Rezoning the Alternative:

Art and Politics in New York at the Dawn of the Reagan Era

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# ABSTRACT

**Rezoning the Alternative: Art and Politics in New York at the Dawn of the Reagan Era**

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This thesis studies the history of alternative art spaces in New York, with a particular focus on the changing use and understanding of the term "alternative" at the turn of the 1980s. Exploring the impact of New York's 1975 fiscal crisis, funding cuts in the public sector, gentrification, and the professionalization of established alternative spaces on the formation of new forms of artists' self-organization, this thesis reveals the brief period of 1978 to 1981 as a lynchpin in the history of alternative art in New York. Each chapter examines an identity crisis that began to emerge when the first wave of alternative art institutions that formed at the beginning of the 1970s was confronted by a second wave that was poised to replace it. Representatives of this second wave, which included Collaborative Projects, Inc. (1978-1985), Fashion Moda (1978-1993), Group Material (1980-1996), and Political Art Documentation/Distribution (1980-1988), railed in different ways: against the bureaucratization of existing alternative spaces (Chapter One); against the continued exclusion of racial and ethnic minorities (Chapter Two); against the widespread refusal of artists to engage in radical politics (Chapter Three); and against the complicity of alternative spaces in gentrification and displacement (Chapter Four). By examining how competing ideas of the "alternative" coexisted during this brief period of time, I expose the "alternative" as a site of contestation—an unstable keyword struggled over in art discourse and practice.

More broadly, this thesis asks how the austerity politics instituted in the aftermath of New York's fiscal crisis left its trace on the organizational forms and institutional positions established in the New York art system at the turn of the 1980s. What marks of neoliberal ideology appeared before Ronald Reagan assumed the presidency of the United States? What assumptions guided artists and art critics working during this period—about the role of the alternative space, the position of the artist in society, and the potential for artists to act as agents of social change? Recovering the imprint of ideology on New York's alternative art sphere

during a moment affirmed by many artists, curators, critics, and politicians as "post-ideological," this thesis charts the blind spots, limitations, and political consequences of ideals inherited from 1960s counterculture in the New York art system, as well as the unexpected convergence of these ideals and the nascent political imaginary of neoliberalism at the dawn of the Reagan era.

**Acknowledgements**

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**Introduction**

In 1984, art critics Walter Robinson and Carlo McCormick chronicled the first years of the East Village gallery district, a constellation of densely packed storefront commercial galleries that embodied the decadence of 1980s art in New York: "Poverty, punk rock, drugs—East Village artists and dealers have forged this avant-garde setting into both a collective identity and a marketing tool."[1] The Lower East Side galleries represented a new beginning: an emerging market for contemporary art, one that overturned the dominance of ephemeral modes of conceptual and process-based art to trade once again in objects, from graffiti-on-canvas to repackaged kitsch. As the new galleries marched to the drumbeat of postmodern pluralism, they were also curiously proclaimed by artists, curators, and critics as the definitive successor of the city's existing alternative spaces, an array of self-organized art institutions and organizations that constituted a parallel sector for art production, exhibition, and discourse during the 1970s and early 1980s. Robinson and McCormick reflected on recent exhibitions profiling the East Village galleries at Artists Space (1972 -) and P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center (1976 -), two of the city's oldest government-funded alternative spaces, recognizing the irony of this loving embrace:

> It will be interesting to see whether [President Ronald] Reagan's NEA takes note of this particular episode of public funding of the private sector. The East Village art scene, incidentally, suits the Reaganite zeitgeist remarkably well; its private, economic entrepreneurship coincides so closely with Reagan administration attitudes that one almost expects to hear a reference to the new art scene in a presidential anecdote.[2]

This critique was directed only at the alternative spaces, which the critics believed had distorted and deformed the idea of the "alternative" to fit a brazenly entrepreneurial art scene.[3] As the dominant idea of the "alternative" in New York was captured by a market rationality that we

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[1] Walter Robinson and Carlo McCormick, "Slouching Toward Avenue D," *Art in America* (Summer 1984): p. 135.
[2] Ibid., p. 137.
[3] Presenting a counter-argument in the article immediately following "Slouching Toward Avenue D," art critic Craig Owens argued that "[d]espite attempts to fabricate a genealogy for the artist-run galleries of the East Village in the alternative-space movement of the '70s, what has been constructed in the East Village is not an alternative to, but a miniature replica of, the contemporary art market." See Owens, "Commentary: The Problem with Puerilism," *Art in America* (Summer 1984): p. 163.

might now call the neoliberal common sense—the values, ideals, and desires that set the normative limits of thought and action under conditions of neoliberal hegemony[4]—the meaning of the term "alternative" became an open cause of conflict. This thesis treats the meteoric rise of the East Village galleries not as a new beginning but as an end game. Turning to the mission statements, business plans, grant applications, and other administrative byproducts of a selection of small-scale counter-institutions, artist-run agencies, organizations, and publishing ventures established at the turn of the 1980s, as well as the critical debates swirling around them, I uncover the critiques, crises, and subsequent adjustments that enabled the dominant idea of the "alternative" in New York to conform to the ideology of the free market.

At the end of the 1970s, more than a decade before the highly publicized "culture wars" of the early 1990s, and even before the Reagan Administration began to reduce funding to the National Endowment for the Arts' (NEA, 1965 -) Visual Arts Program in the early 1980s, a wave of critical dissent was brewing in Lower Manhattan. The "alternative" was in crisis. For artists, critics, and curators, the concept of the alternative space no longer signified the radical, anti-elitist, anti-hierarchical, and anti-bureaucratic position that some of its earliest proponents sought to institute. The alternative spaces endured a barrage of complaints.[5] They were accused of assimilating the logic of state and federal granting agencies and becoming as inflexible as the institutions they were established to circumvent. They were accused of making little to no attempt to serve the interests of racial and ethnic minorities—quite the opposite, they were seen to be programming art that was politically apathetic, racist, or reactionary. Most damning, they were seen to be catalyzing the process of gentrification that would make most of Manhattan uninhabitable for the working class and poor.

Within this culture of critique, new independent art institutions and organizations began to define themselves not against the museums or the commercial art system but against the first wave of alternative spaces.[6] Collaborative Projects, Inc. (Colab, 1978-1985), Fashion Moda

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[4] Political theorists Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams use the Gramscian framework of hegemony to chart the ascendance of neoliberalism at the turn of the 1980s. For them, the neoliberal common sense expresses "[t]he worship of individual freedom, the value ascribed to hard work, freedom from the rigid work week, individual expression through work, the belief in meritocracy, the bitterness felt at corrupt politicians, unions and bureaucracies." See Srnicek and Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and A World Without Work* (London and New York: Verso, 2015), p. 64.
[5] For example, see Rudolf Baranik, "Is the Alternative Space a True Alternative?" *Studio International* (January 1980): p. 69.
[6] Herb Tam, "Interview with Joe Lewis," in Lauren Rosati and Mary Anne Staniszewski, eds., *Alternative Histories: New York Art Spaces, 1960 to 2010* (Cambridge, MA: Exit Art and MIT Press, 2012), p. 72.

(1978-1993), Group Material (1980-1996), and Political Art Documentation/Distribution (PAD/D, 1980-1988), as well as the numerous sub- and splinter-groups they instigated, constituted a second wave of alternative art institutions and organizations that set out to challenge the first. The formation of Colab marks an important juncture in this history.

Formed in May 1977 through a series of open and informal meetings attended by roughly forty young artists interested in developing an infrastructure for art production and exhibition that could exceed both the commercial gallery system and the existing alternative spaces, Colab was less a proper cultural institution than an incubator of micro-institutions, a central apparatus from which smaller groups of artists with diverging priorities, aesthetic sensibilities, and political convictions would fracture and depart over the duration of its short lifespan. Pragmatically conceived as a "grant-getting machine" for artists who wanted to evade the managerial control of curators and arts administrators,[7] Colab was the seedbed for many of the small-scale institutional and organizational practices that would leave their mark on the nascent East Village gallery district. Among them are The Offices of Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince & Winters (1979-1980), a short-lived consulting firm that imagined a "professionalized" alternative to the alternative space; Fashion Moda, an influential South Bronx artist-run space that was credited with launching the commercial art careers of a generation of graffiti writers; the New Cinema (1978-1979), a screening room at St. Mark's Place dedicated to showing "no wave" films by Colab members and their friends—low-budget super-8 films that adapted the aesthetic and attitude of punk music for the silver screen; and the Committee for the Real Estate Show (1979-1980), an activist-oriented splinter group that, after hosting *The Real Estate Show* (1979-1980), an illegal anti-gentrification exhibition in a city-owned storefront on the Lower East Side, founded ABC No Rio (1980 -), the first non-profit alternative space to set up in the neighbourhood in the 1980s.

Despite the fact that Colab had no direct involvement in the making of the East Village gallery district, as Colab member Alan W. Moore puts it, "the group's fingerprints were all over it."[8] Stefan Eins, director of Fashion Moda and founding member of Colab, boasts that

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[7] Alan W. Moore and Walter Robinson, "Colab & Rule C: Notes for an Ideological Prolegomenon," *The Colab Daily Purge*, vol. 1, no. 3 (May 26, 1982): p. 1. (Andrea Callard Papers, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, series I, subseries A, box 1, folder 24).

[8] Alan W. Moore, *Art Gangs: Protest & Counterculture in New York City* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2011), p. 107.

"FASHION MODA was a role model for the flowering in the East Village in the '80s."[9] The first East Village commercial gallery, Fun Gallery (1981-1985), explicitly modeled itself on Fashion Moda. Its co-director, Patti Astor, was the star of numerous no wave films made by Colab artists, including Eric Mitchell's *Kidnapped* (1978), *Red Italy* (1979), and *Underground U.S.A.* (1980), as well as Charlie Ahearn's cult classic *Wild Style* (1982). In the latter film, Astor played the role of a gallery director scouting for talent in the South Bronx, performing a fictionalized account of her own entry into the world of art and commerce. Colab's *The Times Square Show* (1980)—heralded at the time as "the first radical art show of the 1980s"[10]—launched the commercial art careers of Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring, and Kenny Scharf, as well as Colab members John Ahearn, Jenny Holzer, Tom Otterness, Kiki Smith, and other artists whose work would become representative of East Village art. Robinson and McCormick, who were among the most vocal supporters of the East Village gallery district, were also Colab members. A central hypothesis of this thesis is that the splintering of Colab at the turn of the 1980s was key to the making of the East Village and the re-ordering of the idea of the "alternative" that this cultural district has come to signify. The range of pragmatic and ideological positions claimed under the Colab umbrella reveal the contours of an emergent field of struggle in which the idea of the "alternative" was a central bone of contention.

The overlapping contestations appearing in (and sometimes against) the name of the "alternative" developing in and around Colab reveal the contradictory aims and ambitions of New York's alternative spaces, as well as the complex political divisions animating the alternative space movement during the 1970s and early 1980s. They also shed light on the shifting ideological ground upon which the second wave of putative alternative institutions and organizations was formed and into which many of its leading proponents would collapse.

**The Idea of the "Alternative"**

Standard historical accounts of the alternative space movement illustrate the gradual process by which generation after generation of alternative art institutions and organizations were co-opted by the mainstream art system. This narrative was first outlined in Robyn Brentano's book *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street: History, Artists & Artworks* (1981) and Jacki Apple's exhibition

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[9] Stefan Eins, Fashion Moda Historical Overview, undated (c. 1990s) (Fashion Moda Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, series I, subseries A, box 1, folder 1).
[10] Richard Goldstein, "The First Radical Art Show of the '80s," *Village Voice* (June 16, 1980): p. 31.

and catalogue *Alternatives in Retrospect* (1981), which together underscored how, as New York's alternative spaces were swallowed up by administrative procedures and long-term plans, they became indistinguishable in both form and function from museums and commercial galleries.[11] In such accounts, the history of the alternative spaces is a history of failure, leaving one to wonder whether self-preservation or self-annihilation was the nobler path.[12] Variations on this narrative have underpinned much discourse on the alternative art sphere. For example, considering the role of the NEA in shaping the alternative art movement in New York, Brian Wallis has argued that the federal grant system ensnared the first wave of alternative spaces into a Foucauldian logic of governmentality. As Wallis explained: "In particular, the NEA strategically compelled the alternative spaces to become more institutionalized, to seek and rely on greater and greater amounts of funding, to redefine the role of contemporary artists as professional workers, and to qualify the types of art being made and shown."[13] Dependent on government funding structures and thus beholden to the ideological sway of cultural policy, the alternative spaces existed in a state of contradiction. The structural rigidity and long-range plans recommended by the NEA discouraged institutions and organizations from adapting to changing social, cultural, and political conditions, compelling many to betray the contextual nature of the concept "alternative." The habitual question, "Alternative to what?" was enough to jeopardize the increasingly tenuous relationship between the ideals and practices of many declared alternative spaces.[14] For Julie Ault, founding member of Group Material and leading historian of the alternative space movement, the failure of most alternative practices to sustain experimental, activist, anti-commercial, or dissenting agendas into the twenty-first century signalled "the disintegration—perhaps even obsolescence—of an alternative art sphere."[15] Faced with such a bleak outlook on the future of alternative art, Ault took up the task of writing its history in order to "ensure that alternative activities are not written out of the cultural histories of the recent

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[11] See Jacki Apple, ed., *Alternatives in Retrospect: An Historical Overview 1969-1975* (New York: New Museum, 1980). See also Robyn Brentano with Mark Savitt, eds., *112 Workshop / 112 Greene Street: History, Artists & Artworks* (New York: New York University Press, 1981).

[12] For a defense of failure over accommodation, see Gwen Allen, *Artists' Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

[13] Brian Wallis, "Public Funding and Alternative Spaces," in Julie Ault, ed., *Alternative Art New York* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 164.

[14] For example, see Alan Wallach, in Baranik, "Is the Alternative Space a True Alternative?" p. 73.

[15] Julie Ault, "For the Record," in *Alternative Art New York*, p. 3.

past."[16] Subsequent histories have distanced themselves from Ault's pessimism while agreeing with her central premise—that the "alternative" as a counter-institutional position has become increasingly impossible to maintain.[17]

The narrative of decline is seductive. It approaches the history of the alternative space movement through the lens of the tragic drama, offering a framework to illuminate practical and intellectual shortcomings at particular historical junctures. However, this narrative is problematic for two main reasons. First, it anchors the idea of the "alternative" to a common set of values— usually pronounced as anti-institutional, anti-bureaucratic, anti-elitist, non-commercial, idealistic, and self-determining—which, due to various historical factors, could not be sustained. However, there was never a time when alternative spaces conformed to a single ideological position or common agenda. There was no manifesto for the alternative space, and no consensual idea of the "alternative" from which to establish a baseline for decline. The second problem with the narrative of decline is that it promotes an undialectical interpretation of the history of alternative art in New York, obfuscating how practical challenges to existing ideas of the "alternative" contributed to shifting values and priorities.

A sampling of alternative institutions formed in the first half of the 1970s reveals the diverse and sometimes conflicting priorities animating the alternative art sphere. 98 Greene Street (1969-1973), 112 Workshop/112 Greene Street (1970 -), and Apple (1969-1973) were founded in former manufacturing lofts by artists to support the experimental creative practices of their friends. Inheriting a critique of administration from the 1960s counterculture, these spaces emphasized spontaneity over structure in their organizational practices, representing themselves as deliberately unprofessional. On this account, these institutions sharply contrasted with Artists Space, which was founded by the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) to serve as a professional outlet for non-commercial art exhibitions. Like Artists Space, Institute for Art and Urban Resources (1971 -) and Creative Time (1974 -) were founded and directed by arts administrators. They aimed not simply to exhibit new art, but, more specifically, to facilitate artistic interventions in abandoned buildings and other unconventional spaces. The Kitchen (1971 -), Electronic Arts Intermix (1971 -), Printed Matter (1976 -), and Franklin Furnace (1976

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[16] Ibid., 1. Apple's *Alternatives in Retrospect* was justified by a similar archival impulse. See Apple, "Introduction," in *Alternatives in Retrospect*, p. 5.

[17] For example, see Lauren Rosati, "In Other Words: The Alternative Space as Extra-Institutional," in *Alternative Histories*, pp. 41-43.

-) were devoted to supporting the production and exhibition of specific media practices that were viewed to be underrepresented in commercial galleries and museums, namely performance, video, and artists' publications. Women's Interarts Center New York (1969-1981) and Artists In Residence (A.I.R., 1972 -) were not primarily concerned with incubating alternatives in aesthetic form. Instead, they were established in order to "redress a scarcity of exhibition opportunities available to women artists."[18] In a similar spirit, American Indian Community House (1969 -), El Museo del Barrio (1969 -), and Just Above Midtown (1974 -) were dedicated to supporting the cultural production of specific minority groups, providing workshop and exhibition space to Native American, Puerto Rican, and African American artists, respectively. Political art collectives associated with the alternative art sphere, including Art & Language (1966-1982), the Art Workers Coalition (1969-1971), Artists Meeting for Cultural Change (1975-1978), and the Heresies Collective (1976-1993), emerged from the margins of the New Left social movements, where they anchored themselves in anti-capitalist politics and ideology. Artists' magazines such as *Art-Rite* (1973-1978) and *Avalanche* (1970-1976) provided low-budget vehicles for the promotion of the experimental art and alternative spaces burgeoning in Lower Manhattan during the 1970s. According to art historian Gwen Allen, these and other magazines enlisted the printed page as an alternative space for art.[19] The different and oftentimes contradictory ideas of the "alternative" adopted by early alternative institutions and organizations, as well as the antagonisms and divisions between (and within) them, play integral parts in the history of alternative art in New York.

Considering the internal fragmentation of New York's alternative art sphere, artist and cultural organizer Arlene Goldbard has argued that the very existence of an "alternative space movement" is problematic:

> Some groups started like clubhouses for edgy artists; some set out to model alternative art economies; some were impelled by urgent political missions. Some groups painted the walls white and hung paintings; some offered performances in abandoned buildings; some organized street demonstrations. The sheer vitality of this writhing tangle of simultaneous ideas and action makes me want to pack it

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[18] "A.I.R. Gallery," in *Alternative Histories*, p. 138.
[19] Allen, *Artists' Magazines*, p. 2.

into a catch phrase, wrap the entire skein in a red ribbon, and there you have it, the Alternative Arts Movement—or rather, a bundle of contradictions. The problem is that the term lumps artists who'd have settled for nothing less than total revolution together with artists who'd have been happy simply to have a show in a good gallery.[20]

Goldbard's argument is both strong and weak. It is strong in so far as it highlights how the practices, institutions, and organizations assembled under the banner of the "alternative" in the 1970s and early 1980s were highly diverse on both aesthetic and political grounds. Her argument is weak in so far as it conflates the term "movement" with the assembly of a united front, presupposing that cultural or social movements are anchored in unity and consensus, rather than antagonism and dissensus. According to political theorist Jodi Dean, the fantasy of consensus masks divisions that are internal to every collective, movement, or political party: "division goes all the way down—antagonism is fundamental, irreducible."[21] For her, movements are not monolithic entities but complex social assemblages fractured into revolutionary and conservative elements, avant- and rear-gardes. Movements are not only vehicles for struggle; they are also active sites of struggle, divided from within. Reflecting on sharp divisions within the Occupy movement of 2011-2012, the activist art collective Not An Alternative (of which I am a member) has argued that the movement was powerful "not where consensus worked but in instances where groups and individuals showed a commitment to a collective idea even when they disagreed."[22] This formulation can be useful for the study of alternative art in New York because it highlights how, by committing to a common identifier (in our case the "alternative"), a wide range of artists, institutions, and organizations were somehow bound together despite their numerous differences. The fact is that many artists, arts administrators, and critics in the 1970s and early 1980s adopted the term "alternative" to describe their practices not because they agreed with the term's dominant usage, but because they sought to shift its meaning and political horizon. If there was an alternative space movement, it was not constituted as a united front, but

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[20] Arlene Goldbard, "When (Art) Worlds Collide," in *Alternative Art New York*, p. 185.

[21] Jodi Dean, "The Subject of Revolution," *Crisis & Critique*, vol. 4, no. 2 (November 2017): p. 169. See also L. A. Kauffman, "The Theology of Consensus," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, online (May 26, 2015): http://berkeleyjournal.org/2015/05/the-theology-of-consensus/.

[22] Not An Alternative, "Common Power as Counter Power," *The Journal of Aesthetics & Protest*, no. 9 (2014): http://www.joaap.org/issue9/notanalternative.htm.

as a site of struggle.

At any given point, there exist dominant, residual, and emergent conceptualizations of the "alternative." As a relational term—a term counterpoised by an unstable dominant—the "alternative" is subject to continual redefinition. This point was stressed by Raymond Williams, who theorized the dynamic and changing relationship between alternative cultural forms and dominant culture. In his analysis, alternative forms were theoretically distinct from oppositional cultural forms: whereas alternatives signified deviations "which can be accommodated and tolerated within a particular effective and dominant culture," oppositional forms were perceived as threats to dominant culture.[23] For Williams, it was critically important to recognize that the "alternative" did not itself signify any particular set of practices and meanings; instead, it signified a *position* vis-à-vis dominant culture. Both alternative and oppositional forms were "subject to historical variation"—that is, they were contingent on the social and political conditions in which they operated.[24] Accordingly, shifts in the dominant meaning of the "alternative" could point toward broader social and political transformations. As Williams remarked in *Keywords*, it was "especially in periods of change" that the consensual meaning of words became "brittle."[25] Although the term "alternative" refuses the logic of consensus (since its meaning is contextual and always transitioning), it retained a brittle veneer of consensus in the New York art world during the 1970s. This veneer allowed artists, critics, and curators to speak of an alternative art sphere and an alternative space movement despite the absence of a shared cultural or political project. By the end of the decade, this veneer of consensus was no longer tenable. This was not merely the consequence of a lack of coherence within the alternative art sphere, but also symptomatic of broader social and political transformations produced by the austerity politics instituted by New York's power elite in the aftermath of the city's 1975 fiscal crisis.

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[23] Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," *New Left Review*, vol. 1, no. 82 (November-December 1973): p. 9.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 16. For a contemporary re-reading of this passage, see Kelly Fritsch, Claire O'Connor, and AK Thompson, eds., *Keywords for Radicals: The Contested Vocabulary of Late-Capitalist Struggle* (Chico, CA and Edinburgh: AK Press, 2016), pp. 6-7. Although the term "alternative" is not included in Williams's 1976 publication or 1983 revision, it was included in *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, a 2005 updating of *Keywords* published to account for "'new keywords' that have emerged as the vocabulary of culture and society has responded to new social movements, changing political concerns, and new horizons of political debate." See Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, and Meaghan Morris, eds., *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. xviii.

**The Cultural Logic of Austerity**

New York in the late 1970s was "a city of ruins," as Marxist cultural critic Marshall Berman aptly described.[26] Roads and highways were crumbling and caving in. Entire city blocks were levelled to the ground—some as a result of arson, others as a result of abandoned or delayed redevelopment plans. Firehouses and hospitals were shut down. Daycares, public schools, libraries, and colleges were closed. The 1979 sanitation workers' strike left piles of trash for the city's surging rat population to feast upon. The decaying city provided the physical support for new practices of guerrilla public art, from Jenny Holzer's *Inflammatory Essays* (1979-1982), manifesto-like texts that accosted unsuspecting readers with impersonal, anonymous, and sometimes threatening demands, to Christy Rupp's *Rat Patrol* (1979), a single illustration of a rat, which, printed in the thousands and wheat-pasted across Manhattan during the city's garbage strike, called attention to the city's growing rat problem while animating the becoming-wild of the urban infrastructure. "Wild style" graffiti covered the exteriors and interiors of the city's aging subway trains. As City Hall amped up a "war on graffiti" it had initiated in 1972, graffiti writers such as Fab Five Freddy (Fred Braithwaite) and Lee (Lee Quiñones) were becoming both enemies of the state and subcultural celebrities.[27] Eric Mitchell, Beth B and Scott B, Michael McClard, and other no wave filmmakers channelled the attitude and energy of punk music, where they staged fictional torture plots and psychological dramas against the backdrop of urban decay. Artists associated with Colab (which counted most of these artists among its members) began hosting scrappy art exhibitions in lofts and abandoned buildings, where they brought together graffiti, no wave film, and guerrilla public art under the banner of artists' self-organization. Fashion Moda, ABC No Rio, Group Material, and other new organizations were established to support, frame, and legitimize these emergent practices. Operating in the poorest neighbourhoods in New York, specifically the South Bronx and the Lower East Side, they physically expanded the terrain of New York's alternative art sphere, which had previously been concentrated in the former manufacturing district of SoHo.

New York was a city of extremes. As SoHo was becoming the site of massive reinvestment by real estate developers and speculators, the predominantly Black and Latino/a ghettos of South Bronx, Harlem, and the Lower East Side were disinvested of City resources.

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[26] Marshall Berman, "A Struggle to the Death in Which Both Sides are Right," *Village Voice* (July 12, 1982): p. 12.
[27] Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005), p. 134.

Political hacks alternately called this disinvestment "planned shrinkage" or "benign neglect," but there was nothing benign about it.[28] The human cost of disinvestment was severe. Between 1969 and 1979, the poverty rate surged from 14.5 percent to 20.2 percent, meaning that one in five New Yorkers lived in poverty by the end of the decade.[29] The overlapping crises of unemployment, addiction, crime, homelessness, and poor housing conditions exacerbated public health emergencies associated with extreme poverty, including outbreaks of tuberculosis in the city's poorest and most overcrowded neighbourhoods.[30] These were among the myriad aftershocks of deindustrialization that decimated New York's working class during the 1960s and 1970s. By 1980, the city retained only 499,000 manufacturing jobs, having "lost more than half of the 1,073,000 manufacturing jobs of 1947."[31] Almost twenty-five percent of the city's white population left during the 1970s—"a decade when New York's overall population fell by more than 800,000, even as its Latino population increased by 17 percent and the black population grew slightly."[32] The massive loss of jobs and people strained the City budget. As the City's tax base was eroded by white flight, the number of people qualifying for public assistance exponentially grow, rising from 322,921 to 1,255,721 between 1960 and 1972.[33] Meanwhile, the City began to operate as "the employer of last resort," employing more than 414,000 people in 1970, seven times more than the city's largest private employer.[34] The local government's ballooning operating expenses and depleting tax revenue contributed to the protracted fiscal crisis that New York faced throughout the 1970s—and especially in 1975, when the City teetered on the edge of bankruptcy.

Historian Kim Phillips-Fein has explored the causes and consequences of New York's fiscal crisis, revealing how the City's rising debt enabled politicians, banks, and the financial

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[28] Daniel P. Moynihan, "Text of the Moynihan Memorandum on the Status of Negroes." *The New York Times* (March 1, 1970): p. 3.
[29] Mark K. Levitan and Susan S. Wieler, "Poverty in New York City, 1966-99: The Influence of Demographic Change, Income Growth, and Income Inequality," *FRBNY Economic Policy Review*, vol. 14, no. 1 (July 2008): p. 14.
[30] See Deborah Wallace and Rodrick Wallace, "Chapter 4: Tuberculosis: The Captain of All The Men of Death," in *A Plague on Your Houses: How New York was Burned Down and National Public Health Crumbled* (London and New York: Verso, 1998), pp. 83-108.
[31] "New York City's Decline in Manufacturing Gained Momentum in 1980," *The New York Times* (March 22, 1981): p. 46.
[32] Kim Phillips-Fein, *Fear City: New York's Fiscal Crisis and the Rise of Austerity Politics* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2017), p. 22.
[33] Ibid., p. 21.
[34] Ibid., p. 24.

elite to institute a politics of austerity that would radically reshape everyday life in New York.[35] Cuts were the order of the day. Between 1975 and 1978, the public-sector workforce dropped by 69,672, forcing city residents to accept massive and sweeping cuts to social services.[36] As Phillips-Fein explains, "The cutbacks affected the entire spectrum of city services. Fewer people were seen in the public clinics and public hospitals. Streets were cleaned less frequently. Restaurant inspections and inspections for lead paint declined. Transit fares were raised from 50 to 60 cents, even as the number of subway breakdowns tripled and the bus fleet aged. The number of students at CUNY dropped by a quarter. Capital improvement projects ground to a halt."[37] Thousands of public school teachers, custodians, security staff, and crossing guards were laid off between 1975 and 1976, leading to overcrowded classrooms, deteriorating facilities, and a rising incidence of crime on public school premises.[38] The countless cuts spurred on by the fiscal crisis were met with strong resistance from local unions, activist groups, community organizations, and concerned citizens. However, as Phillips-Fein notes, "[f]or all the accomplishments of the local, neighborhood-driven resistance to cuts and retrenchment, activists

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[35] Phillips-Fein's basic account is as follows: as the City's debt increased during the 1960s and 1970s, its connections to the financial sector grew tighter but more volatile. By 1974-1975, fifteen percent of the City's annual budget was dedicated to paying off old debt to its creditors. The fate of the City was left to the goodwill of its financial institutions, which elected to bid on municipal bonds on a monthly basis, despite growing anxieties that the City would default on its debt. The State of New York was not in a financial position to bail out the City if it could not meet the terms of its creditors, and President Gerald Ford was outspoken in his refusal to intervene. If the City was to default on its debt payments, the banks and their investors would be caught holding worthless municipal bonds, and the City would immediately lose its borrowing privileges. This would abruptly constrict the City's budget, requiring mass layoffs of City employees and immediate cuts to public services. When the banks refused to bid on the City's bonds in January 1975, the threat of bankruptcy became real. Facing default on June 11, 1975, Mayor Abraham Beame (1974-1977) capitulated to the demands of the State of New York and members of the financial sector, agreeing to a proposal for the establishment of the Municipal Assistance Corporation (MAC), a State-controlled agency that would market low-interest bonds on behalf of the City. Crucially, as Phillips-Fein explains, the board of MAC was stacked with influential New York businessmen, who would now "have the power to assess the city's progress toward a balanced budget and, if warranted, release the money that MAC raised through its bond sales. If its members deemed that the city's elected leaders were not doing enough, MAC could withhold the funds New York needed to cover its bills." MAC gave the corporate class the leverage it needed to force the city and its employees to accept massive cuts to social services, signalling a significant incursion of the corporate class into the everyday workings of the City, rearranging the priorities of the municipal government in lasting ways. See Ibid., p. 3; p. 57; p. 78; p. 121.
[36] Ibid., pp. 206-207.
[37] Ibid., p. 207.
[38] Ibid., p. 221.

involved in particular struggles around the city had never been able to unify their protests into a single movement, one that could articulate a different direction for the city as a whole."[39]

The austerity politics advanced in the name of fiscal responsibility over the course of 1970s immiserated the poor most of all. But it also dramatically reduced the public's expectations of the government, establishing a new political reality in which social welfare would be of secondary concern. The fiscal crisis created an opportunity for the financial elite, as well as for conservative politicians across the United States to point to the failure of the welfare state. For President Gerald Ford (1974-1977) and the politicians and advisors surrounding him, "the New York City fiscal crisis was a story of the bankruptcy—economic and moral alike—of liberal politics. It proved that using government to combat social ills would end in collapse."[40] This narrative stuck. Ed Koch would soon weave it into in his inaugural address as Mayor of New York on January 1st, 1978:

> Experience has shown that Utopia cannot be conjured up with a magic formula of more services, more agencies, more plans and more programs. A better city requires the one ingredient that money cannot buy: people who will fight for a cause they believe in, people who are willing and able to defend and protect the city they love.[41]

Koch put a cheery spin on a bleak new reality: significant aspects of social life previously supported by the local government would be left to volunteer initiatives and private enterprise. In the new New York, the true guardian of the people would not be the state but the intrepid entrepreneur. With hindsight, it is easy to recognize how the city of ruins did not represent the bankruptcy of liberal politics, but the shifting priorities of government. When Ronald Reagan was inaugurated as President of the United States in January 1981, the foundation for his broad vision for political change was already in place. For half a decade, New York had been a testing

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[39] Ibid., p. 301.
[40] Ibid., pp. 3-4.
[41] Mayor Ed Koch, "Text of Address Delivered by Koch at His Inauguration as Mayor of New York City," *The New York Times* (January 2, 1978): p. 13.

ground for the austerity politics that his administration (1981-1988) would aggressively institute on a national scale.[42]

Austerity is the domestic policy of neoliberalism. In the neoliberal world view, every cut to state funding for social welfare creates a void that can be filled by private enterprise. Reagan's doctrine, that "the most important cause of our economic problems has been the government itself,"[43] was built upon a series of ideological convictions that we now identify as elements of the neoliberal common sense: a strong critique of state bureaucracy and regulation (as so much red tape), a belief that collective institutions (especially unions) are inherently oppressive, a focus on the creative ingenuity of individuals, a faith in competitive markets as instruments for economic growth, and an adherence to the conventional wisdom that the ideologies of Marxism and socialism had been exhausted. As political theorists Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams explain, neoliberalism gained dominance in the U.S. not only by taking over the guiding values of the Republican party apparatus, but also by appealing to the hearts and minds of conservatives, liberals, and radicals alike through a "a full-spectrum project of constructing a hegemonic world view."[44] The watchword "freedom" became a key site of ideological struggle, where it was "reduced to individual freedom, freedom from the state, and the freedom to choose between consumer goods."[45] Seizing the language of liberation was central to the ideological victory of neoliberalism:

> With its emphasis on individual freedoms, neoliberalism was able to co-opt elements of movements organized around "libertarianism, identity politics [and] multiculturalism." Likewise, by emphasizing freedom from the state, neoliberalism was able to appeal to anarcho-capitalists and the movements of desire that exploded in May 1968. Lastly, with the idea of freedom being limited to a freedom of the market, the ideology could co-opt consumerist desires.[46]

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[42] Phillips-Fein, *Fear City*, p. 9.
[43] William A. Niskanen, *Reaganomics: An Insider's Account of the Policies and the People* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 4.
[44] Ibid., p. 63.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Srnicek and Williams, *Inventing the Future*, p. 63.

A similar ideological struggle played out on the terrain of the concept of "self-organization," which became increasingly indistinguishable from entrepreneurialism over the course of the 1970s and 1980s. Tracking the development of new corporate management discourse since the 1980s, sociologists Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello recognized a strong turn away from hierarchical and centralized modes of organization, and toward flexible modes of self-organization.[47] Self-organization appealed to the corporate class not because of its emancipatory potential, but because it would place the burden to succeed on competitive, enterprising individuals.[48] For curator Barnaby Drabble, "the precise difference between self-organization, self-enterprise, self-help and any number of other self-words (including self-interest) remains, in practice, remarkably hard to hold on to."[49] This semantic disorientation is among the innumerable consequences of neoliberalism's "stealth revolution."[50]

It should be stressed that in the U.S., the ideological victory of neoliberalism preceded Ronald Reagan's presidential inauguration. Subject to a series of "false starts" since the 1930s, neoliberal ideology was firmly in place by the end of the 1970s.[51] By 1981, neoliberalism had already become "the *form of our existence* – the way in which we are led to conduct ourselves, to relate to others and ourselves."[52] It is thus understandable that in the preceding years, artists, arts

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[47] Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999), Gregory Elliott, trans. (London and New York: Verso, 2005), p. 159.

[48] Ibid., p. 75.

[49] Barnaby Drabble, "On De-Organization," in *Self-Organized* (London and Bergen: Open Editions and Hordaland Art Centre, 2013), pp. 20-21. Drabble's text responds to Anthony Davies, Stephan Dillemuth, and Jakob Jakobsen, "There Is No Alternative: THE FUTURE WILL BE SELF-ORGANIZED, Part 1," in Nina Montmann, ed., *Art and its Institutions: Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaborations* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006), pp. 176-178.

[50] See Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2015).

[51] For Marxist geographer David Harvey, the emergence of neoliberalism as a dominant global phenomenon can be dated to the years 1978-1980, when a coordinated shift in public and monetary policy in the U.S., the United Kingdom, and China led to rapid transformations in the global economy. As Harvey explains, neoliberalism's doctrine of "[d]eregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision," was implemented on a global scale after China's leader Deng Xiaoping put in place a capitalist economic reform plan in 1978, Paul Volcker was elected as the Chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve in 1978, Margaret Thatcher was elected as the Prime Minister of the U.K. in 1979, and Ronald Reagan was elected as U.S. President in 1980. New networks of global trade as well as creative interventions into the U.S. Federal Reserve contributed to the rapid growth of the American, British, and Chinese economies, revealing new economic practices that would be replicated in other countries soon after. See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 1-3. While for Harvey, the birthdate of neoliberalism as a dominant political and economic force can be marked with some precision, theorists including Srnicek and Williams, Philip Mirowski, and Michel Fehrer have described a much longer pre-history of the neoliberal era, anchoring the birth of neoliberalism to the foundation of Mount Pelerin Society in 1938. See Srnicek and Williams, *Inventing the Future*, p. 52, and Philip Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown* (London and Brooklyn: Verso, 2014), pp. 38-39.

[52] Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, *The New Way of the World: On Neoliberal Society*, Gregory Elliott, trans. (London and Brooklyn: Verso, 2014), p. 3.

organizers, and critics associated with New York's alternative art sphere began to echo some of the key tenets of neoliberalism, from its critique of bureaucracy to its emphasis on personal autonomy and creative freedom.

Many of the artists and cultural organizers emerging at the turn of the 1980s adopted a similar do-it-yourself ethos. Working on tight budgets, they eschewed administrative oversight, preferring to act directly, often in haste. Frequently involving untrained and non-professional artists as co-producers, they invoked a democratized concept of art as a de-skilled and non-specialist practice. They found opportunity in the chaos of post-crisis New York, claiming space for self-representation in the interstices of the city of ruins. Finding common cause with punk, they positioned themselves as anti-establishment and anti-authoritarian. Scavenging both medium and support from the detritus of disinvestment, they did more with less. In this last respect, the call to self-organize resonated all too closely with Mayor Koch's appeal to the citizens of New York. This is my central argument: over the course of the late 1970s, New York's alternative art sphere did not only accommodate an even larger range of possibilities, values and priorities than it had in the first half of the 1970s, but it also began to conform—albeit subtly, impurely, and not without resistance—to the conditions of austerity that reshaped everyday life in New York after 1975.

**The "Alternative" in Conflict**

How were the traces of austerity left on the organizational forms and institutional positions established in the New York art milieu at the turn of the 1980s? What marks of neoliberal ideology appeared *avant la lettre*? And what can this teach us about the assumptions made by artists and critics working during this period—assumptions about the role of the alternative space, the position of the artist in society, and the potential for artists to act as agents of social change? This thesis zeros in on a very narrow period in the aftermath of the fiscal crisis, the period of 1978-1981, an ellipsis in which the "alternative" was under intense scrutiny from both critics and artists. An investigation of this brief period of struggle provides not only a historical understanding of the shifting culture for alternative art at the turn of the 1980s, but also a sense of the strong ideological divisions forming within it.

Many—if not most—of the self-organized initiatives forming in New York's alternative art sphere at the turn of the 1980s did not themselves make political statements. As I will explore

in the first two chapters of this thesis, more often than not, they positioned themselves *beyond* ideology. However, following Fredric Jameson, I contend that "there is nothing that is not social and historical—indeed, that everything is 'in the last analysis' political."[53] In *The Political Unconscious* (1981), Jameson developed the concept of history that would inform his influential writing on postmodernism,[54] interpreting history as an "absent cause," an invisible and inaccessible structure baring down on culture, determining its ultimate shape and form.[55] In his analysis, it is through the interpretation of cultural artifacts that history can be accessed—and by this, he means the history of Marx and Engels, the uninterrupted and unending history of class struggle.[56] This thesis takes on the challenge of uncovering the political unconscious of the alternative art sphere at the turn of the 1980s, extending Jameson's theoretical project into the archives of New York's alternative art institutions and organizations. The question of political commitment so often avoided in the period under study guides my analysis, forcing difficult questions not only on the alternative art organizations and creative practices that were understood as "radical" at the turn of the 1980s, but also on the contemporary curators and cultural historians who celebrate these organizations and practices while placing the very question of the political out of bounds.[57]

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[53] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 20.

[54] In the classic essay "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," Jameson examined the political and ideological underpinnings of postmodern culture, arguing that postmodernism was "the cultural dominant of the logic of late capitalism." By this he meant that the heterogeneous cultural forms encompassed by the term "postmodernism," as well as their constitutive spatial and temporal features, reflected the multinational expansion of capital in the second half of the twentieth century. By insisting on the link between postmodern cultural forms and the political and economic forces that determined their conditions of possibility, he developed an analytical frame for a Marxist interpretation of postmodern culture. His aim was not merely to critique or to denigrate postmodernism's prevailing tendencies, but, more constructively, to locate within the postmodern the outlines of a radical cultural politics. See Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, vol. 1, no. 146 (July-August 1984): p. 85.

[55] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 35.

[56] Ibid., p. 20.

[57] Major exhibitions on downtown art, including *The Downtown Show: The New York Art Scene 1974-1984* at New York University's Grey Art Gallery (January 10-April 1, 2006), *Rituals of Rented Island: Object Theater, Loft Performance, and the New Psychodrama* at the Whitney Museum of American Art (October 31, 2013-February 2, 2014), and *Club 57: Film, Performance, and Art in the East Village, 1978-1983* at the Museum of Modern Art (October 31, 2017-April 8, 2018), celebrated the creative practices formed in the 1970s and early 1980s, invariably highlighting how "[d]owntown artists violated the gap between high art and mass culture, removed the production and reception of avant-garde art from isolation in elite circles, and directly confronted social and political concerns." Such exhibitions situated downtown art on the aesthetic backdrop of austerity (the illegal loft, the abandoned lot, etc.), underlining the freedoms that austerity afforded enterprising young artists, while only rarely examining how the politics of austerity acted on the political imaginary for art, shaping the horizon of the possible for even the most socially- and politically-engaged artists and collectives. See the exhibition statement for *The Downtown Show: The New York Art Scene 1974-1984*: https://greyartgallery.nyu.edu/exhibition/the-downtown-show-011006-040106/.

The late 1970s was far from the first period in which young artists attempted to assign a social role to their creative practices. It was also not the first "de-Marxization of the intelligentsia" in New York, to borrow a fitting phrase from art historian Serge Guilbaut.[58] The problematic, inconsistent, and contradictory "good intentions" of young artists in New York during this period are of particular historical import because they testify to a shrinking of the political imaginary for art, as well as to the potential impact of the politics of austerity on this contraction. Responding to the supposition that we might be asking "too much of art and artists in terms of social and political engagement," Martha Langford has recently stated that "we don't ask enough, and therefore don't ask enough of ourselves as spectators and interpreters."[59] My analysis is guided by this conviction: not only art, but also art criticism and art history, should be held to account.

As with any historical project, this one is not without its limitations. By focusing on the narrow period of 1978 to 1981, I forfeit the important work of establishing historical arcs and chronology from the 1960s to the present day, recognizing that such a task has already been accomplished by Alan W. Moore in *Art Gangs: Protest and Counterculture in New York City*, which covers the range of artistic experiments taking place over the period of 1968 to 1985. My project foregrounds an array of artistic and activist activities occurring almost simultaneously in order to establish a field of distinct and conflicting positions that composed the alternative art sphere during a brief period of time in which the meaning of the "alternative" was under intense scrutiny from multiple sides. This was also the historical period in which the neoliberal politics of austerity, incubated in New York since 1975, was taking the world by storm. With the aim of establishing the entanglements and antinomies within and between coterminous scenes, this project follows recent art historical projects, including Darby English's exemplary *1971: A Year in the Life of Color*, and Serge Guilbaut and John O'Brian's edited collection *Breathless Days: 1959-1960*. The results of my own excavation, like those of Guilbaut and O'Brian's, "resemble

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[58] See Serge Guilbaut, "New York, 1935-1941: The De-Marxization of the Intelligentsia," in *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, Arthur Goldhammer, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983, pp. 17-47.

[59] Martha Langford, "Introduction," in Langford, ed., *Narratives Unfolding: National Art Histories in an Unfinished World* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2017), p. 4.

those of an architectural dig . . . sometimes revealing gold and sometimes rubbish," as they put it in their introduction.[60]

At the center of this thesis are the institutions and organizations surrounding Colab, many of which were widely reported as the cutting edge of alternative art at the turn of the 1980s. This focus allows me to magnify the rifts forming both between and within institutions and organizations that had penetrated the art world's established regime of visibility. Historically marginalized alternative organizations, institutions, and collectives—what Gregory Sholette has described as the art world's "dark matter"—largely remain in the shadows here.[61] However, while this study places greater attention on institutions and organizations that competed for recognition by the art establishment, the impact and legacy of feminist, community-based, and militant activist art practices haunt every page, exposing significant limits and blind spots within the conflicts and debates under study.

The diverging ideas of the "alternative" held by the array of artists, curators, museum directors, critics, cultural theorists, and activists that composed New York's alternative art sphere were rarely communicated directly. More often, they were expressed in practice, privately pitched and tailored to the priorities of granting agencies, vaguely described in interviews, and diffusely presented in mission statements and manifestos. Among the greatest challenges of this project is in working with the wide range of archival and critical documents available to grasp— or, rather, to synthesize—the sometimes half-baked and always contradictory ideas of the "alternative" expressed by institutions and organizations that did not prioritize administration and record-keeping. I draw upon grant applications, published and unpublished texts found in archival folders, private correspondence, mission statements, promotional materials, posters and ephemera, interviews, critical reviews, exhibition documentation, and in the rare cases that they exist, exhibition catalogues and historical surveys. By examining the support structures for art— the promotional, social, and economic aspects of its production, distribution, exhibition, and reception—with an attention to detail typically reserved for artworks, I foreground the importance of context and framing in the reception of art while insisting, as Richard Meyer does

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[60] Serge Guilbaut and John O'Brian, "Introduction," in Guilbaut and O'Brian, eds., *Breathless Days, 1959-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 3. See also Darby English, *1971: A Year in the Life of Color* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2016).
[61] See Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2011).

in his book *What was Contemporary Art?* "that the history of contemporary art extends well beyond the frame of original works."[62]

*Rezoning the Alternative* engages with specific conflicts over the stakes of artists' self-organizing at the turn of the 1980s in order to grasp the shifting ideological coordinates of the dominant idea of the "alternative." This project follows two overlapping lines of inquiry, one related to potential for alternative institutions and organizations to represent authentic alternatives to the art establishment, and the other related to the ability of artists associated with the alternative art sphere to build alliances with the activist left.

The first two chapters examine the contested category of the alternative space, exploring how established operational and curatorial practices became points of contention at the end of the 1970s. I address critical debates about the failures of the first wave of alternative spaces to live up to their ideals, as well as attempts by young artists to respond to these critiques by establishing new models for the alternative institution or organization. Chapter One, "Bureaucracy and Its Discontents" studies the critique of bureaucratization levelled against the first wave of alternative spaces at the turn of the 1980s, as well as the identity crisis provoked by this critique in a minority of institutions, most notably 112 Workshop/112 Greene Street, which was among the first alternative spaces to receive funding from the NEA. Zeroing in on 112 Workshop/112 Greene Street's effort to "throw off the shackles of the 1970s"[63] after being displaced from the iconic Greene Street warehouse for which it was named, this chapter interprets the institution's activities in 1980—including its two-week consultation with The Offices of Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince & Winters, its participation in *The Times Square Show*, and its subsequent rebranding as White Columns—as attempts to manage its public image. If the early alternative spaces were held to account for adopting bureaucratic forms of management in the interest of self-preservation, they were no less shaken by the increasingly commonplace recognition that they served the interests of white artists over and above the interests of artists and communities of colour. Chapter Two, "Fashion 時髦 Moda МОДА and the Politics of Integration" begins by considering the ingrained racial bias of the alternative art sphere, a problem that was vividly exposed during the controversy surrounding white artist Donald Newman's notorious *The Nigger Drawings* exhibition at Artists Space in 1979, before

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[62] Richard Meyer, *What was Contemporary Art?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), p. 35.
[63] Josh Baer, in Shawna Cooper, "Josh Baer," *Times Square Show Revisited*, online (May 22, 2012): http://www.timessquareshowrevisited.com/accounts/josh-baer.html.

examining problematic efforts to promote diversity and inclusion. I concentrate on the case of Fashion Moda, the first alternative space to situate itself in the primarily Black and Latino/a neighbourhood of the South Bronx, as well as the first to incorporate cultural pluralism as an operational imperative. I look at Fashion Moda's attempt to integrate itself into the local South Bronx community as well as its attempt to integrate South Bronx art and culture into the global art economy before outlining the ideological limits of its pluralist utopia.

Chapters Three and Four examine the contested and contradictory relationship between the art scenes forged around the city's second wave of alternative art institutions and organizations and the movements for equality and justice mobilizing both locally and internationally at the turn of the 1980s. Chapter Three, "Politics in Square Times," considers accusations of political apathy aimed against the generation of artists coming of age in the second half of the 1970s—and, in particular, factions of Colab (and their friends) that were invested in channelling the energy and attitude of punk music into the realms of visual art and film. Exploring how images of left-wing political radicalism circulated at Colab's *The Times Square Show*, in *X Motion Picture Magazine*, and in no wave films screened at the *New Cinema* and in downtown clubs such as Max's Kansas City, I investigate no wave's paradoxical fascination with and ambivalence toward left political activism. Addressing the implicit critiques of no wave featured not only in art reviews but also in "Italy: Autonomia," the 1980 issue of *Semiotext(e)* (1973-), a publication that involved some of the implicated artists on its production team, this chapter untangles a knot of relations between artistic and intellectual scenes in New York at the turn of the 1980s, revealing *Semiotext(e)*'s Italian issue as an intervention into the no wave scene, an attempt to unsettle and challenge no wave's desires for radicalism and freedom, and to drive these desires in the direction of committed anti-capitalist politics. Chapter Four, "Dividing the Lower East Side," picks up on the local struggles for housing justice that were overlooked not only by the no wave scene, but also by the wider New York art community, at a time when flocks of artists priced out of SoHo were rapidly taking over the Lower East Side, a predominantly Latino/a ghetto with an already-established network of anti-gentrification organizations. By 1980, it was widely accepted that the downtown art community had been enlisted as an agent of gentrification in SoHo. The question remained whether or not artists could work against the interests of the real estate industry—if they could forge bonds of solidarity with the poor, evicted, and displaced in anything other than bad faith. I examine sharply diverging

responses to the Artists' Homeownership Program (1981-1983), a contested City-sponsored program for artists' housing at two abandoned sites on the Lower East Side, in order to address the ideological division forming between influential art workers and longstanding community members at the very moment when the first East Village commercial galleries were opening their doors. Turning to three organizations that refused to accept the inevitability of gentrification on the Lower East Side, namely Colab's Committee for the Real Estate Show, Group Material, and PAD/D, I grapple with the challenges of alliance-building within and beyond the art community.

Together, these four chapters attest to the complex field of struggle in which competing ideas of the "alternative" were enmeshed at the turn of the 1980s. They represent a battleground during a brief period in which the material consequences of neoliberal economics were still undecided. None of them led directly to a cultural politics capable of meaningfully challenging neoliberal hegemony, and as I demonstrate in the pages that follow, some of them even assumed some of neoliberalism's accompanying ideological features: its appeal to efficiency, critique of bureaucratization, faith in the creative ingenuity of individuals, and refusal of the concept of the political. However, to declare that this accommodation was inevitable—that there was no alternative to neoliberalism, as British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was known to proclaim—is to accept neoliberalism's terms and to inhabit the constrained political imaginary ushered in by the politics of austerity. In writing this history of alternative art in New York, I do not want to build a monument to defeat, nor do I want to recover some overlooked silver lining. Instead, my aim is to soberly confront the limits of the "alternative" as it was conceived at the dawn of the Reagan era. Only from this vantage can we begin to redraw the conceptual edges of the "alternative"—or, to borrow from the language of urban planning, to *rezone* it.

**Chapter One:        Bureaucracy and Its Discontents**

At the turn of the 1980s, the idea of the "alternative" adopted by many of New York's earliest alternative spaces was in crisis. Perceived by many as elitist, ineffectual, and stiflingly bureaucratic, the alternative spaces drew the scorn of young artists, particularly those surrounding Colab, Fashion Moda, and Group Material. Among the more obscure—and least remembered—groups formed in this culture of critique was The Offices of Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince & Winters (The Offices), a short-lived consulting firm established by artists Peter Fend, Coleen (Colen) Fitzgibbon, Jenny Holzer, Peter Nadin, Richard Prince, and Robin Winters in 1979. All but Prince were members of Colab. Over the course of 1979 and 1980, the firm held meetings with a diverse array of organizations including the UN International Labor Organization, California Institute of Technology, and the Los Angeles Public Library, where they advertised "practical esthetic services adaptable to client situation" [fig.1.1]. While only scant evidence remains of The Offices, it emerged at an important transitional moment in New York's alternative art history, finding itself at the heart of the problem.

Among The Offices's clients was 112 Workshop/112 Greene Street, widely recognized as New York's oldest alternative art institution. Hired by Josh Baer, who became director of 112 Workshop in 1979, members of The Offices spent two weeks in the spring of 1980 working with staff to revive an institution that was, in Baer's words, "basically dead."[1] Surviving on $9,000 of federal funding—$4,800 went toward rent—112 Workshop was financially hamstrung.[2] It had recently relocated from the vast unfinished warehouse that garnered it critical acclaim in the first half of the 1970s to a subsidized storefront at the Port Authority Truck Terminal building at 325 Spring Street. The artists associated with 112 Workshop's first location had moved on. Gordon Matta-Clark, the most critically and commercially successful of them, died of cancer in 1978. The institution bore the name of an address it had been evicted from. It inherited a legacy to which it was no longer directly tied. Only 24 years old and uninterested in the performance and process-oriented art that defined the early years of 112 Workshop, Baer wanted to commit the institution to a new direction. Hiring The Offices was his first initiative.[3]

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[1] Josh Baer, email to the author, February 15, 2017.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.

Shortly after The Offices visited 112 Workshop, the institution was renamed White Columns (as it is known today), partly in reference to the columns visible through its Spring Street windows. The name-change marked a clean break for a new director who wanted to "thr[ow] off the shackles of the seventies."[4] Baer's desire reflected his irreverence for the past. It was also linked to a more widespread belief that the model of the alternative space invented at the turn of the 1970s had run its course. Since 1976, when 112 Workshop founding director Jeffrey Lew officially withdrew from the institution, 112 Workshop was overwhelmed by organizational instability. It faced an overloaded exhibition and performance schedule, a shrinking operational budget due to the rising cost of rent in SoHo, and a rapid turnover in staff.[5] This convergence of factors was to a large degree built into the institution's foundations. The group of artists who congregated at 112 Workshop in 1970 were attracted to the anti-establishment values associated with the bourgeoning counterculture. 112 Workshop situated itself against existing architectural conventions for art presentation, against conventional notions of the art object, and against the bureaucratic structures that fixed institutions to rigid schedules and protocols. In its first two years, there had been no exhibition planning. Artworks were installed and de-installed on a rotating and ad hoc basis. Alternately called 112 Workshop or 112 Greene Street, the institution couldn't even settle on a name. As it grew, its directors attempted to maintain allegiance to the anti-bureaucratic ideal it was founded on. To this end, they were reluctant to develop a stable organizational structure, even after registering 112 Workshop as a non-profit organization and gaining government support in 1973.

That 112 Workshop was renamed White Columns in 1980 is historically significant. It corresponds to a moment when art critics and curators began to historicize the first wave of alternative spaces founded in the early 1970s. Robyn Brentano's book *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street: History, Artists & Artworks* and Jacki Apple's exhibition and catalogue *Alternatives in Retrospect* together established a narrative about the fate of the first wave of alternative spaces that has become accepted in the popular mythology: overburdened with bureaucracy, New York's alternative spaces had become "alternative" in name only. The

[4] Baer, in Cooper, "Josh Baer."
[5] Under Jeffrey Lew's leadership, Alan Katzman acted as administrator of 112 Workshop between 1972 and 1976. In 1976, Katzman was replaced by Billy Apple, Carol Parkinson, and Dina Ghen. After Lew withdrew from 112 in the summer of 1976, he was replaced by Mayra Levy and Robert Levithan, who were later joined by Katherine Goetz and Robyn Brentano. In 1979, John Abbott was hired to facilitate 112 Workshop's transition to its new 325 Spring St. location. After resigning in May 1979, Abbott was replaced by Josh Baer, who directed 112 Workshop/White Columns until 1983.

narrative constructed around this first wave of alternative spaces also cast into relief the shifting priorities of artists associated with a second wave coming onto the scene in the late 1970s. This chapter examines the broader identity crisis invoked by the White Columns name change, as well as the ideological cleavage forming within this crisis. The critique of bureaucracy inherited from the 1960s counterculture had been undermined by the pressure to professionalize. Another critique of bureaucracy incubated in the free-market think tanks of the American right wing was poised to replace it. If The Offices—a for-profit consulting firm born out of a very specific critique of the alternative art system (more on this later)—was consulted in the rebranding of New York's pioneering alternative space, what can this tell us about the shifting horizon for the alternative at the turn of the 1980s?

**Protest Fatigue**

112 Workshop was founded in 1970, at a moment when a large cross-section of artists working in New York was embroiled in a collective struggle against the city's largest cultural institutions. The Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (1968-1971) and the Art Workers' Coalition (AWC) provided a platform for artists to confront museums like the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art for their complicity with the racist, sexist, and imperialist policies of the U.S. government.[6] The 1970 Art Strike against Racism, Oppression and War, organized by members of AWC, Women Artists in Revolution (WAR, 1969-1971), and United Black and Puerto Rican Artists (1969-1971), called for a general strike within the art world in protest against the war. This moment of contestation fomented an array of oppositional cultural practices that have since been associated with the artistic genres of art activism and institutional critique. Collectives such as Guerrilla Art Action Group (1969 -) and Artists Meeting for Cultural Change continued the legacy of AWC by organizing artists in a sustained struggle against New York's largest cultural institutions during the 1970s.[7] Latino/a art spaces such as El Museo del Barrio and Taller Boricua built institutional form around the Puerto Rican Art Workers faction of AWC. Women's Interarts Center was founded by members of WAR. The protest culture of the late 1960s led to the political

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[6] For more on the artist-led protest culture of the late 1960s, see Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); see also Susan E. Cahan, *Mounting Frustrations: The Art Museum in the Age of Black Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).
[7] Moore, *Art Gangs*, pp. 27-45.

awakening of many artists in New York. For others it led to protest fatigue. 112 Workshop was established as a refuge from the protest culture that captured the energy of the moment.

In an interview with *Avalanche* magazine, Lew explained the protest fatigue he shared with the community surrounding 112 Workshop: "There was once a time for being chaotic and letting yourself completely freak out. Now I just don't feel that way. I feel like getting it together."[8] Artist Tina Girouard, who was very involved at 112 Workshop in its first years, elaborated: "We had been protesting all our lives. We had had Cuba in high school, the Viet Nam War, the Civil Rights movement. By the time we reached maturity and were out of the universities ready to be artists, we were finished with protest. We just wanted to make our work, and yet, we were anarchists."[9] Both Lew and Girouard attributed the formation of 112 Workshop to the protest movements of the late 1960s—not as an extension of them, but a reaction to them. They believed that their retreat to art making and self-organized community-building was not a reactionary withdrawal from politics, but a shift in tactics. Lew argued that "things which make you an artist can make you a revolutionary, can make you change your own environment."[10] His promiscuous use of the term "revolutionary" was built upon a set of ideas about personal and social change held within the burgeoning counterculture.

Historian Fred Turner has written extensively on the youth culture of the late 1960s, locating within it a central rift between two dominant tendencies:

> The first grew out of the struggles for civil rights in the Deep South and the Free Speech Movement and became known as the New Left. Its members registered formerly disenfranchised voters, formed new political parties, and led years of protests against the Vietnam War. The second bubbled up out of a wide variety of cold war-era cultural springs, including Beat poetry and fiction, Zen Buddhism, action painting, and, by the mid-1960s, encounters with psychedelic drugs.[11]

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[8] "112 Greene Street: An Interview with Alan Saret and Jeffrey Lew," *Avalanche*, no. 2 (Winter 1971): p. 12.

[9] Tina Girouard, quoted in Robyn Brentano, "Introduction," in *112 Workshop / 112 Greene Street*, p. vii.

[10] Lew, quoted in "112 Greene Street," p. 12. Alan W. Moore discusses the wider appropriation of social movement vernacular to describe artistic positions and postures during this period: "Younger artists felt that what they were doing for themselves was in itself political. In the same way that the word 'movement' was used interchangeably to denote social, artistic and institutional programs of action, so the term 'revolutionary' was employed to denote not only those who described themselves as oppositional political activists, but artists who understood themselves as avant-garde." See Moore, *Art Gangs*, p. 51.

[11] Fred Turner, *From Counter-Culture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 31.

