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## Re-Examining the Soho Effect

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Published July 21, 2010

The eulogies for the Ohio Theatre

[\[http://www.thelmagazine.com/newyork/the-artsy-ghosts-of-soho-past-buy-themselves-one-more-year/Content?oid=1199777\]](http://www.thelmagazine.com/newyork/the-artsy-ghosts-of-soho-past-buy-themselves-one-more-year/Content?oid=1199777) are popping up in blogs

[\[http://culture.wnyc.org/articles/performance-club/2010/feb/22/so-long-ohio/\]](http://culture.wnyc.org/articles/performance-club/2010/feb/22/so-long-ohio/) and newspapers

[\[http://www.villagevoice.com/2010-05-18/theater/remembering-the-ohio-theatre/\]](http://www.villagevoice.com/2010-05-18/theater/remembering-the-ohio-theatre/) across the city. It

is among the last of a small group of arts organizations born during the arts boom in Soho in the 70s and early 80s that have held out into the aughts. Most of them, like the Ohio, are quickly approaching

the end of their run. Since its founding in 1980 thousands of artists, and many more audience members, have trudged across the theater's boards. A number of those artists have gone on to

receive international acclaim for their work since those early days—Anne Bogart

[\[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne\\_Bogart\]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne_Bogart), Maria Irene Fornes

[\[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria\\_Irene\\_Fornes\]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria_Irene_Fornes), and Tony Kushner

[\[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tony\\_Kushner\]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tony_Kushner), to name but a few. But in the grand scheme of Soho's

history, the Ohio was a short-term resident and a late-comer amidst the artist-driven changes that started in the neighborhood as early as the 50s.

While the phrase the "Soho Effect" may not be one that you've heard much before, its meaning is likely lodged somewhere in the periphery of your understanding of the flux of certain neighborhoods in New York City—the most well-known contemporary example being Williamsburg. It refers to the artist-led gentrification of urban neighborhoods and came about, as you can imagine, because of what happened in a certain corner of Manhattan's 8th Ward

[\[http://www.demographia.com/nyward1800.jpg\]](http://www.demographia.com/nyward1800.jpg) early in the second half of the last century, around the time when the area was affectionately referred to as Hell's Hundred Acres.

Artist-led gentrification in New York City neighborhoods has been an inescapable cycle since at least the 70s, though the conditions for each iteration vary. In fact, it's such a common phenomenon (or so economists and urban planners would have us believe) that most "urban renewal" or "urban redevelopment" plans around the country, and in many parts of the developed world, include plans to bring artists' studios and housing into economically depressed areas as a means of stimulating change.

The "Soho Effect" is so well known and so often referred to in contemporary New York that it seems to be part of the city's m.o. See the constant features in magazines like *Time Out* or *New York* for proof, each one lauding the latest "hip" neighborhood, inevitably tauting the handful of crusty artists

who have been inhabiting the odd space here and there. The obvious implication in these pieces being that these neighborhoods were once scary, crime-infested places likely populated almost entirely by at least one minority group, somehow made "safe" and comfortable by these brave artistic souls who have ventured into unknown territory and helped colonize the wilds (i.e. convinced the bodegas to stock your favorite organic, vanilla, low fat soy milk), so it's okay for you to move in now. Though you better do it fast, before prices skyrocket.

The notion of the "Soho Effect" is an incredibly short-sighted idea, and, more importantly in today's New York, it seems to ignore the shifting economics over a wider swath of the city and during a longer period that drive many of these neighborhood changes. Not to mention the side-stepping of more complicated ramifications in situations where entire populations are being displaced by new residents, as opposed to those where artists are moving into otherwise unoccupied former manufacturing spaces.

The U.S. and the globe are urbanizing at a rate that the five boroughs are currently unlikely to be able to sustain, even with all that vacant, glass-fronted housing stock along the river in Williamsburg. According to the UN's World Urbanization Prospects [<http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/WUP2005/2005wup.htm>], in 1950 roughly 30 percent of the world's population was urban; by 2005 that figure had jumped to 49 percent, and estimates indicate that by 2030 60 percent of the world's population will be living in urban centers.

New York is a global city, it's always been known for attracting people from around the country and the world. People with the means and desire to travel to and live in New York have more access to the city than ever before. But the infrastructure of the city, particularly after the latest round of budget cuts slashing essential and already strained city services like public transportation [<http://abclocal.go.com/wabc/story?section=resources/traffic&id=7524510>] and libraries [<http://www.thelmagazine.com/newyork/books-not-cops-on-the-nyc-budget-slash/Content?oid=1677510>], indicate that the city is likely not going to be in such good shape come 2030.

The ideas that are traditionally talked about when people trot out the "Soho Effect" demonstrate a distinct myopia, and even more importantly an economist's lack of imagination—just because it happened a certain way in the past, doesn't mean it's ever going to happen that way again. It's not enough to look at what's happening right now, or even within the past one or two generations. To really understand a place, you've got to have a bit of a longer view and you've got to take yourself out of the picture as much as possible. As Robert Lyons, the Artistic Director of the Soho Think Tank [<http://www.sohothinktank.org/>] and the man who has been running the Ohio Theatre since 1988, put it when I spoke to him about the history of the Ohio's building and the neighborhood: "People plant their flags when they arrive...people who arrived 10 years ago say it was better 10 years ago, people who arrived 30 years ago say it was better then." The flag-planting image has an appropriately

colonialist bent to it, one that conveniently negates the existence of anything before the new residents' arrival.

With all that in mind, I want to give you a longer view of the "Soho Effect," because we tend to forget that dramatic and unpredicted changes are the norm in New York, not the exception. Rather than take on all of Soho, I think it's much more interesting to look at a single plot of land, a microcosm of the city. In this case, that plot will be 64-68 Wooster Street, soon to be the former home of the Ohio Theatre.

### **A Longer View**

The history buffs among you know that long before New York became New York, or even New Amsterdam, it was a home and trading hub, as well as a major source of food and goods, for a number of Native American tribes that had villages on the island. Many other tribal groups traveled by water to reach the area's plentiful harbor. I couldn't find a map that gives any indication of whether or not those tribes were located near to the land beneath 64-68 Wooster, but it's safe to say that none of them ever broke bread over the actual 6,517 square feet occupied by the building, as that little area was a swamp when the Dutch West India Company first made landfall on Manhattan in the early 1600s.

