

The following oral history memoir is the result of 1 videorecorded session of an interview with Anthony Rosado by Cynthia Tobar on July 20, 2015 in New York City. This interview is part of "Cities for People, Not for Profit": Gentrification and Housing Activism in Bushwick. Anthony Rosado has reviewed the transcript and has made minor corrections and emendations. The reader is asked to bear in mind that she or he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

Anthony Rosado

[Start of recorded material at 00:00:00]

Cynthia: State your name and occupation.

Anthony: Anthony Rosado. My money comes from being a teaching artist with Urban Arts Partnership and other occupations that are not signed under by any employee because I do them myself as curatorial works, my performance art based works, and my installations, I guess.

Cynthia: And today is July 20, 2015, and we are in your home with your wonderful cat, home sweet home. And we're here to talk about the Bushwick Fair Housing collective. We're documenting People's stories about Bushwick and gentrification housing and how they affect you particularly as an artist. So I was hoping maybe perhaps you can start by going back a little further. How long have you lived in Bushwick?

Anthony: I was born in Woodhull Hospital. My mother lived between my grandmother's house in Brownsville and then later my grandmother's house in Bushwick and our home which we got when I was around two and that was on Ralph and Eastern Parkway. So these three kind of like places I grew up at. And then around 12, my family moved from East New York to Bushwick. So my grandmother lived on Wyckoff and Greene and we moved to Putnam and Wilson and then a year and a half in we were gentrified out and that caused us to go to the Bronx, to go through like the shelter system, put us back in Brownsville at Pitkin and Saratoga which we stayed for another year.

By this time I'm 14, 15, and then we got placed into housing in Jamaica, Queens, so the project housing that's out there. My mother still lives there until today. I moved out when I was 17. I moved in with my mentor who was my eighth grade social studies teacher. So I moved to Bay Ridge in Brooklyn. For the first time I had my own room. Then that summer we moved to Jersey. So I moved around a lot but the core of it all was always Bushwick. I'd always had family here. So even if I didn't have a residence here at some point I had like a place to stay here. I still had family that was here. Most of my life prior to I would say 2010, all my family lived in Bushwick.

Cynthia: As an observer of life in Bushwick, at the time, before this initial move. Maybe you can tell me a little bit about those moves as well.

Anthony: Like I saw how them happen over time?

Cynthia: Yeah. What was the living condition like in the neighborhood then? Maybe you could tell me a little bit about that growing up.

Anthony: Well, I can only speak from my experience, of course. And my experience in particular, my mom, she's a single mother who raised five kids and so when we went out we were like monitored and we had curfews and we were very policed in a positive sense of the term by my mother so that we were safe. The other bit is that most of the inner city neighborhoods, the economically deprived neighborhoods in New York City pre-2005 that were considered most dangerous, Bushwick for some reason was one of them but I never felt unsafe here. And you can talk to many folks. I grew up in Brownsville too. And in Brownsville there were times where I definitely felt unsafe. And it still is today, of course, for different reasons. But Bushwick was always a safe place for me at least. I never really felt unsafe in it.

So that's kind of one thing that I want to debunk. In terms of the environment, it's just like I'll go to my senses. Right? Like the smells that aren't here anymore. There used to be small culture kind of spread throughout Bushwick of Latina women who would like make their food and just like have it outside their crib. So those smells would be in the air. Or they'd be walking around with their carts parked somewhere. You still see it. You might see in on Flushing. You'd see it on Avenue de Puerto Rico which other people know as Graham Avenue. Like smell, that's something that used to exist.

Sounds. Sounds of people like myself calling out to someone because the bell doesn't work. Now you have like [makes noise] and you can get inside. But even still to today my grandma's bell still doesn't work so I'll call Abuela real loud like from three stories down. Or all the cars. And when I say these things that are not here anymore, they were here because there was a large population of people doing these things, acclimating to these things, making these meals, calling out to their abuelas or their titis Mostly men, mostly the most masculine of the men had their cars with no space in their trunk because there were just speakers. You know what I mean, like blare. You know what I mean, like blaring, like that sound. In the summer, not being able to walk four blocks without hearing like [makes noise], like reggaeton or some hip-hop, laughing down the street. Now that's rare. It's like a shooting star. I'll get like four of them a summer.

Let's see. Those are sounds. We had smells. Sight. Sight is simple. It used to be more brown, black and brown. That's the simplest one.

Cynthia: What about the street, like what specific area in the neighborhood?

