“The Secret Garden”: Artists, Bohemia and Gentrification in the Ouseburn Valley, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

Abstract

Research has pointed to the importance of artists in the early stages of gentrification however few studies have examined specifically the meaning of gentrification and place-change from the perspective of artists themselves, and few studies investigate the role of ‘creative city’ policies as unintended drivers of gentrification processes. This study generates insights into artists’ own views of gentrification processes within the gentrifying bohemia of the Ouseburn Valley in Newcastle upon Tyne in the North East of England. We stress that gentrification in this area cannot solely be understood as a process of displacement, but is also clearly linked to the growth of modes of regulation and commercialisation within social space. Increasing regulation, brought about by greater local state focus on ‘creative districts’ has impacted the Valley. Alongside this, projects of property development as well as a general growth in the popularity of the Valley as a nightlife consumption district and area of production for commercially-orientated creative class workers have challenged artists’ values of the area as a ‘secret garden’ where romantically inflected values of self-expression, autonomy, spontaneity and non-instrumental artist cooperation can be found.

Keywords: gentrification; artists; regulation; commercialisation; Newcastle upon Tyne.

Introduction

Recent ward changes have seen the Ouseburn Valley area of Newcastle upon Tyne become separated as an administrative boundary from Byker, to which it was traditionally (in both bureaucratic/administrative and social space) attached and incorporated into a new ward called 'Ouseburn'. These ward changes have placed the Valley more solidly within a middle class constituency, and have made the Valley symbolically central to this wider ward. These changes have, under the rubric of an 'entrepreneurial' mode of local governance (Jessop, 2013) made the task of rebranding the Valley as a creative centre easier, and the local authority has, since 2007, promoted the area as a 'creative hub' for the city.

These processes of commercialisation and regulation conflict with the creative-community values identified in many of the artists interviewed and as such, support previous work by Marti-Costa and Pradel i Miquel (2012) that suggests developments of the broader creative economy can often run counter to the values and interests of artists who have originally 'inscribed' a district with an aura of creativity. Our results also support Markusen's (2006) research that posits that working artists form a unique stratum of Florida's (2002) broad creative class but we add depth to Markusen's findings though a qualitative methodology that gives voice to individual artists, and we further explore their perceptions of gentrification processes, which Markusen only briefly covers in her work.

Artists have often been viewed as important actors within demand-side discussions of gentrification processes (Cole 1987, Ley, 1996, 2003). Ley (2003) further suggested that artists would be the first group of the middle classes, along with other cultural professionals closely aligned to artistic sensibilities and practices, to settle in areas that have previously been viewed as dilapidated or even dangerous to middle class inhabitation. Further, the cultural values that underpin the desire for the central city are well documented by Ley (1996) and others (Williams, 1986; Butler, 1997; Kaufmann,

2005; Nicolaides and Wiese, 2006) and pre-eminently include a dislike of, and sometimes, an exclusion from suburban living patterns.

These issues have informed processes whereby many generally liberal middle class groups (see Williams, 1986; Ley, 1996; Butler, 1997; Lees et al., 2008), from intellectuals (Kaufmann, 2004) to homosexuals (Lees, 2004; Castells, 1983), social improvers (Butler, 1997) to political radicals (Merrifield, 2002), and of course artists, musicians and performers have simultaneously derided 'the suburbs' and desired 'the city' (Stevenson, 2003). Of all of these groups, artists with romantic sensibilities, are seen both within gentrification theory and within the creative class thesis as the most important catalysts for attracting broader, again generally middle class, resident groups, creative workers and leisure users to areas (Florida, 2002; Peck, 2005).

Indeed, Smith (2002) pointed out that much gentrification literature does not, in fact, give voice to participants in the process, but, is rather, focused upon 'higher level' discussions of transformation and displacement. However, Forkert (2012) has given voice to Berlin and New York artists in relation to the process of gentrification and indeed Markusen (2006) does discuss artists within creative class contexts but more evidence of these important actors' views on these processes is warranted, as Markusen relies upon aggregate secondary data for her discussions. Further to this Markusen (2006) suggests that modern artists, as they often have critical positions, need to be treated more specifically in creative class research rather than simply being amalgamated with Florida's (2002) much broader cohort of creative workers. This stance has been supported more recently by Marti-Costa and Pradel i Miquel (2012) who demonstrate that the focus on developing a knowledge economy in Barcelona's Poblenou has led to displacement and fears over 'institutionalisation' on behalf of resident artists.

Artists then are important instigators of gentrification processes. This paper analyses the ways in which the spatial choices of artists in Newcastle upon Tyne, to locate themselves in the Ouseburn Valley, has led to this area becoming a popular destination for leisure, tourism, residential development and more commercially orientated creative businesses. This process in part has been influenced by the local authority's desire to promote the area as a 'creative hub' of the wider region; a region that has been beset by industrial decline, that became particularly acute in the 1970s and 1980s (Robinson 1988; Byrne 1999). It is argued that the Valley's development has led to the perceived loss of freedoms previously associated with the area, on behalf of resident artists, as the Valley becomes more regulated and commercialised through processes of gentrification. We thus argue that gentrification as a process affects the meanings of places to their residents as much as it involves issues of pricing of housing and services and of displacement. In particular, our findings suggest that it is the incursion of modes of regulation and commercialisation, both seen as challenges to artistic values of spontaneity and self-expression, that are particularly significant.