64-68 Wooster is located just at the northern edge of what was known for most of New York's early history as Greppel Bosch, or the Great Cripplebush, after the menacing shrubs that covered much of the swamplands. (You can see a map depicting the outline of the swamp here [<http://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~2289~180029:Sanitary-&-Topographical-Map-of-the>].) The boggy area wound its way from the western edge of the city, around the freshwater Collect Pond that used to sit a bit north of where City Hall now stands, and over to the ports along South Street. Robert Lyons told me a story about a short-lived idea that the Ohio staff had in the theater's early days. They thought they might be able to excavate the basement of the building in order to create a space below where the theater is now. The architect they were consulting with for the project, referring to the 1865 Viele Map linked above (a topographic map of the city's original waterways overlaid with the modern street grid, which is still used to this day by builders and city planners), quickly put the kibosh on that idea—excavating a swamp, even today, is generally a bad idea.

Among the first landowners along the swamp's winding northern edges were free blacks and slaves of the Dutch West India Company. Under Dutch rule free blacks, as well as slaves, had the right to own property and with that right they amassed a smattering of small farms in what was then just beyond the northern reaches of the city. It's worth noting that "free" is not really an accurate term for these former slaves. This brief summary

[[http://colonial-america.suite101.com/article.cfm/free\\_blacks\\_and\\_slaves\\_in\\_dutch\\_manhattan](http://colonial-america.suite101.com/article.cfm/free_blacks_and_slaves_in_dutch_manhattan)]

gives a quick, if perfunctory, overview of the terms of the "freedom" that the Dutch granted these early Manhattan landowners.

As of 1644 the land upon which 64-68 Wooster now stands was granted to one Jan Francisco [[http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/cul/texts/ldpd\\_5800727\\_006/pages/ldpd\\_5800727\\_006\\_00000132.html](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/cul/texts/ldpd_5800727_006/pages/ldpd_5800727_006_00000132.html)]. (You can see a map that shows an overlay of his property on a roughly contemporary street grid here [[http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/cul/texts/ldpd\\_5800727\\_006/pages/ldpd\\_5800727\\_006\\_00000143.html?toggle=image&menu=minimize&top=200px&left=70px](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/cul/texts/ldpd_5800727_006/pages/ldpd_5800727_006_00000143.html?toggle=image&menu=minimize&top=200px&left=70px)], you'll have to really squint to see it, but it's there above the swamp.) In fact, Jan was one of the original group of eleven African slaves brought to New Amsterdam in 1624 by the West India Company, all of whom were made "half-free" and granted land by the Company in 1644 [[http://books.google.com/books?id=ErPg7VegkcMC&pg=PA106&lpg=PA106&dq="jan+francisco"+west+india+company&source=bl&ots=RC7KdJSAvv&sig=Hg5g8K3bNo4DT3vHiepMKkESk70&hl=en&ei=4949TMmkJtT5IAf5ntn4CA&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBgQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=%22jan%20francisco%22%20west%20india%20company&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=ErPg7VegkcMC&pg=PA106&lpg=PA106&dq=)]. According to one source, Jan was formally granted his freedom by Dominie Megapolensis [[http://books.google.com/books?id=9XPHIC8eAPIC&pg=PA153&lpg=PA153&dq="jan+francisco"+new+york+dutch&source=bl&ots=KlUFJaxrJj&sig=UU\\_CtgDPwV7-kfUo4cUnXtgMfkl&hl=en&ei=cdw9TJq3Ioz6lweD4oD-CA&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=5&ved=0CCUQ6AEwBA#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=9XPHIC8eAPIC&pg=PA153&lpg=PA153&dq=)], but he was ever-after expected to pay the company annually to maintain his freedom by contributing large amounts of wheat from his farm. Further dovetailing with current artist-led gentrification trends, Jan Francisco and "Anton the Negro" signed a petition to found Bushwick (yes, seriously—Bushwick goes back to the 1600s), where Francisco become a prominent landowner [<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Contested+ground:+hinterland+slavery+in+colonial+New+York-a0192404033>]. According to *The Iconography of Manhattan Island 1498-1909* (a New York City history geek's nirvana [<http://cliobeta.cul.columbia.edu:7018/vwebv/holdingsInfo?searchId=21766&recCount=50&recPointer=1&bibId=5800727>]), Francisco still had the land in the mid-1670s when he mortgaged it for 400 guilders worth of wampum [[http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/cul/texts/ldpd\\_5800727\\_006/pages/ldpd\\_5800727\\_006\\_00000247.html?toggle=text&menu=maximize&top=200px&left=70px](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/cul/texts/ldpd_5800727_006/pages/ldpd_5800727_006_00000247.html?toggle=text&menu=maximize&top=200px&left=70px)] (the Indian beads made from oyster shells used as currency for a period in early Manhattan before counterfeiting and all manner of other problems made it an untenable currency). Francisco likely used the money to pay for or develop new properties in Bushwick.

Following Jan Francisco, Thomas Eckerts, a vintner, owned the land beneath 64-68 Wooster for a time in the late 1600s, building a large brick building somewhere on his plot. The land then passed to the merchant William Smith in 1709.

Judging by the maps in the *Iconography*, in the 1760s most of the land above the swamp was still primarily farmland,

[http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/cul/texts/ldpd\\_5800727\\_001/pages/ldpd\\_5800727\\_001\\_00000501.html?toggle=&menu=maximize&top=&left=](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/cul/texts/ldpd_5800727_001/pages/ldpd_5800727_001_00000501.html?toggle=&menu=maximize&top=&left=)], even as the city was beginning to develop far northward. It wasn't until after the 1770s, when Broadway, which followed the much older Wickquasgeck Trail created by the island's original inhabitants, was extended north above the Canal that gave Canal Street its name, that the streets of Soho began to follow their contemporary layout. (View an early city plan here [http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/cul/texts/ldpd\\_5800727\\_001/pages/ldpd\\_5800727\\_001\\_00000641.html?toggle=image&menu=maximize&top=&left=](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/cul/texts/ldpd_5800727_001/pages/ldpd_5800727_001_00000641.html?toggle=image&menu=maximize&top=&left=).)

By the early 1800s the swamp below 64-68 Wooster had been filled and the street officially had its name. In 1819, the street was "regulated" from Lispenard up to Spring [http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/cul/texts/ldpd\\_4760947\\_002/pages/ldpd\\_4760947\\_002\\_00000564.html](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/cul/texts/ldpd_4760947_002/pages/ldpd_4760947_002_00000564.html)], making it flat and even (or as close as they could get at the time) for carriage and foot traffic. Soho was developing into a wealthy neighborhood as the population center of the city moved north to get away from the crush and filth of downtown. The neighborhood quickly filled with theaters, grand homes, merchants, and opera houses. But Soho's first wave of wealthy residents didn't last long. As the city's grid quickly expanded northward so too did the population, looking for more space, along with cleaner, newer buildings. (Sound something like suburban sprawl in the postwar era of the 20th century?) In the mid-1800s the population of New York was exploding—it went from 202,589 in 1830 to 1,206,299 in 1880. The rush on housing and the influx of immigrants brought a whole new element to 64-68 Wooster.

