

# BOSWIJK: TOWN OF THE WOODS

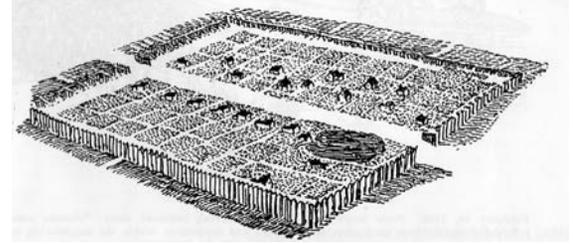
## *life in the borderlands*

∞ scrapworm ∞

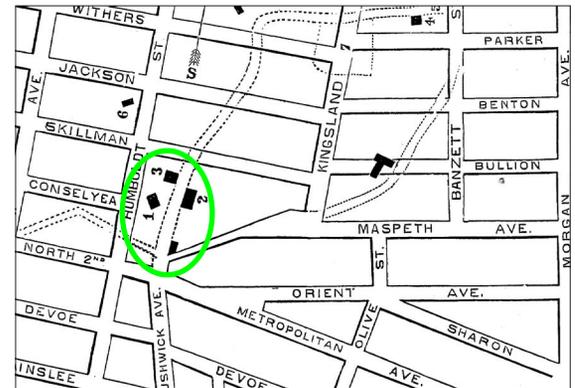
Cited nostalgically as an *ancient township* by the Brooklyn Eagle (1946), the original boundaries of the “Town of Bushwick” contained Greenpoint, Williamsburg, the old Eastern District, and the neighborhood of Bushwick-- extending all the way south to Highland Blvd. Dutch settlers built *Boswijk(c)*, “town of the woods” in a square clearing of land far to the north of contemporary Bushwick proper. At the trail-head for Bushwick Avenue, the 1661 *het dorp* site (trans. “the village”) was bisected by a road to be called Wood Point: now the location of triangle islands created by Metropolitan, Bushwick, and Maspeth Avenues converging with Humboldt and Conselyea Streets. The early settlement was surrounded by a high fence of local logs; and earliest communal structures included a civil building, church, school, and cemetery (the remains of 250 original settlers were moved in 1879).

The earliest Norwegian, Swede, and Dutch pioneers of these lands (Dutch West India Company purchase, 1638), did not create a civil settlement until ordered by Peter Stuyvesant to concentrate in 1660 due to conflicts with Indians. The village remained Dutch despite the British conquest of 1664. Hosting Hessian mercenaries within a lively community neither patriot nor loyalist, *Boswijk*, *Breukelen* has welcomed expatriate populations throughout nearly 400 years of boundary drawing, patent filing, and civil annexation disputes.

The creek-canal area lands were caught between the rapidly urbanizing Cities of Brooklyn and Williamsburgh until 1854, having been the subject of heated eastern edge boundary disagreements with Newtown (*Middenburg*, *Maspat*, *Nieuwe Stad*), Queens since the mid-1600s.



“Bushwick Green / *Het Dorp*” woodcut (ABOVE)<sup>1</sup>



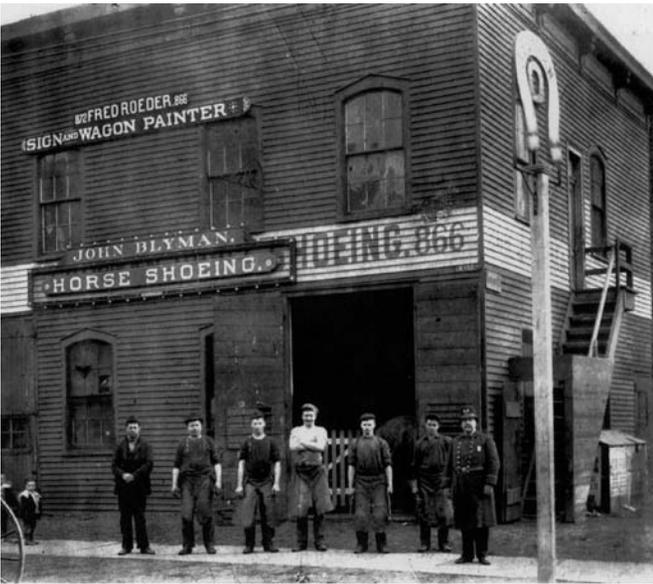
MAPS (LEFT TO RIGHT, ABOVE, THIS PAGE & OPPOSITE): “*Het Dorp*” ( IN MAP 1 1:Church; 2: Town Civil House, 3: School, 6: Conselyea House)<sup>2</sup>; Sanborn Insurance Map, 1886; Sanborn Insurance Map 1915-1933; TeleAtlas/Sanborn, 2009<sup>3</sup>. #1-3 ACQUIRED BY CHURCH BY 1886. CONSELYEA ST. EXTENDED BY 1915.