Anthony: Oh, my God! That's another aesthetic one. So we lived on Wyckoff and Greene. When I'm there now I feel like I'm in a mini-14th Street which is interesting because like that little stairway you walked up, that you could enter from outside, that never used to be there. It used to be just that you walked downstairs and then you got on the train. That was planned for probably in the

early 2000s but that was made around 2005, 2006. We started seeing construction when I was like visiting back and forth from college and I kid you not and I say this wholeheartedly white folk come and not only do real estate values go up and not only do people who publicize it kind of like act as catalysts to this idea that whiteness is normalcy by saying like the community is getting better. What you see, like the literal, streets are made more convenient. Like now on Myrtle and Wyckoff you have more space to walk. Now, like it's safer for bikes. Like now evergreen is smooth. You know what I mean?

And then we can go to touch and we can go on and on but the one I want to get to, the sense that we don't talk about, is that energetic one, that shit is not tangible. And that's the biggest change. It's like when you walk into a space, the way that you feel and I'll speak just from my experience because I can talk about my aunts and family members and friends who have felt as though cafes and galleries and restaurants are too exclusive, off putting, all of these kind of like I go in there and there's a negative energy and I do not feel invited even though I can walk on the street and feel semi-invited. I talk about my own experiences and my own experiences are I can go into these new gallery spots and pass as a hipster and not have that experience though I know that experience exists.

And then there are certain spaces that I go in or even certain times that I'm riding my bike which is this green bike with a white seat and white rims and I pass for a hipster. Right? So even within my own community, a community that I wanted to feel a part of for a long time but have had struggles with because of like, the fact that my family didn't teach me Spanish at an early enough age. I was really, really light skinned. I spoke white. All these things. I'll go into certain spaces and you know the gays. I can read to the end of days so I can read it when someone's reading me and it's like oh, you're one of the gentrifiers. And I get some shade sometimes. In some restaurants I'll get some shade. And my Spanish is like it's good. Anyone's language can get intimidated when it's their second language. Right?

I can speak French but when I speak to French people my French isn't as good. So sometimes when I'm in an intimidating space and I speak to Spanish people, my Spanish gets fucked up so it really, I sound like I'm this big ass gentrifier. So those are the energetic things. Those are the shifts that have happened for me. Right? Like growing up I went through those struggles of wanting to feel more Puerto Rican. However, going into different spaces it was like you're a little Latino boy. You know what I mean? But now it's not about that anymore. It's like we know that the gentrifiers are predominantly white but we know that the gentrifiers are also like young hipsters and therefore you are that.

Cynthia: Tell me a little bit about that, I guess, in regards to your time growing up with all your siblings. What are their trajectories? What are their dreams like, with

yours, since you were displaced early on in the process? Can you tell me a little bit about that and how that affected your family?

Anthony: My mother is a single mom and my older brother and I, he's two years older. So listen to this, Timothy, Anthony, John, Stephanie, and Erica. Right? Like my mom's survival method. Timothy is going to be 26. I'm 24. Johnny is 22. Stephanie is going to be 18. Erica is going to be 16. So we're all pretty close in age. So my older brother, when we were much younger, did a bulk of the work in terms of helping my mom with us, taking us to school, this and that. And as we got older I jumped into the mix. I mean my brother and I going back and forth and back and forth. He was 17. I was 15. Basically everything I mentioned, we'd been through that whole process together. By the time we were in Jamaica Park housing Timothy had turned 17 and then at the end of that year he bought a camera and he left. I am so proud of him. He is currently a photographer freelancing for some of the most major fashion managements in New York City and other parts of the world. And last summer he got the cover of Vogue Mexico. This is like my mom who had nothing and figured shit out along the way, she had him and then she had me.

We were all, of course, were affected but I think how it affected us a lot, I can only speak for my older brother and myself because my younger brother still lives with mom and so do my sisters. I can tell you what they're going to go do. They're going to succeed and I think that all of that has a lot to do with the fact that we didn't have that stability in terms of where our home was but we knew that us making it would be our stability. So everyone's going for the idea of something at this point. And so me and Timothy, we were both in places where like we want to stay here. And my older brother, he has a partner that he wants to get married to. They have one floor in a home in New Jersey and Timothy is...I know with love he wants...I'm sure he wants to settle down early because he wants that stability and he's comfortable with that. It makes him feel good.

But it's also funny because he lives in Journal Square so he's getting his share of gentrification now. Like within this past year we've really been able to have conversations about gentrification in Bushwick and everywhere else because now it's kind of like triggered for him whereas before we wouldn't be able to really have conversations about it because for him it was happening over there. It was happening like in this other place that he used to live in but he really didn't associate with anymore at all. I mean if I talk to my mom or my extended family about it, they know...but they know in a sense like it's either not going to affect me or like I'm not really that bothered by it because it's not really affecting me right now.

Cynthia: By it's affected you, what are you talking about specifically?

Anthony: So I mean like the erasure of our history and the displacement of our peoples and all of those things are affecting me a lot. They don't affect my family. What affects my family is if they get kicked out because that's a direct action.