In spatial terms, the post-war countercultures, centred around values of individuality, autonomy and self-expression often included critiques of the 'regulated spaces' of Fordism (Allen, 1992) and 'technocracy' (Roszak, 1969) including the suburb (Nicolaides and Wiese, 2005) and modernist architecture where "spaces themselves were mass produced" (Gartman, 2009: 12). More recently, a broader desire for these places has given birth to, ironically for some authors, a form of mass produced Bohemia (Forkert, 2013), where desirable 'lifestyle spaces' have been as much manufactured by the local state as they are 'organically' or spontaneously developed through concurrences of market forces and cultural desires for inner urban life. The problematic 'mass production of Bohemia' and the 'management' of such spaces has been actively encouraged which charges the local state with the creation of cultural and social ambiences to attract creative human capital (Florida, 2002). Importantly for this paper, this relatively recent state intervention in the planning and promotion of bohemias can be linked to the desire to court artists and 'creatives' as

part of the creative class policy drive. Zimmerman (2008) has looked at how the local state has attempted to attract the creative class and human capital to cities and Rousseau (2009) has investigated the theme from the perspective of the general middle class that can be attracted to areas through selling the ambiences and, essentially, cultural appeals of creative lifestyles. These studies have looked at the activities of the local state, and with regard to Zimmerman's (2008) work the perceptions of local residents as to these activities. They have not though, specifically, analysed the views of artists themselves in relation to these processes, and as such our paper attempts to begin to fill this gap in empirical literature by giving voice to artists who are experiencing processes of gentrification.

Bohemian Spaces and the State

Bohemias, and the idea of ludic, 'alternative' and 'countercultural' urban spaces are clearly tied to the emergence of European Romanticism. Campbell (1987: 195) has described Bohemia as the "social embodiment of Romanticism", whilst Wilson (2000: 28) describes Bohemia as a "mythical construct" as well as a spatial one, that "modernized the aesthetic of Romanticism by applying it to urban life". Seigel (1986) further argues that Bohemia can be viewed as an extension of the newly won 'Bourgeois' freedoms of the later 18th century, beyond the realms of individual political and economic rights into the area of individualistic, emotive and semi-spiritual self expression through art (also see Blanning 2010).

The 'rift' between the cultural identities of 'Bourgeois' and 'Bohemian' can be identified as a continual theme within the modern period (Grana 1964; Goffman and Joy 2004), often appearing in different guises such as 'straight' and 'hip' (Becker 1951), and in relation to Newcastle upon Tyne's 1990s cultural milieu as 'mainstream' and 'alternative' (Chatterton and Hollands 2001).

The romantic aura of Bohemias as places of freedom and self-expression on behalf of the individual in the *modern* world has arguably been challenged by the closer alignment of these areas of western

cities with the rise of the *post-modern* 'creative economy'. Bohemias have thus become viewed by local actors as growth nodes for urban economies (Evans, 2009; Florida, 2002; DCMS, 2001), and for some authors, the division between bohemian and bourgeois cultural identity has become blurred, as, within creative economy working practices, bourgeois 'work ethics' and 'business acumen' and bohemian desires for 'creativity' become consummated (Brooks 2000; Ray and Anderson 2000; Florida 2002) . This very blurring of the identity of an 'artist' with the needs of consumer capitalism and of creative production though has been critiqued, by artists themselves, at least from the 1960s onwards. Julia Bryan-Wilson (2009) discusses how the New York based Art Workers Collective sought to maintain and focus a critical perspective for artists in the late 1960s and early 1970s seeking to challenge both cooptation and the legitimization of art through institutionalisation. These strands of 'artist as social critic', often infused with left-leaning and socially progressive political values, are also present in the work of Markusen (2006).

Even if there may be dissenting voices as to the meaning of post-modern creative work we can see that the broader conditions for the pursuit of urban growth through creativity can be seen in the well documented rise of global divisions of labour, and the role of western economies as creators of new markets and intellectual property within this division. Thus, 'creativity' and the human capital required to 'create' have become desirable objects of urban policy (Evans, 2009; Florida, 2002; DCMS, 2001). In post-Fordist, 'global' capitalism this has, more specifically, seen cities in the West, such as Newcastle upon Tyne, denied of their previous roles as centres of manufacturing and industrial production, move towards more 'entrepreneurial' modes of governance, that seek capital investment, tourist visitation and residential reinfusion through a variety of urban regeneration strategies (Harvey, 1989; MacLeod, 2001; Jessop, 2013).

For this reason Florida (2002) identifies artists as a 'core' of the creative class, tasked with the creation of a 'cosmopolitan', diverse and exciting city-scape that, in turn, will attract other segments

of the creative class to live in urban zones and hence turn cultural and creative capital into tangible economic growth. However, in reality, the increasing diversity of many European cities would appear to have as much to do with growth in low-wage service work as with the proliferation of creative districts (Nathan 2015), and is, arguably more importantly, related to challenges of governance of diversity and mobility, (Syrett and Sepulveda 2012). Thus Florida's version of 'diversity' is ironically, in itself, lacking in diversity somewhat, and further to this there is debatable evidence about the correlation between urban growth and Florida's metrics for neo-bohemias measured in levels of talent, tolerance and technology, (Nathan 2015).

