THE WALLS OF WYNWOOD:
ART AND CHANGE IN THE GLOBAL NEIGHBORHOOD

Alfredo García

A DISSERTATION
PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY
OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

RECOMMENDED FOR ACCEPTANCE
BY THE DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIOLOGY

Adviser: Robert Wuthnow

June 2017
ABSTRACT

Recent changes in wealth acquisition and global inequality have resulted in the formation of a new class of individuals at the top of the socioeconomic spectrum worldwide. These High Net Worth Individuals (HNWIs)—also known as the “super-rich”—hold a larger percentage of global wealth than ever before and shape global trends in culture and leisure as they traverse the world for meetings, events, and parties. Part of this globetrotting has included attending major contemporary art fairs in cities like New York, Berlin, Miami, and Hong Kong. A result of an increased use of contemporary art as a financial instrument, these art fairs have become landmark moments in the calendars of HNWIs and the galleries that cater to them. This dissertation examines how these changes in the global contemporary art market and the cultural consumption of global elites affect small neighborhoods by examining the case of Art Basel Miami Beach and the development of an arts district in Wynwood, Miami. Beginning as one of Miami’s first suburbs and continuing on to becoming Miami’s garment district in the first half of the twentieth century, Wynwood eventually became Miami’s Puerto Rican barrio and one of its most dangerous neighborhoods by the end of the 1990s. The arrival of high-end contemporary art galleries and collections in Wynwood during 90s and early 00s, however, began Wynwood’s change into a center for art and culture and landed it as a stopover during the famous Art Basel art fair in Miami Beach. The resulting flow of the world’s super-rich through the neighborhood, coupled with their desire for the “art lifestyle,” resulted in what I call the formation of a “global neighborhood”: a stopover for the cultural and leisure consumption for the super-rich. Through data collected from three years of ethnographic
work, data analysis, and historical research, I demonstrate the changes that have taken place in Wynwood and how these shifts affect the lives of residents, artists, and cultural institutions therein. This study provides an analysis that is useful for other considerations of neighborhood change from global flows of the super-rich.
## CONTENTS

**CHAPTER 1:** Introduction  

**CHAPTER 2:** The History of the “Arts District”  

**CHAPTER 3:** Living in the Global Neighborhood  

**CHAPTER 4:** Getting a Wall in Wynwood  

> *Same Walls, Different Meanings*

**CHAPTER 5:** The Global Chapel  

> *Creating a Sacred Space for Elite Consumption*

**CHAPTER 6:** Conclusion  

**METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX**  

**NOTES**  

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**
Acknowledgments

The trope is that it takes a village to raise a child. But I have come to find that it takes much more than a village in order to help produce a dissertation. As a final marker of 13 years of higher education, this project has been influenced and improved by the many individuals that have helped to both shape my thinking/writing and have served as tremendous sources of inspiration, motivation, and support. My first thanks go to my three dissertation committee members. At Princeton University, I was blessed with an amazing dissertation chair and adviser, Robert Wuthnow. With an unending supply of patience, poise, and insight, Bob was always available to listen to my ideas—no matter how crazy or far-fetched—and provide sage advice on theoretical, empirical, and practical realities. Beyond offering knowledge, Bob exuded wisdom. I learned as much from his words and writings as I did from his actions: famously early beginnings to the work day, lightning-fast response time to emails, and comments that were critical but never hurtful. His guidance went well beyond that which is normally seen in academic advisers and dissertation chairs, and for that I am ever grateful.

Also an integral part of my formative years as an adult and intellectual was Viviana Zelizer, who took me under her wing early on in my time at Princeton and welcomed me into that very special group of people worldwide who are, in a way, a part of her family. With her sharp analytical eye, I grew to become a better theoretician; with her excitement for pedagogy, I grew to become a better instructor; and with her kindness, warmth, and sincerity, I grew to realize that the intellectual pursuit does not stop with the boundaries of the mind but rather continues on to include the heart as well. And finally, I would like to
thank Paul DiMaggio for the dozens of hours that he spent with me and my writing throughout the years. The level of detail that Paul paid to my work was astounding: every word was analyzed, every citation was examined, and every construct was questioned. It was a very special time to work with Paul during my general exams, but I am thankful for the hours that he spent with me and my writing during the production of this dissertation.

These three committee members have been so tremendously integral to the production of this final piece—and, indeed, for my development as an intellectual and scholar—that it is hard for me to express my full gratitude within these simple sentences. Oh how I hope that the words within the pages suffice as a fair demonstration of the yields that their investments have had. I can only hope that I have made them proud.

I would also like to thank the other professors at Princeton who have shared a part of my journey and who have left their fingerprints on my thinking and writing. To Patricia Fernandez-Kelly, who pushed me hard early on to motivate me to write—write anything!—and get it to her by next week. She was, in short, the catalyst for this whole venture. To Mitch Duneier, whose instruction in ethnographic methods was, of course, essential for my work here. His instructions and insights lie behind every sentence in this dissertation. To Wallace Best, who took his charge as a mentor seriously and motivated me during our conversations on anything and everything. To Miguel Centeno, who always had a spare second to share with me and who immediately called me into his office when I was at the verge of giving up and dropping out. His workload notwithstanding, Miguel was there for me at any second of the day. To Deb Kaple, a constant source of love and friendship throughout the years. She welcomed me into her home and family and drank numerous
cups of tea with me as we joked about any and all topics. Miguel and Deb were my family at Princeton, two of the most special individuals during my journey.

Other scholars have provided invaluable feedback on the ideas herein. I would like to thank Olav Velthuis, Rivke Jaffé, and the other faculty and graduate students at the University of Amsterdam; David Kling and the faculty in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Miami; and Terry Rey of Temple University. And then there are the scholars who were at the beginning of my intellectual journey all the way back at Duke University. Kalman Bland, Steven Churchill, and Jill Rhodes have impacted me more than they can know—and, indeed, more than I can describe here.

Many thanks to my friends, those invaluable sources of insight, yes, but also of companionship and love. At Princeton, many of these friends worked alongside me and read much of my work. I am indebted to Yossi Harpaz, Nicole Pangborn, Heather Kugelmass, Sophia Li, Glenn Harris, Maria Abascal, Sarah Brayne, Cary Beckwith, Linsey Edwards, Janeria Easley, Allison Kenney, Heba Gowayed, and many others at Princeton for all that they did. A special thanks to Amanda Rowe, Cindy Gibson, and Donna Defrancisco for their invaluable support. I would like to thank other close friends who have been integral sources of support (and even part of the dissertation research!), such as Lee Pearson, Steven Worrell, Adam Dixon, Thijs Jeursen, Daphne Delgado, Shaina Ault, and Hemel Mariano. Two friends, in particular, served as the very source for my decision-making process to research and write about Miami: Michael Chicas and Frank Castillo.

The research presented here was partially funded by generous grants from the Center for the Study of Religion, the Center for the Study of Social Organizations, and the Canadian Studies Program, all at Princeton University. I thank them for their financial
support. I would like to thank, as well, the research help provided by Tsering W. Shawa, Joshua Scheer, Michelle Gonzalez, and Matthew Romero. I am especially appreciative of all the help that my research participants have given me during my time in Miami: Cuqua Pacheco, Louie DeRosa, Maribell Camacho, Janitza Kaplan, Aurea Ingles, Fr. José Luis Menéndez, Ray Zamora, Hec One Love, Pete Kirill, Diana Contreras, Tom Curitore, and Hari: who remains pseudonymous in these pages yet is the single best friend I have made during my dissertation research.

And, finally, my family, the ultimate source of my being and the most important part of my formation. We are big, loud, and crazy, but we have always come out united through any struggle that has come our way. I would like to thank them all for being my ultimate source of energy and commitment. María Paula, Ruben, Juan Manuel, Louise, María José, Luis Fernando, Viviana: my siblings who have cheered me on throughout all of these years and yet never let me forget that I am, ultimately, the youngest child. Know your place. To my nieces and nephews, who I adore: Samantha, Christopher, Matthew, Isabella, Julian, Daniella, Gabriella, Jaxon, and Leah. I have cherished the opportunity to research in Miami more so because it has meant that I have been able to spend more time with you. And a very special thank you to my beautiful, forgiving, and patient partner, Cindy: who exudes happiness and who makes my soul smile.

But this dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Alfredo Eduardo and Sonia Pamela García. I have been inspired by their tenacity and courage in moving the family from Colombia, their ability to do whatever necessary to support and advance our family, and their perpetual love for all of us. Yo dedico esta tesis a ustedes: por todos los esfuerzos que ustedes han hecho por mí y por la familia, por el coraje que ustedes demuestran día tras
día. Ustedes son, en pocas palabras, mi inspiración. He apreciado todos estos días que he podido pasar con ustedes. Les amo con todo mi corazón.
To my parents

Alfredo Eduardo García Cepeda

and

Sonia Pamela García Mora
Chapter 1: Introduction

“Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it’s not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don’t think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened.”

Toni Morrison, Beloved

* * *

Fifty people, all dressed in black, sat in fifty chairs, all facing the same direction, in front of fifty cakes, all covered with white icing. As soon as the call was made, attendants opened the doors and allowed visitors to enter into the waiting area to be spoon-fed bits of the cake by any of the fifty patrons in the chairs. The line for the event had stretched well outside the venue, but luckily the cool December-in-Miami air meant that these guests were not uncomfortable as they waited. Everyone—both the cake servers and cake eaters—giggled at the spectacle and odd nature of it all. Simultaneously romantic and paternalistic, ennobling and degrading, the cake offering seemed to leave many in an awkward limbo about what, exactly, was happening. But boy was it fun.

This event was the 2014 edition of Jennifer Rubell’s renowned annual breakfast at her parent’s contemporary art collection in Wynwood, Miami: a yearly performance art project that includes an element of food, eating, or other gastronomic experiences. Although previous years had included 1573 Chinese egg custard tarts on a see-saw or jars or yogurt fermenting in a chamber, 2014’s spectacle of 50 cakes was meant to represent a pivotal moment: the 50th wedding anniversary of Jenn’s parents, Don and Mera Rubell. But instead of having her parents just watch the feast held in their honor, Jenn sat them in
the center of the first row of cake patrons, a position of honor from which they could enjoy
the opportunity to feed the masses. “It’s a very good feeling to serve other people on your
anniversary,” Don Rubell told WLRN, Miami’s public radio station.³

Although a strange spectacle in itself, the performance art project was seen by many
as being emblematic of the place of Wynwood: the former Puerto Rican barrio of Miami
that has become an international destination for high-class art, murals, galleries, and art
fairs. Since the mid-2000s, Wynwood has been the site of some of the most
transformational efforts in all of Miami. Over the course of just a few years, art dealers
arrived, property developers invested, galleries were established, and real-estate prices shot
up exponentially. These skyrocketing property values only increased the attention that
Wynwood garnered worldwide in a feedback loop: the more prices went up, the more
property developers and speculators descended upon the neighborhood. Not content with
merely purchasing individual lots, these investors sought to purchase several contiguous
lots or even whole blocks (known as “assemblages” in real-estate terms). Before long,
Wynwood was being featured in in-flight advertisements, jet-set magazines, trade
publications, documentaries, blogs, law school classes, and even a remake of a music video
by Nick Jonas.⁴

The 50 cakes at the Rubell Family Collection took place amidst a long queue of
limousines, photographers, and visitors that arrived in taxis, Ubers, and Lyfts: part of the
understanding of the high-class art district that Wynwood had become. But just across the
street from the contemporary art haven of the Rubell Family Collection was a county-
owned building where families struggle to make their monthly payments. “Wynwood is
still the hood,” one of the street artists reminded me during an interview. “And people here,
they don’t get that. You gotta respect the hood, man, or else it gets you.” There are those who relish in experiential art, and then there are those who see this very same art as “shit.”

As one of the graffiti artists who runs a graphic design company in Wynwood reminds me, from “there is the Wynwood Art District. Like Yayyyy! Like food trucks and, you know, white people with fanny packs walking around and buying art and gawking at street art and talking about how edgy it is. But then they go back to their car and their car has been broken into. You understand? It’s an interesting dynamic. It’s like a social study, really. Like what happens when you kick people out of their neighborhood and just literally plop some like nice shit into it and see like what happens. And this [Wynwood] is what happened.”

By the mid-2000s, Wynwood existed at the crossroad of these two worlds: the new reality of global recognition and economic interest coupled with the realities of creating a market for an experiential marketplace of art consumption. Wynwood had, indeed, become what I call a “global neighborhood”: a site of cultural consumption and leisure that has spawned as a result of being part of the stopovers for the richest men and women in the world. I chanced upon Wynwood at a fortuitous time: Miami, overall, was abuzz in 2014 when I arrived. There was an electricity in the air that all pointed to promises of exponential growth and progress; dollar signs replaced pupils in the eyes of all of those around me. And although real estate has always been one of the most important avenues for the Miami growth machine, the best get-rich-quick scheme in the city, it seemed as though the fever for land had reached its apotheosis when I arrived. Rents soared in just the first few months that I was in the city, and they continued increasing over my time in the field. Construction projects multiplied across the expanse of Miami with cranes joining the high-rises as part of the Miami skyline. A steady surge of money was arriving and flowing through Miami.
from other countries (mainly from Latin America).\textsuperscript{7} Even amidst all of this construction and speculation, there was still a significant housing crunch in Miami-Dade County with rents soaring and a lack of affordable housing options.\textsuperscript{8}

At the center of much of this ruckus was Wynwood: a neighborhood transformed by real-estate speculators, property developers, politicians, tourists, and—most importantly—art entrepreneurs. With all its galleries, collections, art institutions, and street art, Wynwood is one of the primary centers of art and culture in Miami today. Spurred by the arrival of Art Basel Miami Beach in December 2002, Wynwood’s rapid rate of change has been catalyzed by the global art market.\textsuperscript{9} Tastemakers the world over walk the streets of the neighborhood to check out art for purchase, attend parties of note, and take snapshots of everything for their various social media outlets. The “#wynwood” notation on Instagram, for instance, appeared 1,489,240 times in Instagram by January 11, 2017. But all of this fame does not come without its conflict. Wynwood has changed dramatically, yes. But the neighborhood’s change has come incredibly quickly. While the world’s elites coursed through the streets of the neighborhood, some of Miami’s poorest still live in the small houses and run-down apartments nearby. While men and women dressed in fancy suits talk about real-estate opportunities that can garner millions of dollars in profits, the residents of Wynwood are using their prime location to sell parking spots to visitors for $10, $15, or sometimes $20 a pop.

As we know from classic studies on communities and neighborhoods, the understandings of neighborhoods by outsiders do not map exactly onto the realities within.\textsuperscript{10} Outsiders, for instance, may define groups and communities without the input of the very members therein. In other instances, individuals in communities can actively work
to “rebrand” their neighborhood reputations in an effort to raise community spirit, draw new commerce, or work to receive government funds. This disjoint between perception and reality is equally present in Wynwood as it has been in other studies. Although the magazine articles, news pieces, and blogs all catch the glitter of the neighborhood—Kanye West and Kim Kardashian’s attendance at a wedding, for instance, or the latest multi-million-dollar acquisition of property—they of course miss the reality of life on the ground for many of the residents who have made Wynwood their home for decades.

While the image from outsiders does not correspond exactly with the realities of insiders, however, there is the additional problem of the lack of cohesiveness of meaning and understanding within the neighborhood itself. I had the honor to spend a great amount of time with those who reside in the neighborhood as a result of this study, an opportunity that enabled me to collect the stories of men and women who were living at the moment of exceptional change in their environment. While the headlines raced about parties and paintings, I was able to sit down and spend hours passing time, listening, and being present with those who most likely would never read those headlines. As businesses opened and closed, I was able to walk around the streets on a daily basis and ask numerous questions of business owners, pedestrians, and others. I also, however, spent a great amount of time with those that came into the neighborhood for one reason or another: street artists who came to tag walls or sell works, property developers that arrived to their offices to plan the future structures that would go up in the neighborhood, tourists and visitors that came to eat-and-drink-and-be-merry.

The differences across the contexts in Wynwood was so stark that it was often difficult for me to reconcile the worlds that existed as neighbors. I would sit down to play
bingo with locals on a Friday morning at the community center in the park where each entry went for 25 cents and the winnings would rarely top $4, for instance, and then head to art gallery openings that very same evening where red dot stickers would be placed on the information placards of pieces that sold in the tens of thousands of dollars. I would chat with men and women who were excited about making a little money by selling a bike or their prescription drugs before going on to hold conversations with property owners who were about to become millionaires by selling their decrepit property to real-estate speculators.

All of this, then, led to my interest in studying how global trends in art and consumption among global elites lead to profound effects in small neighborhoods. Academic studies often use complexity as a central area of focus in the study of the world. Normal narratives that explain phenomena, for instance, are too simplistic and do not take myriad factors into consideration. The goal for the academic is often to provide the thick description, analytical results, and other points of evidence that demonstrate the complexity that lies behind our taken-for-granted notions. This is a trope that I have grown accustomed to reading during my dissertation research—one that I promised myself I would never use in my own writing. But as my work in Wynwood advanced and as I continued to read more of the literature on neighborhood change, the more amazed I became at the veritable complexity that lied in my experiences in Wynwood. The socioeconomic chasms between those who traversed this social world were, in themselves, difficult for me to digest (such as the prescription drug sellers and the soon-to-be millionaires). But there were also the unexpected narratives that I would hear from some of those who lived in the neighborhood, many of whom were excited about the attention Wynwood was now receiving even while
their own community members were forced to move from rising rents and/or new ownerships of their apartment complexes. There were dramatic differences in perceptions among street artists, property owners, business owners, hustlers, homeless individuals, and others. As much as I hate to admit it, it was complicated.

This complexity notwithstanding, I was drawn in to the place of Wynwood because of how all interpretations emerged from one understanding of Wynwood’s reality as an arts district and the impressive draw that the consumption of art created. Wynwood was seen, as I gathered from years of ethnographic observation, as the arts district of Miami. Whether I was speaking with the Mayor of the City of Miami or the men who hung out on the street corner outside of the grocery store, there was rarely a time when my correspondents saw Wynwood as anything but the major locus of arts and culture in Miami. The external understanding of Wynwood, in short, was quite cohesive. What that meant, however, was often quite different. Digging deeper into the views of those in and around the neighborhood, I found that there was little (if any) cohesive understanding of the meaning of Wynwood by those on the ground. Was Wynwood supposed to be a new neighborhood of new tenants? Was Wynwood a place for exclusive high-end art? Who, in the end, was the neighborhood for? While the changes in art, finance, and travel helped produce the boom in the neighborhood, the resulting efforts at the production of Wynwood led to the fine tuning of a neighborhood for art consumption rather than a neighborhood for residing. Although it was the glitter in the headlines of newspapers and magazines that originally caught my eyes, although the street art and parties were the most exciting aspects of the neighborhood early on in my research, it was the undercurrents of art, real estate, and place construction that made the complexities of the neighborhood worth analyzing.
This dissertation is, in the end, an analysis of the complexities how the global art market and the flow of global elites produced a neighborhood that was focused on the experiential qualities of art consumption. Instead of a classic story of gentrification through residential partitioning, rather than a narrative about how the arts were causing change in a neighborhood, my interest here is in the processes of staging for consumption that I witnessed. Instead of seeing the natural progression of a bohemian enclave, for instance, I saw the conscious effort of art enthusiasts and property developers working together to create a semblance of a bohemian enclave. But instead of constructing a neighborhood with a bohemian source—which is characterized by low economic capital but high cultural capital—the place shapers of Wynwood constructed the neighborhood around the goal of art consumption. The bohemian milieu was merely part of the experience of purchasing art. Instead of learning about the chaos and disorder that is traditionally associated with graffiti, for instance, I learned about the vast amount of order and planning that went into allotting wall space, preserving wall art, and protecting artists’ “rights” to certain walls. The walls were integral, I found, to the shaping of the experience of art consumption in Wynwood and, as a result, were too precious to allow just anybody to paint.

Amidst all of my interviews and participant observations, the most consistent aspect of the complexity was the continual negotiations of how Wynwood was perceived by others, how good the staging was for visitors. This, indeed, was central: the meanings, perceptions, and understandings of this place were highly contested and continually clashing. During meetings of the Wynwood Business Improvement District, business owners and property developers would continually discuss and debate the “image” or “vibe” that the neighborhood was giving off to visitors and residents as they made wide-
ranging decisions on storefront decorations, sidewalk placements, design plans, and the rest. Long-time residents of the neighborhood, meanwhile, expressed confusion to me about what their neighborhood had become and how different the understandings of “Wynwood” were in comparison to their own experiences. In their minds, Wynwood was not about art and consumption: it was about walking down the street to the LaGuardia market and making sure you did not step on the dog excrement on the sidewalk surrounding the park (there always seemed to be dog excrement on the sidewalk surrounding the park). As Hari, one of the former button vendors in the neighborhood told me, “It’s all about perception. What you see is not what they [property developers] see.”13 As helicopters with developers flew overhead to examine the real estate from the sky and young men crossed the neighborhood on their bikes trying to get home amid the chaotic traffic, as people bought goods and others took pictures, it was the case that the place of Wynwood was being constructed out of multiple gazes, perceptions, and meanings in a vast attempt to prepare the perfect environment for consumption of art.

It is here, with an analysis of the place of Wynwood, that I wish to center this whole intellectual venture. The financialization of art and the explosion of wealth for some across the globe has led to the development of a lucrative and powerful art market that spans cities and countries worldwide. As I will demonstrate below, this development is intimately tied with new developments in using art as an investment, the formation of a cultural circuit amongst the super wealthy of the world, and the demand for unique and worthwhile experiences among this circuit. Wynwood is just one case of a future in which neighborhoods in major cities become a part of the global circuit of cultural and
experiential consumption. What happens in Wynwood, in short, can be a harbinger for what will happen in other neighborhoods worldwide.

In this introduction, I wish to contextualize Wynwood in a series of theoretical understandings that converge to produce the results that I witnessed in Wynwood. I begin with a serious consideration of place and placemaking strategies: the heart of my analysis here. As the primary loci of social activity, places are vastly important for understanding what interactions happen, how interactions play out, and who is excluded from social interactions. As a result of the importance of places for determining social activity, the construction, maintenance, and shaping of places becomes essential for individuals who wish to direct certain forms of social activity: business owners who wish to encourage consumption, for instance, or city officials who wish to decrease vice. After discussing the importance of place and place construction, however, I move on to discuss the presence and influence of the global economic elites. Known as the “super rich,” these men and women travel the planet for events, meetings, parties, and investments. Of particular importance in this project, however, is the rise in prominence of contemporary art fairs and the surge in prices for contemporary art. As a result of their global reach and unending supply of money, the world’s super rich now traverse the world in search of their art investments. Global shifts in money and cultural consumption, coupled with the speculation of real estate that has become characteristic of global cities, produced major structural changes in Miami. In the process, however, place entrepreneurs and other place shapers work hard to establish the just-so places for just-so consumption: a phenomenon that results in the likes of Wynwood. With an eye towards the consumption of the global elites spurred by their desire for the “art lifestyle” in addition to art purchasing, power
brokers in Wynwood grew the neighborhood into an arts district founded on consumption and consumption practices. And that is how the global art market, in the end, shaped the neighborhood of Wynwood.

* * *

Robert was a man in his 30s, a native of Hialeah from Cuban descent who is proud and unabashed in his stereotypical embodiment of all that is Miami. He and I were standing outside of one of the galleries on NW 2nd Ave, the main thoroughfare of Wynwood, during an afternoon in July 2014, finishing up a conversation about Robert’s projects in Wynwood. Robert had spent the previous three years working with his business partner to archive and digitally curate the street art of Wynwood on their website. Every wall around us was covered with artwork: giant murals spanned walls several hundred square feet in size; stickers cropped up at all angles on light posts and warehouse shutters; and even the sidewalks had become spaces for art, with a myriad of tags, stencils, and markings littering every inch of the floor space. Walking the streets of Wynwood around 4 or 5 days a week the past few years had enabled Robert to witness the incredible amount of change that had taken place around the streets. “Wynwood,” he told me, “you go through here and it’s never the same.” New businesses, new developments, and new people have all been the reason for Wynwood’s explosion, he said. But most important of all, in his

---

*a* Years after I interviewed Robert, I could still hear his voice with the cadence and accent that singles him out as an “all Miami” kind of bro. Entirely self-aware of his eccentricities, Robert did not mind that I would make fun of him for his Miami turns-of-phrases. Everything was peppered with sentences that began with *mira bro*, interjections of *pero* or *ya tu sabes*: all of which added a particularly Miami Spanglish flair to our conversation. And then there was the cursing—lots of cursing. When he told me about the graffiti world and the push and pull about the exchange for money, Robert did not hold back. “I guess to try and define selling out, it’s if you’re a musician and somebody sought after you for your musician-ship, then don’t allow them to tell you what to play….If you’re getting paid to do what you’re good at, that doesn’t mean you’re a sellout, that means that you’re fucking lucky that somebody got your goddamn attention and is trying to give you money for something you’re fucking good at. To me that’s what this is. I mean, it’s a fucking ad. It’s an ad! Everything’s an ad.”
opinion, was the street art. As he told me with great pride and awe: “There has been graffiti for a long time, there have been cities all over the world that cater to this [street art], but what do we have here? This is the largest street art gallery in the world. And we live here, bro.”

Similar to others, Robert was angry and bitter about the prospects of the neighborhood’s change via art and how the place had changed for the worse.

[Graffiti] has literally transformed a fucking industrial crap of a fucking town that had nothing but drugs, nothing but gang violence, nothing but bullshit. But now you have companies like Ducati coming in here. I mean, look at the fucking Wynwood Kitchen and Bar, where you have all the fucking celebrities and stars coming to dine there and shit. I mean, art transformed this place. Period.

The problem, Robert said, is that the artwork that transformed the neighborhood had been maligned by the local government. Instead of seeing the street art as the catalyst for economic growth, police imprisoned graffiti writers and maintained a strict regulation of graffiti as illegal. What is more, the Miami Parking Authority had begun taking initial steps to requiring visitors to pay for parking in the streets: an unnecessary step that would dissuade many from stopping in the neighborhood. “It’s ridiculous, dude: the city has done nothing for Wynwood. Nothing. And now they wanna start charging people [for parking]? Go fuck yourself. No way.”

We finished our walk around the streets of the neighborhood with a final conversation on the sidewalk outside one of the galleries when an African American man, probably in his mid- to late-thirties, walked past us on the street. His clothes were dirty and his skin was leathery. He saw us chatting and looked right at us while he yelled: “You cannot control the world with this shit! This is shit! [pointing to wall after wall] That’s shit! I don’t give a fuck how creative in thinking you are—that is shit!” His eyes were open and
intense, the muscles in his arms taut as he pointed to the walls around us. Robert and I just stood there, watching the man as he continued down the avenue past us. While he was within earshot, he continued screaming. “You got me!? That’s shit! I don’t care how creative you are. That’s shit!” The man turned the corner to the left and was gone.14

* * *

Theories of Place | Or, Who’s City is it Anyway?

The 50 shades of cake at the Rubell Family Collection, Robert’s tour of the neighborhood and his cursing, the random man’s outburst: these tableaus and details can be contextualized in a variety of ways. For me, however, the central aspect of these—and, indeed, of the myriad of other experiences that I had during my research in Wynwood—has to do with the concept of place and the experiences of consumption. In many ways, place both matters and does not matter in sociology. As Thomas Gieryn notes in his widely-cited review of the literature on the topic, sociological studies are constantly touching upon the issue of place.15 All social actions, indeed, happen in places. Whether it is the ethnographer examining the unspoken rules of a group in a small neighborhood or the statistician examining the differences in urban and rural effects on a particular variable, all sociologists must contend—either implicitly or explicitly—with the issues associated with place. And yet there is an irony associated with the fact that any study of social action must take place into consideration: “Sociologists,” as Gieryn argues, “have given the appearance of not being interested in place—perhaps preferring to leave the matter to specialists” from other disciplines.16 There is no particular subsection for a sociology of place, for instance. And in many sociological studies, place is merely a container for social activity.17
Overall, however, the literature on place is vast and spans a variety of disciplines. In geography, the term has gained in theoretical importance since the 1970s. Through the theorization of place, geography was able to move from the analysis of abstract locations in the world to the study of realms of existence and habitation. While the field of geography in the 1960s mainly focused on the spatial layout of the world rather than the individuals in it, the development and advancement of humanistic geography in the 1970s replaced humans as objects of the world with humans as subjects in the world. The new goal was no longer to solely map the world but to understand how individuals interact and inhabit this world. In anthropology, the term has been taken up in ethnographies of areas with quickly shifting and changing notions of place. Marc Auge, for instance, argues that the way we live our lives today—one marked by rapid communication and information flow, the shrinking of the world via accessibility, and an increased individualism—creates “nonplaces”: areas of hypermobility and transience. Sites such as airports, service stations, and other places of transit all become more prevalent in the world, yet they are characterized by the lack of attachment, constant communication, perpetual consumption, and ephemeral social bonds.

The sociological definition of place is denoted in particular by three factors: (1) location; (2) material form; and (3) meaningfulness. First, a place is a particular geographical location; you can locate a place, you can plot it. It is, at the end of the day, a “unique spot in the universe.” Second, a place has a particular material form and physicality attached to it. There are houses and trees, for instance, or monuments and street signs. Whatever it is, a place requires some kind of material assemblage in the geographic spot. And third, a place is nothing if it is not imbued with meaning(s) and value(s). This is,
by far, the most important aspect: a place holds, imbues, and transmits particular meaning(s) and value(s) to individuals. The importance of place is not only that it can be located in a cognitive map or that it is formed of a certain amount of stuff. The importance lies in the fact that individuals confer qualities to a place: “ours or theirs; safe or dangerous; public or private; unfamiliar or known; rich or poor; Black or White; beautiful or ugly; new or old; accessible or not.”22 As a simple memory of one’s hometown can demonstrate—and as the epigraph to this introduction poetically intimates—there are certain meanings that are deeply attached to a place.23

Although many of the meanings associated with a place are developed and created by the individuals that interact in or with these particular places, for instance, it remains the case that the particular meanings attached to a place can be created by outsiders or people with certain types of power. Communities, for instance, and the neighborhoods in which they are found are often constructed are delineated through a dialogue from both residents and nonresidents alike. Although there is a vast amount of cultural work that happens within a neighborhood that creates the cultural meanings for a place, outsiders often have as much a say in the ongoing commentary about the composition of neighborhoods and communities. As has been found, moreover, these meanings gain a tremendous amount of legitimacy and concreteness regardless of the reality of the actual composition of individuals in the community/neighborhood.24

The mass media, as well, has a tremendous effect on the creation of certain meanings attached to places and can have powerful effects for public policy.25 Once an area is designated as “lawless,” for instance, or once a neighborhood is seen as requiring more security, it becomes “easy for the authorities to justify special measures, deviating
from both law and custom, which can have the effect—if not the intention—of destabilizing and further marginalizing their occupants.” From the American ghetto to the French banlieue, there are particular areas that are given particular meanings from the outside. These meanings, as a result, have the profound effect of shifting dollars, encouraging certain policy campaigns, and even degrading those who choose to live in these places. As realities that are socially-constructed through narrative processes, materiality and meaning come together in descriptions, writings, conversations, and rumors. Places, as Molotch and his co-authors argue, arise from the linkages “across material and ideational realms” whereby “the physical thing and the social practice make each other up.”

In the end, although places may seem to be natural constructions that arise from social interaction at the ground level, they are far from that. As Marxist, feminist, and post-structuralist authors have emphasized, there is always power implicated in the creation of places, in the perpetuation of places, and in the eventual contestation of meanings attached to places. The meanings attached to place are not merely nostalgic feelings of home or particular judgments brought about from direct contact or interaction with a place. These meanings and values can have profound effects—both positive and negative—on social interactions, stigmatization or isolation, and public policy. The practices that bring these elements into importance, indeed, are essential for understanding places. Places are dynamic, places are contentious. Places are, as Michel de Certeau asserts in his classic book, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, always in a process of becoming, of transforming. Even shopping malls, it has been shown, have a long tenure for being sites of power contestation. Creating areas for safe consumption that are gendered, racialized, and highly
policing, shopping malls have been sites in which the public becomes private, where consumption is epitomized, and civic life is idealized. Understanding these transformations requires a gaze at multiple social worlds and narratives with a particular eye towards power structures and power dynamics.

Cities are special sites where the construction of place is in constant pursuit and the shaping of the political economy of places is an ever-shifting game of power. Made famous by Harvey Molotch’s argument of the city as a “growth machine,” cities can be viewed as locations in which property developers, real-estate moguls, and other local elites simultaneously compete and collaborate to achieve their economic ends. What Molotch brings to the fore is the irony of consensus behind the semblance of competition. Whereas the local elites in cities battle with each other for the dollars of residents, they all agree on one point: the obsession with growth. “The desire for growth,” Molotch says, “provides the key operative motivation toward consensus for members of politically mobilized local elites, however split they might be on the issues.” It is this interest on growth that “is the overriding commonality among important people in a given locale.” Because of their common focus on growth, local elites spend vast amounts of their money and time to enact policy and zoning changes in order to perpetuate this growth. They are, in the end, those who have the most at stake in local political decisions. They are, as well, those who have the economic foundation that is large enough to allow for the time that it takes to participate in local decision-making.

Molotch’s argument has had considerable traction in the world of urban studies in sociology and elsewhere because of its insight into the vested interests that local elites can have in cities. The previous reigning approach to understanding change in cities was that
of the Chicago School of sociology, an ecological paradigm of city life that emphasized the interaction of elements within social worlds of the city. In the writings of Robert Park and Ernest Burgess in particular, students of city life in the United States focused on the negotiations that took place on the ground brought about by the natural differentiation of people in cities. But together with John Logan, Molotch moved away from examining these within-place interactions as taking place on equal footing and instead emphasized the power dynamics that are at play within cities.

But together with John Logan, Molotch moved away from examining these within-place interactions as taking place on equal footing and instead emphasized the power dynamics that are at play within cities.

Cities, however, and the interpretations of urban change have changed since the time of Molotch’s publication. Beyond the within-city concerns that Park, Burgess, Logan, and Molotch highlight, other forces from outside the city became critical to understanding urban change. Shifts in the national economy, for instance, such as the move away from industrial production, can leave gaping holes in cities that relied on manufacturing. Or national decision-making for the allocation of federal resources, such as for public housing, can have profound effects on the urban layout. As a result, scholars of place today focus on more than the three categories of geography, materiality, and meaning that Gieryn highlights. Krista Paulsen, for instance, prefers to use the term “place character” when discussing differences of identity and expression across particular places, a term that she defines as “a particular combination of geography, history, economy, demography, politics, organizations, culture, and aesthetics.” Other studies—such as those by Katja M. Guenther and Japonica Brown-Saracino—build on this interpretation of place and defend its usefulness in studying the expression of feminist and LGBTQ identities, respectively.

As a result of these considerations, I take great pains to analyze how multiple variables (or...
“elements,” as Molotch prefers to call them in a more recent publication) come together to create change in Wynwood.  

**Global Wealth Inequality and the World’s “Super-Rich”**

Global Cities with Global Offerings

One variable that is particularly important to consider vis-à-vis change and growth in cities is that of globalization and global markets. As technological advances and a worldwide division of labor began taking shape over the course of the 1980s, cities became important not just for local or national interests. As markets the world over became increasingly intertwined and transnational corporations began setting reaching the furthest corners of the globe, cities became essential to global economic markets. This shift caused by globalization led to the formation of what Saskia Sassen calls “global cities”—areas of highly concentrated knowledge and finance firms that serve as sites of production and innovation in leading industries. Sassen’s profound insight draws from a central irony: in a globalized world, one would think that location would matter less and less. Since production can theoretically take place anywhere, one would assume that companies and corporations would stretch far and wide across the globe for the placing of their economic roots and manufacturing. The irony that Sassen points out, however, is that globalization includes both dispersal and centralization. Companies and corporations do span the globe for raw materials, production centers, and employment bases; this dispersal is key for corporate production in a globalized world and is a natural byproduct of the increase in transnational corporations. Yet the same forces that produce dispersal also produce centralization in cities that contain the essential resources that enable these global
operations. Certain cities (i.e.: global cities) become those central nodes in the cross-border interactions of globalized firms and corporations.42

Because of their worldwide economic importance, becoming a global city entails a restructuring not only of the economic sphere but also the social sphere. Different forms of economic growth produce different forms of spatial organization in cities and also shape consumption patterns and labor markets. Global cities, for instance, become areas of highly concentrated numbers of high-income and professional workers who live, work, and play in or near the dense central business districts of the city. Their demands for living space typically leads to gentrification of areas in the city, and their need for distinctive consumption leads to new goods and services. What is more, their search for distinctive consumption patterns and a desire to spend their (typically ample) disposable incomes leads to new cultural offerings and commodities.43

The increase in global inequality and the development of global cities has also led to the formation of an upper stratum of wealth holders worldwide: the global economic elites.44 Most scholars agree that global inequality comes as a direct consequence of uneven and disparate levels of income worldwide after the industrial revolution. Many nations, especially in North America and Western Europe, have generally been on the leading end of economic markets for the past several decades. With the rise of globalization and the rapid rise of markets in other parts of the world since the 1980s has come a substantial shift in the distribution of wealth worldwide. Yet even though many nations have taken large steps of increasing economic output within their country, overall levels of global inequality continue to increase.45 Indeed, global inequality today has resulted in a situation in which one’s nationality is the predominant indicator of income.46 The global variations in quality
of life, purchasing power, and economic markets is astounding. Glenn Firebaugh, a leading expert in levels of global inequality, is quite blunt when he states that “the level of global inequality observed in today’s world is massive.”

But amidst these studies of global inequality—which mainly focus on markets, national estimates, and productivity—there are a series of analyses of the key individuals across the globe that hold the most wealth. Known as High Net Worth Individuals (HNWIs), members of this upper stratum are characterized as individuals who hold financial assets that exceed $1 million. According to the 2015 World Wealth Report tabulated by Capgemini and RBC Wealth Management, the number of HNWIs worldwide has continued increasing since 2009. Currently, there are 14.6 million individuals worldwide that are included in this category, and although rates of increase have somewhat slowed, the report predicts that global HNWI wealth should top US$70 trillion by 2017. North America still holds the lead for the greatest number of HNWI individuals and HNWI wealth (at approximately US$16.2 trillion), but the Asia-Pacific region is close behind and increasing rapidly (currently at US$15.8 trillion).

Even amongst the highest earners, however, there are tiers that separate the holdings and influence of individuals. The World Wealth Report divides the entire body of HNWIs into three distinct wealth bands: (1) the “millionaires next door” with US$1 million – US$5 million in investible wealth, (2) “mid-tier millionaires” who possess between US$5 million and US$30 million, (3) and the “ultra-HNWIs” at the top: the group of individuals who possess more than US$30 million in investible wealth. And as with other measures of inequality worldwide, the ultra-HNWIs at the stratospheric top make up only 1% of all HNWIs but account for approximately 35% of all HNWI wealth.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Individuals</th>
<th>Population Growth</th>
<th>% of HNWI</th>
<th>Wealth 2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ultra-HNWI</strong></td>
<td>139.3k (1% of total)</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mid-Tier Millionaire</strong></td>
<td>1,325.0k (9% of total)</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Millionaire Next Door</strong></td>
<td>13,185.2k (90% of total)</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data taken from the 2015 World Wealth Report.

As a result of media attention and pop culture portrayals, HNWIs have come to be characterized and identified by a few variables. They are those who have made their fortunes from earnings and investments, especially high-risk investments using state-of-the-art mathematical financial algorithms, rather than through inheritance. Most, indeed, have made the big bucks through finance. They are the ones who own the yachts that get photographed in magazines; they are the ones who party in Milan, San Tropez, and the Hamptons while posting pictures of their escapades on their social media platforms; these are the men and women who attend “ideas summits” to share their latest insights in improving the world; and they are the ones who give loads of their money away to creative and innovative social ventures and become “philanthropreneurs.”

Even in the academic literature, they have their own name: the “super-rich.”

It is important to emphasize that although trends in globalization and the opening of markets have led to a surge in HNWIs worldwide, it is still the case that the vast majority of HNWIs come from particular parts of the globe. North America and Asia, for instance, are the two regions of the world with the highest number of HNWIs. Indeed, approximately 60% of the world’s HNWI population comes only from the United States, Japan, Germany,
and China. Going down to a finer level of geography, however, HNWIs around the world also increasingly live and in elite enclaves and neighborhoods across the world. These are the places that we have all heard of: the Bel-Airs and Fisher Islands of the world, for instance. But then there are the tiny places that get chosen as vacation destinations or neighborhoods that see a surge of interest from global elites as places to raise their families. Indeed, the surge of wealth into some neighborhoods has created a phenomenon known as “super-gentrification,” whereby global elites settle in previously gentrified areas and increase property and rent values well beyond the already-high levels that they began.

The Super-Rich and Contemporary Art | Buying a Piece of the Glam Life

Don and Mera Rubell are recognized worldwide for their expansive and impressive art collection. Together with their children, Don and Mera run the Rubell Family Collection (RBC), their private museum for the exhibition of their holdings, and the Contemporary Arts Foundation, their non-profit arm that supports their artistic ventures. Beginning their collection in 1964 as a newlywed couple, Don and Mera have grown from amateur collectors in New York City to global tastemakers by accumulating thousands of pieces of artwork over the past 50 years. Don’s brother, Steve Rubell, owned and ran the famous Studio 54 nightclub; it was there that Don and Mera first met many of the hip and leading figures in the art world, connections that would last them a lifetime.

The RBC, indeed, is a must-see stopover for contemporary art lovers and enthusiasts who arrive in the City of Miami. The cake-eating and revelry that took place in the public showing facility of the RBC was part of their yearly tradition of hosting a breakfast during the Art Basel Miami Beach art fair held in the Miami Beach Convention
Center. Far from being an event isolated to just the confines of the convention center, however, Art Basel Miami Beach has been the catalyst for about a dozen of other art fairs during the same week in December every year. Instead of having these (and other) events in Miami Beach, the Rubells host guests inside their facility in the center of the neighborhood of Wynwood. The RBC is housed in a massive building that is imposing in both size and architecture. As a former holding facility for the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), the building sits with tall walls of concrete adorned with a front façade that resembles a flattened accordion ribcage with a single window. The entire building is a dominating presence in a neighborhood with small houses, two-story apartment complexes, and low-height industrial buildings.

By 2014, the RBC was one of the approximately 70 galleries, collections, and art institutions that dotted the small neighborhood of Wynwood. Once the former Puerto Rican barrio of the Miami, Wynwood exploded in less than a decade into an international destination for art and leisure. In addition to the galleries and collections, Wynwood is also home to hundreds of pieces of street art: large-scale murals, stencils, stickers, and graffiti tags dot every conceivable inch of landscape in the area. It is not uncommon to see visitors from all over the world walking the streets of the neighborhood snapping pictures of the walls and sipping coffees in the cafes. Once the bars and restaurants open in the evening, the crowds swell and the sports cars clog up traffic in the main arteries. And during the peak season of Basel time in December, it is also not uncommon to see limousines and other luxury cars parked outside the collections.

All of the fanfare, all of the parties, and all of the media attention, however, did not portray some of the underlying tensions in the neighborhood. Wynwood was, by all
accounts, the undisputed arts district of Miami by the time Don and Mera Rubell fed pieces of cake into the mouths of visitors. But many of the very same people who made Wynwood into an arts district were now questioning what kind of place Wynwood had become. A month after the cake-eating event, I met Mera Rubell at a meeting of the Wynwood Business Improvement District and asked to speak with her about her influence in the neighborhood. She readily agreed and even gave me her cell phone number.

When the Rubells bought their 45,000 square-foot building in 1993, Wynwood was far from a location where the world’s wealthy could walk. Still reeling from a night of chaos and rioting in 1990—after a police officer was pardoned for the suspicious killing of a Puerto Rican drug dealer—Wynwood was famous in Miami for violence, theft, and drugs.61 In the late 1980s, for instance, there were efforts to rename the area “Little San Juan” in honor of the Puerto Rican city. In Miami there are several “Little” neighborhoods: Little Haiti, Little Havana, Little Managua, etc. These are all efforts to create community identities in these areas and, ideally, spark some kind of economic rejuvenation along the lines of the “Little Italy” and “Chinatowns” in other U.S. cities. But this effort in Wynwood felt forced and out of touch with the reality of the neighborhood. As one longtime resident told a reporter from The Miami Herald at that time: “Old San Juan? It’s probably better to call it Vietnam because it’s so bad.”62 The crime would continue well after the Rubells purchased their plot of land. Even in the beginning of the 00s, the neighborhood was seen as one of Miami’s most dangerous areas.

By the time that I spoke with Mera Rubell in 2015, her collection had become a central axis for the neighborhood, an artistic anchor for the art world of Wynwood. Even with all of this, however, Mera bristled on the phone and refused to continue speaking with
me for a full interview. The neighborhood, she said, had become a place of parties and nonsense; those damn graffiti walls had ruined what had begun as an exciting and possible venture: to make Miami into a real and serious destination for high-class art. People did not realize, she said, what her collection had done for the neighborhood, for Miami. Wynwood was supposed to be a destination for real art. What it had become was a farce. And her frustration expressed itself with me and my questions.\(^b\)

As with all high-income populations worldwide, one of the characteristics of the super-rich are their propensity for certain kinds of cultural items. Although Sassen’s original formulation of the concept of global cities focused on New York, London, and Tokyo, she has gone on to include Miami among the ranks of these three cities.\(^63\) Central to my argument is the idea that there have been significant global shifts in money, cultural consumption, and the linking between the financialization of art and the speculation of real estate that have yielded the kinds of rapid changes that have taken place in Miami. Instead of focusing just on the new patterns of cultural consumption within the city of Miami, therefore, I believe that it is imperative to understand how the global art market has dramatically shaped the urban environment in the city. These shifts, while all global in nature, have had profound effects at the local level in Wynwood—effects that have been compounded in their effect because of their very global nature.

In his classic book on the subject, Thorstein Veblen argues that overt portrayals of cultural consumption are integral to the demarcation of class and status among elites. Coining the term “conspicuous consumption,” Veblen demonstrates that certain forms of

\(^{b}\) A year after she yelled at me on the phone, the Rubells announced that they would be putting up their Wynwood property for sale and build a new, 100,000-square feet “museum” for their collection in the adjacent Allapattah neighborhood. Guess she really was angry about what Wynwood had become.
visible markers—such as flashy items, valuable gifts, wastefulness, or even extraordinary leisure—are ways in which elites compete with each other for status. Pierre Bourdieu, of course, rejects these overt displays as true markers of class and focuses instead on the habits and practices that are used to establish cultural capital. It is not just the purchasing of items, Bourdieu states, that produces distinction. It is the appropriate use or consumption of the items that leads to its association with class: the bodily motions, verbal cues, and other hints that indicate to well-trained viewers that one possesses a certain level of cultural capital necessary in order to appropriately consume the cultural items. Owning a Picasso painting, a Hirst sculpture, or having the remnants of a Tiravanija dinner: these are all items that demonstrate the levels of economic capital that an individual has for consuming such goods. But then there are the invitations to gallery openings, the front-row seats at special art auctions at Sotheby’s or Christie’s, and the conversations that art patrons can have with artists, collectors, and gallery-owners alike: these are the demonstrations of the embodiments of the cultural and social capital necessary for the “appropriate” consumption of these items.

Art, especially fine art, has long been one of the most poignant of sought-after cultural items for consumption by economic elites. This is not in question here. But what is demonstrably different among the super-rich of the world today is the high levels of financialization of art. Using art as investment has been common for decades. Even with the highly fickle nature of the art market and the incredible shifting tides of taste, artwork remains one of means by which elites invest their money. Yet as Noah Horowitz demonstrates in his comprehensive book on the subject, the financialization of art and the use of art as investment has ballooned in recent years. “Though every era inevitably
possesses its headline-grabbing prices and household names, and the web of social commentary and competition this yields,” he says, “there has also never been such an intense and widespread focus on the economics of art as there is today.”\textsuperscript{68} Especially through the use of art investment funds that enable patrons to place their money in a collection of art ownership, a kind of mutual fund of art, there has never been as much of a connection between the worlds of finance and the worlds of art. Spurred in part by the development of the art advisory profession—staffed by well-paid professors of the history of art, economists, gallerists, and financial experts—there is no lack of available options for investment opportunities in art and reports that translate the theoretical world of art with the jargon of economics.\textsuperscript{69}

This substantial rise in the financialization of art is also a direct result of the globalization of the art world and the spread of these art financial instruments to developing areas of the world. As the World Wealth Report demonstrates, one of the fastest growing regions of the world for HNWI wealth is in Asian countries. The surge of interest in Asian markets has, as well, extended from the world of finance to the world of art. The extension of the Art Basel art fair to Hong Kong in 2013, for instance, and the rising interest in art collection among HNWIs in China, Japan, and elsewhere in Asia has meant that there is now a thriving interest in collecting and investing in art among Asian HNWIs. Added to this mix is the surge in Russian and Middle Eastern buyers that have also entered the market and have driven the interest in art as a financial instrument.

But amidst the surge of interest in art as both a marker of socioeconomic class and a useful financial tool has been the boom of the contemporary art world. Although it remains somewhat ambiguous as to what can be included in the category of
“contemporary”—some sources only include works from artists born after 1945 while others focus on the past fifty years—what is not in question is the dramatic and impressive rise in interest in and prices for contemporary art. Indeed, by 2007, contemporary art reached a new superlative by dominating all sales at both Sotheby’s and Christie’s for the first time. Seasoned patrons of the arts and new, aspiring collectors alike have for the most part abandoned the works of the great masters (many of which have become taken out of the market by museums and elite private collections) for the latest productions from young, new, and/or controversial contemporary artists. According to the Artprice’s 2015 report on the Contemporary Art Market, auction turnover for pieces in this category yielded $1.76 billion: an approximate 1,800% increase since the 2000-2001 season.

The big figures that have been documented at the closing of each auction has spurred a worldwide interest in contemporary art as a financial instrument. Artprice’s report is quite direct in this regard, stating that “the Contemporary art segment is posting attractive returns for investors and has become a key area for international rivalry with the development of the museum industry.” This report, indeed, even details price indexes of individual artists in terms that are overtly financial in nature. In discussing Damien Hirst, for instance, Artprice states how “the auction prices of the British enfant terrible have never recovered: his price index is down -83% since its peak in 2008 and the volume of transactions on his work is down 91%.” But this language notwithstanding, the latest records from the contemporary art world do show just how profitable these investments can be. In 2015, Peter Doig’s Swamped, an oil on canvas painting from 1990, sold at a Christie’s auction for $25.9 million. It had previously sold, in 2002, for a paltry-by-comparison $455,000. Jean-Michel Basquiat’s fame, as well, has continued to grow over
the years with the $8.8 million purchase of his *Orange Sports Figure* at a Sotheby’s auction. In 1992, this very same piece sold for $66,000. The language of these reports is reminiscent of economic speculation: “China slows, but remains potent,” one section of the report states; “Europe’s turnover largely dependent on London,” it states elsewhere.

Beyond the explicit financial benefits to purchasing and selling contemporary art, however, there are the social and experiential qualities associated with this art world. Purchasing contemporary art is no longer merely a process of walking into the local gallery in Chelsea or attending an opening in London. The explosion of global money and interest in contemporary art now means attending art sales on floating megayachts, sipping expensive champagne and cocktails alongside movie stars and pop icons at gallery openings, and attending the never-ending array of parties during art fairs and art weeks. These art socials are now part of the “must do” list for HNWIs worldwide, part of the yearly rotation of parties, forums, and events that global elites participate in.

This phenomenon has been fueled, in part, by the greater emphasis today on the selling of art at art fairs. Whereas gallerists used to run and manage their galleries as the primary loci of selling art, they must now contend with packing, shipping, displaying, and selling their most valuable pieces at art fairs around the world. In the early 1970s, the only major art fair for contemporary art was that of Art Basel. Today, after a post-2000 boom, art fairs are a nearly constant affair. In 2015 alone, *The Art Newspaper* listed 269 fairs across the globe; indeed, more than 1 million people attended just 20 of the top art fairs worldwide. And although the selling of art in art fairs allows for dealers to reach the global audiences, it does create a tremendous amount of stress and work for art dealers. Participation in art fairs—especially the most prestigious—often costs tens of thousands of
dollars. With additional costs for travel, shipping, administration, and insurance, participation in a high-prized fair can easily surpass the $100,000 mark. But the art fairs are whirlwinds not just for the dealers who bring the art to the fairs. Attendance at top art fairs can easily reach the tens of thousands, causing a congested and hectic environment on any given day. Hotels and accommodation prices, moreover, skyrocket, while roads become clogged from the extra traffic. There are, as well, the constant assemblage of satellite fairs that pop up around the major art fairs and the barrage of parties that take place every night. For the global elites of the world, all of this is compounded with even more: conferences, panels, performances, fund-raisers, networking events, cocktail hours, private meetings, networking events, and exhibition openings. And since many HNWIs attend the same events every year, there are also the innumerable conversations and small talk that global elites must participate in: “short conversations with people you like and long conversations with people you don’t,” as artist Walead Beshty puts it.