# ORIGINAL *bushwick green*



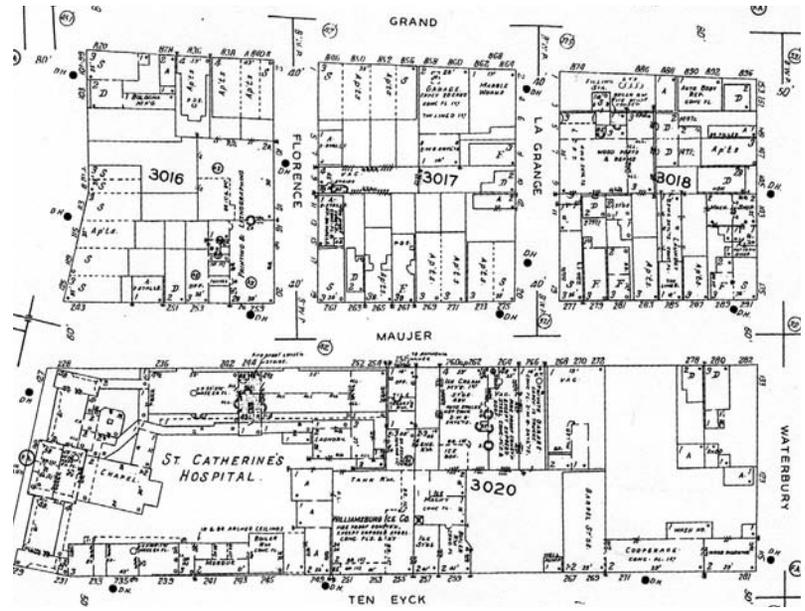
Now considered East Williamsburg or North Bushwick, *Boswijk's* original *het dorp* was populated by the Devoe and Conselyea families; neighboring settlers included Schenck, DeBevoise, Thursby, Boerum, Vandervoort, Polhemus-Wycoff, Harrison, Conklin, and Bogaert farms. The meadow marshlands of Newtown Creek's terminating streams were poised for agricultural success. Often descended from long-time Brooklyn families, subsequent "old Eastern District" land owners included John Devoe, Andrew Conselyea, Abraham Meserole, William Powers, James Scholes, and Abraham Remsen; however, the eastern border of an expanding "Village of Williamsburgh" remained drawn at the straightened Bushwick Ave.

James Riker's 1706 "*Bushwicklands*" were separated from the original *het dorp* site by the estuary wetlands that would evolve from a creek into fetid industrial transportation canals (from the Dutch *keil*, trans. "body of water"). As the old farms were surveyed and sold as city-block lots, area borderlands became an underbelly serving the 19th century constructions of the "English Kills Canals," the "Town of Bushwick" to the south, and the westerly "Village of Williamsburgh." Becoming an offal zone for breweries, slaughterhouses, & chemical manufacturing, glass, rope & bag factories, and coal, oil, & stone distribution: the flatland meadows and canal basins provided business opportunities for waves of 19th century Central European immigrants that was near, but away from, metropolitan domestic life down Bushwick Ave.