The role of artists, as 'settlers' (or 'stormtroopers' of gentrification as described by Zukin (1989)) in previously denigrated (by the broader middle class) or dilapidated or 'dangerous' neighbourhoods or brown belt post-industrial areas in cities is not only limited to smaller scale or piecemeal middle class and creative class re-inhabitation of such districts. The presence of artists in areas of cities is often linked to the encouragement of larger scale investment and development in areas, and Zukin (1989) has shown how the location of artists in a district indicates to larger scale capital interests that an area is 'ready for development' as an attractive neo-bohemia. This status of artists as a figurative 'green light' for capital re-investment, as well as being important in the supply-demand debates over gentrification processes, is also prominent in the creative class discourse; but in a slightly different way. The creative class thesis places artists and bohemias as a *central strand* of urban growth agendas and as important *in and of themselves* (Florida, 2002).

Such processes of gentrification, through which areas may become 'less creative' as more 'mainstream' middle class residents with higher economic but lower cultural or 'creative' capital take over may in fact be seen as antithetical to the central tenet of the creative class thesis, and as such bohemias or creative quarters have increasingly been viewed by local governments as areas to be protected, maintained and nurtured (Evans, 2009), and the need to 'nurture' creative districts

and to have an adequate supply of cultural amenities to appeal to the locational preferences of creatives has empirically been demonstrated, in relation to Spanish cities, by Navarro *et al* (2014). Although proving controversial, it is clear that Florida's thesis has both reflected and promoted local state desires to harness the possibilities of creative production in Western cities. Evans (2009) and Atkinson and Easthope (2009) although critiquing some of the logic and possible social consequences of Florida's approach, clearly chart its influence on local policy directions and how it has alerted local state actors, and directed funding streams, to the growth potentials – real or imagined – of creative districts.

A number of cities, including the city in question - Newcastle upon Tyne in the UK, have attempted to maintain the aura of creativity associated with their creative districts or neo-bohemias. This has often involved a form of hands-off management in such areas – a form of 'planning through non-planning' where the governance of such European districts is founded within localised civic institutions so as to allow a sense of spontaneity and autonomy to be held within such areas (Krivy, 2013; Vanolo, 2013). The social and spatial preservation of the ideals of spontaneity, autonomy and possibilities for self-expression that are central to modern artistic identities and creative processes are often difficult to achieve however.

Attempts at maintaining the 'creativity' of such districts are challenged by a number of factors. Firstly, the desire of cities to brand and promote themselves as 'creative' means that artists and residents found in creative quarters become increasingly aware of the instrumentality of the district within wider urban growth agendas (Long, 2009). This challenges another value set of modern artists – that of authenticity and authenticity of place, and concerns for 'authenticity' of community are ones clearly shared by other groups of middle class urban dwellers such as 'social preservationists' (Brown-Saracino, 2004). Secondly, the process of 'cultural desire' (Caulfield, 1989), in demand-side gentrification theory, manifest in the want of the broader middle class to be associated with the

lifestyles and spaces of modern artists, often means that bohemias become subject to both population pressures in terms of leisure consumption (bars, restaurants etc.) and to property speculation in terms of both household and commercial interest in housing stock. These two factors lead to interest from the local state in terms of regulation, and particularly for regenerating or gentrifying brownfield sites and as found in our case study discussed below, the increased visibility of planning regulation and large-scale capital investment.

Case Study Location: The Ouseburn Valley in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK

The policy of moving towards the 'creative city' must be viewed against the broader context of Newcastle upon Tyne's (and the broader conurbation and region's) industrial decline from an area of shipbuilding, coal extraction and manufacturing towards a service economy (Robinson 1988; Byrne 1999). This shift initially showed an emphasis on the city, and the Quayside area of the city in particular (that is geographically adjacent to the Ouseburn Valley), as a zone of nightlife consumption (Wilkinson 1992; Chatterton and Hollands 2001). This branding of Newcastle upon Tyne as a 'party city' was then followed by developments appealing to 'higher' cultural capitals such as the SAGE music centre and the BALTIC centre for contemporary art. Although these developments are actually based on the Gateshead side of the River Tyne (opposite the Newcastle Quayside) they are clearly marketed as destinations in the Newcastle city region by the NewcastleGateshead Initiative – the immediate area's DMO. The shift towards the creative city in Newcastle upon Tyne echoes what Hannigan (2007) describes as a new '*Eldorado*' in urban economic planning – a desire to move beyond 'urban entertainment districts' (Hannigan 1998; 2007), and 'cultural' tourist attractions towards 'creativity'. It is this latest mode of development that the local authority in Newcastle upon Tyne has concentrated upon through its support of the case study area of the Ouseburn Valley.