The kind of “art fair fatigue” that results from these whirlwind events, however, does not prevent art fairs from attracting thousands of attendees and being the fodder for hundreds of media articles. And this makes sense: as roving markets across the globe, art fairs depend on effective marketing campaigns, branding, and reputations in order to keep people interested and attending. People travel great distances not just to see artwork that they might purchase; people travel great distances (and, indeed, pay great sums for lodging, food, and other necessities) in order to see art and also participate in an event: a full package of art, fashion, and parties. Wealthy patrons, especially Ultra-HNWIs, do not actually need to attend art fairs in order to acquire the items that they wish to add to their collections. For
the most part, these high-end collectors employ specialist art buyers to go to auctions, art fairs, and other events to make purchases since it is the art experts that truly know the worth of pieces. What is attractive about certain art fairs—such as Art Basel Miami Beach—is that they offer more than just an environment to purchase art: they offer experiences.

At the heart of this, as Noah Horowitz demonstrates, is the connection between art fairs and the development of the “experience economy”: a market for experiences that rivals those of commodities, goods, and services. The original formulation of the experience economy by Joseph Pine and James Gilmore focuses more on business plans that provide for both entertainment and purchasing—locations such as Rainforest Café for “eatertainment” or Niketown for “shoppertainment.” The emphasis in their work is in identifying the added value that experiences offer for companies. A commodity, they argue, is something that is raw and cheap. Companies turn commodities into goods, thus increasing its value and worth. Eventually, businesses will sell these goods, but will also provide services to their customers: thus increasing the price, yet again, while also providing a larger offering for consumers. Experiences, they argue, are the “fourth economic offering, as distinct from services as services are from goods.” Just as a fancy hotel ambience may raise the price of a cup of coffee by two or threefold, companies can gain a tremendous amount of revenue by constructing and facilitating experiential components to their offerings.

This paradigm of experience emphasizes, of course, the importance of places and settings for the staging of the experience. Using language that parallels with dramaturgical theories of social action made famous by Erving Goffman, Pine and Gilmore’s book is subtitled, “Work is Theater and Every Business is a Stage.” It is the task and craft of
businesses to construct the settings of a place for customers that go beyond mere entertainment. The goal, as they argue, is engagement: the critical component that motivates customers to dwell in a place and spend more. Designs and decorations, lights and sounds, even the small reconstruction of a rainforest (as with the entrances to the Rainforest Café) are all essential in providing the esthetic experience that consumers are seeking and enjoying. It is through a great amount of attention to these details in the setting that business owners can transform “place space” into “a distinctive place.”

Horowitz links the experience economy to contemporary art and to art fairs. “One may even suggest,” he says, “that contemporary art fairs constitute near perfect embodiments of the experience economy’s penetration into the cultural sector. Not only do they adjoin buyers and sellers of contemporary art goods and services, but they streamline the contemporary art experience into a tightly packaged event—a lifestyle—for the international business and social elite.” These are the events that appear all over the local and national media: private openings with high security, celebrity spotlights, and yes, even 50 cakes spoon-fed to guests by 48 volunteers and 2 high-end art collectors. Attendees find that art fairs become social gatherings that cannot be missed, functions that they must attend in order to remain relevant. And it is through this process of purchasing art and attending the right social functions that global elites are able to continue distinguishing themselves. “This explains,” Horowitz continues, “why there are an increasing number of those within the art world who consume the art lifestyle but do not (yet) collect.” The goal is not to merely join the ranks of collectors who sit at Sotheby’s and Christi’s auctions but rather to join “the art world” of hanging out with artists, attending parties, shaking hands, flirting, and taking selfies to post on social media.
Wynwood, Miami | Welcome to the “Global Neighborhood”

Central to Sassen’s exploration of Global Cities is the demonstration of how these places are reformulated due to the large influx of money, finance, and people. The increase in the knowledge economy today has resulted in increased options for places to work and places to live. With a shift from material production to intellectual production, from how-to to know-how, the link between work and places has become less overt. Unlike the labor markets of previous decades, the knowledge economy of today does not require particular material goods or locations in order to thrive. “Places,” says strategy expert Donald Haider, “no longer define where people work and live as they once did.”

Instead of attracting employees and businesses solely through railroads, cheap labor, or tax incentives, places now draw in workers and talent through the offering of services and leisure activities. Museums, fairs, breweries, concert halls: these are the new sources of increasing labor markets for cities, towns, and districts. And as these products can be offered in a multitude of places, there results a kind of conflict among places: a constant push for branding, marketing, and retention among places across the globe.

There are efforts at marketing an image, for instance, through ad campaigns and branding efforts. Places now seek to interject themselves into the global marketplace with edgy catchphrases and appeals: “West Virginia, Wild and Wonderful,” “Atlanta, Center of the ’New South,’” “Seattle, Leading Center of the Pacific Northwest.”

What is important is place distinction, place difference.

The global art market has now become one of the key ingredients for distinguishing places around the globe and creating needed revenue streams. With the rise of prices in the
contemporary art world, the paparazzi-like blog posts on lavish art lifestyles, and the deep pockets of the globetrotting elites has come an interest from places worldwide to possess the cultural attractions that these HNWIs seek to enjoy. And it does not just include art fairs. Cities around the world—especially cities that have struggled in the post-industrial age—turn to high-class cultural offerings such as museums, concert halls, sculpture gardens, and much else in order to attract patrons. The use of museums to spark economic revitalization in particular even has a name: the “Bilbao Effect.” Named after Bilbao, Spain, for its successes from constructing the Frank Gehry-designed branch of New York’s Guggenheim art museum in their city, the Bilbao Effect describes how cities turn to major art museums as one means of attracting cultural patrons from the world over.95 Opened in 1997, the Bilbao Guggenheim created a fervor in cities the world over trying to replicate the same results: another Guggenheim and a Louvre in Abu Dhabi, a new museum of Chinese contemporary art in Hong Kong, even a museum of contemporary art in North Adams, Massachusetts.96 As Maria Fernandez Sabau, a cultural and museum consultant, told The Guardian, “Yes, many of my clients say the same thing: give us the Guggenheim. Often the exact same building!”97

This development of places due to the global art market is different from other analyses of art, creativity, and cities, the most famous of which is Richard Florida’s wildly popular work on the creative class.98 Published in 2002 and rising to immediate fame, Florida’s book argues that members of the “creative class” seek for and create new, meaningful modes of work and leisure to shape the cities in which they live so that they are more attractive, prosperous, and economically successful. With an emphasis on meaning and imagination, these members of the creative class coalesce in certain places
and work towards innovation: a critical variable for economic markets in post-industrial cities. Although Florida’s work has been severely criticized on a variety of points—for ambiguity and lack of analytical precision in defining who is included in the “creative class,” for demonstrations that creative cities actually perpetuate social and economic inequalities in cities, and for the circular logic in his argument—his emphasis that “creative” individuals spark economic vitality in cities has become a mantra for investors and others interested in urban rejuvenation. His ideas perpetuate from the platforms of panels, conferences, and from the wide readership of his book, but they are also pushed from the company that he founded: the Creative Class Group.

With Wynwood, however, the reality is that it was not the presence of any assortment of a “creative class” that led to neighborhood change. Indeed, instead of being a cause or precursor to the massive change in the neighborhood, the development of a creative class hub was the eventual goal for property developers and real estate moguls. As Jessica Goldman, CEO of Goldman Properties, one of the largest investors and owners of property in Wynwood, said in a video on the BBC News website: “We wanted to create the center for the creative class, a neighborhood that was geared towards creative people” (emphasis mine). Wynwood, in short, was made to look like a site of the creative class, a location that software companies, app developers, collaborative work spaces, and other companies of the modern creative economy can desire to work at. Tied to places in urban environments, the experience economy shows what happens when the dramaturgical emphasis is enacted in certain settings in cities. Although the former paradigm of city development focused on how urban projects spur consumption and entertainment, new waves of urban theory reverse the causal arrow. Consumption and entertainment, in short,
is what produces the urban development. And in a world where the global flows of people and capital has increased, the emphasis on the arts and culture—the emphasis on establishing an experience economy attached to place, in short—becomes ever more important.102

As I will argue in the coming pages, Wynwood is the location of where the aforementioned ingredients of the rise in global wealth, the surge of interest in contemporary art, and the fixation on using contemporary art as a financial instrument all collide with these new uses and manipulations of the experience economy of places across the globe. Although there has been a long lineage of the connection between art and places, Wynwood is an example of what happens when the global cultural markets connect with place construction to yield what I call a “global neighborhood”: a significant node in the roadmap of cultural consumption and, as a result, economic investment for global elites. Whether as locations for ideas summits (Aspen), film festivals (Cannes), or elite VIP parties (the Hamptons), global neighborhoods become important places whereby cultural consumption and experiences join social networking among global elites. Instead of stasis and dwelling in these neighborhood, there is constant flow. Instead of communitas, there is consumption. And amidst all of the events, global neighborhoods offer the events whereby global elites can network with each other and maintain network closure of money, resources, information, and other goods.103 Wynwood did not bubble up from a demographic soup of creatives but was, instead, a neighborhood that was transformed by the global art market and the flow of HNWIs through the city every year searching for both art and experience, commodities and parties. What they left in their wake was a desire among others to perpetuate that experience of art consumption.
Wynwood shares many commonalities with other post-industrial neighborhoods while also demonstrating new and important differences relevant to urban sociologists, sociologists of culture, city planners, and others. As with other areas with run-down manufacturing buildings and leftover warehouses, Wynwood bears an urban physicality that is attractive for today’s popular merging of the industrial with the chic.\(^{104}\) There are, as well, the boutiques, breweries, and baristas that are also used as attractions for urban elites.\(^{105}\) But these telltale signs on the surface of the neighborhood distract from the larger global currents at play in the development of the neighborhood. From the restructuring of art worlds to the reconfiguration of the art collector’s role, from competing art interests to the rapid pace of creative destruction, Wynwood demonstrates what happens when global circuits of art combine with entrepreneurial interests in places. As Hari, the button vendor, told me after reading a draft of this chapter: there is a reason that Art Basel chose Miami and not Wichita.

Every morning during my dissertation research, I would turn on my radio to the NPR station of Miami to listen to the news during the first few hours of my day. For several months, there was a message by one of the station’s major underwriters, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). As I heard several times a day, “This message is brought to you by the National Endowment for the Arts. Art works.” I heard this announcement dozens of times before I chuckled one day and thought to myself about the parallels between this commercial and my dissertation research. It seemed like a hilarious coincidence as I sat in my apartment writing up field notes or making plans for interviews or activities. Art works, as I indeed was finding, but for whom? Art works, but to what end? Art works, but with what effects? This dissertation is centered on these kinds of
questions and this kind of reasoning. In the following pages, I demonstrate just how art works in Wynwood and what we can learn by it.

* * *

The chapters of this dissertation are split as follows.

In Chapter 2, I present a detailed account of the history of Wynwood and how it became the arts district of Miami today. Of primary interest in this chapter is to delineate the physical layout of Wynwood (an important aspect for considering places and place construction) and tie in the changes in the neighborhood with the arrival of Art Basel Miami Beach. I delineate how Wynwood became the arts and culture node of Miami amidst larger shifts in global art and Miami and set the scene, in short, for the analyses that I conduct here.

In Chapter 3, I present findings from ethnographic work that I conducted with community members of Wynwood at the Dorothy Quintana Community Center and place entrepreneurs at meetings of the Wynwood Business Improvement District to show how the neighborhood of Wynwood became bifurcated along lines of consumption. Instead of understanding gentrification as simply the process of residential displacement of lower-income individuals by wealthier patrons, I push to examine the case of gentrification of Wynwood as one geared towards the production of a new place of consumption for particular individuals. The northern and southern halves of Wynwood were split, I show, along the lines of businesses, goods, services, and events that were geared towards non-resident members of Wynwood.

In Chapter 4, I examine how the meanings of place in Wynwood and the development of the experience economy therein affected the work of street artists in the
neighborhood. Although Wynwood is known for its galleries and collections, many view Wynwood as a street art haven. The myriad of street art, indeed, is one of the main attractions for people to come to visit. But while the work that street artists perform is essential for the economic vitality of the neighborhood, they often go unpaid for their work. In this chapter, I show how the status obtained from being a part of the experience of Wynwood provided the alternative remuneration of value for street artists. In addition, as part of the staging process of the experience economy, many street artists joined the ranks of other place entrepreneurs in the neighborhood and gained access to a new network of power brokers that implemented street art into other projects.

In Chapter 5, I present findings from the Catholic church in the neighborhood: Corpus Christi Catholic Church. As a longstanding institution in the city of Miami, Corpus Christi had survived immense transitions in its surrounding areas. In this chapter, however, I demonstrate how Corpus Christi adapted to the shift in understanding of Wynwood as an arts district by constructing their own art museum/chapel. Of importance is the idea of exclusion and exclusivity: Wynwood has become an arts district, but much of this art is inaccessible or incomprehensible to actual residents in the neighborhood and surrounding areas. But high class art, the church leaders say, does not have to be exclusionary. By building their own colonial art museum, church leaders tap into the meanings of the neighborhood as an arts district yet provide their own democratized version of the consumption of art. In the process, however, the leaders of the church also develop the new project along the lines of the experiential economy that focuses on the experience of elite cultural consumption.
Chapter 2: The History of the “Arts District”

*Yah, but how do I know if you’re legit?*

I had ridden my bike up to Hari as he stood outside of a building in Wynwood smoking a cigarette. Since this was early on in my research, I was interested in establishing ties with anybody I could in the neighborhood, so this often meant stopping and chatting with any stranger that seemed willing. He had sunglasses on with a tie-dye band going from the end of each leg so he could hang them from his neck, and his shirt was unbuttoned halfway down his chest. His graying chest hairs bulged out of the open space in his shirt, and he was wearing a smirk on his face. I could tell he was not a tourist—no cell phone in hand taking pictures, no wandering gaze towards the street art on the walls, no walk with purpose but rather the ambling stance of a cigarette smoker who is in his element—so I thought I would try to chat with him about the neighborhood. I gave Hari my pitch about being a graduate student, about my interests in Wynwood, and about the study I was conducting. I had just purchased a box of business cards with the Princeton University logo on them before moving to Wynwood to conduct my research and I was excited to use them in securing respondents for my study. Everybody seemed to be impressed by those business cards, but Hari was the first person who questioned their validity. *You’re not a property developer, are you?* he asked with deep suspicion in his voice. Nope. *Interested in buying property?* Nope. I handed him my card. I’m just a student, I told him, doing research for my dissertation. *Yah, but how do I know if you’re legit?* he asked me. Well, I told him, everything’s you would want to
know is online. Just look me up. Okay. I’m gonna go pick up my son from school. Maybe we can talk another time.

I figured that this was just a polite way for Hari to avoid talking to me, so I went on my way thinking that I would never see him again. Little did I know, however, that this interaction would be the first of several meetings, conversations, and interviews that I would have with Hari, and that this initial encounter would mark the beginning of a long-lasting friendship with him and his family. At first, he was guarded during our encounters—refusing to give me his cell phone number, for instance, or not consenting to recording our interview—but he eventually grew to trust me and welcome me in to his circle of family and friends.

I saw Hari a week or two later as I was walking in the neighborhood showing some friends around. He was sitting in his car about to head out, but he waved me over. With a cheeky grin on my face, I asked him about the interview that I had mentioned the first time we met, and he nodded his head. \textit{Yah, you checked out, Princeton boy. But why haven’t you written on your blog since November?} It was June. We both laughed at the depth of Hari’s investigation of me online and made an appointment to meet up that week. He handed me his business card with his information on it. \textit{Email me. Don’t call. I never pick up the office phone. But if you do call the office phone, leave a message and I’ll call you back.}

I was lucky to have stumbled upon Hari: his parents set up their clothing and textiles business in Wynwood during the 1960s, so he has been coming into Wynwood nearly every day for the past 45 years. As a Jewish man with a button company, Hari was one of the last vestiges of the old garment industry days in the former fashion district,
now referred to as Wynwood. He met his wife in Wynwood, one of the Colombian employees of an adjacent factory. His kids would eventually play in the factory and in the streets as they grew up amidst the buttons and the machinery. And as the neighborhood changed, global trade agreements were signed, and globalization pushed the garment industries overseas, Hari put up his property for sale. Nobody really wanted buttons anymore, but they were voracious for property in Wynwood.

Hence his initial suspicion of me. I get a lot of people calling me every day talking out of their asses about buying this place, he confided in me early on. Constantly. All day. They spew their lies and their crap. Really? You want to buy this property? Show me the money. Oh, you can’t sign just yet? Get out of here, stop wasting my time. Hari thought that I was one of these speculating property developers pretending to be a nice guy, so he had initially given me the cold shoulder. Although he is generally suspicious of people’s intentions and motives, a character trait that I came to see over the time of our friendship, he was especially on edge during the days that we met. Hari had just placed the property of his button factory on the market and he was being bombarded by phone calls, emails, letters, and visitors. I didn’t know if you were one of those kooks—I had to make sure you checked out!

The more time I spent with Hari, the more I realized the intense level of attention that he was getting for his property. He and I met for a coffee and a stroll on a weekly basis, and I always stopped by his business whenever I was nearby just to say hi. He was one of those men who bore an ease of life that originated from the knowledge that he was sitting on a real estate bonanza. He was a millionaire before being a millionaire, a man

---

*Years after this first encounter, Hari would read a copy of this dissertation and comment about how he was one of the last surviving dinosaurs of the previous grouping that made this an organized place. He told how he was a part of the place that it was before. Not art, not parties, but manufacturing of apparel.*
who won the lottery of life, as he would say, and so he didn’t have to worry so much anymore. *People want this, and I have it!* He walked around the streets peeling off street art stickers from curbs, walls, lamp posts, and other surfaces so that he could add them to his enormous collection of stickers in the entrance of his building. He drank coffee all day long and bracketed each cup with a cigarette. And he read the news constantly—newspapers, blogs, news collections, Twitter—usually of the conservative bent.

As a result, he seemed to always be outside in his unbuttoned shirt and with his sunglasses on. With every visit to his business, Hari would update me on the latest sales and goings-on in the neighborhood (details that I confirmed on the Miami-Dade Property Appraiser’s website) and other gossip that was hot at the moment. He would complain of the posers and liars that wouldn’t leave him alone and just kept trying to get him to sign on the dotted line. Instead of paying big bucks to have a broker or real estate representative sell his property, Hari was going at it alone. As a result, he had to learn the slow and hard way about contracts, taxes, deposits, and scams. The rapid rise of interest in the neighborhood, the explosion of notoriety, and (most important to him) the incredible rise in property values: all of it was a confusing, yet exciting, end to his decades in the neighborhood. It was partially for all of this that Hari began our first interview with the sobering statement: “If you want to understand Wynwood, if you really want to get it, you have to read science fiction.”

Hari will appear time and again throughout this dissertation, but for now I will leave this tableau of his experiences with property developers in order to step back and place his craziness into context. Wynwood is a small neighborhood, and like all neighborhoods it has had to adjust to municipal, state, federal, and global currents. Hari’s
science fiction life in 2014, indeed, is but the product of multiple variables that converged in that moment to produce the real estate whirlwind that he was now a part of. In this chapter, I present the trajectory of Wynwood and couch the neighborhood’s transitions in larger shifts of art at the city and global level to document the significant changes in place and placemaking that have occurred in Wynwood. Beginning as one of Miami’s first residential neighborhoods, Wynwood was shaped by the larger trends of money, leisure, and travel in the United States during the 1900s-1920s. As construction and manufacturing booms took place in the city from the 1920s-1940s, Wynwood became an industrial sector of the city: a place for garment production and the main site for much of Miami’s clothing manufacturing. As with other manufacturing centers in the United States, Wynwood declined in the post-World War II years. At the same time, the neighborhood became the Puerto Rican barrio of Miami and gained new prominence as a neighborhood of blight, violence, and rioting.

It was at this nadir of the neighborhood, however, that many of the initial steps towards placemaking occurred. Areas of blight in cities become problematic places for city bureaucrats and politicians and are often seen as blank slates for redevelopment. These areas go through a process of “territorial stigmatization,” in the words of Loic Wacquant, whereby they transition from places (full of meaning) to empty spaces (voids) that must be addressed through policy declarations and police activity.¹ To put this another way, low-income areas in cities become seen as non-places: absent of meaning, worthwhile infrastructure, or relevant social life. This phenomenon of becoming a non-place did occur in Wynwood over the course of the final decades of the 20th century, as I detail here. By the 1990s, there was “nothing” in Wynwood, as several of those I
interviewed told me. Today’s manifestations of the art district, however, occurred when art entrepreneurs tapped into this perceived absence of meaning and materiality in Wynwood to create a new semblance of place. Without changing the geography nor much of the materiality in Wynwood, these cultural pioneers brought with them a profound shift in meaning through the arts—with a particular emphasis on appropriate consumption. The old warehouses and walls remained, but they became filled with galleries and collections. The old houses and families stayed put, but the visitors to Wynwood changed. With the global shifts in contemporary art and art fairs, cultural entrepreneurs ensured that some of the wealthiest individuals on the planet coursed through the downtrodden streets of the neighborhood.

In short, much of the materiality and geography of Wynwood remained the same. What changed, instead, were the meanings associated with the neighborhood and the development of a new environment for consumption. Over the course of just one decade, Wynwood shifted from blight to bright, from ghetto to worldwide destination for art. And almost everyone that I spoke to agreed that Wynwood had, indeed, become the arts district of Miami. Underneath this semblance of coherence on the understanding of the place of Wynwood, however, there lay a tremendous amount of confusion and divergence on what this all meant. There is a “stickiness” to place, as the opening epigraph of the introduction alludes to.² Shifts in meaning can take place, movement of peoples can happen, but there are some elements of places that change with more time and, indeed, may never disappear. The history of the neighborhood presented here establishes the history of the neighborhood to demonstrate some of the elements that will “stick” in the chapters to come.
The Larger Context: Miami as a Global City | Overview of Waves of Immigration

Ever since the early years of Miami, when Henry Flagler commissioned and bankrolled the Florida East Coast Railway all the way to the Southern end of the Florida mainland, Miami has been a significant outlier among major cities in the U.S. for patterns of immigration and investments. Even as early as the Reconstruction period, Miami was facing issues of assimilation and immigration that other cities would not have to contend with for decades to come. Although most blacks left the South for more favorable areas in the North after the Civil War, a movement known as the Great Migration, there were a great many who were drawn even further south to Miami to fill the labor needs of building the new railroad and constructing a new city. It was there that these African American blacks encountered Caribbean blacks—mainly from the Bahamas—who had arrived for the same reason: the desire to work. Caribbean blacks, however, rarely identified with the same racial struggles as African American blacks. They were not used to the servile status of blacks in the U.S., for instance, and lacked the sense of stigma that was attached to skin color. This difference in worldview notwithstanding, they were both treated with the same racial denigration by white business owners and were forced to live in the same worker camps around what is today called Overtown, the neighborhood on the southern edge of Wynwood.³ This would lead, of course, to significant social friction among the black population in early Miami. It would take approximately two to three decades before Miami’s African American and black Bahamian communities reached a point where they cooperated through collaborative social institutions and thrived together against wider social exclusion.⁴
By the mid-1920s, Miami had become a popular destination for vacation goers of all walks of life: the railroad now made it significantly easier for travelers to reach Miami, its proximity to the Caribbean meant easy access to alcohol during Prohibition, and the year-round sun ensured that there would be no snow on the ground in December. As a result, Blacks in Miami were joined at the turn of the century by Jews from New York and other major cities who were initially attracted to Miami as a vacation spot. As the Great Depression hit hard on Miami, these Jewish immigrants began buying up property across the city. Focusing on Miami Beach in particular, these families established a significant enclave on this sliver of the city—an enclave that remains to this day.5 In addition to choosing the city for its leisure benefits, Jews from New York also found Miami to be amenable for production in garment industries. As they came to vacation, Jewish business owners found the skilled and non-unionized immigrant workforce perfect for garment production and settled in the city to set up shop. They came for the sun; they stayed for the business.6

By far the most significant waves of immigration to Miami, however, took place in the second half of the twentieth century. On January 1, 1959, Fidel Castro overturned the Batista dictatorship and declared a new revolutionary government in charge. Although he was not initially vocal about his future Marxist-Leninist platform, it was not very long before businesses, homes, and wealth were all nationalized under his regime. Thousands of wealthy Cuban families, those with the most to lose from the sociopolitical changes, left the small island as political exiles and landed in their former vacation spots throughout Miami. Approximately 135,000-250,000 Cubans arrived in Miami during those first three years after the revolution, a massive figure that shook the city’s social
framework and established a new future for the city.\textsuperscript{7} Even children were placed on planes to leave the island without their parents. Indeed, the federal government joined forces with the Archdiocese of Miami to send the approximately 14,000 unaccompanied Cuban minors who arrived in Miami to foster homes throughout the U.S., an effort that was dubbed “Operation Peter Pan.”\textsuperscript{8} The Cuban Revolution, in short, began the most significant wave of immigration to Miami in the city’s history. And although immigrants from other Latin American countries also continued to flow into the city, the arrival of these new Cubans dwarfed all of the other numbers by comparison. It was at this point that Miami became Cuba’s second-largest city. These early Cuban exiles formed an intense ethnic and economic enclave in Miami thanks to a stable immigrant market community, access to cheap labor through social networks, and access to capital that was based on an applicant’s business reputation from back in Cuba.\textsuperscript{9} Joined by Nicaraguans, Haitians, and others, these years of Miami history would see the city become the Hispanic city that it is considered today.

These significant waves of immigration altogether shifted Miami from a primarily white vacation city to the capital of Latin America.\textsuperscript{10} Indeed, so different is Miami’s immigration and processes of assimilation that it has even turned classic sociological models on their heads. Drawing from the classic work of Portes and Stepnick, social historian Melanie Shell-Weiss describes the development of “the Miami school” of immigration studies. Whereas “the Chicago school analyzed the immigration experience from the standpoint of the receiving society, the Miami school placed immigrants’ own viewpoints at the center of their analyses.” In the end, “rather than adapting to existing systems, these social scientists explored ways that immigrants reshaped social structures
to exert their own power in receiving societies.”

Miami, in short, reversed classic models of immigration and assimilation.

Aside from being shaped by large waves of immigration from Latin America and the Caribbean, Miami grew over the course of the 20th century due to significant sources of capital within—and flowing through—the city. Primarily fueled by the illicit drug trade and the billions of dollars that it produced, a great number of banks began to appear and settle in Miami over the course of the late 70s and early 80s. Although it is easy to sensationalize or dramatize this period in Miami’s history, it really was a time of big money and dangerous streets, million-dollar homes purchased with briefcases of cash, and no end of twenty dollar bills with traces of cocaine. Those were the days of big money in the collection plate, said Father José Luis Menéndez, the parish priest of the Catholic church that is a part of this study, during lunch one day. I looked at him and wondered if he was kidding; I half-laughed just in case this was a joke. No, for real! Those were the days when you would find hundred-dollar bills in the collection plate out of nowhere. Lots of twenties. You know how it goes. I kept looking at him with a questioning look on my face, so he continued: It was to fulfill promises, Mijo. You know: God help me come out alive, God help me do such-and-such, God help me and I will give to the church or to a charity. So it was them keeping up their end of the bargain. God kept them alive, so they came to church to give money.

---

b It might be tough to follow, but there will be a myriad of Spanglish slang terms dotting the entirety of this dissertation. This is not meant as an effort to distract or frustrate. I am, instead, more interested in using the seamless transitions between English and Spanish as a way of providing a thicker description of Miami life and narrative. People in Miami rarely speak only in Spanish or in English, so I seek to preserve the flavor of the narratives of many of my respondents in this dissertation by including their normal “Spanglish” flare. As a result, I do not emphasize shifts in language in the narratives presented here with shifts in typeface. It is all presented here as it is in real life: as a seamless thread. In this case, Mijo is a shortening of Mi hijo (“my son”).
As the federal crackdown on drug activity in the 1980s nearly eliminated many of the drug markets, the economy in South Florida began to diversify into legitimate activities. Although a sizeable number of banks had to close due to the reduction in the flow of dollars coursing through the city, the ones that remained were able to use their holdings of cash and capital from the heyday of drug-running to establish strong market roots in the city. Drug money got the banks started, conscious efforts by businessmen and entrepreneurs attempted to keep them from closing, and global shifts in money kept them going. “In little over a decade,” writes sociologist Jan Nijman, “Miami’s banking scene shifted from a small number of parochial commercial institutions into a national and international banking center with strong ties to the Caribbean and Latin America, and with a diversified cast of participants, including major banks from the United States and the world.”14 By the 1990s, Miami was a new locus for large numbers of multinational corporations. Once a tourist location with multiple quiet and comfortable retirement homes, Miami was transformed into an economic metropolis at the center of the Western Hemisphere.15 Even as early as 1996, the economy of Dade County (the county where Miami is located, now known as Miami-Dade County) surpassed the GNP of Colombia.16 And through an insistent and strong culture of growth—perpetuated by the “exceptionally strong consensus” among elites and “the materialist culture that prevails in this city”—Miami has now become an important actor among global cities, especially in the areas of tourism, international trade, and real estate.17
Like many of the north-south avenues in the city of Miami, NW 2nd Ave takes the driver through an uninterrupted journey of neighborhoods that suddenly transform as one crosses dividing streets and avenues. At its southernmost apex lies the easternmost tip of Little Havana: a neighborhood known as the northernmost barrio of Cuba. Waves of Cuban exiles arrived to this neighborhood alongside the Miami River after the Cuban revolution in 1959, with more coming with the Mariel boat lift in the 1980s. Cafes and restaurants throughout this area are equipped today with the sturdiest of espresso machines that experienced servers use to prepare the strongest caffeine kick: the infamous and sugary cortadito, the Cuban espresso. The avenue continues north over the Miami River and breaks into the skyscrapers and traffic congestions that symbolize the best, and worst, of Downtown Miami. It is a dirty place, one that has the trappings of a typical metropolitan downtown—high density, lots of panhandlers, the mid-day lunch rush hour—yet lacks the attractions that would draw in visitors. The Miami Metro System, for instance, the above-ground line that gets you around the downtown area, circuits in and out of buildings and provides much needed shade to roads underneath, but it is underused by locals. Just a few blocks north of Downtown lies Overtown: an area that has been perpetually blighted and scorned for the entirety of Miami’s history. Formerly known as “Colored Town,” this neighborhood has been populated by blacks in Miami since Caribbean blacks began arriving in large numbers to help build the railroad down to the city in the 19th century. At the time, they were forced to live there. By the 20th century, Jim Crow laws and racist zoning policies kept blacks in the neighborhood even as they performed, served, and worked elsewhere in the city. And by the 21st
century, structural conditions of inequality and urban poverty continue to keep blacks in the blighted neighborhood.\textsuperscript{19}

But then there is Wynwood: a stretch of properties that starts with Overtown at its south and ends with Little Haiti to its north.\textsuperscript{20} Today, this area of approximately 96 city blocks is flanked on the west by the massive I-95 highway; to the north, there is the equally-immense I-195 highway; and to the east is the Florida East Coast (FEC) Railway.\textsuperscript{21} These three physical structures create three of the four borders of Wynwood (the fourth boundary is that of NW 20\textsuperscript{th} street in the south, where Overtown begins). And although Wynwood has been a center of artistic, economic, and political attention in recent years, Wynwood remains one of the most forgotten and understudied neighborhoods in Miami.\textsuperscript{22}
Wynwood was created through an annexation vote in 1913 by Miami politicians seeking to expand the north-south boundaries of Miami. At the time, the area that would become Wynwood was composed of large fields ready to be developed by the middle-class and wealthy families seeking to build their own single-family bungalows or developers seeking to build residential apartments. The construction of I-95 was still a long way off, and most of the roads in the area were gravel farm paths. Just a few blocks west from what would become the current center of the Wynwood neighborhood, for instance, was George B. Cellon’s 36 lots of fruit groves. George’s father, John A. Cellon, was said to be the first man to bring citrus trees to Florida: he set up his farms near Gainesville from 1836-1881. Continuing on this tradition of citrus production, George brought the craft to Miami in 1900 and used his lot on NW 7th avenue to both grow citrus and experiment with breeding mangoes and avocados.

With the groves nearby, the FEC rail line cutting through the area, and the ocean not a far way off, the fields around Cellon’s property were prime for construction. Development began in earnest during a housing boom in the 1920s and 1930s and continued relatively unabated until the beginning of World War II. Construction in Wynwood was quick and impressive due to a variety of reasons. First, the FEC railway eased the transportation of goods and materials straight into the developing neighborhood and ensured that both businesses and property developers were able to build and grow with minimal transportation issues. Second, there was a substantial amount of interest in establishing businesses in Miami, and the growth of the city meant that there was a prime opportunity to build these enterprises from the ground up. Coca-Cola, for instance, built a massive bottling plant in Wynwood less than 10 years after Wynwood was established.
and was followed shortly thereafter by an orange juice plant. And third, construction in Wynwood was spurred through the tremendous amount of immigration of individuals relocating to Miami. Having heard of the “Magic City” from advertising, films, songs, and the popular press, droves of families and pleasure seekers alike took the train to establish new roots in the distant city. In just a few short years, Wynwood would become “one of Miami’s earliest suburbs.”

These early waves of businesses and residents began establishing initial spatial divisions in the area, many of which remain today. The primary residential area of the neighborhood remained to the north of NW 29th street and stretched to around NW 36th street. Although there would be spaces for some businesses, such as a bakery and other warehouses, the area north of 29th street would become dominated by homes, apartments, and a new public park constructed in 1917. So successful was this early development of Wynwood that new construction projects were advertised to wealthy patrons in publications such as The Miami News from the 1920s to the 1940s. To the south of NW 29th street, however, most of the construction efforts were geared towards the industry and manufacturing businesses that took the opportunity to set up in Miami in the 1920s. Based almost entirely in the production of clothing—with a particular emphasis on sportswear—these early businesses were integral in the shaping of the southern half of Wynwood as the Garment District of Miami.
These garment industries in Wynwood, however, went hand in hand with the development of Miami as a tourist destination and business center. From 1900-1920, as Wynwood was being established as a residential neighborhood, Palm Beach was becoming a national destination for tourism and recreation. The flurry of advertising and marketing of the beaches, spas, and entertainment venues in the new city allowed for Palm Beach to become solidified in the minds of many as an attractive tourist destination—especially during the winter months. Far from being an isolated event, this development of Palm Beach took place during the time of rapid commodification of leisure and leisure activities in the United States, what Gregory P. stone characterizes as the transition from the leisure class to the leisure mass.30 Spurred in part by the newfound wealth among many in the United States prior to the Great Depression, thousands of families across the United States were interested in spending their capital on trips, dips, and outings.

With all of the booming construction efforts, Miami was ready to receive tourists and welcome their dollars. One of the first major construction projects in Miami, indeed, was Henry Flagler’s lavish Royal Palm Hotel: a welcoming oasis for the new wealthy class right at the end of Flagler’s own FEC Railway. With the extravagant touches that characterized the time—and continues to characterize the city today—Flagler and others tapped into the leisure mass to make their wealth in the new, uncharted lands of Miami. The weather was good, the hotels were new, and, most importantly, there was plenty of rum and spirits to go around during the Prohibition era. Being so close to the Caribbean meant that getting alcohol was cheap and easy. The rum run, indeed, was one of the biggest business opportunities for entrepreneurs in Miami and eventually became one of
the major trade channels between Florida and the Caribbean.\textsuperscript{31} Even since its beginnings, then, Miami has been a place for the hustle.\textsuperscript{c}

And then there was the plethora of activities that visitors could enjoy all year long. “Other cities,” says historian T.D. Allman, “have started as forts or foundries, trading centers or ports. Miami is surely the only city of its size to start out as a place to get away from it all.”\textsuperscript{32} As an unintended consequence of this shift in leisure came the development of a prominent industry in Miami. Unlike in the northeast, Miami’s weather allowed for constant golf games, tennis matches, and swimming sessions. As visitors arrived to the city they found that they needed wardrobes to match the plethora of activities that they would be doing.\textsuperscript{33} As the housing and construction boom took place in Miami over the course of the 1920s-1940s, therefore, a myriad of garment factories came to respond to this emerging need for sportswear and clothing for leisure activities. So significant were the demands, in fact, that Miami would grow to become the third largest producer of sportswear in the United States in just two decades.\textsuperscript{34}

The rise of Palm Beach’s notoriety and the subsequent demand for sportswear in Miami spurred the construction of garment industries throughout the city, the vast majority of which were located in the southern half of Wynwood. In addition to the high demand for sportswear, however, there were also laws, regulations, and employment bases that were fortunate for aspiring garment entrepreneurs. Jewish business owners from New York City who initially left the Big Apple for the Magic City because of the better weather and year-round leisure found a trained and non-unionized workforce when they arrived to establish their factories, two key ingredients for the eventual success of the garment industry in Miami. Women who had migrated to Miami from the Caribbean

\textsuperscript{c} It was little facts such as these, indeed, that led me to call Miami “the sunny city full of shady people.”
and Latin America were already capable seamstresses who were excited about the prospects of joining the labor force. The recent arrival of these immigrants, coupled with the fact that the city was still in its infancy, meant that there were still very few efforts at unionization throughout Miami. Thus, by the 1950s, the heyday of garment production in Miami and in Wynwood, there were more than 250 garment factories throughout the City of Miami with the largest concentration found in Wynwood. And so it was that two of the excluded minority populations in Miami—Jews and Hispanic women—were instrumental in the development of the garment industry in Miami and Wynwood. By 1951, fashion was “the single largest industrial employer in all of Miami-Dade County,” and Wynwood was the garment district.

Little San Juan | The Making of a Puerto Rican Neighborhood

The development of the Garment District in Wynwood took place over the course of fifty years and resulted in a thriving neighborhood with homes, warehouses, and a slew of businesses. In that time, Miami shifted from being a sleepy town with plenty of potential to a major center of production and speculation. The initial investments in the City of Miami by individuals such as Julia Tuttle, Henry Flagler, Carl Fischer, and others at the turn of the century had ballooned by the time that Wynwood’s industrial center had grown to a thriving epicenter of garment production. The economic boom coupled with the development of air transport to/from Miami so as to enable access to new international markets; this development enabled, as well, the influx of a large number of immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean.
Although most studies of the Latinization of Miami have focused on the post-1960s arrival of Cubans, Nicaraguans, Haitians, and others, the real processes of Latinization began with the industrialization of the city brought about by garment production and World War II. By the end of World War II, indeed, Miami had already gained a reputation for its Latin flavor. And a significant portion of the Latin presence prior to the end of World War II came from Puerto Rican migration to Miami. The earliest documentation of Puerto Rican arrivals to Miami dates back to the 1940s. Wealthy families and agricultural businessmen from Puerto Rico descended upon Miami and began to establish their own businesses in agriculture, real estate, and other ventures. Miami was an obvious choice for these economic elites because of the city’s use as a connection point with Latin America. The US federal government, moreover, encouraged business owners in the US to recruit and hire Puerto Ricans to fill in the labor gaps in low-wage and low-skill jobs brought about by World War II. The fact that Puerto Ricans had US citizenship meant that they were a more attractive population than those from other Caribbean and Latin American countries. This initial group of Puerto Rican migrants were followed in the 1950s by others who were sponsored by the Migration Division of Puerto Rico’s Department of Labor and supported by the US federal government.

Many of these families would benefit from the varied job opportunities for both men and women in Miami, all of which contributed to the growth of Wynwood as a Puerto Rican neighborhood. Although jobs in construction, agriculture, and the hotel industries would be populated by the Puerto Rican men, their wives, sisters, and mothers were rushed into jobs in the booming garment industry that sought their skills. The New
Yorker business owners, moreover, were already used to hiring Puerto Ricans and were willing to continue doing so in Miami. With the plethora of job availability at the time, therefore, Puerto Ricans would come to dominate nearly half of the garment workforce by 1950. Wynwood was an attractive neighborhood for these families because of the garment industry jobs available and because of its close proximity to Miami Beach. The men would wake up, hop over the causeway, and get started in their construction or service jobs. The women, conversely, would be able to walk to work in the garment factories in the neighborhood and remain close enough to the home to deal with family matters.

All of this, then, meant that Wynwood was known by locals as “Little San Juan” by the 1970s. Miami has many “Little” neighborhoods—Little Haiti, Little Havana, Little Managua—so it was only natural that Wynwood would become known as Little San Juan. Although Puerto Ricans would never be the majority of the neighborhood, the majority of Puerto Ricans in Miami lived in Wynwood. And this population would grow to be so significant in the neighborhood that the public park at its center was renamed after the famed Puerto Rican baseball player Roberto Clemente. After playing as an outfielder for the Pittsburgh Pirates and becoming the first Latin American player to be inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame, Clemente would perish in 1972 in a plane crash while on his way to Nicaragua to help with earthquake relief. He was just 38 years old when he died. Two years after his death, the City of Miami contributed $140,000 for the renovation and renaming of the park in Wynwood to Roberto Clemente Park and heralded the event with the governors of Florida and Puerto Rico, the Mayor of
Miami, the vice mayor of Dade County, the Nicaraguan consul in Miami, and Roberto Clemente’s widow.47

**Out with the Old | Beginning of the Decline: 1950-1970**

As with other major cities in the United States after World War II, Miami suffered a dramatic decline in industrialization and economic output from the effects of globalization and economic recession.48 Clothing manufacturing was particularly affected. Garment production began to move to other nations worldwide over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, leaving many shops closed in Wynwood and further increasing the unemployment rate spurred on by the recession of the 1970s. The effect was profound. In 1973, there were 112 manufacturing firms (mostly garment industries) in Wynwood. By 1997, only 35 manufacturing firms remained, most of which employed less than 10 individuals.49

To make matters worse, these large-scale shifts were also coupled with significant waves of immigration that resulted in tremendous social and economic strain in Miami. Fidel Castro’s takeover of Cuba, just 90 miles South of Key West, would go on to be the most significant sociopolitical catalyst for the shaping of modern Miami.50 But this wave of immigration would join in with another significant change in helping to reshape the Wynwood neighborhood: the construction Interstate 95, the new major thoroughfare set to cut through the state of Florida. Politicians in Tallahassee signed on the construction of the highway in 1959, the same year as Castro’s revolution, and began construction of the nearly 400-mile highway soon thereafter.
The finished interstate 95 connected Miami with the rest of the East Coast, yet the areas immediately surrounding the highway plummeted with the construction. In Miami, the north-south corridor of the highway was set to flank NW 7th avenue until it reached the Miami River to the south. It cut through the business sectors of several neighborhoods—including those of Overtown, Wynwood, and Allapattah—and created...
economic dead zones in these areas as a result. Homes and other buildings were taken through the processes of eminent domain, and many people were relocated to other parts of the city as part of the “slum clearance program” attached to the highway construction. Original plans for the highway had I-95 flanking the Florida East Coast Railway, thus preventing unnecessary destruction of the surrounding neighborhoods. But advocates of slum clearance won the day and rerouted the highway through the neighborhoods, a step that they deemed necessary for future growth. Some of those very same displaced residents would tear up as they were interviewed about their memories of Overtown five decades later. “I get choked up every time I talk about it,” Naomi Rolle told The Miami Herald in 2013. “In 1965 they ran [my father] out of that house.”


As the 1970s progressed, Miami continued to spiral into economic decline, and Wynwood was not immune to this deterioration. Economic disinvestment from globalization, ghettoization through the construction of physical barriers, and the strain of massive immigration into the city would all mean that by 1980s, Wynwood would become “one of the poorest neighborhoods in one of the poorest cities in the country.” Census data from 1980 still documented Puerto Ricans as the second largest group of Hispanics in Miami, yet most of the Puerto Rican residents of Wynwood tried their hardest to leave the neighborhood—a departure that would result in more degradation, more blight, and a lessening of a collective political voice. But City officials and grassroots organizers tried their best during this time to save the neighborhood. Residents
of Miami had elected Maurice Ferré, a Puerto Rican, as the first Hispanic mayor of the city in 1973, and residents of Wynwood tried to put this political capital to work in their dying district. In 1982, Ferré donned a formal *guayabera* with bow tie and cut the ribbon to rename NW Second Avenue—the main business and community thoroughfare in the neighborhood—after the 19th-century Puerto Rican educator and patriot Eugenio Maria de Hostos. De Hostos’ great-grandson was there, having flown in from San Juan just for the ceremony.57 The City also established the Wynwood Chamber of Commerce a year later with $275,000 in federal money to rehabilitate a vacant, vandalized, three-story concrete building, a necessary step to alleviate the problem of overcrowding and housing shortage in the area.58 And commissioners even considered officially naming the neighborhood as Old San Juan in 1988, an effort to give the area an identity and a sense of pride.59

These actions notwithstanding, it remained the case that everybody—from the mayor to the residents—knew that Wynwood needed much more. Things were so bad that the neighborhood was described as “one of the city’s most crime-infested playgrounds” in a *Miami Herald* article at the time.60 Business owners complained about break-ins that took place at least twice a week.61 Drug sales peaked, thus resulting in increased violence and gang warfare. And no matter how much they attempted to hold their elected officials accountable, nothing seemed to change. Residents of Wynwood took to the streets in 1983 to protest the poor conditions and to blame politicians for the neglect and disregard for their community.62 They felt maligned by one of their very own: at a time when the mayoral office was occupied by a Puerto Rican, the Puerto Rican barrio suffered the most. And other politicians continually ignored the neighborhood.
Citizens, for instance, held a meeting in their local middle school to discuss the drugs and violence, only to have two commissioners show up and no business matters discussed because of the lack of quorum. Violence was so bad that 20 merchants even pitched the idea to the police department of using one of the abandoned buildings as a makeshift police post. The merchants offered to provide the building, pay for phones, include a television, pinball machine, and even a horse for patrols—anything that the police needed in order to ensure the safety of the residents in the neighborhood. “Basically, it would be a place for the police to meet and hang out,” said Manuel Silva, executive director of the Wynwood Community Economic Development Corps. “All they have to do is provide us a presence here.” But nothing came out of these efforts and no permanent patrols were put in place.

Some of the neglect and violence would be humorous if it was not so disturbing. When City officials wanted to demolish a building in Wynwood that was being used by drug addicts and thieves as a hideout spot, for instance, the company that was hired to do the demolishing actually destroyed the building next door. In another incident, Television correspondent Lesley Stahl was mugged twice in one day while reporting in Wynwood: once during the day, while with producer Barbara Dury, and then once at night with her film crew. And even the police were not immune to the violence and petty crime. While making an arrest in Wynwood, Miami Police Sgt. Robert Dyer had his clothes completely ripped off his body and his squad car was vandalized.

By the end of the 1980s, it was reported that “Wynwood residents were twice as likely as other Miami residents and four times as likely as neighbors throughout Dade County to be the target of a violent crime.” In that same report, it was found that
“Wynwood rated highest of all city neighborhoods in terms of total per capita major crimes such as murder, rape and robbery. In 1989, the area showed 585 major crimes, almost 10 percent of the city’s total.” Wynwood was, overall, exactly what one headline called it in 1990: “A neighborhood of broken dreams.”

The Riot, the Change | Neighborhood Lost, 1990

It was during the afternoon of December 16, 1988, that six officers from the Miami-Dade Police Department’s Street Narcotics Unit stopped in front of a nondescript white house in Wynwood while on their way to another drug sting uptown. This house was a well-known drug den, one of the many that dotted the neighborhood, and sitting outside was Leonardo Mercado Nuñez, one of the many crack dealers that worked the neighborhood. Also known as “Cano,” Mercado Nuñez was a small-time merchant, one of those that was equally known for being quick to enact violence for a wrong committed as to give money to the poor as a local Robin Hood. But on that day, 9 days before Christmas, the six officers approached Cano and went inside the home with him. According to an investigative report from The Miami Herald three years later, what took place next was as rapid as it was gruesome.

Within minutes, Cano was sprawled on the green linoleum floor of a dim bedroom, battered, in a puddle of blood. He had ‘doll’ eyes, circled in purple, a broken nose, internal bleeding. A quart of blood was in his stomach. Blood bubbled from his mouth. Forty-four separate bruises and cuts marked his body. Evidence would later suggest that the cops stomped him, smacked him against a wall, beat him while wearing fingerless weight lifter gloves and bashed his head with a flashlight. An ambulance sped him to Jackson Memorial Hospital, but it was too late. He was dead, a bloody sneaker print on his clothing and what prosecutors called the imprint of one officer’s size 12 Adidas on his forehead.
To the world, another drug dealer had gone down in an event that probably merited his death. During the trial two years later, nobody seemed to care about his passing. Cano was, indeed, a constant problem for the Miami-Dade Police Department, a figure that continually popped up in their jails yet always managed to evade conviction. It was no surprise, then, that on December 3, 1990, the court acquitted the police officers of all charges of conspiracy and depriving Mercado of his civil rights.

Cano was not a community hero, but everybody knew him. He owned and ran a neighborhood cafeteria and game room. He was also the local supplier of cocaine. And although everybody disagreed on the morality of his life, they all agreed about the injustice of his death and the acquittal of the police officers. Minutes after the announcement of the ruling, scores of Wynwood residents took to the streets in anger to protest the injustice. They chanted "We want justice!" and "Viva justicia!" The protest soon turned deadly. With some donning masks made out of paper bags and t-shirts, rioters overturned cars, set dumpsters aflame, pelted city buses with stones, opened water hydrants, broke into businesses, looted stores, and broke windows. Some business owners, armed with guns and accompanied by family members, stood guard to protect their wares.

"[The riot] surprised me," said one resident to a news reporter, "but it happened, and I’m glad it did. Now they know about us." The main word was "surprised." First, residents were surprised that it took six undercover drug squad officers to take down a puny, small-time crack dealer. Second, they were surprised that he had been beaten to death while just sitting on his front porch. Third, they were surprised at the full acquittal of the police officers at the end of a six-week trial. And then, finally, they were surprised
by the riots: just one night of riots that would shake the whole city. Police officers were also taken completely by surprise: it took three hours for officers to get into the neighborhood. But by that point, the damage had been done. It took 200 riot-trained patrolmen to quiet down the protestors, but the three hours left a wake of damage totaling more than $3 million.74

The riots in Wynwood made national news; even the New York Times ran a full coverage piece in their Sunday edition just a few days after the events took place. “Five times in the last 10 years,” the report states, “Miami has been rocked by disorders. The latest eruption of looting, mayhem and hatred raised the question of just what it is about this sun-splashed city that begets such uprisings.” It seems that by this point, the whole nation was looking towards Miami with serious worries. “While other cities mark the passage of time by elections, natural disasters, or championships won by local sports teams,” the article continues, “Miami’s calendar is pockmarked by riots named after the neighborhoods where they have occurred: Overtown, Liberty City, and, last week, Wynwood.”75 Mired by all this bad press, city commissioners moved in and immediately offered financial aid to those in the community: a $50,000 loan to the shoe store that was pillaged (and was not insured); $100,000 in development grants; and additional monies for other damaged businesses.76 There would be a surge of money given for the Roberto Clemente Park as well, conversations that were sparked about ethnic studies courses in Miami-Dade public schools, and even a “Unity Day” parade was staged a week after the riots (whose theme, “one people, one community, doing the right thing,” was an effort at public relations amelioration).77
The “Unity Day” parade did take place, of course, but the ethnic studies courses never came to fruition as proponents expected. And Roberto Clemente Park received funds but remained in a perpetual state of incompleteness and disarray. Decades after the riots and the subsequent political promises, I was sitting in a meeting with the “Roberto Clemente Steering Committee,” a makeshift group of business owners, neighborhood proponents, and Puerto Rican leaders put together by the director of the Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce in order to push for more funds and attention for the park by the City of Miami. Among them was the director of multicultural marketing of the Miami Marlins, a man who had long ties with Wynwood and the Puerto Rican community in Miami. I would like to get an update on those batting cages that we donated to the park, the Marlins rep asked the group. Through the next few minutes of confusion and muttering, it finally came to light that the Miami Marlins had donated professional batting cages for the baseball programs held at Roberto Clemente Park with the understanding that the City would provide the funds to build the cement slabs needed to ground the cages. I’ve put in the work orders for those things, said the park manager, but the parks department just doesn’t get around to it. Years had gone by, and the batting cages remained in the corner of the park’s land wearing away from sun and rain and more sun. That’s all I can really do, the park manager continued. I put in the work orders and I can’t do anything until they actually get around to doing them.

The residents of Wynwood and the surrounding neighborhoods would never forget that night of mayhem and protest. Eva was a longtime Wynwood advocate, a Puerto Rican woman who had volunteered and worked for the public health center in the neighborhood, Borinquen, for decades. I was sitting with Eva and her friend, Luis, in her
living room for an interview about Wynwood a full 24 years after Cano’s death, yet his name came up, unannounced. *He wasn’t a good man, but he didn’t deserve to die that way,* Eva said. *They beat him to death, in his own home, in front of his children’s eyes!* They had never seen Puerto Ricans rise up in this way, Eva and Luis told me. *Puerto Ricans don’t do riots. Puerto Ricans are calm people, relaxed people.* But the Puerto Ricans *did* riot on that December evening, and the neighborhood *was* severely damaged. And, as Luis told me on another occasion, it was this riot that gave a bad reputation to Wynwood and the Puerto Rican population in Miami. “Crea tu fama y acuéstate a dormir,” he told me, citing a very popular saying. Roughly translating to “establish your reputation, and then go to sleep,” the adage means that reputations remain long after a person or group ceases to make that reputation. Wynwood, he told me, had garnered a reputation for being a dark and dangerous place after the riots. And no matter how much the city invested in the neighborhood, Wynwood remained a blight on the map of the City of Miami.

