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Bushwicked! Globalization and Local Community in an Emerging Art World

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

Requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

In Sociology

by

Kimberley Anne Robinson

2012

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Bushwicked! Globalization and Local Community in an Emerging Art World

by

Kimberley Anne Robinson

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor David Halle, Chair

Much attention has recently been paid to the shifting meanings and forms of “community” given the increasingly global world. As the geographic basis for community has arguably begun to weaken, while other possibilities for defining community have blossomed, the nature of local communities has shifted. Despite some claims that local communities are no longer especially important in people’s lives, arguably this is not always the case. Local community may be particularly important for art worlds, where rapid exchange of ideas and nuanced styles may be best facilitated through face-to-face interaction. How and to what extent is local community established and made meaningful in an increasingly global world? Drawing on data from an ethnographic study of Bushwick, Brooklyn, an emerging bohemian art world that has built its community around a local, geography-based identity, I examine these issues. Bushwick artists have attempted to create a cohesive local art community; yet in many ways Bushwick is also a global neighborhood, as well as one that shares its location with a much more longstanding community of primarily Latino residents, and serves as a satellite to Chelsea, the center of the world for contemporary art. Drawing on data culled from interviews, participant observation, and

media and art analysis, I examine the nature of Bushwick's local art community, its relation to the pre-existing Latino community, and its relation to and meaning in the context of the broader NYC/Chelsea art world and society at large.

The dissertation of Kimberley Anne Robinson is approved.

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2012

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Bushwick, Brooklyn has received a lot of media attention in recent years. A primarily low-income Latino community during the last five decades, only since roughly 2005 has it become home to an expanding bohemian art world. One recent New York Times article, a feature on an artist-filled Victorian-era house in Bushwick, opened with a bold assessment of the neighborhood's new status:

A century ago, when Bushwick, Brooklyn, reigned as a center of the American brewing industry, a beer baron may have lived in the prim black-and-white mansion topped with a steeple on Bushwick Avenue. But even in his wildest dreams, this Victorian captain of industry would never have envisioned what the old place would be like a hundred years later. Nine artistically inclined 20-somethings — “Renaissance men and women,” as they were once described — use the premises to create hipper-than-thou music and art....Bushwick may not be East Williamsburg. But for those seeking the newest Bohemia, this neighborhood is arguably the coolest place on the planet.¹

Bohemia has been often characterized as a state of mind,² but clearly many believe that it can also be located on a map – that it is a place. As touted by the journalist above, Bushwick is one such bohemian, and an impressive one – it is “arguably the coolest place on the planet.”

Bohemian neighborhoods have long been viewed as intriguing, exciting, and edgy places, where creativity flows and interesting and sometimes shady characters abound.. There have been many neighborhoods across time and space that have been understood as bohemias, from Paris in the late 1800s to modern-day Berlin. Such areas house various kinds of artists and intellectuals – and their sympathizers – as well as providing workspaces, social gathering spaces, venues for work to be shown, and social support, historically with a strong undercurrent of rejection toward the bourgeoisie and/or the mainstream world, solidifying their status as other, outsider worlds. Much

¹ Rosenblum, New York Times, July 16, 2010.

² E.g., Seigel, 1986

writing on local communities, bohemias, and the clustering of institutions, including art galleries,³ suggests that geography matters quite a bit for creative enterprise. It matters for practical reasons, such as drawing crowds and patrons, and providing artists with the resources needed for producing art; and it matters for the cultivation of a subjective sense of community, cohesiveness and identity on the part of those who live or work there. In short, geography has been a key way in which such communities, including bohemias, are defined, understood, and lived.

However, as globalization impacts our world at an ever-deeper level, is geography still so relevant to community? Discussed at length below, globalization may weaken the geographic basis for community – including art communities and bohemias - in several ways. In the case of art worlds, globalization may obviate the need for physical galleries and social gathering spots, may weaken the basis for geography as a foundation of one’s subjective sense of identity and belonging, and, especially in a place as expensive, dirty and plain difficult as New York City, may give artists elsewhere the advantage of space and money, with few drawbacks. Thus in this study I ask, how does globalization impact community, and in particular, the young art world of Bushwick?

³ Discussed in greater detail later, it is important to note that there are different types and ways of carving up art communities, and they don’t necessarily have to overlap. Becker (1982) defines “art worlds” as including all of the people who are involved in making a particular work of art. Most of the studies he examines dealt with art worlds involving participants in reasonably close geographic proximity to each other, although presumably this doesn’t have to be a criterion for an art world. I use the term “art communities” to refer to communities where artists live, work or show art in close proximity to each other, although presumably such communities could be spread over great geographic distances as well. These art communities could, but don’t necessarily, encompass gallery districts. Finally, I draw on Seigel’s (1986) characterization of “bohemia” as a place, often partially imagined, where young artists of all varieties live an impoverished and often transient life, usually actively rejecting mainstream or bourgeois society. All of these terms get at different possible dimensions of how artists congregate and make work, and figuring out how these terms apply to Bushwick is a central goal of this project.

In this introductory chapter, I first cover key theoretical background pertaining to these issues. I then discuss how this material applies to Bushwick and why an investigation of Bushwick matters. I conclude with a discussion my methodology and a brief outline of the chapters to come.

I. Background: Community, globalization and art worlds

a. Definitions

Two central concepts in this study are community and globalization, and both of these are difficult to define. Although there are many possible definitions of “community,” here I will consider community to be a group of people whose lives are interconnected in subjectively important ways, and who regularly participate in formal or informal social interaction. By “local community,” I mean those that involve considerable face-to-face interaction within a specific geographic area. Discussed at length below, understanding what constitutes a community is one of the central goals of this project.

Globalization, very broadly, is “characterized by the rapidly developing and ever densening network of interconnections and interdependences that characterize modern life” (Tomlinson, 1999:1), links which can range from culture to personal travel to markets and corporations. These connections typically produce a “compression” of time and space. Globalization also typically refers to the ways in which production, consumption, communities, politics and identities become detached from local places, as well as the blurring of the entire distinction between center and periphery (Kearney, 1995). Globalization is not a singular process that applies equally to all domains, however: Mann (2007), for example, notes that there are many “globalizations,” meaning that different kinds of expansions are taking place at different rates in different domains. The range of these globalizations also varies: Mann (2007) and others (e.g., Smart & Smart,

2003) argue that much of the movement of ideas and people isn't even fully "global," in the sense of actually expanding throughout the whole world. However, even in cases where much of what is generally considered "globalization" in fact involves much more limited geographical regions, nonetheless the increasing flows of ideas, culture, goods, and people brought by globalization have major implications for a variety of aspects of contemporary life, including community, identity and art, among many others.

b. Globalization and community

The issue of community in light of globalization has received much attention. The rapid expansion of the internet as a social and networking tool, coupled with the increased ease of travel and generally heightened rate of transfer of information, goods and money have thrown traditional understandings of community into question.

Globalization has impacted community in a variety of ways. Some have argued that specific places are losing their distinctiveness because of globalization. Thus not only are places around the world becoming more similar – and this is especially obvious in the case of chain stores and restaurants all over the world, and spaces such as airports, sometimes called "hyperspaces" (Kearney, 1995) – but the increasing rate of information transfer is, in more subtle ways, changing people and places through exposure to so many different cultural ideas through compression of space. Thus Japan is becoming less "Japanese" because of constant exposure to culture and ideas from around the rest of the world. As places grow more similar to each other, and places are more accessible via the internet and travel, many have argued that specific locations lose their distinctiveness, and that place doesn't matter that much anymore.

Globalization has also changed the ways in which communities connect people, especially with

the rise of the internet. More and more communities have developed an online presence – either as the primary form in which it exists, or as a complement to other activities. Some such communities involve no face-to-face interaction at all. Many of these communities provide participants with ongoing and meaningful social interaction, even though most, if not all, of this interaction is not face-to-face (Bennett & Peterson, 2004). Many of these online communities have arguably broadened the field of possibilities for community for many individuals, since many such communities are based on highly specialized interests that wouldn't necessarily be available otherwise to participants who are widely dispersed geographically. These communities also arguably change the nature of communication between members since, of course, so much of this interaction does not occur in a face-to-face manner. Thus the issue of globalization and community essentially gets at the relationship between participants' interactions with each other and their subjective sense of community, in light of shifting patterns of actual geographic clustering.

In many ways, then, thanks to globalization people have many more ways of creating community, and are able to create communities based on highly specialized interests, and connect via mediated, rather than primarily face-to-face interaction. Geography is thus arguably less important as a basis for community than it once was.

c. Local communities in the context of globalization

While globalization has impacted many aspects of community, local community – involving primarily face-to-face interaction with others and a sense of connection to a particular place - is arguably still important.

The idea of local community seems to have broad appeal and value, judging from the widespread

interest in local food organizations, such as farmer's markets and food co-ops, and community gardens. This may connect as well to a more general sort of reactionary interest in a return to less technologically-advanced and less global times, which may be evident in the recent resurgence of interest in folk music, knitting and sewing circles, craft projects, slow food, vinyl records, etc. (e.g., Harris, 2005). Recent advertising campaigns have similarly drawn on interest in face-to-face rather than mediated social interaction (Dentyne gum's "face time" ad campaign,⁴ for example). All of these activities to some degree stand in opposition to technology, technologically -mediated social contact, and, perhaps, the idea of global rather than local community. This suggests that local community, or at least the idea of local community, may be particularly appealing in the context of globalization.

Further, local community – or at least the perception of local community, existing largely untouched by global communication and influence - seems to be valued as a source of "authentic" - or what one hopes to be authentic - culture. Certainly much tourism thrives on such notions (e.g., MacCannell 1976), and authenticity in food (e.g., Baumann & Johnston, 2008) and music hinges on similar constructions. For example, Fine (2004), Peterson (1999) and Grazian (2003), found that the artists who were seen as authentic – a critical status for their acceptance by wider audiences - were not only understood to be poor and lacking in professional artistic training, but also firmly rooted to a particular regional identity. In all these cases, the local, "authentic" identities of the artists, which hinged in part on their perceived ties to a particular geographic region, made the culture they produced more interesting and valuable to widespread audiences. This suggests that the idea of a local community that serves as a home to local individuals who produce authentic goods, untouched by global forces, is still very appealing.

⁴ Commercial is viewable here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMOT1abNipM>

Local community and the face-to-face interaction it facilitates may be especially crucial in the case of artistic communities. Lloyd (2004), for example, suggests that artists of all kinds need to be able to live near each other to exchange ideas and helpful information through casual and face to face everyday interaction. Similarly, Florida (2002) argues that one of the defining features of the “creative class” is its insistence on living in tolerant and diverse urban centers, places where creative people can interact with other creative people. Molotch (2004) and Currid (2007) similarly suggest the often spontaneous and casual socializing involved in face-to-face interaction makes creative community very important for cultural producers.

Thus it seems that in the wake of globalization, there is still ongoing interest in local communities. Face-to-face interaction may still be critically important for the sharing of ideas and innovations, especially in art worlds, and local community – and the “authentic” culture produced by its inhabitants - may be seen as especially valuable in light of widespread globalization. Whether or not such communities really operate as meaningful local communities for their residents, however, is less clear.

d. Globalization and art worlds

Globalization’s impact on community is important for all kinds of communities, but, noted above, may be especially important for understanding current art worlds. Drawing on sociological approaches to understanding art, I now turn to a discussion of the ways in which globalization has particular implications for art communities.

First, it is important to note that art *is* in fact a product of communities, rather than individuals. One of the major contributions of sociology to the understanding of art is its emphasis on the social nature of art. As Becker (1982) has explained at length, art is not made by some sort of

lone genius in a vacuum, as the tortured artist stereotype would have it, but instead is produced collectively through the efforts of entire art worlds. The specifics of these art worlds thus are key to understanding how art is produced, and what kind of work is made.

Production of culture theorists in particular have urged the analysis of art in terms of art worlds, often drawing on insights from organizational theory. In a nice summary of the production of culture approach, Peterson and Anand (2004) identify several objects of analysis in the production of culture model, including culture industry structure, technology, and markets, to name a few. Other sociological approaches to culture focus on cultural consumption – e.g., examination of the relationship between cultural consumption and social class, social boundaries generally, and community building – and similarly stress the importance of art’s connections to social worlds.

Much sociological work on art thus emphasizes the ways in which art is produced and consumed by, and in the context of, communities. Just as communities of all kinds have been affected by globalization, every aspect of these art worlds similarly has been impacted. For example, artists from around the world now learn of artistic innovations via the internet, allowing for a much more rapid spread of ideas (Galenson, 2008). Artists and culture industries increasingly work together at great geographic distances and across national boundaries, and globalization of markets has allowed for expanded audiences for any given cultural object and the creation of larger and much more lucrative markets than would be possible at a local level. Websites such as Saatchi Gallery Online sell a considerable amount of art online, calling into question the future viability of galleries as commercial enterprises. Cultural texts thus are likely to be consumed by many different people, and in many different contexts – an important point in light of the power of context of consumption to shape the meaning of a text (e.g., Cruz, 1999; Griswold 1987;

Levine, 1988). Further, new kinds of media brought by globalization allow for different ways of experiencing culture, which allows for even more possible cultural meanings (Sverdlow, 2008).

Taken together, virtually all of the features of art worlds that are relevant to understanding art have become much more complicated by globalization. Even in the likely event that these aspects of art worlds have not become fully global in Mann's (2007) strict sense, these changes are arguably very important in understanding any art world. Yet for all of these increasingly global aspects of art worlds, local community and face-to-face interaction may still critically shape the production and consumption of art. How do these local and global aspects of community impact art worlds?

e. Local community and the arts

Noted above, globalization has produced many important shifts in art worlds. But if art worlds continue to thrive on face-to-face interaction, then local community arguably continues to be very relevant, perhaps especially to art worlds. Local community is thus important to art worlds, but art is also important in creating local community. How do art communities interface with the broader regional communities in which they are situated? And how do the content and style of art, and the processes of making and consuming it, contribute to the creation of local community?

Recent work suggests that artists contribute substantially to their local communities through improving the local economy (Florida, 2002, Markusen, 2005, Markusen and King, 2003, McCarthy et al. 2004). This can occur through a variety of pathways, but some contributions include supporting local businesses that supply art materials, supporting other local businesses generally, and, perhaps most widely discussed, attracting more creative and well-educated people to the region. Artists also help the local economy by finding creative ways to repurpose spaces

that are no longer being used profitably.

The economic benefits that artists bring to a local area are perhaps most evident in economically depressed neighborhoods. In addition to bringing considerable cultural and economic capital to a blighted region, many artists beautify their homes and communities with artwork, and create a street presence in otherwise desolate areas. When artists move in sufficient numbers to a neighborhood experiencing major disinvestment, their presence often increases the neighborhood's value by making it appear "safe" for those with more money (Cole 1987), "edgy" or "hip" (Bowler & McBurney, 1991), by helping to reframe urban blight as exciting "grit" (Deutsche & Ryan, 1984), and/or by contributing to a market for more upscale consumption (Zukin, 2008). More people, usually those with more money than the artists, then move to the neighborhood, often in a way that almost perfectly mirrors Bourdieu's (1984) fields of capital, moving from those with high cultural/low economic to eventually those with low cultural/high economic capital (Ley, 2003). Ultimately, many initially impoverished neighborhoods can be transformed into very wealthy, exclusive neighborhoods. This pattern of gentrification broadly describes the transformation of many urban neighborhoods, in New York and beyond, since the 1970s, even though it is difficult to generalize from one neighborhood to another (Lees, 2000). Nonetheless, it is understandable that the arrival of artists might be viewed with some fear and animosity by long term, low-income residents.

In addition to the economic benefits that artists bring to a local community (even though arguably the massive gentrification that sometimes occurs is beneficial only to some), artists and art strengthen local community. As McCarthy et al. (2004) note in a review on the literature of the benefits of the arts, local arts involvement – including a variety of ways of participating, including making, appreciating and organizing art - tend to facilitate community by promoting social interaction among members, creating a shared sense of community identity, fostering a

sense of empowerment for community organization and action, and, at an individual level, promoting tolerance for diversity.

Thus a thriving arts community has the potential to improve the local economy and sense of community. But can artists add value to communities, and contribute to a vibrant local community, especially one that both respects and integrates with long term residents, without simultaneously facilitating gentrification that ultimately forces residents, including artists, out? Bushwick serves as an excellent site for addressing these questions.

II. Bushwick: a local arts community in a global world

Bushwick is an interesting case in light of the literature on globalization and community: a neighborhood in the middle of New York City, one of the most cosmopolitan and global cities in the world, Bushwick has developed a thriving art scene in the past few years that is largely built on a geography-based local community. Further, the media stereotype suggests that this community is primarily organized by and composed of young, well-educated, and often well-traveled artists – exactly the sort of person who is likely to be a geographically unfettered cosmopolitan - who have moved to Bushwick from somewhere else. Given this, how, and to what extent, does Bushwick operate as a meaningful local community? What is its relationship to the rest of Bushwick, NYC and society at large?

First I provide an overview of Bushwick. I then discuss some of the goals and efforts of some of the most prominent art community organizers in Bushwick and the ways in which local geography is established as a basis for community in Bushwick. I then review some of the challenges associated with these attempts, and conclude with key questions that I address in my study.

a. Background

Located in the northeastern region of Brooklyn, Bushwick is currently a very poor and densely packed residential and industrial neighborhood. According to 2008-2010 ACS data, the largest racial groups in Bushwick were Latinos (68%), whites (34%), and blacks (22%). 30% of Bushwick residents were below the federal poverty level, and the percent of families with children living in poverty was much higher, with 54% of single parent families with children living in poverty.⁵

Although Bushwick prospered during the late 1800s, with several breweries and farms providing income for resident families, since the 1960's the area has experienced extreme disinvestment. After rioting, arson, and mass abandonment during the 1970's, Bushwick became known for its "open air drug market" during the 1980s and 1990s, a time period during which Bushwick was filled with crime and violence – and drugs (Robbins, 2007). Largely through dedicated efforts of neighborhood residents, the area improved during the late 1990s, making it safer for inhabitants (Curtis, 1998). Artists slowly began moving in during this time, although the pace picked up after 2000, and especially after the rents in Williamsburg, a more established arts community located just to the west of Bushwick, skyrocketed. In search of cheaper rents and convenient access to Manhattan and Williamsburg, Bushwick became a reasonable choice for impoverished artists – though it is a destination for artists from many places, not just Williamsburg refugees.

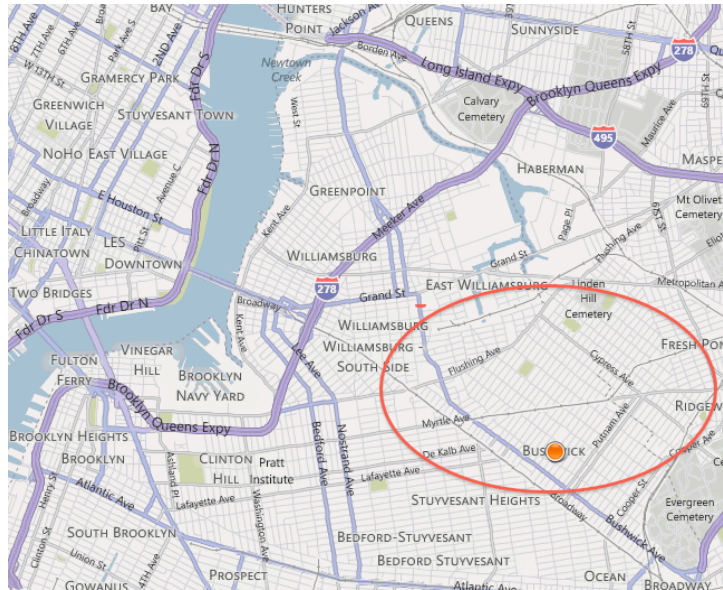
The issue of access to Manhattan is important. Although Bushwick is located at least six stops into Brooklyn, relative to other similarly-priced neighborhoods it offers convenient access to

⁵ Data retrieved from
<http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>

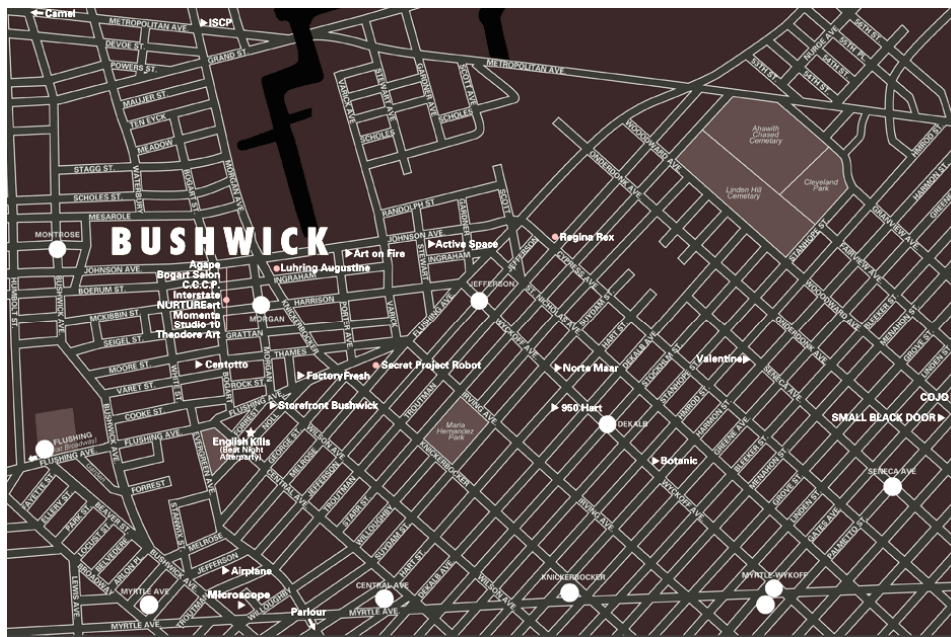
Chelsea, Manhattan and the world's premier gallery district. Chelsea is home to an extremely dense clustering of blue chip galleries, and is widely considered the epicenter of the contemporary art world. Thus, for the money, Bushwick provides very good access to Chelsea – an important consideration for many artists.

Only since roughly 2006 have artist-oriented spaces begun to open. Bushwick – as it is commonly understood (discussed at length below) – encompasses both an industrial zone, which increasingly has been converted into residential and work lofts for artists – and a residentially zoned area that is densely populated, mainly by Latino residents. Artists have most obviously moved into the industrial section of Bushwick, although many have found spaces in the residential section as well. The artist presence is clearest near the Morgan stop on the L train, located in the industrial section of Bushwick. Here, several enormous former factories have been converted into artists' lofts, and hundreds of mainly young artists have moved in. Two of these huge buildings, facing each other on McKibbin street, became infamous for their dorm-like spaces and raucous parties during the early 2000s (Buckley, 5/7/08) During the past few years, establishments other than artists' lofts have opened, including coffee shops, restaurants, two upscale grocery stores, and several galleries.

Map 1, below, shows the location of Bushwick. To the immediate west is Williamsburg, and across the river, Manhattan. Map 2 shows recent Bushwick galleries. Note the location of Flushing Avenue, a large street that runs diagonally through Bushwick, from southwest to northeast, separating the residential area of Bushwick proper the right from the industrial East Williamsburg portion on the left.



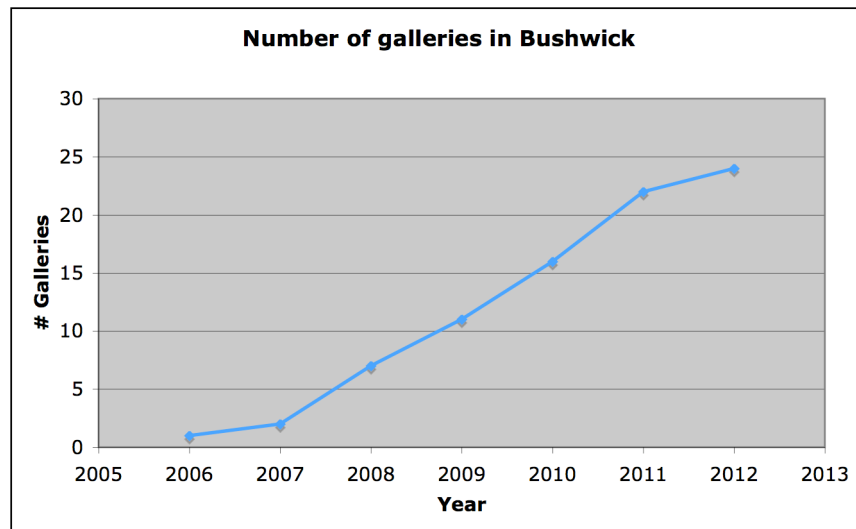
Map 1: Bushwick and surrounding areas



Map 2: A recent map of Bushwick galleries

One of the most distinctive aspects of Bushwick's art scene is the fact that its galleries and spaces are multi-use. Many galleries depart from the typical gallery model, and instead are situated in artists' homes or studios. Art is also displayed throughout the neighborhood, on streets, and in cafes, bars and shops. Despite the challenges presented to the gallery-goer, which range from

having to walk long distances to see work in poorly-designated spaces, to having to carefully coordinate and schedule visits to galleries that are essentially artist’s homes, to having to “trudge,” in the words of one reporter, (Buckley, 2009) through desolate and blighted urban blocks, Bushwick has received a fair number of gallery visitors, increasingly from outside Bushwick, and much attention in local media (field notes, 3/15/09). The pace at which new galleries and other establishments are opening is increasing, and Bushwick may well explode in the next few years. This is clear from Figure 1, below, which shows the number of galleries⁶ over time:



b. Bushwick’s local community

Bushwick’s local community is created in a number of ways. Arts organizations and some galleries explicitly attempt to use art to foster a sense of community through creating a welcoming, participatory and experimental ethos; the content, style and location of the art shown and produced in Bushwick; and even the names given to local establishments.

⁶ This chart shows only galleries with ongoing shows and regular hours – there are many more “galleries” that host events sporadically. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

Bushwick gallerists and arts organizations have explicitly tried to create a geography-based arts community, and some have specifically included the broader Bushwick community in these attempts as well (Linderman, 2009). Arts in Bushwick (AIB), the largest arts and community organization, and the one responsible for putting on virtually all of the arts festivals in the region, states their mission as follows:

Arts in Bushwick is an all-volunteer organization; our mission is to promote and support local artists, serve the community at large through arts education and creative accessibility, and organize all residents and stakeholders in Bushwick to fight development-driven displacement and work toward an integrated, sustainable community.

With these goals in mind, AIB organizes major festivals that typically include dozens of living room gallery events, outdoor art events, and community discussions on gentrification and sustainability. Further, AIB in particular encourages community participation in planning these events. AIB is run entirely by volunteers and holds organizational meetings that are open to all. Described in greater detail in chapter 4, many galleries also attempt to foster a sense of local community, and some feature mission statements on their websites that explicitly indicate these community-building goals.

The first galleries in Bushwick often showed “street art” or “lowbrow” art, and some of this work deals thematically with issues of place, public/private space, and community. Thus crumbling buildings, vermin, and graffiti are often topics of art shown in Bushwick. But street art itself is another popular genre in Bushwick and is featured both in galleries and in the streets of Bushwick. The subject matter and style of much of the work shown in Bushwick galleries thus nicely parallels the physical environment: the work is gritty and “lowbrow,” fundamentally different and far away from the established art world of Chelsea, and claims to ownership of

public space. Thus the style, subject matter, and location of street art in Bushwick seemingly help define the identity of the area, facilitate dialogue with the local space and contribute to the establishment of local art community.⁷

Finally, an interest in place is also evident in the names given to many arts venues, such as English Kills, Chez Bushwick, 3rd Ward, Eastern District, and the Bushwick Starr, which refer to specific Bushwick locations; others refer to environments more generally, whether connoting an isolated, wild land (e.g., “Deep in the Woods,” “Northeast Kingdom”) or an urban wilderness (e.g., “Urban Jungle Vintage”).

Bushwick’s relationship to place thus operates at several levels: as an interest that guides the dedicated efforts to form a new arts community; as one of the main principles of that community – a dedication to local place, and a dedication that helps to create the community itself (as opposed to communities that may be developed around other bases or principles that simply happen to be in a geographic area); as an integral part of art – in terms of art as an activity that facilitates community, as a subject/topic of art, and as a style that references urban life and community (though not necessarily that of Bushwick per se).

Challenges to the local community in Bushwick

Despite these efforts at creating a vibrant local arts community, there are a number of challenges to Bushwick artists’ ability to create a cohesive local community, including defining its boundaries, dealing with the possibility that Bushwick’s art will not be taken seriously by more established art worlds, escaping the shadow of other bohemian neighborhoods, dealing with

⁷ However, during the past two years in particular this has begun to change, with a much broader range of work appearing in Bushwick galleries. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

artists' high turnover and short tenure in the area, and integrating with other neighborhood residents and businesses.

One of the most obvious challenges to the creation of any geographical community is figuring out the boundaries of the area. This has been a rather thorny issue for Bushwick: the area that I refer to here as “Bushwick” encompasses what is technically part of Williamsburg, and specifically, the East Williamsburg Industrial Park – the area of “Bushwick” with the heaviest concentration of artist lofts, loft galleries, and work studios. As recently as 2005, a New York Times reporter called the area around the Morgan L stop a place with “no real name” (Vandam, 2005). There is still some controversy among residents over whether this area should be called East Williamsburg or Bushwick, but “Bushwick” seems to be the general consensus – even though this is not the official designation for the area.

Another challenge to creating a geography-specific identity is that Bushwick seems to be largely understood as the newest location of an ever-present bohemian New York community. Bushwick is constantly discussed in the media with reference to prior heydays of other neighborhoods in New York, mainly Williamsburg and the East Village, but also Soho (e.g., Ferris, 2006; Hastreiter, 2006; Robbins, 2007; Salz, 2008, to name a few). It is as though Bushwick is seen as the newest incarnation of those neighborhoods, rather than a community that is meaningfully and uniquely related to Bushwick as a site.

Related to this, again the arts community in Bushwick is quite new (not that there weren't any artists there before; but the rapid conversion of factories to lofts, influx of resident artists and development of galleries has occurred only since the late 1990s, with the bulk of the development occurring since roughly 2006. This recent development stands in stark contrast to the many poorer, primarily Latino residents, many of whom are born and raised in Bushwick, and still

there. And, again in contrast to long-time resident Latino families, many current artist residents of Bushwick do not intend to stay for even another five years (field notes). How can a geography-based community be built and sustained with such a high rate of turnover among inhabitants?

The integration of the new arts community with the much larger and established Bushwick community, primarily composed of Latino families, is also important, and potentially thorny. Race, class, culture and mobility differences between the two groups are often quite evident, and there is widespread belief that the arrival of artists often leads to gentrification of an area – and subsequently, rising rents and displacement of many low-income tenants. Discussed above, this often does happen, and it is thus understandable that the arrival of artists might be viewed with some fear by long term, low-income residents.

Thus Bushwick's newly formed art community has seemingly attempted to use art and grassroots organization to create a vibrant local community. But there are many challenges that threaten this status. Many fascinating questions remain: Do the artists involved in the Bushwick art world consider it a cohesive local community to the same degree as its organizers and gallerists? How and to what extent is this local community established, and what does it provide its participants? To what extent has the Bushwick art world integrated with the pre-existing Latino community, and on what basis has this unification proceeded? To what extent are artists in Bushwick oriented toward Chelsea, and is Bushwick best understood as its own separate, or possibly even oppositional, community? Or is it instead an extension of or satellite to Chelsea? Is Bushwick understood as a unique and separate art community, or rather part of a network of global bohemias? Does Bushwick similarly oppose mainstream society, as has been the case for many other bohemias?

III. The present study

Why Bushwick?

To address these questions, I conducted an ethnographic study of Bushwick. Bushwick is an ideal site for investigation of these questions, and studying Bushwick is important for at least three reasons.

First, for the reasons illuminated above, Bushwick provides a glimpse of an art world that is coming of age since the internet. This fact differentiates it from many of the other studies of art communities in the sociology literature (e.g., Plattner, 1996, Mele, 2000, Simpson 1981, etc). Discussed at length above, this heavy reliance on the internet in all realms raises many questions about the need for face to face interaction, the possibility of galleries going online, and the need for local community, especially in a city as expensive and difficult as New York.

Related to this, if geography still matters for art communities then Bushwick is important because its close proximity to Chelsea, the center of the contemporary art world. Chelsea is a gallery district, not a place where artists live and work; Bushwick, on the other hand, is in some ways a bedroom community of artists. Discussed at length later on, the relationship between Chelsea and Bushwick is complex. To the extent that Bushwick provides new artistic talent to Chelsea,⁸ this positions Bushwick as a very important source of potential art stars – a worthy topic of investigation, and one that arguably has a narrative warrant (Katz, 1997). Moreover, while it looks unlikely at this point in time, galleries in NYC and beyond have always clustered, and it is possible that Bushwick will one day become one of the leading gallery districts in the NYC – which would position it as a leader also in the world. Thus, Bushwick’s relationship to Chelsea makes it a fascinating and potentially very important place.

⁸ And it may. As Halle & Tiso (forthcoming) found, a large percentage (37.3%) of artists on the rosters of Chelsea’s star galleries reside in New York City. While this obviously doesn’t specify Bushwick, it suggests that living in NYC has some relationship to showing work in Chelsea, and Bushwick is currently one of the most concentrated residential neighborhoods for artists in the NYC region.

Finally, Bushwick is also in a relatively early stage of development as an art neighborhood, and there have been few studies of bohemia in their early days – a phase that critically seems to define the “glory days” of any bohemia. Thus this study illuminates a rarely documented phase of bohemia, as well as the ideology – a narrative of bohemia - that artists (and journalists) draw on to make sense of what is happening. Discussed at length in the next chapters, artists use this mythology of bohemia in complex ways to make sense of where Bushwick is headed, and to differentiate between desirable and undesirable bohemian figures.

In short, Bushwick is a fascinating and rapidly changing community, and provides an excellent site for examination of questions surrounding globalization’s impact on art worlds and local communities in general. It offers opportunities to study a rarely-documented phase (early) and type (internet-fueled) of bohemia, and given its proximity to Chelsea, has the potential to be the source of future art stars and a world art center – perhaps truly the coolest place on the planet.

Method

I formally interviewed fifty participants in the Bushwick art world,⁹ although I also more casually spoke with many more. Of the fifty formal interviews, all of my interviewees were artists, and fifteen of them also ran galleries. I contacted gallerists directly, based on my knowledge of the galleries in the area, asking for an interview.¹⁰ To reach artists, I selected a random sample of artists from the biggest annual art even in Bushwick, Bushwick Open Studios (hereafter referred to as “BOS”), organized by Arts in Bushwick. This event is basically open to any artist, so long

⁹ Bushwick arguably is not just a center for visual art but for all different kinds of creative activity. The music and performance scenes are particularly vibrant. However, I had to limit the scope of my project in some way, so I decided to focus on visual artists only. There are clearly many overlaps between different kinds of artistic activity in Bushwick, and in fact many of my interviewees were also musicians, writers, and many did different kinds of visual art – the projects bleed into each other. Those I interviewed, however, put most of their energy into some form of visual art; this was their primary activity.

¹⁰ Although in one case, an artist I had contacted for an interview in fact ran a small and then-defunct gallery I had not heard of.

as s/he has a space in Bushwick to show his or her art. Would-be participants simply have to register, either pay \$35 or agree to attend Arts in Bushwick volunteer meetings, and then prepare and show their work during the weekend-long festival. I gathered a random selection of names and then looked up the artists online to get contact information. The vast majority of artists had a website with a contact email address, but for the few who didn't, I chose another artist to contact instead, figuring that if contact information was not readily available online it seemed too prying (not to mention time-consuming) to press on.¹¹ I deliberately contacted only artists whose displayed work in BOS was visual – i.e., if a randomly selected artist did performance or audio work, I selected another instead (although it is the case that several of my interviewees do this sort of work in addition to painting, photography, drawing, etc. that was displayed during BOS). I also decided not to interview an artist if s/he didn't live or maintain a studio in Bushwick, in order to make sure I was dealing with people who have fairly regular participation in the area. Although such cases were rare, I did encounter a couple as I sought out interviewees. Of the artists I contacted, my response and interview rate was about 50%. I conducted two rounds of interviews: one in the summer of 2010, and the second in the summer of 2011. I interviewed most of the gallerists in the winter and spring of 2010 – and thus my sample does not reflect the profusion of new galleries, and gallerists, since mid- 2011. Interviews ranged from thirty minutes to four hours, with most lasting between one and two hours. I conducted all but two interviews in person (the others were conducted over the phone) and all were tape recorded and transcribed. Most of the time I met artists at their studio or home, but sometimes we met in public places such as coffee shops, bars, or public parks. Most of the interviews were conducted in Bushwick.

The interviews were loosely structured. Prior to the interview I told my interviewees that I was broadly interested in artists and community, and wanted to talk with them about their experiences

¹¹ However, once again this criterion raises the bar for my artist informants: presumably those who have active websites with contact information are more “together” and perhaps professional than those who lack a website. Again, my method of finding interviewees likely shapes the results I obtained.

in Bushwick. I began interviews with a set of questions about their background and how they arrived in Bushwick, their daily routines (essentially trying to understand how Bushwick figures in their daily lives) and then a broader discussion of their goals, hopes, challenges. I asked them to recount specific instances of events and moments pertaining to art and community that they found especially rewarding, or problematic. I attempted to make my interviews both active and creative, as described by Holstein and Gubrium (1995).

In addition to these interviews, I also casually talked to many other artists, in Bushwick and other NYC arts neighborhoods as opportunities arose. Although these discussions were not taped and by and large I do not rely on them as a source of data, they nonetheless deepen my knowledge of Bushwick and artists in New York. I also attended Bushwick gallery openings and events, artist-run parties, a couple of Bushwick community meetings, took drawing classes at a major Bushwick art institution, 3rd Ward, and hung out at local coffee shops and bars. I lived on the immediate northern border of Bushwick, in Ridgewood, from 2008-2011. For part of that time I inhabited an artist-filled building that housed a practice/exhibition/performance space in the basement, and which had been home to one of my gallerist interviewees two years prior to my arrival.

There are some ways in which my methods undoubtedly shape my findings. Although Bushwick Open Studios imposes very few barriers to participation for artists, there are ways in which it does limit the range of artists in my sample. First, in order to participate in Bushwick Open Studios, artists must have at least some basic access to a space in the Bushwick vicinity that can be shown to the public, whether that's one's own studio, home, or that of a friend or associate. The most transient artists are probably more likely than more established ones to have difficulty

meeting this criterion, and thus my sample may not accurately reflect artists whose living and working situations are highly unstable.¹²

Another requirement for participation in BOS is that an artist have work that s/he has completed and is willing to show. Although this is arguably a low bar, nonetheless it may filter out artists who are insecure about their work or who haven't been productive enough to amass enough work for a show. In this way also, the most insecure, unstable and unproductive artists may be underrepresented in my sample. Some of my interviewees agreed that you have to be at least a bit together in order to be included in BOS. Although it seemingly doesn't take too much to participate in BOS, even this might be out of reach for many artists who are very young and perhaps have not yet had enough time to put together a body of work to show, or struggling with addiction problems,¹³ or whose lives are very unstable. The percentage of Bushwick artists who fall into these categories – and not into my sample – is impossible to know.

On the other side of the spectrum my sample likely omits highly successful artists who may be too busy with more prestigious engagements to bother participating in an open studios event. Although many of the artists I spoke with were well into middle adulthood, and some were represented by galleries and frequently sold work, I did not encounter any “art stars” either among my interviewees or those I selected to contact for an interview. Thus, my sample of artists likely underrepresents the upper and lower strata of Bushwick artists.

¹² Some artists I met in other settings led highly unstable lives, couch surfing or subletting with no permanent residence, or plagued by constant financial and other problems, which made it difficult to produce work, or perhaps for some, difficult to withstand the further stress associated with showing your work publicly. This may be especially true for younger artists who are less accustomed to showing and producing work, who are likely still getting their bearings as artists in basic ways. Clearly there are some very unstable artists in Bushwick, and these did not find their way into my sample.

¹³ Some of my younger interviewees alluded to the fact that there is a massive and at times engulfing party scene in the Bushwick art world, one that is a barrier to productivity.

Another way in which my sample may not reflect artists in Bushwick at large is that those who participate in Bushwick Open Studios clearly have at least some basic desire or willingness to affiliate themselves with the neighborhood. Anyone who truly disliked Bushwick, yet for whatever set of probably practical reasons found him or herself living or working there, would probably not want to put the effort into an activity that would at least to some degree link his or her artwork with the region. This is an important consideration given that one of the main issues that I investigate is community. In short, because of the way I solicited interviewees, my sample is largely composed of people who have already made at least a minimal effort to participate in the Bushwick art community. Those who are truly disinterested would likely be underrepresented in my sample because of my method.

Despite these limitations, nonetheless I think my selection of interviewees provides a reasonable portrait of working artists in Bushwick, as reasonable as any selection process could be. The fact that most (with the exception of the gallerists) of my interviewees were randomly selected from a large pool increases the odds that my small sample accurately reflects participants in Bushwick Open Studios, if not Bushwick artists at large to an ideal degree.

My sample of gallerists is a bit more straightforward. At the time that I started this project, in 2009, there were far fewer galleries in Bushwick. I simply emailed all of the gallerists requesting an interview. Most of them agreed to be interviewed, and in the cases of those that didn't, I informally talked with the gallerist during a gallery visit without disclosing my identity (this covers three interviews – these were not recorded or transcribed, and were much shorter and less focused than the others). In one case, noted above, an artist turned out to be a gallerist of a gallery I hadn't heard of. At any rate, I obtained interviews with all of the gallerists on the Bushwick scene as of early 2010. In early 2011 I contacted gallerists at several more galleries that had opened, but most of these gallerists did not respond to me – which I suppose is just as well given

that most of these galleries were quite new. My sense is that the area was getting more press at this point and people were less willing to talk, or perhaps I was emailing more high profile galleries who had many other obligations.

Relation to the field

I attempted to serve as a participant-observer in Bushwick as fully as possible. Although I am not an artist, I was viewed, I think, broadly as an insider by many of my interviewees, who sometimes made comments such as “people like us,” referring to me, and otherwise indicated that I was viewed as something of an insider, despite the fact that I made it clear that I am not a practicing artist. However, I am not completely out of that world. In my teens and early twenties I took studio art classes, started college as an art history major (a short-lived enterprise), and three of my longtime closest friends could be described as “Bushwick artists.” Immediately after I finished college, from 2000-2004, I lived in Williamsburg and spent most of my time glomming onto the cool kids in the local music and (to a lesser degree) art scene, which had just begun to put legs into Bushwick by about 2002. Thus I can recall going to some of the earliest McKibbin loft parties and other events, the general scariness of the area, and the wild dogs that roamed Bogart at the time. Although I have well aged out of the Bushwick party scene at this point, my “credentials,” such as they are, I think gave me some degree of insider status among my interviewees. It was never entirely clear to me exactly what this shared status was based upon – whether history in Brooklyn, ability to identify current and past hotspots, age, dress, race, poverty relative to educational attainment, status as a teacher or an interviewer,¹⁴ or something else. Nonetheless, several interviewees made it clear that they felt we were broadly of the same ilk. Fortunately I never felt like I was playing a character during my fieldwork (other than interviews,

¹⁴ Several of my interviewees taught art classes, and some also conducted interviews as part of their work. Although the specifics varied widely, I found something in common with virtually all of my interviewees.

at least, when I often felt uncomfortable with the idea that I was “studying” someone who was in many ways a peer).¹⁵ I had the great opportunity to do things I would have been doing anyway, and didn’t feel that I was having to feign interest. The suspicion and hope that I would be able to relate to Bushwick artists as a semi-insider was one of the reasons I chose this project in the first place.

This semi-insider status seemed to be useful. I feel that I was not too close to my informants to be critical and observant, yet I was close enough to (seemingly, hopefully) allow them to speak candidly with me. In general I was impressed by how much they were willing to divulge, and how much time they were willing to spend with me. I was unable to offer them any compensation other than buying a drink or cup of coffee – which even for starving artists is not that much of a perk for up to four hours of time. Many invited me to their homes or studios and offered me coffee and a tour of their space. They were trusting in the face of my total lack of identification that could prove that I was who I claimed to be and for the most part allowed the conversations to be taped. In short, overall my interviewees appeared to trust me, and were very generous with their time and the detailed information that they gave me.¹⁶

Insider status, even unclear insider status, has its drawbacks as well (e.g., Thorne, 1993, and Warren, 2001). One downside to this status is that I found myself sometimes taking for granted things that my interviewees said. I realized at various points that I was making a lot of assumptions, filling in a lot of gaps, during conversation, much as I would with a friend who

¹⁵ Because of the fact that I was studying artists and Bushwick, rather than participating as another gallery-goer, etc., I did feel separated from my interviewees, much in the same way described by Cavicchi (1998) relative to his interviewees. Whatever insider status I had clearly was not complete. Many others, e.g., Baca Zinn (1979), note the complexity of insider/outsider status.

¹⁶ Although this willingness to talk to me may have little to do with insider status, and may instead reflect my interviewees’ more general tendency to help each other out with projects. Fortunately dissertations seem to count as worthwhile projects, at least this one did. In any case, I was impressed by the number of artists who willingly spoke to me for a long time – not that it isn’t fun to talk about yourself for long stretches of time.

shared my background. In writing this dissertation I have tried to catch myself in this and not rely on those assumptions, but there are some holes in the data where I didn't look closely enough.

Another downside is simply that I did and do feel a connection to and empathy for my interviewees. Since I genuinely liked many of my interviewees, I find myself not wanting to say anything harsh about them, and have struggled to present some of their stories in a critical light, even when I have felt it appropriate to do so. I'm not sure that I have fully succeeded in overcoming this.

On the other hand, I am clearly an outsider, or at best a novice, relative to my informants in the sense that I am not a visual artist and do not have extensive knowledge of visual art, particularly contemporary art, despite several years of studio art classes and regular gallery-going in my youth. I do not have the ability to "talk art" with my artist friends or interviewees. This outsider status in some ways was an advantage because I felt less opinionated and more open-minded about work. I am far more knowledgeable and opinionated about music than art, and it would have been extremely difficult for me to write my dissertation on the Bushwick music scene because I find myself irrationally opinionated about music. Although I certainly have some preferences, visual art did not pose this problem for me in the same way. Yet at the same time, because of this tendency I can understand my interviewees' feelings when they talk about how angry they feel when work they consider bad is applauded and rewarded by galleries and others.