The Ouseburn Valley itself lies approximately one mile to the east of Newcastle city centre and, as stated above, borders on the Quayside area of the city. It is one of the oldest industrial districts in Newcastle upon Tyne and can be viewed as one of the most important areas for the generation of the industrial revolution in the North East of England (Morgan, 1995). The Valley has undergone residential clearance – particularly in the 1930s and 1960s – and, due to being a tipping ground in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, undergone significant changes in its landscape. Indeed much of the 'Valley' and its immediate outlying areas have been re-landscaped, (Ouseburn Farm Management Committee, 2005), and the Valley is now a mixture of green spaces, industrial age buildings, a number of garage and scrap businesses, bars and restaurants and a sizeable animal population due to the presence of the Ouseburn Farm. The Valley is straddled by one road and one rail bridge (the latter carrying the Tyne and Wear Metro service). At its furthest reach the Valley sees the Ouseburn River empty into the River Tyne.

[Insert figure 1 here]

After a number of developments in the Valley in the 1980s, including the establishment of 36 Lime Street Artists' Cooperative, at the disused Cluny Whiskey warehouse, in the early part of the decade and the establishment of Polestar recording and practice studios in 1984 (Langley and Robinson N.D.; Ouseburn Trust 2012), the Ouseburn Trust was formed in 1995.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

The Trust was formed around an effort to claim funds from the third round of Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) bidding (Ouseburn Trust, 2012), a regeneration funding process that allowed local authorities in England, in conjunction with voluntary sector and private sector interests, to bid for

central government fund matched and project-tied proposals, in the aim of developing deprived areas (Communities and Local Government, 2007). The Trust's application, supported by the local authority and associated interests was successful and the £2.5m gained was used to invest in upgrading of infrastructures in the Valley (Ouseburn, 2008; Newcastle City Council, 2003). Around this time the Ouseburn Valley began to re-develop at a much faster pace, with an increase in both public and private funding in the area leading to a raft of new developments aimed at encouraging leisure and cultural consumption in the Valley and the encouragement of creative industries in the area.

The number of art galleries and work spaces has increased dramatically in the period following the millennium. The Mushroom Works gallery opened in 2004 and the Biscuit Factory and Gallery in 2006, and although both of these spaces could be said to be outside of the 'Lower Ouseburn Valley Proper', they are clearly in terms of economic and social alignment very much part of the area's creative industry scene. Spaces for creative industries also expanded during this period and the former Maling pottery works, Hoults Yard, was reopened as a workspace for creative digital industries, self-described as a "funky and flexible office complex with character" (Hoults Managed Workspace Ltd, 2008). In 2011 the former Maynards toffee factory opened as a hub for creative industries, selling its office space to prospective tenants, in a similar vein to Hoults, on the flexibility of space available and twenty four hour access to offices, allowing responsiveness to uncertain working patterns and staff requirements.

[Insert Figure 3 here]

By 2003 the local authority estimated that because of 'locational advantages' some 300 businesses, mainly in the creative industries, and in leisure provision, were located in and around the Valley (Newcastle City Council, 2003). (A more recent document estimates the number of businesses in the

Valley to be now nearer 400 (Newcastle City Council, 2012)). 2009 also saw the creation of an Ouseburn Ward in the city, for the first time, as the city's electoral boundaries were changed and the completion of a barrage in the Ouseburn River, designed to allow for more use of the river for leisure purposes (Newcastle City Council, 2008). The naming of a ward 'Ouseburn' is testament to the growing importance of the Valley in the city, and the fact that it had, through the early 2000s come under a more focussed gaze as an area for development and growth. In total the local authority estimates that since 2003 the Lower Ouseburn Valley has seen £67 million of investment with fifty physical regeneration projects being undertaken in this period (Newcastle City Council, 2012).

During the 2000's as creativity was being seen as a viable growth strategy for western cities within the global division of labour, we can see that the growth potential of the Valley in relation to wider economic regeneration agendas became more focused, and the Ouseburn area, the largest cluster of four creative nodes identified within the Newcastle and Gateshead urban area (EKOS 2012), was identified as "clearly the creative heart of Newcastle Gateshead" (BNG, 2007: 17). This same latter report recognises the importance of historicity and heritage, plus affordability in attracting artists, more commercial creative industries, and wider consumption on behalf of broader reference group attracted to such lifestyles. As such we can see clearly how regeneration policies can be tied to the cultural capital of certain social groupings and the economic possibilities found within the gentrification or regeneration processes discussed earlier.

The Newcastle city authority, in combination with the Ouseburn Trust produced the most recent planning documentation in relation to the Valley in May 2012. This policy assessment and plan, the *Ouseburn Regeneration and Action Plan* (Newcastle City Council, 2012), suggests that the Valley is now well and truly integrated into the growth agenda of the local authority. The latest document suggests that, although funding issues in the public, private and third sectors, due to the recessionary tendencies in the economy and the drive towards fiscal constraint, will be affected, the

local authority wishes to "enable the area to use its assets so that it is globally competitive in a global knowledge based economy" (Newcastle City Council, 2012: 5). There are also recommendations from a separate report that the creativity of the urban region as a whole should be mobilised through greater networking and cross-working between individual businesses and sector organisations (EKOS 2012). Newcastle City Council (2012) also strongly point to the local authority's desire to grow creative employment in the area due to "continuing demand for artists' workspace" (Ibid, 26). This document also stresses the fact that *residential* development in the Valley is to be encouraged. At the present time there is construction underway adjacent to the Toffee Factory in the Valley, of 76 'eco-homes', and there is a current proposal to build residential properties with artists' workspaces in another area of the Valley (Ouseburn Trust 2015). These dwellings have further instigated debate as to what is the use and character of the Valley.