**Art All the Way Down | Arrival of the Cultural Growth Machine: 1990s-2000s**

*Well, I think that Wynwood is a miracle, a miracle that happened not because of the government but because of the mission of several people.*

Tomás Regalado, Mayor of the City of Miami

**The Collections**

By the beginning of the 1990s, then, Wynwood was a significant source of problems for commissioners, politicians, police officers, and residents alike. It was during these tumultuous times, however, that the first seeds of an eventual art district
were planted. As with other areas in the United States, blighted former factory regions become attractive places for the arts because of their cheap real estate and large spaces. With low and irregular incomes, artists can take advantage of these opportunities to create their work—a phenomenon that was instrumental, indeed, for the development of the loft-style homes in New York City. As has been shown by Richard Lloyd, these blighted areas become attractive not only for their cheap rents but also for their urban chic: with the grit and the grime, they are more reminiscent of classic images of bohemian enclaves and are more attractive as a result.

With Wynwood, the early arrival of the arts was spearheaded mainly by economic and spatial conditions rather than cultural shifts pertaining to an influx of artists and the development of a bohemia. The South Florida Arts Center, for instance, a non-profit organization seeking to provide studio space for artists at cheap prices, looked to Wynwood as far back as 1984. They would eventually choose to settle on Lincoln Road in Miami Beach instead of purchasing property in Wynwood, but this decision was integral to the establishment of the first art organization in the neighborhood: The Bakehouse Art Complex (BAC). Although originally blocked from receiving city funds for the purchase, the BAC was eventually able to secure public financing to purchase the former Flowers Bakery right in the shadows of the I-95 overpass on the west side of the neighborhood. Still functioning today, the BAC offers studio spaces for more than 60 artists at affordable rents. The goal since the beginning has been to pool resources in order to provide equipment, machinery, and gallery and meeting spaces for artists to create and show their work—an idea similar to the collaborative work environments that have become popular today. Back with the purchase in 1987, however, hopes were high
that the BAC would turn around the neighborhood and revitalize the area. “It’s not even too much to imagine weekends in the future,” wrote Beth Dunlop, former *Miami Herald* architecture critic, “with art aficionados and theatergoers stopping to buy empanadas or chorizos on their way to the Bakehouse, or pausing to look at South American handiwork offered by street vendors, or lingering to listen to some street music with its roots in the homelands of Wynwood’s diverse residents.”

None of this, of course, came to pass, and although Wynwood became an international arts destination decades later, the BAC was far from the catalyst that enabled this drastic neighborhood transition. There were no empanada stands, no chorizos on toothpicks, and no South American handiwork in Wynwood. Wynwood community members and commissioners saw the appeal of bringing artists to the neighborhood, which could “create more traffic and a greater acceptance of the area as a safe place to shop.” But the reality was that artists came in during the day to work and then left at night to their homes elsewhere in the city. Instead of developing a bohemian enclave, the artists who rented spaces at the BAC were more of a diverse group that included retired doctors and first-timers as well as experienced artists. At the same time as these efforts were taking place, business owners along the NW Fifth Avenue corridor were making an attempt to come together and make their avenue attractive once again to shoppers and fashion enthusiasts. They wanted to spruce up the avenue—make it beautiful and get rid of theft and crime—so that garment sales could pick up once again. But, of course, the perpetual disarray of the neighborhood prevented this effort from being successful as well.
Even though the BAC did not bring about results, power brokers in Miami did turn to the arts as part of revitalization efforts throughout the city. The resurgence of culture in Miami over the course of the 1980s and 1990s is not without its parallels in other major cities in the United States. After cities became hollowed-out centers of blight and despair following World War II, policy analysts and urban planners turned to culture as part of efforts to revitalize city centers and make them more appealing to workers and residents. With manufacturing and industrial decline through to the 1970s, says sociologist of culture Sharon Zukin, “culture became more of an instrument in the entrepreneurial strategies of local governments and business alliances” in cities. Yet with Miami, this trend reached a new and unprecedented scale. Art collectors, curators, gallerists, dealers, artists, and other art professionals all converged in a spirit of cooperation to enact dramatic change in the city via art markets. “On almost a daily basis,” art critic Roni Feinstein reported in 2003, “news arrives about the opening of new galleries and alternative spaces.”

The real conditions that made Wynwood into the destination that it is today all revolve around major shifts in the global art world—especially the radical changes in the financialization of art—and Miami’s subsequent rise to participate in this art world. In a similar way to how local elites seek to ensure the progress of the economic growth machine through their participation in local politics and zoning, the art elites of Miami worked to ensure that the Miami would become a cultural center as well as an economic center. Throughout the late 1990s, reported art critic and art historian Roni Feinstein, “increasing numbers of Miami collectors…assumed highly public roles, contributing to the city’s art culture in ways rarely seen in other American cities.” These art dealers,
gallerists, and collectors worked hand-in-hand with property developers, real estate moguls, and speculators to artificially create the arts neighborhood of their dreams. They were spurred by the fact that internationally-renowned names in art collecting and selling—such as the Rubell Family, the Bramans, Martin Margulies, Fred Snitzer, and the de la Cruz family—all had their eyes set on making Miami a center for contemporary art.

Much of this activity was focused in Wynwood. The Rubell Family Collection (RFC), for instance, purchased a former DEA facility on NW 29th Street in 1993, right in the middle of the neighborhood, to house their extensive and internationally-famed contemporary art collection. With more than 45,000 square feet of space to work with, the Rubells were able to showcase pieces from their collection that spanned more than 5,000 individual works in a variety of media. Their pull was essential for the flow of High Net Worth Individuals (HNWIs) through the streets of Wynwood: the RFC was a must-do and a must-see for these economic and cultural elites. In order to remain abreast of the latest trends in the world of art, it was necessary to pay a visit to the collection and to admire the acquisitions and exhibits that were on display. And in addition to seeing art pieces, collection-goers needed to be seen. The parties, the drinks, the invite-only events: these were part of the attraction for HNWIs. Although the collection is now open to the public, it was originally closed off and sheltered only to those with previous appointments and reservations. And once it was established and opened, the RBC served as the anchor for elite art in Wynwood.

Other gallerists and art dealers followed soon thereafter, spurred in part by the RFC. Damien Boisseau, from Nice, France, opened the Damien B. Contemporary Art Center on NW 36th Street a few years later, first of a flurry of a dozen of art galleries,
vintage stores, and eateries to open by the beginning of the 2000s. Bernice Steinbaum moved her gallery from New York to the corner of NW 36th Street and North Miami Avenue, right on the NE corner of Wynwood and immediately off the ramp from the highway. And then there was Brook Dorsch, just starting off in the gallery world but with a clear line upwards to gallery fame in Miami and abroad. “I loved the idea of a bigger space and I checked out about 9 buildings around here [Wynwood],” he told me in an interview. The land was cheap, the buildings were big and open, and, of course, “the Rubells were already here.” Martin Margulies, Fred Snitzer, and others also followed the Rubells into Wynwood and set up their collections and galleries nearby. There were a few artists in the neighborhood, yes, but there was no artist enclave. Instead of the artists, what came to Wynwood were the art dealers, gallerists, and collectors. What came to Wynwood, in short, was the art market. And it all happened so quickly. Just a few years after the Rubell’s opened their collection, the Miami Herald was already calling the neighborhood “the home of art, fashion and flavor,” a kind of “destination point” with “galleries and attractions.”

The Street Art

Beyond the arrival of the cultural growth machine in collections and galleries, there was also the introduction and institutionalization of another form of art in the neighborhood: that of street art. Although street art (broadly defined as art on the streets rather than on canvases in galleries or museums) has existed in some form or another across the world for centuries, the recent interest in the genre since the 1990s produced by big names such as Banksy or Shepard Fairy has meant that street art has come to be
seen as a significant genre of art in itself. The rise of popularity of street art worldwide, moreover, has also created a significant amount of friction around the question of whether or not street art is graffiti and, if not, what the differences are therein.99 These questions are not merely ones of semantics or word use. Graffiti is a criminal activity with legal sanctions; you can, in short, spend a night or two in jail for writing up graffiti. Street art, on the other hand, is more widely sanctioned and permissible; you can, instead, become famous for putting up great street art.

Alex Vahan, a member of the MSG Cartel—Miami Style Gods, one of Miami’s most famous and longest-running graffiti crews—sat with me for an interview next to his incredibly oversized Macintosh computer screen in his office in Wynwood. After years of tags, bombs, and throwies, Alex is now the owner—or “boss man” as his business card labels him—of Cushy Gigs, a graphic design company that does everything from stickers and t-shirts to murals and corporate events. Cushy is the “crew’s legitimate occupation,” he told me, a way for the older guys to keep working with their graffiti skills even after they have started a family and have settled down a bit. Although there are people who work there outside of MSG, most of the employees are MSG members. During our interview, Alex reminisced about the neighborhood, about his years in graffiti, and about the changes that had taken place to the neighborhood during all the decades that he’s lived in Miami. “We’ve been painting in this neighborhood since the 90s. There was nothing here. No one gave a shit about it, and that’s how we liked it. Now everybody gives a shit about it, but we just happened to have been here the whole time.”100

Alex corroborated what came out of the archives of newspapers and the dusty files of people’s memories from the 80s and 90s: Wynwood was a run-down
neighborhood that was the center of a plethora of criminal activity. One of these activities was, of course, graffiti. With giant walls and an absence of police presence, Wynwood became one of the foremost places to bomb, tag, and throw in 1980s and 1990s Miami.101 As I met with other street artists, many of whom had very active pasts in illegal graffiti, similar stories began to appear and reappear. Wynwood in the 1990s was the place in Miami for graffiti. KRAVE, a Miami-based artist with a graffiti past, was the most passionate in his interview when he talked about this past. “I mean, you know, we had a huge, huge, huge sleeping group of creative individuals that were underground and who found a place where it was a fuckin’ free for all. We can all put up here, it’s all good here, and when other people came in and started doing it as well, it just added to the chemistry of it.” He kept going for several minutes telling me about that time of the neighborhood. “We were like, holy shit: we can get away with anything here. This area is nuts! [We’d go around] informing the artists that this place is like the most legitimate area to do illegal graffiti. [laughs] You’ll never find that in the books.”102

The FEC railway that forms on the eastern edge of Wynwood was a popular spot for the MSG crew, for instance. The giant walls of the warehouses that abutted the train tracks were the popular spot for the crew to put up its productions. Away from the streets, away from the peering eyes of cops and locals, members of MSG would have the time to get up on a grand scale. The RC Cola factory, down on the opposite end of the neighborhood, was another popular spot to get up. This lot is just over 2.5 acres, picked up for $2,065,000 in 2010 (120,236 sqft., approximately $17/sqft) and is now owned by Moishe Mana, the single largest landowner in Wynwood. The spot was a perfect place for graffiti activity: empty, abandoned, and rarely checked on. Just on the edge of the
neighborhood, flanking I-95 and a few yards from Overtown, this location rarely got much foot traffic. This graffiti-haven past of Wynwood is, like much of the world of this ephemeral craft, mainly relegated to the memories of individuals and the few polaroids and snap shots that some took of their favorite taggers—what graffiti writers call “flicks.”

Beyond the big business of galleries or collections, however, street art has also become a favorite ingredient for place entrepreneurs seeking to create the urban chic in neighborhoods and city centers. Using street art, I was told, is a quick and cheap way to attract attention to a neighborhood and bring in foot traffic to the stores on the ground. Because of their size, complexity, colors, and messages, street art pieces are attractive for their ability to bring glam to grit, to join the bohemian with the bourgeois. Installing street art, moreover, provides a cheap alternative to sprucing up streets and avenues. Instead of investing large sums in physical renovations to an area, street art can provide an easy fix of color and design.

As more money and attention was placed in Wynwood over the course of the early 2000s, those very same neglected walls became blank canvases for large-scale art pieces. In just over the course of a decade, the walls of Wynwood went from being forgotten facades of buildings to being the most highly sought-after public canvases in Miami. These giant displays of street art quickly became the most easily recognizable, and most heavily policed, aspects of Wynwood. Those walls along the FEC railway that MSG used to hold on to? They grew to have three large murals on them, preserved and protected by the business owners behind those walls and the police patrolling on the outside of the walls. The RC Cola factory? It remained a favorite spot for graffiti, but it
quickly changed due to the increased foot traffic drawn to mega parties and the popular microbrewery just across the street. The owner of the condemned building, Moishe Mana, realized the potential of capitalizing on this barren property. The space became a free-for-all party venue every second Saturday of the month: replete with pop up bars, food trucks, graffiti artists painting live, and a stage for live music. At all other times, the property was closed off to visitors and tourists.

As several graffiti writers and police officers told me, graffiti was the least of Wynwood’s problems in the 1990s. If you were stopped for tagging back then, you might spend a night in jail or be slapped with a fine. But that was if you were stopped for tagging. But by 2014, the walls had become heavily policed and monitored. They were no longer blank canvases for illicit and illegal vandalism; they had become essential parts to the value added to the neighborhood and, as a result, had become an item worth protecting. In one extreme case of surveillance and policing, for instance, 21-year-old Delbert Rodriguez was chased down by police officers and ended up passing away from injuries resulting from being hit by a police car during the chase.106

As I continued asking people about the walls, it felt as though everybody knew exactly who was the person or group that was responsible for creating the fame of street art in Wynwood. Tony Goldman, many would say: he was the true visionary who saw the beauty and appeal of street art. Others would scoff at the Goldman hagiography and lower their voice in an effort to indicate that they knew the “real deal”: Goldman was the guy who made money off of it, they would tell me, but it was actually a clandestine group of artists known as Primary Flight that got this whole thing going. And amidst all these voices, there were those from the graffiti crews in Miami that gruffed about how they
were here since the beginning. This street art stuff is crap, they would tell me. Beautiful, fancy, and policed crap.

The reality is, of course, that all these variables—and many more—converged upon Wynwood at the prime moment and worked off of each other in a fine sequence to create the street art gallery of Wynwood. Although the neighborhood had a tremendous amount of graffiti on its walls, there were a couple of mural ventures early in the 1990s that were installed by members of the community. After Cano, the crack dealer whose death sparked the Wynwood riots, died, a graffiti artist went and spray painted a mural for him at El Gallito café in Wynwood with his name and a Puerto Rican flag, for instance. Just a few months later and just a few streets to the south, students from Booker T. Washington High School in Overtown painted an anti-drug mural in their community. Efforts such as these—community-inspired and community-sponsored murals with moral messages—continued until the end of the 1990s. Even the BAC participated in these ventures of painting murals with kids as part of a “Round Robin Mural Program” that they enacted in 1998.

But one of the first big-time mural projects in Wynwood was sponsored by Altoids mints in 2003. The Altoids Wall of Fame, a 550-ft graffiti art project, took place on NW Fifth Avenue and NW 24th Street: a section of Wynwood populated mainly by industrial buildings and factories. An early indication of things to come, the Altoids wall brought together dozens of graffiti writers and muralists from all over South Florida for the effort. Sanctioned by the property owner and sponsored by Altoids, these “spray-paint pioneers” enjoyed tagging, piecing, and bombing the walls without any fear of sanction. And as one graffiti writer told The Miami Herald, there was a clear indication that there
was the prospect of making a life out of this spray skill. “Parla said his career benefited from the higher profile graffiti art gained in the last 20 years and he thinks newer artists can benefit as well. ‘I want to open the eyes of younger artists that there are opportunities beyond the streets,’ he said, smiling. ‘It’s not a dead-end field; you can go to all these other opportunities.’”

By the time of the Altoids Wall of Fame, Wynwood was still not known for its street art but was, rather, a location full of high-end galleries and collections. There were a couple of artists working in the neighborhood, yes, but for the most part Wynwood was still a dangerous place. The key ingredient that transformed the neighborhood and led to the dramatic place revitalization, however, took place in the early 2000s.

**The Pivot | Art Basel Miami Beach**

The cultural buildup in Miami at the end of the 20th century was prompted by the arrival of the art fair that would change Miami’s art status moving forward: Art Basel Miami Beach (ABMB). Originating in Switzerland in 1969, Art Basel was the pinnacle art fair of the contemporary art market for decades. In an effort to increase sales and expand to new markets, Art Basel slated its inaugural American fair in Miami for 2001. The decision on expanding to Miami was a relatively risky move—Miami, indeed, was not known for fine art, art markets, and culture—but it made sense because of Miami’s burgeoning status among collectors and the city’s infrastructure for large-scale events. Some of the world’s art leaders had made Miami their home (if only for the 180 days per year that are required so as to declare Florida as your primary residence for tax purposes) and had invested heavily in building new homes for their collections and galleries. What
is more, Miami already had the structures in place in order to execute an art fair of this size and scope. There was a plethora of hotels of all varieties and prices, for instance, and the Miami Beach Convention Center was large enough to handle the crowds that were expected. And then there was the weather: it was more than likely that art enthusiasts would be willing to spend a week in Miami Beach during the first week of December every year.

Everything was prepared for the inaugural year of the Art Basel Miami Beach in 2001, but the terrorist attacks in New York in September of that year prevented the fair from moving forward as planned. Although dozens of art buyers did come to Miami regardless, the full opening of the fair was pushed back a year to December 2002. Within a few years, the Art Basel fair in Miami became one of the prominent destinations for serious art collectors and buyers worldwide: one of the destination points, indeed, for the world’s global elites. The fair, art critic Roni Feinstein asserts, “reconfigured the map and calendar of the international art world.” With ABMB, there was now a new counterweight to the famous and successful Art Basel fair in Switzerland every June, a counterweight that quickly became a huge success: the first full fair was in 2002; by 2005, ABMB was drawing more than 30,000 visitors; by 2008, that figure would grow to approximately 45,000. And as the fair returned year after year, those numbers remained steady.

Although grassroots efforts like the BAC were successful in their own right, nothing could compare to the effect that the Art Basel fair had on Wynwood. With thousands of the world’s superrich descending on the city every year, the cultural elites of Miami coordinated efforts to provide the art and entertainment that they would ultimately
seek. By October 2003, indeed, just one year after the full launch of ABMB, so many
galleries had moved into Wynwood that gallerists even created a map of the area so that
Basel visitors could find the galleries more easily. With approximately 30 galleries,
project spaces, private collections, and art venues by the end of that year, it was
immediately apparent that ABMB had created something new in the former Puerto Rican
barrio of Miami. “Wynwood’s Puerto Rican Character Fading,” stated one Miami Herald
article from 2004, just two years after ABMB began in earnest. Gallerists were already
complaining about rising rent prices and were wondering “about where the next hot place
for art will be” as a result, and there were already questions about the rising trends of
gentrification in the neighborhood by 2005.

Although it is difficult to document exactly how much of an impact Art Basel had
on the City of Miami and on the neighborhood of Wynwood, it remains the case that the
prevailing mindset among those I interviewed in the city was that Art Basel completely
transformed the status of Miami as a global cultural hub. The amount of attention that Art
Basel gave to Miami—not to mention the overwhelming amount of money that the art
fair produced and the myriad of cultural institutions that it helped spawn—led Miami out
of its previous irrelevance in the global art world and placed the city on the top rungs of
culture worldwide.

One way to document the changes brought about by Art Basel is by examining
data on private charter flights into Miami. Labeled by the Federal Aviation
Administration (FAA) as Air Taxis, these small jets usually transport wealthy
individuals, diplomats, and other VIPs into cities throughout the world. I collected data
on the number of air taxis into Miami International Airport from the FAA’s Airport
Operations and Ranking Reports, which document the take-offs and landings at all airports through the Air Traffic Activity Data System (ATADS) database. The graph of air taxi activity at Miami International Airport (Figure 2) provides a useful window into the activity of HNWIs traveling into the city over time. The red dots mark data for the December months of every year so as to track the amount of activity that the Art Basel art fair brings into the city. The yellow circle with a blue “X” marks September 2001: the date of massive terror attacks in the United States and also the month in which Art Basel decided to postpone the full launch of Art Basel Miami Beach. The red dots indicate the December months.

Prior to September 2001, the December months were not always the most popular for air taxis. In comparison to the preceding months from each red dot, one can see that it was often March and July/August that saw the majority of air taxi activity. With the exception of December 1998, all the Decembers before Art Basel’s launch were not the months of highest private charter flights. Once ABMB was fully launched in December 2002, however, the image begins to change. Although 2004 saw a spike in March that was much greater than the activity in December, almost every December after 2003 saw the most activity in air taxis for that year. Slow and steady growth of air taxis from 2002-2008 (gray zone) demonstrates the increasing attention that Art Basel Miami Beach received in its first few years. The sharp decline following this period is indicative of the stock market crash brought about by sub-prime mortgage lending and speculative investments: with stocks tanking and less money to spend, the frills of private air travel to an art fair in Miami Beach became a second-order priority to many of the superrich. But this drop of air taxis recovered almost immediately. As Noah Horowitz details, the
subprime crisis did little to mitigate the rising trend of the financialization of contemporary art and the importance of art fairs like Art Basel Miami Beach.\textsuperscript{120} Although the major auction houses—such as Sotheby’s and Christie’s—saw minor dips in their stocks and some art funds had to close their doors for good, the overall trends in prices and sales within the global contemporary art market was stable. It took two years for air taxi values to reach their previous level, but once the private jets began landing once again, December became the most popular month to land.
Figure 2: MIA Air Taxis, 11/1989-01/2016 (Monthly)
Art Entrepreneurship | Building and Shaping a Neighborhood

As discussed above, Wynwood was never an artist enclave: instead of the artist-led neighborhood changes like in other parts of cities the United States, the artists did not arrive to reside in Wynwood in large numbers.\textsuperscript{121} It was the thousands of visitors, the millions of dollars, and the unceasing amount of press surrounding ABMB that allowed Wynwood to change into the arts neighborhood that it became. Scores of gallerists and entrepreneurs came to Wynwood to set up their exhibit spaces; artists flocked to the neighborhood seeking a space among the madness; and, most importantly, real estate developers set their gaze on transforming the neighborhood for their economic benefit.

The key to understanding this kind of revitalization in Miami is this connection between arts entrepreneurship and property development: a combination of private holdings and real-estate speculation that has come to be known as the Miami Art Model. Prior to the development of Miami as an art city with the arrival of Art Basel and high-prized collections, there were few art institutions in the city that were state-sponsored and funded through public monies. Although there were a few art museums in the city, they did not have an impressive collection of works and some eventually became embroiled in a legal battle over ownership and money.\textsuperscript{122}

With the arrival of the Rubell Family Collection in Wynwood, however, private collections began displacing public holdings as spaces for the holding, preserving, and showcasing of artwork to the public. Internationally-renowned collectors in Miami built or renovated their own private warehouses to hold exhibitions of their own holdings to art enthusiasts in the city.\textsuperscript{123} The De La Cruz family, for instance, was famous for their annual garden party in their home where they showcased many of the pieces from their
prized collection. The parties eventually got too big for their home, so they purchased property in the Design District, just northeast of Wynwood, and built their own custom collection space. Martin Margulies, as well, purchased his own property in Wynwood for his vast collection and showcased the artwork to the general public for a small donation (which goes to the local women’s shelter).

In almost all cases, however, the high-prized collectors and gallerists began to transform the nature of the arts and culture in Miami—especially in Wynwood. Instead of relying on public institutions for art, most of Miami is dominated by these private art collections and galleries that serve as de-facto public art institutions. And the collectors themselves see their responsibilities as collectors in this light: there are public lectures, for instance, free tours, and college scholarships for aspiring art students from low-income backgrounds. “The work is going to be very alive in our space,” said Rosa de la Cruz in an interview with WPBT2’s “Art Loft.” “And we want to share it with people. So the collection is really—this idea of private, we’re tearing down the idea of private and making it public even though it’s a private collection.”

But beyond the perceived public duty of these institutions, there are the private interests: nearly all of these art ventures connect with real-estate property development. It is, indeed, the intimate and powerful connection between art and real estate that makes the Miami Art Model unique in practice. Collectors and gallerists are as involved in the speculation of property as they are in the fulfillment of a kind of public duty to disseminate art to the masses. And with this connection, there has arisen the ability for real estate developers—already attuned to the importance of the arts and culture for the
raising of property values—to collaborate with these art leaders in the production of financially-viable real estate portfolios.

Among these property developers in Wynwood was Tony Goldman and his company, Goldman Properties. With his passion for the arts and his unique style in clothing—preferring to wear white, for instance, and always donning an interesting hat—Goldman is known as a small-scale legend in the world of arts-led gentrification. Known for developing parts of SoHo (New York), Central City (Philly), and South Beach (Miami), Goldman developed a reputation for investing in down-and-out neighborhoods and turning them into incredibly profitable holdings through the use of the arts and culture. Beginning in 2004 (during the early years of Art Basel) and continuing on until his death in 2012, Goldman set his sights on Wynwood. Over the course of just a few years, Goldman and his company purchased more than $20 million worth of property in the neighborhood and installed two fine dining restaurants: Joey’s (named after his son) and the Wynwood Kitchen and Bar.125 So significant is his fame in the Wynwood area, indeed, that the section of NW Second Avenue to the south of NW 29th Street was renamed as “Tony Goldman Way” a few years after his death.

His effects in the neighborhood were profound. Although graffiti and murals covered Wynwood for decades before his arrival, Goldman was instrumental in institutionalizing and curating street art after his arrival. Over the course of the early 2000s, Goldman organized his property holdings and collaborated with artists (most notably with a group named Primary Flight) to get them to paint the walls of Wynwood with large-scale production murals. These pieces, done with the permission and guidance of the property owner, allowed artists to take hold of a giant wall without fear of
punishment from the police. And through their own acquisition of grants and sponsorships, Primary Flight was able to obtain the materials needed to have the artists paint their productions. Eventually, Goldman built a fenced-in private park that included curated pieces from some of the most famous street artists in the world. Known as Wynwood Walls, this little park would grow to become one of the most attractive tourist destinations in the whole neighborhood.

Goldman, however, was not the only real estate developer to set eyes on Wynwood and collaborate with art institutions in an effort to develop. I walked into David Lombardi’s real estate office one Monday morning and was greeted by an older woman at the receptionist counter. She was so nice that it was hard to imagine how the office remained in a perpetual lock-down state: cameras on every inch of the building, private parking protected by gates and more cameras, and a front foyer that was separated from the inside offices by a thick door and powerful latch with a button to unlock the door. *Do you want a bottle of wadda?* Even before I could respond, she was already telling me in her New York accent, *I’m gonna get you a bottle of wadda. You want some chocolate?* Even before I could say yes, she was handing it to me saying, *Here, have some chocolate. Here’s another one. Have more.* I had to laugh from my shock: I was here to interview one of the main property developers of Wynwood, David Lombardi, and his mother was welcoming me into his office with *wadda* and chocolates, telling me about how “Little David” grew up in New York yet had to leave for Miami because his asthma was so bad.

Lombardi was one of the handful of property developers that built up Wynwood during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Through my analysis of property data, Lombardi
amassed a buildup of approximately 4 acres of property in Wynwood by 2015, property that had soared in value and had made him a multi-millionaire in a short amount of time. David is emblematic of many of the individuals that were responsible for the transformations of Wynwood. For one, David is a former New Yorker. The more I walked and talked in the neighborhood, the more I found that the vast majority of the investments and developments were being conducted and run by New York firms, New York agencies, and New Yorkers themselves—a fact that was not lost on reporters and residents alike. “Think SoHo—before it was SoHo,” stated one *Miami Herald* article from 2002.126

This factor is key in understanding Wynwood because of the way in which the cultural growth machine developed out of transplantations of culture from New York.127 David was at the heart of much of this. “Our vision for Wynwood,” David told reporters as early as 2003, “is to make it the true live/work artists’ community in the City of Miami.”128 The key words are “make it”: Lombardi and others in the development community made it their mission to construct a place that matched the culturally attractive (and financially lucrative) trends from New York. These efforts in Wynwood, however, often required the literal construction of the neighborhood. The buildings in Wynwood are mostly two-stories tall. As of the fall of 2016, only four buildings reach 4 stories or more: two of which were constructed in the past decade. The typical images of retrofitting old buildings, preserving character, and/or renovating old structures in New York did not hold in Wynwood: the squat houses or low-rise apartment complexes were not financially viable nor aesthetically appealing, there were no real “historic” buildings in the neighborhood, and most property developers preferred demolishing and rebuilding.
The goal of property investors in Wynwood had been, as I learned through my interviews, to purchase many contiguous lots (known as “assemblages”) so as to destroy the buildings and build up. And capitalizing on the new boom in loft construction in Miami, developers set about building “New York lofts with a South Beach attitude”: which meant that they had amenities like sky gardens, zen gardens, meditation gardens, roof swimming pools, fitness areas, cabanas, hammocks, sun beds, oriental soaking pools, and even a pet park, “where pet owners can walk or bathe their dogs and water fountains for both owners and pets.” Gone were the days of the renegade artists who occupied and built loft spaces in buildings in industrial sectors of New York, as Sharon Zukin wrote about decades ago. Unlike the lofts in New York, Chicago, or San Francisco—carved out of the former shells of factories and warehouses—the lofts in Miami were planned and built from the ground up to match an ideal. They were, as one journalist phrased it, “the residence of the millennium for young professionals and cosmopolitan empty nesters.”

Lombardi’s vision for this growth in Wynwood, however, began with the galleries. Although he purchased properties as early as 2000, these ventures were more for covering costs and providing capital to move forward. It was not until Lombardi stumbled upon an article about Brook Dorsch’s gallery right around the corner from his office, however, that Lombardi began thinking about buying, building, and renting residential property. “After I had bought these five buildings,” Lombardi told me one day, “I pick up the Miami New Times one day and there as an article called ‘Welcome to the Edge,’ and it was about a guy called Brook Dorsch who was living in a warehouse around the corner from here….So my wife and I went on a Saturday night [to one of his
shows], and I mean the streets were dark here back then. There were junkyards and there were mean dogs behind fences….We walk into this guy’s warehouse gallery and it blew my mind.”

It was clean on the inside, Lombardi told me, with bright lights, drinks, and nice art. There were about 100 young people inside, all drinking beers and wine and admiring the art. Through conversations that night, Lombardi said that he realized that some of the artists had small studio spaces in corners of Wynwood but that they all lived in Miami Beach. So it was here that Lombardi began looking into the creation of artist lofts. Although Lombardi preferred to label his efforts as “gentlefication”—a more sensitive way to the creation of gentrification, as he says, with smaller scale buildings, higher density neighborhoods, and a lack of large, national corporate chains—he was part of the original investors that set about to create the Wynwood of their dreams.

**WADA, BID, and Acronyms Galore**

The collaboration between gallerists, collectors, and real-estate entrepreneurs in Wynwood solidified early on in the neighborhood’s transition after Art Basel arrived on Miami’s shores. The sudden interest in the art holdings in Wynwood led to the formation of neighborhood maps organized by galleries and collections, as I described earlier, but the flurry of activity also demonstrated to the key powerbrokers that it was necessary to organize and collaborate more effectively. Those I interviewed reminisced on those first few years of ABMB and remembered the monthly informal meetings held by Tony Goldman in the backyard portion of his Wynwood Kitchen and Bar. These early efforts eventually coalesced into the formation of the Wynwood Arts District Association (WADA): an organizing body of gallerists, collectors, property owners, and developers
that sought to work together to set up programming, hire cleaning staff for the streets, and pay for private security to patrol the neighborhood. It was an effort spearheaded and partially bankrolled by Lombardi and Goldman in particular. After several years of informal gathering, WADA received 501(c)3 nonprofit status in 2011. According to the organization’s 2013 tax filings, WADA’s primary exempt purpose was the “improvement and betterment [sic] of Wynwood neighborhood” and their mission was “to provide the Wynwood business community (estimated at 1,000 people) with a way to keep the neighborhood clean and safe.”

These early efforts at organizing under WADA were also geared towards the formation of a Business Improvement District (BID): a special formation of taxing and spending in which business and/or property owners in a particular geographic area agree to provide extra public services in their area by collecting additional taxes or fees from the businesses and/or properties in that area. The basic idea is for powerbrokers in an area to spearhead direct spending of taxes in their area rather only paying into a larger tax fund that is redistributed across the entire urban area. As a kind of mini-government, BIDs collect additional taxes and place them in special accounts with the city; once collected, members of the BID can decide to allocate those extra dollars in however they see fit. In this way, BIDs are able to pay for a host of services that are particular to their own geographic area. From additional security and street cleaning to marketing programs and benches, BIDs allow stakeholders to focus public funds into their area.

Begun in United States in the 1990s, the concept of the BID grew to numerous cities across the country by the 2010s. New York City has the largest number of BIDs at 72. Although BIDs may go by other names—business improvement areas, business
revitalization zones, community improvement districts, special services areas, special improvement districts—the idea remains the same: to provide a communal approach to making places more amenable to producing money, what M.G. Lloyd and his colleagues call the combination of “social democratic interventionism and neo-liberal market ideas that is of significance for planning practice.”136 And to their credit, BIDs have been successful for their revitalization of blighted and ignored areas of cities. By requiring buy-in from businesses and property owners, BIDs can harness social capital in its geographic area and encourage trust and cooperation among businesses. What is more, the collaborative efforts of BIDs usually encourage backers to think creatively and effectively for the use of collective funds. And since BIDs are able to bypass the problems of traditional city governments in order to isolate and address particular concerns for the geographic area, changes can often come at a fast pace.137

These benefits notwithstanding, BIDs do have their critics. By concentrating power in private hands, for instance, and requiring additional taxes for businesses, BIDs may further the chasm of marginalization between areas in cities that can pay additional taxes and those that cannot. What is more, the formation of BIDs may lead to a kind of disempowerment of local government.138 But as several studies have demonstrated, the formations of BIDs in cities across the United States have led to significant shifts in power dynamics, place-making and place-shaping, and the uses of public space. In her extensive work on New York City, for instance, Sharon Zukin has argued for the negative effects that arise from the privatization of public space brought about by such efforts as BIDs. Areas such as Bryant Park, she argues in her book, Cultures of Cities, are increasingly placed in the hands of private corporations and businesses because cities just
cannot pay to take care of them. The problem, as she points out, is that granting administrative and policing powers over public spaces to private individuals and organizations inevitably leads to a power imbalance for determining who can occupy public spaces, what activities are permitted, and who makes the decisions in these areas. “The disadvantage of creating public space this way,” Zukin says, “is that it owes so much to private-sector elites, both individual philanthropists and big corporations….Handing such spaces over to corporate executives and private investors means giving them carte blanche to remake public culture.”139

Although very popular and successful in other cities, BIDs were relatively new to Miami when I began my research in Wynwood. Although the BIDs for Coral Gables and Coconut Grove had been incorporated since 1997 and 2009, respectively, Wynwood was only the third BID to be formed in Miami. And, as David Collins, the man hired by WADA to form the BID, told me, “as much as Republicans bitch about Obama’s community organizing,” it still remains the case that “essentially BIDs are a Republican idea that are established and run with democratic principles.”140 After David helped begin the formation of the Wynwood BID, however, the powerbrokers in the neighborhood decided to hire Tom Curitore, a New York native (of course) who had years of experience as Director of Operations for the Union Square Partnership, one of the oldest and longest-running BIDs in New York City. And well into the 2010s, the Wynwood BID remained a strong collaborative effort in the neighborhood, one that continually sought to increase its spread and influence in the neighborhood.
A Tale of Two Wynwoods | North and South Wynwood

As with all BIDs, the scope of influence of the Wynwood BID is in a geographically-enclosed unit. The goal of collecting taxes from property owners in the neighborhood, indeed, is to allocate those particular funds to the specific needs of a given territory. In creating the BID, the powerbrokers in the neighborhood decided to focus on the area with the larger number of galleries, collections, and street art: the southern half of the neighborhood (below Northwest 29th Street). And with an analysis of the properties in this southern half, this decision to focus here makes more sense.

The numbers provided in this section come from a dataset that I created from January to March of 2015. Because information on property values and sales are notoriously difficult to obtain, I composed a dataset of information on every single folio in the Wynwood neighborhood from the Miami-Dade Property Appraiser’s website.141 With 15 columns of information and 1356 individual rows of folios, the final dataset contained 17,837 individual cells of information.142 And these data demonstrated an incredible amount of information on the neighborhood’s physical layout.

Figure 3 demonstrates the figures for the entire neighborhood (1,355 total folios). The amount of empty space that is available in Wynwood is impressive: approximately 47 acres of land overall in Wynwood is vacant, a value that comes to approximately 17% of the total neighborhood area.143 Of the remaining land, 18% is composed of single-family, 1-unit homes (of which approximately 60% are owned by the property owner) and 23% are multi-family homes of 2 or more unites (ie: rental properties). Of the remaining folios, light manufacturing lots (8.3%) and warehouse or storage (8.4%)
comprise a sizeable portion. The remaining 25% includes public housing, mixed use commercial and residential, retail outlets, and others.

These percentages, however, do not tell the whole story of the neighborhood. Since its inception, Wynwood has been split in half with the mainly-residential to the north and the mainly-industrial to the south. The dividing line (NW 29th street) splits the two sides into almost equal halves: the north, there are 672 folios; to the south, 683 folios. But the ways in which these segments break down demonstrate a great amount for patterns of development and the arts. The separation between the two halves of the neighborhood will be a recurring theme throughout this text. From the spatial and residential differences to cultural and historical differences, the northern half of Wynwood is often quite different from the southern half. Figures 4 and 5 offer a beginning for comparison:
The first point to note is the incredible amount of vacant lots south of NW 29th Street (37% of all folios), especially when compared to the 14% vacant land to the north. In addition to having a large amount of vacant land, the folios to the south also have a relatively low number of residential properties (only 13% of the total) in comparison to the northern half of the neighborhood (68%). And, finally, there is the substantial
amount of light manufacturing and warehouse spaces to the south. In many ways, in short, the northern half of Wynwood is quite the opposite to the southern half of Wynwood.

Instead of housing, then, the south has a tremendous amount of vacant land and big buildings, factors that make this section of Wynwood incredibly attractive to property developers and place entrepreneurs. It is much easier to purchase contiguous units of vacant land, for instance, than to purchase several buildings side by side. And since vacant land is often used for illicit activities or for dumping, city bureaucracies usually encourage or provide incentives for developers to purchase and develop vacant lots. In addition to the purchasing options, vacant land means that developers do not have to spend money on destroying buildings before starting their projects—a huge cost-saving measure—and do not have to deal with the removal of tenants should developers decide on destroying or renovating the building. Vacant land is ideal, in short: just purchase the property, get the permits, and build.

The plethora of light manufacturing and warehouse spaces, moreover, are a boon to place entrepreneurs, especially those who desire to incorporate the arts into their neighborhood projects. First, there is the fact that big, open spaces such as warehouses are easy to retrofit and refashion based on business types. A developer can split up the warehouse into multiple retail spots, for instance, and cash in on the monthly rents from each vendor. Alternatively, the property owner may fit the large space for multiple purposes and rotating venues. Parties, openings, and shows are all excellent one-size-fits-all options for renting the space and increasing revenue. Second, there is the need for big spaces when it comes to the arts. Galleries and collections need the big spaces to
show their pieces and to ensure that they can take risks with large installations, sculptures or paintings. There is also the constant need for storage space in the arts, a factor that can be more easily accommodated in retrofitted warehouse spaces than in other building types. And finally, the warehouses themselves are attractive options because of the coolness factor that they draw.

All of these factors have contributed to the rise of property values to the south. As Figure 6 demonstrates, all properties in Wynwood have increased in value since 2012. The largest jump in property value over the course of two years, however, was in the southern half of the neighborhood. From 2012-2014, properties in the northern half of Wynwood increased by approximately 70%. The southern half, conversely, more than doubled (over 120% increase in two years).
“Gentlefication” | Pushing Out, or Buying Out?

These values demonstrate the physical and infrastructural ingredients that attracted many developers to Wynwood and continue to draw real estate entrepreneurs to the neighborhood. These numbers also demonstrate, however, what it is that is most attractive about the southern half of Wynwood: the abundance of vacant land, the availability of large warehouse spaces, and the relatively low number of housing. The open space is perfect for building since there is no need to spend money on destroying or renovating previous buildings. The large warehouse spaces are excellent for a variety of large-scale projects (rock concerts, parties, filming), artistic ventures (galleries, collections, pop-up shows), and businesses that require large spaces (studios, yoga, breweries). But the paucity of housing in the southern half of Wynwood is most attractive for developers seeking to revitalize an area, garner a financial windfall, and yet avoid criticisms of forced gentrification of an area.

The word “gentrification,” of course, has a long and tenuous history in the scholarly literature, but a simple definition that is useful for the analysis here comes from Jason Hackworth’s analysis of gentrification as “the production of urban space for progressively more affluent users.” Although studies have shown processes of gentrification in multiple cities across the world, I focus my understanding of gentrification in Saskia Sassen’s work on the Global City and her most recent work on expulsions at the global level. As certain cities across the world become the “command” and “control” sectors of the global economy, there arises an increase in the number of highly educated and skilled workforce that arrives in the city. Needing housing near the urban core of these cities, these new arrivals inevitably displace the poorer
residents of the city centers who had turned to these buildings at a time of white flight to the suburbs.

This image is, of course, part of the standard image of gentrification in large cities. Yet Sassen develops her understanding of the flow into Global Cities in a later work, *Expulsions*. There are two massive shifts that have taken place since the 1980s, states Sassen. First, there is the demarcation and development of points on the planet into key economic zones: cities, for instance, that hold a great amount of importance for global economic production and maintenance. These are, of course, the Global Cities. But over and beyond that, Sassen cites a second shift in the substantial financialization in this network of Global Cities. What has resulted, then, is the development of a system that perpetuates expulsions across the planet: the isolation and exploitation of certain lands for minerals, metals, and other resources; the pushing out of unwanted individuals from key zones; the marginalization of national and international guidelines and restrictions. These expulsions become part of a further kind of concentration at a global scale, one that isolates power among global elites. “My thesis,” she says, “is that we are seeing the making not so much of predatory elites but of predatory ‘formations,’ a mix of elites and systemic capacities with finance a key enabler, that push toward acute concentration. Concentration at the top is nothing new. What concerns me is the extreme forms it takes today in more and more domains across a good part of the world.”

Part of these processes of hyper concentration of elite power and financialization, says Sassen, is the use of local housing markets as global financial instruments. This can come in a variety of forms. From the securitizing of home mortgages and their transformation into speculative investments to the development of superprime housing
markets for the superrich, the buying and carving of housing markets across the world has become another part of the systemic processes of expulsions that Sassen describes. In Wynwood, the focus on housing and real estate mainly centered on the southern half of the neighborhood, where only 13% of the real estate folios were single- or multi-family homes comprised mainly of buildings in disrepair. The goal was not to purchase a single building and renovate it for new residents. The goal was to purchase entire city blocks so as to raze the homes and build apartment complexes, condominiums, and lofts. And since the southern half of Wynwood is primarily filled with vacant lots, light manufacturing, and warehouse buildings, real estate developers see their influence in purchasing property as part of the positive effects that they can have in the struggling neighborhood. It is, to use David Lombardi’s term from above, part of the “gentlefication” of the neighborhood.

Although the word often elicits images of forceful evictions, physical exclusion, and the full replacement of low-income members of neighborhoods, the actual process of gentrification—and, indeed, the responses from those on the ground—is far from homogenous. As Marcos Feldman argues in his 2011 dissertation on the topic of gentrification in Wynwood, there were several government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and grassroots level groups that created partnerships that eventually went on to produce the exclusionary processes of gentrification. Whether consciously or not, these partnerships at all levels of society in Wynwood ended collaborating and perpetuating the larger goals of the growth machine in Miami.

The word “gentrification” appeared many times during my interviews and conversations about Wynwood. I sat down with Joe Furst, Managing Director of the Wynwood neighborhood properties for Goldman Properties, to chat about his work in the
neighborhood and Goldman Properties’ influence in the changes that were taking place. Joe is an incredibly nice man who always seems to have something perfect and polished ready to say. He also dresses impeccably well, something that Hari and I often joked about. I was excited to speak with him because he is one of the important actors in the neighborhood. As a member of the Wynwood BID Board of Directors and as a head figure at Goldman Properties, Joe has the power to enact—or, indeed, to block—many of the decisions in relation to the Wynwood neighborhood. “Gentrification to me,” he said, “is really the displacement of residents and displacement of people who have long-standing history of living in a community within a space.” The trick with Wynwood, especially the southern half of Wynwood, is that it was not a “community” in his eyes.

In Wynwood, to me, it’s a much different model. We have a neighborhood that consists primarily of one story warehouse buildings. We only have 8 blocks, currently, that were residential and have experienced a lot of investment and some displacement. But a lot of the people within that displacement area were owners, valued renters, and they had a choice as to whether they wanted to stay or whether they wanted to go….In the experiences I’ve had, the ones that have gone have been elated to take the money they were offered for their homes and move elsewhere.\textsuperscript{152}

Although there is the danger of even more concentration of power, wealth, and resources among global elites, the focus on using housing markets as financial instruments is that it destabilizes one of the primary forms of security in the neoliberal era. Having a home, indeed, is an essential aspect for individuals and communities “to be resilient in the face of unexpected life challenges,” says James Dunn.\textsuperscript{153} Ontological security is produced and reproduced through the routine aspects of daily life, many of which take place in one’s home. Threatening one’s home with a sale, an eviction, or any other kind of social pressure places a great amount of social strain on members of communities, especially communities in flux. Although the prices that were being offered
for homes were well above their market value, it still remained the case that many people did not want to sell.

As I will show in the next chapter, the normal conceptions of gentrification do not hold for Wynwood. Instead of thinking of residential displacement, I argue that Wynwood demonstrates the formation of a new place of consumption and experience shaped by the consuming habits of the global elites. From suburb to manufacturing center to urban blight to art district, Wynwood transitioned through several iterations of place formation and politics. As this chapter demonstrates, these manifestations of place arise from both the conscious acts of some and structural changes at the local and international level. With each passing epoch, the understanding of place in Wynwood shifts for both insiders and outsiders. But instead of a complete supplanting of previous understandings of place, remnants of the past meanings remain attached to Wynwood.154

What is interesting to witness is how insiders and outsiders respond to and enact the shifting meanings of place in Wynwood. Amidst much of the contention about what Wynwood is and what Wynwood represents, it remained the case that nearly everybody in my research agreed that Wynwood was the arts district of Miami. But the actions that arose as a result of this new shift of meaning were not as coalesced as the understanding of the place of Wynwood. Yes, the global elites did begin to descend upon the neighborhood for art and leisure, but what difference did that make for the local parents that still had to get up in the morning and walk their kids to school? Yes, there were now fancy restaurants in renovated warehouse spaces and huge parties on the second Saturday of every month, but why would locals care if they could not even afford the beers at the party? In the next chapter, I present ethnographic evidence from my time at the local
community center in the heart of the Wynwood residential area (north of Northwest 29th Street) to show how Wynwood eventually developed around the idea of art consumption and modes of consuming.
Chapter 3: Living in the Global Neighborhood

“Diagrams of aesthetic power lend themselves to becoming emblems of economic power.” – John Berger.\(^1\)

As I demonstrated in the previous chapters, the development of Wynwood into a global neighborhood rested upon the large shifts in money, consumption, and global art. Levels of global inequality produced a new class of elites, the High Net Worth Individuals (HNWIs) that were unique as much for their impressive wealth holdings as for their patterns of consumption. From VIP parties to superrgentrification, the consuming habits of the global elites has had profound effects on multiple market areas. In particular, the demand for cultural goods among the global elites has exacerbated the use of art as a financial instrument and has reshaped the nature of art purchasing. Although art has long been seen as a prospect for investment, it was still the case that a significant aspect of purchasing art was for enjoyment and consumption: placing a painting in a home, for instance, or gifting a work of art to children or others. Since the 2000s, however, certain artists became treated like stocks that rise and fall with shifts in the markets, art funds helped wealthy patrons invest their money wisely into art holdings, and a tremendous number of pieces sat in storage spaces away from gazing eyes. The contemporary art market at the turn of the century, moreover, became dominated by the sale of works at art fairs worldwide. A few of these art fairs—such as the Art Basel art fairs—dominated the market in terms of size, prestige, and sales. And in addition to shaping the modern art market, art fairs were integral in the development of the art *lifestyle*. Far from being merely locations for economic transactions, art fairs became a part of the experience economy of art consumption. In addition to (and, indeed, sometimes in lieu of) purchasing artwork,
patrons wished to live the art lifestyle by having access to the studios, parties, shows, openings, and other exclusive events.

What I have argued thus far is that these shifts in cultural consumption by global elites and the new push for an experience economy of art has combined with patterns of place construction and urban revitalization to produce the changes that were seen in Wynwood. As a global neighborhood, Wynwood became a node for global elites and other high-end cultural consumers as they traversed the planet in their pursuit of cultural consumption. As an example of how art and placemaking come together, Wynwood is far from a unique case. Efforts to revitalize downtrodden urban areas in the United States through the use of cultural institutions during the 1980s and 1990s were widespread. What does make Wynwood a significant case study, however, is how the neighborhood was tailored to provide a holistic experience of art and consumption. From the street art to the galleries, the artwalks to the art talks, Wynwood demonstrates how place construction and cultural consumption join in the wake of global flows of people in pursuit of these cultural experiences.

But what is it like living in the global neighborhood? How is it that the global art market shaped the residential aspects on the ground? What I argue in this chapter is that global shifts in art and the local shifts in Wynwood actually worked first to produce a place of cultural consumption rather than residence. The emphasis on art consumption and the flow of economic elites through the neighborhood, in short, resulted in an inversion of typical patterns of art and placemaking. Rather than certain communities of residents that produced a cultural enclave that then became attractive to residents—such as Chicago’s Wicker Park— and the lofts of SoHo—place entrepreneurs in Wynwood first produced a
cultural enclave revolving around consumption and consuming habits that would ideally prove to be attractive to certain types of residents. As exemplified by Tony Goldman’s daughter, Jessica Goldman Srebnick—now the manager of the Goldman Properties—in an interview with BBC news, “We wanted to create the center for the creative class, a neighborhood that was geared towards creative people.”

The actual shaping of Wynwood, therefore, was focused on creating the experience economy the presence of people who had not even moved into the neighborhood. Indeed, the very buildings that would house these future residents were far from even being executed. Instead of focusing on the residential aspects of the neighborhood, then, the place entrepreneurs of Wynwood focused instead on establishing the correct experience economy for the kind of resident that they aspired for in the future. The melding of the global art market and the experience economy of purchasing in the contemporary art market created a buzz of excitement in Wynwood. Although the global elites coursed through a small number of collections and galleries in Wynwood as they visited Miami for Art Basel Miami Beach and other art events, individuals outside the sphere of the global elites were able to participate in a similar experience economy of art purchasing through the parties and events in the dozens of other galleries and venues in Wynwood. By tapping into this experience economy, the place entrepreneurs of Wynwood focused first on consumption and the experience of consumption in order to create the “stage” of the experience economy that would attract a particular kind of consumer and, eventually, resident.
Shape it and they will Buy | Gentrification through Consumption

One of my first questions to Brook Dorsch, a gallerist in Wynwood who was often touted as being part of the initial spark that got the neighborhood going, was about why he was looking in Wynwood for property to relocate his gallery in 1999. His first gallery was on a scenic, tree-lined section of Coral Way in a rented space above a drugstore. At that point in his career, Dorsch was ready to buy property for his gallery rather than continue renting from property owners. When he asked the owners of the building he was renting from how much they would sell it for, they priced the building at a million dollars. “Investors were already behind it, apparently,” Dorsch told me. Well out of his price range, Dorsch began to look at other areas on the Miami map. Having heard of a property for sale in Wynwood from his mother, Dorsch arrived to the neighborhood to check it out. “I came in to look at it, got one foot in the door, and that was it. It was filled with garbage. It was a lamp factory and this guy was using it just for storage. It had a leaky roof, so there were all these cardboard boxes with mold and roaches, big puddles of water after rain.” There was a safe, heavy machinery, two kilns, a spray booth, and an entire truck inside the space. But for the price of that building, Dorsch was willing to put in the legwork needed to clear out the building and fix its structural issues. “I just looked at him and said ‘How big? How cheap? I’ll take it.’” Within a few weeks of viewing the property, Dorsch purchased the factory along with the “crack house” next door and joined a few other art entrepreneurs in purchasing property in Wynwood. It was at this time that the initial galleries and collections began purchasing property in the neighborhood.

Through his purchase of a former factory in Wynwood, Dorsch was unknowingly participating in a larger trend that unified cultural institutions and urban development in
the latter half of the twentieth century. As Sharon Zukin argues, two significant shifts during the 1960s effected this trend. First, there was the professionalization and democratization of artistic careers, whereby an artist could become “practically indistinguishable from other groups in the broadly-defined middle class.”⁵ And second, the state’s participation as a patron for the arts increased considerably at this time. In an effort to combat communism, deflect attention from bad policy, and establish avenues for reducing unemployment, elected officials and other political leaders provided state-level and corporate support for numerous arts institutions and cultural programs.⁶ Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, artistic venues and cultural institutions were essential for the revitalization of bleak urban spaces in former industrial areas of cities in the United States: efforts meant to put the “symbolic economy” to work in these sections of cities, a process by which “productive” sections of a city (delineated by industrial production) are replaced with “nonproductive” economic activity (such as cultural institutions) in order to attract high-income users.⁷

In understanding the role of art institutions in Wynwood, however, it is essential to delineate the differences in the kinds of art institutions. In purchasing his property, Dorsch was joining a handful of others in establishing a gallery in Wynwood, a particular kind of cultural institution with its own set of entanglements to surrounding properties. Museums, for instance, have long been holders of art, culture, and national patronage. As long-term holders and preservers of precious items for public consumption, museums are typically funded by tax dollars, large-scale grants, and other public monies at the state and national level. Because of their level of public interest and public funding, then, the establishment
of museums has been one way that local and state governments in the United States have injected cultural catalysts to urban places.

