



Art, Crime, and the Image of the City

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Art, Crime and the Image of the City

A dissertation presented

by

Matthew Kaliner

to

The Department of Sociology

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the symbolic structure of the metropolis, probing how neutral *spaces* may be imbued with meaning to become *places*, and tracing the processes through which the image of the city can come to be – and carry real consequences. The centrality of the image of the city to a broad array of urban research is established by injecting the question of image into two different research areas: crime and real estate in Washington, DC and the spatial structure of grassroots visual art production in Boston, Massachusetts. By pursuing such widely diverging areas of research, I seek to show the essential linkage between art and crime as they related to the image of the city and general urban processes of definition, distinction, and change. And yet, the research pursued here offers a mixed appraisal of strategies that pin urban prospects to image and image manipulation, from the great crime decline of the past two decades to the rise of the creative economy and application of urban branding campaigns. Across the analyses, I highlight tension between expectations of change and the essentially conservative forces of image. Far from rebranding the city, culture is shown to play a key role in locking in inequalities, undermining revitalization efforts, and generally explaining the reproduction and persistence of place over time, following the logic of the “looking glass neighborhood.” Thus, culture is not nearly the tool to revalorize, relabel, and transform place so well depicted in studies nor do the buzz of cultural events shape markets and communities as effectively in “offcenter” cities. Place is not fixed for good, and can be “re-accomplished,” albeit through decades-long demographic, cultural, and political processes.

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Introduction: Iconic Places

Cities and neighborhoods are defined by the images and ideas that circulate around them as much as by their facts on the ground (Milgram 1984; Suttles 1972). This is most evident with an iconic place like Paris, France, where dozens of tourists reportedly are hospitalized each year when their arrival to the city does not live up to their “fantasy and idealization of Paris” (Tamami 1998). As the BBC explains, “Many of the visitors come with a deeply romantic vision of Paris - the cobbled streets, as seen in the film *Amelie*, the beauty of French women or the high culture and art at the Louvre. The reality can come as a shock” (Wyatt 2006), resulting in what has been termed the “Paris Syndrome,” or the “collection of physical and psychological symptoms experienced by first-time visitors realizing that Paris isn't, in fact, what they thought it would be” (Fagan 2011). While such incidents may be rare, they are frequent enough for the Japanese Embassy in Paris to set up a special hotline to help tourists cope with the confrontation of pristine images and messy reality.¹

Although the Paris Syndrome is extreme (if it exists at all), it highlights the importance of the symbolic representations of place as something both distinct from the experiential city and also intimately connected to it. Through a series of social processes, that image may be both born of the city it seeks to represent, and able to restructure and reshape its prospects. Paris's image has a global impact in a way that few places can, but the same logic holds within a typical metropolitan area, where numerous neighborhoods may evoke the kind of strong identities that welcome or inhibit flows of migration, investment, and community development and personal attachment. At the other end of the spectrum, the absence of iconic status – a neighborhood or

¹ I thank the students of Sociology 98ka for bringing the Paris Syndrome to my attention.

community with little or no legible identity – may carry personal and social consequences of an entirely different sort, but they are still consequences.

This dissertation explores and maps out the symbolic structure of the metropolis, probing how neutral *spaces* may be imbued with meaning to become *places* (Gieryn 2000), and tracing the processes through which image can carry real consequences. The basic concern is not with explaining change, however, but with stasis – of showing how the image of the city is best thought of as a cultural mechanism of reproduction and differentiation, not transformation (Sampson 2012). This framework is established by injecting the image of the city into two different research projects: one which tracks crime and real estate in Washington, DC and the other which engages grassroots visual art production in Boston, Massachusetts. Although these might appear to be wildly divergent areas of study, and each case study’s differing methodological and conceptual priorities and site of inquiry may further suppress connection, one of the recurring themes of this dissertation is the parallel between the study of art and crime, at least in regard to their impact on urban affairs and the image of the city. At the most basic level, I will show the same spatial analytic strategy may be used to organize, assess, and understand the patterning of art and crime across space and time. But, the studies diverge methodologically beyond this baseline, with the crime study pursuing a causal identification strategy while the arts inquiry takes a qualitative, interpretive tack. These topics are complimentary within the greater context and charge: understanding the role of image in the contemporary, post-industrial American city.

Under the guise of the “resurgent” or “consumer city” (Glaeser, Kolko, and Saiz 2001; Glaeser 2011; Gottlieb and Glaeser 2006), “city as an entertainment machine” (Clark 2004; Clark et al. 2002) and “creative city” (Florida and Mellander 2010; Florida 2002, 2005), prominent

analysts of various stripes have characterized American cities as experiencing population stability or even rebounds after decades of loss, increased competition for talent and jobs, greatly reduced crime rates since their peak in the early 1990's, newfound emphasis on amenities and authentic experiences, and increased social and economic inequality. Of these authors, Glaeser goes the furthest to integrate these trends into a comprehensive framework. For Glaeser, cities' greatest resource is their population density, which puts more people in regular contact with each other, generating stronger competition, more efficient diffusion of ideas and practices, and thus greater productivity, but also exposes urbanites to greater risk from disease and crime – historically. Due to reduction in crime and improvements in public health (Gottlieb and Glaeser 2006), Wirth's classic lament that “cities are the consumers rather than the producers of men”(1938:20) can be declared at least partially reversed. In this context, it is easy to see why arts are generally “good” and crime is “bad” for both the image and prospect of the city. Glaeser goes further in demonstrating that cultural offerings are a core draw of the cities, and that urbanities participate in cultural life more than their suburban or rural counterparts. But, they increasingly pay a larger share of their income for the urban residence to do so (Glaeser 2011:130–132; Gottlieb and Glaeser 2006). Florida, who has had little say about crime directly, appends to this the important notions that artists are directly related to the image and economic vibrancy of the city. Artists, alongside gays, are important less for what they make than for their visible presence as a signal of the kind of tolerant atmosphere that attracts talented people and technological innovation. They also contribute to the authenticity of place, revalorizing gritty locations as sites of consumption and high-tech enterprise (Florida 2002; Lloyd 2006). Hence Florida's typically bluster of a subtitle on an article: “Why cities without gays and rock bands are losing the economic development race” (Florida 2003). In short, as competition between cities grows, and talent

attraction and retention and vague notions of authenticity rise to the fore of urban policy, it is no wonder that urban imagery takes on all the more force. It is in this context that I argue the clustering of crime and art are amongst the strongest forces that shape the perceived character of neighborhoods.

In the chapters that follow I explore these broad questions by conducting parallel investigations into two distinct but important qualities of urban life. In the first part of the dissertation, I use a case study of crime, media coverage, and housing prices in Washington, DC to explore the spatial structure of reputation, and develop a conceptual framework for understanding it. I seek to show that neighborhoods have reputations and that these reputations carry long-term consequences. Specifically, the analysis draws on quantitative analysis of crime reporting in DC to show how closely a neighborhood is associated with criminality in local discourse. By sampling the totality of media traces that link locality with criminality rather than individual news stories, I seek to move beyond merely documenting the well-known biases of journalistic practice. Through a series of transformations, media traces are shown to yield both volume and evaluative components, which together provide a rough but viable index to the ebb and flow of metropolitan wide conversation – the chatter that differentiates and layers the internal structure of the city with meaning. Chapter 1 introduces these measures and their conceptual underpinnings, before exploring their spatial and temporal structure empirically. Chapter 2 subjects these measures to causal analysis, demonstrating that what I have termed a neighborhood’s “reputation for crime” significantly impacts housing prices above and beyond officially reported crime patterns. By looking at these patterns spatially as well as temporally, this chapter also demonstrates the “stickiness” of reputation. That is, as the time between officially recorded crime rates and housing sales prices grows, crime rates tend to lose their

explanatory power and their association with sales prices tends to drop to zero. Reputation exhibits the opposite dynamic: the association between media discourse about crime and housing prices grows over time, peaking at seven years between media circulation and housing prices. In other words, homebuyers appear to be most strongly effected by place reputations circulated if not entrenched many years earlier, even more so than by the present reputational or official dimensions of crime. At a larger scale, this finding suggests a new perspective for understanding the uneven benefits of the great crime decline of the 1990's and 2000's for America's inner cities. For areas most severely associated with crime and disorder – even well into the past – this process of spatial stigmatization may be difficult to reverse, continuing to isolate these communities from the larger metropolitan economy.

Chapters One and Two conceptualize, operationalize and evaluate how reputation effects housing prices by mediating the benefits of the crime decline, while Chapters Three and Four take on a popular response to a declining reputation: the influx of artistic “pioneers” into the city and their potential to rebrand and revitalize. Despite strong policy and academic interest in these creative migrations, little is known about the processes or mechanisms they represent. Sociologists have long invoked the story of SoHo, the neighborhood of New York City, now iconic for its rapid transformation from post-industrial wasteland to artist enclave to some of the most expensive real estate in the world. In two distinct chapters, I cast a critical eye to this narrative, and examine the generalizability of this “SoHo Effect” and its predicted sequence of abandonment, revitalization, and displacement beyond the competitive markets of New York, via a fresh analysis of artist locational and activity data in Boston. Rather than repeating the media-based construction of reputation employed in earlier chapters, I look at the spatial, historical, and locational structure that would make the SoHo story possible, essentially trying to answer the

question: “What do we mean by an artistic neighborhood?” To identify the structural antecedents of the artistic neighborhood, I draw on a variety of sources, including annual city directories, census data, local “open studio” events, as well as informal conversations with over 150 artists, site visits to over 500 studios, observations at nearly 100 events, and ethnographic fieldwork to cast the geography of Boston’s art scene in sharp relief, and to distinguish between where artists reside, where they create art, and where they market their products. Rather than finding tight-knit art enclaves of lore, I highlight a more complex, interactive, and open-ended spatial pattern that calls into question the very nature of the “artistic neighborhood” as often imagined.

Although Chapters Three and Four could have been conducted using parallel methods to the crime chapters, I chose qualitative and ethnographic methods, which allowed me to tap into the grassroots, amateur cultural production networks across Boston, and analyze how they mirror, reproduce, and ultimately give substance to the well-worn neighborhood identities they operate under. Artists in this view are less a source of change than stability and differentiation - at least in staid Boston. Moreover, despite the singular success of the SoWa art district in Boston’s South End, my research casts doubt on the promise and sustainability of top-down, art-led rebranding efforts. SoWa and other communities suffer from unintended consequences of their success, as I explore in Chapter Four.

Across the analyses, I highlight the tension between expectations of change and the essentially conservative forces of image. Far from rebranding the city, culture is shown to play a key role in locking in inequalities, undermining revitalization efforts, and generally explaining the reproduction and persistence of place over time, following the logic of the “looking glass neighborhood” (Sampson 2012, see also Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulsen 2000). Thus, culture

is not nearly the tool to revalorize, relabel, and transform place so well depicted in studies on New York (Mele 2000; Zukin and Braslow 2011; Zukin 2010) nor do the buzz of cultural events shape markets and communities as effectively in “offcenter” cities (Currid and Williams 2010; Shaw Forthcoming). Place is not fixed for good, and can be “re-accomplished,” albeit through decades-long demographic, cultural, and political processes (Kaufman and Kaliner 2011).

Chapter 1: The Conceptual and Spatial Structure of Reputation

Despite early interest in these reputational or sentimental aspects of urban neighborhoods (Firey 1945, 1968; Park, Burgess, and McKenzie 1984) and a resurgence of research both addressing urban culture (Borer 2006; Bridge 2006; Gieryn 2000; Harding 2007) and the nature of “place” (Gieryn 2000; Kaufman and Kaliner 2011; Molotch et al. 2000; Paulsen 2004), such research has yet to adequately conceptualize reputation in a holistic and multifaceted sense, nor articulated a clear and objective method for making the symbolic qualities of urban space observable. In order to “make character concrete” (), in this chapter I will operationalize and explore the spatial and temporal dynamics of neighborhood reputations, defined here as their *external identities as perceived by the larger urban public*. By this definition, reputation can be distinguished from residents’ perceptions of their own community, an issue well covered by several important strands of urban and community research. Perceptions, evaluations, or sentiments toward one’s own neighborhood have proven key predictors of, for instance, residents’ attachment to place (Gerson, Stueve, and Fischer 1977; Kasarda and Janowitz 1974), mobility intentions (Guest and Lee 1983; Lee, Oropesa, and Kanan 1994), and community involvement (Small 2004). Yet a whole host of questions remain to be explored in reference to how larger publics may perceive different areas of the city, and how these perceptions aggregate into widely known – and potentially consequential – reputations. As will be shown below, this simple definition of reputation invites a series of such distinctions, specifications, and questions, cumulating into a powerful framework for urban cultural analysis. In pursuing these issues, the key motivation is to push urban cultural research beyond the individual psychology of residents’

subjective views and toward the processes that imbue urban spaces with their distinct characters² and generate shared understandings of place.

In this chapter, I develop a conceptual framework for understanding neighborhood reputations, and use it to explore the salience of crime for demarcating space and defining neighborhood in Washington, DC. The chapter proceeds as a conceptual exploration of reputation with methodological, contextual, and design issues interspersed to better specify the research problem and set up the exploratory analysis and validity tests this chapter concludes on. The next chapter extends the analysis by demonstrating the causal role of reputation in housing markets and neighborhood selection. At the core of both chapters is the idea that local media constitute the most powerful carrier of neighborhood images and reputations, an idea that dates back to the earliest Chicago school theorists. By harnessing the media's descriptive power, it is possible to construct rich measures of diverse urban imagery, without being constrained by the availability of sample surveys. I assemble a measure tapping one key dimension of reputation: the degree to which DC's neighborhoods are associated with crime, violence and danger, over the years 1996-2005. A reputation for criminality was chosen for four key reasons. First, prior literature indicates the high salience of crime and fear of crime in demarcating urban communities and restricting movement between them (Anderson 1999; Suttles 1972). Second, a reputation for criminality has a clear analog and so can be compared with rates of reported crime, to assess the degree to which the media-derived measure of reputation matches (police-reported and processed) reality. Third, a criminal reputation is all too often conflated with poverty, racial segregation, and disorder (Wacquant 2007, 2008), begging the question of how much of criminal reputation may

² I use the terms "reputation," "character," "image," and "identity" interchangeably; all being understood as the distinct meaning that a bounded geographical area has for the wider city or metropolitan population.

be due to other stigmas. Finally, better understanding reputational processes specifically related to neighborhood crime should carry implications for other processes, namely neighborhood selection, migration flows, and especially housing markets dynamics - the topic of the next chapter.

This chapter proceeds on two levels: first, as a conceptual and methodological contribution to the study of urban social processes, and second as an exploration of the spatial and temporal structure of reputation. I divide the remainder of the paper into five sections. First, I consider past research on the cultural ecology of the city. Second, I elaborate a framework for studying neighborhood reputation and use it to review current literature. Third, I describe the media content analysis and operationalize the reputation measure. Fourth, I introduce the Washington, DC case study, and data and methods. Finally, I summarize a series of validity tests and exploratory analyses. The results raise questions concerning data error and noise, as well representations of crime and race, but in general lend sufficient credence to the data and theoretical framework to invite the more rigorous casual evaluation in the chapter that follows.

The Cultural Ecology of the City

American sociologists have been attuned to the cultural and symbolic demarcations of urban space since the earliest days of the Chicago School (Park 1952; Suttles 1972). In the ecological approach advocated by Park and others, the city is a “mosaic” of more or less known, functional communities: the central business district, exclusive residential areas, industrial regions, slums, ghettos, immigrant or ethnic neighborhoods, and so on (Park 1952: 196). Through “natural” processes of selection and segregation such areas come into being, develop an internal coherence, and either persist or are eventually succeeded by new demographic or

industrial forces. This perspective has been as important for what it has provided urban sociology for what it overlooked.

Walter Firey, in his critique of the Chicago School, made perhaps the strongest case for a systematic cultural ecology of the city (1945, 1947). For instance, Firey claimed that profit maximization predicted the razing of Boston's prestigious Beacon Hill district and Boston Common and replacement with high-rent apartments, given their proximity to the central business district. However, both areas persist as low-density residences and open park land, respectively. To explain such anomalies, Firey suggested that land use cannot be understood without taking into account the symbols and cultural values that become associated with urban space. Firey detailed the history of efforts to cultivate a distinctive neighborhood identity amongst Beacon Hill residents. Local history and tradition thus mark certain areas of the city like Beacon Hill as "culturally contingent," thus effecting future development (1945: 323). By identifying these anomalies, one can advance a cultural ecological theory of urban development, Firey advocated. Later attempts at developing a cultural or symbolic ecological theory moved generally away from detailing the characters of places, and instead focused on the social psychology of individuals' perceptions, attachments (Hunter 1974), and cognitive maps and wayfinding behavior (Lynch 1960, 1984). For these theorists, the question was how urbanites conceptualize their environments as "ordered segmentation," or maintain attachments to their "symbolic communities" and construct boundaries for their local neighborhoods. Although this literature is important as it continues to find resonance for the neighborhood concept in the daily lives of urban dwellers, its priority on social psychological factors makes it less useful for understanding how places achieve and retain cultural meaning.

In his seminal volume, *The Social Construction of Communities* (1972), Suttles advanced ecological research by suggesting that different parts of the city develop their identities largely through contrast across adjoining areas and relation to the larger metropolitan structure. A community does not need to be ethnically homogenous to be termed an ethnic neighborhood, for instance: what matters is the extent to which its ethnic composition distinguishes it from abutting neighborhoods.³ Rather than internal qualities or local cultivation, as Firey suggested, the relative differences in such qualities across adjoining areas is decisive for the construction of their distinct identities. Suttles updated these ideas later, applying them to the development of “cumulative urban texture” of entire cities (1984). Here he proposed that cities demonstrate a “manifest urban iconography” that is at once part of their ecological structure and exhibited in popular culture like songs, slogans, and how cities are typified by insiders and outsiders alike in the press and songs.

In the absence of a clear methodology for studying place identities, research under the banner of urban cultural ecology has generally shifted toward a concern with individual perceptions, not the character of locales (e.g., Hunter 1972). In the present paper, I seek to build on the framework developed by Firey and Suttles, but based on a rigorous methodology. The ultimate goal is the same: to refocus analysis on the symbolic structure of the city. To specify and give substance to this query, I turn to conceptualization of reputation.

Understanding Neighborhood Reputation

³ Although Suttles does not specify this example, it should follow that the perceptions of a “high crime” neighborhood have more to do with its relation to the overall city crime rate than with the absolute concentration of crime in that neighborhood.

The definition of neighborhood reputation employed here – *external identities as perceived by the larger urban public* – is designed to be simple yet comprehensive in regard to sorting through and incorporating past literature. As already alluded to, such a definition entails a series of distinctions and questions, each carrying important conceptual and empirical consequences. I treat these not as rigid limitations, but as points of variation to guide inquiry, much in the spirit of Sampson’s open-ended definition of neighborhood (e.g., neighborliness or sense of community is a *hypothesis*, not a given characteristic of neighborhoods) (2012:55-57). My framework for understanding reputation turns on seven such research challenges: 1. the distinction between external and internal perception; 2. the distinction between reputation and information; 3. reputation’s temporal and spatial processes; 4. the relation between reputation and the reality it represents; 5. the extent to which reputations are widespread and shared across groups (vs. heterogeneous); 6. the multidimensionality of reputation (vs. a singular fixation on a master category like prestige or status); and 7. the extent to which reputation may be manipulated, or even controlled, through policy. I use these distinctions to organize the prior literature and develop the framework that will inform the rest of the analysis.

1. External vs. internal perception: By privileging external identities, I seek to draw analytical attention to the differential power of outsiders and insiders in the arbitration of urban imagery, while acknowledging that in reality these distinctions remain fluid and subtle. Urban research has long focused on residents’ subjective feelings towards or understandings of their own neighborhood (Kasarda and Janowitz 1974; Gerson, Stueve & Fischer 1977; Guest and Lee 1983b; Lee, Oropesa & Kanan 1994; Small 2004). Far less research has probed the external perceptions of neighborhoods despite the fact that outsiders always constitute the overwhelming numerical majority and carry tremendous power in both assigning and perpetuating place

identities (Matei, Ball-Rokeach, and Qiu 2001; Matei and Ball-Rokeach 2005, 2005; Suttles 1972, 1984). Yet, the high turnover rate within – and mobility between – neighborhoods cautions against reifying insider and outsider status, as most insiders ultimately become outsiders. But such logic does not operate in reverse: outsiders tend to remain outsiders, despite their mobility. Residential migration can only expose residents to so many different neighborhoods, and in practice, migration tends to maintain rather than expand horizons, as individual migrations largely trace the established circuits that link similar neighborhoods within closed strata of the city (Sampson 2012). Moreover, comparative research confirms that the symbolic representation of the city is shaped as much by second-hand sources, like media depictions, peer networks, and structural location as by personal experience (Milgram 1984; Milgram et al. 1972). For our images and knowledge of iconic locations, such indirect sources can often trump the presumed familiarity of proximity (Milgram 1984).

Empirical studies on how insiders and outsiders view neighborhood suggest that insiders tend to inflate the status or prestige of their own neighborhood and convey a more nuanced and complex understanding of place (Andersen 2002; Hastings and Dean 2003; Permentier, Van Ham, and Bolt 2008). Insiders are more aware of internal divisions and the precision of boundaries, yet on most dimensions insiders and outsiders tend to broadly agree. Hence Hortulanus's (1995) exceptionally well developed and influential conceptualization of reputation, as:

A mirror and a symbol of the position a household occupies in society, its preferences and life style. The neighborhood is thus a representation factor. Reputation refers thus to the meaning and assessment assigned by residents and outsiders of the neighborhood. Next, it refers more or less to the steady image the neighbourhood has among city resident and to the place it has in that way in the urban neighborhood hierarchy. (Hortulanus 1995: 42, translated from Dutch in Permentier 2009:17).

Despite the general usefulness of this approach, many of the supporting points remain empirical questions. That is, reputation may be associated with position, hierarchy, and steadiness, but certainly not always. Research is yet required to understand these linkages and the conditions that generate them.