The New Left expanded and updated the Marxist critique of capitalism to connect the workers' struggle with the movements for civil rights, women's liberation, and gay liberation, forming political opposition around previously marginalized constituencies within the left. The second tendency, which Turner calls "New Communalism," operated on a different set of assumptions about emancipation. The New Communalists "turned inward, toward questions of consciousness and interpersonal intimacy."[12] Witnessing the dramatic expansion of government bureaucracy during the Cold War-era, they positioned themselves against centralized and hierarchical bureaucratic forms. Drawing on cybernetics and systems theory, they identified egalitarian potential in the model of the decentralized network. The New Communalists developed their group identities and practices on principles of horizontalism and leaderlessness, becoming best associated with the rise of communes toward the end of the 1960s. If the New Left set the program for new forms of direct political opposition, the New Communalists provided a template for the alternative culture of the 1970s. The rift between oppositional and alternative forms of organization within late 1960s protest culture was reflected in the New York arts milieu. Lew and others associated with the rise of alternative spaces in New York built and fortified their own self-organized communities, which they positioned beyond—but not against—the existing art system.

**No Administration**

In 1981, former 112 Workshop co-director Robyn Brentano published *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street*, the first of several retrospective accounts of the alternative space movement in New York published in short succession.[13] Brentano's book chronicled the first eight years of 112 Workshop (1970 to 1978), weaving together testimony from key witnesses to the institution's early years with historical details regarding the institution's founding, everyday operations, and gradual transformation. She chronicled the formation and decline of 112 Workshop over the period in question, measuring its transformation against the countercultural spirit that oriented it during its first two years. 112 Workshop built its institutional identity through a negation—or perhaps more prosaically, a suppression—of the organizational structure required for its survival. Describing the anarchic beginnings of 112 Workshop in the opening

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Others include Jacki Apple, ed., *Alternatives in Retrospect* and Calvin Tomkins, "The Art World Alternatives," *The New Yorker* (December 26, 1983): pp. 54-57.

pages of Brentano's history, Jeffrey Lew both affirmed and denied his role as founding director: "I was the head administrator. And of course, nobody listened to me."[14] He elaborated:

> There wasn't really a first show because everybody just arrived. Gordon Matta, Alan Saret, and everybody came there and worked. They would say, "Jeffrey, could I have a show here?" My answer would be "No!" but then of course they would have their show. They would just walk in and do it. That's what I liked about it—the fact that there was no administration. None.[15]

For Lew and the other artists who worked at 112 Workshop between 1970 and 1972, the idea of an art space without administration represented an ideal. They attempted to enact this ideal by emphasizing process over protocol. No official rules governed the use of the space.

112 Workshop was recognized as the first art space in the city to occupy an unrenovated warehouse. Lew argued that the institution's spatial features provided a distinctive freedom for the artists who worked there: "In most galleries you can't scratch the floor. Here you can dig a hole in it."[16] Matta-Clark performed his first architectural interventions there in 1970, after which he developed the increasingly ambitious building cut-outs for which he would be remembered [fig. 1.2]. 112 Workshop departed from existing conventions for art production and display, merging the studio with the gallery and installing a raw and gritty laboratory for experimentation in their place. It broke from what Irish-born, New York-based artist and critic Brian O'Doherty would later call the "ideology of the white cube," anticipating O'Doherty's claim that "[g]enuine alternatives cannot come from within this [the conventional gallery] space."[17] Exhibitions were not advertised by the institution. Artists were responsible for spreading word when their works were finished. As Brentano explains, "When group shows were set to open, they were 'juried' by an ad hoc committee of whoever happened to be there at the time."[18] Peeling back the organizational conventions that constrained the organic rhythm of studio practice, 112 Workshop cultivated an alternative temporality that could accommodate

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[14] Jeffrey Lew, in "History," in *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street*, p. 2.
[15] Lew, in Ibid.
[16] Lew, quoted in Brentano, "Introduction," p. viii.
[17] Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 80.
[18] Brentano, "Introduction," p. viii.

process-oriented sculpture, dance, and performance, emerging art forms that were not being supported by existing museums and commercial galleries [fig. 1.3-1.4].[19] Artist Suzanne Harris claimed that "There wasn't really any structure to it; it was just something about friends. It wasn't even a cooperative."[20] Arguing that "there was no need for an organizational policy," Harris bolstered Lew's claim that 112 Workshop modeled an art space in which bureaucracy played no part.[21]

What this anti-bureaucratic ideal erased were the day-to-day operational protocols required for 112 Workshop to exist. Somebody had to pay the rent. For its first two years, 112 Workshop was financed by private donors, including Robert Rauschenberg and Kurt Wasserman, the uncle of Alan Sarat, an artist and organizer who was part of this early group.[22] Lew quickly hired an assistant to coordinate the use of the space. Brentano claims that although the assistant was hired to "sit at the desk, . . . there was no desk. There was no telephone and no sign outside."[23] The absent desk is a suitable metaphor for 112 Workshop's founding myth. It underscores the tension between visible and invisible forms of administration, between the myth that the institution could function without bureaucracy and the maintenance work required to preserve this myth. The institutional ideal imagined by Lew and his friends when they began working at 112 Workshop was tenuous from the start. Within three years, it would be shattered.

**Identity Crisis**

Between 1969 and 1976, Brian O'Doherty was the director of the Visual Arts Division of the NEA. O'Doherty had exhibited at 112 Workshop under his pseudonym Patrick Ireland and was an early supporter of the space. He had institutions like 112 Workshop in mind when he introduced the Workshops program to the NEA budget in 1972, a program designed to channel NEA funds to non-profit art institutions (renamed Workshops-Visual Arts in 1976,

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[19] Judson Memorial Church was an important precedent. Dancers and choreographers associated with Judson such as David Gordon, Yvonne Rainer, and Steve Paxton routinely used 112 Workshop as rehearsal and performance space. See Ibid., p. ix.
[20] Harris, quoted in Ibid.
[21] Although 112 Workshop was founded on anti-bureaucratic and anti-institutional pretences, it was not anti-establishment in any systemic sense. Influential artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol were advisers to Lew. One of Lew's aims was to broker deals between collectors and young artists whose work did not adhere to the stylistic or material conventions supported by New York's commercial art galleries. See Stephanie T. Edens, quoted in Ibid., p. x.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., p. ix.

Workshops/Alternative Spaces in 1977, Artists Spaces in 1980, and Visual Artists Organizations in 1982). The possibility of no-strings-attached government funding lured many arts organizers working in non-commercial spaces, including Lew. In 1972, Lew registered 112 Workshop as a non-profit organization, applied for the institution's first grant, and invited the poet and editor Alan Katzman to act as administrator. Having previously worked at the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA), Katzman "formalized the grant process . . . and established a scheduling format of two week shows."[24] Receiving $10,000 from the Workshops program in 1973—the maximum amount awarded to any institution in the Workshops program that year—112 Workshop was among the first alternative spaces in New York to receive funding from the NEA.[25]

In Brentano's account, "The 1973-74 season appears to have marked the beginning of a shift for 112 Workshop away from the anarchic group catalyzed by Lew toward a more formally organized structure."[26] The shift in 112 Workshop's finances lent it a level of financial stability inconceivable to Lew and his friends just two years earlier. While still supportive of the process-oriented and performance-based art that garnered it early acclaim, 112 Workshop was now responsible for keeping records and matching government funds with private donations and in-kind services. As a publicly-funded art space, it was also now accountable for serving as many people as possible.[27] These new responsibilities were antithetical to the anti-bureaucratic ideal nurtured by the institution over its first two years. It provoked both a crisis in identity and a crisis in reputation.

The NEA was founded in 1965 during the Presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson (1963-1969) with three specific goals: "to strengthen a sagging sector of the economy, to promote American cultural values abroad, and to make culture available to all Americans at home."[28] Inextricable from the U.S. government's Cold War cultural plan, the NEA saw its greatest growth during Richard Nixon's (1969-1974) and Gerald Ford's (1974-1977) terms in the White House, when its

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[24] Ibid., p. x.
[25] Twenty-nine institutions were distributed grants of up to $10,000 from the Workshops Program in 1973. Other New York-based alternative spaces funded by the Workshops Program in 1973 included Electronic Arts Intermix ($2,000) and Women's Interarts Center ($10,000). See National Endowment for the Arts/National Council on the Arts, *Annual Report 1973* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974).
[26] Brentano, "Introduction," p. x.
[27] Suzanne Harris, quoted in Ibid.
[28] Brian Wallis, "Public Funding and Alternative Spaces," p. 170.

budget ballooned from \$11 million in 1969 to \$114 million in 1977.[29] The Workshops Program likewise saw its budget grow during the Nixon-Ford years—from \$203,478 in 1972 to \$559,000 in 1977.[30] However, while the NEA claimed ideological neutrality—O'Doherty himself stated that "NEA support is nonintervening and nonideological"[31]—this positioning was paper thin. Brian Wallis has argued that although public funding allowed non-commercial and artist-run art institutions to expand during the 1970s, it also effectively re-shaped these institutions according to the economic and cultural imperatives of the state. Wallis points out that the NEA did not define an official style or overtly privilege specific genres of art or types of arts organizations, nor did it regularly enforce disciplinary measures on institutions that refused to comply with its guidelines.[32] Instead, it exercised its control in less spectacular but more systematic ways: "[T]hrough a series of regulatory guidelines, the agency established a new subject, the 'professional artist,' and a new form of administration, the 'artist-run organization'."[33] In establishing best practices for organizations seeking government support and rewarding institutions that adhered to its guidelines, the NEA incentivized conformity, ultimately curtailing the idea of the alternative space that was taken up in the U.S. By the end of the 1970s, alternative spaces were not primarily associated with the anarchic and informal organizational protocols mythologized by the founders of 112 Workshop. Instead, they were understood as proving-grounds for young artists not yet signed by commercial galleries. They were not perceived as anti-institutional but as "neo-institutions."[34]

Wallis's text was written at the tail end of the "culture wars" of the 1990s, when the question of state-led censorship at alternative spaces was a central topic of discussion in both the mainstream and arts press. By examining the less sensational but more systemic forms of self-censorship appearing to shape the conditions for alternative art during the late 1970s and early 1980s, Wallis offered a crucial reminder that "everyday practices of social control" exercised in and through institutions—including those representing the "alternative"—had been far more

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[29] Ibid., p. 171.
[30] See National Endowment for the Arts/National Council on the Arts, Annual Reports, 1972-1977.
[31] O'Doherty, quoted in Wallis, "Public Funding and Alternative Spaces," p. 172.
[32] The NEA and NYSCA occasionally responded to public controversies surrounding programs at alternative spaces, beginning with the strong response to Donald Newman's notorious *Nigger Drawings* exhibition at Artists Space in 1979, which will be discussed in Chapter Two. The NEA established a commission on minority artists following this controversy.
[33] Wallis, "Public Funding and Alternative Spaces," p. 177.
[34] Moore, *Art Gangs*, p. 64.

effective in silencing dissent than the noisy diatribes of Republican Senator Jesse Helms and the religious right.[35] While his intervention was perhaps an important antidote to cultural amnesia, his conclusions were not new. Arguing that the oppositional energy driving the birth of the alternative spaces had been hollowed out and co-opted by the bureaucratic procedures imposed on them by granting agencies, Wallis recapitulated a long-established narrative about the demise of the alternative spaces. This narrative framed bureaucracy as the enemy of the alternative space, linking the rise of bureaucratic forms of management in alternative spaces to their declining significance in the New York art system.

**Bureaucracy in Retrospect**

By 1980, the "alternative" label no longer signified the radical, anti-elitist, anti-hierarchical, and anti-bureaucratic position that the earliest proponents of the alternative spaces sought to institute. This was underscored in the January 1980 issue of *Studio International*, which was dedicated to the topic of art galleries and alternative spaces. In this issue, Rudolf Baranik compiled a "collective view on the subject of alternatives to the established gallery system," featuring responses to the question "Is the alternative space a true alternative?" from seventeen artists, writers, and editors associated with New York's alternative art sphere.[36] The report is a catalogue of complaints about the shortcomings of the city's alternative spaces. Critics Kate Linker and Peter Frank emphasized how the alternative spaces tended to rely on conventional exhibition formats, preventing artists from reconceiving their practices beyond the established form of the

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[35] Wallis draws upon Michel Foucault's concept of "governmentality" to explain the "everyday practices of social control" exerted by the NEA during the 1970s and '80s. In his 1978 lectures on "Security, Territory, and Population," Foucault built a genealogy of the concept of "the arts of government," focusing on sixteenth-century critiques of the concept of sovereign rule advanced in Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Machiavelli articulated a top-down relation of domination between the prince and his principality, whereas his critics developed a more expansive and decentralized concept of "government" that acted on and through the institutions of the state, the family, the church, the school, and so on. The fundamental task of the arts of government was to "establish a continuity, in both an upwards and a downwards direction" between the power of the state and other forms of pastoral power. This meant both that "a person who wishes to govern the state must first learn how to govern himself, his goods, and his patrimony," and correspondingly, that, "when the state is well run, the head of the family will know how to look after his family, his goods and his patrimony, which means that individuals will, in turn, behave as they should." When people think and act like the state, they act in the interest of state power, acknowledge its sovereign rule and reproduce existing relations of domination. This is the essential structure of governmentality: the complex and interlocking system of institutions, bureaucratic procedures, and economic imperatives that encourage individuals to govern themselves according to the interests of the state. See Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-1979* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 91-92; p. 102.
[36] Baranik, "Is the Alternative Space a True Alternative?" p. 69.

gallery exhibition.[37] In this sense, these spaces did not represent a significant alternative to the already-established commercial galleries. Art critic John Perrault, artist Howardina Pindell, and art administrator Marina Urbach more forcefully accused the alternative spaces of serving the interests of commercial galleries. Not only did the alternative spaces tend to adopt the same selection process as most commercial galleries, they also functioned as indispensable "stepping-stone[s] to the commercial system" for young career-savvy artists.[38] At the core of these and other complaints was the ambiguity of the term "alternative." Both *Artforum* editor Ingrid Sischy and art historian Alan Wallach posed the problem of the alternative as primarily a semantic one. Sischy writes, "Alternatives to what? to whom? and for whom? Is the New Museum an alternative to the Whitney? The Whitney to the Modern? The Modern to the Met? New York to Paris? Soho to Madison Avenue to 57th Street? Tribeca to Soho? The NEA to the Guggenheim Foundation? Would a Whitney be an alternative in Mississippi? In Glasgow?"[39] If respondents such as artist Dottie Attie argued that the alternative spaces could only be true alternatives if they provided greater economic incentives for full-time artists, others, including artists Carl Andre and Adrian Piper, were more militant in their responses.[40] For them, without an overhaul of the broader social and economic system, alternative spaces could be "alternative" in name only.

*Village Voice* journalist Elizabeth Hess echoed the general sentiment of the *Art in America* questionnaire, describing how this culture of critique had permeated the alternative spaces themselves: "Alternative spaces are becoming as common as cars running through red lights; they are, however, not quite as dangerous. In fact, many so-called alternative spaces no longer consider the tag a compliment because the concept no longer has a radical connotation."[41] Brentano's account of 112 Workshop ended on the same melancholic note. She more forcefully underscored the role of administration in the waning "radical connotation" to which Hess referred:

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[37] See responses from Peter Frank and Kate Linker in Ibid., pp. 70-71.

[38] See responses from Howardina Pindell, John Perrault, and Marina Urbach in Ibid., p. 71; p. 73.

[39] Ingrid Sischy, in Ibid., p. 72. Alan Wallach echoes Sischy's question, writing, "Alternative spaces – alternative to what?" See Ibid., p. 73.

[40] See responses from Dottie Attie, Carl Andre, and Adrian Piper, in Ibid., p. 69;72.

[41] Elizabeth Hess, "Home-Style Looking," *Village Voice* (January 26-February 3, 1981): p. 72. This narrative was also upheld by Lucy R. Lippard: "The fires of the late sixties sparked a number of artist-run 'alternate spaces,' co-op galleries, and underground publications. Some of them survived the cooled-out seventies by becoming as institutionalized as the institutions they resisted; others folded when artist organizers burnt out and retreated to their studios; others still maintain a degree of independence from artworld bureaucracies by not biting the hand that feeds them." See Lippard, "Real Estate and Real Art à la Fashion Moda," *Seven Days*, vol. 4, no. 1 (April 1980), reprinted in Lippard, *Get the Message: A Decade of Art for Social Change* (New York: Dutton, 1984), p. 179.

Service, meaning administrative savvy, is just as important as space and a growing cadre of arts managers has surfaced bringing business practices to bear on the art-showing process. Administrative functions such as fund-raising, record keeping, and audience development absorb much of the funds while monies directly available to artists remains minimal. Artists, quite naturally, regard this development with suspicion, simply because an organization that behaves like an institution is no longer an alternative. Since most alternative spaces depend on state arts councils for a substantial portion of their funding (by law, never more than half of the annual budget), and the councils themselves are subject to the scrutiny of politicians, the priorities of alternative spaces are being eroded.[42]

In Brentano's account, as new forms of administration entered the alternative spaces, the "alternative" status of these spaces was put into question. The priorities they were founded on had slipped away. Brentano's idea of the alternative was not relational—endlessly redefining itself against a shifting dominant—but rooted in a set of values she imagined to be enduring. The anti-bureaucratic position that grounded 112 Workshop's institutional identity in its early years was taken as its keystone.

Brentano's account of the failure of 112 Workshop formed the basis of the survey exhibition *Alternatives in Retrospect: An Art Historical Overview: 1969-1975*, curated by Jacki Apple at the New Museum later in the same year [fig. 1.5]. If for Brentano, the future of alternative spaces remained uncertain, Apple argued in more overt terms that the alternative space had already completed its decline.[43] Apple conceived of *Alternatives in Retrospect* as an archival project. It was motivated by a felt need to gather information about alternative spaces that "might easily have been erased from memory."[44] The exhibition situated 112 Workshop alongside Gain Ground (1969-1970), Apple, 98 Greene Street, 10 Bleecker Street (1972-1975), Idea Warehouse (1973-1975), and 3 Mercer (1971-1978). With the exception of 112 Workshop, all of these spaces subsisted without the aid of state and federal granting agencies, and none of

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[42] Brentano, "Introduction," p. xi.

[43] Jacki Apple, "Introduction," in Apple, ed., *Alternatives in Retrospect*, p. 5. Melissa Rachleff recounts this narrative: "Brentano's essay concludes with an assessment almost identical to Apple's: artist-run galleries receiving public funding are not alternative; they are institutions with the goal of self-perpetuation, not experimentation." See Rachleff, "Do It Yourself: Histories of Alternatives," in *Alternative Histories*, p. 25.

[44] Jacki Apple, "Alternatives Reconsidered," in *Alternative Histories*, p. 17.

them survived into the 1980s. Apple set her curatorial focus on institutions that maintained ideals that were incompatible with the structural bureaucracy imposed by state and federal granting agencies. She excluded spaces such as The Kitchen, The Clocktower (1972 -), P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, Artists Space, and Franklin Furnace from the exhibition, arguing that these institutions could "no longer be identified, defined, or accurately referred to as alternative spaces in the spirit of what that had originally meant in the early and middle 1970s."[45] Instead, they had "evolved into non-profit arts institutions, governed by boards of directors and arts administrators, funded by corporations, private foundations, and government."[46] Apple did not explicitly define the spirit of the alternative. Rather, she defined it in the negative: the spirit of the alternative was essentially incompatible with the non-profit business model that had become dominant within the alternative art sphere at the turn of the 1980s. We can deduce that for her, the spirit of the alternative space was, in a word, anti-bureaucratic.

*Alternatives in Retrospect* set out to chart the emergence of an anti-bureaucratic impulse in the alternative art sphere at a moment when such an impulse was thought to be beyond the horizon of the possible. The New Museum was perhaps the perfect location for Apple to send her message. The New Museum had been a recipient of Workshops/Alternative Spaces grants since 1978, but its mission and operations could not have been more different from those chronicled in the exhibition. The New Museum was founded in 1977 as a platform to exhibit artworks produced within the previous decade. Artists were not allowed on staff. Exhibitions were professionally documented, critical essays were commissioned, and catalogues were published for most exhibitions. The New Museum's founding director Marcia Tucker aimed to build institutional legitimacy around new art—to give the museum treatment to artworks that were not actively sought out by the city's major museums.[47] The New Museum was not the only institution associated with New York's alternative art sphere that built professionalism into its core. Even in the early 1970s, the anti-bureaucratic values Brentano and Apple ascribed to the alternative spaces were not uniformly accepted.

Other early recipients of NEA funds included Artists Space, A.I.R. Gallery, Creative Time, Electronic Arts Intermix, Institute for Art and Urban Resources, The Kitchen, Franklin

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[45] Apple, "Introduction," p. 6.
[46] Ibid., pp. 6-7.
[47] David Troy, "The New Museum as *Kunsthalle*: Interview with Marcia Tucker," *Artworkers News* (December 1980): p. 19.

Furnace, and Women's Interarts Center. Artists Space and Institute for Art and Urban Resources were never hostile toward arts administration. Artists Space was established by the Committee for the Visual Arts, an advisory group to the NYSCA, and directed by Trudie Grace, the director of the agency's Visual Arts Program. Institute for Art and Urban Resources was run by the arts administrator Alanna Heiss from the beginning. The feminist art space A.I.R. Gallery was run by artists, but it strategically adopted the conventions of the white cube, recognizing that while the "disaster-area ambiance" of 112 Workshop offered a spatial alternative to the conventional gallery space, it "did little to counter the art world's tendency to exclude women artists."[48]

The NEA's Workshops program positioned this assemblage of institutions on common ground. It also divided these institutions from those that did not receive funding. The class structure dividing unfunded and funded alternative spaces was quickly reproduced within the Workshops program itself. For example, while NEA funding awarded to Women's Interarts Center dwindled from $10,000 in 1973 to $3,000 in 1979, funding awarded to Artists Space grew from $10,000 to $28,000 over the same period.[49] The institutions and organizations routinely at the top of the NEA food-chain—including Artists Space, Creative Time, Franklin Furnace, Institute for Art and Urban Resources, The Kitchen, and the New Museum—were some of the same ones named as traitors in Apple's catalogue essay. None of these institutions or organizations attached themselves to the anti-institutional or anti-bureaucratic tendencies growing out of the counterculture. With very different institutional identities and founding stories, they were unequally affected by the bureaucratic responsibilities imposed upon them by the granting agencies. The early presence of institutions like Artists Space and Institute for Art and Urban Resources in New York's alternative art sphere disturbs the narrative of decline developed by Brentano and Apple and extended by Wallis two decades later. This narrative presupposed a stable and consistent understanding of the "alternative" that slowly eroded over time. The fact was that bureaucracy was not the enemy of every alternative art institution founded in the early 1970s. What some have called the "alternative space movement" was composed of conflicting versions of the "alternative" built upon diverging ideals and imagined to serve different functions.[50] The crisis in the alternative art sphere recognized at the end of the

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[48] Martin Beck, "Alternative: Space," in *Alternative Art New York*, p. 262. Here, Beck summarizes a point made by Reesa Greenberg in her 1994 essay "The Exhibition Redistributed: A Case for Reassessing Space."
[49] See National Endowment for the Arts/National Council on the Arts, *Annual Reports*, 1973-1979.
[50] For example, see Julie Ault, "For the Record," pp. 3-4.

1970s was not produced by a unilateral decline, but by a widening economic and ideological gap between institutions founded on anti-bureaucratic pretenses and those that were not.

**An Anti-Bureaucratic Bureaucracy?**

The division between artist-run and administrator-run alternative spaces was already apparent by 1972 when Artists Space was founded. However, it would take the rest of the decade before this split would manifest as a crisis. Brentano and Apple's projects were significant for animating the growing enmity within the alternative art sphere and for legitimating a historical account of the alternative space that focused on the anti-bureaucratic stance shared by a minority within it. Their efforts to historicize the alternatives were bolstered by the concurrent emergence of new independent art institutions and organizations that also began to define themselves against the existing alternative spaces.[51] Colab, in particular, was founded on a pointed critique of the administrator-run alternative spaces, on the complaint that aside from small project grants, fellowships for individual artists and "shamefully small" honoraria distributed by institutions, state and federal arts grants were largely earmarked for non-profit organizations and institutions, a structural parameter that disproportionally supported the salaries of administrators and bureaucrats. [52] Colab's paradoxical (and decidedly contradictory) response to the bureaucratization of the alternatives was to form an artist-run bureaucracy.

Colab formed in May 1977 through a series of open and informal meetings attended by roughly forty young artists interested in developing an infrastructure for art production and exhibition capable of circumventing both the commercial gallery system and the existing alternative spaces [fig. 1.6].[53] It had been incubated years earlier by a much smaller group of artists, several of whom met while enrolled in the Whitney Independent Study Program (ISP) during the 1973-74 and 1974-75 sessions. Coleen Fitzgibbon and Diego Cortez, who studied together at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, moved to New York in 1973 when Fitzgibbon was accepted into the ISP. There, she met Colab member Tom Otterness as well as her future collaborator Robin Winters, who moved to New York from San Francisco with Michael McClard (also a founding member of Colab) the previous year. Winters was enrolled in

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[51] Both Colab and Group Material issued public statements against the alternative spaces. See also: Tam, "Interview with Joe Lewis," in *Alternative Histories*, p. 72.

[52] Moore and Robinson, "Colab & Rule C," p. 1.

[53] See "Colab Exhibition Project," cover letter for grant application, 1979, one page (Andrea Callard Papers, Fales Library and Special Collections, series I, subseries A, box 1, folder 52).

the same class as founding Colab members Charlie Ahearn and Terise Slotkin, as well as future collaborators Edit DeAk and Walter Robinson.[54] The strong relationships built through these encounters preceded the formation of Colab and provided a basic social structure from which the group organically grew. Envisioned as an equipment pool for filmmakers, a framework for developing collaborative art exhibitions and selling inexpensive artists' multiples, an artists' union, and a brand name, Colab was marked from its inception by the conflicting interests of its fluctuating membership. As several of its members have claimed, the formalization of the group as Collaborative Projects, Inc. was primarily a pragmatic means to capture government arts grants for a loosely-affiliated community of artists. Carlo McCormick, who joined Colab in the early 1980s, described it as a "scam to get federal funding," rather than a serious move toward collective organizing.[55] Robinson and Alan W. Moore confirmed this account in 1982, emphasizing how, first and foremost, Colab was "envisioned as a grant-getting machine" for its network of artists.[56]

Artists already involved in small working groups and experimental collaborations, including the artist-run publishing group X Collective and the theatre ensemble Nightshift Theatre, retroactively incorporated their existing work under the Colab name, cobbling together the three-year track record required to meet eligibility requirements for state and federal funding. Colab's first grant application was formally submitted in 1978 by the Center for New Art Activities, an arts organization founded by Colab member Liza Béar. The group functioned as a micro-granting agency dedicated to funding collaborative projects in visual art, performance, film, media, TV broadcast, and publishing. Colab members were invited to apply for funds from the group's annual budget; applications were then reviewed at monthly meetings; decisions were made by vote. The only overriding stipulation was that Colab funds could only be used to support collaborative projects: works involving two or more members of the group. An array of subgroups quickly formed under the umbrella of Colab. As art historian David E. Little recalls, between 1978 and 1979, Colab members "published two issues of *X Motion Picture Magazine*, produced no less than fifteen independent films, sponsored three cable programs, *All Color News, Red Curtain,* and *Nightwatch*, and opened a film house, the New Cinema, to screen

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[54] See Ron Clark, et. al., eds., *Independent Study Program: 40 Years* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2008), pp. 100-101.

[55] Carlo McCormick, quoted in Andrew Russeth, "Art Net: The Life and Times of Walter Robinson," *Observer*, online (January 24, 2012): http://observer.com/2012/01/art-net-the-life-and-times-of-walter-robinson-01242012/.

[56] Moore and Robinson, "Colab & Rule C," p. 1.

selected members' films."[57] Over the next three years, Colab sponsored artist-run magazines, such as *Spanner/NYC* (1978-1980), *BOMB* (1981 -), the hybrid cassette-magazine *TELLUS* (1983-1993), and numerous projects in film, video, broadcast television, and QWIPS fax technology. The group became best known for mounting exhibitions in lofts and abandoned buildings throughout New York, beginning with *Exhibit A*, hosted at the Center for New Art Activities in November 1978. As Moore explains, this exhibition assembled "graphic works by artists who usually worked in film or video media," and "was to be followed by exhibits B, C and D in years to come, open to any artists."[58] He continues: "Wary of a seeming dependency on Liza Béar's Center for New Art Activities, Robin Winters and Colen Fitzgibbon moved the 1979 exhibition activities to their own lofts which were within a block of each other."[59] These subsequent shows—including *The Income and Wealth Show* (1979), *The Doctor and Dentist Show* (1979), *The Manifesto Show* (1979), *The Batman Show* (1979), and others—were open to all artists who wanted to participate (although most were invited) [fig. 1.7]. The entire curatorial process, from the selection of artists to the arrangement of works, was left up to the open list of participating artists. As experiments in artists' self-organization, these exhibitions were meant to "str[ike] at curatorial privilege."[60]

It was within this context that the short-lived Offices of Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince & Winters was formed. Established as a sub-group of Colab, The Offices was even more extreme than Colab in its critique of the state and federal granting agencies, based on the premise that in order to exceed the self-absorbed cloisters of the art world, it would have to begin by dissociating itself from the state—including its benevolent arts councils. Gesturing toward this hypothesis, the group borrowed corporate vernacular and styled itself as a for-profit enterprise.[61] The Offices has been relegated to the footnotes of the history of alternative art in New York. References to the consulting firm appear in the notes of Moore's *Art Gangs* and in an article by

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[57] David E. Little, "Colab Takes a Piece, History Takes It Back: Collectivity and New York Alternative Spaces," *Art Journal*, vol. 66, no. 1 (Spring 2007): p. 67.

[58] Moore, *Art Gangs*, p. 92

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid., p. 93.

[61] According to Fend, The Offices was quickly abandoned because it did not go far enough in assuming a corporate model: "I received a call from a lawyer on Wall Street. He had been a boyhood friend, a friend from grade school, and he had gone on to Harvard Law School—and now, outside the art world, rediscovered me. He said, 'Listen, let's meet.' And he saw The Offices, even in our actual office space on Broadway, and he said, 'This is not legal. You need a legal corporation'." See Joselit and Harrison, "A Conversation with Peter Fend," *October*, no. 125 (Summer 2008): p. 118.

Melissa Rachleff.[62] Its origins were briefly described by Fend in a 2008 interview with David Joselit and Rachel Harrison.[63] More recently, The Offices was the subject of a dissertation chapter by art historian and curator David Breslin, who describes not only the limited evidence remaining of The Offices's activities, but also the reluctance of its founding members to discuss the project at all: "Holzer, in an unadorned attempt to dissuade me from writing about the project, said: 'There is very little to know about *The Offices*.' Peter Fend, in correspondence with Colen Fitzgibbon, bluntly stated that *The Offices* 'did not work' and 'the experience was noteworthy but also unsuccessful… It did not even get off the ground'."[64] By most accounts, The Offices was inconsequential, an aborted experiment unworthy of historical analysis. Even in his generous reading of The Offices, Breslin admits that although The Offices claimed to "effect workable improvements," its only concrete outcome—the renaming of 112 Workshop as White Columns—"certainly isn't a career maker."[65] The Offices may not have actually even suggested the renaming of 112 Workshop as White Columns; according to Baer, the credit should go to 112 Workshop board member Mike Roddy.[66] Regardless, it is safe to say that the direct impact of The Offices on the history of alternative art in New York was extremely limited. I do not intend to dispute this. Rather, my argument is that the consulting firm's significance rests on the promise it represented within the alternative art sphere at the end of the 1970s.

Nearly everything we know about The Offices appears through traces of publicity: advertisements, business cards, short statements, and dossiers disseminated by the members of The Offices, the institutions they associated with, and several downtown New York art magazines. The 1980 issue of Dick Miller and Terise Slotkin's *Spanner/NYC*—a compilation of one and two-page spreads produced by artists, most of whom were associated with Colab—features two contributions by members of The Offices: an austere text-based advertisement bearing only The Offices's mission and contact information [fig. 1.8], and a manifesto-like text by Jenny Holzer and Peter Nadin titled "Here To There."[67] Printed in all caps—a signature

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[62] For references to The Offices, see Moore, *Art Gangs*, p. 94; see also Rachleff, "Do It Yourself," p. 24.
[63] Joselit and Harrison, "A Conversation with Peter Fend," pp. 117-136.
[64] David Breslin, "'A Desire for What Works': *The Offices of Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince & Winters*," in "I WANT TO GO TO THE FUTURE PLEASE: Jenny Holzer and the End of a Century," PhD Dissertation, The Department of History of Art and Architecture, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, March 2013, p. 123.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Baer, email to the author, February 15, 2017.
[67] See The Offices of Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince & Winters, "Advertisement," *Spanner/NYC* (Blue, 1980): p. 72, and Jenny Holzer and Peter Nadin, "Here to There," *Spanner/NYC* (Blue, 1980): p. 16.

stylistic device of Holzer's *Truisms* (1978-1987)—this text builds upon The Offices's slogan, "Practical Esthetic Services Adaptable To Client Situation," anchoring the group's aims and ambitions within a transformative social project. I will quote the text in full:

> THE PRESENT SYSTEM DEADENS OUR SENSIBILITIES AND THREATENS OUR WELL-BEING. SOCIETY MUST BE REWORKED SO IT IS MORE RESPONSIBLE TO OUR NEEDS. IT IS NOT ADEQUATE TO EXPOSE SOCIAL ILLS OR DEAL WITH PROBLEMS SYMBOLICALLY OR METAPHORICALLY. IT IS REALISTIC TO ACT DIRECTLY TO PROPOSE AND IMPLEMENT AN IMPROVED ORDER.
>
> IT IS TIME TO CLARIFY RATHER THAN CONFUSE. THE BASIS FOR EFFECTIVE ACTION IS ACKNOWLEDGING THERE IS NO NEUTRAL STANCE; IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPLICATIONS OF WHAT WE DO ON A DAILY BASIS BEFORE UNDERTAKING LARGER REVISIONS. THEN IT IS REASONABLE TO ASSUME THE POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY TO ATTEMPT A MORE PLEASURABLE, MORE FUNCTIONAL SYSTEM. PLEASURE AND FUNCTION ARE INCLUSIVE; BOTH ARE REQUIRED FOR A NONCOERCIVE, SUPPORTIVE SOCIETY.
>
> A DESIRE FOR WHAT WORKS IS A LEGITIMATE POINT OF DEPARTURE. PROCEDURE SHOULD NOT RELY ON IDEOLOGY, ACTIVITY SHOULD NOT ILLUSTRATE IT. EVERY PROBLEMATIC SITUATION IS UNIQUE; INHERENT IN OUR RESPONSE SHOULD BE AN APPROPRIATE COURSE OF ACTION. CONSTRUCTING A PRACTICAL METHODOLOGY IS AN APPROPRIATE COURSE OF ACTION. WE ADVOCATE INTEGRATING ESTHETICS WITH PRACTICE TO BETTER OUR POSITION.[68]

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[68] Holzer and Nadin, "Here to There," p. 16.

This series of short declarations offers a glimpse into The Offices's aesthetic and political agenda. Holzer and Nadin invoked the necessity of broad-scale social change ("society should be reworked so it is more responsive to our needs") while underscoring the importance of developing and implementing workable solutions ("it is realistic to act directly to propose and implement an improved order"). However, although the authors declared the necessity to rework the deadening system in which they were enmeshed, they left ambiguous what system they were referring to (the capitalist system or the art system?), what types of needs required servicing, and in what priority. What, too, would have constituted an improved social order? Improved for whom? What is most striking about "Here to There" is its evasiveness and its fundamental ambiguity as a political text. Holzer and Nadin evoke a host of problems without providing a single referent or anchoring point. More significantly, they give no indication of the direction in which their imagined revolution would be heading. "Here to There" adopts the manifesto form while giving the reader almost nothing substantive. All that can be drawn from it is a vague appeal to an anti-idealist politics of compromise, one guided by practicality rather than ideological commitment.

In Breslin's analysis, the manifesto attests to the group's measured pragmatism: "If one facet of the postindustrial economy was the increased reliance on information management and dispersal as an engine of growth, we see Holzer and Nadin functioning within this order yet advocating a position where gained knowledge is only valuable if it helps put into practice what will 'better our position'."[69] Their emphasis on implementing concrete solutions to complex individual problems reflects, for Breslin, "a deflated optimism (as in, yes, change is possible but it is incremental and limited), the *realpolitik* of cultural work that resists ideological posturing as it abandons the grand sweep of history."[70] In abandoning the "grand sweep of history," The Offices broke from both the political and cultural avant-garde as well as from the modernist teleology of progress. The firm also rejected the efficacy of protest and refused the Marxist interpretation of culture that swayed much art discourse in the U.S. during the 1960s and 1970s. The anti-idealist and anti-structural solutionism advocated by The Offices reflected a "post-ideological" current of anti-Marxist thought which I will explore in greater depth in Chapter

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[69] Breslin, "'A Desire for What Works'," p. 118.
[70] Ibid., p. 91.

Two. It also reflected the firm's alignment with the emerging culture of postmodernism. As an artistic experiment, The Offices gave form to the "deflated optimism" recognized by Breslin.

In this and other respects The Offices bears an uncanny resemblance to N.E. Thing Co. (NETCO), the Vancouver-based "conceptual enterprise" run by "co-presidents" Iain and Ingrid Baxter between 1967 and 1978. NETCO adopted the "aesthetics of administration" characteristic of conceptual art in the late 1960s,[71] performing as a corporation, and later, as a consulting firm. Art historian Adam Lauder has outlined how, in acting as a "remote service provider," NETCO reflected broader transformations in business management associated with decentralization, arguing that "[t]he flexibility and mobility of NETCO's corporate apparatus is consistent with the new class of executive consultants dubbed 'drop ins' by [Marshall] McLuhan and [Barrington] Nevitt" in 1972.[72] NETCO made its New York debut in the iconic 1970 exhibition *Information* at MoMA, where, as Lauder demonstrates, the enterprise acted both as a content provider and a consultancy service. Although there is no concrete evidence of influence, The Offices echoed NETCO's earlier practice not only in its adoption of an aesthetics of administration, but also in its performance of the "artist-executive," its function as a contracted service, and, perhaps most significantly, its adherence to what Lauder characterizes as "[t]he disruptive logic of the non-oppositional."[73]

It should be emphasized that The Offices not only echoed NETCO's earlier conceptual experiments; founded more than a decade later and situated at the periphery of New York's alternative art sphere, The Offices also implicitly responded to the crisis of bureaucracy described above. More broadly still, headquartered in Fend's TriBeCa art studio, itself a repurposed manufacturing loft, The Offices reflected the transforming class composition of Manhattan at the end of the 1970s, a transformation that was viscerally felt in SoHo and TriBeCa, where local populations of manufacturers and artists—constituencies that had co-habited in the area for the previous decade—were being evicted and replaced by white-collar workers.[74] The symbolic shift enacted by The Offices—from the *artist as worker* to the *artist as*

[71] Benjamin H.D., "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October*, no. 55 (Winter 1990): pp. 105-143.
[72] Adam Lauder, "IAIN BAXTER&: The Artist as Drop-In," *Journal of Canadian Art History*, vol. 31, no. 2 (2010): p. 57.
[73] Ibid., p. 48.
[74] According to urban sociologist Sharon Zukin, artists played a pivotal role in this replacement, where, by repurposing manufacturing lofts as art production and exhibition spaces, they "transfer[red] urban space from . . . the

*professional*[75]—was also, by implication, a shift in class alliance. Considering this reordering, it is curious that among The Offices's clients was 112 Workshop, an institution that was struggling to reinvent itself in light of its own professionalization.

**Rebranding 112 Workshop**

"A MOMENT OF TRUTH (with drinks)" reads an announcement for the two-week residency undertaken by The Offices at 112 Workshop [fig. 1.9]. It continues: "Members of The Office will be at 112 Workshop, 325 Spring Street, 7-9 PM, Friday, March 28 to answer questions and discuss public policy. An exposition of our services along with opportunities for individual inquiries will continue through April 8, Tuesday-Saturday, 1-6 PM." Printed on The Offices's custom letterhead and emblazoned with a line-drawn illustration of shaking hands, it mixes the informational jargon of professional culture ("services," "opportunities for individual inquiries," etc.) with the standard conventions of the exhibition announcement: the obscure lead statement and the bold, centrally-located illustration. Appearing both professional and amateur, flatly informational and needlessly opaque, the advertisement is consistent with the few other material traces left by the consulting firm, one of two documents related to this particular event. The other, a slim dossier produced to document The Offices's consultation with 112 Workshop, was first discovered in the White Columns archive through this research project [fig. 1.10].[76] It is impossible to glean a comprehensive account of The Offices's consultation with 112 Workshop from these documents. Nevertheless, as traces of activity, they shed light on The Offices's actual practice, suggesting that despite its promise to offer clients "a complete review of their needs and suggestions for functional rearrangements," the firm offered little in the way of "workable improvements" during its residency at 112 Workshop.[77] The degree of irony intended by the group remains an open question.

The Offices's 112 Workshop consulting booklet is composed of eight sheets of standard printer paper hastily bound with staples along its edge. In lieu of a cover page, it was stamped

realm of productive economic activity to that of nonproductive economic activity." See Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 178.

[75] See Isabelle Graw, *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture* (2008), Nicholas Grindell, trans. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2009), p. 160; See also, Ulrich Bröckling, *The Entrepreneurial Self: Fabricating a New Type of Subject*, Steven Black, trans. (London: Sage Publications, Ltd., 2016).

[76] Thanks to White Columns archivist Christina Leung for discovering and sending me this dossier.

[77] The Offices of Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince & Winters, "Consultation," self-published booklet, 1980, 14 pages, unpaginated (White Columns Archive, White Columns, New York, 1978-1980 file).

with the words "CONSULTATION 1$" in blue ink on its front page. The booklet itself consists of a brief history of The Offices's activities followed by short reflections by each member of the firm on the present and future of 112 Workshop. Its opening lines consist of a sales pitch:

> WE ALL KNOW WHAT THE PROBLEMS ARE, BUT WHO NOW MEETS THEM DIRECTLY?
>
> We are a consulting firm. The clients we serve receive a complete review of their needs and suggestions for functional re-arrangements.
>
> As individuals, we encompass diverse political and esthetic viewpoints. As a consulting firm, we collaborate to effect workable improvements.[78]

The firm highlights its promise to put aside political and aesthetic considerations in its search for solutions to real-world problems. Presenting itself as a professional, efficient and legitimate consulting service, the firm boasts its impressive client list, ranging from the Los Angeles Public Library to University of California, Irvine, from the engineering firm Global Marine Development, Inc. to the UN International Labour Organisation, UN Development Programme, and UN Environment Programme. Only three clients are from the arts: Foundation for Art Resources in Los Angeles, California Institute of the Arts, and a collective consisting of Los Angeles-based artists Vic Henderson, Randy Davis, and David Amico. Fend has claimed that by "work[ing] in a real-world mode," the firm sought to discover non-art applications for artistic problem-solving skills and methodologies.[79] On this point, Breslin argues that the firm "adopt[ed] the functionality and guise usually associated with the professional to deplete expertise's aura of authority and invincibility."[80] In place of the expert, they affirmed the role of the amateur, proposing that "the artist-citizen can elicit a response by probing for and asking the right questions."[81]

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[78] Ibid., p. 2.
[79] Fend, quoted in Joselit and Harrison, "An Interview with Peter Fend," p. 118.
[80] Breslin, "'A Desire for What Works'," p. 113.
[81] Ibid., p. 110.

If the opening pages of the booklet represent The Offices as an authentic consulting service dedicated to finding workable solutions to complex institutional problems, the accompanying dossier on 112 Workshop is strikingly devoid of practical or concrete proposals. Instead, it assembles imprecise statements written by Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer and Nadin, Prince, and Winters on a broad range of themes and social issues. Fend's contribution consists of a one-page statement responding to the state of the U.S. economy, speculating about the potential for art to play a role in organizing society after the decline of the American empire. Asking the question "who will bail out the United States," Fend imagines that after the collapse of the U.S., the building blocks for a new society could be formed with the ingenuity of art and the ruthless pragmatism of business.[82] His conclusion, that "112 Workshop sponsors in New York projects on life after the U.S.," tethers his otherwise unrelated text to the task at hand, repurposing it as a general proposal for future programming at 112 Workshop.[83] Fitzgibbon's text, titled "First Amendment 1980," adopts the form of the constitutional amendment to foreground new rights and responsibilities in regards to the freedom of speech and assembly. She implicates the alternative spaces (and perhaps more specifically 112 Workshop) in the following demands:

> THAT . . . ALL PUBLIC FUNDED SPACES ETC., SHOULD BE CONSIDERED PUBLIC UTILITIES OWNED AND CONTROLLED BY AND FOR THE PEOPLE, WITH LOCAL COMMUNITY ACCESS (INTO NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS) FOR ALL INDIVIDUALS THE FIRST AND PRIMARY REASON FOR THEIR EXISTENCE. . . .
>
> THAT PUBLIC COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS AND OR SPACES SHALL BE RESPONSIVE TO THE WISHES OF THEIR COMMUNITIES, NOT SELF-APPOINTED ARBITRATORS OF TASTE BUT FLEXIBLE ORGANS TO THE NEEDS OF ALL INDIVIDUALS WITHIN THEIR COMMUNITY.

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[82] The Offices, "Consultation," p. 4.
[83] Ibid.

THAT NO PUBLIC PLACE, COMMUNICATIONS DEVICE OR UTILITY BE
CONTROLLED OR MONOPOLIZED BY ANY USER OR GROUP OF
USERS.[84]

Reflecting complaints about elitism and exclusivity that also marked the critical discourse on New York's alternative spaces, Fitzgibbon proposes the use of constitutional authority to enforce a kind of egalitarianism within and beyond the art system. Her manifesto suggests an appeal to modifying not 112 Workshop itself, but the juridical framework in which it operates. Holzer and Nadin included two texts, neither of which directly referred to 112 Workshop. The first explores the undisclosed decision-making process that led to the contamination of the Long Island drinking water supply in 1979. The second, titled "SUGGESTIONS FOR A FUNCTIONAL TRANSFORMATION OF 112 GREENE ST," makes no direct reference to 112 Workshop, consisting instead of a poetic meditation on the experience of space. Winters also considers a terrain that vastly exceeds the specific context of 112 Workshop. In two short texts accompanied by stylized black-and-white illustrations, he proposes an alternative economy built on heavy fines for lumber, chemical, and oil companies. On his wish-list are a ban on automobiles, a restructured public transportation system, financial incentives for people who plant trees, and the creation of accessible community centres for free food and shelter.[85]

Prince's contribution is the only one to actually fulfil the firm's promise of reviewing the specific needs of 112 Workshop and suggesting functional re-arrangements. Titled "Changing Station," his text argues that the institution needed to emancipate itself from its legacy.

112 Greene St. should de-referentialize its past association with 112 Greene St. Its present location need not refer to a questionable history. It should re-enforce its advantage of being meaningless and consider itself a soup bone within striking distance. 112 Greene St. as a "Changing Station" could provide the convenience of privacy within a public context.

Here's How:

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[84] Ibid., p. 6.
[85] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

Comfortable booths with leather padded seats and high-back chairs will be installed to afford the convenience. Postures will be presented to give the appearance of order. The primary activity will be to wait and dispatch. Music or "juke" boxes will be plugged into individual booths with a program of records subject to constant change. A single customer will be able to appropriate an entire booth alone. A selection of daily newspapers will be available upon request. Coffee will be complimentary. Hours will be from 10 PM to 6 AM. There will be no food. No liquor. No entertainment. The advantage of being meaningless will become the advantage of being boring.[86]

Prince's recommendations almost programmatically invert the practices and ideals that oriented 112 Workshop in the 1970s. If its former Greene Street warehouse was known as a cavernous and unrenovated space, the Spring Street storefront should be divided up and retrofitted with seating booths. If the Greene Street warehouse fostered an anarchic communalism and an open-ended use of space, the Spring Street storefront should facilitate rigid transactions with individual consumers. Prince's text also reminds us that a distinctive feature of 112 Workshop's Spring Street location was its proximity to Port Authority, the city's central bus terminal. The architectural features of Prince's "Changing Station"—as well as the boredom it was imagined to generate—conjure an image of the artist-run space as a simulated bus terminal. His proposal also anticipated transformations in institutional practice that emerged under the banners of relational aesthetics, Kontext Kunst, and new institutionalism in the 1990s.[87] Although Prince's proposal was not fully implemented at 112 Workshop, Baer recalls responding to this prompt by turning the Spring Street venue into a "clubhouse" for a short duration, where he changed the opening hours to 4:00pm – 11:00pm and installed a pool table in place of his office desk.[88]

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[86] Ibid., p. 11.
[87] For example, see Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods, trans. (Paris: Les Presses du Réel, 2002); Peter Weibel, ed., *Kontext Kunst. Kunst der 90er Jahre* (Ostfildern: DuMont Reiseverlag, 1995); Valérie Knoll, Hannes Loichinger, Julia Moritz, and Magnus Schäfer, eds., *Dealing With—Some Texts, Images, and Thoughts Related to American Fine Arts, Co.* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012); and Jonas Ekeberg, ed., *New Institutionalism: Verksted #1* (Oslo: Office for Contemporary Art Norway, 2003). Art historian Lane Reylea has questioned how this genealogy of art practice relates to concurrent developments in enterprise culture. See Reylea, *Your Everyday Art World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).
[88] Baer, email to the author, February 15, 2017.

If The Offices articulated a politics of prudence—arguing in multiple places that ideology should be circumvented so that problems could be solved directly—the 112 Workshop dossier presents readers with a surprisingly circuitous set of methods and proposals. The firm's emphasis on problem-solving was vastly overstated in its publicity. With retrospect we can only interpret this as part of the firm's performance. Its promise to deliver was broken, at least in the case of its consultation with 112 Workshop. One question that remains is whether or not Baer or the board of directors at 112 Workshop were in on the gag. It is highly unlikely that The Offices was invited to consult at 112 Workshop because of its reputation as an effective and efficient consulting firm. The firm was almost completely unproven, and its reputation in the spring of 1980 was only as great as the reputations of its associated artists. It is far more plausible that The Offices was invited to 112 Workshop because the firm represented an opportunity for Baer to associate the institution with artists who appealed both to himself and to the emerging generation. As an intervention into the storied history of 112 Workshop, The Offices—a professionalized offshoot of an artist-run organization that was outspoken in its rejection of the existing alternative spaces—presented a radical break, not only from the generation of artists associated with 112 Workshop's Greene St. location, but also from the "disaster area" ambiance it had become known for.

Over the following year, 112 Workshop would continue to align itself with the art scene forming around Colab. Along with board members Marc Blane, Lea Douglas, and Mike Roddy, Baer helped to set up an installation on the fourth floor of Colab's *The Times Square Show*, a ramshackle exhibition in a disused massage parlour at Times Square which, garnering significant press attention, positioned Colab and many of its associated artists at the leading edge of 1980s art in New York.[89] Shortly thereafter, 112 Workshop was consecrated as White Columns, and its first exhibitions anchored it firmly within the Colab milieu. White Columns rebuilt its identity as an experimental venue for art by supporting the latest trends emerging from the downtown art and music scenes in exhibitions such as *New Painting: The Third Phase* (September 30-October 11, 1980), which profiled the work of graffiti artists and *The Times Square Show* participants Lee and Fab Five Freddy, *Power for Peace: Our Lost Horizon* (October 28-November 8, 1980), featuring work by Colab members Joseph Nechvatal and Peter Fend, among others, *Andrea*

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[89] White Columns installation consisted of individual contributions by Blane, Douglas, and Roddy in addition to a "blackboard where people could draw their own art or put up inscriptions." See Baer, in Cooper, "Josh Baer."

*Callard and Dick Miller* (February 17-March 7, 1981), a two-person exhibition aiming to answer the question "What do Collab-Collaborative Projects, Inc. members do individually anyway?" *Group Show* (April 21 to May 9, 1981), which situated the work of Callard and Miller in relation to the work of board members Douglas and Roddy, as well as artists such as Mike Kelley and Kim Gordon, who were gaining recognition within the emerging noise music scene, and *Cave Comin Out* (September 22, 1981), a day-long media and performance festival featuring the work of Colab artists Jane Dickson, Becky Howland, Judy Rifka, Christy Rupp, Kiki Smith, and Terise Slotkin, among others [fig. 1.11]. The Offices's consultation with 112 Workshop did not contribute to the implementation of any long-lasting improvements, and if anything, the institution appeared less professional following its consultation with The Offices. The Offices's brief and largely aimless consultation does, however, testify to the determination of the staff and board of 112 Workshop to break with their institution's past as well as their decision to negotiate its identity crisis in full public view.

By 1980, 112 Workshop had become the icon of an outmoded idea of the alternative space, and Colab represented the new vanguard. As an alternative to the first wave of alternative spaces, Colab had become a touchstone for critics seeking to claim a new direction for alternative art. In the summer of 1980, the agile organizational model devised by the group, as well as the brash aesthetic sensibilities of many of the young artists who worked under the Colab name, had gained widespread influence in the cultural milieu. The group had eclipsed many of the first-wave alternative art institutions in both visibility and cultural capital. Colab's rising profile at the end of the 1970s was significant for two reasons. First, it signalled the return of the "anarchic spirit" imagined to have driven the alternative space movement in its early years. Like 112 Workshop, Colab garnered acclaim for facilitating self-organized exhibitions in derelict buildings. Characterized by the constant addition, removal, and defacement of artworks, these exhibitions gained credibility as "alternative" by appealing to the brash creative energy of untested young artists. However, unlike 112 Workshop, Colab was an organization, not a space. This designation allowed the group to adapt to shifting cultural conditions and to the interests of its constantly changing membership. Consequently, Colab's anarchic spirit was less vulnerable to fluctuations in both cultural tastes and property values than first-wave alternative spaces that anchored their institutional identities to specific sites and spatial features. Second, taking a strong stand against the influx of arts administration in the alternative art sphere and claiming the

existence of viable alternative to the non-profit organizational model that had become the golden standard, Colab was especially notable for putting the dormant question of artists' self-determination back on the table.

The idea of building an artist-run culture independent of the art world's managerial class can be tied to the rise of the alternative spaces earlier in the decade, as well as to the international artist-run networks associated with Fluxus (1962-1978), Ray Johnson's Correspondence School (1962 -), Image Bank's *Artists' Directory* (1972-1974) and General Idea's *FILE Megazine* (1972-1989). However, while these earlier groups and projects were primarily concerned with gaining creative autonomy within (or in parallel to) the established art system, Colab's rationale for reviving the vanishing ideal of artists' self-determination was above all economic. Winters has made this clear: "My basic thrust and opinion, which I still believe is that real estate and administration take too much money away from artists. Colab, as a group of 50 indigent maverick artists, supplied more money and more direct show space to more artists, with less funding, no real estate, and no administrative costs."[90] Adopting the rhetoric of fiscal responsibility, Winters contends that by cutting out the middlemen, enterprising artists could do more with less. This logic steers the critique of bureaucracy away from the countercultural politics that guided Lew and Girouard's statements nearly a decade earlier, pairing the critique of bureaucracy not with an ideal of creative independence, but with an ideal of efficient organization. It is worth mentioning that the cost-benefit analysis promoted by Winters was a central feature of the neoliberal rationality that would reshape the role of government during the Reagan presidency.

**Another Critique of Bureaucracy**

If bureaucracy was a key target of the countercultural movements of the late 1960s, it was also a central bone of contention for both right-wing libertarian and neoliberal economists. In *Bureaucracy*, the influential Austrian-American economist Ludwig von Mises railed against the growing sway of socialism in both Europe and the U.S., arguing that the rapid expansion of government over the course of the twentieth century restricted individual freedoms and stunted innovation and progress. "Bureaucratism" was his name for the expansion of government into

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[90] Robin Winters, in Claudia Gould and Valerie Smith, eds., *5000 Artists Return to Artists Space: 25 Years* (New York: Artists Space, 1999), p. 75, quoted in Little, "Colab Takes a Piece," p. 63.

spheres of life previously governed by free enterprise. He argued that "bureaucracy in itself is neither good nor bad. . . . What many people nowadays consider an evil is not bureaucracy as such, but the expansion of the sphere in which bureaucratic management is applied."[91] Making a categorical claim that one must take the side of either capitalism or socialism, he forcefully argued that for those who valued freedom and progress, the choice was clear: "What must be realized is only that the strait jacket of bureaucratic organization paralyses the individual's initiative, while within the capitalist market society an innovator still has a chance to succeed. The former makes for stagnation and preservation of inveterate methods, the latter makes for progress and improvement. Capitalism is progressive, socialism is not."[92] Mises's perspective on government and bureaucracy influenced a generation of economists surrounding the Mount Pelerin Society, an organization he co-founded in 1947 with his student Friedrich Hayek, as well as Karl Popper, Milton Friedman, and other economists who have become known as leaders of the "neoliberal thought collective."[93] The critique of bureaucracy advanced by these thinkers would take three decades to occupy the seat of power in the U.S. William A. Niskanen, Jr., the architect of the Reagan Administration's economic plan, was a student of Friedman, and his aggressive critique of bureaucracy carried the distinctive traces of Mises pioneering thought.

In his 1971 book on *Bureaucracy and Representative Government*, Niskanen described a cleavage in the electorate produced by the growth of the welfare state in the U.S.: "A large part of our population wants to expand the role of government, particularly to alleviate poverty and improve the environment. A correspondingly large part of our population is exasperated by the methods of bureaucracy and dissatisfied by its performance."[94] He argued that the state's monopoly on the provision of social services simply did not work. For him, bureaucratic management was undesirable not only because it was inefficient and costly, but also because "there is nothing inherent in the nature of bureaus and our political institutions that leads public officials to know, seek out, or act in the public interest."[95] Niskanen did not merely critique centralized bureaucracy. He also outlined three prescriptions which would, in his estimation, dramatically improve economic performance and quality of life in the U.S.: increasing

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[91] Ludwig von Mises, *Bureaucracy* (Glasgow, Edinburgh, and London: William Hodge & Company, Limited, 1945), pp. 56-57.
[92] Ibid., p. 148.
[93] See Mirowski, "The Red Guide to the Neoliberal Playbook," in *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste*, pp. 325-358.
[94] William A. Niskanen, *Bureaucracy and Representative Government* (Chicago: Aldine, Atherton, 1971), p. 3
[95] Ibid., p. vi.

competition between state bureaus, subsidizing the private sector to supply services formerly offered by the state, and strengthening the review process for federal programs by periodically and randomly assigning review committees. Niskanen's proposals anticipated the basic principles of *New Public Management*, which, emerging as a fully-fledged concept in the late 1980s, held that the efficiency and fiscal responsibility of governments would be optimized if they were managed like corporations.[96] His objective was to shift the common sense understanding of the role of government by foregrounding the economic rationale for dismantling the welfare state:

> Most people, considering only their personal relations with government, would prefer a government that is more efficient, more responsive, that generates larger total net benefits, and for which the distribution of taxes and net benefits is more equitable. All of us who are concerned about the viability of our democratic political institutions and the integrity of our national community would prefer a government with these attributes. The unavoidable conclusion of this book is that a better government would be a smaller government.[97]

The "better government" advocated by Niskanen was, in short, the neoliberal vision set into motion by the Reagan Administration a decade later. It was premised on the elimination of discretionary spending from the federal budget as well as the deregulation of financial markets, real estate, and industry, all of which would reduce the federal government's regulatory control over economic, environmental, social, and cultural matters in the U.S. Quietly lurking in the shadow of the public discourse for decades, the ideal advanced by Niskanen was brought into the spotlight in the aftermath of the 1973 global economic crisis. As David Harvey explains, when the U.S. faced a widespread reduction of profits in the mid-1970s, the then-reigning monetary policy, built upon the rigidities of the Fordist mode of production during the postwar economic boom, was revealed to be incapable of adjusting to the economic downturn precisely because it could only store capital in long-term investments (equipment, pension plans, and so on). The

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[96] See Michel Feher, "Lecture 1: The Neoliberal Condition and its Predecessors: Redemption, Fulfillment, Appreciation," 1 hr., 43 min., 9 sec.; digital video; from the Department of Visual Cultures and Forensic Architecture, Goldsmiths, University of London, *The Age of Appreciation: Lectures on the Neoliberal Condition*, November 20, 2013, FLV: http://vimeo.com/80882516.
[97] Niskanen, *Bureaucracy and Representative Government*, p. 227.

recession was deepened by soaring energy costs due to the October 1973 oil embargo called for by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries, the already high inflation rate, and the worsening unemployment brought about by deindustrialization. These interlocking factors impacted federal, state, and municipal economies, forcing the shortcomings of Keynesian economic policy into the open and creating an opportunity for neoliberal economists to advance their alternative vision.[98]

President Gerald Ford seized upon on the prospective bankruptcy of New York City in 1975, taking the financial crisis as an opportunity to foreground the central tenets of what would become the neoliberal common sense. In one notorious statement, Ford advanced the rhetoric of austerity which would become commonplace during and after the Reagan era: "If we go on spending more than we have, providing more benefits and more services than we can pay for, then a day of reckoning will come to Washington and the whole country just as it has come to New York City. . . . When the day of reckoning comes, who will bail out the United States of America?"[99] Ford embraced the economic justification for shrinking government that had been drafted by neoliberal economists such as Niskanen.