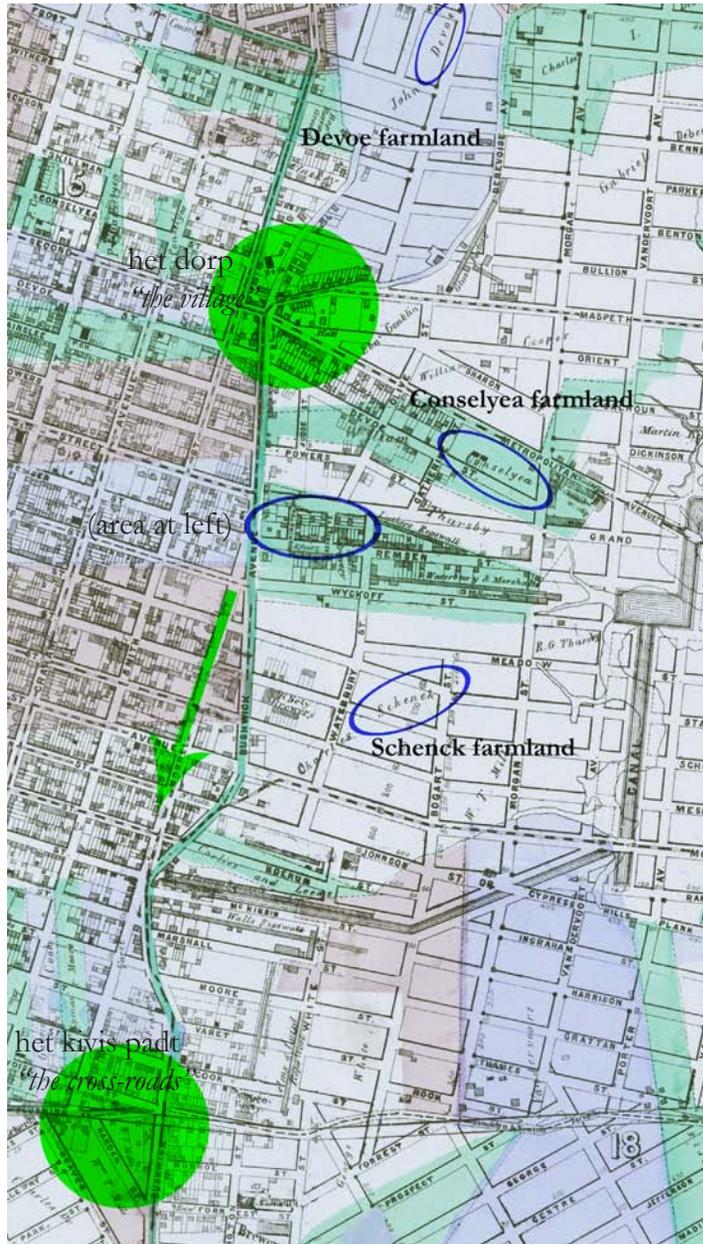


# *invisible* HISTORIES

Like long forgotten Florence Pl. (formerly called Agate, Jefferson, and Washington Sts., ca.1830-1930) and LaGrange St. (formerly Lafayette) that had connected Grand St. to Maujer St. (formerly Remsen, see below and right)-- the site of the original call to centralization for the forested *Boswijk* village would later not be thought of as a 'part' of Bushwick at all. Because East River travel allowed Williamsburgh to grow with Manhattan throughout the 19th century, the radiating river-front village-turned-city met the enclave township of Bushwick where the connecting streets of colliding municipalities subjugated local histories in favor of the impending consolidated urban future. The original village itself now lies along a borderland. This fringe neighborhood (surrounding *het dorp*) has hosted a mix of settler descendants and co-mingled immigrant groups throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.



UPPER LEFT TO ABOVE: Blacksmith John Blyman's farriers with upstairs sign shop of Fred Roeder, east corner of LaGrange and Grand St., ca 1895<sup>4</sup>; Sanborn Insurance Map 1886, Sanborn Insurance Map 1915-1933.<sup>5</sup>