Analysis of interview data

Again, I tried to keep my interviews open ended and responsive to issues that my interviewees felt were important, rather than imposing my categories on them. In that spirit, I by and large

relied on the grounded theory approach to analyze my data (Charmaz, 1995), allowing themes to emerge from the interviews.

Media and art analysis

In addition to these participatory activities and interviews, I also systematically analyzed New York Times coverage of Bushwick from 2004-2011. Although there are many more other sources of media coverage, the NYT likely is the most widely-read news source, particularly relative to local blogs. In some cases I also included articles written about Bushwick in. Although I did not subject them to the same systematic analysis as the NYT coverage, I also tried to stay on top of Bushwick-related articles in other news sources, such as various blogs, New York Magazine and the New York Daily News, as well as the few articles about Bushwick in major arts magazines, such as ArtForum and Art News. I also gathered supplemental information from artist and gallery websites, including biographical sketches, gallery mission statements, and information about previous shows or work.

Finally, I also coded a sample of work shown in Bushwick galleries, during March/April of 2012. A full discussion of my methodology for this is described in Chapter 5.

Outline of the dissertation

First I start by outlining some of the unique features of the unique features and challenges associated with the artistic career path. I cover some of these difficulties as well as some common strategies that artists employ in attempting to deal with these challenges, as well as some of the more common goals that were articulated by many of my interviewees.

In chapter three I consider the issue of artistic community more specifically, and attempt to describe some of its bases and functions in light of the challenges and goals described in the previous chapter. I discuss some of the reasons why artists are drawn toward and away from the Bushwick artist community, and argue that local community serves a variety of important purposes for artists, but there are also clear limits to this.

In chapter four I discuss gallerists, a subset of the artists who are most invested in Bushwick as a neighborhood. I describe some of the main goals of gallerists, their reasons for showing art, and their role in anchoring the identity of Bushwick as an art world.

In chapter five I provide a brief analysis of some of the actual work shown in Bushwick galleries, considering primarily whether or not it lives up to its reputation as “edgy.” In addition to coding the work displayed in recent gallery shows, I also consider artists’ and gallerists’ ideas about the work shown in Bushwick, as well as the depiction of Bushwick art in the media.

In chapter six I discuss artists’ relations with the long term residents of Bushwick, who constitute the vast majority of residents. I discuss artists’ and gallerists’ attempts to forge a shared community, challenges associated with this goal, and the ability of art to serve a ‘bridging’ function.

Finally, in chapter seven I discuss the weighty issue of gentrification and consider the future of Bushwick’s art community, before offering some conclusions in the final chapter about Bushwick’s cohesiveness and status as a local community, and the nature of Bushwick’s relationship to Chelsea and American society at large.

Chapter 2: Artists

Clearly some of the most important figures in the Bushwick art world are, of course, the artists themselves. In comparison to gallerists, artists were the first to move to the neighborhood, with some arriving in the 90s, a solid decade before the region was widely recognized as an arts community. Artists clearly constitute the largest and most important group of participants in the Bushwick art world, and understanding their challenges, interests, and goals is critical to understanding the community in which they participate.

In this chapter I will discuss a number of key features of the artists I interviewed in Bushwick. I first cover some basic background information on these artists, then discuss some of the specific features and challenges associated with the visual artist career path. Finally, I discuss some of the ways in which artists deal with these career challenges, and some of the rewards of making work in the first place. All of this information helps to illuminate the importance and functions of artistic community, discussed at length in the following chapter.

Bushwick artists: an overview

Who are the artists who live, work and exhibit in Bushwick? Glossy photo spreads of Bushwick appear in the media coverage of the region, featuring attractive and trendily-dressed twenty-somethings as Bushwick residents. Media coverage of the area, showcasing communal living in loft buildings and aging houses, suggests that Bushwick's artistic inhabitants are young, bohemian, and fresh out of college (the opening story for this paper is a good example). According to these images, artists are blazing new territory in derelict Bushwick, in the spirit of

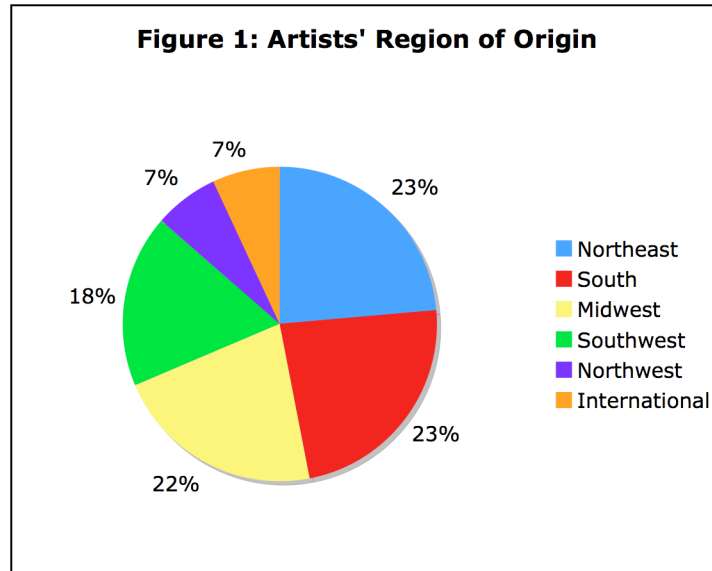
their pioneer counterparts in 1960s Soho or 1980s East Village. Free spirited and creative, they lead true bohemian lives in an industrial wasteland.¹⁷

While some inhabitants undoubtedly fit this stereotype, it did not apply well to most of my interviewees. Discussed in detail below, artists in Bushwick are a very diverse group in many ways. Although Bushwick is certainly a marginal area relative to Chelsea, the artists with whom I spoke were very productive and well-educated. Nearly all (92%) hold a B.A. degree, mostly in art, and of these a majority also have a MFA, some from very prestigious schools. Several had shown their work in galleries in various locations throughout the US and NY. Some had shown in Chelsea – in fact, more artists had shown their work in Chelsea than in Bushwick galleries.

Most of the artists I spoke with arrived in NY from elsewhere in the country or world, and for most of them Bushwick was not their first place of residence in the NYC area. While 23% of my respondents hailed from the Northeast, only one was actually born and raised in the NYC area. The majority of those from the Southwest arrived from California. International artists hailed from Sweden, the UK, and Uruguay.

Figure 1 shows the US quadrant of origin of the artists I interviewed:

¹⁷ Media coverage of Bushwick is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.



The majority of them are white (90%),¹⁸ heterosexual and unmarried. I didn't consciously try to even out the gender ratio, but I ended up with an almost perfect split of men and women. Their ages ranged from late 20s to 50s, with the average age roughly 35. Most (72%) live and produce art in Bushwick, but some live outside of Bushwick (Manhattan 10%, elsewhere in Brooklyn, 18%) and keep a studio in Bushwick. Most rent their spaces rather than owning them (84% rent vs. 16% own) and very few (8%) children – and no one had more than one child. Virtually all have paying jobs outside of making art, although two of my interviewees were able to sell enough work to live, though they did depend on financial help from a significant other. Several of my interviewees hold paying jobs that are related to the arts, include working as a gallerist (in Chelsea or the Lower East Side), art handler, art teacher, medical illustrator. Others worked in carpentry, the advertising industry, restaurants, daycare, a frame shop, among others. Virtually all of these jobs are located outside of Bushwick, with most in Manhattan. They have been in

¹⁸ A few were Asian, two identified as white and Latina, and another was American Indian. It is interesting to note that relative to all artists in the U.S., roughly 80% of whom are white, my sample was slightly more white (Data from the American Community Survey, 2003-2005). It is also interesting to note that, according to the same data source, artists in my sample were also better educated: 92% of my sample held a B.A., in comparison to “over 54%” of artists nationwide in 2003-2005 (Source: Artists in the Workforce, 1990-2005).

Bushwick anywhere from one to ten years, with an average tenure of roughly 3 years, and most hope to stay, for a while at least. Although most do not own their space in Bushwick, several indicated that they would consider buying if they had the means, and otherwise hope to stay in Bushwick at least for a few years.

Although there are many similarities in the backgrounds of the artists I interviewed, I also found wide variation. Artists also differed markedly in terms of the type of work they produced, which ranged from large abstract sculptures to small and delicate watercolor portraits, and everything in between. Despite the stereotype that Bushwick is a place for very young artists who have yet to achieve any kind of career success, I found a broad spectrum, ranging from these stereotypically young artists to those in their 50s with a long record of sales and gallery shows.

Age was one of the most consistently mentioned sources of difference between artists in my interviews, with older artists typically feeling great distance from younger artists. Young artists generally felt more optimistic about their career possibilities, and didn't feel it necessary to judge their progress to date. Older artists, on the other hand, either had more success to look back on, or seemed to be more pessimistic and jaded about prospects of succeeding as an artist. Despite this wide variation, however, I found a few similarities that seemed to characterize virtually everyone: all interviewees acknowledged the extreme difficulty of "making it" as an artist in NYC; most expressed a desire to make work that serves as an authentic extension of the self, and the motivation to make work simply because they love making it; and most embraced a living-in-the-moment, faith in the universe and themselves approach to their career, and perhaps their lives more broadly. Discussed at length below and in the following chapter, these tendencies have important implications for artistic community.

1. Challenges of the artistic career

Every one of my interviewees noted the intense challenges associated with pursuing a career (or life, for those who seemed to have limited artistic career aspirations) as a visual artist. Making a living as a visual artist anywhere is notoriously difficult; even gaining any significant recognition without making any money is difficult. NYC may be a particularly challenging location for artists, given its very high cost of living and the fact that the area is completely saturated with artists and it is thus all the more difficult to distinguish yourself in such an environment. Artists in Bushwick (and elsewhere, no doubt) are keenly aware of these challenges. The difficulties in being an artist in NYC include eking out an existence on a usually very limited income, while still having time and energy left over to do your own work; figuring out a strategy for career “success” in what seems an enormous, convoluted and sometimes nonsensical art world; and managing identity issues given the high probability that you will not be able to live off of your work, and will have to also devote substantial time to a separate paid job.

Limited time and money

The most oft-cited challenge of living in NYC and pursuing a career in the visual arts is the difficulty involved in juggling paid work and making your own artwork. Artists are well aware that very few artists are actually able to make a living from selling their work. This was true for my sample of interviewees as well. Even those who are able to pay their bills from sales of their work live in a constant state of stress, wondering if they’ll be able to sell enough work to pay next month’s rent. The majority of artists, however, work paid jobs and make only a small amount of money, if any, from sales of their work. Many artists juggle multiple paid jobs in order to make ends meet, and find that their schedules are hectic and draining. Even while hustling for work, money is usually a problem for artists – not a surprise given the very high cost of living in NYC, even Bushwick. Depending on a number of factors, some artists require a separate studio space,

which of course only amplifies their financial burden. Many whose work doesn't absolutely require a studio keep one anyway, for the community, discipline, and sense of professionalism it brings. Others struggle to make payments on school loans that further stretch their already limited finances. Several artists I spoke with relayed a lifestyle fraught with economic hardship that those in other professions – especially those with similar cultural and educational backgrounds - might consider unacceptable. Obviously, in general, the more time one makes for art, the less time is devoted to making money, and for those who pursue limited paid work, living standards are very low. One interviewee, for example, lives in the middle of a railroad apartment in a windowless “room” made of three walls, and through which the other residents of the apartment must routinely pass. He essentially lives in a hallway, and on top of that, the ceilings are too low to allow him to stand up. Others had resigned themselves to sitting constantly on the brink of having their electricity shut off¹⁹, or being evicted; others subsist primarily on a diet of oatmeal. Artist-filled buildings such as the notorious McKibbin lofts have been widely publicized for the extremely low standard of housing that they provide (“it’s like living in a public bathroom”²⁰). Other artists live in studios not zoned for residential use, some of which impose other hardships on residents. In short, many artists, including several of my interviewees, experience substantial financial difficulty, largely due to their career choice.

This financial hardship is often a fact of life regardless of the quality of one’s work. Even artists whose work has received attention and praise are not necessarily able to live on sales. Critical acclaim doesn’t always lead to sales or other funding, and selling work often isn’t lucrative or stable – assuming you can sell much work in the first place. The burden of poverty is difficult for artists to take, especially as they age, and often forces artists out of the art world. Several older artists I interviewed, for example, observed the very high attrition rate amongst artists, and

¹⁹ One interviewee mused about his situation, “What’s the worst that could happen? I guess they might shut off my electricity. But you know, I could live without electricity. It’s not like I’m going to die.”

²⁰ Buckley, NYT, May 7, 2008.

attributed that largely to lack of funds. One interviewee in his forties, who supported himself as an illustrator, work that he loved, for many years before turning to a much better paid job in advertising, noted:

Illustration is a pretty specialized field, it's its own weird subculture. I have a really dear friend that [is also an illustrator] and her work is so mind-blowingly awesome that it just makes you weep when you look at it, and she's my age and she's getting her phone shut off. Like wow you're a rock star, and it's like yeah but I don't want my phone shut off actually. I've already been through that. I just don't want to go there anymore.

Not surprisingly, younger artists are in general more willing to tolerate poverty, in part because they hope that it will not be an ongoing feature of their lives. One artist in his late twenties, the one mentioned above with the tri-walled space, notes:

I've made certain decisions in my life, like I'll live in a place where I have to duck my head and not have a window to be able to [devote most of his time to making work]. And people have different priorities. In the bigger picture, sure I want a house one day, or I want a dog or a car or wife or a husband or whatever, but right now I've made certain very conscious decisions. You can either call them sacrifices or you can say decisions about what I need to do to do this the way I want to do it.

Clearly, he feels fine about his present financial and living situation, but views it as a conscious choice – he has decided not to take on much paid work in order to devote as much time as possible to his art - and a conscious set of sacrifices that he is currently making in order to pursue his artwork. He does not, however, view this as a permanent state – clearly, changes will be necessary if he ever manages to have the future house he hopes for. The extent to which other artists view their poverty as a temporary state in their lives is not entirely clear. A majority seem to come from middle class origins, and thus perhaps perceive their poverty differently than those who are born into it; specifically, they may view it more as a lifestyle choice than an inescapable reality. However, my older respondents often still lived very meager existences, with little clear

hope of making considerably more money, and seemed resigned to the lifestyle. Most artists, while recognizing the slim odds, nonetheless remained hopefully that their hard work would eventually pay off, either via significant recognition, money, or, better still, both. Thus they soldier on, hoping for future reward.²¹

Convoluting path to success in the art world

Most artists hope to show their work in galleries, and ideally, to sell enough work to be able to quit their day job. The primary payoff in this is not huge financial success, but rather having enough money to get by and more time to devote to art. Thus, most artists to some degree hope to gain recognition for their work and sell it. Doing this, however, is difficult. Most artists I spoke with had already done everything they could at an institutional level – earning degrees, often from top schools, completing artist residency programs and internships, working at galleries, etc. – to become qualified and competent in the art world. These steps, however, in no way guarantee any kind of success as an artist, and there is no clear path to becoming a successful artist at all.

Many younger artists I spoke with felt confused about the workings of the art world, or figuring out how they were “supposed” to act in various art world settings. Several commented that they didn’t understand the art world, didn’t understand how it worked. This is not surprising, given that these young artists are still getting their bearings, and many are relatively new to NYC. The lack of a clear and reliable path to success is more obvious in the case of older artists who have had decades to become familiar with the art world, yet still see no clear avenues to success. One artist in his early forties, for example, describes his frustration with trying to move up in the art world:

²¹ A few interviewees noted a handful of now-legendary artists, such as Van Gogh, who were not recognized at all in their lifetimes and died destitute, as if this would be a desirable outcome and something that they could hope for, even if they never lived to see their own success.

Well the program I applied to, that's a great opportunity and a great experience overall, and it was a great thing and a valuable experience, and not that I expected that I deserved this to happen, but ideally those experiences would slingshot to the next experience, whereas I feel like each show [I participate in] is its own little hill that gets climbed, and then instead of like it being a view to the next hill, you just go down the other side and look for the next hill. So yeah it was great but it didn't directly lead....I didn't get a show out of that show. The next show was arrived at some other way...Part of it is that you jealously examine the resumes of more successful artists and you see what happened, see like the big break show, then the next year there's six shows around the country all at the same level, and you can read it, you see oh they all saw the review of that one show and were psyched about that artist's work, and then once it kind of expands like that. They still may not be making any money but their work is being seen more broadly and in better reputed places, getting reviewed in better places to be reviewed, it's a rung up the ladder instead of like taking the first step up the ladder repeatedly.

Here, my interviewee clearly feels frustrated that showing his work doesn't seem to clearly lead to more or better shows or recognition. His experiences don't seem to build on themselves, an experienced echoed by other interviewees. He "jealously examine[s] the resumes of more successful artists" as if looking for the clues to how to "make it," trying to find the path that led them to success. The implication of this, of course, is that he has not found a path that works for him, and even with decades of experience behind him is still trying to find a route to success, in what appears to be a very complicated and haphazard career minefield. Another artist (and musician) in his fifties, who has largely decided only to make work for himself at this point, rather than devoting energy to showing it, similarly notes that there is simply no way to know if your efforts will eventually pay off:

So many people say, oh you gotta pay dues you gotta keep going out and playing shows, every night, every night that you can play that gig. And it's like, why? Or like, keep showing your artwork in any little gallery that will show your work...I don't know, there's something to that, somebody might stumble in and see your work, that's the prevailing wisdom, eventually somebody's going to see you and that's going to be your big break and you know you go through 30 years of your life and you're miserable because that hasn't happened yet. Some people are happy being martyrs that way and others aren't.
[Sounds like you're more interested in just enjoying your work.]

Yeah, so some people might say that I'm not serious. I haven't figured it out. If it was as easy as that, where you could be miserable and totally overwork yourself and kiss every ass available for 10 years and then you were guaranteed some success then maybe I would have done that. But there is no guarantee.

Thus, despite intense efforts to get recognition, artists are largely aware of the fact that there is no guaranteed route to any kind of success in the art world. Younger artists similarly felt confused by the path forward in the art world, but it was older artists with many years of experience behind them who seemed most convinced of this.

Subjective and often unfair standards for art

Another source of frustration and difficulty for artists is feeling that good art is not reliably rewarded, while bad art may be shown in galleries and otherwise celebrated. The vast majority of my interviewees were highly educated in art, very knowledgeable about art history and contemporary art, and quite opinionated about what does and does not constitute "good" art. Unlike some other realms outside of art, however, standards for what constitutes "good" art work are often highly subjective and hotly contested. This disparity in opinion over what constitutes good work, and which work is rewarded with attention, is a source of frustration for struggling artists. For example:

If I go and see a horrible show, I get pissed! Like what the fuck's wrong with you people? This person obviously put no thought, no time, no consideration into this work and why showcase this, why say this is important? And a lot of it has to do with the economics and finances, who knows who and this networking thing, all of that, and I think...I don't know...like science is right or it's not, it's very concrete. Fine art is the exact opposite. It's so interpretive, it's so open to whatever, and taste is, there's no explaining taste, I like what I like and you like what you like and you can't really...I mean it's just different schools of thought. So yes. And there's always that, well perhaps it's rescued because it's a different school of thought, but it still pisses you off, because deep down you know, you know when you see something that's just slopped together and you're like, fuck you man. And it's not a jealousy thing either. It's disrespectful to the field I've

dedicated my life to. So it's not like I want to be you, and I'm pissed that I'm not, it's how dare you treat this thing this way.

Here my interviewee expresses considerable frustration at the extent to which mediocre work receives attention in galleries and media sources. She notes that the quality and worthiness of art are highly subjective determinations, but also suspects that social connections lead to unfair rewards for mediocre work. Another artist echoes these sentiments; of gallery shows, she notes:

It feels like it's a lot of really mediocre work, which again makes me think that it might be people they know as opposed to [curators] going out and really trying to find work that's really exciting. And I guess a way I've come to feel in New York is that there's no excuse to show mediocre work because there's so many artists doing really innovative exciting and beautiful work in all mediums.

Thus, artists seem to feel that galleries often showcase work that is not high quality, and this is a source of great frustration as they struggle to get any kind of recognition for their own work. The path to a successful art career is not at all clear, and the ways in which the art world chooses to reward artists are similarly hard to understand. The only conclusion that many interviewees reach is that social connections are critical in gaining attention for your work – hardly a guarantee of attention, but necessary if you are ever going to get a show. Many interviewees lament this fact; they would prefer that their work “speak for itself,” to use the commonly cited phrase, but recognize that in fact social relations are key. Discussed at length in the next chapter, this need for connections in order to get shows and other opportunities is a major issue in the formation of artistic community. The point for now is simply that standards for quality art are highly subjective, and this further complicates an already foggy career path.

Dubious rewards of selling your work

Given the substantial financial hardships and time demands discussed above, it is not surprising that artists are usually eager to sell their work. Despite the negative connotations associated with the commercialization of art, the artists I spoke with are generally thrilled to be able to sell their work and recognize that this is necessary if they are ever to quit day jobs – a hope for many.

However, although many artists hope to sell some work, others – primarily those who have experienced greater success in selling their work, or are close to others who have – expressed disappointment and concern for the sort of artistic “success” many artists may dream of. Many artists hope to show their work at galleries and eventually be represented by one. Few of the artists I spoke with had current gallery representation (roughly 10% did); however, many, even most of the artists I spoke with who are represented by a gallery feel very dissatisfied with their galleries. Artists typically feel frustrated with the very high commission rate charged by the gallery and the general sense that the galleries are not doing as much as they could to sell the work. Artists thus try to sell as much work as they can on their own, but the more seriously they take sales, the more their limited time goes to being a salesperson. One artist describes intense frustration with the galleries he’s dealt with:

There’s no reason I can think of ...why the gallery is taking 50% of every artist’s productivity. To me that’s completely unjustifiable. Shame on them. I mean is it because they can’t move anybody else’s work so they penalize you?...and it made me think, this ADA, the American Art Dealers Association, is it a conspiracy of art dealers agreeing that we’re all going to be charging and negotiating the same sort of thing but if that’s the case, fuck them.

The interviewee above is clearly very frustrated with the gallery representation he’s encountered so far, and is currently trying to find other, more lucrative ways to sell his work. Artists such as these thus hope to find representation at a better gallery, or perhaps better still, look for ways to circumvent the entire gallery system. Artists who have dealt extensively with galleries believe that it is not the gallery but the dealer that really matters in terms of selling work. For example:

One of the best shows I had was in Geneva, on the 5th floor, a little suite, no street presence or anything, and [the owner] invited really important people and I sold a couple pieces and then got write ups and stuff and so I learned early on in the fine art thing that it wasn't the space it was the person representing your work. I like to think that, and I'd like to have a gallery but I know it's not all that, it's just not, I know so many artists that have that fantasy gallery and they're still disgruntled. I think they have this fantasy that it will all be ok if I have this gallery. I don't think I'm jaded or unrealistic, but I've learned that you just can't have your energy on that, you have to have your energy on your work, and that's where you'll get the real reward...so I'd love to have an art dealer, but it's got to be the right one and I'm really not trying to hustle that anymore, because it seems that's not the end all anyway and so...it's tough.

Here my interviewee notes that many artists feel that everything will be better if they could just get gallery representation, and he clearly disagrees with this. He feels that his energy should go mainly into his work, perhaps implying that this is its own reward, and that sales should be a secondary concern (“you have to have your energy on your work, and that's where you'll get the real reward”). Another artist notes the strain that selling work can place on artists, and echoes the idea that doing, rather than selling, work is the best approach:

I guess my biggest fear is that this whole pursuit of money is going to suck all the life out of my artwork. Part of this whole thing...my girlfriend is a lot more successful than me, she's had a couple of shows at a Chelsea gallery, but you know she's got a whole different list of problems. And it's harder for her because she actually has been selling some work, but you get to the next plateau and you find it a lot harder to get to the next plateau after that. And that's the thing that I try to avoid the most, when it comes down to it, you're miserable because you don't think that...you sort of lose sight of why you, or why I, got into it in the first place, which is because I really enjoy doing it. That's my biggest fear.

Successful sales of your work, thus, can ratchet up your expectations and take the focus off of doing your work for the simple reason that you love to make it, which is why you started to make work in the first place. Another artist in his mid 40s, similarly describes the mixed rewards of becoming a “successful,” selling artist:

My friend Jules de Balincourt, he'll sell out a show and gets half a million dollars and is like, dude it's not all that. That's so easy to say when you're making your bills and tons of money that it's not about the money. You know and he just got another great write up in Flash and he's still struggling with trying to break out of his own shell that he's created, his own kind of thing. If you don't have a lot of people looking at you it's easy to go on your merry way, follow your inefficient experimentation and no one's going to ruin your career. But when your art is traded like Jules' it's a whole different set of parameters and it seems like it's really hard to maintain that whole kind of art aspect of what you're making.... This one collector in Geneva, he's into buying artists that aren't renowned or recognized yet, just emerging. Like he bought all these great artists in the 50s and 60s. Anyway he's had a lot of experience watching these artists when they were nobody and then when they became somebody and he believes 100% of the time the work gets worse...that's what he believes, that once you start having money thrown at you to do these things, like Picasso signing a napkin to pay for dinner, the art goes down the tubes. Doesn't have to, there's always exceptions, I think, but you're going to have to be super deliberate to not let that go to your head, the money or recognition. But sounds like it's probably impossible. But I don't want to be a struggling artist either.

He outlines a clear dilemma: on the one hand it is very difficult to be struggling to pay your bills; on the other, when you do start to experience real financial success as an artist, the quality of your work is likely to suffer, and you are likely to feel disillusioned. Other interviewees similarly worry that commerce could affect the quality and sincerity of their work, although no one I spoke to claimed that this has actually happened to their work just yet.²² The main point here is that many artists may be ambivalent about the goal of attaining success in the first place. Alternately, this could be read as a sort of schadenfreude toward more successful artists – perhaps not such an irrational response, given the difficulty of achieving this level of success.

All of this suggests that artists typically work very hard, and live very financially stressful lives, in pursuit of goals that are not necessarily very concrete, attainable, or even rewarding. This is nothing new – artists in NYC confronted a similar situation in the 1960s (Rosenberg & Fliegel, 1965). Although gallery representation is a goal for some of my interviewees, it is clearly not seen as a career endpoint, and in some cases it isn't desirable at all. When asked about their goals

²² But again, most in my sample did not sell a lot of work.

with respect to showing their work, many indicated that they were mostly concerned with *how* the work would be shown – whether it would be curated and hung in a way that showed it to best advantage, lit well, etc. In this case, the criterion for a successful show becomes the overall aesthetic experience of the work – not the sales.²³ But again, the important point here is that the career goals of artists are often complex and unclear. Many opt to not make these goals primary, and instead focus on making art as its own goal and its own reward, rather than seeking shows, recognition, and sales as an endpoint.

Identity problems

One potential problem with such a convoluted and unclear career path is that it can be difficult to establish an identity as an artist, or at least a “good” or “successful” artist in the same way that those in other careers do. Identity in American culture is tightly linked to one’s career and for artists, given the low odds of substantial sales or even recognition, the link between identity and career is more complicated. Moreover, there is a huge number of artists (or aspiring artists!) in the US, particularly NYC,²⁴ and thus pressure to distinguish oneself as a good and productive artist rather than a hack. This trouble has been noted in the art world before: discussed by Simpson (1981) and others, the majority of artists are not able to earn much money from their work. Especially without financial success, institutional ties or considerable peer recognition, it can be difficult to convince yourself and others that you are, in fact, an artist. Simpson (1981) suggests that artists, especially young artists who have yet to establish themselves in the art world, are likely to embrace a bohemian, “artist” lifestyle, presumably in order to bolster their identity as

²³ This is a good example of the “art for art’s sake” principle described by Caves (2000). Caves observed that artists of all kinds are attuned to very specific features of the aesthetic aspects of the work they create, features that may not be readily obvious to non-artists.

²⁴ According to 2000 Census data, NYC is home to roughly 133,000 artists, and has one of the highest concentration of artists of any city in the US (although this takes into account artists of many different varieties. Source: Artists in the Workforce).

artists since they have little to fall back on otherwise. He argues that this involves viewing art as a calling rather than a profession, refusing any kind of rationalization of the process of making work (it relies primarily on inspiration, which his artists feel cannot be summoned on a regular work schedule). Although I found only limited evidence of this approach amongst my interviewees, nonetheless my informants expressed difficulty surrounding establishing an identity as an artist.²⁵

This issue of identity gets at the heart of beliefs about what constitutes a real artist. Especially in a place like NYC where so many individuals attempt to become artists, it is not surprising that many distinctions are made between serious and not serious artists, or real and hobby artists, to name just a few. These sorts of distinctions are common in art worlds (Becker, 1982). My interviewees used words such as “hobby” or “not serious” artists, or “hipsters” to denote artistic groups that they sought to distance themselves from. Some questioned, with a bit of disdain, those who took on an artistic identity without producing work to back it up. In short, many of my interviewees seemed to feel some stress over creating an identity as a “serious artist,” particularly when they must juggle making work and having a job outside of the art world.

Holding down a job while continuing to make art can threaten one’s identity as an artist in a number of ways. For those who invest heavily in another job, this threatens to become the primary identity. This can happen if one spends too much time at a particular job, especially when

²⁵ Simpson (1981) argues that there are substantial differences between successful and unsuccessful artists, particularly in the extent to which they glom on to a “crazy artist” or bohemian identity (much more popular amongst the less successful artists who, Simpson argues, do not have much to ground their artist identity in.) I felt that it was difficult to characterize successful versus unsuccessful artists in my sample. That may be largely because, as noted in my earlier discussion of methods, my sample may have largely excluded truly failed and truly successful artists, thus the range may be restricted. But it may also speak to the fact that defining success is not always clear in the artistic realm. Success and attention can be short-lived, and after a particularly successful show or new crop of paintings, artists I spoke with generally were looking to the next challenge. In short, very few seemed totally satisfied with where they were in their art careers, and evaluating what makes an artist successful or not seems a complex procedure.

your energy primarily goes to that job rather than toward making work.²⁶ One interviewee, for example, felt frustrated by the fact that others did not seem to view her as a real artist if she wasn't making a living selling her work:

I used to have this problem where I didn't feel like I could call myself an artist if I wasn't supporting myself as an artist, so I'd always be like 'I'm an artist but I make my money as a waitress' and I've stopped doing that, because it doesn't really matter how I make my money. I got really frustrated because I found that a lot of artists are just living off their parents and so they'll call themselves artists but...I felt like for a while I totally undercut myself, like oh I'm kind of an artist but I don't really sell that much, but...people don't want to hear that. It actually has nothing to do with whether you're an artist or not.... I think it's kind of what we were talking about at the beginning, like people think that if you're not in it 100% that you're not a real artist...it drives me crazy, and I feel like that's when it tests my self esteem. Where you're like, no I can do both [making art and having a separate career]. And maybe I can't, because I'm not really making it as an artist in that sense, but I feel like my art speaks for itself,²⁷ so maybe that's fine.

Even though she recognized that there are plenty of people who claim to be artists, despite the fact that they do not support themselves with their art, she nonetheless felt held to this standard and struggled to feel like an artist while requiring a paid job on the side. Another artist who also works part time as a waitress echoed these concerns:

it's very good money so I understand how people...some of my colleagues are there for years, five years...and I'm like I would die, that's what you are. I can understand waitressing for a while and make some money and leave, but I think that if you do it longer you become a waitress, and it's like come on, I mean I value every job I think it's fine if you like that, that's perfect, but if you have other ambitions if you don't leave the restaurant for a long time which I know is difficult because the money is good, it's like then you stop having the ambitions that you have.

²⁶ To take just one example of how this process can unfold, Blumstein's (1991) theory of ossification of self, drawing on Goffman, suggests that if you are continually in a situation where you enact a particular role eventually you attribute your behavior not to the situation but to your core personality or deeper sense of self. In this way frequently enacted roles, such as those on a job, over time affect one's more permanent identity and sense of self.

²⁷ The idea that one's art "speaks for itself," rather than relying on other aspects of the artist's biography, lifestyle or situation for interpretation, is an important point that I will return to in later chapters.

Here, my interviewee expresses angst over maintaining a central identity as an artist when she spends so much of her time and earns her money by waitressing. Some of these paid jobs – hers included – can also provide important social groups, which is often a nice change from the isolation of making art, but which tends to further cement one’s identity as a waitress. Partially to deal with these identity concerns, this informant does not keep waitressing jobs for longer than a year, and also works in childcare. Although this helps her to maintain her central identity as an artist, it likely prevents her from developing a side career that might provide a more stable and plentiful income.

The informants in my sample who seemed the most concerned with their own identity as an artist were those who made good money working full time jobs in arts-related fields, such as advertising, design, or architecture. These interviewees spent a huge amount of time at their primary job and had little time left over to make work; moreover, they gained a lot, economically, socially and career-wise from their paid work, leaving little left over for an identity as an artist. More difficult still, some of these interviewees felt that they had lost status because they had chosen jobs in which they had to relinquish some of their artistic control. One informant describes his strategies in dealing with his largely commercial artistic job in advertising:

Doing personal work, how that fits into the life when you have to actually work for the man and make a living, how to reconcile those two identities [are challenges]. I find that the best way is to have it be one identity: I am an image maker, whether that’s working for advertising or doing drawing. But it’s hard because when you introduce yourself as an advertising art director - I feel like so much more of a human being now that I can pay the rent, but when I couldn’t pay the rent and I introduced myself as an illustrator I remember people’s reaction, and it’s very different...One identity is no money but you’re a rock star, the other identity is like you’re taking the subway into work every day and working for the boss just like they are, so they find it less sexy.

Above my interviewee clearly feels the need to reconcile his advertising work with his artistic interests, but has difficulty dealing with others’ reactions. Another financially successful

commercial photographer noted that most “artists” in Bushwick – he notes that they don’t make any money from their work or seem to have much direction, and views them as more poseurs than real artists - probably wouldn’t consider him to be an “artist,” even though he produces a good deal of his own creative work. He feels his identity as a successful commercial photographer overshadows his identity as an artist in the eyes of others. Both of these cases show the complexity of establishing an identity as an artist when you are not making a good portion of your income from your personal art work.²⁸

Most artists thus find themselves in a difficult bind: they must look to sources of income other than selling their work, but doing so tends to compromise their identity as an artist. The more time they devote to paid work, the harder it is to find the time to make art, and the more likely it is that the paid work identity will overshadow the artist identity. Artists thus face a number of challenges as they attempt to carve out an identity for themselves as artists. Not only are they surrounded by tens of thousands of artists in who are similarly trying to establish themselves, but they do not usually have the typical option of defining yourself by your source of income that most occupations allow. Further, there are many groups that one has to constantly try to keep at bay, groups that are similar in some ways to functioning, successful artists, but which, in many ways, fail to achieve that status (described at length later). Finally, given the subjective and sometimes incomprehensible standards for art work described earlier, it can be difficult to rely on others’ assessments to determine whether you are in fact a good or real artist. Discussed at length in the next chapter, I will argue that one of the major functions of artistic community is to bolster the artistic identity.

II. A strategy for life and art: screw plans, be yourself

²⁸ And, described in more detail later, even if you are making good money from your work, you must be sufficiently untainted by the market or trends to be considered a real, and not overly commercial, artist.

In light of the many challenges associated with the choice to be an artist, how does one pursue a path in the arts, and why? Discussed above, artists widely believe that there is no clear cut path to success in the art world, and feel ambivalent about what success brings and what it even means. Given this, the artists that I spoke with seemed to feel that a good strategy is to relax and not push yourself to be something you're not. Artists seemed cultivate a sense of faith that things will happen for you if you live your life in a way that is true and authentic to yourself. This need to be authentic to the self is also a guiding principle behind their definition of good and worthwhile work. In all cases these approaches underscore the need for the artist to be as true and authentic to the self as possible. This is both something akin to a career path and the main reason and reward for making art in the first place.

"Screw Plans"

Other than simply improving and developing one's own work – a goal expressed by virtually everyone I spoke with - and "networking," artists had few specific approaches to their careers. Many artists also employ a third strategy: cultivating a sense of faith that things will happen for you if you live your life in a way that is true and authentic to yourself and your work. This often involves embracing risk and trying to stay open minded to the possibility that opportunities could be around any corner. Celebrating coincidences is also a big part of this. One young artist describes her career trajectory to date:

I've learned that a lot of times when good things happen with your work or your career it's not really something I can force to happen they just kind of happen. I don't know how to explain it, but for example, there was a piece I put into that benefit show and a woman who owns a gallery in Bushwick bought my piece and then she contacted me and has been so nice and I've been to her studio and I met her and everything, so we've just been keeping in touch, just on a friendly basis, but she's aware of me now....as far as a gallery owner being aware of me, that feels really

good. She's invited me to be in this other open call show and I know another girl who works in her gallery. And then these commissions I've been getting...it's nothing that I applied for or had to be some kind of overly enthusiastic networking freak who goes to all the openings and meets people. I think that's important but I think for everyone things just happen the way they happen. I don't know how to explain it. And I will say that [doing] Bushwick Open Studios was definitely an outlet that helped me to meet more people, but like I said I didn't force anything....I put in as much effort as I can, but I don't want to have to feel uncomfortable about it, like I'm not myself.

This artist indicates that for her, career advances have happened without a lot of effort on her part. She's attained some recognition for her work without becoming "some kind of overly enthusiastic networking freak," and has managed to avoid feeling "uncomfortable about it, like I'm not myself." She thus seems to indicate both that career advancement generally takes place in ways that require limited effort on her part, in ways that she can't necessarily predict or understand ("I don't know how to explain it"), and that she seeks to avoid any situation where she feels like she's not being herself. Another young interviewee provided an interesting example of career opportunities arriving coincidentally:

...I worked as an art handler [at a gallery in Chelsea], so I got a lot of more contemporary experience, seeing trends in people's private collecting so really it just became, all this opportunity came to me. I don't want to say it's luck but a lot of it was very coincidental....I was on my lunch break I'd only worked [there] for about a month at this point and I heard a woman yelling at me from down the street like, excuse me! I'd only lived here for 2 months, I can't give anybody directions, I was like what does she want now. She's like I need you. For what? I need your hair! You look like Peter Brady. I'll give you \$50 to take a picture of your hair. She needed to photoshop it into one of her pieces. She was doing a series about jobs she had while growing up so she needed to put my hair on a photo of a little boy from the '70s...[she is a well established artist and ended up hooking him up with a residency in Australia and he continues to work now as her assistant]. It's so weird to me because you hear about stories of people coming out here and you hear about these kinds of things happening, coincidentally, screw plans, and everything that's happened to me is completely coincidental...I never planned on any of this and that's why it's, I've enjoyed living here, all this weird shit is happening.

This example nicely illustrates the sort of coincidence that can lead an artist into a wonderful opportunity without trying, beyond putting oneself in the right environment. The absolutely unpredictable nature of this encounter – my interviewee had hair that looked like Peter Brady's,

an expression of his own unique personality, presumably, and it just so happened that an established artist was looking for this hair. By expressing his own personality and putting himself in a place where things can happen – NYC – opportunities came to him. Others simply noted that you can't predict how your work will reach people; for example:

You never ever know how people are going to see you work. A lot of people have seen my work on sites that I never expected anything to come of, but I guess the search terms came up right.

The statement above implies that good things can happen in ways that you couldn't predict and can't always control. Many artists, then, in several ways seem to be keenly aware of the fact that career opportunities can arrive in ways they never expected, and they embrace this possibility. Further, they often felt that you shouldn't have to act in ways that make you feel that you're not being "yourself." You are just doing what you do and maintaining faith that it will pay off in ways that you can't necessarily predict.

Other artists seemed to take this faith to a higher level by embracing risk taking in a broader sense – almost as a life strategy, rather than just an occupational one. Discussed at length above, pursuing an artistic path fundamentally involves many uncertainties, so it is no surprise that artists might be comfortable with taking risks. Some, however, seemed more enthusiastic and adamant about these risks than others, even to espouse this as an approach to life in general. For example:

Blaze your own trail. I think that's really critical, not just the energy and the artists and those individuals, but all the artists [in Bushwick], I'm always encouraging people to shoot for the moon, why wouldn't you? Even if I think they can't succeed and I know that to fail will hurt, but still, go for it. I think going for money or success, you end up being more conservative because you have things to lose, [but in a place] like Bushwick, it's like fuck, go for it!

This artist clearly feels that risk, and the possibility of loss, shouldn't be a reason to keep one from pursuing dreams. Further, money and success are not valid goals because they make you conservative and risk averse, and this is viewed as a problem by my informant. Risk taking is embraced, it seems, as a goal in and of itself – it connotes living a passionate life in which you attempt to live your dreams, rather than settling for a safe but stultifying option. This may well sum up the entire life path of most artists. Another artist sums up his current approach to his work and his life in general:

To me it's really fun, I like to present a challenge for myself, get myself into a new situation where I then have to produce something. I'll leap and then the net will appear, that's kind of the mantra that I operate under: leap and the net will appear.

Here he clearly is taking a lot of risks, and feels that doing so is necessary. This embracing of risk operates as a life mantra, but also as a principle for one's career, and, discussed in more detail in the coming chapters, also extends to the kind of daring artwork that many artists in Bushwick find exciting. Risk, then, operates at a number of levels in artists' lives – ranging from the decision to be an artist in the first place, to the precarious financial situation it often puts artists into, to embracing a DIY spirit and experimental approach to life, to creating daring work. Although there is no clear path to artistic success, by taking risks and staying open to unforeseen opportunities, good things can come to you.

Art is who you are

This emphasis on risk taking and openness to possibility thus involves “being yourself,” rather than trying to push yourself to do something that feels outside of who you are. The approach thus prioritizes maintaining one's own identity and acting in ways that are an authentic expression of one's self. This need for authenticity to the self is also a key piece of what makes one's art good,

as well as a worthwhile pursuit, even in the face of the many difficulties described above. Your art is in many ways who you are, and there is no point in doing it if it isn't a meaningful and authentic expression of your self.

This close connection between one's self and one's work is a major, if not the major, reason that artists begin and continue their careers in the face of so many challenges. My interviewees love making art and it is a part of who they are. Making work is simply a part of your personality that needs to be expressed, and you value your work to the extent that it is an authentic representation of your self; a tight connection between your self and your work is a must. Further, art is not only expressive of one's self, but it is exploratory and expanding – in some sense you discover more about who you are by making work.

For many of my interviewees, making work does not feel like a choice, but rather it is a basic attribute of your self and personality – as well as something that you don't fully control. Many of my interviewees indicated that they had made art in some form since childhood. Making work is framed as a key part of the self, something that is simply there. It is a compulsion, something that, in the words of one informant, you “don't know how not to do.” Even if one pursues a different career path or doesn't try to make money from art work, making work is still a major part of your life, as was the case for several of my respondents. One notes:

I've always [made art] my entire life. It's always been a part of my life, a part of my being. I can't remember a time I didn't draw. I didn't intend to be a studio art major [in college] because I do it for me, I don't do it for anyone else, and I've never been able to escape it.

Here, my interviewee indicates that art is fundamentally part of who she is and something that she's always practiced. She's been unable to “escape” it, despite her earlier and current attempts to forge a different career path. It is as though it's a part of her that she's been unable to tamp

down. Despite pursuing a separate career, making art takes up a lot of her time because she can't imagine not doing it. It is a part of who she is and something that she seemingly has limited control over.

Thus making work and, at least in that capacity, being an artist, is understood by my informants as part of who you are and something you cannot fully control. Some informants provided other evidence of the tight connection between art and self. For example, many alluded to the highly personal nature of their work by noting that criticism of their art is extremely difficult to take, and more difficult to deal with than criticism of other kinds of work that they produce. Although they certainly hope for praise from others, they feel that ultimately the work must first meet their own personal standards and be true to the self. This can create tension between desire to be true to oneself and desire to please others. Another articulates the close and complex relationships between his work, who he is, and the reaction of the audience:

At this particular moment because of that recent online dialogue I got really hyper conscious of how I respond to criticism in my work, if at all. One of the difficulties in being an artist where part of the practice is social media art is that I'm constantly putting myself out there and part of the actual work is me, so when someone's writing about the work they're writing about me, so it's very hard to tease it apart. My fear is that I'll create work that's not true to the work I want to make but more a response to, trying to cater to an audience. So I have to work really hard to say what do I really need and want to do, and not how do I engage an audience or incite people?

Here the artist notes that criticism of his work is very difficult, because his sense of self is tightly intertwined with his work, a point that several of my interviewees echoed. Further, he notes that your work is supposed to be a sincere reflection of your own feelings and artistic self, and something that you hope to appraise by your own standards, rather than anyone else's. Some of my interviewees, for example, when asked about any fears they have for their practice, indicated that they were most afraid that they would end up making work that was more geared toward

appealing to others, rather than themselves. This is the essence of what makes work overly commercial, according to some artists. Most artists I spoke with would love to sell work and have no problem with this commercialism whatsoever, so long as the work remains a true reflection of their own artistic vision, as this is a central goal in making work: that it be true and authentic to your feelings and vision of the world.

Thus it is clear that artists value work as part of the self and that work must be an authentic expression and extension of the self. Inauthentic work – work that is contrived, aimed at pleasing someone else, made with the explicit goal of being marketable, or which is trendy for the sake of being trendy – is consistently disparaged. Similarly, work that is made largely by the artist’s assistant(s) is also regarded as inauthentic to the self; for example:

[In principle he’s not opposed to selling work but] People that are making money off of art, in a way it’s the biggest scam because you have somebody, you have all these people who are...making work at such a rate that they couldn’t possibly make it themselves so they have to have all these assistants and they become so far removed from it and they’re making millions and millions of dollars....I wouldn’t ever want to feel like I’m the ideas guy and then I have a factory that makes those things and sells them for me.

While some interviewees mentioned assistants that they seemingly had no problem with, and a couple of my interviewees even employed their own assistants, assistants are problematic if the artist becomes “far removed” from his or her own work. Assistants can help you with routine tasks, such as organizing supplies, but when it comes to actually making the work you as the artist mustn’t be too far removed from the process. It is exactly this proximity– the close relationship between the artist and his or her work – that makes the work authentic, sincere and valuable.²⁹

²⁹ The complexity of the relationship between the artist and the work that s/he produces, especially in tandem with many other producers, is of course discussed at length by Becker (1982).