It is worth recalling that the question of "who will bail out the United States" was also at the core of Peter Fend's contribution to the 112 Workshop dossier. Arguing that "we don't need the President of the United States. And we don't need the United States," Fend's text adopted an anti-authoritarian and anti-American rhetoric that would have found sympathy within the radical left, and yet his fantasy of "life after the U.S." strangely converged with the emerging neoliberal common sense.[100] If the economic crisis was an opportunity to do away with government, our brief gloss of the neoliberal critique of bureaucracy reminds us that it was also perceived as an opportunity to do away with the welfare state. The Offices was not a shill for the Republican Party, but its vision for art—socially-minded, professionalized, and entrepreneurial—was compatible with the becoming-dominant neoliberal common sense. The Offices and Colab came together in justifying their models of organization in the language of efficiency—on doing more with less. It is on this account that the idea of the "alternative" advanced by each group resonated most strongly with the neoliberal common sense.

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[98] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 141-145.

[99] President Gerald Ford, "Transcript of President's Talk on City Crisis, Questions Asked and His Responses," *The New York Times* (October 30, 1975): p. 46, quoted in Phillips-Fein, *Fear City*, p. 3.

[100] The Offices, "Consultation," p. 4.

**Blind Spots**

As one Colab member reflected in an anonymous letter sent to the group in 1983, Colab "was never an organization wherein ideology was developed."[101] Instead, it based its operations on "an entirely received basis in thought. All that was needed was action, preferably according to a hastily elaborated strategy insuring impact."[102] Colab's organizational structure incorporated and tolerated internal division and conflict, as well as competing understandings of the collective's practical, theoretical, and political values. Members were committed to the Colab name even when they disagreed about its meaning, staging in and beyond their meetings a continued struggle over its legitimate use. The Offices replicated this structure, likewise imagining itself beyond the plane of ideology by allowing its individual members to "encompass diverse political and esthetic viewpoints."[103] For both groups, ideology was perceived as an obstruction to action, a sort of filter that could be dispensed with.

If, as Winters reminds us, "Colab started in reaction or in relation to P.S. 1, Creative Time, The Kitchen and Artists Space," this did not stop Colab from participating in exhibitions at these and other established art spaces.[104] For example, following *The Times Square Show*, the group accepted back-to-back invitations to exhibit at the New Museum and Brooke Alexander, Inc., a commercial gallery in the posh 57th Street gallery district. Their Brooke Alexander benefit exhibition in December 1980 helped cement commercial representation for several Colab artists, including John Ahearn and Tom Otterness (the main organizers of *The Times Square Show*).[105] Colab's New Museum show—part of a three-part exhibition series on new directions in artists' self-organization titled *Events*—was scheduled for the following month. This show was cancelled at the last minute when the group's proposal was turned down.[106] Writing in *The New York Times*, art critic Grace Glueck reported that Colab withdrew because it believed "that it stood to gain less from the collaboration than its host," provoking New Museum director Marcia Tucker to issue a strong response in the catalogue released following the exhibition series. Calling out the organization for collaborating with the "establishment" [referring to the Brooke Alexander show], Tucker ultimately accused the group of abandoning its "original radical

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[101] "Talking Points RE: Future of Colab," anonymous letter to Andrea Callard (Colab secretary), September 22, 1983, 3 pages (Andrea Callard Papers, Fales Library and Special Collections, series I, subseries B, box 1, folder 25).
[102] Ibid.
[103] The Offices, "Consultation," p. 2.
[104] Winters, quoted in Little, "Colab Takes a Piece," p. 63.
[105] Moore, *Art Gangs*, p. 106.
[106] Ibid., p. 105.

stance," implicating Colab in the narrative of decline that would be fortified in Jacki Apple's New Museum show only few months later.[107] Played out in public over the course of months, the New Museum incident appears in retrospect to have been precipitated by a combination of miscommunication and what Moore and Robinson characterized as "personal animus."[108]

Colab's willingness to engage in enemy territory was not an indication of hypocrisy on the part of the group or its associated artists. Rather, it underscored the group's relentless opportunism.[109] For the artists of Colab, it was never a matter of contesting or reforming the art system. Nor was it a matter of taking a hard stand against alternative institutions built by arts administrators. Rather, Colab was established in order to work the system, or, as Winters recalls, "to get a piece of the pie."[110] NEA Annual Reports document the group's success in piggybacking on institutions like the Center for New Art Activities and Artists Space in order to maximize its annual grant budget. After receiving $7,500 in 1978 and $10,000 in 1979 through grants submitted by the Center for New Art Activities, the group would receive funds simultaneously on its own (under the names Line Association and Line II Association) and from applications submitted by the Committee on Visual Arts (Artists Space). From the NEA alone, the group received a total of $10,000 in 1980, $21,000 in 1981, and $34,000 in 1982. If, as Winters suggests, Colab formed in reaction to the perceived failings of administrator-run alternative spaces to actually serve artists, this did not prevent the group from engaging with such institutions if it benefited its agenda. The flexibility and adaptability that distinguished Colab from the first wave of alternative institutions and organizations was rooted in its steadfast refusal to take a "radical stance."

As an anti-bureaucratic bureaucracy composed of artists largely invested in building their individual art careers, Colab was founded on a contradiction that it never intended to resolve. As Moore and Robinson recalled, Colab's one stipulation was that it would support "collaborative, collective, cooperative, communal projects only."[111] The advantages of building its identity around process rather than ideology was that its members could benefit from Colab's brand name

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[107] Tucker, "Introduction," in *Events: Fashion Moda, Taller Boricua, Artists Invite Artists* (New York: New Museum, 1981), p. 5.

[108] See Moore and Robinson, "Colab & Rule C," p. 1. The incident underscored the conflict between two distinct models of the alternative organization. Even though Colab and the New Museum were established in the same year, they stood on opposite sides of the bureaucratic divide. I will return to this incident in Chapter Two.

[109] Moore, *Art Gangs*, p. 108.

[110] Winters, quoted in Little, "Colab Takes a Piece," p. 63.

[111] Moore and Robinson, "Colab & Rule C," p. 1.

without having to forfeit their individual values, styles, and practices. Colab thus stripped the collective form of its association with the political ambitions of modernist collectivism—"the desire to speak as a collective voice"[112]—reforming the collective as an informal assemblage of individual subjects. The fact that the group did not consciously develop a coherent ideology was its central conceit. As Slavoj Žižek has influentially argued, ideology is not consciously developed, but is "an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself."[113] Just as the refusal of bureaucracy tends to conceal the everyday bureaucratic realities of artists' self-organization, the refusal of ideology masks the ideological field in which every cultural practice is enmeshed. Both Colab and The Offices collapsed into the ideological field they imagined themselves to escape. They affirmed that systemic change was neither desirable nor possible, and that large-scale problems could be relieved through small-scale organizational tinkering. Both groups responded to the perceived failure of the alternative spaces at the turn of the 1980s. More significantly, as 112 Workshop's appeal to Colab and The Offices suggests, they were recognized for providing legitimate answers to the problem of bureaucratization faced by the first wave of alternative spaces. Colab and The Offices expanded the range of positions that could be taken up within New York's alternative sphere, adapting the empty signifier of the "alternative" for the culture of austerity that shaped their conditions of possibility.

The anti-bureaucratic alternatives emerging at the end of the 1970s did not only reiterate the critique of bureaucracy already circulating in the art milieu. They also devised alternative forms for the artist-run institution, anticipating a desire to leave behind existing models of the alternative space. However, although these groups modeled innovations in form, the premise they were founded on converged with the ideal orienting 112 Workshop in its earliest years. As Jeffrey Lew put it: "no administration. None."[114] The premise undergirding the anti-bureaucratic position—that the influx of arts administration was the primary problem faced by the alternative spaces—was widely reflected in the art critical, art historical, and curatorial domains at the turn of the 1980s. By framing the anti-bureaucratic impulse within the alternative art sphere as its essential characteristic, critics and historians claimed the co-optation and obsolescence of existing alternative spaces such as 112 Workshop, recuperated defunct institutions that remained

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[112] Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette, "Introduction: Periodizing Collectivism," in Stimson and Sholette, eds., *Collectivism After Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p. 3.
[113] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989), (London and Brooklyn: Verso, 2008), p. 30.
[114] Lew, in "History," p. 2.

committed to that ideal despite the pressure to conform to the administrative norms cultivated by granting agencies, and championed new groups like Colab, which, from the anti-bureaucratic perspective, represented the future of the alternative art institution.

Just as the bureaucratic mind-set brought into focus the tendency of some institutions to surrender to the demands of granting agencies, it also produced notable blind spots. On one hand, the most forceful critics of administration in the alternative art milieu overlooked the critique of bureaucracy advanced by right-wing politicians as they worked to reshape the political common sense in the U.S. On the other hand, they ignored the gendered dynamics of workplace administration which reproduced themselves in the alternative spaces. Most of the "bureaucratized" alternative spaces operating during this period were directed by women, even as white male artists continued to receive the greatest access to exhibition space.[115] While state funding for the arts conscripted the alternative spaces to a set of organizational norms largely considered to be incompatible with the ideals of the alternative space movement (at least as they were understood by the founders of 112 Workshop), it also transformed administrative work largely done by women artists and arts organizers into wage labour, inferring that the administrative turn in the alternative space milieu could also be understood as a provisional victory for the women's movement. Artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles thematized the erasure of administration and other forms of maintenance labour in her early work, highlighting in her *Manifesto for Maintenance Art* (1969) the under-acknowledged and largely unremunerated forms of labour that buttressed the heroic ideals of progress inscribed in the avant-garde. The myth of the absent desk perpetuated by the founders and historians of 112 Workshop inscribed the institution within the very tradition that Ukeles railed against.

A photographic profile of Artists Space produced by Cindy Sherman for a 1979 issue of the short-lived downtown art magazine *Cover* (1979-83) illustrates the living spirit of Ukeles's

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[115] Although dispersed, incomplete, and non-existing staff and exhibition lists make it difficult to gauge the exact numbers, the important role of women in the administration of New York's largest and most well-funded alternative spaces is particularly evident in Jacki Apple's brief list of art institutions that could "no longer be identified, defined, or accurately referred to as alternative spaces in the spirit of what that originally meant in the early to middle 1970s." See Apple, "Introduction," p. 6. Specifically, of the five institutions singled out by Apple (The Kitchen, The Clocktower, P.S. 1, Artists Space, and Franklin Furnace), only The Kitchen involved male artists and musicians in lead administrative roles during the 1970s. The Clocktower and P.S. 1 were directed by Alanna Heiss, who only stepped down from the latter institution after it completed its merger with the Museum of Modern Art in 2008. Artists Space was directed by Trudie Grace from 1972 to 1975, Helene Winer from 1975 to 1980, and Linda Shearer from 1980 to 1985. Franklin Furnace was founded by Martha Wilson, who continues to direct it today. A systematic study of the gendered dynamics of arts administration in New York's alternative art sphere (including the roles of interns and low-level administrative staff) remains to be done.

feminist critique within the late-1970s alternative art sphere, thereby placing the anti-bureaucratic alternatives on unstable ground [fig. 1.12-1.13]. Dressed in 1950s-era office wear and period hairstyles, Artists Space staff members are documented performing various administrative tasks in the institution's offices. In one image, Sherman assumes the position of mid-century secretary. Wearing a bob-style wig, collared blouse, and an Artists Space pin on the breast, she leans forward to inspect a document as it exits a black typewriter. In another image, several staff members are staged performing various office tasks: as one administrator reads a document at her typewriter, another inspects a long ribbon of ticker tape, presumably calculating expenses or preparing a grant budget. Artists Space director Helene Winer wears a long blonde wig, addressing the camera from her desk in an adjacent room. Designed for the specific purpose of representing Artists Space to the downtown art scene, Sherman's photographic series reveals how the institution paradoxically deflected the critique of bureaucracy directed at the city's alternative spaces by embracing the aesthetics of administration in its own self-presentation. The stylistic codes redeployed in the photographic series also injected the issue of gender back into the public discourse on arts administration in New York, serving as a reminder that art spaces assembling under the banner of "no administration" tended to invisibilize rather than eliminate the unglamorous and underpaid maintenance labour largely done by women. The photographic series was both an overidentification with and feminist unmasking of the critical discourse on New York's alternative spaces. It sent an important message to the anti-bureaucratic zealots of the alternative art sphere: without attending to the enduring necessity of maintenance work and the power dynamics that expel it from the dominant regime of visibility, the appeal to an art world without administration can only result in the reproduction of patriarchy. At the same time, this photographic series captures another equally pervasive predicament for the alternative spaces at the turn of the 1980s: the unbearable whiteness of SoHo.

**Chapter Two:**　　　　**Fashion 時髦 Moda МОДА and the Politics of Integration**

In 1978, ten years after arriving in New York from Vienna, Austria, Stefan Eins, a 37-year old artist, exhibition organizer, and founding member of Colab, decided to abandon the SoHo art scene. He was not facing exclusion from this scene, far from it. Eins's creative work, developed in the context of the 3 Mercer Store, a hybrid studio/exhibition space he founded at the fringes of the Canal St. junk shops in 1971, had not only gained an audience, but also favourable reviews in trend-setting magazines like *Art-Rite* and *Artforum*.[1] Fed up with what he regarded as the elitism and insularity of the SoHo art scene, Eins closed 3 Mercer, opening a new storefront in the business district of the South Bronx. For him, the South Bronx represented an antidote to SoHo: it was widely perceived from the outside as one of the worst ghettos in the U.S., predominantly inhabited by working-class Black and Latino/a residents, and remained uncolonized by the New York art establishment. As he explained, "I went to the area where human resources were most depleted to make an art space . . . I wouldn't have been able to make the same point in Soho."[2] The South Bronx provided a new setting and a new demographic for the artist's practice, one that could allow him to test his hypothesis that art "can happen anywhere."[3] Re-purposing a gutted storefront previously occupied by a Salvation Army thrift store, he called the space FASHION 時髦 MODA МОДА (the word "fashion" written in English, Chinese, Spanish and Russian), alternately describing it as an "international cultural concept" and a "museum of science, invention, technology, art and fantasy" [fig. 2.1].[4] Enlisting as co-director Joe Lewis, a 25-year-old Black artist and musician who grew up on the Lower East Side, and junior director William Scott, a 15-year old Black artist from the neighbourhood, Eins and his collaborators worked to earn the trust of the local community, the commitment of state and federal granting agencies, and the respect of the art world establishment by manically producing exhibitions and events with Colab artists such as John Ahearn, Jane Dickson, Jenny Holzer, and Christy Rupp, alongside local sign painters, graffiti writers, rappers, b-boy dancers, and schoolchildren.

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[1] Alan W. Moore, "Stefan Eins," *Artforum* (February 1975): p. 72; "A Nebulous Art Presence," *Art-Rite*, no. 8 (Winter 1976): p. 13.
[2] Stefan Eins, quoted in Randi Hoffman, "Biology=Life=Art: An Interview with Stefan Eins," October 26, 1988 (Fashion Moda Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, series III, subseries A, box 4, folder 36).
[3] Eins, quoted in Calvin Tomkins, "The Art World Alternatives," p. 55.
[4] Both phrases were used to describe Fashion Moda in press releases, newsletters, correspondence, grant applications, and press clippings after 1979.

Fashion Moda was not in itself a Colab splinter group, but, as an important outlet for collaborations between Colab members and South Bronx artists and residents, it significantly widened Colab's cultural reach, animating one of the organization's internal problems—its lack of diversity as a group almost entirely composed of white, middle class artists—while facilitating a solution, which, as I will discuss, was no less problematic.

Fashion Moda was founded on the principle of "open[ing] the doors to everyone," and it set about mobilizing constituencies underserved by the state and invisibilized by the SoHo art establishment.[5] It practiced what I will call a "politics of integration," where it aimed to integrate itself into the local South Bronx cultural life and, in turn, to integrate South Bronx culture into the global art system. Situating untrained South Bronx artists on the same horizontal plane as downtown artists who were gaining international acclaim, the institution embraced the emerging postmodern discourse on both aesthetic and cultural pluralism; not only did it advance an eclectic program stressing the equality of aesthetic positions, but it was also among the first art institutions in New York to adopt cultural diversity as an operational imperative.

Fashion Moda was significant because it gave the pluralist position an organizational form. It was profoundly of the moment—merging with, not departing from, the logic of postmodern culture. In this chapter I will animate some of the blind spots and limitations of Fashion Moda's pluralist position by examining its organizational structure, as well as some of the projects it supported. I will then turn to the theoretical and political implications of this position, particularly as it related to the sustained and systemic problem of racial injustice in the U.S. I will suggest that by imagining itself to prefigure a world beyond ideology—a world in which existing conflicts and divisions had been overcome—Fashion Moda did not adequately scrutinize its own ideology or historical circumstances. This re-examination demonstrates that Fashion Moda's position resonated uncomfortably with the neoconservative "end of ideology" thesis, which, claiming the exhaustion and collapse of both left and right-wing political ideologies, had been used to delegitimize collective struggles against class and racial oppression since the Second World War.[6] While Fashion Moda aimed to open doors to everyone, it did so without questioning what lay beyond those doors or what held them in place. In other words, it evaded difficult questions about its integrationist politics: integration into what and for whom?

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[5] Eins, quoted in Tomkins, "The Art World Alternative," p. 56.

[6] For example, see Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (1960) (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1988).

This chapter also examines Fashion Moda's critical reception, asking how the discourse around Fashion Moda and South Bronx art was shaped and conditioned by ingrained prejudices. As art world interest in South Bronx graffiti surged following two key Fashion Moda exhibitions in the fall of 1980, downtown critics questioned the implications of the so-called "South Bronx invasion."[7] However, this turn toward art and artists from the South Bronx marked a turn away from the institution that facilitated their entry into the art system. Foundational questions about Fashion Moda's aesthetic and political objectives were left unaddressed. This is my attempt to re-open the case of Fashion Moda with the clarity of historical distance, to situate it within its time, and to ask inconvenient questions about its ideological position that remain urgent today.

A methodological note: Fashion Moda developed numerous overlapping, ongoing, and inconsistently active programs that served both the local community and broader art audiences.[8] Accused of poor record-keeping and uneven quality, the institution gained a reputation for bureaucratic irresponsibility, particularly in its earliest years.[9] Consequently, it thwarts any attempt to establish a comprehensive record of its events. Faced with this predicament, this chapter focuses on a few exemplary projects from Fashion Moda's formative years in order to unpack some of the risks and limitations of its politics of integration. The period examined in this chapter—1978 to 1981—marks the phase between the institution's opening and its first major exhibition to take place outside of the South Bronx. I begin with a brief detour through the urban politics of SoHo and the South Bronx in the 1970s.

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[7] Francesca Alinovi, "Twenty-First Century Slang," *Flash Art International* (November 1983): p. 23.

[8] Fashion Moda positioned itself against existing alternative spaces in SoHo, and in particular, their tendency to establish mid- and long-range plans in response to pressure from state and federal granting agencies. Even in grant applications, the directors argued against advanced planning, stating: "Fashion Moda intentionally does not prepare explicit exhibition schedules in advance in order to remain flexible enough for spontaneous events." See New York State Council on the Arts Contract, November 10, 1982, 6 pages (Fashion Moda Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, series II, subseries B, box 4, folder 64). Fashion Moda supported an exhibitions program, public art program, events program, and international touring program. Each followed its own irregular rhythm. Some projects, such as John Ahearn's well-known face-castings of South Bronx residents (discussed at length in this chapter), were ongoing. Works delivered by people in the neighbourhood were sometimes hung on the spot. See Joe Lewis, quoted in Bunny Matthews, "Fashion Moda Is Coming to New Orleans," *Figaro* (New Orleans), vol. 9, no. 42 (October 20, 1980): p. 12. Additionally, Fashion Moda research institutes, such as the *Institute for Appropriate Technology* and the *Institute for Aesthetics and Economics*, were frequently mentioned in promotional material and press articles but never formally presented as exhibition projects. Fashion Moda commissioned artists to produce works for abandoned lots, city buildings, and billboards, often without advanced notice or archival record.

[9] See Eins, Letter of Appeal to Mary Hays, Executive Director of NYSCA, January 14, 1983, 3 pages (Fashion Moda Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, series II, subseries B, box 4, folder 64).

**Two Ends of a Tipped Scale**

When Fashion Moda opened its doors on Third Avenue in the business district of the South Bronx, it was surrounded by buildings destroyed by fire and years of neglect. The space itself had had a fire. Across the street was a methadone clinic where recovering addicts would line up and hang out. Kids passed by on their way home from school. The neighbourhood was lively but tough—struggling with the effects of gang violence, drug addiction, poverty, homelessness, and other problems common to inner-city neighbourhoods in the U.S. For much of the previous decade, the South Bronx had borne the brunt of the disastrous urban policy known as "benign neglect," a political and economic project that, in practical terms, involved the planned shrinkage of neighbourhoods perceived to be beyond repair. The term "benign neglect" was coined by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, an urban affairs advisor to President Richard Nixon, to advocate for a period of withdrawal from debates over race relations in the U.S.[10] It was taken up as the lynchpin of urban policy by the New York City Housing Commission, among other City departments, to justify cuts to vital public services such as hospitals, schools, and fire departments in the city's poorest districts starting in the early 1970s when the City was teetering on the edge of bankruptcy. Policies associated with benign neglect were meant to make already underserved neighbourhoods uninhabitable, to push residents out of their neighbourhoods, and ultimately, to clear the way for redevelopment. As ecologist Deborah Wallace and research scientist Rodrick Wallace explain, City representatives "denied the existence of the social networks that compose communities and mocked the idea of community, claiming that Americans can be arbitrarily shifted around without serious consequences."[11]

Between 1970 and 1980, the population of South Central Bronx dropped 80%. The staggering flight from the South Bronx was the result of deindustrialization, which accounted for the loss of over 600,000 manufacturing jobs in New York alone, as well as the massive outbreak of fires that continued from the early 1970s into the 1980s.[12] Cultural historian Jeff Chang recalls that "between 1973 and 1977, 30,000 fires were set in the South Bronx alone."[13] The fires of the South Bronx became the subject of international media attention, garnering headlines in major

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[10] Moynihan, "Text of the Moynihan Memorandum on the Status of Negroes," p. 3.
[11] Wallace and Wallace, *A Plague on Your Houses*, p. xv.
[12] Ibid., p. 12.
[13] Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, p. 15.

newspapers, and in 1976, a BBC-TV special titled "The Bronx is Burning."[14] Although blame for the fires tended to be passed on to tenants and slum landlords—casting the epidemic as an issue of bad behaviour[15]—Wallace and Wallace have since unpacked the broader structural factors leading to the epidemic, where the Rand Institute, a U.S.-based policy think-tank, played a prominent role. As they argue, pseudoscientific data from the Rand Institute's Fire Project was used to support the reduction of firefighting resources in "poor, minority, overcrowded, high fire-incidence neighborhoods with very old housing."[16] Recommending the closure of nearly 10% of the city's fire companies, mostly affecting low-income neighbourhoods, the Rand Institute poured fuel on the fire, so to speak, supplying the justification for the City to carry out its proposal for planned shrinkage, where it ostensibly let the Bronx burn.[17] Much of the South Bronx was reduced to rubble. It became a place of pilgrimage for politicians seeking to convince the electorate of their commitment to resolve the problem of urban blight. That the South Bronx was abandoned by the City did not mean it was empty. Rather, increasingly marginalized Black and Latino/a residents were left to fend for themselves.

When it came to ignoring the interests of the city's poor and minority populations, City Hall was not the only guilty party. Toward the end of the 1970s, many artists, critics, and arts administrators began to recognize that, despite their radical pretensions, the alternative institutions they had built over the previous decade rarely supported the work of racial and ethnic minorities, groups most severely impacted by the City's urban policy during the 1970s. Indeed, if for some artists and critics the bureaucratization of alternative spaces like 112 Workshop contributed to the waning purchase of the term "alternative" (as discussed in Chapter One), for others, the problem of its inherited and ingrained racial bias provoked an even greater crisis in faith. In a 1982 interview, Edit DeAk, co-founder of *Art-Rite*, stated the issue bluntly: "Our alternative systems have no money except for middle-class white art."[18] New Museum director

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[14] Wallace and Wallace, *A Plague on Your Houses*, p. 5. See also: Joseph B. Treaster, "20% Rise in Fires Is Adding to Decline of South Bronx," *The New York Times* (May 18, 1975): p. 1; p. 50.

[15] As Wallace and Wallace explain, "[a]rson as an idea caught on in the late 1970s and became a political tool. Tenant groups and their allies pushed landlord arson as the big fire issue, and arson task forces were formed. The landlords and their allies made a big deal of tenant arson and arson-for-revenge or gang punishment. Huge amounts of time and money were drained by these efforts. Resources were made available to 'fight arson' but not, unfortunately, to fight fires." See Wallace and Wallace, *A Plague on Your Houses*, p. 23.

[16] Ibid., p. 32.

[17] Ibid., p. xv.

[18] Joan Wallace and Gerlayn Donohue, "Edit DeAk, an interview with Joan Wallace and Geralyn Donohue," *REAL LIFE Magazine*, no. 8 (Spring-Summer 1982): p. 4.

Marcia Tucker likewise recognized this problem, spinning it as a challenge that established institutions could face through practical measures of reform:

> "We've taken pains to find out what ethnic and non-white organizations are doing. Mostly, it's a process of socialization—we're trying to broaden our circle of friends. We would like very much to have non-white representation on our Board and to have a strong internship program that trains minority people, but those things come slowly."[19]

To this end, the New Museum initiated a bi-monthly "Minorities Dialogue Series" in the spring of 1980 to attend to issues of cultural diversity in New York art.[20] Non-profit art spaces supporting artists of colour, such as The Studio Museum (1968 -), Taller Boricua, and Cayman Gallery (1975-1990), had long played an integral role in New York's alternative art sphere. However, these spaces remained largely unsupported by and invisible to the institutions and periodicals that would catapult New York's alternative space phenomenon to national recognition in the second half of the 1970s.

The issue of racism in the New York art milieu had already been raised by the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC), a coalition of African American artists, curators, and activists that drew attention to the problematic exclusion of Black artists in a series of major exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art between 1968 and 1971.[21] The perennial problem of racism in the arts became a flashpoint in the alternative art sphere nearly a decade later, in the winter of 1979, when Artists Space—the city's most reputable and well-funded alternative space—made the judgement to mount the exhibition *The Nigger Drawings* by Donald Newman, a young white artist who was presumably seeking to incite controversy. Disgusted by the institution's insensitivity to the concerns of the city's Black community, artists, curators, and critics assembled in opposition both to Newman's insensitive

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[19] Troy, "The New Museum as *Kunsthalle*," p. 20.

[20] The Minorities Dialogue Series brought together art workers from racial and ethnic minorities to "promote a familiarity between a variety of minority artists and The New Museum, and to enhance the interaction between those artists and other interested parties." See New Museum, flier for "Events: Artists Invite Artists," February 1980: http://archive.newmuseum.org/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/9440.

[21] See Carolyn Wallace, "Exhibiting Authenticity: The Black Emergency Cultural Coalition's Protests of the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1968-71," *Art Journal*, vol. 74, no. 2 (Summer 2015): pp. 5-23. See also Cahan, *Mounting Frustrations.*

exhibition and to Artists Space's political folly. The charge was led by former members of BECC (including artists Cliff Joseph and Faith Ringgold) and AWC (including Lucy Lippard, Rudolf Baranik, May Stevens, and Carl Andre), well-known art critics and editors (including *Artforum* editor Ingrid Sischy and critics Kate Linker, Amy Baker, and DeAk), and politically-engaged Black artists Howardina Pindell and Tony Whitfield, who signed an open letter condemning the exhibition as "an incredible slap in the space of Black and other artists, of Black audiences and of everyone connected in any way with one of our leading alternative spaces."[22] This core group set the foundation for the Emergency Coalition, an ad-hoc committee established to address the broader issue of systemic racism in the alternative art sphere. Staging unauthorized demonstrations and teach-ins both outside and inside Artists Space over the month of April 1979, the Emergency Coalition and its supporters forced the question of race back into the art discourse, where they drummed up support for sector-wide reform [fig. 2.2]. Artists Space director Helene Winer stood by her decision to exhibit *The Nigger Drawings*, stating that the institution "had respected the artist's right 'to present his work unedited'."[23] She found support from an influential group of critics, including Rosalind Krauss, Craig Owens, and Douglas Crimp, who indicted the members of the Emergency Coalition for "their prolonged harassment of an extremely valuable and ethical arts organization, and their insensitivity to the complexities of both esthetics and politics."[24] This controversy was not all hot air. A year later, the National Endowment for the Arts introduced the Office of Minority Concerns in an attempt to "broaden the scope of minority review," which, while clearly insufficient, stands as a lasting consequence of the struggle waged by the Emergency Coalition.[25]

The critique of racism and racial exclusion in the alternative art sphere at the end of the 1970s was, in the art criticism of the period, coupled with a growing anxiety over the middle-class values imagined to be taking root in New York as droves of young white artists flocked to

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[22] Open letter to Artists Space, signed by Carl Andre, Amy Baker, Rudolf Baranik, Edit DeAk, Cliff Joseph, Kate Linker, Lucy Lippard, Howardena Pindell, Faith Ringgold, Ingrid Sischy, May Stevens, and Tony Whitfield, reprinted in Joseph Henry, "Sources of Harm: Notes on the Alternative Artworld," *Hyperallergic* (September 11, 2014): https://hyperallergic.com/147841/sources-of-harm-notes-on-the-alternative-artworld/.

[23] Helene Winer, quoted in Grace Glueck, "'Racism' Protest Slated Over Title of Art Show," *The New York Times* (April 14, 1979): p. 15.

[24] Rosalind Krauss, Craig Owens, Donald Crimp, Roberta Smith, and Stephen Koch, quoted in Ibid.

[25] Judith H. Balfe, *Paying the Piper: Causes and Consequences of Art Patronage* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 259. Addressing the NEA's increased sensitivity to the problem of racial and ethnic exclusion, NEA Program Coordinator Ana Steele described 1980 as "the year that all the programs paid more attention to minority concerns." See Steele, "Program Coordination," in National Endowment for the Arts/National Council on the Arts, *Annual Report 1980* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1981), p. 253.

the city from the suburbs. These debates prompted some art groups—particularly those situated in the predominantly Latino/a working-class neighbourhood of the Lower East Side—to establish creative frameworks for strengthening links between white artists and the communities in which they worked. This approach was taken up by Group Material, which will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Four. The foundation and rising profile of Fashion Moda was also inseparable from the confluence of concerns about cultural diversity in the art world and in the domain of cultural policy. The brutal contrast between the concentration of white privilege in the SoHo art scene and the widely reported plight of the South Bronx people destabilized the sense of radicalism assumed by many downtown artists. For Eins, SoHo reinforced a bankrupted idea of the "alternative" and the South Bronx represented its antidote. By abandoning SoHo, the artist imagined that he could leave behind the SoHo art scene's elitist and exclusionary practices, as well as its unresolved racial blind spots. However, much to the artist's chagrin, the critics tasked with attributing meaning to his project would reattach it to the scene he disavowed.

Fashion Moda garnered nearly immediate critical attention from the arts press. In its first two years, it received frequent mention in the *Village Voice*, *SoHo News*, *East Village Eye*, *Artforum*, *ARTnews*, and *Art in America*, among other periodicals.[26] Regular *Artforum* critic Carrie Rickey summarized the early critical reception of Fashion Moda as follows:

> Fashion Moda's apologists argue that Eins and company have created an art outpost in hostile territory—a situation beneficial to downtown artists and residents of the South Bronx alike. Critics of the operation insist that it reeks of "downward mobility," a radical chic equivalent of *noblesse oblige*, and that the art-worldly travelers to the South Bronx have a missionary misapprehension about the value of bringing art to the ghetto. . . . Fashion Moda's fascination is that both its apologists and its critics are right.[27]

Was Fashion Moda a sincere attempt at cross-cultural community engagement or an example of cultural imperialism? Should Eins be praised for supporting South Bronx culture or charged for expropriating it? Although Rickey described Fashion Moda's apologists and critics as separate

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[26] A selection of the earliest reviews were reprinted in *Events: Fashion Moda, Taller Boricua, Artists Invite Artists*, exhibition catalogue (New York: New Museum, 1981), pp. 27-28.
[27] Carrie Rickey, "Animals Living in Cities: Fashion Moda," *Artforum* (January 1980): p. 69.

actors, the new institution rarely elicited such strong and divided critical responses. In fact, it was most common for critics to note the institution's ambiguity without pressing for greater clarity (as Rickey does in the above quotation).[28] As if locked into a dual state of suspicion and attraction, critics appeared content to defer judgment on the political position and aesthetic value of Fashion Moda and the work it promoted. Fashion Moda destabilized critics, particularly those for whom SoHo was a primary point of reference. To them, Fashion Moda appeared as a radical innovation by virtue of its location alone.[29]

Eins was sceptical of the positive reception of Fashion Moda in New York's arts press. Not only were the majority of critics writing from the context of SoHo; their imagined audiences were also in SoHo: "[A]ll this coverage I get in those white elitist magazines doesn't really get the whole gist of what's happening here, of what Fashion Moda is about. It feeds back to SoHo, it's all so intellectualized."[30] For Eins, the emerging discourse on Fashion Moda in the arts press was merely another expression of the ethnocentrism of New York's art establishment. In his mind, the critics largely failed to comprehend the significance of the institution within its local milieu. Fetishizing the South Bronx as an exotic locale entirely apart from the arts milieu, they also reinforced the distinction between "art in the ghetto" and art in the centre. The perceived foreignness of Fashion Moda—the supposition that it was of and for SoHo, but located in the South Bronx—was part of its attraction. It gave it a veneer of exoticism while providing a familiar access point for downtown artists and critics.

**The Fashion Moda Idea**

From Eins's perspective, Fashion Moda was not a naïve attempt to redeem the South Bronx. He believed that the critical arts press in New York overemphasized the significance of the South Bronx location in which Fashion Moda was installed, mistaking the institution as a site-specific project. For Eins, Fashion Moda was a flexible and global "cultural concept" deployed in the

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[28] For example, Thomas Lawson writes: "What I like is the ambiguity of the situation here. A place where local people can come, make art if they want to, or just sit around, talking and getting warm, a place like a public library; but also a chic gallery space, perceived as being radical and avant-garde." See Lawson, "Fashion Moda: Stefan Eins, Joe Lewis and William Scott Interviewed by Thomas Lawson, January 1980," *REAL LIFE Magazine*, no. 3 (March 1980): p. 8.

[29] Walter Robinson explained that "for seasoned New Yorkers, the trip is short and perfectly safe." He evoked an imagined reader who was presumably white, middle-class, and in need of reassurance to travel one subway stop north of Manhattan. See Robinson, "John Ahearn at Fashion Moda," *Art in America* (January 1980): p. 108.

[30] Eins, in Lawson, "Fashion Moda," p.8.

South Bronx only in order to prove in practice the hypothesis that art could happen anywhere. The confusion over what exactly Eins was doing in the South Bronx was warranted. Eins's global vision was not self-evidently expressed in Fashion Moda's earliest exhibitions and projects. The Fashion Moda idea was also never declared definitively or consolidated in a single document. Rather, it was disseminated in fragments, appearing in press releases, membership drives, and grant applications, as well as interviews and texts written by its directors. As these fragments are compiled in the archive and examined together with historical distance, they begin to reveal a logic that may have been unclear to critics writing at the turn of the 1980s.

When asked to define Fashion Moda—to articulate its precise aims or the focus of its programming—Eins and Lewis (who together acted as principle spokespersons for Fashion Moda) made a point to emphasize its central values of flexibility and inclusivity. For Lewis, Fashion Moda differed from other institutions active in New York at the turn of the 1980s precisely because it lacked a strong definition or programmatic agenda: "If you ask someone from Artists Space or Group Material or the Alternative Museum or the New Museum or Franklin Furnace what they were, everyone would tell you the same thing. If you asked ten people about Fashion Moda, you would get ten different responses."[31] The range of responses elicited to the question "What is Fashion Moda?" was, to a large degree, engineered by its directors, who repeatedly positioned the institution against all forms of categorization and enclosure. This was animated in their introduction to a portfolio of posters published in *Artforum* in January 1981, where Eins, Lewis, and Scott described Fashion Moda as follows: "Fashion Moda has been around forever, but as of the summer 1978, it finally had an address. Fashion Moda is impossible to define because by definition we have no definition. There is no permanent exhibition and often not much of a planned schedule."[32] In this passage, Fashion Moda is described as a trans-historical phenomenon that knows no spatial or temporal bounds, not a new alternative space situated in the South Bronx. Eins and Lewis distanced their institution from the alternative space phenomenon that it grew out of, repeating in numerous interviews that "Fashion Moda is not an alternative space. . . . It is not alternative to anything."[33] Critics parroted Eins and Lewis, qualifying the institution as "the only *alternate* space in town that deserves the name it

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[31] Lewis, quoted in Tam, "Interview with Joe Lewis," p. 71.
[32] Fashion Moda, "Some Posters from Fashion Moda," *Artforum* (January 1981): p. 50.
[33] Eins, quoted in Calvin Tomkins, "The Art World Alternatives," p. 55.

rejects."[34] The institution presented itself as a virtual inversion of existing alternative spaces: not an alternative, not a space. Most basically, it sought to do away with the alternative space's growing reputation for bureaucratic rigidity and exclusivity, and to install a language of flexibility and inclusivity in its place. For the directors of Fashion Moda, flexibility equalled freedom. It meant that anything was possible.

The Fashion Moda idea was not only meant to frame the institution's utopian vision. It was also meant to be put into practice. For example, to give form to its claim to flexibility, Eins and Lewis not only conceived, but also partially executed an ambitious plan to franchise Fashion Moda between the years 1980 and 1982. During this time, the directors installed Fashion Moda exhibitions and pavilions at various locations in the U.S. and Europe, including the *Fashion Moda Store* (1982), which consisted of three merchandise booths installed outside the Fridericianum at Documenta 7 in Kassel, Germany.[35] As for Fashion Moda's claim to inclusivity, it compelled Eins and Lewis to take the task of community outreach seriously. This was especially apparent in their programming, which regularly included both artists and non-artists, as well as in their frequent communications with local public schools, where parents and schoolchildren were encouraged to submit projects alongside trained professionals. In a limited sense, Fashion Moda worked to include demographics traditionally excluded from the art field: children, working-class people, as well as racial and ethnic minorities. In a broader sense, Fashion Moda's commitment to inclusivity manifested in its alignment with the emerging terms of aesthetic and cultural pluralism. Whereas in the U.S., the phrase "cultural pluralism" (often used interchangeably with the term "multiculturalism") invoked a democratic society where cultural differences would be tolerated, even embraced, the phrase "aesthetic pluralism" entered visual arts discourse to refer to the view that, following the decline of the Modernist teleology toward the end of the 1960s, all aesthetic positions, styles, or forms had become equal and valid.[36]

Fashion Moda's model of inclusivity—and particularly its emphasis on including the work of non-artists and children—has its precedents in *art brut*, named by French artist Jean

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[34] Lucy R. Lippard, "Retrochic: Looking Back in Anger," *Village Voice* (Art Supplement) (December 10, 1979): p. 68. See also: Carrie Rickey, "Animals Living in Cities: Fashion Moda," *Artforum* (January 1980): p. 69.
[35] Fashion Moda's Documenta 7 project is discussed at length in Douglas Crimp, "The Art of Exhibition," *October*, no. 30 (Autumn 1984): pp. 49-81.
[36] See Russell Jacoby "The Myth of Multiculturalism," *New Left Review*, vol. 1, no. 208 (November-December 1994): pp. 121-126.

Dubuffet to describe "works of art emanating from obscure personalities, maniacs; arising from spontaneous impulses, animated by fantasy, even delirium; and strangers to the beaten track of catalogued art."[37] In his best-known text on the subject, Dubuffet attacked what he perceived to be the elitism, intellectualism, and conformity of the art establishment, positioning *art culturel* against *art brut*, which he characterized as "completely pure, basic; totally guided in all its phases solely by the creator's own impulses."[38] As if in anticipation of Eins's mantra that "art can happen anywhere," Dubuffet claimed that "[t]rue art always appears where we don't expect it."[39] The form of cultural mixing advanced by Dubuffet in the interest of troubling the distinction between normal and abnormal art[40] was likewise revived at Fashion Moda, albeit in the very different intellectual context of postmodernism, where the project of levelling the hierarchy of cultural values—imagined to be avant-garde in Dubuffet's time—was thoroughly integrated into the dominant culture. Although Fashion Moda replicated the central tenets of *art brut*, this should not be viewed as an expression of homage, but, rather, as the consequence of a shared assumption that authentic creativity laid beyond the cultural establishment. In his examination of *art brut*, Hal Foster noted a paradox in Dubuffet's primitivism: "[E]ven as he seeks to undo the opposition between normal and abnormal art . . . , Dubuffet affirms an opposition between *brut* and *culturel* art, between civilized and noncivilized forms."[41] The authenticity of *art brut* was always counterpoised by an inauthentic, artificial art, the art of intellectuals. It was perhaps this stubborn opposition—not just between high and low culture, but more profoundly, between elitist and generalist ideas of creative expression—that Fashion Moda sought to break down yet again, not by denigrating *art culturel*, but by validating *art brut* through promotional mechanisms that were already in place.

When Eins founded Fashion Moda, he imagined it as a kind of side show: "A show where people just come and look around because it has a variety of interesting and unusual

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[37] Jean Dubuffet, letter to Charles Ladame, Paris, August 9, 1946, quoted in Lucienne Peiry, *Art Brut: The Origins of Outsider Art*, James Frank, trans. (Paris: Flammarion, 2001), p. 11.
[38] Jean Dubuffet, "Art Brut in Preference to the Cultural Arts" (1949), Paul Foss and Allen S. Weiss, trans., *Art & Text*, no. 27 (December-February 1988), p. 33.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Hal Foster, "Blinded Insights: On the Modernist Reception of the Art of the Mentally Ill," *October*, no. 97 (Summer 2001): pp. 14-15.

objects and phenomena, not unlike a circus or a show of inventions."[42] Following its first two exhibitions, which were structured according to this model, the institution became best known for its exhibitions of visual art. Nevertheless, its directors attempted to supersede existing hierarchies of cultural value by waiving their right to exclude art on the grounds of its aesthetic quality.[43] The institution sought to expand the perimeters defined by contemporary art—both who can participate as artists and what can be shown as art. Eins and Lewis made a connection between demands for cultural pluralism in American society and the growing currency of aesthetic pluralism in the arts. The aesthetic implications of this convergence were literally put on display, where works by downtown artists with strong support from the New York art establishment were intermixed with (and given equal status with) an eclectic range of projects by South Bronx locals. As for the political implications of the Fashion Moda idea, they were not immediately clear.

In a 1980 statement quoted in the *East Village Eye*, Lewis laid out the structural logic behind Fashion Moda's identity and practice: "At a time when the situation in politics, economics, science, is separating people, we are trying to pull them together by incorporating all things."[44] This claim was far from neutral. Situated on the grounds of artistic practice, Lewis's statement affirmed the centrality of interdisciplinarity and aesthetic pluralism in Fashion Moda's institutional identity. In the 1982 essay "The Problem of Pluralism," Foster analyzed and indicted the dominance of aesthetic pluralism in recent art and art criticism, asserting that the pluralist position resulted in "an eccentricity that leads, in art as in politics, to a new conformity."[45] He argued that antagonisms, disruptions, and transgressions were absorbed as vital elements of pluralist culture. As such, they were coded not as ruptures but as "others among

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[42] Eva Brenner and Ricky Flores, "Art Can Happen Anywhere: An interview with Stefan Eins, Founder of Fashion Moda," 1988, 2 pages (Fashion Moda Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, series III, subseries B, box 5, folder 12).

[43] In a series of notes written in 1986, Eins distinguishes Fashion Moda from other institutions on the grounds of its inclusivity: "I have heard many times 'sorry we are closed,' and I have witnessed the curators making judgements, excluding what was not considered good enough, in their opinions. I showed everybody. Yes, I gave some people more space, time, devotion. Some people are more interested. But I always felt I gave everybody enough space to satisfy their desire and need." See Stefan Eins, handwritten notes on Fashion Moda, Februrary 12, 1986, pp. 2-3 of 5 pages (Fashion Moda Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, series III, subseries A, box 4, folder 37).

[44] Joe Lewis, quoted in Steve Vincent, "Fashion/Moda at the New Museum," *East Village Eye*, vol. 2, no. 16 (Xmas 1980): p. 12.

[45] Hal Foster, "The Problem of Pluralism," *Art in America* (January 1982), reprinted as "Against Pluralism," in *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1984), p. 15.

others" from which consumers were free to choose.[46] Foster was concerned with pluralism's effect on art and criticism, and particularly its capacity to foreclose on the future of the avant-garde. Shifted onto the terrain of politics, Lewis's statement suggests a similar recuperative function. It implied that the solution to increasing division and polarization in various spheres of human activity was their integration into a system that could support all positions equally. As a consequence, forces of political antagonism and struggle—like the aesthetic transgressions described by Foster—would be captured and sublimated as mere options among others. Difference would be recoded as diversity.

**Politics of Integration**

Fashion Moda's politics of integration owed much to the German artist, educator, and media personality Joseph Beuys. Eins participated in Beuys's Free International University at Documenta 6 in 1977, where the future of democracy was a central topic of discussion [fig. 2.3]. In "Appeal for an Alternative," published in the German newspaper *Frankfurter Rundschau* in 1978 and subsequently translated in Toronto's *Centerfold* magazine, Beuys outlined the political position supported by the Free International University. Stating that both capitalist and communist political systems consolidated power "in the hands of those who control the money and/or the state," he argued that both had "led mankind into a dead-end street."[47] Against the strong ideologies of capitalism and communism, he proposed a "third way" based on the concepts of "equilibrium and solidarity."[48] Beuys's rejection of Marxist and communist thought was longstanding. In an interview with Willoughby Sharp published a decade earlier, he positioned his own aesthetic position—based on the conviction that "every human being is an artist"—directly against the supposedly mechanistic view of the human held within certain strains of scientific Marxism: "In the simplest terms, I am trying to reaffirm the concept of art and creativity in the face of Marxist doctrine."[49] If the collective was the central political subject of communist thought, the creative individual formed the basis for Beuys's alternative. For Beuys, if man was essentially "an enterprising being," the institutions and systems produced by a

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[46] Ibid., p. 31.

[47] Joseph Beuys, "Aufruf zur Alternative," *Frankfurter Rundschau* (December 23, 1978), translated as "Appeal for an Alternative," *Centerfold* vol. 3, no. 6 (September 1979): p. 308.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Beuys, quoted in Willoughby Sharp, "An Interview with Joseph Beuys," *Artforum* (November 1969), reprinted in Lucy R. Lippard, ed., *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973), pp. 121-122.

strong state served only to restrict this universal characteristic.[50] Consequently, his answer to the question of universal emancipation was tied to the shrinkage of state power.

Beuys's third way suggested a form of direct democracy in which universal participation in social decision-making was an end goal. It required the general capital of creativity held by all humans to be recognized and supported within the "social organism," an ecological metaphor he borrowed from the philosopher Rudolf Steiner to define the relations of culture, politics, and economics within the social totality.[51] Only after every human recognized his or her capacity to participate in social affairs could the egalitarian principle of direct democracy (consensus decision-making without representative or bureaucratic mediation) be met. Reflecting on the Fashion Moda idea in a series of notes written in 1986, Eins appealed to Beuysian terminology, claiming that the institution's fundamental role was in "digging for, exposing the free exercise of creation in humans."[52] This was what he meant by his own mantra that "art can happen anywhere." Eins and Lewis articulated Fashion Moda's Beuysian perspective in interviews and internal documents, emphasizing the universality of creativity and the regenerative power of art. As Eins recalled, Fashion Moda was not about "educat[ing] the underprivileged ghetto."[53] The institution did not seek to provide humanitarian aid by funnelling resources from the outside in. Rather, following Beuys, it acted on its humanitarian conscience by supporting and directing the capital of creativity already located in the South Bronx.

Fashion Moda's politics of integration can be tracked on both microscopic and macroscopic levels. It was expressed both in its specific programs with South Bronx community members and in its overarching conceptual aims. In the institution's earliest years, it pursued two seemingly contradictory models of integration that prioritized different subjects and sites of integration: a community-based model that worked to integrate downtown New York art into the existing South Bronx social life, and an internationalist model that facilitated the integration of South Bronx culture into the international art system.[54] If Fashion Moda's community-based

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[50] Beuys, "Appeal for an Alternative," p. 313.

[51] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells* (London and Brooklyn: Verso, 2012), p. 355. See also Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol," *Artforum* (January 1980), reprinted in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), p. 45.

[52] Eins, handwritten notes on Fashion Moda, p. 1 of 5 pages (Fashion Moda Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, series III, subseries A, box 4, folder 37).

[53] Ibid.

[54] I invoke here art historian Miwon Kwon's analysis of the integrationist model of site specificity as it was adopted by artist John Ahearn in the 1980s and '90s following his first solo exhibition at Fashion Moda in the spring/summer

model provoked questions about the downward mobility of educated white artists choosing to make art in the poorest congressional district in the U.S., its internationalist model presented another set of problems. By seeking to de-ghettoize South Bronx culture and connect South Bronx artists to the international art world, it carried the risk of extracting value from the South Bronx and reinvesting it in a system that gives nothing back. At Fashion Moda, these two models were not defined or articulated as separate; rather, for the directors, the local was imbricated in the global, and vice versa. Eins and Lewis were required to integrate themselves within the local milieu before they could identify the creative energy already located there. They thought that by exposing the existence of this creative energy to the world, they would provide an inspiring narrative of creative resiliency that could provoke others to follow. Fashion Moda's earliest engagements with—and adjustments to—the community surrounding its South Bronx storefront are telling of the ad-hoc support structure built by Eins and Lewis to navigate their competing ambitions for local support and global recognition.

**Community Work**

When Eins signed the lease to the burned-out storefront on Third Avenue, he hired local kids to help clear out the rubble [fig. 2.4].[55] The renovated space, complete with a large plate glass window spanning the façade, was meant to draw in foot-traffic. This facade was a statement in itself; the only one the block without security gates to protect it from vandalism and theft, it made itself physically vulnerable, extending a message of trust (or perhaps naivety) to the local community. The goodwill Eins placed in the South Bronx was not immediately reciprocated by either the local people or the local bureaucracy. Bronx Council on the Arts Director Bill Aguado confirmed that within the Council, Fashion Moda was viewed with suspicion: "It was a novelty item," he explained. "Initially, there was some hostility; gradually the idea caught on."[56] Eins was under no illusions that Fashion Moda would be warmly welcomed into the South Bronx. In a 1980 article, Lucy R. Lippard reported on some of Eins's organizational challenges during his first year in the South Bronx. He was "constantly aware that he has entered a 'different culture,

of 1978. See Kwon, "Sitings of Public Art: Integration versus Intervention," in *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 56-99.
[55] See Bunny Matthews, "Fashion Moda is Coming to New Orleans," p. 11.
[56] Bill Aguado, quoted in Carey Lovelace, "S. Bronx Art: There Goes the Neighborhood," *Los Angeles Times* (September 2, 1984) (Fashion Moda Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, series III, subseries B, box 5, folder 6).

with all the conflicting behavior patterns and wrong assumptions' that lead to misunderstanding and, too often, to hatred in the city's daily class struggle."[57] When he found that his assumptions were proven wrong, he made adjustments. For example, "after announcing a meeting of South Bronx artists to which no one came, he realized 'you can't do anything here at a certain hour on a certain day'."[58] The regular opening hours the institution eventually settled on—Tuesday to Saturday, 2 p.m. to 7 p.m.—were set to accommodate the schedules of workers, students, and the unemployed.[59]

Fashion Moda was also subject to modifications in its programming focus and institutional identity. The institution's first two exhibitions, which presented idiosyncratic collections of objects and implements in the spirit of the 3 Mercer Store, give an indication of the kind of project Eins initially planned for Fashion Moda. They combined artifacts from Eins's own collection with objects from neighbourhood people, but they did not speak directly to the local audience.[60] Eins soon adjusted Fashion Moda's public-facing identity to stress its potential value to the local community. Its earliest archived newsletter, distributed to local residents in February 1979, boasted that with the help of the community it would give local residents "the chance to have their heritage viewed with dignity and esteem."[61] The institution was rebranded as a cultural service for local residents, where it would function as an exhibition space for locals to display their art and an educational space for workshops with artist-volunteers.[62] Eins also began to have most publicity material translated into Spanish (and occasionally in Chinese and Russian as well), not only to stress the institution's global vision, but also because English was not the first language for much of the neighbourhood's Latino/a population. After briefly involving local artist Hector Ortega, Eins brought Lewis on as co-director in March 1979. Eins recognized that the institution was too demanding for one person to manage, and had come to

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[57] Lucy R. Lippard, "Real Estate and Real Art à la Fashion Moda," p. 181.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Joe Lewis, Grant Application to Institute of Museum Services (MS/GOS) for the period of October 1, 1980-September 30, 1981, June 3, 1980 (Fashion Moda Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, series II, subseries B, box 3, folder 23).
[60] Asked about the early reception of Fashion Moda by the *Los Angeles Times* in 1984, Crash explained that while "some of Fashion Moda's more experimental imports have stuck locals as 'crazy,' others have been popular—at times provoking surprising results." See Lovelace, "S. Bronx Art: There Goes the Neighborhood."
[61] Hector Ortega and Stefan Eins, Fashion Moda newsletter, February 1979 (Fashion Moda Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, series III, subseries B, box 5, folder 14).
[62] Ibid.

believe that it was essential to have an African American represented on staff.[63] Soon thereafter, William Scott was appointed as Junior Director and Youth Liaison, giving Eins and Lewis a designated ear to the local youth culture.

The responsive and adaptable approach to programming taken by the directors began as a pragmatic response to local conditions. The expectations they faced diverged from those of downtown galleries, which had become accustomed to scheduling exhibitions one or two years in advance. Lewis explains: "If someone comes in with something we like, it goes up then and there. That's one of the major differences between us and anyone else. We have a basic year program that's pretty flexible but we realize how important it is to get the stuff up as fast as possible, especially since we deal with a very wide variety of artists from real straight academics to just the most out macho gang-type, zip-gun people."[64] Fashion Moda's directors did not only wait around for locals to drop off their artworks. They took a proactive approach to local programming, which Lewis conceived as a kind of community outreach: "It has a lot to do with developing the area that we're in and going out and finding the sign painters whose signs you've always liked and putting their signs in a show. The guy you see tinkering with his car all the time – going and taking pictures of his engine that he's just rebuilt. That's art."[65] In this, Lewis underscored Fashion Moda's expanded notion of art, as well as the institution's interest in and ability to incorporate and designate everyday objects as art. The directors also emphasized the equality of intelligence and expertise between artists and non-artists, adults and children, specialists and generalists, experts and the public-at-large. This manifested in Fashion Moda's frequent calls for local residents to participate alongside trained professionals. For instance, in a letter sent by Eins to parents of South Bronx students, local children were invited to contribute ideas alongside designers and professionals for the planning and implementation of a rehabilitation program for Third Avenue. Their contributions, stated Eins, "should be an integral part [of the program]."[66] Eins, Lewis, and Scott also inaugurated *The South Bronx Show*, an annual exhibition of South Bronx artists that explicitly celebrated local culture. What made Fashion Moda distinct from existing community centres in underserved neighbourhoods was its

[63] Steve Lyons, "Interview with Stefan Eins," unpublished audio recording, December 6, 2013.
[64] Lewis, quoted in Matthews, "Fashion Moda is Coming to New Orleans," p. 12.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Stefan Eins, letter to South Bronx parents inviting student contributions to a Fashion Moda-led rehabilitation project for Third Avenue between 138th St. and 165th St, undated (Fashion Moda Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, series II, subseries A, box 2, folder 25).

simultaneous commitment to community work and avant-garde art. Participants to Fashion Moda programs were told they were contributing to the development of a "cultural concept," a designation that provided a dimension of critical vanguardism to otherwise innocuous community initiatives.[67]

Eins and Lewis were aware of the fault line they were navigating. On one side of this line were the people of the neighbourhood whom they wanted to participate in their exhibitions and programs not only as audience members or objects of study, but also as active contributors. On the other side was the downtown New York art scene from which they came, and in which they remained invested. Fashion Moda was not alone in enlisting the participation and support of non-artists. Not long after Fashion Moda established itself in the South Bronx, artist and educator Tim Rollins established the Art and Knowledge Workshop (otherwise known as Kids of Survival, or K.O.S, 1981 -), also in the South Bronx, an after-school art program for at-risk youth. Rollins was a founding and active member of the art collective Group Material, a middle school art teacher, and, through his work with the Art and Knowledge Workshop, an important precursor to contemporary genres of "participatory art."[68] Rollins and his students developed a collaborative, largely improvisational process they called "jammin'," in which Rollins or a student would read from a selected text—from Shakespeare to Mark Twain to W.E.B. Dubois—while others would make drawings or paintings that related the texts to their own experiences. These exercises would generate the blueprints for large-scale collaboratively-produced paintings, which typically consisted of bold, graphic designs applied to book pages that had been glued onto canvas. As Rollins's long-term collaborator Julie Ault explains, although the Art and Knowledge Workshop was conceived as a pedagogical initiative, "in the mid-1980s paintings by the group were circulated in the downtown commercial art world, and Tim Rollins and K.O.S. were celebrated not only in the local milieu but nationally and internationally."[69] Not surprisingly, Fashion Moda was one of Rollins and K.O.S.'s earliest supporters. Together, Rollins, Eins, and Lewis stood for a kind of art that exceeded the restricted field of art production. They saw not just artists but all people as potential audiences and creators. They also recognized that community-based art required a level of mutual trust that could only be

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[67] Ortega and Eins, Fashion Moda newsletter.
[68] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 1; p. 243.
[69] Julie Ault, "A Chronology of Selected Alternative Structures, Spaces, Artists' Groups, and Organizations in New York City, 1965-85," in *Alternative Art New* York, p. 62.

developed gradually. They rooted themselves in the South Bronx, building alliances for the long haul.

For downtown artists searching for new and less art-world entrenched audiences, Fashion Moda represented a vital alternative to existing alternative spaces. The institution did not only provide artists with a white-walled gallery space to exhibit existing work, but also a loaded socio-political context for site-specific projects. Artists such as John Ahearn, Jenny Holzer, Justen Ladda, Peter Mönnig, Christy Rupp, Douglas Turnbaugh, and David Wells were invited to produce exhibitions in the gallery and off-site projects in abandoned buildings and lots throughout the South Bronx. Some of the institution's most well attended exhibitions were co-productions between downtown artists and local South Bronx residents. Ahearn's 1979 exhibition *South Bronx Hall of Fame* remains one of the most iconic and widely discussed exhibitions held at Fashion Moda, and among its clearest examples of cross-cultural collaboration. Ahearn is a white, middle-class artist from Binghamton, New York, who, after finishing his studies at Cornell University in 1973, moved to TriBeCa, where he became a founding member of Colab.[70] While *South Bronx Hall of Fame* was a direct extension of Ahearn's artistic practice, it was also put to work as a catalyst for Fashion Moda's own unsettled integrationist project. It is worth unpacking Ahearn's project more carefully to consider exactly how it contributed to Eins's and Lewis's efforts to integrate Fashion Moda into the South Bronx cultural life.

Ahearn's exhibition consisted of dozens of painted cast plaster relief portraits of South Bronx residents produced at Fashion Moda over the course of 1979. Hung as a frieze high along the perimeter of the gallery, and extending out from its white walls, the busts represented neighbourhood people striking various poses. David Ortiz appears in an ecstatic state with his jaw dropped and eyes wide open. An unnamed young woman labeled "Pregnant Woman" is depicted motionless, her eyes framed by dark circles. Johnny purses a half-finished cigarette between his lips as he looks to the side. Butch and Earl are captured in a brotherly embrace [fig. 2.5]. Norma's hand clasps Mario's bare chest, drawing notice to a long scar cutting across his tattooed torso. Each of their faces is polished smooth and painted with a gloss finish. Some, like David, Butch, Earl, Norma, and Mario are treated in natural tones, while others, including Johnny and Pregnant Girl, are painted in a more expressionistic manner, with blotches of gold,

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[70] Jane Kramer, *Whose Art Is It?* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 54.

grey and yellow. Together, they form a fraction of Ahearn's monument to the community that surrounded the gallery.