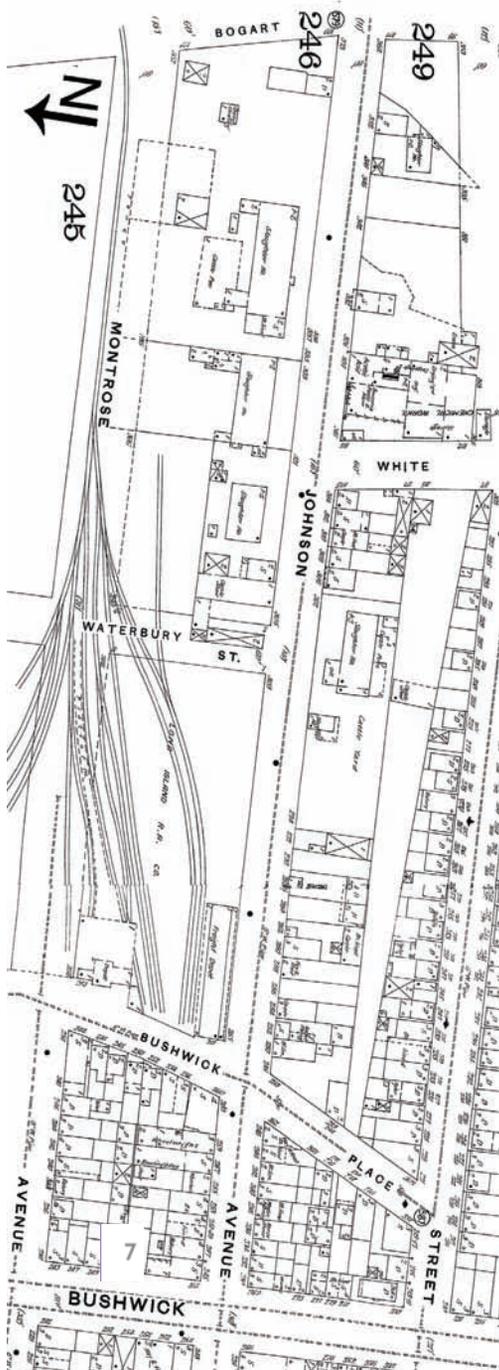
By the war of 1812, civil meetings had moved down Bushwick Avenue to a tavern at “the cross-roads” (on the Cripplebrush to Newtown Road, now Flushing). The more commonly accepted northwestern border of contemporary Bushwick, the tavern at *het Kuyvis padt* (Dutch trans.) had been seized from the Dutch Rapalje family (of several *Boswijk* generations, assumed politically loyalist, *i.e. to Britain*), to be a Public House. The population had outgrown the pre-revolutionary era village Town House to the north, and younger generations were moving either to the *het strand* “shore” (Williamsburgh) for business opportunities or further south for agricultural potentials growing tobacco and produce.

Between the *village* (Metropolitan Avenue) and the *cross-roads* (Flushing), from Bushwick Avenue east to the creek (near today’s Morgan Avenue lots), meadow-marsh fields initially supported farmers with tidemills. Like Luqueer’s and Conselyea’s to the north, “on another branch of the Maspeth kill, stood another structure, known as *Schenck’s mill*, the site [was, by 1884] only known by tradition. [Its ruins were completely] concealed by alluvial deposits, swept by the rains from the cultivated fields around.”<sup>7</sup>

By the 1800’s Bushwick had already earned a reputation for lively debauchery (“the influence of Anglo-youth”) disturbing the peace of pastoral nights’ quietude previously broken only by birds and the clatter of wooden mill wheels. Whereas the stagnancy created by canal building eliminated potentials for tide-milling, an influx of German Immigrants in the 1840’s and 50’s transformed the aforementioned region into a hyper-density of beer-crafting known as “*Brewers Rom.*” Focused between Grand and Montrose, up to 14 breweries operated within 14 blocks-- including *Rheingold* at Flushing Ave. (until 1976).

Transportation infrastructures such as the *South Side Rail Road* (Bushwick to Patchogue LI branch, 1868; and right-of-way for trolley cart lines from Bushwick Place to the river) facilitated efficiency in linking “*new bushwick lotts*” farmers to the supply- demand prosperity of the burgeoning metropolis.

