Divided Landscape: The Visual Culture of Urban Segregation

Lilian Knorr

ABSTRACT Segregation remains a feature of life in American cities, despite legislative efforts to end discrimination in housing. The political and economic causes of segregation have been the topic of rigorous scholarship, but segregation is embedded in urban space, as well as in socioeconomic and political systems. This paper discusses the spatial production of segregation in Baltimore by identifying the markers of division that are produced by formal and informal urban design practices. It proposes that a visual culture of segregation reinforces racial division in the urban environment. Focusing specifically on urban form, land use, and iconography, the paper explores how symbols, signs, and ornamentation produced by public and private actors create informal borders that denote distinct racial places in the city. The principle findings are: that urban design elements can maintain and reinforce politically significant sociological divisions, and that visual culture is a significant place-maker in cities.

KEYWORDS Urban segregation, urban design, Baltimore, visual culture, street art

INTRODUCTION

The 2010 Census revealed a national trend towards greater racial integration, leading to reports heralding the end of the segregated century (see Glaeser and Vigdor 2012). Yet the urban unrest that unfolded across the country in response to racism and racial bias in policing, first in Ferguson, Missouri, following the shooting of Michael Brown by local police in 2014, soon after in New York City following the death of Eric Garner, and more recently in Baltimore following the arrest and death of 25-year-old Freddie Gray in April 2015, shows that the nation is far away from the end of segregation.

Demographic mappings of many American cities illustrate that the divided urban form can still be found throughout the United States.[1] These maps show that despite legislative reforms aimed at promoting equality in housing markets, racial segregation remains a feature of life for many living in the post-industrial cities of the Northeast (Logan and Stults 2011, Denton 2013). Current legislation prevents purposive discrimination against potential tenants and homeowners on the basis of race, but racial separation is maintained implicitly by public and private actors through conventions such as exclusionary zoning and discriminatory lending practices that exploit structurally embedded disadvantage (Rothwell and Massey 2009, Alexander 2012, Sharkey 2013). Therefore, while national segregation levels may have declined since their peak in the 1970s, inequality remains both racialized and spatialized in many American cities.

Why does the divided urban form persist? The political and economic causes of segregation have been the topic of rigorous scholarship in the social sciences; the legacies of segregationist federal housing policies, discrimination in housing and lending, individual preferences and prejudice, and the impact

Landscape Journal 35:1 ISSN 0277-2426
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of deindustrialization and subsequent subsidization of white flight have been dominant themes in this research (Jackson 1985, Wilson 1987, Massey and Denton 1993, Vale 2013). Segregation, however, is a spatial condition as well as a political and economic one. Asking the simple question, "*What does segregation look like?*" reveals an unexplored dimension of the phenomenon because it approaches the city as a series of places that send diverse visual cues about who belongs and who does not. The visual culture of black poverty thus acts as a product and sustaining agenda of urban segregation because it provides city-dwellers with an identifiable, visual expression of what are otherwise immaterial forces such as identity and race. The term *visual culture* encompasses the production, use, and reception of images.

This paper will discuss the ways that a visual culture of segregation reinforces racial division in the urban landscape. Focusing on the city of Baltimore, the paper examines the practices involved in the spatial production of segregation by identifying its underlying conditions and the markers of division that are produced by formal and informal urban design practices. This analysis suggests that visual signs and artifacts constitute significant markers of division; many of Baltimore's most stringent racial divisions are not mediated by topographical, morphological, or infrastructural elements, but rather are signalled through seemingly arbitrary shifts in the visual culture of neighborhoods. In short, black and white low-income groups represent themselves and are represented by others in ways that are distinct and identifiable.

The Baltimore case shows that there are distinct visual cultures of black and white poverty, and that widely held interpretations of those visual cultures—in particular the association of black urban poverty with crime and disorder and the association of white urban poverty with artistic lifestyles or the working class—further polarize the city by adding normative layers to its landscape.[2] It is important to note that much of Baltimore's low-income working class fled the city following the collapse of the city's manufacturing economy in the 1970s. The images of white poverty discussed in this paper, therefore, look at communities where the creative community has a strong presence. Focusing specifically on urban form, land use, and iconography,[3] this paper explores how the physical environment and the visual symbols, signs, and ornamentation produced by public and private actors create informal borders that denote distinct racial places in the city. The principle findings of this paper are first that urban design elements can maintain and reinforce politically significant sociological divisions, and second that iconography—which is often overlooked in studies of urban politics and design—is a significant placemaker in cities. This study is based on empirical research done in Baltimore in 2010. The neighborhoods discussed in this study were analysed using site visits, photography, and semi-structured interviews with community actors, policymakers, local residents, and activists.

THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF URBAN SEGREGATION

The literature on spatial segregation offers a comprehensive account of the negative effects of residential segregation on segregated groups and explores the political, economic, and social causes of residential segregation by race. Two books widely acknowledged as being seminal to the field are William Julius Wilson's *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987) and Doug Massey and Nancy Denton's *American Apartheid* (1993). Wilson's book turned a debate focused largely on individual causes of urban crisis back to the analytic unit of the neighborhood by arguing that poverty had become concentrated in the inner-city urban 'ghettos' in the post-war era, following the decentralization of work and investment in Northeastern cities. Massey and Denton then showed that racial segregation persisted in American cities even after significant legislative changes in the 1970s, such as the Fair Housing Act of 1974.

This scholarship connected residential segregation to black poverty by positioning it as a cause of persistent racial inequality. In *American Apartheid*, Massey and Denton argue that "racial segregation—and its characteristic institutional form, the black ghetto—are the key structural factors responsible for the perpetuation of black poverty in the United States" (Massey and Denton 1993, 7). Residential segregation was subsequently approached as a systemic condition and scholars established links between spatial segregation and poverty (Sampson 2013, Sharkey 2013), educational segregation and subsequent achievement gaps (Gray 2005, Cashin 2014), occupational segregation (Feagin 1986, Cable and Mix 2003) and systemic racism (Bowser 1985, Césaire 2000, Hesse 2004).

Figure 1
The evolution of Baltimore's segregated neighborhoods, 1930–1964.

The asymmetries of power resulting from decades of racism and discrimination are a perpetuating cause of residential segregation. Residential segregation has been variously explained by scholars as a product of socioeconomic conflict (Ellen 2000), market forces (Galster 1977, Gray 2005, Sugrue 2005), government policy (Jackson 1985, Ross 1987, Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom 2001), and systemic inequality (Massey and Denton 1993, Pattillo-McCoy 1999). These authors attribute the emergence of the impoverished inner city to black isolation, claiming that racial discrimination and consequent disadvantages in employment, education, and welfare made it impossible for black families to overcome their spatial disenfranchisement. By concentrating poverty in space, racial segregation exposes whites and blacks to very different socioeconomic environments, thereby embedding and entrenching the conditions that created residential segregation in the first place.

URBAN SEGREGATION IN BALTIMORE

Baltimore is a city that has been starkly divided by race and class since the turn of the twentieth century. For over a century, public and private institutions have restricted the movement of black families in the city; the result has been the emergence and proliferation of segregated, impoverished, densely populated, inner-city neighborhoods. The city's social geography has long resembled a split core divided on the lines of race and class: black low-income neighborhoods are concentrated in the center of the city, save a spine of primarily white settlement running from the wealthy city suburbs of Roland Park to the waterfront and the newly developed Harbor East (Figure 1). Despite significant demographic change—Baltimore's population was 76% white in 1950 and today it is 63% black and 31% white—the spaces delimited as "black residential" by the segregation laws of the 1910s remain populated by low-income black families today (Figure 2).

Civic institutions, a racist real estate market, and de-industrialization have shaped and upheld the city's social geography. Divided urban form in Baltimore is the consequence of a decades-long process of residential separation by race that began in 1910. Housing in Baltimore wasn't segregated until waves of black migration from the South and immigration from Italy and Eastern Europe provoked panic over "black expansion" (Power 1983, 290). To prevent upwardly mobile black and immigrant families from moving into predominantly white neighborhoods, residential segregation was legally enforced in Baltimore through a segregation ordinance between 1910 and 1917, restricting black and immigrant families to small neighborhoods in the eastern and western parts of the city. Although segregation laws were deemed unconstitutional in 1917, segregation by law was replaced with de facto segregation through practices of redlining, racial zoning, and racially restrictive covenants (Power 1983, Pietila 2010).

Figure 2
Race and Income Map of Baltimore, 2010.

From 1917 to 1948, racially restrictive covenants took over as the primary tool of racial separation in Baltimore. While European immigrants were gradually able to integrate into mainstream housing markets, neighborhood associations worked tirelessly to prevent black homeownership in white neighborhoods through covenants that restricted residents from selling their homes to black buyers. Once covenants became illegal in 1948, racial zoning and urban renewal projects were used to maintain separation, and segregationist institutions operated once again within the public realm. These measures promoted segregation implicitly through such means as locating undesirable facilities in poor black neighborhoods and displacing entire communities to make way for urban renewal projects.