Another important link between your self and your art is that making work is often described almost as a process of continuing to get to know yourself. Several artists indicated that they often didn't know where their work was going or what they would make next, where the work would take them. Some state that their work "goes where it wants to" or that they never know what they're going to end up producing, and this is one of the most exciting aspects of making work. It is almost as if they're being carried along by their only partially known creative side, and in doing so they find excitement and self understanding.

In all cases, it is clear that for artists, your work is tightly linked to your sense of self. It is often framed as something that you have to do, rather than a choice. It is simply there, a part of who you are. The act of producing work involves getting to know yourself better, in a variety of ways. This also underscores another way in which artists are able to let go and not need to be in control all of the time: they take risks, embrace possibility and not having a clear path, and relinquish some amount of control, in their career path, while creating work, and as a general life strategy.³⁰

This need to have one's work be an authentic representation of the self, connected to the self, also seems to extend to a broader attitude in one's life. For example, many of my interviewees noted that they want to have deep and authentic relationships with others, rather than engaging in superficial and instrumental networking (as in the case of the "networking freak" mentioned earlier). In particular artists don't want to feel that they're having to play a role that doesn't feel like it's really who they in fact are. There seems to be a desire to be true to yourself in every realm of life, artwork included.

³⁰ This tendency to embrace a sort of faith-based approach to making art, in which you relinquish some amount of control, is described in the widely-read book on artistic practice, *The Artist's Way*, by Julia Cameron. I have seen several young people reading it on the train in Bushwick.

Given the close proximity between art and self, it is not surprising that for virtually all artists, making art is one of the most important, if not the very most important thing in their lives. It is its own reward, and they are passionate about it. For example, one artist – who both paints and writes music – described the central role of work throughout his life:

I was having problems keeping up relationships because I spent so much time doing my [art] work, I was not really interested. I would have jobs and I'd lose a job because you know obviously I wasn't very enthusiastic about the job, I was just there to make some money to pay my rent, it was obvious to the people who worked there. I feel like making art and making music is something that's always driven my life, and the rest of the stuff is semi expendable.

To him, making work seems to be the most important thing in life. It is more central than a paid job, and even relationships; it is the central thing that has “always driven” his life. Other artists echoed this intense interest in and love of making work.

Thus, for all of the intense hardships and frustrations associated with being an artist – frustrations and challenges that artists are for the most part keenly aware of – they nonetheless pursue the artistic path simply because they love doing it. Making work is its own reward, and selling and showing work are primarily means of finding more time to produce yet more work. The thrill of self discovery via making work is often one of the most important forces in your life, and if you're really invested in and passionate about your work, your self is heavily intertwined with what you make. In many cases, you do feel that you choose to make work; it is simply part of who you are.

To me one of the most powerful testaments to this feeling was that many of my interviewees, despite the challenges, frustrations, and grim economic realities, nonetheless said that they simply wanted to “keep going,” to do whatever they needed to do to “keep doing what I'm doing.”

Making the work is its own reward, and as long as these artists managed to keep making work, they led satisfying lives, and hoped only to be able to continue living satisfying lives.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have attempted to outline some of the challenges and strategies that are widely shared by those pursuing a career – or life – in the visual arts. Despite many differences between them, my interviewees largely agreed on most of the topics raised in this chapter. While younger artists in my sample often seemed less career focused (or accomplished) than older ones, all broadly noted the patterns described above.

Documented at length earlier in this chapter, even deciding what constitutes “success” in the world of artists is not always clear cut. Artists struggle tremendously to balance making work with making a living, as well as cultivating a solid identity as an artist. Although artists generally deal with some of these challenges by focusing on their own work and making it as good as they possibly can, they also embrace risk and remain open to possibilities and opportunities that might present themselves in many forms. They similarly seek to create work and more generally, lives, that are authentic to the self. That these strategies apply not just to one’s artwork and career, but also to other areas in an artist’s life is not surprising, given the very short distance between artwork and self for most artists.

I now turn to a discussion of how these features of artistic life and work connect to the formation of, basis, and need for local community.

Chapter 3: Bushwick artists and community

Discussed earlier, Bushwick, as depicted by gallerists, arts organizations, and to a lesser extent, also the media, is a thriving local community of artists. Despite challenges to this local status, including its location in cosmopolitan NYC, the fairly recent arrival of most artists to the area, and what seems to be rapid turnover among them, creating a strong and cohesive local community³¹ in Bushwick seems to be a central goal of many of its gallerists, organizers and artist residents. In this chapter I ask, do artists perceive a strong local artistic community in Bushwick? If so, what does this community seem to involve and provide? If not, why?

I found in my interviews that artists have a wide range of orientations and levels of commitment to Bushwick. Very few work in Bushwick for pay, but everyone I interviewed either lives or keeps a studio in Bushwick. Many have social lives that prominently feature Bushwick, although this is not the case for everyone, especially those who do not live in Bushwick. Artists display widely differing levels of engagement with the artistic community, ranging from having virtually no knowledge of the community to essentially making it one's entire social and career life. Not surprisingly, then, artists report widely diverging opinions on the nature and cohesiveness of the artistic community in Bushwick.

In this chapter I focus on the two poles: artists who actively keep the Bushwick arts community at bay, and those who embrace it wholeheartedly, although many of my interviewees fall somewhere in between these extremes. In this chapter I first discuss some of reasons artists initially came to Bushwick. I then explore some of the motivations behind both the distancing

³¹ In this chapter I deal primarily with artistic community. The issue of community between artists and long term residents of Bushwick, who are generally not artists, is covered in depth in chapter 6.

from and embracing of the Bushwick artist community, and examine what this says about the Bushwick art community.

Why Bushwick?

Why do the artists who live in Bushwick choose Bushwick? How do they learn about the neighborhood and decide to move in? For all interviewees, the main lure of Bushwick is that it was a logical, practical place to go – a practical place to be so that one can live in New York City. Not surprisingly, it is primarily NYC, not Bushwick, that draws residents from other places in the country and world. The biggest appeal of Bushwick was simply that it was affordable. Bushwick is one of a handful of affordable neighborhoods in NYC that also provides easy access to Manhattan and particularly Chelsea, and this is a major draw for the move. Beyond that, respondents reported finding “dream spaces” that attracted them. Thus, many of my informants moved to Bushwick largely for basic practical reasons, given their desire to live in NYC.

Although most of my interviewees moved to Bushwick during the last five years, and some within the year, a handful arrived closer to 2000, a time when Bushwick, and particularly its industrial area, was a no man’s land. Most of these interviewees have a story to tell about moving to Bushwick and finding a great and affordable space, sometimes along with notable drawbacks, such as gunshots at night, wild dogs, or prostitutes – although these gritty features weren’t necessarily construed as problems by my informants, and clearly weren’t deterrents to moving in or staying. Most interviewees indicated that they no longer feel unsafe walking through Bushwick, despite the fact that a few have been mugged. Many felt very fortunate to have found large and cheap space. One interviewee, for example, refers to her apartment as a “dream space,” one that essentially took her ten years to find. Others similarly felt that they happened upon incredible spaces, for the price, and would have been foolish not to take advantage.

Many initially heard about Bushwick from friends, and some had friends already living there. A few respondents indicated that they had previously lived in Williamsburg but could no longer afford the rent, and moving further out along the L train seemed to be the path of least resistance. For those living elsewhere with studio space in Bushwick, the area provided a huge number of available and affordable studio spaces that, for many, were convenient to home. A couple moved directly to Bushwick from areas outside of NYC, although this arrival pattern was less common – most respondents had lived elsewhere in NYC before coming to Bushwick. Some had friends in the neighborhood who alerted them to open spaces; others went through realtors. In all cases, Bushwick’s low cost and convenient location beckon.

Bushwick’s easy commute to Manhattan and particularly Chelsea is an important aspect of its location. Although Bushwick certainly seems to attract those arriving in NYC, it is important to note that for many artists Bushwick itself is hardly the central lure. Most of my informants came to the NYC area because they felt that they needed to be in NYC in order to make it as an artist. NYC broadly, and Chelsea in particular, are perceived to be critically important by my interviewees. That it is key to actually be in NYC in order to make it in the contemporary art world is a longstanding and widespread belief among artists (e.g., Montgomery & Robinson, 1993). Contemporary artists in St. Louis, for example, constantly struggle with the question of whether to move or otherwise how to spend considerable time in NYC (Plattner, 1996), and many of my informants moved to NYC in part because a valued art school professor counseled them to do so.

Described below, my interviewees strongly believe that social connections are critical to artistic success, and they feel that it is necessary to actually be in NYC to forge these relations – that they won’t develop over the internet or via another medium. Given the highly competitive nature of

the contemporary art world, and the lack of a clear pathway to success described in the last chapter, many of my informants felt that they needed every advantage they could possibly get – including actual face time with key figures in the art world, virtually all of whom are located in Manhattan. Thus, Bushwick’s proximity to Manhattan, and particularly Chelsea, is very important to my informants. Not only do artists shuttle to Chelsea on a regular basis, but this relatively easy access on the L train also means that the dream of getting a studio visit from a major gallerist or dealer is not entirely out of the question.³²

Bushwick also offers important amenities for artists. Lofts in industrial buildings now seem to be a bit of a clichéd habitat for artists, but some artists truly need such spaces in order to create their work. Although some artists can work in a small residential apartment, others make very large and/or heavy work that requires the wide hallways, large doorways, high ceilings, and freight elevators that are only available in industrial buildings. Other artists use toxic materials that require ventilation systems, much more common in industrial than residential buildings. Bushwick’s heavy concentration of industrial loft buildings is thus a major draw for many artists whose work requires this type of space. Even for artists whose work doesn’t absolutely require the amenities of industrial buildings, it is freeing to know that you have the option of expanding your work into different mediums.

In sum, most of my respondents indicated that practical concerns – mainly finding an affordable place to live and/or work, and Bushwick’s proximity to the L train and Manhattan, especially Chelsea, and for many, industrial work space – were the main reason to move to Bushwick in the first place. Although living in Bushwick seems to provide artists with other perks – described in detail below – these seem to take second place to the practical constraints of finding affordable

³² Although there are very few (none?) actual cases of this that I heard, it is an ongoing hope of many artists in Bushwick, and often noted as an advantage of Bushwick’s location.

space in NYC. For some interviewees these practical concerns constituted the initial reason for moving to Bushwick, but they stay in the area for the arts community; for others, there is little else to appreciate about living in Bushwick.

Missing Community in Bushwick

Despite the fact that my interviewees seemingly had much in common in terms of their reasons for moving to Bushwick, for a number of artists this has not led to any clear sense of artistic community there. Many of my interviewees reported hesitation to get involved in the Bushwick art world, largely because they felt it did not provide the art world connections or identity that they seek, and they were not necessarily looking for any sort of local community in the first place.

“I’m just not made that way”: The reclusive self and the need to network

One reason that many artists in Bushwick do not seem to seek out artistic community is that they’re not particularly interested in community per se, for a number of reasons. I was struck, in my interviews, by the fact that many artists did not mention community as a reason behind their move to Bushwick or their decision to stay there. When I asked them more directly about it, they did not report much of a perceived sense of community, either with other artists in the area, Bushwick organizations, nonartist residents, or anyone else. Despite indicating that they felt little sense of community in Bushwick, my interviewees didn’t seem to be especially bothered by this. I noted that they often referred to themselves essentially as loners, often in a way that suggested that they felt this was an essential and immutable part of their personalities. For example:

I’ve never been one to search for community. I’m just not made that way.

Another remarked:

I'm more individual minded than community minded. I do my own work and I'm not looking to be part of an art movement or community or anything like that or collective or whatever. I guess that's the way I work, the way I am...

The above comments suggest that these artists feel that they are intrinsically solitary people, not interested in searching out a community, suggesting that they may not prioritize it. Even when it is not framed in terms of some fundamental aspect of their personality, many artists similarly indicated that they are "private" individuals. Many interviewees, for example, even when working in large studio buildings claimed that they did not spend much time socializing with others in the building. Although most had the sense that Bushwick is teeming with artists, they didn't necessarily know many of them personally or go to great lengths to try to become a part of any aspect of the Bushwick community.³³ This disinterest in reaching out to the Bushwick art community seemed especially pronounced in the case of organized groups:

I think a lot of artists, myself included, are not really joiners, I don't want to be in a club, I don't want to be in a religion. The more organized your group is the less likely I am to want to join.

Another said:

I can definitely see the value of these organizations, collectives that sort of thing, but myself, I'm more comfortable doing my own thing, not getting too tied up in a community group. I guess that's how I am. I don't have that mindset....Like Arts In Bushwick, they had the option of doing volunteer work or just paying the \$35 registration fee and I was like, oh I'll just pay the fee. I don't want to go to any community meetings, I'll just pay the fee, that's fine with me.

³³ This was especially interesting given that throughout my interviews they frequently seemed to carve the social world into artists and nonartists, even when mentioning their friends, suggesting that status as an artist is a very important status, and perhaps one that would likely serve as a basis for a sense of community.

Here again the artists seem to imply that in a basic way they do not like to join activities, especially organized ones. At other points some referred to artists as “for the most part socially awkward,” loners, which suggests that socializing with new people is effortful and not always pleasant. One interviewee described socializing with other artists and gallerists in Chelsea as an overwhelming and difficult experience. This suggests that the artists I spoke with often feel some anxiety over socializing and don’t necessarily feel the need for community, particularly one that is highly organized.

Related to this lack of interest in seeking out community, another way in which my interviewees seemed to feel that they fundamentally did not want or miss a sense of community is simply that they did not seem to feel they had time for it. Discussed in the previous chapter, my interviewees consistently noted that the biggest challenge associated with their work was finding the time to make money and make art. The pressures associated with working and making art, especially in a city as expensive as NYC (even in Bushwick), create a time and energy bind that leaves little to devote to community – or at least one that does not clearly help to further one’s artistic progress or meet other practical needs. One interviewee, describing her grueling schedule – which involves teaching in Manhattan and Riverdale, working in a Manhattan studio, and living in Bushwick (with her teenage son, no less) – remarked, “I’m a commuter, I don’t have time for community!”

This time bind is particularly clear in light of the fact that many of my interviewees participate in multiple communities. Many interviewees, for example, feel that they are a part of a job community or Manhattan art community more than one in Bushwick (or in some cases, in addition to a sense of community in Bushwick). A couple of my informants regularly work abroad, and thus have substantial and ongoing community ties in other countries. Others participate heavily in online communities, and many more still are heavily involved in

alumni/school communities. Although these sometimes overlap with the Bushwick art world, this is not typical. In short, my informants usually juggle participation in several separate communities, often dispersed over wide geographic and cyber terrain, and this drains resources that would perhaps otherwise go toward deeper participation in the Bushwick art world.

Given this time bind, it is not surprising that as my interviewees talked about community broadly and socializing with other artists, they rapidly slid into a discussion of networking in order to further one's career, suggesting that the two are often highly intertwined in the minds of my interviewees. Despite feeling socially awkward and not wanting to "join" anything, virtually all artists indicated that networking with others is extremely important to one's art career. The hope is that your work will "speak for itself," that it won't need the help of social connections to get attention, but most recognize that this is unlikely. Most artists I spoke with recognized the critical importance of social ties for getting shows and recognition; for example:

I like to think that my work will speak for itself, but if I never left my apartment then no one would ever see my work, so you inevitably have to get out there. My experience, based on all the art shows I've been in, is that you get them because of someone you know. You have to make some sort of connection. I've made a lot of fleeting connections out here, exchanged a lot of cards with people, but...

Another echoed this sentiment:

Well social connections aren't going to do anything for you if you don't have strong work. But given that, given that you're doing strong work that's marketable, after that, it's all social.

Thus artists seem to be in a difficult situation: on the one hand, they are not interested in joining any particular groups, nor do they have much time for this, and seem to feel that they may be fundamentally people who prefer to isolate themselves and work alone, yet they feel they are highly unlikely to find any career success without social connections. Virtually all artists I spoke

with indicated the importance of social connections in getting your work shown, and often they seemed resentful of this, wishing instead that their work could simply “speak for itself” without the need for social help. “Networking” to help further one’s career and artistic goals is often presented as a chore, rather than a pleasant experience, and many artists seemed more interested in holing up and doing their work than schmoozing. Discussed in the previous chapter, many artists feel angry that what they perceive to be mediocre work seems to be given attention only because the artist has useful social connections; this is a major source of frustration to many artists who feel pressure to network in order to succeed artistically. To the extent that their sense of community is largely intertwined with the need for social networking in order to further their careers, whom you network with becomes very important, and, discussed at length below, often problematic in the Bushwick art world. The fact that community and networking for the benefit of one’s artistic career are so intertwined is perhaps not at all surprising, given that virtually all of my informants initially moved to NYC to pursue an art career, and to do so in what is widely perceived to be the most competitive and prestigious art center in the world.

Taken together, these comments suggest that artists are not likely to seek out community, particularly if this involves organizations and organized activities. This disinterest in organized activities and community is not surprising, given the overall decline in this type of socializing over time (e.g., Florida, 2002, Putnam, 2000). The lack of desire to participate in these types of activities, or actively seek out community, is often presented as a fundamental personality trait, but is exacerbated by the fact that most artists feel extremely pressured for time and energy, given the need to work, usually full – time, to fund their art practice. For some, all of this contributes to distance from the Bushwick art world; for others, described later in this chapter, it seemingly facilitates and strengthens a flexible and inspiring art community.

“Why would you network with those people?” The limitations of the Bushwick art world

Given the tight link between community and social networking to further one's artistic career, it is perhaps not surprising that my interviewees discussed the Bushwick art world in terms of its ability to help them forge artistically useful relationships. These useful relationships include finding peers who can help you to get your work shown, or at least to get the attention of curators, and sometimes also includes finding peers who can critique your work and give you feedback, and also more broadly, to support what you are doing artistically. For a number of reasons some of my interviewees felt that the Bushwick art world does not provide useful networking opportunities - a serious limitation, given the importance of networking for my interviewees.

Some (roughly a quarter) of my interviewees, despite having shown their work in BOS 2010 and/or 2011, maintained low levels of involvement in the Bushwick art world. Most indicated that they did not frequent Bushwick galleries or events, and were more likely to go to openings in Chelsea or the LES than Bushwick (there are, of course, many more such events in Manhattan than in Bushwick). Many were not familiar with the full roster of Bushwick galleries, organizations, or events. I was very surprised to find that several of my interviewees were only dimly aware of Arts in Bushwick, despite having recently participated in their Open Studios event. Discussed below, my interviewees found it unpalatable to identify strongly with the Bushwick art world, largely because of their perception that it is associated with low quality art, low barriers to entry, various groups who are not serious artists, and gentrification.

Bushwick "art" and "artists"

Despite a lack of familiarity with many of the specific Bushwick arts organizations and galleries, and often limited social contact with other Bushwick artists, several artists I spoke with had a negative impression of the Bushwick art world, or at the very least felt that it didn't offer what

they were looking for: connections that would help them to further their careers. This image is likely based on media coverage of artists in Bushwick, which, discussed in more detail later in this chapter, often highlights aspects of the Bushwick art world that many of my interviewees found unpalatable.

First, many of my interviewees felt that much of the art produced and shown in Bushwick was amateurish and not high quality. Of the work produced and shown in Bushwick, interviewees often had little positive to say. One artist comments:

There's the people who are already established, and I'd say they'd be less susceptible to the umbrella of a Bushwick style, but I think a lot of the less established people could be more. I think there is a lot of street art or street looking art, graffiti, illustrative work. I might just call it amateurish, art school work, excessively figurative work or something, work that isn't necessarily all that conscious of developments in art history, retrograde, illustrative, that's just a total impression, that has no basis in reality....But of course there are tons of people here, especially older artists who used to have a studio in Soho or something who are out here and they just have a studio here because it's available, they're not necessarily part of the scene.

Here my informant suggests that he feels most of the work produced in Bushwick is amateurish and not good, and he implies that this may be connected to the youthfulness of the art world in Bushwick. He also notes that there are more established artists, whose work is presumably high quality, but they do not stand out as the primary "scene" members. Some interviewees made similar points, but with a more positive spin. For example:

What I think [Bushwick artists and galleries] do produce, is not art but they do tend to do fun parties, events, BBQs, events, I don't know, screenings. Especially 3rd Ward is really active in that, and I like that. there's like this, maybe because there's a lot of young people that move here, it's not necessarily high quality. People are doing stuff, having fun, they have energy, this music scene....This I like about Bushwick, these events and...there is something about that that I like, they produce fun events you know. Like when last year was the biennial it was so ridiculous, that was the purpose of it. to do the Bushwick Biennial, to have the limousines going along, I think that's hilarious. You don't

do that in Manhattan. You don't have space. So I think that's what I like about it, it's fresh.

Here my informant emphasizes that Bushwick events are “fun,” “fresh,” sometimes “hilarious,” and take advantage of opportunities that aren't available in Manhattan. At the same times, she also emphasizes the youth of the artists involved and notes that much of what they do is not “high quality” and “not art,” suggesting that it is not something that she takes very seriously. Another of my interviewees similarly feels that much of the work produced and shown in Bushwick is not high quality:

Bushwick is so small time that it's sort of like ...making a silk purse out of a sow's ear. I mean, not that I don't like some of the things...but they do all this stuff that is like experimental Japanese people come and cut things up with chain saws they did like last year at that show and then they have barbecues and drink beer. And I'm just like, whatever. I'm too old to be like entertained by that... I mean why would you network with those people? I have tons of friends, plus I'm easily 10 years older than [them] and I'm aesthetically I would say much more traditional and so when I see a lot of them making work that wow that's really like art school project #17, where you make pillows out of your own hair I mean whatever, I feel like a lot of it is really bad and I don't really want to be associated with it.... [there is] a stereotypical bad reputation that [Bushwick artists are] a bunch of rich kids whose parents pay their rent. And that they “make art” and they are “artists,” and I don't know...I don't like to be associated with the people that identify themselves as artists in my neighborhood. I would say that the majority of them like I don't have anything in common with. There are certainly several “real artists” who...Bushwick is their place and it's because it's cheap and they can get a lot of space.

This artist clearly articulates a negative stereotype of Bushwick artists and the work they produce, and distances herself from this world. She also points to the youth of many of the artists in Bushwick, suggesting that they are not real artists and make bad work, and calls attention to the unclear definition of art and artist. She seems to go beyond simply feeling that networking with those in the Bushwick art community wouldn't help her to get the sort of shows she wants by implying that it might actively hurt her by tainting her reputation or identity as a good artist by

association. She also implies that the “real artists” are somehow in Bushwick for legitimate reasons – affordable space – rather than because of a desire to join the Bushwick scene.

Beyond the characterization of Bushwick art as “bad,” it is also important to note that several interviewees said, in less value-laden terms, that they did not feel they had much in common aesthetically with various artists they had met in the area – the intimation being that doing work that is similar to that of another artist is a fundamental way in which a bond or community can be forged.³⁴ Some interviewees pointed to earlier art scenes in New York, such as the Soho and the East Village, that have been associated with particular artistic movements, and noted that they do not feel Bushwick has a similar tie to any one style.³⁵

Taken together, this suggests that aesthetic sensibilities and tastes are important as a basis for community in Bushwick, and perhaps other art communities as well. Without a shared aesthetic, artists may run the risk of not respecting each other’s work, and not wanting to associate with each other, or more broadly, not have enough in common artistically to feel much of a connection. Working in a highly competitive art world such as NYC, and a difficult city that requires most artists to work full time jobs to pay bills, my interviewees seem to feel that they must conserve their time and energy, and only associate with those who are likely to help their art careers. Further, some interviewees clearly state that they don’t want to be associated with this amateurish work, suggesting that such association could be tainting either for the way others see them and their work, or the way they do, i.e., their identity. Establishing yourself as a “good” artist seems to constitute an important dimension of some interviewees’ hesitation to embrace the

³⁴ The issue of whether Bushwick has anything resembling a cohesive style is considered in more depth in chapter 5.

³⁵ Although some interviewees pointed out that these sorts of linkages – attaching a particular style or movement to a given scene – are likely to be made retrospectively by art historians, and are perhaps difficult to see as something is happening – and thus question whether it is ever possible to see a characteristic style emerging from a scene as it is developing.

Bushwick art world. This type of distancing was mainly evident among artists in their early thirties, who had relatively recently completed art school and might be especially likely to feel the need to distance themselves from amateurish work. For all of this distancing, however, virtually all interviewees note that there are at least a few well-known and well-respected artists in Bushwick, “real artists” who give the area some credibility.

Peddling wares: the challenges of participating in an open, noncommercial art world

Discussed in the next chapter, Bushwick gallerists are guided by several ideals, including a desire to facilitate participation and openness in the art community, an interest in creating venues for showing art that eschew the perceived commercial and conservative Chelsea principles, and a desire to reach out to the broader Bushwick community. Gallerists and arts organizers in Bushwick work tirelessly to create spaces and events that allow them to fulfill these ideals, but many of the artists I spoke with seemingly had somewhat different priorities. Although all of my interviewees participated in Bushwick Open Studios, they had some reservations about showing work in a forum that provides essentially no barriers to entry at all, and that is unlikely to put their work in front of a buying or powerful audience. Even when interviewees do not specifically mention low quality of work as a problem, the very ease of participating in some events, such as Bushwick Open Studios, may contribute to the sense among many of my respondents that Bushwick is a place for hacks; one respondent, an artist in his mid 30s who is currently represented by a Chelsea gallery, noted:

When I first finished grad school I first moved to this building in '06 and I got a gallery right away. I was a bit snobbier than I am now and I didn't want to associate with the people doing open studios, it seemed desperate to me, but I've come around, and I'm more I guess humble now and I don't make such distinctions. I only wanted to associated myself with “successful” artists... And that's almost part of the myth that allows art to be marketable is that it's hard to access, so why would you want to just peddle your wares so easily?

Here, my informant views some of the artists in BOS as “desperate,” as “peddling their wares,” suggesting a marginal art world in which subpar artists vie for the attention of onlookers – even though he distances himself from these “snobby” beliefs by stating that at this point he has outgrown them. Although it is easy to show your work in setting such as BOS, he suggests that doing so runs the risk of lowering the status of your work simply by making it so readily accessible in a venue that does not provide any controls to entry. Although this artist feels he has moved past this perception of BOS, it is likely that other artists may have similar feelings about what may amount to low status art shows. This suggests that the spirit of many Bushwick art galleries and events – one that attempts to embrace an open and participatory ethic – may in fact repel a number of artists in the area who are concerned with furthering their careers, or at best artists may see them as a shot in the dark diversion, rather than an effort that is likely to put their work in front of powerful viewers and moneyed buyers.³⁶ Although the artists I spoke with may well theoretically support the values espoused by Bushwick gallerists and organizers, they feel that the reality of the situation is that they compete in a cutthroat art market, and may feel that such venues could harm the reputation of their work.

Although the concept of “peddling wares” suggests a disdain for a commercial approach to art, in fact many artists seemed to be very eager to sell their work. Unlike Bushwick gallerists, many of whom left Chelsea to pursue a different gallery model (discussed at length in the next chapter), overall Bushwick artists are very interested in selling. They are, on the whole, particularly interested in showing work in Chelsea, as this is widely perceived to be the primary and most prestigious art market. Unlike Bushwick gallerists, some artists were very open about having no problems with Chelsea’s supposed commercialism and conservative taste. Many of my

³⁶ In fact Bushwick galleries are at least somewhat selective in the work that they show – certainly they are more selective than Open Studios. It is not that easy to get a show in the more established Bushwick galleries, but my interviewees who hadn’t tried wouldn’t necessarily know that.

interviewees seemed to feel that Chelsea galleries showed work that was consistently good, and in a way that was very accessible, due to the intense concentration of galleries in Chelsea, in comparison to galleries elsewhere. Most of my interviewees visit galleries in Chelsea far more often than those in Brooklyn, including Bushwick. Overall artists didn't express the sense that Chelsea was overly conservative or commercial, and instead held views that could be best seen as pragmatic and open minded; for example:

If I'm ever going to not have to lift plywood for a living, I'm going to have to start selling my artwork which is a lot, lot harder to do than selling cabinets. But I also don't spend a ton of time networking with strangers to try to develop that. Also sculpture is a rough sell from the start, although that's also kind of an excuse. All of which is to say that I don't spend as much time in Chelsea as I probably should. I'd be more enthusiastic about a brand new storefront gallery in Chelsea [in comparison to a new gallery in Bushwick]..although that would be really expensive, probably more like Chelsea 6th floor but you know what I mean, brand new unknown but in Chelsea means they're making a play at a market that I should be making a play at myself, you see what I mean? So yeah it would be fun to have an opening in Bushwick and meet a bunch of new other Bushwick people but if it's not going to develop into more than a bunch more acquaintances.... from my point of view, as someone who's a little bit cynical about the idea of an avant garde, and is not too heavily invested in Marxist concerns about selling out, I would happily sell artwork, I don't have a problem with that, Chelsea is where people with more money go to buy work for more money.

Here, the 42 year old sculptor recognizes the need to sell his work in order to have any sort of possibility of moving beyond his current day job. Other respondents similarly looked at Chelsea pragmatically – as the place to show your work if you ever hope to sell it and succeed in the eyes of the art world. Although Bushwick may be easier to approach and show in than Chelsea, my respondents felt that the rewards of showing in Bushwick were limited. Some of my informants indicated that they were interested or “open to” showing in Bushwick galleries, but had seemingly not pursued those opportunities with fervor. Thus, my informants seem to be far more worried about wasting their time by showing their work to the wrong audiences or cheapening it by showing it in non-prestigious venues than appearing to be “commercial” or a “sell out.”

Despite these qualms with the ease of showing work in Bushwick, all of my interviewees nonetheless did participate in Bushwick Open Studios in 2010, and several interviewees had participated in the annual event in earlier years as well. Above, my interviewee notes that it would be “fun” to have an opening in Bushwick – suggesting that it might be enjoyable rather than career-building. Other interviewees similarly indicated that they viewed doing Bushwick Open Studios as an enjoyable event, as a way to meet neighbors, other artists, or as a shot-in-the-dark attempt to have curators look at their work. While a few felt that they had made some important contacts via participation in BOS, and some even sold work, most indicated that it was a fun and interesting experience, though not one that led to any useful connections.

Taken together, these comments suggest that Bushwick artists and gallerists, discussed at length in the next chapter, may often have different goals. Gallerists seem focused on creating an art community that stands in sharp contrast to Chelsea – one that fosters open and widespread participation, noncommercial values, and community building, while artists largely recognize the need to show in Chelsea in order to sell work and further their careers and don’t want to waste their time in Bushwick, even if they otherwise support the goals of Bushwick gallerists. Although my interviewees recognize that Bushwick is home to a number of serious artists, the most visible artists – at least those who seem to fuel their stereotype of Bushwick artists – are young, not serious, and not people my interviewees want to be associated with.

Hipsters, party people, and consumption versus production

In addition to “bad artists,” other key outgroups for my interviewees include “hipsters,” partiers, and young kids, three potentially distinct groups that seem in many cases to overlap, at least according to the perception of my interviewees. These are largely young people who are

considered peripheral to, or sometimes even actively engaged in the art scene in Bushwick, yet not members who can contribute meaningfully to the art itself in any way. Noted above, they supposedly produce work that is not good. Beyond this, their main failing, as articulated by my interviewees, is their attention to superficial appearances rather than serious art work. I was surprised to find that so many informants – a majority - described hipsters and partiers as outgroups. This may have to do with the stereotype, largely fueled by media coverage, that Bushwick is a place for hipsters and party kids. In fact, much of the media coverage of the area describes Bushwick as a hip party area. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that many artists seemingly feel the need to distance themselves from these groups.

Although the term ‘hipster’ seemingly has many definitions,³⁷ what matters most here is how my interviewees understand them. The main trouble with hipsters, according to my interviewees, is their attention to appearance rather than focus on substance. They are dilettantes who have limited originality and use whatever originality they do possess on clothing rather than serious art. Noted in the last chapter, artists strive to avoid superficiality and insincerity, inauthenticity to the self in their work, as well as in other arenas of life as well. Work that constitutes an honest and authentic extension of the self is an important standard used to evaluate others’ work, as well as other forms of expression, such as clothing choice, demeanor, and a general focus. Hipsters are often disparaged as trust fund kids who like to party and look good, and worse still, are snobbish and elitist on the basis of appearance. For example, one interviewee describes his horror at the hipsters attending a recent Bushwick party:

³⁷ For example, Greif et al. (2010) offer a quasi/sociological definition: “The hipster is that person, overlapping with declassing or disaffiliating groupings – the starving artist, the starving graduate student, the neo-bohemian, the vegan or bicyclist or skatepunk, the would-be blue-collar or post-racial individual – who in fact aligns himself both with rebel subculture and with the dominant class, and opens up a poisonous conduit between the two.” There are many other possible definitions, however, as the term is thrown around constantly in the media and beyond.

I think if you were to look at an event like the Bushwick block party which was this like, oh my god, it made me nauseous actually, what I imagined Williamsburg was like in the earlier 2000s, a certain type of hipster, ironic Michael Jordan jerseys, neon colors... the other thing I really appreciate about the type of network that I've been a part of online via Twitter is that they're all not into that particular type of fashion and that particular type of hipster, I don't even like to use the word 'hipster,' that kind of cultural um...ingratiating or something, that particular type of being. They're just kind of real people that really care. They're kind of art nerds and that's something that I really focus on. I focus on, you know what, I don't care if I wear fucking flip flops and whatever shorts I happen to have in my house. I'm not going to spend 3 hours putting my outfit together. And [dressing up] has benefits in certain ways for certain cultural things, but what I'm hoping is that it becomes more about the actual work, and not about this particular image. And I feel that most of the artists I'm connected to and most of the critics and bloggers and people I associate with have that same mentality.

Here my interviewee clearly feels that it is important to focus on the art itself, rather than the fashions and other trappings associated with "hipsters," or we could substitute whichever term he would prefer. He feels that the focus on fashion distracts from a commitment to the real art, and he has no interest in spending his time on appearances. My informant would rather put effort into connecting with "real people who really care," who are "art nerds" who presumably are totally focused on the art itself rather than appearances, who can support his hope that "it becomes more about the actual work, and not about this particular image." Many of my other interviewees echoed this sentiment in several ways, ranging from more disparagement of the superficiality of hipsters to the superficiality of art scenes and schmoozing. Artists I spoke with value authentic expressions of the self in every realm, especially one's own artwork. Hipsters, who are seen as caring about surface more than substance, and who cater to trends rather than their own authentic vision, stand in opposition to core values of the artists I spoke with. To the extent that artists believe that Bushwick is overrun with hipsters who are out partying and making the art "scene" visible, they are loathe to join in.

Similarly, several interviewees mentioned "partiers" or "party kids" as an outgroup in Bushwick. These are people who are young and spend more time partying than actually producing work, and

in many cases may overlap with hipsters. Also an oft-cited feature of Bushwick, partiers are similarly often artists who are not serious about their work. More interested in the “scene” than serious art, they are to be avoided. A few of my interviewees seemed almost frightened of party kids, as if they posed a real threat to their own ability to get work done. Some of my interviewees in their mid twenties and beyond referred to earlier periods in their life when they had themselves spent too much time partying, resulting in drug and alcohol problems, instability, and diminished productivity. For one young interviewee who otherwise embraces the Bushwick art world, the main problem associated with living in Bushwick in fact was the intense party scene that constantly threatened to engulf her. Partying thus is problematic mainly because it compromises a central goal of artists: to be serious and prolific producers of art.

Overall, then, many artists I spoke with seemed eager to dissociate themselves from these groups, and instead position themselves as serious artists who focus on their work rather than a showy, fashionable appearance, following trends, or partying the night away, and the stereotype that Bushwick caters to these groups does little to facilitate their attachment to the area and arts community. Noted earlier, for a variety of reasons artists must work very hard to establish an artistic identity, and with this in mind it is understandable that being surrounded by poor quality or not serious artists and hangers on, e.g., hipsters, would be threatening and unappealing to artists trying to establish their careers.

“How about trees and trash?” Not wanting to be a “gentrifier”

Finally, another barrier to strongly identifying with the Bushwick art scene seems to be discomfort with the possibility of being a “gentrifier” of the neighborhood. All of my respondents were keenly aware of the recent changes in Bushwick, and some expressed discomfort with the

possibility that they might be agents of neighborhood change.³⁸ My respondents were very aware of the rapid gentrification taking place in Bushwick, as well as the potential for artists to serve as the “shock troops” of gentrification, and didn’t want to be affiliated with that. Artists recognized that there are some benefits to neighborhood gentrification, such as reduced crime rate and increased neighborhood cleanliness, but along with these benefits could cause trouble such as higher rents, displacement of original tenants (and eventually artists as well), and cultural clash. One respondent indicates dismay over the gentrification in Bushwick:

Everything is a tradeoff. I don't...there was this "trees not trash" thing going around. This girl, I think she worked at the [local coffee shop], started this campaign to get rid of trash and grow more trees, and that was about 4 or 5 years ago, and I remember going, no! I want my rent to stay low, I don't want a bunch of people out here. How about trees *and* trash?

Here Mike worries that cleaning up Bushwick will contribute to the gentrification of the neighborhood, complete with more attention, newcomers moving in, and eventually higher rents. He thus laments the efforts of one of the local residents to clean up the area. Described in detail in chapter 7, my interviewees were universally attuned to gentrification, and many had mixed feelings about the possibility of changing Bushwick in any way. Some conveyed clear disdain for artists who seemed to put no effort into connecting with the broader community of long term residents and instead started their own world; for example:

...Like Brooklyn Natural, it’s a huge waste of money. It’s ridiculous. I think that some of the people who are new to this hood are afraid to go down Knickerbocker because there’s the old hood and the people who really live here are hanging out there and they might be intimidated or scared but I’m not . I don’t want to pay a lot at Brooklyn natural. If you’re scared or you don’t want to go mix w the locals then you have to pay a lot of money at Brooklyn natural for your stuff. There’s something kind of spoiled about some of the young people that maybe they don’t know that you can buy milk for half of what they’re paying because they have no experience maybe? I don’t know. Everybody in b natural an wait in line everyone

³⁸ The issue of gentrification in Bushwick is discussed at length in Chapter 7. Here I am to bring it up briefly as a means of showcasing some of the implications for artistic community in Bushwick.

in there is terribly cool and very hipster, I don't know where they get there money to afford this kind of stuff but they do.... when it comes to getting fruits and veg I'll go to any store I want, and usually I'm looking for where I can save money because I've had to shop my whole life so it's for me doesn't make sense to pay twice as much when there's all this other stuff that's same or even better quality from all these other [mainly long-term resident-run] stores. You don't have to be afraid or...its just a very funny part of gentrification, a part I never really liked which is people come here, artists or whatever and from what I'm observing they don't really want to mix with the locals so they'd rather start a really expensive business here a restaurant here, start things that are much more expensive and are much more their own taste that they want to bring from Williamsburg or Manhattan...and push people out and make everything more expensive.

Here he disdains the fact that these stores are so expensive in the midst of a poor neighborhood, and that they cater to a group of young people who seemingly are not adventurous or perhaps courteous enough to get to know the long term inhabitants of the neighborhood, and instead patronize expensive businesses that eventually raise prices in the neighborhood, thus contributing to gentrification. Here my informant clearly distances himself from the “terribly cool and very hipster” patrons of Brooklyn Natural, the only fancy grocery store in Bushwick for several years. Another respondent put her discomfort with gentrification directly in terms of association with other Bushwick artists; she notes, of a performance artist friend of hers:

He's been doing these...one man shows where he does like a dozen characters that are of the neighborhood for a long time. The one he's done most recently is one about Williamsburg basically and he talks about artists being the ground troops for gentrification and I kind of feel like that's true but then I'm, I always feel it's like the other kids, not about me, and then like wait a minute, but I am that ground troop so wait, but it makes me uncomfortable to associate too much with those other kids.

Here my informant again articulates an awareness of artists' role in gentrification, and clearly indicates that she does not want to be associated with the artists in Bushwick she feels could be identified as gentrifiers – implying that she would not want to be identified as a gentrifier herself, or, for that matter, a Bushwick artist. Throughout my interviews respondents seemed very aware of the gentrification taking place in Bushwick, and they expressed ambivalence and hesitation

about it, as well as concern over their own role in the process. This issue is discussed in greater detail in chapter 7, but for now it's important to note its implications for fracturing the Bushwick art community.

Taken together, these comments suggest that artists in Bushwick are extremely aware of the gentrification in their midst and are deeply uncomfortable with the possibility that they could be facilitating gentrification. Against this backdrop, they seem particularly unlikely to want to identify themselves with a group of artists they perceive as highly visible – “clamoring for attention” – and young, amateurish, perhaps “trust fund” kids, who, with their parties and bad art and money are driving the gentrification of Bushwick and potentially raising rents and displacing longterm residents. This discomfort makes it difficult for my interviewees to want to associate with Bushwick artists, and brings up complex and difficult issues surrounding their own role in the potential gentrification of the region.

Conclusions

Overall, then, many artists I spoke with did not identify strongly with the arts community in Bushwick. They felt that doing so might be a waste of their time in the sense of not leading forward to Chelsea and sales, but beyond that they seemed to actively distance themselves from some of the negative stereotypes of Bushwick artists. They felt particularly uncomfortable with the possibility that they might be agents of gentrification. Thus, although there are major practical barriers to participating heavily in the Bushwick art world – namely, little time left over for socializing, and whatever time is available needing to go to the forging of more promising art world ties – the extent to which my interviewees seemed to distance themselves from what they perceive to be stereotypical Bushwick artists is striking, and suggests identity concerns and boundary work. Specifically, identifying yourself with “Bushwick artists,” at least in stereotypical

form, implies that you might be a bad artist, a hack, a cheesy hipster, or a gentrifier, and points to identity concerns as a potentially major driver in the search for community. This is particularly striking given that all of the artists I spoke with were active participants in Bushwick Open Studios, and for many it was not the first time they had done it, and thus were clearly participating, to some degree, in the Bushwick art world.

A Bohemian Dream: Inspiration and Support in Bushwick

On the other side of the spectrum, some artists (roughly a third) expressed intense and passionate involvement in the Bushwick art world. For many of these deeply involved artists, Bushwick is a creative haven for like-minded artists who can help to support each other in their endeavors.³⁹ In many, though by no means all, cases these highly involved artists are, perhaps not surprisingly, less oriented toward getting work shown in established venues such as Chelsea galleries, though they don't necessarily reject Chelsea, and are more interested in simply producing work that they enjoy, with limited regard for how their work is perceived by those outside of their peer group. Many simply are prioritizing making their work rather than dealing with the rest of their art career. For these artists the concerns described above either don't apply, or fail to dampen their intense enthusiasm for Bushwick otherwise. For some of these artists, Bushwick is nearly their whole world and they rarely leave.⁴⁰ The Bushwick art community has great appeal to some artists because it is inspiring, provides considerable support from other artists, and reinforces a set of alternative artistic and life values and a DIY ethic.

Connection to past bohemias

³⁹ There were more artists in this camp during my later interviews. It's difficult to say for sure, but my sense is that the clout of the Bushwick art world is on the rise and artists may be more interested in identifying with it over time.

⁴⁰ I say nearly only because virtually no one earns their money in Bushwick, although some do work from home – for companies and clients that are not located in Bushwick.

Several of my interviewees noted that Bushwick is full of inspiring “creative energy.” This is often described as something that is part of the atmosphere, something that can be hard to pin down exactly but that is nonetheless inspiring. It is evident in the physical environment of Bushwick, primarily in the street art, the art displayed on the walls of coffee shops and other venues, and even the industrial architecture itself, and the diverse array of people on the street.⁴¹ One interviewee, who moved to the area several years ago, not knowing much about it before arrival, describes his initial impression of Bushwick:

I guess I saw the graffiti on the buildings and what the loft spaces looked like, and it was my idea of what artist spaces would look like, and I knew that these were studios here on Bogart, but I thought that was it, I had no idea that everything around here is studio spaces and that there were things going on all over the place. So yeah I’ve been here long enough to see some of the gallery spaces open up, some of those things happen. It’s been really cool.

For this interviewee and others, Bushwick’s appearance fits a well-developed stereotype of what a thriving bohemian art world should look like, and it is inspiring to be a part of that. Most interviewees’ image of arts neighborhoods seems to be based either on their own past experiences in other such bohemia, or on what they’ve read and heard about such places. Either way, artists are very familiar with other bohemian worlds, and see Bushwick in terms of them. In my interviews artists compared Bushwick to many different current and past bohemia, including Gothenberg, Berlin, Prague, San Francisco, Shanghai, London and Portland. Most frequently, however, Bushwick was likened to earlier bohemia in NYC – Soho, the East Village, and to a lesser degree, Williamsburg – and part of the excitement of Bushwick is the prospect of participating in the current incarnation of such a bohemian, rather than just hearing about it retrospectively.

⁴¹ The actual art shown in Bushwick is described in more detail in chapter 5, and the diversity of Bushwick’s residents is covered in more detail in chapter 6.

I don't want to be a romantic about it but I do have these notions. When I first moved [to Bushwick] I was talking about it one day, I was like man I would have loved to have been in Soho in the 60s, kind of had this romantic notion about that, or the West Village in the 50s or the East Village, and the woman I was living with who was a little bit older was saying, it was like here. She was there [in the East Village]...She was saying you're living in a place that has the potential to become what that was, and that kind of added a different perspective to how I think about Bushwick.

Above, my interviewee is clearly well aware of different past bohemia in NYC, and, like many of my interviewees, wishes he could have participated in them. Bushwick is his chance to do this, an exciting prospect. In the example above, and others, this yearning for past bohemia also seems to connect him to older artists – they share a similar understanding of what bohemia look like, and first-hand knowledge of what earlier worlds were like is passed down to a new generation of artists. Thus connecting Bushwick to earlier bohemian neighborhoods adds to its excitement, and links Bushwick to a greater constellation of bohemia, as well as linking younger artists to older ones. For young artists, Bushwick is their chance to experience an exciting art world that they've only read about; for some older interviewees, Bushwick is reminiscent of earlier bohemia they've participated in, and that's exciting too. In all cases, Bushwick is largely understood in light of earlier bohemia that have come and gone.