Because of the relative paucity of state-sponsored art institutions in Miami, however, collectors in the city increasingly used their art holdings for both private and public functions, a phenomenon dubbed the “Miami Art Model.” Collectors in Miami, for instance, took their private holdings out of their homes and storage facilities and began participating in educational and outreach efforts. They began holding art talks, for instance, or sponsoring scholarships and internships. School programs could book appointments to have special tours of their holdings or students could request time in their libraries. And as they all emphasized, their art holdings are open to the public and available for viewing during their open business hours.

Galleries, however, are different in their aim. As privately-run art venues, the main goal of galleries is to sell art pieces, not to preserve or showcase them. As Zukin succinctly states, “If the museums’ functions are educational and curatorial—to show and to tell—then the galleries functions are to show and to sell.”8 This image of the gallery as simply a selling ground, however, does not adequately describe the way that galleries have functioned in Wynwood and to what extent galleries have participated in the experiential economy of the neighborhood. As I detailed in the previous chapter, gallerists joined with property developers to establish formal structures (like the Wynwood Arts District Association and the Wynwood Business Improvement District) and held large-scale social events that could attract buyers at all levels of the market spectrum: food and beverage, art, and even property. Over the course of the late 2000s and early 2010s, galleries opened their doors late into the night on the second Saturday of every month for “Wynwood Artwalk.”
With the installation of approximately 70 galleries in the southern half of the neighborhood, the emphasis of the businesses in the area was on high-end *consumption*. This is the key to understanding the changing processes in Wynwood. The few collections notwithstanding, the main art institutions that arrived to Wynwood were art galleries, boutiques geared towards the selling of art. And although gallerists in Miami may see their role as having a public, educational element, they are ultimately running a business that depends upon the sales of their artworks. In Wynwood, however, the arrival of these galleries was joined with the establishment of restaurants and bars, yet other spaces for consumption. And with all of this came the appropriate mannerisms and behaviors for the proper consumption of these cultural goods.9 The galleries, the chic restaurants, the earthy bars, the pop-up foodways, the food trucks: all of these sites of consumption provided the different environments (or stages, in Goffmanian language) for the execution of appropriate forms of consumption.

Thinking about gentrification as purely about the replacement of marginal or working-class residents in housing, therefore, does not sufficiently address the kinds of cultural and place-driven changes that Wynwood demonstrated. As I have stressed before, the physical makeup of Wynwood did not profoundly change in the decades leading up to my research. Very few new housing options were built or renovated during from the 1990s to the mid-2010s. But the neighborhood did undergo a significant transition of use during this time—one that is more in line with Hackworth’s understanding of gentrification as “the production of urban space for progressively more affluent users”10—that was based on consumption and consumption habits. The focus in Wynwood, in short, was on constructing the particular place whereby the experience economy of art consumption
could take shape. With this established, new structures of residency could be constructed for higher-income “creatives.”

Time and again, I found that the products for consumption, coupled with the appropriate means of consuming, that defined a sharp delineation between the northern and southern half of Wynwood. Although the entire neighborhood was seen as “Wynwood” from the outside, a bifurcation in the neighborhood took place over the course of the 2000s and 2010s. Few new residents strolled in, but the vast majority of businesses were bought out at high rates or pushed out by high rents. What created the gentrification in the southern half of Wynwood—again, emphasizing Hackworth’s definition of gentrification more generally as the preparation of areas for affluent users, regardless of residential displacement—was consumption and consuming habits. Central to all of this was the presence of galleries, art institutions geared towards the selling of art, and the other spaces that collaborated with the galleries to present the necessary staging for the right consumption of art.

**Starbucks or Cafecito? | Consumption and Invisible Boundaries**

Pearline had her Jamaican restaurant, Clive’s Café, in the southern half of Wynwood for 38 years. Named after her son, the café was one of the many places that served up small menus of homemade food to the workers and families of the area. Clive’s Café was a prosperous business with dedicated clientele that loved her oxtail dishes and jerk chicken plates. By mid-2013, however, Pearline had to look for a different location for her restaurant. The building she was located in was sold to a property developer who had a new vision for what sorts of businesses should be in the neighborhood. According to
Pearline’s words to journalists, “Our lease was up last year. When we asked for renewal, our landlord said they are going to remodel the building and bring it up to code with other stuff in the area.” After four decades of being in the neighborhood, Pearline had three months to find a new location. A couple of harried weeks later, Pearline secured a spot in Little Haiti, just north of Wynwood.

*I was there when there was nothing there,* she told me as I awaited my food at her new location just a few months after her move. Pearline had tired eyes, graying hair, and gave off a demurred and uninterested air. I told her about my project, and she seemed unimpressed. She had several people come to her from news stations, magazines, universities, and others: all wanting to know her story. And, in my opinion, she seemed over it. I would ask her questions, she would answer them in brief replies, and then she would go silent. My usual trick of waiting 10 full seconds before asking another question just in case a person wanted to clarify or add something did not work with Pearline. She would stay quiet for 10, sometimes 20 seconds, as I waited to see if she wanted to add anything else to her sentences. *They wanted to change things,* she said. *They didn’t want anything like this anymore, these kinds of mom-and-pop restaurants and stuff. They were changing it all, so all the cafes went with me. I was one of the last to go.*

I asked Pearline what her opinion was on all that happened. *I’m not bothered. In fact, it may have been a blessing from God, the one I serve. I would’ve been angry if I had lost my clients. But a lot of ‘em just came up and followed me. It’s a quick drive, not so long on bike.* It seemed that Pearline was right about this: so many clients continued to arrive for food that it was difficult for me to interview her. The bell that hung above the door to announce another customer would not stop ringing during the entire 2 hours that I
spent at Clive’s. In the end, her message was repeated. *They don’t want people like me anymore. They want other stuff, like that stuff they have over there now. [waves hand in the air]* Pearline’s old location was renovated and fitted for new businesses. She was replaced by a boutique pie shop run by a former fireman. So it seemed ox tail was out and pies were in. Eventually, in a few years from then, pies would be out, and who knows what will be in.

The idea that the place of Wynwood was changing due to the sites of consumption and corresponding styles of consuming was something that came up in other conversations that I had with residents of Wynwood. Luis, for instance, was the nephew of Dorothy Quintana, the former unofficial “mayoress” of Wynwood. Known for driving around in her car meticulously taking notes on drug transactions, suspicious loitering, illegal dumping, and other neighborhood ills, Dottie represented the Wynwood neighborhood at many civic and political events throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The police officers all knew her well and respected her steadfast dedication to addressing the troubles of the neighborhood (even if they may have been annoyed at her copious notes and constant reports). The city commissioners grew to expect her at their monthly meetings with clear instructions for them, usually preceded by a slew of reprimands and admonishments for not doing enough for her neighborhood. And as the lore in the neighborhood had it, everybody who lived in Wynwood respected her—even if they did not like her. When Dottie turned 100, there was a party at the community center, and the children of the neighborhood held a ceremony where they released 100 balloons into the air in her honor. At 101, Dottie was honored with the naming of that community center after her; she died shortly thereafter.¹⁴
Luis moved into Dottie’s house with his two daughters when Dottie began having health issues, and carried on her legacy in the neighborhood from her very own home after she passed. He was the executive director of the Rafael Hernandez Corporation, an organization founded by Dottie in 1993 that was dedicated to building affordable housing and renovating business facades in low-income areas. It was named after the famous Puerto Rican composer who wrote the song *La Cachita*: a dance favorite on the island and among Puerto Ricans in the United States. I interacted with Luis often while volunteering and working in Wynwood: he worked closely with the Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce, the park officials at Roberto Clemente Park, and was a constant presence in the Dorothy Quintana Community Center. I would run into him at different events, meetings, and even at people’s homes. He was a simple, kind man, raising his two daughters alone while also helping his community as much as possible.

“Oh yah, she had a gun,” he told me as we sat in the lobby of the Center one day. I had asked him to chat with me about the changes to Wynwood since he was a part of the family that had a significant impact in the area. Aurea, the cleaning lady, sat nearby eating a bowl of instant ramen noodles from a Styrofoam cup; she started laughing when she heard Luis start on the topic. *Yeah, she kept it in a tiny purse.*¹⁵ She told me about it when I went to go pick up this purse one day. I didn’t know what was inside, but she said, ‘No, no no! Don’t touch that!’ Both Luis and Aurea were cackling by this point. Eventually she took it out and showed me so that I wouldn’t touch the purse again. I don’t actually know where that purse is now. We all laughed. *I tell my kids to watch out for a purse if they ever come around to one in the house.*
Sitting there with Luis and Aurea, I asked Luis about how the neighborhood had changed and what that had meant for him. Since Luis worked with affordable housing projects and the revitalization of business facades, he had been at the forefront of many of the conversations on property development in the area. *We have a reputation here,* Luis told me, *that is hard to get rid of.* The drugs, the riots, the theft: all of the negative past of Wynwood remained in the minds of many, he said. “Crea tu fama, y acuéstate a dormir,” he said, using a well-known saying in Spanish. “Make your reputation and then go to sleep.” To the south, they’re selling buildings to people with money. But up here around the park, the Rafael Hernandez program has been helping with the revitalization process. In his mind, these were two different worlds: the north and the south of Wynwood. That stuff “over there,” he said with his mannerisms as much as with his words, is a different situation, a different reality.

His interest was in helping his neighbors, the people who were hardworking, *humilde,* and who needed help. There was a coffee shop nearby, he said, that had asked for help from the Rafael Hernandez Corp for funds and labor to revitalize their shop front. *I went in to check it out,* he said, *and they had cups of coffee for like $3! Como el precio de Starbucks, you know.* And they talked about what they wanted to do to the front of their store and all, but I asked them if their clientele came from the area. And they said no! [laughs] So I told them that I can’t help them. If most of the residents can’t even afford to buy a sandwich there, then I can’t spend government funds to help them look more beautiful. There were so many clients that this coffee shop could already tap into, he said, that it did not merit his attention and concern. Developers were not building for them nor were they catering to the population living in Wynwood. Take, for instance, the Target that
was nearby. The people [in Wynwood] used to go shopping there, at Target, but now it’s too expensive to park! I mean, I stopped going as much when they stopped giving the first hour of parking for free. Now it’s $2 for the first two hours of parking there. So if I go to buy laundry detergent with a $1.50 coupon or something, it really doesn’t pay for me to go over there and spend $2 just for parking to buy the laundry detergent! It just doesn’t make sense! One time I had to pay like $6 or $8 to park there. Era loco.

By the time I conducted my research in the neighborhood, Wynwood had been equated with gentrification in the media and in the minds of many in Miami. So many of my respondents had used that word to describe what was happening in the neighborhood that I was sure that Luis would have used the word in his narrative. With all his work in the neighborhood and in the surrounding areas, I was surprised that he did not know about the word “gentrification.” But the use of the word surfaced in a roundabout way during our conversation. Luis is a part of a LinkedIn group that talks about housing in Miami, an online forum that helps him in his work with building affordable housing and fixing up business facades, and he was telling me about the increase in conversations about Wynwood that he has read on that forum. There is this word that they use, he said. They use it constantly. He was searching for the term, but he couldn’t remember it. He asked somebody sitting nearby us at the community center if they knew. I gave him time to think, but I did not offer up any suggestions because I did not know what word he was referencing. After a few questions, I offered up: is it ‘gentrification?’ Yes! That’s it, he said. Gentrification. What is it in Spanish? he asked me so that we could include the others sitting nearby. Aburguesamiento, I replied. Yes, aburguesamiento, he continued. The realtors, they say on the forum, buy up land and prices go up and people get pushed out. I
don’t like that. I haven’t seen much, maybe one or two houses. There were two of them over on NW Second Avenue, dos Americanos. Sure enough, they were artists.18

Overall, Luis spoke of Wynwood as two separate worlds. “Down there,” he indicated with his language and his mannerisms, is a different world. The southern half of Wynwood, where coffees cost $3 and parking is expensive, is something else. It is a place with a different understanding of investment and revitalization, a place that can often be silly in its realities. He started laughing at one point in our interview and said, Well, just take a look at all those businesses that are creeping up onto Northwest 29th street. Luis was excited to see new investments, new businesses, and (since this is what he specialized in) new facades along the streets of the neighborhood. But, as he continued, he was unhappy with what he saw. What did they put there? A Ducati store! [laughs] They finally put a business in the area, but a damn Ducati?19

When Luis discussed “Wynwood” in his narrative, he often spoke of the entire neighborhood as a unit. But when we spoke about the actual effects of neighborhood change, Luis focused on the northern half of Wynwood: the area with the homes, the local businesses, and people like him. When I asked Luis about what Wynwood really needed, for instance, he did not talk about development projects, lofts, parking, or nightlife: all of the things that had come to define Wynwood in the media and in the minds of many. Beautification, he said instead, is critical. More vegetation and better business facades would be good. And we also need more activities for the kids, you know. Things for them to do. Later, he continued with how Wynwood could do well with more cameras to help with crime. However, both of these elements—beautification and cameras—were already present in the southern half of the neighborhood, the half that had been shaped by changing
patterns of consumption. Property developers, I found out by attending monthly BID
meetings, were already beginning plans for outdoor café areas, vegetation improvements,
and even a Dutch *woonerf*: a streetscape that is meant to be shared by both cars and
people. And, as well, the southern half was littered with cameras and audio recording
devices. There were more than twenty cameras in the Wynwood BID area, for instance,
that could be immediately accessed on the iPhone of the BID’s executive director. The idea
of “Wynwood” in Luis’ mind was, in short, quite the opposite of what others in Miami held
about the neighborhood. Whereas “Wynwood” elicited images of street art and parties for
many, Luis instead focused on the houses near him and the public park that we were
meeting at. This was what “Wynwood” really was. The rest was just *otra cosa*.

Central to his perspective was an understanding of Wynwood as being split because
of businesses and consumption. The Ducati store, for instance, was front and center in his
mind when he discussed the changes to the neighborhood, and the coffee shop was also
prominent in his discourse. When it came down to discussing gentrification through
residential displacement, however, Luis had little to say. Very few people he knew had
been pushed out of their homes because of rising costs of rent, the classic definition of
gentrification.

Other residents of Wynwood shared similar narratives that demonstrated a similar
theme: residential life remained quite similar in their neighborhood, but the space for
consumption was changing. Aurea, for instance, was the only member of the custodial staff
at the Dorothy Quintana Community Center and was a lifelong resident of Wynwood. I
found through my time in the neighborhood that Aurea was a central node in the gossip
network of the neighborhood. Her job at the Center meant that she interacted with many in
the community: the adults that would come in for meals or social services, the children who would arrive for summer camps and time on the playground, and teenagers conducting illicit activities away from their parents. In addition to this central positioning, Aurea was an active member of the local Jehovah’s Witnesses church, which meant that she would evangelize door-to-door throughout the year and interact with many in their homes and on the sidewalks. I met Aurea in my first days at the Center, but she was always a bit of an elusive character: a quiet and observant woman who was not much of a willing talker. She knew how to pull information out of people, but she was not so reluctant to divulge information unless you were in her close circle. Over the years that I spent in Wynwood, I grew to gain her trust and learned a lot from her.

When one of the young men of the neighborhood died of a drug overdose, for instance, the conversations in the days following focused on the details. I was in the (tiny) gym at the Center one morning during those days following the death trying to work out and also connect with some of the younger men of the neighborhood who were my age. (My field notes are embarrassingly honest about this fact: “In any case, I started lifting weights. I just need to be present, I told myself. Get them to recognize me and stuff. Maybe one day they’ll talk to me.”) Oye, Aura said to the two young men in the gym with me. What’s the scoop on Jillian? Two kids apparently gave him drugs, the young men told her, in a kind of “test.” Like a ‘hey, try this and let me know what you feel,’ kind of test, they said. But he popped it like Molly—didn’t shoot it up. Was, like, heroin or something and it just killed him. Aurea was walking around the gym listening intently but not looking at anybody. Aurea kept asking questions, the young men kept answering them. You need to stay away from that kind of stuff, Aurea finally told one of the young men. I don’t do that
shit, man. I don’t do drugs, one of them said with a smack of his lips. Too busy workin’. Aurea and I stepped outside of the building to continue our own private conversation. I was interested in learning what Aurea knew of the incident, what she knew of the men, and what her views were on the matter. He’s a good kid, Aurea told me. Goes to work. Sometimes takes his brother too so that the little one can make a little money too.  

Cuqua, Aurea’s niece, is also a lifelong member of the Wynwood neighborhood. Although she and her family now live just a few blocks north of the neighborhood’s cutoff, she is still an active member of the community overall. She comes to the Center two or three times a week to spend time with the other residents and her mother, Luz, who lives across the street from the Center. She grew up in the streets of Wynwood, attended the elementary and middle schools in the area, and now spends her days watching telenovelas on TV or visiting friends. Cuqua and I got along very well at the Center because we were both inquietos: we didn’t like to just sit down and watch, but rather got up and were always doing something. We would scurry around the room getting people coffees or lunch, for instance, or we would tidy up a corner of the room.

It was as a result of their longstanding membership in the community, then, that Aurea and Cuqua, tia and sobrina, were two embedded members of Wynwood. They personally knew many of the people who had been shot or had died in the neighborhood during my time at the Center, for instance, and were up to date with the details on who was moving in or who was moving out. With all their knowledge, then, I was often surprised at their relative ignorance of the dramatic changes that were taking place in the neighborhood to their south. Aurea and I were sitting in the Center’s foyer area one day, for instance, when somebody mentioned that Wynwood had been listed by Vogue magazine as one of
the 15 coolest neighborhoods in the world. 22 Really!? Aurea asked. Vogue magazine? Pero that just happened overnight?23 By this point in 2014, Wynwood had been featured in a myriad of magazines, television shows, and other media platforms. To hear Aurea say that this feature in Vogue was something that happened “overnight” surprised me. I would have imagined that Aurea would have known about the press coverage and popularity that her own neighborhood had garnered on the global level. With Art Basel Miami Beach now a full decade into its tenure, I was surprised, in short, that Aurea was surprised.

I had a similar feeling when I went for a drive with Cuqua. I had mentioned in the Center that I was going to head out for a quick errand to the brewery at noon because their growler fills were discounted by 50% from noon-1pm. I had to go during the middle of our session in the Center, therefore, in order to get the discount. Cuqua asked if she could go with me. She had heard about the Wynwood Brewing Company before because she knew the founders. The owner and his family were old natives of Wynwood who had moved out of the neighborhood decades ago. The father and son, however, had returned to set up their brewery in the early 2010s and had donated much of their profits to the community—especially to Roberto Clemente Park.

Cuqua and I hopped in the car and drove to the brewery that morning. It was a quick drive—six streets down and three avenues over—but it seemed like a totally different world for Cuqua. Just look at all of this! She said. I didn’t know this was here! I was pointing out different changes that had taken place in the blocks around the brewery: the new bars, the new shops, and the new plans for new buildings. But all of this esta tan lindo. This was all so different when we were growing up! We went in to the brewery to have my growlers filled up, and I bought Cuqua a growler as a souvenir. She loved the fact that the growler
proudly stated “Wynwood” on the label. *This is all so good*, she said. *It’s about time that the neighborhood gets the recognition it deserves. And who would’ve thought a pair of Puerto Ricans would do this!* [points around the brewery] *This is all so lindo! Tan, tan lindo.* We drove around some of the side streets while Cuqua continued pointing in amazement. She knew about the art stuff and the parties, she told me, but she never thought it had gotten to this level.

Although Northwest 29th Street divides Wynwood into northern and southern segments merely by being a larger road that bisects the neighborhood from end to end (extending past I-95 underneath an overpass to the west and finishing at Biscayne Bay to the east), it also served as a kind of invisible boundary for the interests of many that I spoke to at the Center. What lay to the south of NW 29th Street—the majority of the galleries, collections, boutiques, breweries, and other venues—were beyond their scope of interest. Overall, I found that most of the people I encountered at the Dorothy Quintana Community Center were relatively uninformed and—more importantly—uninterested in the waves of art and money that were coursing through their neighborhood until changes began to take place in their immediate environment. And, what is more, their narratives were often split into the “here” and “there” of the two Wynwoods that were above and below, respectively, the dividing line of Northwest 29th Street.

In many ways, this did not surprise me. With the majority of homes, schools, and small businesses in the northern half of Wynwood, I had expected that local residents would focus more on their immediate environments than on the popular destinations that were frequented by others from outside of the neighborhood. The hipster bars, the Taco Tuesdays, the DJ-street artist mashups: these are not the kinds of events that created places
that were welcoming to those who actually lived in Wynwood.\textsuperscript{24} Even when I was with Cuqua in the brewery, I could feel how uncomfortable she was feeling. These establishments, indeed, were not built with the locals in mind.

But what did leave a profound impression on me was the way in which Wynwood was split in the minds of the residents based on themes of consumption and consuming spaces. When they spoke about Wynwood, they were speaking about the northern half of the neighborhood. When they spoke of what was happening “here” or “in Wynwood,” they were speaking about what was taking place in the northern half. Although local radio, television, magazines, and other forms of media had shifted the meanings of Wynwood towards those of arts, culture, and leisure, the residents of Wynwood still saw the neighborhood as being how it had always been for them in the northern half. When I asked for their opinions on changes in the neighborhood, for instance, residents were more aware of Hondurans moving in than with Jeff Koons pieces going up. And although the fact that residents still viewed the neighborhood as they always had is not immediately surprising, it impressed me because of the decade-long effort to change the meaning of Wynwood from blight to chic.

My experiences at the Center demonstrated that instead of a blanketing of meaning across the entire neighborhood, the financial, cultural, and social efforts in Wynwood led to a kind bifurcation of the neighborhood based on consumption rather than residency. And this bifurcation, moreover, took place in the minds and actions of both residents within the neighborhood and interested parties from without. Although they knew very little of what was taking place a few blocks to the south, residents still knew that it was not for them: it was all taking place “there,” not “here.” Their daily lives were interrupted because of those
consuming habits of those who came to the southern half of the neighborhood—as with the monthly Artwalk events and the arrival of Art Basel—but their residential lives were very much the same as they had been.

Selling for Residents | When Businesses Build a Residential Neighborhood

For the individuals who were involved in the production of the experience economy in the southern half of Wynwood, however, the questions surrounding the proper production of consumable space was of utmost importance. Monthly meetings of the Wynwood Business Improvement District took place in the BID office: a room that was, appropriately enough, part of a refurbished factory building that had been made to house multiple offices for businesses like technology startups, a boutique furniture store, and a Dutch bicycle shop. Although BID members placed out dozens of plastic chairs, the meetings were consistently packed so that several individuals had to stand in the back or just outside the office door. As official meetings of the City of Miami, these monthly sessions were documented with detailed notes, new officials had to be sworn in, and members of the BID committee followed Roberts Rules of Order as they proceeded through the agenda for discussion.¹

It was during these meetings that I was able to see the processes of place construction that led to the production of the experience economy of art consumption in the southern half of Wynwood. BID leaders consistently spoke of “our neighborhood.”

¹ Only once did the Executive Director of the Wynwood BID, Tom Curitore, require attendees to pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States, an act that was in accordance with governmental meetings. After surprised looks and snickers, attendees eventually stood up and began to recite the pledge. I overheard one person joke that he knew the pledge for his old country of residence but not that of the United States. Tom led the charge, and several people had to mumble their way through the words. At the close, those nearest me giggled about not having had to recite the pledge since their school days.
Whether it was during security briefs from the police department, planning and zoning updates from BID directors, or discussions from business owners, the presentations always centered on the important consequences for “our neighborhood.” Not a single member of the board of directors of the Wynwood BID and none of the individuals present that I recognized, however, actually lived in Wynwood. Although several of the attendees were property developers intent on eventually building residential buildings, they were not, nor had ever been, residents.

In discussing “their” neighborhood, then, the directors of the Wynwood BID targeted the interests and needs of businesses, business owners, consumers, visitors, and others who flowed through the southern half of the neighborhood. They were not, as a result, discussing the neighborhood as a whole: that which included the northern half and edges surrounding. As a result, conversations often turned towards the most useful means of selling for the type of consumer that they were seeking. In establishing an experience economy in the southern half of Wynwood, the members of the Wynwood BID were charged with establishing the “just-so” environment for “just-so” consuming that was based off of the demand for the art lifestyle that I described earlier in this dissertation.

Some of the moments of tense confrontation during the meetings demonstrated the fine distinctions that members of the BID were drawing and what population they had in mind as residents and consumers. The owner of Gramps, one of the popular bars and concert venues of Wynwood, for instance, took the opportunity at the end of one meeting to raise a request for the BID board to consider. It was unfair, he said, that his establishment was forced to close at 3am while another bar nearby, the Electric Pickle, could close at 5am. The issue, he said, was that the rules stipulated at the beginning of Wynwood’s
creation as a café district created silly discrepancies such as this. Just because Gramps was within the confines of the café district that Tony Goldman established, he was forced to close early for no real reason. The owner of Gramps was nervous as he stood up and read from his prepared speech, one that included a summary of all the analyses he had conducted on similar establishments in Wynwood and Miami, the rates of people at different hours of the night, and the demand for later services for bars in Wynwood. I had heard about this issue before from my conversations with others, so I knew that this was not a new issue. The body language of the BID directors, however, confirmed my suspicions. They seemed uncomfortable with the argument and seemed to resent the owner’s speech at the end of an already-long BID meeting.

Joe Furst, the Managing Director of the Wynwood neighborhood for Goldman Properties who explained to me the difference between “gentrification”—which displaces community members—and what was taking place in Wynwood in the last chapter, addressed the owner’s complaints with tired eyes and an exasperated voice. The increase to 5am, Furst said, would lead to an entertainment district similar to that of Washington Rd on the Beach, and we don’t want that. We have to think about the future condos that will probably go across the street from you. They won’t want something open until 5am, people outside, drunks, and all that. The owner suggested closing the outside at 3am and the inside at 5am, thus allowing people to still finish their drinks at their leisure. This is not the vibe we want in this neighborhood, Furst responded. We want to make sure we preserve the character of the neighborhood and remain true to our vision.25

As Furst mentioned, the efforts that the BID were enacting would be important for the future residents of Wynwood. Note, again, that when the BID spoke of “Wynwood,”
they were really speaking about the southern half of the neighborhood. In addition to forming a public-private partnership between businesses and the city in the form of a BID, the leaders of the neighborhood also structured a new kind of zoning designation: Neighborhood Revitalization District (NRD). The first of its kind, the NRD was a concept drafted by the leaders of the Wynwood BID so that they could enact significant changes in residential zoning and planning more quickly rather than by going through the typical steps required by the City of Miami. In its official designation, the NRD was said to “establish a series of protective regulations to guide the transition from an industrial district into a diverse, mixed-use area to include industrial, retail, and residential components.” The experiential component of the effort was central to the NRD designations. Preserving the “character” of the neighborhood was of primary concern: ensuring that the industrial feel of the neighborhood remained through keeping setbacks at a minimum and keeping the factory buildings as they were. This emphasis tied in with the desire to tie in the industrial buildings with the “artistic character” of the neighborhood—typically an indication towards the street art on the walls.

The Wynwood Model | Crossing the Division

The construction of a place geared towards a particular kind of consumption bled into the actions and efforts of local residents as they assimilated the new reality of the southern half of Wynwood. I use a longer explication of one event in particular to demonstrate how the decision-making processes of those at the Dorothy Quintana Community Center were shaped by the experiential economy of the southern half of

---

b In an effort to keep out big-box stores and other franchises, the Wynwood BID even discussed the idea of blocking businesses from using lit signs and, instead, requiring businesses to paint their company signs.
Wynwood. It was rare for representatives of the two worlds, the northern and southern, to interact at the level that I witnessed during this event. I present it here, therefore, as an indication for how powerful the place construction of meaning and consumption can be.

As the president of the Puerto Rican Chamber, Louie was responsible for holding networking events, supporting political platforms, pushing for grassroots organizing of Puerto Ricans in Miami, and a whole host of other formal and informal duties. One of his major successes at the helm of the Chamber was securing a piece of land in Wynwood in order to build a stand-alone Puerto Rican community center that could provide meeting spaces, offices, and other amenities for both the Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce and the Puerto Rican citizens of Miami (especially those in Wynwood). The little sliver of undeveloped land lay in the southern half of Wynwood just behind one of the old factory buildings from the garment district days of the neighborhood: an uninteresting and undeveloped piece of property that was owned by the county. When it was allotted to the Puerto Rican Chamber in the late 90s, this plot was not worth much: it lays on a small lane with minimal foot and auto traffic just two blocks north from the infamous Overtown neighborhood and is surrounded by nearly 8 acres of parking lots.

As with most municipal projects, the Puerto Rican community center was still just a dream a decade and a half later when I arrived in 2014. Lack of funds, the absence of grassroots interest, and the rapid influx of global attention to Wynwood downgraded the project in importance. During those years, however, the plot of land assigned for the building had become quite valuable. Although it resides along a small lane, the small plot abuts the prominent Northwest Second Avenue that forms the main artery of the arts district. What is more, Moishe Mana had procured the parking lots and warehouses in the
surrounding area in 2010 and had shaped them over the years into a popular destination for food trucks, outdoor concerts, bars, and vendor tents on the weekends. As a result, Mana saw the parcel that had been allocated to the Puerto Rican Chamber as a necessary component for completing his assemblage of property in the area and pushed for the opportunity to purchase the lot from the county.

Mana was the man with the single largest collection of Wynwood property and one of the main property developers in Miami overall. Mana owned dozens of parcels and buildings in the neighborhood, including the 160,000-square foot warehouse that was, at one point, scheduled to become a free trade zone for the city. With a tremendous amount of open space, ample parking, and a security detail, the Mana warehouse quickly became a hub for parties, concerts, other high-end events. Mana’s interests in the county land, therefore, were not taken lightly. He and his staff pushed a series of formal and informal lobbying efforts on his behalf over the course of several months in 2014. Through a series of conversations with the county and city commissioner of the district and Louie and his Chamber, Mana was able to secure the land through a land swap agreement. Mana would take the property from the county so that he could complete his assemblage and would offer up other land of his in the neighborhood for the Puerto Rican center in the swap. But because the land he was offering was smaller than the land he was purchasing, however, Mana agreed to help finance the building of the community center: a trade that excited both Louie and the county commissioner.

This bro was a caricature of sorts. As a self-made millionaire who had been covered several times by major news outlets for his rags-to-riches story, Mana arrived to New York from Israel, began his first company with a van and a moving company, and then ended decades later with major property holdings in both Miami and New Jersey. Even his Facebook profile stated that he went to the “School of Hard Knocks, The University of Life.” But the man was no stranger to the Miami glam. He loved flanking himself with tall, gorgeous models (even though he was around 5 feet tall) and holding lavish parties with hundreds of guests and gallons of alcohol at the open bars.
Mana furthered his economic venture, however, with other informal measures—such as inviting Louie and his family to parties, galas, gallery openings, offering donations for smaller efforts at the Dorothy Quintana Community Center, and attending events put on by the Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce as a special guest. The fundraising event was one of the efforts that Louie and Maribell held to raise money for arts and crafts supplies at the Center that took advantage of this newfound interest from Mana. Louie was tired of begging the commissioner of the neighborhood, Keon Hardemon, for grants and aid for the center. Unlike other efforts that they had held to raise money, therefore, this fundraising event would use their big sponsorship from Moishe Mana to attract more sponsors and give a positive impression of the Center and its efforts.

Meetings: there were always meetings when it came to Louie. It didn’t matter how much had to get done, Louie was a fan of having meetings. During one of our meetings in mid-January, then, Louie asked me and some of the other community members about our views for a fundraising event. A happy hour thing, you know. Like nice drinks, wine, a few foods. Nothing big, you know, just a few finger foods.28 We all liked the idea and thought we could put on a nice event, but we emphasized that it was important to pick the right date for something like this. We were too small and insignificant to compete with other Miami offerings for Friday and Saturday nights, for instance, but nobody would come out for a happy hour drink on a Monday or a Tuesday, we felt. After a bit of deliberation, we decided that a Thursday night would be the best time in the week for an after work happy hour and a bit of fun.

Three days after this meeting, we began brainstorming more details for the event. Right off the bat, Louie was thinking well beyond the basics of food and music. We have
to give attendees something to do, Louie said, or something to see or win. People aren’t just going to come for a drink. He scribbled notes down on a legal pad and dominated the conversation by interrupting and interjecting at every opportunity. There could be a raffle, a tour of Mana’s space: these things could draw people in and they could pay $20 at the door for an open bar for a few hours. I know somebody who could donate the wine: we use him all the time for Chamber events. We could get somebody else to donate the other alcohol. And I know a solid Puerto Rican band that can donate the music. We get these people lots of business—they’ll definitely do this for us for free. His excitement was palpable from the way his sentences melded into one another.

The conversation went back and forth in this way for over an hour when Louie’s friend—who happened to be the wine distributor that he was mentioning—knocked and entered the office. The Puerto Rican street festival in Wynwood had just ended a few days prior. Louie’s friend was the wine distributor for the event, and he was still riding high from the weekend. Man, it was amazing, he said to me before addressing everybody else in the room. And it was perfect, too! You couldn’t have asked for anything better. Twenty-seven thousand people came this weekend, and not one single issue came up. Not one fight! Not one vomiting. Not one drunken arrest. Nothing! It was perfect [he does the sign of the cross and points upward]. It was beautiful; absolutely beautiful.

Through the rest of the conversation, it became apparent that this was the kind of image that Luis had conjured in relation to a fundraising event for the Center: getting the Puerto Rican population of Miami together to celebrate community involvement and support the Center’s initiatives. Although this would be a much smaller event than the Puerto Rican street festival, the members of the Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce could
mobilize their networks and bring a good number of people to the fundraiser. What is more, these Puerto Rican businesspeople could sponsor the event and advertise their products. The food would be Puerto Rican, the band members and songs would be Puerto Rican, and even the vendors that donated other goods—such as Mark and his donation of cases of wine or a Puerto Rican singer in the neighborhood—would be Puerto Rican. As a community initiative, the fundraising event would be an expression of the people in the neighborhood, no matter how poor or marginalized, and the joy that art brings into their world. We were all quite happy with how things were moving forward and took on a list of action tasks at the end of the meeting.29

After several weeks of anxious meetings and hurried confusion, the day of the final walk-through finally arrived. Michael, Louie’s son, walked in with a life-sized male manikin on a pedestal: bright white and with a glossy finish. It was the kind of manikin that department stores use to show their clothing in shop windows. After he put the manikin down on the floor, he went back to the car and returned with a cardboard box filled with bottles of neon-colored spray paint. As we marveled at the spectacle, Michael took the manikin outside of the building and set it up in the children’s playground that was just outside our room. Without hesitation, Louie’s son began spraying the manikin with splotches of bright orange, silver, black splotches, and other frenetic motions and colors. As he doused the manikin with paint, Louie’s wife, Maribell, cut out Hebrew letters on cardstock so that she could stencil the lettering onto the manikin.

The members of the Center laughed and marveled at all of this: they were deeply confused about what, exactly, was going on. Janitza and I were alongside them with confusion as well, but we continued collecting the pieces that community members had
made and put them in my car so we could take them to the Mana compound. Midway through this process, Maribell brought in another manikin from the car. This time, however, it was only the bottom half of the manikin, and it was covered in blood-red paint with black splotches and writing. This was followed by a rack of clothes that, Maribell said, would be worn by the models.

It was all quite overwhelming and confusing. Everybody was running around with tasks to do, things to find, cloths to cut, buttons to sew on, and artwork to organize. While we were putting the arts and crafts in my car, for instance, Janitza, one of the longstanding volunteers at the Center, confided in me about how she was feeling. *I just get so frustrated,* she told me. *This is about the seniors, about the locals. It’s not about her and her show.* Janitza’s concerns became worse when Maribell joined us outside to ask our opinion about whether or not to invite a particular member of the Center. This woman, Maribell said, would not be good for the Center’s image. *We can’t have her walking around fighting with everybody and dressed like she dresses. No no no! We can’t have her going around like this. This is a classy affair. No, she can’t come. We have to tell her!* When Maribell left, Janitza turned to me and said, *I think that when Maribell says that ‘we’ have to tell her, what she really means is that I have to tell her.* I was in shock that Maribell would uninvite one of the active members of the Center just so that she could keep appearances for our event.

I spent the rest of the day with members of the Center helping bring items to the Mana warehouse and running final errands for the big day. Later that afternoon, I called Louie to express my own worries about the fundraiser. I was confused about what the fundraiser was really about. The manikins, the spray paint, the models: I wasn’t sure how
all of this fit with our community. It’s all okay, Alfredo, Louie assuaged me. This is part of the entertainment factor of the whole event. People will be paying lots of money to come in, so we need to make sure that they have things to do, things to look at, etc. This is a big event in Wynwood! We need to make sure we do it right! We gotta keep the Wynwood vibe going. There’s a way that things are done in Wynwood. In that conversation, the day before the event, I found out that the Puerto Rican band, the Puerto Rican food, and the Puerto Rican vendors had all been replaced. Mana was going to take care of everything, Louie told me. It’s going to be really nice, really fancy. I marveled at the profound change in preparation for the event and the need to shape the entertainment towards the experience economy of arts consumption in Wynwood. There would not be any art for sale at our fundraiser, but the atmosphere was constructed so as to mirror the environment of consuming art.

As with all large-scale party planning, the day of the event proved to be a bit of a fiasco during the day but a huge success at night. The artistic displays filled up the cavernous warehouse somewhat effectively. Maribell had placed her table of golden plastic toys on one side and had used her easels of paintings as a dividing line in the large, expansive room. Her son, moreover, had placed the bottom half of the manikin (painted blood red and with black splotches) off to one side with a white plastic rhinoceros at the base (also doused with a variety of paints and colors). The other manikin—the full-sized one with erratic spray paint—was placed on the path to the food with a variety of permanent markers so that guests could tag it up with graffiti. The projector was set up with the photo montage rolling on the wall, and the table that Janitza and I had set up with arts and crafts from the community members was now adorned with additional bulletin boards with
pictures from the past few years. A female artist, moreover, arrived with canvas, easel, and paints to set up in a corner and live paint throughout the event. And as guests ate and drank, a series of models walked through the space wearing clothes that Maribell had sewn. It was all impressive and somewhat overwhelming. *Just as soon as I think that I know what’s going on, something else happens and I’m back to square one, a friend told me as she walked around looking at all the things.*

After speeches, announcements, and donations, the DJ switched his music from lounge-style beats to a samba rhythm and increased the volume so as to grab everybody’s attention. While I looked around wondering what was happening, my friend tapped my shoulder and pointed to the far end of the warehouse: a woman with a glittering carnival outfit—replete with feathered headdress and Brazilian thong—was samba dancing through the crowd. Although I had spent several weeks helping organize this event, I had never once heard any hints of a samba dancer. As she danced through the crowd, she would occasionally stop and flirt, kiss, or boogie for guests. Once she reached the manikin with graffiti and spray paint, she danced with it in a sexually provocative way. There were pictures, there were cheers, and there was more dancing. This was the last thing I noted in my field notes for that day.30

* * *

Living in the neighborhood meant coming to terms with the displacement of certain individuals from being welcome in particular places of consumption rather than in homes or residencies. The surge of art fairs worldwide led to the demand for participation in the experience of art consumption—the parties, events, and the like—among many outside of the stratum of the global elites. This desire for the experience economy of art bled into the
southern half of Wynwood as a result of the large number of galleries and collections, and businesses followed so as to continually provide the necessary staging for this kind of consumption. As a result, visitors from far and wide coursed through the streets of Wynwood even in the months outside of ABMB. Everybody, it seemed, wanted a piece of that art lifestyle.

There was very little residential displacement outside of the homes in the southern half of Wynwood that were purchased by property developers over the course of the 2010s. In the north, residents continued life in much the same way as they always had, and few had to leave as a result of rising rents. What was more palpable in the minds of residents, however, was the displacement of particular places of consumption. Gone were the Clive’s Café’s of the neighborhood, for instance, and in were the Ducatis. The new establishments in the experience economy of the southern half of Wynwood, moreover, were clearly aimed at other types of consumers rather than the ones who resided in the neighborhood. Even the workers who were hired to work many of the events in the southern half, one party organizer told me, rarely came from the neighborhood.

This emphasis on the experience economy and the establishment of just-so places for people to consume in just-so ways also impacted other social worlds of the neighborhood. In the next chapter, I discuss how one group of Wynwood regulars, the street artists, were affected by the construction of the experience economy of Wynwood.
Chapter 4: Getting a Wall in Wynwood: Same Walls, Different Meanings

Put that in your project, bro. Put that in your motherfucking project. I do this for free, you get me? Free.

We were regaining our nerves when Hec One Love told me this. I had just fallen off the top of a 9-foot ladder while helping Hec, a local Miami street artist, paint one of his walls in the neighborhood. We had been working since 9am that morning putting up lines and painter’s tape to create straight, crisp, and clean white lettering on an abstract spray-painted background. We measured every line with incredible precision: 22 ¾ inches from the top of the wall to the top of the letter; 5 inches for the thickness of the letters’ legs; from here to there was 15 inches, but from those two spots it was 11 inches. I was amazed at the kind of detail that he paid to the letters. It was a whole day of Line it up. Snap the line. Do it again. Use the tape. Careful, bro, that line isn’t straight enough. Nice, that’s a nice line. Nice, that’s badass. We spent several minutes with each piece of tape; every single line was painstakingly added.
At some point during the day, I was up at the top of the ladder working on one of the letters when I felt the ladder creep up onto its two side legs. Sure, I wasn’t supposed to stand above that step two away from the top. Sure, I also wasn’t supposed to be on my tip toes while standing on the highest point. But Miamians are not known for following the rules, and street art does not have the axiom of “safety first.”

I tried to compensate the tipping and gave a little yell. I must have done something right because the ladder remained balancing in the air with all my weight still on the two outer legs. I balanced on those two legs for what felt like an eternity, but eventually all my efforts failed and I started falling away from the wall and onto a parked car. I still yelled out for Hec but thought that I was on my own. At the last fraction of a second, Hec arrived
and caught the ladder in mid fall. I fell more slowly as a result and softly landed on the car. Nothing happened to the car, nothing happened to me, and everything—except my dignity—was saved.

We were both shaken up from this episode. He hit me on my chest and yelled at me for being stupid, but we both just kept laughing from the nerves. He does this for free, Hec reminded me. You think that [the lady who owns the business behind the wall] offered to pay me anything? No way, man. She just comes up to me and asks me if I’m going to fix it up for Basel. Oh really? So you gonna pay me for the wall? No? You gonna buy my supplies? You gonna buy me food? You gonna hook me up in any way? No? Then go away, this is my wall. This is the kind of bullshit that I have to put up with, he told me, bullshit that also includes dangerous escapades like falling off of ladders.
It struck me to realize just how dangerous painting walls can be. Looking at the beautiful walls in Wynwood riddled with street art, it was difficult to fully realize how hard it is to get those images up. From 30 feet away, Hec told me, the walls look like a sheet of paper, a canvas of sorts. You can pull out your iPhone, snap a picture, and go on your way. But when you walk up to the walls and see how big the productions are, you start to realize: this is hard work. Getting the proportions right means an unceasing back and forth with the wall: climbing up the ladder, spraying and/or painting for a few minutes, returning down the ladder, walking away for a look at the wall, and then climbing back up again. Rinse and repeat dozens of times over several days, and that’s how a wall gets painted. Getting
to hard to reach places means leaning out far over your ladder, it means risking your body for the sake of the wall. *You got health insurance, right?* Hec joked with me when we got started. *Yah, school pays for it,* I told him. *Okay good,* he said. *Then that means you get up the ladder. I don’t have insurance.*

Beyond the danger, however, I was surprised by how much of this work is done for free. When I first arrived to Wynwood, I assumed that the walls were painted through commissioned projects that were paid for by the businesses behind the walls. I imagined a back and forth between businesses and artists that rested upon mutual economic benefits: the artists would get paid for their work while the businesses would benefit from more sales due to the increased foot traffic the art would yield. Yet the more and more that I became involved in my research, the more and more I found that many of the walls were being done for free. While many street artists make a living from painting murals in other locations, the vast majority of street artists do their work in Wynwood for free.

But why is that? Why do some street artists charge for their work in people’s homes or in nearby cities while agreeing to paint for free in Wynwood? While other artists put in a vast amount of time producing canvases and other artwork that might sell one day, the street artists in Wynwood are up on the walls and in the sun for hours often without any prospect of monetary compensation. Instead of expensive lifts or scaffolding, many rise up on rickety ladders. Instead of hiring a team, they call and text their friends for help. And without sponsorships or commissions, they rely on their own money to paint walls of Wynwood. Why do many street artists risk their bodies, their pocketbooks, and their livelihood in order to paint a wall in Wynwood for free?
As essential members of the construction of the experience economy in Wynwood, street artists play a significant role in the construction of the settings of consumption in the neighborhood. People regularly spoke of Wynwood as “the largest street art gallery in the world,” and the colorful murals, stickers, tags, and other markings repeatedly appeared across all forms of media that spoke of the neighborhood. Yet with the street art’s pervasiveness in the external imaginings of Wynwood and the internal place construction of the neighborhood, street artists were rarely compensated for their work and, more insidiously, were rarely attributed to the works that appeared in the media. One “celebrity pastor,” indeed, was even sued for improperly using street art images in his church’s advertisements (the case was settled outside of court). My buddy Robert, the cussing curator of street art from Hialeah that I cited in the introduction, was quoted in the Miami Herald as saying “It feels like s*** that this happened in the first place and it feels worse that no one reached out to the artists.”¹ And what is more, the street artists themselves are aware of the ways in which their works are used and misused by interested parties in Wynwood and elsewhere.

After detailing the methods street artists use to price their artwork, I present some of the taken-for-granted explanations for why they paint for free in Wynwood. I argue that sociological theories of place, especially in light of the experience economy and the important role that street artists have for setting the stage of consumption in Wynwood, hold the key for understanding why the street artists are much more willing to do walls for free or for no profit in Wynwood. These street artists are part of the placemaking strategies of the place entrepreneurs in the neighborhood. Instead of size, visibility, or location in the neighborhood, it is important for the street artists to be able to possess a wall in Wynwood
itself: to “have a wall in Wynwood” bears a different meaning than having a wall elsewhere. The place of Wynwood is what gives a particular meaning to the street art, a meaning that confers value. In addition to how the meaning of place confers value to the possession of a wall in Wynwood, however, I argue that the important role that street artists have in perpetuating the experience economy of Wynwood provides them with a kind of placemaking status as important as that of property developers, gallerists, and other place entrepreneurs. As a result, their participation in this placemaking process further legitimizes street art as a genre of artwork and provides a social link between street artists and economic elites.

**Art on the Walls | The Differences between Graffiti and Street Art**

Although it has increasingly been seen as a different art form, a form of “legitimate art,” street art has its roots in the graffiti world. The English word “graffiti” comes from *graffiare*, the Italian verb *to scratch*.

Although most of the images that are conjured up by the word are of spray cans and rebellious youth, the basic practice of writing on walls “goes back to some of the earliest visual forms known.”

Reaching as far back as the ancient Greek and Roman worlds, graffiti has existed in both urban and rural settings as forms of communication, deviance, defacement, and even taunting.

Most authors agree, however, that the contemporary urban and aesthetic form of graffiti took shape in New York City during the 1960s in connection with the alternative youth cultures of hip hop, rap, and breakdancing. The simple writing of one’s stylized pseudonym or logo, known as a “tag,” became a popular act at the time. Other forms of graffiti writing became prevalent, such as “throw-ups” or “throwies”—larger ballooned
lettering that uses more than one color of spray paint—and “pieces”—small masterpieces of multiple colors, shading, and depth. In these early decades of graffiti, writers took to painting their names—or “bombing,” in graffiti terminology—all throughout New York. Subway cars were popular in particular because of their ability to take a writer’s image far and wide throughout the city as they made their route, a theme that continued on with the bombing of freight trains throughout the nation.

As the graffiti style continued to take off in New York, Los Angeles, and other major metropolitan cities, many came to recognize that the images that were scrawled around the city were not just simple acts of senseless vandalism. They were, instead, forms of taking back and reclaiming the city, efforts of retaking public space in cities that were becoming structured more for exclusion than for inclusion. The top-down methods of powerful and wealthy developers and urban planners built cities like New York in the manner that they wished. Large buildings offered spaces to dwell, but they also represented the power that these figures held. It is no coincidence, then, that the graffiti subculture developed and grew alongside these urban development projects and the increased policing of public spaces that began as a result. Instead of just being about the perpetuation of a tagger’s name, graffiti became a process of resistance to authority and structure “in an urban environment increasingly defined by the segregation and control of social space.”

Over and beyond the reappropriation of city spaces, however, graffiti is also a means of communication. Within the graffiti subculture, writers use their work to get messages across that can challenge, praise, or compete. While much of the graffiti writing can be impenetrable or incomprehensible to the untrained eye, writers take pride in being able to look at a piece and tell the quality of work of the writer and the direct message of
the piece. What to many might look like a throwie of a person’s name could be a memorial piece for the passing of a crew member, for instance, or the scrabling of one’s name over another piece may be an invitation for antagonism. Works of graffiti can also communicate to the wider population of untrained viewers. Graffiti delineates areas that are controlled by gangs or other small groups, for instance, or can be an indication of social tension between communities or neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{14} Graffiti is also a means by which the larger cultural milieu of an area becomes expressed on the walls and alleys of a location, a “visual parole” that is tied to the “langue of a broader cultural practice.”\textsuperscript{15} The bright colors and intricate letters serve as markers of an area, spray-painted walls can, for instance, give off the message of “do not enter.”

There is a great amount of work, in short, on the history, culture, and style of graffiti in the United States.\textsuperscript{16} Most of the sociological literature in this area, however, has focused on the cultural and subcultural aspects of the graffiti world. “Sociological research,” states Virag Molnar, “is rather limited and mainly concentrates on graffiti, using ethnographic methods and drawing on theories of youth subcultures.”\textsuperscript{17} Street art, though, is a subject that has only garnered recent attention. Part of this is because of the relative newness of street art itself. Although graffiti dates back to the Greek and Roman times and the modern subculture of graffiti goes back to the 1960s, street art only began to gain notoriety as a style of work in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Fueled in part by a wave of viral images and videos online, street art quickly garnered international attention. By the late 2000s, even museums such as the Tate Modern in London, the National Portrait Gallery in Washington D.C., and several major New York museums had street art pieces or commissions as part of their body of work.\textsuperscript{18}
Although it is not always easy to delineate the differences between graffiti and street art, there are a few unique qualities that distinguish the two. First, there is the question of aesthetics. Artists of graffiti often prefer to identify as graffiti writers in particular because of the lettering style of their artwork. Although pieces can often have other figures or motifs, the main emphasis in graffiti is the stylized lettering. Street art, conversely, is praised for its myriad of subjects. Street art can include writing, but it is not limited to lettering. Instead, street art includes a variety of aesthetic manifestations: from ironic alternative city signage to grandiose landscape paintings, from cartoons and splotches of paint to the creative use of doors and windows as elements. Second, graffiti is distinguished from street art from the media that are used. Graffiti writers take pride in their command of the spray can. By using different tips on the spray cans and choosing cans with the right amount of pressure for the job, graffiti writers are able to make clean, crisp lines and edges in their writing. Much of the praise for graffiti writing, indeed, comes from the artist’s ability to control the spray can. With street art, however, the number of media vary considerably. Artists can use spray paint for their walls, yet they often choose to employ other media as well, such as wall paint, wheat pastes, found objects, or silicon. And finally, there is the question of payment and money. Graffiti is known for being free and illegal, a style of artwork that is more of a rejection of traditional market-based understandings of ownership and private property than a supporter. On the other hand, street art can secure large figures in major auctions and street artists can become famous and wealthy because of their work. In one documented example, for instance, a Banksy piece that was spray painted onto a cement wall was cut out and removed from the rest of the building and then placed on auction for hundreds of thousands of dollars.
**Pay Up | On Pricing Walls**

Wynwood is only comprised of 96 city blocks, yet this neighborhood holds more than 70 galleries, multiple event spaces, and two of the most famous private modern art collections in the world. Yet it is not always the art *inside* the walls that gives Wynwood its notoriety. It is, instead, the artwork on the *outside* of the walls that draws the most attention of visitors and tourists. From the light posts to the sidewalks, from the walls to the stop signs, Wynwood is covered in a wide array of street art: murals, stickers, stencils, and much else. Walking through the streets of Wynwood means walking through a sea of vibrant colors. Everything is art; everything is worthy of a picture. The immense amount of commerce in the neighborhood relies heavily on the artwork that is on the walls. People come from far and wide to take pictures of (and with) the murals, and after they have put away their selfie sticks and sunglasses, they turn to the local businesses for coffee, beer, or air conditioning. There is, therefore, an incentive for businesses to hire artists for mural work and painted signage on the outside of their buildings. From commissioned walls to large painted advertisements, commercial murals can often cost several thousands of dollars. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that artists can get paid to do murals across the U.S. that are the size and scope of the ones that are found in Wynwood.\(^\text{21}\)

The world of wall painting usually follows several best practices for the pricing of murals. Companies that provide commercial murals and artists that sell their skills must price their walls to compete with plastic or synthetic signage that can be made quickly and easily at large sizes while simultaneously ensuring that they cover their costs for the labor-intensive work. Many use a standard price sheet for quoting their work. Yet overall, prices
vary based on the (1) size, (2) content, and (3) social connections involved. Large murals, of course, cost more than smaller murals. Large pieces woo viewers and demonstrate the ability of the artist. Visitors might also be more inclined to take pictures of larger walls and post them on their social media platforms, thus providing free publicity for the businesses. But large walls are hard to come by. Artists often talk about how hard it can be to find a wall that is made of the right materials or is big enough. Certain stones or bricks, for instance, can be so porous that it takes in a significant amount of the paint from spray cans, thus taken away much of the vibrancy of the paint. Moreover, big walls that do not have windows that break the flow of the surface are hard to come by.