The discriminatory mechanics of Baltimore's real estate economy further manipulated the housing market so that the distribution of racial groups in the city was more starkly divided than it would have been if black and white buyers had been able to participate in the market as equals. In the first half of the twentieth century, many realtors wouldn't do business with black customers, leaving them with very few options in the real estate markets. A select few were able to deal directly with white sellers; however, the majority had to deal with corrupt speculators who charged inflated prices to black clients. Black customers who bought houses from real estate speculators paid prices that were marked up 85% from the fair market value determined by the Federal Housing Administration (Pietila 2010, 202). Black renters were also charged higher rent than their white counterparts. The economic practices of this period led to greater density in black neighborhoods, overcrowding and poor housing maintenance by landlords, and made it more difficult for black families to accumulate wealth.

In the 1970s, deindustrialization and the consequent loss of jobs entrenched the spatial patterns put

Table 1. Typology of Urban Divisions

	Description	Examples
Constructed Divisions	Walls constructed to physically divide conflicting groups that would otherwise be in contact with one another	Peace walls; border walls; gated communities
Morphological Divisions	Dramatic shifts in architecture, housing stock, and arbitrary changes in street pattern that dissuade the movement of people through particular neighborhoods	Changes in street grid; changes in housing type
Infrastructural Divisions	Major infrastructural interventions that reflect or create demographic divisions	Highways; railroads; airports; train stations
Topographical Divisions	Topographical changes and features of the landscape that reflect demographic divisions	Park space; rivers and other bodies of water; contrast between floodplains and hills
Visual Divisions	Changes in visual culture of neighborhoods that signal sociological difference	Graffiti; murals; lawn ornaments; street signs

in place in prior decades. Cities across the Northeast lost thousands of well-paying manufacturing jobs, as firms and industries either closed their doors or relocated from the city center to the surrounding suburbs (Hayden 2003, Sugrue 2005). Deindustrialization created what urban historian Thomas Sugrue describes as a "spatial mismatch" between urban African Americans and jobs (Sugrue 2005, 141). High unemployment coupled with the replacement of manufacturing jobs with jobs in the service industry created conditions of chronic poverty in many urban black communities. For example, in 1945, Baltimore employed 250,000 people in the manufacturing sector, but by 2005 there were only 17,800 such jobs. Ninety percent of jobs in the city are now in the service sector. The replacement of industry with a service-dominated economy has meant the replacement of well-paid low-skill employment with low-paying alternatives in the service sector. As such, individuals who have historically had less access to opportunity and higher education now find themselves with fewer employment options in the city.

The impact of segregationist institutions, a racist real estate market, and de-industrialisation is the enduring segregation of black urban communities and their persistent isolation from economic opportunities. Historically low levels of public improvements in these neighborhoods have amplified the disrepair brought about by segregation and disinvestment (Rabin 1987). Indeed, the combination of physical deterioration, poverty, and political impotence has widely stigmatized low-income black neighborhoods in the popular imagery of Baltimore, branding them as "ghettos" (Clark 1965, James 1994).

THE SPATIAL PRODUCTION OF URBAN SEGREGATION

Social geography is more than the physical articulation of political and economic systems. The underlying conditions of urban segregation, discussed above, are accompanied and superseded by physical environments that (re)produce segregation through urban form, land use, and iconography. The physical and visual qualities of Baltimore's segregated neighborhoods perpetuate segregationist trends by enforcing racial barriers through seemingly apolitical features, such as street grids and signage. In this context, urban design is an oft-ignored actor that actually plays a significant role in maintaining and reproducing the divided urban form for new generations. A broad approach to urban design assumes that cities are designed by a wide range of actors, including formal (designers, architects, city planners, engineers) and informal (residents, artists, business owners, youth) actors. It assumes that the interpretation of an environment—that is, the way that insiders and outsiders assign meaning and normative value to the things that they see in a particular neighborhood—impacts the function and meaning of place. Many stories, histories, and fallacies are rooted in urban landscapes; as urban scholar Anne Whiston Spirn contends, these stories can be read and understood through an informed analysis of urban design (Spirn, 2000).

The Design Elements of a Divided City

Urban segregation is physically articulated through five urban design elements: constructed divisions, morphological divisions, environmental divisions,

infrastructural divisions, and visual divisions. For example, physical features such as walls, buildings, highways, rivers, and graffiti can create barriers to entry and exit between different neighborhoods in the city. These five elements combine in different ways to form divided urban landscapes.