1850s Soho was an exercise in contrasts. While high-end shops like Tiffany & Co had moved in, doing business on Broadway, only a couple of blocks west New York's largest red light district was taking shape. Brothels lined Wooster Street from Canal up to Bleeker. According to Timothy Gilfoyle's *City of Eros*, Annie Clark, one of the city's leading madams operated out of 43 Wooster between 1855-1859 [http://books.google.com/books?id=ccEP\\_1Lox-cC&pg=PA371&lpg=PA371&dq=directory+to+the+seraglios+in+new+york&source=bl&ots=TyJBt5UdZ-&sig=zVeK5eMOeCjUth\\_aVPt17Hxc0Ew&hl=en&ei=tFA1Ti7YLcH\\_lgfppDVBw&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBIQ6AEwAA#v=snippet&q=wooster&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=ccEP_1Lox-cC&pg=PA371&lpg=PA371&dq=directory+to+the+seraglios+in+new+york&source=bl&ots=TyJBt5UdZ-&sig=zVeK5eMOeCjUth_aVPt17Hxc0Ew&hl=en&ei=tFA1Ti7YLcH_lgfppDVBw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBIQ6AEwAA#v=snippet&q=wooster&f=false)]. Newcomers to the city could purchase books such as *The Directory to the Seraglios in New York*, written by "A Free Lover" in 1859, to help navigate the district, advising them on what was expected of visitors and what they could expect at any given house of ill repute.

According to Gilfoyle's notes, by the 1870s Wooster Street had 27 brothels, its only rival being Greene Street to the east, which boasted an impressive 52. But make no mistake about it, this was not the kind of place where you could see a fetching burlesque show with your upturned mustache and then grab an artisanal cocktail served by a tweed-vest sporting kid from Cleveland. This was a neighborhood rife with extreme poverty, murder, rape, rampant alcohol and drug addiction, violent

robbery, regular fires, disease, starvation, slavery, graft, and a near-complete lack of legal recourse for those who were not voluntary participants in what was happening.

Around this same time blacks, along with myriad other immigrants, began to repopulate Soho. According to the fascinating, if deeply misguided and more than a little bit salacious, article on the "Condition of the Colored Population of New York"

[<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9C00E5DE1E3AEF34BC4A53DFB5668382679FDE>]

from 1869 (4 years after the end of the American Civil War), things were not going well for blacks living along Wooster Street. The writer specifically mentions 40 Wooster, describing the tenement that stood there this way: "If the builder of this house was anxious to erect a place where thieves could play hide-and-seek, and elude the pursuit of the Police, he has certainly succeeded to his heart's content." He goes on to describe a bar on a corner of Wooster (though he doesn't say which corner), known as "The African Capitol," which was, according to the writer, among the worst of the worst places in the city because of the depraved and drunken crowd that lurched out of it after closing each night.

Despite the prurient overtones given to the neighborhood in the press at the time, there seems to have been a smattering of working-class and working poor residents, along with merchants living among the mix. A primary school teacher by the name of Eliza Cronin was living at 62 Wooster, making a salary of \$100 in 1858

[[http://books.google.com/books?id=T2YbAQAAIAAJ&pg=PA844&lpg=PA844&dq=%2262+wooster+street%22&source=bl&ots=HS6ZMyvdFf&sig=ICkYKr9KPN3j0841XEPurl2zZps&hl=en&ei=RSY9TOTDGY8-Abc6pSnBg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=8&ved=0CDEQ6AEwBzgK#v=onepage&q=%2262%20wooster%20street%22&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=T2YbAQAAIAAJ&pg=PA844&lpg=PA844&dq=%2262+wooster+street%22&source=bl&ots=HS6ZMyvdFf&sig=ICkYKr9KPN3j0841XEPurl2zZps&hl=en&ei=RSY9TOTDGY8-Abc6pSnBg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=8&ved=0CDEQ6AEwBzgK#v=onepage&q=%2262%20wooster%20street%22&f=false)]. In 1860 Adam Prediger had a liquor shop at 64 Wooster

(perhaps contributing to the seedier elements of the area)

[[http://books.google.com/books?id=fplTAAAAYAAJ&pg=PT689&lpg=PT689&dq=%2264+wooster%22+ny&source=bl&ots=mPblyE6bl\\_&sig=nRIVEMJCxd9ryGWac0g2d9EN2mQ&hl=en&ei=eks1TODuMYTGlQez39XVBw&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBEQ6AEwADgU#v=onepage&q=%2264%20wooster%22&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=fplTAAAAYAAJ&pg=PT689&lpg=PT689&dq=%2264+wooster%22+ny&source=bl&ots=mPblyE6bl_&sig=nRIVEMJCxd9ryGWac0g2d9EN2mQ&hl=en&ei=eks1TODuMYTGlQez39XVBw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBEQ6AEwADgU#v=onepage&q=%2264%20wooster%22&f=false)]. In that same year a mason named Jacob Oberlies was occupying 66

Wooster

[[http://books.google.com/books?id=fplTAAAAYAAJ&pg=PT689&lpg=PT689&dq=%2264+wooster%22+ny&source=bl&ots=mPblyE6bl\\_&sig=nRIVEMJCxd9ryGWac0g2d9EN2mQ&hl=en&ei=eks1TODuMYTGlQez39XVBw&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBEQ6AEwADgU#v=onepage&q=%2266%20wooster%22&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=fplTAAAAYAAJ&pg=PT689&lpg=PT689&dq=%2264+wooster%22+ny&source=bl&ots=mPblyE6bl_&sig=nRIVEMJCxd9ryGWac0g2d9EN2mQ&hl=en&ei=eks1TODuMYTGlQez39XVBw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBEQ6AEwADgU#v=onepage&q=%2266%20wooster%22&f=false)]. He, or someone with a very similar last name, seems to have also been operating a club next door at 64 Wooster, where, according to an announcement

[<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9401E2DD1231E13BBC4051DFBF668389649FDE>] in the *New York Times*, there was a meeting of the German Democratic Whig Union Club of the Eighth Ward scheduled for September 29, 1852. 64 Wooster remained a Whig polling place for at least a few years after that time.