## creating connections



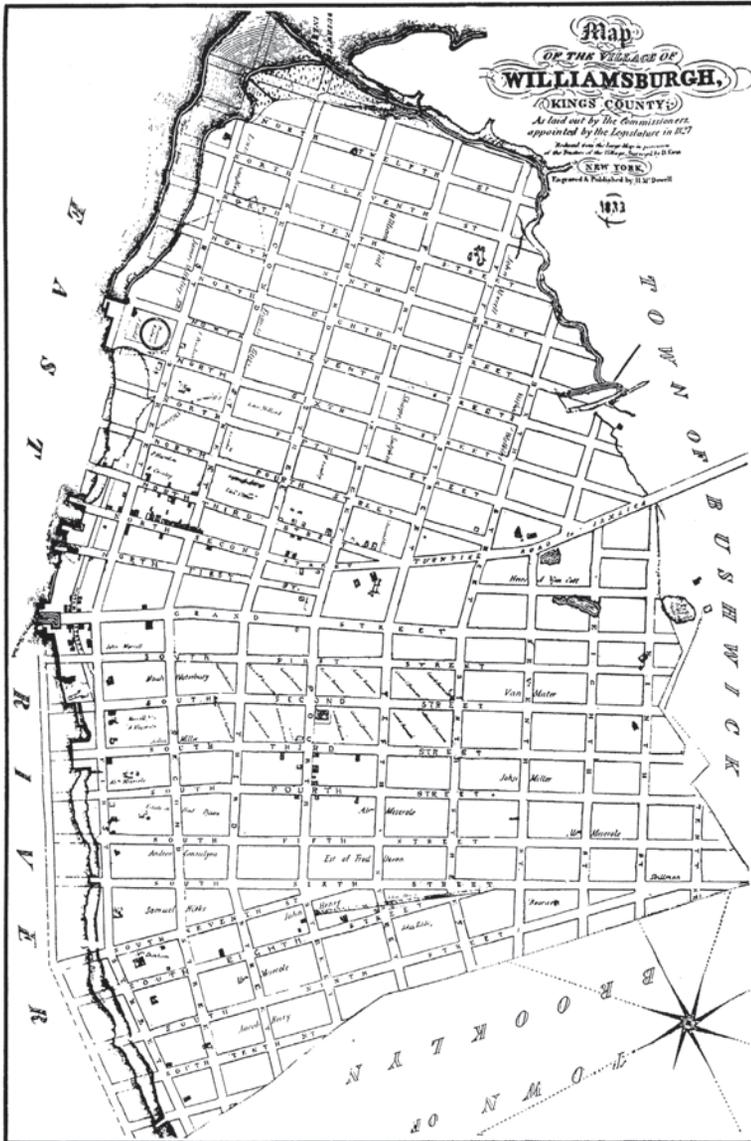
The *South Side Rail Road's* Long Island line terminated at Charles Schenck's farmhouse and barn on Montrose and Bushwick Place, allowing mass distribution of fresh produce from deep within the "Town of Bushwick." As Henry R. Stiles described (1884), "The Schencks were of old Bushwick, from it's settlement in primitive times, when the Newtown tidewater [still] ebbed and flowed to the boundary of their little plot."<sup>6</sup> Old structures demolished, freight and passengers traveled via trains that connected to horse carts/trolleys running along Broadway and S8th to ferries, and later, to the elevated subways and bridge.

Subsequent LIRR service enabled industrial entrepreneurs to commute from the canal/depot area just east of Bushwick Ave.'s formerly crooked route (corrected by eliminating Morrell St.) to mansions being built to the south along the Avenue (by then called "*The Boulevard*"). Today's *Waste Management* train hauling route and a dumping ground for dead animals, these tracks shaped the boundaries and systems supporting Bushwick throughout industrialization, residential development, and contemporary evolutions.



COUNTER-CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Bushwick Pl. looking toward Johnson, 1923; LIRR Depot, 1890<sup>8</sup>; Sanborn Insurance Map, 1886.<sup>9</sup>

# & DIVISIONS



Bushwick Ave. remained the long-standing boundary of Williamsburgh throughout the 19th century. Growing transportation networks allowed the efficient *borderland* relegation of offal industries such as cattle slaughter, coal and lime yards, fuel stations, chemical rendering, and glass furnaces. While brewer's grain waste was used to feed livestock-- entrails, fat, blood, manure, acids, dust, smoke, oil/gas, sewer overflow, rubber/glue toxins, and runoff from various printing and refining processes fully contaminated the groundwater ecosystem. Although many current structures were built in the 20th century, land-use patterns from the 1800s led to the 1980's East Williamsburg Valley Industrial Park (*EWVICO*), now the "North Brooklyn Industrial Business Zone (*IBZ*)."



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:  
map of Williamsburgh  
boundaries 1827-1833,  
poultry market and  
pork packing shop near  
Johnson and Bushwick,  
1907; Meserole Street  
(west from Bushwick  
to Wmbrg., 1923).<sup>10</sup>





ABOVE: historic map, Brooklyn Eagle pub. 1946 <sup>11</sup>

BELOW TO RIGHT: photographs of Scholes St. roof garden, 2004, Morgan Oil shore, 2003.

# claiming TERRITORY

If the root of rivalry is in the staking of claims, the classic **Williamsburg vs. Bushwick** antagonism is a battle not only for defined blocks, but also for the title of **true vanguardism**. Problem being, as soon as any conforming boundaries are set (whether physical, classist, academic, or scenist), the spirit of the Avant-Garde immediately vanishes. A freedom that cannot exist within parameters, the glamorized aura of the cutting-edge *Artist* “ahead of the times” has less to do with specific artists and more to do with the phenomena of visions without categories: creative insights that are ever-morphing, both as subtle and alive as aesthetic experience in itself.