For Ahearn, as for many South Bronx residents who returned to Fashion Moda throughout the life-casting process, *South Bronx Hall of Fame* was not only a collection of relief portraits, but also a collaborative social experiment [fig. 2.6]. Ahearn's life-casting process provided an unpretentious situation for locals to enter the doors of Fashion Moda and an excuse for the artist to get to know the neighbourhood people. Some of the relationships made by Ahearn over the course of his exhibition at Fashion Moda were lasting. It was there that he met the 17-year-old high-school student Rigoberto (Robert) Torres, who became his apprentice and long-term collaborator throughout the 1980s. Less than a year after the closing of *South Bronx Hall of Fame*, Torres convinced Ahearn to move to a sixth floor apartment in his building on Walton Avenue in the South Bronx, where together they continued casting South Bronx residents over the course of the 1980s and early '90s.[71]

While some artists active during this period sought to expose and examine the implicit power dynamic between artists and the objects of their gaze—particularly those invested in extending the post-structuralist critique of ethnographic authority into the domain of visual art— Ahearn proceeded in another direction. His work was predicated on an assimilative process wherein, following an extended period of mutual investment and collaboration, the distinction between the artist and the community in which he was embedded would weaken and ultimately collapse. Ahearn wanted to "ennoble" the South Bronx community that he represented at the same time as he chose to diminish his own status by calling himself not an artist but an "itinerant portrait painter."[72] He imposed stringent ethical criteria on his practice, demanding that his work support (and not exploit or alienate) the community it represented. He cast his portraits in editions of two, giving one to each sitter as a gift. He portrayed people coming from different class, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, emphasizing their essential commonalities as human subjects. In this, he adopted a perspective that critical race theorist Paul Gilroy has since called "planetary humanism," a radical sense of solidarity between all humans that makes "solidarities based on cultural particularity appear suddenly trivial."[73] In the face of longstanding divisions

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[71] Ibid., p. 58.
[72] Ibid., p. 115.
[73] Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 17.

cutting along racial and ethnic lines, between generations, and between the South Bronx and greater New York, Ahearn represented the South Bronx as a unified whole.[74] By suspending the racial and ethnic barriers that divided the South Bronx (and the U.S. at large), Ahearn's convivial *South Bronx Hall of Fame* supported Fashion Moda's Beuysian perspective, which held that human creativity would supply the basis for universal solidarity.

For art historian Miwon Kwon, Ahearn's work exemplified a model of integration that underlies much community-based site-specific art.[75] By this she means that it hinged on "the *performative* capacity of the artist to become one with the community."[76] The assumed unity between the artist and the community carried significant implications. Kwon explains: "[T]his 'becoming one,' no matter how temporary, is presumed to be a prerequisite for an artist to be able to speak with, for, and as a legitimate representative or member of the community."[77] For her, this unity is imagined—it is a fantasy exposed as such when manifested in social space. Kwon's analysis is especially useful because it signals some of the basic limitations of Ahearn's model of community integration—including the significance of racial and ethnic difference in the community response to his work. She locates Ahearn's project within a genealogy of public art, noting affinities between Ahearn's process and the genre of community-based site specificity later known as "New Genre Public Art."[78] While she persuasively situates Ahearn's practice in the conflictual arena of public art during the 1980s, this framing does not allow her to address the significance of the institutional context in which Ahearn's life-casting process was first developed. It is not incidental that Ahearn's process and subject matter came directly out of his collaboration with Fashion Moda. Fashion Moda held an integral role in the development of Ahearn's work, creating a support structure for his project to happen, framing it, and galvanizing community support in turn. Ahearn's project also attracted community members to Fashion Moda, providing an instrumental service toward Eins's and Lewis's own integrationist ends. The forms of community outreach undertaken by the directors of Fashion Moda were essential for

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[74] Kramer, *Whose Art Is It?* p. 63.

[75] Kwon distinguishes between two models of public art emerging at the turn of the 1980s: an interventionist model, in which public artworks were designed to interrupt or antagonize their sites of display, and an integrationist model, in which public artworks assimilated into their social environments. Each conceived of the "site" of public art differently. Whereas the interventionist model conceived of the site as an architectural or physical space full of conflicts and divisions, the integrationist model conceived of the site as a social unity, as a community. See Kwon, "Sitings of Public Art," pp. 56-99.

[76] Ibid., p. 95.

[77] Ibid.

[78] See Suzanne Lacy, ed. *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).

them to begin to understand the existing contours of the local culture. It was also through collaborations like Ahearn's that they came into contact with the vibrant graffiti subculture that had been incubating in the South Bronx for several years.

**Local Culture**

The essential ingredients for *South Bronx Hall of Fame*—downtown artist, South Bronx residents, and participatory frame—were taken up again in numerous projects at Fashion Moda. The institution incubated important and lasting collaborations between Jenny Holzer and the South Bronx graffiti writer Lady Pink (Sandra Fabara) and John Fekner and the graffiti writer Crash (John Matos). Following *South Bronx Hall of Fame*, Jane Dickson's *City Maze* (1980) rooted Fashion Moda more deeply into the local community [fig. 2.7]. A collaboration between Dickson, Crash, and graffiti writer Noc 167 (Melvin Samuels, Jr.), *City Maze* consisted of a makeshift labyrinth of recycled cardboard constructed inside Fashion Moda, which then became the support for local graffiti writers to practice their craft. When it was open to the public, the cardboard maze, dense with spray-painted tags by local teens, functioned as a playground for kids on their way home from school. *City Maze* tapped into growing excitement about graffiti, hip-hop music, and b-boying (a precursor to breakdancing).[79] It was Fashion Moda's first concrete attempt to incorporate South Bronx street culture into its frame, a move that would become central to its own integration into the South Bronx cultural milieu.

The South Bronx graffiti scene was not unknown to the artists and critics working in downtown New York. Increasingly elaborate spray-painted signatures (tags) covering the city's subway cars had become ubiquitous elements of the urban infrastructure—making the subway system both a destination for graffiti-lovers and a site of scorn for City officials and neoconservative critics. The work of South Bronx's best-known graffiti writers had been profiled in the New York press over the previous five years.[80] As early as 1972, an older generation of

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[79] The period 1973-1979 in the South Bronx is recognized as the most important period in the early development of hip-hop and graffiti, after which hip-hop culture became increasingly present in mainstream media and culture. In 2016, two television series delved into that period in the South Bronx: *Vinyl* (HBO), and *The Get Down* (Netflix). In 1978, when Eins entered the South Bronx cultural scene, this scene had not yet gained widespread recognition. The first hip-hop track to gain mainstream popularity, *Rapper's Delight* by The Sugarhill Gang, was not released until October 1979. See Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, p. 131.

[80] Fab Five Freddy and Lee were profile in the *Village Voice* in 1979. This exposure led to an invitation from Italian art dealer Claudio Bruni, who invited both graffiti writers to exhibit at Galleria La Medusa in Rome. The subsequent show would be their first formal gallery exhibition. See Howard Smith and Cathy Cox, "Scenes," *Village Voice* (February 12, 1979): p. 24.

graffiti writers including Phase II (Lonnie Marrow), Admiral (Richard Admiral), and Mico (Jaime Ramirez) formed the company United Graffiti Writers, Inc. to stage exhibitions of graffiti-on-canvas at City College of New York (1972), Razor Gallery (1973), The Chicago Museum of Science and Industry (1974), and Artists Space (1975), albeit without immediate cultural or commercial impact.[81] Graffiti reappeared in the art scene at Colab's *The Times Square Show* in June 1980, where writers such as Fab Five Freddy and Lee sprayed murals directly on the interior and exterior of the temporary exhibition space. Their murals were placed into conversation with new works by previously unknown downtown artists who took inspiration from subway graffiti, including Jean-Michel Basquait (then referred to as Samo) and Keith Haring. Documentary photographer Henry Chalfant's exhaustive catalogue of images of New York's subway graffiti was exhibited at SoHo's O.K. Harris Gallery the following September. Filmmaker Charlie Ahearn, who was a founding member of Colab, twin brother of John Ahearn, husband of Dickson, and co-organizer of *The Times Square Show*, had already begun working on *Wild Style* (1982), a feature-length drama about the South Bronx graffiti scene that would become a cult classic.[82] Eins himself had been discussing the prospect of collaborating with South Bronx graffiti writers for nearly a year.[83] Despite the widespread interest in graffiti coming from the downtown art scene, this scene was unknown to most of the South Bronx graffiti writers until shortly before Dickson's exhibition.

Journalist and music critic Jeff Chang chronicles this convergence in *Can't Stop, Won't Stop*, his acclaimed history of South Bronx hip-hop culture. In the late 1970s and into 1980, much of the South Bronx graffiti scene congregated at the "Writer's Bench," an informal meeting spot at the back of uptown platform of the 149th Street Grand Concourse subway station, where writers would make plans and view each other's work on the passing train cars.[84] The Writer's Bench was only two blocks from Fashion Moda. However, as Charlie Ahearn recalls in interviews with Chang, "No graffiti artist had ever heard of Fashion Moda."[85] This would soon

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[81] See Artists Space, *United Graffiti Artists*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Artists Space, 1975).

[82] *Wild Style* is a fictional treatment of graffiti's ascendance at the turn of the 1980s. The film stars Patti Astor, Lee, Lady Pink, Fab Five Freddy, and other prominent graffiti artists of the era. Joe Lewis makes a cameo appearance.

[83] In an interview with Annette Barbasch, Eins mentions the work of Straight and Phase II, who, it should be noted, represented an older generation of graffiti writers than the group that would become associated with Fashion Moda. See Annette Barbasch, "Fashion Moda: Dialogue with Stefan Eins," *Cover*, vol. 2, no. 1 (January 1980): p. 35.

[84] Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop*, p. 119.

[85] Charlie Ahearn, quoted in Ibid., 150. Futura 2000 corroborates this point: "When Crash [a 19-year-old graffiti curator] first organized a show, in September 1980, of graffiti writers for the directors of Fashion Moda, we weren't

change. As Chang recounts, the crossover between downtown art and South Bronx graffiti was quickly facilitated in the summer of 1980, when Diego Cortez (also a founding member of Colab, and a central figure in Chapter Three) introduced Ahearn to Fab Five Freddy, who began working with Lee in 1978.[86] Unlike many of the South Bronx writers, Fab Five Freddy did not grow up there. His time and interests were split between the South Bronx and downtown Manhattan, where he frequented the nightclub scene alongside Cortez, Deborah Harry, Patti Astor, and others. With Fab Five Freddy's endorsement, Ahearn embedded himself into the notoriously guarded South Bronx graffiti scene, where he began research and preliminary shooting for *Wild Style*. Ahearn was not a passive documentarian. As Chang writes: "When he [Ahearn] met graf writers Crash and Daze, he walked them the short distance from their residences to meet Eins at the Fashion Moda."[87] It was thus through the meeting of Fab 5 Freddy and Charlie Ahearn—two strangers to the South Bronx who infiltrated the milieu—that the South Bronx's most noted graffiti writers first entered the orbit of Fashion Moda.

Dickson, Crash, and Noc 167's *City Maze* brought local graffiti writers into the gallery, altering the context (from outside to inside) and material support (from subway car to cardboard) for their work. As a participatory artwork, it was not immediately appreciated. In contrast to the nearly instant critical attention given to John Ahearn's *South Bronx Hall of Fame*, *City Maze* was met with silence by the arts press. However, it made sense within the local community. In video documentation of the exhibition, packs of local kids are shown running through the space as the camera snakes behind them. As Eins frequently told it, the maze proved so popular with the local youth that, when it was temporarily closed to control the crowds, "people were so excited that windows and a door were broken down by the crowd to gain access."[88] This anecdote was likely meant to underscore the attraction of the exhibition for the local community—functioning as proof of the institution's relevance to the community. It may have also served to indicate Dickson, Crash, and Noc 167's success in producing an unpretentious context for creative action. Interpreted as a symptom—that is, as a displaced expression of latent anxiety—the physical destruction of the gallery's facade could have also signalled unease over the enclosure of graffiti

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even aware of SoHo." See Futura 2000, quoted in Suzi Gablik, "Report from New York: The Graffiti Question," *Art in America* (October 1982): p. 36.
[86] Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, p. 149.
[87] Ibid., p. 150.
[88] Eins, letter to Mr. John Maggiotto, National Endowment for the Arts, November 19, 1982 (Fashion Moda Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, series II, subseries B, box 3, folder 43). See also Lovelace, "S. Bronx Art: There Goes the Neighborhood."

art within the gallery space. *City Maze* did not merely provide a participatory framework for community engagement, but also an authorized and legitimate setting for a subculture that, in 1980, was largely performed as illegal and unsolicited public art. It hinted at a structure of co-optation that critics would later diagnose. Dickson, Crash, and Noc 167 did not exactly give graffiti the white cube treatment. Upending the modes of display, conventions of spectatorship, and rules of decorum typically expected within art institutions, their exhibition occupied an intermediary zone between the street and the gallery. *City Maze* built upon Fashion Moda's integrationist project by welcoming the participation of the local community *and* incorporating its most contested cultural innovation.[89] If *City Maze* was key to establishing links between Fashion Moda and the South Bronx graffiti scene, it would only be a matter of months before these links were solidified in the historical record.

Since the early 1970s, graffiti had been at the center of a controversy playing out at City Hall and in the press. New York had been waging its "War on Graffiti" since 1972, when Mayor John Lindsay (1966-1973) initiated a multi-pronged anti-graffiti program which, as Chang recalls, "called not only for restriction of markers and aerosol paints, increased security measures and use of chemicals, solvents and paints to deter graf, but the deployment of psychological measures" aiming to scapegoat graffiti writers for the city's social and economic problems.[90] In an article published in the neoconservative quarterly *Public Interest* in 1979, Harvard sociologist Nathan Glazer surveyed the ongoing problem of policing subway graffiti in New York, where he expressed not only the neoconservative perspective on graffiti, but also its racist overtones.[91] Faced with train cars dense with tags, the commuter, wrote Glazer, "is assaulted continuously, not only by the evidence that every subway car has been vandalized, but by the inescapable knowledge that the environment he must endure for an hour or more a day is uncontrolled and uncontrollable, and that anyone can invade it to do whatever damage and mischief the mind suggests."[92] For Glazer, graffiti was a problem precisely because it indicated that the subway system could escape police protection. It functioned as a kind of psychological assault on

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[89] In 1978-1979, Ray Ross's archive of photographs titled *The Face of Jazz* was the only Fashion Moda exhibition not authored by a white artist or group with ties to the downtown art scene. In 1980, the institution's programming focus shifted to foreground local artists, as well as collaborations with local residents: Exhibitions such as *South Bronx Art, Projects, Others* and Community School District #9's *Science/Math Projects* joined *City Maze* and *Graffiti Art Success For America* (discussed in the next section) to support South Bronx culture.

[90] Mayor John Lindsay, quoted in Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, p. 134.

[91] Nathan Glazer, "On Subway Graffiti in New York," *Public Interest*, no. 54 (Winter 1979): pp. 3-11.

[92] Ibid., p. 4.

anxious (and presumably white and middle class) commuters, threatening them with the looming presence of violence. Describing the "litany of proposals" to solve the perceived graffiti problem, from resurfacing train cars with spray-paint-resistant finishes to providing summer jobs in graffiti removal as a form of soft punishment, to increasing overnight surveillance of the train yards where most of the painting was done, Glazer dwells on two. The first, favoured by Sanford Garelik, head of the New York City transit police, involved "intensive work, on a one-to-one basis by youth workers (students in psychology and sociology)."[93] This proposal essentially advocated for the development of "a 'big brother' program that would involve young graffitists in other activities and introduce them to young adults who would help find other outlets for their energies."[94] Glazer himself imagined a situation in which the promise of harsh punishment for juveniles would function as a deterrent: "Would a few days in the detention center have more effective results than a few weekend sentences to erase graffiti? What would be the problems in trying to test such an approach? In trying to institute it?"[95]

Glazer's hard-lined stance on graffiti was premised on the racist assumption that graffiti (a practice predominantly associated with young Black and Latino men) was a gateway to violent crime.[96] Insinuating that graffiti writers were "part of one world of uncontrollable predators," the same world as "the criminals who occasionally rob, rape, assault, and murder passengers," he provided an un-researched justification for the zero-tolerance response to vandalism, drug possession, and other petty crimes already instituted in New York. The theory that a strong police response to petty crime could lead to a drop in violent crime became known as "broken windows theory," a term coined by criminologists James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling in 1982.[97] Borrowing the hackneyed sentiment that "if a window in a building is broken and is left unrepaired, all the rest of the windows will soon be broken," they argued that "serious street crime flourishes in areas in which disorderly behavior goes unchecked."[98] Broken windows theory suggested that increased foot patrol in neighbourhoods with high crime rates would lead

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[93] Ibid., p. 7.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid., p. 10.
[96] As Chang points out, graffiti in the late 1970s was surprisingly multi-ethnic in composition: "First practiced largely by inner-city youths of color, by the mid-'70s the second generation of writers was more integrated than the army." See Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, p. 119.
[97] George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson, "Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety," *The Atlantic* (March 1982), pp. 29-38, republished online: http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1982/03/broken-windows/304465/.
[98] Ibid.

to the return to order. Not only did this theory bolster policies leading to the mass incarceration of Black and Latino men in the U.S. (such as New York's controversial stop-and-frisk program), but it also masked the most overwhelming and obvious cause for increased urban disorder in underserved neighbourhoods such as the South Bronx: the stripping away of social services conducted under the benign neglect policy of the previous decade. It extracted the class dimension of instability felt within such neighbourhoods, laying the burden of responsibility on the citizens, rather than the municipality or the State.

In the context of the City's war on graffiti, Fashion Moda's celebration of graffiti art was widely understood as an intervention meant to direct the negative energy around graffiti toward legal and potentially profitable ends.[99] It provided an alternative to the law-and-order response proposed by Glazer and adopted by Mayor Ed Koch (1978-89), who amped up New York's anti-graffiti campaign with "a new $6.5 million program to discourage graffiti, complete with trained guard dogs to attack artists working illegally in the train yards."[100] After Dickson, Crash, and Noc 167's *City Maze*, Eins and Lewis turned Fashion Moda over to Crash, who convinced several prominent members of the South Bronx graffiti scene to reformat their work for the gallery context. The institution supplied spray paint, plywood, canvas, and the promise of publicity for the young graffiti writers. Crash, then just 19 years old, acted as curator. When entering the exhibition, titled *GAS (Graffiti Art Success for America)*, visitors were confronted with *Danger: Live Artists* (1980), a stencilled wall painting by John Fekner, whose *Word-Signs* (1976 -)—stencilled messages related to urban decay in public spaces around New York—had already gained an international reputation. Consisting of the words "Danger Live Artists" stencilled in large red font and framed by green lightning bolts, Fekner's work played on the vernacular of urban signage ("Danger: Live Wires") to lampoon the perceived public safety threat associated with graffiti. The rest of the gallery was dense with canvases and panels by Ali, Crash, Disco 105.7, Futura 2000, Kel 139th, Lady Pink, Lyndah One, Mitch, Zephyr, and others. Lady Pink, Mitch, Kel 139th, and Disco 105.7 reproduced tags that might have otherwise been inscribed on the sides of subway cars, whereas Ali and Futura 2000 moved in the direction of

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[99] For example, see Elizabeth Hess, "Take the A Train," *Village Voice* (November 12-18, 1980), p. 87. Glazer even mentions efforts to reform graffiti writers as legitimate artists, only to propose why it wouldn't work. See Glazer, "On Subway Graffiti in New York," p. 8.
[100] Gablik, "Report from New York: The Graffiti Question," p. 34.

abstraction.[101] Elizabeth Hess, who visited the show, noted not only the stylistic differences between artists, but also the recurrence of certain themes and imagery. As she writes, "A collective, idealized vision of the city shows up quite often in postcard skylines under perfect sunsets, in bright cracker-jacks colors."[102] Extending beyond the confines of the gallery, the exhibition also included a new mural painted by Crash on the side wall of a nearby convenience store.[103]

In a recent interview, Lewis recalls the transitional moment marked by *GAS*: "There was a close community already, so I wouldn't say that we established anyone, but we were a conduit. There was a synergy, a moment in time when things connected almost by themselves."[104] Lewis nearly removes Fashion Moda from the equation, suggesting that the institution's intervention was insignificant to the international spotlight that would soon fall on the South Bronx graffiti scene. Curated by a respected South Bronx graffiti writer, the exhibition expressed a desire for enduring support coming from within the graffiti scene itself. In this sense, the institution functioned as a platform for local graffiti writers to amplify their own culture. However, as Lewis admits, Fashion Moda also served as a "conduit." Conduits are infrastructural elements connecting distinct sources. With existing ties to SoHo and positive attention from influential critics like Lucy R. Lippard and Richard Goldstein, editor-in-chief of the *Village Voice*, Fashion Moda was well placed to draw graffiti into the realm of the downtown art scene. *GAS* introduced the South Bronx graffiti scene to conventional artistic surfaces, giving writers a chance to see their work in a legitimate setting. The exhibition was an experiment in extracting graffiti from the urban context and reformatting it for a system conditioned by bourgeois cultural values. As Rollins would later express: "It is difficult to accept it [graffiti] on white gallery walls. Then it becomes part of the commodity market. The social context is what gives it its meaning, and this is being ripped from it."[105] The art system would find a market for graffiti. The question remained whether graffiti would change the values underpinning that system.

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[101] Hess, "Take the A Train," p. 87.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Lewis, quoted in Tam, "Interview with Joe Lewis," p. 72.
[105] Tim Rollins, quoted in Gablik, "Report from New York: The Graffiti Question," p. 37.

**Beyond the South Bronx**

Eins and Lewis never identified Fashion Moda as a South Bronx space. They repeated in press interviews and grant applications that, although their headquarters was in the South Bronx, they wanted the Fashion Moda idea to "ripple out from the New York community, into the national community, and, subsequently, into the world."[106] This statement conveyed Fashion Moda's imagined project of global integration. Like a tidal wave, the Fashion Moda idea would increase in force as it radiated outward from the institution's South Bronx storefront, and with this force it would eventually engulf the world's cultures. It is worth repeating that the Fashion Moda idea was not reducible to the finite set of practices supported by the directors of Fashion Moda. On the contrary, the Fashion Moda idea was based on the abstract notion that human creativity could be found anywhere. In the spirit of Beuys, it was imagined that once globally integrated, the sense of cross-cultural solidarity invigorated by the Fashion Moda idea would have a transformative and ultimately emancipatory effect. While Eins's and Lewis's proposal for global integration implied a kind of contagion, it was highly centralized in practice. Eins and Lewis began to act on this proposal in 1980 with a series of lecture tours and exhibitions across the U.S.[107] These franchise and off-site projects were administered from the South Bronx office shared by Eins and Lewis, and the artists they involved tended to be ones previously included in exhibitions or programs at the South Bronx storefront. The institution's first attempt to move beyond the South Bronx was not far away.

Only one month after *GAS*, in December 1980, Fashion Moda was invited to organize an exhibition at the New Museum. There, Eins and Lewis staged a kind of retrospective of the previous three years of programming [fig. 2.8]. The exhibition included plaster busts by Ahearn and Torres, drawings by Dickson, spray-paintings by Crash, Lady Pink, Futura 2000, Zephyr, Fekner, and others, as well as projects by Christy Rupp, Polly Ester Nation, Marianne Edwards, Ray Ross, and others who had already shown at Fashion Moda. Artworks by Eins, Lewis, and Scott, as well as newcomers including Keith Haring, Marc Brasz and Candace Hill-Montgomery, were also included. A total of fifty artists ranging in age from 15 to 62 displayed works in a ramshackle installation that effectively "de-sanctif[ied] the Museum setting," as recalled by New

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[106] For example, see Eins, letter to Mr. John Maggiotto, National Endowment for the Arts. See also Matthews, "Fashion Moda Is Coming to New Orleans," p. 10.

[107] The earliest franchise projects were staged in New Orleans, Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Francisco. See Fashion Moda, press release for National Exhibitions and Events Fall 1981, October/November 1981 (Fashion Moda Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, series I, subseries A, box 1, folder 2).

Museum curator Lynn Gumpert, who explains: "The pictures that were framed were hung askew, works were seemingly installed helter skelter, nail holes were left unspackled. Formal labels were eschewed for hand-written Magic Marker ones scrawled directly on the wall in four languages."[108] Even the museum's odour defied convention: Hill-Montgomery's installation integrated a pot of cooking chitlins (the Southern dish associated with African American cuisine), permeating the museum with its potent odour for the duration of the exhibition. Fashion Moda's exhibition at the New Museum displayed the chaotic and informal style of exhibition design favoured by many artists emerging at the turn of the 1980s in New York. It was part of a string of well-attended and widely discussed exhibitions to translate the values of aesthetic pluralism into the domain of curatorial practice. Others included Colab's *The Times Square Show* and *New York/New Wave*, curated by Diego Cortez at P.S.1, both of which will be discussed in Chapter Three.

Fashion Moda's exhibition was the first installment of a three-part series titled *EVENTS*. The second was carried out by Taller Boricua, a Puerto Rican artists' workshop based in East Harlem which emerged out of the Art Workers Coalition in 1968. As mentioned in Chapter One, the third was offered to Colab, but the group backed out at the last minute following a conflict between some of its members and New Museum director Marcia Tucker. Filling the void opened up by Colab's cancelation was an exhibition titled "Artists Invite Artists," which featured works by artists selected by members of the New Museum's Minority Artists' Dialog. *EVENTS* marked an important break for the New Museum: it was the first time in the institution's short history that it gave artists free rein in its exhibition space. In an interview published just before the opening of Fashion Moda's exhibition, Tucker distinguished the New Museum from the alternative spaces it was predominantly associated with (and against which it competed for NEA grants). She explained that the New Museum developed administrative and organizational policies to create a buffer between the institution and the artists invited to stage exhibitions. Staff curators exercised complete responsibility for the selection and arrangement of artworks in New Museum exhibitions.[109] Tucker noted that the museum's commitment to curatorial control had been the cause of much conflict between the institution and artists working downtown, many of whom were calling on the institution to simply give over its space to artists, as was

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[108] Lynn Gumpert, "Observations on 'Events'," in *Events: Fashion Moda, Taller Boricua, Artists Invite Artists*, p. 10.
[109] Marcia Tucker, quoted in Troy, "The New Museum as *Kunsthalle*," p. 21.

commonplace in the city's alternative spaces. As she continued in the catalogue released several months after the exhibition series, *EVENTS* "came about as a result of continued conversations, often heated, about artists' intervention in or control of our exhibition policy."[110] The impetus for *EVENTS* was not unrelated to Tucker's comments quoted earlier in this chapter about the New Museum's newfound sensitivity to racial and ethnic diversity. As critics were apt to point out, none of the groups invited to participate in *EVENTS* called themselves alternative spaces, each deliberately based itself outside of SoHo, and both Fashion Moda and Taller Boricua were known for their support of artists of colour.[111]

  *EVENTS* was thus as much an experiment in relinquishing curatorial control as it was a means of responding to the call for racial and ethnic diversity within New York's alternative art sphere. In other words, it was a proactive response to the multi-faceted crisis of relevance facing New York's established institutions at the turn of the 1980s. Gumpert's catalogue essay positioned the exhibition as a manifestation of the institution's commitment to change.[112] Tucker went further to describe the foundational institutional changes precipitated by *EVENTS*:

> Ultimately, what has resulted from "EVENTS" is something we could not have predicted, or even hoped for. While we anticipated a confrontation with esthetic viewpoints that were not our own, and hoped to share these viewpoints with a public accustomed to the mainstream (albeit in our case, the radical fringe of that mainstream), we did not expect the kind of real change in possibilities that this exhibition represents. The Museum's familiarity with the work of artists coming from completely different cultural, political, and esthetic perspectives has greatly enlarged the scope of our own understanding; alliances were formed which color the things we see and the way we see them; boundaries shifted, cracked, and ultimately broke down, so that ideas which were initially foreign are now part of an expanded vocabulary and a broader vision. Most importantly, friendships were

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[110] Marcia Tucker, "Introduction," in *Events: Fashion Moda, Taller Boricua, Artists Invite Artists*, p. 5.

[111] See Thomas Lawson, "Fashion Moda. The New Museum," *Artforum* (March 1981): p. 81.

[112] Gumpert explains: "For this kind of institution to remain viable, it must continually question its own function." See Gumpert, "Observations on 'Events'," p. 17. This reiterated an earlier claim made by Tucker: "I think that the idea of what a 'museum' is is changing, and what I hope The New Museum can do is be flexible enough to allow change, to grow as things change internally, and to meet the needs of the art – which is, of course, more important than anything else." See Tucker, quoted in Troy, "The New Museum as *Kunsthalle*," p. 21.

made and bonds between us strengthened, enabling us to work together in new and better ways.[113]

Tucker's statement reflects a desire to present the institution in a new light at a historical moment when it (along with many of the alternative spaces founded during the previous decade) was criticized for its elitism, exclusivity, and ingrained racial bias. If *EVENTS* was to mark the beginning of a new era for the New Museum, it would be an era in which the museum could support a greater range of cultural, political, and aesthetic positions—that is to say, positions not entrenched in the masculine and European avant-garde cultural heritage that was influential to many in the alternative art sphere during the previous decade. In claiming that boundaries had been broken and foreign ideas had been assimilated into the New Museum's institutional vision, Tucker positioned the museum as a newly pluralist institution, one in which a diversity of practices, perspectives, and subjects could be supported, cultivated, opened up to new audiences, and conferred with cultural legitimacy.[114] She thus indirectly confirmed the successful integration of the Fashion Moda idea into the New Museum's public identity. It is difficult to gauge the actual impact of *EVENTS* on the New Museum's institutional vision.[115] Nevertheless, Tucker's rhetorical appeal to the values of inclusivity, access, and diversity is significant: it tells us that these terms were thought to represent a sufficient response to the criticisms the institution was facing. By accepting Fashion Moda's terms, the New Museum confirmed their symbolic value.[116]

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[113] Tucker, "Introduction," p. 6.

[114] Ibid., p. 5.

[115] The institution followed up with a second iteration of *EVENTS* in 1983, where exhibitions were staged by the Latino/a photography collective En Foco and the feminist publishing collective *Heresies*. See New Museum, *Events: En Foco, Heresies Collective*, exhibition catalogue (New York: New Museum, 1983).

[116] Tucker was vocal about the New Museum's power to provide credibility and visibility to artists working outside the art establishment, but she was less forthcoming about the credibility those artists could bring to the New Museum. Colab's last-minute withdrawal from the exhibition series was tied to this tension. Reporting in *The New York Times*, Grace Glueck stated that the group believed "that it stood to gain less from the collaboration than its host," thus characterizing the exhibition as not just an exchange but also an unequal one. See Glueck, "The New Collectives – Reaching for a wider Audience," *The New York Times*, Section 2 (February 1, 1981): p. 27. Alan W. Moore has since nuanced this point: "From the point of view of the group, the museum had turned down our proposal. Those negotiating the show reported that the New Museum refused to approve the idea of removing a blocked-up display window on 14th Street – an important mainly Hispanic low-priced shopping street – and putting in a soup kitchen for the duration of the exhibition." See Moore, *Art Gangs*, p. 105. While it is unclear why the New Museum refused this proposal, it does jeopardize the creative autonomy supposedly allotted to participants in the *EVENTS* series. Was the New Museum guilty of instrumentalizing its collaborators in *EVENTS* to mask over its own deficiencies? Colab's withdrawal from *EVENTS* casts into relief the basic ideological distinction between Colab and Fashion Moda. Although Colab was ideologically inconsistent and divided from within (as explored in Chapter

**A South Bronx Invasion?**

If Fashion Moda supplied the New Museum with much needed credibility and a spike of racial and ethnic diversity, the New Museum lent Fashion Moda and the artists it showcased a level of broad media exposure they had not yet attained in the South Bronx. Some critics read the show as a sign of a foreign invasion into the downtown milieu.[117] Grace Glueck noted that "Reactions to the show . . . ranged from 'unspeakable' and 'they should have been toilet-trained earlier' to 'fascinating' and 'of real cultural significance'."[118] The metaphor of the graffiti artist as wild, untrained, and dislocated in his or her new habitat recurred in press reviews, recalling the perspective taken by Glazer and other neoconservative opponents of Black and Latino/a culture. In the art critical discourse, it both served to reinforce stereotypes about the South Bronx as an "urban jungle" isolated from the rest of New York and also to underscore the supposed authenticity of the work on display.[119] In a feature article published in the *Village Voice* shortly after the New Museum show, Richard Goldstein surveyed the public controversy surrounding subway graffiti, defended its historical significance, and chronicled its entry into the New York art establishment. While Goldstein had a longstanding interest in subway graffiti and a more thorough analysis of the works than most, his narrative of the New Museum exhibition was tethered to the confrontation of the South Bronx's graffiti writers with their institutional and commercial success: "'I sold a piece tonight. For $200'. Futura is dressed in downtown formals—a white Lacoste over baggy black slacks and clean white sneakers. He's accompanied by his father, his cousin, and his girlfriend Rennie. The crowd is in a pre-Christmas, buying mood."[120] Goldstein's text was prescient.

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One), its members openly criticized institutions that treated artists as mere content providers. In archival documents and meeting minutes, administrators like Tucker and Alanna Heiss (The Clocktower, P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center) were discussed with much more vitriol than commercial art dealers precisely because administrators symbolized the problem of bureaucratic inefficiency in the artist-run system, as well as the diversion of state and federal funding for the arts away from artists. Fashion Moda took no such hard lines. Its utopia of integration was premised on the idea that the Fashion Moda idea should affect all institutions and individuals. The adoption of the Fashion Moda idea would, without exception, indicate its success.

[117] For example, William Zimmer writes: "The artists and community people whose ideas shape the cross cultural organization have now sent some specimens south to the New Museum, and it's a feisty aggregate." See Zimmer, "Fashion Moda," *SoHo News* (October 11-17, 1979): p. 44.

[118] Glueck, "The New Collectives – Reaching for a wider Audience," p. 27.

[119] See Julie Sze, *Noxious New York: The Racial Politics of Urban Health and Environmental Justice* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), p. 66.

[120] Richard Goldstein, "On Zephyr, Futura, On Crash and Ali: In Praise of Graffiti – The Fire Down Below," *Village Voice* (December 24-30, 1980): p. 58.

Futura would soon be courted by the established blue-chip commercial gallerists on 57th Street and SoHo, as well as the younger generation of gallerists who were starting to open storefronts in the East Village. Futura's appearance at the New Museum was followed by an invitation to make a commissioned mural for the apartment of no wave film star Patti Astor. What began as an informal "Art Opening and Barbecue" celebrating the mural became the unintended launch of Fun Gallery, which Astor co-directed with art dealer Bill Stelling until 1985. As Astor recalls:

> Someone glanced out of the front window overlooking the street, and an amazed "Oh, shit!!!" drew us all to the spot. In front of our collective astounded eyes, Diego Cortez and major uptown dude Jeffrey Deitch, in his perfectly tailored Brooks Brothers suit, were getting out of a cab!! Delicately picking their way through the heaped up garbage cans, Diego and Jeffrey were heading to the door. We all cracked up. Soon I was handing ribs to the art buyer for Citibank![121]

Deitch's presence at Astor's apartment show signalled not only a mixing of uptown and downtown, but also a business opportunity in the making. After formalizing Fun Gallery, Astor and Stelling would quickly sign artists like Fab Five Freddy, Lee, Basquait, Haring, and Kenny Scharf, becoming the downtown nucleus for graffiti during the early 1980s. Futura noted the appeal of Fun Gallery over the more established commercial galleries: "SoHo and 57th Street intimidate me, which is why I like the Fun Gallery. I don't want to work on demand; Fun doesn't use me as a token figure. I'd be afraid to be in a big gallery where they would be trying to make money off of me—those people don't even ride the subways! My art's not for exclusive buyers."[122] Fun Gallery modeled its informal style of presentation and artist-centred philosophy directly after Fashion Moda, in turn establishing a template for other commercial start-ups in the East Village. New galleries such as Gracie Mansion (1981-1991) and Civilian Warfare (1981-1988) would also solicit artists directly from Fashion Moda exhibitions, providing a gritty and unpretentious context for artists to begin their professional careers. Observing the rise of the East Village gallery district from their headquarters in the South Bronx, Eins and Lewis recognized

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[121] Patti Astor, "Oh What Fun! Excerpts from Gallerist Patti Astor's New Memoir," *Paper*, online (November 13, 2012): http://www.papermag.com/oh-what-fun-excerpts-from-gallerist-patti-astors-new-memoir-1426662223.html.
[122] Futura 2000, quoted in Gablik, "Report from New York: The Graffiti Question," p. 36.

their historical impact. Eins often noted that Fashion Moda "role-modeled the East Village," finding pride of place in "bridging the gap into the commercial art world."[123] Fun Gallery, Gracie Mansion, Civilian Warfare, and other East Village galleries quickly established relationships with major art collectors and museums, leading to inflated prices for many of the artists they represented. As the gap between the South Bronx and downtown New York narrowed, the distance between subway graffiti and the new genre of *graffiti art* continued to spread.[124] In the process, the varnish of authenticity attributed to graffiti was wearing thin.

Soon after the graffiti writers made their first museum appearance, critics began to speculate about their impending co-optation. The most patronizing represented the graffiti artists as mere casualties of the art system. Questioning the commercial success of graffiti in 1982, critic Suzi Gablik wondered:

> "Does all this produce a conflict of values? Is this just another case of a mass-consumption capitalist economy expanding into a taboo area of transforming private behavior into a commodity? Are these artists being rescued from a life of ineffectuality and insecurity, or have they sauntered out onto a limb that ultimately will not support them but only breed new expectations, false hopes and disappointments?[125]

To be sure, there was reason for concern. For example, many of the local artists who did not immediately sign with commercial galleries in Manhattan, such as Crash, Daze, Noc 167, and Lady Pink, turned to Graffiti Above Ground, a company formed by Mel Neulander and Joyce Towbin in 1981 to capitalize on the institutional success of graffiti. Neulander made his motivations known: "An article came out asking 'Is it art, or isn't it art?' When that happens, you can always be sure that, two years later, it's art. So I thought, lemme get onto the bandwagon. For me it was a money-making proposition."[126] Gablik struggled to understand how the very

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[123] Eins, Fashion Moda Historical Overview, undated (c. 1990s) (Fashion Moda Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, series I, subseries A, box 1, folder 1). See also: Randi Hoffman, "Biology=Life=Art: An Interview with Stefan Eins."
[124] Graffiti art was showing up in the city's private collections and most revered museums at a time when subway graffiti remained a primary target of the City's broken windows policies.
[125] Gablik, "Report from New York: The Graffiti Question," p. 35.
[126] Mel Neulander, quoted in Ibid., p. 37.

category of graffiti was reconfigured by what she called the "success ethic."[127] For her, the art establishment's recent appeal to the values of cultural and aesthetic pluralism only expanded its capacity to reformat culture (now diverse subcultures) for the capitalist economy. Drawing on the left critique of consumer culture that informed much art criticism at the turn of the 1980s, her text was written as a defence of graffiti against its exploitation by the capitalist class. However, her apprehension about graffiti's entry into the art market was tied to a fetishization of origins that positioned graffiti, then widely understood as an emblem of urban Black and Latino/a culture, beyond the market economy, a premise that was both theoretically problematic and historically false.[128] Sociologists have shown how, especially after the 1970s, marketing research was increasingly aimed at inner-city youth, where it was discovered that "the twin burdens of racial humiliation and the agony of poverty in an affluent age influenced young black people's interest in commodities."[129] The position underlying Gablik's perspective—that graffiti's authenticity was co-opted by capitalist culture—posited an explicit division between South Bronx and downtown New York, reaffirming the image of a South Bronx invasion that held sway over much of the critical discourse on graffiti art in New York.[130]

The concept of invasion animated in the art critical discourse on South Bronx art contrasted strongly with the concept of integration articulated by New Museum staff. For the critics, the assimilation of Black and Latino/a artists from the South Bronx into the downtown art milieu was essentially a uni-directional process: the artists' entry into the new milieu would necessarily lead to their subordination by the art establishment.[131] Contrarily, New Museum staff held that the supposedly harmonious co-existence of South Bronx and downtown art was proof

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[127] Ibid., p. 34.

[128] Reflecting on five-years of ethnographic research in a comparably underserved neighbourhood in Philadelphia, sociologist Carl H. Nightingale argued that "Inner-city kids' *inclusion* in mainstream America's mass market has been important in determining those kids' response to the economic and racial *exclusion* they face in other parts of their lives. And, indeed, kids' experience of exclusion and of the associated painful memories has made their participation in mass culture particularly urgent and enthusiastic, for the culture of consumption has given them a seductive means to compensate for their feelings of failure." See Carl H. Nightingale, *On the Edge: A History of Poor Black Children and Their American Dreams* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), p. 135.

[129] Ibid., p. 144.

[130] Writing for *Flash Art*, Italian art critic Francesca Alinovi was less subtle: "The blacks, sanctified by the success of graffiti, have literally invaded the New York art scene, sparking off unpredictable chemical chain reactions in the painting milieu. For the first time in history, after taking over the field of music and dance, the blacks have moved in to conquer the art world." See Alinovi, "Twenty-First Century Slang," p. 23.

[131] While this view effectively underscores how the pressure to perform in commercial contexts reshapes values and practices, it was predicated on a vision of racial and ethnic isolation that bore little resemblance to reality. The South Bronx was not entirely foreign to Manhattan. Desires for success and mainstream validation were shared by graffiti writers in the South Bronx and young artists in downtown Manhattan.

of a new cultural pluralism in the art establishment. While the institution and the critics pointed to radically different consequences for the downtown embrace of graffiti, both the idea of a South Bronx invasion and the idea of harmonious co-existence were predicated on the assumption that South Bronx culture was distinct and singular, categorically separate from the culture of downtown New York.

The appeal to authenticity and cultural separation was out of step with what anthropologist James Clifford called the "unprecedented overlay of traditions" characteristic of cultural developments in the twentieth century.[132] Historian Russell Jacoby observed this phenomenon within the U.S. context, arguing that "in highly organized American society the maintenance of unique cultures is improbable; neither the means nor the requisite isolation exist."[133] In Jacoby's analysis, the discourse on cultural diversity in the U.S. was significant for turning political discourse inward toward subcultural differences between communities and ethnic groups. This turn effectively masked the broader homogenizing force of American consumer culture: "The drumbeat of cultural diversity covers an unwelcome truth: cultural differences are diminishing, not increasing. For better or worse only one culture thrives in the United States, the culture of business, work and consuming."[134] The appeal to cultural difference tended to render capitalism—the system that turns cultural differences into class inequalities—as an unquestioned and incontestable backdrop. In the U.S. context, the discourse of cultural pluralism tended to secure dominant culture by locating antagonisms *within* the system but never against it. In this sense, the New Museum's "expanded vocabulary and . . . broader vision" was less progressive than de-politicizing.

The presence of South Bronx art in the mainstream art world put critics in the position of being either for or against the inclusion of artists and cultural practices incongruous with avant-garde tradition, for or against the commercial success of artists who had been historically excluded from the art establishment. The circular debate about South Bronx art staged between institutional and critical voices recreated the distance between the South Bronx and downtown Manhattan that Fashion Moda was trying to eliminate. Despite Eins's and Lewis's continued claims that "graffiti art never dominated the exhibition schedule at Fashion Moda," the

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[132] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 9.
[133] Jacoby, "The Myth of Multiculturalism," p. 123.
[134] Ibid., p. 122.

institution's place in the historical record was largely subsumed by the success of graffiti; it is largely remembered as a graffiti gallery.[135] As critics questioned the merits of the cultural practices promoted by Fashion Moda, they increasingly let the institution's own politics of integration off the hook.

**Ideology beyond Ideology**

Despite strong evidence that graffiti art was being tokenized by institutions seeking cultural diversity and instrumentalized for the sake of quick profit by dodgy enterprises like Graffiti Above Ground, the directors of Fashion Moda remained publicly supportive of graffiti's entry into the mainstream. This may have had to do with their understanding of the material interests of the graffiti writers they encountered, as well as the tough conditions these writers were likely to face if a career in art was not an option. On another level, it should be noted that the local graffiti scene's interest in gaining wider visibility and financial reward aligned with Fashion Moda's interest in affirming the universality of human creativity. If South Bronx graffiti—a practice denigrated in the mainstream press and at City Hall—could be valued as legitimate culture by the art establishment, it would be proof that the Fashion Moda idea was catching on. The scope of the institutions and galleries—both what they showed and whom they supported— would certainly be wider. For Eins, graffiti's integration into the art establishment marked the definitive "end of modern art."[136] The end of modern art, for him, came with the levelling of cultural values, which he attributed to the concept of aesthetic pluralism. The rise of aesthetic pluralism contributed to a broader understanding of what counted as human creativity. And this broader definition of creativity—affirmed in local instances—provided the substance for planetary solidarity, priming the people for a genuinely pluralist culture. This was the escalating procession implied by the Fashion Moda idea.

At the turn of the 1980s, the discourse on cultural pluralism in the U.S. was largely influenced by the book *Beyond the Melting Pot: Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*, written by (of all people) Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan in 1963. In this book, Glazer and Moynihan argued against the pervasive vision of the U.S. as a melting pot of immigrant cultures (one that would eventually lead to a distinct American

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[135] Hoffman, "Biology=Life=Art: An Interview with Stefan Eins," p. 13.
[136] Eins, Fashion Moda Historical Overview. See also Tam, "Interview with Joe Lewis," p. 72.

ethnicity). For them, the distinct character of ethnic groups was key to understanding their place in the social and economic stratification of the U.S. They argued that the U.S. was not a melting pot, but a kind of pluralist society. Their argument hinged on the intractable character of ethnicity: despite all effort at assimilation, ethnic differences would always remain. Turning to the cosmopolitan context of New York, they argued that ethnic differences were the root cause of gross social inequalities in the city. Black and Puerto Rican constituencies found themselves at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder not because of the structural violence disproportionately waged against them, but because, for example, Black constituencies were limited by an ingrained "incapacity for business" and Puerto Ricans were plagued by a general unwillingness to treat illness.[137] Glazer and Moynihan presented a vision of a multicultural city in which racial and ethnic differences were tolerated and supported, but their vision justified inequality as predestined. They implied that the supposedly self-destructive attitudes and behaviour of marginalized ethnic groups was at the core of the inequalities they faced. The role of the state in class and racial oppression was, in their analysis, of secondary concern.[138]

Glazer and Moynihan's book advanced what, in 1981, sociologist Stephen Steinberg would call "the ethnic myth": the idea that "cultural values and ethnic traits are the primary determinants of the economic destiny of racial and ethnic groups in America."[139] For Steinberg, ethnic pluralism in the U.S. was the result of the long history of "conquest, slavery and exploitation of foreign labor."[140] Recovering the dimension of class and racial oppression underlying the social stratification of the U.S., Steinberg offered a strong materialist response to Glazer and Moynihan. It was apparent to him that Glazer and Moynihan masked the role of economic and social policy in producing the problems that turned the Black and Puerto Rican constituencies into interest groups. Steinberg's work went against the grain of the *doxa*, which praised ethnic pluralism and cultural diversity as the cornerstone of liberal democracy.

I have already discussed Glazer's stubborn refusal to consider local issues such as subway graffiti as symptoms of systemic problems in which the state played a determining role. Glazer's policy suggestions, informed by his sociology of ethnicity, consisted solely of

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[137] Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1970), p. 34; p. 119.
[138] Ibid., p. 116.
[139] Stephen Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981), back cover.
[140] Ibid., p. 5.

economically feasible means of punishing and reforming offenders. Glazer engendered what, in *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (1960), sociologist Daniel Bell had called "prudence": "the focus, *within a framework of liberal values*, on problem solving as a means of remedying social ills and inadequacies."[141] Bell's book influentially argued that the complexity of the modern world, coupled with the trauma of the Second World War, had led to the exhaustion of the nineteenth-century ideologies of Marxism and socialism: "Few serious minds believe any longer that one can set down 'blueprints' and through 'social engineering' bring about a new utopia of social harmony."[142] His real target was Marxism and Marxist intellectuals working in the U.S. and Western Europe. He argued that Marxism's all-or-nothing position against the capitalist mode of production had lost both its credibility and its desirability in the West: "there is today a rough consensus among intellectuals on political issues: the acceptance of a Welfare State; the desirability of decentralized power; a system of mixed economy and of political pluralism. In that sense, too, the ideological age has ended."[143] The hegemony of third-way liberalism and political prudence pushed Marxism and socialism off the table, so to speak, in official U.S. political discourse. Bell quoted President John F. Kennedy (1961-1963) in his 1988 "Afterword," effectively encapsulating this emergent political sensibility: "What is at stake in our economic decisions today is not some grand warfare of rival ideologies which will sweep the country with passion but the practical management of a modern economy."[144] The rhetorical exclusion of ideology from the domain of political decision-making was, of course, merely a means of masking the capitalist ideology underlying political prudence. The "end of ideology" thesis was picked up by neoconservative and neoliberal pundits and policy-makers to delegitimize collective struggles against the interests they served.

In 1981, Eins claimed that Fashion Moda aspired toward "communication beyond ideology."[145] This statement resonates with Bell's end-of-ideology thesis, which by the turn of the 1980s would become a core element of the neoliberal common sense in the U.S. Fashion Moda's Beuysian model of social change diverged from the model promoted by the end-of-ideologists in important ways. For the end-of-ideologists, economic feasibility provided the basis for a new political realism, whereas for Fashion Moda, the creative enterprise of humans

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[141] Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology*, p. 419.
[142] Ibid., p. 402.
[143] Ibid.
[144] President John F. Kennedy, quoted in Ibid., p. 419.
[145] Eins, quoted in Tomkins, "The Art World Alternatives," p. 56.

provided the basis for a new political idealism. The end-of-ideologists reduced the political to the economic,[146] whereas the directors of Fashion Moda—and Beuys before them—imagined the eventual supersession of politics by art. However, in both systems of thought, division and partisanship were viewed as retrograde artifacts of a bygone era. Their models of social change were formed against the common ideological opponent of Marxism, which defined class struggle and antagonism as the motor for social change. By turning away from the systemic critique of the capitalist state and toward "third way" approaches thought to produce social harmony (alternately appealing to free creative enterprise or to free markets), the post-ideological ideologies, whether Beuysian, neoconservative, or neoliberal, suggested that human behaviour, rather than systemic injustice, was the source of social dysfunction. Each thus placed the burden of responsibility for social problems on the enterprise of individuals, letting the state off the hook.

With historical distance, the overlap between these post-ideological positions is not difficult to recognize. Some might argue that the artistic position adopted by Fashion Moda and the sociological ones maintained by Bell, Glazer, and Moynihan are incommensurable, since Fashion Moda's Beuysian position was conceived within the restricted field of contemporary art, and unlike the position promoted by Bell, Glazer, and Moynihan, it was not intended to strategically influence policy and public discourse in the U.S. It is important to emphasize that at the turn of the 1980s, the South Bronx, the very site upon which Fashion Moda practiced its third way alternative, was at the centre of a much larger political discussion about urban decay to which Glazer, Moynihan, the New York City Housing Commission, and the presidential campaigns of Ronald Reagan and incumbent President Jimmy Carter (1977-1981) contributed. Fashion Moda also positioned itself at the leading edge of the reconstruction and revitalization of the South Bronx. Months after Glazer published his essay on subway graffiti in *Public Interest*, the directors of Fashion Moda wrote to Mayor Koch [fig. 2.9] regarding their work in the South Bronx: "The reconstruction of our block, 147th Street and 3rd Avenue, in the Hub, the business center of the area, was initiated by us. A gutted building was used to facilitate our enterprises.

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[146] German political theorist Carl Schmitt famously described this substitution of the economic for the political as a central feature of Liberalism. The consequences of this substitution are wide ranging: "In the domain of economics there are no enemies, only competitors, and in a thoroughly moral and ethical world perhaps only debating adversaries." The concept of the political depends on what Schmitt calls the "friend-and-enemy grouping"—the recognition of fundamental division and struggle. See Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political (Expanded Edition)* (1932), George Schwab, trans. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 28.

We like to offer our service and know-how to you at your earliest convenience."[147] It is not known if the Mayor took the directors up on their offer. Although their letter to the Mayor was likely meant to curry favour with City Hall, it is consistent with their inclusive and collaborationist approach.

In Fashion Moda's various proposals and completed projects, the revitalization of the South Bronx was linked to the prospect of discovering the creative capital already stored in the South Bronx and directing it toward constructive ends. The institution's support of graffiti was also coded in these terms.[148] It should be noted that the directors insisted that Fashion Moda was not a public service, but a visionary "cultural concept." The institution was thus imagined more as a model prefiguring future action than a service contributing to the immediate betterment of the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, as an aesthetic and political proposition, the Fashion Moda idea affirmed a set of assumptions about the individual's power to change society. It did not challenge the City's continued disinvestment of resources from the South Bronx.

In the summer of 1980, as Fashion Moda was preparing for the exhibitions that would garner it international attention, a coalition of activist groups associated with Black, Latino/a, Native American, and gay liberation organized a congress for more than two thousand delegates on a vacant lot blocks away from the institution's Third Avenue storefront.[149] The Counter-Convention of the People's Alternative [fig. 2.10] was convened over three days on the occasion of the Democratic National Convention to "expose the neglect and disregard of government officials for black and brown poor people in the Bronx."[150] Fashion Moda organized a public art program in concert with the Counter-Convention (*Road Kills*, August-September 1980), testifying to its confusing and contradictory relationship to progressive and conservative

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[147] Stefan Eins, Joe Lewis, and Hector Ortega, letter to Mayor Ed Koch, April 17, 1979 (Fashion Moda Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, series II, subseries B, box 3, folder 20).

[148] In an application for support to the Bronx Council on the Arts, Fashion Moda's fundraiser Susan Spencer Crowe writes: "The purpose of this exhibit is to demonstrate the dynamics which govern graffiti both as a lifestyle and an indigenous American art form. By rechanneling the energies to constructive surfaces, United Graffiti Artists, Inc. provides and promotes an alternative to an 'illegal' and transient medium." The central problem here was that the constructive element of graffiti on canvas was economic rather than social. Its benefits served the interests of individual graffiti writers rather than the wider population of the South Bronx. See Susan Spencer Crowe, proposal for the exhibition "Urban Phenomena" at Fashion Moda, March 8, 1984, 5 pages (Fashion Moda Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, series II, subseries B, box 3, folder 3).

[149] Frederick Douglas Opie, *Upsetting the Apple Cart: Black-Latino Coalitions in New York City From Protest to Public Office* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 93.

[150] Ibid., p. 94.

causes.[151] Neither the oppositional alliance-based politics forged by grassroots activists at the Counter-Convention nor the third-way alternative advocated by Fashion Moda were likely to impact policy at City, State, or Federal levels in immediate and concrete ways. Nevertheless, they help us chart diverging concepts of the alternative as they appeared in the domains of art and activism at the turn of the 1980s. To the eternal question "whose side are you on?" Fashion Moda appealed to the third way, imagining that the interests of the City and the interests of the South Bronx locals could be supported if the energies of the local youth were redirected towards economically constructive ends.

Alternatives are formed and put into practice under the pressure of specific historical conditions. In New York at the turn of the 1980s, the third-way alternative formulated by Beuys and put into practice at Fashion Moda inadvertently assumed the logic of the end-of-ideologists, imagining a world *beyond* struggle at the very moment when the South Bronx was *becoming* a site of struggle. If the case of Fashion Moda animates the capture of the alternative by the neoliberal common sense, the case of the Counter-Convention can help us break free from the melancholic attachment to defeat. Oppositional politics existed in the South Bronx at the turn of the 1980s, just not in the name of art.

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[151] The most well known contributions to *Road Kills* were *Broken Promises* (1980) and *Decay* (1980), murals produced by John Fekner on two abandoned buildings bordering the site of the Counter-Convention. As I will discuss in the Conclusion, these murals supplied the backdrop for an iconic photo-op by Ronald Reagan, who visited the South Bronx days before the Democratic National Convention to discuss the failure of the "war on poverty" to solve the problem of urban blight. Fashion Moda included reproductions of these press photos, without commentary, in grant applications, as well as in *Some Posters from Fashion Moda*, a feature profile in *Artforum*. Fashion Moda's ambiguous relationship to Reagan's instrumental use of its commissioned murals supports the overarching argument of this chapter: that the refusal to take sides characteristic of the "third way" almost inevitably plays into the hands of dominant power. See Fashion Moda, "Some Posters from Fashion Moda," p. 52.

**Chapter Three:      Politics in Square Times**


The numerous challenges to the first wave of alternative spaces discussed in this thesis resulted not only in new organizational models—from the corporate firm to the deterritorialized cultural concept—but also in changing ideas of *where* authentic alternatives could be discovered. At the end of the 1970s, many young artists, filmmakers, musicians, and critics believed that authentic expressions of the "alternative" were not to be found in the city's recognized alternative spaces (whether white cube or unfinished loft, in SoHo or the South Bronx), but in the growing array of downtown nightclubs, film screening rooms, private apartments, and radical publications from which a new (or revived) fantasy of bohemia was coming into view. Artists carved out an unofficial and after-hours alternative art sphere beyond the non-profit sector, repurposing nightclubs like CBGBs, the Mudd Club, Club 57, and the historic Max's Kansas City, as well as abandoned lofts and dilapidated storefronts, as temporary galleries, production studios, underground cinemas, and concert halls. As cultural historian Tim Lawrence notes, nightclubs became the bedrock of the downtown arts community, functioning as both destinations and meeting-points for employees and their peers to "congregate, exchange ideas, and plan projects."[1] Adopting anti-institutional and anti-authoritarian positions and prioritizing direct and immediate forms of expression, the artists, filmmakers, and musicians who frequented the club scene thrived on the cult of the new already ingrained in the dominant idea of the "alternative," accelerating the creative process to a frenetic pace that most non-profit alternative spaces, with their planned exhibition schedules, selections policies, and boards of directors, were too slow, careful, and seemingly conservative to contain.

The informal groupings of artists most commonly associated with the club scene assembled under the banners of "no wave," "punk," and sometimes "new wave," terms that were used inconsistently to describe creative practices that advanced the aesthetic grammar of British punk—direct expression, iconoclastic messaging, violent imagery—within the fields of visual art

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[1] Tim Lawrence, "Big Business, Real Estate Determinism, and Dance Culture in New York, 1980-88," *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, vol. 23, no. 3 (2011): p. 304. As Lawrence explains, "A number of these spots displayed the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat, Futura 2000, Keith Haring, Kenny Scharf, and other young artists who could not find a way into SoHo's already sedimented gallery scene, and gave them jobs if they needed to supplement their income. As such, they operated as inclusive, self-supporting communities that forged a cooperative ethos that contrasted with the neoliberal logic of exploitation, division, and maximum profit." See Ibid., p. 290.

and film.[2] Like many of the practices outlined in the preceding chapters, no wave was an indirect outgrowth of Colab; many of its most influential voices, such as Beth B and Scott B, Eric Mitchell, Michael Oblowitz, and Diego Cortez, participated in Colab meetings as early as 1977. Sharing Colab's arm's length relationship to the established alternative spaces, the no wave artists and filmmakers occasionally worked with institutions such as Artists Space and P.S. 1, but they enlisted them as *legitimizers* rather than *incubators*, accepting that while the alternative spaces were incapable of keeping up with the pace of artistic production, as monied institutions and as stepping stones, they were of at least some value. If no wave indirectly pointed to some of the structural rigidities of the alternative spaces, it was not without its own detractors. Alternately championed as a radical development in contemporary art and denounced as "a reactionary wolf in countercultural sheep's clothing,"[3] no wave was at the centre of a struggle over the place of politics in New York's alternative art sphere. Under dispute was no wave's distanced fascination with ultra-left armed struggle. In the no wave imaginary, references to politically-motivated kidnapping, torture, and execution circulated as displaced cultural commentary, but also as cultural capital.

After exploring how the figure of the "terrorist" was rendered in no wave art and film, this chapter will zero in on an unlikely forum in which this struggle played out: the 1980 issue of *Semiotext(e)*, a New York-based journal-turned-publishing imprint then widely regarded for turning New York's art community onto France's most original post-1968 thinkers, including Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari.[4] This issue was titled "Italy: Autonomia,"[5] and it surveyed the fraught political context of Italy in the post-1968 years, which had reached a fevered pitch on April 7th, 1979, when hundreds of promising intellectuals, activists, and organizers were issued arrest warrants for inciting acts of terror.[6] This chapter appears to leave New York but the excursion is necessary. I contend that there is an important story to tell

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[2] I use the term "no wave" in this chapter to denote experiments in visual art, film, and music that appropriated the aesthetic and attitude of British punk, because this term was most widely adopted by the specific community of artists examined in this chapter.

[3] Lucy R. Lippard, "Hot Potatoes: Art and Politics in 1980," *Block* 4 (1981), reprinted in Lippard, *Get the Message*, p. 165.

[4] Although Semiotext(e) is best known today as a publishing imprint, I italicize *Semiotext(e)* in this chapter to reflect its early identity as a periodical.