An upholsterer by the name of John J. English was residing next door at 62 Wooster in 1866

[[http://books.google.com/books?id=J0Q-AAAAAYAAJ&pg=RA7-PA109&lpg=RA7-PA109&dq=%2262+wooster+street%22&source=bl&ots=U0YkVxo4ED&sig=OeV1NRI1ofX3yH5R0tkfPTNmaD4&hl=en&ei=RSY9TOTDGY-8Abc6pSnBg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CCMQ6AEwAzgK#v=onepage&q=%2262%20wooster%20street%22&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=J0Q-AAAAAYAAJ&pg=RA7-PA109&lpg=RA7-PA109&dq=%2262+wooster+street%22&source=bl&ots=U0YkVxo4ED&sig=OeV1NRI1ofX3yH5R0tkfPTNmaD4&hl=en&ei=RSY9TOTDGY-8Abc6pSnBg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CCMQ6AEwAzgK#v=onepage&q=%2262%20wooster%20street%22&f=false)], and in 1877 there was both a framer and mason working at 66 Wooster

[[http://books.google.com/books?id=j9oCAAAAYAAJ&pg=PT1069&lpg=PT1069&dq=oberlees+wooster+street&source=bl&ots=glyS6oA9C0&sig=D-uFXzYfxewqwOqTU64BX6tx3-I&hl=en&ei=2iw9TL-Ylcl98AaXrJztBQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBQQ6AEwAA#v=snippet&q=%2266%20wooster%22&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=j9oCAAAAYAAJ&pg=PT1069&lpg=PT1069&dq=oberlees+wooster+street&source=bl&ots=glyS6oA9C0&sig=D-uFXzYfxewqwOqTU64BX6tx3-I&hl=en&ei=2iw9TL-Ylcl98AaXrJztBQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBQQ6AEwAA#v=snippet&q=%2266%20wooster%22&f=false)]. In 1864 there was a brush manufacturer, Henry H. Winans, at 64 Wooster

[[http://books.google.com/books?id=XtsCAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA85&lpg=PA85&dq=%2264+wooster%22+ny&source=bl&ots=Xf1eXL-IV2&sig=4u3ivlt6kpzfYkjsUfevSirs9Q&hl=en&ei=N3Q6TOGyAsWBLAeyq5nTBw&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBEQ6AEwADgU#v=snippet&q=64%20wooster&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=XtsCAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA85&lpg=PA85&dq=%2264+wooster%22+ny&source=bl&ots=Xf1eXL-IV2&sig=4u3ivlt6kpzfYkjsUfevSirs9Q&hl=en&ei=N3Q6TOGyAsWBLAeyq5nTBw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBEQ6AEwADgU#v=snippet&q=64%20wooster&f=false)]; a draper named Charles Scholt, at 66 Wooster

[[http://books.google.com/books?id=XtsCAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA85&lpg=PA85&dq=%2264+wooster%22+ny&source=bl&ots=Xf1eXL-IV2&sig=4u3ivlt6kpzfYkjsUfevSirs9Q&hl=en&ei=N3Q6TOGyAsWBLAeyq5nTBw&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBEQ6AEwADgU#v=snippet&q=%2266%20wooster%22&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=XtsCAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA85&lpg=PA85&dq=%2264+wooster%22+ny&source=bl&ots=Xf1eXL-IV2&sig=4u3ivlt6kpzfYkjsUfevSirs9Q&hl=en&ei=N3Q6TOGyAsWBLAeyq5nTBw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBEQ6AEwADgU#v=snippet&q=%2266%20wooster%22&f=false)], and a coal and wood dealer by the name of Dusenberry & Miller at 68 Wooster [[http://books.google.com/books?id=XtsCAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA85&lpg=PA85&dq=%2268+wooster%22+ny&source=bl&ots=Xf1eXL-IV2&sig=4u3ivlt6kpzfYkjsUfevSirs9Q&hl=en&ei=N3Q6TOGyAsWBLAeyq5nTBw&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBEQ6AEwADgU#v=snippet&q=%2268%20wooster%22&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=XtsCAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA85&lpg=PA85&dq=%2268+wooster%22+ny&source=bl&ots=Xf1eXL-IV2&sig=4u3ivlt6kpzfYkjsUfevSirs9Q&hl=en&ei=N3Q6TOGyAsWBLAeyq5nTBw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBEQ6AEwADgU#v=snippet&q=%2268%20wooster%22&f=false)].

During all this time the cast iron buildings that Soho is famous for began to be constructed. Large loft spaces meant for manufacturing and sales were built. But the real influx of industry didn't happen until the end of the 1890s, when New York experienced its second population explosion as America's industrial engine revved up to full speed. You'll remember that there were 1,206,299 in the city in 1880. A mere 30 years later, in 1910, there were 4,766,883 New Yorkers.

In 1890, Louis F. Dommerich purchased 64, 66, and 68 Wooster, then quickly proceeded to rip them down in order to erect an annex for his business on Greene Street. (You can see a record of the sale [here](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/cul/texts/ldpd_7031148_006/pages/ldpd_7031148_006_00000654.html)

[[http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/cul/texts/ldpd\\_7031148\\_006/pages/ldpd\\_7031148\\_006\\_00000654.html](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/cul/texts/ldpd_7031148_006/pages/ldpd_7031148_006_00000654.html)].) According to the sale record, 64 and 66 were two- and three- story brick stores, sold together for \$50,000, and 68 was a group of three sheds, which Dommerich picked up for \$20,000. Dommerich had been working for some time as one of the heads of the dry goods company Oelbermann, Dommerich & Co. He was based in Germany before moving to New York in 1858. In Europe he spent his time procuring textiles, especially silk—one of a mix of fine fabrics that helped establish Oelbermann, Dommerich & Co as one of the premier textile firms in New York at the time. (Read more about the company [here](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/cul/texts/ldpd_7031148_006/pages/ldpd_7031148_006_00000654.html)

[[http://books.google.com/books?id=MEEAAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA878&lpg=PA878&dq=Oelbermann,+Dommerich+and+Co&source=bl&ots=Ndaj6ZcOJT&sig=kj5SKYpneWSMjVNp73L-Go6vzTU&hl=en&ei=-jQ9T Om2loG78ga2\\_s2mBg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=OCBsQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=Oelbermann%2C%20Dommerich%20and%20Co&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=MEEAAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA878&lpg=PA878&dq=Oelbermann,+Dommerich+and+Co&source=bl&ots=Ndaj6ZcOJT&sig=kj5SKYpneWSMjVNp73L-Go6vzTU&hl=en&ei=-jQ9T Om2loG78ga2_s2mBg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=OCBsQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=Oelbermann%2C%20Dommerich%20and%20Co&f=false)].) You can still see the sign at the top of the store's main building on Greene Street [<http://www.waltergrutchfield.net/oelbermann.htm>].

