Lowercase Elements of the Typeface

Beyond its aesthetic qualities, the conceptual design of Blackpool Reverie also reflects the narratives and resilience of the community it represents. Inspired by Blackpool's rich working-class history and its cultural identity, the typeface embodies the spirit of the town itself, bold, enduring, and unapologetically authentic. Blackpool, historically a haven for working-class families, has long been associated with a sense of resilience and community pride, as its inhabitants have navigated economic challenges, industrial change, and social transformation. The typeface mirrors this spirit, embodying the strength of the community while celebrating its history and culture. The elegance and refinement of Victorian design provide a rich backdrop to the stories of struggle and triumph that have shaped Blackpool's identity (Tschichold 1991). In this sense, Blackpool Reverie is not just a typeface; it is a reflection of the town's enduring character, capturing the essence of a working-class community that has weathered many storms and continues to thrive.

By capturing the duality of history and modernity, Blackpool Reverie invites viewers to explore the richness of Victorian design principles reimaged for contemporary times. The typeface serves as both a tribute to the past and a celebration of the ongoing evolution of design. It celebrates the artistic beauty of the Victorian era while acknowledging the ever-changing nature of visual culture in the twenty-first century. In doing so, Blackpool Reverie not only honors the heritage of its inspiration but also stands as a testament to the enduring power of

design to adapt, evolve, and reflect changing times. It offers a powerful narrative that links the past with the present, making it a compelling example of how design can transcend eras.

Implications for Urban Regeneration and Design Research

The findings of this research suggest that urban regeneration cannot be fully understood through economic indicators or spatial redevelopment alone. The cultural and emotional dimensions of place, particularly within working-class communities require methodologies capable of capturing the lived experience of memory and loss. Practice-led research offers a valuable approach in this context enabling designers and researchers to engage critically with urban change. For urban planners and policymakers, this study highlights the importance of recognizing cultural presence as a vital component of sustainable regeneration. The erasure of working-class identity through redevelopment risks not only social displacement but also the loss of local knowledge. Creative practices such as graphic design, typographic design, photography, and moving image can function as tools for documenting and preserving these intangible cultural traces providing alternative forms of evidence that may inform more inclusive regeneration strategies.

Within design research, the study demonstrates how typography can operate beyond functional communication to act as an expressive and analytical medium. Typeface design when grounded in social narrative has the capacity to embody cultural conditions and to communicate affective dimensions of place that are difficult to articulate through text alone. This positions design as a critical research practice with relevance beyond the discipline itself. More broadly, the research advocates for greater integration of artistic methodologies within studies of urban transformation. By making visible the layered and contested nature of regeneration, creative practice can encourage public engagement and challenge dominant narratives of progress. In this way, design research has the potential to contribute meaningfully to debates around cultural memory and the future of postindustrial cities.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates that practice-led methodologies offer valuable ways of engaging with the complexities of urban regeneration and gentrification, particularly where traditional empirical methods may fail to capture lived experience and cultural loss. By positioning typography and visual practice as analytical tools, the study reveals how design can operate as both a form of critique and cultural preservation. In doing so, it contributes to broader debates in urban studies and design research, suggesting that creative practice has an important role to play in shaping more socially aware and community-centered approaches to regeneration.

Blackpool's working-class communities, like many other working-class towns, face a dual crisis of unemployment and gentrification. The decline of traditional industries and the erosion of affordable housing have led to high unemployment rates and increased social

division. Unemployment often has far-reaching consequences that go beyond financial hardship. It impacts mental health, reduces self-esteem, and diminishes overall quality of life. At the same time, gentrification exacerbates these issues by pushing out long-standing residents, often replacing them with wealthier newcomers who do not share the same history or experiences. This displacement fractures the sense of community that has been vital for social support and cohesion leaving behind feelings of powerlessness and marginalization. This history, once overlooked or undervalued, must be celebrated and preserved. Cultural events, festivals, and creative initiatives can play a pivotal role in bringing the community together and fostering a sense of pride and belonging. By promoting these cultural expressions, it is possible to create a more inclusive environment that respects and values the contributions of all residents. Despite the adversity they face, working-class communities in Blackpool have shown incredible resilience. Their strong social networks and mutual support systems provide a foundation for collective action and social cohesion. These networks help to maintain community identity and enable residents to overcome the difficulties posed by unemployment and gentrification. This sense of solidarity and shared purpose is a critical asset that can be harnessed to ensure that the community remains vibrant and thriving for generations to come.