[5] Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, eds., "Italy: Autonomia," *Semiotext(e)*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1980) was republished as *Autonomia: Post Political Politics* (Los Angeles: *Semiotext(e)*, 2007). I will refer to "Italy: Autonomia" as the Italian issue from this point forward.

[6] See Sylvère Lotringer, "In the Shadow of the Red Brigades," in *Autonomia: Post Political Politics*, p. v.

between the lines of *Semiotext(e)*'s Italian issue, and that this story can help unpack a significant conflict within the alternative art sphere. While *Semiotext(e)*'s Italian issue did not stray too far from the foreign context of Italian political life, it resonated in strange ways with the changing cultural context of New York, delivering both a thematic link and a displaced theoretical perspective on the "pseudo-terrorist" artistic postures assumed by the no wave artists, filmmakers, and musicians.[7] This was no coincidence. Produced and laboured over by an eclectic mix of intellectuals, artists, filmmakers, educators, and entrepreneurs, many of whom populated New York's no wave scene, it is understandable that the Italian issue expressed some of no wave's attitudes and concerns. This chapter considers the connected histories of no wave and *Semiotext(e)*. By investigating their overlapping engagement with ultra-left insurgency and the linked social network that brought them together, I read *Semiotext(e)*'s Italian issue against the arts milieu it obliquely addressed. I do so in order to chart some of the larger stakes at play in the shifting terrain marked by the term "alternative" in New York at the turn of the 1980s. How did the city's intellectual and artistic milieus come to share a set of references related to armed struggle, and how were these references articulated through a variety of self-organized experiments in exhibition and publishing? What was communicated, and what was lost in transmission?

While numerous downtown artists were fascinated with ultra-left armed struggle—a fascination that informed and catalyzed the rise of no wave—there was, by and large, almost nothing in common between the perspectives expounded in *Semiotext(e)*'s Italian issue and the kind of work promoted in the name of no wave at the turn of the 1980s. The former privileged emancipatory politics, the latter nihilistic iconoclasm; the former was emphatically collective, communal, social, inclusive, and non-violent; the latter was characterized as individualist, anti-social, and regarded in some cases as racist, homophobic, and sexist.[8] I will argue that it is precisely in the friction between the Autonomist Marxist political project relayed by *Semiotext(e)* and the artistic scene it was oriented toward that we can observe one of the intended functions of the journal: to not only reflect, but also to intervene into the artistic scene that helped produce it. The Italian issue sought to unsettle and challenge the desires for radicalism and freedom that

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[7] Lucy R. Lippard (as Anne Ominous), "Sex and Death and Shock and Schlock: A Long Review of 'The Times Square Show'," *Artforum* (October 1980): p. 52.

[8] For example, see Jim Jarmusch, Lindzee Smith, and Tim Burns, "Men Looking at Other Men," *BOMB Magazine*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Winter 1982), republished online: http://bombmagazine.org/article/46/men-looking-at-other-men.

were key to the common sense of the no wave scene, and to drive these desires in the direction of committed anti-capitalist politics. That this effort was largely understood as a failure by Sylvère Lotringer, founding editor of *Semiotext(e)*, does not only underscore the art community's stubborn "refusal of politics."[9] It also forces us to question the refusals and blind spots guiding *Semiotext(e)*'s own intervention.

**Marxists, Fascists, or Nothing?**

In June 1980, more than one hundred artists assembled at a former massage parlour in Midtown, New York for Colab's *The Times Square Show*, a gritty, self-organized exhibition that intended to radically upend the dominant stylistic pretensions of the previous decade in American art [fig. 3.1]. At *The Times Square Show*, canvases, sculptures, photographs, wall paintings, and found objects of various styles and subject matter were densely collaged together in a manner similar to the salon exhibitions of the nineteenth century, wall labels were absent, and a souvenir shop for affordable art highlighted the supposedly unpretentious nature of the work on display. The show modeled a visual and organizational analogue to the emergent punk subculture, matching the formal rigour of minimal art with informal nonchalance, the ideational clarity of conceptual art with neo-expressionist excess, the elegance of the white cube with the scum of Times Square.

Each room in the four-story building was crowded with art. In the second-floor "Portrait Gallery," a trio of photographs of stabbing suspects taken by Gregory Lehman were inconspicuously hung alongside portraits of punks, artists, soldiers, and businessmen by Jane Dickson, Walter Robinson, and others. Paired with John Ahearn's cast plaster busts of South Bronx residents, the room's typological arrangement produced a false equivalency between works, belying the friction and incongruity at play. The "Money, Love, and Death Room" [fig. 3.2] featured wallpaper by Coleen Fitzgibbon and Robin Winters. Patterned with images of dollar bills, guns, and place settings, the wallpaper set the backdrop for modestly-scaled neo-expressionist paintings by Richard Bosman and other young artists who had not yet gained recognition. Paired with a sculpture by Tom Otterness—who was then notorious for shooting his dog on videotape in 1977—the room insinuated the mesh of violence and domestic life that

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[9] Sylvère Lotringer, in Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, "The Return of Politics," in *Autonomia: Post Political Politics*, p. 12.

preoccupied much of New York's downtown art scene.[10] Christy Rupp's *Rat Patrol* lined baseboards throughout the building. Performances by Jack Smith, slide projections by Nan Goldin, and super-8 films by Beth B and Scott B, Jim Jarmusch, and others, were programmed in a continual rotation of live events and screenings.

The cultural significance of *The Times Square Show* was not lost on its critics, who hailed it as a landmark event. Before it was even taken down at the end of June, *Village Voice* critic Richard Goldstein called it "the first radical art show of the '80s."[11] Writing a few months later for *Art in America*, Jeffrey Deitch championed it as the birthplace of a "major Pop revival."[12] *The Times Square Show* put both Colab and the no wave scene on the map. It did not take long before a dissenting voice emerged from the haze of exuberance and amnesia. In a lengthy review published in *Artforum*, Anne Ominous—a nom de plume for the eminent critic Lucy R. Lippard—noted the reactionary political turn in the punk sensibilities of the young generation of artists featured in *The Times Square Show*. Lippard was not outright dismissive of the exhibition, but she was suspicious of the art it showcased: while the exhibition itself functioned as a progressive experiment in artists' self-organization and a "microcosmic strike for economic independence" from the art world's managerial class, it was populated with gratuitous depictions of "knives and guns and money and dirt and cocks and cunts and blood and gore," images that, to her, did little to rouse a critical perspective on the sexist and racist themes proliferating in mainstream culture.[13] In her assessment, many of the works in *The Times Square Show* rested on the flawed assumption that images of guns, money, or sex constituted political statements in and of themselves.[14] Devoid of social commentary and, more alarmingly, emptied of any apparent political commitment, many of the works featured in *The Times Square Show* appeared to Lippard not as radical but retrograde: formally conservative, politically apathetic, and little more than "middle-class TV terrorism" when isolated from their backdrop at Times Square.[15]

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[10] In recent art discourse, the "downtown art scene" delineates the burgeoning community of artists, musicians, photographers, filmmakers, choreographers, dancers, playwrights, theatre producers, actors, dancers, activists, publishers, socialites, and cultural entrepreneurs active in and around the neighbourhoods of SoHo, Tribeca, the Bowery, the East Village, and the Lower East Side in the 1970s and '80s. See Marvin J. Taylor, "Playing the Field: The Downtown Scene and Cultural Production: An Introduction," in Taylor, ed., *The Downtown Book: The New York Art Scene, 1974-1984* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006).
[11] Goldstein, "The First Radical Art Show of the '80s," pp. 31-2.
[12] Jeffrey Deitch, "Report from Times Square," *Art in America* (September 1980): p. 62.
[13] Lippard, "Sex and Death and Shock and Schlock," p. 53; p. 51.
[14] Ibid., p. 53.
[15] Ibid.

"Sex and Death and Shock and Schlock" was one of a series of articles penned between 1979 and 1981 in which Lippard examined the violent imagery flooding New York's art world in the name of no wave.[16] For her, the emerging fashion for "costume militarism, violent porn, pseudoterrorism and ethnic-racial-and-gender-based slurs" indicated a backward-looking and rightward-swaying turn in the cultural milieu, one that, if left uncontested, would reverse the progressive social gains made during the previous decade.[17] She dubbed this fashion "retrochic" to indicate its strange convergence with the reactionary politics of the American right wing. For her, retrochic was not reducible to any particular aesthetic style; it was, more generally, "a subtle current of reactionary content filtering through various art forms."[18] Retrochic artists seized upon the do-it-yourself material processes once supported by Lippard and others for their democratizing potential—Xerox and video, for example—but redeployed them without any apparent political commitment.[19] "Is the artist a fascist or a Marxist or nothing?"[20] Lippard asked, pointing to the crux of the problem: retrochic could only thrive in a culture of ambivalence, wherein art's political function and social conscience had been hollowed out and replaced with a conservative vision of art as neutral, apolitical, and divorced from its social context.

From Lippard's perspective, *The Times Square Show* was both progressive and reactionary. At the level of its organizational form, the show made a case for artists' self-organization at a moment when, for many, the alternative space movement had become inseparable from the processes through which it was professionalized, bureaucratized, institutionalized, and defanged in previous years. It modeled a new kind of temporary alternative space built through the direct engagement of a community of producers. It also joined with the broader anti-bureaucratic and anti-hierarchical turn within and against the alternative space movement, as examined in Chapter One. However, while *The Times Square Show* offered a vital and timely alternative to the existing alternative institutions, many of the works it promoted reeked of the status quo.

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[16]  See Lippard, "Retrochic," pp. 67-69; See also "Hot Potatoes: Art and Politics in 1980," pp. 2-9.
[17] Lippard, "Retrochic," p. 69.
[18] Ibid., p. 67.
[19] Lippard reassessed these presumptions in the "Postface" to *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973), pp. 263-4.
[20] Lippard, "Retrochic," p. 68.

*The Times Square Show* appears today as a kind of laboratory for what would become the dominant culture of the early 1980s in New York. Less than a year after it closed, when journalist Frank Rose published a cover story on 1980s fashion in the mainstream magazine *Esquire*, his glossary of key terms featured the same words used by Lippard, Deitch, and Goldstein to describe *The Times Square Show*:

> *Punk*: Alienated youth, circa 1977. Nihilistic world view attuned to declining urban environment of England and industrial-Northeast America. Rage amid ruins.
>
> *New Wave*: Originally coined to describe the "new wave" of British rock that wasn't getting airplay because American disc jockeys associated it with punk, i.e., violence. Now used increasingly as a label for avant-garde efforts in film, video, painting, sculpture, and fashion. Includes a number of substyles and cultural permutations that are variations on a theme.
>
> *Retrograde*: The theme. What happens when a whole planet starts moving backward. "I feel that retrograde is like walking down the street and then all of a sudden looking back over your shoulder," says art writer Jeffrey Hogrefe. Pertinent question: Why would anybody do that? Possible answers: (a) When the view ahead is repellent; (b) when something over your shoulder beckons seductively; (c) both of the above.[21]

Punk, new wave, and retrograde: such terms quickly exceeded their narrow use in the field of contemporary music, art, and film to delineate a wider youth style expressed in television, high fashion, and lifestyle. As explained by Rose, youth culture had "hit on a new way to be hip—not by rejecting what's square but by perverting it, by searching it out and wallowing in it."[22] Gone were the days when hip young people would take to the streets and speak truth to power. Protest

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[21] Frank Rose, "Welcome to the Modern World," *Esquire* (April 1981): p. 30. In this article, Rose describes the cultural influence of the Mudd Club (founded by Diego Cortez, Anya Phillips and Steve Mass in 1978), Colab's *The Real Estate Show*, and *The Times Square Show* on new trends in apparel, music, and lifestyle.
[22] Ibid., p. 32.

and partisan politics were not only unfashionable, but, according to Rose, largely inconceivable to the generation of hipsters coming of age at the turn of the 1980s. He continued:

> This is not to suggest that they have right-wing politics: most of them are too ambivalent for that. It's just that the only way to make a statement these days is to be reactionary. It's not their fault; it's the world they were born in.[23]

This might be classified as an early expression of what the late cultural theorist Mark Fisher termed *capitalist realism*, an ideological formation suggesting that "not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it."[24] The generation of youth described by Rose and feared by Lippard appears retroactively as an embodied icon of capitalist realism: an ideology that both feeds on and nourishes the apathy and perceived powerlessness of its constituents. For Rose, "America's first reactionary bohemians"[25] were a fascinating breed; for Lippard, they were an atrocity. According to both, they had pulled the plug on political commitment.

**No Wave**

It is somewhat of a curiosity that many of the artists, filmmakers, musicians, and writers implicated in Lippard's critique, most notably those working with and around Colab, shared a sustained fascination with the extreme left, and, in particular, with the armed liberation tactics performed in the name of groups such as the Red Army Faction (RAF) in Germany, the Red Brigades in Italy, the Weather Underground in the U.S., and the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (FALN) in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Calls for action coming from the ultra-left provided a confrontational geopolitical counter-point to the aggressive punk aesthetics and do-it-yourself production ethos embraced by many young artists working in Lower Manhattan. Perfectly radical, anti-social, and extremist, the armed ultra-left militant—branded as a "terrorist" in the U.S. media—became a kind of downtown muse. The visual stand-ins for insurgency—masked bandits, kidnapped victims, torture devices, death threats, automatic weapons, and explosives—became leitmotifs in no wave films, collages, literature, and

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[23] Ibid.
[24] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Ropley, UK: Zero Books, 2009), p. 9.
[25] Rose, "Welcome to the Modern World," p. 32.

magazines, and yet the meaning and use of these motifs was anything but decided. The conflict over the representation of armed struggle touched upon the relationship between political imagery and political engagement in no wave art and film.

Film, specifically consumer-grade super-8 film stock, became an important media support for terrorist-themed works, and Colab played a key role in supporting many of the filmmakers who would be recognized within the emerging genre of no wave cinema, most notably by funding Becky Johnston, Eric Mitchell, and James Nares's New Cinema at 12 St. Mark's Place on the Lower East Side, the city's only dedicated venue for no wave cinema. In their acclaimed film *G-Man* (1978), Colab members Beth B and Scott B spliced photographic and film documentation of their research on the NYPD's investigation of FALN bombings into a fictionalized scenario about the head of the Arson & Explosives Squad and his sadistic dominatrix. Their next film, *Black Box* (1979), was made at the request of punk musician Lydia Lunch, who wanted to screen their work at Max's Kansas City [fig. 3.3].[26] *Black Box* centered on the "Blackout Box," a now-infamous torture device invented by the U.S. government for use by allies in Central and South America. Featuring Lunch and actor Bob Mason alongside Colab artists such as Kiki Smith, Ulli Rimkus, and Christof Kohlhöfer, *Black Box* depicted, over the course of an hour, the ruthless torture of an innocent man by a group of punk "thought police" in a seedy downtown loft.[27] Mitchell was working on a similar theme with *Kidnapped* (1978), a film starring himself alongside Patti Astor, Anya Phillips, Duncan Smith, Gordon Stevenson, Michael McClard, and others. Described by critic Jim Hoberman as a "mock-Warhol, terrorist parody," *Kidnapped* approximated Andy Warhol's *Vinyl* (1965), featuring "[a] few jittery extroverts, stimulated by drugs, Mitchell's on-screen direction, and the no-wave music blaring from a plastic phonograph on the floor. . . . When not trading insults, the cast vaguely pretends to have abducted a wealthy industrialist (Mudd Club owner Steve Mass) and are half-heartedly beginning to torture him as the camera runs out of film."[28] Hoberman may have seen an early cut of the film; the final cut concludes with the point-blank execution of the torture victim by the character played by Phillips. *Motive* (1979), a super-8 film produced by Colab-members Liza Béar and Michael McClard, starred Jimmy DeSana as "a punk psychokiller [who] rigs the

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[26] Scott B, in *Blank City*, DVD, directed by Céline Danhier (2010; New York: Kino Lorber, 2012).

[27] Beth B and Scott B, "Description of *Black Box*," online: http://madmuseum.org/events/underground-usa-black-box.

[28] For a more extensive comparison of *Kidnapped* and *Vinyl*, see Vera Dika, *The (Moving) Pictures Generation: The Cinematic Impulse in Downtown New York Art and Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 92-98.

Museum of Modern Art's men's room to electrocute random users."[29] Tim Burns's 16 mm film *Against the Grain: More Meat than Wheat* (1981) featured a western Australian terrorist named Ray Unit who was forced underground after bombing a war memorial on Anzac Day (Australia's national day of remembrance).[30] Scenarios of kidnapping, torture, and ideologically-motivated murder were the mainstay of no wave cinema, which drew upon New York's history of underground narrative film—most notably the films of Andy Warhol and Jack Smith—to produce a filmic parallel to punk art and music's "energy, iconography, and aggressive anyone-can-do-it aesthetic."[31]

The burned out remains and rat-infested tenements of New York's Lower East Side provided the mise-en-scène for the scenarios captured by the no wave filmmakers. James Nares's *Rome '78* took "faux-classical sites like Grant's Tomb and Tribeca's American Thread Building" as backdrops for a campy period piece set in Ancient Rome.[32] Mitchell's feature-length *Red Italy* (1979), produced one year later, starred Mitchell alongside a list of no wave musicians and young actors in a melodrama that was simultaneously about forbidden love and class struggle. A deliberate clashing of diegetic and non-diegetic elements, it narrated a story taking place amidst the strikes and uprisings of contemporary Italy with a cast of mainly American actors speaking English on the unmistakable backdrop of Manhattan. As film historian Vera Dika explains, such operations were typical of no wave film: "[I]f the streets of downtown New York were featured, they were often used to allude to *other* locations and to *other* time periods."[33] *Rome '78* and *Red Italy* stand out within the no wave corpus for *not* depicting violence. However, conveying a sense of the foreign, they point to a broader interest in European politics among the no wave filmmakers. As if to force this connection, Mitchell's film production company was named Autonomist Films, presumably in reference to Autonomia Operaia (Workers' Autonomy), the popular front of Italy's extra-parliamentary left. Although references to armed insurgency and class struggle were omnipresent in no wave cinema, no wave's treatment of this subject matter

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[29] Jim Hoberman, "No Wavelength: The Para-Punk Underground," *Village Voice* (May 21, 1979): p. 42. See also Kathy Acker, "Michael McClard," *BOMB Magazine*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 1981), republished online: http://bombmagazine.org/article/14/michael-mcclard.

[30] Jarmusch, Smith, and Burns, "Men Looking at Other Men."

[31] Hoberman, "No Wavelength," p. 42.

[32] Ed Halter, "James Nares's Downtown Empire Strikes Back," *Village Voice* (May 13, 2008): https://www.villagevoice.com/2008/05/13/james-naress-downtown-empire-strikes-back/.

[33] Vera Dika, *The (Moving) Pictures Generation*, p. xviii.

was far too ambiguous and devoid of political commentary for it to stand as an example of engaged cinema.[34]

The films making up the no wave corpus were not initially screened at New York's alternative spaces, nor even at the city's designated sites for avant-garde film and video, such as Jonas Mekas's Anthology Film Archives (1970 -), Millennium Film Workshop (1967 -), or The Kitchen. Instead, as was the case of *Black Box*, they typically found themselves at home in Lower Manhattan's art bars, and especially Max's Kansas City, CBGBs, and the Mudd Club, as well as the O-P Screening Room, a Lower East Side screening room owned by Palestinian film and video supplier Rafic Azzouni, and, for a brief period between 1978 and 1979, at the New Cinema. These informal or provisional venues set the context for no wave film, enabling filmmakers and actors, many of whom were also musicians working in popular no wave bands such as the Contortions and Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, to almost immediately show their films to the artists, performers, and musicians who helped produce them. According to Scott B, the informal contexts in which no wave films circulated enabled filmmakers to "really just bombard the audience."[35] The network of improvised screening venues constituted unofficial alternatives to the existing alternative spaces, positioning the clubs as the crucible for avant-garde cinema. Mitchell attributed no wave's prioritization of informal venues with its subsequent visibility and acclaim:

> If we just made our own little movies, and showed our movies at so-called legit places, we would have disappeared in the general consensus of independent or avant-garde film. By creating the New Cinema and making movies in Super 8, and by showing them in rock clubs, we made the movies stand out.[36]

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[34] The political crises of the "Years of Lead" (1968-1983) were more substantively examined by European filmmakers at the time, including Margarethe von Trotta, Alexander Kluge, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, and Chris Marker. See Charity Scribner, *After the Red Army Faction: Gender, Culture, and Militancy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). In the downtown New York art scene, there were notable exceptions to no wave, particularly coming from radical feminist artists and filmmakers. For example, see Yvonne Rainer, dir., *Journeys From Berlin/1971,* 16mm film, 1980; Martha Rosler, dir., *A Simple Case for Torture, Or, How to Sleep At Night*, video, 1983; and Lizzie Borden, dir., *Born in Flames*, 16mm film, 1983.

[35] Scott B, in *Blank City.*

[36] Eric Mitchell, quoted in Dika, *The (Moving) Pictures Generation*, p. 92.

In this respect, no wave echoed a longer tradition of avant-garde film and performance in New York. One could think of Jack Smith, Robert Wilson, and others invested in experimental theatre and performance in the first half of the 1970s, whose productions were staged in out-of-the-way private lofts leased by their directors, or perhaps even more aptly, Andy Warhol's Factory.[37] For the no wave filmmakers, like for their precursors in Lower Manhattan, self-organizing meant working beyond the administrative constraints of the growing non-profit arts sector. No wave constructed itself both as a *new* underground and as a *revival* of Warhol's downtown bohemia.[38] Following in the footsteps of older self-identified bohemian communities in Lower Manhattan— a tradition reaching back to the 1890s—the no wave artists, filmmakers, and musicians "prided themselves on living a life apart—a modernist secession—even as they shrewdly identified and exploited certain openings in the establishment they denounced."[39]

Also echoing the modernist tradition of bohemia, while no wave was a decidedly New York invention, it was largely the product of émigrés.[40] Mitchell was French, Nares was British, and Burns was Australian. Others prominent members of the no wave scene, including Vivienne Dick, Michael Oblowitz, and Manuel DeLanda, hailed from Ireland, South Africa, and Mexico, respectively. Amos Poe, who was among the most influential early no wave filmmakers, was raised in Israel. The artist, curator, art director, band manager, and downtown impresario Diego Cortez was one exception. Born as James Curtis in the Chicago suburb of Geneva, he adopted a Latino pseudonym in a lifelong project of "myth construction" before arriving in New York in 1973.[41] As a founding member of Colab, co-founder of the Mudd Club (1978-1983), curator of the landmark no wave exhibition *New York/New Wave* at P.S. 1 (discussed at the end of this chapter), and frequent art editor of *Semiotext(e)*, Cortez was a central figure in the no wave scene and is often credited with coining the term. He launched the careers of Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, collaborated on performances with Kathy Acker, facilitated some of the first

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[37] See *Rituals of Rented Island: Object Theater, Loft Performance, and the New Psychodrama—Manhattan, 1970-1980*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2013).

[38] The influence of Andy Warhol was pervasive in the no wave scene. Mitchell's *Underground USA* (1980) was conceived as a pastiche of Warhol cinematographer Paul Morrissey's *Heat* (1972). Similarly, Nares's *Rome '78* was conceived as a pastiche of Warhol's *Lonesome Cowboys* (1968).

[39] Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 6. This quote refers to the bohemians of the turn of the 20th century, yet could be easily applied to the imagined bohemia constructed by Mitchell and company.

[40] On the "transnational identity" constructed in late nineteenth century bohemia, see Ibid., pp. 21-26.

[41] Diego Cortez, "My Latin Heritage/El Cansearch Presidente," in *Moving 1977* (New York: Hal Bromm Gallery, 1978), pp. 20-21.

collaborations between South Bronx graffiti writers and downtown artists and filmmakers, contributed to downtown magazines like *Art-Rite* and *Avalanche*, co-edited a themed issue of General Idea's *FILE Megazine*, directed music videos by The Talking Heads and Blondie, and, at the height of his celebrity in 1982, declined the opportunity to manage Madonna's music career.[42] He was what Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello would call a "keyholder" in contemporary network jargon: he found himself not only at the centre of New York's downtown art scene, but also between previously divided scenes for art, theory, music, and graffiti.[43] He was also captivated by the ultra-left, which he wove into his art practice and mythical identity. Cortez's fetishization of ultra-left armed struggle is worth unpacking in some depth, not only because of his trendsetting role within the no wave scene, but also because he played a significant part in bringing together no wave and *Semiotext(e)* toward the end of the 1970s.

The terrorist provided a conceptual form for Cortez's experimental fusion of punk, politics, and fashion in everyday life. It appeared both as part of his fictionalized biography, and as a representational element within his artwork. Together with Duncan Smith, Anya Phillips, and Jimmy DeSana, Cortez imagined a pseudo-terrorist posture for his crew. Referring to himself and his friends as the "Esoterrorists" in an exhibition text and photographic series shown at New York's Hal Bromm Gallery in 1977, he injected a mythologized account of his "street gang" into the cultural discourse, putting it into context with the wider fashion for punk extremism [fig. 3.5].[44] His work at Hal Bromm consisted of blown-up snapshots of himself and DeSana—both outtakes from a spread printed in the Fall 1977 issue of *FILE* ("Punk 'Til You Puke")—with the logo for the FALN roughly scrawled across each in permanent marker. The piece fused Cortez's interests in art, terrorism, and punk, while aiming to invoke "a believable sympathy/identification with FALN and art/terrorism."[45] As a curious neologism, "esoterrorism" truncated esoterica with terrorism, two interests shared within Cortez's social group. Alan W. Moore recalls that "'Eso-terrorism' for Cortez seemed to be about pose, identity, and the glamour of danger. The name also implied a conflation of the political and the esthetic, albeit a

[42] Diego Cortez, "Biography," *Diego Cortez Lost Object*: https://diegocortezlostobject.wordpress.com.
[43] See Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999), Gregory Elliott, trans. (London and New York: Verso, 2005), p. 116.
[44] Diego Cortez, "My Latin Heritage/El Cansearch Presidente," p. 20.
[45] Ibid.

hermetic one."[46] For Cortez, the lure of terrorism corresponded to the lure of punk. Both appealed to his interest in extremism and exclusivity.[47]

In 1978, Cortez and Phillips travelled to Stammheim Prison near Stuttgart to witness the trial of RAF member Irmgard Möller, where they gained a first-hand view of an event that captured Western media attention in the late 1970s. Forced to check their recording equipment at the courtroom entrance, Cortez smuggled in paper towels from the men's restroom for Phillips to use as support for a series of unauthorized courtroom drawings. They quickly turned this ad hoc experiment in citizen reportage into a one-page article that appeared in the third and final issue of *X Motion Picture Magazine* (May 1978), a short-lived magazine published by the X Collective under the auspices of Colab between 1977 and 1978.[48] Titled "'OFFICIAL' / 'SUICIDE' / 'TERRORIST' / 'PROTEST'," Cortez's and Phillips's report from Stammheim Prison featured reproductions of Phillips's paper towel drawings alongside an interview between the two. After a short preamble explaining the events that led to the trial of Möller, the duo used Phillips's courtroom drawings as prompts to discuss the trial. The article charted a distracted and circuitous path through the legal proceedings, largely determined, as the authors noted, by their insufficient

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[46] Alan W. Moore, *Art Gangs*, p. 90.

[47] In the fall 1977 "Punk" issue of *FILE Megazine* to which Cortez served as a contributing editor, AA Bronson explained the exclusivity of Punk: "In reaction to class structure the punk scene has recreated the very system it set out to upset. If you don't speak a working class lingo you're an outsider, an intruder, you're putting on airs." See Bronson, "Pogo Dancing in the British Aisles," *FILE Megazine*, vol. 3, no. 4. (Punk 'Til You Puke, Fall 1977), p. 17.

[48] Founded by Betsy Sussler (who would go on to found *BOMB Magazine* in 1981), Eric Mitchell, Michael McClard, and Duncan Smith, *X Motion Picture Magazine* was conceived as an experimental publishing platform for New York artists and filmmakers. Prototyping the ethos that would come to define Colab in the public eye, the magazine was inexpensive to make, cheap to own (it was sold for a nominal $1.00), and radically opposed to editorial authority or centralized administrative oversight. All submissions were printed, so long as they fit the page. In place of an editorial statement, the X Collective published an explanation of the printing process, as well as details on how readers could prepare submissions for forthcoming issues. Three issues were produced between December 1977 and May 1978. *X* was designed to showcase a range of artistic practices without editorial mediation. What appeared in its pages was an unexpected clarity, a collage of texts and images that, aesthetically unified by the one-colour printing process, forged a kind of thesis on the emergent punk aesthetics of no wave art and film. The unexpected coherence of each of its three issues stemmed from a tension that would play out within the Colab group at every turn: while it made a claim for radical inclusivity, it was nevertheless made both by and for the close-knit community of artists and filmmakers who attended Colab meetings in its early years. As Moore and Robinson reflected: "even the dubious 'alternative' distinction derives from the pretence that Colab is 'open'; in fact, while real alternative spaces provide services to a continually changing roster of artists, Colab activities actually involve and benefit only Colab members and a few associates." See Moore and Robinson, "Colab & Rule C," p. 1. To publish in *X*, one first had to know about it. Since Colab and its artists remained largely unknown until *The Times Square Show*, *X* performed a kind of exclusive inclusivity. Like all of Colab's exhibitions, events, and media programs before 1980, *X* was an open platform in a restricted network.

command of the German language.[49] Describing the red tie of a legislator who reminded them of American sports journalist Howard Cosell, as well as the high cheek bones and 1960s haircut of the defendant, who resembled the German pop star and Warholian muse Nico, Cortez and Phillips processed the proceedings through their idiosyncratic mesh of popular and avant-garde references—highlighting, rather than masking, the foreign lens through which they viewed the trial.[50]

Cortez's and Phillips's "'OFFICIAL' / 'SUICIDE' / 'TERRORIST' / 'PROTEST'" was one of several contributions in the third issue of *X* to engage with the fallout of the armed liberation groups of the previous decade. The issue opened with a four-page spread of research materials for Beth B and Scott B's *G-Man*, including a transcript of an interview with Robert J. Howe, the commanding officer of the NYPD Arson & Explosive Squad, a photomontage of Howe in front of an NYPD incident chart, a photographic reprint of a FALN communiqué claiming responsibility for a 1975 bombing of New York's historic Fraunces Tavern, and two grainy snapshots of a binder opened to grisly documentation of the damage, most likely taken from NYPD archives [fig. 3.6]. Mitchell reprinted an English translation of French writer Jean Genet's "Violence et brutalité," a short essay about the RAF first published in the French daily *Le Monde* in September 1977 and translated for the British counterculture newspaper *The International Times* six months later.[51] Genet's article appeared in *X* exactly as it did two months earlier in *The International Times*, with one addition: the words, "Stolen from International Times by Eric Mitchell" hastily scrawled in black marker over Genet's biography. The article

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[49] Diego Cortez and Anya Phillips, "'OFFICIAL'/'SUICIDE'/'TERRORIST'/'PROTEST'," *X Motion Picture Magazine*, vol. 2, no. 4, 5 & 6 (May 1978): unpaginated.

[50] Ibid.

[51] In "Violence et brutalité," Jean Genet countered the violent acts undertaken by the RAF with the brutality of the West German state. Brutality, for Genet, was a form of structural violence organized by the imperialist state apparatus and diffused across society as a whole, in "the architecture of council housing, bureaucracy, the replacing of words – proper names and other – by numbers, the priority given in traffic to speed over the slowness of pedestrians, the authority of the machine over the person who works it, the quantitative increase in punishments," and so on. According to Genet, if brutality was concealed in the foundations of the oppressive state apparatus, only violence directed against the agents of oppression could draw it into the open. Describing the political aims of the RAF, he issued a provocation that stood in stark contrast to the mainstream news coverage on ultra-left resistance in the U.S. and Western Europe: "We owe it to Andreas Baader, to Ulrike Meinhof, to Holger Meins, to the RAF in general, to have made us understand, not only by their words, but by their actions, outside and inside prison, that only violence can stop human brutality." See Genet, "Violence et Brutalité," *Le Monde* (September 2, 1977): pp. 1-2; translated and republished as "Genet on the R.A.F.," in *The International Times*, vol. 4, no. 3 (March 1978): pp. 18-19; "stolen" by Eric Mitchell in *X Motion Picture Magazine*, vol. 2, no. 4, 5 & 6 (May 1978): unpaginated. After seeing the article re-printed in *X*, Tim Burns, who also contributed to the third issue of *X,* incorporated passages into the opening sequence of *Against the Grain: More Meat than Wheat*.

was illustrated with two drawings commissioned by *The International Times*: one of Jesus, the other of an unidentified man holding a cigarette. Both were naked, flaccid, crowned in halos, and rendered in the same expressionistic style. The second included a caption that could have functioned as a meta-commentary on the entire issue of *X*: "terrorists as sex objects."[52] The slight displacement of Genet's article, from a left-wing British counterculture newspaper to Colab's *X*, placed the article into a different cultural milieu. In *X*, it served to justify the lure of armed insurgency already common within the scene surrounding Colab, to provide a radical defense of extreme violence for artists and filmmakers committed to advancing the aesthetic grammar of punk within the fields of visual art and film.

The third issue of *X* also featured an array of sado-masochistic film stills, re-prints of news articles on terrorism and armed struggle in Germany, Lebanon, and Israel, ads for sexual services, and grainy photographs of explosions, ritual sacrifice, and downtown icons like Iggy Pop, Allan Ginsberg, and Peter Orlofsky. Robin Winters and Coleen Fitzgibbon, working collectively worked under the name X&Y, contributed an impressionistic film scenario, interrupted by block quotations from the U.S. Criminal Justice (Reform) Act of 1978 and illustrated with collages featuring an inventory of weapons and explosives.[53] Kathy Acker published her "Persian Poems," a handwritten manuscript in English and Persian featuring a sex-addicted teenager named Janey who would become the protagonist of *Blood and Guts in High School* (1984).[54] Interspersed with DeSana's portraits of Phillips, Andy Warhol, a naked amputee, and notorious Sex Pistols frontman Sid Vicious with his pants down to his ankles, the issue expressed the themes of sex, violence, ultra-left armed struggle, and downtown nightlife that preoccupied the no wave art scene in 1978. It also exhibited the "'look of concern' communicated by rough typography, banal advertising images, and blurry, pseudo-porn

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[52] Ibid.

[53] The terrorist appears only briefly in X&Y's scenario, not as a character, but as the subject of conversational banter: "'Terrorists are the disenfranchised, except for military backed mercenaries who work for the rich,' Y modernizes." See X&Y, "Just off the Boat," *X Motion Picture Magazine*, vol. 2, no. 4, 5 & 6 (May 1978): unpaginated.

[54] See Kathy Acker, "Persian Poems," *X Motion Picture Magazine*, vol. 2, no. 4, 5 & 6 (May 1978): unpaginated. See also: Acker, *Blood and Guts in Highschool* (New York: Grove Press, 1984). Acker, who contributed to all three issues of *X*, famously called herself a "literary terrorist." She cites Sylvère Lotringer as a primary influence on her writing in the 1980s, which, like many of the artists described in this chapter, mix references to terrorism, downtown nightlife, and European political philosophy. See Christina Milletti, "Violent Acts, Volatile Words: Kathy Acker's Terrorist Aesthetic," *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 36, no. 3 (Fall 2004): pp. 352-373.

photographs" that Lippard would associate with the rise of retrochic later in the following year.[55] The cover of the third issue of *X*, submitted by Alan W. Moore, featured a brick wall superimposed over a widely circulated image of the former Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro after he was assassinated by members of the Red Brigades in 1978 [fig. 3.7]. Heavily obscured on the cover of *X*, the image represented what Moore described as an American "media blackout" on the topic of ultra-left insurgency.[56]

The shared fascination with terrorism and armed struggle within the Colab group was, paradoxically, a central site upon which it divided. Although Beth B and Scott B were regarded by some as "the most effective of the super-8 filmmakers" of their generation, their films were not screened at Mitchell, Johnston, and Nares's New Cinema.[57] As Moore recalls, Mitchell was known to be a "hard-charging bossy character" in Colab meetings, one of "a bunch of egomaniacal histrionic pricks who were fighting amongst themselves" toward the end of 1979.[58] The refusal of the New Cinema group to support the work of other Colab members, even while continuing to request financial support, forced Colab's members to consider more stringent eligibility requirements for Colab support.[59] Indications of in-fighting punctuate Colab's meeting minutes in 1979-1980. Existential questions about the collective's survivability were periodically raised: "We're dancing to it already. We might as well face the music," declared one anonymous letter from March 1980.[60] Despite the collaborative structure of the organization, as well as the many successful projects it incubated, Colab's membership was not uniformly invested in—or even aware of—every project carried out by its members.[61]

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[55] Lippard, "Retrochic," p. 68.
[56] Lyons, unpublished interview with Alan W. Moore, January 22, 2016.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] When asked about Mitchell's participation in Colab, Moore remembers Mitchell and his collaborators at the New Cinema as Colab's "Glamour Faction." See Ibid.
[60] "Untitled," unauthored letter, March 24, 1980 (Andrea Callard Papers, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, series I, subseries A, box 1, folder 22).
[61] For example, although both Cortez and Moore contributed heavily to the third issue of *X*, Moore had no indication that Cortez was working with Lotringer on *Semiotext(e)*'s Italian issue, a project that overlapped, in both content and motivation, with Moore and Cooney's *Terrorist News Annual*. Colab's *Semiotext(e)* cadre (which also included no wave filmmaker Michael Oblowitz) struck Moore as "guarded and exclusive." See Moore, with the artists of the Real Estate Show, "Excavating Real Estate," *House Magic: Bureau of Foreign Correspondence*, no. 6 (Spring 2014): p. 8. From his vantage, Cortez did not appear to have the vaguest interest in the specificity of armed struggle or its history as a leftist liberation tactic. "Terrorism *was* armed struggle" for Cortez, as far as Moore could tell. This indicates less Cortez's actual commitment to politics than to a communications firewall between Moore's faction within Colab and the one that overlapped with Lotringer's circle. As Cortez became more invested in the New York no wave music and club scene toward the end of the 1970s, he disengaged from Colab. Submitting a letter of

The aesthetic uniformity of the third issue of *X* papered over the mounting tensions and internal conflicts that were threatening the disintegration of Colab in 1978-1979. This was among the risks of punk aesthetics as they appeared in downtown New York: committed to direct expression unmediated by justification or apology, artists risked circulating politicized content without political intent, consequentially flattening political struggles into one-dimensional symbols of extremist behaviour. Viewed in retrospect, the brick wall obscuring the image of Aldo Moro on the cover of *X* splits itself into a double allegory. On one hand it is suggestive of the media blackout to which Moore referred. On the other, it announces a relation to the politics of armed struggle that would play out in the pages of *X*, wherein political intent was concealed behind a dense wall of pose.

**Autonomia in America**

It was within this cultural context that, six blocks south of the disused massage parlour that became the temporary destination for *The Times Square Show*, in the closed quarters of a loft apartment at 225 West 36th Street,[62] a related team of artists and intellectuals was preparing *Semiotext(e)*'s Italian issue. Shared by Sylvère Lotringer, founding editor of *Semiotext(e)* and Cortez, who had recently disaffected from Colab and who was actively serving as a member of the *Semiotext(e)* design team, the loft served as the production hub for the Italian issue—the journal's ninth issue, but its first to directly approach the question of political activism [fig. 3.8].[63] This issue surveyed a landscape far removed from the glam and excess of Times Square, but, as I will demonstrate, this proximate cultural context lurked beneath the surface of every page. In brief, the Italian issue set out to explore the intellectual project and creative tactics employed by Autonomia Operaia at a time when some of its key theorists and representatives awaited trial for conspiracy in the 1978 kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro. Claimed by members of the Red Brigades, a Marxist-Leninist paramilitary group that splintered off from the Autonomia movement five years earlier, the assassination drew the attention of the international media, which widely denounced the Red Brigades—and by extension, the intellectuals awaiting

resignation in late 1979, Cortez's official participation in Colab concluded as his role in designing *Semiotext(e)*'s Italian issue was becoming more involved. See Lyons, unpublished interview with Alan W. Moore.

[62] See "Lease Agreement: Made between James Allan Curtis and Sylvère Lotringer, for the joint lease of the sixth floor at 225 West 36th Street, New York," July 2, 1979 (Sylvère Lotringer Papers and *Semiotext(e)* Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University, series I, subseries A, box 2, folder 6).

[63] See Henry Schwarz and Anne Balsamo, "Under the Sign of *Semiotext(e)*: The Story According to Sylvère Lotringer and Chris Kraus," *Critique*, vol. 37, no. 3 (Spring 1996): p. 209.

trial—as "terrorists" without further examination of the contours of political struggle in Italy. *Semiotext(e)*'s Italian issue offered a platform for actors who had been shut out of the dominant narrative forming around Italy's extra-parliamentary left.

The seed of the Italian conflict was planted in 1973, when, threatened by rising economic instability, widespread social unrest, and growing national support for the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement, Enrico Berlinguer, leader of the Italian Communist Party, made a controversial proposal to build a coalition government with the Christian Democrats, the governing party that, historically aligned to the centre-left, was on course to swing rightward.[64] Widely referred to as the "Historic Compromise," Berlinguer's proposed coalition was fiercely criticized for signalling the ultimate ideological bankruptcy of Italy's parliamentary left. In the midst of debates over the Historic Compromise, a small group of intellectuals and activists including Antonio Negri, Mario Tronti, and Franco "Bifo" Berardi worked to incite a movement calling for the collective refusal of state power. Born from collaborations between Marxist intellectuals surrounding the *Quaderni Rossi* (*Red Notebooks*) editorial collective and factory workers in northern Italy between 1959 and 1964, and consolidated through the organization of *Potere Operaio* (Workers' Power), a leftist political group operating from 1968 to 1973, the Autonomia movement spread across Italy in the wake of the Historic Compromise to become the popular front of the nation's extraparliamentary left.[65] Autonomia challenged existing centralized models for collective organizing—especially the union and the party—by conceiving a radically decentralized movement that could expand across the country without the oversight of a core administrative leadership. Collectives associating themselves with Autonomia rapidly sprung up in Bologna, Padova, Milan, Rome, and elsewhere during the mid-1970s. Galvanizing the support of workers, students, and the unemployed, and supported by the growing free radio, feminist, and squatting movements, Autonomia became among the dominant forms for Italy's popular resistance. Its authors and spokespersons openly disavowed the violent tactics of the Red Brigades—a much smaller militant group that splintered off from the earlier *Potere Operaio* organization.[66] Instead of calling for armed struggle, Autonomia, and especially its "creative wing" in Bologna, promoted new forms of "social 'war-fair'—pranks, squats, collective

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[64] Enrico Berlinguer proposed what became known as the "Historic Compromise" in a series of three articles penned for *Rinascita*—the official journal of the Italian Communist Party—in 1973. See Tobias Abse, "Judging the PCI," *New Left Review*, vol. 1, no. 153 (September-October 1985): p. 17.

[65] Schwarz and Balsamo, "Under the Sign of *Semiotext(e)*," p. 209.

[66] Antonio Negri, "Negri's Interrogation," in *Autonomia: Post Political Politics*, pp. 189-90.

reappropriations (pilfering), self-reductions (rent, electricity, etc.), pirate radios, sign tinkering."[67]

Periodic demonstrations and strikes energized the movement between 1975 and 1977, culminating in widespread actions in the spring of 1977. Violent confrontations between demonstrators and police, as well as attacks executed by armed splinter groups, provided "a golden opportunity for the authorities to launch a campaign of raids and arrests against the Left."[68] Berardi, an important member of the Radio Alice production collective, was accused of organizing demonstrations that led to two civilian deaths in Bologna. As an international solidarity effort demanding the release of Berardi and his comrades began to unfold, Lotringer decided to lend his support from the U.S. Following an even larger mass arrest of Italian activists ordered by the Padua state attorney on April 7, 1979, Lotringer scheduled a trip to Italy. Supplied with a list of key contacts from his friend, Félix Guattari, who was close with many of the Italian Marxists, he traveled from Rome to Bologna in the summer of 1979, where he attended organizing meetings and interviewed key actors in the Autonomia network, before arriving at Guattari's sanatorium in Blois, France, where Franco Piperno, one of the suspected leaders of the Red Brigades, was in hiding.[69] The trip confirmed for Lotringer the extent of state repression in Italy. Antonio Negri had been arrested for the murder of Aldo Moro. While the murder charge was ultimately dropped, Negri and seventy other activists from the Autonomia network awaited trial for over four years before facing jail sentences for "promoting an insurrection, forming a subversive organization and an armed band, performing several actions related to political violence, and being instigators and abetters of two murders."[70] Pietro Calogero, the Padua state attorney, issued the strongest accusation against Negri. His theory, which had come to be known as the "Calogero theorem," went as follows:

> [F]rom the early '70s, a single organization had 'coordinated' the different forms
> of terrorism, and linked them to outwardly legal 'mass' movements and struggles
> into a coherent subversive strategy. This organization went through outward

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[67] Lotringer, "In the Shadow of the Red Brigades," p. v.

[68] Jean-Paul Sartre, et. al., "The Appeal By J.P. Sartre and Other French Intellectuals on Behalf of the Comrades Who Have Been Imprisoned," leaflet (July 8, 1977), p. 1.

[69] Lotringer, "In the Shadow of the Red Brigades," pp. v-xvi.

[70] Alessandro Portelli, "Oral Testimony, the Law and the Making of History: the 'April 7' Murder Trial," *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1985): p. 6.

changes, splits and apparent dissolutions, but it maintained a continuous core of leaders and thinkers, of which Antonio Negri was the most important.[71]

Negri and his comrades were trapped in extended legal proceedings by a repressive state apparatus intent on discrediting the Autonomia movement at large.[72]

In their introduction to *Semiotext(e)*'s Italian issue, Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, who co-edited the issue, explained the context leading up to the arrests and outlined the political perspectives and theoretical claims made by key actors in the Autonomia movement. Faced with a barrage of disinformation flowing from the Italian state to the international media, which widely relayed the "Calogero theorem" as undisputed fact, the Italian issue set out to disentangle the web of relations between the Red Brigades and the Autonomia movement, and to defend the latter against the actions of the former. Featuring short articles and interviews written by Autonomia's leading theorists alongside texts written by allies in France and the U.S., the issue plotted out a series of debates held within the movement, and between the movement, the Red Brigades, and the Italian state. They also defined their central aims for the issue: first, to dissociate the Red Brigades from the popular Autonomia movement by presenting their opposing tactics, forms of organization, and theories of revolutionary change; second, to make a plea for support from the Anglophone left on behalf of the imprisoned intellectuals; and third, to revitalize a discourse on political activism that—according to the editors—had gone stale in the U.S. over the course of the 1970s. Lotringer explained this last point as follows:

> Our decision to step in at once in an explosive, conflict-ridden situation – while everything connected with Autonomy is threatened from all sides – is equally a response to preoccupations that are closer to home: in many respects, the reaction against the 60's [sic] in the course of the "me" decade . . . has meant an impatient refusal of politics. This refusal has gone on long enough. Politics must *return*.[73]

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[71] Ibid., p. 7.
[72] An emergency legislation that was passed in 1975 "set an unprecedented maximum of twelve years pre-trial detention for suspects of terrorism." See Ibid.
[73] Lotringer, in Lotringer and Marazzi, "The Return of Politics," p. 12.

Recalling the words of Lippard and Rose above, Lotringer and Marazzi described the erosion of left political engagement in the U.S. over the course of the 1970s. For them, the challenge of the 1980s would be to re-install left politics "as *other*."[74]

Drawing on the insights of Autonomia's critique of the Italian state, Lotringer and Marazzi advanced a wider argument for "post-politics": a new kind of leftist project that would abandon hierarchical forms of political organizing in favour of horizontal forms of direct democracy. According to this position, the party and the union had become retrograde organs for left politics; both misrecognized the distribution of power in post-industrial capitalism, fetishizing the centrality of the state in the face of increasingly decentralized and rhizomatic mechanisms of control. The Autonomia movement imagined a form of politics that would bypass the political establishment and refuse its technics of representation while installing itself directly on the terrain of social life. Advocating a complete refusal of state power—non-participation in elections, ignorance to property laws, and so on—Autonomia composed a new political class united by a common estrangement from established political institutions. As Marazzi explained, "If capital attacked the worker's struggle with mass layoffs, inflation, chronic unemployment, etc., it was then necessary to determine a new political terrain where the most diverse social strata could join their struggles and recompose a front against capital."[75] This recomposed front—which included workers, students, women, and the unemployed—would not only form against capital, but also against the state and party system which aided and abetted the unfurling of capitalist exploitation.

Following Lotringer and Marazzi's introduction, the Italian issue consisted of four thematic sections, each representing an aspect of the ongoing debate on extraparliamentary politics in Italy [fig. 3.9-3.10]. The first, subtitled "The Impossible Class," outlined the Autonomist Marxist theory of class composition, which reworked traditional Marxist themes and terminology to explain how the capitalist mode of production—and thus the sphere of class struggle—extended beyond the factory floor to encompass the entire "social factory."[76] By expanding the concept of labour to account for unacknowledged and unremunerated forms of

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[74] Lotringer, in Ibid. The notion of "post-politics" – the politics as *other* evoked by Lotringer above – was distinct from the "beyond politics" of liberalism encountered in the first two chapters of this thesis. It signalled not the *end* of politics but a crisis in the definition of the political, which had become, over the course of the 1970s (and particularly in Western Europe), an important site of contestation.
[75] Marazzi, in Ibid., p. 13.
[76] Lotringer, "In the Shadow of the Red Brigades," p. v.

work largely done by women and youths—housework and schoolwork, for example— Autonomist Marxist thinkers, including important voices from the Women's Movement, "emphasiz[ed] the need to force changes on the capitalist system independent of trade-union bureaucracy."[77] Faced with capitalism's colonization of every element of life and work, the Autonomist thinkers concluded that effective alternatives could only be mounted *inside and against* existing conditions of domination.[78]

The second section, subtitled "April 7 Arrests," assembled texts defending the imprisoned intellectuals against state repression. For example, the Italian dramatist Dario Fo indicted the Red Brigades for destabilizing not the state but the broader movement, which was forced to take the side of the law "in order to avoid being suspiciously drawn in as a cover to terrorism."[79] Berardi took a more measured and historically nuanced approach, acknowledging that, like Autonomia, the Red Brigades emerged from committed proletarian struggles in Milan, Turin, and Genoa, where its "first armed actions (the kidnapping of managers of factories, together with acts of sabotage) were linked to the workers' struggle against the factory hierarchy."[80] He argued that it was only when the militant group evolved into a tight political organization taking on party-like characteristics that it explicitly broke from the movement, both in its political strategy and its correlation to the movement's popular base.[81]

The third section, subtitled "Beyond Terrorism," staged a debate about the efficacy of armed struggle as a liberation tactic, posing the violent and confrontational tactics of the Red Brigades against the innovative non-confrontational forms of dissent developed in the name of Autonomia. It was primarily on the question of state power that many of Autonomia's leading theorists publicly disavowed the insurgent practices of the Red Brigades. As Negri conveyed in his testimony to the Italian criminal court, translated and republished in this section, the Red Brigades assumed that a surgical strike at the heart of the state could lead to its overthrow. In contrast, Autonomia sought not to invert but to transform the structure of power relations.[82] This

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[77] Ibid.
[78] Lotringer, in Lotringer and Marazzi, "The Return of Politics," p. 14.
[79] Dario Fo, "The Sandstorm Method," in *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics*, p. 214.
[80] Bifo, "Anatomy of Autonomy," in *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics*, p. 160.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Negri distinguished Autonomia from the Red Brigades on two fundamental issues: firstly, on the form of organization, and secondly, on the concept of insurrection. Whereas the Red Brigades held "an extremely centralized idea of organization (the party)," which it designated a weapon in the project of seizing state power, Autonomia, on the contrary, was conceived as a decentralized mass organization that refused state power while taking the social field as its primary site of struggle. See Negri, in "Negri's Interrogation," pp. 189-190.

required neither a reformist strategy of compromise nor a Leninist strategy of seizure. Instead, it would require a strategy of refusal. The last section of the issue consisted solely of a comic strip first published in the Autonomist magazine *Metropoli* depicting Moro's kidnapping and murder. Like many of the movement's publications, *Metropoli* had been seized by police as evidence of collusion with the Red Brigades.

The strong critical perspective on armed struggle advanced in the Italian issue clearly resonated with local debates on the representation of ultra-left in the no wave scene. Autonomia's refusal of state power likewise mapped easily onto the anti-establishment sensibilities of the no wave artists and filmmakers, indicating a potential common ground between *Semiotext(e)* and the young artists, musicians, and filmmakers who were concurrently claiming affinity with the ultra-left. The visual treatment for the Italian issue, devised by Cortez, articulated this common ground more clearly. Using a biology manual published by MIT Press as a readymade template, Cortez designed the Italian issue to look "clinical, in contrast to its highly political, neo-terrorist content."[83] The issue was meant to "give political credibility to the autonomists," and, consequently, its design appeared distinct from the cut-and-paste collage aesthetic of the previous "Schizo-Culture" issue, which was designed by a committee of young artists and filmmakers including Cortez, Martim Avillez, Kathryn Bigelow, Peter Downsborough, Denise Green, Linda McNeill, Michael Oblowitz, and Pat Steir. Next to the "Schizo-Culture" issue, which was dense with images, as well as varying fonts, column widths, and page layouts, the Italian issue stands out as relatively austere: each page is identically laid out; title casing and notes are consistent; identically cropped photographs punctuate the bottom quarter of most recto pages of the issue. These photographs—grainy images of crime scenes, mass protest, political figures, stacks of newspaper, institutional architecture, and occasionally downtown nightlife—do not function as straightforward illustrations to the theoretical and critical writings detailed above. Rather, they exist somewhat independently of the texts.

Among the most striking insertions appears at the centre of the issue, immediately following an open letter to Negri's judges authored by Gilles Deleuze. Deleuze's passionate defense of his Italian comrade is paired with a photograph of a dark-haired white woman laying

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[83] Sylvère Lotringer, quoted in Juliette Premmereur, "From New York No Wave to Italian Autonomia: an Interview with Sylvère Lotringer," *Interventions Journal*, online, vo1. 3, no. 2 (Political Performativity and the Legacy of '70s Radicalism, March 2013): http://interventionsjournal.net/2014/03/13/from-new-york-no-wave-to-italian-autonomia-an-interview-with-sylvere-lotringer/.

on a bed, staring stone-faced beyond the frame while clasping a phone to her ear [fig. 3.11]. Although this picture appears without caption or explanation, it is, without question, an outtake from Cindy Sherman's series of *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-1980), bearing striking resemblance in hair and makeup to *Untitled Film Still #30* (1979), the artist's representation of the cinematic archetype of the forlorn and abused girlfriend or wife. To my knowledge, it is the only direct reference to contemporary art in the Italian issue. Far from didactic, its uncredited (and potentially unauthorized) presence in the journal is likely more contextual than conceptual. It signals the overlap of intellectual and artistic milieus occupied by *Semiotext(e)* at the turn of the 1980s.

## Worlds Collide

*Semiotext(e)* occupied a strange and specific place in the alternative art sphere—strange in that, like the figure of the stranger famously outlined by Georg Simmel in 1906,[84] *Semiotext(e)* was both *near to* and *remote from* the community of artists congregating in Lower Manhattan's art bars. The journal's position within this milieu was established, more or less deliberately, between 1975 and 1980, under the direction of Lotringer, a Polish-Jewish-French émigré, former student of Roland Barthes, and Professor of French Literature at Columbia University in New York. As Lotringer remembers, when he arrived at Columbia in 1972, he quickly fell in with a group of professors and students who had been regularly meeting to discuss issues in semiotics at the nearby Maison Française.[85] It was with this group, which included John Rajchman (a graduate student in philosophy) and Denis Hollier (a scholar of George Bataille and the surrealist avant-garde), among a half-dozen others, that the first three issues of *Semiotext(e)* were published. The primary aim of the journal, announced on the cover of its first issue, was "to explore alternatives in semiotics within and across the boundaries of literature, philosophy, psycho-analysis and the arts."[86] Consisting largely of reproductions and translations of texts by contemporary French philosophers, the journal aimed to introduce recent developments in French semiotics into American academic discourse. After spending a sabbatical studying with Guattari in 1974, where he became gripped by the work of Guattari, Deleuze, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, and other

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[84] Georg Simmel, "The Stranger" (1908), in D.N. Levine, ed., *Georg Simmel: On Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 143-149.

[85] Sylvère Lotringer, "American Beginnings," in Anaël Lejeune, Olivier Mignon, and Raphaël Pirenne, eds., *French Theory in American Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), p. 50.

[86] *Semiotext(e)*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Alternatives in Semiotics, 1974), frontmatter.

radical intellectuals who had been working to push semiotic analysis into the domains of politics, culture, and mental health, Lotringer returned with a simple hypothesis: that the range of critical accounts of power, capital, and language formulated by such thinkers had no business being taken up in the American university. They would resonate far more strongly in the downtown New York avant-garde, where writers, composers, and artists such as William Burroughs and John Cage had arrived at similar interpretations of the present without the slightest interest in French philosophy.[87]

After an exodus of the founding *Semiotext(e)* group, Lotringer and the two remaining members of the editorial committee, John Rajchman and Kathy Dudda, chose to resuscitate the journal not with another publication but with a conference that would take the name "Schizo-Culture" in direct allusion to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), an influential book on capitalism and schizophrenia that had not yet made its way into the American academy. The "Schizo-Culture" conference became the experimental ground from which the new committee would renegotiate *Semiotext(e)'s* relationship to its assumed audience. The conference, organized by Lotringer and Rajchman, provided an excuse for the pair to put French intellectuals and American artists together in the same room, to make worlds—and languages, customs, priorities, and politics—collide. Lotringer and Rajchman were careful to define the downtown art scene as their primary target audience, not merely by including downtown artists in the conference program, but also by advertising it in downtown newspapers such as the *Village Voice*.

Staged between November 13 and 16, 1975, the "Schizo-Culture" conference featured panels, conversations, and debates between French thinkers such as Deleuze, Guattari, Foucault, and Jean-Francois Lyotard and American radicals like Burroughs, Cage, and feminist author Ti Grace Atkinson. Billed as a "counterculture event" in the media and promoted by Richard Goldstein as the *Village Voice*'s "Pick of the Week," it attracted over two thousand attendees, far more than could be accommodated in the auditoriums that Lotringer and Rajchman had booked.[88] Oral histories of the event confirm that the "Schizo-Culture" conference was an organizational nightmare and that most of its invited speakers left outraged.[89] However, it

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[87] See Sylvère Lotringer, "Notes on the Schizo-Culture Issue," in Lotringer, ed., *Schizo-Culture: The Book* (Los Angeles: *Semiotext(e)*, 2013), p. xi.

[88] David Morris, "Schizo-Culture in Its Own Voice," in Sylvère Lotringer and David Morris, eds., *Schizo-Culture: The Event* (Los Angeles: *Semiotext(e)*, 2013), p. 204.

[89] For example, see Sylvère Lotringer, "Introduction to Schizo-Culture," in *Schizo-Culture: The Event*, pp. 9-39. See also Lotringer, "American Beginnings," pp. 44-76.

accomplished its goal: France's new wave of radical theory became a topic of discussion in the alternative art sphere. Recalling the immediate impact of the "Schizo-Culture" conference on New York art, Alan W. Moore characterized the event as "epochal," particularly for the community of artists surrounding Colab, who, after attending the conference, "began a kind of intense, albeit ragged engagement with post-structuralist theory." [90] The "Schizo-Culture" conference was a significant event in the cultural milieu not only because of the theoretical debates it staged, but also because of the unprecedented buzz it generated about new French philosophy. It made philosophy fashionable in some segments of the New York art world, creating a demand for accessible translations of French post-structuralist thought that *Semiotext(e)* was poised to fulfil. Along with the rising profile of French philosophy in the New York art world came a strange philosophical hybrid that critics have since dubbed "French Theory": a term designating French philosophy from the post-1968 era "as it appeared in the United States, with all the transformations, simplifications and deformations regarding French ideas and debates borne by this complex process of assimilation." [91]

Following the "Schizo-Culture" conference, *Semiotext(e)* refashioned itself as a theory magazine for artists and punks. The magazine became well known for its issue launch parties and concerts, which it staged at downtown nightclubs like Danceteria, Mudd Club, and World, venues that held strong ties to the emerging no wave scene that *Semiotext(e)* aimed to attract. [92] These parties performed two services at once: they facilitated the magazine's fundraising efforts—allowing Lotringer to avoid pleading his case to bureaucrats or private donors—while supporting its edgy image. The shifting audience for *Semiotext(e)* corresponded to the changing make-up of its production team, which was increasingly composed of young downtown artists who found in *Semiotext(e)* an alternative framework for creative and intellectual collaboration. The first was Cortez, who was drawn as much to the French philosophical movement

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[90] Moore, "Excavating Real Estate," p. 8.