According to Charles Magistro, who bought 64-68 Wooster in the late 1970s and founded the Ohio Theater with his partner William Hahn, there were bridges on every floor of the building, connecting the Greene Street property to the Wooster Street annex, allowing the staff to quickly run to the back for more goods. Magistro told me that "the large windows on the street were there so that the ladies could see the textiles in the natural light." Interestingly, when the Ohio Theatre first opened, the address was listed as 54 Greene Street and the complex stretched through in a similar way to Dommerich's store, from the Greene Street entrance back to Wooster Street. There were apparently a total of three theaters and a large open space that made up the Ohio

[[http://www.nytimes.com/1984/07/14/arts/going-out-guide.html?scp=13&sq="ohio+theater"&st=nyt](http://www.nytimes.com/1984/07/14/arts/going-out-guide.html?scp=13&sq=)].

Both retired architects, Magistro and Hahn developed a keen interest in the building's structure. Magistro told me he suspects that 64-68 Wooster was a precursor to the skyscraper because of its steel structure, a feature not typical of other buildings in the Cast Iron Historic District, and also given its nine stories (if you count the above-grade basement) a structure that was very tall for its time.

Across the street from 64-68 Wooster, according to the report designating the Cast Iron Historic District, "The west side of the block is almost entirely taken up by the [architect J. B.] Snook-designed buildings for the Lorillard tobacco business." Lorillard [<http://www.lorillard.com/>] is still operating today as a manufacturer of a number of cigarette brands, most notably Newport. The Lorillard estate owned all of the west side of Wooster from 61-85. These buildings housed everything from a factory "for drying and moistening tobacco," to stores for selling it, along with offices to run the massive operation.

Louis Dommerich retired to Florida not long after the building was completed in 1900 and died there in 1912. I'm unsure of the owners after Dommerich, but the building seems to have remained in the "rag trade" well into the 20th century. According to Robert Lyons, members of the Open Space Theatre Experiment (the group that occupied the space before the Ohio was founded) used to walk the floors with magnets to remove the straight pins lodged between the boards—a prickly reminder of the building's past for barefooted performers.

As manufacturing in New York declined after World War II, the buildings in Soho began to turn from bustling and proud examples of American commerce to small low-end manufacturers and sweatshops. Landlords started having trouble maintaining tenants and by the 1950s artists slowly



started to move into the gradually emptying buildings, some of whom took jobs in the sweatshops to help pay their rent. Although the buildings weren't approved for residential use, the tenants came for the then-novel lofts that offered ample light and room to work and live. Landlords were happy to bend the rules just to have paying tenants. But into the 1960s Soho hit one of its lowest points. This is when the area famously became known as Hell's Hundred Acres

[[http://www.barrypopik.com/index.php/new\\_york\\_city/entry/hells\\_hundred\\_acres/](http://www.barrypopik.com/index.php/new_york_city/entry/hells_hundred_acres/)] because of the number of fires that raged in the decrepit buildings.

The 60s was also a time when the city was going bankrupt. Soho stood as a glaring sign of the government and the economy's failures following the boom in the first half of the 20th century. In fact, during the period between 1950 and 1990 the population decreased for the first time in New York City's history. In the early 60s, as a quick means of removing the blight, Robert Moses proposed the Lower-Manhattan Expressway

[[http://www.vanshnookenraggen.com/\\_index/2009/02/unbuilt-robert-moses-highway-maps/](http://www.vanshnookenraggen.com/_index/2009/02/unbuilt-robert-moses-highway-maps/)], which would have seen 64-68 Wooster demolished to make way for a massive roadway bisecting the city in order to give cars coming off the Manhattan and Williamsburg Bridges direct access to the Holland Tunnel. It was rather famously Jane Jacobs who led the fight to quash the plan. In fact, the performance group Les Freres Corbusier presented their musical, *Boozy* [[http://www.lesfreres.org/archives/05\\_boozy.html](http://www.lesfreres.org/archives/05_boozy.html)], in 2005 at the Ohio riffing on this very topic.

In 1968 the SoHo Artists Association (which gave the neighborhood its enduring moniker) was founded by both artists and activists living in the area in order to advocate for their legal right to live and work in the former manufacturing zone. While much has been made of the well-documented legal battles between the city, the landlords, and the artists to rezone the area, Magistro reminded me during our phone conversation that "the landlords were just glad to have tenants." After years of fly-by-night sweatshops and rampant crime, they were happy to have anyone in their buildings making regular rent payments or even better, willing to take the buildings off their hands completely. Unlike more contemporary gentrification, the artists were not, on the whole, displacing residential tenants—the residential tenants had long ago been displaced by manufacturing in the late 1880s. So, in that regard, the "Soho Effect" term seems misapplied in situations that involve the displacement of minority and working class residents.

As is wont to happen in either case, once a "next new neighborhood" begins to gain additional services and crime statistics begin to nudge downwards, the character of the place quickly shifts in yet a different direction. Wealthier buyers with more access to people in power and the know-how and checkbooks to influence larger scale change begin to trickle in, demanding that derelict buildings be cleaned up, while also luring fancy boutiques and upscale eateries. It's a gradual process, but we all know it well by now. In 2010 the first sign of change is a fledgling and often wildly over-priced organic foods section in an otherwise rundown bodega.

Hahn and Magistro bought 64-68 Wooster in the late 70s and, according to Magistro, they had no real concept of what they were getting into: "We were very naive. We didn't understand the market...No one was buying at that time." Previously they had lived in a loft in a former chocolate factory at 141 Prince Street, a loft that was later bought by Rupert Murdoch, and after him, the fashion designer Elie Tahari

[[http://ny.curbed.com/archives/2010/02/25/fashion\\_titan\\_quietly\\_selling\\_rupert\\_murdochs\\_soho\\_water\\_tower.php](http://ny.curbed.com/archives/2010/02/25/fashion_titan_quietly_selling_rupert_murdochs_soho_water_tower.php)]. As Magistro told me, for a time, the tenants in 64-68 Wooster had to be certified by the city as artists in order to live in the building, so that they would be in compliance with the city ordinance marking Soho out as an artists' district.