Wynwood, however, is full of walls that are several hundred square feet in size and have surfaces that have been smoothed over from years of exterior paint: perfect canvases for large-scale projects. The former factory buildings, indeed, are ideal for wall painting. They bear expansive walls, are empty of windows, typically only having one entrance in the front, and they face the main avenues and many of the side streets with no set-backs from the sidewalks. The concrete surfaces are smooth and easily buffed with rollers and paint. In short, the buildings that once offered little aesthetic appeal, as Joe Furst and others detailed to me, are now the perfect canvases for large-scale murals and other forms of street art.

Having a big wall is definitely a blessing for artists – the bigger the size, the more impressive the work. But a big wall can also be a tremendous burden. These productions require many gallons of paint, several days of work, and (hopefully) a couple of hands to help in painting. And then there are the changes in weather that are particular to South Florida: sudden winds that push both artist and paint in directions they did not intend on,
rainstorms that come out of nowhere, and the unending supply of heat and sun. Especially in Wynwood, where the bare streets offer little in the way of shade, the sun can be killer. In the end, painting a mural is physically demanding, incredibly tiring, and financially expensive. Big walls mean big work.

Coming up with a price for the walls, therefore, can be difficult. There are the materials to consider, yes, but then there is the difficulty of painting and the elements to consider. Some of the artists, especially the ones who have a business arm attached to their work, charge for their work by the square footage of the piece. Alex Vahan, the “Boss Man” of Cushy Gigs, the legitimate arm of MSG activities, recounted to me how they come up with prices for their mural work. I met with Alex at the Cushy headquarters one morning after he had dropped off his daughter at school. The company started because a lot of the guys that he joined the crew with wanted to continue pursuing their “graff work” but had responsibilities that require them to think differently. “There’s the aspect of all of us getting older now and seeing things differently and not wanting – like I don’t have the same drive that I did when I was in my teens and my 20s to go out at night and tag shit,” he said. “It just doesn’t interest me anymore.” Cushy gigs, however, enables the crew members to make a living off of the work that they love. “I prefer to work on projects, you know. Big projects. Like, the bigger the project, the better. Like we have two walls that we’re quoting for right now that are 60ft tall, another is 140ft tall, and another is 140ft wide.”

These big projects bring in big revenues for Cushy. According to Alex, a commissioned piece for a wall 60ft x 140ft (a sizeable, but not uncommon, dimension for walls in Wynwood) can fetch anywhere between twenty and fifty thousand dollars. This price, which he shot out during our conversation, is actually relatively cheap: around $2-
$6 per square foot of work. For the most part, artists who charge by the square foot aim for somewhere between $10 and $12 per square foot. The business of walls can be a profitable venture, especially if a corporate entity decides to hire you. As Alex stated,

We had one recently with American Eagle Outfitters who wanted us to paint a 45-ft tall wall by 100-something-foot wide wall. [They wanted] that big wall, plus the adjacent building, the stairs and everything: they wanted us to paint both things in 3 days, so I quoted them accordingly and I hired 9 guys to help me. We did it in 2 and a half days, we beat the deadline, and there was a film crew filming the whole time. And they weren’t filming in a way that was easy….So there was a lot of stop-and-go. But we still did it.

Alex demonstrated one of the ways in which artists price their work on walls: simply charging by the square footage of the assignment and adding to the price if the difficulty increased—for hard to reach or difficult surfaces, a strict deadline, special requests, etc. Most of the artists that followed this method, however, were more institutionally organized in their work. They might have a gallery representing them and their artwork, for instance, and thus must go through the gallery in order to secure a gig on a wall. They may, alternatively, be called up by other companies that do this kind of work, like Alex’s Cushy Gigs. Overall, pricing by the square foot was the gold standard for getting paid for wall work that ensures an artist gets enough payment for his/her work. Pricing per square foot is “the only real way to make sure you don’t get screwed,” one artist told me.

Beyond the importance of size, however, the content of the wall also matters to a great extent. The amount of freedom that an artist is given greatly influences price. If the artist can choose what image will go on the wall, using his/her artistic liberty to paint whatever they would like, then the artist is much more willing to charge less for the piece.
If the owner wishes to have a very particular thing painted—a brand or logo, for instance, or a specific scene—then the artist charges more.

Atomik is one of the most well-known graffiti writers in Miami. He’s been in the Miami graff scene for around two decades, beginning in the early 90s and working on his style before officially joining MSG in the mid-2000s. In the graff world, he is contentious. He was dubbed “the Kanye West of the Miami graffiti world” by a writer for the Miami New Times because of his amazing talent for art and the large amount of conflict that he has with other artists. He placed his tags and throwies all over Miami with MSG for years, but Atomik picked up his signature image when the city of Miami decided to demolish the famous Orange Bowl arena to make way for the new (air-conditioned!) Miami Marlins baseball stadium. Since then, Atomik has painted bright oranges with eyes and a cheeky smile: a figure, he says, that is in honor of the Orange Bowl. The orange character now decorates the entire city: it is on everything from highway overpasses to buildings ready for demolition to side streets and corners. And although Atomik’s name has been known in the graffiti subculture for some time, his orange character has made him famous outside of the graffiti world as well. If Miamians don’t know his name, they have most certainly seen his oranges throughout the city.

I asked Atomik how he negotiates a price for work he gets paid for. “It all depends on what they want on that mural, what the size of the mural is” he told me. “If they come to me and say ‘Hey, I got this huge wall, I want you to paint your orange on it. How much is it gonna be?’ then it’s gonna be significantly less than if they say, ‘Hey, I want you to paint my logo or me and my wife running in a field [laughs].’ You know?” Atomik’s response raises the issue of corporate and business interests in street art. Although most
businesses and corporations continue to use traditional means of advertising (such as billboards, internet ads, and other forms of communication), many have turned to street art or graffiti culture in their effort to brand their logo or advertise a product. Ever since the Rolling Stones used graffiti ads for the debut of their 1974 LP, *It’s Only Rock’n’Roll*, it has become popular to use the medium of graffiti and street art on products and ads. From stencils on walls to graffiti images on product labels, the main goal is to kick up the “cool” factor of their advertised product or instill a sense of “street credibility.” And since murals are pricey, it is often big corporations that have the money to pay.

Wynwood quickly became a target for this kind of corporate interest. My interview with Atomik took place in one of the galleries in the neighborhood. Right in front of the gallery entrance, however, was a wall piece that was commissioned by Sea-Doo, replete with wave runners, ocean sprays, and bikinis. Down that street, Harley Davidson had a very large, colorful wall of a suited-up motorcyclist on a branded bike. Nearby, Fiat commissioned a local street artist to do a rough mock-up of their logo. And the more time I spent in the neighborhood, the more I heard about other corporate ventures. Anheuser-Busch launched their new brand of tequila-flavored beer by hiring several street artists to paint the beer’s skull logo in different styles, Beck’s began an initiative to “support independent artists and creators” by hiring Miami-based artists to paint walls, and even Burger King—which once housed its global operations in Miami—commissioned a large wall, with much fanfare, in Wynwood. The artists that I spoke with were all well aware of the kind of financial boost that these kinds of corporate gigs can bring in and they charge accordingly. When I asked Krave, another Miami local street artist, about his negotiations on price, he detailed how his thought process worked:
Well, it depends on what they’re gonna use [the wall] for and what the entity is that is contracting the artwork. So the Ritz Carlton West Palm Beach, for instance: they want a mural [by me] for their teen kids club downstairs and they want it to be “urban.” Okay, so this is gonna be a good one. It’s a big fish, obviously, and they’re coming to exploit my culture, they’re coming to hire me to do something that they want me to do. They’re a huge, very rich company with a gigantic brand name, so it’s time to hustle. Like, let’s do it. So you price it right.

In the end, getting to decide what goes up on the wall will make the wall cost more. As with Hec One Love in the opening of this chapter, business or property owners do not have a say in the art on the walls unless they pay up. The business owner behind Hec’s wall wanted something new for Basel, something that was more in line with her flowers and plants business, but she was not willing to pay Hec for anything. As a result, he painted the wall as he saw fit. The owner of the business still had her wall painted and maintained for free, but she had no power to delegate what would go up on the wall.

And finally, after considering size and content, street artists consider the relational bonds between artist and owner for determining a final price. As a wealth of sociological literature has shown, economic transactions are not purely quid pro quo interactions in which goods and payment are solely exchanged. Economic transactions are full of relational work in which the actors involved negotiate social relations, media of payment, the boundaries of the transaction, and meanings associated with the transaction. As an essential part of economic transactions, pricing is, as well, contingent upon the social relations involved. Through my interviews with street artists in Wynwood, it became apparent that social bonds deeply influenced the price of a wall. Is the gig for a family that wants a large piece for their backyard? Does the owner hook up the artist with gigs all the time? Is the owner willing to save the wall for the artist and make sure that others do not

---

*a* Everybody in Miami, indeed, loves a good hustle.
tag up the building? As with other areas of economic life, the social relations matter, and they are important for the artists involved: the stronger and more reliable the bond, the less that the mural will cost them. Krave mentioned this in my interview with him as well. Sure, he said, you have your companies, your businesses, and your corporations. “But then there’s a mom or dad that has a small budget and they want something for their backyard. They’re cool, you know. You can do it in a day, you don’t have much else going on, so you see what they can do for you. It’s like, shit, I can put a few hundred dollars cash in my pocket to go have fun and chill. What’s the problem?” Artists are much more willing to “help out” people who want works if they are supportive friends or close acquaintances.

It’s not About the Money…Kind Of | On Doing Walls for Free

The question of money came up early on in my research. One of my first interviews was a Skype conversation with Alex Senna, a Brazilian street artist famous throughout the world for his murals and fine art. He visited Wynwood during Art Basel a few months before I moved to Miami and painted several walls in Wynwood and Miami Beach. His art remained a fixture in the neighborhood for years following and were covered up approximately 3 years later—quite the feat for street art in a neighborhood that is constantly changing its murals. “Nobody pays me,” he told me when I asked him about the payment for his walls. “It’s not work. I just paint like I paint here in Sao Paulo. I did not make it for somebody.” The walls that he painted, Senna told me, were done for free. He had canvassed artwork that was being exhibited in a gallery during the week, he had secured funds to get down to Miami, and he just painted what he felt like painting. “If you see good art,” he
continued later in the interview, “you will see that it is true. You don’t have any money
involved—it’s not about the money. It’s only [about] the painting.”

This was the first of many iterations on this similar point: although there is always
the opportunity to get hired to put up street art, time and again I learned of an artist painting
a wall for free or nearly for free. Walls of various sizes, walls with various content, walls
that took days to paint and walls that took hours to paint: almost all were painted without
a penny being exchanged or at a financial loss for the artist. It is difficult, if not impossible,
to fully count the number of pieces that are in Wynwood. The adjudication of where one
piece begins and another ends is ambiguous at best, the rapid change of the pieces changes
the total number constantly, and the corners or alleys that serve as canvases may not be
accessible. But from my time with the art community in Wynwood, I came to find that the
vast majority of the walls were done for free. Even the original artists that painted the
central Wynwood Walls location, Tony Goldman’s dream child for the neighborhood, went
unpaid. “Mr. Goldman,” reported the *New York Times*, “provided lodging for the artists,
who included Kenny Scharf, Shepard Fairey and Os Gemeos, at the Park Central, one of
two hotels he owns in South Beach, and provided the canvas—freshly painted warehouse
walls between Northwest Second and Third Avenues—but did not pay them.”

But how is it that these magnificent, massive works of art go unpaid? Why is it that
artists are so willing to risk their bodies and pocketbooks for free walls? I asked this
question of artists and property/business owners alike and noticed several consistent
explanations. The first is that doing walls for free was a way of starting out a career for
many artists. Instead of having the artistic background worthy of payment, street artists use
the walls of Wynwood as beginning canvases for their career. I heard this explanation
often: artists that are just beginning out need the walls to build a portfolio, in a sense, and they choose to do it for free if it comes down to it. I asked one of the local street artists whether people do walls for free, and he replied: “Of course! Especially here in Wynwood. Well, what you have is the starving artist. It’s a terrible kind of thing. And we all go through it as artists, you know. But yah, people are willing to just get their stuff out there. They want to get their stuff up any way that they can.” Another artist told me that pricing a wall depends on where the artist is at in his/her career. “It all depends on where that artist is at. It really depends. Some would jump at the opportunity and do it for free: they’re doing it for the love, they’re hyped up, they’re excited, they’re new to it. Some people will do it for a couple hundred bucks, some for a couple thousand bucks, and some people just flat-out won’t do it. It’s not gonna be, like, worth their time because they’re selling their canvases already for hundreds of thousands of dollars. If they’re gonna paint a wall then it has to be, like, major.”

As with all the explanations provided, this one had some truth to it. Artists do have to build portfolios, and if they wish to cross boundaries from making canvassed artwork to making murals on commission, they usually need to demonstrate their mural-painting abilities before they secure a paying gig. One woman who helps direct a mural-painting project in a nearby city confirmed this: “Just because somebody is a good artist, doesn’t mean they can paint walls,” she told me.

And I constantly get people who want to be a part of my project who are really talented fine artists, and I ask them what their murals look like and they’re like ‘oh, well I’ve never done a mural.’ Okay, I’m not gonna gamble on you either, so go ahead and do some murals. Do it on your front garage, do it wherever you can get a wall. Go ahead and do some murals, take some pictures of them, and get them back to me. I’d love to use you but I can’t.
Doing walls for free, therefore, might be part of this kind of portfolio-building process. “I didn’t get paid,” one of the female street artists told me about doing her first wall. “She buffed the wall, and for me it was kind of like nobody gets to learn unless you try. So that was my tuition, you know. She’s not paying me: I’m paying her, in a way, to give me the experience so I can learn.”

But the explanation of doing walls for free for career advancement did not square away with other observations. Many of the walls of Wynwood are painted by men and women who have established careers as artists, such as the original artists that Tony Goldman hired for his Wynwood Walls. They have painted commissioned murals in other cities, for instance, or they sell their artwork in galleries or online at sizeable prices. Many others had other side art ventures, such as working in graphic design or other creative industries. But almost all, in short, already had their career in tow when they painted in Wynwood.

The second explanation given about why artists paint for free is that of visibility: many described that artists were willing to do walls for free because that would be the way that they get their name out. Using data that I received from the Miami Parking Authority, there are approximately 50,000 parking transactions conducted each month in Wynwood. With an estimate of 2 people per car, on average, that means there are approximately 100,000 people parking in Wynwood each month. This figure, moreover, is a conservative estimate: many cars have more people in them, many people choose to not pay for parking, and there are others who choose to commute in with ride-sharing apps rather than drive in and park. According to the argument on visibility, all that foot traffic means that there are
a lot of eyes on the murals every month, a visibility that can increase the probability of being hired for a commissioned piece later on.

This explanation, however, falls short of giving a full explanation for the free work as well. First, although thousands of people do course through the neighborhood, many of the walls are far off the beaten path or are not visible from the bars and restaurants that are frequented by visitors. Some walls remain in the dangerous parts of the neighborhood that are avoided in the evening, for instance, while other murals have been squeezed in the alley walls between buildings and are rarely seen or documented. While the most intrepid and dedicated of travelers might pursue the walls in the nooks of the neighborhood, most stick to the most visible walls that flank the main NW 2nd Ave corridor and the few side streets that jut off of it towards popular spots.

Second, the visibility gained from the street by pedestrians is nothing in comparison to the visibility that artists gain through the internet. All of the street artists that I met in Wynwood closely managed their online presence through personal websites or through their accounts on Facebook, Instagram, and other social media outlets. As with other artists worldwide, these street artists depend heavily on their internet exposure and work hard to maintain an active and attractive online presence. As Didi Contreras recounted to me: “Like the first mural I did, it got 24,000 likes in one day on Instagram. In one day! 24,000 people saw it and liked it!” I was constantly told to check out somebody’s Instagram account or to follow them on Facebook. The visibility of the walls, then, is important, but it is this kind of visibility online that often got my respondents jobs in other parts of the city or country. Indeed, one online magazine reported how a street artist’s mural in Wynwood was posted onto the Reddit listserve, “where it quickly hit the site’s frontpage [sic] and brought
in over 1 million views on Imgur in just 4 hours.”30 And most importantly, the digital visibility preserved the artwork well after it disappeared. After detailing how she got 24,000 likes of one of her murals in one day, Didi continued: “That mural was only up for like 4 months because the lady wanted to switch it out. It’s still getting shared, and people are still tagging me today.” I found through my own work on social media platforms that other street artists still posted images of old walls in Wynwood long after those walls had ceased to exist.31

Online exposure is so important to street artists, in fact, that many of them use their social media handle or their website URL as a signature for their pieces.32 Instead of a tag that might be illegible to most or a signature that might not be recognizable, these hashtags and handles encourage viewers to find them online or tag any pictures they post on social media with the artist’s account. Artists can post pictures of their works on their own platforms, for instance, but viewers can also tag and post images of the artwork, thus increasing the scope of visibility across more social media networks. Artists are, as a result, strategic about the placement of these digital signatures. They often paint them high up on the piece, for instance, far away from vandals or others who might deface their work; the wall might get tagged up or vandalized, but their Instagram and Twitter handle will remain intact. Others try to put their handles in the image itself so that all the pictures of the wall will have the handle visibly portrayed. “I would try to achieve the most I can out of [my walls], the most publicity, the most attention,” one of my street artist friends told me. “The piece I just did on I-95? If you go by there, it’s not signed ‘Style’ or ‘Decay.’ It’s signed ‘LuisBerros.com,’ because that’s where I want people to go.” Other artists have taken even more direct means to preserve their presence, like Pete Kirill, who drills in plaques on his
wall that preserve a sheet of paper that gives his biography, information about the piece on the wall, his website, and even a QR code for people to find him online easily.

The final explanation for the free walls that I heard often emphasized that the walls were done illicitly. The artists, some would tell me, take to the walls in the darkness of night and produce their pieces without the permission of the owner. Some of the more courageous ones might even paint in the middle of the day to produce their illicit pieces, brazenly telling cops that they were hired to do the piece or wearing reflective traffic vests and putting bright orange road cones around the wall so as to give a semblance of working for a company. Especially during Art Basel, it becomes incredibly difficult to know who has permission and who is just bold. During a BID meeting a few weeks before Basel, for instance, the off-duty police officers who were hired by the BID to patrol the neighborhood opened up the meeting with security updates. This is a common practice during the BID meetings: the first order of business is always a security update from the police force. In their presentation, the officers continued to emphasize the need for businesses to communicate clearly with artists and security officers about their walls. With the rise of prominence of the neighborhood had come an increased policing of the walls, so it was imperative that business and property owners communicate effectively with law enforcement. It’s the season, folks, the head police officer told the room. We have a zero tolerance policy going on for tagging and graffiti. If they are caught, they will go to jail. But, again, please, please, please let us know when you have something going on. If an artist is working on a wall, give them a letter or a card so that the cops can know. And, he ended, If you are going to paint your walls, tell them not to do it at 4am. A light chuckle filled the room.
There are, of course, many walls that are essentially free game for vandals to tag illegally. The abandoned and condemned buildings in the neighborhood are excellent canvases that are rarely policed, for instance, and the spaces abutting the FEC railway are excellent because of lack of lighting and foot traffic. But as I spent more time with the artists and property owners of the neighborhood, I realized that more often than not, the works I saw were not painted illegally or without permission: there is a vast amount of background work that goes into getting a wall and in keeping it, especially if the wall is in a prime location.

Born in Puerto Rico and living throughout the world as he grew up (his father was in the military), Trek6 has spent the longest time of his life in Miami and is now one of the most well-known of the Miami-based street artists. Like Hec, Trek has been in the Miami graffiti scene for decades, incorporating bright colors and sleek design into his pieces and throwing in the occasional Puerto Rican symbol into his work. He has painted for years everywhere he has gone. And after years of hustling and spray painting, he told me, he is now able to support himself and his family off of his artwork. “I never thought that this whole graffiti thing would be what it is now,” he told me. These days, he sells his artwork on canvases for large sums of money and is commissioned to paint in cities all over the country. In the years that I spent in Miami, moreover, Trek also scored several impressive contracts to do artwork for beer labels (Blue Moon and Becks), the New York Fashion Week (with designer Naeem Khan), and even a grocery store indoor parking lot (Whole Foods). “I couldn’t even define [what graffiti is now]. It’s just…huge. That’s the only thing I can say. It’s huge.”
Trek Six was the mastermind behind one of the most widely seen and iconic of Wynwood walls: the two-story abandoned building that he and a fellow street artist, Chor Boogie, painted into a giant boombox. Replete with buckets that have been mounted as volume, treble, and bass knobs, and lights that illuminate the piece at night, Trek and Boogie’s boombox was seen by thousands of commuters each day as they pass the western edge of the neighborhood on the lanes of I-95. The boombox had become a favorite backdrop for modeling shoots, music videos, and—of course—selfies (with and without selfie sticks). The way the project came about, Trek told me, was because he wanted to reinstate a boombox that had been painted on that building back in the mid-2000s. The original boombox was painted by a New York artist, but this piece had been vandalized over the course of the years; after the first few tags went up, local vandals started to see that the artist would never be able to come back and retouch his piece, so the building became fair game, in effect, for anybody to deface. Trek, therefore, took it upon himself to get in touch with the property owner and propose that he take over the building’s façade maintenance so as to keep the boombox alive. The property owner agreed but gave him no money: Trek provided all the materials himself.
The area that the boombox was located was still “hot,” as Trek told me. Right at the SW corner of the neighborhood where Wynwood meets Overtown, the Boombox abuts neglected public housing buildings, is nearby several abandoned properties, sits across the street from the condemned and partially-destroyed former RC Cola factory, and faces the eastern bank of I-95. Gangs still meet in that area, and shots still get fired from time to time. Keeping the wall, then, is an active endeavor on Trek’s part. Holding onto it requires a combination of using his local contacts and putting in the sweat equity to cover up vandalism. As he hinted at one point in my interview with him, Trek is a well-connected man who can use his circles to prevent his wall from being defaced.
Trek: So I took it upon myself to put [the boombox] back….And I’ve held it for the last four years. I’m trying to hold it for as long as I can.
Me: How do you hold it?
Trek: [Laughs] Well, it’s a combination of the political circles that I move in and the street circles that I move in, and using them both as checks and balances on each other.

I came to understand through my interview with Trek6, in short, that a few short text messages to a few key people would go a long way to keeping his wall intact. Mess with his wall and your walls could be messed with: a standard rule within the graffiti subculture.

These feuds would be a tit-for-tat that could last for months or years depending on the drive from each side, and they could lead to antagonism off the walls as well. But nobody wants that, all of the artists said with a solemn head shake when the topic came up in conversation: it’s stupid, unnecessary, and time-consuming.

Beyond these social circles that help protect the wall through soft power, there was also the vast amount of sweat equity that Trek puts into the wall. In the graffiti subculture, Trek explained, a vandalized wall that is allowed to remain vandalized becomes open game for others to tag the wall.\textsuperscript{34} “I hold onto it because I really care for it,” he told me. “It’s a lot harder task than people realize cause I have to clean it up every month, I have to call the city every month to turn on the lights on that street because it’s a bad part of town….I take on all these responsibilities that go well beyond just painting a wall.” In the end, Trek would take care of this wall for as long as he could.

Trek6 told me about all the ins and outs of his painting and maintaining the wall. But when the conversation turned to the question of the owner, he would not budge with information. No matter how hard I tried to get closer to the details, he would not tell me anything about the owner.

Me: Who owns the building?
Trek: I can’t tell you. Cause if I tell you that, then I’ll open up a lot of doors for people to start issues that I would rather not have. It’s an abandoned building and the property owner is quite aware of what’s going on with everything. What happens is that once I make his identity known, once you know who the real property owner is, then I’m gonna have every Tom and Jane in the world trying to get that spot. And then corporate America steps in, money steps in.35

In the end, although there is a large amount of graffiti or vandalism up in the neighborhood, most of the walls of Wynwood are executed in the way that Trek demonstrated: through the permission of the property or business owner. And this makes sense: the incredible amount of time that is required to paint a wall of large proportions cannot take place without at least some kind of agreement. Instead of quick tags or throwies that are attempted time and again so as to reach perfection in the shortest amount of time possible, the pieces that these artists erect are intricate works of art that take time. As a result, the major productions are not illegal.

These statements notwithstanding, the question of payment for graffiti or street art work was very prominent in the minds of the artists that I spoke with. Some, for instance, marveled at the fact that their doodling in notebooks during high school or their rebellious actions as an adolescent would ever achieve them financial stability. Others, conversely, saw the walls as billboards of sorts: huge advertisements both for the products that appeared on the walls (as was common in Wynwood) and the artist that painted the piece. But the linkage between money and walls was not firmly delineated but was rather part of an intricate negotiation of power, status, prestige, and, of course, place.

**Selling Out** | The Friction of Making Money
Ever-present in the conversations about street art was the question of its uniqueness from and relationship with graffiti. First, of course, there is the question of the style of composition between the two: the distinction most people mentioned in distinguishing graffiti and street art. While graffiti has its classic styles and is mainly relegated to an intricate form of letter painting, street art is difficult to delineate based on aesthetic style alone. From stencil art to wheatpasting, street installations to flash mobs, street art comes in a variety of shapes and sizes worldwide. Many of the street artists and graffiti writers that I interviewed emphasized this point: there is an aesthetical quality that sharply delineates the two worlds. Graffiti is about letters, they tell me. Street art is about everything else.

Second, there was the delineation between legal and illegal. All 50 states have some kind of sanction against graffiti and vandalism, for instance. In Florida, Title XLVI, Section 806.13, titled “Criminal mischief; penalties; penalty for minor,” discusses the issue of graffiti. Monetary penalties start at $250 for the first offense, but then escalate to $1,000 for the third or subsequent convictions. This penalty comes with at least 40 hours of community service, a great majority of which may be dedicated to the removal of graffiti, and the possible suspension, revocation, or withholding of a driver’s license. The law requires that the damage be conducted willfully (intentionally and with purpose) and maliciously (with the knowledge that damage would be done to the property of another person). All graffiti writers ultimately pass through the rite of passage in dealing with the law. They all spoke to me about “paying their dues” or “putting in the time” for their work. It is a mark of sincerity and dedication for many writers, an indication that s/he is “real.” The illegal aspect of the work, however, is also part of the subcultural distinction. Street
art, for instance, does not always have to be considered illegal. There are exceptions, of course. Quick stenciling or stickering is often done without permission and with vandalism as the goal, so they are often sanctioned similarly to graffiti. Large murals, however, take far too long for an individual to do them surreptitiously. And other works of street art can be seen as beautifying an area, so they are passed over or not objected.

This question of legal or illegal rests upon a third distinction between graffiti and street art: the question of audience. Graffiti is an art form that is social in its aesthetics; as detailed above, graffiti is a form of communication that primarily focuses within the subculture. Graffiti does give off messages to outsiders, of course, but the primary goal of graffiti work is to speak to others in the subculture. Street art, however, is often about adding beauty, making something more interesting, or attracting tourists to a business or market. The audience is not necessarily other street artists but is, instead, the wider population. While graffiti writers take pictures for their own collections or avoid pictures altogether, street artists are quick to take pictures and post them on all their social media avenues. While graffiti writers prefer anonymity in the public realm, preferring instead to be known through their graf work, street artists often seek public notoriety. And while graffiti writers prefer the darker corners of the urban world, street artists seek the most public and visible areas of the city.

In the end, street art began with the graffiti subculture and then spiraled out into a legitimate art form. The prospects of making money from street art ventures, however, disrupt the rules of the subculture of graffiti and influence the pricing of walls. In his pioneering article, “Graffiti as Career and Ideology,” Richard Lachmann melded the research literatures on subcultures, deviant careers, and art worlds in his analysis of
interviews with 25 graffiti writers and patrons in the Brooklyn neighborhoods of Williamsburg-Navy Yard and Crown Heights. Through his work, Lachmann demonstrated the important role that peers and mentors play in the development of the career of a graffiti writer. Drawing from the work of Howard Becker, Lachmann argued that the “motivations and conventions for engaging in these activities” of deviance must be taught and assessed by those in the deviant communities.36 Friends convince other friends to pick up a can and start spraying and join the graffiti subculture.

Beyond the question of joining the graffiti subculture, Lachmann showed in his article the ways in which the subcultural activities of graffiti writers continue to be shaped by the larger hegemonic culture surrounding them. Although graffiti writers often portray themselves as standalone figures who work on their takeover of the city, there is a significant amount of social influence that shapes what they do and how they grow in their work. The commodification of graffiti during the 70s and 80s by many gallery owners, for instance, shaped the graffiti subculture in a new way for many writers. Many art buyers wanted a piece of the graffiti action in their very own home. As a result, some of the graffiti writers found their work alongside Picassos and Pollocks instead of train cars and alleys.37 This movement from subway cars to galleries and museums made the very same tags and throwies into “legitimate art.”38

It is this transition area of graffiti as career, of graffiti as a possible source of income, which begins to touch on the nature of and issues surrounding street art. Graffiti is an art form that is traditionally done for free. The illicit nature of the activity means that writers are not excited or driven by the prospect of public notoriety. There is a sense that graffiti is a form of communication, yes, and that there is a certain amount of subcultural
prestige that comes about from being up all over a city. Yet the prospect of monetary payment for their graffiti work is not expected. Making money, in fact, can often be a negative trait in the subculture. “Career success,” Snyder states in his ethnography of graffiti writers, “can only be achieved by some degree of distance from the [graffiti] subculture.” Making money, he found, was conflicting for graffiti writers. For many, it was an indication that a writer had “sold out.”

And it is in this area of career and money that the world of graffiti gets most muddled with that of street art. During my fieldwork, I found that many were quite confident that they could determine the difference between street art and graffiti if they were to look at it. But when I asked about what terms in particular they would focus on to differentiate the two, they were stuck for words. Even Alex, the Boss Man from Cushy Gigs cited above, had a hard time with some of the distinctions. Like the men and women that Snyder spoke with, Alex had been able to make a career out of his graffiti work, something he had never imagined could happen. During our interview, Alex was loquacious and very giving with his responses. But when we started to talk about money, he cut short:

Alex: Graffiti is about vandalism…Street art is more fan-friendly…. Underlying everything about graffiti is competition. Who’s doing it bigger, who’s doing it better, who’s doing it faster, who’s doing it more colorful, you know, who’s got the best spot…. There’s so much of a competitive spirit in the culture that there are gonna be cats that say I don’t give a fuck about street art, I’m just gonna do these throw ups everywhere, and I’m gonna travel the world and do them, and I don’t give a shit what people think about it. And they’re gonna do it. They’re gonna hit trains, they’re gonna hit freight, they’re gonna hit buildings and billboards and highway signs and they don’t care what people think. Now some of those people are starting to cash in now, they’re starting to make money now because of the amount of work they put in. Some people are like hey, you know what? That’s actually kind of cool. This dude paints a lot. So that’s when the line gets fuzzy between graffiti and street art: when these graffiti artists cross
over into street art and do it. But usually they’re the first ones to tell you
hey this is not graffiti, this shit is street art. It’s different shit.
Me: So does the fuzziness come from being paid for it?
Alex: No. [long pause] Maybe. [long pause] I don’t know. I don’t know the
answer to that question.

Atomik, the Kanye West of the Miami graffiti scene mentioned above, has also
made a living off of his graffiti work. His orange character can be found on empty spray
paint cans, pieces of scrap wood, and even canvases: all for sale in galleries and through
his website. At one gallery in Wynwood, you can pick up an 18” x 24” Atomik piece, a
close up of the orange’s eyes and smile, for $500. His Instagram account (@atomiko) had
approximately 63,000 followers with 6,265 posts as of January 30, 2017, many of which
detail items for sale. “Selling out” is definitely something that is on his mind. As he detailed
to me, with his fame has come the pressure from the graff community.

Me: You mentioned “selling out” earlier. What do you mean by that?
Atomik: Well, like this mural for instance, right here [points to a mural
across the way from where we were having our interview]. It’s
commissioned by Sea-Doo. So, ultimately, it’s a job. And I could say, oh,
this guy came down here and he painted this wall and it’s just an
advertisement for a jet ski company. Fuck off.
Me: So ultimately, it’s the fact that it’s a job?
Atomik: It’s not that it’s a job. There are people that sell out that, like—yah,
I guess it’s when you’re dealing with corporate. It’s when you go from
doing something for yourself and the passion to when you’re doing it for
money. And you can take what you have, you know, and what you’ve been
doing for your whole life and stay true to it, never sell out, never, like, you
know done any corporate work or any paid work and then the moment you
go and take that one job and you’re name is plastered all over MTV, or
whatever it is, the internet or whoever it is you’re working for, that’s when
people are like, “he sold out, he’s doing a jet ski commercial,” you know.

But as he also told me in this interview, he still continues doing his “legitimate” graffiti
work (ie: his free, illegal work) even while he is making a living selling his other items.
It’s clearly a struggle, a point of friction for him: there is his side that sells out, that makes
a living off of his graffiti, and then there is his side that remains true, that paints walls
illegally. In fact, it is his illicit life as a graffiti writer that serves as the rationale for why he should feel comfortable taking money for his other gigs.

I still do graphic design from time to time, but I’m able to support myself off of my graffiti art, off of my orange character. A lot of stuff comes from that, you know…. Like I said, I roll with it. I’m still out there painting illegally, so it’s not like I’ve sold out. I mean, I have sold out, you know: there’s been a bunch of corporate work that I’ve done. But fuck it, dude, I’m still out there painting. It’s not like I’m somebody who hasn’t put in his work and is over here claiming that he’s a street artist or a graffiti vandal or whatever. I’m still out there doing it, so I feel like I can take the jobs that have come my way, whether it’s corporate or whether it’s television or whatever.

In the end, the inclusion of money into the equation seems to disrupt the taken-for-granted rules and regulations in the graffiti subculture. Graffiti should be done because of a subcultural urge to take back the city, for instance; it is imagined as simultaneously an act of vandalism and empowerment. A person does it only for his/her own edification even if as a part of a crew. Money? This isn’t about money. This is about fulfilling an urge; it’s about fueling an addiction.

The reality with graffiti, however, is that the appeal of the style has led to it becoming very profitable. The graffiti subculture ties in with those of the hip hop underground to adorn t-shirts, shoes, and backpacks; music albums often put graffiti on their album covers; and graffiti writers become celebrities in their own right. But then there is street art: that fuzzy designation that includes, but is not limited to, graffiti writing. Companies pick up street art as well, eager to cash in on the cool factor that comes with urban grit and counterculture. Art on walls, however, whether graffiti or street art, continues to be seen as a renegade artwork that is done for free.
There are, of course, other examples of artists working for free. In another area of artistic work, modeling, the publication—rather than the paycheck—is what matters. Similar to gatekeeper galleries for artwork, there are certain magazines that establish prominence for models: publications such as *Dazed and Confused* are the ones that are edited and read by the tastemakers in the fashion world, so appearing in one of these magazines is essential for a financially secure future in modeling. But what Ashley Mears discovered in her analysis of elite modeling was an “economic world reversed”: the elite publications might help in a career, but they compensate models with gifts, clothing, and other perks; commercial publications pay models with money, but they do not advance professional modeling careers. In short, the worthy gigs don’t pay, and the gigs that do pay aren’t worthy. The place of publication can be seen as paying for itself with future prospects of income.43

These kinds of insights can apply to studying the pricing of other types of artwork. Although not immediately apparent for its influence on the art world, place does affect the opportunities of success and the pricing of artwork of all kinds. Where an artist is located geographically, for instance, can have a great amount of influence on making connections that can be important for the success or failure of his/her career. The social bonds between artists, vendors, and buyers create an intricate web of connections that influence the status of art—art worlds or fields that both create the boundaries for inclusion or exclusion of an artist and their work and the terms for adjudicating the quality of the work.44 As items without a purely instrumental value, it can be difficult to assign an appropriate price to a particular piece of art. The world of cultural production, then, depends on these intricate social processes for the assignment of a price. These kinds of bonds, what Zelizer calls
“circuits of commerce,” are social networks that coalesce around specific kinds of economic activity that hold particular understandings for practice, shared meanings and information, erected barriers to entry, and the employment of specific kinds of media for transactions. As in other areas of cultural production, these circuits are key to the pricing of art. A great amount of relational work takes place by individuals who become the tastemakers of certain areas of culture. From fashion to modeling, vast areas of cultural production depend primarily upon the valuation given to certain products by certain individuals and shared through particular circuits. Knowing that a certain individual has a piece by a particular artist can encourage purchasers to pay more for the item.

An artist, therefore, has much to gain by being in an area with a high concentration of these kinds of circuits. We all know of these places: Los Angeles for acting, Berlin for fine art, and New York for, well, everything. Artists flock to these places because there are structural realities associated with the prominence of those cities in the art world (studios in L.A., for instance), but also because these cities have a high concentration of individuals in the prominent art circuits. The more tastemakers there are in an area, the more opportunity there is in having one of the tastemakers purchase or praise a piece. In this case, then, the importance of place is that of an indication of a certain kind of density of individuals: a higher amount of these types of circuits in the art world, in short, can have positive effects on art prices.

Beyond the importance of place at the city or town level, there is the importance of place at the gallery or collection. The type of gallery that displays a piece of work can be influential for increasing an artist’s notoriety. Having a spot in a “gatekeeper gallery,” the kind of gallery that takes risks with unknown artists and typically launches their careers,
can be the ticket to artistic stardom for many.\textsuperscript{50} Having a piece of artwork displayed in certain galleries and collections also indicates to the viewer that the artist has reached a certain status of valuation: the tastemakers of the art world have chosen the piece, and thus it must be worthy of artistic praise.\textsuperscript{51} In this case, the place of a piece’s curation indicates that it has gone through some kind of assessment by professionals in the field. Viewers assume that if it’s in a prominent gallery, then it must be prominent artwork.

With all these examples, the place of one’s residence and artwork influences the price in (hopefully) a positive way.\textsuperscript{52} These places are meant to increase opportunities to transition cultural capital to economic capital through social connections and the density of art worlds.\textsuperscript{53} But with the walls of Wynwood, I argue, it is not so much density, social connections, or circuits that influences value in art. Instead, the meanings associated with place are strong enough to encourage artists to flock to Wynwood and, contrary to economic logic, create massive works of art for public consumption for free.

\textbf{It’s all about Wynwood}  \ | How Place Influences Pricing of Walls

In my travels around the country and around the world, I found that the name “Wynwood” was intimately tied with excellent art. For many, this connection lies with Art Basel and high-priced collections: it is \textit{the} place for big art at big prices. Especially for street artists and those connected to the world of street art, however, Wynwood is seen as \textit{the} place where the best street artists in the world are able to put up their stuff: having a wall in Wynwood is a mark of status for many in the street art community. Wynwood has become a sought-after destination point for street artists because the meanings associated with the place give a special prominence to those cherished walls. Artists, especially street
artists, flock here to participate in the environment and (hopefully) leave their mark on the neighborhood, even if it means doing it at an economic loss because Wynwood is known as the place for street art.

A significant aspect of the art on the walls in Wynwood is a result of the link that they provide between the physical world of materiality and the invisible realm of meaning in Wynwood, what Jeffrey Alexander calls, “iconic consciousness.” Drawing from the writings of Freud, Mead, and Weber, Alexander argues that icons are “symbolic condensations” that “root generic, social meanings in a specific and ‘material’ form.” They take shape through the aesthetization of the meanings that are constructed through social processes and narrative: a physical manifestation of the myriad of interlocking meaning constructs that individuals in society produce. But beyond the classical images of aesthetics as paintings, musical scores, and dance, Alexander asserts that iconic consciousness is essential to understanding “the aesthetic within everyday life.” Instead of imagining material things as objects-in-themselves, universally seen and recognized as the objects that they are, an understanding of iconic consciousness argues that all material things are experienced aesthetically. Although material and three-dimensional, they are viewed as aesthetic constructs and imaginary realities in the brain. Once a viewer becomes immersed in the material-object-as-aesthetic-object, it becomes an icon. And as an icon, as a physical reality of meaning, it becomes central to the semiotic process and circularity of meaning construction.

This understanding of iconic consciousness is essential for understanding the importance of the walls of Wynwood for street artists and why they chose to bypass payment for their work in the neighborhood. Street art is, in its essential form, an aesthetic
process that focuses particularly on the surface elements of material realities: the part of
the icon that, as Alexander puts it, serves as “a magnet, a vacuum cleaner that sucks the
feeling viewer into meaning.” The buildings, walls, and other elements of the streetscapes
do not change when street art is painted onto the facades. What does change, however, is
the participation of those material objects as icons in the semiotic process of meaning
construction. Street art radically transforms the aesthetics of the material bodies so that
they possess and participate in new meaning structures.

As I have described in earlier parts of this project, the actual physical makeup of
Wynwood (buildings, roads, and other physical structures) has not changed much for
decades. As a result, the influx of graffiti and street art into the neighborhood has been a
primary means of constructing a new sense of place. As Joseph Furst, managing director
of Goldman Properties, told me, Wynwood was a different project for Tony Goldman and
his company when they decided to invest in the neighborhood in the early 2000s. Whereas
their previous efforts in neighborhoods across the country focused on the renewal and
revival of interesting architecture, Wynwood presented the opposite. Wynwood, he said,
was

“the one neighborhood we’re invested in that doesn’t have architectural
significance. It has an architectural rhythm, right, it’s got a common
building type, it’s got a common grid, it’s got a common scale—like you
would have in other great architectural districts. But the buildings are block
buildings. There’s nothing in their design of architecture. So here in
Wynwood, we had to find something different, something new, to create
that sense of place that typically gets created through architecture. And
that’s through the art on the walls.”

In building up a sense of place through street art, however, Furst and other developers also
inadvertently created a whole neighborhood of icons that became imbued with new
meanings. The walls of Wynwood were different than the walls of other places, and it was
not just because of any understandings of hipness or coolness. The walls of Wynwood became magical material elements in the process of meaning transference, totemic elements that transformed the place of Wynwood, the art on its walls, and the artists who painted the works of art.61

With Wynwood, the idea of iconic consciousness combines with the experience economy to yield a profound link between art, artist, and status. As I have emphasized in prior chapters, the experience economy of Wynwood was created as a byproduct of the experience economy of elite contemporary art consumption. The bleeding out of these styles of cultural consumption into the neighborhood led to the perpetuation and obsession with creating the right kinds of places, atmospheres, and environments for the perpetuation of this kind of elite consumption even among non-elites. As an essential part of the construction of the experience economy in Wynwood, then, street artists become a part of the place construction of this experience economy and, as a result, receive an elite status for their role.62 Although Bourdieu demonstrated this phenomenon in the field logics between economic elites and cultural elites—whereby artists are prized for their cultural capital but not their economic capital—the case of street artists in Wynwood demonstrates how their art can serve as linking these artists with others in the worlds of elite consumption and economic power.63 The walls are icons, in the way that Alexander uses the term, that link the art with the artists, the artists with the place of Wynwood, and the place of Wynwood with mental images of social connections of power, money, prestige, and elite consumption. Instead of real social connections that can be visible only through co-presence in particular locations, the street art serves as the symbolic indicator for that connection. The understanding is that if street art is part of the experience economy of elite
cultural consumption, then street artists must themselves be a part of the elite circuit as well.

Ashley Mears presents a similar finding of free labor in cultural sectors that may elucidate my argument. In her ethnographic work on elites and the VIP party circuit around the globe (in places like New York, the Hamptons, Miami, and Cannes), Mears found a similar phenomenon of free labor. Beautiful women in these cities are recruited and mobilized by party brokers and promoters to attend the VIP parties that take place in the cities at particular times of the year. Once in the venue, these women are pushed to perform through a variety of social pressures and subtle threats. They are required to dance, drink, laugh, party, and enjoy their time; they are not allowed to text too much, sit too much, remain quiet for too long, or to ignore big spenders (known as “whales”). These women, as Mears points out, go unpaid for this kind of labor because their participation is framed as leisure and the relational bonds that are created between promoters and women are framed as special kinds of friendships.64

Mears identifies the role that these women play in the experience economy of these party establishments. “To attract VIPs,” she states, “clubs stage a glamorous platform for them to spend money, with high-profile DJs, chic and expensive-looking décor, brand name alcohol, special events, and restricted access to an exclusive crowd.” In addition to all of this, however, “their chief attraction is a high volume of beautiful women…a high quantity of ‘quality’ women, assessed exclusively in terms of feminine beauty.”65 These women, in short, are a part of the staging process for the experience economy of elite clubs. Yet what is interesting in this case is the fact that the relational bonds that these women create must be carefully managed so that their participation is not linked as real labor, sex
work, or other forms of exploitative labor. It is also recognized, as well, that these women are seen as distinct from the actual worlds of economic elites: they participate in the clubs, but it is at that point that their participation ceases.

With the street artists in Wynwood, however, the painting of walls serves as the primary function for inclusion into the elite world of place construction and experience economy in Wynwood. Artists “live paint” during parties and events, participate on panel discussion on art topics, are interviewed for their views on current events, and eventually become integrated into the elite networks of place construction in Wynwood. Krave, for instance, who spoke of his work with the Ritz Carlton, was eventually hired as an art consultant and curator for a development project in another part of Miami: he was in charge of hiring street artists to paint each floor of a new residential building in downtown Miami. Other artists become members of the elite circles through their participation at exclusive dinners and events. As with the women in Mears’ article, street artists in Wynwood are essential for the place construction in their respective experience economies. Unlike the women in Mears’ article, however, the street artists in Wynwood are capable of using their participation in the construction of place to connect with elite members of the neighborhood and the world. And because it is the art that links the artist to the place construction, the artwork remains the icon, the “symbolic condensation,” of these elite links regardless of their existence.66

The use of the artwork to create a new sense of place can, however, clash with the preexisting meanings that reside with the walls, the “physical trace material” in places that leave behind understandings of previous social relationships, markets, and histories.67 Before the galleries and collections rolled in, before the boutique coffee shops and plant
nurseries, the walls of Wynwood structured pedestrian flows, served as canvases for business logos, and demarcated the possession of space for gangs, graffiti crews, and other subcultures. As I found with Wynwood, however, one can splash some paint on the walls, but the physical structures still hint at what Howard Becker calls the “congealed social agreements” that existed before. As a result, there was clashes of understanding related to ownership, power, morality, and payment.

“Wynwood?,” Elian Chali told me. “Eso es una locura,” It’s just crazy. Elian is a prominent Argentinian artist who specializes in abstract works. I met him during the third annual Montreal Mural Festival in 2015: an event that hires 20 new artists every year, 10 local and 10 international, to paint large-scale murals in the hip Saint-Laurent Boulevard in Montreal. I had obtained funds from my university to attend the event and was brought onto the Mural team as a volunteer for the program. I was assisting Elian because he was way behind schedule on his wall and needed help to make sure the piece was finished before his flight out of the country. A series of miscommunications and poor planning resulted in a last-minute loss of his planned wall and a scramble to find Elian a new one. And the incredible amount of leg work needed to obtain a wall in Montreal—which includes getting approval from both the property owners and all the tenants in a building—meant that it took days to find a new wall for him to paint. Finally, a week into his time in the city, Elian was able to begin painting.

We were four stories up on a scissor lift all day switching spots on the platform to fill in the crevices of the wall. Elian would do the detail work and call the shots, while I went on and filled in the large swaths that he indicated. All the while, we talked. There is a hushed silence up in the air on a lift, where only the loudest of conversations or the
noisiest of car horns make their way up to our ears, so there is always plenty of stillness to fill in with conversation. I had heard of Elian before I assisted him because I had seen Elian’s mural in Wynwood several times—his wall in Wynwood was located at a prominent corner on the main NW 2nd Avenue drag—but I learned during my time with him in Montreal that Elian was a part of a residency program in Miami that brought artists from around the world, and part of his residency included painting the mural.

“It’s amazing what Wynwood is, what it’s become,” he told me while he painted. “That place is crazy! I didn’t know just how big it is. There is definitely an amazing element of creativity and art there. It’s incredible.” But, Elian told me, his time there was more than overwhelming. “You see this patch here? [he pointed to a patch of missing hair on the back of his head] I lost that bit of hair from all the stress of that time in Wynwood!” The parties, the galleries, the networking, the painting, the media, the drinking: it all got to him and took a tremendous toll on his body. It’s sad to see what Wynwood has become, he told me, but the place is still hugely important for art, for connections, for the global circulation of culture. “The thing is that it’s just crazy.”

As described above, there really is no advantage of visibility to having a wall in Wynwood. Although thousands of people go through the neighborhood each week, especially during its peak season, this kind of visibility is easily eclipsed by the kind of digital visibility that artists gain from having active social media accounts and websites. It is not the place’s importance for gaining notoriety that just gives Wynwood its pull: it is the vast amount of meanings associated with the place that encourage artists to come and paint. Even those who have become bitter about Wynwood’s current status cannot deny its magnetic draw. With Wynwood’s rise has also come, many told me, its parallel demise in
the eyes of some of the artists in Miami. Many told me that Wynwood had lost its soul, that
it remained today only a shell of the grand being that it once was. “It’s bittersweet for us,”
one of the street artists told me. “We fucking hate it now. We used to love it three or four
years ago, but it’s a bullshit gray zone now.” But even with all of this, it doesn’t stop the
artists from wanting to be in Wynwood, from wanting to get up in Wynwood. After calling
it a “bullshit gray zone,” that same artist began telling me about how he and his wife are
already on the works for securing walls for this year’s Art Basel and how they are planning
something big for the event. There is no escaping the powerful meanings that Wynwood
evokes, it seems.

Krave, the local street artist who discussed pricing the Ritz Carlton West Palm
Beach above, shared similar views. As we chatted about his work in the neighborhood, he
went back and forth about his involvement in Wynwood.

Krave: Wynwood is like, people be like “oh that’s so dope.” [For] me, it’s
like ugh, I’m so done. I’m so done.
Me: Tell me more about that, about Wynwood and being done with it.
Krave: Ugh, well, I don’t want to be negative. But at the same time, I gotta
be real with you, man. It’s like a Disney Land of graffiti. It’s got all the
attributes that you expect heaven to look like as a graffiti artist, but the soul
is missing or something. There’s no teeth to it anymore. It’s really exciting
but I think that what turns me off from the artist perspective is that all these
artists are coming here and doing like a popularity contest. And it’s like,
[they get here and they say] let me get down, let me get a wall. And I’m just
like, yo, okay: yah, I gotta keep my walls up, this is what I do, this is my
shit, but I don’t have the same intentions as they do. And people start going
over my walls to get seen—it’s not supposed to be a big contest. It’s
supposed to be a movement.
Me: Do you still keep your walls?
Krave: Yes. With that said, I’m still heavily active in Wynwood cause it’s
amazing! It’s fucking amazing. It’s so fucking spectacular. [laughs] I know
that that’s like a complete contradiction, but not to me. It makes total
fucking sense to me.
Hec One Love, who opened this chapter, had similar feelings about the neighborhood. He hated what it has become, he lambasted the corporate interests, he made fun of all the hipsters: yet he still went back to paint, he still maintained his walls, and he still played an active role in the art scene. He did, as well, still get angry at losing one of his walls. That day that we were painting, Hec’s buddy, Pascal, stopped by to check out the wall and say hi. He was talking with Hec about small stuff when he mentioned that “they” covered his wall. Hec was on the ladder at the time, but he stopped painting.

*What do you mean they went over my wall?* Hec asked. *They went over your wall,* Pascal responded with confusion at Hec’s surprise. *What the fuck are you talking about? The wall over by [business]?* At this point, Hec was getting visibly angry. *Yah man. Wait, you didn’t know?* Responded Pascal. *You’re freaking me out, man. Freaking me the fuck out. Don’t fuck with me. They went over my fucking wall?* Hec continued peppering Pascal with questions like this. *Yes. You mean they didn’t tell you anything?* Pascal said.

*Fuck man. No fucking way.* Hec was half saying this out loud to himself and half telling Pascal as he descended the ladder. *Is that your car? [Points to a parked car; Pascal nods]* Can you drive me over there to check it out? Then Hec turned to me: *Hey man, stay here. I gotta check this shit out. No fucking way. No fucking way.*

Hec hopped in the car with Pascal to go check on the wall. I stayed there, on the other ladder, dumbfounded by all of this. Hec was pissed. He was really pissed. I didn’t know what to do or what to say. I just kept painting. The wall in question was very large. At around 20 ft in height and almost 100 ft in length, this was one of the biggest walls in Wynwood. The business owner got Hec to paint the wall during Basel 2013, so it had only lasted about 10 months.
Hec and Pascal eventually came back. Sure enough, his big wall had been covered by several tags from crews throughout South Florida. To make matters worse, the business in the building at the time sold spray paints and other materials for graffiti writers: these were supposed to be his people, essentially. *They should know better*, Hec kept saying. *They should respect. There’s no more respect anymore. No more fucking respect.* He went over there, he told me, and shamed them. He knows the owner of the business and walked into the office and right up to his face. *Where was my fucking phone call, eh? Why did nobody tell me about this?* Hec was irate; the business owner tried to sidestep it all, he told me. *They told me, ‘Oh, I guess in hindsight, it would’ve been good to call you.’* *Fuck them!* *How the fuck are they going to do this?! Not even a fucking phone call!*

*So what are you gonna do?* I asked him.
Well, first I’m going to boycott his shit. I’m going to tell everybody what the fuck they did to me and tell them not to buy any of their shit. Then I’m going to take my wall back. I told them: I’m taking it back. I’m going to have that wall for Basel. And I’m going to spread the word about what they did, tell everybody to not fucking touch my wall.