Constructed divisions most often take the form of a dividing wall. Walls are used to divide neighborhoods, cities, and even nations. They are invoked in response to a desire to distinguish insiders from outsiders and to restrict contact and movement. The Berlin Wall, the security wall straddling the US-Mexico border, and the so-called Peace Walls of Belfast are some of the more infamous examples of walls used to divide groups of people (Brown 2010). More modest examples of constructed divisions can be found throughout American cities. For example, Detroit's 'dividing wall' was built in the 1940s to separate black homeowners from white homeowners living on opposite sides of the same block. Although black families now occupy the entire neighborhood, the wall remains as a relic of past segregationist spatial practices. Constructed barriers can also take the form of gated communities, which can be found in both cities and suburbs and are popularly invoked for greater security (Caldeira 2000, Low 2003).

Morphological divisions constitute a less explicit physical division of groups in the city. Dramatic shifts in architecture, housing stock, and arbitrary changes in street pattern signify neighborhood change and can dissuade the movement of people through particular neighborhoods. For example, in Baltimore, there is a significant change in the street grid on opposite sides of Greenmount Avenue north of 33rd Street. Roland Park is one of Baltimore's wealthiest neighborhoods. Originally designed as a suburb for wealthy Baltimoreans fleeing the expansion of the city's non-white population in its downtown, Roland Park features large single-family dwellings rather than the traditional Baltimore row house and a winding street pattern that significantly disrupts the grid. Opposite Roland Park is Waverly, a low-income black neighborhood. In Waverly, the housing type and grid pattern is typical of Baltimore neighborhoods. The stark division in street pattern and housing type here reinforces the extreme demographic income and racial shift across this section of Greenmount Avenue. Moreover, the maze-like quality of the Roland Park street pattern discourages individuals from entering the neighborhood from the opposite side of Greenmount and acts as a de facto wall.

Changes in topography can also reflect racial and class divisions in cities, as the rich tend to live on higher grounds whereas the poor are often concentrated in lowlands and former swamplands (Spirn 2005, Moga 2010). Although topography plays a less prominent role in Baltimore's social geography, it has a powerful presence in other segregated Northeastern cities. For example, Mill Creek, one of the Philadelphia's poorest neighborhoods, sits atop a stream that is buried in a sewer. The hydrological processes of the floodplain have had significant impacts on the built environment and have caused damage to sidewalks and building foundations, creating the illusion of neglect by residents (Spirn 2005).

Infrastructural elements, such as highways and train tracks, can be markers of division, especially where there are few topographical elements to act as territorial markers. Baltimore's transportation infrastructure closely corresponds to sociological divisions and Baltimoreans commonly cite mobility as a key explanation for persistent division. The Metro Subway, for example, runs only through impoverished black neighborhoods and so discourages the movement of residents around the city. The I-83 highway marks the city's strong east-west division, and also enables residents of affluent suburbs to reach the commercial Harbor East district without encountering the inner city.

Visual divisions, or shifts in the visual culture of neighborhoods, constitute the subtlest form of urban division because visual divisions operate primarily on a semiotic level, impacting space through the communication of information, meaning, or affect. The urban elements of visual culture are made up of the images, symbols, signs, and ornaments created by public and private actors in neighborhoods. Visual cultures construct a narrative of place that can reinforce sociological division when accompanied by normative associations between the features of a particular urban environment and race, identity, and income. Widely held social assumptions can become quickly attached to emblematic images of an urban environment. For example, news reports on the urban unrest that took place in Baltimore in April 2015 commonly showed images of boarded-up houses and abandoned neighborhoods alongside images of the protests themselves. When racialized readings of an urban landscape are

URBAN LAND USE

Figure 3
Urban Land Use along Greenmount Avenue (top) and 36th Street (bottom). From left to right: local food shops in both neighborhoods; in Hampden a high-end furniture shop serves clients throughout the city; McDonalds in both neighborhoods; alternative banking institutions are more common than banks along Greenmount Avenue; local restaurants in both neighborhoods.

popularized in film, media, and policy, visual divisions become even stronger.

In Baltimore, visual culture is a significant marker of racial difference. Many communities coalesce in a seemingly arbitrary way; demographics edges exist with no physical marker, such as a river, highway or a major shift in housing type and street pattern. On-site examination of these places reveals that these divisions are primarily visual ones. Images, signs and symbols provide the narrative that makes it possible to distinguish between neighborhoods along racial lines.

VISUAL CULTURES OF URBAN SEGREGATION

To claim that there is a visual culture of segregation is to assert that the images produced of and within segregated urban neighborhoods create a representation and self-consciousness of place that is central to its social identity. Images play an important role in the formation of values and beliefs. The visual environments of segregated neighborhoods, and the media they inspire, are used to construct articulations of income and race based on the imagery that is found there. As such, it is possible to know the city's social geography simply by looking. Just as spatial divisions of income are visible, so are spatial divisions of race.[4] The discussion that follows will focus on comparisons of the visual culture of black and white neighborhoods, focusing on the predominantly white neighborhoods of Hampden and Remington and the predominantly black neighborhoods of Waverly, Barclay, and Greenmount West.