The fringe of culture is often the future of culture, thus often idealized as a coveted frontier. However, like in many metaphysical quests, the boundary blurring “creative next” cannot be sought-- if attempted, a spoiling, delimiting refraction sets in. Fragmenting community spirit into an every man for himself quest for “it”-level notoreity, “Biennial Culture” too often pits artists into survey cliques with little long-term historical memory even for the shown (not to mention the overlooked). Could a “Bushwick Biennial” attempt to allow for the rise of expanding underground art networks that transcend confines, surpass divisions, and exist beyond comprehensions of hierarchal ranking?





Originally founded to set one group against another (Dutch vs. Indians, and Bushwick vs. Newtown), the landscape that originally supported *Boswijk's* 17th century Dutch Reformed Church (LEFT) gave way to dynamic interactions between Italian, Bavarian, Slavic, and German populations founding traditions and faiths (Catholic, Methodist, Jewish) in a common landscape. Dwellers and workers crossed paths amidst ever evolving architectures, industries, and technologies. Many carriage houses/stables, schools, factories, slums, and streets would disappear and/or be reinvented like gas lamps in the new 20th century of AC electric powered social progress.



In the tradition of gay nineties “Garden City/City Beautiful” movements in Europe, the Cooper family gifted the former workers’ housing yard of Peter Cooper’s Glue Factory to the City of Brooklyn. Transforming the Civil War era military and Gypsy campground into a “fresh air ration” for the masses, the park responded to the mounting congestion of industrial development and decaying historical edifices. Similarly motivated projects (such as 1930’s public housing) would reduce Victorian era schools, storefronts, factories, and facilities to a *tabula rasa* for Modernist thinking. Modernism’s macro-universalizing paradigm lead to the decline of “eyes watching the street” (*Jane Jacobs, as in Life and Death of American Cities, 1992*).

Decreased community participation, both in observing the sidewalks and cooperatively engaging in local affairs, accelerated with post-war urban blight. Italian-Americans occupied depression era property left by Germans moving to Queens, but overcrowding and a multi-million dollar HUD\* real estate scam caused property foreclosures, a home-owner exodus, and the late 60’s influx of Hispanic renters living in neglected properties. Turf boundaries became ever more delineated as failing local industries abandoned aging factories during the 1970’s. The already depressed landscape was devastated by looting and arson during the 1977 blackout.

TOP: Original Bushwick Dutch Church;<sup>12</sup>

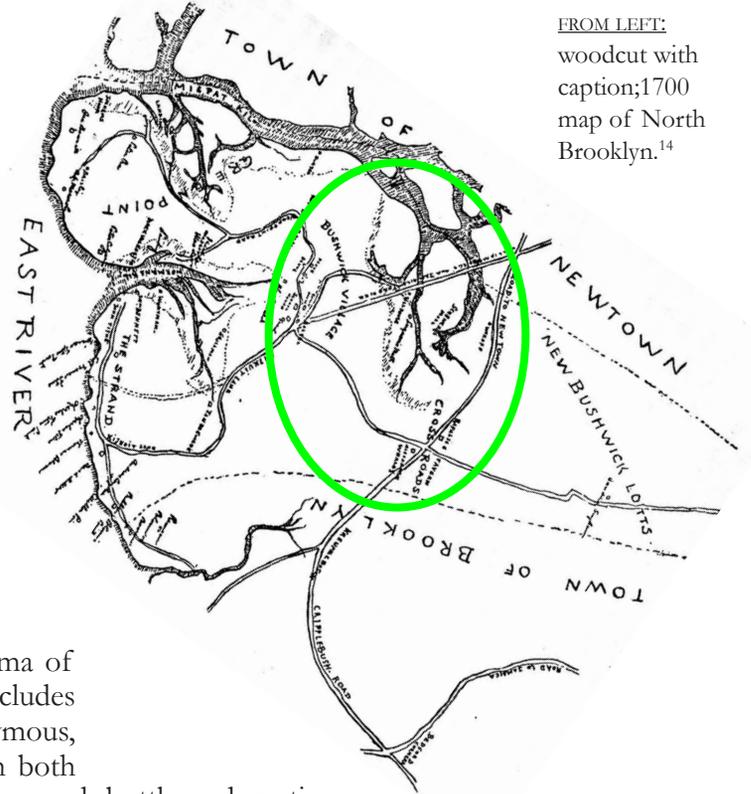
ABOVE: Bushwick Avenue, north to Devoe (*bet dorp* site), 1916.<sup>13</sup>