Inspiring to know that there are many artists and art events in your midst

Even if artists don't know many other people in the area, many find it inspiring to be in a place where there are so many little signs of artistic activity. Simply being around other artists, even strangers, is inspiring. One interviewee explains:

I don't believe in this spiritual stuff, I'm an atheist, I don't believe there's any special force in the world, but I do think that when you exist in a place you do pick up stuff and you know that down the street there's an art opening 2 blocks

away, just knowing that this stuff is going on around you inspires you and lets you know that there are other people out there doing that, and I think that's the most important part of living there. It's not necessarily that you're going to get some guy walking in who's going to buy all your work, it's more like you're going to walk down the street and there's going to be an art opening that you duck into, or there's going to be a show or some guy doing some weird graffiti on a wall, and that in itself, that creation, everywhere you look there's creation, and that's gorgeous, and that is why I like it there, and why I am so concerned about gentrification and stuff, because I don't want it to not be that way.

Here my interviewee describes several features of Bushwick that she finds inspiring, features that serve as indications of the huge amount of "creation" taking place in Bushwick. Beyond that, some find it deeply motivating to live and/or work in a place where there are so many artists, even when you're not close to them, or don't even know them at all. While some interviewees have a very negative vision of the typical Bushwick artist (noted above), they nonetheless are aware that there are many astereotypical artists in the area, many of whom may be very good, and proximity to these real or imagined artists is motivating. Even artists who are highly critical of other Bushwick artists and their work in general often cite the few well-known artists in the area, acknowledging that Bushwick is not solely a place for hacks. Thus artists, even the more cynical ones, are aware that there is talent in Bushwick. Describing his enthusiasm for his new studio in Bushwick, one informant says:

The other artists around you, being around artists...has an effect, helps me to push my limits. And that's important....The first studio I had [in Manhattan] had these geriatric people coming to do whatever, here I'm around much higher, really great artists. It makes me want to be at the top of my game, really on. NY is the center of the art world in the world, really, and there's vital places like London or Berlin or LA and China, but NY is the center and I think so as far as working here goes, you feel like this is the most vital place to have a studio in NY, that's basically saying it's the most vital place to have a studio in the world, you know? This is where it is.

This artist worked at home, outside of NYC, for most of his artistic career, and then had a studio in Manhattan that he shared with artists who were considerably older than he is. Compared to these two situations, he finds Bushwick extremely motivating. Even though he claims to not have

a lot of friends in Bushwick and doesn't live here, he nonetheless finds it inspiring, because he considers Bushwick a place with many talented artists. Moreover, given that NYC is the center of the world artwise, and Bushwick is one of the major residential areas in NYC for artists, this informant views Bushwick as the center of the universe in terms of art production. Not everyone in Bushwick lives up to this standard, of course, but enough do to keep the hope and inspiration alive. All around you you see – and beyond that also imagine – all sorts of great artistic things taking place, and you feel motivated to be a part of that.

Beyond this, artists in Bushwick are there to provide emotional support for the many challenges that are near universal to artists (as discussed in the previous chapter). They also provide practical help, often on an informal barter system, as well as sharing information and skills. In many different ways, then, it is key for artists in Bushwick to be surrounded by each other. Even when you don't know other artists personally, drawing on your knowledge of NYC's renown and a mythology of past bohemias that provides hope that Bushwick either is or is becoming a legendary bohemia, you interpret the activity around you meaningful, and inspiring.

Good things without a plan

Several interviewees indicated that Bushwick is full of inspiring surprises, and described images of a rich sidewalk life akin to that described by Jane Jacobs. In Bushwick you can stumble upon all sorts of interesting things and people, without trying. Thanks to both the artistic community and the many other diverse Bushwick residents, the streets are filled with an interesting mix of people, activities, sights and things. Artists often described moments of feeling enchanted with the neighborhood as they randomly found people and things that were helpful for their career or other practical activities, or simply interesting. Part of this also is the belief that all kinds of great things that you haven't even learned about yet are happening all around you. In this way

Bushwick thus seems to fit in with artists' sense of hopefulness and openness to possibility, faith in the universe. Without planning, Bushwick is filled with wonderful surprises and intrigue that is exciting and artistically inspiring.

Many interviewees also note the importance of being able to see other artists and familiar faces without planning. This feature of the neighborhood – being able to run into your friends without much effort, and not having to take a lot of time out of your day to feel a part of the community – is especially valuable. One interviewee comments:

I think that's one of my favorite parts of living in Bushwick, the community aspect of it...is you're walking around Bushwick constantly and seeing, being able to just say hi to dude on the corner and not have to stop and have a long conversation, it was like such a special thing, just saying hi to the guy on the bench or whatever, and also seeing, knowing the streets well enough that when a new piece of street art goes up you can recognize that and you can say, oh wow this is so awesome, so and so has been here...[xx] is my local bar and my favorite part about going there was that I could go alone and know that I'd always know half the people in there if not all of them, and that most of them were artists and that all of them were really supportive.

Here a major part of the appeal of Bushwick, and a source of the sense of community, is the fact that you can interact with others – and others who are supportive of you – without planning, and without major investment of time. She describes a Cheers-esque situation in which she can walk into her local tavern and always find a friend, a sentiment echoed by a few other artists describing the Bushwick bars as well. She also notes the importance of street art – for the art itself and also as a marker that other artists have passed through.

It is not only inspiring to be in the midst of other artists, but it also keeps you accountable when you bump into an artist acquaintance; for example:

I'll go out and I'll run into my friends who are artists and they'll be like, what are you working on man, what have you been doing this week? And you're like, um I played a lot of video games this week...and they're like, uh that's cool too, I don't own a TV but...and you're like, shit! Alright alright I gotta stop. So there is that pressure.

Especially given the relative lack of structure in the lives of many artists, at least with respect to producing their own work, it is important and inspiring to be around other artists to whom you feel accountable, and this sort of accountability arguably works best when it's unplanned, and thus you never know when you'll need to be ready.

Especially in light of the many difficulties expressed by other artists re: the challenges of actually making time to see friends and others due largely to extremely demanding work schedules and limited funds, the fact that this type of interaction can take place without having to invest time and energy in planning or transit, is extremely valuable, and again solidifies Bushwick's ability to bring good things without a plan. In this way arguably Bushwick lends a sense of fun, adventure and discovery. Whether acquaintances or friends, exciting new street art, a new gallery or coffee shop, or a bizarre and random street scene, interesting surprises await in Bushwick.

Noted earlier, many of my interviewees indicate that they are especially loathe to join any kind of community that is organized and requires regular meetings or any other kind of formal participation. Again this is not surprising given the trend away from most forms of organized activities for most people identified by many social scientists, e.g., Putnam. However, in light of this it is clear that what Bushwick *does* provide for many artists is a form of community outside of this, one that does not require formal participation of any variety. It is precisely the fact that you can bump into friends and colleagues on the street, with no advance preparation, that makes Bushwick so enticing.

Small world in Bushwick means you care and matter more/DIY

Several of my interviewees indicated that living in Bushwick is nice because the art world is small and you're thus more attached to what it does have to offer. One respondent indicates what she likes about Bushwick:

My rent is really cheap, I can bike anywhere in Brooklyn very quickly, and maybe even when I do find a gallery or a meeting place I think I might hold it closer to my heart than I would if I lived someplace where there – like this place, or life café, love it, Shea Stadium, I love that place, it's the best venue – so I would say that's an upside, just feeling greater attachment to the little centers of activity.

Others expressed similar sentiments, though with a more specific emphasis on the fact that you as an individual have more of a chance to make a difference, to be heard and appreciated, in Bushwick, in comparison to the enormous art worlds of Manhattan:

...there are galleries and restaurants and bars in Bushwick that I really like and I've gotten to know the people who own them. One of my friends went to school with the owner of [a popular Bushwick restaurant] which is a pretty awesome restaurant. I find that the restaurants and bars out there are like little pioneering outposts, and going to them made me feel like I was a pioneer, a settler, and there's a certain camaraderie in that. It's the opposite of going to a place that's totally blown out, so I like that part of the Bushwick experience.

In this case my interviewee actually knows the owners of local establishments and feelings intimately connected to them, a point echoed by other informants. All of this suggests that Bushwick feels like a small art world where your individual presence matters, and where the reduced number of options available to members of the art community makes each of these that much more valuable and enjoyable, not surprising given that people are generally happier with their lot when given fewer options to choose from (Schwartz, 2004). You as a participant also feel like your showing up actually matters – you are one of only a small few, a handful of pioneers

and settlers, rather than an enormous crowd, and feel that as a participant you have a chance to really make a difference in building a scene and a community. This seems to be an important piece of a broader theme – the often-repeated phrase that Bushwick is exciting because you finally have a chance to “be a part of something.” Especially against the backdrop of the enormity and anonymity of Manhattan and NYC in general, this is very appealing.

Supporting an alternative view of success

Finally, this sense that you as an individual matter is evident in a broader DIY ethos that allows Bushwick participants to embrace alternative standards of success, artistic and otherwise. Although most hope to sell their work and support themselves by doing so, for many this goal is worthwhile only if it doesn't involve any sacrifice in terms of doing what you want to do. Thus many artists espouse a passionate, DIY approach to making work that to some degree stands in contrast to mainstream views of success, both inside and outside the mainstream (e.g., Chelsea) art world. This is an ethos that supports the risk taking and passion described earlier. Some artists are very, very poor, and risk homeless or having their electricity or phone shut off. They make these sacrifices largely so that they are able to pursue an art career – a choice that many outside of the art world – and also within some art worlds – would not understand. In Bushwick, however, these decisions are not derided, but rather taken as evidence of passion, commitment, and the guts to take the risk necessary to pursue a dream.

In a statement that touches upon most of the key reasons why some artists love Bushwick, one informant, who usually leaves Bushwick only twice a week to bartend in Manhattan, describes what Bushwick means to him:

I don't know that I care [about showing work] anymore, and I think that has a lot to do with this neighborhood. All the ideas of what it meant to be an artist what it was all about, all the things you're supposed to do, like you're supposed to show in a gallery, you're supposed to show here and do this, those don't seem to matter anymore. All I really want now is to just have enough free time and have enough money to produce what I want, cos that's really what it comes down to...I guess there's a pervasive mentality out here [in Bushwick], not exactly counterculture but a secluedness because you know out here people will be bragging about how long it's been since they've been to Manhattan....we're all like that, like this is our area, this is our little bubble, we're all like constantly inspiring each other and we're all out here doing different things. We sit around and talk about art and we all share different things with each other and I don't know if it's just that people who are drawn to a specific type of work are out here or if it's the other way around, like we all just started merging our idea pool together doing things, but I found a lot more artists out here that are doing work that I'm excited about than anywhere else in the city. So you have to be kind of influenced by that... I think a lot of what's out here that really appeals to me is people are like, fuck it let's just do it ourselves. We want to have an art show, let's do an art show, we'll put it on. No one has to house it, we'll put it in the street. Let's perform, we can't get a gig somewhere for our music, ok we'll just do it on the street corner over here, we'll sit around and do it....People out here don't think that they can't do anything. And I think that has a lot to do with the loft buildings. People move out here and they're like oh I don't know how to build anything but I'll figure it out. I feel like you get a lot of people out here who are very independent of regular society's [goals], like the house and the kids and what the world wants. Here it's like, nah, I just want to do what I want to do. So that's what's pervaded my work, that idea. Being out here I've certainly been a lot more inspired. The question has been more what are you doing with your life, and instead of what should you do with your life, what's going to make you happy? And I think that people out here are concerned about that.

Here my interviewee mentions many of the things that seem to attract artists to the Bushwick community: it's a place that is "our little bubble," a place that you control. It is filled with people who inspire each other and share aesthetic interests and a DIY ethic, who are enthusiastically willing to help each other achieve artistic goals. Moreover, in Bushwick you are surrounded by others who share your values, which frequently depart from "the house and kids and what the world wants," or even more typical definitions of artistic success, such as showing your work in particular venues. Bushwick supports an alternative set of ideals and standards, and supplies many people who can help you to meet goals in line with these ideals. This alternative set of

ideals is likely to be particularly appealing given the difficulty of achieving real success in the art world, and the perils of achieving it, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Taken together, these points suggest a community that appeals to artists' visions of what a bohemia should look like. It is everything they imagined the East Village or Soho to be, only now they can participate in and shape it, as opposed to only reading about it thirty years after its heyday. This is exciting and inspiring to many artists who embrace the Bushwick art world. Bushwick also exists in artists' imaginations in that they view it as a place of possibility, where all kinds of interesting artistic things that they haven't yet discovered are happening all around. Bushwick is a place where one doesn't need to plan things out, a place that supports an a life outlook that centrally involves faith in unknown possibilities. For those who embrace an alternate set of values and goals that depart from those of mainstream society, Bushwick furnishes social and practical support, creative energy, and great inspiration

Conclusions

Overall, the artists I spoke with ranged widely in their levels of commitment to the Bushwick art community. For many of my interviewees, particularly those who hope to show in established galleries, Bushwick does not seem to provide artists with what they recognize as a strong sense of community – or at least not one they participate in, even if they see others engaged. These interviewees did not seem to be particularly bothered by this, and noted that they were unlikely to seek out community and had limited resources to devote to it – any community- seeking effort had more to do with making connections that would likely improve one's art career. Thus, not surprisingly the interviewees who seemed most focused on pursuing a career in the mainstream art world seemed least likely to commit to Bushwick's art scene, largely because of time constraints and the need to network with people who they perceive as having more clout in the

mainstream art world. On the other hand, for many artists who are either less goal-oriented in their art or have goals that depart from mainstream art world success, Bushwick is a bohemian haven of like minded individuals. Bushwick thus tends to separate artists on the basis of seriousness, although there are some exceptions to this.

The disparaging comments that my interviewees made about the Bushwick art world show very clear boundary work, aimed mainly at groups in close proximity (Lamont & Fournier, 1992, among others; also lots of work in psychology). It seems that throughout their discussion, my interviewees were very concerned with appearing to be “serious” artists, rather than hacks. My interviewees prize serious work, work that can or should speak for itself, and seem to resent the idea that you must be social to get your work shown - that you would need social connections, or flashy clothes, or anything else to speak for your work. My informants thus draw sharp lines between themselves, bad artists, hipsters, and party people. This tendency to disparage those who are not “serious artists” has been documented elsewhere, notably Simpson (1981) but also in the others. Stuart Plattner, for example, in an ethnographic study of artists in St. Louis notes: “‘Real’ artists are not bohemians, in the sense that their purpose in life is to create art, and their lifestyle is an efficient, low-cost means to that end. For others like bohemians and hippies, the lifestyle is an end in itself. Serious artists, who tend to be self-centered workaholics, despise this as mere hedonism.” (1996:26).⁴² Artists in my interviews clearly depict their interests, goals, lifestyles and selves as those of “serious artists,” yet they don’t show the same sort of disdain for bohemianism documented by Plattner. It may simply be that the connotations of “bohemia” have shifted since 1996, making it less offensive to my interviewees. Beyond this, my informants seemed to latch onto an idealized portrait of past bohemians – one that keeps the positives, such as

⁴² Discussed in greater detail later, this quote suggests an interesting contrast: my interviewees find the idea of bohemia very exciting, but generally dislike a lot of the character traits associated with bohemians, e.g., lifestyle concerns over serious artistic pursuits. This may indicate that they hold onto a very idealized portrait of past bohemians, clinging to the palatable features rather than the less appealing ones.

concentrated creative energy and innovation, but omits the hangers-on, partying, and superficiality that they dislike in Bushwick.

What Bushwick does seem to provide for virtually all artists, however, is a way to feel like an artist, and ways of helping to push your work forward. Many have suggested that face-to-face interaction may be especially crucial in the case of artistic communities - Lloyd (2004), for example, suggests that artists of all kinds need to be able to live near each other to exchange ideas and helpful information through casual everyday interaction. Similarly, Florida (2002) argues that one of the defining features of the “creative class” is its insistence on living in tolerant and diverse urban centers, places where creative people can interact with other creative people. Molotch (2004) and Currid (2007) similarly suggest that the spontaneous and casual socializing involved in face-to-face interaction makes creative community very important for cultural producers. Despite the fact that many of my interviewees claimed to have little respect for other Bushwick artists, and distanced themselves from this stereotype, nonetheless they described several ways in which they found it motivating and useful for their work to be surrounded by artists.

Living in Bushwick also seems to bolster one’s identity as an artist. Knowing that you live in an arts community, knowing that there are other artists around you – many bad ones you want nothing to do with, but also at least a handful of other good artists whose presence you can hold onto for validation, and the excitement of others you haven’t met yet all contribute to a sense of oneself as an artist – a critically important goal, given that achieving “artist” status is very difficult, particularly when you’re not selling much work, as Simpson (1981) discusses at length. Similarly, Richard Lloyd (2004) found, in his study of the bohemian area of Wicker Park in Chicago, that young artists, often high in cultural capital, nonetheless preferred taking “working class” service jobs, largely because doing so did allowed them to craft a more artist-centered

identity than other types of work. Artist respondents in Simpson's work on Soho identified similar concerns. Artists, then, clearly value nurturing an identity as an artist, and are willing to take on jobs that may not allow them to make a high income, partially in order to protect this artistic identity.

For my interviewees, personal identity as an artist also seems to be bolstered by the identity of the neighborhood. While Bushwick's identity as an art world is obviously fairly new, it seems to gain from association with art neighborhoods from the past and around the world. Artists and gallerists in Bushwick continually liken the neighborhood to earlier NYC art neighborhoods, such as Soho and especially the East Village, understanding all three according to a particular art neighborhood narrative that they hope to relive. Many interviewees extend this to a broader global constellation of bohemia, including areas such as Prague, Berlin and others. The media also contribute considerably to this linkage: Bushwick is constantly discussed with reference to prior heydays of other neighborhoods in New York, mainly Williamsburg and the East Village, but also Soho (e.g., Ferris, 2006; Hastreiter, 2006; Robbins, 2007; Salz, 2008, among many others). It is as though Bushwick is seen as the newest incarnation of those neighborhoods, rather than a community that is meaningfully and uniquely tethered to Bushwick as a site. While drawing on this imagery of trans-time and space bohemia surely strengthens bonds between some artists, notably young and old, as discussed above, it may also weaken the importance of Bushwick as a unique place, compromising its ability to serve as a meaningful local community.

The actual art produced and shown in Bushwick – the art in the streets, cafes, and other spaces (and, as I will discuss later, also in the galleries) – has an interesting relationship to community. On the one hand, artists find it important to be around other artists who share their very specific artistic interests – style and ideas. Noted in the last chapter and here, artists are generally very opinionated about what they think is good, or even will consider “art” in the first place. This

usually means that a lot of work is looked on with disdain or puzzlement, and understandably this does not bode well for good relationships. In this way, it matters quite a bit that you find other artists whose work is similar in some way to your own, or at the very least that you like. At the same time, even bad work is inspiring to the extent that it reminds you that you are surrounded by “creative energy” and other artists in Bushwick. This work signifies that you are in an artistic neighborhood and that people are creating things all around you. Although on the surface these two attitudes about artwork seem antithetical, I think they may instead reveal two different levels of community: the people you want to talk to about work, and perhaps befriend, probably need to have work that you like; work on the streets serves mainly to tell you where you are – an artistic world – and you don’t need to hobnob with its producers in any way.

Overall, then, Bushwick seems to provide a vibrant and inspiring local community for many artists. Clearly some artists are more invested in it than others, but for those who do embrace it, Bushwick is a way of life and totally immersive. The rewards of Bushwick – social and emotional support, bolstering identity as an artist, being able to stumble upon inspiring people and sights, and feeling part of a community that is both real and imagined – may be difficult to replicate in a virtual environment.

I now turn to a discussion of the goals and priorities of the artists who are consistently the most engaged and active in the Bushwick art world: gallerists.

Chapter 4: Bushwick Gallerists

Bushwick galleries provide the backbone of the Bushwick art world. Although artists who live and work in the area clearly outnumber gallerists by a huge margin, it is arguably the galleries that make the neighborhood an art world. These galleries serve as social spaces, draw visitors from inside and outside the neighborhood, and help to define the area as an art world. Galleries and gallerists have thus been critically important in the development of Bushwick as an art center.

This chapter will focus on some of the central goals of Bushwick gallerists. These gallerists open spaces in Bushwick that depart radically from a standard commercial gallery model, which they feel is typified by Chelsea galleries. These friendly and noncommercial spaces allow gallerists to show work that they love, take an experimental approach to curating and displaying work, and help foster a sense of artistic community and otherwise support artists.⁴³

Bushwick gallerists: an overview

Who are Bushwick gallerists, and why do they choose Bushwick as a site for their galleries? I spoke to fifteen gallerists, covering the organizers of most of Bushwick's stable (that is, ongoing in a particular location) galleries as of early 2010 (many more have opened since). With just one exception, all of these gallerists are also visual artists, and they generally share all of the characteristics of my other artist interviewees, described in chapter 2. Gallerists, not surprisingly, tend to be some of the most enthusiastic participants in and creators of the Bushwick art community.

⁴³ It is important to note also that some gallerists also put considerable effort into integrating the artistic community with the long term residents of Bushwick; this is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

In many ways it is difficult to identify “gallerists” in Bushwick. In districts such as Chelsea, gallerists are people who own or operate galleries, and galleries are well-defined. The galleries have names, are listed in databases online that provide contact information, are open during regular hours, and generally do not double as other kinds of spaces, e.g., residences or studios. Gallerists at these galleries work full-time as gallerists and have no other competing profession. These parameters do not extend neatly to galleries in Bushwick.

While there are some (and more and more over time) galleries that fit the common definition of a gallery – a place that shows art, and only art, and is open to the public during regular hours - there are many more exhibition spaces in Bushwick that do not clearly fit this definition. Work is typically shown in spaces that double for other uses, typically residential or studio spaces for artists and often the gallerist. There are also many shows in “pop up” spaces that might house one show only and then move to a different location, or simply disappear. There is a very high turnover rate among galleries, largely due to the considerable strain of living in a gallery space, which further diminishes the stability of the gallery world of Bushwick. Adding to this complexity, some artists put together art shows that are only semi-public or poorly advertised, so that the audience consists entirely of their friends. Thus the definition of a gallery in Bushwick is a little fuzzy, and with that comes a hazy definition of a “gallerist” as well. I have confined this chapter to discussing individuals who run gallery spaces that repeatedly show art in the same space – essentially, those who devote the most time to serving as gallerists (although this is not the primary occupation for any of my interviewees). However, there are many others who show work in a much less organized or ongoing way. Bushwick Open Studios, for example, in some sense allows artists to become “gallerists” for a weekend as they tend their exhibition space and “curate” the work that is shown there. Work is also displayed in coffee shops, bars, and on the streets throughout Bushwick. Because art is shown in such a range of ways in Bushwick, the

definition of a gallerist in Bushwick is quite fuzzy.⁴⁴ Again, this chapter focuses on individuals who run fairly organized spaces – galleries that put on shows in an ongoing way.

Of these gallerists, most are white and in their thirties, although they range in age from mid twenties to fifties. Although approximately a quarter are married, none have children. Virtually all live in Bushwick, although a couple live in Greenpoint, and one in Manhattan. Over half live in some part of their gallery space. Most hold paid jobs during the week, mainly in Manhattan and related to the arts. Some curate galleries in Chelsea, some are former gallerists there or in galleries on the Lower East Side, some are art handlers, one is a commercial artist, another works in a frame shop. None of the Bushwick galleries make substantial money from selling art – rather, they subsidize the cost of their gallery through repurposing the space at other times. Many of the gallery spaces are in fact the gallerist’s living room or studio, and in two cases, the largely otherwise unused basement of a tenement building. In the case of one gallery the gallerists have enough money to fund the cost of the space, but lose money on it.⁴⁵ The gallerists have been in Bushwick between two and ten years, and most of them rent, rather than own, their spaces. All are college educated, and several also hold MFA degrees.

Most gallerists put on several shows a year. They have openings, like any other gallery in Chelsea or elsewhere, followed by regular hours (usually weekends only) during which visitors can view the show. Some galleries present shows that last only one weekend, or in some cases, only one night. Most can afford to be at least somewhat selective in the work they show because of the sheer number of artists looking to display their work. Many of the galleries receive a lot of interest from artists hoping to show their work, and are able to book a full schedule of shows up

⁴⁴ It’s not even clear that many of the individuals I consider gallerists in this chapter would use this term to describe themselves – unfortunately I didn’t think to ask them at the time.

⁴⁵ However, since my interviews, and mainly since mid-2011, several more galleries have opened in Bushwick that are more gallery-like, i.e., in commercial storefront spaces that do not seem to be anyone’s residence, and which hold regular visiting hours on the weekends.

to a year in advance. Gallerists select work to show largely from the work made by friends and acquaintances. In some cases artists have heard of the gallery and contact them in hopes of being included in a show; in others, gallerists actively visit studios and seek out the work of new artists. Some, though not all, gallerists are particularly devoted to showing the work of artists who live and work in Bushwick, and rarely show the work of those living or working outside the neighborhood. In order to put on a show, the gallerists must often clear out the room (in some cases, moving furniture and personal belongings, painting walls, cleaning) and then hang and light the show themselves. They advertise and host opening and sometimes closing parties, as well as weekend open hours. For many of the gallerists, this is their first experience with running a gallery or curating a show. None of them indicated that they hoped to serve as a gallerist at another gallery, or open a gallery outside of Bushwick.

Arrival

Why Bushwick? How do aspiring gallerists find out about the neighborhood and decide to move in? It is important to recall that gallerists are basically a subset of other Bushwick artists, and differ from the rest mainly in terms of their very high level of investment in the local artistic community. Most gallerists came to Bushwick for the same reasons that the other artists did, and often without the initial intent to open a gallery. Like many of the artists I spoke with (non-gallery-running artists that is), Bushwick gallerists similarly indicated that it was critically important to be in NYC if you intend to make it as an artist. However, unlike many of the other artists I spoke to, most gallerists felt very disillusioned with Chelsea galleries, and came to Bushwick in an attempt to distance themselves from that type of gallery. Several had worked or continue to work as gallerists, curators or art handlers in Chelsea, and thus had some experience, much of it unpleasant, with the Chelsea art world.

Many stumbled upon affordable spaces in Bushwick and decided to take them at a time when they were not entirely committed to having a space in Bushwick per se. Especially in the case of those who arrived prior to 2008, before Bushwick had the “buzz” it does now, some were only dimly aware of Bushwick as a neighborhood, and others had no intention of opening a gallery. As was the case for several artists, some gallerists described finding affordable “dream spaces” that they simply couldn’t refuse. Many of the gallerists arrived in search of a place to live, and only later decided to use the space to show work as well.

Most spaces, upon arrival, needed considerable work to become appealing, or in some cases just basically functional as living spaces. Many of the gallery spaces are either residential – mainly the living room area of a multi-bedroom apartment – or commercial (often with people, usually including the gallerist, living elsewhere in the space). Most gallerists put a great deal of work into their space, often working for over a year to make the space attractive. Many gallerists had to replace floors (“battleship grade” floors, in one case; in another, carpeting imbued with the “fat lady sweat” left over from the space’s former life as a low cost gym), build walls, paint, and otherwise revamp the space to make it appealing. In most cases gallerists completed this work themselves, rather than hiring help. In addition to this basic work, gallerists also cater the space to each individual show, often repainting the walls or at the very least removing furniture and belongings from a living area to ensure that the work is presented in the most attractive way possible. In most cases, upon arrival gallerists saw an affordable and potentially beautiful space, but one that needed a lot of work to become what they wanted.

Why show art? Why Bushwick? Goals of Bushwick gallerists

The gallerists I spoke with articulated several goals that guide their galleries. These included, broadly, showing art in a way that departed from a commercial gallery model, one epitomized, in

their view, by Chelsea galleries. Specifically, gallerists in Bushwick run their spaces because of a basic love of showing artwork, the freedom available in Bushwick to show whatever they want to show, and a desire to facilitate community between artists.

Fun and freedom

Nearly every gallerist I spoke with indicated that they show work simply because they love showing work. Gallerists all spoke of an interest in running their space because of a basic enjoyment of showing the work that they show, without any financial incentive and often with a lack of concern for the considerable work involved in putting on shows. One interviewee says:

[He and his partner at the gallery] have this artist-driven, sort of we-don't-really-care-what-it-costs-or-what-happens, we just have to make it happen and it has to be awesome [ethic]....the biggest dream, for me the dream of the gallery space is that you get to show the art that you think is amazing. I've always wanted to own a gallery.

He thus indicates that showing work that he loves is its own reward, and the guiding drive behind running his gallery. Similarly, another gallerist opened a new gallery space in addition to his small home gallery primarily out of a desire to realizing his dream of showing a particular series of large, Bushwick-themed paintings all together in the same room – an impressive example of dedication to putting on a beautiful art show. Gallerists are thus motivated by a dream of showing work that they care about, and are willing to put in much work to make this happen. Another gallerist describes the intense work and reward of showing art:

For the most part we have one night shows and that's it. We work for a month or two months to have a seven hour event and then we just break it down for the next couple of days. That's how we get our kicks.

Gallerists thus invest considerable time and effort in putting on work, and the show is its own reward. For this gallerist and several others, because the gallery space doubles as living space (and sometimes other functions as well), there are often many pressures to move the shows through quickly. Further, the space often must be cleared of furniture and other possessions and housemates must comply – and deal with considerable inconveniences – as well. Another gallerist describes a similar procedure:

I would only do shows for one day, because [the gallery space is] my studio so I wanted it to go back to normal. So on Friday or Thursday we would install, I'd be cleaning out the space for the week and we'd install, do lighting, and then typically we'd be doing all that stuff til 6pm on Saturday when we'd open the show, have the opening and closing part all at one time, my strategy was like I'll just document everything really well and then every show will be online in completion, it won't just be an excerpt... It's a lot of labor but it's worth it.

In short, there is often considerable work involved in putting together a living room or studio show, and these shows often only last for a very short period of time, as in the case discussed above. What makes these worthwhile is simply the enjoyment of putting them on. Thus, many gallerists clearly derive a lot of pleasure from running their spaces.⁴⁶ Since these gallerists generally do not sell much work, and certainly don't sell nearly enough to cover the rent,⁴⁷ they do not rely on selling work to finance their galleries. Instead, showing work seems to be its own reward.

One of the reasons why showing work in Bushwick seems to be so enjoyable for gallerists is that it provides many freedoms that would not be available in a more competitive situation. One

⁴⁶ Although it is still taxing work to run a gallery space, and some gallerists I spoke with who no longer put on shows indicated that the strain of essentially trying to live in a gallery was too much. This strain is the most common reason for not doing more shows.

⁴⁷ Especially because many gallerists give most of the money from sales to the artists, keeping very little, in some cases none, for themselves.

gallerist describes the process of putting on shows as “easy,” and conveys the sense that his audience is appreciative and easily impressed:

A gallery is the easiest thing you can do with a space like [ours], I think. All you have to do is throw some art up on the walls and put lights on it and people think it’s something special. Then you give people some free beer and they’re like “wow”! It’s amazingly simple. I really enjoy that aspect of it. It’s very direct. Someone put a lot of work into [creating the art]. We invest that work with the space, we give it as much as we can, but there’s no permits, there’s no money, there’s nothing at all so it’s very...you know you just do what you can. For me it’s a very creative process in that I don’t have to plan it out, I just do it and then it is there.

Here my informant indicates that he enjoys the process of putting on art shows, and also feels that those who view the work are easily impressed and don’t demand that he meet standards he cannot meet with respect to a professional looking space. This also suggests that there is a supportive audience for these shows and the work, an audience that is readily available and willing to attend events.⁴⁸ Several gallerists indicate that this is the case, and, described in more detail below, this is a critical part of what makes operating a gallery, or “gallery,” rewarding.

Thus without money and other resources, standards and expectations are low (at least relative to more traditional galleries), and the entire affair fun and easy. However, despite his claim that running a gallery is “easy” and “simple,” nonetheless this gallerist and his partner are responsible for all of the work in putting on shows, from finding and selecting artists to hanging and advertising the show and cleaning up afterward. To those who do not love showing art, these tasks might well be considered work – but my interviewee does not frame it this way, suggesting, again, a love for what he does. Another respondent also indicated that running her gallery is enjoyable and low-stress, and moreover, something that allows her to express her personality:

⁴⁸ Especially at smaller galleries, gallerists report that audiences are mainly composed of friends of the gallerists, friends of the artists whose work is on display, artists in the neighborhood, and a handful of random visitors. During gallery visits I was almost without fail asked by the gallerists, “are you an artist? Do you live in the neighborhood? Do you know [the exhibited artist?]”

We just do what we do. We somehow have reverted back to our middle school personalities and we have the need to [do these things]...We want to enjoy life and these are hobbies and we take them very seriously....We definitely have a big sense of humor here, it's definitely a big part of us and how we do things. We're definitely really into silly and gross. We like silly and gross a lot.

Running a gallery is a "serious hobby," and one that allows her and those she works with to cultivate a sense of humor. Moreover, she and her collaborators "do what [they] do," suggesting that running the gallery is a natural and intuitive process, perhaps even an extension of self, rather than an effort that requires meeting someone else's standard – she doesn't have to be someone she isn't. Bushwick gallerists clearly enjoy showing work and feel that they are able to express their own personality and creativity, and facilitate a fun and relaxed gallery atmosphere.

An important part of what makes running a gallery in Bushwick so fun is that for many gallerists it's essentially a hobby, rather than a full time pursuit, or one that gallerists expect to be a primary activity or a money-making venture. Other gallerists similarly refer to their galleries as "hobbies"; for example:

I don't feel like the goal is necessarily international acclaim. I'm happy with the community that we've developed through [running the gallery], the connections we've made through it. In terms of hopes, it would be great if we got written up in Artforum or something, but I'm not holding my breath for that because the reward is more on the night of the opening and once you're having a great time it's just really nice, that's a really nice moment. That's the highlight...I mean I think in terms of hopes and fears I think we're both maybe more focused on our careers [as artists]. I mean [the gallery] isn't really our nest egg, it's not something that makes us any money, it's actually the opposite. It's more like an expensive hobby.

The vast majority of gallerists in Bushwick are also visual artists, and this pursuit – making their own work – seems to be the biggest ambition. Since gallerists do not have lofty goals for their galleries they can be relaxed about their standards and procedures – which is not to say that the

shows are not often very high quality. Instead, the gallery is a side project next to producing one's own work; running a gallery is a fun and exciting, if at some points expensive, hobby.

Another freeing aspect of running a gallery is that it allows artists to participate in artistic endeavors without the same pressures they face as artists struggling for recognition. Some gallerists note that running a gallery provides a sense of control and vantage point on the art world that is not necessarily available to artists who make art only; for example:

As an artist you feel like you're always in the position of asking people for things, like oh give me a show, you're always applying for things, and it's this kind of powerless position, but when you start a space you're not asking for something, you're creating something for yourself and for people around you....I'm not really great at making money off of it, that's not really goal. It's more the event and the excitement of it. And also getting to control something. It's like when I, as an artist I don't get to control anything, I'm always petitioning for someone to be nice and give me an opportunity, but it's nice to have the opposite situation where you can give someone an opportunity and take care of everything for them and just say, no don't worry about it, I got it.

Being a gallerist is thus in some ways more rewarding – or at least differently rewarding – than being an artist yourself. Finally feeling like you control some aspect of arts participation is exciting and empowering for artists who are generally lost in a sea of others, clamoring for any attention they can get from gallerists and curators. It is fantastic to finally be in control for a moment, and gives these artists a way to relate to the artistic world in a different – and in some ways less stressful – capacity.

Taken together, these comments suggest that gallerists – who are themselves overwhelmingly also visual artists – are guided by principles similar to those outlined in the first chapter. They not only make but also show art because it is intrinsically enjoyable to do so, and put in huge amounts of effort and some money to make this happen, despite the fact that the experience overall is perceived as fun and easy. It is particularly impressive that some gallerists will work

tirelessly for a show that may last only one evening. Putting on shows gives them another way to participate in Bushwick's art world (other than simply as an artist) and provides some sense of control that they wouldn't otherwise have. In short, for some it is an enjoyable break from being on the other side of gallery equation. Moreover, for many Bushwick gallerists, running a gallery is a "hobby," and they don't seem to feel the need to take it more seriously than they do. This stance stands in sharp contrast to the widely-perceived need to be a "serious artist." Described in chapter 2, "hobby artists" are generally derided and seen as not producing good or serious work. However, such restrictions do not seem to apply to hobby gallerists, and it is fun to have a hobby that you don't need to take so seriously.

A new kind of gallery

Many gallerists also hope to create a type of gallery that differs substantially from typical commercial galleries in a number of ways – including the general atmosphere, the work shown, and the relationship between the gallery and the viewer. Bushwick gallerists (as well as artists) frequent galleries in Manhattan, and many also work or have worked at these galleries, and are thus very familiar with, and often critical of, their operations. One interviewee described his negative experiences while working at a prominent Chelsea gallery:

It was impersonal. You walk in on Monday morning and there was never like "how was your weekend"? it was just like...you weren't allowed to talk unless it was something related to what you were doing for the gallery. Even when you sneeze no one says god bless you. It was totally impersonal. Of course I showed up fresh from Virginia, all enthusiastic, and [the owner] told me right away, you have to be more opaque here...She pretty much dehumanizes you right away. Like try to be more like an object, try to be more like a robot....I had to show up in a 3 piece suit to mop the floor...I was like the little guy on the ladder, for a year. You know it's very tough....What we have [at the gallery he runs] is almost like the complete opposite of that.

This gallerist is clearly frustrated by his lack of any kind of power at the Chelsea gallery, as well as the lack of closeness between employees and need to disguise his personality there. My informant above clearly feels that he had no power at all while working at the Chelsea gallery, and that he wasn't able to assert his personality in even a limited way. This clashes intensely with many of the values espoused by artists, discussed in chapter 2 – i.e., authenticity to the self and freedom/openness to possibility, not to mention basic kindness. Running a gallery in Bushwick, where you can have control over what you decide to show and how you show it, and how to run the space and relate to those who work with you, seems to provide a very refreshing contrast to the fetters of Chelsea.

This sense of freedom extends to the physical gallery space as well. The very fact that so many Bushwick gallerists create galleries in residential basements and living rooms stands in sharp contrast to conventional ideas of what constitutes a legitimate gallery. Although these gallerists generally do try to make the space more gallery-like by removing personal possessions, hanging and lighting the work as professionally as they can, and trying to hide other evidence that the space doubles as a living or working space, nonetheless the appearance of the galleries nonetheless departs from a Chelsea standard. Even galleries that are not also residential depart from the Chelsea look, sometimes deliberately so. One gallerist, whose space is large and relatively unfinished, describes the fact that he feels no pressure to finish his gallery space so that it resembles a Chelsea gallery:

I think [Bushwick galleries] have an edgy reputation. I don't think [visitors to the gallery] come out here expecting Chelsea white cubes. I think that when they see a place like this it probably satisfies their need to see something different from Chelsea....there's always that guy who's like, why don't you just sheet rock the [exposed brick gallery] walls?...for me it's like we're not a Chelsea gallery, I like the brick walls, I think paintings look fine on them. Also this room is a lot more appropriate for installation and sculpture because of the brick walls. I always try to improve the space, but I've never tried to make it look like one of the Chelsea galleries, the same fucking thing. I do want to seal up the floor, make the floor a

little nicer, but you know for the most part it's up to the level where I want it, I'm not going to pretend I'm in Chelsea.

Here, my informant clearly states that he wants to do something that departs from a Chelsea version of a gallery. He has created a space that looks good according to his standards and doesn't feel the need to conform to a more typical standard of what a gallery should look like.

Some Bushwick galleries also deliberately try to make the atmosphere of their gallery friendly and interactive for visitors. This also stands in contrast to what they perceive to be a stuffy Chelsea model that tends to make many viewers, especially those without considerable art experience, uncomfortable. Bushwick galleries actively try to change this. Showing work in spaces that double as living areas is one way of achieving a more relaxed environment for visitors; for example:

It was fascinating because at that opening the audience really stayed in the gallery, really presented, and interacted with the objects and were reading stuff, moving things around. ...this was amazing, people were coming back into the house to hang out at the opening. So it's very comfortable in the house, but why was it comfortable? [His collaborator] had this amusing but real insight: people don't feel comfortable around art, and so...you're taught to stay away from it, and it's weird. It's a weird thing. You're looking at an object on a wall, and it's not even an inviting wall, it's a white wall. So that's an interesting barrier...it's one of the things that [we] are trying to do, break down that barrier. This is a space, a place where people hang out and live, and these are pictures on the living space. And it's a weird back and forth... You know you want it to be about the art, but also about a space that you can be in.

This gallerist thus recognizes that many visitors feel uncomfortable around art, and manipulates the physical space of his gallery to try to reduce that anxiety, mainly by highlighting the fact that it is also a living space, a place that invites visitors to relax and stay a while. Part of this involves departing from the "white wall" model of a gallery. Another gallerist echoes this desire to make her space as inviting and relaxed for visitors as possible, including those who may not know anything about art, as she can:

For the most part...our shows have been like these intimate social meetings and so I think people don't expect to have to dress up or even necessarily know too much about art. We get some of the people from Bushwick who know nothing about art. I'll go out in the street when we have shows sometimes and a couple times people will be looking and I'll say "hey, why don't you come in, what are you doing with your time?" so they come in and they're like "what is this place?" so I just take my time and I talk to them, and they're like "oh that's nice" and they tell me what they know about art and I'm like, yeah that's awesome.

In some cases, then, this gallerist actively solicits visitors from the street, inviting in those who are unfamiliar with the space or perhaps art in general. She emphasizes the welcoming and casual air that she attempts to create at her gallery – a place where you don't need to "dress up" or have much background in art in order to enjoy the gallery. Gallerists feel that this stands in contrast to the typical model of gallery that leaves viewers feeling intimidated by the art and the space.

The "fun" and comfortable environment of the galleries is also confirmed by events such as nights featuring artist-themed drinks and burgers, performances, BBQs, and other party-like events. Some gallerists create very welcoming spaces, complete with candy or snacks and beverages for visitors, chairs and benches to encourage long-term stays, friendly conversation on the part of the gallerists, background music, and pets. All of these gestures help to facilitate a friendly gallery model that stands in contrast to the what many Bushwick gallerists perceive to be a stuffy model of Chelsea galleries.

Gallerists thus feel totally free to create a different kind of gallery space, one that departs from typical – and this is often epitomized by Chelsea – galleries. Gallerists seek to collapse the distance between the viewer and the work, and to create a welcoming environment by showing

work in spaces that are more home-like or otherwise less sterile than those in Chelsea, and sometimes reach out to visitors and attempt to put them at ease.⁴⁹

Finally, another key difference between Bushwick and commercial galleries is that Bushwick gallerists feeling free to show whatever work they want to because it doesn't matter much whether or not it sells. Although some do sell work, no one I spoke to sells enough work to cover the expenses of the gallery. Instead, gallerists fund the gallery space with money from their day jobs, or by using the space for alternate purposes at off times, e.g., renting it out as art studio or practice space, but usually living quarters. Since they don't need to sell the work they show, gallerists in Bushwick are free to show whatever they like, which is exhilarating, and stands in sharp contrast to the fetters of the market in Chelsea galleries. One sums up his feelings about not needing to sell work:

Well I think we care a lot about our artists, it doesn't just get equated with money, sales, stuff like that. We have the luxury of not depending on sales at all, because people have studios here, so the rent's subsidized. I never have to give...salability a second thought....we do [sell work], but just not that often. But you know every Chelsea gallery, they tear their hair out every month trying to sell. Their taste gets totally in line with what sells, it really is a luxury to not even have to take that into account. I think that's probably what makes us different from other galleries.

Another gallerist echoed the freedom that comes from not needing to show work that will sell, emphasizing the fact that this freedom extends to curating also:

⁴⁹ However, for those like myself who are not especially art-savvy (and possibly also for the savvy), visiting home galleries can pose different challenges. Especially during Open Studios, when a lot of artists open tiny and cluttered spaces to show work, it is often difficult to figure out what you're meant to be looking at since work is not always clearly labeled and is often displayed amidst personal items. On more than one occasion I found myself mistakenly looking at some item, with a contemplative, "I'm looking at art now" gaze, only to later realize, embarrassed, that I was staring at someone's keys, discarded furniture, etc. Moreover, it can be awkward to feel obligated to socialize with others in the usually small room, or shimmy past racks of clothing and other personal items.

I feel like at this point in my life I know a lot of artists, having been in New York for so long, I have my taste pretty well refined and I think that it was something actually that has allowed me to curate shows using young people and older people which I think is one of the things we want to do at Storefront, something you can't always do at Manhattan galleries, show people who aren't very well known, people who are. People who've been getting a lot of attention, people who haven't shown for a while, young people, older people, and if you've been in New York a long time you know all those people and they never get mixed up in the same shows because of commercial reasons the galleries don't want to do things like that often. But out here we can do it. But I think this is something I share with Jason, wanting to break down those hierarchies.

Without commercial pressures, she is able to indulge her taste while curating and put together shows that would be unlikely to work in more commercial galleries in Manhattan.⁵⁰ Feeling little pressure to show work that is likely to sell, galleries in Bushwick can show work that is not commercial and thus not likely to be shown at commercial galleries. This includes a lot of installation, large pieces, sculpture, performances, lowbrow work, work by unknown artists, and other kinds of art that generally are not easy to sell. Although Bushwick, according to my interviewees (and discussed in detail in the next chapter), does not have a well defined aesthetic or style, most of the galleries are united in their desire to show work that is not commercial.

Taken together, the above comments suggest a sense of freedom – and to some degree also rebellion against the art establishment - in Bushwick. Bushwick gallerists actively question and critique what they see as a dominant gallery model, epitomized by Chelsea, that prioritizes selling work in what they perceive to be a sterile and impersonal environment, and strive to create a different kind of gallery. In Bushwick gallerists can show the work that they want to show without concern for whether or not it will sell, allowing them to fully indulge their own artistic curatorial taste. They can create a comfortable environment that encourages participation with the artwork, and can make the physical gallery space whatever they want it to be – they feel no pressure to look like a “Chelsea cube.” They are able to inject their own personality and taste into every aspect of

⁵⁰ The important issues of curating, and the freedom of curating in Bushwick, are described in more detail in the next chapter.

the work they do, and expect a supportive and friendly audience that will not demand that they adhere to a different standard. Manhattan and particularly Chelsea galleries provide a constant reference point and outgroup for Bushwick gallerists, an example of what they do not want to be.

Creating a community of artists

Another important goal for Bushwick gallerists is to facilitate and participate in the artistic community in Bushwick. This goal is clearly articulated in the mission statements listed on some galleries' websites; for example:

[We are] a 501(c)3 arts organization with a mission to build community, foster artistic expression, and raise the imaginative energy in us all through collaborations. [Our gallery] creates, promotes and presents collaborations within the disciplines of visual, literary, and the performing arts with an emphasis on community outreach. [Our gallery] connects visual artists, choreographers, composers, writers and other originating artists with venues and each other.