[91] Anaël Lejeune, Olivier Mignon, and Raphaël Pirenne, "French Theory and American Art: An Introduction," in *French Theory in America*, p. 11.

[92] For example, on the occasion of *Semiotext(e)*'s "Nova Convention" (1978), Lotringer worked with Club 57 to organize the "Nova Concert" at Irving Plaza, a disused auditorium on West 14th street previously housing a Polish community centre. Featuring emerging bands the B-52s and Blondie, prog rock musicians Robert Fripp and Frank Zappa, as well the Stimulators, a group recommended at the last minute by Nova Convention participant Allen Ginsberg, the concert launched the successful career of the B-52s and put Irving Plaza on the map as a concert venue, which it remains to this day. Lotringer admits that these were merely unintended consequences of his idiosyncratic fundraising strategy: "All I was hoping, though, was that we would get some money to pay for the 'Schizo-Culture' issue, but all we managed to do was break even." See Lotringer, "Notes on the Schizo-Culture Issue," p. xxiv.

foregrounded at the "Schizo-Culture" conference as to its reverberations with the downtown counterculture. His primary contribution to *Semiotext(e)* was to be as immaterial as it was physical. Lotringer explains: "he became my 'mentor' in relation to downtown culture."[93] Cortez initiated Lotringer into the punk and no wave scene before it had defined itself on the world's stage. He accompanied the professor to parties and concerts at exclusive venues, offering virtually "unlimited access to the thriving nightlife."[94] As noted above, the two also shared a loft, where they pursued their own overlapping ventures between 1977 and 1982. Lotringer describes this experience as a "defining moment" in the history of *Semiotext(e)*.[95] For him, it meant collaborating and co-habiting with one of downtown's more recognizable impresarios and immersing himself in the peculiar rhythms and social dynamics of the downtown nightlife. It was through Cortez that Lotringer first came to meet many of the artists who would comprise the *Semiotext(e)* art team during the years they shared the loft.

The *Semiotext(e)* team was drawn from chance encounters, often at parties, clubs, and events in Lower Manhattan, where Lotringer would strike up conversations about politics and theory with anyone who would listen. Each first-hand account sounds virtually the same as the next. Denise Green, a core member of *Semiotext(e)*'s art direction working group between 1978 and 1982, explains how she and artist Pat Steir were asked to join the editorial board after Lotringer engaged them in a discussion about poststructural theory at a downtown party.[96] Kathy Acker, who contributed to several early issues of *Semiotext(e)* as either a writer or contributing editor, describes Lotringer's first appearance in her social group as a kind of foreign invasion. When he began appearing in her circle, which included Colab members such as Betsy Sussler, Michael McClard, and Robin Winters, *Semiotext(e)* collaborator Seth Tillett, Cortez and his "esoterrorists," as well as musicians like Lydia Lunch and Richard Hell, Lotringer brought with him the gift of theory: "I knew nothing about Foucault and Baudrillard. He's the one that introduced me to them, introduced *everyone* to them. But it wasn't from an academic point of view, and it certainly wasn't from a Lacanian point of view or even from Derrida. It was much

[93] Ibid., p. xvii.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Sylvère Lotringer, email to the author, January 8, 2015.
[96] Jonathan Goodman, "Abstraction and Representation on Equal Terms: A Studio Visit with Denise Green," *artcritical*, online (June 20, 2012): http://www.artcritical.com/2012/06/20/denise-green/#sthash.0MYSbGt2.dpuf.

more political."[97] Reading these and other stories, one could imagine Lotringer traveling from club to club like some kind of theory evangelist, peddling Deleuze and Guattari like the New Testament, searching for recruits in all the right places.

The colophon of each issue of *Semiotext(e)* weaves its own web of relations between uptown and downtown, academy and art world. Beginning with its 1978 "Schizo-Culture" issue, *Semiotext(e)*'s frequently modulating network of collaborators extended in three directions: to Europe, into the American university system, and into the downtown art scene. By the time the Italian issue was in production, the *Semiotext(e)* network had swelled to over sixty members. While a small group of Autonomist Marxist intellectuals and activists living in New York were credited for their roles in editing (Christian Marazzi), visuals (Silvia Federici), and production (Maurizio Torrealta), the Italian issue was largely produced by a small army of young artists and graduate students who frequented Lotringer's social and professional circles. Credited for visuals and production work, artists associated with Colab, such as Peter Fend, Matthew Geller, and Seth Tillett appeared alongside other downtown denizens like writer Duncan Smith, performance artist Poppy Johnson, multi-disciplinary artist Annie Ratti, video artist Norman Cowie, scene photographers Marion Scemama and Stephen Tornton, painters Denise Green and Ross Bleckner (who also owned the Mudd Club), and past members of the art group Art & Language such as Sarah Charlesworth, Joseph Kosuth, and Kathryn Bigelow. Ron Clark, founding director of the Whitney Independent Study Program—a program that brought together Bigelow with many of the founding members of the Colab group in the early 1970s—was also listed as production staff. Alongside a contingent of young art writers, journalists, and curators including Bruce Wolmer, Sybil Walker, Jim Hoberman, Fred Dewey, and Richard Milazzo, such actors presented a cross-section of New York's emerging generation of art workers, ranging from the unknown to the rising star. As in a Venn diagram, these actors converged with an arsenal of graduate students and young professors from Columbia's Modern Languages departments who functioned mainly as translation editors, translators, and production staff. Some, including John Johnston, Jared Becker, Andrew Rosenbaun, Richard Reid, Daniel Moshenberg, and James Cascaito continued to translate Italian and French thinkers for *Semiotext(e)* into the 1990s.[98]

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[97] Ellen G. Friedman, "A Conversation with Kathy Acker," *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 9, no. 3 (Fall 1989): p. 16.

[98] This particular configuration of *Semiotext(e)* differed from every other. For example, the production staff for "The German Issue," published two years later, was composed of a similar range of downtown artists and uptown

The social network opened up first by Cortez, and then by others in his expanding circle, allowed Lotringer an anthropologist's view of the most current developments in New York art and culture. It also opened up alternative avenues for fundraising. Following the informal and last-minute approach to fundraising characterizing *Semiotext(e)*'s downtown parties, the production costs for the Italian issue were covered through the sale of early paintings by Basquiat.[99] Perhaps most significantly, the journal's proximate relationship to the artworld put it in the position to change what people were talking about.[100] Lotringer's path into the art world provides an oblique view of the process by which *Semiotext(e)* extended its reach in a bid to politicize the group of "reactionary bohemians" encountered by the editor in Lower Manhattan. Lotringer and Cortez did not cast their network wide. Instead, they targeted key sites in a district that held an important historical role in defining and defending international codes of stylistic

academics, yet it shared only three actors with its Italian counterpart: Lotringer, Johnston, and Torrealta. As Lotringer explains, this has been *Semiotext(e)*'s modus operandi since its inception: "I can go any place, any place in New York, and I can find people willing to work for nothing for *Semiotext(e)*. They like the project, they like to be involved, and then they disappear, because we all have our lives." When reading such a statement today, at a time when the precarious labour conditions marshalled in by neoliberalism's debt economy have been subject to intense scrutiny from the left, it is difficult to separate *Semiotext(e)* from the now frequent exploitation of unpaid interns and volunteers in the cultural sector. However, Lotringer's own mythologization of *Semiotext(e)*—which characterizes the imprint as a decentralized and flexible organizational form extending far beyond the editor's managerial control—runs against any straightforward narrative of exploitation. Despite the symbolic capital he has accumulated from this collective undertaking, Lotringer insists that he cannot take ownership of *Semiotext(e)*: "It is like a gigantic network, and I'm not at the center at all…. I can penetrate the network, tap in here or there, but it is not as if I'm in charge at all." See Lotringer, in Schwarz and Balsamo, "Under the Sign of *Semiotext(e)*," p. 216.

[99] Diego Cortez organized an art auction at Anina Nosei Gallery in SoHo, where profits from the sale of new works by Jean-Michel Basquiat would support the Italian issue's production costs. Lotringer recalls the process in an amusing anecdote: "[Cortez] didn't know much about the politics of Autonomia and told the daughter of an Italian general whom he had met at a party at Anina Nosei's what the auction was for. She [the general's daughter] immediately told Anina that she would put her in jail for that next time she would be in Italy if she held the auction or anything of the sort. As a result, she [Nosei] cancelled the auction and returned the works to Diego, who sold them instead." The convergence of forces recounted here—a social misfire, political intimidation, and the silent collaboration of one of the downtown scene's most famous exports at the start of his career—illuminates the strange knot of contemporary art, social life, transatlantic communication, and political struggle appearing in downtown New York at the turn of the 1980s. See Lotringer, in Premmereur, "From New York No Wave to Italian Autonomia."

[100] In a 1985 article on social space and group formation, Pierre Bourdieu reminds us that one cannot make the common sense from without, or even from a marginal position within a social group. Rather, the power to define the "legitimate view of the social world" requires a level of symbolic capital recognized within the group itself. The linked struggles for social capital and for the authority to make the common sense, argues Bourdieu, "is performed incessantly, at every moment of ordinary existence." Every attempt to establish intellectual hegemony within a group, to define its limits, or to articulate its connections to a wider movement or cultural shift, is integrated into this field of struggle. At stake is "the monopoly of legitimate *naming*," the authority to speak *as* and *for* the social group. This structure of group formation extends from the most official—for example, the political party or the nation state—to the most informal—the ethnic group or the social clique. Groups organize themselves according to the struggle to make the common sense whether they are structured or structureless, centralized or decentralized, hierarchical or horizontal. See Pierre Bourdieu, "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups," *Theory and Society*, vol. 14, no. 6 (November 1985): pp. 729-731.

and critical innovation, as Terry Smith convincingly argued earlier in the 1970s.[101] Like the no wave filmmakers, *Semiotext(e)* sought popular appeal and symbolic power not through a logic of inclusivity or populism, but through notorious sectarianism. It took the form of an exclusive but frequently changing network, one that entertained the clandestine and conspiratorial undertones implied by the term "network" before it was redefined by new management discourse in the 1980s.[102]

According to Henry Schwarz and Anne Balsamo, the Italian issue "was conceived as a direct intervention into the American left, where it hoped to inspire international support for a popular movement that Italian authorities were brutally suppressing in the name of terrorism."[103] The story of Semiotext(e)'s immersion into the downtown art scene, and in particular, its involvement with artists invested in no wave art and film casts *Semiotext(e)*'s Italian issue in a different light. At a time when many young artists—and especially those who were associated with Colab—were seeking to reposition their work beyond the art world, *Semiotext(e)* was moving in the other direction. When Lotringer and Christian Marazzi called for the "return of politics," they were not simply referring to the embrace of Autonomist cause theory and praxis by the U.S. left. They were also—in part—making a plea to the downtown art scene from which *Semiotext(e)*'s readership and production team had been built. Lotringer has since clarified this point: "With the 'Autonomia' issue, I also wanted to dispel the glamour that European terrorists had in New York at the time—the Red Brigades in Italy and the Baader-Meinhof group [RAF] in Germany."[104] This makes sense. In the Italian issue, armed insurgency was repeatedly cast as a naïve and retrograde form of political dissent. The Red Brigades were criticized not only because

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[101] See Terry Smith, "The Provincialism Problem," *Artforum* (September 1974): pp. 54-59.

[102] In their examination of the historical permutations of the term "network," Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello explain how "this term, until the 1980s when it was used to refer to human organizations, was nearly always employed pejoratively to characterize clandestine, illegitimate and/or illegal forms of links." See Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, pp. 141-2.

[103] Schwarz and Balsamo, "Under the Sign of *Semiotext(e)*," p. 210.

[104] Lotringer, quoted in Premmeurer, "From New York No Wave to Italian Autonomia." One could speculate why Lotringer chose to unpack the political context behind the Red Brigades before addressing the politics of the RAF. Whereas the strongest wave of RAF action was already complete—many of its leading organizers were either imprisoned or dead—the Red Brigades remained shrouded in mystery at the end of the 1970s. Its leadership and form of organization remained unclear. With its intersections with a mass movement with strong ties to the "molecular" theories that *Semiotext(e)* was already invested in, the Red Brigades was also closer to the editor's own interests than was the RAF, which was unambiguously understood as a Leninist insurrectionary cadre. Perhaps more significantly, Lotringer had privileged access into the world of Autonomia Operaia due to his close ties with Guattari, who was friends with many of the movement's leading organizers.

their tactics were ineffective, but also because they were out-dated.[105] By restaging the Italian debate on armed struggle according to the terms of novelty, the editor implicated his friends in the no wave scene, many of whom were actively glamourizing armed struggle as if it were at the forefront of extremist fashion.

Of course, the Italian issue was not only conceived as an instrument for Lotringer to introduce his friends to more advanced forms of anti-capitalist resistance. The editor's fascination with Autonomia preceded his initiation into the world of art. It was guided both by his close relationship with Guattari—a comrade of the imprisoned Italians—and by his sustained interest in the effects of the movements of 1968 on political thought. Nevertheless, as he argued in the issue's introduction, while the Italian issue was not *about* downtown New York, "we can read our own history, our *possible* history, between the lines."[106] For Lotringer, the *Semiotext(e)* project was fundamentally about maintaining instability and foreignness within the contexts in which it circulated: "It is of the art world, but not referring to it. It is from the university, but not referring to it. It is French, but the French do not recognize themselves in it."[107] Appropriately, the Italian issue was *of* New York's downtown art scene—produced with the help of a cross section of young artists and writers working downtown—and yet it did not include a single mention of art in its 317 pages. It was designed to resonate with the concerns of the New York art world through analogy and insinuation. In this respect, the Italian issue solicited a comparable form of attention as did Nares's *Rome '78* and Mitchell's *Red Italy*, which asked viewers to see Italy in New York. The issue aimed to politicize an art scene that was superficially drawn to the phenomenon of ultra-left armed struggle, not by providing a theory of practice but rather by shaking its common sense understanding of what constituted political radicalism. Lotringer imagined each of *Semiotext(e)*'s publications as an intervention, as an active agent that could drive existing debates in unforeseen directions. The Italian issue was an early attempt to change the vocabulary that artists used and the ways they collectively organized.

The social space created between Colab and *Semiotext(e)* was crucial to the bi-lateral exchange between the fields of art and theory in New York. Examined from the point of view of production, *Semiotext(e)* appeared not as an foreign agent in the artistic milieu, but as a link in

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[105] For example, see Negri, in "Negri's Interrogation," p. 189.
[106] Lotringer, in Lotringer and Marazzi, "The Return of Politics," p. 9.
[107] Lotringer, quoted in "Schwarz and Balsamo, "Under the Sign of *Semiotext(e)*," p. 218.

the chain, part of a feedback loop that would continue to catalyze the idea of the "alternative" in New York and orient critical art discourse to the present day.

**Monuments and Tombs**

When Lotringer presented his friends in downtown New York with the debate over the political tactics of the Red Brigades as it appeared in Italy's activist network, he wanted to highlight the fading star of armed struggle and to propose a politically significant alternative in its wake. However, the social capital and cultural insights he had gained over the previous three years of immersion in the downtown art scene were not sufficient to make an impact. He recalls that neither artists nor activists were moved by Autonomia: "no one wanted to hear about it. It was too hard for both the world of art and politics to understand at the time."[108] Moore flipped through the issue when it was released, but it struck him as too disconnected to actual events: "I am much more of an empirical person; I couldn't hack that shit."[109] According to Lotringer, the failure of the Italian issue to function as an intervention at all—to influence either the organized left or the art community—resulted from its delayed production schedule. When he began working on the issue in late 1977, the Autonomia movement was growing stronger and more passionate in its refusal of the Italian state. By the time the issue was sent to the printers three years later, most of Autonomia's leading theorists and organizers were awaiting trial. In the interim, the issue's concept had to be continually revised in order to make sense of the changing political context it aimed to capture. As the editor reflects: "We wanted to build a monument to the Movement. Unfortunately, what we came up with was a glorious tomb."[110]

Lotringer's emphasis on the mistiming of the issue, on its failure to generate an immediate impact, attests to an impatience that he shared with the no wave artists and filmmakers. In a press release for a no wave film series held at Artists Space in 1981, Tim Burns, who organized the four-day event, succinctly explained no wave's commitment to speed: "Super 8 is geared for fast productions. You can make a feature in two weeks if you're organized. . . .

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[108] Lotringer, quoted in Premmereur, "From New York No Wave to Italian Autonomia."

[109] Lyons, unpublished interview with Alan W. Moore.

[110] Lotringer, quoted in Schwarz and Balsamo, "Under the Sign of *Semiotext(e),*" p. 210. This "tomb" remains an important English-language resource on mid-century Italian Marxism, and yet its significance would not be widely acknowledged in the U.S. art world until two decades later, when *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), the first of a theoretical trilogy by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, was released to the U.S. public in the immediate aftermath of the Seattle uprisings of 1999. See Steve Lyons, "Fashionably Late," *esse arts + opinions* (Autumn 2015): p. 16.

What I'm interested in is content and immediacy of form. I want to see what people are thinking right now, rather than last year."[111] The no wave filmmakers used super-8 film because it enabled them to work quickly. They premiered their films in nightclubs and in their own self-organized venues, where audiences were more-or-less guaranteed and where selections procedures were non-existent. From the point of view of production, *Semiotext(e)*'s labourious and careful editing and design process could not have been much more different. Moreover, not only was the Italian issue published too late to effectively monumentalize the Autonomia movement, but the critique of ultra-left armed struggle it advanced was released into an art world that had, for the most part, already moved on.[112]

If Colab's *The Times Square Show* represented a monument to no wave, *New York/New Wave* (February 15-April 5, 1981), curated by Cortez at P.S. 1 one year later (and shortly after the release of the Italian issue), may have represented its tombstone [fig. 3.12]. *New York/New Wave* included musicians associated with no wave such as Lydia Lunch, Brian Eno, David Byrne, Arto Lindsay, John Lurie, and John Sex, graffiti writers such as Ali, Crash, Dondi, Fab Five Freddy, Futura 2000, artists such as Basquiat, Goldin, Haring, and Scharf at the beginning of their careers, Colab artists such as Peter Fend, Michael McClard and Robin Winters, downtown icons such as Robert Mapplethorpe and Warhol, and *Semiotext(e)* regulars including Acker, Burroughs, Sarah Charlesworth, Joseph Kosuth, and Duncan Smith. As John Perrault

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[111] Tim Burns, quoted in "Emergency," press release (New York: Artists Space, 1981).

[112] Semiotext(e)'s Italian issue would not be the journal's last attempt to integrate political theory into the artistic scene. "The German Issue" featured texts by leading theorists and activists alongside interviews with downtown artists. It directly engaged the role of art in the project of political struggle and included a timeline and glossary of key terms written for the uninitiated. The Italian issue's mistiming was of historical importance. As Schwarz and Balsamo note, "the political context surrounding *Autonomia*, and particularly its 'failure' to capture the intended moment, produced its own quiet revolution in the new philosophy of production at *Semiotext(e)*." The journal was re-conceived as a publishing imprint, where it would specialize in "mak[ing] quick 'lightning strikes' into contemporary cultural issues." Since the book format was both cheaper and quicker to produce, it enabled *Semiotext(e)* to respond more nimbly to current affairs. See Schwarz and Balsamo, "Under the Sign of *Semiotext(e)*," p. 211; p. 215. Among *Semiotext(e)*'s first book projects, Jean Baudrillard's *Simulations* (1983), would become its most widely read in the New York art community. It effectively reshaped the critical discourse around postmodern art and informed the Neo-Geo and Simulationist trends that would become dominant in New York during the mid-1980s. Distorted references to *Simulations* appeared almost immediately in art reviews, exhibition press releases, and catalogue texts, where, as Lotringer recalls, it provided "an aura of theory to what was, for the most part, a shrewd move by art in the direction of the media and advertising industry." See Sylvère Lotringer, "Better Than Life," *Artforum* (April 2003): p. 252. See also Sylvère Lotringer, "Doing Theory," in Lotringer and Sande Cohen, eds., *French Theory in America* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 125-162. By 1987, *Simulations* had become so entrenched in art discourse that it warranted the exhibition *Resistance (Anti-Baudrillard)*, organized by Group Material at White Columns from February 6 to February 28, 1987.

argued in response to the exhibition: "maybe new wave art is already old wave art."[113] Indeed, *New York/New Wave* was widely recognized as a key event in the institutionalization, and consequently, the death of no wave, a process signified by the substitution of *new* for *no*. As the tag "new wave" encompassed an increasingly large and amorphous collection of practices (from no wave cinema to graffiti-on-canvas and neo-expressionist painting), ultra-left armed struggle became only one sub-theme among many, circulating as a relic of the 1970s, and, consequently, as depreciated currency. Like *The Times Square Show*, *New York/New Wave* parlayed no wave's constructed bohemia into market success. Its lasting significance was in boosting the commercial careers of artists like Basquiat, Fab Five Freddy, and Haring, artists who had previously exhibited at *The Times Square Show*, and whose work would come to define the dominant aesthetic of the nascent East Village gallery district. The artists whose careers skyrocketed after *New York/New Wave* had little to do with no wave or its violent iconography.

Lucy R. Lippard rightly detected a reactionary—or at least politically apathetic—impulse behind some of the "pseudoterrorist" practices appearing in the name of no wave at the end of the 1970s. However, as this chapter has demonstrated, the rise of "retrochic" in downtown New York was not nearly as insulated from political discourse as Lippard suggested. The increase in references to terrorism, and the diverging reflections on armed struggle in no wave art and cinema corresponded with a broader convergence between artistic and intellectual milieus in New York, and specifically, between *Semiotext(e)* and Colab, where artists began to engage with post-1968 political theory—whether by reading, editing, translating, illustrating, or typesetting it. The knot of art, theory, and punk emerging at the turn of the 1980s generated numerous iterations on the theme of armed insurgency. Yet these iterations were far from identical. Armed insurgency became a site of struggle *within* the artistic milieu, where divisions appeared both within and between the social groups forming around Colab and *Semiotext(e)*.

These divisions were far from clear-cut. The "subtle current of reactionary content" diagnosed by Lippard flowed through New York's official and unofficial alternative spaces, where it manifested not in the form of a formalist retreat, but as a kind of overcompensation—a symbolic alignment with the extreme left, which, according to the critic, smacked of deceit.[114] No wave represented a threat to Lippard precisely because it harnessed the look of political art

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[113] John Perrault, "Low Tide," *Soho News* (February 25, 1981): p. 41.
[114] Lippard, "Retrochic," p. 67.

while diverting its audience's attention from the political terrain in which it was produced and in which it circulated. It was in the lure of the foreign, as much as the lure of the extreme, that no wave found a common cause with *Semiotext(e)*. With hindsight, it is perhaps this shared diverted gaze that enabled Lotringer and Marazzi to recognize a "refusal of politics" in the U.S. Massive protests to the politics of austerity were a perennial feature of the political landscape after 1975. Anti-gentrification and tenants' rights activists in Lower Manhattan (and especially on the Lower East Side, where the no wave filmmakers resided) were forging coalitions and gaining momentum. Militant groups associated with the Weather Underground Organization, the May 19th Communist Organization, and the Revolutionary Communist League, including art collectives like the Madame Binh Graphics Collective (1977-1983), Black Cat/Gato Negro (1978), and the Amiri Baraka Anti-Imperialist Cultural Union (1978-1981), were plastering the city with revolutionary propaganda, for which members of the Madame Binh Graphics Collective would serve time in prison. Months before the release of the Italian issue, the thirty-one year old Puerto Rican artist Elizam Escobar, who taught at the East Harlem alternative space and community museum El Museo del Barrio, was arrested in Evanston, Illinois along with ten FALN comrades, eventually serving twenty-nine years of a sixty-eight year sentence for his role in conspiring to bomb twenty-eight banks, stores, and government buildings in the Chicago area. While *The New York Times* followed the trial closely, it went unmentioned in downtown periodicals like the *Village Voice* and the *East Village Eye*.[115] When it comes to refusing politics, no wave was only the tip of an iceberg. As I will explore in greater depth in Chapter Four, the widespread refusal of artists, critics, curators, administrators, and art dealers to acknowledge the grassroots resistance movements forming in the shadow of the alternative arts sphere splintered the idea of the "alternative" from within, revealing *Semiotext(e)*'s intervention as only one front in a sustained struggle over the political common sense as it oriented cultural production in New York. The terms that defined the idea of the "alternative"—both its politicized and depoliticized variants—appeared (and still appear), volatile and contested.

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[115] See Nathaniel, Sheppard Jr., "New York Police Take Warrants for FALN. Suspects to Illinois," *The New York Times* (April 6, 1980): p. 1. See also "Prison Sentences Imposed on 10 in Chicago Case," *The New York Times* (February 19, 1981): p. A20.

**Chapter Four:**       **Dividing the Lower East Side**

The fall of 1981 was a critical moment in the history of alternative art in New York. In September, Patti Astor and Bill Stelling opened Fun Gallery in a tiny storefront at 225 East 11th Street in the East Village with an exhibition of drawings by Steven Kramer.[1] The show sold out, attracting New York's collecting class to the Lower East Side, an economically depressed and largely Puerto Rican neighbourhood that, like the South Bronx, was better known for its poverty, heroin trade, and urban ruins than for its nascent cultural scene. The first of over one hundred commercial galleries to be established on the Lower East Side over the next four years, Fun Gallery was ground zero for what would become known as the East Village gallery district.[2] In the same month that Astor and Stelling mounted their inaugural exhibition, Group Material announced that it had closed its storefront gallery at 244 East 13th Street, only two streets north of Fun Gallery, where it had staged art exhibitions and events on social and political themes throughout the previous year.[3] Group Material positioned itself in the activist tradition of art organizations like Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, which several members had taken part in as students of Joseph Kosuth at the School of Visual Arts (SVA). Both Fun Gallery and Group Material promoted themselves as alternatives to New York's established alternative spaces, but they adopted opposing visions of the future of alternative art and the Lower East Side.

For many defenders of the newly-minted East Village art scene, the emerging commercial galleries were thought to be the rightful inheritors of the bohemian subculture that had flourished in the neighbourhood in the 1950s and 1960s. They viewed their presence in the neighbourhood as precedented and generally unproblematic.[4] For Group Material and other artists and art collectives committed to left politics, the supposed benefits of new art on the

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[1] Patti Astor, "Patti Astor Interview," @*149st*: *The Cyber Bench: Documenting New York City Graffiti*, 2002: http://www.at149st.com/astor.html (accessed November 15, 2017).

[2] Drawing on a wide range of gallery guides and periodicals published during the 1980s, Elizabeth Kerwin compiled an exhaustive list of 197 galleries opened in the East Village between 1981 and 1987. See Kerwin, "It's All True: Imagining New York's East Village Art Scene of the 1980s," PhD Dissertation, University of Maryland, 1999, pp. 309-339.

[3] Group Material, "Caution! Alternative Space!" (1981), in *Alternative Art New York*, p. 187.

[4] For more on the bohemian subcultures on the Lower East Side in the 1950s and 1960s, see Ronald Sukenick, *Down and In: Life in the Underground* (New York: Beech Tree Books, 1987). See also Stansell, *American Moderns*. Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan survey responses from journalists, critics, and art dealers about the East Village gallery district, exposing how representatives and legitimators of the new art scene systematically ignored or rationalized their role in the concurrent gentrification of the Lower East Side. See Deutsche and Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification," *October*, no. 31 (Winter 1984): pp. 91-111.

cultural life of the Lower East Side could only be measured against the potentially devastating consequences of gentrification for the neighbourhood's poor and minority populations. As for the Lower East Side's residents and community organizers, many regarded the emerging art scene with suspicion, if not outward hostility. It was widely perceived not as a cultural avant-garde but as the vanguard of gentrification, one element in a long-range plan devised by City officials and powerful real estate interests to evict the poor and working class residents of the neighbourhood and to rebuild it as an enclave for the wealthy. The alignment of artists with the interests of the City and the real estate industry was becoming clear to many—to artists, critics, journalists, sociologists, community activists, and politicians—provoking some segments of the art community to question whether they had the responsibility to confront and work against the processes of gentrification for which they were being put to use.

The solidarity between artists cultivated during the radical movements of the late 1960s had empowered the art community to win state funding for alternative art institutions and non-commercial art practices, as well as the special legal authority to live in buildings not zoned for residential use. It was only thanks to the organizing efforts of artists during this era that a strong alternative space movement formed in New York. But the movement to advocate for artists' rights singled out the art community as a constituency with special needs above and beyond those of blue-collar workers and the unemployed, consequently driving a wedge between art workers and the working class. The subsequent discovery that the interests of the art community could be aligned with those of the City's elected official and real estate developers positioned artists, and especially artists with left-wing political values, in a contradictory position. Should they, or *could they even*, withdraw from the mechanism of power they were integrated into and which supported their self-interest as a constituency? Could art workers organize in solidarity with the poor, evicted, and displaced in anything other than bad faith? These questions erupted in the public discourse during the prolonged controversy over the Artists Homeownership Program, a hotly contested City-led plan for subsidized artists' housing on the Lower East Side announced in the summer of 1981. These questions were already in the air. A year and a half earlier, a small Colab working group named the Committee for the Real Estate Show had staged *The Real Estate Show*, an ambitious exhibition in an abandoned City-owned Lower East Side property that explicitly aimed "to show that artists are willing and able to place themselves and their work

squarely in a context which shows solidarity with oppressed people."[5] The formation of the Committee for the Real Estate Show, which ultimately led to the foundation of the Lower East Side alternative space ABC No Rio, represented yet another split within Colab—and yet another instance in which Colab reflected broader fissures in the downtown New York art community. If, for the majority of artists and critics, the East Village commercial galleries constituted a vital alternative to the existing alternative spaces, for a small minority that counted the Committee for the Real Estate Show among its forerunners, the emergence of the East Village art scene made it urgent and necessary to realign the "alternative" with the culture of grassroots organizing from which the alternative space movement had emerged the decade before. This division had already started to form in SoHo, where, by the end of the 1970s, the art community was identified as both a victim and perpetrator of gentrification.

**The SoHo Effect**

In the 1970s, SoHo represented the future of urban renewal in New York. Over the course of the decade, the average rent for lofts steadily increased. Lofts that were generally listed for less than $200 per month in 1968 were priced at $600-$800 per month by 1975, far exceeding the rate of inflation.[6] What had been for most of the twentieth century a district zoned for manufacturing use was rapidly converted into a residential neighbourhood, leading property values to dramatically increase. As is well rehearsed in the literature on the gentrification of New York, artists—newcomers to SoHo in the late 1950s and early 1960s—found themselves at the frontier of gentrification, where their live-in studios, heavily advertised in *The New York Times* and elsewhere as the avant-garde of "loft living," quickly became the definition of urban chic.[7] A new market was born. This shorthand narrative mistakes the effects of gentrification for its causes. As Martha Rosler explains, gentrification is a complex process that begins with calculated and coordinated disinvestment:

> Under whatever rubric, the process involves not only the withdrawal of monetary
> support on the part of the private sector, including both landlords and banks (in an

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[5] Committee for the Real Estate Show, "Manifesto or Statement of Intent" (1979), transcribed and republished on the back cover of *House Magic: Bureau of Foreign Correspondence*, no. 6 (Spring 2014).
[6] Sharon Zukin examines trends in loft rental costs in *Loft Living*, p. 142.
[7] Ibid., p. 4. For example, see Gilbert Millstein, "Portrait of the Loft Generation," *The New York Times Magazine* (January 7, 1962): pp. 24-36.

illicit policy called "red-lining"), but also the withdrawal of city services such as fire protection, hospital services, schools, and road maintenance. When the recapitalization of gentrification occurs, many of the original residents have already been forced out or are forced to live under grotesque conditions. Many inner-city residents not displaced by the abandonment and disinvestment are finally cast out of their neighborhoods by this process of gentrification. Some of those displaced double or triple up with friends and relatives in already cramped apartments, and others simply find themselves on the streets.[8]

Accordingly, the gentrification of SoHo did not begin with the neighbourhood's repopulation by artists, but with the widespread de-industrialization of the city in the preceding years. This process was not only produced by general shifts in the U.S. economy away from manufacturing and heavy industry and towards finance, real estate, and service. It was also the result of a series of government interventions meant to remake the city for the business class, which had begun in 1929.

The process had took place over the first half of the twentieth century. New York's Democratic Party establishment, prominent real estate developers, and members of the patrician elite devised and gradually implemented a broad-scale plan for urban change, advancing a vision for the city in which manufacturing and industry would be pushed to the fringes of Manhattan and into the Outer Boroughs. The plan—eventually incorporated into the 1961 New York City Zoning Resolution[9]—was motivated by economic calculation, but also by the prejudices of the city's elite; the close proximity of the upper class enclave of Fifth Avenue to working-class residential and manufacturing areas was regarded as a nuisance for much of the upper class, which, as Sharon Zukin explains, "had a serious aversion to the presence of workers."[10] With a vision of rezoning Manhattan for the comforts of the middle- and upper-classes, policy makers proposed to "remap New York into definitive residential, manufacturing, and commercial districts of various levels of activity."[11] The 1961 rezoning made it illegal for landlords to renew

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[8] Martha Rosler, "Fragments of a Metropolitan Viewpoint," in Brian Wallis, ed., *If You Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory, and Social Activism: A Project by Martha Rosler* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), pp. 25-26.

[9] The basic tenets for this resolution were introduced in the 1929 Regional Plan, which was delayed by the Great Depression and World War II, before being revised in the Voorhees Plan in 1951.

[10] Zukin, *Loft Living*, pp. 37-38.

[11] Ibid., p. 41.

leases on manufacturing lofts in SoHo and other districts formerly zoned for light industry, setting the legal conditions for the slow process of eviction and redevelopment that would follow. However, as Zukin points out, the city chose not to enforce the zoning restrictions "until real estate interests – developers and landlords – wanted that space."[12] If rezoning made it technically feasible to clear SoHo for redevelopment, there were still no financial incentives to drive investment into large-scale residential conversions. Furthermore, as Zukin explains, "suburbia had so dominated popular images of the American home that it was almost impossible to imagine how anyone could conceive the desire to move downtown into a former sweatshop or printing plant."[13] The social and cultural conditions necessary to secure a market for converted lofts would require a shift in public perception. New York's art community was central to provoking this shift.

As noted above, large numbers of artists began to occupy vacant SoHo lofts in the late 1950s, first as production workshops and later as illegal live/work studios. As Jim Hoberman remembers, SoHo was attractive to artists for one reason: space was "abundant and relatively cheap."[14] Accessible from five of the city's ten primary trunk subway lines, SoHo was a convergence zone for the city's transit system. SoHo's combination of abundant, inexpensive space and central location supplied the conditions for the district to become the hub for New York's alternative art sphere. 112 Workshop, Anthology Film Archives, Artists Space, *Avalanche* magazine, The Kitchen, among other venues for art, film, performance, theatre, and dance, sprung up in the district at the turn of the 1970s, joining venues such as the Judson Dance Theater (1962 -) to make up the district's burgeoning cultural life.

This new art scene was largely tolerated by landlords, but as greater numbers of artists began living in lofts, the Fire Department started to fear that "in the event of a serious conflagration, fire fighters would be unable either to find or to save artists who might live in a burning building."[15] The City subsequently carried out nearly 2000 evictions between 1961 and 1964.[16] The growing threat of eviction compelled more than five hundred members of the art

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[12] Ibid., p. 42.
[13] Ibid., p. 58.
[14] J. Hoberman, "'Like Canyons and Rivers': Performance for Its Own Sake." *Rituals on Rented Island: Object Theater, Loft Performance, and the New Psychodrama—Manhattan, 1970-1980* (New York and New Haven, CT: Whitney Museum of American Art and Yale University Press, 2013), p. 9.
[15] Zukin, *Loft Living*, p. 49.
[16] Joe Giordano, in Marshall Berman, et. al., "Artists' Life/Work: Housing and Community for Artists," in *If You Lived Here*, p. 156.

community to form the Artists' Tenants' Association (ATA) in 1960-1961, a group established to advocate for the rights of artists to live in lofts not designated for residential use.[17] ATA successfully lobbied the City government, negotiating a deal with Mayor Robert F. Wagner Jr. (1954-1965) that made it legal for professional artists to live and work in manufacturing lofts.[18] ATA, as well as later artists' housing advocacy groups such as Artists Against the Expressway and the SoHo Artist Tenants Association, preceded AWC and other artist-led activist groups to represent New York's art community as an organized constituency. However, although ATA's successful negotiation with the City signalled an early victory for the art community, Zukin points out that "from the perspective of long-term deindustrialization, the artists' protected entry into manufacturing zones signified an incursion, with the state's blessing, into space that had previously been reserved for manufacturers."[19] Now on equal footing, artists and small manufacturers competed for loft space. By presenting a new use for loft space, pioneering the lifestyle of loft living, and turning SoHo into a destination for consumers of art, artists contributed to the gradual transformation of the loft into a site for middle- and upper-class living while setting a precedent for the conversion rather than the bulldozing of SoHo's old manufacturing buildings.[20] Among Zukin's most compelling points is that, although the struggle for artists' live/work space motivated artists to recognize their collective agency, it also positioned the art community in an unexpected alliance with the political and economic elite:

> At the time, people thought that the battle lines were drawn between, on the one side, artists, humanists, and "the people," and on the other side, the power structure – the city government, Wall Street tycoons, and big real-estate developers – that wanted to tear down Lower Manhattan. Little did they realize that in this struggle artists represented both a constituency and a surrogate.[21]

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[17] Zukin, *Loft Living*, p. 49.

[18] Artists were required to apply for "Artist in Residence" (A.I.R.) certification from the City, register their studios with the Department of Buildings, and post an A.I.R. sign on their building's exterior to alert the Fire Department of their presence. See Zukin, *Loft Living*, p. 50.

[19] Ibid., p. 51.

[20] The loft conversion process allowed landlords and developers to secure profits from existing tenants while renovating vacant units, enabling a degree of "mixed use" as manufacturers and artists were priced out of their lofts.

[21] Zukin, *Loft Living*, p. 51.

Although artists were not the pioneers, driving force, or chief beneficiaries of gentrification in SoHo, their interests were aligned with the interests of City Hall. As "a surrogate," the art community did some of the City's bidding, paving the cultural ground for redevelopment.[22]

At the end of the 1970s, artists were on the radar of New York's elected officials. One memo signed by Mayor Ed Koch in 1979 indicated the Mayor's keen interest in replicating the SoHo effect elsewhere: "I am interested in what the overall planning is to deal with the problem of loft conversions in the city. Are there other areas like SoHo that are being given special attention for artist, professional, or residential use and in the other boroughs other than Manhattan?"[23] This throwaway remark, delivered to City Councilman Vito J. Fossella Jr., demonstrates that Koch was not oblivious to the movement of artists in the city. For the Mayor, the clustering of artists in a neighbourhood flagged it as a potential site for gentrification. The supposed link between artists and gentrification was the one point on which the city's elected officials, urban sociologists, art historians, and community groups agreed. However, while the displacement of artists from SoHo to other blighted neighbourhoods created potential opportunities for the City, for many low-income residents of neighbourhoods like the South Bronx, Times Square, and the Lower East Side, the sudden appearance of artists represented a threat.

**The City Plan**

As the art community was gradually priced out of SoHo, droves of young white artists began resettling on the Lower East Side. The neighbourhood was attractive to the art community not only because of its close proximity to the established art enclaves of SoHo and nearby TriBeCa, but also its much cheaper rent.[24] The Lower East Side was historically one of New York's poorest neighbourhoods, primarily known since the nineteenth century for its notoriously overcrowded Old Law tenements teeming with new immigrant populations. In 1910, the Lower

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[22] It should be stressed that without legalizing the residential habitation of SoHo's lofts and providing tax abatements and tax exemptions for developers undertaking large-scale residential conversions of manufacturing buildings (such as the J-51 subsidy amended by City Council in 1975), the City would not have been capable of prompting the massive redevelopment of SoHo in the second half of the 1970s.

[23] Mayor Ed Koch, memorandum to Vito J. Fossella, March 9, 1979 (Edward I. Koch Documents Collection, Departmental Correspondence Series, La Guardia and Wagner Archives, Fiorello H. La Guardia Community College, CUNY, box 0000257, folder 8, January 1979 – June 1989).

[24] The median rent was only $172 per month, much lower than either SoHo or TriBeCa. See Deutsche and Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification," p. 103.

East Side had the highest population density in the United States, with more than 500,000 people occupying less than five square kilometres of land.[25] The population of the neighbourhood plummeted in subsequent years, registering only 155,000 residents in the 1980 census, down 30,000 from the decade before.[26] The racial and ethnic makeup of the Lower East Side shifted according to broader trends in im/migration. Following a wave of migration from Puerto Rico to New York in the 1950s and 1960s, Puerto Ricans began to overtake the predominantly Eastern European and Jewish populations that occupied the neighbourhood in the first half of the twentieth century.[27] As one of New York's most concentrated Spanish-speaking ghettos, the Lower East Side was widely referred to as *Loisaida* by its Puerto Rican residents. Marxist cultural critic Marshall Berman explains that although the declining population of the Lower East Side was initially greeted with relief from the community and from the City, it would eventually become the cause of alarm:

> Starting in the late 1960s, however, the Lower East Side was assaulted and battered by the drug industry, by gang warfare and explosive random violence, by large-scale abandonment and arson for profit, destroying much of the neighborhood's housing, reducing dozens of city blocks to rubble—and leaving not just a few people (a 20 per cent drop from 1970 to 1980), but a collapse of resources for those who were left.[28]

Following the same pattern as the South Bronx, the neighbourhood had become the site of urban neglect. Its deterioration was similarly exacerbated by the massive disinvestment of City resources during and after the fiscal crisis of 1975. By the end of the 1970s, not only was the Lower East Side "one of the few places in Manhattan where you can walk about in the middle of the day and not see another soul," but it was also blighted with urban ruins.[29] Entire city blocks

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[25] Marshall Berman, "A Struggle to the Death in Which Both Sides are Right," *Village Voice* (July 12, 1982): p. 12.
[26] Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 20.
[27] In the 1940 census, 61,463 Puerto Ricans were registered living in New York City. In 1960, the number of Puerto Ricans living in New York City had risen to 612,574. The wave of migration following the Second World War was spurred on by a series of factors, including educational opportunities for Puerto Ricans who served in the military, as well as efforts made by Mayor Robert F. Wagner, Jr. to recruit workers. See Lisa Garcia Bedolla, *Introduction to Latino Politics in the U.S.* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2009), p. 103.
[28] Berman, "A Struggle to the Death in Which Both Sides are Right," p. 12.
[29] Ibid., p. 10.

were boarded up or torn down, held in the break between decay and renewal. These sites represented open wounds in a city that had not yet recovered from near-bankruptcy. However, as art historian Rosalyn Deutsche explains, "[d]ecay, disinvestment, abandonment—displacing processes by which land and buildings are devalorized—prepare the way for profitable reinvestment."[30] The art community began to congregate on the Lower East Side when large chunks of real estate remained abandoned. Its presence alone would signal to City Hall that the neighbourhood was primed for renewal.

It was not by coincidence that in August 1981, the Mayor's office announced that the Lower East Side would be the location for a divisive new initiative called the Artist Homeownership Program (AHOP), a program that was publicly supported by influential members of the art community, including dealers Leo Castelli and Ivan Karp, video artist and founder of Video Data Bank Lyn Blumenthal, choreographer and filmmaker Yvonne Rainer, and leaders of more than two dozen cultural organizations, including Artists Space, the New Museum, and Franklin Furnace.[31] It was furiously opposed by community advocates, residents, and a small but vocal group of artists who recognized it as a "front for gentrification" which would "inevitably displace the poor and working class people of the Lower East Side."[32] Colab and its members were absent from the debate. As will be made clear toward the end of this chapter, this is surprising given the group's significant role in bringing the gentrification of the Lower East Side to the attention of New York's art world only a year and a half earlier. Seventeen abandoned City-owned tenements on two ruined blocks of the Lower East Side were to be converted into live/work studios and sold to moderate-income artists at below-market rates (estimated between $40,000 and $50,000 per unit) [fig. 4.1].[33] Mortgage loans would be subsidized through the City's Participation Loan Program, a program designed to help low- and

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[30] Rosalyn Deutsche, "Alternative Space," in *If You Lived Here*, p. 64.

[31] Documentation is incomplete, but internal planning documents seem to indicate that this initiative came from the Mayor's office, with artists brought into the conversation after the August press release.

[32] Miriam Friedlander and Harriet Cohen, quoted in Leslie Bennetts, "16 Tenements to Become Artist Units in City Plan," *The New York Times* (May 4, 1982), B6. The controversy surrounding AHOP was widely reported in the *Village Voice*. It was subsequently discussed in several critical studies on art and gentrification in New York. For example, see Anne Bowler and Blaine McBurney, "Gentrification and the Avant Garde in New York's East Village: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly," *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 8, no. 4 (November 1991): pp. 56-57; Deutsche and Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification," pp. 100-102; Martha Rosler, "The Artists Home Ownership Program," in *If You Lived Here*, pp. 151-153; and Smith, *The New Urban Frontier*, pp. 22-23. To my knowledge, AHOP has not yet been discussed in relation to the discourse on alternative art in New York.

[33] Grace Glueck, "The Mayor's Lower East Side Story: Tenements into Co-ops for Artists," *The New York Times* (August 11, 1981): p. C9.

moderate-income residents enter the housing market.[34] After three years, artists would be allowed to sell their units to other artists at market rates, where they could expect to make sizeable profits. Anticipating the development of 140 units spread across two sites—one on Forsyth Avenue between Rivington Street and Stanton Street (on the south end of the neighbourhood), and the other on East 8th Street between Avenues B and C (near Tompkins Square Park)—AHOP was framed as a substantial effort to make amends with an art community that had been displaced by gentrification in SoHo. Artists' groups and private developers were invited to submit architect-prepared plans in response to a Request for Proposals. The deadline was September 15th, a little more than a month after the program was made public.

Quoted in a *New York Times* article publicizing the program, the City's assistant housing commissioner Janet Langsam described AHOP as an unparalleled initiative in support of the arts, noting that "[i]n polling about 40 major cities, I find no precedent for it."[35] Mayor Koch's described the program in the narrowest possible terms, justifying it as an initiative to support the previously neglected needs of the city's artists:

> Artists are always displaced. . . . They rent lofts, fix them up, and then avaricious landlords sell them for hundreds of thousands of dollars. I'm not against SoHo, but we should try to create neighborhoods where artists won't be displaced. By building in their ownership, they can stay permanently, and keep the benefits for themselves.[36]

As the program advanced, the Mayor would escalate his ambitions, arguing that AHOP would not only secure a stable art enclave in the neighbourhood even in the event of its gentrification, but it would also "help to fight abandonment and decay on the Lower East Side and to renew the

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[34] This was confirmed in a memo from Commissioner Anthony Gliedman to Mayor Koch, April 1, 1982, p. 2 (Edward I. Koch Documents Collection, Departmental Correspondence Series, La Guardia and Wagner Archives, Fiorello H. La Guardia Community College, CUNY, box 0000073, folder 4, March 1982 – April 1982).
[35] Janet Langsam, quoted in Glueck, "The Mayor's Lower East Side Story," p. C9.
[36] Koch, quoted in Ibid.

strength and vitality of this community."[37] As confirmed by Deputy Mayor Ronay Menschel: "The response by artists, developers and even a bank to the RFP has been enormous."[38]

The art community had little difficulty rallying behind the program as it developed. Representatives from New York's commercial galleries, major institutions, and alternative spaces advocated on behalf of AHOP. Martha Wilson and Barbara Quinn of Franklin Furnace claimed that "[a]rtists are 'working-class' individuals who often hold two jobs in order to support their families and art-making activities. It is fitting that the people of the City of New York support them in their effort to lead less 'nomadic' lives."[39] Linda Shearer, director of Artists Space, pointed to the exceptional needs of artists: "It should be recognized by the City that artists have very special housing needs."[40] Barbara Haskell, curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art, appealed more broadly to the economic incentive for supporting the program: "An art city does not exist without a thriving community of committed, working artists. Without this community and the manifold peripheral activities it generates, New York will lose a great deal— not only intellectually but economically as well as collectors and tourists go elsewhere to buy and be stimulated by new art forms."[41] The logic underlying each of these statements was distinct, as was the constituency to which each aimed its appeal. Whereas Wilson and Quinn's statement appealed to the sympathy of working class New Yorkers, it is difficult to imagine Shearer's statement appealing to anyone other than art workers who believed their needs to be exceptional. As for Haskell, her appeal was directed toward New Yorkers whose interests were tied to the economic prosperity of the city: elected officials, the financial elite, business owners, New York City bondholders, public-sector workers, and, perhaps indirectly, service workers in the city's tourist industry.

Among the most prominent artists selected for participation in AHOP was the renowned filmmaker and choreographer Yvonne Rainer, who, in an interview with Richard Goldstein,

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[37] Koch, quoted in Leslie Bennetts, "16 Tenements to Become Artist Units in City Plan," B6.

[38] Ronay Menschel, memo to Mayor Ed Koch, Re: Artist Housing Project, September 3, 1981, 1 page (Edward I. Koch Documents Collection, Departmental Correspondence Series, La Guardia and Wagner Archives, Fiorello H. La Guardia Community College, CUNY, box 0000072, folder 27, September 1981 – September 1981).

[39] Martha Wilson and Barbara Quinn, quoted in Richard Goldstein, "Portrait of the Artist as a Good Use," *Village Voice* (December 14, 1982): p. 20. This statement is also quoted in Deutsche and Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification," p. 101.

[40] Linda Shearer, quoted in Deutsche and Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification," p. 102.

[41] Barbara Haskell, quoted in Ibid.

provided a simple explanation for why artists rallied around the program. As she explained, her decision to support in the program was based on self-interest alone:

> I first got involved in this program as I saw the termination of an eight-year lease approaching, and I continued to be involved in it when my landlord evicted six tenants in the building. And I continue to be involved with it now because, following the loft law of June 1982, I anticipate my costs going up considerably, what with the allowed increase in rent and the tenants shouldering the cost of bringing this building up to code.[42]

AHOP provided an opportunity for Rainer to stabilize her living situation, but there were other perks: "I like the Lower East Side. I like the neighborhood, the mixture of business and living, the ease of daily life, like shopping. I mean, it's always been a pain in the ass to live in a loft."[43] Rainer recognized that the program was not perfect: "The worst thing about it is that the city has imposed this upon the neighbourhood." However, as she explained, "[o]ne can't survive in cities without contradiction, that's become pretty clear. . . . If the contradictions become too painful, I'm prepared to drop out."[44] Composer and choreographer Ed De Lello, who was interviewed alongside Rainer, put it even more plainly: "If I could drop out and the problem would go away, I would. . . . But if I drop out, the only thing that'll change is that I'm gonna stop making my art."[45]

Combatting abandonment on the Lower East Side and protecting artists from predatory landlords—both of the City's justifications for the program appear noble on the surface, but they should be not be isolated from the Mayor's goal of reproducing the SoHo effect elsewhere. There was nothing explicitly wrong with the City fighting abandonment and decay on the Lower East Side, nor was it a problem for the City to protect artists from eviction. However, underlying the affirmative rhetoric pronounced by the Mayor and parroted by AHOP's art-world advocates was a simple fact: AHOP was designed in anticipation of gentrification on the Lower East Side.

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[42] Yvonne Rainer, quoted in Goldstein, "Portrait of the Artist as a Good Use," p. 22.
[43] Rainer, quoted in Ibid.
[44] Rainer, quoted in Ibid. Rainer dropped out of the program just before it was assessed by the Board of Estimate. See Richard Goldstein, "Why Artists' Housing Went Down," *Village Voice* (February 22, 1983): p. 41. She also later acknowledged that her decision to support AHOP was misguided. See Rainer, in Berman, et. al., "Artists' Life/Work," p. 169.
[45] Ed De Lello, quoted in Goldstein, "Portrait of the Artist as a Good Use," p. 22.

Mayor Koch made this point clear in his public comments on the gentrification of SoHo: aside from the collateral damage to the artists—the shock troops of gentrification—SoHo was, in his assessment, a perfect experiment in urban renewal. Following a decade of austerity measures that devastated the city's poorest neighbourhoods, why should the City's first major initiative on the Lower East Side serve the housing needs of artists before those of the poor?

In the important and widely discussed article "The Fine Art of Gentrification" (1984), Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan explored how this line of questioning was systematically ignored by the arts press during the early 1980s, arguing that "[t]he possible interrelationship [between the influx of artists and the rapid gentrification of the Lower East Side] is treated in two ways: either it is ignored altogether or it is raised only as a side issue to be quickly dispensed with."[46] According to Deutsche and Ryan, the art-world response to AHOP was indicative of a more pervasive "blindness to the social struggle on the Lower East Side" shared by artists, art dealers, and critics living and working in the neighbourhood.[47] The new East Village gallery district emerged hand-in-hand with AHOP in the fall of 1981, where it rapidly developed into a strong commercial art infrastructure. Despite its commercial structure, this scene was widely recognized as the definitive successor of the alternative space movement, even from within the movement itself.

For example, in January 1984, the East Village commercial gallery district was the subject of exhibitions at Artists Space (*New Galleries of the Lower East Side*, January 21-February 18, 1984) and P.S. 1 (*Limbo*, January 22-March 18, 1984), each hosting fifty-one artists represented by commercial galleries in the East Village. Both exhibitions linked the East Village scene to a lineage of artist-run activity, suggesting a deliberate realignment of the idea of the "alternative" as it was understood not only by critics of the alternative spaces, but also by influential stakeholders in the first wave of alternative spaces. In the brochure accompanying *New Galleries of the Lower East Side*, guest curator (and former Artists Space director) Helene Winer argued that although she attempted to represent every gallery on the Lower East Side, she excluded Colab's ABC No Rio. After admitting that ABC No Rio was "an important pioneer in

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[46] Deutsche and Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification," p. 98.
[47] Ibid., p. 106.

the area," Winer justified her decision to exclude it from consideration for the sole reason that it was publicly funded.[48]

The new commercial galleries exhibited an eclectic mix of neoexpressionist painting, graffiti-on-canvas, and retrochic schlock, art trends which, like the critics who propped them up, rarely scrutinized their immediate social and political circumstances. The critics who most actively endorsed the East Village gallery scene, including Rene Ricard, Nicolas A. Mouffarrege, Carlo McCormick, and Walter Robinson, tended to either erase or exoticize the immigrant populations who had no other choice but to live in substandard conditions, representing the Lower East Side as a "unique blend of poverty, punk rock, drugs, arson, Hell's Angels, winos, prostitutes and dilapidated housing that adds up to an adventurous avant-garde setting of considerable cachet."[49] According to Craig Owens, the East Village scene was constructed as a *simulacrum* of bohemia, "the milieu in which exchange between high and low sectors of the cultural economy take place."[50] The subcultural pose taken by representatives of this new scene occluded the reality that "what has been constructed in the East Village is not an alternative to, but a miniature replica of, the contemporary art market."[51] The widespread and uncritical adherence to the fantasy of bohemia—of the generative co-existence of artists and the underclass—enabled defenders of the East Village scene to produce a false equivalency between the subcultural slumming performed by the middle-class white artists who recently moved to the neighbourhood and the everyday lives of the urban poor. It was only through this conflation that both were perceived as unquestioned victims of gentrification.[52] This self-perception enabled members of the East Village art scene to blatantly act in the interest of the City without renouncing their credibility as the rightful inheritors of the alternative space movement.

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[48] Also excluded from Winer's exhibition were Kenkeleba House (1979 -) and P.S. 122 (1980 -), alternative spaces which, like ABC No Rio, were established on the Lower East Side before the first East Village commercial galleries. See Helene Winer, untitled statement in *New Galleries of the Lower East Side*, exhibition brochure (New York: Artists Space, 1984), 6 pages.

[49] Robinson and McCormick, "Slouching Toward Avenue D," p. 135. This fragment was quoted in Deutsche and Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification," p. 93.

[50] Owens, "Commentary: The Problem with Puerilism," p. 162.

[51] Ibid., p. 163.

[52] Ibid., p. 163. Deutsche and Ryan take issue with Owens on this measure: "This is the trap that Craig Owens falls into when he claims that 'Artists are not, of course, responsible for 'gentrification'; they are often its victims, as the closing of any number of East Village galleries, forced out of the area by rents they helped to inflate, will sooner or later demonstrate'. To portray artists as the victims of gentrification is to mock the plight of the neighborhood's real victims." See Deutsche and Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification," p. 104.

**A Struggle to the Death**

If large segments of the art community took the Mayor's bait, responding to AHOP in the affirmative, the local community was prepared to fight back. The Lower East Side was home to numerous community activist groups, tenants' rights associations, and faith-based organizations committed to pushing for decent and affordable housing in the neighbourhood. The infrastructure for resistance was already there [fig. 4.2]. Only nine days after AHOP was publicly announced, representatives of four of these organizations (namely, LAND, Pueblo Nuevo, the Lower East Side Joint Planning Council, and the Coalition for Housing Development) sent a letter to *The New York Times* denouncing the program as a calculated assault on the poor:

> We are in sympathy with the Mayor's concern for artists who have been victimized by 'avaricious landlords'; however, the residents who have been living here for years are also victims of 'avaricious landlords' and we believe the priority for city-owned buildings should be as resources for low and moderate income neighborhood residents. . . . We are for housing low and moderate income people – no matter what their occupation, trade or interests. Shoemakers, bodega clerks, artists and families receiving public assistance or unemployment all need decent places to live at rents or mortgage payments they can afford. This is the kind of housing we want in this area. The Mayor's Lower East Side story further paves the way for displacement of local residents and shows clearly where the Mayor's priorities lie.[53]

This letter laid out the basic tenets of the community's opposition to AHOP. From the perspective of housing justice, the operative question was not whether or not the City planned to stop abandonment and decay on the Lower East Side, but how this plan would impact the urban poor. From this perspective, AHOP stood out not only as a brazen attempt to spur on real-estate speculation in the neighbourhood—to present the Lower East Side as an inevitable site of urban renewal—but also as one which would drain funds from the Participation Loan Program, the

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[53] Douglas Taylor, Lisa Kaplan, Amparo Tirado, and Luis Nieves, Letter to the Editor of *The New York Times*, August 20, 1981, 1 page (Edward I. Koch Documents Collection, Departmental Correspondence Series, La Guardia and Wagner Archives, Fiorello H. La Guardia Community College, CUNY, box 0000175, folder 08, July 1981 – September 1981).

City's only loan program designed to subsidize housing for the poor. As community activist Nilda Pimentel lamented, "It's like taking food out of the mouth of someone who is hungry and giving it to someone who is eating every day."[54]

The location of the two proposed AHOP sites also pointed to the extent of the City's plan. Chosen from the City's stock of *in rem* housing, the two sites were located in discrete pockets near the north-east and south-west borders the neighbourhood. Both were surrounded by abandoned buildings, some of which had been reoccupied in the 1970s by urban homesteaders.[55] If developed, these sites would have constituted what geographer Neil Smith terms "anchors" of gentrification. As Smith explains: "The economic geography of gentrification is not random; developers do not just plunge into the heart of slum opportunity, but tend to take it piece by piece. . . . They move in from the outskirts, building 'a few strategically placed outposts of luxury'."[56] If AHOP was an alibi for City-subsidized gentrification plan, then it would follow that the City was committed to gentrifying not just a portion, but the entirety of the Lower East Side.

Although *The New York Times* did not print the above-mentioned letter, it was copied to Mayor Koch, Commissioner Gliedman, Assistant Commissioner Langsam, and a judge from Community Board 3 (the advisory board for the Lower East Side and Chinatown), as well as an editor from the *Village Voice*. In subsequent correspondence with the Mayor, Gliedman was careful to flag the growing community resistance:

> You should be aware that there is substantial concern in some segments of the community to what has been characterized as an effort to utilize Artist housing to gentrify the Lower East Side. Indeed some local artists were discouraged from

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[54] Nilda Pimentel, quoted in Goldstein, "Portrait of the Artist as a Good Use," p. 20.

[55] The Forsyth Street site bordered a series of abandoned lots that had become the site of the Garden of Eden, a sprawling urban garden produced by the eccentric local activist Adam Purple. Purple had been painstakingly cultivating the Garden of Eden since 1975, using rubble from burned-out buildings to create pedestrian pathways in concentric circles which radiated outward from a central ying-yang symbol. Between the paths, fruits and vegetables grew from topsoil fertilized with horse manure collected in Central Park, as well as Purple's own waste. The Garden of Eden was beloved by the local community, and has since been recognized as a key example of urban land art. This was the cause of some anxiety for Commissioner Gliedman, who, in the above-cited memo, reported: "Also in the problem column is the colorful persona of John Purple [sic], a local folk hero and squatter in an otherwise vacant row of buildings. Mr. Purple's 'Garden of Eden' has been celebrated by the media for its earthly splendor which has come at the expense of the City due to his systematic cannibalization of surrounding buildings." See Gliedman, memo to Mayor Koch, April 1, 1982, p. 2.