\*US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

# DANGER *in the borderlands*



February 14, 1660.  
Peter Stuyvesant,  
[Dutch] Director General,  
ordained that: "Outside  
residents who dwell distant  
from each-other must remove  
and concentrate within the  
neighboring towns, because we  
have war with the Indians."



FROM LEFT:  
woodcut with  
caption; 1700  
map of North  
Brooklyn.<sup>14</sup>

Collective reality always seems to hang in a balance between ordered motions and chaotic disruption of the flow. Because the society we experience reflects constructions of both individual and shared phenomena; living in the social borderlands of contemporary Bushwick reveals a poetry of populations interacting and perceiving one another. For example: the stigma of carting bottles. Like in many locales, Bushwick street life includes the critical gaze. While metropolitan life can be largely anonymous, an air of competitive desperation seems to lie subtly beneath both intent and the surface of social assumptions. The scene around bottle redemption vending machines is an initiation rite for class straddlers that creatively struggle to make ends meet (but who are also often working, housed, and educated). Professional canners have their own jargon and gestures-- all related to the brands and sizes that the "Tomra" may or may not take today (more often than not broken, jammed, or full). Several frantic women convince a store employee to come help: "This ain't money, this is chump change," he says, despising the can-burdened crowd. His back to us reads, "Need help"-- as embroidered on a vest over a "phat farm" hoodie... Well then, what is money? How and why do we form hierarchal/comparative standards? Sometimes it seems that much of the world we *see* refracts through a lens of *expectation*; having spent lifetimes (and generations) creating boundaries and edges to things we observe.



**NEOINTEGRITY: THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND**



# *manifest* DESTINY

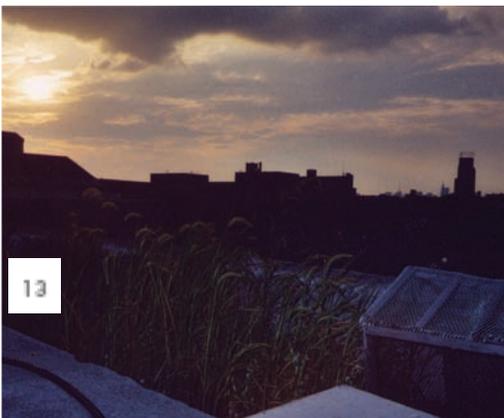
St. Catherine's Hospital eventually closed in 1965, out-grown and out-dated as a facility for modern medical technologies (FAR LEFT). Demolition for the new Eastern District High School included Nicholas (then Michael) Seitz's brewery on Waterbury between Maujer and Ten Eyck (LEFT), and the small blocks of old E. Grand St. (detailed on p. 5, included: apartment houses, bologna manufacturing, a print shop, laundry service, and edifices such as LaGrange's farrier-turned-filling station).

Riddled with under performance, violence, and low graduation rates similar to the old Eastern District High School that the massive building project (1974-81) replaced, the school closed within fourteen years to reopen as four specialty programs offered at the "Grand St. Campus" (Fall 1996). The current "*High School of Enterprise, Business, and Technology*," "*The School for Legal Studies*," and "*Progress High School for Professional Careers*" host a range of community services, and activities including St. Nicholas Neighborhood Preservation Corp. programs, the Wolves football team, live streaming of Metropolitan Opera performances, and seasonal carnivals in the faculty parking lot.

The neighborhoods of Bushwick have been changing over the past 15 years thanks to grassroots organizers' efforts/ services for fostering unity. However, the steady 1990's Brooklyn influx of artists first-stage (gentrified) a rise in Williamsburg area property values. By 2005, a checkerboard of East Williamsburg and North Bushwick lots were being massively redeveloped into code-dodging, two-story floor, *super-loft* condos. Speculators in the borderlands had a vested interest in defining East Williamsburg as an area residentially separate from Bushwick's image of crime-risk and L distance.