These community-building efforts can involve providing a space and series of events that help artists to connect with each other, giving attention to local artists via shows, or more broadly feeling “part of something” in Bushwick. For some this involves helping artists further their careers, especially local artists who live and work in Bushwick. Gallerists attempt to help artists by giving them visibility so that they can move on to more lucrative galleries, as well as by attempting to create artistic community. Many gallerists in Bushwick recognize that they are not in a position to help their artists sell work at their spaces; however, they hope that by showing work at their gallery, the artist will gain more attention and visibility, and perhaps a show at another gallery where his or her work might be likely to sell. For example:

We had an artist who had a show at our space, a gallerist saw her work and now she has a show at [a larger gallery] which is great. So she's doing better

because she had a show at my space, which is sort of my dream. And then we had a show with xx for a little while and then someone else will show him, more well known, better.

Another gallerist, who has worked at Chelsea galleries for years and still works there as a curator, expressed his interest in helping artists, with more of a focus on promoting their work and helping them apply for grants:

[Chelsea galleries] don't develop a stable of artists, there's no such thing. That's what I try to do out here, is develop a core group, a stable of artists that I work with and that I promote and I help them write for studio grants and promote their work and sell their work and it's a whole kind of family thing, to open up all of my knowledge and give it to them because I believe in their work.

Thus although most Bushwick gallerists do not prioritize selling the work of the artists they show, nonetheless they recognize the importance for artists of selling work and moving on to more visible galleries for the development of artists' careers, and hope that they will be able to help artists take the next step toward career success. Some gallerists specifically noted that they completely understood artists' need to sell work, given that most artists must work full time paid jobs in order to pay bills, leaving little time left over to produce art work. Once again the gallerist quoted above views his goals as antithetical to the practices of Chelsea galleries.⁵¹

Another way in which gallerists hope to help artists is by attempting to foster some sense of artistic community, or at the very least to create a space that fosters interaction between artists. The two gallerists who run one gallery keep their space open to the public every weekend, with fresh coffee and chairs to encourage long visits and lively discussion. I spent several hours with

⁵¹ However, despite the fact that Bushwick galleries are not commercial, some occasionally hold "affordable art" shows specifically to encourage people to buy art, with pieces priced to sell, usually at about \$100 or less. Although this isn't a lot of money, it provides some income (given primarily to the artists). Thus Bushwick gallerists are not against the idea of artists selling work – but in general they don't want to operate their galleries as businesses.

them one afternoon as they animatedly discussed their art, work, gallery, Bushwick, and everything else related to these. One describes his inspiration for opening the space:

I did the artist in residency [at a now-defunct Bushwick gallery] that's part of why we opened this space, we opened it a few months after she closed that space, we really wanted to do it, being able to hang out over there and have these kinds of conversations, it's a rare thing actually. Especially when you're working a normal job you realize that there are only a few places where people want to have serious intellectual conversations [about art].

For some gallerists, then, one of the great benefits of Bushwick galleries is that they provide a space where artists can get together and discuss ideas relevant to their work – a type of space that the gallerists above feels is generally difficult to come by. He cites the creation of this kind of space, after having seen it in operation at an earlier gallery while participating as an artist, as one of his primary motivations for opening his own gallery.⁵²

Thus, galleries seem to provide a space for casual but stimulating arts-related discussions. Additionally, other gallerists note that the artists and gallerists they have met and worked with in Bushwick have been supportive, rather than competitive, and this seems to be a critically important piece of artistic community. For example:

I've been working in New York for 15 years, I've worked in artists spaces, I've worked for artists, I really feel like an art worker and I never had a community....It was always like, well let me tell you about myself, and [this gallery] is a testament to artists working together. And that's what happened with [her previous gallery] I started that space to push ideas further, and I ended up for the first time ever as an artist having a group of like 15...a community, I have a community and I support their work, I'm interested in their work....

⁵² The fact that this gallerists had a residency at one gallery prior to starting his own gallery also highlights the extent to which artistic roles in Bushwick overlap. He has also shown his work in Bushwick galleries.

Here my informant suggests that a sense of community comes from trusting other artists to collaborate with you and help you promote and develop your work, a central goal of Bushwick gallerists, rather than thinking only about their own careers. Another gallerist echoes this sentiment:

I've found many artist friends [in Bushwick] whom I've really liked. The person who's out here tends to be somebody who's not trying to cut the legs out from their compatriots but trying to help other people and do things together and that collaborative spirit is really great because if you've been in Manhattan a long time you've seen that there are people who are ruthless about their careers and this is just such a much more open place where people really are at a generous point in their lives and they really want to collaborate and help other people and share with other people and learn about what they're doing and it's really been fabulous, I love that about the art community here, it's been fantastic for me and probably for a lot of other people.

Thus, many gallerists in Bushwick feel a strong sense of artistic community, which they seemingly take to mean open collaboration and exchange of ideas, in contrast to a self-centered or competitive focus on one's own artistic career. Gallerists try to use their spaces as a way of furthering this collaboration and discussion. Unlike Manhattan, where ostensibly galleries are focused on sales rather than artists' development or sense of community, Bushwick provides these gallerists with a sense of artistic community and support.

In addition to these comments, gallerists also indicated that they engaged in many different activities that helped to foster a sense of artistic community. For the most part they are well aware of the presence of other galleries in the area, as well as other places that cater to the arts community, such as restaurants, bars coffee shops, etc. Often the gallerists work together by coordinating openings, scheduling them on the same night to create a multi-gallery event, often complete with flyers and gallery maps to give to visitors, which helps to draw more visitors and increase the visibility of Bushwick's art scene. Routinely when visitors come to one gallery, gallerists will often suggest others to them. With no money at stake, gallerists can only gain from

promoting other local galleries. Moreover, gallerists are often active participants in other artistic events, such as openings, and some actively seek out other gallerists in the area with whom they can coordinate. Several interviewees indicated that this willingness to band together to gain visibility and improve attendance at events was a critical part of what makes Bushwick such an exciting and cohesive artistic community.

This points to a final important dimension of Bushwick galleries (and arts organizers): they are critical in providing a reflection and indication of the art world in Bushwick, a sort of public face for its existence. They attract media attention and draw crowds to events. Artists notice the presence of galleries on the streets, art crawl posters and flyers dispersed throughout the neighborhood, and are particularly impressed when they see the pamphlets accompanying events such as Bushwick Open Studios – many commented to me that they had had no idea that there were so many artists and galleries in Bushwick until they saw the program for Open Studios. Galleries and organizers, then, by showing work and hosting and advertising events, are crucial in making artists and others aware of the presence of the Bushwick art world in the first place.

Taken together, these statements suggest that gallerists are very dedicated to supporting the artists they work with. Gallerists feel a strong sense of artistic community in Bushwick and strive to create this through dedication to artists' careers, collaboration, and simply making space available for conversation with other artists. Gallerists feel that this sort of support is critical to the artistic development of the artists they work with, and they hope to facilitate this. Clearly many gallerists feel that this sort of supportive and collaborative spirit between artists is not something that is readily available in Chelsea, and this artistic community is one of the biggest rewards of being in Bushwick.

Conclusions

Overall, my interviews suggest that Bushwick gallerists are interested in creating an alternative kind of gallery: one that creates a friendly and welcoming atmosphere; that allows gallerists the freedom to show the work that they think is excellent, without any pressure to sell; and one that allows gallerists to foster a sense of community between artists. These goals are usually articulated with reference to Chelsea and Manhattan galleries as a counterpoint. This is not surprising, given that most of the gallerists have considerable experience with Chelsea galleries, much of it negative. Art galleries and museums have long been constructed as sacred spaces (e.g., DiMaggio, 1982, Duncan, 1995), and this can be an intimidating experience for gallery-goers, especially in light of the fact that gallerists are often judgmental about visitors' knowledge, or lack of knowledge, about art (e.g., Sifakakas, 2007). Bushwick gallerists are well aware of these patterns and actively try to cultivate a new model of gallery.

Part of the sense of freedom in Bushwick seems to come from the fact that there are very low barriers to entry in the Bushwick art world. Essentially anyone can be a gallerist – no experience or huge bank account required. All you need is the interest and an apartment, studio, or other space. Bushwick gallerists work full time in other occupations, and in most cases are active visual artists; thus running a gallery is generally a hobby, rather than a profession, and they feel no shame in this. There is apparently no stigma associated with being a hobby gallerist, in contrast to being a hobby artist. Thus artists can essentially try their hand at a number of different artistic pursuits, including serving as a gallerist or curator, with few risks involved. Many of the gallerists I spoke with had not run galleries or curated before. This also means, of course, that many of those who are deeply engaged in the Bushwick art world relate to it in overlapping roles – as artists, gallerists, curators, and sometimes also event organizers. At virtually every step a DIY ethos applies, and one needn't be anything close to an expert to get involved. In short, in

comparison to the art worlds of Manhattan, it is relatively easy to become involved in Bushwick in almost any capacity, a situation that allows for considerable freedom and experimentation.

Although gallerists in Bushwick clearly differentiate what they do from galleries in Chelsea, their work is not totally in opposition to Chelsea. While Bushwick galleries are not commercial, gallerists recognize that artists do need to sell work. They hope that their gallery can provide exposure and useful social contacts for artists, and if their artists end up in more commercial galleries in Chelsea, so much the better. This is a dynamic very similar to that described by Bystryn (1978) – essentially small, artist-run and non-commercial galleries serve as gatekeepers to larger and more commercial ones. Bushwick gallerists have no problem with this, but don't want to be on the Chelsea side of the gallerist spectrum.

This discussion sheds some further light on what “community” means, according to Bushwick gallerists. They seem to use the term to refer to several different forms of support and social interaction for artists in Bushwick, as well as a shared belief in the value of non-commercial art venues. Discussed at length in chapter 6, although galleries do attempt to band with the broader, non-art-centric Bushwick community, there are many difficulties associated with realizing this goal.

Bushwick galleries are key in defining Bushwick as an arts area. Gallerists I spoke with are some of the most active organizers and proponents of the Bushwick art world, and they are responsible for putting together the gallery crawls, art shows, other art events, and websites that serve as the backbone of the Bushwick art world. Moreover, galleries, along with art shown in the streets and cafes and bars – provide the public face of Bushwick art and reflect Bushwick's identity as an artistic community to residents and visitors to the neighborhood. The nature of this identity, as shown via the actual work that is displayed, is the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Bushwick Art - Four views

Discussed in the last chapter, Bushwick has a reputation for being a place for young, bohemian, and edgy artists and noncommercial, innovative galleries. Stereotypes of Bushwick suggest that it is a haven for bold street art, lowbrow art, and edgy work of all kinds, often made by young artists. Much of what happens in Bushwick is defined against Chelsea and other more established art neighborhoods, and the art shown in Bushwick galleries theoretically could be expected to similarly depart from that shown elsewhere, and solidify the identity of Bushwick as a local community. Are these stereotypes of Bushwick work accurate? Does Bushwick have a signature type or style of work? How does the neighborhood identity of Bushwick impact the work shown?

Drawing on data culled from an analysis of a sample of Bushwick gallery art shows, as well as data from my interviews, galleries' mission statements, and press coverage, in this chapter I discuss the art that is shown in Bushwick from four vantage points: the type of work that appeared in a recent sample of gallery shows; Bushwick art according to artists; according to gallerists; and finally, according to the New York Times. I discuss how the art shown in Bushwick relates to its identity as an art world, the complexity of determining what “edgy”⁵³ artwork is, and the implications of this work for fostering community.

1. Bushwick art: A sample of work shown in galleries

⁵³ Unfortunately none of my interviewees provided a clear definition of what constitutes “edgy” or similar (terms such as “out there” or “innovative,” or in some cases “interesting”) work, and unfortunately, I didn’t press them on this. I rely on a lay definition of “edgy,” which loosely equates it with work that is innovative, experimental, or hip, though it also carries connotations of work that is marginal in the sense of not accepted by the mainstream, perhaps ahead of the curve. Part of the goal of this chapter is to try to unpack what this might mean based on how artists, gallerists, and the media approach the work on display.

In order to get a clearer sense of the work that is actually shown in Bushwick, I gathered current show information from all galleries open in April 2012. Largely following the method of Halle & Tiso (forthcoming), I categorized the work using visual inspection and analysis of artists' press releases. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 1.⁵⁴

Table 1

Classification	% of work
Abstract	39%
Dark/depressing themes	10%
Pop culture	10%
Street art	10%
Technology/media	7%

⁵⁴ The category was assigned based largely on the content/subject matter of the work, rather than the style or medium in which it was done. The abstract work category, for example, involves work that is not only not figurative, but which also according to the press release is primarily concerned with the relationships between forms. Dark/depressing work featured mainly figurative work that depicted dark themes, such as people gambling alone at casinos in the wake of the financial collapse, depictions of natural and other disasters, and in one case, abstract work that, according to the press release, dealt with the theme of failure (coded as both abstract and dark/depressing). The 'pop culture' category includes work that explicitly deals with pop culture as a topic – for example, a painting of Michael Jordan, paintings that reference current films, etc. Street art is a category reserved for the work of artists who have made a name for themselves by doing work on the streets of NYC or beyond, despite the fact that in these cases work was shown in galleries. In one case work was coded both 'abstract' and 'street art' because the artist created abstract paintings using spray paint, a key element of street art and street style, despite the fact that she was not a well known street artist. The other works in this category were all by artists who had established reputations as street artists. Technology/media involves work that explicitly deals with these topics, as stated in the press release. Animals/nature deals with these topically. Landscapes were typically on the dark side and all of these were photo-based. The relationships category included work that deals with the theme of relationships, or, more accurately in many cases, the lack of relationships – loneliness. Unlike work shown in Chelsea and LES (Halle & Tiso, forthcoming), there was no depiction of nuclear family relationships. For galleries that have closed, I gathered as much data as I could about their second to last show and categorized that.⁵⁴ In total I gathered data for 28 galleries and 41 artists. I included shows that involved up to three different artists, and coded the work of each artist separately. Group shows including more than three artists (some group shows feature the work of up to 15 artists – very difficult to categorize) were not included unless there was a clear theme and similar aesthetic apparent. In most cases the work was assigned to just one category, but for 9 artists the work was assigned to two – thus the percentages below add up to a little more than 100.

Animals/nature	7%
Landscape	7%
Relationships	7%
Pop art	5%
Commercialism	2%
Political	2%

These results are very interesting. First, it is noteworthy that despite the fact that Bushwick stereotypically is a center for street art, this is not clearly reflected in my sample – although certainly the streets of Bushwick show that street art is quite alive there. Noted in Chapter 1, two of the first galleries in Bushwick were specifically devoted to showing street art,⁵⁵ and this, along with the bountiful art in the streets, may have helped to solidify the stereotype that Bushwick is a center for street art, even though it no longer is singularly devoted to this at all. Bushwick also has a reputation for “lowbrow” work, most of which I classified as “pop culture,” since this sample the lowbrow work included brightly colored paintings of Magic Johnson and video game imagery. It is clear that despite this stereotype, such work comprised only 10% of my sample. A final stereotype of Bushwick art is that it is innovative and edgy. Although my system of categorization arguably does not allow for the determination of edginess (and, discussed at length below, this is not an assessment that can easily be made – there is wide disagreement about what constitutes innovative, or “edgy,” or “good,” work among artists), it is the case that obviously controversial⁵⁶ subject matter, such as sex, politics or religion, is largely absent from work in my sample.

⁵⁵ Both of these galleries are currently closed, though they were open for several years.

⁵⁶ I use a lay definition of “controversial” work here – meaning work that is likely to cause controversy, and might include typically inflammatory topics such as sex, politics, or religion. It is important to note, however, as Halle and Tiso (forthcoming) suggest, that edgy and controversial work are not necessarily the same.

It is interesting also that despite the fact that so many gallerists are quite outspoken about their interest in promoting non commercial work, very little of the work that they show deals explicitly with consumerism or commercialism. While commercialism seemingly is something that gallerists want to keep out of their galleries, it does not seem that they are on a crusade to make a point about the troubles of commercialism in general. However, the format of much of the work shown does suggest an interest in noncommercial work. In this sample, the work of 46% of the artists shown involved sculpture or work that involved some time-based element (i.e., video, sound recording, or performance) and which would thus be unlikely to sell. This seemingly reflects galleries' stated commitments to showing noncommercial work, even if arguably this is done in a quiet, indirect way – the work is simply noncommercial, rather than defiantly confronting commercialism.

Bushwick vs. Chelsea and the Lower East Side

While arguably this method of categorizing art fails to detect nuances in meaning and style, nonetheless it reveals important similarities and differences between the work shown in other New York gallery districts. Halle and Tiso (forthcoming), for example, using a similar methodology found that, like Bushwick galleries, LES galleries predominantly show work that is either abstract or decorative. After abstract/decorative work, landscapes, including work that involves threatened landscapes, as well as work depicting the troubled nuclear family, were most popular. Although these specific categories were less common in Bushwick, these topics could broadly be considered “dark” or “depressing” work, similar to this category of work in Bushwick. In short, the art shown in Bushwick does not seem to differ appreciably from that shown on the LES.

There are some interesting differences, however, between Bushwick and Chelsea. Halle & Tiso found that classic, beautiful landscapes were the most common type of work shown in all Chelsea galleries taken together, comprising 30% of all the work shown in Chelsea. Classic, beautiful landscapes are arguably one of the more conservative forms of work that one could show, and it is interesting that they are almost entirely absent from my sample in Bushwick. This suggests one way in which Bushwick art may truly be more “edgy” than the work shown in Chelsea. On the other hand, galleries in Chelsea (including both star and upper floor) were more likely to show work that is likely to be controversial (i.e., work featuring sex, politics and religion): together these categories accounted for 14.8% of work shown in Chelsea, in contrast to 19% of the work shown in LES galleries, and just 2% of work shown in Bushwick.

This contrast is very interesting, and suggests that Bushwick differs from both Chelsea and the LES in its tendency not to show work that covers traditionally controversial themes. On the other hand, Bushwick also shows far less pleasant landscape work than the LES and particularly Chelsea, as well as more work that is in line with Bushwick stereotypes, i.e., street art and pop work (which includes “lowbrow” art). It is interesting to note that some topics, such as relationships involving the nuclear family – a topic that represented 11.4% of the work shown in Chelsea, and 13% of the work shown in LES galleries, was entirely absent from my sample. In comparison to these two key Manhattan gallery districts, then, Bushwick art stands out for its lack of attention to obviously controversial topics, such as sex, religion, and politics, and also to beautiful landscapes (and landscapes in general) and the nuclear family. Relative to both of these Manhattan gallery districts, Bushwick shows more abstract, as well as more street art and work that deals with popular culture (including “lowbrow” art). From this data it is very difficult to say whether the stereotype that Bushwick work is “edgy” holds up, but the stereotypes of Bushwick as a center for street and lowbrow art do seem fairly accurate. However, this is true only relative to Manhattan galleries, and these stereotypes miss the fact that Bushwick galleries – at least

according to my sample - primarily display abstract work. Thus, if by “edgy” we mean “controversial,” Bushwick art does not seem to be “edgy.”

2. Bushwick art according to artists

Noted in chapters 2 and 3, the artists I interviewed in Bushwick are generally thrilled to live and/or work in a place where they are constantly surrounded by “creative energy.” This seems to be one of the main advantages to living in Bushwick, and serves as an ongoing source of inspiration and motivation for my informants. One of the many sources of this creative energy is the art on display in Bushwick, not only in galleries but also in coffee shops, bars, stores, friends’ studios, and streets.

With few exceptions my interviewees indicated that there is no one style of work that predominates in Bushwick.⁵⁷ However, some felt that forms such as street and video art were especially popular in Bushwick. Some noted that street art was originally a defining style in Bushwick, but that a greater variety of work seems to be associated with the area now. Others noted the prevalence of figurative painting, especially portraiture, as well as performance and digital art. Others provided descriptions that were less genre-specific and more descriptive, such as “edgy,” “avant garde,” “weird” “experimental” “not commercial” or “wonky, handmade,” especially in comparison to the “slick” and “professional” work shown in Chelsea.

Some made value judgments about the work – often, that Bushwick art was amateur, not conscious of art history, “bad art school” work, often made by very young artists who were still

⁵⁷ Artists, as well as gallerists and others, make judgments about what kind of work is shown and made in Bushwick based on what they see not only in galleries, but also in coffee shops, bars and other venues, on the streets, and in friends’ and others’ studios. The range they describe thus may be broader than the gallery-exhibited work analyzed in the first section of this chapter.

finding themselves artistically. Others, however, also noted that excellent work is also being made and shown in Bushwick, and they can easily rattle off at least a few fairly well-known and respected artists who currently live or work in Bushwick as examples of this. One interviewee articulates these two stereotypes – the respected artist and the young hack – very clearly:

I think someone like Jim Herbert would be like your ideal Bushwick artist. He's an older artist. He used to teach at the University of Virginia and then he decided to dump it all, said fuck everything, and he just started painting these 20 foot canvases. He's really cool, he's probably one of my favorite painters.....Then there's also the young 20-somethings who are deciding that they're going to be artists which is great to watch, cos they all fail.....that would be my stereotypical Bushwick art school grad, that John Waters kid from [Polyester] where he's like, "look mom I went to art school" and he has a drawing of a shoe. "I'm going to be an artist." "Oh that's great."

Here my interviewee identifies two stereotypes of Bushwick artists: an older and somewhat established artist who made a risky, perhaps rash, decision ("fuck everything") and began dedicating himself to making enormous (and thus largely noncommercial – especially also because many of his works are explicitly sexual) paintings. The image here is one of someone who walked away from stability and toward a capricious but passionate lifestyle devoted to making art because he wanted to – and making work that is potentially controversial, or at the very least, aggressive, given its size and frequent subject matter.⁵⁸ On the other hand, my informant also articulates the stereotype of the young Bushwick hack, someone who does not seem to have much talent but thinks s/he is an artist. This duality - that there is both excellent and bad work made and shown in Bushwick – is described by many artists I spoke with.

Several artists also felt that some of the work in Bushwick at least was experimental. One interviewee sums up the general consensus among artists I spoke with very nicely:

⁵⁸ This seems to underscore the Bushwick ideal of making work because you love the work, being totally devoted to art without much attention to the practical consequences or implications – even though many artists are not in fact this idealistic at all. The interviewee who made this comment is in fact extremely pragmatic, and spends much of his time and energy trying to figure out ways to sell paintings.

I see a lot of, a lot of people doing contemporary work that pushes the boundaries of things a bit because they're not, they're doing more experimental stuff and taking more chances, like performance pieces or crazy sculptures or painting. Weird stuff. I guess weird is a fitting word. ...As far as contemporary art stuff I think that there's so many options that to say that anything is prevalent or that anything is really at the forefront is a little unfair right now because everybody's doing everything, especially with the internet, there's room for everybody. And I think that's probably diluting some of the idea of what the art world is. If Bushwick is doing anything I think that it's shaking up the old idea of what art galleries are and what the art world can be.

He thus sees a wide range of work being produced in Bushwick, including a lot of experimental work. The main, though seemingly loose, pattern he identifies is that Bushwick is “shaking up the old idea” of galleries and art worlds, a form of innovation and experimentation in itself.

While many artists I spoke with felt that galleries are in fact pushing boundaries, some noted that the art shown in Bushwick galleries is disappointing, given that the galleries do have the freedom to show whatever they want to show. For example:

It's funny cos I always go to these, the [Bushwick gallery crawls], because I feel like I'm part of the community and I want to support it and I'm interested in what's going on there, but I can probably remember one piece I've seen that's really stuck with me.... Especially when you're sort of outside the mainstream and all that, meaning that they're probably not depending on sales, the way they are in Chelsea, I don't totally understand why a lot of the work seems so boring, or at least just not particularly inspired. I don't want to say 'good,' I don't want to use that value judgment, but just not very interesting or innovative.

This underscores the fact that in general, artists enjoy seeing work that is innovative, experimental, “out there,” and expect such work from galleries that are outside of the mainstream and not commercial. The artist quoted above is clearly disappointed with the work shown in Bushwick galleries, but it is important to note that in general, Bushwick gallerists feel that they show quality and innovative work. This shows that there is often little consensus regarding what constitutes “edgy” or “innovative” work, and is likely to be especially true of new work that has not yet had

the opportunity to withstand the test of time. There seems to be much more agreement on what constitutes important or innovative work many years in retrospect, after the world has had the chance to see its influence. This lack of consensus surrounding what constitutes innovative work is not surprising given the fact that there is so little consensus among artists on what constitutes good work, described in Chapter 2.

Overall, my informants did not identify a characteristic style of work coming out of Bushwick. This is largely in keeping with the broader trend in contemporary art toward a profusion of different styles, rather than concentrated artistic movements (Halle & Tiso, forthcoming). Despite a lack of any kind of signature Bushwick style, many artists feel that there is at least some work being shown in Bushwick that they find risky, innovative, and interesting, but they don't seem to agree on what constitutes innovative, edgy or good work. Whether or not such works could be identified in my sample is unfortunately not clear from my data, which does not include interviewees' responses to particular works, or the views of gallery goers.

3. Bushwick art according to gallerists

Like the other artists, Bushwick gallerists similarly don't feel that there is a singular style of work being produced or shown in Bushwick. However, they are very attuned to the fact that much of the work shown by galleries in the area is noncommercial, interesting, and shown in an unconventional way. This context – the way in which work is shown by galleries – may critically determine the meaning of the work shown.

Noted earlier, virtually all gallerists in Bushwick are visual artists themselves, and generally decide to open galleries in Bushwick largely because there they have the freedom to show whatever they want to. Because of the low rents, multipurpose spaces, and relaxed DIY

atmosphere of Bushwick, gallerists do not rely on selling work to fund their spaces, and generally do not make sales a priority. Further, most galleries in Bushwick are not storefront galleries that expose the work the show to passersby. A few fit this description, but this does not apply to the majority. Moreover, since most galleries are closed during the week, and sometimes the weekends as well, even the art that is displayed in storefront galleries is not likely to be seen by those on the street. In short, the work is very protected from onlookers, unlike street level galleries in Chelsea and the LES, which must take into account the fact that a controversial art show may cause trouble with their neighbors (Halle & Tiso, forthcoming). Bushwick galleries thus have tremendous freedom in what they show. Given this freedom, it is interesting that they do not, at least according to this sample, opt to show obviously controversial work.

Gallerists thus are not necessarily interested in showing work that is controversial in its own right, unless it happens to be something they particularly like. This is consistent with my finding that in my sample of gallery shows, virtually none of the art could obviously be considered controversial or risky.⁵⁹ However, gallerists seemingly like to have the option of showing such work if they particularly like it, or for whatever reason want to show it. Thus gallerists pride themselves on showing what they feel is quality work, regardless of its commercial appeal.

The gallery environment that Bushwick gallerists cultivate may shape the way in which the art shown there is perceived. Part of the freedom that gallerists have is not only the choice of which work to show, but also how to show it. Many gallerists for example are primarily interested in creating a specific environment in their gallery, often one that they feel contrasts to typical Chelsea “white cube” galleries – a model that is based on earlier Soho galleries, which sought to show art in a neutral context. One gallery’s mission, for example, is to show art in an alternative

⁵⁹ Although there are at least a handful of Bushwick shows that I can think of, not in this sample, that would meet this criterion, e.g., Marni Kotek’s gallery birth, described later in this chapter, as well as the enormous and explicitly sexual paintings of Jim Herbert, just to name a couple.

fashion that “physically embodies the challenge of a new generation of artists in their quest to explore alternative venues and ideas within an established art system.” Many feel that showing work in an environment that departs from and challenges the typical “white cube” model creates a different interaction between the viewer and the work, and thus a novel and more interesting experience of the art on display. It seems, then, that to these gallerists the context in which the work is shown is vitally important to determining its meaning.

Gallerists also have total freedom in curating their shows, and this may have implications for the way the work displayed is understood. Several gallerists described the thrill and the freedom of curating in Bushwick, where gallerists feel able to put together combinations of artists that wouldn’t fly in more established art neighborhoods. As described in Chapter 4, many gallerists find this to be an exciting, challenging and rewarding aspect of running a gallery in Bushwick. The way a show is curated also shapes the context in which any particular work of art is seen, and may shape its meaning as well as the extent to which it appears ‘edgy’ or tame. One gallery went so far as to include in its mission statement a discussion of how curating shows, and thus the shows themselves, are a form of art:

[The gallery] is an artwork in and of itself. It is not an attempt at any other entity, other than what it truly is...[The gallery], (found in a large variety of recipes... in my mixing bowl). Exhibiting two, sometimes three artists, I approach each exhibition as a work of art. By juxtaposing the artwork of one artist with another I create my own aesthetic, philosophies and theories, focusing on the idea of defining equilibrium or lack thereof. I imagine it being like an arranged marriage for the art works, and the artists involved. I am not interested in solo exhibitions, nor focusing on one certain medium. [The gallery] is about exploring the nature of art and the artist.

Here, the gallerist clearly indicates that her shows must be understood in their entirety – that one cannot understand the show by looking simply at one or two pieces on display. The point is that

the show itself – the work and the way the work is put together, the pieces that are chosen to sit in the room together – that in its entirety is the art.

Taken together, these comments suggest that gallerists in Bushwick open their galleries in part because they love the freedom they have – to show whatever work they like, regardless of its commercial potential, but also the freedom to show work they consider edgy or controversial, if they want – even when they frequently do not take advantage of this particular freedom. In addition, freedom also involves showing art in the way that they want to show it, which often includes showing work in spaces that depart radically from the “Chelsea cube” model, and curating shows so that the juxtaposition of artists is novel, exciting, and perhaps, in some cases, even controversial, even if the work on its own, in a white cube gallery, wouldn’t necessarily be perceived this way. Gallerists thus seemingly take a broader view of a gallery show: it is not just the work itself, but the space in which it is shown, and the other work it is shown alongside, that is meaningful. Such an outlook suggests that trying to determine whether a particular work is “edgy” (or whether any other label applies, for that matter), to a large degree misses the bigger picture. The work must be evaluated in a more complex way, in light of the context in which it is shown. This suggests that gallerists may be attuned to factors that others are not, and that any view of Bushwick art that does not take this context into account is unlikely to fit gallerists’ assessments of the work. Discussed below, the novel context in which art is frequently shown in Bushwick, however, may well contribute greatly to the perception that it is “edgy.”

4. Bushwick art according to the New York Times

As Bushwick’s art world has grown, media sources such as the New York Times (referred to hereafter as “NYT”) have taken note. Although press coverage of Bushwick in major art

magazines is still quite limited,⁶⁰ many local papers and blogs dedicated to regional events and culture (e.g., New York Magazine,⁶¹ The New York Daily, Hyperallergic, the L Magazine, Brooklyn Rail, the Village Voice, etc.) have begun to document the new Bushwick scene. Of these sources, the New York Times arguably has the widest readership and the most influence, and thus I decided to focus on this coverage for a brief analysis of how Bushwick is framed by the major media.

In local media, Bushwick has been heralded for its “creativity” and interesting art and art scene. Thus according to recent press, Bushwick produces a “unique brand of art” (Hewitt and Callender, 6/19/08); its art is “experimental” (Linderman, 11/14/2008); Bushwick produces “art on a shoestring....where creativity really thrives” (Salz, 11/30/08); and Bushwick galleries display art that is “daring, a tad risqué and sometimes befuddling” that is produced by “a slew of emerging artists” (Sachs, 11/16/08). However, a closer look at media coverage of Bushwick’s art world, and the neighborhood more broadly, suggests that this edgy image may have much to do with the depiction of the context in which the work is shown.

For this analysis I searched the NYT archive for all articles containing the word “Bushwick”⁶² from 2004-2011 and sifted the results, coding only articles that dealt with Bushwick or Bushwick

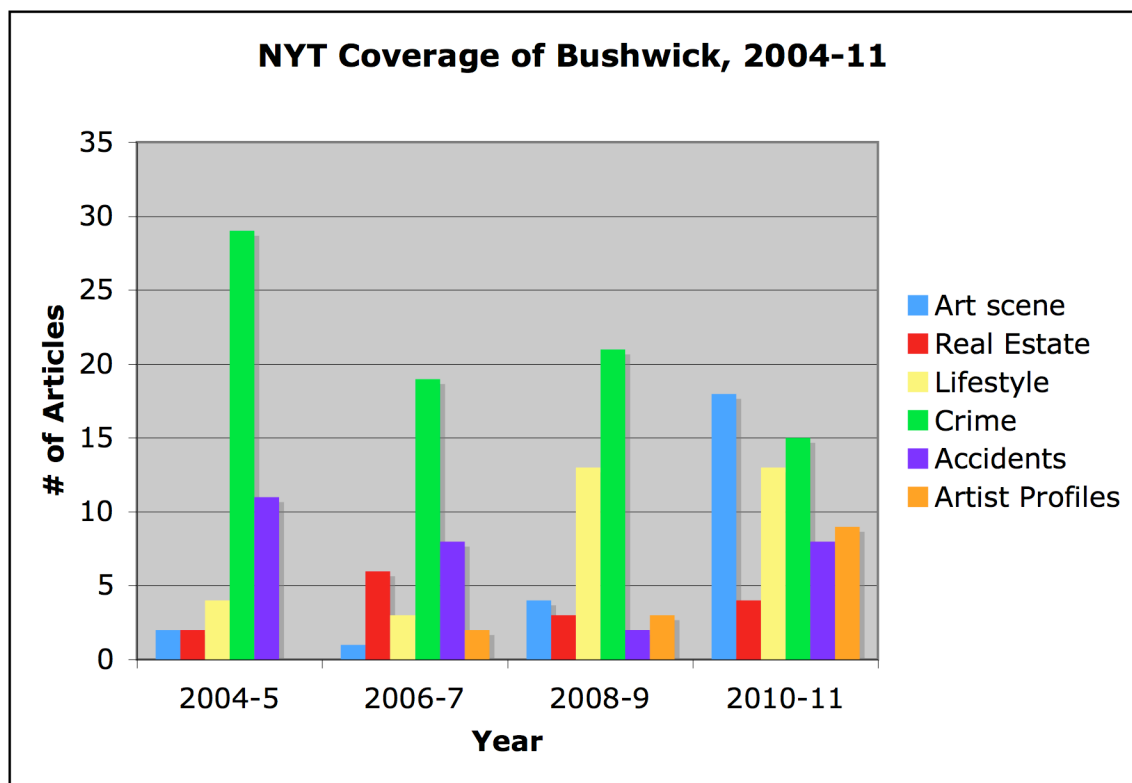
⁶⁰ I searched major art publications such as ArtForum, Art in America and ArtNews. There are to my knowledge two brief show reviews, and one article hailing the emergence of a new Bushwick scene in Art News, 2012.

⁶¹ New York Magazine has mentioned Bushwick repeatedly, almost always in reference to lifestyle issues. Overwhelmingly its coverage of Bushwick seems to involve discussion of a popular pizzeria there, Roberta’s.

⁶² I also searched for each gallery based on its title, without the term “Bushwick.” This did not yield any results beyond what I had already found. However, I felt this was important. It is interesting to note that galleries in Bushwick are specifically considered Bushwick galleries – the geography is always attached. By attempting to find information without the term “Bushwick” I tried to cover the possibility that there was additional press coverage of these galleries that freed them from their location – but there wasn’t. I didn’t include articles prior to 2004 because at this time there was essentially nothing pertaining to the art world – which largely didn’t exist then.

artists as a topic and excluding those that merely mentioned Bushwick in passing.⁶³ Of these articles, I focus on categories that are most relevant to the current study, while excluding categories such as education, local politics, other. The frequencies of these articles are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1:



⁶³ I focused only on articles that mentioned Bushwick somewhere on the first page (there were many articles that did mention Bushwick, but not until the end of the article) and that covered Bushwick as a topic (many, many articles mentioned Bushwick in passing, but were not really concerned with Bushwick per se). I put the articles into several broad categories (some are not included in Table 2 because they are not particularly relevant to this study, e.g., articles about public schools). The relevant categories are as follows: 1. Art scene coverage (covering the lives of artists and galleries and art ‘scene’ in Bushwick); 2. Real estate (articles that primarily discussed Bushwick as a place to live or invest in property or find affordable rent); 3. Articles that primarily deal with lifestyle issues and amenities, such as groceries and farmers markets, restaurants, entertainment (other than visual arts-based), etc; 4. Crime reports; 5. Strange happenings/accidents (this includes events such as car accidents, building fires, babies found in bags on the street, etc.), and 6. Profiles of Bushwick visual artists.

The above figure indicates that NYT coverage of the Bushwick art scene (and artists, as shown by the rising number of artist profiles) has increased dramatically between 2004 and 2011.⁶⁴ While the most common topic covered in the NYT pertaining to Bushwick is crime, this has been decreasing over time, and in 2010 was eclipsed by art scene coverage (although only barely). Finally, lifestyle and real estate articles also dwarfed art scene coverage until roughly 2010, although again, the art scene wins only by a small margin. Coverage of individual artists (“artist profiles”) lags behind the art scene coverage, but shows a similar uptick over time. In short, heavy coverage of the Bushwick art scene has developed only quite recently.

Taken together, Bushwick media coverage paints a picture of Bushwick as a crime-ridden, accident-prone neighborhood, though one with some real estate potential, an interesting lifestyle, and a recently booming art scene. The image is one of a gritty neighborhood with an intriguing art scene that may turn into a real estate hotspot. While this topic summary provides an important overall portrait of Bushwick, it is necessary to look more carefully at the actual coverage of the Bushwick art world in order to get a sense of how the art itself is understood and assigned meaning.

While Bushwick is presented as a rough and marginal, but also exciting and gritty, new art world, much of this picture comes not from discussion of the work itself but rather the scene that surrounds it. For example, a recent NYT article about the Bushwick gallery scene opens as follows:

A Styrofoam chandelier hung from the ceiling. A piñata was stuffed with candy cigarettes. An alien statue was wrapped in a Brazilian flag. But perhaps the

⁶⁴ The “art scene” article category includes gallery show reviews, similar to the type you’d find in art magazines. There were only three gallery reviews: one in 2010, and two in 2011.

strangest sight at the North Light Exhibition Space, a scrappy art gallery in Bushwick, Brooklyn, was the proprietor himself.

Hunched inside a plywood-and-plexiglass booth, John A. Holt, 63, was bundled in a gray hoodie, camouflage pants and army-issue leg warmers. It was freezing inside the basement gallery.

The article continues:

Temperatures during gallery-hopping hours can dip to beer-cooler levels, but the scene is starting to heat up in more ways than one.

While Bushwick’s art scene is not new — cheap warehouses have been carved into bedbug-infested lofts for the better part of the last decade — it is turning a pivotal corner. In the last year, more than a dozen art galleries have opened in the industrial neighborhood, taking over rusty factories, Dominican botanicas and auto-parts stores. Some run on a shoestring and feel more like student exhibitions. But blue-chip names like Luhring Augustine are arriving, too, opening satellite galleries that tap into the area’s bohemian mood.

And while you won’t see packs of high-end art buyers (who are in the city this week for the Armory Show) crossing the East River to see these galleries, intrepid collectors from Manhattan are making the journey. As with SoHo, Chelsea and the Lower East Side before it, Bushwick is shaping up as the city’s next gallery district.

In this article, the art itself is presented as strange, yet the “strangest sight” is the gallerist himself, who, in his “scrappy” (a word frequently used by the NYT to describe all things Bushwick) gallery, is apparently interesting because of his unassuming clothes. This gallery and many surrounding it are depicted as gritty, raw spaces – housed in former “rusty factories, Dominican botanicas and auto-parts stores,” or “bedbug infested” loft spaces, lacking heat, and the destination for “intrepid” visitors. This article, like many others, focuses more on the gritty excitement of Bushwick than on the art that the galleries actually show, although the brief references to this work seem to highlight its unusual character. Other articles on the gallery scene in Bushwick similarly discuss the ways in which these galleries may surprise the viewer – often, the fact that gallery spaces double (and serve primarily) as living quarters for the gallerists. Clearly reporters and probably the public as well are fascinated by the combination of urban blight and art – somehow this juxtaposition never seems to grow tiresome.

While there are many articles in the NYT covering the emergence of the new art scene in Bushwick, few articles could be described as gallery or show reviews of the type that one sees of work shown in Chelsea galleries. In fact, I found only three proper gallery show reviews of Bushwick exhibitions in the NYT from 2004-2011. Of these, one showcased the (quite controversial) “performance” during which Marni Kotek delivered her first baby in the gallery.

The review of Kotek’s performance notes:

MARNI Kotak would not give birth in just any art gallery.

“I had to trust the gallerists on an intuitive level,” she said the other day. “And the space had to be a safe and comfortable environment. I mean, I couldn’t imagine giving birth in a big white-box gallery in Chelsea.”

....The exhibit has touched off a shower of news coverage, not all of it positive, by media outlets around the world. But much less attention has been paid to the newborn gallery, which in its first year has won a reputation among art world insiders for the chances it takes on emerging artists, and for its ties to older pioneers of the New York avant-garde.

Though Microscope is a profit-making venture, its admirers say that in the city’s money-driven art market, it stands out for its relative indifference to trends and commercial success.

“Most New York galleries today are scenes where people go to show off their clothing style,” said Ken Jacobs, an avant-garde filmmaker whose films have been screened at the space. “Microscope isn’t that. It’s a place you go to learn and concentrate on what’s presented to you.”

Here, the reporter depicts Kotak’s performance and its host gallery as controversial, risk taking, and edgy, as well as linked to more longstanding avant garde artists (“pioneers”). Microscope is “indifferent” to commerce and the “chances” it takes on emerging artist. Moreover, rather than

caring about “showing off their clothing style,” those involved in the Microscope scene mainly just care about the art – it’s a place for serious consumption of edgy work.⁶⁵

Other articles and reviews focused on the personal characteristics of the artists. For example, another review of an actual show in the NYT described the self-portraits of Matthew Miller, and described him as showing great, nearly religious, dedication to his work:

Mr. Miller comes from a non-mainstream background. Raised as a Mennonite and trained at the New York Academy of Art, which favors traditional figurative representation, he brings to his art a painstaking work ethic and an earnest humanism. His work exudes a feeling of religious devotion — not to any transcendent deity but to the process of painting itself. That’s what makes it modern. No prizes in heaven or on earth are guaranteed for this kind of faith, but he persists because it is, like prayer, its own reward.

After a fairly brief description of Miller’s work, this article then discusses his pure devotion to his work, implying that part of what is interesting about his painting is his attitude toward it and his background. This particular theme – total devotion to art for its own sake, rather than financial reward – is of course a major one in the coverage and experience of Bushwick.

Other coverage also highlights interesting Bushwick artist personalities, often with more emphasis on personality than work. Several articles, for example, cover various activities (moving to a new neighborhood, a new documentary film about, a clothing sale) of Genesis P. Orridge, a well-known (mainly performance, though formerly musician – Coum Transmissions, Throbbing Gristle, Psychic TV) artist who has been living in Bushwick for over a decade, in the building above one of the galleries. This coverage again focuses more on his personality than his

⁶⁵ This is similar to the ‘curatorial approach’ to showing art taken at some LES galleries – the idea that the gallerist is there to curate and thus educate viewers, rather than merely entertaining them – discussed by Halle & Tiso (forthcoming).

artistic endeavors. Overall, such coverage contributes to the portrayal of Bushwick as a place for edgy avant garde people and the (presumably also edgy, avant garde) work they create.

Finally, NYT coverage particularly discusses artists' lifestyles in Bushwick in general, often focusing on various types of communal and loft living in Bushwick. This focus on lifestyle is apparent even in some discussions of arts events. For example, in one description of Bushwick Open Studios, the event is touted as a chance to basically see how artists really live. Of BOS, one NYT article notes:

People who believe that New York has lost its anything-goes cultural energy have just been going to the wrong parties. In basements, lofts, studio spaces and bars around the city, there are still plenty of opportunities to connect creatively, with varying degrees of festivity, and nakedness. And you need not be a friend of the art-star photographer Ryan McGinley to partake. This weekend the Bushwick Open Studios tour allows visitors a glimpse into artists' spaces and their psyches.

Here, BOS is depicted as a place to experience "anything-goes cultural energy," complete with nudity, and a chance to get "a glimpse into artists' spaces and their psyches." Again the focus is on the edgy and interesting scene, rather than the art itself. Like the coverage of individual artists noted above, news coverage tends to focus on their characteristics as interesting individuals, rather than on the art they produce per se.⁶⁶

This coverage implies that visitors are coming to Bushwick from outside the area, in part to experience a gritty and exciting authentic bohemian art neighborhood. Truly there are a multitude of interesting challenges associated with a Bushwick gallery crawl, in comparison to one in Chelsea or on the Lower East Side. Potential visitors, at least those without internet phones, must

⁶⁶ Some artists I spoke with did report feeling during BOS that visitors were in fact there because they wanted to see the 'artist in his natural habitat,' or to look around their space, or to see 'real painters painting,' rather than because of any real interest in their work, and this made them feel a bit uncomfortable.

research galleries to visit, and, of course, check to make sure that they're open at all on the proposed visit date. Given the vast geographical terrain, it is best to map out a route – which, for the ambitious visitor hoping to see most of the galleries, involves a little over four miles of walking. To add to the challenge, the four miles unfold over terrain that is only partially a street grid – other portions of it involve confusing intersections and dead ends, making navigation far more complicated than in a place like Chelsea. Much of this terrain is, despite ongoing gentrification, still strewn with trash, rubble, and derelict buildings, as well as random weird sights, such as a pick up truck filled entirely with belts parked on Siegel that I saw on during a recent visit.

Further challenges/thrills are associated with getting into many of the galleries once they've been located. A first time visitor (an easy status to have, even for a Bushwick regular, given the high turnover in galleries) is likely to encounter minor drama in accessing galleries. Once the building has been found – not always easy, given that some of the galleries are not clearly marked - one often has to navigate a switchboard of potentially unmarked buzzers, and hope to gain entry, often through multiple sets of locked doors. On one memorable visit to a now-defunct loft gallery, visitors had to shout up to the gallerist on the fourth floor. He would then he lower a large iron key, hooked onto a 50 foot long string, down through the window. In short, gaining access to many Bushwick galleries is often nowhere near as simple a procedure as popping into an unlocked storefront gallery that has its own sign.