[56] Smith, *The New Urban Frontier*, p. 21. See also Doug Henwood, "Subsidizing the Rich," *Village Voice* (August 30, 1988): p. 10.

submitting proposals and an attempt was made to preclude HUD's participation. Therefore, the selection comes without the blessing of the Community Board and Councilperson, despite a year and a half consultation.[57]

While the program had strong support from the arts community, Gliedman was apprehensive about the value of this support because, from his vantage-point, the art community "tends to be less vocal and organized" than the opposition.[58] Nevertheless, Gliedman was not about to throw in the towel on AHOP. The program's defeat would be particularly difficult to swallow because the Mayor was "personally committed to its implementation."[59] However, as AHOP advanced through the approval process, Gliedman's reports to the Mayor became increasingly pessimistic.

AHOP was one of an arsenal of City-led initiatives meant to drive real estate speculation to the Lower East Side. Others included the proposed sale of 130 of its stock of 688 tax-foreclosed properties to private developers, the demolition of abandoned buildings illegally occupied by drug traffickers, and the defunding of community groups that were committed to resisting gentrification.[60] As journalist Martin Gottlieb reported, by the end of 1982, the "land grab on the Lower East Side" was already wreaking havoc on the neighbourhood's poorest residents: "As their old Lower East Side buildings sell for three, four, and five times the prices of five years ago, large numbers of the poor have been forced to find shelter illegally with friends and family in the massive band of public housing projects that flank the East River."[61] As poor residents were priced out of the neighbourhood's privately-owned apartment buildings to make way for co-op conversions, large-scale redevelopments, or simply tenants who could afford higher rents, the demand for public housing accommodations far exceeded the City's supply. According to the Housing Authority, in 1982 the waiting list for public housing was 21 years long.[62]

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[57] Gliedman, memo to Mayor Koch, April 1, 1982, p. 2.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Anthony Gliedman, letter to Fred W. Pfaender, Director, Office of Single Family Housing at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, August 28, 1981, two pages (Edward I. Koch Documents Collection, Departmental Correspondence Series, La Guardia and Wagner Archives, Fiorello H. La Guardia Community College, CUNY, box 0000072, folder 27, September 1981 – September 1981).
[60] Martin Gottlieb, "Space Invaders: Land Grab on the Lower East Side," *Village Voice* (December 14, 1982): p. 10.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.

The emerging East Village gallery district, which crowded the streets with white artists, art dealers, and their wealthy patrons, was the most visible symbol of the neighbourhood's transformation.[63] The superficial radicalism of the art works notwithstanding, the art community became the target of scorn from anti-gentrification activists, and those who stood in favour of AHOP were publicly denounced for betraying the neighbourhood people. The operative division was not between the "alternative" and the "establishment," but between the art community and everyone else. Chuck Delaney of Lower Manhattan Loft Tenants underscored the perceptible alliance of artists with the City and real estate industry, delineating the central antagonism in the housing struggle:

> It's certainly clear that a lot of people who live in lofts are desperate for work space. But it's one thing when artists respond to community interest, and another when the influx is by invasion. . . . When art starts serving the interests of the government rather than the people, it's time for the people to wise the artists up.[64]

There was to be no ambiguity—"those who line up on the side of profit are going to find themselves on the enemy list," explained Carol Watson, Director of the Catholic Charities's Housing Leverage Fund.[65]

As if to add insult to the injury already felt by the poor and working-class residents of the Lower East Side, when the list of artists chosen to participate in AHOP was announced in the spring of 1982, it was revealed that none were artists of colour.[66] Not only were the projected beneficiaries of the program white, but, as Richard Goldstein explained, "the support for artists' housing has come from groups that serve a primarily white constituency."[67] Notable exceptions included Just Above Midtown, an art space supporting contemporary Black culture, and the La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club (1961 -), a Lower East Side theatre production and rehearsal space known for its "diverse and intergenerational audience."[68] By contrast, Goldstein continued, "[c]ultural organizations that serve a mostly minority population in the immediate area, such as

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[63] Ibid.
[64] Chuck Delaney, quoted in Goldstein, "Portrait of the Artist as a Good Use," p. 22.
[65] Carol Watson, quoted in Deutsche and Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification," p. 102.
[66] Rosler, "The Artist Home Ownership Program," p. 151.
[67] Goldstein, "Portrait of the Artist as a Good Use," p. 20.
[68] "La MaMa La Galleria," in *Alternative Histories*, p. 218.

Charas and Seven Loaves, are a good deal less enthused about the plan."[69] Chino Garcia, co-founder of CHARAS (1964 -) and long-time community activist, led the charge against AHOP.[70]

CHARAS—an acronym of the first initials of its six founding members: Chino Garcia, Humberto Crespo, Angelo Gonzalez, Roy Batiste, Anthony Figueroa, and Sal Becker—was established in 1964 by former gang leaders who wanted to give back to their community.[71] Working under the name the Real Great Society until 1968, the group initially framed itself as a community-based alternative to President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society program, a federal program that had invested millions of dollars to fight the "war on poverty" on the Lower East Side and in other urban ghettos. According to Garcia, the failure of the anti-poverty program to significantly improve the quality of life on the Lower East Side convinced the collective "that we had to make changes ourselves if we really wanted to control what happens in our neighborhood."[72] CHARAS expanded to include a diverse and multi-ethnic group of organizers, including Mike Good, a counsellor at a local settlement house, Fred Good, his ex-military brother, and Dr. Charles Slack, a former professor of clinical psychology at Harvard, who became the group's publicity director in 1968.[73] The collective's first initiatives included University of the Streets (1968), a self-organized and anti-hierarchical alternative education program which enrolled over 800 students in its first summer, and a series of geodesic domes in burned out lots produced by community members after a 1968 meeting with R. Buckminster Fuller [fig. 4.3].[74] While CHARAS was drawn to Fuller's techno-utopian vision of ecological design, the collective did not share the architect's apolitical vision for a "design revolution."[75] As opposed to Fuller, who imagined design replacing politics as the motor of social change, the collective remained deeply committed to addressing the real political challenges related to housing, education, poverty, and addiction faced by the Lower East Side community. CHARAS

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[69] Goldstein, "Portrait of the Artist as a Good Use," p. 22.

[70] As opening speaker for the opposition at the four-hour long meeting of the New York City Board of Estimate which would decide the fate of the program, Garcia condemned the program for serving "white people of upper class." See Garcia, quoted in Maurice Carroll, "A Housing Plan for Artists Loses in Board of Estimate," *The New York Times* (February 11, 1983): B1.

[71] Syeus Mottel, *Charas: The Improbable Dome Builders* (New York: Drake Publishers, 1973), pp. 17-18.

[72] Chino Garcia, quoted in Daniel Elliot Chodorkoff, "Un Milagro de Loisaida: Alternative Technology and Grassroots Efforts for Neighborhood Reconstruction on New York's Lower East Side," PhD Dissertation, New School for Social Research, New York, 1980, pp. 126-127.

[73] Mottel, *Charas*, p. 18.

[74] Ibid., pp. 19-20.

[75] Fuller explains his vision of design revolution in R. Buckminster Fuller, "Doing More with Less: Excerpts from an Interview with Buckminster Fuller," 1978, p. 5, quoted in Eva Díaz, *The Experimenters: Chance and Design at Black Mountain College* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 140.

developed a practice of reclaiming condemned Lower East Side properties through sweat equity, aided by a City-sponsored urban homesteading program.[76] In 1976, the collective established La Plaza Cultural, a community garden and open-air organizing space at East 9th Street and Avenue C. The following year, it worked with the non-profit organization Adopt-A-Building to reclaim and renovate the abandoned P.S. 64 School building on the same block. When the renovation was complete, it was turned over to a coalition of neighbourhood groups, including CHARAS and Seven Loaves (a network of seven primarily non-white community arts organizations including Cityarts, Los Hispanos Co-op, CHARAS, Basement Workshop, Children's Art Workshop, the Printshop, and the 4th Street i). Renamed as El Bohio (which translates as "The Hut," 1979-2001), the institution was repurposed as a hub for Latino/a art and grassroots activism, which it remained for the following two decades. It was particularly notable for its role in supporting and incubating the Nuyorican movement, a movement in poetry, literature, theatre, and visual art, which represented the experiences and struggles of Puerto Ricans living in New York.[77] The artists and cultural organizers invested in Nuyorican culture formed their own alternative art institutions, including both El Bohio and the influential Nuyorican Poet's Café (1973 -). However, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Nuyorican practices were largely excluded from (or at least marginalized within) the discourse on alternative art, which remained indebted to Western notions of the avant-garde. As discussed in Chapter Two, this situation was slowly beginning to change.

El Bohio was a multi-purpose community centre containing studio and rehearsal space for local artists, performers, and musicians, office space for cultural organizations, as well as La Galeria en El Bohio—an art gallery, and New Assembly Performance Space—an experimental theatre. El Bohio was located only one street north of the proposed East 8th Avenue AHOP site, and it became a central platform for the creative opposition to AHOP. A permanent feature of building's lobby was a wall-sized anti-gentrification mural painted by artist Anton van Dalen for

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[76] As explained by New York University's Furman Center: "The Sweat Equity program began [in 1976] as a response to the city's budget crisis, its ownership of a massive stock of in-rem housing, a growing demand for low-income housing, and resident-led initiatives to rehabilitate abandoned buildings. In exchange for labor performed by prospective tenants, the city offered one percent interest rates on 30-year mortgages for the gut rehabilitation of city-owned abandoned buildings. Despite positive support from President Jimmy Carter, along with financing from four major New York banks, by 1980 the program was defunct." See "Directory of New York City Affordable Housing Programs": http://furmancenter.org/institute/directory/entry/sweat-equity-hpd.

[77] For more on the Nuyorican movement, see Miguel Algarín and Miguel Piñero, eds., *Nuyorican Poetry: An Anthology of Puerto Rican Words and Feelings* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1975).

the 1981 exhibition *The Ninth Street Survival Show*, depicting a massive cockroach labeled "REAL ESTATE" surrounded by an array of burning tenements [fig. 4.4]. *LOISAIDA WAR PARTY*, a jazz musical staged at the New Assembly Performance Space in April 1983, more bluntly named "AHOP artists as the 'front line' of world capitalist repression."[78] Marshall Berman recalls the event:

> [D]ancer and filmmaker Yvonne Rainer, an AHOP participant and spokesperson, was portrayed as a CIA agent; artists were supposed to be working to promote a war in Central America, in order to "pick up the economy and provide more money for art." Liberalism and fascism were proclaimed to be basically the same. The people of the Lower East Side were told, on one hand, that there was no such thing as private property, that no one had any right to claim that any portion of the earth was theirs—and, simultaneously, that the Lower East Side is "ours" and that we must "stand and fight for our land," just as Native Americans fought against whites a century ago. The play's key slogan, repeated at several points, is "gentrification is genocide!"[79]

Produced by Sedition Ensemble (a collaboration between African American playwright Robbie McCauley and African American composer Ed Montgomery) in collaboration with a variety of local community activists and guest performers, *LOISAIDA WAR PARTY* testifies to CHARAS's commitment to promoting politically-engaged works by local artists of colour.[80] Here, art was not positioned as a direct vehicle for political change, but as a form of agit-prop education in the tradition of Bertolt Brecht. El Bohio represented an alternative to the encroaching East Village gallery scene—supporting an overtly political art that was largely produced by and for local artists of colour. The institution also staged group exhibitions with popular downtown artists such as Jenny Holzer and Keith Haring, but its primary focus was on providing infrastructure and resources for the local cultural resistance.

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[78] Berman, "A Struggle to the Death in Which Both Sides Are Right," p. 15. The performance was advertised in *East Village Eye* (April 1983), p. 14.
[79] Ibid., p. 15.
[80] Lucy R. Lippard, "Too Close to Home," *Village Voice* (June 14, 1983): p. 95.

If CHARAS/El Bohio nurtured a culture of resistance on the Lower East Side, the growing conflict between supporters and opponents of AHOP played out more nakedly at community board meetings. Berman, who attended many of these meetings as a critic for the *Village Voice*, recounts the escalating rhetoric that dramatized the conflict between artists and community members:

> The radically clashing interests and needs that emerged here made the many hearings and debates on AHOP as explosive as any urban public encounters I have seen since the late 1960s. The meetings went on for hours, and their emotional temperature rarely dropped below the boiling point. Hundreds of people attended them all, and packed the hearing rooms to overflowing. Sometimes it seemed that every one of those hundreds wanted to talk, to tell his or her life story—and the stories were moving, and even heartbreaking, to the extent we could hear them; but few people were allowed to finish, and some barely had a chance to start, because they were drowned out by shouting from crowds on both sides. The shouting was often boorish and brutal: from AHOP's supporters, cries of "Animals!" and "Fascists!"; From its opponents, to a speaker with an artificial arm, "We'll get your other arm!" and, of a Community Board member who had switched her vote, "She better not let her kids go to school alone after this."[81]

The opposition eventually got its way, and on February 10, 1983, the AHOP proposal was voted down by the Board of Estimate, which was composed of ten elected officials from the City of New York.[82] Although AHOP was defeated, the rift it generated on the Lower East Side would persist.[83]

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[81] Berman, "A Struggle to the Death in Which Both Sides Are Right," p. 11.

[82] As reported the next day in *The New York Times*, "[t]he vote was 8 to 3, with only the Borough President of Staten Island, Anthony R. Gaeta, joining the Mayor, who has two votes on the board." See Carroll, "A Housing Plan for Artists Loses in Board of Estimate," p. B1.

[83] A similar conflict is ongoing in New York's Chinatown, where commercial art galleries are being sharply criticized by anti-gentrification activists. The conflict in Chinatown erupted into the mainstream of art discourse after a series of protests by the Chinatown Art Brigade, Decolonize This Place, Occupy Museums, Artists Against Displacement, and other activist art collectives on the site of Omer Fast's controversial exhibition *August* at James Cohan Gallery. See Holland Cotter, "Omer Fast's Chinatown Installation Is a Misfire," *The New York Times* (October 20, 2017): https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/20/arts/design/omer-fast-chinatown-art-show-james-cohan.html.

In Berman's post-mortem on the AHOP affair, he argued that the conflict between artists and community members was fundamentally misguided. He believed that both sides had legitimate concerns, but that each turned its back on the other's humanity. Referring to Hegel's definition of the archetypal tragedy, he described the AHOP affair as "a struggle to the death in which both sides are right"—a struggle which would inevitably lead both constituencies toward self-destruction.[84] If AHOP's opponents effectively underscored the art community's blindness to the everyday struggles of the urban poor, Berman was alone in articulating how the opposition was "deaf and blind" as well.[85] The opposition was myopic, Berman alleged, in so far as it remained on the defensive:

> It is one thing, and probably a good thing, to defeat a housing program that leaves out the poor; it will be another thing, far more difficult, to put through a program that will actually build housing for the poor. I don't see how this can possibly be done without building a united front, a large coalition that incorporates the poor with many other groups, working jointly to put pressure on the government.[86]

The challenge of organizing grassroots momentum for the people's housing struggle would necessitate a level of strategic cooperation. The alternative to coalition politics, Berman argued, was isolationism: "When the friends of the poor disdain all other groups and exclude other people's needs from their thinking, they deepen a social and political isolation that hurts the poor most of all."[87] Berman's refusal to take a side on the housing struggle should not be mistaken as a liberal conceit.[88] Rather, as he intended it, to refuse to take a side in the AHOP debate was nothing more or less than to refuse to enter into the game of divide and conquer instigated and refereed by the City and the real estate industry. Berman implored artists and community members to look past their differences, and to enter a coalition in solidarity against a common

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[84] Berman, "A Struggle to the Death in Which Both Sides Are Right," p. 11.
[85] Ibid., p. 14.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., p. 15.
[88] The supposed complexity of struggle is often used as a shield to protect individuals and liberal institutions from taking positions on important social concerns. When Berman argues that "both sides are right," he is not referring to the complexity of the debate, but to the objective fact that both constituencies held legitimate grievances, and that these grievances could be strategically sidelined to clear the way for a broader grassroots opposition to gentrification.

enemy. He re-introduced the question of long-term political strategy into the discourse on artists' housing and gentrification, forcing the problem of coalition building back onto the agenda.[89]

## Solidarity in Question

The AHOP controversy provoked some artists, curators, art dealers, and critics to reflect on their class position, marking a period in which the assumed alliance of artists with the working class was put in extreme jeopardy. The influential curator and museum director Robert Storr was among those chosen to participate in AHOP. Then an aspiring painter, he casually (if not sarcastically) identified the art community as part of the "lumpen bourgeoisie."[90] Whatever his tone or intention, Storr's description was apt. While the concept of the *lumpenbourgeoisie* has infrequently appeared in Marxist political theory—usually in reference to "a 'middle class' lacking a collective self-awareness and economic base" in Latin American society[91]—it is possible that Storr was reflecting sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's observations on class composition, and particularly his account of artists, writers, and intellectuals as "a dominated fraction of the dominant class."[92] For Bourdieu, artists, writers, and intellectuals "are dominant in so far as they hold the power and privileges conferred by the possession of cultural capital . . . but . . . dominated in their relations with those who hold political and economic power."[93]

Bourdieu's description does not quite capture the full signification of the neologism *lumpenbourgeoisie*, which invokes a relation to both the dominant class and to the *lumpenproletariat*, which, in Bourdieusian terminology, would constitute the dominated fraction

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[89] For Adrienne Leban, an artist and tenant organizer, the division between artists and community members was not intractable, but the struggle for artists' housing could never provide the basis for coalition: "It is not so much a matter of artists being antithetical to communities as being a situation where artists are their own worst enemies when they separate themselves from the rest of the human beings who have housing needs. True, artists have special housing needs, but I would bet that among the artists here, our special housing needs are quite different from each other's. And just as artists have special housing needs, so do plumbers, so do families with five children, or single teachers with a cat. I'm quite certain that to organize ourselves around artists' special housing needs will not solve the dual problem of being an artist and having housing." See Leban, in Berman, et. al., "Artists' Life/Work: Housing and Community for Artists," p. 158.

[90] Robert Storr, quoted in Goldstein, "Portrait of the Artist as a Good Use," p. 22.

[91] Antoni Kapcia, *Havana: The Making of Cuban Culture* (New York: Berg, 2005): p. 15. See also Andre Gunder Frank, *Lumpenbourgeoisie and Lumpendevelopment: Dependence, Class, and Politics in Latin America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972).

[92] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Intellectual Field: A World Apart" (1985), in *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, Matthew Adamson, trans. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 145. See also Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979), Richard Nice, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

[93] Bourdieu, "The Intellectual Field," p. 145.

of the dominated class. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels scornfully described the *lumpenproletariat* as "that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society."[94] It was an unorganized and criminal underclass which, due to its desperation and lack of class consciousness, was easily enlisted as "a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue."[95] In *The Peasant War in Germany*, Engels continued his assault on this class fraction, describing the *lumpenproletariat* as "the worst of all popular allies."[96] In their view (a view which was strongly contested by anti-colonial and Black Liberation groups in the 1960s and 1970s), the criminals, thieves, and drifters that made up the *lumpenproletariat* were dangerous precisely because they acted in their own self-interest. Following the same (and notably problematic) logic, it could be said that the *lumpenbourgeoisie* would not only constitute a dominated fraction of the dominant class, but one that was similarly driven by self-interest, exiled from the domain of productive labour, and incapable of constituting the revolutionary class—of organizing and mobilizing class power. This sentiment was echoed by City officials during the AHOP affair, who lamented the art community's inability to broaden its base of popular support.[97]

Storr's self-identification with the *lumpenbourgeoisie* pointed toward the alliance of artists with the ruling class, as well as the incapacity of artists to lead either revolution or counter-revolution. However, like the *lumpenproletariat*, the *lumpenbourgeoisie* was not inevitably a slave to the class of which it was a part. In fact, the *lumpen*'s supposed tendency to betray its class alliance was precisely what made it dangerous in the eyes of Marx and Engels. Underlying Storr's remark on the artist as *lumpenbourgeoisie* was a basic fact: for artists to actually work in solidarity with the working class and poor, they would first have to work against their interest as a constituency. They would also have to sacrifice their creative and organizational autonomy for the sake of the broader coalition. This problem of solidarity periodically burst into the art discourse at the turn of the 1980s, largely provoked by the undeniable role played by artists in the dynamics of gentrification. Against the cynicism and apathy displayed by much of the art community, fractions of emerging art collectives such as Colab, Group Material, and PAD/D defended the ideal of solidarity that was thrown into crisis

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[94] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) (London: Pluto Press, 2017), p. 66.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Friedrich Engels, "Preface to the Second Edition" (1870), *The Peasant War in Germany*, Moissaye J. Olgin, trans. (New York: International Publishers, 1926), p. 18.
[97] See memo from Commissioner Anthony Gliedman to Mayor Koch, April 1, 1982, p. 2.

by the AHOP affair, proposing distinct avenues for building coalitions between artists and the poor and working class inhabitants of the Lower East Side.

Among the most legendary anti-gentrification events in New York's cultural history appeared on New Year's Eve 1979, when a group of young artists associated with Colab opened *The Real Estate Show*, the collective's first genuine *succès de scandale*.[98] In the preceding months, Colab's Committee for the Real Estate Show (CRES), consisting of Becky Howland, Alan Moore, Ann Messner, Peter Mönnig, and Bobby G., began preparing a group exhibition devoted to the theme of real estate. The exhibition was to resemble Colab's previous loft exhibitions, such as *The Manifesto Show*, *The Doctors and Dentists Show*, and *The Income and Wealth Show*, with one crucial difference: illegally occupying an abandoned City-managed property on the Lower East Side, it was intended to function both as an exhibition of art and as a protest occupation against redevelopment plans for the neighbourhood. This core group of artists—most of whom lived in TriBeCa—discovered a former furniture showroom at 123 Delancey Street at the corner of Essex Street, right around the corner from the Delancey Street and Essex Street subway stations, where the F, J, and M trains intersected. The property was slated to be demolished to make way for a shopping centre, public housing project, and senior citizen centre. In the darkness of night, they broke open the door with a borrowed pair of Fire Department bolt cutters and installed their own lock, returning a week later to mount the exhibition.[99] Staged as a gesture of solidarity with the working class and poor people of the neighbourhood, *The Real Estate Show* represented a promise that artists and communities could come together against the interests of the real estate industry.

*The Real Estate Show* included an array of real estate and slumlord-themed artworks by Colab artists including Robert Cooney, Jane Dickson, Peter Fend, Coleen Fitzgibbon, Mike Glier, Ilona Granet, Jenny Holzer, Christy Rupp, Tom Otterness, and Robin Winters, members of CRES, and others. Dickson contributed a series of sketches of apartment interiors painted onto garbage bags. Winters's text-based paintings installed in the venue's storefront windows excoriated landlords as "arrogant, unscrupulous and deceitful scoundrels." Bobby G.'s installation, titled *Dead Packs Worldwide* (1979), consisted of a pile of empty cigarettes collected on the streets of the Lower East Side, paired with a tongue-in-cheek proposal for a

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[98] The following account has been largely drawn from Alan W. Moore's in-depth narrative history of *The Real Estate Show*. See Moore, et. al., "Excavating Real Estate," pp. 4-18.
[99] Ibid., p. 11.

community renewal venture: "If all smokers on the Lower East Side pooled their cigarette money for one day they could buy a building."[100] The December 31st exhibition opening brought together artists and passers-by, setting the stage for artists and local residents to discuss the issue of housing [fig. 4.5]. Moore recalls meeting a local tenant's rights activist that evening: "She was organizing to resist eviction of the large city-owned apartment building where she lived. We agreed to support the tenants' struggle, and immediately exhibited information about it."[101] The show, however, would only stay open for one day.

When the artists returned to the Delancey Street site on January 2nd, it was bolted shut by the police and the artworks had been impounded by the City's Housing Preservation and Development department (HPD). CRES was not entirely surprised by this result. The organizers had warned the participating artists that they could not guarantee the security of their works.[102] HPD, which owned and managed the building in which *The Real Estate Show* was installed, was an unwitting participant in the exhibition from its inception. The illegality of the exhibition gave it a subversive edge, allowing the organizers to not merely illustrate the greed and cruelty of slumlords, developers, and the City, but also to confront (and provoke) this trifecta of power in practice. HPD's swift and hard-lined response to the exhibition only confirmed that the exhibition/occupation was on the radar of City Hall. Moore has consistently maintained that *The Real Estate Show* was less about the art featured in the exhibition than about the politics of real estate in New York.[103] The artworks featured in the exhibition were not integral in and of themselves, but for the way they would function as hostages in the ensuing battle with the City.

Responding to the closure of the exhibition, CRES quickly produced and distributed a flyer declaring "Art held Hostage" [fig. 4.6]. The flyer announced a press conference which would be held outside the Delancey Street storefront at noon on January 8th. Much to CRES's surprise, the press conference was attended not only by police who had barricaded the building, but also news reporters from *The New York Times*, *Village Voice*, *East Village Eye*, and *SoHo Weekly News*, several representatives from HPD, members of the downtown art scene, and German artist Joseph Beuys [fig. 4.7]. Beuys had been Mönnig's instructor at the Dusseldorf Academy of Fine Art, and his major retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum had

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[100] Several of these works were exhibited or documented in a historical survey of *The Real Estate Show* hosted by James Fuentes Gallery, New York from April 4 to April 27, 2014.
[101] Moore, et. al., "Excavating Real Estate," p. 12.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid., p. 5. See also Joe Lewis, in Lawson, "Fashion Moda," p. 9.

closed the previous week.[104] The formal press conference never actually happened. Instead, a few artists snuck into the building through a back door with the aim of resuming the occupation, only to be escorted out by police minutes later. Others exchanged words with the administrators sent to the location by HPD, collected petition signatures calling on the City to re-open the building to the artists, and took questions from reporters. Colab artist Cara Brownell and Fashion Moda co-director Joe Lewis recorded the event on video and conducted interviews of their own.[105] Later in the day, Howland climbed to the second floor of the building, where she wheat-pasted a massive octopus to its façade. The January 8th event garnered *The Real Estate Show* news coverage, including an illustrated article by reporter Josh Barbanel in the Metro section of *The New York Times*, as well as a lengthy write-up by Lehmann Weichselbaum in the *East Village Eye*.[106] The sympathetic press coverage gave CRES sufficient leverage to force HPD into negotiations—first to re-open the Delancey St. location, then to offer an alternative location for *The Real Estate Show*. As Howland recalls, "The combination of unprecedented publicity and personalities persuaded the city to agree to meet with us and discuss a solution."[107] HPD ultimately agreed to offer the group a vacant City-owned storefront space to use as a community centre. After a brief relocation to 172 Delancey Street, a dilapidated and cramped storefront down the block from their initial location, the group secured an open lease on a storefront at 156 Rivington Street in March of 1980. This became ABC No Rio, a politically-engaged alternative art and social centre described by Mönnig as an "an anarchist *Freiraum* (free space)."[108] ABC No Rio was established to support local artists, activists, and community members in their individual and collective work.

*The Real Estate Show* was Colab's first and last exhibition-as-occupation. During the planning process, the exhibition proved to be particularly divisive within the Colab milieu. As Moore recalls, both Coleen Fitzgibbon and Robin Winters "said they wanted nothing to do with

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[104] Moore, et. al., "Excavating Real Estate," p. 13.
[105] Ibid.
[106] See Josh Barbanel, "Artists Ejected In 'Occupation' Of a Storefront," *The New York Times* (January 9, 1980): p. B2; See also Lehmann Weichselbaum, "The Real Estate Show," *East Village Eye* (1980), reprinted in Alan W. Moore and Marc Miller, eds., *ABC No Rio Dinero* (New York: ABC No Rio with Collaborative Projects, Inc., 1985), republished online: http://98bowery.com/return-to-the-bowery/abcnorio-the-real-estate-show.php.
[107] Becky Howland, quoted in Moore, et. al. "Excavating Real Estate," p. 13.
[108] Moore, *Art* Gangs, p. 101. ABC No Rio became better known for support of music and performance than for visual art, but its location on the fringes of the Lower East Side, as well as its origins in the artist-run activities of Colab roped it into the conversations on art and gentrification that would define the discourse on East Village art in the 1980s. See Deutsche and Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification," p. 104.

it. . . . Ulli Rimkus, then treasurer of Colab and the partner of German artist Christof Kohlhöfer, took the same line with me, disapproving of the planned show and claiming it was irresponsible."[109] These artists worried that the exhibition's illegality would jeopardize the group's relationship with state funders. Colab had only recently been awarded its first grant from the NEA.[110] The hesitance of some Colab members to support the development of *The Real Estate Show* may have also related to the explicitly political claims upon which the exhibition was built. The manifesto penned by Howland, Messner, Mönnig, and Moore in December 1979 and distributed to exhibiting artists during the exhibition's planning stage, articulated their militant political aims, which I will quote at length:

> THIS IS A SHORT-TERM OCCUPATION of vacant city-managed property.

> THE ACTION IS EXTRA-LEGAL – it illuminates no legal issues, calls for no "rights." It is pre-emptive and insurrectionary.

> The action is DEDICATED TO ELIZABETH MAGNUM, a middle-aged Black American killed by police and marshals as she resisted eviction in Flatbush last year.

> THE INTENTION of this action is to show that artists are willing and able to place themselves and their work squarely in a context which shows solidarity with oppressed people, a recognition that mercantile and institutional structures oppress and distort artists' lives and works, and a recognition that artists, living and working in depressed communities, are compradors in the revaluation of property and the "whitening" of neighborhoods.

> It is important to focus attention on the ways artists get used as pawns by greedy white developers.

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[109] Moore, et. al., "Excavating Real Estate," p. 7; p. 9.
[110] Ibid., p. 9. CRES was ultimately allotted $300 in Colab funds, as well as comparable funding from Artists Space. See Howland, quoted in Ibid., p. 10.

IT IS IMPORTANT for artists to express solidarity with Third World and oppressed people.

IT IS IMPORTANT to show that people are not helpless—they can express their resentment with things-as-they-are in a way that is constructive, exemplary, and interesting.

IT IS IMPORTANT to try to bridge the gap between artists and working people by putting artwork on a boulevard level.

IT IS IMPORTANT to do something dramatic that is neither commercially oriented nor institutionally quarantined – a groundswell of human action and participation with each other that points up currents of feeling that are neither for sale nor for morticing into the shape of an institution.

IT IS IMPORTANT to do something that people (particularly in the art community) cannot immediately identify unless they question themselves and examine their own actions for an answer.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO HAVE FUN.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO LEARN.[111]

In these lines, the exhibition's organizers underscored their activist intentions, justifying *The Real Estate Show* as a creative direct action that would take the side of the oppressed. Although CRES echoed some of Colab's most consistent motivations—its effort to place "art on the boulevard level" and its intentions to "have fun"—these ambitions were nested within an unambiguously political frame, positioning *The Real Estate Show* as a clear intervention within the Colab milieu. Recall the anti-idealist politics of compromise advanced by The Offices of Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince & Winters and exemplified by Holzer and Nadin's

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[111] Committee for the Real Estate Show, "Manifesto or Statement of Intent."

contemporaneous manifesto "Here and There," examined in Chapter One.[112] The Offices aimed to develop concrete solutions to individual problems, whereas CRES sought to expose connections, links between the social position of artists, the interests of the real estate industry, and overarching structures of oppression. The Offices appropriated the vernacular of corporate culture, whereas CRES appropriated the language of grassroots activism. The manifesto for *The Real Estate Show* urged Colab and its associated artists to ground their practices in the political setting. Even if this was a cause of concern for Colab members who were less committed to social activism, it did not prevent these artists from contributing their work.[113]

One of the more striking aspects of CRES's manifesto is the repeated use of the word "solidarity." The manifesto anchored the community of artists and the urban poor in a shared struggle against corrupt landlords, real estate developers, and City officials, framing *The Real Estate Show* as an expression of solidarity with the poor and working-class residents of the Lower East Side. The text also foregrounded the contradiction in which this showing of solidarity would manifest. Artists were not natural comrades in the housing struggle. As CRES conceded, they were "compradors in the revaluation of property and the 'whitening' of neighborhoods." CRES's presence on the Lower East Side was thus acknowledged as double-edged sword. *The Real Estate Show* provided a new context for alliance-building, but, simultaneously, it announced the entry of the "pawns" of "greedy white developers" on the Lower East Side. In chess, pawns are not merely casualties or victims. They are the leading edge of an insurgency. This contradiction played itself out over the course of *The Real Estate Show*, revealing tensions that lingered beneath the surface of both the manifesto and exhibition.

Art critics almost immediately questioned the limits of CRES's claim to solidarity. For example, in an interview with the directors of Fashion Moda published shortly after the exhibition, Thomas Lawson goaded Joe Lewis and Walter Scott (both of whom were present during *The Real Estate Show*) into commenting on the politics of the exhibition. Noting that "there seems to have been quite a strong group already protesting city development plans for the area, and protesting fairly effectively," Lawson contended that "No group of artists, particularly

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[112] See Jenny Holzer and Peter Nadin, "Here to There," *Spanner/NYC* (Blue, 1980): p. 16.
[113] Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, and Winters all exhibited their work. According to Moore, "As the Real Estate Show was being installed, both Coleen and Robin suddenly appeared and put up their artworks in the windows of the 125 Delancey Street [sic] building. . . . They didn't talk to anyone, although the show installation was a busy social scene. They just came in, put up their work, and left." See Moore, et. al., "Excavating Real Estate," p. 7.

one like this which remains deliberately unorganized, is likely to have the stamina to stay in the fight long enough to see any results."[114] Lewis was not troubled by the group's disorganization or presumed lack of long-term commitment to housing activism, but by its readiness to cede the ground it occupied.

> I was there the day the police locked them out and something I thought then was, that previously when artists got involved in politics, like the Dada people or the Russians, they were willing to lay their necks on the line, really. Even Beuys got his face punched talking some stuff at a rally someplace. That's the kind of involvement artists have to get to if they want to have political impact. Even if they're only there for a short time, that will change something. That will ignite something else, because then people will realize that these people are serious. And if they're there for a week or a year, it doesn't make that much difference. The thing is that they are for real. And that, I think, is what the whole Delancey thing was lacking.[115]

Lewis was also concerned with the way in which *The Real Estate Show* communicated its politics to the local community: "a lot of the people who saw the show, the community people, they thought it was just a group of artists protesting that they could not show their work anywhere."[116] From his vantage, *The Real Estate Show* was largely illegible to the community it intended to support. Neither Lewis nor Lawson were unilaterally opposed to the exhibition. However, behind their comments was a damning critique of *The Real Estate Show*. Both pointed to a significant blind spot in the planning process: for all the talk about expressing solidarity with the oppressed, CRES was ostensibly working in a political vacuum. *The Real Estate Show* adopted the trial-by-fire organizing model that had become one of Colab's signatures. Accordingly, the exhibition was not developed in collaboration (or even in consultation) with the squatting and urban homesteading groups, housing activists, and community organizations that

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[114] Lawson, "Fashion Moda," p. 9.
[115] Lewis, in Ibid.
[116] Lewis, in Ibid.

had been building a grassroots defence against gentrification on the Lower East Side for more than a decade.[117]

This blind spot was reflected in the mainstream press coverage of the exhibition. Reporting that "[t]he artists say they have been made, in the words of one, 'economic outcasts in their own neighborhoods',"[118] *The New York Times* columnist Josh Barbanel foregrounded the artists' struggle for space, removing any mention of the broader issue of gentrification and displacement on the Lower East Side. Weichselbaum's text for the *East Village Eye* supported a similar point with a statement from Colab member Mitch Corber: "We're nomads . . . We've got nowhere to go. We deserve a place. We spotted it. No one was there."[119] Weichselbaum's text included quotes from Committee members Howland, Moore, and Mönnig, a representative from HPD, and a local police officer, but not a single response from the activists, organizers, or community members living and working on the Lower East Side. The gap between CRES and the local community, magnified by the complete absence of local voices in the early press coverage of *The Real Estate Show*, was significant not only because it retrospectively casts the artists as self-absorbed and ill-informed of the local battleground, but also because it practically limited the potential for the group to forge a strong bond of solidarity with the local community.

Without *The Real Estate Show*, there would be no ABC No Rio, a cultural centre that has been "explicitly dedicated to the 'culture of resistance'" since its founding in March 1980.[120] This concrete outcome distinguished the exhibition as a touchstone event in the history of artists' self-organization in New York. However, CRES's victory—the securing of an open lease to establish a progressive cultural centre—ultimately reinforced the central tension that the group acknowledged but aimed to overcome. Asked to comment on ABC No Rio's engagement with the local community in a 1982 interview, directors Bobby G., Howland, and Moore (collectively responding in the first-person singular) answered with a caustic note of self-criticism:

> It's really hard to locate Hispanic artists. There aren't too many down there, and
> they wouldn't be particularly oriented towards No Rio anyway, because No Rio is

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[117] For example, the Lower East Side Joint Planning Council (JPC), a community organization of approximately twenty-five community groups working on housing issues in the neighbourhood, had been active since 1968. See Janice L. Bockmeyer, "Devolution and the Transformation of Community Housing Activism," *The Social Science Journal*, no. 40 (2003): p. 180.

[118] Barbanel, "Artists Ejected In 'Occupation' Of a Storefront," p. B2.

[119] Weichselbaum, "The Real Estate Show."

[120] Moore, et. al., "Excavating Real Estate," p. 4.

basically an outgrowth of white, middle class artists who have certain responses to the situation in which they find themselves, and it's directly related to alternative spaces, an attempt by artists to have their own situation, but it's still within the art world structure.[121]

To their credit, the directors also described their direct and intensive working relationship with a small group of local kids, but they were self-reflective enough to admit that the ideal of solidarity that galvanized them into action only two years earlier needed to be moderated. Their deal with HPD was exceptional; it would not be extended to the community residents who were in desperate need for reasonable housing, and who had been fighting for City assistance for years.

**Storefront Activism**

CRES's initial plea for solidarity and alliance was echoed by Group Material, a collective of young socially-engaged artists that established its own storefront space on the Lower East Side in October 1980. As founding member Julie Ault recalls, Group Material was founded in September 1979 by a small group of recent art-school graduates and their friends, including Tim Rollins, Marybeth Nelson, Hannah Alderfer, Beth Jaker, and Peter Szypula, who had recently graduated from SVA, Patrick Brennan, who met Rollins in the Master of Art Education program at New York University, and Ault and Yolanda Hawkins, who were Rollins's roommates at the time.[122] Informed as much by Marxist cultural theory as by second-wave feminism, this early group came together "to discuss and present socially engaged art, other people's as well as their own, and to bring together their aesthetic and sociopolitical aims."[123] After a series of monthly meetings characterized by "animated and fiery debate"[124] as well as a constantly changing membership, the group landed on the idea of renting a space to host events and exhibitions on social and political themes. In July 1980, Brennan signed a year's lease for a storefront at 244 East 13th Street at a rate of $450 per month, where the collective would make its public debut four months later. In the first profile of the collective's work, published in the *SoHo Weekly*

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[121] Shelley Leavitt, "ABC No Rio Interviewed," *BOMB Magazine*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Winter 1982), republished online: http://old.bombmagazine.org/issues/2/articles/34.
[122] Group Material, "Chronicle: 1979-1996," in Julie Ault, ed., *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material* (London: Four Corners Books, 2010), p. 7.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid., p. 11.

*News* two weeks after the launch of its first exhibition, Rollins explained the group's ambitions: "We're not just going to be a gallery devoted to showing political art. . . . We want to set up real social relationships with the people here, working people. It's important for us to become a vital part of the block."[125] Not unlike Fashion Moda (as described in Chapter Two), Group Material was established on the premise that it could use art as the basis for establishing bonds with poor and working-class people of colour. However, while the directors of Fashion Moda tended to avoid making political claims about their work, Group Material consciously anchored its collective identity in left politics, describing itself as a "catalyst" for social and political change. The group recognized that by its very presence on the Lower East Side, it risked also becoming "a catalyst for rising rents and co-op conversions that drive out the very neighborhood people Group Material want to align with," as critic Gerald Marzorati was quick to suggest.[126] For Rollins, this was no reason to retreat: "Most of us are aware of how gentrification works. But what are we supposed to do? Would it be better if we lived on Columbus Avenue, made art, ignored politics, and remained pure?"[127]

Group Material's public identity was carefully constructed to foreground its members' bread-winning occupations. In a flyer distributed at its inaugural exhibition, the collective described itself as follows:

> GROUP MATERIAL IS 5 GRAPHIC DESIGNERS, 2 TEACHERS, A WAITRESS, A CARTOGRAPHER, TWO TEXTILE DESIGNERS, A TELEPHONE OPERATIOR, A DANCER, A COMPUTER ANALYST AND AN ELECTRICIAN. GROUP MATERIAL IS ALSO AN INDEPENDENT COLLECTIVE OF YOUNG ARTISTS AND WRITERS WITH A VARIETY OF ARTISTIC AND POLITICAL THEORIES AND PRACTICES. GROUP MATERIAL IS COMMITTED TO THE CREATION, ORGANIZATION, AND PROMOTION OF AN ART DEDICATED TO SOCIAL COMMUNICATION AND POLITICAL CHANGE.[128]

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[125] Tim Rollins, quoted in Gerald Marzorati, "Artful Dodger," *SoHo Weekly News* (October 15, 1980), reprinted in Ault, ed., *Show and Tell*, p. 19.
[126] Ibid., p. 20.
[127] Rollins, quoted in Ibid.
[128] Group Material, handout distributed during *Inaugural Exhibition* (October 4-27, 1980), reprinted in Ault, ed., *Show and Tell*, p. 22.

Prioritizing the day jobs taken on by its members over their art-school backgrounds and career-ambitions, the collective attached itself to the lineage of art workers that had inspired left-wing artists in New York since the late 1960s. Art historians Caroline Jones, Helen Molesworth, and Julia Bryan-Wilson have written extensively about the concerted effort made by artists since the 1960s to associate themselves with the working class.[129] Bryan-Wilson's important study linked the convergence of art and work with the broadening concept of labour associated with the New Left, explaining that "[r]ather than believing that only blue-collar workers were the potential agents of revolution, New Leftists began to champion 'intellectual laborers' such as students and artists."[130] Working in the shadow of the New Left, Group Material modeled a different relationship between art and work. The collective's intention was not to valorize art making as labour, but to secure the trust and sympathy of four broad constituencies that it wanted to mobilize: working people, non-art professionals, artists, students, and organizations, and the community surrounding its storefront space.[131]

Group Material's first exhibitions featured artworks on specific political themes by collective members and their friends. After the *Inaugural Exhibition* (October 4-27, 1980), the collective hosted *The Salon of Election '80* (November 4-16, 1980), an exhibition which, opening on the night of the 1980 presidential election, paired works responding to the presidential campaign with television screens broadcasting the live election results. *Alienation* (November 22-December 21, 1980) assembled artworks addressing the Marxist concept of alienation by collective members such as Brennan, Rollins, and Ault, emerging downtown artists like Candice Hill-Montgomery and Manuel DeLanda, as well as the group's mentor Joseph Kosuth. Other early exhibitions included *The People's Choice/Arroz con Mango* (January 10-February 1, 1981), *It's A Gender Show!* (February 14-March 9, 1981), *Consumption: Metaphor, Pastime, Necessity* (March 21-April 20, 1981), *Facere / Fascis* (May 2-June 4, 1981), *Atlanta: An Emergency Exhibition* (June 4-30, 1981), *Eat This Show* (July 11, 1981), as well as dance parties at the Machinists' Union Hall and Club 57.

The group's most acclaimed early exhibition was *The People's Choice/Arroz con Mango*, which was also its only exhibition to reach out to the local community in a direct and immediate

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[129] See Caroline Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Helen Molesworth, ed., *Work Ethic* (Baltimore and University Park, PA: Baltimore Museum of Art and Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003; and Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*.
[130] Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, p. 4.
[131] Ibid.

way. For *The People's Choice/Arroz con Mango* (1981), members of Group Material went door-to-door in the neighbourhood around their storefront, where, accompanied by two Spanish-speaking kids from the block, they asked locals to donate valuable possessions for public display. The resulting exhibition featured family heirlooms, kitsch reproductions of Renaissance masterpieces, religious icons, and an array of other items, displayed salon-style in the art collective's production/exhibition space [fig. 4.8]. *The People's Choice/Arroz con Mango* was intended to represent the vibrant culture of the multi-ethnic neighbourhood while functioning as an opportunity for community outreach. However, contributions by artists were clearly distinguishable from those of their non-artists counterparts. Elizabeth Hess noted that "[i]n between the religious icons and fetishes is a cover from *Interview* magazine, a signed Warhol photograph, and a red Duchampian dustpan on the floor, contributed by Tim Rollins."[132] For the uninitiated, the art historical resonances of Rollins's dustpan would have gone unnoticed. For Hess and other initiates of the art world, it stood out, perhaps inadvertently encapsulating the aesthetic valorization of squalor that would define the Lower East Side's transformation into a cultural hub. Hess went further, detecting a hint of "liberal guilt" in Group Material's staging of community participation—"of getting down with the community they [the artists] have just moved in on."[133]

The members of Group Material quickly recognized the limits of the storefront as a "catalyst" for social change, and after their first year of programming, they did not renew their lease. The group was already torn from within: members most invested in feminist politics, including Hannah Alderfer, Beth Jaker, Marybeth Nelson, and Peter Szypula, dropped out of Group Material in May of 1981; others, including Patrick Brennan, Liliana Dones, and Michael Udvardy left to pursue their individual art practices.[134] By August, Group Material consisted only of Rollins, Ault, and Mundy McLaughlan, a collage artist and former SVA student who had joined the collective a year earlier. In September 1981, Group Material penned a two-page statement to address the collective's tactical failures as well its plans for the future. Starting with the line "WE LEARNED THE HARD WAY," the text was unapologetically critical of the alternative spaces from which it had drawn its organizational structure:

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[132] Elizabeth Hess, "Home-Style Looking," p. 72.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Group Material, "Chronicle: 1979-1996," p. 49; p. 54.

The maintenance and operation of the storefront had become a ball-and-chain on the collective. More and more of our energies were swallowed by the space, the space, the space. Repairs, new installations, gallery sitting, hysterically paced curating, fundraising and personal disputes cut into our very limited time as a bunch of individuals who had to work full time jobs during the day or night or both. People got broke, people got tired, people quit. As G.M. closed its first season, we knew we could not continue this course without self-destructing. Everything had to change. The mistake was obvious. Just like the alternative spaces we had set out to criticize, here we were sitting on 13<sup>th</sup> St., waiting for everyone to rush down and see our shows instead of taking the initiative ourselves or mobilizing into more public areas. We had to cease being a space and become a working group once again.

For this second season, Group Material is a very different organization, with new associates, new tactics. We've learned that the notion of alternative space isn't only politically phony and aesthetically naive – it can also be diabolical. It is impossible to create a radical and innovative art if this work is anchored in one special gallery location. Art can have the most political content and right-on form, but the stuff just hangs there silent unless its means of distribution make political sense as well.[135]

This statement was distributed at *Downtown Uptown*, an exhibition organized by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council featuring contributions by seventeen downtown alternative spaces at the City Gallery in the Upper West Side. Other participants included ABC No Rio, A.I.R., the Alternative Museum (1975-2000), Artists Space, Cayman Gallery, Creative Time, the Drawing Center (1977 -), The Clocktower, Franklin Furnace, Just Above Midtown, The Kitchen, The New Museum, Printed Matter, Public Image, White Columns, and the Whitney Museum's downtown satellite space (1973-1983). Group Material—the rookie on the exhibitor list—indicted its peers for their political bad faith. The collective made a case for a divergent model of the alternative space, one which would depart from the idea of the storefront gallery: "GROUP

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[135] Group Material, "Caution! Alternative Space!," p. 187.

MATERIAL WANTS TO OCCUPY THAT MOST VITAL OF ALTERNATIVE SPACES –
THAT WALL-LESS EXPANSE THAT BARS ARTISTS AND THEIR WORK FROM THE
CRUCIAL SOCIAL CONCERNS OF THE AMERICAN WORKING CLASS." [136]
Deterritorializing the idea of the alternative space, Group Material invoked a practice of public
art oriented toward direct communication. This revised concept of the alternative space resonated
with the guerrilla tactics of the subway graffitists, the recent occupations and exhibitions by
Colab, and Fashion Moda's idea of the institution as a "cultural concept," as well as Public Art
Fund's *Messages to the Public* (1982-1990), a series of artists' projects for the Spectacolor
billboard at Times Square, which would be instigated by Jenny Dixon the following year. What
was left unsaid by Group Material was that by refusing the brick-and-mortar gallery, it was also
refusing to act as a catalyst for gentrification.[137]

  Group Material's exit from the Lower East Side was meant to represent the political
exhaustion of the concept of the alternative space as it had been conventionally understood. The
collective emphasized the mistake of taking the form of the storefront gallery, but this was not
the only problem that limited its capacity to act as a catalyst for social change. Most members of
the collective did not speak Spanish; this greatly limited their capacity to reach out to or build
trust within the predominantly Spanish-speaking neighbourhood.[138] With the exception of *The
People's Choice*, the collective's exhibitions did not respond to the immediate concerns of the
neighbourhood people. Although archival documents suggest that Rollins was conducting some
preliminary research into the network of community organizations already representing and
defending the people of the Lower East Side, Group Material, like CRES, did not forge a
working relationship with the neighbourhood's grassroots activist community.[139]

**Alternative Art and Coalition Politics**
The repeated failure of artists to ally with the Lower East Side community (even when they
outwardly sought to, as was the case with both the Committee and Group Material) does not
point toward some intractable relationship between artists and the poor, or of the impossibility of

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[136] Ibid.

[137] It could be argued that Group Material anticipated the strong position maintained by community activists in
subsequent years. In the words of Carol Watson, Director of the Catholic Charities' Housing Leverage Fund,
"People with choices . . . should choose not to move to the Lower East Side." See Watson, quoted in Deutsche and
Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification," p. 104.

[138] Only Liliana Dones, who joined the collective in June 1980, was fluent in the Spanish language.

[139] See Group Material, Minutes, June 16, 1981, two pages, reprinted in Ault, ed., *Show and Tell*, pp. 52-53.

building solidarity between progressive artists and progressive community organizations. The missteps of the Committee and Group Material are worth revisiting not because they testify to the obstinate naivety of artists, but because they vividly expose the missing ingredient in their cocktail of political art: the committed and long-term work of organizing within a grassroots activist milieu. It was this missing ingredient that motivated Lucy R. Lippard, Jerry Kearns, and a few dozen other politically-engaged artists, writers, and activists to establish Political Art Documentation/Distribution in 1980. Based at the Seven Loaves office in El Bohio for its first two years, PAD/D aimed "to provide artists with an organized relationship to society, to demonstrate the political effectiveness of image making, and to provide a framework within which progressive artists can discuss and develop alternatives to the mainstream art system."[140] PAD/D was distinct from both CRES and Group Material is so far as it anchored itself in the local culture of grassroots organizing. The collective built itself up from existing social movements and campaigns rather than imposing itself upon them.

The seed for PAD/D was planted in June 1979, when Lippard, who was in the process of curating an exhibition of recent political art from the UK at Artists Space (*Art From the British Left*, June 16-July 14, 1979), repurposed the exhibition's announcement as an organizing tool. On the backside of the invitation card, she included a note inviting readers to send her documentation on social and political art. As PAD/D member Gregory Sholette recalls, "[t]he sizable mass of materials she began to receive over the next year led directly to the formation of Political Art Documentation/Distribution."[141] On February 24, 1980, nearly fifty artists, activists, and writers gathered at Printed Matter bookstore in TriBeCA "to explore ways of archiving her swelling collection of documents about art with political intent."[142] By the end of this first meeting, the attendees had not only gone against Lippard's request to "not found another organization," but had decided their new organization's name and primary mission.[143] PAD/D's founding was enabled by two early alternative art institutions—Artists Space and Printed Matter—whose mailing list and physical space, respectively, contributed to the initial

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[140] PAD/D Mission Statement, quoted in Gregory Sholette, "A Collectography of PAD/D," self-published, online: http://www.darkmatterarchives.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/2.2.Collectography.pdf.

[141] The exhibition included works by Rasheed Araeen, Conrad Atkinson, Margaret Harrison, Alexis Hunter, Mary Kelly, Tony Rickaby, and Marie Yates. See Sholette, *Dark Matter*, p. 192.

[142] Sholette, "A Collectography of PAD/D," p. 2.

[143] The name Political Art Documentation, or PAD, was proposed by Clive Phillpot then director of MoMa's library. The /D, for "Distribution" was soon added "to reflect its [the collective's] expanding activist mission." See Sholette, *Dark Matter*, p. 51.

composition of the group. Given its formative links to these institutions, it was perhaps ironic that the group aimed to "establish an autonomous Left cultural sphere that would operate apart from both the commercial market and mainstream museums and not-for-profit spaces."[144] PAD/D's relation to the alternative spaces would be *parasitic*—a point I will return to at the end of this chapter.

Jerry Kearns described the impetus that brought together the broad group of artists and activists that made up PAD/D: "We were disaffected with the direction of mainstream culture and fine art, and wanted to join our art directly with change-oriented politics."[145] In reality, most members of the collective were already entrenched in the culture of grassroots activism, coming from an array of political art collectives and grassroots organizations active in New York since the 1960s. For his part, Kearns—fondly remembered as the "commissar" of PAD/D—was a former member of Red Herring (1977-1978), a splinter group of the political art collective The Fox/Art & Language.[146] He was also active member of Amiri Baraka's Anti-Imperialist Cultural Union, a multinational cultural organization established by the Revolutionary Communist League in order to link cultural production "to the mass movements of the working class and oppressed nationalities," as well as the Black United Front (1965-1996), a Black liberation organization working in the tradition of Malcolm X.[147] PAD/D united long-time activists associated with the New Left, including Lippard and poet Irving Wexler, with young artists from Colab (Mike Glier) and Group Material (Tim Rollins, Julie Ault, Doug Ashford), as well as current and former members of collectives such as Ad Hoc Women Artists Committee (1970-1971), Alliance for Cultural Democracy (1982-1994), Angry Arts (1967), Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, Art Workers Coalition, Carnival Knowledge (1981-1985), Cultural Correspondence (1975-1983), Fluxus, Heresies, Women's Building (1973-1991), and World War 3 Illustrated (1979-1988), among others. PAD/D was in itself a coalition, built from an informal network of political art groups active in New York since the 1960s.

PAD/D was initially split into three sub-groups, each of which was responsible for specific tasks and projects. Group I was responsible for public relations and national outreach; its

[144] Lucy R. Lippard and Jerry Kearns, "PAD: Waking Up in NYC," *1st Issue: Political Art Documentation / Distribution*, no. 1 (February 1981): p. 2.
[145] Jerry Kearns, quoted in Sholette, *Dark Matter*, p. 48.
[146] Sholette, "A Collectography of PAD/D," p. 7.
[147] League of Revolutionary Struggle, "'Unity and Struggle': History of the Revolutionary Communist League (M-L-M)," in *Forward: Journal of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought*, no. 3 (January 1980), republished online: https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-3/rcl-history/chapter-3.htm.

primary means of outreach were through the publication and distribution of *Upfront* (1981-1988), a newsletter devoted to informing subscribers on current grassroots struggles and political debates, as well as *Red Letter Days*, a monthly calendar of exhibitions, events, and political actions in and around New York, co-published by *Cultural Correspondence*. Group II was responsible for building and maintaining PAD/D's physical archive of protest art and ephemera, as well as organizing exhibitions of archival material in the El Bohio office space. Group III was responsible for forging concrete links with political organizations, as well as for developing exhibitions in public places.[148] Between fifteen and twenty core members would meet regularly in the El Bohio office space and the broader collective would meet monthly for open meetings titled *Second Sundays*.[149] Held first at Printed Matter, and later at Franklin Furnace, these events responded to ongoing political conflicts and debates, including women's reproduction rights, U.S. intervention in Latin America, and the education system, providing opportunities for the collective and interested members of public to stay informed on local and national struggles while enabling them to coordinate actions, exhibitions, and events in service of those struggles.[150] PAD/D distinguished itself from collectives like Colab and Group Material by adopting a rigid organizational structure that allowed its members to work within affinity groups without muddling the left-wing politics upon which it was founded.

PAD/D's early activities were geared toward the foundational work of alliance-building—of producing opportunities for collaboration and co-production between artists, issue-oriented activist organizations, and local community groups.[151] Early projects included the design and fabrication of visuals for a massive protest in Washington against U.S. intervention in El Salvador organized by the People's Antiwar Mobilization on May 3, 1981, as well as the organization of *Death and Taxes* (April 1-18, 1981), a public art event assembling creative works protesting "the use of taxes for military spending and cuts in social services" under the Reagan

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[148] "P.A.D. Work groups," October 26, 1980, located in the Lippard Papers at the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute), quoted in Ibid., p. 5.

[149] Lippard and Kearns, "PAD: Waking Up in NYC," p. 1.

[150] "Editorial: Fanning the Spark," *Upfront*, no. 5 (February 1983): p. 2.

[151] The collective's first statement, written by Lucy R. Lippard and Jerry Kearns, emphasized PAD/D's core commitment to alliance-building: "We want to talk to people who organize people: 1) socially concerned art and social groups of all types. 2) local, national and international issue-oriented groups focusing on the major issues of our time, like anti-militarism, ecological damage, racial and sexual liberation, etc. 3) community groups organized around local needs like housing, daycare, police brutality, welfare, etc. PAD sees this triad as the basis for a powerful alliance." See Lippard and Kearns, "PAD: Waking Up in NYC," p. 3.

Administration.[152] PAD/D's members cast a wide net, participating in the struggles for abortion rights, universal healthcare, nuclear disarmament, Black liberation, and housing rights, among others, both by producing banners and organizing artists' contingents for marches and mobilizations. As a networking organization, PAD/D sought to combat the fragmentation characterizing the U.S. left at the turn of the 1980s by situating single-issue struggles within their national and international political contexts, as well as by connecting specific movements and campaigns within a broader cultural resistance.[153] To this end, the collective organized the February 26th Movement (February 26, 1982), a national conference of activist artists and arts organizations aiming "to build an organizational network, to develop new forms, theory and distribution systems for progressive culture."[154] Timed to compete with the annual College Arts Association (CAA) conference, also held in New York, the event was conceived as a counter-conference and a supplement to the CAA conference proceedings.

PAD/D did not remain silent on the issue of gentrification. In 1981, PAD/D members Michael Anderson, Ed Eisenberg, Janet Koenig, and Gregory Sholette formed a dedicated Anti-Gentrification Subcommittee, where they worked closely with the Lower East Side art collective Artists for Social Responsibility, as well as the Cultural Committee of the Lower East Side Joint Planning Council to organize and strengthen the cultural opposition to AHOP. The Anti-Gentrification Subcommittee sought to address the contradictory relationship between politically conscious art and the process of gentrification through a series of consciousness-raising initiatives. The Anti-Gentrification Subcommittee's largest project was *Not For Sale: A Project Against Displacement*, a two-part exhibition featuring hundreds of anti-gentrification artworks by dozens of downtown New York artists [fig. 4.9].[155] The first installation was hosted by El Bohio and ABC No Rio in June 1983; the second was installed outdoors and distributed across four Lower East Side intersections a year later. Opening on the heels of the AHOP controversy, *Not For Sale* aimed to facilitate a renewed dialogue between Lower East Side's art and activist communities. The organizers intended to underscore "how gentrification affects all tenants; how displacement of the poor changes the social and cultural life of a community; the issue of artists' housing; and how to organize for a viable community in which people of all incomes and

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[152] "Death and Taxes," *1st Issue: Political Art Documentation/Distribution*, no. 2 (May-June 1981): p. 1.
[153] Lippard and Kearns, "PAD: Waking Up In NYC," p. 1.
[154] "February 26th Movement: an Inaugural Event," *Upfront*, no. 4 (February-March 1982): p. 2.
[155] Sholette, "A Collectography of PAD/D," p. 10.

backgrounds can live together."[156] Confronting the same limitations as had CRES and Group Material, the Anti-Gentrification Subcommittee recognized that "the exhibit itself furthered the process of gentrification by advancing the neighbourhood's artworldliness."[157] It contributed to yet another "'Off Off West Broadway' encroachment on the Lower East Side community," as Koenig put it.[158] Eisenberg similarly understood both iterations of *Not For Sale* to be failed experiments—not just because they ultimately expanded what counted as East Village art (political art had its own cachet), but, more importantly, because they did not successfully bring participating artists into an organized alliance with the local activist community. "Good intentions are not enough to achieve much more than transitory gains," reflected Eisenberg in his post-modem on *Not For Sale.*[159]

If the local resistance to gentrification could protect individual buildings from predatory banks, slumlords, and real estate speculators, it could not impede the broad-scale and rapid redevelopment of the Lower East Side and the corresponding immiseration of the neighbourhood's low-income residents. No amount of political imagination could combat the austerity politics which, having devastated New York's minority and poor populations over the previous half-decade, had become the bedrock of national policy under the Reagan Administration. Sholette recognized that the scales of justice were tipped against the people, making it impossible for PAD/D to carry out its radical vision for activist art:

> PAD/D's imagined parallel art world was not unlike the cultural organizations of the 1920s and 1930s organized by labor unions, socialists, and the Communist Party USA, except in the 1980s there was little counter-institutional power to provide support. . . . [N]either the historical circumstances nor the technology of the early 1980s permitted PAD/D to realize its somewhat grandiose counter-institutional mission.[160]

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[156] Ibid.