Hec was broken for the rest of the day: quiet and angry about it all, fuming about what the business had done to him and his wall. He hated Wynwood by this point, he kept telling me. The parking lady gives me tickets even though I’m part of the reason that this place is popular in the first place. Cops come around asking me if I have permission to do stuff even though this is what draws in the money. Now it’s to the point that corporations are buying up walls. People don’t want to pay, but they still want to have a say as to what should go up on their walls, he told me. People don’t want to pay, but they still want to demand things. Fuck that, he said.

We worked in silence for several hours. Every so often, he would break his silence and say that he was pissed about losing his wall. But I’m gonna take it back. I’m gonna fucking take it back this Basel. He was sick and tired of it all, he said. This place has become so corporate, so fucking money-based. It’s ridiculous.

Hec experienced the torn feelings that many street artists expressed to me over the years whereby they simultaneously acknowledged the importance of Wynwood and its ridiculousness. Wynwood is seen as a “bullshit gray zone,” as my interviewer earlier called it, yet also an “amazing” place. Wynwood does not deserve the attention it garners, many street artists told me, yet they would consistently go back and touch up their walls. And then there was the ultimate irony: the fact that there could be money to be garnered from painting walls elsewhere in the city, yet they continually chose to paint (and hold) their
walls in Wynwood for free. The shifts in global consumption and attention on Wynwood beginning in the early 2000s had changed the nature of the walls moving forward. Whereas these bare walls used to be a contested ground in the graffiti subculture world, the walls had become prized canvas space for artists and their works. By 2014, street artists and graffiti writers would even spray paint “Reserved” signs on sections of walls so as to “call dibs” on wall space, an act that would be unthinkable and ridiculous just a few years prior.

![Figure 5: Reserved wall. Photo by author.](image)

Business and property owners, of course, exploited these changes in interest for their own benefit. Knowing that their financial future depended upon the popularity of the walls, power brokers in the neighborhood used the importance of the place of Wynwood
to obtain free art on their walls. I was walking around the neighborhood one day, for instance, when I came across a painting session at a wall just across the way from the main coffee shop on the Northwest 2nd Avenue drag, a central hub of activity for many who came to the neighborhood. I walked up to some artists who were painting a mural just across the street and asked my usual questions: where are you from, what are you doing, what’s your story, etc. But when my questions turned to payment, they just pointed me over to a man sitting nearby chatting with a woman. Talk with him, they said. He’s the guy who got us.

I went over to chat with him and recognized him as the owner of a gallery that is off the beaten path in the neighborhood. I had heard about him because he and his family had been active in Wynwood for many years, so many people knew of him. I had not had the chance to have a formal interview with him, however, because he kept brushing me aside. In any case, I took advantage of his disinterest in me and assumed he did not know me—a fact that proved to be true—in order to ask him a few questions while his artists painted the wall.

So do you pay them? I asked.

He stopped and scoffed, looking at the woman sitting next to him with a look of amazement at the stupidity of my question. Why the fuck should I pay them? he responded. They’re getting a fucking wall in Wynwood!71

It was obvious to him, but it was not so obvious to me. As the artists continued their work, I kept wondering about why this was stated as though it was common sense. The latest sale in Wynwood broke records for sales in the neighborhood: at $53.5 million, the property sold for $1,250 per square foot for building and land.72 This figure is astronomical, especially considering the age of the building, the faulty infrastructure, and
the lack of housing options in the neighborhood. But it sold—and much of this figure came from the work that street artists do in the neighborhood. This gallery owner’s curt response, then, indicated how many people feel about the kind of “payment” that artists were getting for their work. They are getting a (fucking) wall in Wynwood, he said, an indication that that was sufficient, that that was appropriate.

Hari, the button manufacturer that I befriended, was another property owner who explained to me why it was okay to pay artists nothing to paint the walls of businesses. He and I were standing across the street from his property one day, like we did often. There isn’t much shade in Wynwood, so we always had to take advantage of the tiny angles of darkness that the buildings make when the sun is just right in the sky by leaning right up against the wall. We often stood in the same spot across from his building that had just the right amount of angled shade, Larry smoking a cigarette and enjoying his colada, me fanning myself with my hat and watching people go by.

Hari’s building was small, but it had a great façade for street art. The 75ft x 20ft front had no setback from the street—so it came straight to the sidewalk on a busy street offshoot from the main NW 2nd Ave. What is more, the wall had no windows and was interrupted only by a single door in the center. The entire expanse of the wall was painted with a crazy-looking creation: a caterpillar-like animal that posed with his mouth open and tongue sticking out. All of the colors were vibrant: the bright greens, pinks, purples, and blues stood out and shined brilliantly in the Miami sun. And the most intriguing (and fitting) aspect of the piece, however, was that the street artist had managed to make the whole creation by spray painting overlapping buttons of different colors on the wall. The
whole thing was buttons. Even the artist’s name and his crew tag were painted on as buttons.

Figure 6: Button wall by Asik. Photo by author.

*Your wall is pretty sweet,* I told Hari. *What’s the story behind it?*

*Well,* Hari responded, *this guy just came up to me one day and said, ‘Hey: can I paint your wall?’* [laughs] *So I was like, sure! Knock yourself out.*

Through our conversation, I learned a little bit more about the wall and the social relations that it represented. As Hari was likely to do, he had underplayed the interaction that he had had with the street artist, making it all seem as though it was a quick and easy conversation that led to the tremendous oeuvre. Turns out, however, that the artist, Asik,
was a long-standing and well-known member of the graffiti world of Miami. He is, as Hari put it, *the real deal. This guy doesn’t fuck around.* And I learned that the relationship between Asik and Hari went back several years. In the beginning, Hari was hesitant to allow Asik to paint the wall. Hari was afraid that Asik would tag up the wall with classic graffiti script, and he did not want that. But through several conversations, Asik and Larry came to work together on the image of the wall.

*I had this awesome image of a whole scene made out of buttons,* Larry told me. *I went home and drew up this idea, I got all excited about it, and then I asked Asik what he thought. He was cool about it, you know. He said he loved the button idea, but he wanted to do things his way. So then he came back to me and showed me what he was thinking, and I was like whoaaaaaa! Do it!*

Hari and Asik got along well through this partnership. Hari promised Asik that he could have the full ownership of the wall while Hari was around in the neighborhood. Since Hari spot was just down the street from the main NW 2nd Ave drag, the newly-named Tony Goldman Way, and just a few hundred feet from the central Wynwood Walls, it was prime real estate for street art. Hari also had a camera aimed at his building that was rolling 24 hours a day, so it would be easy to see if somebody was tagging the building or defacing the wall. And even with all of that, Hari took a significant interest in the wall and made sure to notify Asik if somebody had tagged up the wall.

*Did you pay him?* I asked during the conversation.

*Hell no!* Hari responded. *I told him straight up: you can have this wall if you want, but I’m not paying a penny for it.*
I gave Hari a judging smirk. By this point in my research, Hari and I had become very good friends, so we would pick on each other endlessly. *What!?* he blasted back. *Listen, the guy wanted a wall in Wynwood, and he got one! In fact, he got an amazing wall. Everybody comes by here, this is in the center of all the action. If he wanted it that badly, he would’ve done it for free. I’m taking care of it, aren’t I?*

He kept smoking, I kept fanning, and we went on to other topics. But a year later, I was back at Hari’s spot chatting with him while helping him load some final items into his truck. He was almost done selling his property, just 3 weeks away from disconnecting his computer, taking down his stereo that always blasted classical music, and locking the door for good.

*So what’s going to happen to the wall?* I asked him.

*I don’t know. I mean, the new guy will probably want to paint it his way, I guess. That’s if he even keeps the building and doesn’t just build something different,* Hari replied.

*And what about Asik?*

*Yah, he knows. I called him up, told him that I sold and all.* Hari often called Asik on his cell phone to tell him if anybody had tagged the wall. This time around, he called to give a kind of goodbye. *He thanked me for taking care of his wall all this time, said that he appreciated it all. But yah, there’s nothing I can do. This isn’t mine anymore!* Hari waved throughout the empty space at the empty shelves and empty walls inside. *Guy’s gonna have to find another place for his work.*

*But, man,* he pressed, *we had a great run with that one.*

* * *
Painting walls can be a financially lucrative craft. As Lachman showed several decades ago, the graffiti subculture developed into a form of legitimate art that allowed the style to transition from the streets to the galleries, from free work on walls to commissioned work on walls. As others have shown, corporations began as well to use the graffiti style for their branding and advertising. With the advent of the Internet came the popularity of street art in the 1990s and 2000s, and walls became to be covered with much more than just spray paint lettering. Advertisers jumped on these media of wheatpastes, murals, and stencils to employ them, as with graffiti, for their financial ends as well. Today, street art produces millions of dollars of commerce through tourism and art purchases, and street artists can eventually become internationally renowned for their work.

Yet Wynwood demonstrates a resulting irony for this world of art. Instead of seeking out higher prices for the impact that their art has for commerce in Wynwood, street artists bypass their possible economic gains and, instead, often paint for free or at a loss. Although they may charge for works in other cities in Florida or in the United States, artists jump at the opportunity to have a wall in Wynwood—even if it means working for free. Beyond the visibility of the piece, the status of the artist, or the historical lineage of graffiti, it is the place of Wynwood—the material, geographic location that possesses meanings—that explains most of this action. Wynwood is tied in with art and creativity. Having tied in with the Art Basel Miami Beach Fair, Wynwood is seen as being the place for good art. Thus, having a wall in Wynwood means that one’s artwork is held in high regard.

As a part of the experience economy of Wynwood, however, street artists use their walls as opportunities to link their work with that of developers and other place entrepreneurs in the area. They are aware of the impact that their artwork and connections
can have in place construction, so painting walls for free can be a part of the inclusion for some into the networks that produce these new places. For others, painting the walls for free can be a part of the linkage between their work and the meanings of the neighborhood: the iconic consciousness that Alexander theorizes. Their work bears meaning because of its content and because of its placing.

Beyond impacting the views of residents and the financial decision-making of street artists, the perpetuation of the experience economy of art consumption in Wynwood also affected the processes of institutionalization of other art ventures in the neighborhood. In the next chapter, I discuss how the development particular ways of art consumption in the southern half of Wynwood affected the designing and building of a colonial art chapel museum in the Catholic church of Wynwood.
Chapter 5: The Global Chapel: Creating a Sacred Space for Elite Consumption

The tour took more than two hours. I had heard about a beautiful Peruvian chapel that was being constructed just a few blocks away from the Dorothy Quintana Community Center and in the shadows of the I-95 overpass, what was billed as the parish priest’s *crazy project*: a hand-built chapel-museum that would house dozens of original paintings from the colonial Americas. I had read the writeups about this project from *The Miami Herald* and other publications, I had heard about the project from some of my connections in Wynwood, and I had seen images of the building and some of the paintings online. But it took several weeks before I could finally arrive to the chapel and see it firsthand. It was a striking beauty of a chapel with a pink façade, coral stone steps and edging, and two unfinished bell towers flanking the front entrance. The giant double doors of the entrance creaked open like castle doors at an amusement park, and inside the building was a breathtaking collection of paintings, statues, and documents from colonial Latin America. What made this project even more impressive, however, was the craftsmanship that was going into its production. The altars were made out of hand-carved cedar wood, and three artisans worked full time to paint and gild, by hand, every inch of the wood. Although the chapel was still under construction and items were displaced all throughout, I walked through the rooms in awe of this massive undertaking.

Standing in front of an architectural mockup of the project, I was instructed by Ray Zamora, the project’s artistic director, of the parish’s next steps for the chapel. *We are standing right here*, he said, pointing to the small chapel in the tableau, *but eventually this will become just one point of an active colonial plaza*. He pointed to the open-air square
that would eventually be flanked by two buildings and squared off by a path of arches. We will hold outdoor events here, such as a Venetian masquerade or plays, and the first floor of these buildings will all be for retail. We will have a Starbucks, a bookstore, a place that sells tapas, a gallery with art for sale: those sorts of things.

My initial feelings of enchantment were replaced with surprise. The construction of a chapel in an inner-city neighborhood in Miami, as beautiful as it was, did not seem farfetched. The construction of religious sites, especially in urban areas, are integral for spiritual, ethnic, and communal demarcation. Religious practitioners and leaders alike take great pains to establish and construct religious places that bear beauty and meaning in religious iconography, statuary, and other symbols. But to hear of the grandiose plans for the entire project made me wonder about the community that this project was aimed at. Although the chapel, the first part of construction of the entire project, was projected to have the triple functions of museum of colonial art, classical music concert venue, and religious establishment, it also seemed to be a place of attraction for wealthy art enthusiasts and globetrotters. The 2015 median household income of the surrounding neighborhood was approximately $25,000, nearly a quarter of the 2015 median household income of the much wealthier Coral Gables, around $95,000. And although the parish held cultural events on a regular basis, these concerts and community events were a far cry from the aspirations of champagne, tapas, and other accoutrements that would be particularly elegante in the chapel.

I was intrigued by this initial encounter at Corpus Christi Catholic Church and joined Ray as a part of the project’s team in helping manage their social media pages. What I found through my time at Corpus Christi, however, was how the circuits of global cultural
consumption shaped the formation and building of this project both as a religious and cultural institution. The colonial chapel that was being constructed was the latest manifestation of an effort in the 1980s by the head parish priest, Fr. José Luis Menéndez, to bring together the variety of ethnic groups in his parish geographic area. Changes in immigration patterns in Miami, ethnic segregation in the parish’s neighborhoods, and massive construction projects all came together to radically change the parish community as it entered the second half of the twentieth century. The construction of colonial missions in the parish neighborhoods and the use of colonial art and architecture were the cultural and religious processes by which the parish sought to bring the variety of nationalist identities together. With the arrival of Art Basel Miami Beach and the galleries and collections in Wynwood, however, Corpus Christi shifted the goals of the construction of their new sacred place, the colonial art chapel, so that it would simultaneously serve as a democratized institution of culture and religion for the community and a site of elite cultural consumption. Instead of seeking to unite national identities, the new art venture was an effort to embed the parish in the larger network of elite cultural consumption and economic flow of Wynwood.

By demonstrating how the history of immigrant flows and the arrival of the global contemporary art market affected the cultural logics of Corpus Christi, I wish to challenge and question prevailing notions of sacred place construction in urban areas (especially low-income urban areas) that overemphasize the importance of sacred places for group cohesion and identity. Although the use of colonial imagery and placemaking was important for the unification of the ethnic communities of the Corpus Christi parish, the construction of the colonial chapel was a different effort of using religious placemaking as
an economic venture and a cultural/religious project. As with other cultural institutions in Wynwood, Corpus Christi sought to participate in the experience economy of elite cultural consumption and use this flow of capital to buttress their institution and work in the community. The difficulty of this effort, however, was that the colonial chapel project would have to simultaneously appeal to both elite cultural consumers and low-income religious practitioners. The effort to construct a cultural institution that served the purposes of appealing to both ends of the socioeconomic and cultural spectrum led to a disjoint of meaning. In all, I argue that the emphasis on the experiential economy of cultural consumption in Wynwood was not limited to the art galleries, collections, festivals and the rest. The ethnographic data that I present here elucidates the corporate and economic logics that influenced the decision-making process of religious place construction within Corpus Christi.

**Colonial in Miami | A history of the parish**

“This used to be probably one of the most depressing areas of Miami.” Father Rolando Castillo is a priest in the Archdiocese of Miami, and he and his family have been close friends of mine ever since high school. From 1994-1997, Fr. Castillo was a priest at Corpus Christi and was the primary vicar for the San Juan Bautista Mission in the middle of Wynwood. This was his first assignment as a priest when he was still political refugee from Nicaragua: a parish deep in an area suffering from an economic downturn and urban decay. “It was total inner city here, nothing like suburbia,” he told me. “You, as a priest, did everything. At times, you just had to improvise things because there was no money for
this or that.” It was a depressing time for Wynwood when Fr. Castillo was in the parish. But fortunately, he said, “the church is very much alive here, so it was a good experience.”

Fr. Castillo and I had met up shortly after I moved to Miami so he could give me a tour of the Wynwood neighborhood and the Corpus Christi parish. At 48 years of age, Fr. Castillo was a youthful priest with a rotund belly that pushed on the seams of his button-down shirt and a substantial neck that jut out from his collar. He was the kind of priest that always seems to be in a good mood, and his quick sense of humor won over most people he encountered. **Okay, how about this: I’ll give you a tour of the neighborhood, he told me over the phone before we met up, and you buy lunch.** I laughed to myself as I agreed. **But no hot dogs or whatever. I know you students: you all live off of hot dogs and peanut butter. None of that stuff for me.** It was through his efforts and help that I came to learn of Corpus Christi Catholic Church.

Corpus Christi’s history is punctuated by several key historical moments. Its founding, indeed, took place just one week after the attacks on Pearl Harbor, in December 1941, at a time when Miami was still a small Southern city recovering from the Great Depression. The city only had around 172,000 residents, more than 90% of whom spoke English and almost all of whom were trying to make ends meet in the economic downturn. The Miami River stunk horribly with raw sewage while the Holsum Bakery in Wynwood pumped out beautiful smells of freshly baked bread, a respite from the stench if you were standing in just the right location and the wind was going at just the right speed. Al Capone still resided in a mansion on Palm Island and Southwest Eighth Street was still years away from being known as **Calle Ocho.**
At the time of the church’s founding, however, Miami was on the cusp of significant economic, political, and physical changes. With the Japanese Kamikaze pilots came the inclusion of the United States into World War II. And with this new addition to the war, Miami became an important city for the training and housing of thousands of US soldiers. The year-round mild weather meant that the training of military personnel would not be hindered by snows or heavy winds, and Miami’s geographic location—jutting out into the Atlantic and Caribbean Oceans and with multiple access points to open water—made the city a strategic location. The basic infrastructure in the city at the time also meant that the military could take advantage of the ample space and build up the city as they saw fit. Even the famous Biltmore Hotel, the beautiful and towering luxury hotel that was the brainchild of the wealthy George Merrick and John McEntee Bowman, was taken over by the military. The former vacation spot of figures like Judy Garland, Bing Crosby, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt became the Army Air Forces Regional Hospital and the early site of the University of Miami’s School of Medicine, replete with concrete-sealed windows and government-issued linoleum floors. The Spanish-styled architecture and intricate facades, however, made this structure into one of the most beautiful hospitals in the country.\footnote{The Biltmore Hotel now serves as the backdrop for the shenanigans of some of Miami’s wealthiest patrons. Whether it is playing golf on its perfectly-manicured course or sunbathing in its members-only swimming pool, one of the largest in the United States, the Biltmore is far from the bloody confines that it was during the 1940s. Rumors circulate that the building is haunted because of the many lives that passed within those walls, but that did not stop me from accepting an invitation to their Sunday brunch: the fanciest buffet I have ever eaten and, at $120 per person, the most expensive.}

The war increased the flow of individuals arriving into Miami from outside its city lines. First, there were those that came explicitly because of the war: the soldiers, leaders, and engineers that reconfigured Miami as a military base. Second, there was the influx of
prospective residents from other states: some of which were attracted by the increase in jobs brought about by the war, while others found that the sun and sand made it difficult to leave once they arrived. And third, trade with and immigration from Latin America increased as well. As the war took over Europe and Asia, preoccupying former primary trade leader, the U.S. turned its economic gaze to Latin American countries instead, thus increasing the number of dollars and immigrants.7

Corpus Christi was founded on the cusp of all of these changes. Under the guidance of Father Francis Finnegan, known colloquially as the “parish builder” because of his three successful parish constructions elsewhere in Florida, Corpus Christi set out in the 1940s to purchase land for its own parish. In the early years, mass was held in the local Strand Theater. Fr. Finnegan, however, had his eyes set on a property just down the street from the theater: a small plot of land owned by the agricultural pioneer, George B. Cellon. Coming from a lineage of successful growers—his father, John A. Cellon, is remembered in Florida lore for having been the first to plant citrus trees in the peninsula—Cellon came to Miami in 1900 and set up highly successful mango and avocado groves. The lot near the Strand Theater was one of his smaller plots, just over 12 acres, but it was the site of his agricultural experiments with mangoes and avocados and contained his two-story mansion known as “Mango Manor.”8

The timing for the sale was perfect. Cellon was struggling with failing health as he turned 82 years old in 1944 and had outlived all of his children. There was no family to bequeath the land to and no offspring to continue the family business. After long negotiations, Fr. Finnegan persuaded Cellon to sell the lot to him and the church, a deal that was sealed on July 8, 1944, at $37,500 (approximately $500,000, or just under $1/ft².
in today’s dollars). Four years of planning and fundraising and two years of construction eventually culminated with a small chapel, school, and convent in 1947—no small task amidst the lack of capital and construction materials at the end of World War II. It would take 12 more years before the faithful in the area had a permanent structure for their parish in February 1959: a 17,000 sqft behemoth of a church with accordion sides and a massive, 20-ft carved cross by the famed Croatian artist Ivan Mestrovic. Cellon’s former Mango Manor became the rectory for the parish and one of his old mango trees still stood the grounds around the parish when I conducted my research.
In all, it would take 18 years for Corpus Christi to go from small startup church to full parish. During those 18 years, the numbers of immigrants in Miami continued to increase. Latin Americans, in particular, continued to arrive and remain in Miami through the mid-1950s so that it became more and more likely to find “Se Habla Español” in shop windows and hotel listings. Cubans, Colombians, Venezuelans, Ecuadorians, and others all resided in large numbers in Miami, helping make it into the bilingual city that it is commonly seen as today. Puerto Ricans, in particular, were Miami’s fastest growing group of Latin Americans at the time.¹¹
But the significant shifts in the sociological and urban makeup of Miami in 1941 were no match to the changes that awaited Miami as Corpus Christi consecrated its new worship space in 1959. Just a month before, a relatively unknown guerilla fighter—already with a failed coup attempt and political exile under his belt—successfully overturned the government of President Fulgencio Batista in Cuba. Although promising a new state based on populist ideals, Fidel Castro put in place his dream of a revolutionary socialist state. This government change, just 90 miles South of Key West, would go on to be the most significant sociopolitical catalyst for the shaping of modern Miami.\textsuperscript{12} Approximately 250,000 Cuban refugees arrived in the U.S. during the first three years after the Revolution, most of whom decided to make Miami their new home.\textsuperscript{13} Families fled Cuba in droves, many of whom left behind their families, businesses, and homes. These first immigrants, typically from the wealthy and business-owning classes that had the most to lose from privatization and state control, gave up most of their wealth and set up in Miami to start their new lives. Even children were placed on planes to leave the island without their parents. Indeed, under the “Unaccompanied Cuban Children’s Program” (dubbed, “Operation Peter Pan”), the federal government joined forces with the Archdiocese of Miami to place the approximately 14,000 unaccompanied Cuban minors in foster homes throughout the U.S.\textsuperscript{14} The Cuban Revolution, in short, began the most significant wave of immigration to Miami in the city’s history. And although immigrants from other Latin American countries also continued to flow in to the city, the arrival of these new Cubans dwarfed all of the other numbers by comparison.\textsuperscript{b}

\textsuperscript{b} It was during my dissertation research that politicians began to discuss the possibility of welcoming Syrian refugees into the United States. At one point, there was a tremendous amount of antagonism to the idea of allowing even 10,000 refugees to resettle across the country: a kerfuffle that made me chuckle in light of these figures from the early 1960s. The prospect of helping 10,000 individuals find new homes
This wave of immigration would join in with another significant change in helping to reshape the Corpus Christi parish community: the construction Interstate 95, the new major thoroughfare set to cut through the state of Florida. Politicians in Tallahassee signed the agreement for the highway in 1959, the same year as Castro’s revolution, and began construction of the nearly 400-mile stretch soon thereafter. In the years that followed, Corpus Christi was mired with this construction that effectively split the entire parish geographic area into pieces. Politicians placed the 36th street expressway (now the Airport Expressway) two blocks north of the parish, for instance, and just in front of the church was the construction for the north-south leg of I-95. Standing at the top of the church steps in the mid-2010s, indeed, I was able to see the highway overpass and hear the constant hum of the traffic on the pavement. When I had lunch with other parish staff in Mango Manor, we would be able to hear the faint sounds of car horns or the grating noises of large 18-wheelers downshifting.\footnote{Across the country was minimal in comparison to the 250,000-300,000 who arrived in a single city in the 1960s. But hey: what can you do.}
Figure 2 - Image of planned highway construction from 1956. Red dot indicates Corpus Christi. Image taken from Williams, Verne O., “Questions on Expressway? Here are some Answers.”

Interstate 95 would, eventually, connect Miami with the rest of the East Coast, yet the areas abutting the highway plummeted with the construction. In Miami, the north-south corridor of the highway was set to flank NW 7th avenue until it reached the Miami River to the south. It cut through the business sectors of several neighborhoods—including those of Overtown, Wynwood, and Allapattah—and created economic dead zones in these areas as a result. Homes and other buildings were taken through the processes of eminent
domain, and many people were relocated to other parts of the city as part of the “slum clearance program” attached to the highway construction. Original plans for the highway had it flanking the Florida East Coast Railway, thus preventing unnecessary destruction of the surrounding neighborhoods. But advocates of slum clearance won the day and rerouted the highway through the neighborhoods, a step that they deemed necessary for future growth. Some of those very same displaced residents would tear up as they were interviewed about their memories of Overtown five decades later. “I get choked up every time I talk about it,” Naomi Rolle told The Miami Herald in 2013. “In 1965 they ran him out of that house.”

The rapid and massive influx of new immigrants coupled with the economic degradation brought about by the construction of I-95 meant that the entire makeup of the Corpus Christi parish changed as soon as the church was built. Starting as a community of fairly homogenous middle-class white Anglos, Corpus Christi was soon transformed into a fragmented residential neighborhood crisscrossed by roads, split by a behemoth highway, and dotted with stores and warehouses. As a homemade history of the parish from 1991 stated: “The reality of our Parish changed radically from being a residential affluent neighborhood to inner city.” The waves of immigrants continued to arrive from within and without Cuba as the first blocks of I-95 were laid. Dominicans were fleeing their country due to a 1965 coup and the resulting clashes. Haitians, as well, left when François “Papa Doc” Duvalier took over and named himself “President for Life.” Over time, several of the neighborhoods of Miami—and those in the Corpus Christi parish as well—solidified along lines of national origin. Areas such as Little Havana, Little Haiti, Little Managua, and
others began forming from the 1970s onwards: ethnic enclaves that were known widely to both residents of Miami and individuals seeking to immigrate.

**An Old Strategy as a New Idea | Using Missions to evangelize and unite**

Over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, Corpus Christi continued growing into a community that included thousands of Hispanics of different origins, many of whom lacked education and English-language skills and were represented in national clusters throughout the parish. There was, as well, but one church for the entire parish of approximately 3,000 acres, and the parishioners faced substantial difficulties in getting to/from the church. There was a lack of adequate public transportation, many of these recent immigrants did not have their own form of transportation, and for those families who did have a means of transportation, it was typically used to commute for work. As the parish states in an in-house history of the community, “We came to the realization that our pastoral answer was to accept our sociological reality. In 1989, a change was prompted by a pastoral response to the circumstances of an inner city [sic] Parish.”

This, then, was the reality of Corpus Christi when the current parish priest, Father José Luis Menéndez, arrived in 1988: a poor inner-city parish fractured along national lines and with a paucity of religious participation. Corpus Christi used to serve predominantly middle-class White Miamians and was even the first Catholic center in Miami to offer Spanish classes. By the 1980s, that had all changed. Father José Luis—he is lovingly known to his parishioners as Father José Luis, not Father Menéndez—was 68 years old at the time of my research and towered at 6’2”. He carried a personality that won over most of those he encountered, witty in both English and Spanish and with the energy to keep
addressing issues all day long. From handing out the winning raffle prize to one of his congregants and taking a picture with them to speaking with one of the families that arrived asking for financial help, from picking the color for the fresh coat of paint for one of the parish buildings to meeting with the Archbishop to talk about the current state of the Archdiocese of Miami, Fr. José Luis was the indisputable leader of the Corpus Christi parish and one of the prominent priests in the Archdiocese of Miami.

*Look at that!* he told me when I pulled out some pictures from the church archives. Among pictures of the church’s founding and several others from the past several decades were pictures from Fr. José Luis’s early years with the parish. The hairs in his thick beard and atop his head were still dark in the pictures, but the man who held the photographs bore hair that was all white from age and, as he told me, the stress that comes from running an inner-city parish. In one, he was inaugurating a new building. In another, he posed with local community activists. *That’s when I was still young and energetic,* he joked with me. *Now I’m old and tired.* He loved looking at the pictures and showed them to the whole staff. *Look at Sister Carmen! Look at how young she looks!* Juanita, the cook and house matron of the rectory, laughed at the pictures and poked fun at his dark hair. *The hair color has changed,* I added in, *but at least Father José Luis still hasn’t lost his belly!* Everybody laughed; Father José Luis was constantly trying to convince Juanita for bigger portions at lunch or an additional dessert from time to time, but she kept him on a strict dietary regimen. But even when I poked fun at him, Fr. José Luis was ready with a comeback. *My stomach is nothing; just take a look at all this hair!* *Don’t be jealous, mijito.* I made fun of his belly, he made fun of me for being bald: it was a ritual that occurred often.
Those pictures came from the early years of Father José Luis’s ministry at Corpus Christi: a period of significant restructuring of the parish geographical area and the beginning of addressing the unification of the people under his pastoral care. The 1970s and 1980s had resulted in the decimation of the parish community with the construction of I-95 and the deterioration of the area. Together with Fathers Pedro Corcés and Oscar Castañeda, Father José Luis set out to address those pastoral issues that most directly challenged the parish at the time: the lack of English spoken, the low-income nature of the area, the various nationalities in the community, and the lack of transportation. As Fr. Castillo told me while we drove around the parish area: “If the people cannot come to church, then the church should go to the people.” It was through the construction of sacred places, therefore, that Fr. José Luis and the other parish priests set about to unify the community and move it forward. Instead of relying upon the major church in the area, these parish priests went about building colonial-style missions in the neighborhoods of the parish. The effort, in short, was to use the construction of sacred places as a unifying force.

The sociological literature on the sacred is vast. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim spends a great amount of time discussing the binary of the sacred and the profane, two terms that he defines in strict opposition to each other. The profane is that which is mundane: it is everyday life, everyday actions, and the routine. Beyond the ordinary, the profane is, as well, that which is bad, evil, and dangerous. The sacred, in contrast, is everything that is opposite these traits. Instead of drudgery, the sacred is characterized by frenzy and excitement. Instead of routine, the sacred is set apart and special. And instead of evil, the sacred is good. One of the key distinctions between the sacred and profane for Durkheim, however, is the private nature of the profane and the
collective nature of the sacred. Drawing from the example of the totem in Australia, Durkheim argues that it is imperative for groups to mark the separation between the sacred and the profane with visible, strong, and powerful group actions. The sacred is the collective: that which is sacred is merely the external manifestation of the group. And these manifestations—sacred time, sacred items, sacred actions—require significant amounts of social work to create and maintain.

When looking at Corpus Christi, however, the most important aspect to consider is the development of sacred places. As geographic holders of materiality and meanings, sacred places are powerful centers of group cohesion and identity. They are sacred not only because of the materials they may contain—such as relics or artwork—but also for the separateness that they provide from the rest of the world beyond their boundaries. Whether the boundaries are physical, as with walls, or symbolic, as the taking over of a street for a procession, the creation of a sacred place necessitates collective effort for reshaping the meanings actions associated therein.

The creation of sacred place is one of the most powerful and effective ways for immigrant communities to gain a social anchor in the United States. Spurred in major part by changes to the immigration laws that took place in 1965, the last third of the twentieth century saw approximately 22 million immigrants arrive to the US. Since then, the US has been one of the most significant sites of immigration from individuals around the world. Indeed, “among destination countries, the United States is in a class by itself. About one-in-five international migrants alive today…reside in the United States.”

Today, approximately a quarter of the US population is comprised of both immigrants and their American-born children. And, moreover, these new immigrants no longer live solely
in isolated enclaves or social spaces; they frequently work, socialize, and commute alongside other Americans.\textsuperscript{31}

Sacred places—such as gurdwaras, mosques, churches, and temples—serve as social anchors in the lives of many immigrants in the United States. It is in these places that immigrants are often able to find the elements of community and togetherness; people join together in sacred places to speak in their native tongues, for instance, or to cook their native foods. Sacred places also serve as loci of assimilation to wider American norms. As residents in the United States, immigrants traverse the world of work hours, parking tickets, paperwork, and traffic jams. In addition to worshipping or practicing together in sacred places, immigrants can often help each other in navigating the often-confusing world of their host nations. There is, in short, a strong sense of community that is intimately linked to the construction of sacred places.\textsuperscript{32} As Elaine Peña demonstrates, these kinds of embodied performances—“their voices raised in ecstasy, their praying and dancing bodies in motion, the labor and care they offer to maintain the shrine”—are all integral in the formation of sacred places. Indeed, as she argues, it is only through these embodied performances that the transition from profane to sacred can take place.\textsuperscript{33}

Another aspect of assimilation, as Peña elucidates, is the practice of religion itself. Through the joining in sacred places, immigrants participate in congregational life that is very unlike their nations of origin. Americans, for instance, participate in congregational life at higher levels than other developed nations. From potlatches to bible studies, voting registrations to weekend services, religious congregations provide a vast amount of social and communal services to members and those in the surrounding communities. Although many immigrants hail from countries that exhibit high levels of belief or religious identity,
however, many arrive in the United States with a lack of religious participation at the same level as their neighbors in the new land. As residents of this new homeland, as inhabitants of this new place, immigrants often turn to congregation life.34

Sacred places in the US also go hand in hand with the multiplicities of immigrant identities and their attachment to many places at once. Sacred places are often created with architectural renditions, for instance, in order to transport practitioners back to their homelands, or with religious iconography that is particular to their regional faith practices. They become, in the words of Thomas A. Tweed, “transtemporal and translocative” places for diasporic religions, where the inhabited worlds of meaning allow practitioners to move both across time and location in connecting with their homeland. Although the words on the tablet of the Statue of Liberty, e pluribus unum, implies that the United States’ rich tapestry of immigrant identities and nationalities forms the bedrock of the collective whole, it remains the case that immigrants often hold liminal identities as both insiders and outsiders in the US. And as Tweed demonstrates, the sacred places that immigrants create are integral in providing unifying meanings that allow for dwelling in the liminality.35

In the end, the rootedness and collective forces of sacred places form a significant part of immigrant religiosity in the United States. But what makes Miami unique is the way in which immigration has shaped the interpretive lenses of reality. Although other major cities in the U.S.—such as Los Angeles, New York, or Boston—have had their own eras of immigration, Miami is unique in its recent waves of large amounts of immigrants who primarily hail from a wide number of Latin American nations (as opposed to a small number of Central American countries, as with Los Angeles and other major cities in Texas) and because the Latin American presence in the city is so widespread. According
to the 2010-2014 American Community Survey from the U.S. Census, 51.5% of the population of Miami is foreign born and 72.2% speak a language other than English at home. Instead of having a powerful presence just in certain neighborhoods or parts of the city, the Hispanic population of Miami dominates the city as a whole.

Ever since the 1960s, Miami has grown amidst the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Latin American immigrants. This, then, has led to a sociological quandary of collectivity: in a city where citizens are more likely to identify based on their nation of origin (such as “Colombian,” or “Cuban”) rather than as “Hispanic” or “American,” how is it that group cohesion can be obtained? As Portes and Stepick explain, “the difference between Miami and most communities studied by sociologists in the past is that in Miami even everyday events—not to mention more explosive conflicts between social classes and interest groups—are not necessarily assessed within a common frame of reference, but may be inserted into different, mutually unintelligible, interpretive frameworks.” The key words here are “mutually unintelligible.” This is the difficulty of Miami: the vast networks of transnational ties, cross-national relationships, overseas interests, and personal longings for homelands lead to situations in which it is difficult to reconcile fully the patterns and frameworks that others hold. This is further exacerbated by the multiple national identities that exist in Miami in large numbers.

With Corpus Christi, the construction of missions was not just a translocal and transtemporal effort meant to unify one nationality or one immigrant group, as was the case with Tweed’s exposition of the hermitage for Cubans in Miami. It was, instead, a pan-ethnic effort driven by the unique patterns of immigration in Miami and the shattered, mutually unintelligible worldviews that these patterns produced. Although efforts to unite
across nationalities and differences is a key aspect of religious shrines and other sacred places—what Elaine Peña identifies as “creating a culture of inclusion” in which the presence of the Virgin Mary at a shrine in Chicago unites others “regardless of race, citizenship, or class status”—in Corpus Christi, the effort at national inclusiveness was unique because of residential segregation and pastoral responsibilities. Even with its massive diversity as a result of immigrant flows, Miami has notoriously maintained strict racial and ethnic hierarchies attached to mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion based on both racist narratives in the United States and ethnic differentiation brought from nations of origins. In the Corpus Christi parish, these exclusivist boundaries were built along the lines of neighborhood formation.

By the time Fr. José Luis arrived at Corpus Christi, the three neighborhoods in the parish—Edgewater, Wynwood, and Allapattah—had become what I call “landing neighborhoods.” As immigrants arrived in the airports and shores of Miami, they made their way to these neighborhoods based on the ethnic identity and preexisting social connections. In a city that was seen as being dominated by Cubans, immigrants from other nations often “landed” in these neighborhoods, choosing them based on their ethnic makeup as initial living sites for the beginning of their journey in a new nation. Edgewater was the place for Central Americans, for instance, Wynwood was known to be the center for Puerto Ricans, and Allapattah was primarily for Dominican migrants. With these three landing neighborhoods under his leadership, Fr. José Luis was faced with the sociological and pastoral reality of these mutually unintelligible worldviews in the neighborhoods.

The goal, then, was to unite in the face of obvious divisions, to bring the populations together within themselves and also within the overall church. The solution, however, was
quite unique: together with his other parish priests, Fr. José Luis split up the parish into five mission areas in the colonial style: four missions out in the geographic area together with the Iglesia Madre, the mother church. Each mission was meant to be a central node for the neighborhood: a location that parishioners could come for both spiritual practice and social needs. As part of the family of Corpus Christi, each mission would report back to the Iglesia Madre and serve as the extension of the church in the neighborhoods.42

The first mission to be constructed was that of San Juan Bautista, St. John the Baptist, in the Wynwood neighborhood. Most of the residents at the time were Puerto Rican, although there were other nationalities present in the neighborhood as well. They chose St. John the Baptist as their namesake for the mission because he is recognized as the patron saint of Puerto Rico and was, as one of the founding parishioners of the mission emphasized to me, special in the story of Jesus because he had the privilege of baptizing Jesus in the Jordan River.43 Like many of the foundation stories that I encountered once I moved back to Miami, the founding of the St. John the Baptist Mission was shrouded with the miraculous and extraordinary. Father José Luis was said to have planted a large wooden cross next to a statue of the Virgin Mary on the vacant lot that he hoped to purchase for the construction of the mission. The parish lacked the money to purchase the lot, but Father José Luis and community members were determined to obtain the funds that were needed. Every Saturday morning, the faithful from Wynwood would tip toe over broken bottles, used syringe needles, and the endless supply of trash to pray at the site for God’s assistance to purchase the land. In the meantime, they met for mass at La Reina shoe store.44

Those prayers came true in just six months. A wealthy, anonymous donor contacted the Archdiocese of Miami to ask about donating funds from a financial windfall that he
had just obtained, and the Auxiliary Bishop Agustín Roman introduced the man to Fr. José Luis. When Fr. José Luis took this possible donor to the lot so he could show him the future site of the mission, there was a sheep, a classic symbol of peace, grazing on the lot next to the weather-beaten cross and statue. The presence of that sheep, a rural animal grazing in the inner city, was considered a miracle, one that culminated with a $50,000 check from the interested donor—twice as much as Fr. José Luis needed to buy the land. With this money in hand, construction began on the lot in 1991 and was furthered with yet another $50,000 check from a dying parishioner. Eventually, the mission was completed in 1996 and it would remain the parish’s first daughter: the physical manifestation of evangelization in the face of socioeconomic hardship.

Construction on the other missions continued from there. After St. John the Baptist came Nuestra Señora de la Altagracia, Our Lady of Altagracia, in the Allapattah neighborhood just west of the I-95 corridor. Although there were a sizable number of Nicaraguans, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans in the area, the neighborhood was predominantly populated by Dominicans. In the same style as St. John the Baptist, then, the Altagracia Mission was built specifically with the local population in mind: Our Lady of Altagracia is the spiritual mother of the Dominican people, specifically tied to the Altagracia province at the Easternmost tip of the island.

Once Altagracia was finished, the parish moved to set a mission in the Edgewater neighborhood just east of Wynwood. With a predominantly Central American population, the parish community decided to name the mission after Saints Francis and Saint Clara—two saints who have had a devotional influence across the Central American nations that were represented in the mission community. Consecrated in 1997, the La mission de San
Francisco y Santa Clara became the third mission of Corpus Christi and was primarily focused on helping recently-arrived immigrants get footing in their new nation.

And with a sizeable bronze statue of St. Michael the Archangel protecting its entrance, *La Parroquia la Milagrosa*, dedicated to the Our Lady of Grace, was built at the furthest edge of the parish geographical area. The mission façade was fashioned after the missions in Texas, but the tiles come from Cuba and the antique stained glass windows are recycled from previous churches in the Archdiocese of Miami that had been closed. Our Lady of Grace was chosen by the community of believers in the area because of their deep devotion to Virgin Mary.

All of this construction left the parish split up into 5 sectors: the four missions and the mother church. A fifth mission, San Roberto Belarmino, was added in 2009, but this was not a conscious construction of a mission by Father José Luis and his group of priests and parishioners. Due to financial difficulties and the lack of staff to maintain the parish of San Belarmino, Corpus Christi took on the parish and made it the fifth mission. Since that time, Corpus Christi has been the *iglesia madre*, mother church, of the five missions in Wynwood, Edgewater, and Allapattah. These missions are essential to the maintenance of the entire parish, and Fr. José Luis makes sure that there is continuous collaboration between the missions. Every month there is a planning meeting where representatives from all five missions come together to meet with Fr. José Luis and others, for instance. The missions also often play each other in soccer matches on the grounds of the *iglesia madre*. And whenever there is a competition between the missions—as with the selling of raffle tickets for their annual festival—the faithful come out in full force to represent their neighborhood mission.
The arts formed a significant backbone of much of what Corpus Christi conducted in its evangelization, worship, and practice through these missions. Although one would imagine that the worlds of art and artists, typically associated with risqué hair styles and liberal lifestyles, would contradict with the worlds of religious practice, there are a plethora of instances in which the arts are integral to religious participation. Choirs and musical groups, for instance, have been longstanding parts of a typical Christian congregation. Music is part of religious celebration, ritual significance, and temporal marking. But musical groups are also integral parts to solidifying the bonds among religious practitioners in communities that can unify individuals under a shared sense of identity. The “emotional energy” that is developed in choral groups is integral to the overcoming of difference that arises from diversity and can successfully unite individuals in diverse groups. Other analyses have demonstrated, moreover, that choirs can be important for civic activity: participating in choirs increases voluntarism and develops new networks among individuals that can be important further down the road.

Although these examples may elicit images of guitar-strumming pastors or uniformed chorales, the connection between art and religion is not just limited to these types of interactions. Indeed, religion in pop culture is a highly profitable business that produces millions of dollars every year. Veggie Tales, for instance, a children’s television show that portrayed moral stories from the Bible through vegetable characters, was a runaway hit that broke out of the purely religious market and was successful in the wider, secular market with the help of sales at Target, Wal-Mart, Walgreen’s, and Kmart.
Christian rock and gospel music are also musical genres that dominate sizeable portions of the overall market of music. And in Hollywood, there are the blockbuster favorites that have dominated the industry such as The Passion of the Christ: Mel Gibson’s opus that displayed the suffering and death of Jesus. Even with the Aramaic and Latin language with English subtitles, this film brought in $26.5 million dollars in its first day, $125 million in its first five days, and went on to produce more than $600 million worldwide. Gibson’s The Passion joined Shrek 2, Spiderman, and The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King as the highest grossing films in 2004.

The architectural design of a place of worship, moreover, is important for creating the atmosphere needed for religious practice. Practices, taken in its simplest form, are the actions that people enact and the things that people do. They are inherently social phenomena that take place in institutional contexts that shape the practice as well. The architectural design of a place of worship is important for this institutional embeddedness of practice, and art is central to all of this. A great amount of time, money, and energy, therefore, goes into collecting and displaying the appropriate statuary, artwork, and adornment for the religious institutions across the United States. From gurdwaras to mosques, temples to home shrines, religious artwork is essential to completing the construction of sacred place. These uses of architecture and artwork also have influences on the extent of the religious practice in these spaces.

A central aspect of the pan-ethnic unification of Corpus Christi and the colonial logics of action that the parish used, however, revolved around the arts. Every event contained a host of artistic effort, every building was designed with architectural precision, and every corner of the Corpus Christi Church and missions included a painting, statue, or
mural. The design of the *San Juan Bautista* mission in Wynwood, for instance, included a lengthy analysis of Colonial architecture and urban design. Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, one of the co-founders of the famous Arquitectonica architecture firm, was introduced to Fr. José Luis through a mutual friend and decided to take on the project of constructing the mission as a part of the University of Miami’s architecture program. “There’s an itinerary from the profane to the sacred in that building,” Plater-Zyberk told me, “from the desert out front to the renouncing of sin by stepping on the snake in the foyer, to baptism in the baptismal font, and then, finally, paradise with the ceiling mural.” They really thought of every detail that they could, Plater-Zyberk said, and worked closely alongside Fr. José Luis and others in the community to construct a worship space similar to the neighborhood churches in Latin America. The finished product—with bell tower, cloistered courtyard, and sun-lit interior—was a beautiful beginning to the Corpus Christi colonial missions, a design that would end up winning an architectural award and being featured in *House & Garden* magazine.

This kind of cultural effort continued with each mission. The stained-glass windows of the missions were all chosen meticulously for their theological and cultural relevance, the architecture and facades of the missions were selected with community input and with an eye towards historical accuracy, and all the artwork—the tremendous amount of artwork throughout the entire parish—was hand-picked by Fr. José Luis and other administrators to complement the symbology within each mission. At lunch in the rectory one afternoon, the other staff members and I were detailing to a priest from the local seminary all the different missions and their unique details. *La Milagrosa*, for instance, is known for its
large number of relics from saints: tiny capsules that contain pieces of flesh, bone, or hair from a saint that is used for veneration.

_There are 144 relics dotting the wall_, Fr. José Luis told the priest from the seminary.

_Yes!_ said the priest. _I was able to go and see them. They are arranged in forms of constellations, yes?_

_Exactly_, said Fr. José Luis. _There are 144 of them, arranged in constellations, but one of those 144 is empty. Absolutely empty._ Everybody looked at Fr. José Luis with confusion. _That one is empty so as to remind the viewer that that spot is saved for them._

_We all have the capacity to be saints; let us remember that and attempt to reach that future._

Overall, the construction of the Spanish missions in the Corpus Christi parish was an effort to unify the various ethnic enclaves that existed in the neighborhoods surrounding the church. The artwork that was displayed, the architecture that was employed, and the theological imagery that were chosen were all used in an effort to provide both specificity and communality. With so many ethnic enclaves under their purview, parish leaders used the colonial model to bring unity in the face of difference. But in the same way that Corpus Christi had to contend with the massive sociological changes at the completion of the church in 1959—the influx of refugees and other immigrants landing in its neighborhoods and the construction of I-95—so, too, did Corpus Christi have to contend with another round of global shifts of money, people, and culture as they laid the final bricks in their last parish mission. In Wynwood in particular, the landing neighborhood was beginning to change into the global neighborhood at the close of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. Many Puerto Rican families had moved up and out of the neighborhood, for instance, and the Rubell Family purchased their large warehouse to hold their collection in
the years when the San Juan Bautista mission in Wynwood was being finished. With its mission in Wynwood finished, in short, the first traces of the global art market began arriving in Wynwood: an arrival that would shift the future steps of the parish.

**Elite Colonial Art | How the Global Art Market Changed Corpus Christi**

*I want to show you something, sir.* Fr. Rolando Castillo, my friend who first drove me through the parish area, was adamant that I come with him to see *this Peruvian thing that Fr. José Luis has been working on.* I had heard that there was something quite significant at Corpus Christi well before I ever stepped foot at the church, and Rolando had offered to take me himself to see Fr. José Luis’ latest project. *Fr. José Luis is a big art buff. He also loves history, so he’s put together this Peruvian art museum thing inside a chapel he is building.* The more Fr. Castillo spoke, the more confused I got. Peruvian art? In Miami? In a chapel? I drove up to Corpus Christi’s main offices at the *Iglesia Madre* and walked with Fr. Rolando around the offices. As a former priest with Corpus Christi, Fr. Castillo was very well-loved. There were many handshakes, kisses, and jokes as he walked through the halls. He spent several years at Corpus Christi working with Fr. José Luis as the head priest of the *San Juan Bautista* mission. Fr. Castillo’s brother, Frank, always joked that it was during his time at Corpus Christi that Fr. Castillo became rotund from eating too much of Juanita’s home cooking.

Fr. Rolando introduced me to Ray Zamora, the artistic director of Fr. José Luis’ chapel project. At 70 years of age, Ray is a Cuban immigrant who has seen and worked in much of the United States. As an unaccompanied minor who arrived on the shores of Miami in 1961 as a political exile from Cuba, Ray was shipped off to a foster home through
Operation Peter Pan: a joint venture between the federal government and the Archdiocese of Miami that found foster homes and caretakers for the thousands of unaccompanied minors that arrived from Cuba. His journey in the U.S. would take him from schools and jobs in Washington D.C. to galleries and business ventures in Miami. After working with Ray for several months, he even showed me a picture of him standing next to other Cuban youth alongside J. Edgar Hoover, the first director of the FBI. *Back then, everybody [in the Cuban community] was working for the FBI, the CIA, he told me. I’ve seen so much of this world thanks to that.*

At the time that I met him, of course, I knew none of this. Ray was just one of the staff of Corpus Christi, a wiry old man with a pencil-thin mouth and piercing eyes that saw everything. He also had a quick wit and a cadre of jokes ready for dissemination at a moment’s notice. (The more I worked with Ray, the more I realized that these jokes were his arsenal for showing people around the chapel project. *Oh, I’m retired now and only work half days at the Church, Ray would tell his listeners. That means I only work twelve hours a day.*) But after the pleasantries and introductions with Fr. Castillo, Ray took me to see the actual project: a beautiful chapel built from an inspiration of a Colonial Peruvian church tucked away in the corner of the Corpus Christi property. This, Ray told me, was the beginning of the Colonial Florida Cultural and Convention Center, a project that had been 8 years in the making. The chapel, *La Capilla de Nuestra Señora de La Merced*, was still unfinished—the two bell towers still needed roofs and bells, the land in the front was full of gravel, and the front doors were still needing to be replaced with their final teak versions—but it was still an impressive building that stood out in its juxtaposition to the surrounding area.
The outside façade, however, was no match for what lay inside: a grandiose chapel with a major altar in the center flanked by four lateral altars, all of which was constructed out of hand-carved cedar wood, hand-gilded and hand-painted to match the era, and flanked by original colonial paintings of Latin America from the 17th and 18th centuries. The carvings were of intricate grape vines that spiraled upwards around columns, of giant waves that crashed into themselves and spun outward on other facades, and of individual litanies to the Virgin Mary: a small tower to represent her accolade of “Tower of David,” a mirror to represent “Mirror of Justice,” and onwards. In classical baroque style, everywhere that one looked, there was art. The closet doors in the sacristy were dated 1632; a statue made completely of hammered silver bore 1769 on its front crest; and then there
were the paintings: wall after wall covered with paintings, most of them unsigned, that heralded from all parts of Latin America in the colonial period.

Corpus Christi succeeded in instituting their colonial model for evangelization and community building, a unique trait in the Archdiocese of Miami, to tackle the sociological realities of rapid immigration. But as Miami continued to grow into a global city, Corpus Christi had to contend with different shifting tides. The neighborhood of Wynwood, one of the landing neighborhoods of the Corpus Christi parish, had exploded into becoming one of the most prominent international destinations for art, thus creating a different kind of clash between “mutually unintelligible worldviews”: that of art, money, and inequality. By the time I arrived to tour La Merced, Wynwood had become a main attractions for the globetrotters of the art world. But for the locals of the surrounding neighborhoods, the galleries and collections were not of interest. Through all my interactions with neighborhood residents, I never once heard a resident express interest in visiting any of the art establishments nor met anybody who had actually entered. The artwork inside the walls were not particularly to the taste of those who actually live in the area. And although open to the public year-round, these are hardly spaces of interest to those in Fr. Jose Luis’ flock.