Whether this type of investment on the part of visitor alters perception of the displayed art itself – making the work seem more edgy, innovative, or interesting, or simply more appealing, as a multitude of psychological theories involving cognitive dissonance would predict, after a visitor's considerable allocation of time and energy to see it in the first place – is not entirely clear, but seems quite plausible.

Thus, based on the major media coverage of Bushwick, one might expect to see crazy work – in some cases work that is “risky” or “avant garde,” perhaps in others simply strange, but to be most impressed by the gritty, remote and interesting context in which the work is shown and the pure and passionate dedication of Bushwick artists and gallerists to their work. Although NYT writers do briefly discuss the art actually shown in Bushwick, the art itself is largely lost in the broader discussion of the new scene – one that is creative, interesting, edgy, and scrappy. To the extent that the art shown does appear “edgy,” it seems this may be in part due to the circumstances in which it is shown, rather than a property of the art itself, a point articulated by gallerists who run “edgy” galleries on the Lower East Side (Halle & Tiso, forthcoming). Arguably, to the extent that Bushwick art is considered edgy, a similar process may be at work there as well.

Conclusions

Together, these four views of Bushwick art tell us something about what it is, and what it means. My sample of work suggests that abstract work, not street or lowbrow art, is the main work on display in Bushwick galleries, although relative to galleries on the LES and in Chelsea Bushwick does show more of this work. Although Bushwick has a reputation for showing “edgy” work, very little of my sample included anything that could be considered controversial. If Bushwick art is edgy, it is not because it’s controversial. Bushwick artists indicated that there is no one style to emerge from Bushwick, that there is very good and very bad work shown and produced in Bushwick, as well as some very “weird” and “avant garde” work, though there seems to be little consensus among them regarding what innovative work looks like.

The gallerists and media coverage suggest that the context in which work is shown in Bushwick may critically help to shape its meaning, including assessments of its edginess. While gallerists

focus on creating unique gallery environments and curatorial mixes, much press coverage highlights these aspects of galleries, as well as the grittiness of the surrounding terrain, the bohemian lifestyle of Bushwick art world participants, and artists' intense personalities, rather than focusing on the art itself. Although the work may be considered "edgy" or innovative by artists and gallerists – and many report that they do see much Bushwick art this way – media coverage certainly puts the focus on the context in which the work is shown, an emphasis that is shared, although in slightly different ways, by gallerists.

The picture that emerges from this analysis of the art shown in Bushwick is thus complex. It is clear that context – of the neighborhood and terrain of Bushwick, the physical space, ambiance and curatorial choices of the gallerists, and the biographies and lives of the artists - powerfully shapes the meaning of the work on display, a finding that has been discovered in other creative realms as well (e.g., Cruz, 1999; Griswold 1987; Levine, 1988). Previous work has shown that biographical details and "authenticity" of artists also shapes the appeal and evaluation of the work they produce (e.g., Fine, 2004, Peterson, 1999), and the same may be true for artists in Bushwick, who are portrayed as living and working in a gritty and authentic bohemia – a portrait of authenticity that largely seems to draw on past bohemias, especially those in NYC, as a template. While the fact that biographical information about the artist shapes perception of the work makes sense in light of the very close association between art and self described in Chapter 2, on the other hand artists also largely want their work to "speak for itself," to not be reliant on other details – such as one's social connections, clothing, and likely biography as well– in order to be appealing or comprehensible.

These contextual factors may be especially important given that the art shown in Bushwick is new, and largely created and shown by artists who are not well established. No one has had the chance to stand the test of time, and few have important credentials. Moreover, artists I spoke to

pursue a huge range of types and styles of work, and thus their aesthetic interests likely diverge sharply. All of these factors may well augment the lack of agreement concerning what constitutes good or innovative work and thus heighten the importance of context. The most I can reasonably conclude here about Bushwick's art is that edgy is not synonymous with work that is likely to be controversial; it is something that is highly desirable, if not widely agreed-upon among artists; and it is shaped substantially by contextual factors.

What does all of this mean for local community in Bushwick? Galleries' and media focus on context also suggests that actually seeing the work where it is shown is key to its meaning, or at least making the meaning more interesting. To get the full experience of Bushwick work, it needs to be seen in Bushwick, the way the gallerists intended to show it. The work might well not have the same impact seen online. While this is also arguably true of work shown in other settings as well, the novelty of some of the Bushwick galleries and "galleries" I think makes it more true of Bushwick than the "white cube" galleries in say Chelsea. Moreover, many gallerists deliberately try to facilitate a close, interactive relationship between the viewer and the art – again, something that may be especially difficult to replicate online. Seemingly this would be likely to strengthen local community.

The lack of a characteristic style of work coming from Bushwick seemingly facilitates a large and relatively weak artistic community, rather than a tightly knit small one. Given that many artists hope to forge relationships with others who share their specific aesthetic interests (described in Chapter 3), this breadth of styles likely hinders close affiliation with the Bushwick art world. On the other hand, clearly artists revel in seeing many different kinds of innovative work, and the diversity of work available in Bushwick is a key part of what gives it the "creative energy" that artists find some inspiring. Even if they don't like a lot of the work made in Bushwick, artists still seem to derive some benefit from its presence. While this broad "creative energy" is not likely to

encourage the intense connection of shared aesthetic interests, it is far more inclusive and still contributes importantly to a sense of local community.

The diversity of work shown (and especially produced) in Bushwick may thus help to create the sense that Bushwick is a place for exploring new artistic ideas, a sort of safe haven for artistic experimentation. The fact that the work shown (I'm less sure about the work produced) there is not obviously political, controversial, or "loud," may also give Bushwick the character of being an artist's haven, an insular place where artists are largely unconcerned with the reception of those outside and art does not seem to need to speak to the rest of the world.

Thus, the work in Bushwick is clearly diverse and at least some of it is perceived as innovative or "edgy" by many artists, gallerists, and the media, and for several reasons this work may help to facilitate local community in Bushwick. Discussed in the next chapter, the extent to which this work is also able to engage the long term residents of Bushwick is much more limited.

Chapter 6: Long Term Residents

So far I have mainly discussed the artists in Bushwick, but of course they are not the largest group of Bushwick inhabitants. A stroll down Knickerbocker, one of the major commercial thoroughfares in Bushwick, reveals businesses that cater to Latino customers – as well as throngs of predominantly Latino customers. Everywhere you look are signs in Spanish, a wide variety of churches, bodegas, restaurants and food stores that cater to this population. Important and interesting as artists are, they nonetheless comprise a minority of residents in Bushwick. A majority of residents in the area consist of Latino residents, who for the most part fit a very different socio-economic profile than most of the artists. Discussed in detail below, in general artists differ from these residents in many ways, and their interactions, and the implications of these for community, are complex.

In this chapter I will deal mainly with the relations between artists and these pre-established residents, as articulated by the artists I spoke with.⁶⁷ I first discuss some of the bonds forged between the two groups, then the challenges and disconnects. I conclude with a discussion of the extent to which art can meaningfully facilitate community.

1. Long term residents of Bushwick: background

It is difficult to talk about non-artist residents of Bushwick with any precision, since this is an enormous and varied group. I refer to them here as “long term residents” (“LTR” from here on), a

⁶⁷ It is important to note that I did not actually interview any of these residents. This is of course a substantial limitation to the study. However, for several practical reasons – including my own status as a young-ish white person who is largely viewed as an insider by the artists I spoke with, as well as my inability to speak Spanish, and basic time constraints- I felt that interviewing the LTR might not yield good data. This chapter, again, is thus based on the perceptions of the artists I interviewed.

very imprecise term that I use simply to refer to majority of Bushwick residents. These residents are primarily Latino – a designation that itself encompasses a huge amount of cultural diversity. Although it is difficult to say whether specific individuals of this community in fact have lived in Bushwick for a long time, the visible Latino culture – the shops, restaurants, signage – in Bushwick clearly predates the artists. These two features of the “long term residents” – that there are Latino and that they are perceived as predating the artists, even if this is more true of the culture at large than individual participants – were the most salient to my interviewees, as they described the populations in Bushwick. These criteria, however, do not provide a perfect distinction between the artists and other residents: for example, surely some of these LTR are also artists – though most of them, as far as I can gather, do not participate actively in the Bushwick art world described in this study. A handful of the artists I interviewed, who did participate in the art world I describe here, were Latino, although not originally from Bushwick. In short, it is difficult to draw clear lines between artists, Latinos, and long term residents in Bushwick, and equally difficult to choose terms to refer to these groups. I thus use the term “long term residents,” largely because of its emphasis on the fact that this group predates the arrival of the majority of artists, although again, in many cases this may be more true of the culture at large than its individual participants. However, clearly this is an imperfect term, and one that constitutes a huge oversimplification of a very heterogeneous population.⁶⁸

That said, some generalizations about the LTR in Bushwick can be made. There are a number of important group differences between the LTR of Bushwick and artists, on average. These differences cover many features, including age, race, SES, family status, education, cultural background, and interest in art, to name just a few of the more obvious differences. The age range

⁶⁸ However, for better or for worse, my artist interviewees, while certainly recognizing the heterogeneity of this population, similarly differentiated between artists and long term residents in a broad way, and largely on the grounds of Latino heritage and early arrival, relative to artists. Flawed as this distinction may be, I think it is one that fairly characterizes the way most of my interviewees conceptualize the social landscape of Bushwick.

of the LTR is much larger than the age spread of the artists in my sample. While the artists I interviewed ranged from early 20s to mid 50s, the LTR population encompasses the entire life span, with everyone from infants to the elderly. Closely related to this is the family structure of the LTR in comparison to the artist residents: not surprisingly, the LTR seemingly are much more likely to live in dense family situations, often with multiple generations living under the same roof. This stands in sharp contrast to the artists, most of whom either live alone, with a partner, or with friends or housemates of roughly the same age. Only four of my interviewees had children living with them. The living situation of most LTR, then, seems to differ considerably from that of the artists in my sample.

The artists and LTR differ in many other ways as well. Race is a clear and visually obvious difference. A full 90% of my interviewees were white, a far higher percentage than the average in Bushwick. Thus it is clear that in comparison to the overall population in Bushwick, the artists in my sample were much more likely to be white. Discussed below, this racial difference is very obvious to the artists I spoke with, and at times a source of anxiety and discomfort.

Further, the LTR of Bushwick differ considerably from the artists in terms of SES. While many of the artists I spoke with were very poor, nearly all held college degrees, and most also held a graduate degree. Although they often had very limited income, most seemed to understand that this limited income was related to their own choice to pursue an artistic career; they had not set out to make a lot of money and then failed to do so. Given their typical levels of education and cultural capital, it seems very likely that if any of them decided to try to make as much money as possible, they would have been able to earn far more than their current income – though probably not via artistic pursuits. It is not as clear that this would be the case for many of the LTR. Again according to 2008-2010 Census data, only 14% of inhabitants have received a bachelor's or higher degree, and the median income, as was the median household income. This suggests, again, that relative to

the Bushwick average, my artist interviewees were much better educated and financially stable – another fact that is hardly lost on my interviewees. Beyond these substantial differences, there are also major differences in cultural background, in some cases language, and interests.

It is worth noting that the industrial section of Bushwick (located north and west of Flushing Avenue) seems to be populated with more artists than LTR [clarify Census data?]. Here most of the architecture is industrial, and many buildings have been converted into artists' lofts. While there are a few tenement buildings, for the most part the area is not residential in the typical sense, and does not cater to the LTR the way the (much larger) rest of Bushwick does.

In sum, there are considerable differences between the artists in general, and the LTR in general. Despite this, for the most part they share Bushwick peacefully and, overall, with some sense of shared community. However, given the tremendous differences between artists, on average, and LTR on average, it is perhaps not surprising that artists sometimes feel intense separation from the LTR in their midst (and of course, the reverse is also very likely true, although my study unfortunately does not allow me to provide much detail about the feelings of the LTR about the presence of artists). Described below, I outline the range of orientations of artists toward LTR and conclude with a discussion of what these relations may imply for the possibility of an integrated community.

2. Bridges and Rewards

Some artists, and in particular some gallerists and arts organizers in Bushwick, are passionately interested in creating an integrated community between artists and LTR. These attempts at creating a more integrated community for the most part involve neighborly interactions, often centered on children, that don't necessarily require arts-based participation on the part of the LTR, although

there are some exceptions to this. For example, one gallerist started an after-school program for the LTR children who live on her street. She has come to know them and their parents well and takes the children on weekend outings on occasion. Other gallerists have reached out to the LTR in Bushwick by using their spaces for community programs and meetings, hosting art shows for local teens, using the gallery space as a distribution center for local food deliveries, inviting local residents to gallery events, and, in one case, helping local residents learn web design programs.⁶⁹

Noted in the chapter 4, one of the main goals of many Bushwick galleries is to create a space that is more welcoming and friendly than the stereotypical art gallery. Spaces that double as living or socializing spaces add to the sense of comfort in Bushwick galleries. Some gallerists deliberately try to foster a welcoming environment that they hope appeals to those who might otherwise find galleries intimidating – such as many LTR who are unlikely to have a background in art. Some take this a little further by actively recruiting LTR residents for art shows and events. This can involve putting gallery and event flyers in places where LTR are likely to see them, as well as including information in Spanish.

Some artists (those without galleries, that is) have also made a substantial effort to reach out to the LTR. Several make a point of inviting their LTR neighbors to their BOS events. One babysits for her LTR neighbor, another is learning Spanish partially in hopes of being more able to communicate with the LTR, and a few others have attended Bushwick community meetings. All of these activities suggest keen interest in becoming more involved in the lives of the LTR, in a variety of ways, and of creating an integrated community.

⁶⁹ In many ways gallerists take big risks in showing work, especially when they do so from their homes. The event mentioned above, in which everyone had to be kicked out of an opening because people became too rowdy – highlights the fact that in some cases gallerists invite large groups of strangers into their homes. Sometimes, though very rarely, visitors take advantage of the space or otherwise get out of hand. Surprisingly few problems have arisen, however. The very fact that home galleries operate with as little trouble as they do seems to suggest at least a minimal level of community involvement and connection – basic trust, if nothing else.

Kids, streets and stoops

The reactions of a majority of my informants could perhaps best be described as neighborly interest. Most artists I spoke with indicated positive feelings toward the LTR, but at the same time their relationships with and interest in integrating with the LTR community that didn't go much beyond casual neighborliness. Examples of this attitude include smiling at and chatting with neighbors on the street, sharing food and advice about neighborhood matters. It is also worth noting that most of the artists who even mentioned the LTR (some did not) lived outside of the highly industrial (and now artist-populated) region of Bushwick.⁷⁰ This area is quite insular and largely devoid of LTR residents and businesses (although there are a handful) in comparison to the rest of Bushwick. Artists who live and work here largely do not encounter the LTR unless they venture across Flushing Avenue, and this seclusion seemed evident in the fact that most of them did not mention the LTR. For the majority of artists who live and work outside of this industrial area, however, relations with the LTR are an important part of their daily life. In addition, those who live in Bushwick were much more likely to discuss the LTR than those who only keep a studio in Bushwick (quite possibly in part because many of the artists who keep a studio in Bushwick but live elsewhere have studios in the industrial part of Bushwick that doesn't include many LTR).

For most of my interviewees, virtually all of the interaction that takes place with LTR happens in the street. Artists indicate that they frequently say hello to and occasionally chat with their LTR neighbors on the street. A couple of interviewees reported being offered BBQ food from outdoor

⁷⁰ When conducting interviews with artists I did not specifically ask them about the LTR in Bushwick, mainly because I wanted to keep my questions very broad and open-ended, in hopes of discovering the social groups that they deemed interesting and relevant. Thus although some artists did not mention the LTR at all, most brought up the LTR on their own, when asked about their perceptions of community in Bushwick.

parties hosted by the LTR as they passed by. Artists are particularly likely to engage with the LTR children, sometimes playing with them or retrieving lost balls. Artists with their own children or dogs also indicate that these provide easy conversation pieces with the LTR in the street. Many LTR in the summer months congregate on stoops and street corners, and this provides many opportunities for interaction. One artist described her experience hanging out on the stoop with her LTR neighbors:

[re: her involvement in different communities] then there's living in Bushwick and knowing Giovanni who used to own the corner store [and] the people literally on my block, the Puerto Ricans and Mexicans and Dominicans, we all say hi to each other, there's that kind of realm that is a different type of thing. I feel like Open Studios opened that door a little bit, like being friends with kids and they invited me to drink on the stoop with them so I was hanging out on the stoop, and it was this other world.

Here, in my informant's account, inviting LTR neighbors to her BOS show helped her to connect with them. Although they don't have anything like a close friendship, she has become closer to some of the children and feels included in stoop hangout sessions. She does not indicate that becoming close to the LTR population of Bushwick is a central goal of hers, but nonetheless she has, with relative ease, become familiar with her neighbors, and seems to enjoy these relationships.

Shopping

Other artists indicated that they frequent LTR shops and businesses. Although this doesn't necessarily involve much interaction, or any real relationships with particular LTR residents (although sometimes it does, in cases in which artists come to know shopkeepers – e.g., in the quote above, my interviewee had come to know the owner of her corner shop), it is nonetheless an important way of integrating into the LTR community. Artists show at least some degree of interest and participation in the LTR by patronizing these shops, and of course give money to

support the businesses. Although most artists, even very poor ones, are arguably better off financially than the average LTR, nonetheless they too face considerable financial pressures, and the low prices at many LTR shops is thus very appealing to many artists.

Although artists mention a variety of different kinds of stores they patronize, including clothing and hardware stores, food retailers are the most often discussed. With the recent influx of many young artists, as well as “hipsters” and other assorted young white people with more money than the LTR possess, a number of new businesses have opened that cater to this clientele, primarily food establishments. Restaurants and expensive grocery stores, as well as some coffee shops and wine bars, are clear examples of this. Although many of my respondents patronize these establishments as well as LTR ones, several artists felt such places are fussy and overpriced. Noted earlier in chapter 3, one artist was particularly disdainful of other “terribly cool” artists who shop at expensive Brooklyn Natural rather than patronizing LTR-run food stores. Other informants indicate that they enjoy the bargains at many of the LTR stores, or the array of Latino foods (another loves the readily available tomatillos, for example). One informant describes both the bargains and the social opportunities associated with shopping in Bushwick:

I love walking down Knickerbocker...it's really hard to enter, to be a part of the backbone of the Bushwick community because they're not white artists, but you go to the stores and interact with people and see what's going on and window shop and it's almost like a way of studying, and it's exciting and I love the \$5 shoe store, I can afford \$5 shoes, and Jimmy Jazz has good jeans I can wear. I think that's a lot of the reason it's great to go grocery shopping, it's a way to interact with the community.

Here my interviewee feels that shopping at stores that cater to LTR is a relatively easy way to interact a little bit with the LTR – something, she implies, that is not always easy to do because of racial and artistic differences. Shopping thus provides a bit of an overlap between their worlds. For

this informant and many artists, then, patronizing LTR businesses is a way, even if small, of participating in and supporting that community, and a practice that suits their financial needs as well.

Value in diversity

Thus artists can interact with the LTR in a number of ways, ranging from intense and often structured community activities such as community meetings⁷¹ to casual street interaction and patronizing their businesses. One final way of connecting with LTR – via artwork – is also important, and discussed at the end of this chapter. Artists thus in many ways attempt to connect with their LTR neighbors, even when these connections aren't terribly deep. Beyond making new acquaintances and obtaining cheap goods, however, artists describe benefits inherent in being in a diverse community.

One potential benefit to living in a place such as Bushwick is that you don't feel you must compete for everything. One artist describes why she likes living and working in Bushwick:

I like living in the “suburbs.” I don't like to live in like Williamsburg at all because I don't understand why you want to live in a neighborhood where everyone looks like you, is in competition for the same jobs, boyfriends, galleries, like everything with you. I don't need that. [I prefer] some grandmothers, some kids, some people I don't have anything in common with...

Although my informant doesn't explicitly describe what she gets out of being around a diverse range of people, it seems that at least in part it helps to diffuse the competition that she feels around people like herself. She seems to see inherent value in living in a diverse place. Other artists similarly indicate that they enjoy living in a diverse area such as Bushwick because it

⁷¹ Only a small percentage of my interviewees, however, reported going to structured community meetings.

pushes them out of their comfort zone. This is particularly the case for artists who have never lived in a place like Bushwick in the past. For example, one artist, transplanted from Sweden, finds that for the first time in his life he is part of a minority group in his neighborhood:

When you walk the street you see so many characters. I still think wow what a fucking place, even after 4 years, which is a good thing, I like it. I think everyone has probably talked about gentrification, it's definitely taking place, but I think not to the same extent that has happened around the L train. Honestly not that much has changed over the last 4 years. There are definitely more younger and white people here, but when I walk the street I think a good indicator is that if you think of someone being similar to me, like white, you'd react, and I still react when I see people who are obviously dressed the same way as I am. That's an indicator that we are still in a minority because as soon as it becomes something more than that you don't think about it. It's interesting, coming from Sweden where I've always been the majority you think if someone 's black or from the middle east, you think about it, you don't stop and think, wow that guy is black, but its there. While here it's the opposite. So I think it's a very interesting social experiment for myself, to be part of a minority is very good.

Living in Bushwick, where he is for the first time a minority, surrounded by a very diverse group of others, is a "social experiment" for him. He implies that this is interesting and expanding, something that could perhaps be construed as an educational experience. Beyond this, he loves the "characters" on the streets. Another artist similarly indicated that moving to Bushwick from Carroll Gardens was a way of pushing himself "out of [his] comfort zone," and a way of expanding his horizons. These comments have little to do with the specific diversity found in Bushwick, but do suggest that artists find it expanding to live in places where they are in a social minority.

Artists thus seem to greatly value the presence of the LTR, perhaps not always specifically because of their Latino culture, but because of the diversity they provide in terms of race, culture, age and lifestyle. Described in earlier, in the second chapter, artists thrive on surprises and interesting and stimulating experiences, and it seems the LTR often provide these.

3. Barriers and Frustrations

Despite all of these connections between the artists and the LTR, there are also difficulties. Some of the more commonly reported troubles include lack of communication, the hardship of being surrounded by poverty, and cultural differences, particularly surrounding noise and dirt.

Lack of communication

Many artists feel that their relationships with the LTR may not extend past superficiality, and several artists have wondered what the LTR actually think about their (the artists') new presence in Bushwick. The very fact that artists wonder about this suggests that most don't know any of the LTR well enough to have any sense of the answer. Some suspect that the LTR are probably unhappy about their arrival (even though virtually no accounts of hostility were voiced in my interviews), or, as one mused, perhaps quite indifferent:

I always wonder what people who have been living here for 15, 20 years, like the Latino community, what they think. Most of the guys on the street here, I always say hi to them and not all of them, but a lot of them are like hey man, nice to see you man, always...but I can tell that some people are like, they wouldn't mind if [his building] was shut down and turned into a can factory or something like that. I think most people don't really give a fuck, to be honest with you. And some people would think that it's probably a nice weird little thing that these people live out here. I mean we're still a minority, at least here, not over by the Morgan stop, but over here we're still a minority, the odd looking birds.

He thus suspects that the presence of a relatively small group of artists has little impact on the LTR community. Despite some signs of gentrification, their presence may be fairly unremarkable to the LTR community at large, who are concerned with their own lives, culture and activities, not those of a handful of artists whose lives are likely to be very different from their own. But it is clear from comments such as this that my interviewee above, and several others, do not have open

conversations with the LTR about such important topics as neighborhood change, and see limits to the relationships that are likely to develop between artists and LTR.⁷²

Depressing and frustrating sights and sounds

The artists I spoke to were keenly aware of the LTR poverty in Bushwick. Artists took the trash on the streets, dingy bodegas, crowded stoops, broken windows, dilapidated tenement buildings, and the occasional sight of vagrants and drug abusers on the streets all as signs of poverty – correctly, as Census figures indicate. For some artists Bushwick is their first experience with such a community, and they are taken aback by the conditions. Several indicated that the poverty and culture clash with the LTR was their number one problem with Bushwick.

Many artists indicated that they found it depressing and draining to live amidst the poverty of the LTR. Some found it sad and distressing, and they felt helpless in the midst of it. Several expressed this feeling without any substantial anger or frustration; for example:

I guess I feel like a lot of times...this neighborhood has a lot of poverty and it brings me down seeing how...if I go to the post office I'll see all these young mothers swearing profanities at their children, that makes me sad, or just...instances like that. Seeing a lot of people who are obviously on crack or something, hobbling around. You can make your apartment as happy positive and clean as you want but at the end of the day anytime you want to go outside of the house you'll see that...that's probably the biggest drawback [to living in Bushwick].

⁷² Although, again, I did not interview LTR for this project, unfortunately, other studies have taken on this challenge. Some of the data culled from studies of long term residents in other gentrifying neighborhoods, such as Harlem and Clinton Hill (Freeman, 2006) and the Lower East Side (Cahill, 2007) suggest that long term residents have complex attitudes toward gentrification and the newcomers – often understood largely in racial terms, i.e., mainly white people – who move in. Although I didn't conduct any kind of systematic search for information on this topic, there is some evidence of animosity on the part of long term residents in various neighborhoods in NYC toward newly arrived "hipsters," e.g., diehipster.com, whose purpose is "A place for real New Yorkers to vent about the invasion of attention starved, useless adults that we know as hipsters." One of the central complaints on this blog is that hipsters fuel gentrification, and harm and annoy real, born and bred New Yorkers. Hipsters, according to this site, stand in contrast to real, native New Yorkers..

Here my informant does not seem to blame or feel frustrated by the LTR, but rather finds the obvious difficulties experienced by some of these neighbors depressing and hard to deal with. Being surrounded by the poverty (and, perhaps, cultural or lifestyle differences, in the case of the “young mothers swearing profanities at their children”) is taxing and depressing for many artists. This reaction is perhaps not surprising, given the background of some artists in Bushwick. Noted earlier, for some younger artists (such as the woman quoted above), Bushwick is their first experience with living in a poor or diverse neighborhood. Some artists are fresh out of school, and many are fairly new to NYC, often from prettier and richer parts of the country (and sometimes, world). The difficulty dealing with poverty in their midst is also not surprising given that many artists I spoke with claim to be very sensitive to their environment – whether it’s a home, studio, or neighborhood, it is something that affects them deeply, and in the case of Bushwick’s poverty, negatively.

Other artists professed more frustration with cultural and economic differences between themselves and the LTR. The most extreme cases involved a handful of artists seem to feel an intense and insurmountable culture clash between themselves at the surrounding LTR. While not exactly hostile, these artists seem to feel frustrated at the noise and other difficulties involved in living near those whose lives, by necessity and also perhaps culture, often involve a different set of practices. The central complaints are that many LTR are too loud and too dirty. For example, one artist, describes frustration with the differences in lifestyle he perceives between himself and many of his (former – he recently moved his home, though not his studio, out of Bushwick) LTR neighbors:

The cultural barrier is really significant in Bushwick...the poverty barrier, like the socio-economic demographic that I fit into versus the indigenous population is pretty stark, it’s a pretty clear barrier and I’m never going to fit in. I went to some

community board meetings out there, I did some stuff, I really wanted to, but there's a limit to what you can do. On the one hand you want to be a liberal open-minded person toward their plight, and I'm being condescending just by saying it like that...but on the other hand I'm like, you know what it's not about cultural sensitivity. Being illiterate and not going to school and littering everywhere, fuck you. On the other hand there are of course a billion reasons why that happens, of course, but living it day to day...when you're in an ivory tower feeling responsible or whatever for a poverty stricken hood, that's fine, but when you're living it day to day its crushing, it's just like your soul is....there's a lot of metal grinding on metal, and a lot of merengue blasting all day. I'm at an age where I want to be able to sleep and have it be quiet, that's who I am now, it has nothing to do with not liking them or being a racist or ageist or whatever, it's just where I'm at.

This artist, now in his 40s after living in Bushwick for roughly 10 years, feels that he is no longer at an age where he can deal with the rigors of living among the LTR. He also implies that it is being surrounded by the poverty of the LTR that is most difficult (living it on a daily basis is “crushing,” even though he wants to be open-minded and accepting), but clearly expresses frustration with the trash and loud music. Another expresses his frustration at living in close proximity to his Latino neighbors:

... the hard part about being in Bushwick is the Hispanic culture being super loud and really dirty, it bothers me sometimes. Like my neighbor here, they don't have plumbing so they go in a bag or a bucket and pour it in the street. It's kind of funny because there are so many degrees of community, for myself I engage in com pretty deeply I think as far as art based but the Hispanic community In and out. I kind of got this space because I had visions of hiring the guys next door to do a lot of my metal fabrication, cos they do a lot, but after they kept parking in front of my garage that I'm killing myself to own, when they could park across the street where there's a spot, and they've been parking there for so long the first couple years I got here, and they're like, “you don't need this spot, we've been here longer,” like total disrespect and discourteous. And if I park in front of their thing, which they're cool with, as soon as a spot opens up I'll move my car, or if there's another spot I would have parked there in the first place. But not them, they just park there like they own it. So stuff like that, and then after them crapping and peeing in a bucket and throwing it out there, and then they spray and you can smell it, and they're really nice people, but it's a totally different world. It's totally third world and their idea of neighborhood and community is totally different from mine, like it's totally fine to be smelling piss. And this is my hood and I have to respect that cos that's his world and that's really hard to deal with. So am I anti community? Yeah, us and them. Or blasting your music behind your house, and there's 5 people and it's 3am and they're blasting their music like there's 1000 people out there that have to hear the music. What for? 5 people, and they're all passed out sleeping cos they're so wasted. So if you're going to say 'art

community' I have nothing but positive things to say, but when you say general community that surrounds me, and the thing is the Hispanic community is here now, and it's like, oh well they were here before us blah blah blah, it's like oh really? What about the Sicilians who got pushed out before the south Americans came in? and I happen to be 100% Sicilian. And then before that it was other Italians, and the Germans were like oh it's going to crap, the Italians are moving in. so I think community is always changing, nothing stays the same.

Here my interviewee outlines some understandably difficult circumstances surrounding his relations to his LTR neighbors.⁷³ He, as well as the informant quoted before him, seems to feel a little bit guilty about the complaints, as judged by his apparent need to justify his right to complain. Both of these informants hoped to integrated with the LTR community in positive ways – attending community meetings and hiring LTR neighbors to help with projects – but these artists seem to feel frustrated in their in their efforts to create this type of integration, and instead express great frustration at the differences in culture and lifestyle. Many artists seem to feel guilty about making complaints about a population that has been in Bushwick much longer than they have, and that by and large does not have the resources to afford the same standards of quiet and cleanliness. However, some of these complaints seemingly extend beyond behaviors that the LTR can't control, and these seem to provoke particular frustration – mainly playing very loud music and using the streets as a destination for refuse – differences that interviewees understand in terms of cultural clash.

Taken together, these comments suggest that there are some major challenges to fostering good relations between artists and LTR. Many of these challenges are very likely tied to different standards, stemming from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, and undoubtedly exacerbated by limited space, thin walls, and high population density in Bushwick. Despite good

⁷³ No one else I spoke to indicated any lack of indoor plumbing, but the general complaints about cleanliness and noise are common.

intentions and the desire for an integrated community, this is not necessarily feasible when artists are often offended or bothered by some aspects of the LTR lifestyle.⁷⁴

3. The Community Mission of Art

One final dimension of the relations between artists and LTR in Bushwick concerns the art itself, and the extent to which it can facilitate – or hinder – the creation of an integrated community. As many theorists of culture have noted (e.g., Griswold, 2008; Roy, 2007), cultural consumption (and production) can bring people together or separate them. Discussed below, the difficulty in creating an integrated artist-LTR community unfolds in a number of ways, including the way art is shown, the art itself, and the status of art as a form of high culture that can potentially be very exclusionary.

Inviting galleries vs. “white cubes”

Discussed earlier, many galleries in Bushwick go to great lengths to try to make their spaces as welcoming and participatory as possible. Frustrated with what they see as a sterile Chelsea model, many Bushwick gallerists go out of their way to cultivate a welcoming gallery atmosphere. However, many of these spaces still look pretty much like standard galleries, if less polished than Chelsea galleries. One gallerist feels that the fact that his space looks like a gallery renders it unappealing, especially to LTR, even as a space for community meetings rather than art events per se:

The space can be used for the community – I’m on the community board – but that hasn’t really ironed out mainly because people [in the broader population] don’t –

⁷⁴ Surely the converse is true as well. Again, my perspective is limited to the artists’ point of view.

they don't see, they don't understand what an art gallery is and the community sees it as a white space and very sterile and scary, and white, literally.

Similarly, he notes that, despite many invitations to openings, when those outside the art community do visit, they clearly do not feel entirely comfortable:

I made friends with [the Latino guys at the barber shop next door] and we've invited them over but they'll come and they'll stand right here [by the door] they don't really come in. But one of them I'm working on – he's interested in design so I got him hooked up with a class to learn Mac design so we're trying to get him a Mac now, he's going to go look at some Macs and you know. And they bring in their graffiti sketches and stuff which is really cool.

Thus, some gallerists make some important attempts to connect with the broader community, but the progress is slow. Perhaps it is understandable that those outside the art community, whose interests may not necessarily be artistic, or even if they are, as in the case of the artistically-inclined guys mentioned above, would feel uncomfortable in a gallery or attending an opening. However, here Jason feels that this discomfort extends to using the gallery space for purposes that are not art-related, suggesting that the entire idea of a gallery may be off putting, intimidating, or simply unfamiliar and thus unappealing, to the broader LTR community.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, he continues his attempts to open the space to new people.

Art itself is not always accessible to LTR

Some artists I spoke with distinguish sharply between work that is visceral, beyond words, outside of the parlance of academia – art that speaks to the viewer on a visceral and ineffable emotional level. It hits you with emotional impact in a sort of pre-verbal way. This type of work is contrasted with work that is more conceptual, more academic; work that references art history and can't be

⁷⁵ It seems quite possible also that it is not simply the space that is unappealing to LTR, but also the fact that there are no other LTR visitors in these galleries at any time, nor are there traces of LTR culture inside. It clearly involves stepping into a separate world.

fully understood outside of that context. Presumably work that is more visceral in its appeal wouldn't require a solid background in art history to appreciate; rather, this sort of art should hit the viewer without having to appeal to such knowledge

Many artists I spoke with felt that there are some kinds of art that clearly require an understanding of art history to appreciate and understand, while other types are more accessible to a wider audience – including art that hits you viscerally. Of course, what hits one at a visceral level may itself be a very complex issue, and one that reveals many group differences on any number of dimensions. Even if work doesn't need to be decoded using vast knowledge of art history, criticism techniques, and contemporary issues, the work that speaks to one person at a visceral level may not speak to another. Given the complexity of one's relationship to and taste in art, it is very likely that the many group differences described above between LTR and the artists in Bushwick could easily include differences in what sort of work is likely to speak to members of these groups – and it is also quite possible that they would be unlikely to agree. Thus even though much of the art produced in Bushwick is meant to be powerful, visceral, and to speak for itself, without translation via a wordy academic dialogue that many LTR are unlikely to have handy, even the visceral work of some Bushwick artists may nonetheless fail to appeal to LTR.

Discussed earlier, for many artists in Bushwick shared taste and interest particular types of work is a critical part of what drives relationships with others and a sense of community. If many of the LTR were thrilled by some of the artwork, as many Bushwick artists are, this would likely be a major force bringing these groups together. However, thus far it is not at all clear that this has happened in any substantial way. If anything, my interviews suggest that the majority of attempts to include LTR in artistic endeavors in Bushwick have not been terribly successful.

It is not always completely apparent what constitutes visceral versus conceptual work, as these are elements available, to varying degrees, in any work. However, artists whose work does not rely on obvious craftsmanship – regardless of whether or not it could be considered visceral by an audience – seem to face difficulties when showing their work to LTR. One artist, whose work is bright and colorful but abstract, expressed some of her troubles while showing her work to those without an extensive art background:

Yeah. I had it in my description, se habla espanol. I like that, I think these are attempts, nice gestures, but they don't really...the art world is the art world and usually it communicates with people related to culture. It always tries to [reach out] and I try to get something very human in my artwork that people will understand even if they're not artists, which happens sometimes, but I also do work that I know you'll need a certain background to understand. And there is a tendency of artists to think that they're going to reach out to people, but it's kind of a gesture because in a way...art is always for certain groups, it's difficult. My mother doesn't understand much artwork, she understands some, but like my sister thinks, oh I can do that. This kind of attitude, especially for craftsmanship, things that are not crafted...A drawing is a drawing, you can draw or not, but to put these things on a piece of plastic, anyone can do that...From some people you get a bad reaction, and you get this reaction very often from people outside the art world. Oh come on, I can also do that. Or my kid can do that, you know?

Here my informant outlines some common problems she faces when trying to show her art to nonartists in the neighborhood: chiefly, that this audience will not see the value in what she does, and will devalue the craftsmanship and ideas involved. She seems to feel that there is a fundamental divide between the artist and non artist communities of Bushwick and elsewhere, one that she sees little hope of overcoming, at least by exposing others to her artwork. Examples such as this highlight the fact that it can be difficult to really reach out to those of a very different background using art.

A few exceptions

On the other hand, there are a few cases of artwork actually connecting diverse groups of people and potentially (and actually) forging relations between disparate groups such as the artists and LTR in Bushwick. A handful of artists I spoke to deliberately make work that specifically aims to target and include those who do not have a fine arts background. One artist describes the intentions behind his work, including a recent performance-art piece involving people waiting in line at Port Authority:

I hope to make work that is on some levels a little challenging but also accessible to people who wouldn't experience "fine art" or contemporary art in the same way. And I find that I get people participating in these performances who would never go to a museum or step into a gallery, just average either internet people or just random people who have no arts interest or whatever....People who are waiting in line at port authority bus terminal, but they kind of get it and they can understand and they're like oh that's interesting, that's a cool thing you're doing. And there's something about that that interests me and not just taking the technology to the art masses, but taking the art to the masses, so it's kind of a dialogue that's happening. It can be really challenging because the tendency is to push it too far in either direction, to either make it too easy or too difficult or too dependent upon the technology or the audience and so it's kind of this balancing act. I'm really looking at, how can I engage the most people possible?

Here it is clear that he aims to include many people in his work, hopefully to get them interested in what he is doing, regardless of their lack of art background. Although this sentiment is clearly not specific to LTR in Bushwick, it includes them, and speaks to the possibility that some art may truly be interesting and relevant to a diverse mass audience.

Other artists have specifically created art projects that target and include some LTR from Bushwick. One artist, for example, during BOS showed a large series of photos he'd taken of Bushwick's aging storefront signs, which were a hit with the few LTR who visited his studio. He also photographed LTR on the streets near his home/studio and put a huge mural of the project on the side of a local coffee shop:

We went out and just stopped people on the street and asked to photograph people, some we knew, some we didn't. We tried to photograph as many locals as we could, including bodega owners, people we see every day, and some of my neighbors on the street here which was kind of awesome because now they're high five-ing me when I walk by. It was a really cool project, it was received really well. I remember when I told one of the bodega guys about it, and it wasn't even him, it was his brother's fact that we put up on the wall, and he came running over and was so excited about it and called his brother...so everybody who made it up on that wall, all the locals thanked me and were really grateful, and surprisingly cooperative.

In this case the artist hoped to get to know some of his neighbors better and to simply document the mix of people on the streets in Bushwick. By doing so he helped to foster closer relations with the LTR ("locals") and created work that they clearly seemed to enjoy. This specific project also nicely reflects the diversity of Bushwick in a way that many of the LTR seemed to appreciate. Unfortunately, the majority of work that is produced and shown in Bushwick does not seem to involve or speak to the LTR in this way; however, it is clear that under the right circumstances – such as being featured in a large photo mural – the LTR are thrilled to participate in the art part of the Bushwick art community.

The fact that this mural was on the street, rather than in a gallery, likely made it much more accessible for everyone in Bushwick, but particularly the LTR, who, noted above, may find galleries inhospitable. Using murals for cultivating community is a widely-used tactic in a variety of neighborhoods, especially when a clear political message is involved (e.g., Kunzle, 1995), and the residential area of Bushwick features the work of many muralists whose work in many cases predates the arrival of the current arts community, and seems to reflect the identity and concerns of the LTR. The organization El Puente, for example, is specifically devoted to creating community-building murals in Bushwick and Williamsburg, and has some excellent work on display (below).



El Puente mural in Bushwick



Huge mural on side of industrial building in Bushwick

Street art is a key piece of the “creative energy” that artists experience in Bushwick, and is also clearly the most accessible form of work in Bushwick, in the sense that it’s available for viewing 24 hours a day, in contrast to the often limited and sometimes fickle gallery schedules. Much of the street art in Bushwick, however, is unlikely to speak to LTR the way the mural noted above did. Although I did not conduct a systematic analysis of this work, most of it does not seem geared toward themes and images that would obviously engage the LTR. The work described above

stands in contrast to this, as does the work of many other muralists in Bushwick whose work predates the current art scene. Most of the street art in Bushwick, however, does not convey an obvious or consistent political message, nor does it clearly reflect the members or concerns of the LTR. Thus while street art is important for fostering community among artists, unfortunately it is unlikely that it does much to build bridges between the artists and LTR.

The purpose of art

Taken together, these comments suggest that art has the potential to both separate and engage social groups. In the case of Bushwick, despite some efforts on the part of many gallerists and artists, LTR have largely remained uninvolved in the art world. This seemingly has to do with a number of factors, including the unappealing nature of art galleries for the LTR and also perhaps the work being shown. Beyond this are the many other differences outlined at the beginning of the chapter that may make the LTR hesitant to engage with any aspect of the Bushwick art world – or the Bushwick art world to be able to cater effectively to the LTR community. Nonetheless, there are many examples of meaningful neighborly connection between the LTR and artists I spoke with, as well as a handful of art projects that successfully captivated some LTR and helped to bridge the chasm between the two groups.

All of this gets at some major issues of central importance to art. Who is art for? Is it an elitist pursuit? Should it be publicly funded? These are questions that some of my interviewees have clearly thought very much about. Much as gallerists in Bushwick attempt to create a new model of gallery, some Bushwick artists, like the one whose Port Authority project is described above, similarly aim to create a form of art that is accessible and meaningful to all. Those who don't create work that they believe to be widely accessible nonetheless put a good deal of thought into the issue. One woman articulated her stance on art's role in society very nicely:

I would hope that art does serve some kind of something for people, but then ask this guy walking down the street [she points to a middle aged Latino man on the sidewalk] and he's not going to say that modern art, Donald Judd, did anything for him. I doubt it. You know? I very seriously doubt it. And there's a big disconnect between artistic practice and life, and I think, well especially with the [very conceptual] work I want to make. There's a lot of work that you could show to some guy who has no experience with art and he'll be blown away by it. And then there's art that's about art, or about intellectual stuff that's not readily accessible. And I don't know how valid that is, to someone on the street. I can't answer that, because I think it's really important. But do we subsidize philosophers? No, we don't. You gotta be honest. Yeah I want that funding but I don't know that I do that much for the world. I'd like to think that I do but

Here my informant articulates a clear difference between work that is accessible to those outside the art world, and work that isn't ("art that's about art" or "intellectual" work). She clearly feels that this latter work is worthwhile, though realizes its potentially limited appeal. She and other artists I spoke with were very concerned with the broader impact of the work that they make, while recognizing that probably only a limited type of work that is likely to have broad appeal.

4. Conclusions

Taken together, the above characterization of relations and issues between LTR and artists in Bushwick is important in many ways. The overall picture is one of very limited integration between these two groups. It is obvious from the above comments that my interviewees felt major gulfs between themselves and the LTR on the basis of socioeconomic, culture and lifestyle differences. These differences seem unlikely to be bridged to any substantial degree anytime soon, despite the modest success of some of the attempts described above.

However, it is noteworthy that many artists at least minimally want to be involved with the LTR, even if this doesn't extend beyond casual neighborly interactions in the street. No one I talked to indicated that s/he had no interest in interfacing with the LTR. Perhaps this is a low bar, but I think

that this, along with the much more effortful attempts of some other artists and gallerists, overall suggests that artists in Bushwick in general care and think about the LTR in their midst. This orientation stands in sharp contrast to some earlier studies of the relationships between artists and other newcomers, on the one hand, and LTR, on the other, in neighborhoods elsewhere. Some of these studies have indicated that the newly arrived artists tend to have virtually no relation to the LTR, although they seem to enjoy the “grit” and “urban authenticity” that these residents lend to the area (e.g., Bowler & McBurney, 1991; Deutsche & Ryan 1984). Other studies have indicated that newcomers often view the diversity of the LTR likewise as an exciting and enriching backdrop, a sort of enjoyable wallpaper, against which they lead totally separate lives (Ley, 2003).

Certainly there are elements of this in the case of my Bushwick interviewees, in that virtually none of them had close relations to any of the LTR. Further, clearly just the visible aspects of living in a diverse neighborhood are exciting and rewarding to the artists I interviewed.⁷⁶ However, it seems to me that many of my interviewees expressed interests and actions that went well beyond this superficial enjoyment of the LTR, and render their relation to the LTR something more than viewing them as some kind of wallpaper. Even the artists who displayed the most anger toward and frustration with the LTR nonetheless had initially attempted to engage with them, and their anger seemed in part to stem from frustration with these efforts.

Why the difference? It is entirely possible that my interviewees are far more sensitized to issues of race relations and gentrification, even in comparison to artists twenty or thirty years ago. It is also possible that the idea of “diversity” and multiculturalism has more cachet now, especially in cities (e.g., Caulfield, 1994) in comparison to even thirty years ago – itself likely a consequence of

⁷⁶ Again this is a key part of face-to-face local community. It is worth noting that artists’ interactions with LTR are nothing but local; they have essentially no online or other interactions beside those that take place on the streets of Bushwick. Obviously face to face interaction is very important, but not enough to forge close relations with others.

globalization - making an integrated neighborhood all the more appealing and thus worth working toward and protecting from harm via gentrification and displacement. I argue that gentrification has become a crucial lens through which artists (and LTR, for that matter) think about neighborhoods – at least in NYC – and it is a key script that people use to make sense of what is happening in any particular neighborhood. This is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 7: Gentrification and the Future of Bushwick

At the time of this writing, the NYT has just put out an article celebrating Bushwick as the next major NYC arts district. Several new galleries have just opened space in Bushwick, and the area has begun to attract significant attention in the form of increased media attention, foot traffic, and speculation. What will be the future of Bushwick? Will it become the next major NYC arts district, as forecast? If so, what will happen to the many artists and LTR who currently live and work there?