Permentier and colleagues have taken this inside/outside challenge to what must be the logical extreme, with their concept of “perceived reputation” (Permentier, van Ham, and Bolt 2007; Permentier et al. 2008, Permentier et al. 2007). Drawing on the “third person effect,” (Tsfati and Cohen 2003), Permentier et al. argue that what matters most for urban processes subject to exit, voice, and loyalty mechanisms is not my perception of my own neighborhood, nor outsiders perceptions of my neighborhood, but my perception of how outsiders perceive my neighborhood. In the language of the third person effect literature: power acts through *not me, not you, but them* (Tsfati and Cohen 2003: 711). Despite this impressive framework, Permentier’s empirical analysis ultimately falls into a simplistic status consideration, not reaching the multifaceted conceptualization of reputation developed here.

2. Reputation and information: For many commentators, reputation lies somewhere between information and rumor, between truth and falsehood. Indeed, reputation is often construed as *incorrect* information: partial, unreliable information that may still carry some weight. Rather than getting into the thorny questions of truth and falsehood (nor embarking on the hunt for reliably “true” indicators from which reputation could be compared), I suggest that reputation differs from information by its temporality. Information eventually expires; it has a half-life, albeit of varying extents, and must be updated or replaced to remain relevant. Reputation operates in much the opposite fashion; it is sticky, resistant to updating. Historical images can scar (or shine) on an area for years or decades to come, reshaping the world around it

to assure long lasting continuities of place, or what Sampson calls the “looking glass neighborhood” (2012). Moreover, information can usually be corrected, the record can be set straight. The same does not hold for reputation. Drawing attention to a spoiled identity may only amplify it, creating second-order effects more powerful than the first (Flynn et al. 1998; Kasperson et al. 1988). As Milgram noted, “here is frequently a time-lag between the actual state of an area and its social reputation... A neighborhood may slowly improve without this being reflected in its general reputation for many years” (1984:308). Such has been the consistent finding of a generation of scholars looking at public housing rehabilitations across Europe: whether in Ireland, Scotland, Denmark, or Sweden, research reveals that large public investments stand little chance against the stigma accumulated over a century in the lives of these projects (Andersen 2002, 2008; Cohen 2013; Gourlay 2007; Hastings and Dean 2003, 2003; Hastings 2004; Jacobs 2011; Kearns, Kearns, and Lawson 2013; Slater and Anderson 2012; Wassenberg 2004). In this sense, reputation’s temporal structure makes it conceptually different from information, but also links it to processes of reproduction and continuity.

3. *Temporal and spatial processes.* Reputation is defined by not just its temporal structure, but its spatial dimension as well. The defended neighborhood is the exemplar of the issue, as its “forbidding” reputation is strong enough to restrict the flow of movement and curtail potential violence (Anderson 1999; Harding 2010; Suttles 1972). These dimension may work additively: Ball-Rokeach & Metei (2005)’s inquiries into the perception of comfort and fear in Los Angeles identified the community of Watts as the city’s “fear epicenter,” which they convincingly show can only be explained by the mass media’s frequent linkages of that location with the famous riots forty years earlier.

4. *Reputation vs. reality*: Reputations are usually predicated on some objective or observable antecedent – they cannot emerge in a vacuum nor persist without some claim to reality, but these pathways can be obscure or indirect. The symbolic qualities of place most often take on salience when they establish a contrast with neighboring communities (Suttles 1972, Kaufman & Kaliner 2011). Moreover, as discussed above, research consistently finds that contemporary reputations owe more to patterns from an earlier era than today (Sampson 2012). Finally, these patterns to have a pernicious and troubling edge, especially relevant to the concerns of this chapter: in the contemporary American city, racial composition often overwhelms other factors, shaping and amplifying perceptions of crime (Quillian and Pager 2001) and disorder (Sampson and Raudenbush 2004; Sampson 2012). Perceptions of crime or disorder are refracted through the prism of race, such that residents and non-residents alike read racial composition and not observed neighborhood qualities as cues of disorder.

5. *Shared understanding*. For a reputation to be consequential it must be widely known, but that does not necessarily mean it must be consistently held across all groups. As discussed above, insiders and outsiders tend to have somewhat different perceptions of place – at least in terms of status rankings and the degree of internal detail and nuance (Permentier et al. 2007). These concerns have been at the heart of recent debates over the persistence of segregation in America: to the extent that racial groups have internally consistent but outwardly divergent access to information and perceptions of place, the reproduction of segregation is ensured (Charles 2001; Krysan and Bader 2007, 2009; Sampson 2012). Thus, identifying the *unshared* understandings of place, and the social cleavages these reveal, has proven far more valuable to sociology than fixing the definition to widespread consistency. Along the same lines, research on corporate reputation

has distinguished notable differences in how differently placed actors and audiences assign esteem to firms, revealing their positional differences (Ager and Piskorskil 2007).

6. *Status and hierarchy.* The practice of surveying urban residents about their perceptions of the prestige of different locales goes back to the tradition of social stratification research advocated by Warner (1963). However, Warner and his students were less interested in how perception may be implicated in the spatial hierarchy of communities than in identifying how place of residence can be used as a heuristic for class in the construction of status indexes. Of the many Warner-style studies, Coleman and Neugarten's investigation of Kansas City pursued this idea the farthest, concluding that "residential address was considered the quickest index to a family's social status" (1971:30). More powerful evidence comes from a technique developed by (1961) and Semyonov and Kraus (1982) to evaluate the hierarchy of neighborhoods and cities of Australia and Israel, respectively, and replicated by Ginsberg (2005; 1985) and Logan and Collver (1983). Using a card-sorting technique, this study found that communities can be readily distinguished by respondents, largely based on prestige. Ginsburg replicated this method in Tel Aviv in 1983 and 1998, and arrived at similar findings (1985, 2005). She identified little change in the prestige score of Tel Aviv's communities over time, suggesting the durability of community images (2005). In the only application of this method to a US sample, Logan and Collver asked a sample of residents from two communities in Long Island to arrange cards naming suburbs of New York. They drew the sample from two different groups – a blue collar community and an affluent suburb – which allowed them to test if community perceptions vary by socioeconomic status or by the context of the perceiver. They found very little difference between how the residents of the two communities completed the experiment, providing the strongest evidence that communities have widely diffused images. They also found that these

communities were arrayed primarily by socioeconomic status, with weaker dimensions tracking nearness or familiarity, population density, community age structure, and racial composition.

They conclude that:

Ultimately, all models of metropolitan development and spatial differentiation must rely on some assumptions about people's mental images of the region in which they live.... In our view, residents' perceptions of what their community and other communities are like are as important to urban theory as the information on objective characteristics on which most urban research is based. (432)

The only evidence to the contrary can be found in Felson's study of "invidious distinctions" made by Chicago residents (1978). In phone interviews, he found that up to 42% of participants could not identify the prestige of the suburbs he asked them about, meaning that they could more easily distinguish the statuses of department stores than suburbs. Felson's studies, while an important check, should be interpreted cautiously as he only queried the status of ten communities and these were selected to maximize variation (1978:55). From this review, it should be clear that status and hierarchy must be considered key dimensions of reputation – but not the only dimension. Rather, the present argument holds that reputation may be evaluative without being necessarily hierarchical like prestige rankings. In some images of place – say, school quality or athletic prowess, it is conceivable for rough rankings to emerge, but on so many other fronts, from danger to hipness, there are simply too many ambiguities, unknowns, and contestations for a field of rankings to crystalize. Moreover, what makes reputation especially hard to rank is its relative quality and substitutability among various lateral qualities. The relative proportion of these distinct but nonhierarchical and multi-dimensional qualities constitutes the core of reputation.

7. Manipulation and control. Identities and images are necessarily interpreted, often through broader social, media, and institutional processes (Wacquant 2008). The whole field of branding is predicated on this view, revealing how images are the product of deliberate

cultivation, management, and control. As developers and policymakers work to rebrand communities for redevelopment, policy campaigns may increasingly be the source of community identity. Consistent with other literature reviewed here, however, most studies of community rebranding revealed the difficulty of manipulating and controlling deeply held symbols of community, especially in the case of stigmatized places (Hastings and Dean 2003).

This review sought to highlight the key points of variation around reputational processes, and in doing so, craft an open-ended framework for analysis. I offer these less as hypotheses than as guides to assist inductive data analysis. In the following sections, I briefly introduce the contours of the case study before exploring the role of media reputation.

The Geography of Washington, DC

Among Washington, DC's many distinctive features, three are relevant to the present study: the city's weakly defined neighborhood structure, relatively high crime rate, and robust housing market. Although DC's crime rate has dropped considerably since its peak in the early 1990's (see Figure 1), it remains a notoriously dangerous city. Most prominently, while its homicide rate has dropped in half since the city was declared the "murder capital" of America in 1991, it has been consistently ranked among the top ten large city homicide rates. Indeed, Washington's post-crime-drop low of 40.6 murders per hundred thousand residents *exceeds the historic peak* homicide rates of all but three other cities with over half a million residents studied by Levitt (Levitt 2004:168). And yet, then-Mayor Marion Barry was not entirely wrong when he famously declared in 1989 that "except for the killings, Washington has one of the lowest crime rates in the country" (Keil 1989). Its property crime rates, for instance, tend to fall around the middle of rankings of cities over 100,000 residents in recent years. Also, in total index crime per

capita, it rarely cracks the top one third (Author’s calculations from U.S. Department of Justice, various years). Despite these modest figures, Washington has long been associated with crime – the “murder capital” appellation followed twenty years after President Nixon declared Washington the “crime capital of the world” and fifty years after a *Newsweek* cover made an identical announcement (despite evidence to the contrary in both cases (Lewis 1976:123–124)). Moreover, the universality of these charges notwithstanding, crime in Washington is highly concentrated in a few areas of the city, much like any other large American city. Washington’s crime decline (in relation to housing prices – to be explored in the next chapter) are detailed in figure 1.1.

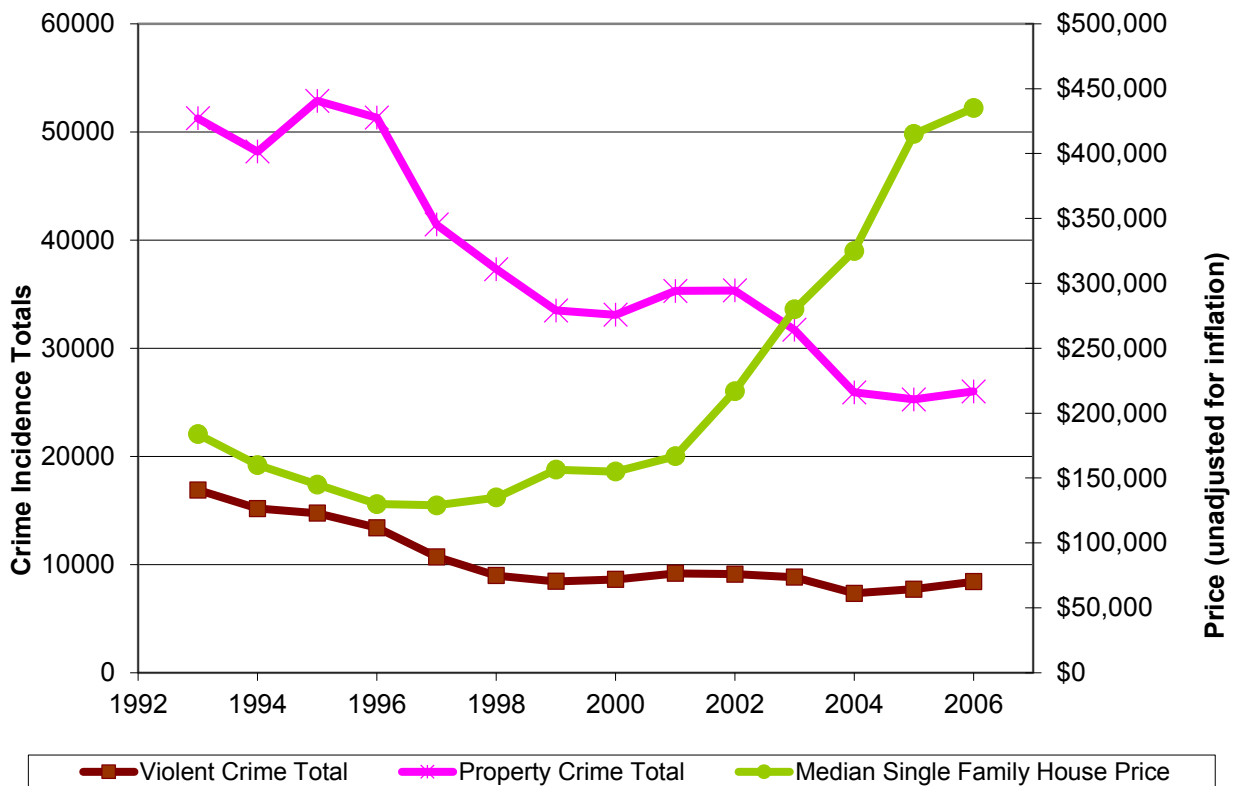


Figure 1.1: Citywide Crime Totals and Home Prices, 1993-2006
 (Sources: Metropolitan Police Department, UCR, and authors calculations from data provided by the Office of Taxation and Real Estate. Note that 2006 crime totals are preliminary)

For a variety of historical and geographical factors, Washington lacks the strong neighborhood identity structure found among most northeastern cities⁴. Founded as a company town for the federal bureaucracy, for much of its history Washington has consisted of a white-collar class of transient administrators and a service class of African-American workers, never attracting the waves of immigration or industrialization that give most modern cities their commercial form, residential enclaves, and distinct communities (Jaffe and Sherwood 1994; Ruble 2010; Smith 2010). While this pattern may be changing with the growth of immigration in the post-1968 era, the historical antecedents for ethnic neighborhoods one finds in most American cities were rarely laid down in Washington. Moreover, Washington was founded on uninhabited marshland by decree of Congress – with the exception of the small tobacco port of Georgetown, it had no pre-existing communities to annex, thus cutting off another potential source of neighborhood differentiation typical of American cities (Milgram 1972). In contrast, it's important to remember how much of the contemporary neighborhood structure of cities like Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, and New York owe to the deeply submerged histories of annexations. Unlike Chicago, where social scientists and authorities collaborated to articulate and maintain community areas for research and administrative purposes (Venkatesh 2001), Washington has never been subjected to large scale community studies by academics or government. Instead, Washington is officially divided into four unevenly sized quadrants

⁴ Here I proceed along broad but defensible (and ultimately testable) lines. The comparative study of neighborhood identity across and between metropolitan areas remains an entirely unexplored terrain, despite the observation that neighborhood takes on a different weight and salience in, say, Boston or New York City, compared to, say, Phoenix, Arizona or Columbus, Ohio.

(northwest, northeast, southeast, southwest), as shown in Figure 1.2. Quadrant is prominently fixed to every street address and thus piece of mail in the city. This ubiquity nominates quadrant as perhaps the most important dividing line in the city, but quadrants are cities in their own right, much too large to serve as the only means of symbolic distinction. Despite the various inhibitors to neighborhood development, distinct communities have inevitably emerged in Washington: city officials currently recognize the existence of over one hundred and thirty named communities, though they (like many American cities) do not delegate or even illustrate their boundaries.

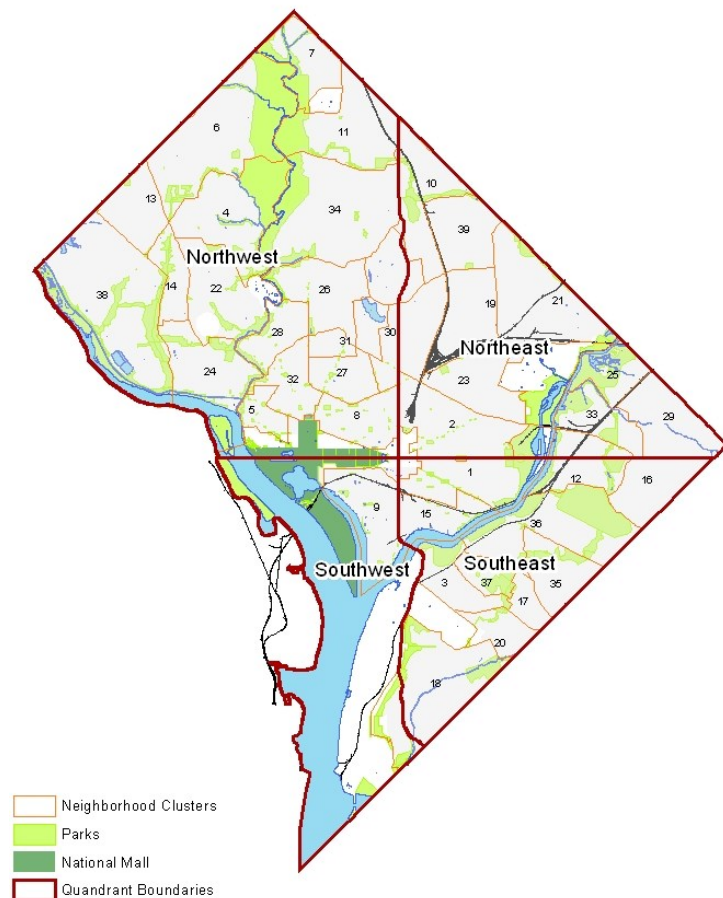


Figure 1.2: Washington, DC: Quadrant, Neighborhood, and Cluster Boundaries

A wave of community historians are working on that effort, in turn redefining space by preserving the past (e.g., Ruble 2010; Smith 2010). Washington's named neighborhoods remain the second or third line of demarcation for residents, after quadrant and perhaps political ward, and thus any study of neighborhood reputation in DC must confront the fact that neighborhoods are likely to remain symbolically impotent in comparison to those of other cities. It is no wonder, then, that researchers from the Urban Institute – the city's most active center for urban research – have produced a document entitled “What is a Neighborhood in the District of Columbia?” (NeighborhoodinfoDC 2006). Their solution, like mine, is to use the geography developed in 2002 through a series citizen forums and focus groups. Heralded as a model of participatory governance by Potapchuk (2002), these forums had city planners and citizens collectively sort all 130 named communities into 39 neighborhood “clusters” to better align community priorities and city planning. I describe these units in more detail in the next section, and how they relate to the media-based measures of reputation this study uses.

The Media as Carriers of Neighborhood Reputation

The role of media in assigning and perpetuating neighborhood reputations has long been recognized (e.g., Park 1952: 201, Suttles 1972: 52, Suttles 1984). That the media may have an interest in promoting the growth of a place (Logan and Molotch 1987; Molotch 1976) or impose a hegemonic discourse that may be contested by locals (Martin 2000)(Martin 2003) does not change the fact that local media constitute perhaps the most important carrier of images and reputations about places within the city. Nor does it matter here if the media is inaccurate in its portrayal of the actual experience of a place (Johnstone, Hawkins, and Michener 1994; Sorenson, Manz, and Berk 1998; Taylor and Sorenson 2002). It is precisely these distortions and

exaggerations that are the stuff of reputation. The underlying view here is that cities are replete with discourse concerning the distinctions between places, and a slim portion of this dialogue is caught, replicated, and preserved in the local newspapers in a seemingly endless feedback loop. This perspective is deliberately crafted to set it apart from a “strong” theory of media effects like cultivation theory (Gerbner 1998; Gross and Aday 2003; Morgan and Shanahan 2010), but also rejects a sociologically naïve view that media merely “reflect” societal consensus (Peterson and Anand 2004; Peterson 1979).

I take my lead from recent work in organizational studies and public health, where researchers have arrived at similar methods and rationales for utilizing print media as measures of corporate or community reputation, respectively. In organizational studies, corporate reputation, or the measurement of comparative evaluation, remains a key practical as well as methodological concern. To overcome the field’s traditional reliance on unscientific and national commercial polls like those conducted by *Fortune Magazine*, Deephouse (Deephouse and Carter 2005; Deephouse 2000) develops a measure of “media reputation,” by coding news items about firms as positive or negative (or neutral), and dividing one from the other. The resulting index is shown to be a reliable measure of reputation, a significant contributor to firm performance, and distinct from organizational legitimacy. Closer to the focus of the present study, McLaren et al (2005) use print media to calculate the potential stigma and loss of esteem faced by residents of different parts of Calgary. Like Deephouse, they code stories about select, named neighborhoods as positive, negative and neutral, then compare resulting indexes to known demographic and risk factors. They found the media-based measures of reputation to be a “convenient source with discriminant validity,” and concluded affirmatively “social identities of places are reflected in and projected by the media” (McLaren et al. 2005:193, 192). Such studies provide a solid foundation,

but they leave too much to the discretion and skill of coders, collapse all nuance and specificity to up-or-down evaluation, and fail to address the question of item salience or frequency.

Although there may be instances when it is fair or even optimal to say a corporation or place has a “good” or “bad” reputation, the position of this chapter is that reputation is best thought of more specifically in terms of distinct items of interest – like crime, prestige, safety, tolerance, cleanliness, and so on; ideally items that that could be compared to their closest analog. Analytically, reputation for crime is thus not analogous with a “bad reputation,” though in practice these likely overlap considerably. To limit avoid coder subjectivity and focus on the linkage of locality with reputation (for crime), a more effective approach is to sample the totality of utterances in the news media, from passing references in obituaries, examples drawn by letter or editorial writers, captions, printed police logs, and – of course – crime reporting itself. Such a wide sweep should edge print media away from the selector of news and a little closer to repository of everyday conversation – although that must be stated with caution. Even in this expansive view, media effects still operate as *framing*, or the “principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (Schudson 2003:34) or *information effect*, or the sheer effect of delivering information. Taken together, such theories begin to explain why the few existing studies treating media in reference to public opinion, relying on letters-to-the-editor, reveal them to be a fair approximation to sample surveys (Dupre and Mackey 2001; Hill 1981; Sigelman and Walkosz 1992), and why lay estimates of crime severity tend to more closely resemble news report distributions than officially recorded crime statistics (Sheley and Ashkins 1981). In short, through framing and information delivery processes, media content and public opinion may come

to roughly resemble each other, giving credence to the careful interpretation of media distortions as statements of community reputation.