In 1982 the Loft Board was formed in order to regulate the conversion of the former manufacturing spaces into residential units and was originally also intended to make sure the buildings remained artists' spaces. But as with so much of bureaucracy, new rules, dollar signs, and weakened ideals contributed to a shift away from the notion of Soho actually being an artists' district in more than name. In the same way that suburban Home Owners Associations are a means of controlling new residents and rooting out those that don't fit with the bureaucrats' ideals, people stopped paying attention to the ordinance making it an artists' neighborhood and a new, much wealthier sort of resident started to move in (see earlier note about Murdoch).

A smattering of the artists managed to protect themselves with rent control or by getting enough money together to purchase their lofts, while others were quickly pushed out or slowly bought out, one by one. It took 64-68 Wooster's new owner, Zar Properties, four years to convince Hahn and Magistro to sell. In some of the older Soho buildings, artists who have held out in their rent-controlled apartments live inches away from tenants who have paid millions for their updated lofts. I interviewed an artist a couple of years ago in one of those rent-controlled lofts and it was every bit the stuff of legend—an entire floor, with a middle room that was used as a rehearsal studio, one of three rooms that each were far larger than many that I've paid nearly \$20 an hour to rent for rehearsals. Of course the real story there is that a large chunk of the roof of the apartment had recently collapsed and the landlord, who was literally bankrupt despite a couple of multi-million dollar market-rate tenants a couple floors down, took months to repair it. Even with a smattering of ultra-expensive units, the cost of maintaining those old buildings is not small, to say the least (though the landlord's hesitance in that particular situation was more than likely also driven by a hope that the artist would simply give up and vacate the space).

There are still some artists holding out at 64-68 Wooster who remain despite the change in ownership. At least a couple of them are likely protected under old rent control laws. According to public record some of the artists still living and/or working in the building include the Nigerian sculptor Billy Omabegho [[http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2391/2259653926\\_1a87c7951c.jpg](http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2391/2259653926_1a87c7951c.jpg)], the artist Joe Breed, and the well-known fashion photographer Steven Meisel [<http://models.com/people/Steven-Meisel>].

Before the Ohio Theatre came into being, the Open Space Theatre Experiment, founded by Lynn Michaels [<http://obit-mag.com/articles/lynn-michaels-offbroadway-producer-and-visionary-83>] created work in the space beginning in the mid-70s. The Ohio opened its doors in 1980. Lyons began running the space in 1988 and later founded the Soho Think Tank in 1995, which has been the producing and managing body behind the theater ever since.

When I asked Lyons what the neighborhood was like at the time he started working there, he told me that one of his most vivid memories of those early days is of being mugged by four men right in front of the theater after returning from a run to the deli on the corner (back when there were such things as delis in Soho). He still bears the scar on his chin, marking the spot where the group split it open with what he thinks was a broom handle, though someone scared them off before they got his wallet or broke any bones. He also spoke about the Prince Street Bar at the corner with Wooster. Apparently it was a popular outpost for Ohio audiences and performers alike and many of the bartenders and wait staff ended up being in Ohio shows. In fact, because Lyons brought so much business into the place, he drank for free (hard not to be nostalgic for years of free drinks). But the Prince Street Bar is now a shoe store. As Lyons told me this he recalled a study he'd read that had determined that the number of shoe stores in a neighborhood is proportional to the value of the real estate. In other words, when there's a glut of shoe stores, the real estate is likely overvalued. I searched around for a reference to the study and couldn't find one, but given the countless shoe stores on Broadway, I would imagine there's something to the idea.

The Ohio's neighbors have included a handful of other important performing arts organizations such as The Kitchen, which used to be right at the corner with Broome, as well as the Performing Garage a bit further down Wooster, which rarely hosts performances any more, and more recently the gallery Deitch Projects, which closed [<http://www.thelmagazine.com/TheMeasure/archives/2010/05/27/deitch-projects-closes-saturday-heres-a-slideshow-of-14-years-of-murals>] in May.

If you've ever spent much time on the block of Wooster between Broome and Spring you know that most times of day there's not much of anything going on, particularly at night. Usually the most you'll find is a few stragglers walking their dogs while talking on their cell phones or drunk friends or couples stumbling around looking for a cab or a subway station. The occasional taxi rattling down the cobblestones is often the only reminder that you're actually in New York City.

Technically you still have to be an artist to live in Soho—the ordinance hasn't gone away. But it long ago stopped being enforced. And as far as I know, outside of a select group of art stars [<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/04/garden/04location.html>], there are very few (particularly performing artists) with \$4 million handy to toss around. It's also not entirely clear that the area provides much of interest besides the architecture. Not to mention Soho's almost complete lack of

essentials like laundromats, grocery stores, and other services—of course the wealthy in New York these days can rely almost entirely on delivery for just about anything—it's only we plebes who actually have to wash our own underwear. As Lyons said, "I love Soho, it's beautiful, but if I had \$4 million I'm not sure I would choose to spend it here."

About the only street life after the shops close for the night on Broadway is over at rare outposts like Cipriani's on West Broadway with its puffed up, Day Glo orange-colored patrons, sipping bellinis out at cafe tables even in the throws of winter, thanks to the likely not very environmentally friendly heaters that rage through the cold, with at least one Ferrari or other over-the-top luxury car double parked on the street in front. Now the neighborhood also sports the Trump Soho, along with the Soho Grand and other boutique hotels like the Mercer. At the height of a Saturday shopping crush, Broadway is jammed with suburban tourists racing to buy the same crap from Victoria's Secret that they could get back home but with the added bonus of twice the sales tax and a subtle coating of perfume imparted by the dust and stink of New York.

When I asked David Zar of Zar Properties, the new owner of the Ohio's building, what his plans for 64-68 Wooster Street were, he demurred, saying that the company's focus right now was just "to complete renovations on the building." Zar Properties acquired the building in January of 2009 for just under \$13 million, and soon after that they sent an eviction notice to Lyons for the Ohio Theatre. After negotiations, Lyons was able to extend the lease first for six months and then a year [<http://www.thelmagazine.com/newyork/the-artsy-ghosts-of-soho-past-buy-themselves-one-more-year/Content?oid=1199777>], but this summer's Ice Factory festival [<http://www.sohothinktank.org/SohoThinkTank-OhioTheatre51910.htm>] features the last performances that will take place in the space under the Ohio flag. Lyons' own piece *Nostradamus Predicts the Death of Soho* will be the last actual show of the festival, the last night of which (August 14) will also feature a benefit party for the theater.