[Insert Figure 4 here]

Research Design and Methods

The empirical basis of this paper is founded in 18 months of interview and participant observation research, in 2010 and 2011, in the Ouseburn Valley area of Newcastle upon Tyne. In-depth semi-structured Interviews that lasted between 20 minutes and over one and a half hours were conducted with 24 people; a mixture of working artists (who work in the Valley) and broader users of the Valley. Many of the interviews were generated through formal requests for interview (email requests) and further interviewees were contacted through a process of 'snowballing' or generating further contacts from initial respondents. This qualitative, semi-structured approach, granted the research project an *emic* epistemological stance, giving priority to the views of the workers and users of the Valley in relation to their work and leisure practices; and importantly allowed their views to guide the conceptual focus of the research. Half of the interviewees (12) came from 36 Lime Street Artists' Cooperative and Studios – the oldest and most central (figuratively and

geographically) artists' workspace in the Valley, that has been in operation since the mid 1980's. Other interviewees (four) came from three other studios around the rim of the Valley – two from Test House Five, and one each from The Biscuit Factory and Gallery and the now closed Artworks Gallery. Other interviewees included the area's former arts officer, a member of the Ouseburn Festival Committee, the bar manager of the Cumberland Arms pub in the Valley with the remaining participants being made up of users of the Valley. The age range of the interviewees was between 30 and 60 years old, and the gender mix was 13 male and 11 female. A notable number of the working artists in the Valley either had in the past, or still had, working positions outside of their artistic production. These roles were overwhelmingly found in public sector professions such as teaching/lecturing, social work and arts administration work, and although the political leanings of the interviewees were never explicitly discussed, their work roles and general values would indicate a liberal-left persuasion in nearly all of them, and this general politics of artists is further supported by Markusen (2006).

Participant observation of activities in the Valley was also conducted, with visits to the Valley's bars and events, as well as through volunteering as a member of the Valley's oral history society giving opportunities for the generation of analytically relevant field notes and allowing for meeting new contacts and arranging more formal interviews with willing interviewees. Participant observation was an important process as it allowed us a broader view of behaviours within and uses of the Valley; and the fact that new contacts could be created outwith snowballing and formal requests for interview added greater validity and breadth to our understanding of views of place change in the area.

An iterative approach to data collection was used in this study; the economic and social practices of the interviewees and participants, and importantly the *meaning* of these practices that emerged through initial interviews and visits to the Valley were focused around a number of themes that

were then further explored in later interviews and visits to the Valley. Through our interviews we adopted a reflexive and self-aware stance, understanding that the process is not based on a simple access to the interviewee's reality but to a performance of roles, with socially constructed apriori expectations. This means that only the performance of 'artist' in the interviewees' identities was really engaged with, and a such a more holistic understanding of the respondent could not be illuminated; essentially we concede that in many ways interview processes are 'unnatural' and lead to the repetition of and creation of selective discourses. Nevertheless, emergent themes were coded around three main axes of: perceptions of the Ouseburn Valley in the past – particularly as a space of freedom of expression and spontaneous artistic activity – a 'secret garden'; 'gentrification' as a process of regulation and 'gentrification' as a process of commercialisation.

Discussion: Ouseburn as a Bohemian 'Secret Garden'

A Changing Social Space

During the interview with Respondent 12, a filmmaker and community activist in the Valley, she suggested that the Ouseburn Valley was something of a "secret garden". Similarly, Respondent 6, a photographer and heritage volunteer at the trust argued that "[t]he fact that no-one knows about it is part of its charm". Although the Ouseburn Valley may adopt a lower profile than other areas of the city, and may even be unknown to people who have lived in Newcastle their whole lives (as we found on explaining the research to people on occasion), the Valley is seen by all of the interviewees to have become much more visible in recent years. Even at the turn of the millennium, the Valley was seen as "much more underground" and "under the radar" by respondent 7 and respondent 9 respectively.

As has been discussed in the case study description, the Valley has, since the millennium, seen many changes and commercial growth and greater interest on behalf of the local state. As such, the Valley in the 1990s was described by Respondent 10 as a "marginal space" with more "freedoms" than at present and it was the encroachment of bureaucratic regulation as well as property development for a more "affluent class" (Respondent 18) that was seen to be the main driver of place-change in the Valley. In the past the industry-age aesthetic, that the Valley still contains and now actively preserves in a more dilapidated form, and in a more ignored and run-down general environment also spoke of an undisciplined, unobserved and 'liberating' 'counter-space' - one may have been surrounded by junk but one was free to 'play' within in it. As Edensor (2005: 833) has observed in his analysis of industrial ruins:

> The lack of intensive performative and aesthetic regulation in these spaces makes evident the hidden excess of the urban order, the surplus of production, the superfluity of matter and meaning which violates order and disrupts the capitalist quest for the always new. Here the supposedly obsolete and irrelevant are not so tirelessly dispensed with.

Respondent 3, a founding settler artist in the Valley suggested that in the mid to late 1980s:

> It was an incredibly different place then to how it is now… it was a kind of fairly derelict area and nobody else lived here …there was a kind of richness to that which I am actually quite drawn to – it was also very cheap.