Urban Form: The Visual Impact of Abandonment and Disinvestment

Baltimore's urban form is relatively monotonous. The city's neighborhoods share an architectural style, a similar skyline of low-rise housing, and a uniform street system based on the grid. Physical manifestations of abandonment and disinvestment, however, alter urban form by changing the relationship between block, house, and street. These ad hoc changes to the form of the city's neighborhoods make it possible to distinguish them by race and income.

Physical reflections of abandonment and shrinkage, specifically boarded up houses and empty lots, are present in all low-income neighborhoods; however they are at their most extreme in impoverished black

neighborhoods, where rates of abandonment and foreclosure are particularly high. In these neighborhoods entire blocks of houses are abandoned and are boarded up with either wood panelling or concrete to prevent squatting. Scaffolding not only changes the way the house looks—without windows the houses look like large slabs of brick and concrete—it also creates a sense of deterioration and emptiness in neighborhoods where it is plentiful. By turning homes into block-like structures, scaffolding changes the relationship between the buildings and the street by turning a pedestrian-friendly streetscape into a street that feels as though it is flanked with walls.

Boarded-up houses are less numerous in white lower-income neighborhoods like Remington; because there are so few (rarely more than one per block, if at all) they do not call much attention and go unnoticed. For example, there are 23 vacant buildings in Remington and 10 in Hampden compared to 125 in Greenmount West. Moreover, many abandoned houses in white neighborhoods are only partially boarded (i.e. windows but not doors) or not boarded-up at all. In fact, many empty houses are left with their façades intact, with only a small paper note on the window indicating foreclosure. Since the imagery of abandonment is less obtrusive in white neighborhoods, they do not experience the same stigmatization that attaches to low-income black neighborhoods where scaffolding is widespread and foreclosure can be easily seen.

The foreclosure crisis that began in 2008 has exacerbated disinvestment in low-income black neighborhoods, without providing any visual evidence of the predatory lending practices that led to large-scale foreclosure in the first place.[5] Rather, the visual representation of abandonment—scaffolding on houses, voids in the landscape, deteriorating facades and front yards—falsely alludes to a causal relationship between disinvestment and resident, leading to the fallacy that associates black poverty with disorder. As such, these neighborhoods are vulnerable to stigmatization by policymakers and outsiders.

Voids in the landscape are the counterpart to vacant houses. A void is an empty lot where a building once stood and can exist in many forms: bare neglected land, roughly vegetated plots, and hollow building frames. An urban neighborhood that is full of voids conjures cultural associations of emptiness and decline. Voids can also take on many transitory uses, such as materials dumps, urban farms, community gardens, and ad hoc playgrounds. These uses that create public space can help mitigate the appearance of fragmentation.

Community gardens are a common sight in Baltimore and can be found in both black and white neighborhoods. For example, in two predominantly black neighborhoods along Greenmount Avenue—Greenmount West and Brentwood—there are community gardens with striking visual similarities. Both gardens are fenced, decorated with random pieces of lawn furniture, sparse flowers, and a small structure. The structure has the frame of a small house, transparent walls (likely plastic), and a number of tables and chairs inside. Both gardens are maintained and utilized by a group of older men from the community who can often be found socializing there. These community gardens are quite different from those found in Hampden, a predominantly white neighborhood, which are composed mostly of gardening plots and have little common space. These gardens seem to be used more for gardening and beautification than socializing. Rather than lawn furniture, the plots are full of flowers and lawn ornaments, such as plastic flamingos. This difference between community gardens in black and white neighborhoods suggests a need for public space in segregated black neighborhoods like Greenmount West and Brentwood. In an environmental justice study, the USDA found that park service areas in Baltimore that are predominantly black have more park crowding than areas that are predominantly white (Boone et al. 2009).

Urban Land Use: Distinct Visual Economies

The financial and commercial landscapes of black and white neighborhoods in the city are quite distinct. Aside from the presence of nationwide chains, such as McDonalds, there are few similarities between the decoration and product offerings of stores, restaurants and financial institutions. Figure 3, above, shows images of financial and retail activity along Greenmount Avenue and 36th Street in Hampden.