Zar Properties began adding a number of new Soho properties to their already Soho- and Tribeca-heavy portfolio right around the time that the market started going sour. Among their recent acquisitions were both 38-40 Greene Street and 42-50 Greene Street, not too far away from the property at 57-63 Greene where the original Oelbermann, Dommerich, & Co store used to be (a property currently owned by a real estate holding company). In addition to flashy purchases in Soho and Tribeca, Zar Properties is also fond of flashy customers and press. Earlier this month Zar offered much-discussed-of-late basketball player LeBron James the Ohio's old rehearsal studio on the sixth floor of the building to use at his leisure for free [<http://174.129.176.119/newyork/articles/will-king-james-lebron-get-a-nyc-free-castle-if-he-signs-iwth-the-nets-or-the-knicks>] while he looked around for a possible place to live in the city. But those kinds of publicity stunts are nothing new for New York business people, regardless of the industry. I asked David Zar if there was a strategy behind their recent Soho purchases and once again he brushed the question off, saying they were just looking at what was available. But it took the company four

years to acquire the property at 64-68 Wooster from Hahn and Magistro and the space was never technically available, as it was never placed on the market, so it's hard to believe that they would work that hard for that long to get something for which they have no specific plans.

For now, all that those of us outside of Zar's offices can do is speculate about what the future of 64-68 Wooster will be. But its time as a hub for the arts is almost certainly over. In the meantime, Zar told me the current tenants were "free to stay," assuming they're protected by rent control or they're able to swallow the hefty rent increases.

The reality is that this kind of thing is old hat in Manhattan and Zar Properties isn't doing much different than centuries of deep-pocketed landlords have done before them. After all their job description includes one thing above all others—to make more money.

Similarly, the "Soho Effect" is largely a concept that relates to finding ways to increase the value of disused or depressed real estate. Artists are less a focus of the idea than a means to an end. Their persistence in the spaces they reshape is not really part of the equation, and Soho is now a shining example of that fact.

Unwilling to call it quits, the Ohio Theatre will in fact carry on, as Ohio Interrupted [<http://www.thelmagazine.com/TheMeasure/archives/2010/07/09/ohio-theater-saved-moving-in-with-3ld-for-three-year-residency>] at a very different downtown performing arts organization, 3LD [<http://3ldnyc.org/>], located just south of the World Trade Center site at 80 Greenwich Street. Press releases about the new partnership were sent out just a few weeks ago announcing that Lyons had signed on to produce work at 3LD for the next 3 years. Fortunately for both parties, the MTA rescinded an eviction notice [<http://www.thelmagazine.com/TheMeasure/archives/2010/05/17/mta-evicting-downtown-experimental-performance-space-3ld>] against 3LD at just about the same time as the Ohio's new plan was unveiled.

3LD, like a couple of other Lower Manhattan arts organizations such as Dance New Amsterdam (which is deep in arrears on their rent payments to the tune of over \$500,000 [<http://www.thelmagazine.com/TheMeasure/archives/2010/07/07/dance-new-amsterdam-facing-imminent-eviction>]), were offered money and special deals by the city to come into the area not long after the World Trade Towers fell in order to help repair and revitalize the area. The city recognized then that these groups could help at a time when many felt that the area surrounding the World Trade Center was not only unwelcoming but also unlivable. Now that things have changed for downtown and the original funds for the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan have started to dry up, the city isn't as interested in either the artistic products or the patronage that these organizations bring to the area, so it has apparently stopped caring about their fate. This is another telling example of artists being used as a means to an end that, once achieved, no longer involves the means.

When I asked Robert Lyons about the situation he and the Ohio will be in at 3LD, he put it fairly plainly: "I'm either entering into a great opportunity to help stabilize the situation or I'm headed out on a ship like the Titanic."

### **The Endgame, or the Next-Big-Change Game**

The many articles decrying the loss of the Ohio Theatre and lamenting the soullessness of Soho come from a genuine frustration about the lack of sustainable spaces for arts organizations, but they're also in some ways related to that flag-planting impulse that Lyons described earlier. Part of the disappointment ultimately reflects a kind of nostalgia for something that was never built to last. The reality is that there are very few neighborhoods in New York that are or ever have been static for any period of time and very few small arts organizations have figured out a business model that ensures a lengthy life for the organization or that includes a permanent space. Urban centers are almost constantly in flux—as illustrated by the earlier history exercise. Any kind of stasis in New York is fleeting. And those changes are driven less often by individual choices to move one place or another, but more often by much larger economic forces that dictate what kind of industry is or isn't driving both the city and the country (i.e. how many and what kind of jobs are available in a given place). If manufacturing had remained a major industry in New York, there's a good chance the artists wouldn't have been able to move into those lofts in the first place. There seems to be something similar at play way out in Jan Francisco' Bushwick right now

[\[http://www.thelmagazine.com/newyork/against-chelsea-a-diy-art-scene-grows-in-brooklyn/Content?oid=1624848\]](http://www.thelmagazine.com/newyork/against-chelsea-a-diy-art-scene-grows-in-brooklyn/Content?oid=1624848). But as I mentioned earlier, the "Soho Effect" is never the same twice, and it would be foolish to ignore the significant and long-standing residential populations in Bushwick that these artists are displacing, at the same time that some are indeed moving into former manufacturing sites.

Small towns are folding while cities across the US, including those in the middle states, are experiencing a population resurgence. Skilled labor, not manufacturing, is the law of the land these days, despite a smattering of boutique farms and handmade goods companies providing baubles for the wealthy in places like New York. Soho is now primarily luxury and commercial real estate. Some parts of Williamsburg have begun to take on a similar character, though Williamsburg is far more residential. But the real point is that more people are moving to New York City in general. Given that fact, over the long term it seems clear that housing stock will continue to become more expensive if left entirely up to the market, and that low income residents will continue to be pushed out if sustainable housing isn't mandated and development is left unchecked.

What's at issue, in a more quotidian sense, for many people, when it comes to these shifting neighborhoods, is the sense that they quickly become centers of homogeneity. While living with a bunch of people who look and think and act like you can be comforting and in stabilizing for some, it



ultimately promotes a conservative ideal of sameness and stasis—I think of that cloying, claustrophobic feeling that comes from being surrounded by so many similar people at the Bedford Avenue L stop.