As an artist working closely with communities, I aim to continue documenting Blackpool's surrounding area as a means of gathering images and narratives that will serve as the foundation for future works of art. Through a combination of typeface design, photography, and short films, this ongoing research project will focus on capturing the essence of community life within Blackpool's working-class neighborhoods. The artworks will serve as a celebration of the strength, resilience, and unique identity of its residents. In addition, this project seeks to engage with the community in a meaningful way, fostering emotional connections and providing a deeper understanding of the challenges and triumphs of working-class life in Blackpool. By highlighting the individual and collective stories of the people who call this place home, this artistic endeavor will contribute to a renewed sense of pride and connection within the community. Through this creative process, I hope to spark conversation, encourage reflection, and inspire a sense of shared responsibility toward the future of Blackpool's working-class communities.

REFERENCES

- Basu, Paul. 1997. "Narratives in a Landscape: Monuments and Memories of the Sutherland Clearances." PhD diss., University College.
- Bridge, Gary. 2006. "It's Not Just a Question of Taste: Gentrification, the Neighbourhood, and Cultural Capital." *Environment and Planning* 38 (10): 1965–1978. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a3853>.
- Candy, Linda, and Ernest Edmonds. 2018. "Practice-Based Research in the Creative Arts: Foundations and Futures." *Leonardo* 51 (1): 63–69. https://doi.org/10.1162/LEON_a_01471.
- Corboz, Andre. 1983. "The Land as Palimpsest." *Diogenes* 31 (121): 12–34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/039219218303112102>.
- Dutton, Peter. 2005. "Outside the Metropole: Gentrification in Provincial Cities or Provincial Gentrification." In *Gentrification in a Global Context: The New Urban Colonialism*, edited by R. Atkinson and G. Bridge. Routledge.
- Goss, Jon. 1988. *Blackpool and the British Seaside: The Myth of the Modern Tourist Destination*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hunter, Colin. 2016. *Tourism and Transport: Modes, Networks, and Flows*. Channel View Publications.
- Lees, Loretta, Tom Slater, and Elwin Wyly. 2007. *Gentrification*. Routledge.
- McMillan, Palgrave. 2015. *Designing Typefaces: Tradition Meets Modernity*. Thames & Hudson.
- Miller, Danielle. 2009. *Material Culture and the Social Construct of Space*. Routledge.
- Moustakas, Clark. 1990. *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications*. Sage.
- Newbury, Darren. 1996. "Knowledge and Research in Art and Design." *Design Studies* 17 (2): 215–219. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0142-694X\(95\)00025-M](https://doi.org/10.1016/0142-694X(95)00025-M).
- Pink, Sarah. 2013 *Doing Visual Ethnography*. 3rd ed. Sage.
- Robinson, Peter. 2001. *Seaside Tourism: The Rise of Blackpool as a Leisure Destination*. Routledge.

- Shields, Rob. 1991. *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*. Routledge.
- Sinfield, David. 2014. "The Semiotics of Business Signage: How Typography is Used in Impoverished and Deprived Areas of New Zealand." *International Journal of the Image* 4 (4): 25–32. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2154-8560/CGP/v04i04/44144>.
- Sinfield, David. 2023. "Connecting Community: Artistic Echoes of a Forgotten Small-Town Community." Presented at the Eighteenth International Conference on Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, *Agency in an Era of Displacement and Social Change*, Oxford, UK, July 19–21, 2023. Common Ground Publishing.
- Smith, Neil. 1996. *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*. Routledge.
- Spiekermann, Eric. 2006. *Stop Stealing Sheep and Find Out How Type Works*. Adobe Press.
- Tschichold, Jan. 1991. *The Form of the Book: Essays on the Morality of Good Design*. Lund Humphries.
- Walton, John. 2000. *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century*. Manchester University Press.