

## Preface: Fuggedaboutit!"

Ethnography (and critical ethnography in particular) adopts a complex theoretical orientation toward culture. Culture is a field of struggle constructed by different points of view. According to the anthropological definition, culture is a common code of practice by a group of people; is treated as heterogeneous, conflicting, negotiated, and evolving, as distinct from unified, cohesive, fixed, and static. Nowadays, in fact, culture is the specific field in which “power” is exercised. Positioning myself as a politically-minded researcher, in this doctoral project I was committed to the art and craft of fieldwork, where empirical methodologies become the foundation for inquiry. It was there, *on the ground of others*, that the researcher encounters social conditions that become the place from which this research begins.

When I started writing this doctoral proposal in Italy very few people had confidence in the usefulness of the research. “There is nothing new about studying urban change in New York City” pretty much sums up the reactions I encountered, as to say “Fuggedaboutit!” in impeccable Brooklynese. Accordingly to Aalbers (2011), this Thesis is the embodiment of my stubbornness, that challenge me to leave home for two years and look for ways of funding the project.

In this study I examined the neighborhood of Park Slope that already in the 1970s had been characterized by a “distinguished” nature; therefore I started looking at the effects of this today. One such effect is that the first

gentrification process created another process of renewal: a kind of second gentrification process, but with different “Bobos<sup>1</sup>.” So, forty years later, what is happening? The two groups coexist (upper-middle class and working class) but do not clash; they do not even seem to have formed a relationship with one another. What is most interesting seems to be the first group of pioneer gentrifiers in the North Slope: they do not come into contact with the working class of South Slope, but overlap and blend with their alter egos, the upper-middle-class next-generation of gentrifiers—the newcomers—with whom they share cultural tastes and urban aesthetics. But do the new gentrifying newcomers form relationships with what remains of the working class in South Slope? To be even more specific: what are the specific aspects of the relationship between the members of a neighborhood in transition? Between the different groups are social boundaries going to be constructed, or not? These questions, which take urban complexity as a premise not an answer, were initially asked in this research.

This work spanned three years: two years of research and one additional year of writing, which was even harder than I thought as I had to go back to my regular job in Milan in October 2012. The list of those to whom I am indebted is long indeed. First and foremost, I am deeply indebted and grateful to my family, for showing me how to be an independent person.

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<sup>1</sup> The word Bobo, Brooks's (2010) most famous coinage, is an abbreviated form of the words bourgeois and bohemian, suggesting a fusion of two incompatible social classes (the counter-cultural, hedonistic and artistic bohemian, and the white collar, capitalist bourgeois). The term is used by Brooks to describe the 1990s successors of the yuppies.

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