Media distortions, though key to this study, are merely assumed to exist – the research design makes no special claims about the direction of the bias. It warrants mention that research on bias in crime reporting has pursued at least three distinct angles: that crime reporting is given undue and blanket priority (“it bleeds, it leads”), that racial minorities or disadvantaged areas are over-represented and/or differently presented in crime coverage, or that media is drawn to the unusual or anomalous crimes most likely to strike a chord with their middle class readership. There is little contest between these theories: journalists are all but trained to follow the third perspective as part of their professional practice (Johnstone et al. 1994), and the most rigorous multivariate analysis of homicide coverage confirm that unusual homicides, with multiple victims or particularly gruesome details receive wildly disproportionate coverage (Boulahanis and Heltsley 2004; Sorenson et al. 1998; Taylor and Sorenson 2002). Murders of racial minorities, or murders taking place in the “inner city” tend to receive the least coverage – and most homicides (let alone the vast majority of non-lethal criminality) may not be covered at all in a given year. Although logically and empirically sound, these findings are amiss without noting that even though crimes committed in disadvantaged communities may be least likely to draw news coverage, that coverage may be that community’s *only* representation in the local media, feeding the perception that minority and disadvantaged areas are over-represented in crime reporting. It is beyond the scope of this paper to sort out these issues here, but it seems possible that this pattern is due to the concentration of criminal offending in certain communities, combined with journalists’ hesitation to enter such communities for anything short of a serious crime, leading to a near-blackout on the kind of “normal” news coverage other metropolitan communities receive.

Finally, as alluded to above, an evaluative measure of reputation makes little sense without a component tapping into the salience or volume of that reputation. We want to know both the valence of that evaluation and how widely or strongly it is felt. This links back to one of the most consistent findings of cognitive mapping research, that when asked to mark their comfort levels with various parts of the city, many residents will plead ignorance for all but the most iconic and well-traveled neighborhoods, or the sites where they themselves live.⁵ Large chunks of many cognitive maps are left blank, pointing to the isolation and unfamiliarity of such areas, but also their lack of a widespread reputation. Such measures are difficult to proxy in survey research, but news media provides a convenient variable: the frequency of news coverage about a community. By simultaneously assessing the volume of news about a neighborhood in a given year and the proportion of that content linked to crime, one can tap into both the comparative/evaluative dimension and the salience/volume dimension of reputation.

Data Retrieval and Variable Construction

To retrieve media traces for analysis, I treated neighborhoods as named entities, and ran newspaper archives for references by name. Textual references to neighborhood names were retrieved via keyword searches in the *Washington Post* archives in Lexis Nexus. As I explain in more detail in the methods section that follows, I employ the “neighborhood cluster” as my unit of analysis, a geography commonly used in studies of DC neighborhoods (Tatian et al. 2008, 2012; Turner 2006) developed to bundle together up to five adjoining named neighborhoods within a single boundary. In this scheme, there are over 130 named neighborhoods that fit within

⁵ I write here primarily from the roughly 150 cognitive maps of fear and comfort collected by students of Sociology 98ka, over the 2010, 2011, and 2013 school years, but this finding is consistent with the literature (Milgram 1984).

39 clusters. I operationalized this cluster concept by running searches that required any neighborhood name within the cluster to be referenced in the text. For instance, for the cluster that includes Georgetown, Burlieth and Hillandale, the search was “Georgetown OR Burlieth OR Hillandale.” To limit my sample to only relevant articles that dealt directly with parts of the city as neighborhoods, and reduce the number of false positives, I developed a search string that required a neighborhood’s name to be within 50 words of the word “neighborhood” or a reference to a quadrant of the city (i.e., “northwest,” “northeast,” “southeast,” or “southwest” or their initials). As most local reporting, calendars, and opinion in DC references quadrant (and conversely, most out-of-town news does not), this search string met little improvement by adding search terms like “section” or “area” or “community.” Routine event listings, sports scores, and lists of health code violations were also removed, as were material from weekly suburban supplements as these rarely reference DC community affairs. Additional restrictions were added inductively to remove false positive retrievals for specific neighborhoods that had generic names (Woodland), names that were shared with suburbs (Takoma, Chevy Chase, Fairfax Village, Brookland), celebrities (Chevy Chase), rivers and other natural features (Anacostia), common names (Shaw, Sheridan, Douglass), local universities (Georgetown, Howard University), or those that served as political referents (Capitol Hill). Results of each search were scanned at random to ensure that additional search terms did not remove stories that conveyed meaningful references to neighborhoods, and that an acceptably minimal number of false positives were retrieved. Once a search string was established, it was applied to all years between 1996 and 2005 to create an aggregate count of “neighborhood news” references. This procedure yielded 30,268 articles addressing neighborhoods in DC for the years in question, or about 776 articles per neighborhood

cluster on average. These articles served as the base for constructing a measure of reputation for criminality or violence.

To calculate a measure of criminality or violence, I developed a search string meant to retrieve articles mentioning crimes included in UCR index crimes, the parallel categories in the DC criminal code, and other major crime categories like drug use and gang violence. This search string was restricted to avoid excessive false positives (e.g., the word “stole” proved impossible to use to retrieve the intended articles), and tailored to peculiar language of crime reporters (e.g. “slay” as a synonym for murder). The search string was (in Boolean algebra)

(crime or crimes or criminal or criminals or homicide or homicides or murder! Or killing* or killed or killer or killers Or violence or arrest! Or manslaughter or assault or assaults Or robber! or robbed Or mugg! Or break-in! or shooting or shootings or shooter! or drug or drugs or gangs or slay or slain or slaying or slayings or rape or sexual abus! or sexual moles! or arson! or stolen)

This string was applied to the list of neighborhood articles discussed above, with the requirement that “crime” terms be used within 25 words of a neighborhood’s name. This was done to ensure that entries in different parts of a crime log would not be misclassified by neighborhood. This string was applied within each neighborhood cluster/year, and all retrieved articles were read to check for accuracy and to remove false positives (which were removed from both the base and crime categories). To summarize, this search was employed on a pool of articles already verified as being about specific neighborhoods, and designed to assess the degree to which the content of each pool mentioned prominent crime types. This procedure yielded 3,520 articles. All crime stories were reviewed for validity, and the rare (less than 5) stories about *declines* in crime or *lack of* crime were excluded and moved back to the base category. Across the entire sample, about 11.6% of neighborhood stories linked the neighborhood to crime issues. Descriptive statistics for

each of these three variables – news stories, crime stories, and the proportional measure – are included in the bottom rows of tables 1-3.

There are at least two key complaints with this method of data retrieval and content analysis. First, references to certain places might fail to mention the place name and thus fall through the cracks of a Lexis search. Indeed, street names may be the more common identifier of place in the local press. This issue is important and warrants special investigation, but can be defended against through logic. I am interested in how neighborhoods as spatial units develop reputations, not the images attached to specific streets or other types of places within that space. There is no reason to think that the images of these specific places should bear on the broader corporate identity of the neighborhood. The second complaint is that the same place may be layered with several different names, each with somewhat different meanings, as partially suggested by Charles' studies of racial perceptions (2002) and more directly considered by Mele's study of the multiple terms and meanings that different groups of New Yorkers use to describe the Lower East Side (2000). In survey analysis this may be an important concern, but in the context of a single newspaper a degree of uniformity in regard to place name should be expected. Moreover, by focusing on a single dimension of reputation – crime and violence – it is unlikely that multiple meanings of place are a confounding issue.

Additional Data and Procedures

As mentioned above, the unit of analysis for neighborhoods used in this study is the neighborhood cluster, a geography invented in the late 1990's through a series of citizen summits and surveys by the DC government to take count of neighborhood concerns and policy priorities (DC SNAPS 2001; Potapchuk 2002; Turner and Berube 2009). This unit was chosen because it

Table 1.1: Correlation Matrix and Descriptive Statistics for Number of Stories Per Year Referencing Neighborhoods in the *Washington Post*, 1996-2005

	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997	1996
2005	1.000									
2004	0.977	1.000								
2003	0.979	0.974	1.000							
2002	0.962	0.941	0.970	1.000						
2001	0.957	0.925	0.966	0.984	1.000					
2000	0.877	0.881	0.886	0.858	0.868	1.000				
1999	0.877	0.877	0.859	0.827	0.833	0.974	1.000			
1998	0.820	0.844	0.841	0.792	0.806	0.945	0.925	1.000		
1997	0.818	0.850	0.837	0.795	0.809	0.945	0.923	0.974	1.000	
1996	0.855	0.865	0.848	0.812	0.813	0.967	0.960	0.949	0.956	1.000
Mean	98.231	102.308	100.744	102.205	110.256	54.436	53.718	56.513	53.769	43.923
St. Dev.	97.613	97.147	97.743	102.298	111.801	51.916	55.945	59.435	53.972	45.491
Min	4	6	3	2	7	3	2	2	4	2
Max	362	340	358	348	432	207	242	261	203	186

Table 1.2: Correlation Matrix and Descriptive Statistics for the Number of Neighborhood Stories Linking Neighborhood to Crime or Violence Per Year, 1996-2005

	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997	1996
2005	1.000									
2004	0.749	1.000								
2003	0.747	0.717	1.000							
2002	0.862	0.725	0.792	1.000						
2001	0.833	0.779	0.766	0.843	1.000					
2000	0.772	0.691	0.815	0.704	0.738	1.000				
1999	0.746	0.714	0.822	0.676	0.679	0.864	1.000			
1998	0.748	0.803	0.727	0.620	0.670	0.682	0.815	1.000		
1997	0.638	0.634	0.693	0.473	0.592	0.719	0.844	0.856	1.000	
1996	0.678	0.758	0.701	0.544	0.639	0.768	0.823	0.815	0.843	1.000
Mean	8.692	10.641	12.436	10.282	9.128	6.385	7.128	7.872	9.538	8.154
St. Dev.	9.177	12.023	14.438	10.978	11.223	6.576	7.871	9.763	11.832	7.289
Min	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Max	33	45	53	44	53	24	27	43	53	26

Table 1.3: Correlation Matrix and Descriptive Statistics for the *Percent of Neighborhood Stories Linking Neighborhood to Crime or Violence Per Year, 1996-2005*

	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997	1996
2005	1.000									
2004	0.611	1.000								
2003	0.261	0.506	1.000							
2002	0.417	0.385	0.247	1.000						
2001	0.555	0.543	0.305	0.670	1.000					
2000	0.155	0.416	0.468	0.435	0.427	1.000				
1999	0.168	0.140	0.174	0.226	0.313	0.164	1.000			
1998	0.400	0.288	0.122	-0.002	0.147	0.125	0.612	1.000		
1997	0.408	0.336	0.163	0.076	0.100	0.070	0.201	0.405	1.000	
1996	0.346	0.476	0.424	0.630	0.532	0.520	0.310	0.119	0.326	1.000
Mean	9.645	11.231	14.892	14.414	9.999	12.358	13.782	12.080	16.679	22.320
St. Dev.	8.019	9.669	12.893	13.366	9.351	11.882	11.128	10.298	12.905	15.026
Min	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Max	28.571	51.220	50.000	50.000	42.857	66.667	45.455	45.455	42.857	71.429

is organized around well-known and currently used neighborhood names, was created through a deliberative citizen-based process during the study period, and has emerged in recent years as the leading geography for studies carried out by DC-based researchers, such as those based at Fannie Mae and the Urban Institute. Indeed, researchers at the Urban Institute have organized an immense amount of community data around the cluster concept and disseminated it for public use⁶, including demographic profiles based on census data, crime rates, public health records, and mortgage loan activity. Clusters contain up to five named neighborhoods that adjoin each other and share similar locational, demographic, and structural characteristics. Shaped by physical geographic boundaries like rivers and railroad tracks as well major street corridors, they vary in size considerably and range from a population of 2,374 to 46,779, averaging at 14,301. In addition, clusters track onto current census tract boundaries, allowing for multi-level models, which will be key to the analysis in the next chapter.

⁶ <http://www.neighborhoodinfodc.org/>

To analyze the framework reputation described above, I first subject it to a series of validity tests. These draw on a range of other data sources, including an identically collected set of reputation measures derived from DC's other metropolitan daily, the *Washington Times*.⁷ As a paper known more for its conservative and evangelical politics than its local reporting, I only constructed reputation measures for 1998, 2000, 2002, and 2004 based on *Times* coverage. I conclude with exploratory analysis that briefly draws on population, crime, and other data aggregated to the cluster level.

Validity Tests

Tables 1.1-1.3 provide a validity test of the neighborhood reputation construct by assessing the measure's correlations across sequential years. Table 1 summarizes the correlations for the total neighborhood news variable. As might be expected, the same neighborhoods tend to get more coverage year to year, as shown by the strong correlations over time. Table 2 repeats the procedure on the number of stories linking a neighborhood to crime or violence, and finds somewhat lower but still strong correlations across years. Table 3 includes the correlations of the proportional measure of reputation – the number of stories linking a neighborhood to crime divided by the base number of neighborhood articles. This measure is less consistent over time, as some correlations are weak while others approach moderate strength. The procedure of converting the two measures into a proportion thus reveals a worrisome though not unexpected

⁷ In the future it would be interesting to draw on a more participatory repository of text for a more strenuous cross reference. The review website Yelp is rich with textual data that characterizes place, as does the popular message boards for homebuyers on city-data.com. Twitter, Foursquare, geocoded Wikipedia, and other web 2.0 platforms are intriguing but either lack the richness or evaluative component to do much more than chart the density of amenities and points of interest.

amount of measurement error in the media-derived variables. However, it is worth noting that for most of the available years, the proportional measure has moderately strong correlations.

Figures 1.3, 1.4, and 1.5 track the proportional measure spatially for 1998, 1999, and 2000, in the neighborhood cluster geography used in this paper. While there is some broad agreement across maps concerning which areas of the city are more associated with a reputation for violence or crime across years – notice the consistently high ratings for areas on the east side of the city, and along the southeast edge – there, again, appears to some inconsistencies over time. Given the nature of the variable and its media source, this should not be a surprise. This view is enhanced by comparing a neighborhood with an unstable reputation – the Congress Heights cluster – with a remarkably stable one, found in LeDroit Park. Figure 6 presents a time series illustrating this comparison over the duration of the study period. Most neighborhoods fall between these two neighborhoods, but some demonstrate even choppier time series, suggesting some concern with measurement error.

To assess these relations more systematically while granting more space for error and year-to-year fluctuations, average reputation measures were constructed for 1996-2000 and the 2001-2005 period and plotted together in Figure 1.6. The correlation between these variables is high at $r=.62$, which follows the strong relationship evident in the scatterplot.

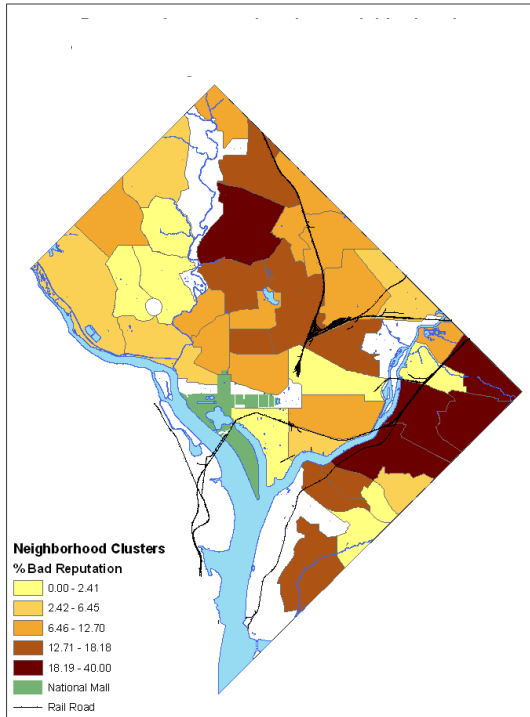


Figure 1.3: Neighborhood Reputation for Crime, 1998

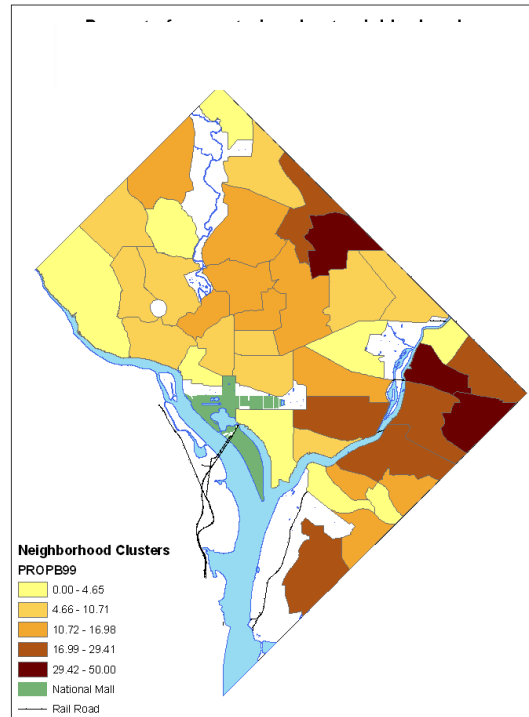


Figure 1.4: Neighborhood Reputation for Crime, 1999

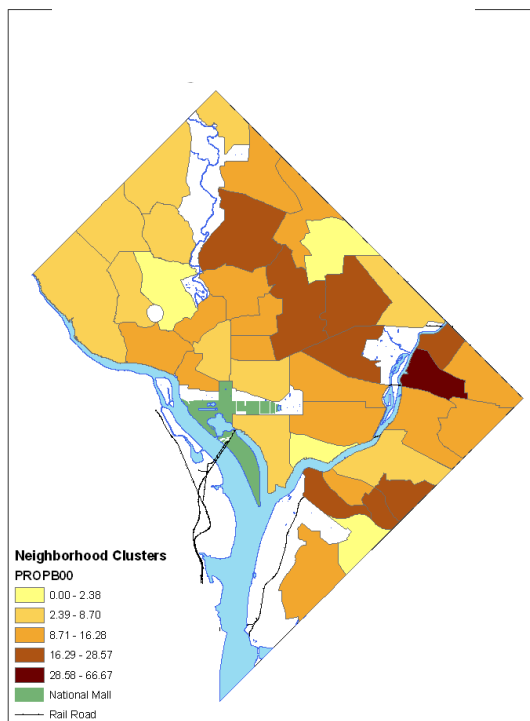


Figure 1.5: Neighborhood Reputation for Crime, 2000



Figure 1.6: The (In)stability of Neighborhood Reputation Over Time: Congress Heights and LeDroit Park, 1998-2006

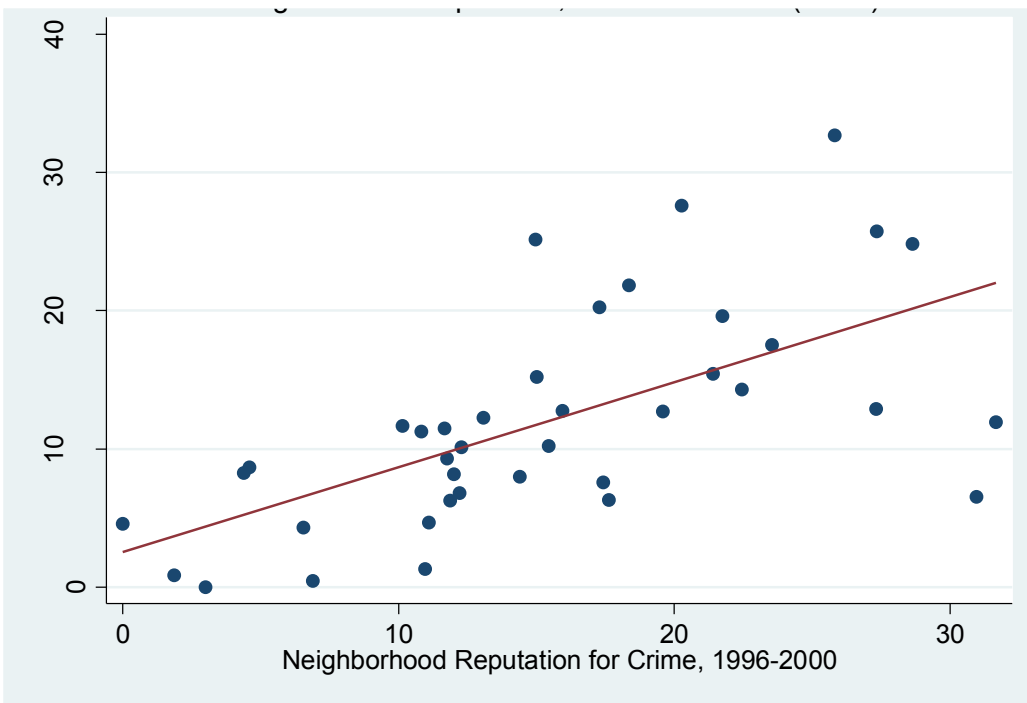


Figure 1.7: The Relative Stability of Criminal Reputation: Neighborhood Reputation in the 1990's vs. 2000s (N=39)

Another validity assessment comes from pairwise correlations between *Washington Post* and *Washington Times* reputation measures (not shown, available upon request) for 1998, 2000, 2002, and 2004 coverage. Despite the difference in ideology, readership, and circulation of the two papers, they seem to capture similar *volumes* of discourse about place, as suggested by the large correlations between same-year news count variables ($r=$ between .83 and .92) and crime count variables ($r=$.65 to .85). However, the proportion variable – the comparative/evaluation variable – is mixed, with the highest within-year correlation at .48, a second at .35 and the lowest at .18. It is interesting to note that both newspapers exhibit a similar pattern of frequency, but the evaluative maps of the city are less aligned.

Exploratory Analysis: Reputation, Race, and Crime

To better understand the constituent elements of reputation – the sources and factors that give way to a reputation for crime and violence, I constructed a series of pairwise correlations between the reputation measures and demographic, crime, and housing data measured at the cluster level, which reveals several important linkages. First, the correlation between the proportional measure of reputation for crime and the officially recorded violent crime rate reveals them to tap distinct indicators of neighborhood quality, with a within-year-correlation ranging between .41 and .17, and averaging around .30. This indicates that a reputation for violence and crime is positively related to actual violent crime, and the weak-to-moderate correlation suggests a sufficient association to lend some credence to the reputation measure. A moderate correlation between these variables appear realistic, especially given the variable's construction and potential errors in both measures. Conversely, no media-derived variable was correlated with rates of property crime.

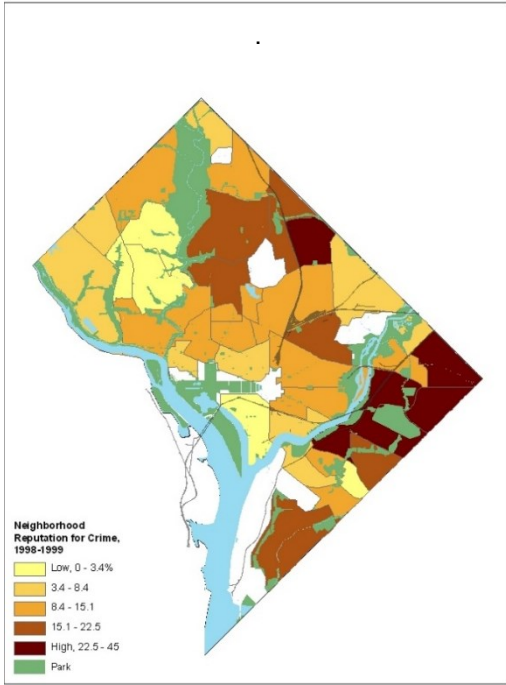


Figure 1.8: Neighborhood Reputations for Crime, 1998-1999 Ave.