Homogeneity is bad. It's bad on a biological level (hence the whole anti-incest thing), and it's bad for society. New ideas don't typically come of sitting around doing the same thing over and over again with the same group of people. I read the trend over the past decade toward handmade goods (particularly the vogue for crafts) as a reaction to the very real commercial homogeneity created by big box stores, global brands, and the ubiquity of American pop culture in many parts of the world. But it's unclear to me how deep the understanding that homogeneity is a negative thing runs with those who have embraced handmade goods. In other words, it's hard to decipher where that impulse slips from simply wanting to have something that no one else has to actually wanting to own something that was conceived of and created by another person with the aim of that thing enduring and that person being fairly compensated for their work instead of toiling in a factory setting as they race to create hundreds of the exact same thing so they can collect their meager pay for the day. The difference between those two mindsets represents a continuum, not a binary opposition. I just hope it skews toward the latter for most people.

The interesting part of this that relates back to real estate and the "Soho Effect" is that we're at a moment where some residents of largely homogenous neighborhoods are not only aware of the negativity of the situation, but also actively looking for ways to counteract it—though some are only interested in change that's palatable for them and controllable.

In a review from the June issue of *The Atlantic*

[<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/06/gentrification-and-its-discontents/8092/>], Benjamin Schwarz suggested that urban shopping malls like Soho, desperate for street cred and "realness," might begin to don a kind of bohemian drag, importing artists in order "to ensure that the affluent, well-educated denizens of said neighborhoods be provided with the stage props and scenery necessary for what [Jane] Jacobs and her heirs define as an enriching urban experience." The trouble is, rather than being ahead of his time with that assertion, Schwarz is actually behind the times. It's already happening.

An uneasy example of this can be seen in a recent *New York Times* article

[<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/20/realestate/20posting.html>] about a midtown developer offering six months rent to the Baryshnikov Arts Center [<http://www.bacnyc.org/>] for \$1, allowing them to house some of their visiting artists in the space. The deal will help BAC's bottom line in a significant way and so is answering a very real need, but the short-term nature of the deal hints at its publicity- and marketing-focused motivation. The unsavory feeling of the deal is most clearly reflected in the quote early in the piece by the building's director of planning that ends with this sentiment: "We're playing it by ear and monitoring how good these dancers look when they're walking through the

lobby." While I can only hope that the statement was made in jest, even as a joke it's hard not to see it as speaking to some kind of truth—that on some level a piece of this deal involves satisfying the developer's wet dream of a hot artist wandering the halls of his building and how the sexy bohemian-ness of that added perk will boost the value of his property. If artists-as-window-dressing and fantasy fulfillment is part of the future, we're not headed to a happy place, not to mention the situations that artists who don't live up to the ideal might face. Most of the best art is concerned with taking down ideals, not living up to them.

A similar, but more robust and sustainable deal between a real estate developer and an artist comes in the form of Douglas Steiner, who recently helped performer Elizabeth Streb purchase the building that she had formerly been renting

[<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/08/nyregion/08appraisal.html>]. The studio

[<http://www.streb.org/index.html>] is adjacent to a property that he's having trouble selling units in and he's hoping that Streb's continued presence will help lend his building a bit of character in a characterless corner of Williamsburg. Unlike all the subsidized rentals and temporary arrangements that most organizations get themselves into, Streb now owns her studio. She also already owns a Soho loft, presumably bought back when things were much cheaper.

The organization ArtHome [<http://www.arthomeonline.org/index.html>] focuses on the issue that ownership is one of the most important ways to counteract the dramatic and near constant migration of many New York City artists to ever-farther reaches of the city, in addition to seeking a concrete way to deal with the instability of life for most artists. The organization's founder Esther Robinson did a study of artists who were continuing to produce artistic work late into their lives and she discovered that one of the most important things those artists have in common is that they were able to purchase, were given, or inherited a home at some point in their career. On an organizational level, institutions like the HERE Arts Center [<http://here.org/>] and Dixon Place [<http://www.thelmagazine.com/newyork/do-it-all-at-dixon-place/Content?oid=1677603>] have also embraced ownership rather than rentals in the hope that this will provide them with greater longevity and stability.

Despite some of my initial misgivings about the above-mentioned partnerships between developers and artists, I have to wonder if there's something to them, particularly those like the one between Steiner and Streb. The reality is that there has to be, or inevitably will be a new model, as I'm skeptical that artists will simply give up on New York completely (though unusually high numbers of them are moving out).

The trick, of course, is that in today's world Streb is the exception and places like 3LD, Dance New Amsterdam, and the Ohio are the rule. A once benevolent landlord who gives these groups favorable terms either sells or stops being generous, the terms change, and the artists go, or struggle to find some way to stay. Ownership is, of course, not a panacea—building maintenance and property taxes

don't come cheap, mortgages can obviously become a significant source of financial stress, and the pressure to sell at the height of a market can be overwhelming. But it does seem like ownership might provide sustainability for some organizations.

What's key in this look at the "Soho Effect" as it radiates to these new partnerships is a recognition that people in power and those with money have expressed a clear need for artists. Yes, it's as a means to an end, but if they know that and we know that, why aren't more people leveraging that need to create long-term sustainability for the arts rather than accepting weak, short-term deals. More artists should be using their status and the willingness on the part of real estate developers to play ball not only to orchestrate better deals for themselves (instead of continuing to sell themselves short), but to also look for ways to help stimulate development that doesn't dismiss the prior existence of entire populations of people in these transitioning neighborhoods. If the rich people want diversity, and they've already shown that these days they're willing to pay for it, then we ought to be using that impulse to do something good in the world, rather than letting them get what they want cheaply and easily. Cities around the country and the world continue to look to artists as a means to an end, but the artists are not using the power they have in that situation to influence what's happening both for themselves and the communities around them. We're too used to taking whatever scraps they throw our way.

Even if these partnerships don't mark the beginning of a new model, the likelihood is that there is one coming. Just as every artist has a different combination of tricks that allow them to make ends meet, so too do arts organizations. The survival instinct among artists is sometimes frighteningly strong, even in the face of a near complete lack of support from local or national government and the dramatic loss of infrastructure like performance spaces that has taken place over the past twenty years. Art, after all, has been around much longer than New York City.

All of this is to say that despite the tongue-in-cheek title of Lyons' closing show for this year's Ice Factory, Soho will not die. Unlike people, Manhattan neighborhoods do not experience death—they get renamed, rezoned, rebuilt, and repopulated, but they don't cease to exist. The "Soho Effect" has run its course in that particular corner of the city and now the wealthy have another pert little playground to add to their portfolio. Across all five boroughs new residents continue to arrive on the city's doorstep. The city's major industries are in flux. Neighborhoods continue to change. Sustainable low income housing continues to be one of New York's major failings. There are many paths forward. I can't predict the future of either Soho or New York, but it certainly has one, regardless of any judgment that people might want to place on it or wishes they have that it would take a different course.