The visual culture of financial activity highlights the lack of banks and the presence of alternative financial institutions in only black low-income neighborhoods. In black neighborhoods, borrowers are served with “a different mix of products and by different types of lenders than commonly serve higher-income

URBAN FORM

Figure 4
Urban Form in Greenmount West (top) and Hampden-Remington (bottom). From left to right: row houses in both neighborhoods; vacant houses in Greenmount West are more heavily boarded up than in Hampden-Remington; vast voids in Greenmount compared to single empty plots in Hampden-Remington; community gardens emphasize public space in Greenmount West; community boards to advertise local events in both neighborhoods.

markets" (Apgar and Calder 2005, 102). Whereas banks are located in low-income white neighborhoods, black neighborhoods are more likely to be serviced by alternative lending institutions, such as check-cash stores. In a study conducted for Brookings, William Agpar and Allegra Calder discovered that subprime refinancing loans are three times more likely to be made in low-income than in upper-income neighborhoods and five times more likely to be made in predominantly black than white neighborhoods. Indeed, a survey of the financial institutions available to residents living along Greenmount revealed only one Bank of America branch but numerous alternative lending institutions.

Greenmount Avenue's commercial corridor is composed primarily of discount stores, fast food restaurants, pawn shops, auto repair shops, beauty salons and barber shops, store-front churches, and liquor/tobacco stores. Many of these shops are distinguished with homemade signs and display prices and deals in shop windows. The heart of the retail strip, between 33rd and 28th Streets, has more diverse offerings such as vintage stores, a bookstore, and an avant-garde music shop leftover from when Waverly was an artists' enclave.

Gastronomically, there are food options clustered around 33rd Street, however further south there are few grocery stores and healthful food options, and many of the neighborhoods that abut Greenmount Avenue below 25th Street are considered to be food deserts by the City. A food desert is a low-income area where the distance to a supermarket exceeds a quarter-mile, there is little healthy food availability, and more than 30% of households lack a vehicle (BFPI 2015). Food deserts can be found in 48% of Baltimore neighborhoods and are disproportionately located in segregated black neighborhoods. A recent study conducted by the City of Baltimore and the Johns Hopkins Center for a Liveable Future found that 34% of African Americans live in food deserts, compared to only 8% of white residents (BFPI 2015, 23).

Hampden's visual economy is reflective of its working-class past and the influx of artists and yuppies that started moving into the neighborhood in the 1990s. The neighborhood's main commercial strip is on West 36th Street, or *The Avenue*. The Avenue has

URBAN ICONOGRAPHY

Figure 5
Urban Iconography in Greenmount West (top) and Hampden-Remington (bottom). From left to right: signs of foreclosure in both neighborhoods; signs of police presence in both neighborhoods—one is a surveillance camera and the other is a sign for the Neighborhood Watch; a mural in Greenmount West and lawn ornament in Hampden; graffiti in Greenmount West and ornamental house painting in Hampden; art adorning a boarded-up house in Greenmount West and a row of "painted ladies" in Remington.

transformed dramatically in the past fifteen years and now offers high-end boutiques, art galleries, furniture shops, a yoga studio, a wine bar, specialty food shops, artisan cafés, and numerous restaurants. Due to its walkability and the diversity of dining options, neighborhood events, and nearby farmers' market, Hampden has become a 'destination neighborhood' within the city and so has experienced significant economic development. In fact, median household income has nearly doubled in areas within walking distance of The Avenue since 2000 (City-Data [2000–2013]). Most of the retail and restaurants along The Avenue cater to new residents, and students and faculty from the nearby Johns Hopkins University. Some businesses from the past remain, including a 27-year-old hardware store and *Café Hon*, a restaurant named for the 'hon,' a working-class local woman dressed in a bright dress and a wearing a beehive hairdo.

Urban Iconography: Placemaking through Symbol, Sign, and Ornament

Analysis of urban iconography highlights the intentional production of images that are added by formal and informal actors to adorn an urban landscape. States use signs and symbols to make urban landscapes more legible, while disenfranchised residents may use street art to challenge the iconography produced by states and power holders. The semiotics of street art and ornamentation suggests that design by informal actors is a politically significant act that not only provides important information regarding the non-jurisdictional territories and boundaries that exist within a city, but that also reconstitutes urban form and renegotiates territorial relationships. That these processes and dialectics occur outside of, and between, state apparatuses of spatial control is also significant; they suggest that political resistance occurs through the subtle subversion of the physical manifestations of the state.