The culmination of the colonial model of unification for the parish, therefore, was represented with their latest project of La Merced. Instead of seeking ethnic unity, however, Corpus Christi was interested in using La Merced as a direct response to the arrival of Art Basel and the global elites in Wynwood. How is it, members of the parish staff and community would tell me, that Wynwood became an art destination for everybody but those who reside in the neighborhoods? Fr. José Luis likened the construction of La Merced as a kind of communitarian response to the art boom in Wynwood. All those places, he told
me, that’s not for us. That’s not for the community. That’s for the elites. That’s for the people with money. But La Merced: that is a place for all of us in this area. It’s a community center as much as an art museum.

Figure 4: Architectural mockup of final project. Note La Merced in the middle. Photo by author.

It was in this way that La Merced grew from being the primary goal of Corpus Christi’s project to being the first phase of the much larger project: Colonial Florida Cultural and Convention Center. Time and again, I heard Fr. José Luis explain to visitors the three primary aims of the project. Whether it was to news reporters, visitors, friends, or family, Fr. José Luis repeated these three aims. This was, first and foremost, a place for the people in the community to come and enjoy art. As a host of studies have demonstrated, certain cultural institutions—such as museums, galleries, collections, etc—are often beset
by issues of perpetuating inequalities even when attempting to mitigate them. Telling the listeners about the Rubell Family Collection and the lack of art institutions in Miami that are welcoming for the low-income parishioners of Corpus Christi, Fr. José Luis said that he aspired for *La Merced* to be a place where people from the surrounding community can come and appreciate art in a setting that is welcoming to their presence. During one visit, Fr. José Luis described one piece in particular at the Rubell Family Collection: a set of sculptures of eight naked men partaking in an orgy, titled “Oh! Charley, Charley, Charley…” Each man was a life-sized mannequin sculpted to look exactly like the artist, Charles Ray, so that the final piece is an assemblage of fellatio, penetration, and masturbation of the very same person. *I looked at this thing, standing there in my priest’s collar and everything, wondering what this work of ‘art’ was meant to represent*, Fr. José Luis said. *The lady from the Collection approached me and asked me if I knew the symbolism. And she told me, ‘Don’t you see? Those statues are all of him, the artist! He is fucking himself!’* Everybody in the group laughed, and Fr. José Luis raised his hands. *This is what we are working with in the neighborhood, these are the kinds of things that these collections hold. That’s not art!*

In addition to being a collection for locals, this project was meant to be a historical site that served as a reminder of the colonial past in Florida and the presence of Spanish-speaking peoples. The choice of constructing Spanish-style missions in an inner-city parish in Miami is extremely odd. Although these kinds of missions dot the landscape in the American Southwest, remnants of the Spanish Colonial presence in the area during the 16th and 17th centuries onward, Miami was still a predominantly swampy land inhabited by the Seminole and Tequesta tribes at the time. Fr. José Luis, however, emphasized that Florida
as a whole was a Spanish colony. Miami was far from being a theological or political center of the state, approximately 300 miles away from the city of St. Augustine, the earliest European establishment in North America. Founded in the 1565 by Pedro Menendez de Aviles and populated by Jesuit priests, St. Augustine predated Jamestown by four decades. Today, St. Augustine is filled with modern reconstructions of colonial buildings, plazas, and streets, meant to lure tourists and travelers. At the time, however, it was the most important settlement in the region.

Beyond being an important Spanish stronghold in North America, St. Augustine was also the beginning of the Catholic presence in Florida overall. The early Jesuit missionaries were, as elsewhere, determined to spread the Gospel throughout the region. This missiological zeal also included efforts at evangelizing in the Southernmost regions of the continent. Early missions attempted to go down to Biscayne Bay, but these efforts all ended in failure due to the rough climate and inaccessible lands. It would take several centuries and significant infrastructural development before the first church of Miami, the Holy Name of Jesus (GESU) Catholic Church, was founded by locals in 1896. Because of the sparse population in Miami, it was still a part of the Archdiocese of St. Augustine. It would take an additional half-century for religious leaders to create the Archdiocese of Miami in 1958.59

These historical details, mentioned during many events at Corpus Christi, were meant to emphasize one larger point: Spanish-speaking populations in the United States are not recent arrivers to a land that is foreign to them. Indeed, as the history of St. Augustine demonstrates, Spanish-speaking populations were some of the earliest settlers in the United States. Spanish, Fr. José Luis explained to visitors, is the first non-Native
language spoken in the United States, not English. And we must remember that we are not foreigners, we were some of the first ones in this country. These comments, of course, were reacting to the rising nativist sentiments in the United States over the course of the 2000s and 2010s. From the anti-immigrant platforms of politicians to new legislation against ethnic studies in public schools, the idea that La Merced could be an indicator of the continued presence of Hispanics in the United States and a strong statement of rootedness and inclusion.

And finally, this project was characterized by Fr. José Luis and the other staff of Corpus Christi as a gift to the United States. We want to give back to the country that gives us so much, Fr. José Luis articulated. The xenophobic and anti-immigrant ethos notwithstanding, La Merced was meant to be a gift of artistic beauty and historical preservation for the wider United States. This, Fr. José Luis told his listeners while opening his arms and swinging around, is our way of saying thank you. We are all so fortunate to live in this amazing country, and we cannot ignore that.

Even with these three reasons touted by Fr. José Luis and Ray, it still remained the case that amidst these communitarian, historical, and nationalistic reasons, La Merced also had another aim: to be an integral part in the global circuit of culture. As I spent more time with the leaders and workers of La Merced, I realized that this project was deeply influenced by the flow of consumption and capital through Wynwood. Just as place entrepreneurs began descending on Wynwood to purchase cheap property and set up cultural institutions, Fr. José Luis was approached by a separate group of place creators: a group of wealthy Peruvian parishioners who were interested in establishing a chapel in honor of Nuestra Señora de La Merced, the patrona of Peru. These parishioners held a
large collection of colonial paintings from Peru and were looking for an appropriate home in which to house them. Fr. José Luis, conversely, had also been collecting pieces of colonial art for decades. It may sound odd that a parish priest in Miami had actively collected colonial paintings, but according to my interviews with those in the art market for colonial works, Latin American colonial art was not an active or expensive market until the mid-to-late 1990s. A few dealers maintained the majority hold of these works outside of universities and public museums, and pieces would often sell for comparatively low rates. But when interest began to grow, Sotheby’s and Christie’s auction houses became involved in the 2000s and spurred the pricing of these types of artworks. Today, the issue is not demand—there are plenty of individuals seeking Latin American colonial artwork—but rather supply: getting items out of countries is difficult and expensive, many pieces are locked into permanent exhibitions, and many vendors are unwilling to let go of their lot.61

The joining of the collections from the Peruvian group and from Fr. José Luis’s holdings, then, was a perfect match: the building would be made to hold services and concerts while also serving as a museum for all this artwork.

The initial plans were just for a Chapel dedicated to La Merced, originally named Iglesia-Museo de Peru. But the changing tides of art—especially colonial art—and the bubbling of the new Wynwood Arts District brought changes to the plans. At first, the goal was to build a chapel. Then, there were additional buildings added to the design, flanking each side of the chapel in order to house more of the collection of art and historical documents. Plans grew to include ideas for retail on the ground floor—a tapas bar, for instance, or a Starbucks—that would draw in both tourists and locals. And then, in the end, the plans grew yet again so as to include a convention center, theater, parking garage, and
an outdoor multireligious wedding canopy. The final project design, shown as an architectural tableau within the chapel, was a massive development that was figured to take more than a decade to build—if Corpus Christi was able to secure the funding.\textsuperscript{c}

Fr. José Luis and Ray had high hopes that at least one visitor would become so enamored with the project that they would open their purse strings and bring forth the generous donations that were needed to keep going. These efforts, however, sometimes led to uncomfortable or awkward moments. It was 10 in the morning on a crisp December day leading up to Miami Art Week, for instance, and I had shown up to Corpus Christi, camera in hand, to take pictures of a special exhibit that was being held in \textit{La Merced}. Fr. José Luis and Ray were preparing for the large influx of art enthusiasts arriving in Miami and were setting up \textit{La Merced} to host a contemporary art exhibition. Amidst the gilding and the colonial paintings, there would be contemporary art installation: large hanging cloths with abstract designs, a hanging sculpture made completely out of plastic yokes for six packs of aluminum cans of sodas or beer, and 88 round clay trays piled with colored spices or sand placed on the floor in the shape of an equilateral triangle. As the morning progressed, these installations would be put together and placed in \textit{La Merced}, together with a table to the side for food and refreshments for guests.

Everybody was abuzz that morning. Through their connections, Fr. José Luis and Ray were able to put \textit{La Merced} on a list of must-see art sights for an art tour company that ran during Art Basel time. The company specialized in taking patrons around noteworthy collections, galleries, and art fairs in small air-conditioned chartered buses and includes

\textsuperscript{c} In typical Miami fashion, the project seemed to grow bigger and bigger every time I asked about it. If these descriptions didn’t seem grandiose enough, I was later informed that the church was looking to develop a boutique hotel or other residencies as part of the final project, a move that they said would increase revenues for the production and maintenance of the whole project.
lunches and dinners in their package. La Merced, then, was being readied for the arrival of these “very important people,” as they were described to me. Ray went to his office and came back with his tweed jacket on even though it was nowhere near cold enough for jackets or sweaters (Decembers in Miami are noticeably different than Decembers elsewhere in the United States). Caterers affiliated with the tour company arrived and started setting up the food table with sushi to snack on and champagne and orange juice for mimosas. Eventually, a steady stream of art enthusiasts began arriving in groups of two and three, all of whom were greeted at the door with a glass of chilled champagne or mimosa. That’s how they travel, Ray whispered to me. This is a different level of people, the elites.

The doors of La Merced stayed open all day while these VIPs coursed through and was opened the following day for the grand launching of the exhibition. As with the previous day, La Merced was mainly populated with VIP art goers, including the Bolivian consul general. I was around to help take pictures and attend to questions or needs. And although the whole staff of the project was around to support the opening, it felt forced and uncomfortable. The intricate baroque carvings of the altars seemed to clash with the shapeless textures on hanging clothes and the 88 pots seemed out of place in the center of the chapel. I was walking around with one of the seminarians based at Corpus Christi who was a professional art appraiser before joining the seminary. I could tell that the irony of it all was getting to him. What is this? he asked me, pointing to the hanging sculpture of six pack yolks with a disgusted look on his face. This isn’t art! This is shit, that’s what it is. How are you going to tell me that this is beautiful, that it is aesthetically appealing? He huffed, he scoffed, and he threw his hands around. It took all the effort of me and one of
the interns to quiet him down so that people would not be able to hear him. But, I was told, these are the things you have to do to get noted, these are the actions you have to perform in order to get the wealthy patrons inside the doors.

Figure 5: Contemporary art pieces in *La Merced* during Art Basel time, December 2014.

It is not surprising that an arts organization would turn to wealthy patrons for their financial support and backing. As has been shown time and again, this is one of the great ironies of art and intellectual worlds: even while individuals in these fields seek to disrupt social order, expose the exploitation of social hierarchies, or criticize the wealthy, they are
equally beholden to wealthy members of a society for financial backing. In trying to attract the wealthy visitors of the world to *La Merced*, therefore, leaders of Corpus Christi were merely seeking to find the financial backing that was needed for their (grandiose) plans at the church. But what is striking about my experiences at Corpus Christi was the way in which the place construction of Wynwood and its transformation into a global neighborhood affected the decisions that were made at *La Merced* and the projection of plans for the future. There was a disjoint, for instance, between the desires for *La Merced* to be an arts space and religious site for the community—one that would stand in stark contrast to the alienating collections and galleries in Wynwood—and other plans for the site to be part of the global stopover of elites coursing through Wynwood. The external perceptions of Wynwood as an arts district transformed the meanings associated with the construction of the sacred, in short, and led to the confusion and disjoint in the execution of place construction at Corpus Christi.

Although unfinished, the Colonial Florida Cultural and Convention Center demonstrates how the cultural logics of the experiential economy were already shaping the decision-making process of the construction of *La Merced*. Instead of being solely a religious space meant for community and identity, as typical examinations of the construction of sacred places emphasize, Corpus Christi was embarking on a project that would simultaneously embed its sacred place into the religious lives of its parishioners and the wider experiential economy of the consumption of art. As I detailed above, the plans for the future of the project included revenue streams, annual events, and atmospheric qualities for outdoor dining. Ray, the artistic director, even transformed the air conditioning vault of the *Iglesia Madre*—a two-story machinery space—into an elegant gallery with
hundreds of art pieces, statuary, and plenty of fine whiskey to taste during the viewing. The
der atmosphere of cultural and commodity consumption, then, shaped the construction
of the project as it unfolded. Beyond the aspirations of constructing a sacred place for
community participation, Corpus Christi sought to build itself into the global
neighborhood.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

Bernice Steinbaum was first. After ten years of running a large, two-story gallery on the northeast corner of Wynwood, Steinbaum held her last gallery opening and sold her building in 2012. The area around her gallery had become, in her words, “silly.” The gallerist’s job, she told me, was to get great art to the people, to have a space that could serve both a private function of generating income for the gallerist and the public function of educating all of those who walked in the doors. But now, “you see busloads of tourists photographing graffiti, never coming into the gallery. Photographing that crap! Most of it is done by kids who are taking risks of their lives with a spray can. It’s not good, it’s not good art, and it has no lastability [sic].” As one of the first gallerists to arrive in Wynwood in the early 2000s, Bernice had been part of the development of Wynwood into a global neighborhood. She brought her art, she brought her style, but most importantly, she brought her clients. After a decade, however, she had had enough.¹

Fred Snitzer was next. He had moved in to Wynwood in 2003, the first property purchase that he had ever made as a gallerist, because of the rock-bottom property values and the sky-high enthusiasm for elite art in the neighborhood. In 2014, however, Snitzer sold his property (for a tremendous profit) and left. “In my mind,” he told me, “you gotta have art in order to have an art district. [laughs] And the quality of what is there is not defendable.” Snitzer was one of the key players who convinced the Art Basel directors to bring the fair to Miami Beach and remains an active member of the selection committee for galleries who apply to show at the fair. But what initially drew Snitzer to Wynwood had changed to such an extent that he had to leave.
The experience in the short term was that Art Basel was there once a year: curators, critics, and collectors arrived. They would go by bus in the mornings on a tour, and the galleries would be open. They would go to the Rubells, de la Cruz, Marguelies, and then they would come to the galleries to check them out. They don’t do that anymore. They don’t look through Wynwood anymore. They go to the Rubells and they leave. They go to de la Cruz and they leave. They know the difference. When you go to Berlin and there’s a critical mass of quality galleries, they go to Berlin for gallery week. They’re not flying to Berlin and staying a week to see mediocre commercial galleries.

Although Wynwood was a “big home run,” in his words, for the city and for property developers, it was a different story for those in the art world.2

And then there were others. Emmanuel Perrotin, Nina Johnson, Brook Dorsch: all of the foundational contemporary art gallerists of Wynwood—those who had given the neighborhood its reputation and had enticed the world’s elites to course the neighborhood’s streets—finished their leases or sold their properties and relocated their wares out of Wynwood to other areas of Miami over the course of the early-to-mid 2010s. And the world took notice. These closures were featured in national and international presses, art blogs, and art magazines that were popular among the cultural tastemakers of the world. Even The New York Times featured Nina Johnson’s sale of her Diet Gallery in Wynwood and speculated, along with many others across the world, whether Wynwood was finishing up its short tenures as an arts district.3

But the loudest sound of change came a few months after I finished my ethnographic research and was writing up my findings. After more than two decades in Wynwood, Don and Mera Rubell decided to put their property for the pioneering Rubell Family Collection up for sale and move to the nearby neighborhood of Allapattah. Instead of their 40,000 square foot former DEA facility, the Rubells would custom-build a 100,000 square foot museum to house their collection, replete with an open courtyard, a nice
restaurant, a lecture hall, and plenty of open space to show their works. As one of the primary mainstays of the neighborhood and one of the most important art collections in the world, it was significant that the Rubell’s would pick up and leave the very area that they had helped create. The neighborhood had changed, Mera Rubell chastised me on the phone once, and they were no longer a part of what this neighborhood was about. Wynwood was not serious, it was not about the art anymore and, what was worse, nobody seemed to understand the role that their collection played in making Wynwood into a real place.

As I stated in my introduction, Wynwood serves as an example of what happens when giant global flows in culture and money meet in a small location and produce a cacophony of activity surrounding art consumption. Small, elite galleries opened in Wynwood during the 1990s and early 2000s, and the arrival of Art Basel in Miami Beach brought a sudden onslaught of money and flow to the neighborhood, one that required an immediate response from the residents and investors of the area. Wynwood had become an international arts destination by the 2010s, and people all over the world had come to learn of the culture that resided in the neighborhood’s confines. The push to produce the experience economy for elite art consumption, the focus to provide for those seeking to relish in the art lifestyle, bled from these changes and produced the results in Wynwood: a neighborhood that grew to provide that experience. With the focus on the experience rather than on the art, the original gallerists moved out and the residential property developers moved in.

On the surface, the case of Wynwood seems to demonstrate the continued effects that art institutions and culture can have for placemaking strategies. As has become

---

*a This would, of course, be a first for the city of Miami: a set of collectors constructing a museum for their collection (a clear broach of the private/public split in art institutions).
common logic for place entrepreneurs and developers worldwide, culture sells. Whether it is the bohemian enclaves that produce lasting economic return or the high-end art museums that attract worldwide visitors, the logic seems to be the same as the whispered message in *Field of Dreams*: if you build it, they will come. But in their study of Santa Barbara, California, Harvey Molotch and his co-authors discuss the implications of place creation via projects that seek to serve as developmental sparks. As they state: “Plopping in a new museum, science park, or stadium, redesigning a streetscape, or injecting a new mission statement or community organization all carry the risk of artificiality. Without the needed complementary elements in place, they may not be viable interventions, something which has resulted in repeated project failures and mixed results.” Part of their argument includes art institutions and their revitalizing effects, the so-called “Bilbao Effect” that municipalities, developers, and urban planners worldwide seek to recreate through their efforts at establishing art institutions in down-trodden areas.

Although Wynwood did demonstrate part of the logic of place construction through blockbuster institutions, what is important to realize with Wynwood—especially the southern half in particular—is that these dramatic changes to the neighborhood were more effective in creating an environment of art consumption rather than anything else. Although shifts in the global art world had produced a contemporary art market that was financially lucrative and volatile, the development of high-end art fairs worldwide also developed the alternative world of those who sought to be in the presence of the sale and purchase of art (rather than they being art purchasers themselves). What took place, in short, was the establishment of the experience economy of high end art consumption. Rather than focusing on the purchase of art pieces in and of themselves, individuals sought to purchase
the experience of being among the art purchasers: joining others in the openings, galas, afterparties, VIP events, breakfasts, and other such occasions, all of which included copious amounts of alcohol, beautiful people, and picture-worthy accoutrements for texting and social media accounts.

With the establishment of art galleries in Wynwood and the arrival of Art Basel in Miami Beach came the solidification of art consumption and the experiences surrounding this consumption. Not all art institutions are the same in their goals; as a result, not all art institutions are the same in their sociological effects. The fact that Wynwood was populated with galleries—art institutions that stress the selling of art rather than the preserving of art—whose success was intimately tied in with the success of the Art Basel art fair—yet again, a yearly art event geared towards the selling of art—meant that the emphasis on the experiential qualities of art consumption was paramount to the decisions that were made in Wynwood and the results that were witnessed (many of them documented in this dissertation).

To begin, the experiential emphasis on art consumption led to a bifurcation of the Wynwood neighborhood along the east-west route of Northwest 29th street. To the south, there was the onslaught of investment, business displacement, and rapid flow of visitors. As a result, the place entrepreneurs and power brokers of the neighborhood formed associations to help manage the changes, a flurry of acronyms that grew with each passing year. The formation of the Wynwood Arts District Administration (WADA) eventually melded into the Wynwood Business Improvement District (BID), which, by 2016, was requesting a new designation for the southern half of Wynwood as a Neighborhood Revitalization District (NRD). Keeping the streets clean became a priority, there was more
of a call for increased police presence for security, and cameras were installed outside of numerous buildings.

To the north, the mainly residential half of the neighborhood, the physical manifestations of the experience economy were not as prevalent. Although there were a few examples of residential displacement, for the most part the northern half of Wynwood remained much the same. Announcements of “gentrification” in the popular media overemphasized the rate at which long-term residents of Wynwood were leaving and incorrectly assumed that these departures were the result of rising rents. While I did witness some evidence of rental displacement, most of the departures from the northern half of Wynwood were as a result of property sales by Wynwood residents. These men and women cashed out, in short, rather than getting pushed out.

This reality notwithstanding, the changing tides of Wynwood to the south did impact the structural world of the neighborhood as a whole, all of which became contentious realities for the residents of the northern half of Wynwood. Streets became clogged with cars, buses, bikes, and pedestrians; noise from the parties and bars were a constant issue for some families; and the general takeover of the very name “Wynwood,” now equated with arts consumption rather than Puerto Rican heritage or the garment district, affected the perception of residents. Seen most visibly with the introduction of new types of businesses that catered to the elite consumers of the elite art world, residents of the northern half of Wynwood understood that the days of their presence were numbered.

And then, of course, there were the new calls, mailings, and visits from property developers across the world who were interested in purchasing their homes as quickly as possible. As I emphasized in chapter 3, the main emphasis of capital investment in
Wynwood over the course of the 2000s and 2010s was in the experiential economy of art consumption rather than the establishment of a residential economy. Part of this fact was because of the physical infrastructure of the southern half of Wynwood—composed mainly of former warehouses and factories—but was mainly a result of the immediate goals of the main property developers in the area. The most amount of money was to be made immediately through the experiential economy of art consumption rather than through the labored process of building construction. Even with plenty of empty folios, rising demand for housing, and the blessing from municipal directors of Miami (who are always quick to accept new building proposals for large-scale residential projects, especially in low-income areas), the real money was to be made in the environmental qualities of the southern half of Wynwood. The food trucks and parties drew in huge numbers on a weekly basis, the fancy restaurants commandeered the market for high-end gastronomic experiences, and the street art kept the crowds coming throughout the days and nights. Housing was not important; being a part of the world of the consumption of art was what sold. So important was this fact, indeed, that the first major construction venture in Wynwood was not the miniscule 11-unit condo building that was completed in 2015, but rather the massive, eight-story parking garage with around 21,000 square feet of retail space, 24,000 square feet of office space, and more than 400 parking spaces, that broke ground in 2016: the largest building in Wynwood to date.

As I finished my research, however, the tides were already turning on the question of residential life. Developers had created the appropriate cultural consumption environment, but there was a demand for housing that was not being met. As a result, speculators turned to the homes in the northern half of Wynwood to see what could be
purchased, renovated, demolished, or built up. Luz, for instance, lived just across the street from the Wynwood Community Center in a one-story home with plenty of space on the porch to sit and chat and plenty of space in her front garden to plant all sorts of herbs, vegetables, and fruits. She’s the kind of lady who collects rainwater in big buckets so that she can give her plants water that is “sweeter” to them, as she puts it. “It’s better, the rainwater. They like it more.” I spoke with Luz often throughout my time in Wynwood about all sorts of things: her history of arriving to the United States from Puerto Rico, her family’s time in the Wynwood neighborhood, the news, and all sorts of other topics ranging from the weather to telenovela star gossip. I get offers all the time to buy my house, she told me one day. Every day. From all over. They send letters. They stop by my house. They call me Russians, she told me, were particularly adamant to buy her house. But I’m not selling! she finished with a mischievous look in her eyes and a cackle. Why not? I asked her. That’s my safe place! she said. No, no, no way. I’m going to live there until I die. And then I’m giving it off to my daughter. No way. I’m not selling!

According to documents available through the Miami-Dade Property Appraiser’s website, Luz paid $20,500 for her home in 1980. By 2014, the market value for her home was listed at $71,017. By 2016, just two years later, her home’s market value doubled to $144,062—the vast majority of which came from the increase in land value for her plot. In 2014, the land value was $20,448. By 2016, her land was worth approximately five times that amount: $104,796. Although impressive in their own right, these numbers do not show the amount that people would be willing to pay for her home. Other single-family homes in Wynwood sold for double or triple their listed market value. One home sold for $100,000 in 2014 before jumping to a sale of $230,000 in 2016. In 2014, the market value for the
home was a mere $78,567. Another single-family unit sold for $30,000 in 1985. By 2014, the home sold for $650,000 (while its market value was listed at $211,768).7

In the end, the global neighborhood of Wynwood began as a result of the circuit of elite art consumption worldwide and thrived under the perpetuation of the experiential economy of art consumption. The question remains, however, as to what the future will hold for the neighborhood with the outflow of the high-end galleries, collections, and other elite art institutions. As several of the gallerists pointed out to me, Wynwood was no longer a haven for elite art. In their eyes, the neighborhood was now rampant with sub-par galleries, food trucks, and the constant stream of live art events that provided a semblance of art without having a true core. Property developers, however, remained optimistic about the continued appeal of the neighborhood and continued to push for their residential projects. And some, such as Jessica Goldman Srebnick, have now begun to evangelize the processes for developing global neighborhoods based on arts and culture throughout the world.

Saskia Sassen was correct in demonstrating how neighborhoods in global cities are often taken over by highly educated and highly paid employees that are brought to the city to work in the transnational businesses that reside in the global city. But this understanding of residential displacement focuses too much on global shifts in employment and flow and not enough on the conscious efforts at neighborhood construction on the ground. Sharon Zukin was astute in demonstrating how places of consumption can shape the understandings of who should be in those places, but her analysis focused too much on patterns of exclusion. With Wynwood, however, we see the conscious effort of place construction surrounding the experience of art consumption. It does not matter if people
actually purchase art. As long as they are enjoying the experience of the art lifestyle, they
will purchase other goods and services that will bolster sales. The semblance of exclusion
gives the air of distinction, but the services are democratized so that all can participate in
the consumption of something: whether a beer, a purse, a necklace, or an actual piece of
art. And instead of residential displacement, there is a real effort at residential preparation.
The creatives did not build Wynwood: developers sought to build Wynwood for the
creatives.

By the end of my time in Wynwood, I could stand atop the steps at the entrance to
my building and see six large-scale residential buildings under construction. Although my
research had finished, I still received numerous emails about zoning and planning
meetings, BID meetings, regulation changes, and media writeups of major developments
in the neighborhood. Goldman’s massive parking garage project was well under way, and
the mess it caused was already on the minds of those who frequented the neighborhood.
As I typed these final words, Wynwood was changing fast. The global neighborhood, built
upon the premise of experience, was entering a new phase of construction that would
dramatically change the physical makeup of the place itself. With new condos, studios,
lofts, retail spaces, office spaces, and more, it will be hard for the neighborhood’s place
entrepreneurs to preserve the “character” of the experience of Wynwood while drastically
changing the environment. The walls of Wynwood had been built and destroyed many
times since 1912. What remains to be seen is how the walls will look in the new global
neighborhood.
It was June. It was hot. We drove away from taking a look at an apartment, and my sister turned to me and said: *So you’re going to buy a gun, right?*

Now in her mid-40s, my oldest sister, Maria, is a dedicated guardian of the family, a pitbull of a woman who serves as a mother hen for all of us in the family (including my parents).\(^a\) She has earned her nicknames from years of arguments, fights, and wins. My brother, sister, and I call her “Big Momma,” her friends call her “Bruja” (“witch” in Spanish), and her nieces and nephews call her “Tía Cruela,” a nickname that my mother donned on her. When I moved back to Miami, she was the first person that I asked to help me find an apartment in Wynwood. This is how we do things in Miami: instead of calling up a real estate agent or going online to find professionals, we are much more likely to turn to our closest friends and family members to see if they know-somebody-who-knows-somebody. Although I grew up in Miami and attended high school in neighboring Broward County, I left the city of my youth when I was 18 years old. It would take 10 years, 4 cities, and 3 universities before I would move back to Miami to begin this project. During that decade of being apart, I had grown and Miami had changed. I needed help, in short, to get my shit together.

*Seriously, Maria?* I asked her on that hot June day. *No, I’m not getting a fucking gun. Are you kidding me?*

*But what if you get robbed!? This area is not good, you know. You’ve been gone for far too long, brother-love. You don’t know where you are.*

---

\(^a\) Both of my sisters, actually, are named Maria, a fact that has caused a considerable amount of confusion throughout the years. But it doesn’t get much more Hispanic than that, I say.
Maria: If they want to rob from me, then let them. All I have is books. And if they want to rob my books, then good: maybe they’ll read them.

My family could not understand why I would want to move into Wynwood, a neighborhood that, in the minds of the members of my family, was marred with violence. Even more to the point, they could not fathom why it was that I kept insisting that I needed to live in Wynwood. Princeton University was a fancy Ivy League school and I was obtaining a fancy PhD: why would I be so stubborn and persistent about living in such an unsafe place like Wynwood? No amount of argument and no attempts at explanation would ever ameliorate the images that my family members had about the neighborhood, and my sister’s insistence that I buy a gun did not help the matter.

By that point in June, several days into an apartment search, our nerves were getting a bit frayed from the apartment hunt. We had arrived to take a look at an apartment and were waiting around for the landlord to open the door for us to see it. Across the street, there was a man moving out of his apartment, so Maria decided to chat him up and ask about the neighborhood. How is the place? How is the neighborhood?

The man stopped for a bit and took the opportunity to sit and take a rest during the midday swelter. His iPhone ear buds dangled around his neck where he let them go, flanking spots of sweat on his t-shirt. Well, I’ve got to be honest, there’ve been some shootings that have happened. Maybe a year ago, he told us. He was from California and had come to Miami because of a girlfriend, but their breakup and his inability to find steady work outside of bartending made him decide to go back to Cali. They moved in to that apartment because it was cheap, $850 per month, but it was not a great building. The walls are paper thin, he said, so noise is an issue. It’s an old building, so there’s that. There’s a
drug dealer who lives in the last apartment down there, but he won’t fuck with you if you
don’t fuck with him.

My sister and I listened as he continued: You get what you pay for, and for $850
per month, that’s what you get. He pointed to the building that I was hoping to rent in.
Some dude killed his girlfriend and then shot himself dead. Ask the landlord about it. If he
says he doesn’t know about it, then don’t trust him.

So is it safe? My sister asked.

Well, I had to buy a handgun, and I would definitely tell you to consider getting one
yourself, he replied.¹

A few weeks later, I moved into my apartment and began my research on
Wynwood. I did not know anybody in Wynwood in particular, but I did have a few people
who seemed willing and able to connect me to individuals in the neighborhood. At the
beginning of this research project, my interests were in studying how the arts were
changing Wynwood, an effort that I had hoped would contribute to the wider sociological
literature on culture and neighborhood change. I had often visited Wynwood while visiting
my family during breaks from school, so I had heard and seen a bit of the changes that were
taking place. As I moved forward with this project, however, I was able to become
embedded in the multiple social worlds that were colliding within Wynwood.

A Colombian Student in a Puerto Rican Hood | The Wynwood Community

Once I was settled in to an apartment (without a gun), I spent several days ambling
the neighborhood on my bicycle trying to understand the layout of Wynwood and the
people who lived there. As I describe in chapter 3, I chanced upon the Dorothy Quintana
Community Center during one of my circuits of the streets. Although I had a few preliminary contacts related to Wynwood (like Rolando, the former priest of the *San Juan Bautista* mission, or a former college acquaintance who taught in the middle school as part of Teach For America), I did not know anybody who actually lived in the neighborhood. For the most part, indeed, many of the individuals that people recommended to me as contacts regarding Wynwood were not residents of the neighborhood. Getting contacts in the neighborhood and becoming embedded in the community, then, was important to me as I began my research.

Once I became an active member of the Center, I went to visit every Wednesday and Friday for an average of 4 hours each day. Wednesdays were usually dedicated to making some kind of craft while Fridays were reserved for bingo: a game that was thoroughly enjoyed yet fiercely policed. Beyond the hours that I spent as a participant at the Center, however, I would meet with other members for a variety of reasons. From helping plan the fundraising event to attending meetings at the Miami City Hall, from picking up a trash bag full of ice at Wendy’s with one of the employees to helping one of the residents move, I was always on call to help in any way that I could.

As with many kinds of ethnographic work, the line dividing the researcher and the researched blurs with increased embeddedness, and the ethnographer ideally becomes a somewhat-seamless part of the community that s/he is observing. In my case, there were several factors that enabled me to form strong relationships with members of the community. As a native of Miami, I knew how to speak the languages of the city. This meant that I spoke both English and Spanish fluently, for instance, but also meant that I was capable of interpreting and executing the various turns of phrases, idiomatic
expressions, and subtle jokes that residents of the city use. Code switching is a linguistic technique to denote cultural membership and understanding. “Spanglish” is a common linguistic occurrence in Miami, yet knowing how to effectively switch in and out of each language is the product of an extended period of time in the city. Although I had spent 10 years living in cities out of Miami, it took no time for me to pick up the vocabulary, cadence, and coquettish rhythm of conversations.

My return to the language of my youth often resulted in comedic situations. Sitting at a diner in Wynwood one day, for instance, I was chatting with the waitresses while I waited for my food. This kind of restaurant is common in Miami, one of those places where the food is great but the service is not necessarily the best. You have to fight for attention to order some food, for instance, or yell over the tops of many heads in order to get your check. This is part of the fun, I explained to my friends and visitors from out of town: it’s part of the hunt for food. As I sat there at the counter that afternoon, however, I seemed to have created quite the stir among the waitresses. At one point, one of them turned amidst the laughter and asked me if I had a girlfriend. I kept laughing, but I told her that I fortunately did not. As she was well into her 50s, I assumed that she was going to try and suggest that I date her daughter or niece: for some reason, mothers in Miami were often trying to pair me up with some young woman that they knew. But instead of suggesting that, the waitress moved in a different direction.

That’s good! You gotta be careful, though, she said to me in a loud voice that the whole establishment could hear. Husband I have, but boyfriend I don’t!
As both waitresses and patrons laughed, I began blushing until my entire head was a bright red. The additional cackles and jokes only increased my embarrassment and blushing. It seems that I had spoken the language of Miami a bit too well.

Beyond my cultural and linguistic awareness, there were also structural and material realities that increased my embeddedness in the community. Having my own car and an open, flexible schedule meant that many of my compañeros would often reach out for assistance. I was more than happy to assist with these requests regardless of my research as these trips and errands were beautiful opportunities to learn about those who I had grown to care so much about. My research in the neighborhood, moreover, enabled me to be a connector of sorts for those at the Center and others nearby. When Hari, the button vendor, was cleaning out his warehouse when his property sold, I convinced him to donate thousands of buttons to the Center so residents could use them for craft and sewing projects. I also introduced some of the residents to businesses, new or old, in the southern half of the neighborhood (such as the old, large second-hand store, the Bargain Barn, or the new craft brewery, as I described in chapter 3).

In the end, I felt quite comfortable in the neighborhood and included aspects of my life into my dissertation research. My father was a musician in Colombia during his twenties—the LP of his quartet, Los Caracoles de Oro, was prominently displayed in my apartment just above my record player, a historical trace that reminded me that my father was, indeed, cool at one point—and still sings and plays on occasion. Although he has become crabby in his old age and is much more picky about when he is in the mood to play, I convinced my father to come several times to the Center to play the guitar and sing to the residents on special days, such as Mother’s Day and Three Kings Day. On one day
in particular, my father had several of the residents in tears as he sang *En Mi Viejo San Juan*, a gorgeous bolero dedicated to Puerto Rico. As the song says:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adiós (adiós, adiós),</td>
<td>Goodbye (goodbye, goodbye),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borinquen querida (tierra de mi amor).</td>
<td>My beloved Borinquen (land that I love).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adiós (adiós, adiós),</td>
<td>Goodbye (goodbye, goodbye),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi diosa del mar (mi reina del palmar).</td>
<td>My goddess of the sea (my queen of the palms).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me voy,</td>
<td>I’m off,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pero un día volveré,</td>
<td>But one day I will return,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A buscar mi querer,</td>
<td>To find my beloved,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A soñar otra vez,</td>
<td>To dream once again,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En mi viejo San Juan.</td>
<td>In my Old San Juan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Luz, one of the oldest residents of Wynwood, was sitting next to me as my father sang. She had tears in her eyes when she looked at me. I gave a nod, a gesture that served as a silent question that inquired about her tears. *Mira hijo*, she told me, *that song is always true. You leave your land, but you always want to go back. Always*. Before my father left, the Center members asked him for an encore of only this song.³

Overall, my efforts at becoming embedded in the Wynwood community were aided by the fact that I was a former resident of Miami who had friends and family throughout South Florida. I was okay with melding my research and personal interests throughout my years in Wynwood as part of my effort to truly understand the changes that were taking place in the neighborhood. Several of the residents came to my parents’ home for a Christmas party one year, for instance, and I brought several friends and visitors to the Center to hang out and participate in the day’s activities. So many of my friends came with me during my time at the Center that it even became a running joke. *You have more friends than the president*, Cuqua joked with me once. *You should run for office!*⁴
In addition to the dozens of hours of participant observation at the Dorothy Quintana Community Center, I also conducted 31 semi-structured interviews with residents, politicians, police officers, security guards, business owners, real estate and property developers, and other individuals in Miami who were directly involved with the changes taking place in Wynwood. Some of the notables in this collection of interviews included Mayor Tomas Regalado, former mayor Maurice Ferré (Miami’s first Hispanic mayor and a Puerto Rican), City Commissioner Keon Hardemon, County Commissioner Audrey Edmonson, and property developers David Lombardi (of Lombardi Properties) and Joseph Furst (of Goldman Properties). I followed up these interviews with constant appearances at monthly meetings for the Wynwood Business Improvement District, the City of Miami Commissioners, and other grassroots and community events.

**Getting Up on the Walls | Street art and Street Painting**

Street art was an essential component to understanding the art worlds of Wynwood, so I spent a considerable amount of time interviewing, observing, and conducting participant observation with street artists during my research. I learned about street artists through a variety of channels. Because of their widespread appeal and ease of use, social media outlets were often used by street artists to show their work and lives. I followed the Instagram and Facebook pages of street artists, street art curators, and other street art enthusiasts in order to track and follow the street artists as they painted in Miami and throughout the world. These social media platforms also functioned as an avenue for contact in addition to emails or phone calls.
In addition to these online sources, I learned about different artists through my interviews and conversations with others in Wynwood. Miami is one of those places where people pride themselves on “having the hookup.” Everybody knows somebody, and everybody takes great pride in knowing the right somebody for every occasion. Snowball sampling from previous interviews, then, was a very effective way for me to contact and connect with street artists in the Miami community. A series of quick text messages sent by my interviewee at the end of our discussion would open up the opportunity to chat with many other. And then there were the surprising links that existed among my friends in Miami. The street artist that painted Hari’s wall (with the monster made out of buttons) was particularly difficult to contact. A few months later, however, I learned that he was the boyfriend of the cousin of a close friend of my girlfriend. Although that sounds like an extended chain of connections, in Miami that is considered a somewhat immediate contact. A few text messages later, I was able to connect with the street artist and even meet up with him and his wife for dinner. Overall, I conducted 21 semi-structured interviews with street artists and held dozens of unstructured conversations with others. I attended gallery openings for street artists, live painting parties, visited their studios, supported their endeavors, and even connected them with willing patrons looking to commission pieces.

As with my time at the Dorothy Quintana Community Center, my open and flexible schedule meant that I was available to help out at a moment’s notice. I concluded all my interviews with street artists by offering my help with any of their projects. Part of my research, I explained to them, involves getting the full exposure of the street art world. If you want any help with anything, shoot me a text. Although I had no experience with spray paint or street art, I would be able to lug paint buckets around, drive the lift, or help paint
larger swaths of wall that do not require detailed work. Three street artists accepted my invitation to help. I worked with Elian Chali, of Argentina, during his work at the Mural Arts Festival in Montreal, Canada, during the summer of 2015. In addition, I assisted Pete Kirill in Miami with one of his walls in the months leading up to Art Basel in December 2015.

But the artist that I spent the most time with was Hec One Love, the artist that I was helping when I fell off the ladder on that hot fall day in 2014. I met Hec through a real estate agent who managed a building in Wynwood. It turned out that Hec made most of his money renting rooms in his home—a venture that allows him to have income while he spends more of his time on his art—and this real estate agent had just started renting from Hec. If you want, I can hook you up with the guy who painted that big Bob Marley wall on I-95, the real estate agent told me. He’s my roommate. I was shocked because of the serendipity of it all because “that big Bob Marley wall on I-95” was one of the most visible walls in Wynwood, a piece that had been photographed and featured dozens of times in media outlets of all kinds. I eventually spoke with Hec and set up a time to meet and interview him in his home for my project. As always, I offered to work for him, for free, at any time that he wished. It was perfect timing because he was about ready to revamp his wall for Art Basel, so he would need the help. Those days on the wall, however, solidified a friendship between Hec and me, one that would continue well after the research for this project was finished. I would go to Hec’s home to help paint or “dick around,” as he put it. We would run into each other at events in Wynwood or elsewhere. And Hec even came to speak to my students about the graffiti subculture in my Social Deviancy class at Florida
International University. I would become, as he often told people, the most highly credentialed assistant he has ever (and will ever) have.

**The Saintly Life as a Non-Priest | Becoming Embedded at Corpus Christi Catholic Church**

One of the only contacts that I possessed prior to this research was with Father Rolando Castillo, a former priest of Corpus Christi Catholic Church and the brother of my religion teacher from high school. He was the one who introduced me to Father José Luis Menéndez and his *La Merced* project at Corpus Christi. I had attempted to meet with Father José Luis several times by calling and emailing, but his busy schedule always prevented him from meeting with me. Father Castillo’s introduction, however, helped me get in touch with Father José Luis directly and was the crucial factor in enabling my entrée into the Corpus Christi community. During my initial tour of *La Merced* with Father Castillo, I met Father José Luis and Ray Zamora, the artistic director of the project. I explained to them that I was very interested in studying the chapel as a part of my dissertation and that I hoped to become involved in some capacity. The four of us talked this over for a bit, but Ray concluded the conversation by stating: *As you can see, we don’t really know what you can do here. Instead of us suggesting something, maybe you could be the one to indicate you imagine you could do for the project.*

After thinking about this proposition for a bit, I returned a few days later to ask Ray and Father José Luis if they had an online presence: a Facebook page, for instance, an Instagram account, or a website. I could be their social media representative, I suggested, and I could help with other communication avenues as well. As a freelance journalist, I
was prepared to write short pieces about the events and successes at Corpus Christi and was aware of the importance of maintaining a well-polished and professional online presence. I was also an amateur photographer with a nice digital camera that I could use for events held at the parish. All I would need, I told them, was to be kept involved with the goings on of the parish and the chapel project.

Both Ray and Father José Luis were excited to have me join the team under this capacity, and I was soon having regular meetings with them and other members of the parish on a weekly basis. While I mainly dedicated Wednesdays and Fridays to the Dorothy Quintana Community Center, I reserved Tuesdays and Thursdays for my time at the church. Each day that I arrived would most likely include 4-5 hours of participant observation in meetings, chapel construction, or lunch. The small group of parish staff would have a homemade lunch every day at 1PM sharp in the rectory building (Ceylon’s “Mango Manor”). Because of my constant presence and dedicated participation, I soon became a fixture at lunch on the days that I went to Corpus Christ. This was an excellent opportunity to hear about the concerns and issues that the parish was facing, but it was also a great way for me to get a great meal prepared by the famous Juanita. *Dios mio*, was that food good.

I would also participate in special parish events as a photographer and member of the parish: concerts, processions, panel discussions, poetry readings, and other communal gatherings. Because I was willing to work for free and had a flexible schedule (yet again, factors that enabled me to become embedded in an aspect of the Wynwood community), I was constantly invited to events across the parish community. My main interests, however, were in documenting the particular use of art and culture with the chapel project, so I
dedicated most of my time there. I became so involved with *La Merced*, indeed, that I was given my own key to the chapel so I could come and go at my leisure. In addition to my role as the social media rep and photographer, I would give tours of *La Merced* from visitors around the world and hosted two large events of my own: a poetry reading with O, Miami, a poetry non-profit, and a book launch for poet Sylvie Jordan.

In the end, I spent so much time at the parish that many in the community thought that I was a budding priest. I would often wear what I called “Wynwood uniform” as I went about conducting my ethnographic observations throughout the neighborhood: a plain black t-shirt with cargo shorts and simple sneakers. This outfit was essential for me to blend seamlessly across multiple social worlds. It allowed me to not stand out at the Dorothy Quintana Community Center, for instance, and was the clothing of choice for street artists that I hung out with and interviewed. At Corpus Christi, my Wynwood uniform was appropriate for another reason: although I was wearing shorts, I was still professional enough to be appropriate around the offices and rectory. What is more, the black shirt blended seamlessly with the other black uniforms of the priests in the parish. Coupled with my extensive theological and religious knowledge (my master’s degree was in theological studies and I have studied religion for years), it was not a large assumption for members of the community to think that I was a current or aspiring seminarian. It did not help, moreover, that Father José Luis told me that I should become a priest every day of my research at the parish. Although this may seem like hyperbole, rest assured that it is not. Father José Luis encouraged me to become a priest at least once during every single interaction that I had with him. Sometimes he would say, *Oye, did you call the seminary yet? I told them you would be stopping by.* Other times, he would be persistent. *Your mother*
would love it if you became a priest. Wouldn’t you want to make your mother happy? Or, alternatively, You can run away from your calling, but your calling will never leave you!

**Witnessing High Class Art with a Meager Budget | The Elite Art World**

Through my preliminary research, I learned about the impact that the elite art institutions had in changing Miami into an art city and developing Wynwood. Many of my initial efforts in the early days of my ethnographic explorations included attempts at tapping into the elite art world of Miami. But as Noah Horowitz details, the elite art world is a tight, closed network of individuals who gain access to each other based on just-right displays of wealth, cultural knowledge, and social connections. The rising emphasis on the contemporary art experience, moreover, has meant that elite art has combined with elite party circuits and events—gallery openings that are invite-only, private parties in homes and yachts, dinners on secluded rooftops in Miami Beach—to produce the special venues for art patrons, purchasers, and enthusiasts. Lacking any social connections to those in the elite circles meant that I had to rely on second-hand descriptions of these circles; coupled with living on a graduate student stipend and having to make ends meet in an expensive city meant that I quickly had to give up my aspiration to spend as much time in the elite art world as I wanted.

As a result, I sought to conduct semi-structured interviews with gallery owners, collectors, curators, and other leaders of art institutions in Wynwood and Miami in order to collect their narratives for analysis and comparison in this dissertation. Although I would not be able to obtain as much data from participant observation, I was at least able to obtain their narratives and impressions on the contemporary art world and neighborhood change...
in Wynwood. I conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 individuals from the elite art world during my time in Miami. In addition to collecting interviews, I attended art fairs, openings, lectures, and other events in order to bolster my qualitative findings with ethnographic data. In particular, details from three years of Art Basel art fairs are included in this dissertation. To supplement this work, I also conducted interviews with 16 artists, museum directors, and other figures in the art worlds of Miami.
Notes for Chapter 1 – Introduction


4 The music video with Nick Jonas, dubbed by him as the “Wynwood Walls Edition” of his previously released “Chains,” is a particularly ridiculous assemblage of clips of Jonas singing in a turtle-shelled golf cart filled with artists, friends, and, of course, nearly-nude women. What makes this work all the more hilarious is that Pete Tunney, the highly successful and lucrative artist who holds one of the most expensive and sought-after gallery spots in Wynwood, is at the helm of the turtle cart driving this whole group around the neighborhood. But while Jonas and his dancer friends are all in their late teens or early twenties, Tunney is nearing his 60s. See Frazer Harrison, “Nick Jonas Shoots ‘Chains’ Video in Miami,” The Miami Herald, April 7, 2015, http://www.miamiherald.com/entertainment/celebrities/article17684948.html; NickJonasVEVO, Nick Jonas - Chains (The Wynwood Walls Edition), 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVLslpAfx2Q. For other portrayals of Wynwood in the media, see JetSetter, “34 Things To Do for Free in Miami,” JetSetter Magazine, accessed January 14, 2016, http://www.jetsetter.com/feature/34-things-to-do-for-free-in-miami. A friend of mine at the NYU School of Law who had visited me in Wynwood sent me a case study on Wynwood that was used in one of his courses.


From field notes and audio recording, July 14, 2014.


Ibid., 464.


Other authors, such as those who emphasize the importance of place in human geography, use the parallel concepts of materiality, meaning, and practice for defining what place is. See Cresswell, “Place.”

From field notes and audio recording, July 14, 2014.

Ibid., 464.


Wacquant, “Territorial Stigmatization in the Age of Advanced Marginality,” 69.


Ibid., 309–10.


110 The study of elites has had a long tenure in sociology even if it has been increasingly difficult to study this population over time. C. Wright Mill’s classic, The Power Elite (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), remains as relevant today as it was back in 1956 during its first publication. More recently, the work of Shamus Khan—especially his ethnography of elite adolescents—and Ashley Mears—who focuses on status display, entertainment, and leisure among economic elites—has sparked a general resurgence in the study of elites. See Shamus Rahman Khan, Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul’s School (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012) and Ashley Mears, “Working for Free in the VIP: Relational Work and the Production of Consent,” American Sociological Review 80, no. 6 (October 20, 2015): 1099–1122. For a full review of the sociological study of elites, see Shamus Rahman Khan, “The Sociology of Elites,” Annual Review of Sociology 38, no. 1 (2012): 361–77.


47 Firebaugh, “Global Income Inequality,” 1.


49 All figures taken from Ibid.


According to 2013 IRS documents, the Contemporary Arts Foundation listed $772,839 in revenues and $2,112,327 in total assets.


Fagenson, “Jennifer Rubell’s Art Basel Breakfasts Are Feasts for the Soul.” From rubbing elbows in the disco to visiting studios, the Rubells formed strong bonds with many artists and often learned about their impressive work well before other collectors had caught on. Purchasing early meant purchasing cheap, and so their collection grew over the years. Today, as central figures in the world of art buying, the Rubells continue their tradition of finding artists early in their careers and buying up a large number of their pieces, a practice that can launch the careers of artists into the stratosphere.


As Veblen states, “Conspicuous consumption of valuable goods is a means of reputability to the gentleman of leisure. As wealth accumulates on his hands, his own unaided effort will not avail to sufficiently put his opulence in evidence by this method. The aid of friends and competitors is therefore brought in by resorting to the giving of valuable presents and expensive feasts and entertainments.” Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994), 75. In this quote, as elsewhere in Veblen’s text, there are echoes of Marcel Mauss’s articulation of the social function of gifts in perpetuating an endless cycle of display via gift-giving. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Fine Books, 2011).


For an early analysis of this kind of market, see Robert C. Anderson, “Paintings as an Investment,” *Economic Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (March 1, 1974): 13–26. For more recent analyses of the link between art and money, see René Gimpel, “Art as Commodity, Art as Economic Power,” *Third Text* 14, no. 51 (2000): 51–55. David Solkin argues that art became a commodity that could be consumed for its own sake and through rational discussion as far back as the 18th century. It was at this point that a cultural turn took place that enabled art to be financialized and serve as an item for investment. See David H. Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Paul Mellon Centre BA, 1993).


As the About page of Fine Art Wealth Management, a financial service company, states: “Fine Art Wealth Management is a membership-based advisory firm that provides independent consulting, education, networking, and proprietary research on managing art wealth. Providing objective knowledge on art financing, art governance, art investment vehicles, and succession planning for art assets is our number one priority.” http://www.fineartwealthmgt.com/home/about (Accessed January 7, 2016).


Ibid., 8.

Ibid., 31.

This push for using art as commodity inevitably produces a slew of articles written about nostalgic pasts of “pure” art collecting or purchasing. See, for instance, Scott Reyburn’s review of a documentary on Peggy Guggenheim that was published in the New York Times a few weeks after the 2015 edition of Art Basel Miami Beach: Scott Reyburn, “When Collecting Wasn’t All About the Money,” *The New York Times*, 271
Much More Than a Beach.” Ashley Mears details more on the VIP party network, focusing on the interactional elements in these environments, in Mears, “Distinction Is Ridiculous: Doing Display Among the New Global Elites.”


Horowitz, Art of the Deal, 139.

Horowitz even details how certain fine art wealth management companies focus on providing these kinds of “lifestyle” services to their clients as part of their offerings. Fine Art Wealth Management (FAWM), for instance, included an “Events & Lifestyle Services” link on their website that stated the importance of this service due to the fact that “the traditional collector is giving way to those who want an environment enhanced by a variety of art objects and the social status that goes with it.” Cited in Ibid., 122. In looking at the status gained through attendance at these art fairs, one is reminded of the subtle, often trivial, elements from culture that enable individuals and groups to form status groups. As Dimaggio and Fernández-Kelly state, “A central theme in the sociology of culture is that culture is connected intimately to individual and group identity. As a branch of culture that is produced with forethought, often by networks of specialized creators, art is especially important in this regard….Max Weber ([1925] 1946) initiated this line of thinking with his seminal work on status groups—collectivities that share a common identity (which, he argued, could be based on any similarity no matter how modest) and a common sense of honor, often connected to a distinctive status
culture….Art, especially performing art, holds special value as a means of ratifying a shared status because it enables in-group members to assemble in ritual settings in which their shared identities are interpreted and affirmed in ways that produce heightened identification.” See Paul DiMaggio and Patricia Fernández-Kelly, eds., *Art in the Lives of Immigrant Communities in the United States* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 13.