Gentrification in Bushwick is an important and omnipresent topic. Where is Bushwick headed? How do artists and other residents feel about these changes? What is the role of artists in Bushwick in effecting these changes? And, of course, what will happen to the art world in Bushwick?

To address these questions I first discuss some of the changes that have taken place in Bushwick during the last ten years, including a discussion of new businesses, real estate prices, and population trends from recent Census figures. I then turn to my interview data for an analysis of how artists feel about these changes, and the ways in which they contribute to Bushwick's transformation. I conclude with a brief discussion of what Bushwick could look like in the next ten years.

1. What is gentrification?

There is an enormous literature on gentrification, largely in sociology but also geography and urban planning. There are many models of gentrification, and many disagreements over what

exactly it involves and how it progresses. At the most basic level gentrification involves investment in a formerly poor or derelict area.

Ruth Glass coined the term ‘gentrification’ in 1964, using it to refer to the tendency of the middle classes to move into and fix up working class housing. This is still referred to as “classic gentrification,” although in the nearly 50 years since its first usage, ‘gentrification’ has been given many new definitions.⁷⁷ There is certainly some consensus, then, at a broad level about what gentrification involves: relatively wealthy (relative to their new neighbors at least) people moving into a poor or working-class neighborhood and ultimately changing the area. Exactly how and why this happens, however, is much debated.

Several models of gentrification propose multiple stages. Most of these basically suppose that the first wave of newcomers, often artists, are generally very high in cultural capital, but very low in economic capital. As these artists make a formerly blighted neighborhood appear safer and otherwise more appealing to those with more money and less cultural capital, new waves of inhabitants arrive. The process continues until the final stage of gentrification, in which the area may be populated with those very high in economic capital but very low in cultural capital (Ley, 2003). Others have highlighted production versus consumption aspects of how and why gentrification proceeds. Recently, however, some have argued that gentrification has become far more widespread – and global – and complex since the 1990s, and thus that the distinction between production and consumption models of gentrification is outmoded, as is the ‘rent gap’ hypothesis as described by Smith (1996) (for a review, see Lees et al. 2008). Discussed below,

⁷⁷ E.g., “immigration to inner city neighborhoods of a wealthier professional class of residents” (Henig, 1980:638); “the conversion of socially marginal and working class areas of the central city to middle class residential use” Zukin 1987; “the movement into a previously working class area by upper income households, generally professionals, managers, technicians, the new gentry, resulting in the displacement of the former lower-income residents.” (Marcuse, 1990), to list just a few. Many essentially get at the same basic principle.

Bushwick is arguably in the early stages of gentrification, although it may be headed toward fuller gentrification.

Is gentrification really taking place in Bushwick?

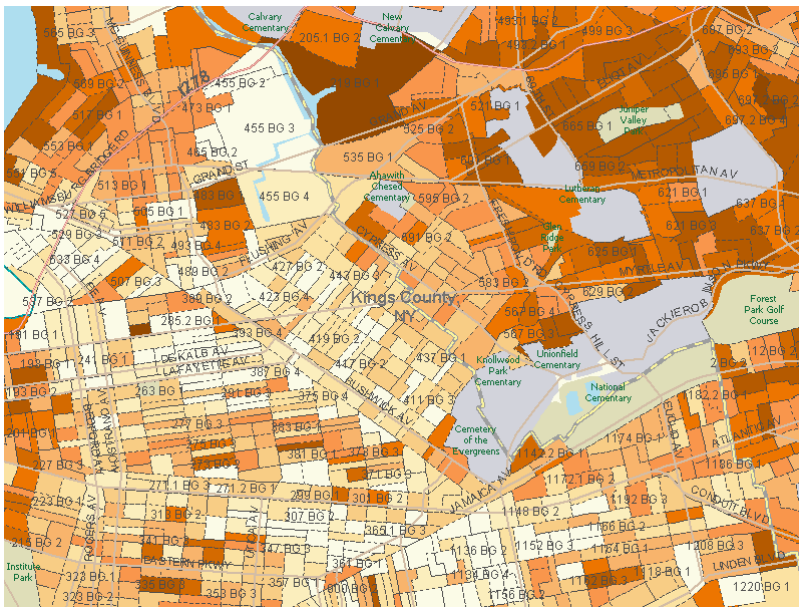
It is widely believed by my interviewees that gentrification is taking place in Bushwick, although it has a very long way to go before it reaches anything resembling late stage gentrification. My interviewees point to the increasing number of young, mainly white people on the streets, or those whom they suspect are artists, as evidence of this. They also point to the recent opening of various establishments that seem to cater to this population, including coffee shops, wine bars, restaurants, and natural grocery stores, as evidence of gentrification. Rising rents, of course, are a less pleasant indication. Media coverage has for several years touted Bushwick as an area on the cusp of rapid gentrification, and increasing rental and purchase prices seem to bear this out.

Is gentrification in fact taking place in Bushwick? There are many possible factors to consider in approaching this question, but some basic Census data comparisons help to shed light on the overall situation. Following the procedure of Walks & Maaranen (2008), I looked three indicators of gentrification: average household income; percent of owner-occupied households, and education status, as well as my own addition, percent non-Hispanic white residents, given that race seems to be the main proxy for gentrification that my interviewees use. I compared data from 2000 to 2010.

Household income, 2000-2010

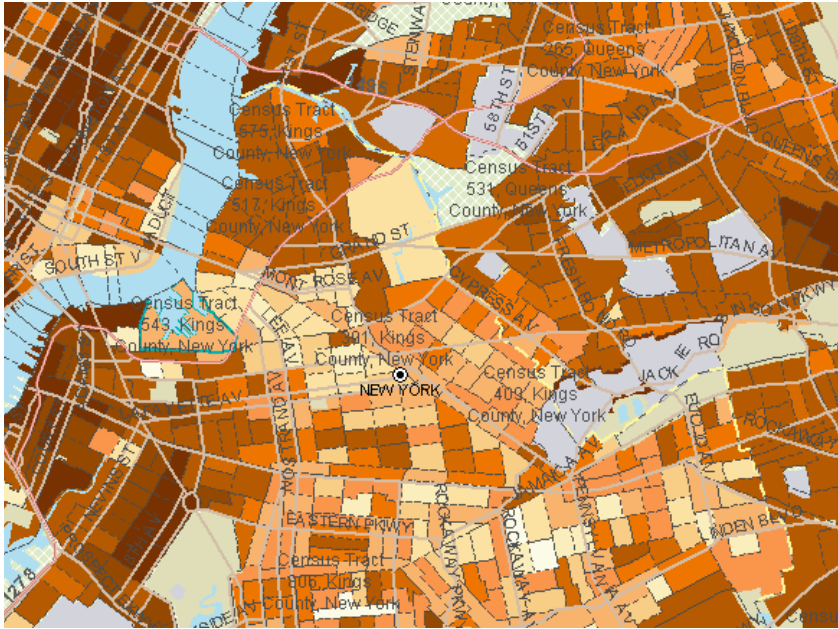
The data for median household income indicates that Bushwick residents became wealthier between 2000 and 2010.⁷⁸ The maps below show that for most Census tracts in Bushwick, income increased. Income was higher in the western portion of Bushwick in 2000, relative to the eastern section of Bushwick, and that trend continues in 2010.

Median Household Income, 2000



Media Household Income, ACS 2006-2010

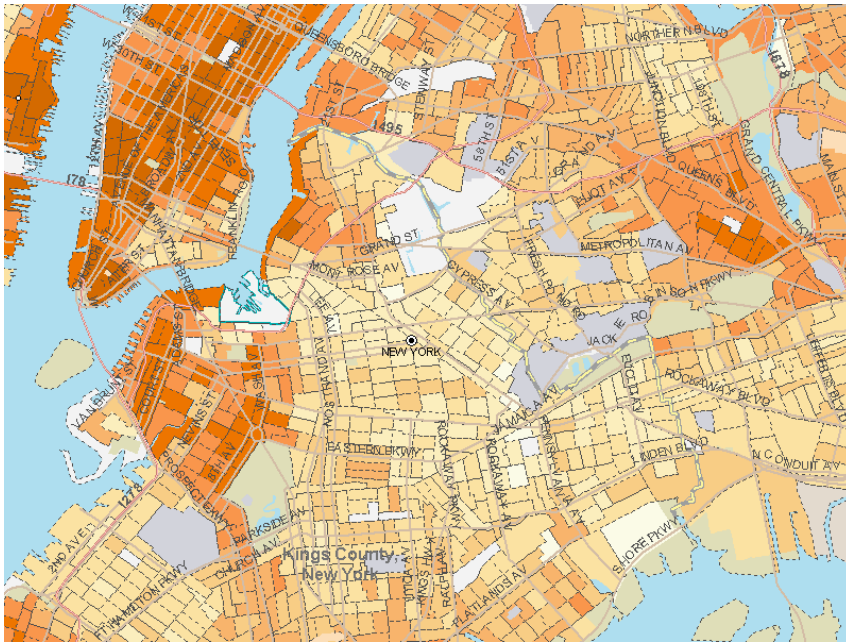
⁷⁸ I compared Census 2000 data to ACS data from 2006-2010, simply because this was the most productive comparison, as far as I could tell, available on Social Explorer.



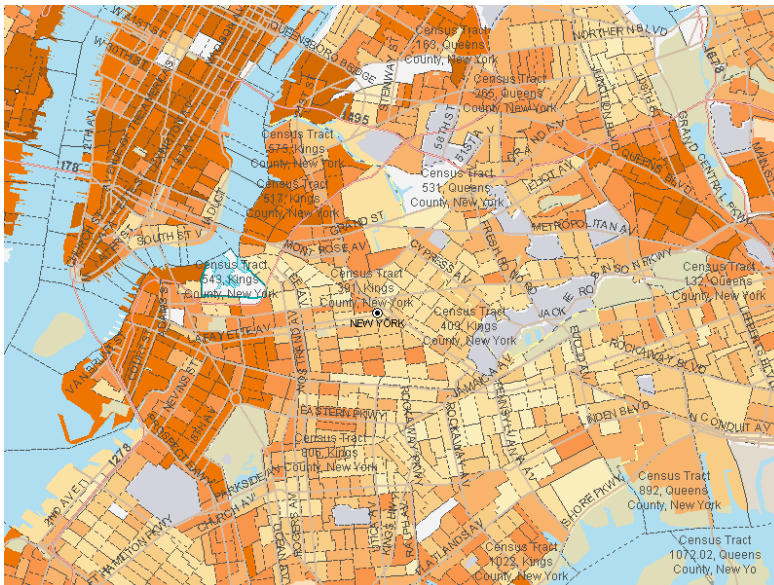
Education, 2000-2010

The percentage of inhabitants in Bushwick holding a bachelor's degree also increased dramatically between 2000 and 2010. Like household income, this data suggests that Bushwick has been slowly gentrifying over the last ten years, given that the percentage of inhabitants holding a BA has seemingly increased from an overall rate of less than 1%, to what appears to be a rate of 1 to 5%. Educational gains appear to be steepest in the western section of Bushwick, particularly north of Flushing Avenue. Although these numbers are unfortunately not very precise, this does suggest that there are more inhabitants with B.A. degrees in Bushwick.

Percentage of inhabitants holding a B.A. degree, 2000



Percentage of inhabitants holding a B.A. degree, ACS 2006-2010

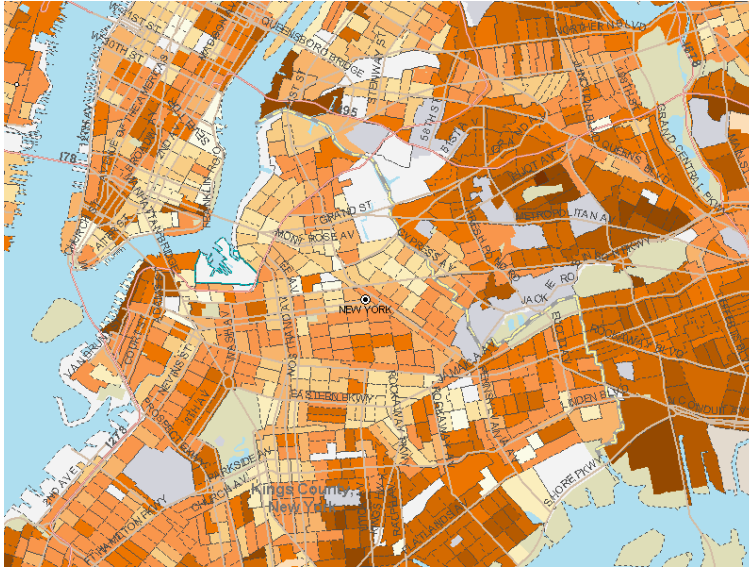


Owner-occupied housing, 2000-2010

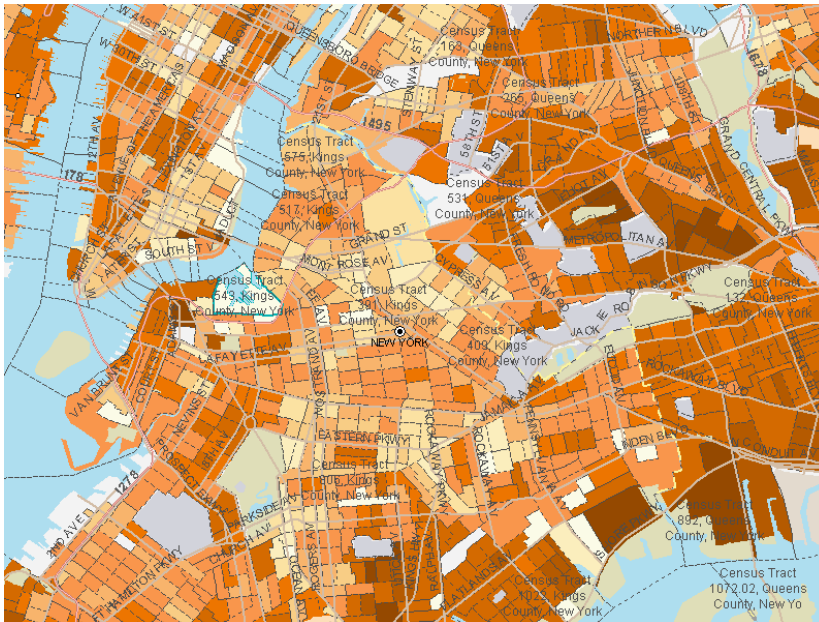
It is interesting to note that there seemingly has been very little, if any, change in the percentage of Bushwick inhabitants who own their space. The maps from 2000 and 2010 (this time based on

regular Census data for both years, at last) look nearly identical. If the supposed influx of new residents are similar to my interviewees – and my assertion is that they are – this is not surprising. Very few of my interviewees (16%) own property in Bushwick.

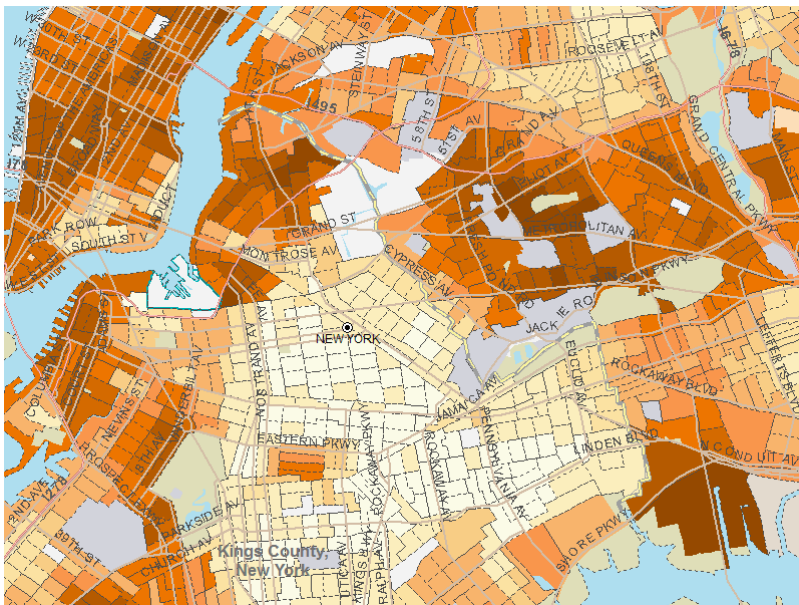
% Owner occupied housing, 2000



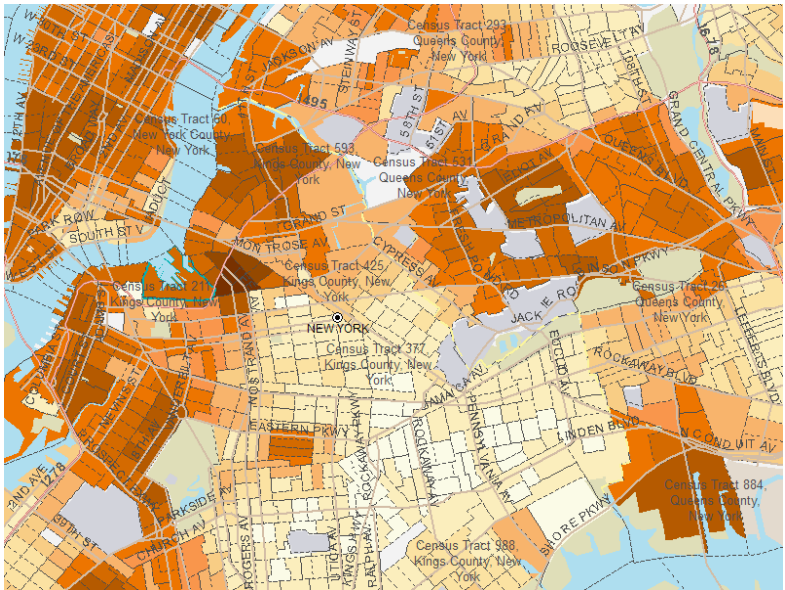
% Owner occupied housing, 2010



Finally, I also included an examination of changes in race in Bushwick, given that in popular lore, and according to many of my interviewees, gentrification is largely associated with an influx of young white people. The data on the percentage of non-Hispanic white inhabitants of Bushwick between 2000 and 2010 is illuminating. Shown in the maps below, their numbers have increased dramatically since 2000.



% Non-Hispanic white residents, 2000



% Non-Hispanic white residents, 2010

The maps above suggest that the non-Hispanic white population in Bushwick has increased considerably since 2000, especially in the western section of Bushwick, and north of Myrtle Avenue. The white population for most of the Census tracts in this region has increased by at least 5%, and for some tracts in the East Williamsburg Industrial Park the increase is even steeper. However, despite these increases, Bushwick is still overwhelmingly Latino.

Taken together, the indicators above suggest that gentrification is slowly taking place in Bushwick. It is clear that the education and income levels of Bushwick inhabitants have increased between 2000 and 2010, and the neighborhood has whitened in that time, but property ownership, a key piece of gentrification according to the literature, has not yet increased.

Confirming this Census view, at the level of casual observation there seem to be a number of indications that Bushwick is slowly gentrifying. Real estate brokers and a variety of news media have been touting Bushwick as the next Williamsburg for several years now, and several loft

buildings have opened. In addition to these developments, as noted earlier, many art galleries have opened, as well as other amenities such as coffee shops, bars, restaurants, yoga studios, and a handful of boutiques. Although I have been unable to find any reliable source indicating the average cost of residential rentals or sales in Bushwick, I found some information suggesting that as of mid-2011, the average rental cost of a one bedroom apartment in Bushwick was \$1338 per month, up from \$800 in 2007.⁷⁹

However, nonetheless, gentrification in Bushwick appears to be in a fairly early stage. The 2010 Census data above shows considerable poverty, and even in arts-heavy area around Wyckoff the Latino culture clearly predominates. Despite changes, a brief walk through Bushwick indicates that the neighborhood is still home to primarily Latino residents, and affordable Latino-run businesses. Further, most models of gentrification propose that home buying by a newer, wealthier class is a key step in neighborhood change, and so far it seems from my interviews and the recent Census data that homeownership in Bushwick is not on the rise. My informants are best understood in terms of what Cole (1987) calls “pioneer” gentrifiers: the first new arrivals of a slightly higher social class, armed mainly with cultural rather than economic capital, to a disadvantaged neighborhood. Further gentrification, if it happens, will have to be spearheaded by others with more money.

All of this suggests some amount of gentrification, but it is of mixed type. Because Bushwick covers both industrial and residential regions, gentrification arguably proceeds in different ways depending on the region. Artists moving into the industrial area are far less likely to displace low income tenants than are those moving into the residential area, since of course there are far fewer tenants there to begin with. Thus only the residential area of Bushwick can experience what Lees (2008) refers to as “classic gentrification.” However, if enough newcomers arrive in the industrial

⁷⁹ Data from http://www.crainsnewyork.com/article/20110417/REAL_ESTATE/304179997.

area, industry may eventually be forced out to make way for them – as has been the eventual fate of Williamsburg and other manufacturing hubs (Curran, 2007).

2. Artists and Gentrification in Bushwick

What is the connection between artists and gentrification? The role of artists in neighborhood change has been widely documented and theorized. Hackworth & Smith (2001) provide a stage model of gentrification that describes how the process of gentrification has shifted over time. Early gentrification, prior to the mid 1970s, involved gentrification in small and isolated neighborhoods in the northeast US and western Europe. During the mid 1970s developers and investors began taking advantage of the downturn (and consequent low housing prices), selling properties to new “gentrifiers.” In the 1980s gentrification picked up in NYC and elsewhere – and in NYC in particular “the presence of the arts community was often a key correlate of residential gentrification, serving to smooth the flow of capital into neighborhoods like SoHo, Tribeca, and the Lower East Side.” (Lees et al, 2008:174). Gentrification slowed during the recession of the early 90s, and then picked up again in the mid 90s.

Artists are thus frequently described as the “shock troops” of gentrification – the first (usually white) people to move into a derelict or slum area, whose presence over time makes the neighborhood more appealing to those with more money and sets the stage for gentrification. Although there are many examples of artist enclaves that do not turn into highly gentrified areas, some researchers have found that typically gentrification does follow artists.

How and why exactly do artists facilitate gentrification? In addition to bringing considerable cultural and economic capital to a blighted region, many artists beautify their homes and communities with artwork, and create a street presence in otherwise desolate areas. Some argue

that when artists move in sufficient numbers to a neighborhood experiencing major disinvestment, their presence often increases the neighborhood's value by making it appear "safe" for those with more money (Cole 1987), "edgy" or "hip" (Bowler & McBurney, 1991), by helping to reframe urban blight as exciting "grit" (Deutsche & Ryan, 1984), and/or by contributing to a market for more upscale consumption (Zukin, 2008). More people, usually those with more money than the artists, then move to the neighborhood, often in a way that almost perfectly mirrors Bourdieu's (1984) fields of capital, moving from those with high cultural/low economic to eventually those with low cultural/high economic capital (Ley, 2003). Ultimately, many initially impoverished neighborhoods can be transformed into very wealthy, exclusive neighborhoods, and in some cases such as SoHo, expensive shopping districts that offer few residential abodes. This pattern of gentrification broadly describes the transformation of many urban neighborhoods, in New York and beyond, since the late 1970s, even though it is difficult to generalize from one neighborhood to another (Lees, 2000).

Clearly, in many cases artists can add value to poorer areas when they move in. Since this pattern has been occurring for nearly three decades, and seems to be particularly obvious in New York, it is not surprising that the arrival of artists might be viewed with some fear and dread by long term, low-income residents who are unlikely to be able to withstand rent hikes. Artists are thus sometimes vilified as "gentrifiers," despite the fact that often they, along with longer-term poor residents, are often also displaced as the neighborhood gentrifies and rents soar.

The artists I spoke with are keenly aware of the link between artists and gentrification, and have complex views about the topic, as it applies to their lives in Bushwick. During my interviews I did not ask informants directly about gentrification, only the future of the neighborhood. Most mentioned gentrification in this context, although this is not the case for everyone.

First I discuss artists' impressions of whether they feel that Bushwick is gentrifying, before examining some of their perceptions of the positives and negatives associated with this. Finally I cover their impressions of the role that artists play in this process, and their own potential for changing the future of Bushwick.

Inevitable gentrification

I was struck, in my interviews, by how knowledgeable my informants were about gentrification. Most were well aware of the role (or theory, at least) that artists serve as the “shock troops” of gentrification, as well as the pattern of displacement of previous tenants, sometimes accompanied by subsequent displacement of artists. As some of my interviewees struggled to pay newly raised rents, it was hard to be oblivious to such issues.

Most seemed to feel that the gentrification of Bushwick was inevitable, although interviewees' predictions of how long it would take varied widely. Regardless of the specific time frame, however, most interviewees foresaw the eventual gentrification not only of Bushwick, but of every region in the NYC area accessible by train. In many cases (in reference to gentrification and other topics), interviewees noted the similarities between Bushwick and other NYC arts neighborhoods such as Soho, the East Village, and Williamsburg, and speculated that Bushwick would, sooner or later, experience the same gentrification. Some marveled at the pace with which it seemed to be happening in Bushwick; others, particularly those who live farther out (i.e., past the Halsey stop on the L train) or along the JMZ, places where gentrification seems to be happening at a much slower pace, in comparison to the Morgan through Myrtle Wyckoff L stops, felt that it would be several years before Bushwick really feels gentrified. Others speculated that the heavy concentration of industrial buildings in western Bushwick (i.e., the East Williamsburg Industrial Park) would also protect the area from rapid gentrification and would not lead to

displacement of residents – even though a similarly dense concentration of industry ultimately did little to protect Williamsburg from this fate (Curran, 2007). Nonetheless, many of my interviewees seemingly felt a sense of safety thanks to the industrial architecture.

Mixed feelings

My informants held mixed views about whether the gentrification of Bushwick is a positive or negative thing. They conveyed considerable knowledge about gentrification in other areas, mainly of NYC, but also beyond, and several pointed out (as writers in the gentrification literature do) that inhabitants of Bushwick had essentially begun gentrification by taking the very first step of taking action to reduce crime and drug activity in the area. Maria Hernandez, an activist in the '90s who was shot in her apartment and after whom a prominent park in Bushwick was named, was often cited as an example of such work. While turning a low income residential neighborhood into an elite shopping destination such as Soho is not something my interviewees would applaud, certainly they see value in stemming widespread drug and violence issues – a first step in gentrification that often occurs prior to artists' arrival, as was the case in Bushwick. Most accepted gentrification as an inevitable, if long term, process, and identified both advantages and drawbacks to it. Mainly, artists felt that gentrification – at least in its earlier stages – helped to augment the arts community and provide more amenities for artists, while also hopefully providing some relief for impoverished long term residents.

Many of my informants, noted earlier, felt that the handful of coffee shops, bars, and other amenities that had opened largely to cater to them were particularly endearing because of their scarcity. Moreover, after living in a neighborhood with few amenities (that cater to their tastes, that is; for example certainly coffee is available at the many Latino bodegas that dot every other street corner throughout Bushwick, but this is not the strong, high quality, organic coffee that is

served by the newly opened coffee shops) makes inhabitants feel particularly attached to and grateful for the options that do exist. Moreover, these establishments provide important social gathering spots for artists in the area, and for some, have been invaluable as places to meet other artists who share their interests. Many of my informants reported frequenting the coffee shops (and somewhat less frequently, bars and restaurants) that have newly opened, with great enthusiasm. Artists clearly identified these new establishments with gentrification, sometimes with a hint of guilt; for example:

I'm super happy that this café is here now, as much as it's a signal of the future progression of the neighborhood, it signifies a certain advanced level of gentrification but....they've also got really good coffee.

While many informants recognize the link between these new establishments and gentrification, they are on balance pleased to see them, as they provide tasty food and drinks and important community gathering spaces – for artists. Others express a similar attitude with respect to art galleries and events in Bushwick; for example:

I'm aware of the effects that gentrification can have on the community that was there before, and like I said I don't know anyone outside the art world but I'm sure that has probably been difficult for the community that was there before, but I kind of think myself that it's exciting, the direction that it's gone in.

Once again here my informant is well aware of some of the potential downsides of gentrification, but overall sees the exciting art scene in Bushwick – which she considers a part of gentrification – as an improvement. Others see gentrification as strengthening the artistic community in Bushwick a bit more broadly; one informant remarks upon the rapid influx of young people into her area of Bushwick, near the Morgan stop:

It's kind of crazy. You see this gentrification happen rapidly every month, every single month there's a new slew of white kids that move in. There's nothing wrong

with that and they're doing really creative things, there's so much going on in Bushwick, it's insane.

The implication here is that so long as the newcomers are contributing to Bushwick's creative community – and she feels this is the sort of person arriving - they are welcome. Thus, many of my informants considered both the art scene and the recently arrived spots of consumption – coffee shops, bars, restaurants – as signs of gentrification, and for the most part, welcomed it.

Others also felt that gentrification could benefit the impoverished long term residents in Bushwick. Noted in chapter 6, many artists find the poverty of the long term residents in Bushwick to be deeply troubling and very depressing. While certainly displacement is not a favorable outcome, many of my informants hoped that gentrification could benefit the lives of these residents, rather than merely forcing them out of a newly improved home. One hoped to see the economic revitalization of Broadway, one of the poorer commercial areas of Bushwick:

it's not like it's a fear but I can see that the neighborhood is changing and that's not a bad thing, but the neighborhood might change faster than I can document it. But that wouldn't be a bad thing, bringing some economy back. Unfortunately I don't see it happening on Broadway anytime soon, unless you're a 99 cent store.

Others feel that the mix of wealth and poor is a vital part of New York City, and sees gentrification as potentially bringing these richer people to Bushwick; for example:

I think diversity is very important, and part of the beauty of NY is that you have housing projects right beside condos that cost a ton of money that neither of us⁸⁰ could afford in our entire lifetimes. And I think that's a gorgeous part of thatIn talking about gentrification...I'm torn, and I can say that it's both good and bad. Having come from the class that I've come from [lower class, poor background] I understand it, and so it's sort of like I get that, but I also get where I am now. So its'

⁸⁰ Here my interviewee refers to me and herself as being broadly similar in terms of social class, i.e., "condos that cost a ton of money that neither of us could afford in our entire lifetimes." This is one example of the kinds of comments my interviewees made that suggested that they saw me, again in very broad strokes, as an insider.

a very weird thing.....Yeah I appreciate the city as a living creature that is in flux and that's beautiful, but making sure that the people who are going to be displaced are taken care of, I don't know if that infrastructure is there. So I don't really know enough to make a decision about that, I guess.

This informant, like many others, sees tremendous benefit in a socially diverse neighborhood, and hopes that Bushwick can have this. Moreover, as someone who was homeless for part of her life, she more than many of my other interviewees is familiar with the stresses of poverty and drain of living in poor areas. However, she expresses mixed feelings about gentrification, knowing that this could – or would; she makes this sound like a certain outcome - lead people to be displaced from their homes.

Overall, then, informants see some benefits of gentrification – particularly for their own benefit and that of the arts community, but also, they hope, for the long term residents as well. This stance is very much in line with some arguments in the literature on gentrification which suggest that the overall outcome of gentrification at the neighborhood and regional level is very positive, but that social policies to protect low income residents must be in place. Unfortunately, such policies are rarely extant or enforced (for a review of this argument, see Lees et al. 2008).

3. The trouble with gentrification

Despite the many advantages associated with having venues, shops, and potentially clean, safer streets, many informants also see considerable trouble associated with gentrification in Bushwick. Problems include a variety of issues that plague their personal lives and artistic community, as well as the lives of long term residents in Bushwick.

Practical issues

Some informants saw significant practical problems associated with gentrification. One of the most obvious signs of gentrification is rising rents (and again, the vast majority of my informants rented, rather than owned, their space). Many of my informants complained that their rent was going up rapidly, and they worried that they would soon be priced out of the area. Some informants have been able to negotiate with their landlords, but their impression seems to be that time is running out. A couple had already been priced out of Bushwick, and were moving to adjacent and cheaper Ridgewood.

Others worried that gentrification would lead to new inhabitants who did not share the artists' values, which could lead to clashes and compromised ability to make work. One informant describes her worries on this front:

I'm afraid [Bushwick is] going to be Soho, what Soho is, with Banana Republic down the street. Again I think the loft law is going to help people like me there, but it's also going to legalize living in these huge spaces that's going to bring in people who don't make [art] work, and then it's going to be, when I run my table saw at 11 at night it's not going to be ok. So right now there are no sound regulations, people can just practice and make as much sound as they want, I went and shot fireworks off the roof randomly and whatever. It's a little bit free for all. Again I can't weld, but it's kind of in that nether region, and I think that with gentrification those things are going to go away. So that's what I'm afraid is going to happen, and what I think most likely will happen.

This shows just one of the ways in which many artists rely upon derelict or industrial areas for practical, art-related reasons. Although these concerns clearly apply to some artists more than others, depending on the sort of work they make, if a region is going to be the sort of arts community described earlier, full of "creative energy" and possibility, it seems that it would have to accommodate the needs of artists who require freedom from sound regulations and other similar rules. The informant quoted above, like others I spoke with, clearly believes that artists will be more accommodating of art-related noise than nonartists. My informants thus worry that

gentrification could have major implications for the most basic aspects of their lives – where they can afford to live, and where they can afford to make work.

Social issues

Some informants worry that the Bushwick art community will not benefit from gentrification, but instead will become large and diluted, and thus lose many of the features that initially made it appealing. Some informants see these changes already taking place. This concern targeted a number of different participants in the Bushwick art world. Some, for example, felt that the concentration of artists was already beginning to become diluted; one informant, who has lived in the notorious McKibbin lofts for several years, no longer knows all of his neighbors the way he used to, and notes that they are no longer exclusively artists:

In this neighborhood I feel like people are out here for very different reasons, and especially in the past few years a lot of people have come out here because it's the cool place to be now and there's lots of parties so people come out for that, everybody knows that my building is the party lofts and a lot of people move out here, there were a lot more artists in my building when I first moved out here. They've since moved to other parts of Bushwick so I don't know, a little bit deeper maybe.

Although he still loves living in Bushwick, he is very aware of the changes taking place in the concentration of artists. Other informants felt that businesses were beginning to open that did not cater to artists, but rather to better-heeled folks who were starting to trickle into the neighborhood; for example:

The Bushwick community it's got a lot of people blazing their own territory, opening their own business, living and working, but now it's getting to the point where you've got companies, a restaurant like the Morgan, try to tap in and ride the wave, they're trying to exploit that aspect of cheap property and like it's the next place.

The Morgan, a recently opened and expensive restaurant, seemingly caters to a non-artist crowd, and this informant feels that such a business capitalizes on the hipness of Bushwick without doing anything to solidify the artist community. Here my informant seems to vilify the business owners – they’re trying to “ride the wave” and “exploit” what the artists have largely built in Bushwick. Thus, some informants noted that the arts community no longer has the same sort of monopoly that it once did on the businesses and character of the area – instead, others (in some case, those seeking parties) are joining in and potentially changing the course of the area. This outcome stands in stark contrast to the sense of freedom and possibility, discussed earlier, that makes Bushwick so appealing in the first place.

These examples speak to the broader fact that many of my informants are not particularly enamored with those they consider to be “gentrifiers” – wealthier people who by and large are not artists. Clearly many of these are people who have chosen different life priorities – i.e., money, not artistic pursuits. In the near-universal bashing of Williamsburg amongst my informants – the former home of many of them - the newly arrived gentrifiers are a major source of neighborhood decline. For example:

It’s an open question, basically of gentrification and am I comfortable with my role in that. it’s not going to make me not rent here, and I don’t necessarily feel that I am any better than whatever, but at the same time I think there’s something kind of culturally bland about some of the gentrifiers, how Williamsburg is now, there’s very [few] actual creative types, although there are some there. Last night I went to this crazy guy’s studio [in Williamsburg], he’s had it for like 20 years but by and large the feeling I get from Williamsburg is that it’s pretty well off people recently out of college.

In this case, the lack of “creative types” and relatively wealthy recent college graduates leads to a sterile environment in what was formerly an interesting neighborhood. The “crazy guy” with the twenty year studio is positioned as an exception to the swaths of “bland” gentrifiers. Another put it a little more bluntly:

I hope [Bushwick] doesn't become like Bedford Avenue and my fear is that it will. There are so many douchebags there now. We went out to [a restaurant there] for my birthday dinner and, just stupid, the people who were there, and I know, people tell me all the time, Bushwick is just like Williamsburg was 15, 10 years ago and I'm like, that sucks! Look what Bedford is now, it's terrible..... it's just sad to see a place that was so near and dear turn into that. So I hope that doesn't happen here. its probably inevitable, that's just the way gentrification goes but...I don't know. I hope that, there's a lot of families out here who have lived here all their lives and call this place home, not necessarily in our area, but once this place explodes its going to push people out and so that's going to suck, and we're going to get stupid shitty chain restaurants and stuff.

Here my informant is horrified at the thought that Bushwick will likely become Williamsburg, complete with people this informant finds distasteful, and in the process the LTR will likely be displaced. In some cases artists are not merely annoyed by, but actively clashing with residents who have arrived more recently. One informant relays a story about a revered music venue in Williamsburg that he has worked with extensively, in its final days before shuttering and moving out to Bushwick, largely due to skyrocketing rent (and, perhaps, ungrateful neighbors):

Well at Monster Island one of the people who lives in one of the [fancy] condos that went up across the street, someone from the condos called the city, I didn't know you could do this, you can call and get graffiti painted over if you complain. And the whole building [Monster Island] is covered in very well done, obviously commissioned graffiti, and just because someone in the condo just didn't like the way it looked they called and somebody came, but somebody came out just as the guy was setting out to paint [over the graffiti] and they're like what are you doing?! This is our building. It's graffiti but we want it here. And then one of the other condos actually featured Monster Island in their brochure as something to do. So it goes either way but it's funny that these condos pop up and people think that....I understand gentrification, people make more money and I guess they're deserving of what they're paying for but at the same time sometimes I don't think they even understand why they're here, it's so over their head. These people are smart, they make good money and buy their nice condos, they're smart enough to do all this, but then how does this go over your head?

Although this incident occurred in Williamsburg, not Bushwick, it is an interesting case of lack of understanding and clashing aesthetic goals between newcomers (in the condos) and the longer-established arts (and music) community. On the other hand, it also shows condo buildings

attempting to capitalize on the supposed hipness of the venue by showcasing it in their advertisement. More broadly, it points to the fact that new arrivals to gentrifying places such as Williamsburg, and to a lesser extent, Bushwick, may have little interest in or understanding of the earlier (artist) culture there – much as many artists in Bushwick arguably have limited interest in or understanding of the Latino culture of the LTR previously and currently living there.

In all these cases, it is clear that artists do not want to live in the midst of those whom they perceive to be relatively wealthy, not creative, and not sympathetic to their artistic pursuits, and this is precisely the sort of person they feel has moved into and ruined Williamsburg. Drawing on the gentrification paths of earlier NYC bohemias, they fear this could happen to Bushwick as well. For both practical reasons, such as unaffordable rent and limitations on producing art work, and social ones, such as the artist population becoming diluted with people whom my interviewees perceive to have different goals and interests, many of my interviewees felt that gentrification comes at a high cost.

Artists' role in gentrification

My informants were keenly aware of the role that artists have played in the gentrification of other neighborhoods, and questioned their own role in the changes taking place in Bushwick. Although most of my informants did not specify what it was about artists and their activities that led to this chain of events, nonetheless they were aware of this progression. One interviewee described a trajectory that leads from artists needing cheap space to boutiques and wine bars:

[Artists] are unwelcome [by LTR in Bushwick] and maybe for good reason. And that's the larger issue you're looking into, gentrification and displacement and it seems the artists lead the charge because of necessity of space and money and good prices, that makes it culturally interesting for a different ethnic group who then move in and turn...boutiques aren't far behind...now we have wine bars [in Bushwick].

Many informants felt uncomfortable with the idea that they were inadvertently serving as the first wave of gentrifiers. Noted in chapter 3, artists do not want to be ‘gentrifiers,’ and this possibility keeps some of them from identifying strongly with the Bushwick art community in the first place. While not framed explicitly in terms of dissociating from other artists, other informants similarly expressed discomfort at the idea that they were changing Bushwick:

It’s not like I just want to come here and be some white gentrifier. I like to fit in and not feel like I’m the devil and just be part of the community, not change it, not try to strip it of everything that’s good about it.

Clearly this interviewee worries about being seen as a “white gentrifier” by the LTR (and possibly other artists) in his midst. Others similarly expressed the feeling that they didn’t want to swoop in and change the pre-existing neighborhood; for example:

I wish that people would care more about cleanliness on the street, be more conscious. But I think it would be really weird if people all of a sudden changed Bushwick, because it’s not really their place to change it. There was a lot going on before, before artists infiltrated, and it would be nice if there were more interaction between different communities. But it’s hard to say if that would actually be comfortable. I’m a little skeptical of that, if that would be welcome involvement. If you could just not have trash all over the street that would be really cool. I don’t know how to change that. I’d be a lot happier.

Here, even though my informant would clearly like to see some changes in the neighborhood, he doesn’t want to be the one responsible for making those happen. He seems to imply that it would be disrespectful to the LTR to do so, and doesn’t want to be involved, much as he would like to see changes.

Many artists, then, are uncomfortable with the thought that they serve as agents of gentrification. They do not feel much of a right to change the neighborhood – at least not in ways that they

perceive to be disrespectful to the LTR – and they are not interested in promoting displacement of LTR. However, there are some limits to this, since it is clear that by and large they do appreciate the new establishments that cater to their tastes (e.g., the coffee shops, bars, restaurants and other establishments described above, as well as galleries and music venues), and many of the artists I spoke with have invested considerable time, money and effort into fixing up their spaces. All of these could be considered examples of changing Bushwick.

Taken together, these comments suggest that many artists are uncomfortable serving as agents of gentrification and don't like to view themselves as gentrifiers. They avoid actions that make them feel as though they're changing the neighborhood and trying to force out LTR. Artists thus don't like to feel responsible for gentrification, despite the fact that they see a clear link between their presence and subsequent neighborhood gentrification. This suggests deep ambivalence on the part of artists toward taking any steps to change the neighborhood, a significant potential barrier to forming lasting local art community. On the one hand, you want the area to be “your” community, but on the other there is clearly ambivalence toward this kind of ownership. While some artists, and especially gallerists and presumably others who do decide to take actions that could be construed as changing the neighborhood, articulate a sense of freedom and possibility in Bushwick, for many of my interviewees this sits alongside an anxiety about serving as a ‘gentrifier.’ It is not surprising, given this, that the first area to be occupied by artists and the region where the art community is most evident is the industrial western part, where such potential conflicts with the LTR are less likely than in the rest of residential Bushwick.

Assigning Blame

Some informants feel that the link between gentrification and the presence of artists is largely the result of exploitation by landlords; that is, landlords use artists to raise their property values, then

raise rents and eventually evict the artists. In several cases this has worked in favor of artists, at least in the short term, as artists have negotiated with landlords for lower or static rents because of the value they add to the neighborhood, and in many cases, the time, energy and money they put into fixing up their space. When artists are priced out, however, they may feel exploited and angry; for example:

I think that's part of gentrification, you [as an artist] get used by the landlords. Ad Hoc [one of the first galleries in Bushwick that was priced out in 2010], they were there for 4 years almost, and...gave it some cache, that area, and that gets used as a tool by landlords that own the lofts, they're like, oh, art gallery, it's such transparent marketing to young artistic white people. Like Castle Braid down the street, it's like this little fucking white castle art compound, one stop living, we have a woodshop, two Wiis, a movie room, and it's way above market [rent] and it's on a dangerous street...it's just ridiculous. And you know Ad Hoc they were instrumental in that little niche over there, and they just get used by the landlord, working for the landlord really, and when it came down to it the landlord didn't give a fuck about them.

This informant clearly feels that landlords are aware of the link between artists and gentrification, and knowingly capitalize on this. When property values go up, landlords are happy to evict the original artist tenants in order to find wealthier renters who can pay the higher prices that the artists' presence had essentially helped to guarantee. Some informants had encountered this situation in other neighborhoods or cities, and felt used and mistreated by landlords. Other artists similarly felt mistreated by city policies that aim to give artists affordable (and sometimes free) space in derelict neighborhoods on the hope that their presence will help to reinvigorate the local economy; for example:

It seems shallow that that's it, like that's not a very big role for an artist, like oh we use them to make areas better, these areas that are down and out the artists come in, we give them free space, like it was totally deliberate in Dumbo....in the Roman days artists were inventors...I feel like the most important human in the world is that inventor, it's the artist. And our big role is to make a neighborhood better so all the commercialization can come in and have this nice place? Make it all pretty so people can come and spend money on Prada? It seems superficial.

This artist, who has watched several artist neighborhoods ascend in value, including his former home of San Francisco, conveys a sense of being used and undervalued by policies that essentially use artists to clean up derelict neighborhoods. Ruminating on the role of the artist in society, he feels that it should be more than simply cleaning up blighted neighborhoods, especially if this is just a step toward super gentrification and expensive shopping districts. Although the tactics he describes often seem to work well in effecting neighborhood revitalization, some artists, particularly those who are subsequently priced out of their homes and workspaces, are likely to feel bitter and used.⁸¹

Powerless to stop it

The artists I spoke to are by and large highly aware of the process of gentrification, and artists' association with this sort of neighborhood change. They also expect that Bushwick will eventually gentrify, although the time frame that they give for this varies widely. While most see some advantages to gentrification taking place, they also see a number of problems associated with gentrification, and on balance hold very ambivalent, mixed feelings about the process. Many understand Bushwick and gentrification in general as part of an ongoing process of neighborhood change, and accept that this flux is simply the nature of places. Some express a sense of resignation (or perhaps acceptance) about the future of gentrification in NYC at large:

Well the L line is vital. It's access to Manhattan. Anyone in Chelsea can hop on the L and be in Bushwick in under 30 minutes. Gentrification is going into Bedstuy now. Wherever the L line goes it's going to happen. After the East Village, Williamsburg was an extension of that, and now Bushwick. Sunset Park is another area, it's cheap.

⁸¹ The artists I spoke with didn't articulate specifically what it is about their presence that fuels gentrification, other than race, although they were very convinced of the link.