The state visually manifests itself in signs, symbols, and surveillance tools. These artifacts project both negative and positive imagery and suggest the complex relationship between residents of low-income neighborhoods and the city. Signs connoting crime and disinvestment can be found throughout segregated black neighborhoods. The city's surveillance cameras,

Figure 6
Red X signs in Greenmount West.

put in place under Mayor O'Malley in 2005, exist almost exclusively in black neighborhoods. There are 603 surveillance cameras in the city; they are accompanied by a flashing blue light to signify their presence and signal that one has entered a high crime neighborhood. The cameras can be easily seen from a distance, during the day and at night. The cameras are located primarily in low-income black neighborhoods, with a heavy concentration in West Baltimore.[6] Another stigmatizing sign found only in low-income black neighborhoods is a red square with a white X in the middle (Figure 6). These signs are put up by the Baltimore Housing Department to signify that a house is in such poor condition that if it is on fire, the fire department should just let it burn. The signs have a very strong visual presence, carry very negative connotations, and create a threatening visual environment.

Street art also has a significant presence in Baltimore neighborhoods. The term street art covers a myriad of activities, most commonly graffiti, but also including mural painting, stencils, stickers, and installation art work. Street art is a prolific form of political expression in Baltimore's low-income black neighborhoods because it enables individuals without access to a media outlet to communicate in a public form with a broad audience. Recently, however, street art has been adopted by the city as a vehicle for culture-led regeneration through creative city policies and programs. For example, two major city projects—City Arts Apartment and the Station North Arts and Entertainment District (which encompasses the Greenmount West neighborhood)—use curated street art projects to revitalize neighborhoods and attract artists to the city.

The politics of street art in Baltimore have become more complex; while still a medium of communication for the disenfranchised, it is now also part of an urban regeneration strategy that favors artists over longtime residents. For marginalized communities, street art can still play a central role in establishing their presence in an urban environment. Graffiti and street art can make the 'dead zones' and 'loose spaces' of the city visible, by providing evidence that they are *places* (Franck and Stevens 2006, 172). At the same time, the same tactics once used by marginal communities to reclaim their neighborhoods are now being used to rebrand

Figure 7
Graffiti along Federal St.

neighborhoods, attract investment, and provide exposure for young artists.

Tagging—the art of writing the name of an individual or a group on a surface—is a prolific form of graffiti in Baltimore and most belies the cultural regeneration tactics (Figure 7). For many, tagging represents ownership and belonging. “It [graffiti] is an expression of my mind,” says graffiti writer Wel. “It’s my mind coming to reality. It’s a thought coming to reality so people can see it . . . it’s me showing the world, it’s like me yelling, well, you know what I’m saying, it’s me yelling to the whole world: I exist, I’m here” (Wel, quoted in Bryan, 2005). Murals, however, are increasingly implicated in the politics of revitalization, gentrification, and displacement. Murals are produced by a wide variety of actors, many of whom live outside of the neighborhoods in which they are painting. In fact, it is now more common to see commissioned murals in Baltimore’s black neighborhoods than murals by local residents and community groups.

The Baltimore Mural Program and Open Walls Baltimore decorate disadvantaged neighborhoods in the city’s downtown to promote beautification and attract visitors. Local artists and art students produce murals in neighborhoods throughout the city as part of their own projects. Residents, on the other hand, create murals to commemorate important cultural events; celebrate local history; serve as memorials; or mark territory. For example, a locally made mural near the Brentwood Housing Development depicts a number of active figures in the branches of a tree (Figure 8). The mural is both a celebration of the neighborhood and a marker of place and territory. It is quite different from the murals that have been installed by Open Walls since 2012 in its effort to mount “an outdoor exhibition of extraordinary murals” in Station North.

Figure 8
Mural located near Greenmount Avenue and Brentwood.

The rhetoric of Open Walls calls into question who the murals are meant to benefit.

Street art can change the meaning of a space by opposing the meaning assigned to it or by rebranding it as a part of the creative city. When the viewer encounters a space covered in graffiti, the art will provoke a reaction to the space that is alienating, absorbing, inclusive, exclusive, or frightening. By imposing new meanings on public spaces, graffiti and murals compel a reconsideration of what they are, who they belong to and how they fit in with the city. By forcing a visual confrontation, street art makes it almost impossible for the presence of its creators to be ignored.

Ornamentation is another popular practice of informal urban design in Baltimore. Ornament is described by James Trilling as a "visual texture, a constant shift of focus from the building as a whole to features deliberately accentuated, and so on down to the smallest detail" (Trilling 2003, 5). Ornament is separable from the functional shape of the object it adorns. Trilling emphasizes that ornament is not necessarily representative; the visual pleasure can significantly outweigh the communicative value of its content. This is not to say that ornament does not have semiotic value. The adornments added to architectural structures, frames, and landscapes can carry semiotic significance without creating a central image because they add color, feeling, meaning, and texture to a space.