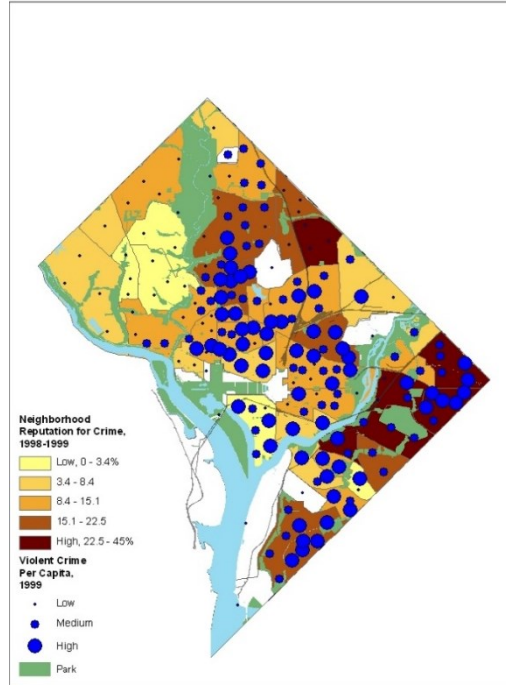


Figure 1.9: Neighborhood Reputation and Violent Crime Rates, 1998-1999 Ave

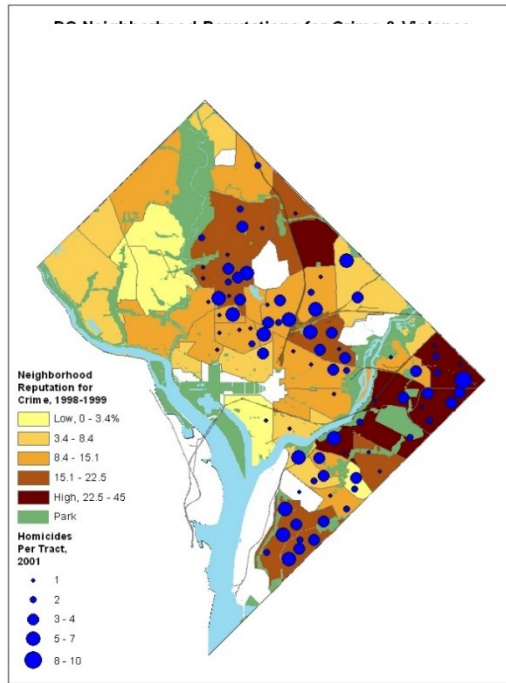


Figure 1.10: Neighborhood Reputations 1998-1999 and Homicides Per Tract, 2001.

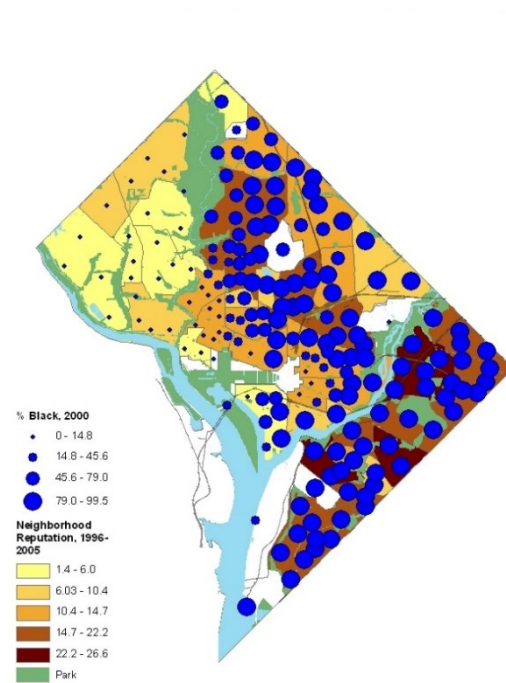


Figure 1.11: Neighborhood Reputations, 1996-2005 (10 Year Ave) Tract Racial Composition, 2000

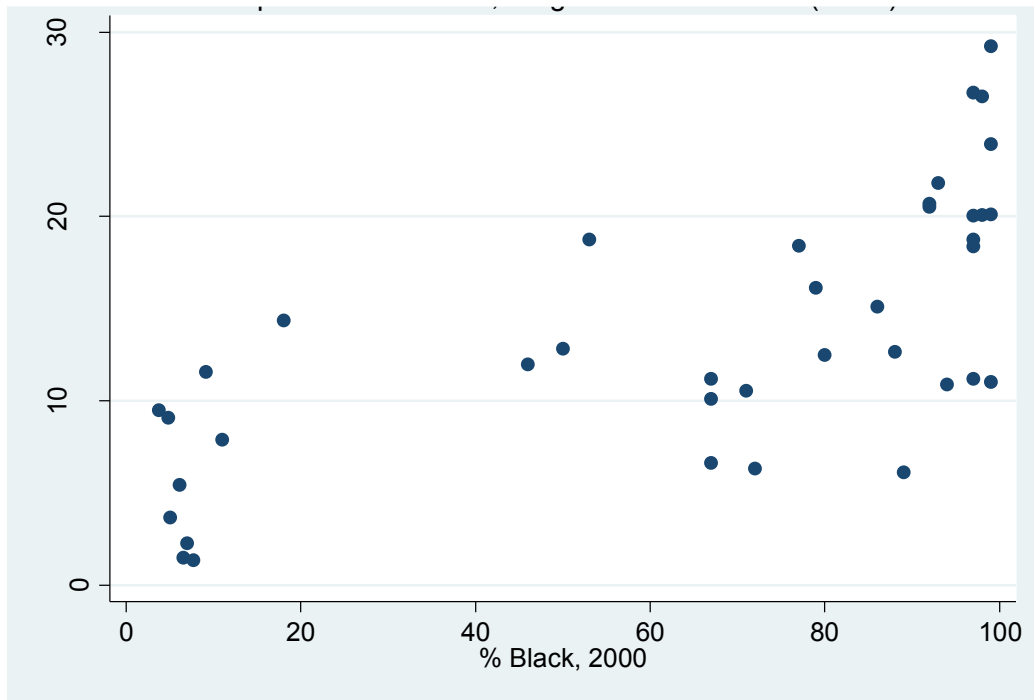


Figure 1.12: Reputation and Race, Neighborhood Clusters (N=39)

The volume/salience dimension of reputation also yields some important findings. In a series of pairwise correlations, it was found that neighborhood racial composition is the most consistent and strong covariate of reputational volume, more so than a host of other values, like neighborhood poverty, population totals or density. Specifically, the higher the African-American percentage in the neighborhood, the lower the number of mentions the neighborhood receives in the local media (this was also true for the *Times*, but at a smaller and insignificant magnitude). This findings likely reflects a mix of routine journalistic practices, the spatial and social isolation of most African-American sections of the city, and the corresponding lower profile these neighborhoods hold in the public mind.

Similar pairwise procedures were applied to the proportional measure. Although the proportional measure was designed to track the evaluative dimension of discourse linking locality with crime, the next set of pairwise correlations suggests that it is better aligned with a range of

other measures. Indeed, the proportional measure is more aligned with housing prices (as measured by same-year median sales) than violent or property crime rates. It is also strongly tied to the demographic composition of the neighborhood. The proportional measure is moderately and positively associated with percent African-American, and highly (and negatively) correlated with average family income. It is worthwhile to pause and note that a measure carefully constructed to track community perceptions of crime seems to better cohere around a cluster of variables conjuring up an unfortunate stereotype: low family income, low property value, and high percent African-American, and only then high crime. The next chapter evaluates these connections in a more rigorous causal framework.

Before concluding, I provide a final set of documentations exploring the validity of the reputation measure by comparing a two-year averages (1998-1999) to various measures of the official crime rate (figures 8-10) and a ten -average (1996-2005) of reputation compared to racial composition (figures 11-12). These figures largely reinforce and recap the core findings: although the evaluative component of reputation (figure 8) appears to coincide with the distribution of violent crime rates (figure 9) and homicide clusters (figure 10) relatively well, figure 11 shows how much more closely the measure tracks the city's racial composition. Figure 12 displays the same data as figure 11 but in scatter plot form, revealing a non-linear but close connection between the two variables. At a larger level, these findings point to the overall utility of reputation as conceptualized and operationalized in this chapter, but leave open troubling questions concerning the interplay of race, crime, and real estate – the challenge of the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Crime, Reputation, and Housing Prices in Washington, DC

This chapter evaluates the contribution of criminal reputation to housing prices developed in the previous chapter in relation to housing. Crime's impact on neighborhoods and housing markets remains an important and unsettled area of scholarship. While a substantial literature demonstrates the strong effect of increasing crime rates on urban outmigration and changes in population composition (Cullen and Levitt 1999; Liska and Bellair 1995; Morenoff and Sampson 1997; Sampson 2012; Taylor 1995), estimates of the impact of crime on housing prices vary widely, depending on locale and model specification (Tita, Petras, and Greenbaum 2006). What unites these studies is the assumption that movers possess perfect information on crime rates when choosing between communities, a position that has become all the more problematic as new research reveals the extent to which residents' perception of crime and disorder are distorted by racial stereotypes and other factors (Quillian and Pager 2001; Sampson and Raudenbush 2004). In this chapter I suggest a correction to this by estimating a hedonic price model that compares a neighborhood's *reputation for crime* and its official crime rate in relation to housing values. By lagging crime rates and reputation measures at various intervals before the time of sale, it is possible to distinguish between the short-term effects of media-derived information about crime and the potentially more durable nature of reputation. Through this analysis, I offer a more realistic conception of criminal activity's impact on housing market dynamics and highlight the place of the neighborhood reputation as a cultural mechanism of neighborhood reproduction.

I take as my departure the finding that subjective community evaluations effect residents' intentions to move *out* of a neighborhood, above and beyond objective structural conditions (Lee et al. 1994; Parkes and Kearns 2003). From the inverse view, it should follow that movers select *into* neighborhoods based on a mix of both easily discernable qualities (e.g., proximity to place of

work, quality of housing) and loosely held ideas about more amorphous symbolic qualities (e.g., social prestige or perceptions of violence). I posit that neighborhood reputation, as developed in the past chapter, acts as an intervening variable, supplying some of the details in movers' cognitive maps and thus partially determining where they may look for housing and the price they are willing to pay once they have found it. At the macro level a measure of reputation is validated to the extent that it may be linked to the operation of local housing markets. By establishing this linkage, evidence in favor of both the measure of reputation and its effects should be simultaneously registered.

Environmental Analogies and the Social Amplification of Risk

To demonstrate the impact of reputation on real estate markets, I borrow from the growing literature on the effect of industrial disasters, air pollution, brown fields, and other forms of environmental contamination. While scholars have used housing price data to evaluate the private and community costs associated with air or water pollution since the 1960's (see Boyle and Kiel 2001 for a review), an emerging school of scholars have cast new light on these issues by distinguishing the actual risk associated with environmental hazards from perceived risk. Here attention shifts to how risk information and triggering event characteristics are communicated by experts, and interpreted and amplified across media and culture as a dynamic process. In this "social amplification of risk" model (Kasperson and Kasperson 1996; Kasperson et al. 1988; Masuda and Garvin 2006), information or discourse about a risk may be more consequential for the behavior of relevant actors than the risk itself, leading ultimately to the stigmatization of areas near (and companies associated with) sites of low risk but culturally potent accidents and events. Relying on a mix of surveys, news analysis, and housing price modeling, this framework has been

convincingly applied to estimate the extent of public aversion to living in areas near nuclear facilities (Flynn et al. 1998) and hazardous waste sites (McClelland, Schulze, and Hurd 1990), for instance. Many studies in this vein use standard hedonic price models to estimate demand for local housing, but add variables for “real” (as technically assessed) health risk, media coverage of the risk, and/or distance from the site (Gayer and Kip Viscusi 2002; McCluskey and Rausser 2001, 2003), allowing for conclusions regarding the relative salience of real and perceived risk assessments in the changing desirability of the community over time. As suggested by Messer et al.’s recent multi-site study (2006) of communities near long delayed Superfund sites, communities may remain stigmatized for decades, with official announcements about clean up delays only exacerbating these conditions. They suggest, however, that a quick and effective clean up can reduce or eliminate community perceptions of health risks, thus removing stigma. While these studies may overstate the impact of media in characterizing place – as I will discuss later – they do provide an intriguing method of analysis and strong evidence that singular triggering events may launch neighborhood perceptions that can last for decades. While the parallels between the environmental risk and other forms of risk should be treated carefully, it is possible to theorize crime-related candidates for the kind of triggering events this framework focuses on, like riots, gang wars, and crime waves.

Crime and Real Estate

The literature on crime and housing warrants brief review to better situate the contribution of this study. Each of these studies differ by locale and model specification, but none take into consideration how home buyer’s cognitive maps or access to information may shape their search and buying behavior. Although this oversight was noted a decade ago in a review by Taylor

(1995), such variables have not been constructed nor entered into hedonic models estimating the cost of crime to date. Given the potential for crime incidents to trigger unexpected public responses (much as the environmental events discussed earlier in reference to “social amplification of risk” framework), it follows that measures of how crime might be mediated through cultural processes of reputation and perception are especially relevant to the pricing of real estate. On the whole, this literature tends to find small but non-trivial associations between crime and the pricing of real estate. Early studies used census tracts to estimate price models and generally found larger effects. Thaler (1978), for instance, estimated that property crime lowers home values by about three percent, and Rizzo’s (1979) study of Chicago’s community areas arrived at similar results for both home values and rents. Using more fine grained hedonic models that allow for property and tract level controls, Lynch and Rasmussen (2001) found a small association between crime and house prices in Jacksonville, Florida, but they employed estimates of the private financial costs of crime rather than crime counts or rates as variables. In contrast, Gibbons (2004) found that “disorder” crimes like vandalism and graffiti had a more severe effect than burglaries on house prices in London. Most recently, Schwartz et al’s (2003) (2003) study of apartment building transactions in New York City concluded that about a third of the rise in New York’s real estate prices in the 1990’s could be attributed to the city’s crime drop. Finally, in a study of Columbus, Ohio home sales in the mid-1990’s, Tita et al. (2006) estimate that home sales in lower income tracts are particularly sensitive to violent crime, while middle class communities demonstrate no association, and the effects among the upper income tracts are small relative to property value. This summary of the research on crime and real estate opens the door to a fuller discussion of the local context of the present study.

As the crime rate dropped in Washington since the early 1990's, the housing market pulled out of the stagnation that had marked the previous decade, and prices soared at unprecedented rates (see Figure 1). In unadjusted absolute terms, the median sales price nearly tripled in value from the late 1990's to 2006 (Author's calculation from data provide by the city's Office of Taxation and Real Estate). Concurrently, the city's depopulation trend slowed and halted, and DC registered its first population increase in five decades in 2005 (Turner et al. 2006). While it may be tempting to draw a causal link between Washington's declining crime rate and real estate boom, along the lines of Schwartz et al's (2003) finding that roughly a third of the rise in real estate prices in New York City can be explained by its crime drop, that connection moves beyond the intentions – and available data – of the present study. Instead, I focus on the importance of crime – real and perceived – for the recent history of DC in relation to city's surging housing prices in order to raise the question of neighborhood selection.

During this period of strong population growth and newly competitive housing markets, how responsive are movers to crime rates in selecting a place to live? With crime rates falling, where do they look for information and opinion to fill in their cognitive maps of the desirable and undesirable sections of the city? As I suggested at the outset, it is at this stage that I hypothesize that neighborhood reputation comes to the fore in constraining or enabling mover's cognitive maps and thus shaping where they may look for housing and the price they will pay for it.

Modeling Strategy and Data Sources

My main empirical test of the reputation measure – and the notion it indexes – is through the hedonic price model common in real estate economics. To assess the demand for neighborhood reputation, a hedonic price index for Washington, DC was constructed, covering all single family home sales between 1999 and 2006. The hedonic model was developed by Rosen (1974) to estimate the demand parameters for the attributes of any product that can reasonably be broken into a finite number of characteristics or properties. By regressing the logged sales price on the fullest possible list of product attributes, one should be able to simultaneously estimate what buyers are willing to pay for each element at equilibrium (Green 2003). In a practical sense, this allows assessors to estimate the cost of adding a new bathroom to a house, but it can be extended to many domains, including neighborhood concerns. For social research, it has become an invaluable tool for assessing the price of such intractable problems as air quality and noise pollution. Although a foundational tool in housing, real estate, and assessment, sociologists have been slow to use the model. The only exceptions have been Harris (1999) and Flippen (2004), both of whom violate model assumptions by including relatively short lists of predictors and relying on national survey data, rather than the local markets required by the model. More promising is the approach by Boggess and Hipp (2010), which looks at crime and real estate dynamically, across multiple cities, but without taking into account the informational and reputation mechanisms that mediate these relations.

The challenge of a hedonic index is that it requires detailed property characteristics on each home sold, spatial features like proximity, and contextual features usually collected at the census tract level as well. I describe each of these sources in turn. Detailed descriptions, sales histories, and spatial locations of all residential properties in the city were acquired from the

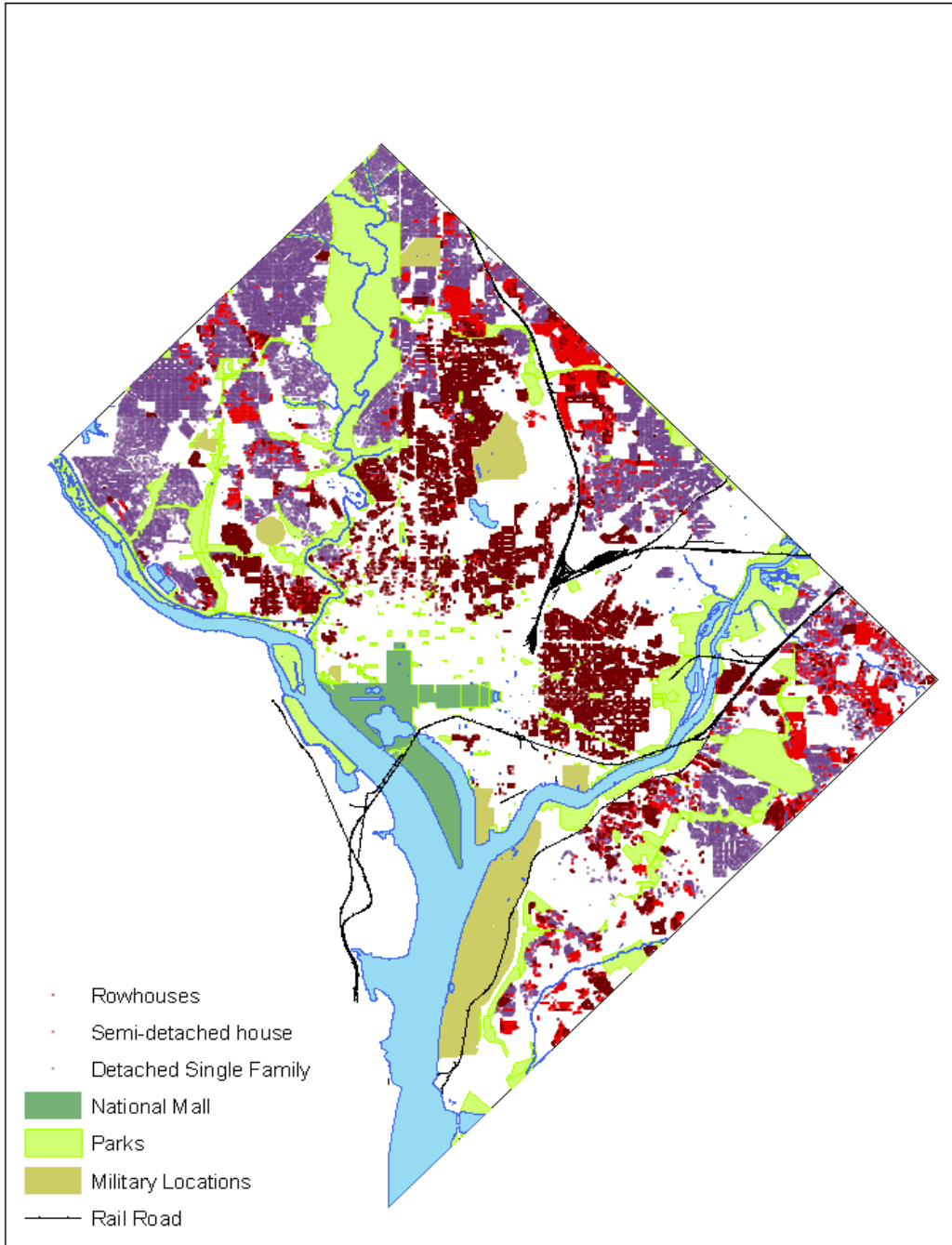


Figure 2.1: The Distribution of Single Family Homes in Washington, DC, by Type of Structure

District’s Office of Taxation and Real Estate (OTR). Assembling the fullest record possible required accessing and merging five distinct datasets. This final dataset includes information on

the size of the structure and lot; number of rooms, bedrooms, kitchens, bathrooms, and half-bathrooms; the existence of air conditioning; type of heating; number of fireplaces; year built and last remodel; property grade and global rating of condition; and the type of roof cover, flooring, and exterior wall. See descriptive statistics in Table 4 for details on the variables included in the final model. After restricting analysis to single family homes, I removed homes that did not sell during the study period, lacked a recorded sales price or date, or were missing data on one or more key predictors⁸. The final sample included 39,8634 transactions on 29,403 properties, including repeat sales.

ArcGIS was used to link these residential properties to census tracts and the neighborhood cluster, and calculate spatial variables capturing the distance between each house and the nearest subway station entrance and the distance to the White House, the latter of which I use as a proxy for distance to the Central Business District, a common measure in hedonic models. A wide range of other spatial variables were calculated but ultimately proved unimportant, including distance to parks, waste sites, and railroad tracks, among others.