Right? And this is that survival method. This is that survival of like we immigrated here at a point where like this place was not on par. The Italian fires had just like happened and like we need to figure something out here. So go, go, go. So when all of the family had to move from here to here to there during these times of gentrification, it was like every individual family, we would be supportive from afar but every individual family for themselves. When we were going through the shelter system no one helped us out. We were on our own like nobody in our family threw us money. No one offered us a place to stay. We just had to figure it out and that's that real survival method. That just reminds me of like, this conversation's been coming up a lot recently of like how people should know their history and X, Y, Z, and how it's kind of like sad that people might not know their history and in addition to the fact that obviously you need access to those resources who has the time to learn about history when they're worried about if their kids are going to eat and like if they don't work for these next six hours what's going to happen with the bills. You know, like that survival method that gets in the way of you actually getting to know more about your body in terms of the history of everybody. I know I went off on a tangent but these things don't exist in a vacuum for me so it's really hard not to go from one end into another.

Cynthia: And that's fine. I think they're interrelated as well. Can you tell me a little bit about that time then, in reference to your family background, where your mother had come from and maybe a little bit about your other family members who you said that have been in Bushwick, if they are, they're not still here. Tell me a little bit about that network.

Anthony: So my grandma is from Guayanilla, Puerto Rico, and that is kind of like around Ponce. Most people know where Ponce is which is the south of Puerto Rico. She immigrated here when she was...I know it was pre-20. I don't know exactly when it was but I know that she had two of my aunts over there and then when she came here she had 11 more kids, most of them by the same man, also really close in age like me and my siblings. So as they got older...we'll jump ahead a couple of years. We all mostly lived around Albany which was in East New York around Brownsville and then my grandma eventually got a house on Wyckoff and Greene. I'm trying to put it all in terms of timeframe because this is like before I'm ten so it's all shifty. But if you go to post ten, by post ten I had an aunt that lived with her family a block up off the Myrtle-Broadway stop, more toward Myrtle by the projects. I had an aunt that lived a couple blocks from Wyckoff and Greene, closer to Ridgewood. I had an aunt who lived next to me in Pitman and Wilson. My Uncle William, he lives with my grandma on and off but the also lived on DeKalb in Bushwick. Another uncle lived on Central and Willoughby. The list goes on. Are we really going on with this?

Cynthia: I mean, it's fine.

Anthony: Because I can go on. I have my great-grandmother who lived in the south side which people call Williamsburg now. She lived in the south side. I'm not going

to remember exactly where but it's by the funeral home right off of when you get on the bridge. And then there's a couple more family members. Long story short, one of my uncles now lives off the Van Siclen stop off the A which is pretty farther out. My mom, like I said, lives in Jamaica, Queens. I had an uncle that had to move his family upstate but stayed here to make enough money to support them. I had another uncle who just got kicked out of living in the south side. I didn't mention that. He lived ten blocks from my abuela, my great abuela. My great abuela is currently losing her home because she had to get her leg cut off. There's this whole big story. But I think someone else is going to take over that space that lives in the family.

My grandma in Wyckoff and Greene, she's fine, she's kind of like that anchor. She's not moving. My aunt that lives on Pitman and Wilson, she moved to Ridgewood, further, further up like North Ridgewood. One of my uncles, that's the one that lived on Central and Willoughby, he died last summer. He lived in Florida, unrelated. And I'm going to stop there just because you get the point. You get the point that we've had to like...just like manifest destiny, you pick a center point and everyone has to like move out from there on. It's really interesting because it's not like Hartford. It's not like Hartford where like everyone goes there and then they move everyone to the center, kind of like how the aboriginals were colonized in Australia. It's the same thing that happened to Hartford. However, I think it's interesting how it happens here in New York City. Even if you take the little neighborhoods that are even next to each other, it's still kind of like this dispersion. It's not this inclusion which I think is really interesting.

Cynthia: Yeah. And then in terms of your trajectory, I mean that's remnant. Tell me a little bit about that post-shelter experience. Tell me what happened after and gentrification as well during this whole process.

Anthony: Okay. So we went through the shelter system when I was 14, when I just turned 14, so that's high school. We were in the Bronx for like two days, three days maybe, and then they housed us on Pitkin and Saratoga for a year and that was just interesting. That was really, really interesting. That year I was pretty good in schoolwork I think. It was freshman year. I was fine. I'd always been called that white kid in my family which is so fucking funny because I'd always just been like so out to like my schoolwork. I didn't mind doing it. I was going to get it done. I got good grades, here and here and there. So that year, we lived on Pitkin and Saratoga and what was most interesting was that if you go five minutes up the hill, go to Ralph and Eastern Parkway where we had our first home that was ours. We were lived between there and my grandma's in Bushwick. And if you go to these two spaces and see the differences, you're just like (Makes hand gestures), like even just down the hill, and I can't imagine that place today homie, with all the gentrification that happened because when I lived there it was like Caribbean, black, and like this much Latino. And then we would go to Bushwick which was like Puerto Rican, Dominican, Mexican, Cuban, and this much black and like this much

Caribbean. So it was always interesting to go back and forth to those two spots.