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: St. Catherine's Hospital, 1923, Seitz Brewery, 1848, Central Brewing Co. chain-driven truck at Bushwick Ave. and Grand St., 1917;<sup>15</sup> inter-arts roof festival promotional image, 7/4/02.

## *spirit in this land*



13

By 2000, the *netherzone* between South Bushwick and East Williamsburg offered affordable opportunity for (then) 20 year-old students such as myself, but street smarts were truthfully required. You might be harassed on Morgan as an assumed prostitute or confronted with hostility when roaming the RR tracks (BELOW) -- or even, like one of my friends, attacked with a knife walking home via Jefferson St. looking a bit too androgenous to blend-in. Nonetheless, it felt as if the empty landscape was *yours* to celebrate, brazenly exploring and contributing to the tragic beauty afforded by unspoiled shelter/playgrounds such as Morgan Oil (pre-chop shop demolition and scaffolding-stowage use, LEFT<sup>16</sup> AND OPPOSITE PAGE: LEFT,<sup>17</sup> RIGHT<sup>18</sup>). The Waterbury/Morgan/Meserole/Grand enclave where I have lived since 2001 has only recently become a fertile ground for rock rehearsal studios, warehouse party venues, fine art fabrication shops, and formal studio buildings. When we came to this borrowed land, my friend Kristin took a chance on my promise, "I will build us walls." The sheetrock/lumber walls have now fully spiraled and recombined over eight years of adaptation.

Far from naïve, we felt so sick of the external, esoteric valuations of *Art* that we were not going to buy into serving them. The immense sense of freedom found in these empty borderlands inspired the little known DIY kumbayah of *Neointegrity* arts roof festivals, 2002-04. My connection to the landscape has also informed my evolving awareness; realizing that the only constant in the universe (or multi-verse) IS change: from the subtle to the monumental. I've now experienced numerous incidents of individual and collective crisis, collapse, loss, death, and decay on E. Scholes St.-- thus also witness to *rebirth*.



All this leaves me asking, why are we so often defining the *self* against the *other*, and why do humans gravitate to creating categorical divisions and retreating en masse to (now, figuratively) barricaded camps in search of security? Why are the fluctuating ambiguities of *borderlands* so ideologically dangerous to orders of classification? Why, ultimately, even when one thoughtfully gifts the “can-tab art” lady the full bounty of a redemption cart; why will she still jump your spot in line if she has the chance? Using the word “Biennial” introduces a *Catch-22* for “professional” thinkers caught in the exclusionary feedback loop of global *biennialism*’s fostering hyperbolic vying for subjective recognition. If the passage of time includes but an endless staggering of “every 2-year” survey exhibitions amidst the annual rigor of globally scattered art dealing fairs, I do wonder if the Art World has a sustainable future in communicating only with itself?

Current demands on humanity call for an urgent paradigm shift in valuation. Do the boundaries of disciplines still serve our evolved obligations to cooperatively collaborate toward synergistic, perma-cultural, socially and biologically sustainable world-views? We’ve progressed to a point where micro-organisms themselves are internationally commingled; species are constantly on the move within the ballasts of porting ships at phenomenal rates. This movement of species creates a competition between *invasive* and *native* species that destructively prompts systemic ecological change. The earth has become a totalized borderland: existing beyond borders, but yet as a battleground. Perhaps artists can be heard beyond a self-referring field-- to speak with the architects, engineers, politicians, teachers, and scientists charged to envision/design possible futures.



IMAGE/QUOTE SOURCE ENDNOTES (SEE WORKS AT RIGHT)

1. Merlis, p. 6
  2. Stiles, p. 282
  3. Sanborn, Vol. 9: 1886 shts. 238 & 241, 1933 shts. 23 & 24 / TeleAtlas
  4. Merlis p. 75
  5. Sanborn, Vol. 9: 1886 sheet 242, 1933 sheet 25
  6. Dripps, sheet 7
  7. Stiles, p. 286
  8. Merlis, pgs. 49, 158
  9. Sanborn, Vol 9 Sheet 246
  10. Merlis pgs. 19, 75, 163
  11. Brooklyn Eagle, inside cover
  12. Brooklyn Eagle, p. 3
  13. Merlis, p. 107
  14. Merlis p. 8
  15. Merlis p. 148, 58, 120
  16. Nathan Miles
  17. JoAnna Scari
  18. Nathan Miles
- all images otherwise by scrapworm*



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