Finally, following the standards set in the housing literature, I used census tracts as a measure of “residential context.” Tract racial composition (percent African-American considered in linear, quadratic, and cubic form, and percent Latino), measures of income, education,

⁸ To avoid distortions from unusual data points or suspicious patterns association with speculation or rapid property turnover, separate analyses were conducted with outliers removed. Following Levitt and Syverson (2008), outliers were defined as homes sold for under \$20,000 or over \$3,000,000, or sold more than four times during the study period. Since such outliers account for less than 1% of the total sample, their removal had negligible effects on the analysis and were reinserted in the analysis reported here. Other, seemingly less arbitrary methods to remove influential outliers (e.g., removing the top and bottom .5%) were considered, but ultimately shown to offer little improvement on the Levitt and Syverson formula.

population density, and the vacancy rate were all included at this level. Excluding tracts with insufficient sales or residential population left 173 tracts for analysis.

To control for crime, I included crime rates measured at the tract level, derived from two different sources. For the years 1998-2000, I relied on tract level rates per 1000 for violent and property crime supplied by the Urban Institute. For the years 2001 through 2005, I acquired a geocoded file of preliminary crime reports directly from the Metropolitan Police Department.⁹ This file was linked with tracts in ArcGIS, so that consistent tract level rates could be constructed to cover 1998-2005.

Although hedonic models are typically run with OLS, they are often confounded by non-independence of observations within tracts and by biased standard errors for clustered data. To overcome these issues, I estimate hierarchical mixed models, with properties nested in tracts and tracts nested in clusters, and allow random intercepts at both the tract and cluster levels. In addition, given the large number of repeat sales in my data, I opted to estimate separate models for each sale year, to maximize coverage of the sample without introducing autocorrelation by entering the same property twice in the same model. It is important to note at the outset some of the consequences of choosing multi-level random intercept model over the traditional OLS design¹⁰. First, in a field characterized by so many strong associations that authors routinely only star those variables that *do not* achieve significance of $p < .01$, the HLM structure imposes scant degrees of freedom and conservative standard errors. Moreover, by correcting for autocorrelation

⁹ To the chagrin of virtually all DC researchers, the MDC does not release index crimes in a geocoded or geocodeable format. Instead, it only shares preliminary reports that follow the DC Criminal Code, not the UCR. These codes have much in common, and when aggregated into index crime categories, match nearly identically to official UCR statistics.

¹⁰ All models reviewed here were also run using Robust OLS regression, where they were found to explain between 73 and 79% of the variance in logged sales price.

Table 2.1: Descriptive Statistics For Hedonic Price Model

<u>Dependent Variables</u>	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Logged Sale Price, 1999	4209	12.10	0.80	9.93	14.85
Logged Sale Price, 2000	4703	12.13	0.82	9.95	14.89
Logged Sale Price, 2001	5264	12.20	0.83	9.92	14.91
Logged Sale Price, 2002	5273	12.38	0.81	9.91	14.86
Logged Sale Price, 2003	5295	12.56	0.77	10.02	14.88
Logged Sale Price, 2004	5715	12.72	0.73	10.02	14.90
Logged Sale Price, 2005	5317	12.94	0.68	10.03	14.87
Logged Sale Price, 2006	4088	13.03	0.61	10.31	14.90

<u>Level 1 Variables</u>					
<u>Property Details:</u>					
Lot size (sq ft)	29403	3125.70	2849.59	31.00	102340.00
Gross building area (sq ft) ¹¹	29403	2797.58	1394.52	252	23599
# Bedrooms (topcoded at 10)	29403	3.16	0.96	0	10
# of Bathrooms (topcoded at 10)	29403	1.73	0.90	0	10
# Halfbaths (topcoded at 8)	29403	0.55	0.62	0	8
1 = Has Airconditioning	29403	0.53	0.50	0	1
# of Fireplaces	29403	0.64	0.86	0	11
Age (years before sale)	29403	76.78	24.70	0	212
Age squared	29403	6504.31	3594.76	0	44944
1 = roof is slate, clay tile, or concrete	29403	0.12	0.33	0	1

<u>Assessor's Rating of Property</u>					
Condition	29403	3.46	0.79	1	6
Grade	29403	4.43	1.49	1	12

<u>Property Type</u>					
Rowhouse	29403	0.54	0.50	0	1
Detached	29403	0.30	0.46	0	1
Semi-detached	29403	0.15	0.36	0	1

<u>Proximity measures</u>					
Distance to nearest subway station (meters)	29403	1156.811	728.4171	20.19407	3969.115
Distance to White House (meters)	29403	5523.172	2142.887	984.5049	10819.72
Distance to White House squared	29403	3.51E+07	2.48E+07	969249.9	1.17E+08

¹¹ All data files list Gross Building Area (GBA), not Gross Living Area (GLA), the more commonly used variable in real estate listings. GBA tends to run significantly larger, as it encloses everything within the exterior wall of the building, including hallways, staircases, storage, laundry, and some below grade facilities not always counted as “living area.” GBA renders these models difficult to relate to other cities, but they pose no problem for internal comparison.

Table 2.1 Continued**Census Tract Characteristics**

	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
% African-American, 2000	173	65.86	35.97	1.80	99.50
% African-American squared	173	5623.95	3879.89	3.24	9900.25
% African-American cubed	173	506385.90	391053.20	5.83	985074.90
% Latino, 2000	173	6.69	8.96	0.10	51.00
% Properties vacant, 2000	173	10.42	6.97	0.00	31.85
Population density, 2000	173	15346.68	10385.70	1379.18	54678.32
Log Average Family Income, 1999	173	11.03	0.62	9.78	12.78
% Adults with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher	173	33.60	28.57	0.00	91.20

Violent Crimes per 1000 Tract Residents

1998	173	17.55	15.07	0.10	147.00
1999	173	15.06	12.44	0.00	118.80
2000	173	16.39	14.45	0.50	145.00
2001	173	16.76	15.74	0.00	168.78
2002	173	16.18	11.87	0.00	95.64
2003	173	16.56	12.43	0.00	99.86
2004	173	14.25	10.25	0.35	80.17
2005	173	14.15	10.25	0.00	61.88

Property Crime per 1000 Tract Residents

1998	173	65.24	78.26	0.20	931.80
1999	173	54.67	72.64	0.20	871.30
2000	173	57.02	85.86	2.30	1023.00
2001	173	57.64	75.69	0.19	905.06
2002	173	55.98	59.11	0.38	693.39
2003	173	56.28	52.38	0.76	601.97
2004	173	50.39	45.54	0.96	475.39
2005	173	44.31	40.80	1.15	431.08

Level 3 Variables**Neighborhood Reputation:**

% of news stories linking neighborhood to crime or violence

1998	39	12.08	10.30	0.00	45.45
1999	39	13.78	11.13	0.00	45.45
2000	39	12.36	11.88	0.00	66.67
2001	39	10.00	9.35	0.00	42.86
2002	39	14.41	13.37	0.00	50.00
2003	39	14.89	12.89	0.00	50.00
2004	39	11.23	9.67	0.00	51.22
2005	39	9.65	8.02	0.00	28.57

in the nested data structure through the imposition of random intercepts at the tract and cluster level, models proved notably more resistant to identification. This is often because the HLM procedure makes the grouped, overlapping structure of the data explicit, and in doing so may reveal incongruity or points of incorrect assignment, issues that could otherwise escape inspection. Especially when using spatial data layers drawn from multiple sources and agencies, the problem of inconsistently drawn boundaries looms large – but difficult to check. HLM proves sensitive to even the slightest misplaced border, as that could artificially split spatial units and generate problems of interpretation across the analysis. In other words, for spatial analysis like this, HLM is not simply a more appropriate analytical strategy, but also provides important checks to ensure that the groupings and boundaries used remain consistent and accurate.¹²

Findings

The presentation of models here suppresses the standard property, tract, and spatial control variables employed in housing research. Across all models estimated, key variables were significant, with coefficients pointing in the expected direction (e.g., positive coefficients for larger lot size, more bedrooms, the presence of a fireplace, and so on), except for mixed results for population density and distance to the nearest subway entrance.¹³

¹² In short: earlier problems with modeling spatial variables were caused by slight differences in how federal and local government agencies draw census tract boundaries. Because local agencies are under significant pressure to respect the details of street and parcel lines, they tend to produce far more exact spatial data files. Ironically, the very precision of the local files can create inconsistencies with other less rigorously drawn sources, resulting in some data points assigned to the wrong tract. To correct for this, all spatial files were first assessed for misassigned data, then manually realigned and collapsed to match consistent parcel boundaries.

¹³ Separate analysis revealed that distance to subway is highly correlated with distance to public housing projects, and once the latter is controlled for a small but significant association emerges in the expected negative direction. This association is sensitive to segmenting the analysis by city quadrant, however.

Table 2.2: Hedonic Models Predicting Logged Home Sale Price, With Neighborhood Reputation and Tract Crime Rates Lagged One Year Before Sale.

Independent Variables	Sales Year (Each year represents a distinct model predicting the logged sales price of homes that sell that year)							
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
	<u>Model 1</u>	<u>Model 2</u>	<u>Model 3</u>	<u>Model 4</u>	<u>Model 5</u>	<u>Model 6</u>	<u>Model 7</u>	<u>Model 8</u>
<u>Neighborhood reputation</u>								
% of news references linking nbhd to crime or violence	-0.0028* (0.0013)	-0.00053 (0.0013)	0.0010 (0.0016)	-0.0039 (0.0025)	-0.0039* (0.0015)	-0.0039* (0.0023)	-0.0060** (0.0018)	-0.0048~ (0.00196)
<u>Tract-level crime rates</u>								
Violent crimes per 1000 residents	-0.0022 (0.0018)	-0.0057** (0.0022)	-0.0022** (0.0022)	-0.0049* (0.0026)	-0.0052* (0.0024)	-0.0029* (0.0020)	-0.0035 (0.0023)	-0.0022 (0.0017)
Property crime per 1000 residents	0.00077 (0.000048)	0.00033 (0.00036)	0.00086* (0.00037)	0.0011 (0.00070)	0.00066 (0.00060)	0.00027 (0.00049)	0.00064 (0.00049)	0.00042 (0.00042)
n	4209	4703	5264	5273	5295	5715	5317	4088

Notes: All models control for the following property characteristics: living area (sq ft); lot size (sq ft); number of bedrooms; number of bathrooms; number of half-bathrooms; a dummy for air conditioning; number of fireplaces; age; age squared; property grade; property condition; a dummy indicating a slate, concrete tile, concrete, or clay tile roof; and dummies for detached and semi-detached properties (rowhouse as the base). At the census tract level, controls include: percent African-American, percent African-American squared, percent African-American cubed, percent Latino, percent of properties vacant, population density, logged average family income, and percent of adults 25 and over with a bachelor's degree or higher. Models 1-2 and 5-8 control for each property's distance in meters from the nearest subway station, the White House, and the White House squared. All models employ a three-level "mixed" structure, allowing for random intercepts at the neighborhood and tract levels.
~ p>.1; * p>.05; ** p>.01; *** p>.001

In addition, an interesting and non-linear relationship between racial composition, specifically percent African-American, and price was determined – a trend already evident in Figure 12 in the last chapter. Controlling for neighborhood racial composition is standard practice in housing research, yet this is usually done with a simple linear regression. For Washington, I found the best fit by estimating a cubic polynomial function, suggesting that a unit difference in percent African-American is associated with a much larger price difference at the extremes of the city's racial composition than more racially diverse communities. There appears to be a tipping point at about 20% African American and again at about 80%, with a flat, sparsely populated line in

between. Consistent with a growing number of studies, percent Latino was found to have small but significant positive association with sales price.

Table 2.2 summarizes the variables of interest for a one year lag between the reputation and crime rates measure and sales price. Model 1 estimates the regression of 1999 sales price on 1998 violent and property crime rates and the 1998 proportional reputation measure. Intuitively it makes sense to position these three variables in the same year, as the reputation measure was designed in reference to crime reports and crime-related discourse from that year. Following these coefficients across the eight sale year models, several issues are apparent. First, the sign on reputation and violent crime rate variables are negative (in all but one model), as expected, but the property crime sign is positive. Although initially surprising, this is a consistent finding in cross sectional models of crimes rates and housing prices. Schwartz (2003), Gibbons (2004) and Tita et al (2006) all arrive at similar results. Gibbons attributes the result to the selective distribution of property crime across space, so that burglars' propensity to target higher priced neighborhoods appears in retrospect as a positive effect of property crime. Tita et al., in contrast, allege that the under-reporting of crime is at the source. In the models reported here, the coefficient for property crime is small, and only achieves significance in one sales year.

Concerning the key measures of interest, violent crime and the reputation for crime, these models indicate that each has a small but non-trivial and generally statistically significant association with housing prices. Both ebb and flow over time, which makes sense given both the potential error in the data and normal fluctuations in each of these variables over time. Looking across models, a unit difference in the reputation measure is associated with between a .3 and .4 percent difference in housing price, and that the price associated with violent crime falls within a similar magnitude. To summarize, violent crime remain a significant predictor of housing values,

Table 2.3: Hedonic Models Predicting Logged Sales Price, With Neighborhood Reputation and Tract Crime Rates Set At 1998, 1999, and 2000 Rates.

Independent Variables	Sales Year (Each predicts the sales price of homes that sell that year)							
	1999 (n=4209)	2000 (n=4703)	2001 (n=5264)	2002 (n=5273)	2003 (n=5295)	2004 (n=5715)	2005 (n=5317)	2006 (n=4088)
Predictors Set at 1998 Rates								
<u>Neighborhood reputation</u>	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12	Model 13	Model 14	Model 15	Model 16
% crime/violence	-0.0028* (0.0013)	-0.0030* (0.0013)	.00067 (0.0002)	-0.0041* (0.0018)	-0.0035* (0.0018)	-0.0041* (0.0016)	-0.0040** (0.0014)	-0.0046** (0.0017)
<u>Tract-level crime rates</u>								
Violent crime per 1000 residents	-0.0022 (0.0018)	-0.0050** (0.0018)	-0.0018 (.0021)	-0.0008 (0.0021)	-0.0001 (0.0020)	-0.00022 (0.00017)	-0.0009 (0.0003)	-0.00005 (0.0001)
Property crime per 1000 residents	0.00077 (0.000048)	0.00056 (0.00037)	0.00081* (0.00039)	0.00025 (0.00046)	0.00004 (0.00042)	-0.000093 (0.00039)	0.00024 (0.0003)	-0.00012 (0.00037)
Predictors Set at 1999 Rates		2000 (n=4703)	2001 (n=5264)	2002 (n=5273)	2003 (n=5295)	2004 (n=5715)	2005 (n=5317)	2006 (n=4088)
<u>Neighborhood reputation</u>		Model 17	Model 18	Model 19	Model 20	Model 21	Model 22	Model 23
% crime/violence		-0.00053 (0.0013)	0.0009 (0.0015)	-0.0033~ (0.0018)	-0.0020 (0.0016)	-0.0029~ (0.0016)	-0.0021 (0.0015)	-0.0035* (0.0012)
<u>Tract-level crime rates</u>								
Violent crime per 1000 residents		-0.0057** (0.0022)	-0.0026 (0.0025)	-0.0036 (0.0023)	-0.0044~ (0.0023)	-0.0012 (0.0020)	-0.0023 (0.0020)	-0.0012 (0.0018)
Property crime per 1000 residents		0.00033 (0.00036)	0.00066~ (0.00035)	0.00045 (0.00043)	0.00032 (0.00039)	0.00006 (0.00038)	0.00038 (0.00031)	-0.00008 (0.00034)
Predictors Set at 2000 Rates			2001 (n=5264)	2002 (n=5273)	2003 (n=5295)	2004 (n=5715)	2005 (n=5317)	2006 (n=4088)
<u>Neighborhood reputation</u>			Model 25	Model 26	Model 27	Model 28	Model 29	Model 30
% crime/violence			0.0010 (0.0016)	-0.0019 (0.0019)	0.0052*** (0.0015)	-0.0051** (0.0016)	-0.0043* (0.0014)	-0.0044** (0.0020)
<u>Tract-level crime rates</u>								
Violent crime per 1000 residents			-0.0022** (0.0022)	-0.0033 (0.0024)	-0.0042~ (0.0022)	-0.0023 (0.0020)	-0.0018 (0.0019)	-0.0021 (0.00178)
Property crime per 1000 residents			0.00086* (0.00037)	0.00036 (0.00048)	0.00008 (0.00041)	0.00051 (0.00049)	0.00028 (0.00030)	0.00009 (0.00036)

Notes: All models control for the following property characteristics: living area (sq ft); lot size (sq ft); number of bedrooms; number of bathrooms; number of half-bathrooms; a dummy for air conditioning; number of fireplaces; age; age squared; property grade; property condition; a dummy indicating a slate, concrete tile, concrete, or clay tile roof; and dummies for detached and semi-detached properties (rowhouse as the base). At the census tract level, controls include: percent African-American, percent African-American squared, percent African-American cubed, percent Latino, percent of properties, population density, logged average family income, and percent of adults 25 and over with a bachelor's degree or higher, as well as each property's distance in meters from the nearest subway station, the White House, and the White House squared.

All models employ a three-level "mixed" structure, allowing for random intercepts at the neighborhood and tract levels.
~ p>.1; * p>.05; ** p>0.01; *** p>.001

but it is sufficiently distinct from the reputation measure so that both can be accommodated in the same model. In terms of the framework of this paper, it appears that home buyers respond directly to official crime rates, but that reputation does impinge on these market transactions. By looking at these single year lagged models, however, it is not possible to identify if the reputation variable is proxying an “information effect,” or if the more durable nature of reputation is at play. Table Six summarizes models that fix the reputation and crime rate variables at 1998, 1999, 2000, and estimate their association with housing prices at incrementally later periods. Given the measurement error in the reputation measure and the consistency of crime over time, it might be expected that the reputation measure loses its association as the period between measurements increases, but these table show an opposite trend. In all three cases, the association between violent crime and housing prices diminishes over time, while the reputation measure ebbs larger in magnitude. In addition, the small positive association of property crime edges toward zero in all three cases.

Table 2.4 extends this analysis in two new directions. First, it introduces the second dimension of reputation to the model, bringing in the general salience of neighborhood reputation (measured by frequency or volume of media traces) so that it may be modeled against the proportional/evaluative dimension of reputation for crime. This should tap into the circulation of the reputation while controlling for its valence, and vice versa. Second, to address the threat of measurement error in the four key predictors, factor analysis was used to construct index variables from pooled years (1998, 1999, and 2000). In each case, the pooled years loaded on a single factor, which was rotated once to predict the new index variables employed here.¹⁴

¹⁴These procedures were repeated using varying pools of variables, including the entire ten year sequence. The larger pools tended to produce two factors, with one most associated with 1998-

Table 2.4: Hedonic Models Predicting Logged Sales Price, With Neighborhood Reputation and Tract Crime Rates Set at Index of 1998, 1999, 2000 Variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
VARIABLES	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<u>Latent Indexes, 1998-2000</u>								
Reputation for Crime	-0.0243*	-0.0192	0.0122	-0.0360**	-0.0477***	0.0562***	0.0471***	0.0667***
	(0.0144)	(0.0148)	(0.0158)	(0.0164)	(0.0167)	(0.0160)	(0.0135)	(0.0181)
Saliency/Volume	-0.00142	-0.00343	0.0252**	0.0150	0.0188	0.0225*	0.0149	0.0193
	(0.0120)	(0.0119)	(0.0128)	(0.0132)	(0.0133)	(0.0133)	(0.0109)	(0.0149)
Violent Crime Per Capita	-0.0959***	-0.113***	-0.0842**	-0.0852**	-0.0565	-0.0309	-0.0411	-0.0221
	(0.0369)	(0.0350)	(0.0364)	(0.0381)	(0.0383)	(0.0339)	(0.0322)	(0.0294)
Property Crime Per Capita	0.174***	0.0838*	0.0850**	0.0415	0.0388	0.0163	0.0501	0.0136
	(0.0652)	(0.0463)	(0.0425)	(0.0528)	(0.0510)	(0.0489)	(0.0368)	(0.0435)
Observations	4,269	4,748	5,328	5,347	5,368	5,776	5,373	4,138
Number of groups	39	38	39	39	39	39	39	38
Standard errors in parentheses	*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1							

Notes: All models control for the following property characteristics: living area (sq ft); lot size (sq ft); number of bedrooms; number of bathrooms; number of half-bathrooms; a dummy for air conditioning; number of fireplaces; age; age squared; property grade; property condition; a dummy indicating a slate, concrete tile, concrete, or clay tile roof; and dummies for detached and semi-detached properties (rowhouse as the base). At the census tract level, controls include: percent African-American, percent African-American squared, percent African-American cubed, percent Latino, percent of properties vacant, population density, logged average family income, and percent of adults 25 and over with a bachelor's degree or higher, as well as each property's distance in meters from the nearest subway station, the White House, and the White House squared. All models employ a three-level "mixed" structure, allowing for random intercepts at the neighborhood and tract levels. ~ p>.1; * p>.05; ** p>.01; *** p>.001

Interestingly, despite the inclusion of second measure of reputation and these less error-prone index variables, the results displayed in Table 2.4 are consistent with the rest of the findings displayed here. Specifically, the proportional dimension of reputation does not have an immediate impact on sales prices, is ambiguous in the short-term, but begins to edge upward as the time between media circulation and sales price increases, peaking as five or more years pass, consistent with the idea that reputation takes hold precisely as it is outdated. The same is not true of the saliency measure, however. That variable performed inconsistently and failed to reach statistical significance, suggesting that it is not how widespread a reputation is that matters, but

2000 coefficients, and the second aligned to the later years, confirming the usefulness of these cut offs.

simply its evaluative content¹⁵. That statement must be treaded on carefully until further research can support it. Finally, the two crime measures, now treated as index variables, performed similarly as in previous models. Violent crime has the strongest association when it is proximate to house sales, after which it decays toward zero. Property crime remains inconstant and positively associated with price.