And then after that we moved to the projects in Jamaica, Queens, and by that time I was a sophomore. That first year it was a rough transition inside because I remember being really like posh and my mom was not happy with it. I remember we moved in and I was just like begging if we could get anywhere else. It was the last stop on the E and then you take the bus and I'm just like why can't we get put in a spot on the upper west side. I know there are projects up there. I was so tight. I remember that transition was rough. Then it ended up fine. We had the three boys in one room, two girls in one room, and then my mom had her own room. Living out there was really interesting. By the time I was a junior my grades had really suffered and that was mainly because there were like some domestic things happening. There was a man involved in our lives who's the father of my three younger siblings. My mom raised us alone so I rarely bring him in the picture but he comes to the picture now because he was in the picture that junior year, kind of like living with us and it was just not a good year at all.

Us living out there and him having to economically support us while seeing us in that place where we used to have much more beautiful homes was just apparently really hard for him. So my grades really suffered that year but the next year they soared because I moved in with my eighth grade social studies teacher. I begged my mom because I was like I need to focus on myself and not really be like here anymore because if I'm here then I can't really focus on all that. So she agreed very hesitantly and after that I lived in Bay Ridge for a year which was dope. I got like grounded because I threw a party when they weren't there. I had my own room. I got an allowance. I spent my allowance on beer and weed and they caught me and were upset about it and I got grounded again. It was just really funny. This is so funny to recall. I got into trouble so many times. This was with a white couple, beautiful white couple, [Jodie Stewart] and the time, now [Ruck], and [Sean Ruck]. We're not in as much communication now. They have their own lives in Vermont actually with two kids, their own home. They got mad land and whatnot, some of the most beautiful people I've ever met.

They were these two white folk living with a Latino in Bay Ridge. It was just like the most interesting but what I was going to say a lot of her clothing was expensive. She liked her materials nice, not that she was fancy or anything along those lines. So I fucked up a lot of clothes because I hadn't messed with clothes like that. This is funny going to that time and being like I'm not purposely fucking this up, I've never had to deal with a J.Crew sweater before and I'm sorry I just made it baby sized. So then that year I did Posse. I don't know if you know what its. It's a full tuition leadership scholarship. It's in seven major cities, inner cities. And each inner city has like 13 schools that they partner with so they send ten kids to each of those schools. There are three rounds. You start them in October and you find out by December. So by December I knew I was going to school. I told my mom I was going back in

December but I stayed there for the rest of the year and I moved in with them, into their house in Jersey. And I lived in the attic. That was really nice.

And then after that I went to Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, and I think that when I got there what was happening here hit me because I was going to a school.

Cynthia: What year was that?

Anthony: That was 2009 and if you think about it, gentrification really started happening here like 2002 to 2005. So 2009, I dip. I go to Hartford which is literally a reflection of what Bushwick used to look like, like so forgotten, so just like forgotten and the epicenter of that on post slave land, Trinity College which was gated up until 1995.

Cynthia: Trinity, you said right?

Anthony: Trinity College, at the time I went there, I think that 90% of the campus was white and around like 70% of the campus paid out of pocket and that's 58,900 a year. So this like microcosm of the United States of America that I went to was like wrapped around what Bushwick once was for me. I mean I was there for four years, studied abroad in the middle, and then when I got out I moved back for six months with my mom. In 2013 I moved back until January of 2014. Then I moved here because it was my goal to get back to Bushwick. Because I remember that summer coming to Bushwick here and there and seeing homies from my college like here. And I was like what the fuck's going on? I thought I was going to leave and have really good rent and be around more brown peoples but that's not what happened. Literally all the issues from over there kind of came here. And that was just a mind fuck. So I'm sorry to have gone on for so long.

Cynthia: Not at all. Tell me what you studied in college.

Anthony: What?

Cynthia: What did you end up studying at Trinity?

Anthony: This is funny, especially because I've been doing radio shows with Christopher Stout and Hrag Vartanian, Christopher Stout of Bushwick Art Crit Group and Hrag Vartanian of Hyperallergic with Dr. Lisa Levy. She has her own radio show. We've been talking a lot about the [cannon]. So this is just funny this is being brought up again. But for the first three years I studied art history and for all four years I studied theater and dance. I graduated with a theater and dance major. I dropped my art history major when I was in Paris my junior spring because I was just like done with Eurocentric labeling. I was like I don't want to study how these homies label like other homies that they decide—I realized and I was gone. I loved it though because you can only study Eurocentric art. When I wanted to study like Caribbean art they were

like there's no one here to help you with that. And I'm like somebody can chaperone me and help me find some books. That's what I studied. I studied that.