Ornaments are temporal and are more indicative of the desire to individualize property than to assert a claim to territory or a particular identity. These distinct forms of visual expression exist simultaneously in a given urban setting, creating a complex visual culture that not only conveys the ideas, personalities, and politics of residents but also gives the place itself

Figure 9
Decorated home in Hampden.

a character that emerges from the aggregation of these diverse artifacts. Ornamentation is quite common in many white neighborhoods but is less observable in black neighborhoods. Many houses in Hampden are adorned with American flags, figurines, and kitsch items to make them distinctive (Figure 9). Some houses are even painted with decorative details to mimic the "painted ladies," the colorful Victorian row homes in the nearby Charles Village neighborhood.

CONCLUSION: THE POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF VISUAL CULTURE

Baltimore's divided landscape is an example of urban environments that exist throughout the American Northeast. These cities, historically divided along racial lines, remain segregated well into the twenty-first century despite political efforts to promote integration, because the social inequalities and identity conflicts born of structural racism have become embedded in the urban landscape through form, land use, and iconography. Baltimore's urban form is a reflection of historical processes of racism that can be similarly observed in cities such as Philadelphia, Detroit, and New York. Its urban iconography reflects contemporary reactions to persistent divisions, as actors reimagine traditional spatial formations through iconography that both criticizes inequality and marks out new territory. Similar responses can be observed in the graffitied landscapes of the South Bronx and local reclamations of vacant land in Detroit. The use of iconography as an urban regeneration tactic can also be seen in cities that employ creative city policies, such as Chicago, Philadelphia, and Cleveland.

Baltimore's divided form is the result of multiple actors exercising their power to design urban places. The urban form created by grid, topography,

infrastructure, and state planning is modified by non-state actors who draw upon visual practices to change the semantic qualities of space and place. The confluence of actors, institutions, and spatial scales in the city-making arena makes it impossible to approach urban form as the result of a single set of interests. As linear causality gives way to complexity, the urban landscape is best approached as an emergent phenomenon; that is, a complex system that arises out of the interaction of a variety of agents, where the system itself cannot be reduced to the sum of its component parts, making it impossible to reduce space to a social container. The places and territorial boundaries produced by the interaction of historical process and contemporary action will therefore operate according to rules and norms that are to some extent independent from the underlying conditions that played a role in their creation.

A city's visual culture makes political and socioeconomic systems legible to residents and visitors. Racism, inequality, and segregation affect individuals through norms, behavior, and institutions, but also through the spatial experience that they engage with every day. The spatial and physical embodiments of identity conflict and division that comprise Baltimore's divided landscape communicate a set of social rules and norms that embed hierarchies of power. Although images and iconography are not traditionally held as significant elements of urban design or politics, the case of Baltimore suggests that they deserve our attention.

NOTES

1. See the Racial Dot Map produced by the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia (http://www.coopercenter.org/demographics/Racial-Dot-Map).
2. See *The Language of Landscape* by Anne Whiston Spirn for a discussion of landscape literacy.
3. The term 'urban form' is used to refer to urban morphology; that is, the spatial structure of an urban area. Morphology most commonly involves street pattern, lot sizes, building pattern, and the relationship between buildings and open space. The term 'iconography' refers to images and symbolic representations that are associated with a particular person or subject. It is also a field of art history that is concerned with the identification, description, and interpretation of the content of images (Bialostocki 1958). According to art historian Erwin Panofsky, iconography "concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form" (Panofsky 1955, 51). Urban iconography, then, consists of the visual signs, symbols, images, and ornamentation that add meaning to a landscape, neighborhood, or environment, because they are associated with a particular subject, person, or institution.
4. It was beyond the scope of this paper to explore whether racially distinct visual cultures exist at middle and high income levels; however a very cursory examination suggests that in Baltimore, visual distinctions between upper income neighborhoods corresponded more closely to lifestyle choice (i.e. central business district vs. suburbs) than race. This is not to say that racial visual cultures do not exist at upper income levels in other cities, especially those with large affluent black communities.
5. See Apgar and Calder 2005 for discussion of predatory lending practices.
6. Although surveillance cameras were first installed in Baltimore in 2005, data showing the location of each camera in the city was not made publicly available until 2013. Geocoded data can now be accessed at OpenBaltimore (https://data.baltimorecity.gov/).

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS I thank Anne Whiston Spirn and Lawrence Vale for their insights and expertise that greatly improved the manuscript, although any errors are my own. I am also grateful to *Landscape Journal*'s editors and reviewers for useful feedback.

AUTHOR Lilian Knorr (MA, PhD) is a research affiliate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Her work examines the impact of urban policy, governance and place-making strategies on the everyday experience of urban youth.

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