Across all models and figures, a trend has emerges t that is largely supportive of the idea of reputation, not immediate information, having the long-term impact on housing prices. If the media-derived measure is linked to housing prices due to information delivery, we should expect to see that linkage decline as the information is no longer current and therefore relevant to decision making. Instead, the opposite trend is observed. This lends strong support to the framework and method at the core this paper.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to extend the model of reputation developed in the previous section to a causal argument, implicating reputation as a mediating variable in housing markets. The results of the models reviewed above are promising on the whole, and lend strong support both to the measure and the notion that neighborhoods possess symbolic and sentimental qualities that resonate with homebuyers and therefore a broad segment of the urban population. To summarize, the models suggest a small but significant association between a neighborhood's reputation for

¹⁵ Pilot analysis at the start of this project suggested the opposite: that the quantity of news traces are powerfully and positively linked to higher housing prices, unless that news concerns crime. In other words, any news is not necessarily good news. Sadly, though, that appealing finding does not hold up once proper control variables and HLM are employed. Additional model specifications and interaction effects were explored to better understand this variable, but further inconsistent and insignificant findings resulted.

crime and the price that homebuyers are willing to pay, an association that grows over time in strength and significance. As the strength of association continues to grow beyond any reasonable time horizon for a “media” or “information” effect, the role of reputation in the dynamics of urban housing markets becomes particularly clear. In this view, reputation can be thought of as information that became stuck in place, unchanging, and thus reshaping spatial practices around it.

This finding also points to the simple costs of reputation, which can be conservatively estimated as a one percentage point difference in the proportion of newspaper articles about a neighborhood that link it to crime or violence can be associated with a 0.3-0.4 percent difference in the sales price of a home. While this might appear modest, put in the context of DC’s high housing costs (where the median home sold in 2006 for \$435,000) this corresponds to between \$1300 and \$1700 per unit. Considering the wide range of reputations found across the city’s neighborhoods, with some neighborhoods’ news stories devoted to crime over 50% of the time, the magnitude of the association becomes all the more compelling.

Although this study is not without its limitations, presents a novel methodology for analytical framework, bringing research closer to the goal of demonstrating that the cultural organization of the city – the spatial distribution of meaning, symbols, perceptions and salencies – is both as observable and as consequential as its social and physical organization. Moreover, these variables were established in an evaluative but not hierarchical way – moving reputation beyond simply prestige rankings. Such was the explicit goal of previous efforts to develop a cultural ecological model of the city. As suggested earlier, Firey’s efforts to establish “sentiment and symbolism as ecological variables,” to quote the title of his famous paper (1947), collapsed in the absence of a positive method, and Suttles’ (1984) program to study the “manifest urban

iconography” proved too literary and impressionistic a foundation for systematic research. Instead, I argue that urbanists can benefit from scrutinizing the discourse that surrounds them – in newspapers, message boards, on the internet, in casual conversations – and notice the degree to which it deals directly with characterizing place. With the growing availability of digital media archives, it is now possible to overcome the limits of available sample surveys, and thereby measure the reputation of neighborhoods, sectors, or even streets in a consistent and replicable manner. The resulting data is descriptively rich, locally meaningful, empirically verifiable, and provides a firm foundation for comparative study in a seemingly infinite range of topics.

Beyond these methodological goals, this research contributes to our understanding of crime and real estate, and opens a new perspective on the impact of the great crime decline of the 1990s and 2000s on American cities. Although research has suggested that the crime drop was important to the health of some housing markets and urban economies, (Ellen and O’Regan 2010; Gottlieb and Glaeser 2006; Kreager, Lyons, and Hays 2011; Pope and Pope 2012; Schwartz et al. 2003; Vélez, Lyons, and Boursaw 2012) the evenness of these effects remains to be explored. The findings of this study suggest that the benefits of the crime drop (other than the reduced victimization rate), like increased housing value and investment, follow antiquated perceptions of safety and danger. Rather than a force for change, reputation acts as a conservative force. Following the logic of the “looking glass neighborhood,” even as crime declined, neighborhood inequality was reproduced (Sampson 2012). More broadly, this study is motivated by the notion that culture and capital come together in increasingly complex forms within and across cities (Scott 2006; Zukin 1995). By tracking the procession of cultural images and capital investment, this research could cast new light on any decision-making arena where reality and reputation may

be decoupled, from education (how do outsiders assess school quality?) to the environment, to workforce development.

Finally, these findings have implications for gentrification, urban revitalization, and community development. As discourse within these fields moves toward re-imagining, re-packing, or re-theming distressed communities (Gibson 2005; Johansson and Cornebise 2010; Reitman 2004; Toups and James H. Carr 2000; Wherry and Rocco 2011) – or, indeed, entire cities (Evans 2003; Greenberg 2008; Paddison 1993) – the issue of community perception is further elevated as an area of policy and study. This confluence of cultural and financial trends reaches its zenith under the sway of Richard Florida’s (2002, 2005) influence: here, cities compete for members of the “creative class” by signaling tolerance and “coolness” through support for artistic districts and bohemian enclaves. It is this argument and question of culture and place that I turn to now.

Chapter 3: What Do We Mean By An Artistic Neighborhood?

The tendency for artists to cluster in dense enclaves has long intrigued urban sociologists and policymakers alike. From the perspective of understanding the image of the city, few trends are more decisive than visible artist settlements. Across history, for a neighborhood to reach iconic status, hit the common parlance, and become so well known that it can be uttered and understood without even identifying the city that hosts it - for that to happen, artists are often (but certainly not always) involved. From Montmartre, to Greenwich Village to Hollywood to Haight-Ashbury to SoHo to the East Village to Wicker Park to the Lower East Side, Williamsburg and Bushwick, the artistic neighborhood seems to be one that resonates widely, and for decades. Sociologists' interest in such communities has steadily crept from the margin to the center of the field, largely thanks to the decade-long debate over the role of the "creative class" and "creative economy" in urban revival (Florida 2002; Markusen and Schrock 2009; Markusen et al. 2004; Peck 2005) augmenting earlier research on artist "pioneers" and gentrification (Ley 2003; Lloyd 2006; Zukin 1982). While these lines of research have done much to advance our understanding of the cultural-economic structure of the post-industrial city, they are in danger of obscuring as much they reveal due to an oversimplified conception of the artist enclave. Here I single out the dramatic and superbly documented story of SoHo, the section in New York City now iconic for its radical and swift transformation from industrial wasteland to vibrant artistic community, then to an elite retail and residential bastion (Fensterstock 2013; Kostelanetz 2003; Petras 2003; Shkuda 2010; Simpson 1981; Zukin 1982). Indeed, well before the term "creative class" was coined, SoHo provided the key, motivating image of a tightly organized if "unanticipated" urban "art

world” (Becker 1982) swelling into the thousands before flickering out, strangled by its own “success.” The SoHo story is a rich and complicated one, but this barebones narrative of economic ascent and displacement captures the essence of the “SoHo effect” that urban scholars have persevered to understand, and policymakers have sought to harness and replicate.

Following from this image of SoHo, research on urban arts and the creative class often assumes that artists naturally come together to form dense if sometimes fleeting artistic communities – settlements which in turn may spark cycles of revitalization, gentrification, and displacement. That is, researchers have treated SoHo as the expected formation and trajectory. In the pages that follow, I draw on a variety of data sources - annual directories, census data, local “open studio” events, interviews, and ethnographic fieldwork – to explore the structure of the artistic neighborhood. By drawing on these kinds of data, I am able to flip the traditional question on its head, and ask: what do we mean by an artistic neighborhood? What are their core qualities, and how do they vary amongst these? And how common are they?

I start with the conventional wisdom that artists are spatially concentrated, both within metropolitan areas and within neighborhoods. At the metropolitan level, research by the National Endowment for the Arts attests that over twenty percent of artists live in just five metros: Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Washington, and Boston metropolitan areas (Gaquin, Bradshaw, and National Endowment for the Arts 2008). Boston’s placement on this list has less to do with visual arts, and can instead be primarily attributed to the large number of writers and designers in the region. Detailed comparative research on the demographics of the arts shows the location quotient for visual artists in the Boston region to fall right at the average of major American metropolitan areas, making it an excellent site for study (Markusen et al. 2004). Far from the hubs of the international art market (Thornton 2008), Boston is also not quite provincial, but

could be best placed as one of many “off center” art worlds that dot the globe (Shaw forthcoming). While instructive, much of the region on these questions – like Richard Florida’s analysis – typically stay at the metropolitan level, when the arts, I contend, play an even more important role at the neighborhood level, in terms of differentiating the internal structure of the city and giving definition to space. As discussed elsewhere, these processes may be importantly related to economic valorization, including gentrification and displacement. Ethnographic studies of specific neighborhoods suggests this to be the case (Mele 2000, Lloyd 2006), but we are lack in the careful, comparative, metropolitan wide research required to understand the structure and dynamics of these neighborhoods. Moreover, attention to the most visible components of the artistic enclave, like galleries and museums, might lead to a very incomplete without consideration of the other components of artistic life. Indeed, several recent studies of the New York art world have focused on the changing patterns of galleries as if they represent the entirety of the artistic scene (Fensterstock 2013; Rothenberg 2012; Schuetz and Currid-Halkett 2011), thus dramatically skewing the art world. To take a fresh look at the spatial structure of the art world, and to better pin down what the “artistic neighborhood” may actually look like, I take an empirical leap, and split the art world into three dimensions of activity. By considering artistic life in terms of residential, retail, and studio dimensions, the pages that follow attempt to give an exact portrait of the art worlds of contemporary Boston. All of these can be seen as structural antecedents for the image of the artsy neighborhood of lore – and thus the focus here is on the independent variable within the image framework developed throughout this dissertation.

The Three Geographies of Cultural Production

To study artist residential settlement patterns in Greater Boston, I utilize the annual “City Census” data forms collected by every city and town in Massachusetts. These forms are meant to track population between census years and keep voter rolls up to date, so offer sparse details: name, sex, address, marital status, age, and occupation, all in the respondents’ own words. By identifying, geocoding, and enumerating respondents who identify themselves as an “artist” or a close variation (designer, sculptor, photographer, etc), it becomes possible to track artistic density at a very fine level, across time and place. These surveys have been collected statewide roughly since for the Civil War, but here I focus only on 2009 results for Boston and immediate inner-ring suburbs of Cambridge, Somerville, Brookline, and Newton. Although infrequently used by social scientists on account of their sparse data, they are widely used in public health and medical studies as a sampling frame, and form the basis of Granovetter’s classic studies of occupational mobility (Granovetter 1974). Public health scholars have routinely found the general reliability of city directories, and new perspectives in urban studies predict a revival of these data sources in future research (Goldstein 1954; Harris and Moffat 1986; Joe Schlichtman and Patch 2008; Rosenbaum et al. 1993)

Figures 3.1 and 3.2 reveal the residential distribution of artists in Boston and its immediate suburbs. They show that Boston boasts nearly 2,000 self-identified artists and another 3,000 workers in allied fields. One interesting finding is that there is not a single tract of the 226 considered here that does not have at least one artist or art-related worker in it. Put differently, half of all artists live in tracts with only five other artists and the densest tract contains 111 self-identified artists or about 5.3% of entire artist population. In other words, artists tend be fairly diffused.

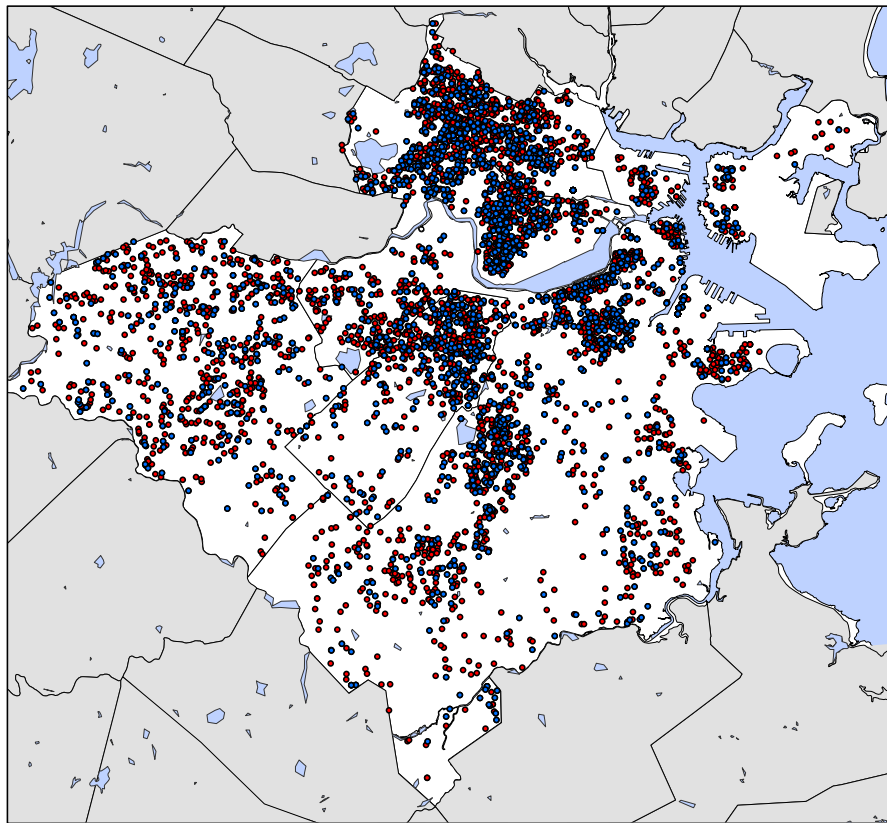


Figure 3.1: Artists Residences, 2009 (City Censuses)

Figure 3.2 shows artists as a percentage of workers, in order to correct for population issues that may confound figure 3.1. There are several notable trends in this figure: the density around Fort Point in Boston and Brickbottom in Somerville is to be expected, given their well-known artist live-work buildings. But, there are other areas of high artistic density that are surprising – especially high economic status communities towards the west, in West Cambridge, Brookline, and Newton. The lowest density of artists follows the corridor of poverty along Blue Hill Avenue in Dorchester and Mattapan, further suggesting a relationship between artists and

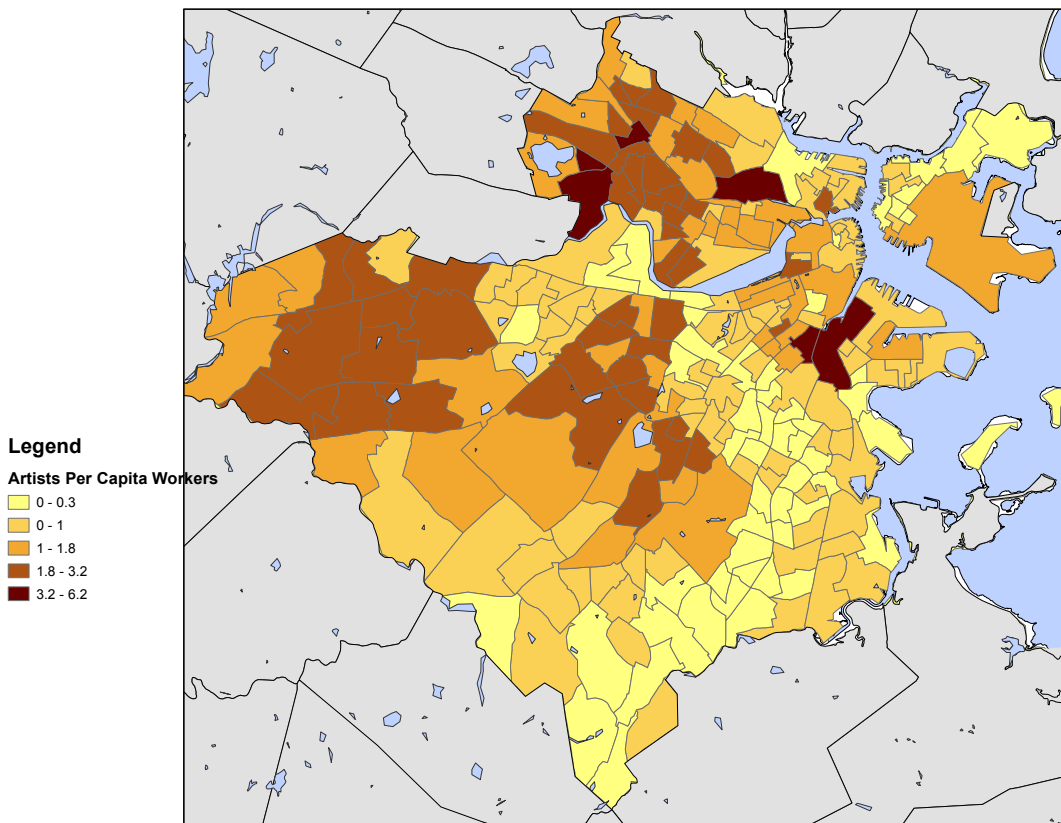


Figure 3.2: Artists Residences Scaled to Local Workforce

Figure 3.3 puts these observations into sharper relief, indicating a strong correlation between neighborhood income and the density of artist’s residence. The correlation is even stronger once the two major outliers are removed, hinting at an important point: artistic concentration is positively correlated with income, except in the two areas with very density of artists. Those two communities fall with the lower-middle class strata of the spectrum, and thus fit more closely with the status of the pre-gentrified, working class community predicted in much of the literature.



Figure 3.3 Economic Status by Artistic Concentration

Figure 3.4 displays the retail side of the Boston visual art world, by mapping the membership galleries of the Boston Art Dealers Association (BADA). The precise definition of a gallery remains an elusive and controversial – simply mapping all the locations where art is both displayed and sold would be all but impossible and invite more challenges (and cast an ultimately much larger net). Relying on the preeminent local association’s membership list solves several problems at once, and limits analysis to only those established and recognized galleries in Boston, similar to recent research on New York that relied on similar gallery directories (Schuetz and Currid-Halkett 2011). This procedure is also in keeping with the use of residential directories to plot artists residential life – much like allowing artists to define themselves, the assumption here that association membership is a fair proxy for gallery identification.

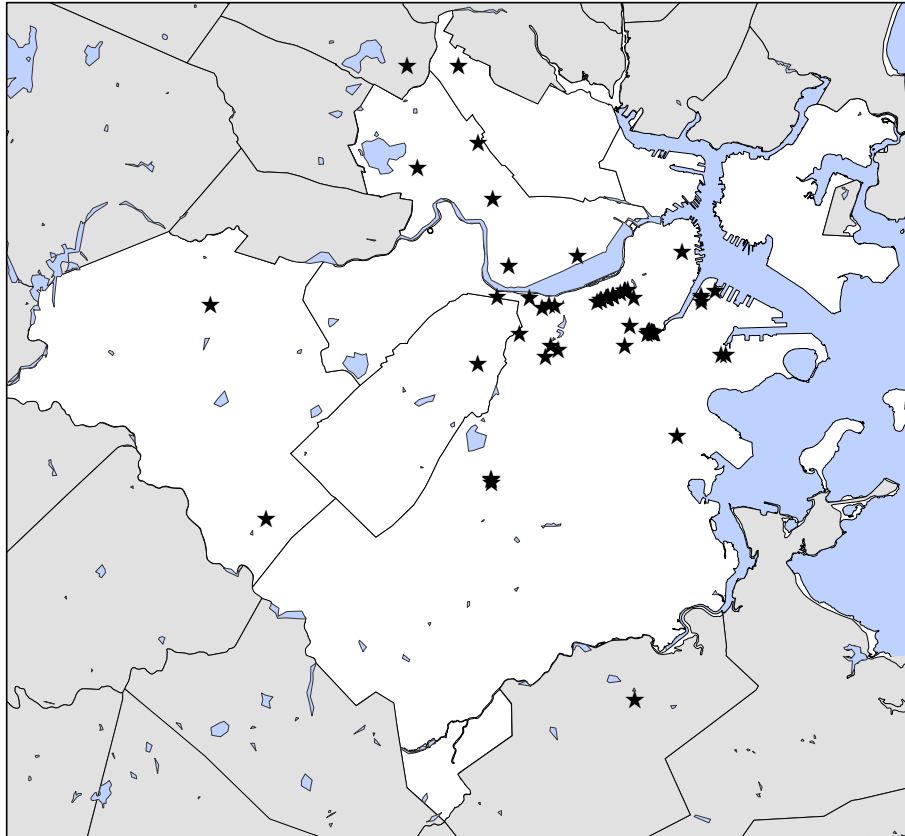


Figure 3.4: Boston Area Commercial Galleries

The map itself (Figure 3.4) shows a vastly simplified and streamlined world from the New York City model. In contrast the complex and dynamic geography of the New York gallery world, with its 800 locations and swirling histories of settlement and Boston has a notably small retail sector for visual arts (65 galleries in the city proper, compared to over 800 in New York) and the galleries are so hyper concentrated in just a few locales, that much of the city is left blank. Two tracts contain a majority (33 of 65) galleries or museums listed, which corresponds to Newbury Street and SoWa District. All galleries are contained in a mere 23 of 226 tracts, demonstrating their isolation from the general patterns of urban life in the city. If the artistic neighborhood is defined by galleries alone, they are few and far between in Boston.

Tracking the studio dimension of Boston arts scene proves a bit more challenging, but ultimately more interesting. Here I take advantage of a unique data source on artists in Boston: the city's tradition of "open studio." Each weekend in the spring and fall, the artists from one or more neighborhoods in Boston or its immediate suburbs open up their studios or homes to visitors. Open studios events – days or weekend when the members of artistic community open their doors, welcoming visitors in as a "way to see art in the space it's made with the maker present" (Shea 2013) – were the initial focus on this study, due to their strong geographical and community focus.

Organized by community-based non-profits, they receive limited assistance from city or state cultural affairs offices (e.g., lax parking rules on open studio days to encourage out-of-towners). Over forty different arts communities host up to seventy different open studios events in Eastern Massachusetts each year, with some holding multiple events across the year. Most open studios, including nearly all those in the city of Boston, take place between September and November, while a second batch of mainly suburban events launch in the spring.