Cynthia: And then you decided to come back to Bushwick after that? Tell me about that period.

Anthony: So then there were six months in between because I had to save up. I was so hyped to do it that as soon as I had 1500 I moved in. I didn't like wait until I had 2000 so I could hold myself over. No. I was just like once I got it, I go. There was also a man living in a space that's like not even big enough for a small family of younger folk and also Jamaica, Queens was too far. Once again I got to get my shit done now. So we moved in here then and I was a preschool teacher for a year and a half after that then a preschool teacher at a place in a Bushwick. The first place was in Tribeca, then in Bushwick. Now I'm a teaching artist at a school in Starrett City just 20 minutes away toward Carnarsie. Yeah, I don't know if that answers your question.

Cynthia: In terms of your own path as an artist, who were some of the more influential people around at the time?

Anthony: At which time?

Cynthia: Time started coming to your own as a new artist, I guess. You said you majored in theatre, tell me a little bit about that time, the transition, getting an education.

Anthony: Okay. Prior to high school I hadn't had any immersion into the art worlds that claimed to be the art worlds aside from the graffiti that I saw and movies that I saw and books that I read except for the two times we went to the Museum of Natural History, the one time we went to the Jewish Museum or any of those like big field trips. The tradition of having the performing arts in your life or like having the visual arts be something that's like consistent for your family's viewing, it wasn't something that my family was really like concerned with. Less that they were concerned with, not that they were concerned with, more so like it was just over there. So when I met my eighth grade social studies teacher that year, she encouraged me to look for schools only in Manhattan. Now I know so that I could just get out of this Brooklyn mindset. Mind you I hadn't been to Manhattan since I'd met her in the eighth grade. She took me to Manhattan for my first time.

In looking for schools in Manhattan the only things that intrigued me were the [for merit] schools for some reason. I'd never done anything. I'd never seen a play. I was just like I want to try that. So we went to the library. We got this big script from "Chicago", the musical. I don't know where it came from. She also got me this like audition book and she supported me. She stayed with me after school. She was the other lines and we practiced and we practiced. She took me to all my high school auditions. I got into a school terribly named

Talent Unlimited High School and I was a drama major, and I hadn't known until I got into college, my freshman year, that I had approached every single character that I played initially from a place of movement. I wanted to know with every character before I memorized lines, before any of that, age, height, weight, all these things, condition. Does this person have an ability that is like strained or anything like that so that I could physically get into it first.

In my freshman year I took a class that I had to take because it's theater and dance so you can't...I'm just theater. I'm not dancing. I'm not going to take any dance classes. That first semester I played Mercutio. I'd never been that physical and my director was like keep on, keep up. I'm like jumping around the stage. I'm doing all this stuff that I'd never had the space [unintelligible 00:32:10] size of this room. I go to this like college theater and they're like go ahead, throw yourself across this massive stage with these big—Do you know what I mean? And the semester after that I took this class called Intro to Performance but it might as well have been called intro to body, an intro to figuring out the mode of expression that you want now and when that happened I was like oh, I only want to dance. I don't want to talk anymore. I don't want to talk because I'm tired. We studied ritual dance and so we had these little projects and every project I did something with my base. And then that summer I worked at Jacob's Pillow Dance. So I got wrapped into this realm of like post modern dance and modern dance and how technical dance was the most important thing and I love dance history, goes on and on and on.

And then I took ballet. And while I took ballet, as much as I loved it, I realized that the inorganicness of it was something that, although I appreciated, I didn't want to do for the rest of my life. So after that I started studying more movement practices that were improvised, like a Ankoku Butoh. I took my own time and my own independent course to study more of Carl Jung and Robert Schultz and wanted to really get into the place of what's going on up here in connection to the body and I studied a lot of Laban based movement practice for early childhood, as much somatic practice that I can and as many somatic classes that I can take. Within that process we were always encouraged to create. So I created. I took creative practice based classes. So by the time I graduated I was confident enough with a toolbox of performing arts based, creation based materials enough to set me into a place where now I'm curating, I'm installing and I'm performing.

Cynthia: Why don't you tell me a little bit about what inspires your art making practice.

Anthony: What inspires my art making practice? I'm trying to boil it down to one thing, create that web that comes down to one.

Cynthia: It doesn't just have to be one. If you want to mull that over a bit, that's fine. We can come back to it later because it's a pretty loaded question. Maybe you could tell me about what your most recent work is.