Respondent 3 thus emphasises the emptiness of the area in the past but also that financially it made sense as an artist to locate there. The decayed sense of place of the Ouseburn Valley in the 1980s was also commented on by Respondent 1, an artist who commented that in the mid-1980s, around the time when the Valley's first 'creatives' settled in the area: "it was very derelict down here, underused - I think there was a pub and a transport company…a lot of very derelict buildings." Further to this description of the dereliction, Respondent 1 suggested that even before the mid-

1980s, when she was an arts student, this dereliction was attractive in its marginality as: "one was always on the lookout for erm different more exciting areas than mainstream areas.", and these views clearly echo the function of modern Bohemia as an 'excitement', at least putatively divorced from the prosaic and seen-to-be banal realms of the 'Bourgeois' (Seigel 1986; Wilson 2000). The ambience of the Valley as a place that exuded difference from the elsewhere was also further commented upon by Respondent 18:

> erm I've been aware of the Ouseburn Valley as a place of creativity since I was a student back in the erm 1980s… it used to be a place which was attractive in its sort of slight 'decayedness'

Respondent 18 here, reflecting Ley's (1996) earlier discussion of artists as the 'first wave' of middle class re-inhabitants of such areas, clearly valued the 'slight decayedness' of the Valley as it began to become populated with pioneer artists. He also signified that it was a specific group of people "cultural creatives" that were drawn to the marginality of the Valley during this period as it offered a distinctive ambience and opportunity for creative working and self-expression in a less regulated and largely ignored and forgotten space that was different to other areas of Newcastle.

The 'scruffy' nature of the Valley in the past and its attractiveness due to dereliction was also commented upon by two working artists who have had associations with the Valley from the early to mid-1990s. Respondent 15 noted that the Valley during this period:

> …was scruffy it was, as you came down Tanner's [Stepney] Bank there was lots of second hand car dealers and beaten corrugated iron sheeting and it was great. [There was] quite a bit of dereliction I suppose… well I'm a bit nostalgic for some of that 'cos I don't want the place to become too gentrified really and I have a fear of that and other artists do as well.

Here the respondent makes the link between change and gentrification processes. The disappearance of such breakers yards and car dealerships / garages, for Respondent 10 has been part of a steady process of change that he himself, like Respondent 15, described as gentrification:

> the studio I was in was obviously at very good rates…and because there was a scrapyard next door then I started using scrap metal… and now there's only one scrapyard left and all of the breakers yards have shut because gentrification occurred.

Moreover, the scrap yard worlds of the Ouseburn provided the raw materials for such artists to experiment with. This is highlighted in the Ouseburn artist's reflections on the "profusion of urban resources spaces, things, meanings that can be utilised in innumerable ways" (Edensor, 2005: 833). Although a number of scrap and garage businesses still occupy areas of the Valley, particularly in the Foundry Lane Industrial Estate, a portion of the Valley conspicuous by its lack of the 'industrial gothic' and preponderance of 'non-creative' ventures, displacement is also hinted at by the Ouseburn Trust (2008), and supports other research (Zukin, 1989; Curran, 2007) that suggests that small scale industry and service ventures often come into conflict with artists in the property market as both are often interested in renting similar sized work-spaces.

Perceived Loss of Creative Community Spirit

To many of our interviewees, the derelict and decayed aspects of the Valley in its earlier years as an 'artists' colony' held significations of the broader possibilities of a creative community in more or less unregulated space. This possibility was often seen to have been more possible in the past, rather than in the present, where for Respondent 10 "the machine has taken over", referring to the process of gentrification. This is important as it demonstrates the perceived effects of the Valley's increased profile and the concomitant regulations and commercial speculations wrought by local government

interest and property development on the social fabric of the area. This and the increasing popularity of the Valley's facilities and pubs by the more general population, has for a number of the artists had certain effects. One of these effects is the perceived loss of, or lessening of, an autonomous sense of community, where things could be done without deference to bureaucratic regulations or outside bodies – this sense of regulation is seen to have increased in recent years. Respondent 3, a self-recognised 'founder' of the Valley's artistic community suggested that in the 'old days':

> There was a lot of anarchic quite creative stuff going on [with] people taking risks and doing things themselves and [the spirit] at that time was in terms of a lot of cooperation and idealism [and it was] very different to how things are now – an entirely different kind of mind-set for what kind of motivated people.

Whilst clearly nostalgic, Respondent 3 suggested that there was also a "political" orientation to the artists' collective in the Valley in the early days. This was aimed at a communitarianism of creative workers that sought to exist outside of dependence upon the state or other bodies in terms of "grant aid" – in other words there was a movement towards an autonomous creative community:

> we wanted a place independent of say grant aid 'cos with grant aid you were always dependent on that and if you got that cut you were stumped… so it was to try to remove yourself from that a bit and provide other cheap workspace for other people like ourselves who also wanted to put in effort to make a good place that was cooperative that was cooperatively run with a vision which was about creativity and all of those things and it was set up in a very idealistic fashion… there was a great generosity of spirit which was fantastic at the time.

Although Respondent 5 suggested that there was still a "social politics in the Valley… about artistic values and people lending a hand" for a number of the respondents with perhaps longer

associations with the area than Respondent 5, this communitarian and self-reliant ethic was, as Respondent 3 suggests above, perceived to be more evident in the past. Respondent 10 suggested that there was a "make and mend do" attitude in the Valley in the early to mid-1990s, and that the Valley's artistic community was "more resourceful [with] informal networks rather than organisational structures", and this comment can be read as a reflection of artists' fears of 'institutionalisation' (Marti-Costa and Pradel i Miquel, 2012).