The history of open studios has not been written, but variation on them emerged across American cities between 1968 and 1970, when young artists frustrated with the gallery system started to organize weekends when blocks of artists would open their studios at once for the public to see. This was most famously led the Downtown Ten in Lower Manhattan, but similar movements arose in Chicago and San Francisco, and by 1970 Boston artists had organized into the Boston Studio Coalition, and opened their first weekend (Driscoll 1970; Glueck 1968; Lafo 2002; RUSSELL 1977). Figure 3.5 reveals that studios at the time were concentrated downtown,

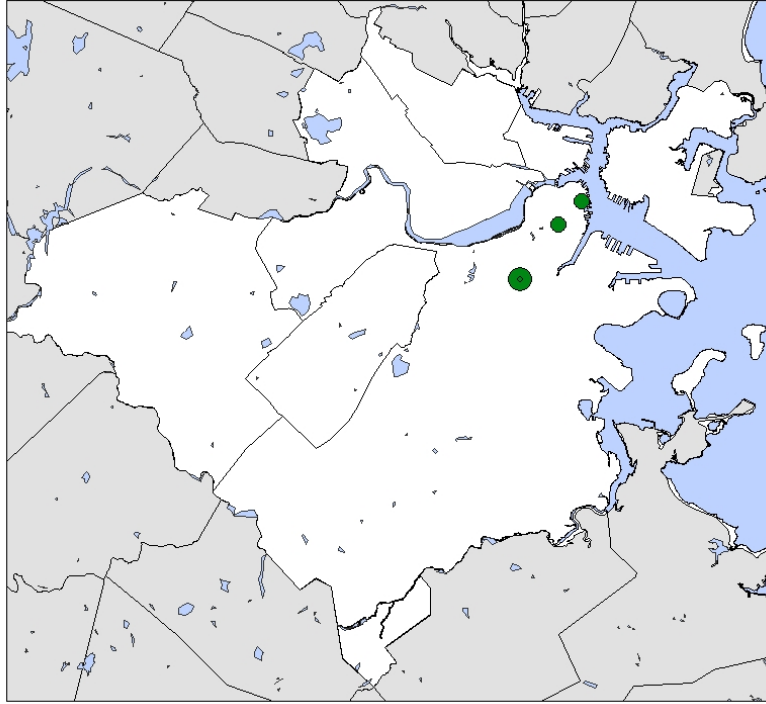


Figure 3.5: Boston Studio Coalition, 1970, Scaled to Size of Studio Location

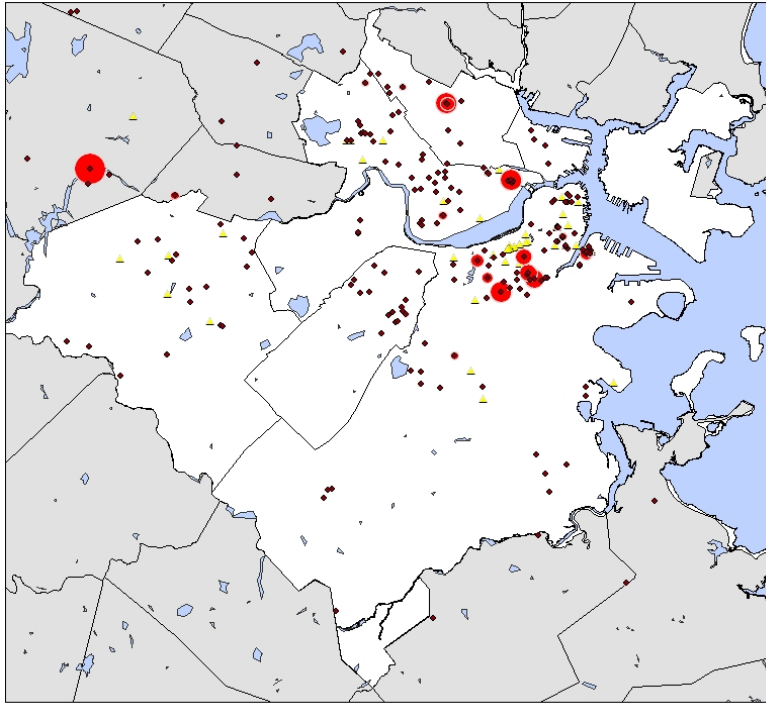


Figure 3.6: Boston Artweek, 1980, Scaled to Size of Studio Location

in the North End, Downtown Crossing, and South End – and in only three locations.

By 1980, there were several regular open studios around the region, which briefly came together to form Boston Art Week, a week-long festival that sought to open all art studios on different days of the same week. Thankfully, the materials from this event have been preserved, giving us an interesting glimpse into the state and scale of artistic studio production in Boston during that era (Artweek 1980; Taylor 1978; Temin 1980). Figure 3.6 displays that data, and is scaled by the size of different studio locations. Note that galleries also participated in Art Week, which are marked in yellow. One can see in this map a world that is quite familiar to current Boston, with large studios in the South End, Somerville, and Waltham. Art Week did not continue past this year, but it did set the seeds for neighborhood and town-based open studios that proliferated in the years that followed, from the basis in Fort Point, Somerville, and Waltham, to the South End and Jamaica Plain, and gradually throughout the city and region. Today there are fewer and fewer parts of Boston that are not part of an open studios, or boast their own. But, as we will see, the open studios vary enormously in their structure, boundaries, geographical scope, leadership, rules, timing, frequency, and more.

Figure 3.6 details the current spatial patterns of open studio locations in the city. Note that open studios today embrace both artists who work from home and in a studios, so the maps provide a revealing description of the structure of the arts community and the kind of studio infrastructure available. This map is based on twenty different data sources collected from different Boston area arts organizations, scanned, converted into text, cleaned, geocoded, and spatially analyzed.

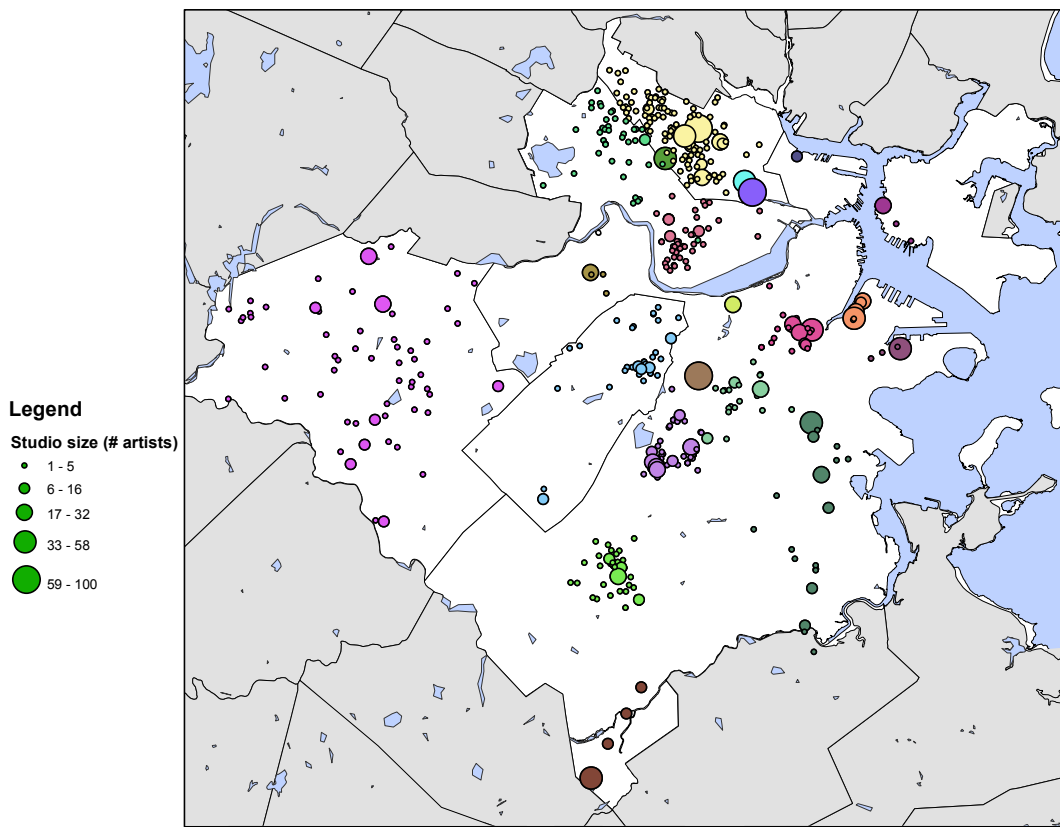


Figure 3.7: Boston Area Open Studios 2012-2013. Scaled to Size of Studio Location

Each open studios event is coded a different color, and the scale represent the relative size of the studio in terms artists at that address. In this way, they provide an interesting register on the how the different arts communities in Boston organize themselves. But they also reveal a moderate level of spatial clustering, about halfway in between the diffusion of artist residences and concentration of gallery locations. The top tract in the city contains 7.6% of all studios, and top five embrace 28% of studios. Meanwhile, nearly half of area census tracts lack a studios at all. Between this moderate degree of clustering and the distinct spatial patterns of these communities, it appears that the studios provide perhaps the most interesting and useful way of understanding the neighborhood structure of the local Boston art world.

Finally, it is important to note that these maps only come together in one location: the SoWa district of the South End. That is one place that contains a large density of art galleries, studios, and nearby artist residences. In short, if Boston has a single artistic neighborhood – and few would truly agree with that statement – SoWa currently would hold that title. The next chapter explores the history of artistic settlement and corporate development that has created such an unique environment in SoWa.

Conclusion:

In this chapter I sought to better describe the artistic neighborhood by breaking it down into residential, retail, and studio location, and I used basic spatial visual techniques to walk through the resulting patterns. I found that artists' residences and studios are not nearly as clustered as is often thought, and that this spatial clustering diverges from expectations in several key ways, particularly in regard to social status/income, although with some important exceptions.

Open studios provide an interesting angle on understanding the neighborhood context of cultural production, but they invite a contradiction. The tension is that although open studios reveal a tremendous amount about neighborhood structure, their sheer dispersal and diffusion contradicts the artistic enclave of lore, as well as the arts district and cluster promoted in policy circles (Chapple, Jackson, and Martin 2010; Freiden 2011; Frost-Kumpf 1998; Mommaas 2004; Rye 2008; Stern and Seifert 2007, 2010, 2010). Although they do seem to play a role in defining neighborhoods, it is thus difficult to say this occurs in a way with an economic impact. Rather than being a force for change, it appears that open studios are a way of differentiating between places, and organizing the cultural life of the community.

Chapter 4: Image in Action: Artists, Audiences, and the Rebranding of SoWa

Overview

Urban cultural branding, or the instrumental use of arts and culture to reshape the outward image of a place, is neither as effective as advocates insist nor as untenable as skeptics allege – and it need not be as manifestly coercive as is often assumed. Much of this depends on the actors, their interests, and the trade-offs and commitments they are willing to make. In this chapter, I take a case-based, interpretive approach to understanding the interplay of culture and capital that established the SoWa District in the South End of Boston. Although grounded in the comparative, spatial analysis of art communities developed in the last chapter, I focus on a single case study here due to its importance in the Boston art scene, its status on an instructive outlier on a number of dimensions, and the intriguing issues of image, branding and manipulation it invokes. Although the focus is on the arts as community generating and defining events, I show how these are embedded within larger artistic ecologies as well as commercial and political networks. Indeed, my research reveals that art communities are rarely – if ever – created or sustained by artists alone. Property developers and landlords, government officials, arts advocates, and local civic organizers can play outsized roles in these processes, and with them may come a plethora of diverging and competing goals and agendas. Branding campaigns simplify multiple realities, and beneath the mask of clarity often lies an uneasy mix of motives, visions, and, ultimately, risks for artists and their advocates. These risks take on a variety of forms, but in general point to the structural precariousness of artists, even the best of conditions.

Much as the previous chapter questioned the simplistic image of the artistic neighborhood, this chapter takes on the idea of branding advanced in much of urban and cultural research. Specifically, this chapter makes three contributions. First, I show that branding is more than mottos or slogans – of mere text – and most meaningful when it is fleshed out on the ground via institutionalized practice and named events (Deener 2007). Second, because artist communities operate in concert with actors who may not share the same agenda, the clarity of the image projected may mask a much more complicated and divisive reality. Yet, branding works best when mutual, if different, interests inspire a sort of collusion or cooperation between actors. Finally, and underlying all of these, is the finding that image and reputation can be manipulated, although the efforts required are substantial, and not all effects may be anticipated or beneficial. Indeed, by highlighting the trade-offs made by one of the most “successful” Boston-area arts communities in the pages that follow, I hope to demonstrate the perverse risks that only come about via effective place promotion.

I begin this chapter with a brief anecdote taken from the world of popular fiction, showing how a recent novel encapsulates and lays bare the struggles to define the freshly christened SoWa arts district, introduced in the previous chapter. The story it highlights a number of the key themes that follow, including the management, collusion of actors, and sheer fragility of branding campaigns. Following this example, I draw on recent innovations in the urban and cultural literatures to develop a framework that stresses differentiation around the actors, interests, and trade-offs involved. I use this framework to return to SoWa, and provide a full analysis and interpretation of the community and image constructed there, while drawing insights from the range and variety of other art communities evident in the Boston region.

Introduction: Fiction Producing Reality

Thirty years after Mario Nicosia began buying up and redeveloping the factories and warehouses that line Harrison Avenue in Boston's South End, 15 years after he began rebranding it as the SoWa (South of Washington Street) arts district, Nicosia's creation and its peculiar name have not just entered the Boston vernacular, but provided the setting to a popular mystery-art-caper novel. The opening pages of Barbara Shapiro's *The Art Forger*, finds the protagonist in her studio:

The building was once a factory – handkerchiefs, some old-timer told me. But the old-timers aren't known for their veracity, so it could be have been hats or suspenders of maybe not even a factory at all. Now it's a warren of artists' studios, some, as in my case, live-in studios. Illegal of course, but cheap.

According to media hype, SOWA – South of Washington – is the new trendy district in the south end of Boston's South End; the north was the new trendy area about ten years ago. But to me, and to anyone who spends any time here, it's barely on the cusp. Warehouses, projects, a famous homeless shelter, and abandoned basketball courts form the base of a neighborhood erratically pockmarked with expensive restaurants, art galleries, and pristine residential buildings protected by security. The roar of I-93 is so constant it sounds like silence. I wouldn't want to live anywhere else. (Shapiro 2013: 4, 5)

The Art Forger's broad success - a certified *New York Times* bestseller (number 13 on the bestseller list for trade fiction as of June 9, 2013), over four hundred reader reviews on Amazon.com, praise by literary critics across the country – testifies foremost to the reading public's limitless thirst for action-packed yet gossipy romantic mysteries (“If *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *The Da Vinci Code* had a love child, this would be it” exclaimed one reviewer [Elle 2012]), but also speaks to the persistence of the middle class's romantic identification with the grit, struggle, and creativity of urban loft living (Zukin 1982, Lloyd 2006). Shapiro, a creative writing professor and long-time resident of the South End (with a doctorate in sociology to boot), reveals a great command of SoWa, the local art market, and city's history, but in playing up the

rough and illicit edges of SoWa – the protagonist resorts to the forgeries of the book’s title to cover her rent! – Shapiro errs dramatically. Despite the veneer of seediness (and the reality of a towering homeless shelter next door), SoWa today is the product of a decades-long process of selection, filtering, and careful management to arrive at the current balance of artists, galleries, restaurants, and markets, nestled between redeveloped, luxury, and highly lucrative residential, commercial, and retail spaces. That’s not to say that Nicosia has entirely stamped out the kind of “studio squatting” featured in the novel, but that such transgressions could hardly be sustained given SoWa’s ubiquitous privately funded security forces and fleet of SUVs specially equipped with surveillance cameras (Smalley 2006). For as much as *The Art Forger* may get right about the lives of young artists in Boston, it falls for the familiar, romantic tropes of “grit and glamour” (Lloyd 2006) and thus misses the larger story about the deliberate exercise of profit-oriented power and control, of order maintenance and staging – and most of all – of *branding* that pervades the SoWa district. Yet, paradoxically – and perhaps most interestingly - by setting the novel explicitly in SoWa, this work of fiction not only captures, fills out, and institutionalizes the still fledging SoWa moniker, but could reshape and amplify it for new outside audiences, playing up its fading edginess and once-subordinate position in the local art networks just as these as these become less recognizable.

In this chapter I look at these struggles over definition and image as attempts to deliberately exercise control over reputation – to apply what has come to be called “place branding.” This is a sharp pivot from the first part of this dissertation, where criminal reputation was treated as an external imposition on place, a stigma difficult to shake despite crime reductions over time. From the perspective of place branding, campaigns such as the work of SoWa and other Boston-area neighborhood-based arts communities introduced in the last chapter

deliberately use arts and culture to re-imagine, recast, rebrand – and ultimately if optimistically, to reshape place. Some of these efforts may be more about creating an artistic community, forging a marketplace for the sale of arts and crafts, or attracting buyers to nearby real estate developments – but that does not diminish the fact that they project out a stylized image and narrative of place. In this sense, opens studios events are branding campaigns in their own right, to the extent that they illustrate careful cultivation and projection of a place identity.

Branding Campaigns and the Arts

One might wonder what art and culture has to with branding, and with the construction of place at all. Conventionally, branding is associated with text – with the slogans and mottos, and the jingles and phrases used to promote and market products, cities and regions. As Greenberg cleverly puts it, “branding simultaneously connotes the corporate labeling of a thing and the permanent, physical, even violent transformation and commodification of both things and living beings” (2000:230). Thus, the development and siting of cultural landmarks and iconic architecture is very much a part of branding, of what Evans has called “hard branding” (Evans 2003). Branding has been part of “urban imaginary” since the earliest periods of urban boosterism to the building of great cultural districts and attractions like Lincoln Center in Manhattan and the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, to the conversion of obsolete ports and warehouse spaces to “festival” market places in Baltimore, Boston, New York, San Francisco and elsewhere, the planning and building of new cultural spaces has long been a strategy to rebuild inner cities, lure in suburbanites and tourists, and position cities globally (Hannigan 1998). The famed “Bilbao Effect” – the sudden rise of the city of Bilbao from fading industrial port city in Basque hinterlands to top tourist destination after the Gehry-designed Guggenheim Museum

opened in 1997 only accelerated the pace to mobilize arts and culture promote place (Evans 2003, etc). Although the verdict on Bilbao is far from settled (Evans 2003; Grodach 2010; Plaza, Tironi, and Haarich 2009; Plaza 2000, 2006) the model has been widely copied, so that cities across the globe increasingly place their fortunes on new arts or music facility built by a narrow slate of “starchitects” (Patterson 2012). It is in this context that Richard Florida’s call for cities to recruit and retain members of the “creative class” has found a receptive audience (2002). Even if Florida himself has consistently criticized what he dismisses as “SOB” facilities (symphony, orchestra, and ballet), his arguments have widely been used to justify these kinds of flagship investments.

Yet this context requires further explication. David Harvey offers an influential and sweeping political-economy argument Harvey’s fullest treatment of the commodification of culture comes in his recent essays on the “art of rent” (Harvey 2009, 2012). In this short piece, he explains the “nexus between capitalist globalization, local political-economic developments, and the evolution of cultural meanings and aesthetic values” (2009: 94). For Harvey, monopoly rents come from exclusive control over something that is tradable yet unique (94). In the contemporary global economy, ease of transit has ended most natural monopolies and local advantages, so that products are increasingly universal and standardized. This creates a contradiction: capital standardizes as it chases particularity, creating a competitive circuit between firms and places. Whole cities and regions may become involved in these processes, and cities without traditional drawing power are at pains to “raise their quotient of collective symbolic capital and to increase their marks of distinction so as to better ground their claims to the uniqueness that yields monopoly rent.”(103) That is precisely what Bilbao accomplished by investing in the Guggenheim museum, yet in doing so, the perceived success launched dozens of copycats,

diluting Bilbao's claims to uniqueness and monopoly rents. These processes repeat as peripheral cities continue to invest in all the more unconventional if not transgressive claims to uniqueness. Considered together, Harvey's argument is perhaps not so different from Richard Florida's arguments about the value of authenticity, but adds the devious touch of explaining why Florida's work has been taken most seriously by marginal cities (MacGillis 2009; Polantz 2010).

Mommas offers a more social psychological theory to explain the use of branding in cities, which he traces back to Simmel's concerns about the sheer pulse and complexity of the modern metropolis. For Mommas

...economic functionality alone does not explain the attraction and popularity of city branding. Its socio-cultural effect is also important. Brands derive their attraction largely from the fact that they introduce a certain order or coherence to the multiform reality around us. Brands enable us to more easily 'read' each other and our environment of places and products. In this respect branding is not simply an economic activity, inspired by market considerations. In a deeper, cultural sociology sense, it is above all a manner of introducing order and certainty into what is in principle a chaotic reality... They are, as a source of orientation, identification, and order, like modern variants of ancient village, tribal, or group culture. (2002:34)

One can see traces of both Simmel and Wirth in this argument – of branding as a means to solve the classic problem of urban disorder, as well the concern with legibility and orientation that motivated Kevin Lynch's pioneering studies on the "image of the city" (1960). As appealing as it is, the argument does not explain the rise of branding on its own. For that, it must be combined with the framework developed by Greenberg, who brings together much of the critical theory on the topic in *Branding New York* (2008).

Greenberg argues that urban branding campaigns, exemplified by the I♥NY campaign of the 1970s, were a major departure from previous modes of boosterism for the scale, sophistication and goals. Professionally organized branding campaigns arose in 1970's, and were distinguished by three elements: they are spurred by past image, are "coordinated by public-private

partnerships, and tied in to broader government restructuring and economic development efforts” that aim for consistency and control (35); and they generate contradictions that expose the city to new image-related risks and co-optation. Boosterism traditionally aims for general promotion, is carried out by single entrepreneurs, and incites little risk. Like Moommas, consistency and clarity are key, since branding campaigns simplify the world and make it more legible (in the Lynchian sense). But, the goal is not so much to help citizens orient themselves to a complex world, as it is about establishing clarity in projecting and guiding action toward new image of place (see also Greenberg 2000, Harvey 1989).

If the theories considered thus far offer a top-down approach to branding, several recent ethnographies suggest a more grassroots, participatory, entrepreneurial process. Wherry, in his study of artists and entrepreneurs in the *Philadelphia Barrio*, an impoverished Latino neighborhood, is critical of the commodification theory, and instead sees place attachment as the key mechanisms driving community rebranding efforts. Local advocates and shop owners, in his study, organize art tours and play up the community’s artistic identity as a reflection of their own devotion to place, and thus are making symbolic rather than financial investments in the well-being of the community. Deener’s studies of “symbolic ownership” in Venice, California makes the related point that the community members who pushed to change the climate and image of the area rarely held serious real estate ambitions; they were merchants interested in improving local aesthetics for their shops. But, in organizing local festivals and upgrading the quality of retail, new practices and new images are institutionalized, an in way that excludes many longtime residents (Deener 2007). Finally, Deas’ study of the decision and controversy around rebranding a predominantly Latino section of Boston as the city’s “Latin Quarter” once again highlights the role of local merchants, working with local advocates and officials to try to help business and

improve their community (Deas 2010). In short, it is simply not accurate to assume branding acts only as a top down process of control. Local merchants are certainly not powerless, but they operate from different commitments and through processes than the speculative and competitive model that comes from the political economy theory above. Deener goes as far to invoke a sort of pluralism to explain community change in Venice, led by “different sets of local actors, embedded in networks and coalitions with distinct agendas, collectively reshaped and redefined the local social and economic climate” (293). Brands may clarify, but the processes that create them appear open-ended, and participatory. Indeed, leaders in the *applied* field of place branding now write of brand “co-creation,” and highlight dialogue, iteration, contestation as key to image formation, which they recognize to be an ongoing process (Kavaratzis and Hatch 2013).