Anthony:

Okay. So my most recent work is called...I'm actually going back and forth with the title, disputing between For Sale, Whitewashing, and For Colonialism or For Neocolonialism. So those are the four places. What the piece is, is most of the summer I've been stealing for sale signs and I've been stealing a lot of them. They're mostly in Bushwick and Bed-Sty that I've been taking them from. So imagine—Can I just tell you how it was the first time it was performed because it's being developed? At En Casa Afuera which is a revolving door of curation anchored by myself and my best friend, McKenzie Angelo. She is an interactive art insulator and I'm mostly a performance artist. We collaborated on an outside space at the Loisaida Center in Alphabet City for En Casa Afuera and what En Casa Afuera is is like we're the anchors and we always have a couple of other people who are family who provide visual art or performance art or interactive art, anything along those lines.

So we had this outside space. We painted the floor black and the walls black except for one corner, one square corner which the floor was painted white. There were like air conditioners and shit. And at the border were all these for sale signs. They were on the ground. They were on the walls. They were everywhere. So in this piece, it's all action based. So I'll tell you what the actions are because the point of it was to just do the actions and look at the audience and kind of do it like I'm doing this here. I'm talking and I'm just doing these little actions with my hands. So what happens is I walk out, ponytail, long white dress up to here with white tape around my wrists. On the stage all these are set up and at the center is this small Doric column that's white. It's like this big. I would say like that big and it's wrapped in white tape at the center and then it's got an American flag vest over it, like draped over it.

So the first like ten minutes of the piece is me doing these tableaux where my hands are always next to each other. Even if they move to the other side of my body, they're kind of like still attached. Many tableaux - pause, image, pause, image, all of these kind of like oppressed images until I get to the column and I'm there and I'm biting...one of the poses is I'm down behind the column and I'm there. Then what happens, before all the tableaux I wrapped white yarn around the whole space and then made a circle around the center. So I pick up the circle, put it outside, pick up the column. Mind you, this entire time my eyes are closed. I pick up the column and I step forward and underneath the column was the white duct tape and once I step on them my eyes close and I bring the column down. I wrap the American vest over that white tape, put that on my back, carry it outside of the space, walk through the entire space, come back, put the column down, then I say this is just a ponytail. I take that out. This is just tape. I take it off. This is just a dress. I take it off. And then I go and I redress in black pants, black boots, and a Puerto Rican flag like a tank. And then the piece is done.

Yeah, I'm performing that again at Sanctum Sanctorum this coming week twice. So I'm excited to see what it develops into, very excited to see what it develops into. That was the last piece I did.

Cynthia: So it seems to me that even with talk about movement—and I love how your cat keeps bumping into the camera, it's awesome.

Anthony: She wants it.

Cynthia: Awesome. He's such a love monster. These themes around place, what else influences your art making, it seems like location, relationships with place and interpretations within that play?

Anthony: Yeah. As we keep going through this, place keeps coming up, as well as people and events. So I think the thing that inspires me most is I create and I curate because not only does it bring me to a better understanding of but it also helps me celebrate who I am. I have all these reasons why I do what I do. I do it for awareness. I do it for conversation. I do it for my community. I do it for dismantling negative effects of gentrification. I do it for bridging. I do it for all these things but all in all I can be selfish and say that I do it because it makes me feel true to me because I didn't get to grow up and like take classes on Taíno then Puerto Rican history. I didn't get art history courses where I was just studying like the Caribbean and then like had qualms when my professor asked why I wanted to study some Italian. I have to struggle to learn a language that isn't even my people's language. Spanish, Hispanic, I'm not Hispanic. My country is a commonwealth. My country has McDonald's and Starbuck's in it. These things keep me creating.

Me growing my hair out is the reason I keep creating. Me making an effort to tan as much as I can so I can be as brown as I can so that when winter comes I'm not that light skinned is the reason that I do my art. Yeah.

Cynthia: And the coming back to the scene of gentrification, given Bushwick's history of being a neighborhood that's going through all these trajectories, these changes, how do we attempt to figure out exactly who's entitled to what in this kind of graphic battle against displacing community residents?

Anthony: That word entitlement is big. I don't like to go over the conversation of who is entitled to what because I think that conversation should come up after we first discuss how we're going to build bridges with one another and why we need to build those bridges and what building those bridges is going to produce. We should build these bridges because we're all inevitably affected by the negative effects of gentrification. What we will produce are not only mobilized acts of rebellion that, of course, bring change but also internal support for that homie that is going to be kicked out because they've been trying to evict her for three years and her landlord's been terrorizing her and he took out her boiler last winter and you know, he ended up throwing tear gas—. Have you heard? These stories are real. These stories are very real. I'm not worried about that question right now because to be real like it doesn't matter what's put down on a piece of paper, the national understanding even for people who are against it and I'm coming back to it is this country was raped and then a blanket of whiteness was placed over it to fabricate that whiteness

is normal so much so that...like how can a community be so popular for its Latinos and the black people that existed there and the second white folks start moving in they don't own everything but the second white folks start moving in and owning some things then that becomes the target of attention.