Respondent 10 however did make an interesting, and ironically intoned, observation about his desire for community and grassroots activity in the Valley in some ways echoed aspects of the 'Big Society' policy being espoused by the newly incumbent (as part of a political coalition) Conservative-led government, where third sectors and 'entrepreneurial' community groups were to be encouraged to become involved in local development and activity – rather than relying solely on the local state (for a critical perspective on the Big Society see Scott 2011). Respondent 7 argued however that even at the turn of the millennium, the Valley had a greater degree of autonomous qualities; "the DIY spirit", allowing for bonfires "that wouldn't be allowed now" (Respondent 20) - at summer solstice as well as warehouse parties in empty buildings. However, the sense of community politics in the Valley is much less activist than in other cases of gentrification such as in Chicago where community organisations based upon ethnicity and social class have done battle over urban space (Wilson and Grammenos, 2005).

Respondent 7 succinctly summarised the link between the aesthetics of decay found to a greater degree in the Valley's past and the freedoms of sensibility and non-regulation that these aesthetics conferred:

> before it was quite derelict so you could do stuff…erm around the nineties and early noughties it was a lot more like DIY style…and there used to be wood barbecues under the

> trees and I dunno if you'd be able to get away with that now… at first it was really underground…it just felt like you could do anything you know… and I haven't felt that for ages you know…

The sense of freedom and being able to collectively inscribe place-meanings onto the Valley in relation to a relatively small and relatively autonomous group of artists through the practices described above is seen to have been lessened in recent years. This lessening of spontaneous freedoms has arguably occurred in the Ouseburn Valley against the canvass of a number of 'global' neoliberal urban trends discussed below.

Commercialisation and Regulation

As was discussed in the literature review, denigrated space can become revalorised by artists and members of the liberal middle class – who often hold the artist and his/her lifestyle in high esteem. Once 'cleansed' and 'sanitised' such space is then 'opened up' to perhaps wealthier but more conservative social groupings. It is through such transitions that many consumption side theorists (Williams 1986; Caulfield 1989; Ley 1996; 2003; Butler 1997; Bridge 2006) describe a classic stage-model of gentrification. However gentrification is a messy process with different groups often still co-inhabiting gentrifying spaces (Lees et al., 2008; Rose, 1984; Bounds and Morris, 2006). Indeed it is in these contacts between different uses and meanings of space by different groups of people that conflict arises. The increasing popularity of the Valley as a place of both cultural production and consumption held for many of the artists' negative or ambivalent consequences. Respondent 5 commented:

> err personally I'm probably holding quite strong opinions but I feel like in the last year there's been more offices opening – more office space in the Ouseburn and I feel like the increase in people wearing suits has really lowered the tone.

This comment can be related to embodied aspects of gentrification such as dress, bodily movements and the deportment of self and others in contested urban space (Wilson and Grammenos, 2005). The "increase in people wearing suits", and their symbolic representations of a more regulated and commercialised 'outside world' encroaching into the (previously to a greater degree) seen-to-be marginal and 'countercultural-creative' place of the Valley as commented on by Respondent 5 found expression in different ways by other respondents. Respondent 1 commented that, in terms of places where artists have originally 'settled', "things get over developed, prices go up, the quality goes down [and] artists want to sort of unconsciously move away from these places and not be part of the mainstream". Here we again see the aesthetic desire for 'auratic place' over 'mainstreamed spaces' with concomitant connotations of blandness, regulation and commercialisation.

Respondent 3 also drew a clear link between greater interest in the Valley and both local authority regulation and commercial speculation, as pressure for space drives up prices in the previously marginalized and de-valorised urban space of the Valley. Respondent 10 also commented on the general move towards greater regulation in the Valley, ironically, citing the designation of the area as a conservation area in 2003 as one of the main reasons for this greater regulation and bureaucratic involvement in the Valley. Respondent 10 suggested that, the "make and mend do" of the Valley and 'mechanical solidarities' of earlier groups of artists and heritage volunteers had given way to deference to "organisational structures". Respondent 10 suggests that "you can't just clag [put together] a fence together with some old pallets… you've got to then apply for money and then jump through hoops". Here we see the ironic process whereby heritage impulses and the desire to

preserve ‘place’ and vernacular architectures on the one hand (the very aesthetics valued by many of the working artists) eventually become linked to regulatory and bureaucratic structures (the very structures putatively opposed by many of the artists) through the incorporation of such agendas into the policy schemas of the neoliberal local state (see Peck, 2005).

In relation to commercialisation as well as regulation, Respondent 7 further suggested, with a sense of exaggeration and irony, that the Valley was “all about money now”, and for her this was linked to both the rise of the ‘creative economy’ and the desirability of the Valley as a leisure space in terms of “countless new creative industries [and] a lot of council development and development for tourism and visitors.” The nexus of leisure and creative industry growth with the city authority as a conduit of the facilitation of both processes was seen by Respondent 7 to have had effects on prices in the Valley with rising costs of studio rentals, and again hints at conflicts within this subset creative class (Markusen, 2006; Marti-Costa and Pradel i Miquel, 2012). This focus on the area by the local authority and developers has also wrought greater limitation on spontaneous and creative activities “We’ve had to become much more regulated and I just think it’s a sign of the times with health and safety and other things”.