91 For many, the idea of place wars brings with it a global competition creates a situation in which “cities become co-opted into a race-to-the-bottom competition for capital investment, corporate headquarters and prized ‘creative citizens.’” See Jean-Paul D. Addie, “Constructing Neoliberal Urban Democracy in the American Inner-City,” *Local Economy* 24 (2009): 538.


93 Haider, “Place Wars: New Realities of the 1990s.”


96 Sharon Zukin details the development of the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA) in North Adams, Massachusetts, in chapter three of her text, *The Cultures of Cities*.


100 www.creativeclass.com


Notes for Chapter 2 – The History of the “Arts District”

1 Wacquant, “Territorial Stigmatization in the Age of Advanced Marginality.”
2 Reyes, “Legacies of Place and Power: From Military Base to Freeport Zone.”
3 Connolly, A World More Concrete, 2014.
4 Portes and Stepick, City on the Edge; Shell-Weiss, Coming to Miami: A Social History, 2009. Caribbean blacks lacked, in essence, the “double veil” that WEB Dubois would describe decades later in The Souls of Black Folk. Zain Abdullah also demonstrates interesting divisions among blacks in Harlem in the late twentieth century. With changes to U.S. immigration laws in 1965, a large number of African Muslims settled in New York and settled in what is now known as “Little Africa.” Yet the divisions between African Americans and those of the new immigrants demonstrate the complex negotiations that take place regarding race, religion, and wider U.S. society. See Abdullah, Black Mecca.
5 Allman, Miami.
7 Shell-Weiss, Coming to Miami: A Social History, 2009, 168. Shell-Weiss draws this figure from the work of Juan M. Clark, a Cuban sociologist who was a veteran of the Bay of Pigs invasion and a former prisoner of war of Cuba in 1962. He was also a professor emeritus at Miami Dade College and wrote reports with faculty from the University of Miami. Portes and Stepick, City on the Edge, 102., conversely, lists the figure of Cuban immigrants as being closer to 135,000.
8 The most famous accounts of Operation Peter Pan remains Carlos Eire’s memoir, Eire, Waiting for Snow in Havana. As a member of the economic elites in Cuba, Eire’s family made the difficult decision to send him and his brother to foster homes in the United States. His mother eventually joined them, but Eire would never see his father again.
9 Portes and Stepick, City on the Edge, 102. Shell-Weiss, Coming to Miami: A Social History, 2009, 168. Shell-Weiss draws the figure of 250,000 Cuban refugees in the first three years after the revolution from the work of Juan M. Clark, a Cuban sociologist who was a veteran of the Bay of Pigs invasion and a former prisoner of war of Cuba in 1962. He was also a professor emeritus at Miami Dade College and wrote reports with faculty from the University of Miami. Portes and Stepick, City on the Edge, 102., conversely, lists the figure of Cuban immigrants as being closer to 135,000.
10 For a more detailed exposition of Miami’s rise as a site of leisure over the course of the 20th century, see Bush, “‘Playground of the USA’: Miami and the Promotion of Spectacle,” and Clemente, “Made in Miami: The Development of the Sportswear Industry in South Florida, 1900-1960.”
11 Shell-Weiss, Coming to Miami: A Social History, 2009, 9; Portes and Stepick, City on the Edge.
12 Grosfoguel, “Global Logics in the Caribbean City System: The Case of Miami.”
13 For excellent portrayals of this time, see Allman, Miami; Didion, Miami. For an excellent documentary on the period, see Corben, Cocaine Cowboys.
15 Jan Nijman emphasizes the geographical importance of Miami’s location at the center of the Western Hemisphere as part of why Miami became the economic center of the Americas. See Nijman, Miami, 2010. Ramón Grosfoguel focuses on the banking and finance sector when considering why Miami surpassed New Orleans in becoming a global center. See Grosfoguel, “Global Logics in the Caribbean City System: The Case of Miami.”
17 Ibid., 168.
19 Connolly, A World More Concrete, 2014.
20 The actual barriers or boundaries of Wynwood have continually changed throughout legal and press materials. Even the same reporter might have the neighborhood going as far south as NW 15th street and as far east as Biscayne Bay in one article (Foote Jr., “Wynwood Plans New Housing Facility”) while saying that it goes as far north as NW 41st street and as far south as 20th street in another article in the same year (Foote Jr., “Wynwood Chamber Gets to Work”). As Gerald Suttles argued in his famous book, The Social Construction of Communities, the boundaries of communities are not always drawn up by insiders: residential groups and residential boundaries often require the input of outsiders as well. Indeed, Suttles argues, these interactions with outsiders—what he dubs, “foreign relations”—often form the basis for the creation of an identity and a set of boundaries by insiders. Suttles, The Social Construction of Communities, 13. All of these
types of interactions between residents, outsiders, politicians, developers, and others result in a cognitive map of a city, a “taxonomy of the city” that “is not unrelated to the real world, but translates it to another scale.” Ibid., 32. For more work on boundaries, see Lamont and Molnar, “The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences.”

21 The role of physical structures—such as highways, roads, and parks—also plays a significant role in the social construction of communities. See Suttles, The Social Construction of Communities. It has been shown, moreover, that these kinds of physical structures are instrumental in the construction of inequality in cities. See Roberto, The Spatial Dynamics of Social Inequality: Three Essays on the Measurement and Analysis of Residential Segregation. The construction of highways through communities also initiates a series of cultural negotiations over the “place character” of a location. See Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulsen, “History Repeats Itself, But How? City Character, Urban Tradition, and the Accomplishment of Place.”


23 The actual name of the neighborhood was advertised as “Wyndwood,” but for some unknown reason that initial “d” fell off of the name. The Wyndwood/Wynwood confusion continued until as late as 1991. Feldman, The Role of Neighborhood Organizations in the Production of Gentrifiable Urban Space: The Case of Wynwood, Miami’s Puerto Rican Barrio.

24 Kleinberg, “The Luther Burbank of S. Florida.”


26 Bush, “‘Playground of the USA’: Miami and the Promotion of Spectacle.”


28 Ibid.


30 Stone, “American Sports: Play and Display.”


32 Allman, Miami, 123.

33 As Melanie Shell-Weiss puts it, “In addition to the numbers of permanent residents, laborers, and businessmen who relocated to Miami, after 1920 the city became an increasingly popular destination for tourists.” Shell-Weiss, Coming to Miami: A Social History, 2009, 75.


35 Indeed, as Melanie Shell-Weiss puts it: “By midcentury [1950], Miami’s ‘Design District’ was one of the largest clothing manufacturers in the nation and served markets across the Western Hemisphere.” Shell-Weiss, Coming to Miami: A Social History, 6. See also Feldman, The Role of Neighborhood Organizations in the Production of Gentrifiable Urban Space: The Case of Wynwood, Miami’s Puerto Rican Barrio.


37 Ibid., 139–40.

38 Allman, Miami.


41 As others have demonstrated, the study of Puerto Ricans in the United States is notoriously difficult. As members of an in-between sector of the population—not fully American, yet not fully foreign; members of separate nation, yet possessors of United States citizenship—figures and studies of Puerto Ricans suffer from inadequate measures and relative confusion of how to operationalize their numbers. See Feldman, The Role of Neighborhood Organizations in the Production of Gentrifiable Urban Space: The Case of Wynwood, Miami’s Puerto Rican Barrio.

42 Garcia, “Los Otros Latinos.”


44 Duany and Matos-Rodriguez, “Puerto Ricans in Orlando and Central Florida.” See also Garcia, “Los Otros Latinos,” and Santiago, “Jobless Puerto Ricans Find Haven in Florida.” Other studies have examined the Puerto Rican enclaves that were created in other cities as a result of job placement programs and migratory waves. Especially in Philly, see Stern, Seifert, and Vitiello, “Migrants and the Transformation of Philadelphia’s Cultural Economy”; Wherry, The Philadelphia Barrio: The Arts, Branding, and Neighborhood Transformation.
46 Balmaseda, “Crime Crushes Dreams for City Park.”
47 Ibid.
48 This decline in the importance of cities for industrial production, Sharon Zukin argues, is integral in the understanding of the development of a symbolic economy in cities in the United States: one that is based on cultural production and consumption. See Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities*, 1996.
51 This phrase was used during a roundtable with engineers involved in the construction of the highway. “The amount of property damage,” they argued, “was considered in choice of the route.” See Williams, “Questions on Freeway? Here Are Some Answers.” For more on the socioeconomic consequences of the construction of I-95 in Miami, see Connolly, *A World More Concrete*, 2014; Connolly, “Colored, Caribbean, and Condemned: Miami’s Overtown District and the Cultural Expense of Progress, 1940-1970,” 2006. Marvin Dunn also discusses the downturn of Overtown in his opus, *Black Miami in the Twentieth Century*.
53 Green, “Legacies of Overtown.”
55 Garcia, “Los Otros Latinos.”
56 Roman, “Wynwood Seeks Its Identity.”
57 Ynclan, “Labor Day Fest Has Latin Flavor.”
58 Foote Jr., “Wynwood Chamber Gets to Work”; Foote Jr., “Wynwood Chamber to Get $275,000.”
59 Roman, “Barrio Boriqueño Lleva Nuevo Nombre de Viejo San Juan.”
60 Balmaseda, “Crime Crushes Dreams for City Park.”
61 Feldstein Soto, “Wynwood Stepping up Crime Fight.”
62 Foote Jr., “Wynwood Residents Protest Area Deterioration.”
63 Thompson, “We’re Fed up with Crime, Groups Tell Commissioners.”
64 Cosco, “Merchants Move to revive ‘Melting Pot’ Neighborhood.”
66 Staff Report, “Mugged Once, Almost Twice.”
67 Balmaseda, “Crime Crushes Dreams for City Park.”
68 Strouse, “Wynwood Tops City Crime Rate.”
69 Strouse and Rodriguez, “Wynwood: A Neighborhood of Broken Dreams.”
70 Balmaseda, “The Imperfect Martyr: How a Drug Dealer Became a Catalyst for Change.”
71 Clary, “Order Restored to Riot-Torn Miami Streets Protest.”
73 Clary, “Order Restored to Riot-Torn Miami Streets Protest.”
74 Balmaseda, “The Imperfect Martyr: How a Drug Dealer Became a Catalyst for Change.” These officers were, eventually, convicted for obstruction of justice for lying under oath. One officer, for instance, damaged his own shirt to justify using force on Cano. Another retrieved a butcher knife from his home to justify the beating. In a rare case of justice for police brutality, these men were sentenced for their crimes nearly 5 years after Cano’s death. See Associated Press, “Four Officers Accused of Obstruction”; Associated Press, “Miami Jury Convicts Four Officers in Cover-Up”; Clary, “Six Miami Officers Indicted in ’88 Death of Drug Dealer.”
75 Holmes, “Miami Melting Pot Proves Explosive.”
76 Sun Sentinel Staff, “Looted Miami Neighborhood Gets Aid”; Associated Press, “Miami Gives Loan to Shop Hit by Riot.”
77 Due, “Clemente Park Expansion Back in Gear”; Ycaza, “City Gets ‘History Lesson’ to Ease Tensions”; Yanez, “Parade Aims to Heal Wounds.”
78 From field notes, November 5, 2014.
79 From field notes, November 18, 2014.
80 From a taped interview, January 20, 2015.
In a more critical perspective, Loic Wacquant points to the dangers of territorial stigmatization of places as "lawless" or "outlaw" can have. These efforts at "advanced marginality" open up opportunities for powers of the state to come in and establish their own structures from the top down. In Wynwood, the lawlessness that followed the 1990 riots led to further stigmatization and marginality in the neighborhood. Instead of allocating resources to Wynwood, politicians in the City of Miami instead used Wynwood as a locale for other institutions that they sought to marginalize. As described in an article in The Miami Herald, residents of Wynwood had grown to protest "the placement of yet another homeless shelter in a neighborhood that already hosts 10 adult congregate homes, four drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers, a homeless shelter and jail. They argued that other neighborhoods should share the burden." Landers, "Prayer, and Power, for the Poor: An Inner-City Priest Teaches the Faithful to Lift up Their Voices for Their Own Rights." On territorial stigmatization, see Wacquant, "Territorial Stigmatization in the Age of Advanced Marginality."

Colon, "Former Wynwood Manufacturing Plant May Become New Home for Art Colony."

Frank, "Wynwood Art Deal Rejected -- For Now"; Dunlop, "Old Bakery Rises Again for the Arts."

Dunlop, "Old Bakery Rises Again for the Arts."

Roman, "'Old San Juan' Cheered as New Name for Neighborhood."

Duhart, "Portrait of Success: Bakehouse Artists Invite Neighbors to Anniversary."

Roman, "Wynwood Sparking A Drive for New Fashion Business."


On the financialization of contemporary art, see Horowitz, Art of the Deal.

Molotch, "The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place."


The term "gallerist" is actually a somewhat recent invention, according to The New York Times. Referring to anybody who owns or runs a gallery, the term "gallerist" became a hot label of sorts in Wynwood during my fieldwork. In contrast to an art dealer—who focuses on buying and selling works of art in the secondary market among buyers and collectors—a gallerist usually tries to represent an artist and obtain their works directly from their studios so as to sell to anybody (the primary market). See Glueck, "Old Business, New Name: Behold the Gallerist"; Thornton, Seven Days in the Art World.

Cohen, "Wynwood Swinging."

With regards to moving his gallery to Wynwood, Fred Snitzer told the press: "Nothing was going to happen without the Rubells, who were the catalyst. Nothing was going to happen without Marty Margulies....Now, thanks in part to Basel, I don’t think there is another major city in America with as much potential for contemporary art." See Martin, "Art and Commerce Mix in a Revived Wynwood."

Odierna, "A Boon for Wynwood."

Molnar, "Street Art and the Contemporary Urban Underground: Social Critique or Coolness as Commodity?"

From a taped interview, July 9, 2014.

A Miami Herald article from November 11, 1987 mentioned how bad the walls had become: "Three months ago, the city assigned Segundo Lemus to clean the streets of Wynwood. 'Too bad I can’t do nothing for the walls,' he said." http://flashbackmiami.com/2015/05/20/wynwood/ (accessed April 6, 2016).

From a taped interview, February 26, 2015.

Snyder, Graffiti Lives: Beyond the Tag in New York’s Urban Underground.

Brooks, Bobos In Paradise; Lloyd, Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City.

Many nonprofits use street art as a means of neighborhood revitalization. The most famous and successful of these ventures is Philadelphia’s Mural Arts Program, which began in 1984 as an anti-graffiti measure and now includes prison rehabilitation efforts, community programming, and other forms of outreach. See www.muralarts.org. Other organizations that sponsor urban renewal through the arts use street art as an inspiring and easy step towards cleaning up streets. The Knight Foundation, for instance, featured buildings that were "art bombed" as part of an effort to increase attention to blighted areas. See Gargarella, "Laundromat Gets ‘Art Bombed’ in First of Many Murals."

Elfrink, “Graffiti Artist in Critical Condition After Cop Car Hit Him in Wynwood”; Goodyear, “In Miami, A Street Artist Dies at the Hands of Police.” In another example of overly brusque responses to graffiti writing, 18-year-old Israel “Reefa” Hernandez was tasered by Miami Beach police officers after they chased
him for tagging a McDonald’s. See Miller, “Israel Hernandez Killing: One Year Later, a Lawsuit but No Answers.”

107 Balmaseda, “The Imperfect Martyr: How a Drug Dealer Became a Catalyst for Change.”


110 Martinez, “Project Turns into a Reunion for Graffiti Artists.”


112 Frank, “For the New Superrich, Life Is Much More Than a Beach”; Horowitz, Art of the Deal.

113 Feinstein, “After the Fair(s),” 78.

114 Sarah Thornton, Elizabeth Currid, and Don Thompson provide excellent details about how events such as Art Basel Miami Beach are not just about purchasing art. The parties, the fashion, the importance of “being seen”: all of these factors and more are integral to the execution of an art fair on the size of ABMB. See Thornton, Seven Days in the Art World; Currid, The Warhol Economy: How Fashion, Art, and Music Drive New York City; Thompson, The $12 Million Stuffed Shark.

115 Mayo, “Arts District Forming.”

116 Ovalle, “Wynwood’s Puerto Rican Character Fading.”

117 Martin, “Art and Commerce Mix in a Revived Wynwood.”

118 Jeffers, “Communities Out to Fight Gentrification.”


120 Horowitz, Art of the Deal, 192–96.

121 Zukin, The Cultures of Cities, 1996; Feldman, The Role of Neighborhood Organizations in the Production of Gentrifiable Urban Space: The Case of Wynwood, Miami’s Puerto Rican Barrio. Art Basel Miami Beach also coincided with the obsession for construction in Miami that took place in the early 00s. Miami only had 7 skyscrapers in 2006—but it was planned to have 71 by 2012. See Triff, Miami Arts Explosion.

122 Cohen, “North Miami Fights to Keep Its Art Museum.”

123 Austin, “Local Collections Add Another Dimension to Miami’s Art Scene”; Sokol, “In Miami, the de La Cruz Collection Commands More Space.”

124 This snippet from the interview was featured on the @delacruzcollection Instagram account on August 12, 2015. On the “Miami art model” perhaps? Noah Horowitz discusses this trend in the publicization of private art holdings and cites the efforts by the Rubell and de la Cruz families in particular: “In the past decade, in lockstep with the global art boom and the flourishing of ever more ambitious individual collections (many contemporary, some not), we have seen a watershed in the rise of private museums and privately funded contemporary art exhibition spaces and foundations.” Horowitz, Art of the Deal, 15.


126 Cordovi, “Artists Reviving loft Life.”


128 Corral, “Artists Work and Reside in an Enclave They’ve Created in This Old Miami Area.”

129 Kelly, “Loft Living.”

130 Zukin, Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change.

131 Kelly, “Loft Living.”

132 From a taped interview, July 28, 2014.

133 Tax documents obtained from the National Center for Charitable Statistics.

134 The literature on Business Improvement Districts in the United States and abroad is overwhelmingly vast. This definition, however, is presented in Lloyd et al., “Business Improvement Districts, Planning and Urban Regeneration.”

135 For more on the spreading of the BID idea, both in the United States and abroad, see Tait and Jensen, “Travelling Ideas, Power and Place: The Cases of Urban Villages and Business Improvement Districts.”

136 Lloyd et al., “Business Improvement Districts, Planning and Urban Regeneration,” 295. Many, indeed, see the formation of BIDs as being part of a larger trend towards neoliberal policies and practices in urban centers across the world. In her work on global cities, Saskia Sassen discusses BIDs as being integral to the reshaping of neighborhoods and the progression of gentrification. See Sassen, The Global City. Jean-Paul
Addie, conversely, argues for the general reshaping of the discourse of democracy itself vis-à-vis neoliberal policies. “Rather than democracy being eroded by neoliberal policy implementation per se,” he states, “or indeed necessarily co-constituted with neoliberal capitalism, the discourse of democracy itself has undergone a concomitant discursive and material transformation enabling the deployment and articulation of neoliberal urban democracy to be rolled out in favour of dominant political-economic interests.” Addie, “Constructing Neoliberal Urban Democracy in the American Inner-City,” 551. In their excellent work on neoliberalism worldwide, Centeno and Cohen argue about the growing presence of neoliberal doctrines across the planet while also reminding readers to remain aware that these shifts are far from impersonal, unknowable forces that create changes. Much in line with Logan and Molotch’s arguments, they emphasize that there are certain actors who make decisions on a daily basis that shape the political economy of places and perpetuate neoliberal practices. See Centeno and Cohen, “The Arc of Neoliberalism,” and Logan and Molotch, Urban Fortunes. Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell likewise emphasize a “process-based analysis of ‘neoliberalization’” that focuses on embedding and contextualizing local forms of neoliberalism in wider networks and structures. Peck and Tickell, “Neoliberalizing Space,” 380.

138 Ibid., 305–9. See also Tait and Jensen, “Travelling Ideas, Power and Place: The Cases of Urban Villages and Business Improvement Districts.”
139 Zukin, The Cultures of Cities, 1995, 32. Although her book was published in 1995, it is interesting to note how her analysis of the public-private controversy of Bryant Park would eventually come to a head with Operation Wall Street’s use of the park for protests in the early 2010s. Her analysis here corroborates work by Peck and Tickell that argues for different forms of neoliberalism: a “roll back” neoliberalism, which takes away the protectionist state policies, and “roll out” neoliberalism, which pushes for the state to be the facilitator (rather than regulator) of an expanding market. Keil adds to this list of neoliberalisms by proposing “roll with it” neoliberalism: the ultimate normalization of neoliberal governmentalities and social formations. See Keil, “The Urban Politics of Roll-With-It Neoliberalization”; Peck and Tickell, “Neoliberalizing Space.”

140 From a taped interview, November 10, 2014.
141 http://www.miamidade.gov/propertysearch/#/
142 I collected data for the rectangle that is bounded by I-95 to the West, NW 36th Street to the North, North Miami Avenue to the East, and NW 20th Street to the south.
143 The details: 36 of these folios are listed as vacant residential land (219,344 sqft.), 141 are vacant commercial properties (987,386 sqft), 96 are vacant industrial lots (630,676 sqft), 29 are vacant governmental lands (226,649 sqft). This yields a total of 2,064,055 sqft of empty, vacant lots. That’s approximately 47 acres of empty land in the whole neighborhood, which has a total of 12,378,736 sqft (284 acres).
144 According to the 2010 Census, the population density for the top half of Wynwood was 10,708.3 while the section south of 29th street was 4,741.8.
145 For an excellent overview from a variety of scholarly lenses, see Brown-Saracino, The Gentrification Debates.
146 Hackworth, “Postrecession Gentrification in New York City,” 815, 839. This general definition, he states, is preferred over the “classic” definition of gentrification—“direct displacement of the working class from residential quarters”—because there is evidence of gentrification in nonresidential urban areas (as in the southern half of Wynwood) and because there is often a time lag between when more affluent arrivals displace more low-income residents.
147 Sassen, The Global City; Sassen, Expulsions.
148 Sassen, Expulsions.
149 Ibid., 13.
150 See Ibid., 121–34. So prevalent has been the development of housing markets for the superrich that a new term, “super-gentrification,” has been introduced to describe when a gentrified neighborhood is even further gentrified by wealthier patrons, what Butler and Lees call “a qualitatively different group of very high salaried ‘masters of the universe’ who are able to buy over-priced properties.” Butler and Lees, “Super-Gentrification in Barnsbury, London,” 469. See also Lees, “Super-Gentrification.”
151 Feldman, The Role of Neighborhood Organizations in the Production of Gentrifiable Urban Space: The Case of Wynwood, Miami’s Puerto Rican Barrio.
152 From a recorded interview, April 13, 2015.
154 Reyes, “Legacies of Place and Power: From Military Base to Freeport Zone.”
Notes to Chapter 3 – Living in the Global Neighborhood


6 Ibid., 440–46.


15 Because of the lack of cold weather in Miami, both men and women used purses to hide their guns rather than coats or jackets. See T. D. Allman, Miami: City of the Future (University Press of Florida, 2013).


17 Time and again, Starbucks came up in the narratives of my respondents as an example of gentrification and neighborhood investment during my time in Wynwood. Of all the establishments, of all the names, of all the people that were idolized in the hagiography of Wynwood, Starbucks remained one of the prime symbols for neighborhood gentrification in the minds of many. I also saw the appearance of Starbucks as an indicator in the academic literature as well. Fred Wherry, for instance, mentions Starbucks in his analysis of a neighborhood in Philadelphia. Lance Freeman, as well, has so many references to Starbucks that it is even given its own listing in the index of his book. See Frederick F. Wherry, The Philadelphia Barrio: The Arts, Branding, and Neighborhood Transformation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Lance Freeman, There Goes the ‘Hood: Views of Gentrification from the Ground Up (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006). Indeed, so many people mentioned Starbucks in interviews and publications that I began to see Starbucks as the cultural image of gentrification and corporate interests. See also Zukin, “Consuming Authenticity: From Outposts of Difference to Means of Exclusion”; Loretta Lees, “Super-Gentrification: The Case of Brooklyn Heights, New York City,” Urban Studies 40, no. 12 (November 2003): 2487–2509; Jason Hackworth and Josephine Rekers, “Ethnic Packaging and Gentrification: The Case of Four Neighborhoods in Toronto,” Urban Affairs Review 41 (2005): 211–36.

18 From field notes, November 18, 2014.

19 In their thorough examination of retail offerings in Brooklyn, Sharon Zukin and her co-authors demonstrate how cultural and economic offerings in a gentrifying area are essential in the production of new spaces of presence and consumption for residents and visitors. See Sharon Zukin et al., “New Retail Capital and
Neighborhood Change: Boutiques and Gentrification in New York City,” *City & Community* 8, no. 1 (2009): 47–64. See also Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities*. Consumption is an essential part of the creation and maintenance of place, a “place creating activity” that is a part of a “consumer’s landscape” that is important for both workers and consumers. See Robert Sack, *Place, Modernity, and the Consumer’s World* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, n.d.), 3–4.


21 From field notes, November 24, 2014.


23 From field notes, November 18, 2014.


27 Figures from the Office of the Miami-Dade Property Appraiser show that Mana purchased the lot in 2015 for approximately $8.5 million: just over $225 per square foot and at 200% its appraised value for that year. In 2016, the land was appraised at just over $11 million.

28 From field notes, January 20, 2015.

29 From field notes, January 23, 2015.

30 From field notes, March 19, 2015.
Notes to Chapter 4 – Getting a Wall in Wynwood: Same Walls, Different Meanings

1 Veiga, “Wynwood Artists Sue Celebrity Pastor for Using Artwork without Permission.” See also Munro, “Pastor Rich Wilkerson Sued by Street Artists.”


3 Although the singular form of the word is “graffito,” I use the colloquial sense of the word “graffiti” for both singular and plural in this text.


5 Baird and Taylor, Ancient Graffiti in Context. Some of these ancient graffiti are actually quite funny. In the latrine of the House of the Gem at Herculaneum, there were two markings that stood out in particular to researchers. “Apollinaris, doctor to the emperor Titus, had a good crap here” (Apollinaris medicus Titi Imp his cacavit bene). And “Fucked, I say, fucked, with legs held up, was the Roman citizens’ pussy wherein no other but the sweetest and holiest sounds were heard.” (futubatur inquam futubatur civium Romanorum attractis pedibus (n)mus in qua(Re) nul(la)e aliae vices erant nisiisset dulcit(a)e et pi(i)sse). See Zadorojnyi, “Transcripts of Dissent? Political Graffiti and Elite Ideology Under the Principate,” 112.


8 Miller, Aerosol Kingdom: Subway Painters of New York City.


10 As Stephen Anderson and William Verplanck discovered in their analysis of the content of graffiti in New York, graffiti can be seen as a “sensitive barometer of social events” rather than random acts of vandalism. See Anderson and Verplanck, “When Walls Speak, What Do They Say?”

11 Zukin, The Cultures of Cities. “Central Park, Bryant Park, and the Hudson River Park show how public spaces are becoming progressively less public; they are, in certain ways, more exclusive than at any time in the past 100 years. Each of these areas is governed, and largely or entirely financed, by a private organization, often working as a quasi-public authority.” Ibid., 26. Interesting to consider that the rise of the popularity of street art took place during a time of heightened public surveillance and increasing tightening of control over urban space See Molnar, “Street Art and the Contemporary Urban Underground: Social Critique or Coolness as Commodity?,” 2011. For more on the tightening of public space and neoliberal urbanism, see Duneier, Sidewalk; Mitchell, The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space.


14 Ley and Cybriwsky, “Urban Graffiti as Territorial Markers.”

15 Chmielewska, “Framing [Con]text: Graffiti and Place.”

16 Other classics include Castleman, Getting Up; Mailer and Naar, The Faith of Graffiti; Chalfant and Silver, Style Wars.


18 Ibid. Some of these items were, famously, not chosen by the museums themselves. While the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., acquired the iconic “Hope” portrait of President Barack Obama by renowned street artist Shepard Fairey—an image which led to a court battle for charges of copyright infringement and destruction of evidence—four major New York museums instead found themselves with impromptu placements of paintings by another artist in their collections. In one stunt, famed street artist Banksy merely placed his own artwork alongside the others on the wall, documenting the whole process with photographs of sleeping security guards and ridiculous disguises in his book, Wall and Piece Many of Banksy’s pieces now fetch six-figures in major auctions by Sotheby’s and Christie’s auction houses. See Moukarbel, Banksy Does New York; Associated Press, “Obama’s ‘Hope’ Portrait Goes to National Gallery”; Kennedy, “Shepard Fairey Is Fined and Sentenced to Probation in ‘Hope’ Poster Case”; Kennedy, “Need Talent to Exhibit in Museums?”; Banksy, Wall and Piece; Norris, “‘Hang-and-Run’ Artist Strikes NYC Museums.”


20 Moukarbel, Banksy Does New York.
21 These type of commercial murals are very popular in New York City. Some of the most successful groups that provide these services include Colossal Media (http://colossalmedia.com/), Sky High Murals (http://skyhighmurals.com/), and Global Street Art (http://globalstreetart.com/).

22 O’Neill, “Miami’s MSG Cartel Graffiti Crew Crumbles.”

23 Alvelos, “The Desert of Imagination in the City of Signs: Cultural Implications of Sponsored Transgression and Branded Graffiti”; Perry, The Writing on the Wall.

24 Alvelos, “The Desert of Imagination in the City of Signs: Cultural Implications of Sponsored Transgression and Branded Graffiti,” 183.


26 Zelizer, The Purchase of Intimacy.

27 The sociology of pricing is, in itself, a very rich field of study that has produced a wealth of useful findings. For a general overview, see Beckert, “Where Do Prices Come From?”. Individuals turn to close relationships for high-stakes purchases so as to ensure that they do not get cheated on pricing DiMaggio and Louch, “Socially Embedded Consumer Transactions.”. Corporate embeddedness also determines price and profit structures Lancaster and Uzzi, “Legally Charged”; Uzzi and Lancaster, “Embeddedness and Price Formation in the Corporate Law Market.”.

28 Pristin, “A SoHo Visionary Makes an Artsy Bet in Miami.” For more on the forms of media used for payment, see the following: McClain and Mears, “Free to Those Who Can Afford It”; Mears, “Pricing Looks: Circuits of Value in Fashion Modeling Markets,” 2011; Zelizer, “The Social Meaning of Money”; Zelizer, The Social Meaning Of Money; Zelizer, Economic Lives: How Culture Shapes the Economy. Although payment for services does not always have to come in the form of cash, it is important to emphasize that this pattern of offering other goods in exchange for painting walls—free hotel bookings, free paint supplies, etc—are not conducive to the economic lives of the painters (much in the same way as the models that Ashley Mears studies in her work).

29 Howard Becker, Art Worlds. famously established the concept of “art worlds” as social worlds that carry their own norms and customs for adjudicating the work within their socially-constructed boundaries. The crossing into new art worlds can be difficult because of the various means of pricing, critiquing, and valuation.

30 Koerber, “Stop Wars.”

31 Justin Armstrong emphasizes that the internet has been essential for the spreading of street art as a legitimate art form and, more importantly, that the online composition of city elements is more visible to more people than any of the actual locations of these pieces. See Armstrong, “The Contested Gallery: Street Art, Ethnography and the Search for Urban Understandings,” 2005.

32 For an excellent theoretical consideration of artist signatures and the ownership of creation, see Becker, Art Worlds.

33 This kind of graffiti work on the tracks hearkens back to the tags and throwies that adorned New York subway cars, freight trains, and the areas immediately surrounding both Ferrell, “Freight Train Graffiti: Subculture, Crime, Dislocation,” 1998.

34 This reality was summed up succinctly by one of the gallery owners in Wynwood: “You don’t get a lot of graffiti unless you get a little bit of graffiti.”

35 Trek6’s reluctance to talk about the property owner made me curious to find out about the property. My time as a journalist several years ago instilled an appreciation for a hunt of this kind, so I set off to find out about the owner. My search, however, came up with little. The 1,625 sq.ft. lot was purchased in 2002 by “Margin Maker Investments, Inc.” Their mailing address, however, is a PO Box in Plantation. I sent them a letter, but nobody responded. I eventually found a name: Roni Oz in Plantation, FL. He has an active role in three companies, one of which is Margin Maker Investments, Inc. That organization was founded in 2002, apparently to purchase the property itself. That’s as far as I got.

36 Lachmann, “Graffiti as Career and Ideology,” 1988, 230; Becker, Art Worlds. For more on the subculture of graffiti, see Barros, Touching the Hood: A First-Hand Insight into the Secret World of Graffiti Writers and Their Culture; Snyder, Graffiti Lives: Beyond the Tag in New York’s Urban Underground, 2009.


38 Gieryn, “A Space for Place in Sociology,” 479. Tim Cresswell argues that the commodification of graffiti by the art worlds of New York was a response to the narratives of disorder associated with graffiti in the media and government during the 1970s and 1980s. Legitimizing graffiti as an art form, in short, was a

40 Snyder found that the successful careers in graffiti came from combining sets of overlapping subcultures like skateboarding, sneakers, fashion, and music. Eventually, many writers began using their graffiti work as part of their portfolios for applying to colleges and art schools, “a very significant point that receives little or no attention,” says Snyder (Snyder, *Graffiti Lives: Beyond the Tag in New York’s Urban Underground*, 2009, 171). Shepard Fairey is probably the most famous of the successful college grads, having gone to the Rhode Island School of Design before continuing on to create a highly profitable career in street art, DJing, and fashion. See Armstrong, “The Contested Gallery: Street Art, Ethnography and the Search for Urban Understandings,” 2005, 4. For more on the appeal of graffiti for commerce, see Alvelos, “The Desert of Imagination in the City of Signs: Cultural Implications of Sponsored Transgression and Branded Graffiti.”


42 Alvelos, “The Desert of Imagination in the City of Signs: Cultural Implications of Sponsored Transgression and Branded Graffiti”; Lloyd, *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City*.


49 Elizabeth Currid Currid, *The Warhol Economy: How Fashion, Art, and Music Drive New York City*. also emphasizes the importance of this kind of social density in creative industries. The internet has, of course, changed a great amount of the nature of these kinds of social networks of distinction through art. Stefan Simchowitz, dubbed “The art world’s patron satan” by *The New York Times* Glazek, “The Art World’s Patron Satan.”, has made incredible wealth through investing in young and hopeful artists early in their careers and creating “heat” or “velocity” for these artists through his wildly popular Instagram account.


52 AnnaLee Saxenian Saxenian, *Regional Advantage*. also laid an argument for the importance of place for the development of Silicon Valley in California and the stagnation of Route 128 in Massachusetts. Although both areas had a high density of companies and interested entrepreneurs, the key ingredient that made Silicon Valley take over the tech industry was structural: the vast amount of banks, law firms, and other side businesses served as catalysts for the tech startups in this wild west of areas. In the world of art and tech, the most popular of work is Richard Florida’s Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*: argument of how the concentration of creative minds in cities—the “creative class”—leads to a rise of knowledge industries, such as technology businesses.


55 Ibid., 782.

56 Alexander’s project is an extension of Rom Harré’s argument that objects can only be fully understood in light of the dual functions in the “practical” and “expressive” orders. See Harré, “Maerical Objects in Social Worlds.”


58 Alexander, “Iconic Experience in Art and Life: Surface/Depth Beginning with Giacometti’s Standing Woman.”

59 Alexander, “Iconic Consciousness: The Material Feeling of Meaning,” 783. Elsewhere, Alexander states: “In the course of everyday life, we are drawn into the experience of meaning and emotionality by surface forms. We experience these forms in a tactile way. They have an expressive texture that we ‘feel’ in our unconscious minds and associate with other ideas and things. These ideas and things are simultaneously personal and social.” See Alexander, “Iconic Experience in Art and Life: Surface/Depth Beginning with Giacometti’s Standing Woman,” 6.
60 From taped interview, April 13, 2015.
63 Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production.
64 Mears, “Working for Free in the VIP: Relational Work and the Production of Consent.”
65 Ibid., 7–8.
68 Becker, Tricks of the Trade, 44.
69 Many thanks to the Canadian Studies Program at Princeton University for these funds.
70 Photo used with permission. The captions for this piece: “The third installment of the Loveism Campaign. This was truly a manifestation of the word, the first week I was assisted by family members then Mathew Wright of Atlanta donated a week of his time and finally my friend Craig Ledermann donated three solid weeks to take this project home. The entire wall is significantly bigger than this picture shows, swallowing three massive bay doors that took an incredible amount of work hours to finish. Standing precariously on the top rung of the short ladder to touch up some final details. At this height with no way to hold on the wind becomes a formidable opponent to the mission. The mission in this case was to finish in time for Art Basel 2013.”
71 From field notes, February 7, 2016.
72 Dahlberg, “Record Price for Wynwood Property Could Bring Retail and Park.”
Notes to Chapter 5 – The Global Chapel: Creating a Sacred Space for Elite Consumption

1 Orsi, Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape.
5 According to the 1940 US Census from the National Archives, “When required to list his previous residence, Capone provided only ‘prison,’ which was dutifully scrawled on the census ledger.” Lilly, “1940 Census: National Archives Releases Information on Old Miami.” For other details on this historical period, see Miami Herald, “Wynwood.”
6 “History of the Biltmore.”
7 Indeed, as Shell-Weiss argues, this influx of Latin Americans are often forgotten in the traditional histories of Latin American immigration to Miami. “Most scholarship,” she says, “has emphasized Miami’s post-1960 Latinization. But this transformation began roughly two decades earlier, as a result of the large influx of Latin American visitors and the city’s industrial transformation.” Shell-Weiss, Coming to Miami: A Social History, 152.
8 It was said that Cellon was a pioneer of the mango and avocado worlds. From an article published in The Miami Daily News from 1944, “Mango Manor to Become Church Site.”: “The Cellon property [the future site of Corpus Christi] was the scene more than 30 years ago of experiments in developing mangos and avocados of the area today, it was recalled. Turbanned East Indians came from horticultural colleges in Bombay and Calcutta to learn new methods of mango-budding from Cellon. He spent a fortune developing speedy and sure ways of budding and later of publicizing mangos—and Miami.” Reprinted in The Miami News Features section, June 29, 1985.
9 Kleinberg, “The Luther Burbank of S. Florida.”
10 It would make sense that Fr. Finnegan would be so active in the construction of parishes throughout South Florida at this time. As R. Scott Appleby notes, “the outbreak of World War II had confirmed a generalized sense among Catholic intellectuals of crisis in the social order,” one that would result in a considerable amount of dialogue about internal diversity in Catholicism in the United States and the role of the Catholic Church in a wider pluralist society. See Appleby, “Pluralism: Notes on the American Catholic Experience,” 131. The construction of new churches throughout the United States was a part of the efforts to order the chaos.
11 According to Shell-Weiss, Coming to Miami: A Social History, 152: “By the mid-1950s, local officials estimated that 46,000 Cubans, 30,000 Puerto Ricans, 3,500 Colombians, 2,000 Venezuelans, 1,200 Ecuadorians, 800 Mexicans, and an additional 2,000 people from elsewhere in Central America made their homes in Miami-Dade County.”
12 The literature on the Cuban Revolution and its effects on Miami is vast. See Portes and Stepick, City on the Edge; Shell-Weiss, Coming to Miami: A Social History; Croucher, Imagining Miami; Eire, Waiting for Snow in Havana.
13 Shell-Weiss, Coming to Miami: A Social History, 168. Shell-Weiss draws this figure from the work of Juan M. Clark, a Cuban sociologist who was a veteran of the Bay of Pigs invasion and a former prisoner of war of Cuba in 1962. He was also a professor emeritus at Miami Dade College and wrote reports with faculty from the University of Miami. Portes and Stepick, City on the Edge, 102., conversely, lists the figure of Cuban immigrants as being closer to 135,000.
14 The most famous accounts of Operation Peter Pan remains Carlos Eire’s memoir, Eire, Waiting for Snow in Havana. As a member of the economic elites in Cuba, Eire’s family made the difficult decision to send him and his brother to foster homes in the United States. His mother eventually joined them, but Eire would never see his father again.
15 It was said that Corpus Christi was set to be the Cathedral of Miami when the plans for the parish were first drawn up. With the confirmation of the construction of I-95 right across the entrance to the church, however, the Archdiocese of Miami changed its mind and decided to set the Cathedral in another location.
16 This phrase was used during a roundtable with engineers involved in the construction of the highway. “The amount of property damage,” they argued, “was considered in choice of the route.” See Williams, “Questions


18 Green, “Legacies of Overtown.”

19 As Tom Tweed demonstrated in his book, *Our Lady of the Exile,* many of the Latin American immigrants that arrived to Miami—especially Cubans—were not considered “active” in their faiths when they arrived. The congregational and structured worlds of religious participation in the United States were substantially different from the day-to-day religiosity that these immigrants were used to in their homeland. One of the most important efforts of the Archdiocese of Miami, then, was to assimilate immigrants into a new form of religious practice.

20 Gomez, “Corpus Christi Cumple 50 Anos.”

21 As Robert Orsi Orsi, “Introduction: Crossing the City Line,” has shown, the emphasis on Catholic stewardship to neglected areas of cities has a long-standing presence in US Catholic history. As he documents in his example of the South Bronx of the 1960s and 1970s, many religious migrants were drawn to the abandoned buildings and broken communities as perfect locations for austere lives and faithful contemplation. “New Christians,” he states, “would begin their spiritual journeys amid the debris of the old world/lost Eden/the South Bronx in disrepair, and then move through the waters of rebirth to the garden—and a revitalized South Bronx—beyond” *Ibid.*, 3. The city, he argues, was seen as in need of both social and spiritual rejuvenation.

22 Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life.*


24 The notion of the collective is essential to Durkheim’s thinking. Early in his career, Durkheim established the idea of social facts—such as crime, language, and marriage—that are to be seen as things in and of themselves that can be studied and measured. These social facts, moreover, have a source outside of purely psychological phenomena. Integral to Durkheim’s theoretical work on social facts is the idea that collective social facts are widespread, external, and coercive. One of the most important of these social facts is that of the religious and the holy. Through his analysis of totemic ritual and practice, Durkheim came to this point: it is through the collective work in society that individuals are able to create the sacredness that is beyond them and the moral rules that accompany that sacredness. A moral code, for instance, is the product of a collective: a product that then has a direct coercive impact on the members of that collective. The sacred is, as well, the product of a collective. Once the sacred is constructed, it must be acknowledged as such by the rest of the collective. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*; Durkheim, *Rules of Sociological Method.*

25 Mircea Eliade develops these ideas in depth in his seminal work, *The Sacred and The Profane.* As influential as Durkheim was, however, recent scholars have been able to note that the creation of or interactions within sacred places are not as fast and true as his sacred and profane division would lead one to believe. In his historical analysis of a street festival in Italian Harlem, Robert Orsi demonstrated that the standard divisions between our taken-for-granted notions of the sacred and profane cannot accommodate the real, lived religious participation of those that he analyzed. Indeed, the majority of the literature in the Lived Religion tradition in sociology and religious studies aim at demonstrating, either implicitly or explicitly, just how blurry the boundary is between the sacred and the profane. See Ammerman, *Everyday Religion*; Hall, *Lived Religion in America*; Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street.*

26 For a complete synopsis of the sociological use of “place,” see Gieryn, “A Space for Place in Sociology.”

27 Because of differences in terminology, theoretical foundations, and disciplinary boundaries, various sources focus on sacred “spaces” rather than sacred “places.” I choose to solely use the term “place” for several reasons. First, my theoretical foundations for this project lie in the sociological literature that roughly distinguishes “places” as having meaning and “spaces” as being meaningless or in the process of becoming meaningful. See *Ibid.*; Logan, “Making a Place for Space.” Second, additional work on changes in urban environments and cities use the term “place” rather than “space,” such as Logan and Molotch’s famous coinage of “place entrepreneurs.” See Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes.* See also Molotch, “The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place”; Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulsen, “History Repeats Itself, But How? City Character, Urban Tradition, and the Accomplishment of Place.” And finally,
I do not use the words “place” or “space” interchangeably in order to mitigate the risk of confusion or imprecision.

28 Will Herberg argues in his seminal work, Protestant, Catholic, Jew, how important religious identity is for immigrants in the United States. Although his three categories are now quite outdated, his theoretical understanding of the importance of religious identification for social participation in the United States still remains viable. For more on immigration and religion, see Carnes and Yang, Asian American Religions; Eck, A New Religious America: How a “Christian Country” has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation; Mazumdar and Mazumdar, “Religious Placemaking and Community Building in Diaspora”; Yang and Ebaugh, “Transformations in New Immigrant Religions and Their Global Implications.” The most comprehensive study of sacred place construction in Miami remains Tom Tweed’s excellent historical and ethnographic account of La Hermita de la Caridad, the national shrine of exiled Cubans, in his book Our Lady of the Exile.

29 Evans, “Religious Pluralism in Modern America: A Sociological Overview”; Wuthnow, America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity.


31 What is notable of the post-1965 surge, however, is that many of these new immigrants came from non-Christian countries. While those that arrived to the US from the 1890s to 1920s came from predominantly Christian nations—such as Poland, Ireland, Italy, and elsewhere—the post 1965 rise brought with it a sizeable number of Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and practitioners of additional non-Western religions. As a result, these religious traditions have come to change the American religious landscape. Arriving to a country that lacked their forms of sacred places, these new immigrants set to work to build them. Temples, mosques, gurdwaras, and other religious centers now increasingly dot the US landscape, many of which were constructed in the past few decades. Levitt, God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the Changing American Religious Landscape; Wuthnow, America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity; Eck, A New Religious America: How a “Christian Country” has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation; Cadge, Heartwood: The First Generation of Theravada Buddhism in America; Evans, “Religious Pluralism in Modern America: A Sociological Overview.”

32 For literature on “significant places,” see Relph, Place and Placelessness. For more on “anchors,” see Marcus, “Environmental Memories.” The study of human/nonhuman interaction is a burgeoning field in sociology. An excellent review can be found in Cerulo, “Nonhumans in Social Interaction.” For applications or examples of research conducted on human/nonhuman interaction, see Jerolmack and Tavory, “Molds and Totems”; Garcia, “Relational Work in Economic Sociology.” Zain Abdullah beautifully portrays the sociological importance of sacred places for French-speaking African Muslims in New York in his book, Black Mecca. For another example of religious placemaking and community development, see Mazumdar and Mazumdar, “Religious Placemaking and Community Building in Diaspora.”


34 For two classics on congregational life in the United States, see Chaves, Congregations in America; Ammerman, Pillars of Faith. Wendy Cadge demonstrated the reality of immigrant faiths adapting to U.S. congregational norms in her work on Thai Buddhists in the U.S. “Like many first-generation immigrants across the United States, practitioners at Wat Phila adopted a congregational form in which people come to the temple on Sunday mornings for meditation, chanting, and rituals that are largely the same from week to week....Meeting regularly on Sunday mornings is one of the primary ways that monks and practitioners at Wat Phila structurally adapted Buddhism to the U.S. norm.” Cadge, Heartwood: The First Generation of Theravada Buddhism in America, 57. Other books have emphasized the importance of congregations for the development of political and civic engagement, a link that is common in the United States but often lacking in the faith traditions in the homelands of immigrants. See Djupe and Gilbert, The Political Influence of Churches; Harris-Lacewell, “Righteous Politics: The Role of the Black Church in Contemporary Politics”; Lichterman, Elusive Togetherness: Church Groups Trying to Bridge America’s Divisions; Pattillo-McCoy, “Church Culture as a Strategy of Action in the Black Community”; Putnam and Campbell, American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us; Stout, Blessed Are the Organized; Wuthnow, America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity.

35 For “translocative and transtemporal,” see Tweed, Our Lady of the Exile, 94–95. For an example of liminality and immigrant life, see Menjivar, “Liminal Legality: Salvadoran and Guatemalan Immigrants’ Lives in the United States.” Drawing from the work of David Harvey in her examination of a Mexican shrine in Chicago, Elaine Peña drives similar conclusions to Tweed’s “translocative and transtemporal” argument.
“Building on David Harvey’s concept that describes the acceleration and wide-reaching potential of business and communication networks,” she writes, “we can imagine how notions of the sacred, like global capital, can transcend the nation-state. Maryville’s built environment inspires these women to transcend time and space on their own terms, to link the original with its counterpart in a way that surpasses a state-based framework.” Peña, “Beyond Mexico: Guadalupan Sacred Space Production and Mobilization in a Chicago Suburb,” 730.

36 These figures are for the Miami-Dade County area and come from the 2010-2014 American Communities Survey estimates obtained from the US Census Bureau’s Quickfacts page (http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/LFE041214/12086).

37 Portes and Stepick, City on the Edge, 10.

38 Tweed, Our Lady of the Exile.


41 A newspaper article from 1993 called Wynwood the “‘golden gate’ for Hispanic immigrants,” and a “melting pot of Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Haitians, African Americans, Nicaraguans and Dominicans.” See Ousley, “Help for Forgotten Wynwood.”

42 Gomez, “Corpus Christi Cumples 50 Anos.”

43 This was even reported in The Miami Herald as being one of the central qualities of this unique mission construction. “Each of the missions will be named for a patron saint. The saint chosen is significant because it is meant to represent the largest minority in the area. San Juan Bautista is named for the Puerto Rican community that makes up the largest ethnic concentration in Wynwood.” Musibay, “Church Missions Will Reach Out to Neighborhoods.”

44 Duhart, “Youths Seek Change of Wynwood’s Image.”

45 Agustine Roman’s influence in the lives of immigrants in Miami is vast. See Tweed, Our Lady of the Exile.

46 Father Jose Luis always chuckled about this story, saying that it was more of a coincidence than a miracle. But the community really rallied around this image of the sheep and even placed a sheep on the entrance gates to the neighborhood along with the Antioch cross. As The Miami Herald reported, “It was a sign. One day, a lamb appeared in the empty lot of the inner-city neighborhood…Never mind that the lamb belonged to a neighbor who had put it out to graze. To the believers, it was a confirmation of their faith.” Gonzalez, “Wynwood: Neighborhood on a Mission.”

47 Wuthnow, All in Sync.

48 Clawson, I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!; Wuthnow, All in Sync; Schnable, “Singing the Gospel.”

49 Collins, Interaction Ritual Chains; Heider and Warner, “Bodies in Sync”; Clawson, I Belong to This Band, Hallelujah!.

50 Baggetta, “Civic Opportunities in Associations: Interpersonal Interaction, Governance Experience and Institutional Relationships.”

51 Hendershot, Shaking the World for Jesus, 44. Bethany Moreton details in her book, To Serve God and Walmart, how Wal-Mart, in particular, aimed to provide “clean” content and items for sale in their facilities across the country. As part of this effort, Wal-Mart provided extensive shelf space for Christian books and videos and, as a result, was integral in launching revenues for these types of products nationwide.

52 Marti, Hollywood Faith, 78.

53 Maclntyre, After Virtue; Stout, Ethics after Babel; Wuthnow, After Heaven.


55 The project overall, including architectural plans and description, can be found on the Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company, LLC, website: http://www.dpz.com/Projects/8905. The article about the mission can be found at: Dunlop, “House of Worship: Faith, Hope, and Charity.” According to reports from The Miami Herald, Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk agreed to design the mission and supervise its construction at no cost. See Musibay, “Church Missions Will Reach Out to Neighborhoods.”

56 As fantastical as this may sound, it was actually quite common for Cubans to join counterrevolutionary efforts with the federal government. As Joan Didion wrote in her seminal book on Miami, there was a constant
buzz of CIA informants, FBI aids, and spies. Miami was littered with these efforts in particular, a denizen for secrets. Didion, Miami. See also Allman, Miami.

57 This was standard procedure for paintings in Colonial America. See Damian, The Virgin of the Andes.


59 One of the most famous portrayals of the Southwest missions remains Willa Cather’s Death Comes for the Archbishop. The very name “Seminole,” comes from Spanish word *cimarrón*, which was an accusatory word for “runaway” or “wild one.” See Mahon and Weisman, “Florida’s Seminole and Miccosukee Peoples.” T.D. Allman describes the artificial nature of St. Augustine as well. See Allman, Miami. Details about Florida’s earliest days also come from Nijman, Miami, 4–5. Details about the history of the Archdiocese of St. Augustine and the Archdiocese of Miami taken from Archdiocese of Miami, History of the Archdiocese of Miami, 1958–2008. Interesting to note that the writers of this history emphasize the link between Miami and St. Augustine. In their description of the Holy Name of Jesus (GESU) Catholic Church, the writers state that “a continued Catholic presence in this area can be traced back to 1565 when Spanish colonists blessed a mission as Nombre de Dios, and shared a great fest with the Natives, one of the first acts of community thanksgiving in North America.” Ibid., 88. Nombre de Dios, however, was the name of the mission established in St. Augustine, and the Catholic presence “in this area” included a wide swatch of modern-day Florida.

60 The literature of trust and social capital, especially at the neighborhood level, is vast and controversial. For recent work on the subject, see Abascal and Baldassarri, “Love Thy Neighbor?”

61 Cembalet, “The Colonial Revolution.”

62 Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production; Bourdieu, Homo Academicus.
Notes to Chapter 6 – Conclusion


7 Data taken from the Miami-Dade Property Appraiser’s website.
Notes for Methodological Appendix

1 From field notes, June 13, 2014.
3 From field notes, October 14, 2015.
4 From field notes, February 11, 2015.
Biography


Landers, Peggy. “Prayer, and Power, for the Poor: An Inner-City Priest Teaches the Faithful to Lift up Their Voices for Their Own Rights.” The Miami Herald, September 5, 1993, sec. Living.