That just baffles me that...there's like so much attention put on all of these incoming businesses that are new in hype but the businesses that have actually been keeping the community really comfortable are not getting that same claim. And we know why those things happen. What I'm saying is like the bodega on my corner, that family takes care of many of the people who are addicted to drugs within a five-block radius. They take care of them.

Cynthia: How?

Anthony: How? They give them little jobs to do so that they can make more money so they can get theirs. They let them slide if they want this beer. They let them get that water for free if they want some water. They ask them to build them something in exchange. You know what I mean? Like, they work.

Cynthia: Versus if it was a new business?

Anthony: Well, like even right next to it is literally a new business owned by a white man that's going to be a bar and it's getting set up currently on the inside and decorated like it's not even a part of this space. And Bushwick Daily is going to write about it and they're going to love it with their like 300-word paragraphs. You know what I mean? And so many people are going to read about it and because those people are reading about it, it becomes important because mostly white folk read, read, read. Vogue eventually catches on and names it 7 out of the 15 coolest places to go in the world. And I'm still strung up on that even though it happened last summer. But the reason that Vogue knows that is because all of these little scenes and things that are happening here are important. And where are they focusing on? They're focusing on what they're doing. They're focusing on the fact that they are the Bushwick open studios revolutionaries and no one's creating art like they have and they're going to get put in some history books.

I'm like you put a fucking circle on a piece of wood. You're not that revolutionary. What is more revolutionary is you moving into a neighborhood and making sure that even if you face animosity that you still work hard to say hello and to learn your shit and ask yourself, which most don't, does my existence here harm more than help this community?

Cynthia: What do you think can be some of those factors can help break down those barriers, that people can reach out more? To community members, artists, activists, how can we fight this form of gentrification that seems to becoming endemic? Which you are arguing that's it always been a part of the culture. And that's true. The notion of ownership, their western ideas, they're not indigenous ideas. The currency, money, but I mean, that's a separate

discussion but going back to that whole thing, how can we break that down? Do you see that happening?

Anthony: (I'm also sorry for all the little flies and mosquitoes, it's because this is open.)

So I mean I just mentioned one, which is the white folk that are here should recognize that animosity if they experience it and work hard to get past it and to make an effort to learn. There's Google. There's a lot of shit you can learn about and all that learning helps you do is answer that question does my existence here harm more than help the community? Right? Like am I living here and working in Soho? Am I buying Starbucks every day or am I buying Starbucks once a week? Am I buying my clothes from the upper West Side or am I buying my clothes from Beacon's Closet or am I buying it from the thrift store owned by the black man that lives down the block on Schaefer and Wilson. You know what I mean? So those things.

In terms of what the native Bushwick community can do if we're just talking about Bushwick. Right? But what any native identifying community can do and I fully believe this, it is up to the oppressed to free the oppressor and the oppressed. So I'm not saying coddle. Right? Especially since gentrification happens with predominantly white folk, there can be this idea that if I am to have a conversation with you, white person, and I am to get anywhere with you then I need to make sure that you feel comfortable and an effort to not let white fragility and in they're doing white tears affect the success of a conversation. No white coddling I say. Keep the aggression back, still have love. You can have love without coddling a white person. I'm saying don't apologize to them because they're uncomfortable or sad by the fact that it just hit them that they have white privilege. You know what I mean? So those things. Those two things are things. And outside of that just like know what's happening in your community, just like know. Do some research.

And if you are an organization within any gentrifying community and you are new especially then make it clear that your resources are accessible to the community farther out than online based outreach. So don't just Instagram or Facebook what your place is doing. Don't just write it on your little chalkboard outside, get your ass up, go outside, and go meet some people and make it clear to them that this is accessible. Because my aunt knows how to do Facebook kind of, she don't really know how to do Instagram but she'd be very excited if someone came up to her and said three blocks down there's this gallery space that this kind of art in it. There are more things but I think that those are the initial ones. You start having those conversations. You start planting those seeds and from then on you can mobilize.

Cynthia: Sure. Do you think that the needs of culturally distinct groups can be merged through a teeny commercial state which would allow artists to work and create local jobs as possible solutions?

Anthony: One more time?

Cynthia: Do you believe that the needs of culturally distinct groups or population can be merged in regards to like again, reaching out? Let's say you've had this conversation and you're starting to get those 'aha moments' and people are starting to feel the similarities amongst their brethren differences. Right? White person you're talking to, is like, I get it. I want to be more helpful, whatever. Artist to artist which would be like one circle. Right? Not just artist to non-artist, let's say artist to artist, white artist to native artist. Would merging them through commercial space, like say, manufacturing purposes, gallery space and things, would that allow artists the opportunity to again keep the jobs local to help enrich the community rather than taking it away from them?