The growth of the Valley as a tourist and leisure resource has been heralded as a great success by the local authority, with some 400,000 ‘visitors’ a year seen to have ‘used’ the area by recent measures (Newcastle City Council, 2012), but for some respondents the increasing popularity of the area challenges the unique place meanings that the artistic community holds towards the area. Respondent 5 commented that “there’s this sort of beer garden mentality [appearing] and y’know it’s all the excesses of consumerism… you get an influx of people who don’t share anything of the cultural identity of the Valley”. Respondent 10 also commented that the Ouseburn Festival had

changed from being a time for “meaningful grassroots development” to being a long weekend of drinking “for the benefit of the licence trade”.

As well as the increased popularity of the Valley amongst leisure users, a number of the interviewees also commented on the effects of the Valley being actively promoted as a creative hub, and the idea that this promotion and the influx of “countless creative industries” (Respondent 7) into the Valley has changed its character. These ideas often related to the perception that the newer ‘creative industries’ in the area were more business orientated that the initial settler artists and the ‘individually creative’ or more purely ‘self-expressive’ artists that were interviewed who were often involved in the production of works of art by hand for market sale rather than working on commission for larger organisations or companies.

These orientations are important as they hint at divisions *within* the putative ‘creative class’ (Florida, 2002) in the Valley, and suggest that many of the working artists, in terms of their desire for creative community, welfare uses of the arts and the production of auratic objects and desire for place meaning (with specific aesthetic signifiers), may in fact form a ‘special’ and quite distinct segment of the (too generally) prescribed creative class. This is of course by no means a clear-cut counter-distinction, but in relation to this sense of distinction within this ‘creative class’, and hence again supporting Markusen (2006), Respondent 18 commented on the development of the Valley in recent years suggesting that:

> Erm [In recent Years] a different…tier of creative workers have moved in and they’re more err I suppose economically savvy… [They are] not necessarily artists that want to change the world…[they are] more commercially orientated.

These perceptions therefore point to fact that many artists in our research, at least putatively and in their role of 'artist' in our interviews, reject the notion of the 'neo-bohemian', as discussed by Florida (2002), Anderson and Ray, (2000) and Brookes (2000) as possessing an equity of business orientation and creative desire. For many of the interviewees, the identity of 'artist' retains the critical distance as discussed by Bryan-Wilson (2009) in relation to the Art Workers Coalition of late 1960s New York.

Nevertheless, The Valley as a centre of creative industry has been heavily promoted by the local authority in recent years. The Valley now boasts over 400 creative businesses, and the local authority, through promotion and development can be in some ways seen to have, through public art and the branding of the area as a leisure/heritage nexus, embraced Zukin's (1989) 'artistic mode of production' to signify a post-industrial area ripe for property development and the knowledge and creative economies. The incorporation of the Valley into 'post-modern' growth objectives, where intellectual property right (through creative industry development), the experience economy (through leisure and heritage), and the economy of symbolic distinctions (through the production and consumption of bespoke artworks) all meet, has meant greater local authority promotion of the area as a 'creative hub' for the wider city and the North East Region. As the above factors have been seen to be key to economic growth in later capitalism, it is logical that the local authority has become much more observant of this 'creative space', and as such, over the last ten to fifteen years, the Valley has been enveloped by policy objective linked to growth in these areas.

Conclusions

This research has contributed the voices of working artists to the debate over the meaning and processes of artist led gentrification, a voice that, even though artists are seen as central actors to

this process (Cole 1987, Zukin 1989, Ley 1996, 2003), has often been ignored (Smith 2002) . We have argued that gentrification is not only a process of displacement (although some evidence of displacement has been found in the Ouseburn Valley) but is also a process of commercialisation and regulation of, in this case, a formerly dilapidated or brownfield, space. Artists can often be central to the processes of gentrification and regeneration that may take place in such areas and it is their presence which also signifies that an area of a city may become the focus for a creative city strategy. As such our study has clearly outlined the role that creative city strategies can have in promoting forms of gentrification, even if it is their desire to preserve the quirky or 'authentically creative' sense of place that such policies rely on.

As well as giving voice to artists within gentrification processes we have also illustrated, from a qualitative standpoint, how many of the working artists in our sample group reject, at least nominally, in their role of 'artist' in our interviews, the construction of the post-modern bohemia – one that is linked to creativity, and creative city policies, as a tool of economic development. This critique, illustrated by our qualitative findings clearly gives support to the research of Markusen (2006) in that individual artists need to be considered as a special segment of Florida's (2002) creative class. Our work also supports the studies of Long (2009) and Marti-Costa and Pradel i Miguel (2012) in suggesting that when artists begin to sense instrumentality at work in 'their' bohemias they begin to find them less appealing. The desires for autonomy, certain freedoms of expression and affordable work space mean then that for working artists, the pursuit of creative city policies following Florida's model may, ironically, render creative quarters less attractive to the very group that has founded them, and that is tasked by Florida with giving such spaces their vital appeal.

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