This review leaves us with two radically different sets of expectations concerning the operation of urban branding campaigns. On the one hand, branding reflects global pressures to discover special claims to uniqueness, and operates through top down strategies of control, projection, and restructuring, that ultimately exposes the city to new risks and contradictions. On the other, branding is a participatory process often led by civic leaders and local shop owners eager to improve their community through changes in visible cues, retail aesthetics, public events, and new labels, even if these may prove controversial or alienating to some. Artists are relevant to both arguments. First, art and artists often fill in as claim to uniqueness or authenticity (“our unique local art scene”), and second as potential talent to make possible the visible and aesthetic changes sought, and third as the small business owners and merchants most actively involved in community affairs. On a different level, there is a difference in tone and evaluation in these arguments that cannot escape comment: the political economy approach of Harvey and Greenberg sees imposition of community image as a tool for sweeping restructuring, a mechanism of

control or distraction, in line with akin the critic's Naomi Klein's charge that branding creates a "double world: carnival on the surface, consolidation underneath, where it counts..." (Klein 2001:130). Ethnographies of small time shop owners and local advocates trying to uplift their community naturally draw a more sympathetic figure of the actors and motives involved. Yet, both arguments invoke trade-offs, identify groups displaced or alienated, and raise questions of sustainability and equity. To connect to the larger charge of this dissertation, both sides interestingly invoke an image of the city as ordered and orientating, but capable of deliberate manipulation and change. The divide falls most decisively on the kinds of actors, interests, and trade-offs made in regard to branding campaigns. With this complex of issues identified, I turn to the communities studied and procedures employed.

Observational Methods

I attended 37 different open studios organized by 26 different art communities, primarily located in Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville, between Fall 2011 and Spring 2013. This section primarily draws primarily on observations, conversations, and interviews conducted at just SoWa but I put those in the larger context of open studios via the hundreds of studios visits and conversations that help to frame the discussion of SoWa.

Over the study period, I visited SoWa's First Friday art crawl about 15 times, for 2-4 hours each visit. The crawl typically opens the doors to fifty artist studios located on the upper floors of 450 Harrison Avenue, and up to twenty galleries hosting receptions on ground floor, and surrounding blocks, along with any special pop up shows that may happen onsite or nearby. I initially treated these events like open studios, visiting each studio and engaging the artists, before observing the gallery openings and taking in discussions in the plaza between the various buildings. Over time my attention shifted from the art to the studio spaces, to the galleries, and

finally to the audiences and how they interact with the space and each other. Although SoWa does house a significant community of working artists, it is far more important the central node in the Boston art world for the past decade: the spot where hundreds of artists, curators, students, collectors, and gadflies come together each month to observe, discuss, learn from, and critique each other's art. I held informal conversations with audience members, artists involved, and organizers, and developed a series of regular contacts through frequent interaction over the study period. By observing other art communities across Boston, I was crucially able to identify and engage with artists who had left or had been forced out of SoWa or its earlier incarnations over the past two decades, but remained active in other art communities. I also spent a day with a prominent SoWa artist, shadowing his preparations for First Friday while interviewing him about his artistic career. Finally, I reviewed media coverage, historical archives, published accounts to confirm or augment the historical narrative that follows.

The Creation of SoWa

It remain an open question as to when the first artists and musicians arrived in the area of the South End where Thayer Street links Albany with Washington Streets, criss crossing a cluster of the last empty mills and warehouses that stood in close proximity to downtown Boston. In all likelihood the process was underway by the mid-1970s, as contingents of Boston's growing art community pushed out beyond the crowded tenements along Atlantic Avenue in the North End and Bromfield Street near Downtown Crossing, fled Hyde Square after the fire that claimed over a hundred artist studios in the former Plante Shoe Factory (Taylor 1976a, 1976b), or graduated from one of the several art schools in the area. Artists in the mid-1970's were on the move, making their initial inroads in Fort Point, the Leather District, parts of Somerville, and the South End, including the warehouse district just south of the "Old Dover" elevated station, now better

known as the SoWa Arts District. At the time, artists were forced to live illegally, and artists and landlord alike remained hopeful that the city would follow New York's example of SoHo and grant artists legal permission to live and work in industrially zoned properties. Many landlords looked the other way, if not welcomed the artists who filled their factories and warehouses with paying tenants who often would live, work, and raise their families under one roof. As one Leather District landlord told the *Boston Globe* at the time, his artist tenants were "trying to preserve middle-class values" in a "neighborhood gone downhill" (Taylor 1976b).

By 1984, when Mario Nicosia and his partners at GTI Properties bought the giant warehouse at 450 Harrison Avenue – the building that now houses the SoWa Artist Guild – the area was home to numerous artists, their studios, and practice spaces and lofts at the reputed center of the city's burgeoning "new wave" and punk rock scenes (Vibbert 1980). This was the gritty artist neighborhood of lore, replete with illegal loft living, rowdy parties hosted by teenage musicians, an active drug market, and notorious street prostitution. Moreover, the whole complex lies in the shadow of the towering Pine Street Inn next door, the largest homeless shelter in the city, which continues to provide much if not most of the pedestrian life in the area. Not dissuaded, Nicosia would go on to develop over a million square feet of commercial and residential of property in the area, and transform SoWa into the center of the Boston art scene over the next twenty years. Although this may appear to be a textbook case of art-based branding and gentrification, SoWa is very much the exception to the rule in Boston, and its success raises important questions for sustainability of the artists there. In what follows, I review the current makeup of SoWa for the key qualities that makes it stand out: effective branding, clustering of amenities, for its singular organizational leadership, but also the nearly-hidden history of selection and control that is so key to it today. What makes SoWa interesting is not that the

developer created an artificial arts community, but that the developer *inherited* an arts community, and after a decade of mistakes, found a way to concentrate that community into something that has proven quite powerful.

When the GTI Corporation began buying large warehouses and mills along Harrison Avenue in 1984, the area had a notorious reputation for drug abuse, prostitution, and violence, and all reports from the era suggest that homeless people constituted the majority of the area's street life. The character of the place was immortalized in the 1982 lyrics written by the resident punk band *The Dogmatics*, in a song appropriately named Thayer Street:

Broken glass on the sidewalks, people in the doorway I don't know, the place downstairs serves as a hotel for all the people out of homes.¹⁶

Nicosia had been a successful developer since his student days at Northeastern twenty years earlier, already profiled for his work reviving St. Boltolph Street in the 1970s (Anon 1980), but he had no record of working with the crowd of artists and musicians he found occupying his new real estate. If it was his plan was to cultivate the arts from the start to reduce the stigmatized reputation, revalorize the properties he had bought, and shift the ratio of homeless on the street¹⁷, that is not evident. Far from embracing artists, by 1986 he had tripled rents, and was widely blamed for causing an artist space crisis citywide (Temin 1984, McLaughlin 1986). Over the coming decade, rents and restrictions on the resident artists continued to increase, forcing artists to steadily decamp to other communities, until 1997, when a contract dispute allowed him to remove the last hundred remaining music practice spaces in the complex, effectively evicting six

¹⁶ The Dogmatics were also an early innovator in amateur music videos, and the video for this song provides perhaps the best visual of what Thayer Street looked like before it became SoWa: http://youtu.be/x_QakUvlgM

¹⁷ It has been explained to me on several occasions that much of what GTI has instituted was designed to increase the number of middle class pedestrians around SoWa, to make the homeless population less obvious. This might be more accurate of later years, but remains doubtful.

hundred rent-paying musicians overnight (Dowdy 1997). If that seemed like the beginning of the end for the arts community, the following events complicated the story. In 1998, Nicosia began to publicize the area as the SoWa Arts District, court galleries from Newbury Street, and organize art events. Although trendy acronym was met with some ridicule and derision, it caught on in some circles, and fit into a ready-made narrative of artists and grit.

Once known mainly for its hookers, its homeless, and its extensive array of manhole covers, Harrison Avenue is fast becoming a flourishing alternative art center. In the past two years, seven art galleries have opened, along with several showrooms for jewelry, pottery, renegade clothing, hand-painted body accessories, and more. It may still be in the fledgling stage, but that hasn't stopped South End denizens from puckishly dubbing the new art mecca "SoWa," referring to the warehouse district south of Washington Street... In their view, it's Boston's answer to New York's SoHo. (Gaines 1998)

The next year, letters went out to all studio artists within the 8 buildings owned by GTI inviting them to participate in SoWa99, while announcing that nonparticipation would encourage them to “seek replacement tenants with a desire to be active at this site”(Beggy and Carney 1999). Artists who fled SoWa from this era speak of leases growing from two to twelve pages with added requirements and expectations. The last straw for some was the First Friday art crawl, which started around this time, and was accompanied by mandatory participation clause in leases. For even some of the more community-oriented artist, the requirement to open their doors one day a month was too much. Ironically, with every step in this process, the community appeared to be all the more active and engaged, but it was actually shrinking, and consolidating into a single building. This, not coincidentally, freed the much of the remaining buildings and space (now estimated at 800,000 square feet) for new restaurants and retail establishments, as well as for commercial office and luxury apartments. Concurrently the pace of galleries moving to SoWa accelerated, with several each year trading down from increasingly high rent locations on

Newbury Street, and several more moving in from suburban or peripheral locations across the city (McQuaid 2003). As these movements quickened, the history of rent increases and evictions faded away, so that by 2005 Nicosia had taken on heroic qualities in local media:

In 2000, he launched a massive PR campaign to rechristen a blighted area of the South End in hopes of transforming it into a trendy arts district. He flew SoWa flags from his buildings, published a SoWa newsletter, established a shuttle to the subway with "SoWa Express" emblazoned on the side. He also invested heavily in the arts community there, allowing artists to rent lofts at below-market rate and celebrating their work in biannual events. (Wangsness 2005)

Today, interviews confirm that most artists do pay what they perceive to be below market rates, but they do so as a trade off for the obligation to participate in the dozens of events GTI now sponsors each year (including a weekly farmer's market, the Open Market, a vintage market, holiday markets, First Fridays, and two full weekend long open studios) To be sure, for some this is a win-win proposition: an attractive South End studio that comes with ready access to audiences through events across the year. But, this has had a notable effect on the kind of art displayed, and the social structure of the artists who participate.

SoWa Today

Given the cachet and centrality of SoWa to the Boston art scene, one might expect to find challenging, experimental, or avant-garde art made there. The dozen galleries on the ground floor suggest as much: they deal exclusively in contemporary art, mostly from New England, and include a fair showing of what can only be called avant-garde art, including a gallery devoted staging performance art. Upstairs, in the studios, artists tend toward attractive landscape paintings of Cape Cod, nature photography, portraiture, and other genres that appeal to middle class audiences looking to decorate their home or office. The rents are too high and public is too small for artists to treat the building like a craft fair or festival; the artists are evidently serious and committed, but remain mostly unknown or emerging artists trying recoup between \$500 and

\$3,000 for each work (though closer to the lower bounds). There are exceptions: at one extreme, a wire sculptor makes whimsical and uplifting pieces that sell for under \$100 (many for under \$50) always draws a crowd and eager buyers. At the other extreme, the only professor of fine art in the building fills her small studio with massive and intricate installations that model weather patterns and other data sources using children's toys. She draws curious onlookers but does not post a price list nor has ever been asked for one, and she does not advertise commissions either. Her largest recent piece now hangs prominently above the entrance to the new Mass Art dorm, another is on display at Woods Hole. There are other studios that consistently display interesting work, commercial or not, but much of what in SoWa falls in the comfortable middle, aiming at what can only be described as the median voter of New England art consumption: pleasant paintings of seaside scenes and nature. Given the high volume of sales opportunities (and required interruptions) that come with this building, it is not a surprise that such neutral, commercial work dominates.

What is more surprising is how little of the art is actually made on site, which ultimately reveals a great deal about how SoWa works. Some studios seem suspiciously clean, lack any art supplies or instruments, or are missing the traditional book case of art books or comfortable chair found in most art studios. In these case, it usually means that that the artist has a second, primary studio somewhere else, usually closer to home (or literally at home) where they work. They rent the SoWa space primarily if not entirely as a place to market their art, sometimes for studio visits with clients, but mostly for scheduled public events like First Friday. In fact, conversations reveal that many of the studios are empty except on First Friday, meaning that the artists arrive only a few hours before the audience, hang their art, set out snacks and just enough personal effects to present the image of being comfortably at home. Several of the studios are shared by

groups of four or five artists, who split the rent, and rotate different First Fridays between themselves. This was brought home when I discovered that one studio that always seemed to have completely different art and personnel present, was actually shared by six artists who lived and had studios in Cambridge, Somerville, and as far away as Vermont. They did not know each other previously nor shared a style or even medium; one member had secured the lease then recruited the others via ads on Craigslist. While it might seem strange for artists to pay rent for a studio they do not use to produce art and only use for retail a few times a year, the artists there had maintained this arrangement for nearly a decade, and saw the venture as worthwhile. Sharing the studio granted them more than just access to audiences at SoWa events; it gave them membership in the arts community there and in the greater South End artist community, where some of them became active members. This was the arts community and audience they had invested themselves in, and the price of admission allowed them continued access to the prestige, networks, and competitions carefully cultivated in SoWa and across the South End. Indeed, many of the artists I met throughout SoWa would identify themselves as South End artists, or members of the SoWa artists guild even if their “real” studio was elsewhere. Place and community takes on a symbolic property here, as a means of communicating genuine affiliation and loyalty, and as a way to tap into the aura of professionalism and prestige often associated with South End artists. And this remains largely true in art markets outside of Boston, where the SoWa brand has diffused across much of New England¹⁸. When talking with gallerists from Cape Cod to the Maine coast, SoWa does not necessarily open doors, but it does provide a quick shorthand for a

¹⁸ To be sure, these place reputations can only travel so far, and it seems unlikely for them to hold much or any meaning once they approach the orbit of New York City, or beyond. While Boston artists are well aware of the intricate art geography of New York, it would be hard to believe that this works in reverse.

serious commitment to art. In this way, the branding of the SoWa brings in artists in need of external certification, making them active partners in the effort to cultivate and diffuse its name within Boston and across the region.

Finally, the number of subletting or substitute artists on display each month in SoWa points to the notable minority of artists who seek studio space in SoWa but not participation, revealing a contradiction in the branding strategy and participation requirements. There are some artists who seek a studio in SoWa primarily as a place of work, not for the marketing opportunities. They can exploit a loophole in the leases that allows them to sublet on the night of First Friday, thus fulfilling their participation requirement without going through the work of hosting the hundreds of attendees who will pass through their studio that night. This is likely condoned as it adds variation and freshness to the roster of artists each month, and brings in new audiences from that subletter's mailing lists and friends and family. Moreover, the opportunity tends to be seen as a mark of good will and prestige, and especially if it proves lucrative or leads to other shows, invitations, or commissions, the gig can only positively reflect on the SoWa name. But, the presence of subletters, together with artists who work elsewhere and affiliate in name more than practice, and the narrow range of art on display, does raise questions of the artificiality and authenticity of the SoWa experience.

It is tempting here to relate SoWa to Grazian's analysis of the Chicago blues scene as a confidence game (2003). For Grazian, blues clubs operate on a web of deception between club owners, performers, audience actors, and other actors that produces a "staged authenticity" that vastly reduces the canon and improvisational qualities of blues down to canned performances of a handful of audience favorites. Each member ultimately dupes the other, in the interest of enhancing the credibility, enjoyment or profitability of the performance (Grazian 2003). Some of

this appears to ring true with SoWa: from the landlord aggressively herding artists to take part in an endless litany of events and markets, to the artists tapping into the prestige associated with the SoWa brand, to the audiences comforted by a narrow range of relatively accessible art. Even more so, the landlord is not simply a club owner here, but a developer eager to generate foot traffic and positive buzz for the hundreds of thousands of square feet of property available for lease elsewhere in the complex. This reaches the cynical peak when we realize that very few of the actors spend much time in SoWa, but may in fact live and work in close proximity to each other. The ultimate irony, then, is that the audience's pursuit of professional artists making serious art, and the artist's pursuit of discerning art buyers with the capital to purchase their art, ultimately and unwittingly may compel two neighbors to commute an hour from home to meet each other for the first time. But the analogy to confidence games and blues clubs starts to break down when we realize that there is no price of admission for the audience, and they need not participate in the game any longer than they choose. I conclude this chapter with a brief consideration of their participation in SoWa.

Conclusion: Branding and the Changing Audience at SoWa

The central contradiction of using the visual arts as a promotional tool is that the larger crowd attracted, the smaller the fraction of serious art buyers. Indeed, gallerists have long complained that art crawls like First Friday bring in audiences more interested in free drinks and a cheap date, crowding out if not discouraging potential buyers (Shaw 2015). And yet, the audience at First Fridays and open studios events like it across Boston remain relatively small, rarely exceeding a few hundred, maybe a thousand people over the course of an evening. For a gallery trying to cultivate relationships with a handful of buyers who can spend a few thousand

dollars on a piece art, these crowds can be counter-productive, and it is not surprising that many galleries have opted to hold unadvertised receptions on off-nights meant for these more select crowds. For the purposes of changing the image of the neighborhood, the select crowd of art buyers and the wider scene around First Fridays works at crosspurposes; but both may be too limited, and indeed appear to be in the process of being edged out by a still larger source of attention.

I have observed a growing disconnect in conversations about SoWa over the past few years, a gap that points to a shift in strategy there. As the term moved from ridicule to reluctant acceptance in the mid-2000s, it fragmented and shifted in meaning. Today, if were to use the term “SoWa” around Boston, I suspect that few would think of the warehouses and mills redeveloped by GTI; or the artist buildings, studios, and galleries at the center of it; or the First Fridays that happen each month; or the high end restaurants and boutique retail that encircle it. What has caught fire with Boston are the many outdoor marketplaces that the area hosts each week, including the SoWa Open Market, the SoWa Food Truck Festival, the SoWa Vintage Market, the SoWa Farmer’s Market, the SoWa Holiday Market, and probably others. These started modestly in 2003, and have been augmented with new additions each year, each drawing larger and larger crowds. I have had whole conversations with acquaintances about the kind of art produced at SoWa only to realize they were thinking of the silk screen t-shirts and artisan jewelry available at the Open Market, not the paintings and sculpture in the studios and galleries above. The typical audience for First Friday – equal parts art student, emerging artist themselves, or couple on the proverbial free date – has likely run its course as the channel through which SoWa brands itself. In a town with the wealth of open studios and artist communities described in the last chapter, it is no wonder that SoWa has gradually shifted its strategy from the

warehouse spaces and studios artists inside, to the open spaces and food trucks and vintage peddlers outside. If the logic of branding is to exploit a unique quality of place, ironically that would suggest a shift away from fine arts toward open markets, which portends a precarious future for the remaining SoWa artists.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have sought to give real substance to the study of the urban imagery and neighborhood reputation by injecting the image of the city in two important areas of the urban research: the impact of crime on communities, and the potential for the arts to express neighborhood identity and catalyze change. These rely on a variety of indicators, methods, and analytical and interpretative strategies, and often speak to different literatures. The common thread across these analyses is the importance of image to basic social processes, especially in the context of the post-industrial city, where the qualities of place may take on all the more importance.

In the first chapter, I developed a conceptual framework for understanding reputation as an external identity that can often be differentiated from information by its outdated quality. Reputation contains both evaluative and salience components, but is specific on both, so it cannot be reduced a single prestige ranking or hierarchy. I argue that media traces provide a measure of reputation understood in this way, and develop a measure of reputation for crime via a quantitative content analysis of newspapers in Washington, DC. Exploratory analysis lends some support, but suggests that the variable is better aligned with race and real estate than crime. Chapter 2 explores takes on this association more rigorously, using a hedonic model to estimate the price consumers are willing to pay to avoid a neighborhood with a reputation for violence, above and beyond official crime rates, and a range of house and tract level controls. The findings suggest that a criminal reputation has an effect that is distinct from official crime, and these work in opposite directions over time, with the media-reputation variables growing influence as the time horizon between press coverage and house sale grows. This finding has implications for

how the crime decline has effected American cities, but also paves the way for a closer consideration of reputation as it relates to other urban processes.

Chapters three and four transition to the role of the arts in shaping the image of place, keying in on recent debates about gentrification and the “creative city.” Here I am interested less in how images are imposed from outside, and focus on how identities are strategically cultivated by interested insiders, and also revealed via the structure of how community’s organize their arts. Chapter 3 continues in the spatial-analytic mode of the first two chapters by using spatial and visual methods to describe the concentration of different dimensions of artistic life across Boston. These visualizations point to the arts being more diffused on residential dimensions, concentrated on retail, but fragmented by neighborhood identity on the studio level. Chapter 4 explores the SoWa district of the South End, the one area where all three dimensions come together. As SoWa is embedded a larger – and evolving – corporate development strategy, I use the case study as an opportunity to explore the potential of art-lead branding strategies. Although the branding strategy carries a series of perverse effects on the arts community, the artists who remain become key players in launching and diffusing the brand. However, as SoWa’s claim to uniqueness shifts from fine art to outdoor markets, the artists’ security appears to be all the more tenuous, even as the commitment to the arts remains.

The big question of this dissertation concerns, at the broadest level, both the *tractability* and *role* of image in the spatial and temporal structure of urban processes. Each of the projects described here fills in a different piece of that inquiry, breaking new ground in their specific domains, and showing how spaces are infused with meaning to become the distinct if not fully iconic places that matter in everyday life and research alike. Although the branding story does describe an instance in how image may be cultivated for change, the general trend of these studies

is that image has more to do with reproduction and differentiation – with distinguishing the internal structure of the city – than change. Indeed, as I argue throughout – reputation takes hold just as it loses its relevancy – and by that logic the image of the city will always be a force better for understanding the past and its bearing on the present than for predicting the future.

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