Anthony: Yeah, I think it'll help if they do it.

Cynthia: Yep, definitely.

Anthony: I think it's simple. It'll help if they do it. Right? It'll help. Like there's this one little Jew shop off the Jefferson stop that I used to work at. I actually worked there when I just got hired here and there's two Dominican women who own it and that made me very happy. And they had a staff of predominantly people of color, primarily Latinos which made me really, really happy. And then I got fired because they needed to cut staff and I had just been making too many mistakes in my first month. And I remember visiting there the other day, that was two years ago, and a couple of their hires are hipster passing folk, white or not. And I was so disheartened because I think about the youth. I think about the youth and how I was when I was of that age and how I remember being like thank goodness I get to go back to Bushwick because I want to see more Latinos. Especially when I went to high school I was like oh, my god, I was in the upper East Side, like that was a lot for me to handle. I would like to be in a space that I feel comfortable in.

I can't imagine like the younger Latinos right now how they must feel being like okay, I have mad Latinos in my school because it's that middle school that's here but then I leave and I can't be in a space that's really not white or not hipster until I get home but even then maybe they live downstairs. You know what I mean? Which is totally fine but not to the extent that it's happening, not at all. So I say to this bar right here. If I could talk to these people at this bar, I would be like do you know how many people just in a ten-block radius would be down to work at your spot? As the months go by it's going to be curious to see who gets hired there. I'll give him the benefit of the doubt and who knows.

Cynthia: Can you give me examples of any attempts and interests you had with collaborating and interacting with the community?

Anthony: Any what? Attempts?

Cynthia: Any of your attempts to collaborate with the community since you've come back.

Anthony: Okay. I'll first speak to like the non-native community, the gentrifying community. So I've made a lot of successful efforts to infiltrate with love a lot of these new gentrifying spaces. For example, Christopher Stout of the Bushwick Art Crit Group encouraged me to curate a native Bushwick artist based lecture series at Brooklyn Fire Proof due to everything that we're talking about right now. I have met a lot of beautiful organizers that I intend on collaborating with in the near future like Nicole Brydson is definitely one of them. I intend on becoming a part of the arts in Bushwick to Bushwick Open Studios volunteering group. I intend on inviting a friend of mine. Her name is Julietta. She's 30 now and was gentrified out of Bushwick a while ago and moved away because she had always really felt very like turned off, not always I mean, but recently she felt very turned off before she moved and now she wants to come back and help out. So I told her let's be the first native Bushwick artists, six years after its inception which is bullshit but we can still do it. It's not even six years. What am I saying? No, 2006 to 2015, that's even longer.

Jaz Colon, she's Bushwick Vendors Market. She has educated little monsters—She has Educated Lyrical Monsters. She is this hub of like native Bushwick support, meaning she takes in native Bushwick youth and has all these youth-led based programs. I would say for the most part these folks are folks that I've been staying close to and I've also been meeting other dope folks that I can see myself collaborating with in the near future like folks at IMAGE Gallery, folks at 3rdEye(Sol) which is going to open up again really soon, people who are making moves. So that's on that tip. On the other end in terms of the non-native community, I've been visiting my abuela as much as I can. I've been having conversation with venues that have space to present curated works that are native to the community that I've done like quinceaneras and shit forever. I'm in conversation here and there with them about ensuring some works in Bushwick that are native Bushwick led for next, like spring. I've been talking to people. I know my neighbors. Let's see, I support my local businesses. Also what I don't do. Right? I feel like it's important in terms of like what I don't do.

I work very hard to refrain from major capitalists like businesses, like I mentioned Starbuck's earlier or anything like that. Like the last pair of Nikes I bought were two years ago and I still have them and I'm going to use them until they wear themselves out. I make sure to shop at only thrift stores that are like individually owned. Food is still a back and forth because it's dependent on what I can afford and what I can't afford. So sometimes I'll have to go to the Family Dollar. You know what I mean? It's a back and forth. So those are all the things that I can think of right now in terms of what I do and don't do.

Cynthia: And at the end of the day, how would you characterize the impact of all of this work on your life and in your own community?

Anthony: Well, throughout the day I remember to watch myself because if I didn't watch myself I'd be crying all the time. I'd be so upset all the time so I watch myself. I take a deep breath and I listen to a song or go running or get on my bike or call a friend or take a little shower or do something that's going to wash me and then I can approach whatever it is afterward. I reflect. I ruminate but I don't ruminate too much. But if we're talking end of the day, just deal with it. What else am I going to do?

[End of recorded material at 00:58:50]