This interviewee makes a point echoed by several others: that gentrification will continue along the L train because of easy access to Manhattan. The implication is that until people don't need to go to Manhattan, or the L train stops running, or there is some other large scale shift in who needs to go to Manhattan and transportation options, gentrification is inevitable. Framed in terms of major infrastructure in NYC, gentrification thus seems a process that will be difficult for any individual or group to stem. Another frames the inevitable gentrification of Bushwick in terms of the broader economy and housing market in NYC:

I guess I figure that if the rest of the city will be as expensive as it is people will move here because it's cheaper. As long as the transportation is good, there's no way around that. I see gentrification continuing, and as long as that continues there will be a demand for restaurants and nightlife and whatever else....all of this stuff is out of my control, greater forces than all of us are at work.

Clearly this informant feels powerless to change the course of gentrification in Bushwick and other neighborhoods in NYC. Since it is linked to the overall NYC economy and housing market, there is little to be done. Noted earlier, artists are highly aware of the fate of past art worlds in NYC, most recently Williamsburg, but also the East Village/LES, and Soho before, it and see gentrification as an inevitable process that stems from factors too big for artists to control. Again Bushwick is understood in terms of earlier bohemian neighborhoods, mainly in NYC, but in some cases elsewhere too, e.g., San Francisco and Chicago. While some artists, mainly younger ones or those newly arrived in NYC, have heard these stories but not experienced displacement first hand some of my interviewees have personally witnessed and been priced out of other art worlds. In all cases, artists are well aware of the fact that

The Last Stand

With the sense that gentrification is inevitable, and the suspicion that they will eventually be priced out or no longer desire to live in Bushwick, many of my informants seemed to simply embrace and enjoy Bushwick while they still can. Noted earlier in chapter 3, many of my informants spoke of the thrill of finally being “part of something,” of belonging to a bohemian NYC neighborhood that in their minds connotes Soho and the East Village (Williamsburg is probably too recently fallen to have yet acquired the legendary quality of these two areas, although interviewees still draw on it in a somewhat less enthused tone) in their artistic heyday, rather than simply hearing or reading about these places after gentrification had devoured their artistic communities. Moreover, many artists in Bushwick have felt like active participants and creators of that world, and have made Bushwick into the art world that it is. In that spirit, and with the conviction that Bushwick will likely one day resemble the East Village, or even Soho, for reasons beyond their control, many artists seemingly try to enjoy Bushwick while they can; for example:

[Bushwick] is a fantastic neighborhood, it's really fun to be a part of it. It's really fun to be part of something that's new and fresh for once. That's the fun part. So and I think that there is a sense of pride, like we have been here a while and this has been a lot of fun, and yes we all know how it's going to go. Nobody's pretending we don't know what's going to happen in a few years....development, price hikes. I think we see it as this is the last stand for this place and we're going to enjoy it.

Another echoes this sentiment:

[Bushwick is] changing though, it's going to have the same progression it always does.

In terms of gentrification?

Yeah, and what follows. And it's funny because I was thinking about that...and I still wouldn't take it back to be here, you know. The five years and now. And more, it's going to be a while before it just gets pitiful. And it's not a big deal, it's supposed to change, nothing stays the same. And to resist it is just ridiculous. There's going to be another edge, it'll be Brownsville or East New York or further out. And still there's a lot of ground to blaze, it's awesome. As far as I'm concerned if you're on the subway it's going to be gentrified someday, it's going to change. It's fair game. And right now it's here and it's awesome, a lot of great spaces are opening up, a lot of music, a

lot of performance, visual art and galleries popping up, and cafes and bars. It's cool but it's still down to earth.

Taken together, these comments (and the many others uttered by my interviewees) suggest a sense of powerlessness over the process of gentrification in Bushwick, coupled with a desire to enjoy the neighborhood while they still can. They see gentrification as an inevitable part of neighborhood change, and the result of forces over which they have little control, such as the tendency for money to follow artists, or the economic pressures and tight housing market in NYC that force more and more people to the periphery, so long as transportation is available. Although they have very mixed feelings about these changes and see an uncertain future for themselves in Bushwick, many artists embrace what they have now, knowing it likely won't last.

Conclusions

Overall, the comments above suggest that my informants have complicated feelings about gentrification. They are very aware of its signs and trajectory in New York, as well as the role that artists frequently play in encouraging it, even if the specific mechanisms by which they can occur aren't always obvious. Most of my interviewees saw both advantages and disadvantages – and seemingly more of the latter – to gentrification, and many worried about their own ability to remain in Bushwick. Since most (84%)of my interviewees rent, rather than own, their space in Bushwick, this is understandable. They seem to feel they have little control over the progress of the neighborhood, and try to simply enjoy being in Bushwick while they still can.

Given their many reservations and fears about gentrification in Bushwick, it is striking how little effort artists have so far made to try to fight gentrification in general, or rent hikes, or the displacement of long term residents (or other artists, for that matter). With the exception of several individuals' rent negotiations with landlords, I heard very little about efforts to stem

gentrification, particularly in an organized way. Noted earlier in chapter 5, the art that they make similarly tends to lack a political message. This lack of political engagement may be a result of the fact that they feel powerless in the face of the massive economic forces that they feel fuel gentrification, or perhaps a basic lack of time and energy, given the draining schedules most artists keep, to wage these battles. It is also possible that gentrification simply hasn't taken place to the point that large numbers of people are being displaced (it is, as noted by several [e.g., Cahill, 2007, Lees, 2008] difficult to gauge displacement and easy to underestimate its pace), a scenario which might spur artists and others to political action, as was the case in the East Village (Smith, 1996). Given that many of my informants have already lived in other neighborhoods that have experienced widespread gentrification on the heels of artists, perhaps they feel helpless to change the course of events in Bushwick. It is also possible that the constant threat of being priced out of their homes leaves many artists unwilling to totally commit themselves to Bushwick, no matter how much they currently enjoy it. With such an uncertain future, it may not feel worthwhile to fight tooth and nail for one more year in the neighborhood, particularly if it increasingly becomes one that is no longer an artistic haven. It is interesting, however, to contrast this aspect of Bushwick artists with young artists in Soho in the 60s, to take one example, who sought to buy properties cooperatively in order to defray costs and have a stable foothold in the neighborhood (Simpson, 1981, Zukin, 1982). None of my interviewees lived in a co-op situation, for whatever reason. The end result, however, is that artists by and large seem to view themselves as transitory residents of Bushwick, though not necessarily by choice. This is perhaps unflattering to artists, and bolsters the stereotype of artists moving into a derelict area without much concern for what came before them, changing the area (deliberately or not) and then leaving. However, if they are priced out and must leave by force, rather than choice, this certainly complicates the picture of artists as cavalier gentrifiers.

One way in which my informants may differ from artists in earlier studies is simply that artists in the past thirty years, especially in New York City, have become identified with gentrification in a way that is relatively new, and this has become a very pervasive ideology/way of understanding contemporary art neighborhoods. Soho was one of the first neighborhoods in NYC to gentrify rapidly on the heels of artists, and to connect artists to gentrification, but as a unique instance of this, it probably took a few more occurrences to really establish this linkage in the broader culture. Since Soho there have been several similar examples in the NYC area, including the East Village and, more recently, Williamsburg, and in the minds of my artists, this has become a well-worn path of events. Drawing on these past events to make sense of the present and future, my interviewees seem to feel that the eventual trajectory from bohemian art haven to expensive shopping center is inevitable. This is particularly interesting given that there have also been several examples of arts neighborhoods in NYC that have not exploded in terms of gentrification – for example, Hoboken or Long Island City – yet these were rarely discussed amongst my interviewees. Rather, they feel that Bushwick is moving toward gentrification on the scale of Williamsburg or the East Village. Although many interviewees linked the inevitability of gentrification in Bushwick to broader structural forces in NYC, some linked gentrification to San Francisco and Chicago, suggesting that they see inevitable gentrification as something that is not just NYC-specific, although NYC provides the clearest reference points.

Particularly striking is the fact that arguably gentrification has not yet really taken hold in Bushwick. Although there are some signs – ranging from the growing white population in Bushwick to the bloom of galleries and other indicators – the neighborhood is still overwhelmingly Latino, poor, trash-strewn, and fairly affordable. Yet the possibility of gentrification among my interviewees does not seem speculative but determined. By tightly linking Bushwick to previous art meccas in NYC and beyond, my informants make sense of what

is happening in Bushwick, and may even in some ways help to make that a reality, for example if they feel that it is hopeless to even try to stop gentrification.

My informants' keen awareness of gentrification and their own potential role in this process may shed some light on the glamorization of urban grit. One of the most scathing critiques of artists in poor urban neighborhoods has been that they essentially make urban blight appealing by framing it as a sign of urban authenticity, usually constructed in contrast to the banality of suburban life. In extreme cases, poverty, crime and drug use may be glamorized and understood as excitement and authentic experience. It is the case that many of my interviewees recount how Bushwick has changed since their initial arrival (in many cases, only a few years ago), when prostitutes, wild dogs, gunfire, and drug use were more rampant in the area. There is a wistful character to some of these descriptions.⁸² However, I would argue that this reminiscing about grit may be less a way of consuming poverty in a superficial and glamorizing way than it is a sign of security – a sign that Bushwick is still at least a few years away from condos and suits and rents that will drive artists out. Perhaps this attitude was not in place in the east village in the 80s – which is the scene that most critics who point to the glamorizing of urban grit and poverty discuss, e.g., Deutsche & Ryan, 1985 - but a central argument here is that artists, at least in Bushwick, are now extremely well versed in gentrification. It figures very prominently in their understanding of what's happening in Bushwick and critically shapes the way they understand and relate to Bushwick and its future. The spectre of gentrification seems to color their vision of every aspect of Bushwick and its future, urban grit included. While there may be some degree of glamorizing blight in Bushwick, certainly this is not the primary orientation of my interviewees.

⁸² Although more often interviewees simply find LTR poverty sad and depressing. The more wistful descriptions of grit usually involved descriptions of the derelict industrial area, or trash, rather than people.

Once again underscoring the importance of the gentrification narrative for my interviewees, it is interesting to note that my informants seem to feel that the primary threat to Bushwick as an art world is gentrification and raised rents – few articulated any possible demise other than that. I asked my interviewees specifically what they hoped or feared for Bushwick in the future, and gentrification was the central fear. Theoretically art worlds die or change dramatically for many different reasons – but these did not figure prominently in the imaginations of my informants.

These comments also reveal artists' notions of what an ideal neighborhood looks like. Artists, while clearly interested in living in a diverse neighborhood, are also drawn to living near other artists, seek affordable spaces and limited regulations that might impinge on their ability to make work, as well as affordable places to congregate and socialize with other artists. Beyond this, they seek a place with “creative energy” – a source of inspiration that often shows itself in street art, surprising visual juxtapositions, and interesting street characters. Thus gentrification can ruin an art world such as Bushwick by raising rents forcing out inhabitants, both artists and LTR, which diminishes diversity, or ruining the character of the area by drawing too many non-artists to the neighborhood – particularly better-heeled ones who do not share the same values.

What will be the future of Bushwick? If the area does in fact progress in a fashion similar to the East Village or Soho, in several years it may well be an area populated with top rate art galleries, excellent restaurants, luxury shops, and expensive condos and loft apartments that mainly house the wealthy, while most long term Latino residents and artists are priced out, perhaps deeper into Brooklyn or Queens. Another possibility is that gentrification won't in fact take hold as thoroughly as some of my informants anticipate, perhaps leaving Bushwick half-gentrified – a place that has been widely speculated about, but never fully materializes, such as Hoboken, Red Hook, or Long Island City, where gentrification has proceeded far enough to make these areas unaffordable for many artists, but not Prada-filled real estate jackpots.

In the meantime, artists and gallerists in Bushwick are enjoying the fruits of their own hard work and inspiration, soaking up their own fifteen minutes in the sun.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

I began this work with an exploration of some of the unique challenges faced by artists in my sample and some of the strategies they implemented to deal with these difficulties. I then discussed how these needs helped to shape the local art community in Bushwick, and the role of gallerists in creating this world, as well as the actual art shown in a recent selection of shows and perceptions of Bushwick art. Finally I covered the long term residents of Bushwick, gentrification, and the future of Bushwick – both in terms of its arts and long term resident communities (which, as we have seen, are fairly distinct and likely will remain so). From all of this I hope to have conveyed the extent to which Bushwick is a world largely run and devised by artists, on the one hand, and many more long term, primarily Latino, residents on the other. The artists revel in the freedom and possibility they find in Bushwick, but fear that gentrification, displacement of long term residents and artists, and loss of control over the character of the neighborhood could be on the horizon.

What can we conclude from all of this? Taken together, the material presented shows several dimensions of a thriving artists' community. Returning to some of the questions outlined in the introductory chapter, what does all of this say about Bushwick's status as a local community? How cohesive is it? How does Bushwick fit into a broader context, and what can Bushwick tell us about arts (and other) communities elsewhere? In this concluding chapter I want to cover two major themes that have emerged from the data presented: first, ruminations about global and local community and its relation to Bushwick; and second, the extent to which Bushwick can or should be understood as oppositional, either to Chelsea or mainstream American society in general. I conclude with a discussion of the extent to which these findings can reasonably be generalized to other communities, artistic and otherwise.

Community in Bushwick

Many of my initial questions about Bushwick concerned its status and viability as a local community. As described in the introduction, it is interesting though seemingly implausible that the Bushwick art world could in fact create anything resembling a stable local community, given the very cosmopolitan nature of its inhabitants and the global art world, to name just a couple of the many challenges. Nonetheless, it is clear that several key organizers and gallerists in Bushwick have sought to create just that.

1. Local Community in Bushwick

There are a number of ways in which artists have established a meaningful local community in Bushwick. Two features that emerge as primarily important in the establishment of this local community are the fact that it helps artists to meet several practical and emotional needs, and it allows them a sense of hopefulness and inspiration.

Practical help, inspiration, and “creative energy”

There are many ways in which living or working in Bushwick helps artists meet a number of practical needs. Affordable residential and/or studio (and in some cases, also gallery) rent is one of the most important and obvious of these, but there are other benefits as well. Bushwick allows artists to casually run into friends, acquaintances and studio mates on the streets, which provides refreshing chit chat and sense of accountability for one’s time – both important given the usually isolating and unstructured nature of making art. You are surrounded by other artists who can help you to meet practical objectives when making art or living – people are like you and willing to

help. Given that so many people in Bushwick have limited finances, this type of support is probably more important in a place like Bushwick than in a wealthier area – a point noted by some of my interviewees.

Beyond this, however, Bushwick also provides artistic inspiration and support. It is helpful to have other artists around who can provide practical assistance and social and emotional support for your art projects. Artists find considerable inspiration in the surrounding ‘creative energy’ that seems to waft through the streets of Bushwick, and connection to Bushwick helps to reinforce one’s own identity as an artist. Especially for artists who are not particularly careerist, the local community in Bushwick helps to reinforce an “art for its own sake” and non-commercial ethos, a set of standards that differs from what inhabitants feel they encounter from people elsewhere in NYC, and this is nurturing. Given that Bushwick is home to so many artists who are either young or not careerist enough to be able to make any appreciable amount of money from selling their work, bolstering one’s artistic identity may be particularly important in Bushwick.

Part of the diffuse ‘creative energy’ that artists find so inspiring comes from the fact that they feel free to try new activities and projects, and see others doing just that. Because of the low costs and low barriers to entry and generally receptive and supportive audiences, artists in Bushwick can try their hand at running a gallery, curating, trying their hand at street art, or any number of other activities that are feasible and low-risk in Bushwick, but not elsewhere. Discussed at length in chapter 3, all of these – a sense of inspiration, artistic identity, practical help and support for artistic goals and projects, and a sense of freedom and possibility - seem to be important needs of most of my interviewees, and ones that were at least partly met by resources they found in Bushwick..

Part of the inspiration in Bushwick comes from a sense of intrigue and possibility in the physical space of Bushwick. Described earlier, many of my interviewees are largely unaware of the sheer number of artists in Bushwick, yet they see glimpses and traces of them in the neighborhood, glimpses of unknown artists in Bushwick that are reinforced by signs of their presence, such as street art, new art spaces, the sound of bands practicing – all of which reinforce the fact that Bushwick is a neighborhood for artists, and a place where you can stumble upon interesting new things and people. The unknown, and faith in the exciting outcomes possible in this unknown, seems to be a large part of what makes Bushwick exciting, interesting, and to some degree a source of “creative energy.”⁸³ This faith and hope in the unknown terrain of Bushwick extends not only to artists but to long term residents as well. In this way the sense of local community in Bushwick is seemingly as much about strangers as it is about actual friends, acquaintances and associates.

Taken together, these aspects of Bushwick – its ability to help artist residents meet a wide range of practical needs, and to nourish artistic identity, inspiration and possibility in several ways – seem to serve as key features that make Bushwick a meaningful local community for my interviewees. All of these aspects of Bushwick rely on face-to-face interaction with peers, even if that involves only passing interesting strangers on the street, indicating that these are features of community that are not readily available in any form other than the local. Moreover, these gifts from Bushwick – help, social support, identity, and inspiration – are key parts of artists’ lives.

⁸³ Relevant to this point, “creative energy” involves signs of creative activity of any sort, not just visual art. It is important to emphasize that I confined my study to visual artists, simply to impose some limitations on the scope of this project. However, there are of course many different kinds of artists who live and work in Bushwick, including musicians, writers, actors, etc. Even amongst my interviewees several engaged in a number of different forms of art, e.g., music or writing, although it was more common for artists to create several different forms of visual art, e.g., painting and drawing, sculpture, etc. Although I do not deal at length with these overlapping artistic pursuits, I think it is important to note here that the density of different kinds of creative activity probably contributes substantially to the “creative energy” of Bushwick, and thus makes the neighborhood more appealing. Certainly it has been documented elsewhere (e.g., Currid, 2007) that such artistic overlaps are stimulating and productive for artists.

Bushwick as a local community thus figures centrally in the most important aspects of what artists do and who they are.

Challenges to Bushwick as a stable local community

Despite these aspects of Bushwick that facilitate an important and meaningful local community for artists, there are at least as many challenges to this sense of community. Broadly, two of the biggest challenges to the formation of a stable, local arts community in Bushwick include divisions within the communities of Bushwick, and the fundamentally global nature of both the contemporary art world and the bohemian mythology in which Bushwick is situated.

A cohesive local community?

Is Bushwick a meaningful local community? For whom? The extent to which Bushwick inhabitants feel connected to Bushwick and to each other via shared goals, concerns, and interaction, is an important part of creating a meaningful local community, and it is not clear that Bushwick artists are closely connected to each other, and certainly their connections to the LTR in Bushwick, such as they are, do not further the sense of a singular, cohesive community.

One major challenge to the establishment of a local artistic community in Bushwick is the fact that there are substantial differences and divisions between artists there. My interviewees varied in a number of ways, ranging from age to artistic interests, family situation, income, and career goals. One of the most important differences between my interviewees could be termed level of seriousness as an artist – those who are hoping to build a significant reputation, show in Chelsea, and sell their work – versus less serious artists who are more aligned with the ideals espoused by the Bushwick art world, which, documented at length, tend to oppose the Chelsea model in favor

of a DIY approach that extends to all arenas of one's life. This same division also applies to gallerists in Bushwick, i.e., those who oppose Chelsea – which includes the majority of galleries opened prior to 2010 and most of my interviewees for this project - versus some of the newer galleries that have closer ties to the Chelsea art establishment.⁸⁴ This division shows itself in a number of ways and seems to be a major determinant of whether my interviewees latch on to the Bushwick community or instead treat Bushwick as a place to work or live only, while investing their energy in the art worlds of Manhattan as much as possible. Although all artists I spoke with are clearly invested in being seen as “serious artists,” for some this seemingly means aligning with Chelsea and distancing oneself from Bushwick, while for others it does not.⁸⁵

Loosely related to this careerism division is the fact that specific aesthetic interests also to some degree form the basis of community for artists. While many respond positively to the ‘creative energy’ evident in any kind of art, most also hope to find at least a handful of artists who share their specific artistic vision and aesthetic – a much more difficult task. Especially in light of the profusion of different styles of work being made in Bushwick, the area is not a magnet for one particular type of artist. As some interviewees have noted, this stylistic breadth makes Bushwick work for a very broad group of artists, but also dilutes the sense of community for those involved. In short, there is clearly a wide range of artists working in Bushwick, and is difficult to create a singular community that all, or even most, of them would want to commit to. Those artists who are most committed to Bushwick feely deeply in tune with its ethos and “creative energy,” and are less interested in seeing one particular kind of work.

⁸⁴ This would include, but it is not limited to, recently-opened galleries that have clear connections to Chelsea. This includes Luhring Augustine, a well-known Chelsea gallery that just opened a satellite space in Bushwick, as well as Slag, another Chelsea gallery that relocated to Bushwick. Both spaces opened in Bushwick in 2011. Luhring Augustine is considered a “star” gallery, and its opening in Bushwick may have important implications for whether Bushwick explodes (Halle & Tiso, forthcoming; Zucker & Darby, 2007).

⁸⁵ And many, discussed in Chapter 3, had nothing against Bushwick but simply little time and energy to devote to community anywhere.

Finally, it is clear that overall the artists are not well integrated with the long term residents of Bushwick, and do not form anything resembling a singular community. Although there are some signs of neighborliness, moments of integration, and only rare overt hostility, artists and long term residents live largely separate lives. Despite many attempts on the part of many gallerists and some artists, there are numerous barriers to the creation of any kind of cohesive community, arts-based or otherwise, between these two populations. Artists still constitute a small minority in Bushwick, in comparison to the long term residents, and thus to the limited extent that artists form a cohesive community in Bushwick, this community is still a small proportion of Bushwick residents.

Overall, then, there are major divisions between artists in Bushwick, and certainly between most artists and most long term residents. Bushwick is thus not a terribly cohesive community, and although those who are invested in the Bushwick art world put forth tremendous energy, enthusiasm, and largely share goals, the fact that many artists and long term residents do not seem to share these goals surely complicates Bushwick's ability to create a singular and robust collective identity and community for its inhabitants.

A global art world

Noted throughout this paper, overwhelmingly my interviewees could largely be considered cosmopolitans, at least to some degree, based on several criteria. For example, they are well educated, have considerable cultural capital, are often well-traveled, and virtually all of them are recent transplants not only to Bushwick but to NYC generally, with most arriving during the past five years. Most came to NYC not for Bushwick but for the art world in Manhattan. All of these

features suggest less than total commitment to Bushwick per se, and contrast sharply with the many long term residents who have lived in the area for decades.

One clear indication of this lack of commitment is that very few of my interviewees own property in Bushwick.⁸⁶ This lack of homeownership may show a hesitation to commit to Bushwick, although in most cases my informants indicated that they did not buy because of financial reasons, some were unsure how long they would stay in Bushwick, and others simply did not want to deal with the headache of buying property. This contrasts sharply with the many artists who collectively purchased property in Soho in the 1960s (Simpson, 1981). Regardless of the reason behind it, renting means that artists are vulnerable to rent hikes, and clearly shows lower investment in the area. Even those who are very enthusiastic about Bushwick worry that they'll soon be priced out of the area, as (for some at least) they have previously been priced out of other gentrifying neighborhoods. How can one make a deep commitment to any local place when it's not clear that s/he'll be able to stay? In short, many of my interviewees were not sure how long they would be in Bushwick, either because of gentrification or their own need to move for other, often career-related, reasons.

Another substantial challenge to full devotion to Bushwick is the fact that many opportunities in the art world involve participation in a variety of communities outside of Bushwick. Virtually all of my interviewees sought to show their work or see the work of others throughout NYC, in an effort to keep options open. Several of my interviewees, especially those who finished graduate school in the past decade, found that they relied heavily on those alumni connections, most of which were dispersed throughout NYC or beyond – not centralized in Bushwick. Many of my participants are involved in art projects across the country, and sometimes the globe. Virtually all

⁸⁶ In at least one case, the property is an absolutely tiny bachelor apartment in a condo building, purchased because it was cheaper than renting, calculated over the span of eight years – not the sort of space that this informant is likely to stay in for the next forty years.

have at least some involvement with projects in Manhattan in some capacity, and again it is important to recall that interviewees overwhelmingly came to the NYC region not for Bushwick per se but rather the opportunities offered by Manhattan – mainly in Chelsea. Although Chelsea is arguably the center of the art world, many important national and international art opportunities abound – especially for less established artists for whom showing regularly in Chelsea is not always an option. In short, artists in Bushwick participate in multiple artistic communities in a global art world, many of which take them far beyond Bushwick and impose limits on how much time and energy goes to Bushwick. Important as Bushwick is for its artist residents, it nonetheless must compete with memberships in many other art worlds, in the NYC art world, online, and across the country and globe.

A bohemian dream

In addition to these other diffuse art worlds, artists in Bushwick are also linked to art neighborhoods from the past. Bushwick is largely understood by my interviewees and the media as part of a global and historical bohemian art world. This image of bohemia is arguably a very idealized world⁸⁷ and my interviewees understand everything that happens in Bushwick and in their own art career trajectories in terms of what’s happened before and elsewhere. Discussed in detail in Chapter 3, this mythology covers nearly all aspects of Bushwick, including the industrial architecture, “creative energy,” range of styles of work being produced, ways of showing work, the fact that the area serves as a mecca for young artists from around the country and in some cases the world. Legendary bohemias have cropped up in many different times and places, and they’re exciting, lead to important artistic innovations, and are also fleeting. My interviewees

⁸⁷ For example, my interviewees talk about the excitement and energy of the East Village scene in the 1980s, despite the fact that Kirwin (1999) found that the scene had fallen from grace, even ruined careers, by the late 1980s. Not that most were around to recall these events, but this is not part of my interviewees’ generally rosy image of that scene. Similarly, my interviewees also in many ways distance themselves from the many bohemian hangers-on, those who want the bohemian lifestyle but don’t produce serious art.

largely understand Bushwick as the current incarnation of this mythology, and this is a lot of where the excitement comes from – the idea that you’re now living something that you’ve heard and read about elsewhere for years, and which could produce lasting names or innovations. The idea that Bushwick constitutes the newest node in a network of bohemias may help make work shown there appear ‘edgy,’ despite the fact that at least in broad strokes this work doesn’t differ significantly from work shown elsewhere in NYC. The media image and beliefs of my interviewees draw continually on this idea of past bohemias to understand what is going on in Bushwick, and to render Bushwick an authentic bohemia in comparison.

Artistic bohemia, according to this mythology and as articulated by my interviewees, has very little to do with Bushwick per se, is unlikely to last long in any particular location, and will eventually disappear only to crystallize sometime in the future, on a new frontier, a new edge. This does not have to detract from its importance as a local community, even as an instance of this bohemia coming together and living for a moment, but it does suggest that Bushwick, and likely any other bohemia, will be understood against the backdrop of history. This suggests that my interviewees view themselves as largely affiliated with a community of artists that extends well beyond Bushwick, far into other times and places. While this does not mean that Bushwick per se is not important as a local community, it shows that artists are caught up in a community (or at least the idea of a community) that extends well beyond local space and time borders.

Perhaps the most problematic aspect of this mythology for local community is that edges, bohemias come and go – they never last. Thus artists I spoke with often feel very fortunate to get to experience such an edge. For many, although not all, this is the first time they have experienced this firsthand, and it’s very exciting. Although bohemias can end for a variety of reasons, arguably the role of artists in gentrification was not obvious – or important – until the 1980s. My interviewees, in comparison to those in earlier studies of artistic neighborhoods, e.g.,

Simpson 1981, Rosenberg & Fliegel, 1998), were extremely aware of and worried about gentrification of Bushwick, even though so far gentrification of the area is still in a very early stage. This addition of the idea that artists spur gentrification, which leads to the demise of the area, to the mythology arguably makes my informants in Bushwick far more sensitive to issues of gentrification, displacement, and integration with the LTR than artists in earlier bohemia, such as those in the East Village and Soho.⁸⁸ Thus gentrification, along with the displacement of LTR and eventually artists themselves, is now a key part of the mythology of bohemia and its demise, as articulated by my informants. This belief in the eventual demise of Bushwick and other bohemia via gentrification likely undermines their motivation to create a lasting local community – because they feel they can't – and reduces its ability to serve as a stable local community.

Thus it is difficult to understand Bushwick simply in light of what it currently is. The weight of the past figures heavily in making sense of what is happening and what will happen in Bushwick, and to some degree it may also serve as a script and a self-fulfilling prophecy. The ongoing reliance of my interviewees and the media on this mythology suggests that what is happening in Bushwick is linked to a much broader framework and has important implications for Bushwick as a local community. For my interviewees, this does not mean that Bushwick as a local community lacks meaning, but rather that this meaning is diluted, given artists' commitments to many other communities, including a global and historical mythologized community of artists.

Conclusions

⁸⁸ Noted earlier, this addition to the mythology also suggests that artists' occasional celebration of the 'grit' of a neighborhood may have far less to do with exoticizing the long term residents or poverty that they find there, as suggested by earlier writers describing the East Village (e.g., Deutsche & Ryan) and rather serve mainly as a welcome reminder that there is still time, that gentrification has not proceeded at full tilt just yet.

Taken together, all of this suggests that Bushwick does serve as a meaningful local community for the artists involved, but that there are limitations to this. Returning briefly to some of the ideas presented in the introduction, many studies have suggested that face to face interaction may be especially important for arts communities, where exchange of creative ideas is critical and best done through real interaction (e.g., Lloyd, 2004, Florida, 2002, Molotch, 2004, Currid, 2008). This is largely true in Bushwick, although the benefit of actually being in Bushwick seems to extend beyond actual talking with people, and seems to include simply seeing others on the street, including long term residents, seeing signs of any form of creative activity, and generally feeling surrounded by “creative energy” and a sense of possibility. These are very important sources of inspiration for artists, and, at least as described by my interviewees, unlikely to be found outside of a local community, e.g., online.

On the other hand, participation in Bushwick sits along side many other important ties to communities far beyond Bushwick in the lives of my interviewees, and is continually interpreted in light of other times and places – all of which distract from its ability to serve as a meaningful local community that centrally or singly organizes artists’ lives. Further, however meaningful and important Bushwick may be in the lives of my interviewees – and some are fully devoted to Bushwick, hardly ever leaving –nonetheless Bushwick is a temporary community. This is a key difference between older versions of local community and newer ones, and may be unique to arts communities that embrace a mythology with a built-in death clause, in comparison to local communities centered on other activities. Despite the global dimensions of Bushwick and the many other challenges associated with creating a local community there, however, many of the organizers and participants of the Bushwick art world clearly value and want a sense of local community. The idea of local community has not lost its appeal, even if its realization is increasingly complex.

2. Separation and opposition in Bushwick

Although Bushwick is in many ways a meaningful, useful and important local community for its artist inhabitants, it is clearly one of many for these artists, suggesting that Bushwick is in no way a remote, isolated world. Looking more broadly, beyond the specific affiliations of its residents, what is the relationship of Bushwick to the greater NYC area and beyond? Given that Bushwick is largely understood by resident artists and the media as a contemporary instance of a classic bohemian neighborhood, does it stand in opposition to mainstream society (or Chelsea, or anything else) as many of these other bohemias have? In short, what does Bushwick mean in a broader context?

Working hard in Bushwick

As Simpson (1981) and others (e.g. Lloyd, 2006, Rosenberg & Fliegel, 1965, Siegel 1999) have argued, it is impossible to understand artist communities without looking at their relationship to broader society, particularly the middle class. A long history locates bohemias in opposition to a particular and usually power powerful group or set of groups, e.g., the bourgeoisie in Paris beginning in the 1830s (Seigel, 1999), and more recent work similarly positions artists as often working in opposition to dominant groups in society (e.g., Simpson 1981, Lloyd, 2006). Does Bushwick seem to oppose any particular groups or values in American society at large?

It is striking that there are many ways in which my interviewees in Bushwick live lives that are very much in line with upper middle class values and lifestyles. On the whole they are very hard working, well educated, disciplined, and come from middle or upper middle class families – characteristics that in many ways put them squarely in line with typical American upper middle class values such as hard work (e.g., Lamont, 1994) and high educational achievement (e.g.,

Fussell! 1983...find some other cites) Most distance themselves from the party world of Bushwick and adhere to strict work, and sometimes even exercise regimens. In short, in a variety of ways my interviewees generally did not live up to a stereotype of the “crazy” or unstable artist, nor do they flout or even oppose many typical upper middle class American values, such as hard work, education, discipline. In fact, many artists seemed, in several ways, to again and again emphasize that they are “serious artists.” They work very hard, take their work very seriously – even when this does not involve constantly attempting to show in Chelsea, but rather many hours logged at the studio – and do so without clear financial reward. In comparison to artists described elsewhere (e.g., Simpson, 1981, Becker, 1983: 18), my interviewees generally did not seem to feel particular tension between making work that is inspired and true to the self, on the one hand, but also working long, regular, and disciplined hours, on the other. Thus despite the stereotypical image of the artist as an outsider to mainstream society, my interviewees seem in basic ways very much aligned with these values.⁸⁹

Moreover, Bushwick is not overtly political in almost any way. In general my interviewees aren't very engaged politically in any clear fashion – not in terms of mobilizing to stem gentrification/displacement in Bushwick or anywhere else, or in taking action on any other political issue.⁹⁰ Similarly, as discussed in Chapter 5, the art shown in Bushwick is not by and large controversial, aggressive, or political in almost any way. The work produced by my interviewees similarly was quiet on the political front. This does not of course mean that my interviewees do not have strong political interests – but rather that these interests are not at the

⁸⁹ Although there are exceptions, most notably the materialistic aims of many Americans (described, for example, by Lamont 1994). This opposition to materialism is discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

⁹⁰ At least, this was what came across during interviews. It is of course possible that my informants were engaged in causes that they did not mention to me.

forefront of the message they are currently conveying in their work, in their communication with me, or in their daily lives.⁹¹

Dropping out: quiet opposition in Bushwick

On the other hand, in some ways Bushwick seemingly can be understood as quietly oppositional – living by its own separate standards without yelling about it. Many Bushwick artists arguably live in a way that quietly differs from, perhaps opposes, mainstream society, but does little to actively try to confront or change the rest of the world.

The most obvious way in which this applies to Bushwick is its noncommercial, DIY ethos. A DIY ethos is arguably inherently oppositional, if not always confrontational, because one of its central premises is that it aims to circumvent the usual institutions and regulations. It also, according to some, fundamentally involves a noncommercial approach to everything (e.g., Culton & Holtzman, 2010). Given that a materialistic focus in life is one of the most central of American values (Lamont, 1994, etc) Bushwick's noncommercial DIY ethos clearly goes against a major part of mainstream society.

⁹¹ Although there are many potential reasons for this lack of political action amongst my interviewees, it may have important implications for the extent to which artists (and LTR, for that matter) in Bushwick truly share similar goals. This lack of political action may both reveal and exacerbate a lack of cohesiveness between artists in Bushwick. Many theorists in psychology have noted that one of the most powerful ways to bring a group of people together is to get them to fight a common cause. Although many of my artists expressed shared concerns – namely the detrimental aspects of gentrification and the commodification of art – but without taking collective action to deal with these issues, not only are the problems presumably more likely to persist, but an important potential source of group solidarity is lost. Moreover, such lack of action also raises questions about the shared goals and motivations of the group in the first place. Thus the fact that there has been so little collective action against any political issue, and particularly gentrification, amongst artists in Bushwick raises the possibility that perhaps they do not clearly share priorities, despite concerns about gentrification, and indicates that they are not banding together to change Bushwick's future, as important way in which groups are often brought together.

Although this noncommercial interest is clearest among gallerists, it is evident among artists also. While many artists aim to sell their work and have no problem with this, they are not willing to compromise their artistic vision to do so, and instead choose to live in near-poverty, relative to what others with their level of education are earning, in order to pursue their art – clearly a vote for artistic integrity over financial gain. Similarly, perhaps, some could find artists’ devotion to authenticity to the self – which largely involves not wanting to manipulate who you are, or pretend to be who you’re not in any circumstances – oppositional in light of the fact that many Americans find themselves making all kinds of concessions, in some cases to earn good money, in many others in order to have a job at all (e.g., Hochschild, 1985, others). Thus artists, as well as gallerists, in Bushwick in many ways seem to prioritize a variety of artistic goals over financial and commercial ones – and thus they choose not to pursue a central American goal.

Other aspects of artists’ approach to work and life similarly don’t seem to connect neatly to typical American values. There are ways in which a lot of what artists do and appreciate – art for its own sake, for example - isn’t particularly goal oriented, rational, or even easily defined – e.g. “creative energy” – and one of their key approaches - “screw plans” – is certainly not one that is preached to children as a recipe for life success. On the other hand, perhaps artists in Bushwick are simply ahead of the curve. As the current job market and economy shift rapidly, with a general trend toward unstable and piecemeal work, along with what seems to be an increasingly unsure career track, even for paths that used to be fairly guaranteed (e.g., medicine, law) and increasingly widespread job instability (e.g., Ross, 2009, Segal, 2011), the artists’ embracing of risk, creativity, possibility, and improvisation in all arenas of life – not to mention frugal living and low expectations – may be an optimal strategy. For now, however, such an approach still seems to oppose the accepted paths to respectability and success in America.⁹²

⁹² However, in many ways, artists in general are less ‘outsiders’ to the rest of society than they once may have been. Even artists who fail to adhere to these mainstream American values may nonetheless be more

Bushwick vs. Chelsea

Discussed at length earlier, many Bushwick gallerists position themselves and the art world of Bushwick in general in opposition to Chelsea, the epicenter of the contemporary art world. The non-, even anti-commercial, ethos in Bushwick is most evident among some of its galleries, which to a large degree serve as the public face of the Bushwick art world and help to shape its identity. Although usually not overtly political, this noncommercial stance could be read as oppositional, given the very materialistic nature of our society.

At the same time, arguably Bushwick filters and eventually feeds artists into Chelsea (although of course it is hardly the only feeder region to Chelsea, nor likely the most prominent). The organization of galleries in Bushwick is not unlike that in early Soho, as described by Bystryn (1978), and involves essentially a tight relationship between Chelsea and Bushwick, whose galleries serve artists at different points in their careers. Thus for all of the opposition, the two centers arguably work together in providing a pathway for at least a handful of artists. At the level of paid work, Chelsea is also key in that many artists in Bushwick, particularly gallerists, have extensive experience working in Chelsea galleries, usually in an art handler capacity – a job that gives them many ties to and information about the contemporary art world. Although many gallerists resist the Chelsea model in their Bushwick galleries, they continue to work in Chelsea during the day – suggesting some limits to their belligerent stance toward Chelsea. Finally, for all of the desire to create a noncommercial gallery model, one that allows gallerists and curators total

in line with American society at large than once was the case. Some have argued that particularly since the 1960s, as the counterculture has been coopted by corporations and essentially integrated into mainstream America (e.g., Frank, 1997, Brooks, 2001). Given this trend, it is quite possible that artists are even less marginalized now than would have been the case fifty or a hundred years ago – an idea which seems supported by the profusion of art students during the past twenty years and their numbers among the new “creative class” (Florida, 2004).

control over what work is shown and how it is shown, it is striking that this actual work does not differ appreciably from what is shown in Chelsea. Artists and gallerists in Bushwick walk a line: on the one hand, they want to remedy some of what they find problematic in the mainstream Chelsea art world, and have control over what they do in a way that is often not feasible in Chelsea; on the other, they still want to be taken as serious, credible artists. Given this, their mixed relationship to Chelsea is not surprising.

Conclusions

Overall, my data suggest that the extent to which Bushwick stands in opposition to Chelsea or mainstream American society is not entirely clear. Some aspects of Bushwick gallerists' and artists' goals can be construed as oppositional, but lack the obvious political dimension that could provide a clear message, beyond opting out of commercialism and advocating a life lived true to one's own vision. Instead, Bushwick seems to be not actively opposing either Chelsea or the rest of the world, but rather providing a space of respite, a quiet restorative place where inhabitants feel free to experiment and generally don't feel the same pressures associated with other art worlds. Although Bushwick bears little resemblance to a subculture due to the wide variation between artists there, in some ways perhaps its resistance to Chelsea and mainstream culture more generally, can best be understood as the type of quiet and often symbolic resistance associated with various subcultures, rather than overt political action (e.g., Hebdige, 1979). Such an approach may be meaningful and useful for those involved – even if the central goal isn't political change.

One of the clearest themes to emerge from this study is simply that artists in Bushwick prioritize art. They are and want to be taken for serious artists, and they have attempted to structure their lives around the creation of art. Artistic freedom is the whole point, and using this freedom to

make a broader political statement – perhaps particularly one that is part of a group’s cause (artists are not “joiners”) - I think for some of the artists would somehow seem to sully or at least limit that freedom. Certainly for all of my informants’ concern about gentrification and the possibility that art is elitist, some seemed sure that the mission of art and artists is something more transcendent and lofty than serving political or community-related ends.

If not exactly oppositional to mainstream society, chasing art for its own sake may be a lonely pursuit, and perhaps even one that is incomprehensible in the eyes of nonartists, including LTR. Again and again artists in Bushwick show an “art for art’s sake” ethos, one that prioritizes art over many other goals and interests. Letting the work “speak for itself,” rather than viewing it in terms of the artist’s personality, or clothing, or social connections, or “authentic artist” identity, is the hope of many artists, but as media coverage shows, this is not the vantage point that seems to appeal to a broader audience, for whom the work may not speak for itself. This is certainly not to say that nonartists cannot understand or appreciate art work, but rather that, for whatever varied reasons, most do not feel sufficiently compelled by art to make the sacrifices that artists make in order to pursue it, and may not fully appreciate the art for its own sake ethos.⁹³ Thus Bushwick, filled with artists and at least a bit separated from the more competitive art worlds of Manhattan, to a large degree provides a space where this art for its own sake ethos can flourish, a place of support, inspiration and freedom to experiment that arguably provides the right conditions for artistic productivity, innovation, and community, however fleeting it may be.

3. Generalizing from Bushwick

To what extent is Bushwick unique? What can it tell us about other art worlds, or other local communities in general? Why does Bushwick matter?

⁹³ The division of artists and nonartists on this point is discussed by Caves 2000.

Clearly, there are many ways in which Bushwick is similar to other bohemia – around the world and through time – and this mythology of bohemia, which provides a script for Bushwick, also is likely to provide a similar script for art neighborhoods elsewhere and in the future. Despite many specific differences, bohemia have many similar features, largely tied to this mythology. Certainly my interviewees, many of whom have lived in or at the very least visited, different bohemia around the world and in some cases over the past several decades, see many similarities between these bohemia and Bushwick.

The basis for local community in arts neighborhoods may work similarly in other places as well. Many of the needs that local community seems to serve for artists in Bushwick are likely to exist for artists elsewhere. A key difference, however, could be the spread of the local community. Unlike most cities throughout the US, New York City has long been home to a type of Jane Jacobs-style of vibrant urban living in close quarters, with neighborhoods designed on a walking rather than driving scale. This geography may well create more opportunities for spontaneous social interaction, and heighten awareness of “creative energy” in the area in a way that would be more difficult to capture in a place like, say, Phoenix.

Artists throughout the country, and increasingly the world, must face a global art market, as well as the centrality of Chelsea. Regardless of one’s location, if one hopes to really “make it” in the contemporary art world, dealing with Chelsea is a necessity. Although some artists show in Chelsea without living in NYC, clearly they still have to address that world. In this way, whether in Bushwick or St.Louis (Plattner, 1996), artists have to deal with the same contemporary art world.

However, artists in Bushwick may differ from those outside the area in their commitment to trying to “make it” in Chelsea. Artists in NYC generally, including Bushwick, arrived from elsewhere in the country knowing that they would be dealing with a highly competitive, expensive and difficult place. These artists then may be among the most competitive, striving and risk taking, in comparison to those who opted not to move to NYC.⁹⁴ Thus while many of the interviewees I spoke with seemed to embrace risk and chance, I may have been dealing with a population of artists who had already proved themselves to be high risk takers. Artists in other, less difficult places might be less embracing of risk taking as a way of life.

Living anywhere in NYC also arguably involves dealing with intense pressures – competition, financial trouble, a lower standard of living and less space, etc – than artists elsewhere, and there may be important implications associated with this. Artists elsewhere may have more time and energy for, and interest in developing or participating in, local community for its own sake. They may similarly have more resources to devote to actively fighting gentrification or any other political cause, for that matter. They may be somewhat less transient, given that NYC can be a very difficult place to stay in if your financial situation suffers, and it would be cheaper to buy property almost anywhere outside of NYC. In short, there are reasons to believe that local community might be more robust outside of NYC.

While the noncommercial, art-for-its-own-sake ethos of Bushwick is likely one that appeals to artists elsewhere, it is quite possible that the current dismal economy may be shaping Bushwick’s stance toward the economy and augmenting its appeal. Since many artists in Bushwick currently feel that there’s little money to be made, either within or outside of the art world, in some ways

⁹⁴ Some evidence does suggest that artists who choose to come to NYC differ from other artists: for example, they work longer hours and endure more financial hardship than artists elsewhere, suggesting greater dedication to art (e.g., Montgomery & Robinson, 1993).

they're not protesting against much by taking a noncommercial stance.⁹⁵ According to the bohemian mythology, an artist in Bushwick today is the contemporary counterpart of the young artist in the East Village in 1982, at a time when artists there were making huge profits (some of them, at any rate). It was a different time and a different economy, and given that it's difficult to say whether Bushwick's noncommercial ethos would extend to art communities in other economic contexts.

It also seems quite possible that in other places where there is no domination by an at center as important as Chelsea, that the sort of boundary work engaged in by Bushwick gallerists, and to a lesser extent, artists, would be less important. In short, the proximity to Chelsea and complex relationship between Chelsea and Bushwick clearly shapes many aspects of the Bushwick art world in ways that wouldn't be so salient for art worlds at a greater distances, despite Chelsea's worldwide importance.

In short, there are many ways in which several features of Bushwick may extend to art worlds outside of NYC and in the future, although clearly there are limits to this. Less clear is the extent to which these findings might apply to communities other than art worlds, for example ranching communities in Montana. It is difficult to say. Perhaps one of the most basic findings here could illuminate dynamics elsewhere: that face to face interaction does continue to serve important functions in the formation of community, and often in ways that are not always immediately obvious, and which interact in complex ways with the mythologies and ideals that also help to create community. Perhaps elsewhere, as in Bushwick, local community exists not only in the streets, but also in the imaginations of those involved.

⁹⁵ The potential impact of the economy also may shape the willingness of my interviewees to take all kinds of risks in their lives. Some indicated that they had lost reasonably well-paid jobs during the worst part of the recession, and that this provided them with a sense of freedom – they now had nothing to lose by pursuing art with vigor.

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