[157] Ed Eisenberg, letter to Keith Christensen, no date, p. 1, published online at Gregory Sholette, Dark Matter Archives, 2011: http://www.darkmatterarchives.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/PADD-ED.pdf

[158] Janet Koenig, "NOT FOR SALE: A Project Against Displacement," *Upfront*, no. 6-7 (Summer 1983), p. 3.

[159] Ibid. While largely left unrealized, the Anti-Gentrification Subcommittee's later plans included lobbying the new East Village galleries to provide monetary support to JPC, as well as spearheading an ambitious community-led sculpture garden "which would stand as a pro-Loisaida, anti-gentrification symbol." See Ed Eisenberg, "P.A.D.D. Anti-gentrification Subcommittee Proposal," November 1983, p. 3, published online at Sholette, Dark Matter Archives, 2011: http://www.darkmatterarchives.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/PADD-ED.pdf.

[160] Sholette, *Dark Matter*, p. 25.

PAD/D was an important experiment in cultural organizing not because it was politically effective in the short term, but because it represented the possibility for artists to stand in solidarity with the working class and poor *even when this went against their interests as a constituency*. PAD/D stood with the Lower East Side community and against the City, real estate industry, and their art-world surrogates, but it moved beyond the game of divide and conquer that animated the AHOP affair. The Anti-Gentrification Subcommittee entered the housing struggle from a different angle, seeking not to peg the art community as an enemy to be shamed or denounced, but to "engage this group in the community as allies."[161] The Anti-Gentrification Subcommittee directed its outreach inward, seeking to realign the constituency of artists of which it was a part with the grassroots resistance movement that was already in place. In this respect, the group shared Marshall Berman's analysis of the housing struggle, but it pivoted from the necessary work of critique to the practical (although evidently incomplete) work of coalition-building.

PAD/D, CRES, and Group Material marked counter-points to East Village boosterism, forging recognizable alternatives to both the established alternative spaces and the emerging East Village commercial galleries.[162] Like the directors of Fashion Moda in the South Bronx, these collectives understood that the first wave of alternative spaces had reached a dead end. The established alternative spaces relied on inflexible organizational models with high overhead costs. They tended to be elitist and exclusionary, apathetic toward social issues, and inaccessible to artists of colour. As the SoHo story made clear, they were also complicit in the process of gentrification that worked against the art community they were founded to serve. The first wave of alternative spaces was galvanized by the ideal of artists' self-organization—that artists could build a system of support independent of established institutional and corporate structures.[163] Following the lead of Fashion Moda, CRES and Group Material revised the limited concept of "community" that falsely isolated this first wave of spaces from their broader social and political circumstances. They affirmed that it was essential for alternative spaces to not only serve the art community, but also the neighbourhoods they inhabited. PAD/D adopted a different model. For PAD/D, the primary objective was not to *engage* communities but to *organize* with them—to

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[161] Ed Eisenberg, "P.A.D.D. Anti-gentrification Subcommittee Proposal," p. 3.
[162] *Not For Sale* was singled out in this manner by Owens in "Commentary: The Problem with Puerilism," p. 163.
[163] For a recent critical examination of the concept of self-organization in the arts, see Stine Hebert and Anne Szefer Karlsen, eds., *Self-Organized* (London and Bergen: Open Editions and Hordaland Art Centre, 2013).

build durable alliances between artists, local people, and political organizations in order to strengthen the cultural resistance. The collective shifted very deliberately from the framework of the alternative to the framework of the oppositional, treating the art world as its primary terrain of struggle.

As I have already noted, PAD/D parasitically exploited the institutional resources of first wave alternative institutions, including Artists Space and later Franklin Furnace, institutions that issued public letters in support of AHOP at the very moment that PAD/D's Anti-Gentrification Subcommittee was lobbying against it. When the collective occupied such alternative spaces, it affirmed that these institutions could be useful even if they did not share its political values.[164] PAD/D's close relationship to the city's established alternative spaces points to a neglected (and perhaps unintended) *use* of these institutions while testifying to an oppositional counter-history that divided them from within. This much is now certain: the established alternative spaces were always contested in practice. If they no longer represented alternatives in and of themselves, this did not mean that they could not be put to use by activists and artists who sought to be *in* but not *of*.

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[164] PAD/D also received donations from established artists (including Haacke, Leon Golub, Jenny Holzer, Nancy Spero, Barbara Kruger, Julian Schnabel). See Sholette, "A Collectography of PAD/D," p. 5.

**Conclusion:** **Rezoning the Alternative**

The preceding chapters expose the years 1978-1981 as pivotal in the displacement of a reigning model of the alternative space, the non-profit model adopted with minor variations by Artists Space, P.S. 1, the New Museum, and Franklin Furnace, among others. This was a period of both crisis and confusion. The non-profit model was clearly problematic: it did not represent an alternative to anything, as its critics relentlessly declared. However, as I have demonstrated, the alternatives to this model advanced by Colab, Fashion Moda, and Group Material, among others, did not constitute a radical break within the alternative space movement so much as they added to the menu of options within it, expanding what constituted an alternative space, where alternative spaces could be located, and how they could exist in relation to museums and the art market. The second wave of alternative institutions, organizations, and collectives held distinct but contradictory relationships to their precursors. None were ready to give up the free money promised by state granting agencies, nor were they willing to refuse the exposure offered by first wave alternative spaces, commercial galleries, and museums when they began to align themselves with the new generation. If this period witnessed a rezoning of the idea of the "alternative," it was not at the level of the master plan. Both first and second wave alternative institutions, organizations, and collectives embodied Raymond Williams's definition of the alternative to a T: they represented difference within the dominant political and economic system without constituting a threat to that system.

The conflicts and controversies examined in this thesis attest to the ambiguous status of the "alternative" during a period of significant political transformation. Slight modulations and adjustments were recognized and celebrated as radical innovations by art critics, and they were wholly embraced by the city's museums, commercial art galleries, and first wave alternative art spaces. As the alternative art sphere accommodated a greater range of creative practices and organizational positions, it also reflected the pluralist condition impacting postmodern culture at large. Noting the effects of pluralism on the cultural field, Hal Foster reminds us that "[a]s anything goes, nothing changes; and *that* . . . is the catastrophe."[1] Indeed, that key stakeholders of both the first and second wave of alternative spaces recognized the emerging East Village galleries as allied institutions—accepting the galleries' private entrepreneurialism as an

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[1] Foster, "Against Pluralism," p. 24.

acceptable form of self-organization, as opposed to an encroachment and a threat—testifies to the critical groundlessness experienced but not recognized by the majority of artists and critics in Lower Manhattan.

The struggles *within* the alternative space movement—between competing institutions that adopted distinct models of the alternative space, between first wave and second wave—did not take place in isolation. The field of struggle was not only populated by self-organizing artists and art critics jeering from the sidelines, but also community activist groups, bureaucrats, and local politicians. The struggle over the "alternative" also occurred within a climate of austerity that not only left indelible marks on the urban infrastructure, but also constrained the political imaginary. The idea of the "alternative" was not only contested from within, but also from well beyond the field of cultural production.

In the summer of 1980, as Colab basked in the glory of *The Times Square Show*, as 112 Workshop/112 Greene Street was about to rebrand itself as White Columns, as Fashion Moda was preparing to launch its most critically successful exhibition season, and as *Semiotext(e)* was about to release its Italian issue, U.S. presidential candidate Ronald Reagan paid a visit to New York, holding a press conference on Charlotte Street in the South Bronx, only a few blocks from Fashion Moda's Third Avenue storefront [fig. 5.1]. He stood in front of *Broken Promises* (1980) and *Decay* (1980), two murals painted by John Fekner and commissioned by Fashion Moda in advance of the Counter Convention of the People's Alternative, a grassroots political event that was briefly described at the end of Chapter Two. Despite the intended meaning of and context for these murals, "Broken promises" soon became part of Reagan's arsenal of catchphrases, and he used it often in the last three months of his candidacy.[2] For Reagan, what was broken was the promise of the Great Society first announced by President Lyndon Johnson, and in particular, the idea that a "war on poverty" could be won by spending more money on government programs and policies. Reagan stretched Fekner's murals to fit an emerging rhetoric around the freedoms afforded by market deregulation, the promise of prosperity espoused by trickle-down economics, and the purported efficiencies of small government and competitive markets. His was an

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[2] For example, in his Labor Day Speech at Liberty State Park in Jersey City, New Jersey, Reagan directly addressed the Carter administration's inaction in the South Bronx, arguing that "The Carter record is a litany of despair, of broken promises, of sacred trusts abandoned and forgotten." See: "Reagan Raps Carter: 'Broken Promises'," *Ellensburg Daily Record* (September 2, 1980): p. 1.

intervention on the grounds of the political alternative, one meant to foreclose on any alternative to neoliberal capitalism.[3]

Jodi Dean has elaborated the disorienting effects of this kind of intervention: "When one's enemy accepts one's terms, one's point of critique and resistance is lost, subsumed. The dimension of antagonism (fundamental opposition) vanishes. Other, smaller conflicts emerge. Conflicts that are less significant, less crucial, become sites of intensity, sucking up political energies. Confusions arise as the multiplicity of small antagonisms, each seemingly central, make finding the key division difficult."[4] It was this turning-inward of struggle that Marshall Berman recognized in the vicious fight between artists and community members that animated the AHOP affair recounted in Chapter Four. It was also this inward turn that enabled some of spokespersons and champions of the second wave alternative institutions to see the first wave as *the* problem. However, it would be a profound mistake to view this as a phenomenon exclusive to the alternative art sphere or to the obstinate ignorance of artists. This inward turn, and the consequent incapacity to forge broad coalitions against a common enemy, was endemic to the U.S. left.[5]

This is not simply to conclude that the alternative space movement was a failure and a farce, a conclusion that has too often lured art historians of this period in American art. As Jacques Rancière argues, we should be wary of any game that "invites us to recognize that there is no alternative to the power of the beast and to admit that we are satisfied by it."[6] This sort of game neutralizes and sublimates every desire for an alternative world, reifying the critical gesture—the admission of guilt—as an end in itself rather than as the first step toward thinking

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[3] Reagan's political project was coherent with that of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990), who, also in the summer of 1980, coined the slogan "There is no alternative." First stated at a press conference for American correspondents and repeated enough to earn Thatcher the nickname TINA, this phrase illuminates a defining feature of neoliberal ideology—the foreclosure of any outside to neoliberal capitalism—making it seem completely rational to say, as Fredric Jameson suggests, that "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism." See Jameson, "Future City," *New Left Review*, vol. 2, no. 21 (May-June 2003): p. 76.

[4] Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism & Left Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 9.

[5] Jameson discusses left fragmentation in the U.S. at the turn of the 1980s, writing "Ethnic groups, neighborhood movements, feminism, various 'countercultural' or alternative life-style groups, rank-and-file labor dissidence, student movements, single-issue movements all have in the United States seemed to project demands and strategies which were theoretically incompatible with each other and impossible to coordinate on any practical political basis. The privileged form in which the American Left can develop today must therefore necessarily be that of an alliance politics." See *The Political Unconscious*, p. 39.

[6] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London and New York: Verso, 2011), p. 40.

otherwise. This is one reason why I have avoided speaking in the terms of failure—of erosion, obsolescence, and the like.

Instead of taking the perspective of ideological defeat, Dean draws from Salvoj Žižek to suggest that we take the perspective of ideological victory, arguing that "[w]hen one's opponent takes over one's position, one is confronted with its realization, with its repercussions."[7] This is one way of reading the statement by Walter Robinson and Carlo McCormick that opened this thesis—that "[t]he East Village art scene . . . suits the Reaganite zeitgeist remarkably well."[8] To write from the perspective of victory is to take stock of the consequences of the dreams we have inherited, the ideals we put our faith in. It is to scour the past for lessons rather than excuses.

By examining the alternative space movement as a field of struggle, and by zeroing in on specific struggles at an important historical juncture in New York's cultural history, I hope to have demonstrated that the "alternative" was and will always be divided. The question that I hope to have opened up is *how* it was divided—on what meaningful political grounds. Like the late 1970s alternative art sphere, the East Village was not monolithic. Over the course of the 1980s, groups of artists and art dealers disaffected by the market euphoria and provoked by the harsh political realities of Reagan's presidency splintered from the East Village to mobilize as a constituency in struggles for nuclear disarmament, against U.S. invention in Central America, and against the government's indifference to the AIDS epidemic.[9] The enormity of the challenge of rezoning the "alternative"—in Žižek's words, of "reinvent[ing] [our] very modes of dreaming"[10]—is not something that self-organizing artists can take on in isolation. And this is precisely the point.

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[7] Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, p. 9.
[8] Robinson and McCormick, "Slouching Toward Avenue D," p. 137.
[9] The radical counter-history of activist art in New York has been explored by Yates McKee in *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition* (London and Brooklyn: Verso, 2016).
[10] Slavoj Žižek, *Slavoj Žižek Presents Mao: On Practice and Contradiction* (London and New York: Verso, 2007), p. 24, quoted in Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, p. 10.

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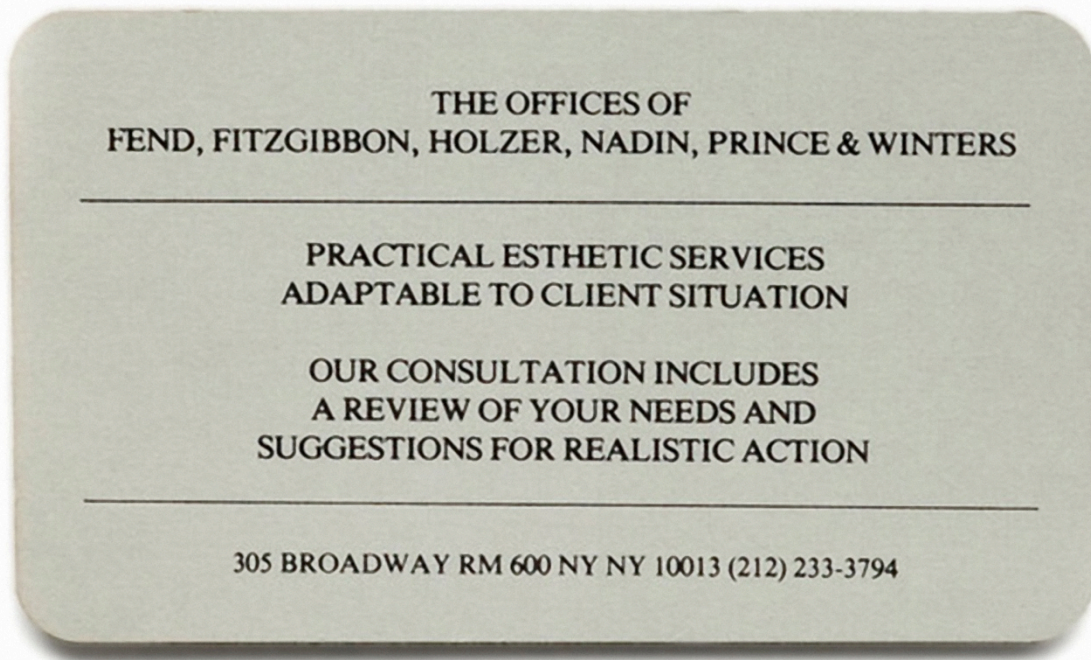
**Fig. 1.1 Business Card for The Offices of Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince & Winters, 1979.**

The Offices produced a business card, custom-designed letterhead, and print advertisements. The slogan featured on these documents, "practical esthetic services adaptable to client situation," was adapted from *International Services*, a 1976-1977 project by X&Y, an earlier group composed of Coleen Fitzgibbon and Robin Winters. In this earlier project, X&Y advertised "International services adaptable to your situation" before listing an extensive menu of services (from the development of film programs to the armed protection of artworks) and potential clients (from galleries and museums to law enforcement agencies, parades, and farmers, among many others). *International Services* eventually took the form of a cable-access television program described by the duo as "an ad you can interrupt." While X&Y's project was primarily expressed as a parody, The Offices intended to more fully assume the vernacular of the corporate service and to actually gain a client base.

**Fig. 1.2 Gordon Matta-Clark, *Cherry Tree*, installation at 112 Workshop/ 112 Greene Street, New York, 1971.**

During the winter of 1971, Gordon Matta-Clark dug a hole in the foundation of 112 Workshop, planting a cherry tree in its place and scattering grass seeds in the mound of rubble and dirt produced in the excavation process. An infrared light was installed in the vain attempt to nourish the tree and grass. This work resonated with the emerging genre of earth art, which Matta-Clark was exposed to as an artists' assistant during the important 1969 *Earth Art* exhibition curated by Willoughby Sharp on the campus of Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, where he was studying architecture. As a direct intervention into the material structure of 112 Workshop, *Cherry Tree* anticipated the more complex building cut-outs that would garner Matta-Clark widespread recognition.

**Fig. 1.3 View of the interior of 112 Workshop/112 Greene Street, New York, 1971.**

Exemplifying the genre of process-based art supported by 112 Workshop during its early years, this exhibition featured large-scale sculptures by New York artists Carl Andre, Rosemarie Castoro, and Marjorie Strider. Andre's *Floor Piece*, (1971) consisted of a row of metal squares running from the entrance to the back of the exhibition space. Castoro's *Cold Sake* (1971) consisted of two large, free-standing Masonite screens gesturally applied with graphite. Strider's *Window Work III* (1971), installed in the front windows of the exhibition space, consisted of two venetian blinds altered with large blobs of bright foam.

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**Fig. 1.4 Carmen Beuchat performing in *Energy Fields*, event at 112 Workshop/112 Greene Street, February 21, 1972.**

Although 112 Workshop is primarily remembered as a venue for process-based sculpture, it was also an important hub for experimental dance. Dancers and choreographers associated with the Judson Dance Theater and the Natural History of the American Dancer would frequently rehearse and perform at 112 Workshop, often in collaboration with visual artists. *Energy Fields* was a one-night multi-media event produced by Chilean choreographer Carmen Beuchat and Chilean media artist Juan Downey, both of whom moved to New York in the late 1960s. In the main section of this multi-part event, performers interacted with an invisible field of ultrasonic waves, generating an electronic tone as they passed through it. Performers included Trisha Brown, Caroline Goodden, Suzanne Harris, Rachel Lew, Barbara Dilley, Gordon Matta-Clark, Judith Padow, Penelope Scheiber, and Gerald Sheiber, all of whom were active participants in the 112 Workshop community.

**Fig. 1.5 Installation view of the 112 Workshop/112 Greene Street section of** *Alternatives in Retrospect: An Historical Overview 1969-1975*, **curated by Jacki Apple, New Museum, New York, 1981.**

The 112 Workshop section of Jacki Apple's *Alternatives in Retrospect* highlighted the practices of process-based artists working at 112 Workshop during its early years. In the foreground of this image is Richard Nonas's *Southern Champ (Robert)* (1973), a provisional sculpture composed of rough-hewn wood. To its rear are three examples of Jeffrey Lew's *Favourite Artists*, (1974), a series of prints on glass depicting the backsides of his favourite artists (including Philip Glass, Robert Rauschenberg, Richard Serra, Keith Sonnier, and Cy Twombly), as well as fragments from Tina Girouard's exhibition *Patterns* (1974), which consisted of arrangements of wallpaper and printed cloth originally draped from the ceiling of 112 Workshop. Hung from the ceiling is Suzanne Harris's *Flying Machine* (1973), a contraption used to suspend performers in the air during a March 1973 exhibition. On the right, pages from Robyn Brentano and Mark Savitt's *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street: History, Artists & Artworks* are installed in a grid.

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**Fig. 1.6 A meeting of the members of Collaborative Projects, Inc. at Peter Fend's Broadway Street Loft, New York, 1983.**

Colab's first meeting was on May 22, 1977. The group met regularly to discuss issues pertaining to New York's artist-run culture, to facilitate collaborations between members, and to collectively determine what projects would be supported by the group. Colab meetings were conducted according to Robert's Rules of Order, a protocol that was designed to ensure consensus-based decision-making while stalemating proposals that only represented a minority within the broader group. Although the participatory structure of the meetings ostensibly impeded any motion to situate the group on political grounds, Colab meetings were, as one member complained in a 1983 letter, "surrounded by swirls of caucusing, conversations in private, little meetings impromptu, chats about business about what to do." See Author unknown, three-page letter to Andrea Callard, September 22, 1983 (Andrea Callard Papers, Fales Library and Special Collections, NYU, series I, subseries A, box 1, folder 22).

**Fig. 1.7 Installation view of *The Manifesto Show*, organized by Jenny Holzer at 5 Bleecker Street, New York, 1979.**

*The Manifesto Show* was a month-long exhibition featuring work by dozens of downtown New York artists, opening on April 7, 1979 with a series of readings and performances. It was one of several exhibitions organized in short succession by Colab members either at Coleen Fitzgibbon's storefront studio at 5 Bleecker Street or Robin Winters's loft at 591 Broadway Avenue. Characterized by a chaotic arrangement of artworks produced by an range of artists associated with Colab, these shows anticipated the key traits of later exhibitions such as *The Real Estate Show* and *The Times Square Show*. These early exhibitions were primarily organized to facilitate relationships and foster new collaborations between artists.

The Offices Of
Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince & Winters

Practical Esthetic Services
Adaptable To Client Situation

Our Consultation Includes
A Review Of Your Needs And
Suggestions For Realistic Action

305 Broadway  Room 600  NY NY  10013

**Fig. 1.8  Advertisement for The Offices of Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince & Winters, published in *Spanner/NYC* (Blue, 1980): p. 72.**

The Offices's advertisement is one of twenty-one contributions to the third and final issue of Dick Miller and Terise Slotkin's *Spanner/NYC*, a Colab-sponsored magazine that assembled short image or text-based contributions by artists associated with New York's downtown art scene. Other contributions include outtakes from Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* and Jenny Holzer and Peter Nadin's manifesto "Here to There." The Offices's contribution stands out as the only advertisement in the issue.

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THE OFFICES OF
FEND, FITZGIBBON, HOLZER, NADIN, PRINCE & WINTERS

305 BROADWAY ROOM 600 NY NY 10013 (212) 233-3794

*A MOMENT OF TRUTH*

*(with drinks)*
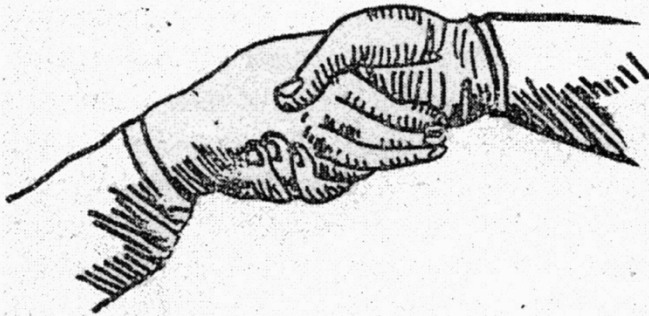
MEMBERS OF THE OFFICE WILL BE AT 112
WORKSHOP, 325 SPRING STREET, 7-9 PM,
FRIDAY, MARCH 28 TO ANSWER QUESTIONS
AND DISCUSS PUBLIC POLICY.

AN EXPOSITION OF OUR SERVICES ALONG
WITH OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIVIDUAL
INQUIRIES WILL CONTINUE THROUGH
APRIL 8, TUESDAY-SATURDAY, 1-6 PM.

**Fig. 1.9  Announcement for a meeting at 112 Workshop/112 Greene Street held by The Offices of Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince & Winters, 1980.**
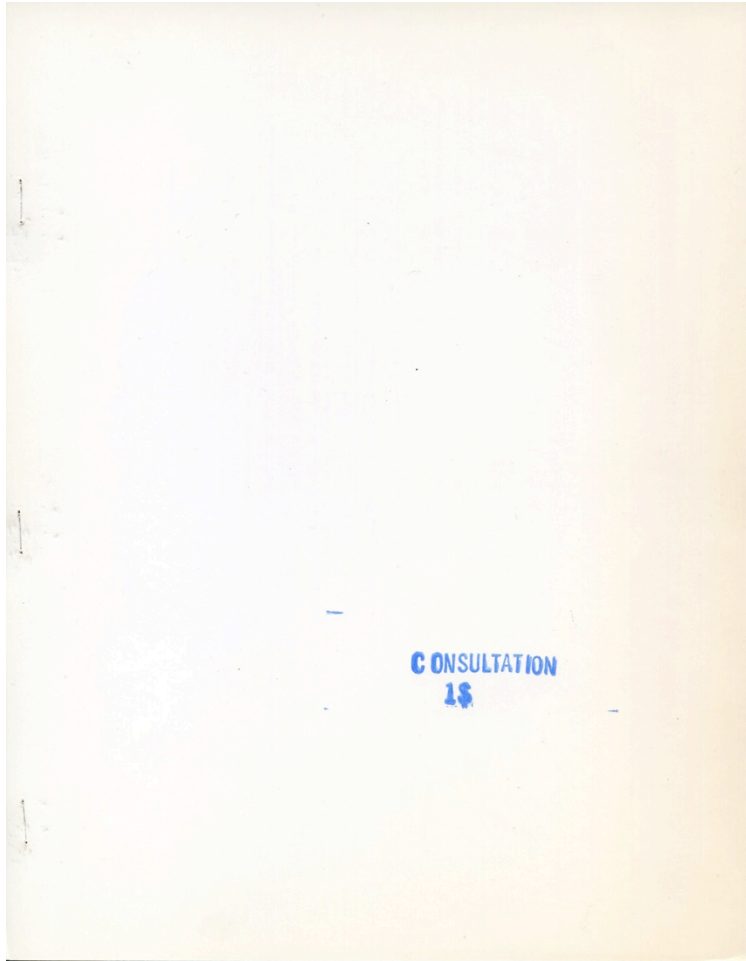
CONSULTATION
1$

Fig. 1.10  Cover of a 14-page consultation dossier produced by The Offices of Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince & Winters during a two-week residency at 112 Workshop/112 Greene Street, New York, 1980.
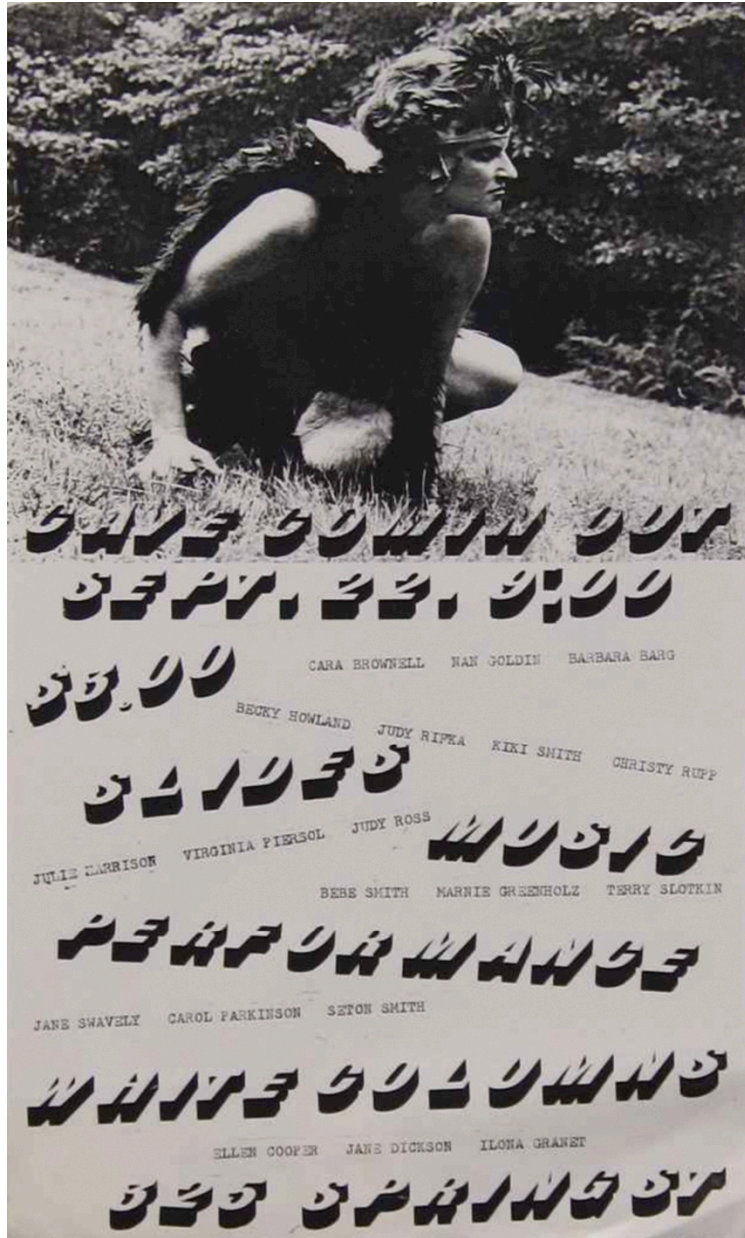
**Fig. 1.11  Poster for *Cave Comin Out*, a media and performance program at White Columns, New York, September 22, 1981.**

*Cave Comin Out* featured work by nineteen women artists and musicians working in downtown New York, including Colab artists Cara Brownell, Ellen Cooper, Jane Dickson, Ilona Granet, Julie Harrison, Becky Howland, Virginia Piersol, Judy Rifka, Judy Ross, Christy Rupp, Terise Slotkin, Bebe Smith, Kiki Smith, and Seton Smith, in addition to poet Barbara Barg, photographer Nan Goldin, noise musician Marnie Greenholz (Jaffe), TELLUS cassette co-publisher Carol Parkinson, and painter Jane Swaverly. *Cave Comin Up* was one of the numerous events and exhibitions to prominently feature Colab-affiliated artists at White Columns between 1980 and 1982.

**Fig. 1.12  Cindy Sherman,** *Untitled (Secretary),* **1978, published as part of a**
***COVER*** **magazine profile on Artists Space.**

*COVER* was an outgrowth of the downtown art scene, featuring in its first issue
Colab artists Scott B and Beth B, Peter Fend, Becky Howland, Tom Otterness,
and Alan W. Moore, among others. Artists Space's photographic profile
lampooned the institution's reputation as a bureaucratized alternative art space
by appropriating the aesthetic conventions of office work as represented in
mainstream cinema. Sherman's concurrent series *Untitled Film Stills*, which
likewise adopted generic representations of women in film and media, was well
known in the downtown art scene. Outtakes from Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*
were included in 1980 issues of *Spanner/NYC* and *Semiotext(e)*—a journal
designed by Colab member Diego Cortez—placing Sherman and her work on
the outer-limit of the Colab milieu.

**Fig. 1.13  Cindy Sherman,** *Untitled (Artists Space Staff)*, **1978, published as part of a** *COVER* **magazine profile on Artists Space.**

**Fig. 2.1 Fashion Moda façade, with mural (on right) by John Fekner, South Bronx, 1980.**

Fashion Moda was located at 2803 Third Avenue in the South Bronx. Fitted with three large windows during the storefront's 1978 renovation, Fashion Moda distinguished itself as the only storefront on the block without security gates. The windows and façade were frequently sites for public artworks and creative interventions, including stencils by John Fekner and Jenny Holzer's *Truisms*. It was also the site for unsolicited graffiti. Beginning in 1982, the entire façade was frequently repainted by commissioned artists, including the graffiti writer Crash.

**Fig. 2.2  Teach-in inside Artists Space against Donald Newman's *The Nigger Drawings* exhibition, organized by the Emergency Coalition, April 14, 1979.**

In the spring of 1979, the Emergency Coalition hosted a series of unsanctioned teach-ins on the topic of racism in the arts at Artists Space, located at 105 Hudson Street in SoHo. These teach-ins were opportunities to address the problem of racial insensitivity made apparent by the *Nigger Drawings* affair. They were also conceived as opportunities to initiate a dialogue with Artists Space staff, with the aim of creating lasting institutional change. An important direct action tactic devised by students and activists during the movements of 1968, the teach-in is both critical and constructive; it enables activists to simultaneously protest against and constructively re-use existing institutional infrastructure. The Emergency Coalition straddled the language of critique and affirmation in its posters and advertisements. For example, in one hand-painted invitation, the Coalition writes: "Artists and Artworkers: Come today, Saturday, April 21, 1pm to 105 Hudson Street to express our protest against racist practices by the staff of Artists Space / Help Artists Space to become a true alternative space."

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**Fig. 2.3 Joseph Beuys lecturing at the Violence and Behaviour Workshop,** *100 Days of the Free International University*, **Documenta 6, Kassel, Germany, 1977.**

Joseph Beuys founded the Free International University (FIU) with writer Heinrich Böll in 1973 after being dismissed from his permanent teaching position at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie in 1972. The FIU became the vehicle for Beuys's pedagogical experiments. In 1977, Beuys produced *100 Days of the Free International University* at Documenta 6, which consisted of a series of thirteen public workshops on a range of social, political, and economic themes. Stefan Eins participated in the week-long Violence and Behaviour Workshop, where he led sessions on September 8th and September 10th. Other noteworthy participants in this workshop included Amerigo Marras, co-founder of Toronto's Center for Experimental Art and Communication (CEAC), and Caroline Tisdall, a frequent collaborator of Beuys who would later co-curate the artist's 1979 retrospective exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York.

**Fig. 2.4 Unidentified neighbourhood boy (centre) and Stefan Eins (right) sort trash inside 2803 Third Avenue before the opening of Fashion Moda, New York, 1978.**

Before the opening of Fashion Moda, the storefront required extensive work. Denied funding for facilities improvement from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, Eins invested his personal money into the renovation, where he worked with locals to completely rebuild the façade, clean out rubble and garbage, sand the floors, and repaint the walls. The building was owned by a private landlord, who refused to sell the unit. Fashion Moda operated out of this storefront until 1989, when it relocated to a derelict three-story building at 2754 Third Avenue, two blocks away.

**Fig. 2.5 Stefan Eins (centre), with Earl (left) and Butch (right), below portrait busts of *Stefan Eins* (top middle), and *Butch and Earl* (top right), installed in the exhibition *South Bronx Hall of Fame*, Fashion Moda, South Bronx, 1979.**

The closing party for John Ahearn's *South Bronx Hall of Fame* was attended by dozens of South Bronx locals, including many of the artist's models. Representing life-long residents of the South Bronx on the same plane as Stefan Eins (pictured above), Ahearn's exhibition represented Fashion Moda as a local fixture before the institution had gained the trust of the local community. The exhibition simultaneously *represented* the existing community and *produced* new community ties. In this respect, *South Bronx Hall of Fame* could be recognized as a vital and early contribution to Fashion Moda's project of community integration.

**Fig. 2.6. Tom Otterness watching John Ahearn cast *Carlos* during the exhibition *South Bronx Hall of Fame*, Fashion Moda, South Bronx, July 1979.**

Ahearn's *South Bronx Hall of Fame* was an evolving installation, open to the public during the life-casting process. Photographic documentation of the production process represents the project as a complex and performative social art experiment involving a range of volunteers, spectators, and the artist himself. In the above photograph, a shirtless man (Carlos) lays on a raised platform that runs along the Fashion Moda storefront, his head covered by a mound of wet plaster gauze. He is flanked by a group of neighbourhood kids who line the storefront window no more than a metre away. Others peer in from outside. At a few metres remove, Colab co-founder Tom Otterness is crouched behind some buckets. Ahearn, on right, prepares the next strip of plaster gauze. Other angles on the same scene reveal an even larger crowd watching the process or waiting for their turn. Ahearn's sculptures were more than visual representations. They were indexical traces of a participatory performance.

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**Fig. 2.7** Press release for Jane Dickson's *City Maze*, installation at Fashion Moda, South Bronx, September 6-October 4, 1980.

**Fig. 2.8 Installation view of *Events: Fashion Moda*, New Museum, New York, 1980.**

In view are representative works by Futura 2000 (left), Lady Pink (centre), and Ali (right). Although *Events: Fashion Moda* was not the first exhibition of graffiti art in New York, and although only a small portion of the exhibition was dedicated to the work of graffiti writers, it is remembered as a touchstone moment in the legitimization of South Bronx graffiti.

**FASHION** 時髦 **MODA МОДА**
2803 Third Ave.,Bronx,N.Y. 10455  WEDNESDAY - SUNDAY 2 - 7  Tel. 5850135

The Honorable                                    4/17/79
Edward I. Koch
Mayor
City Hall
New York  N.Y.  10007

Dear Mayor Koch,

    your asking Ed Logue,the Executive Director of the South Bronx
Redevelopment Office,about artists as catalysts for a South Bronx
revitalization (N.Y. Post 4/17/79),prompts us to write this
letter.

We are from Soho - multiracial - and have started an eccentric
museum of science,technology,invention,art and fantasy in
the South Bronx.Fashion Moda is a vital cross-cultural effort
with international dimensions.The reconstruction of our block,
147th Street and 3rd Avenue,in the Hub,the business center of
the area,was initiated by us.A gutted building was used
to facilitate our enterprise.

We like to offer our service and know-how to the city.
We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience,

                    sincerely

    Stefan Eins,Joe Lewis Jr.,Hector Ortega,Directors

P.S. Your interest and help made one of our directors - Stefan
Eins - gain permanent residence immigration status during your
days as a Congressman

copies: Ed Logue
        select.members of the public
        press

**Fig. 2.9  Stefan Eins, Joe Lewis Jr., and Hector Ortega, letter to Mayor Ed Koch, April 17, 1979.**

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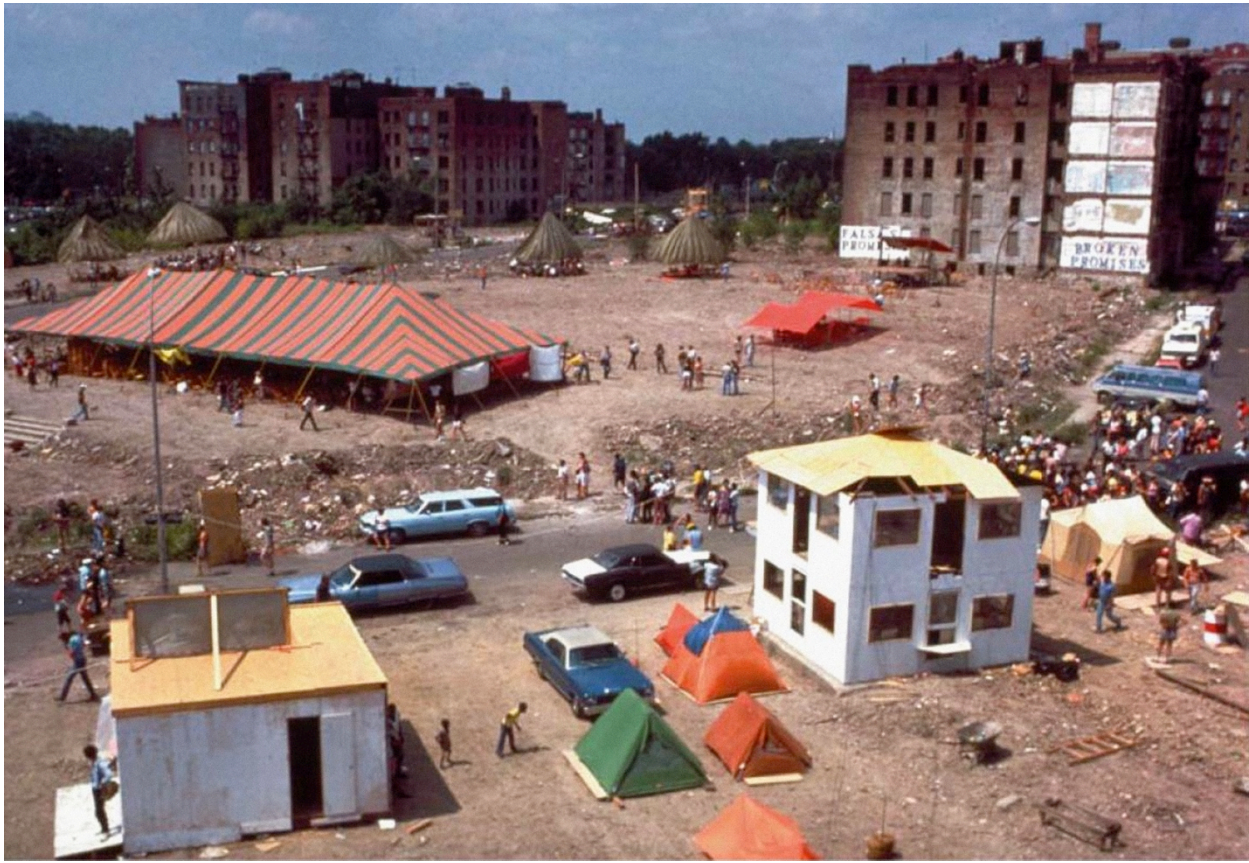
**Fig. 2.10    Overview of the central convention area of the Counter-Convention for the People's Alternative, Charlotte Street, South Bronx, 1980.**

The Counter-Convention for the People's Alternative was the organizational hub for the opposition to the Democratic National Convention, held in New York on August 8-9, 1980. In addition to the central tent, which hosted a full program of events, volunteers erected the "White House," a provisional structure meant to represent a South Bronx model home, alongside other pavilions and displays. Members of the city's alternative art sphere were on the scene, although in almost imperceptible ways. For example, Tim Miller, who co-founded the performance space P.S. 122, was head carpenter for the Counter-Convention. John Fekner's stencilled mural *Falsas Promesas/Broken Promises* (1980, top right), was produced for the Fashion Moda public program *Road Kills* (August-September 1980), which coincided with the counter-convention.
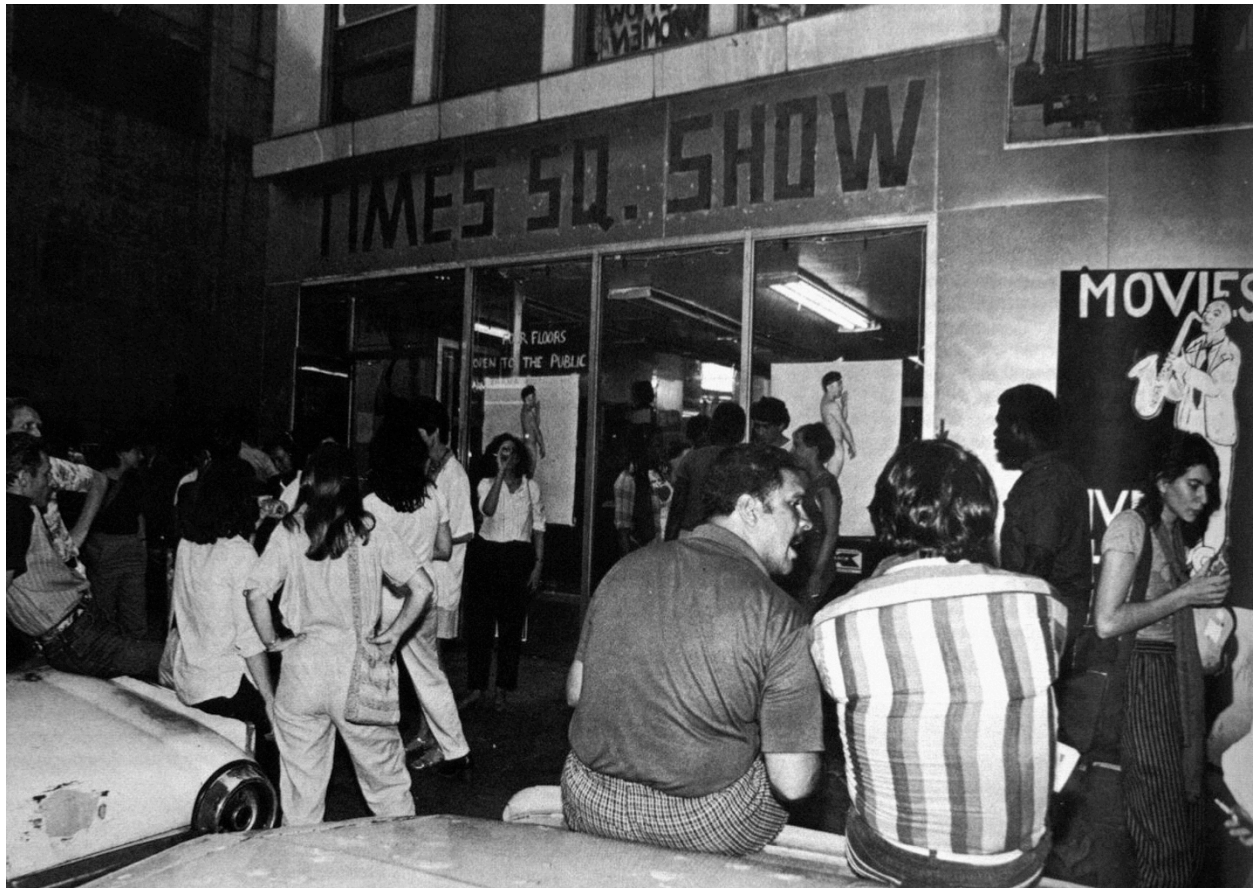
Fig. 3.1 Outside *The Times Square Show*, 201 West 41st Street, New York, 1980.

**Fig. 3.2 "Money, Love, and Death Room" on the second floor of *The Times Square Show*, 201 West 41st Street, New York, 1980.**

The "Money, Love, and Death Room" featured a wide range of artworks installed haphazardly over every surface. On left is a poster by Stefan Eins, which printed the Fashion Moda logo above an appropriated drawing of Nicole Baker, the girlfriend of Gary Gilmore, a notorious murderer who had been executed by firing squad in 1977. Above the first door (and safely out of reach of thieves and vandals) is a portrait of two women by established painter Alex Katz. Affixed to the second door, on right, are three text-based posters by Jenny Holzer. The walls are covered with a wallpaper pattern by Coleen Fitzgibbon and Robin Winters and fake currency by Christof Kohlhöfer. Christy Rupp's well-known *Rat Patrol* prints line the baseboards.

**Fig. 3.3  Advertisement for a screening of Beth B and Scott B's** *Black Box* **at Max's Kansas City, 213 Park Avenue South, New York, March 26, 1979. Poster, Xerox print on paper, 8 1/2 x 14 in.**
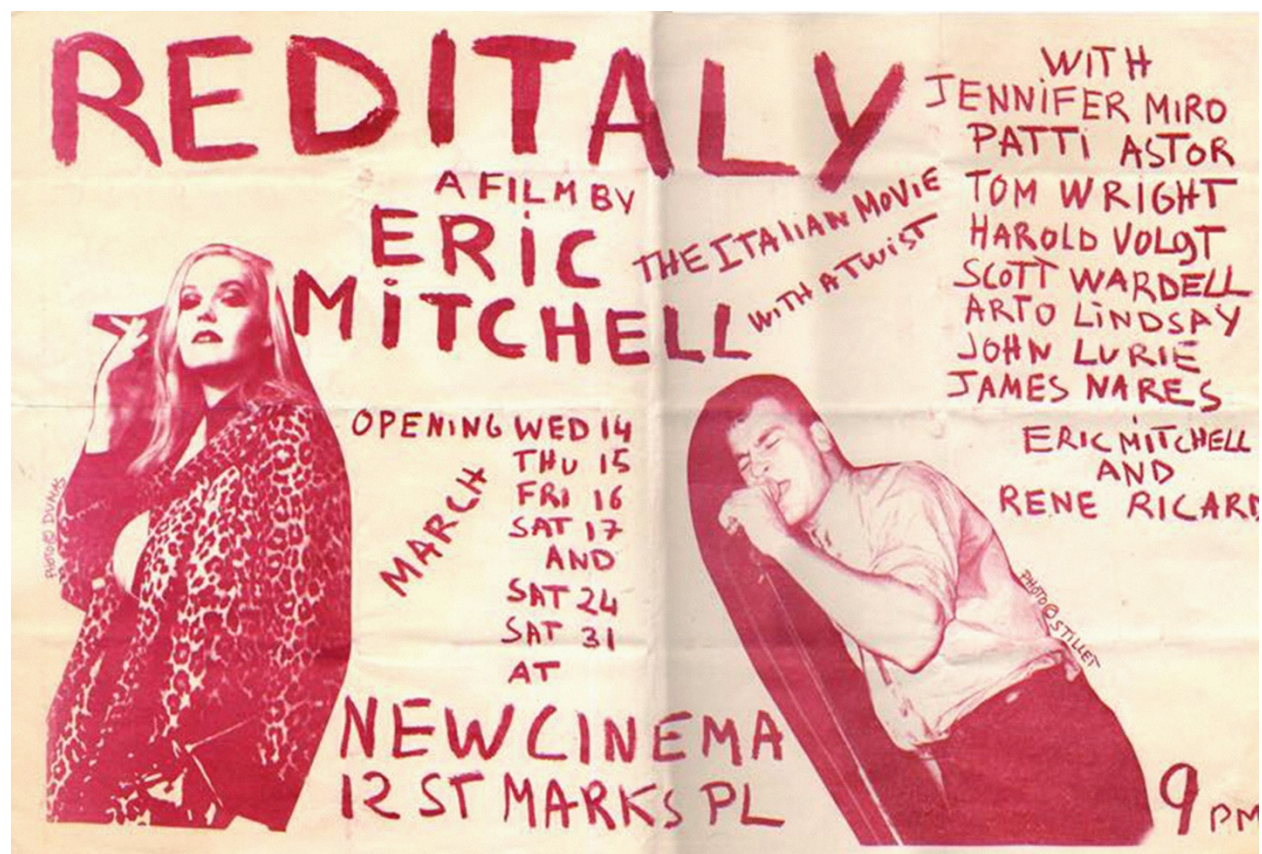
**Fig. 3.4 Advertisement for screenings of Eric Mitchell's *Red Italy* at New Cinema, 12 St. Mark's Place, New York, March 14-March 31, 1979. Poster, Offset print on paper, 11 x 17 in.**

*Red Italy* was Eric Mitchell's second feature film. Its cast featured a range of musicians, actors, and filmmakers from the close-knit no wave scene. Jennifer Miro was best known as the leader of the punk band The Nuns; in addition to making films, James Nares played guitar for the Contortions; Arto Lindsay was a guitarist for DNA and the Lounge Lizards, a band founded by John Lurie; Rene Ricard, who appeared in several films by Andy Warhol in the 1960s, including *Chelsea Girls* (1966), was also an art critic and vocal supporter of the no wave artists and filmmakers. Patti Astor was well-known as a no wave film star, where she acted in more than a dozen films, including all of Mitchell's films, before founding Fun Gallery in 1981.

**Fig. 3.5 Diego Cortez, *My Latin Heritage/El Cansearch Presidente* (from the Esoterrorist Series), installed in the exhibition *Moving*, Hal Bromm Gallery, New York, 1977.**

Diego Cortez's *My Latin Heritage/El Cansearch Presidente* was representative of the artist's work during the no wave period. In a statement accompanying the work in the catalogue for *Moving 1977*, Cortez described his objectives for the work, underscoring his deliberate appropriation of the conventions of punk: "The piece should have an urgency to it: a quick, easy blow up of a not-posed-looking mug shot situation; a rushing to Press: to sell the FALN story."
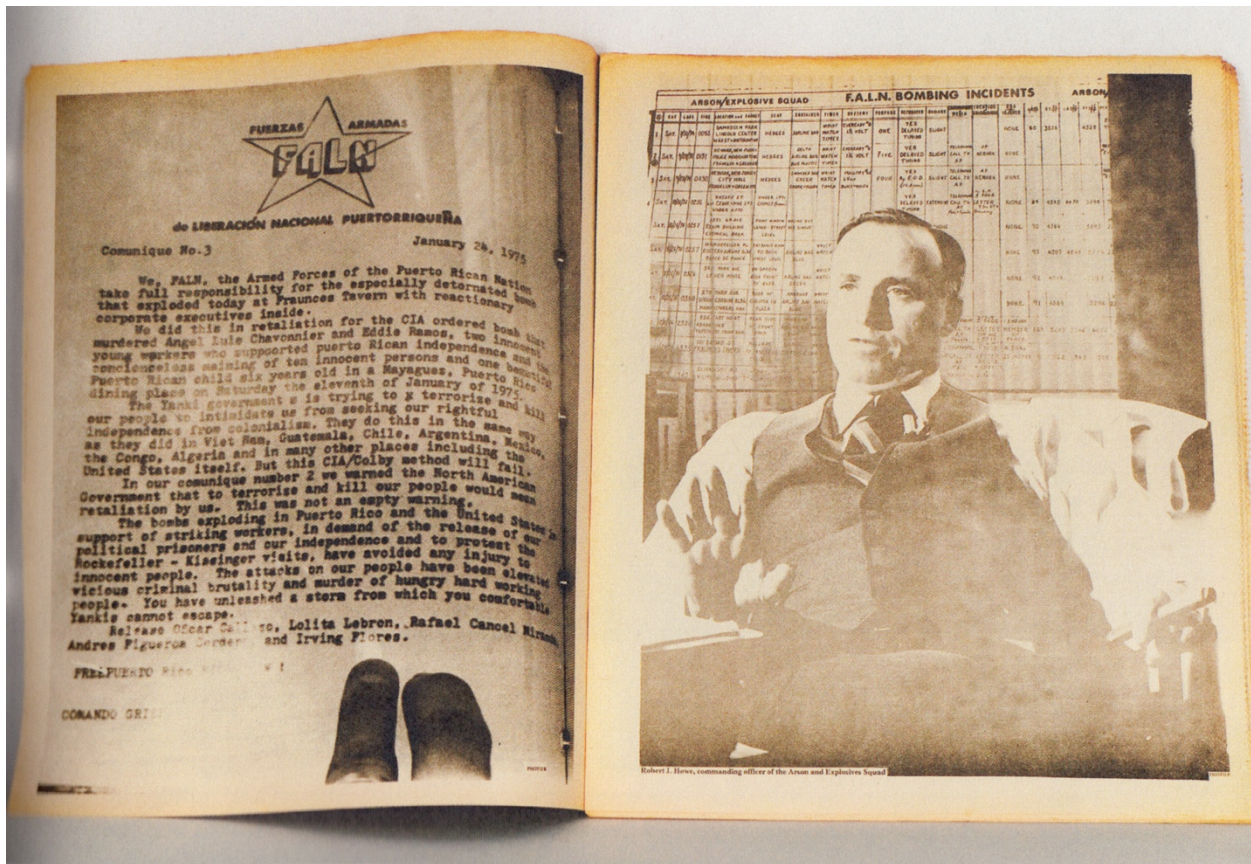
Fig. 3.6 Two-page spread by Beth B and Scott B in *X Motion Picture Magazine*, vol. 2, no. 4, 5 & 6 (New York: Collaborative Projects, Inc., 1978), edited by Jimmy DeSana, Coleen Fitzgibbon, Lindzee Smith, and Betsy Sussler.

**Fig. 3.7** *X Motion Picture Magazine*, **vol. 2, no. 4, 5 & 6 (New York: Collaborative Projects, Inc., 1978). Cover design by Alan W. Moore.**
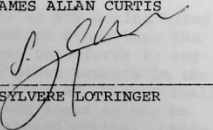
The front and back cover for the third issue of *X* features an image of a brick wall collaged overtop of a widely-circulated image of Aldo Moro posed in front of a Red Brigades banner during his fifty-five days of imprisonment. This collage was drawn from *Terrorist News Annual* (1978-1979), an eventually-abandoned research project started by Colab members Alan W. Moore and Robert Cooney. Moore and Cooney aimed to use archival research methods to expose a gap between armed struggle as a leftist political tactic and the blanket term "terrorism." Cooney, who moved to New York from Sydney, Australia in 1977, had a strong background in anarchist political organizing. Producing political street posters with the anarchist collective Black Cat/Gato Negro, which also included Colab member Tom Otterness, influential New York housing activist Frank Morales, and members of the Puerto Rican nationalist group the Young Lords, Cooney's commitment to activism was rare within the Colab group. As for Moore, he had arrived in New York in 1975 to take an internship at *Artforum*. Quickly disillusioned by the limitations of mainstream arts publishing, he took a typesetting job at the *Guardian*, an independent leftist weekly, where he became steeped in political discussions held in alternative and anarchist media. In contrast to the majority of terrorist-themed contributions to *X*, Moore's and Cooney's cover image stemmed from a serious and long-term interest in the history of class struggle. However, neither Moore and Cooney's motivations nor their deeper inquiry into the politics of armed struggle can be gauged from the cover image itself.

and shall then assign his interest in the leasehold to the remaining partner or to any new third party produced by the remaining partner.

6. The parties will share the rent and electric utility charges equally. They will each install separate phones for which each will be separately responsible. In the event that either party shall fail to pay his share of rent and utilities for more than three (3) months, then he shall be deemed to be in default of this agreement and the other party shall have the right to require the defaulting party to sell and assign his share of the leasehold for the best price obtainable within the thirty (30) days following the notice of default from the other party. From the proceeds of such sale, all arrears and the expenses of sale shall be paid and the balance, if any, shall be paid over to the defaulting party. This provision shall not be operative in the event that the defaulting party is able to obtain permission of the landlord of the premises to withhold his share of the rent for any period of time. The three (3) month requirement shall only begin to run after the expiration of any such moratorium from the landlord.

        IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties have signed this agreement on the day and year first above written.

_____
JAMES ALLAN CURTIS

_____
SYLVÈRE LOTRINGER

**Fig. 3.8 Final page of a three-page agreement made between James Allan Curtis (Diego Cortez) and Sylvère Lotringer, for the joint lease of the sixth floor at 225 West 36th Street, New York, July 2, 1979.**

**Fig. 3.9 Front matter of *Semiotext(*e), vol. 3, no. 3 ("Italy: Autonomia," 1980): pp. 2-3.**

The number of names listed in the front matter of *Semiotext(e)*'s Italian issue testifies the massive undertaking of its publication. It also points to important and problematic blind spots in the production and editing process, particularly on the topic of gender. Given the important role of the women's movement in the political tumult of 1977, it is a scandal that the Italian issue was almost completely silent on radical feminism, with only one article devoted to the complicated relationship between Autonomia and the women's movement: Lia Magale's "The City in the Female Gender," published at the end of section two, "The Impossible Class." Lotringer admitted this blind spot in a 1996 interview with Henry Schwarz and Anne Balsamo: "You asked why we didn't pick up on the Feminist movement: because we had missed out on it. It happened and I wasn't aware of it." The marginalization of radical feminism in the Italian issue, as well as Lotringer's claim to ignorance, is particularly troubling, considering that Silvia Federici, a leading Italian Marxist-Feminist thinker, was living in New York City at the end of the 1970s and is credited in the Italian issue's colophon under the heading of "Visuals," on left.

il/1  Gramsci Lucio Pozzi, 1977



**Fig. 3.10  Front matter of *Semiotext(*e), vol. 3, no. 3 ("Italy: Autonomia," 1980): pp. 4-5.**

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each day, and since repudiations or contradictions from the previous day have no influence whatever on the "news" of the following day, the Press and media can operate an accumulation of everything that is said from one day to the next without fearing any contradiction. The use of the "conditional tense" allows all possibilities to be multiplied and to co-exist. Thus it is "possible" to present Negri as being in Rome, Paris or Milan on the same day! The three "possibilities" are simply accumulated. He is presented at one point as an "active member" of the Red Brigades, or their "hidden leader", and at another as representative of a totally opposed tendency and tactics. No matter. . . the differing versions are again accumulated.

If we are to believe one French paper (*Le Nouvel Observateur*), we get the following result: even if Negri were not in the Red Brigades, he is an Autonomist, and "we all know who the left Autonomists in Italy are". Whatever the facts, the treatment of Negri becomes justified.

The Press has abandoned itself in this affair to a fantastic accumulation of make-believe, which has *not followed after*, in the wake of, the judiciary, but by their "pre-trial", has actively prepared the way for the judiciary and the police to conceal their total lack of evidence or substance to the charges. The new space for judicial and police repression in Europe today can only function *through* a crucial preparatory role of the Press and media. All organs of the media, from Left to far Right, have in this case, "made up for", made acceptable this gross breech of justice and due process. It seems that the time has come in Europe, when the old reproach that the Press should "keep a certain distance", should represent a certain resistance to "official slogans", will soon no longer apply.

Given the alleged international ramifications of this conspiracy, as reported in the Press ("the French Connection", the "Parisian HQ of the Red Brigades", etc), let it not be thought on this occasion that my letter is a "meddling in Italian affairs of which we are ignorant"[3]. Negri is a political scientist, an intellectual of high standing, in France as well as Italy. Italians and French today have the same problems in facing escalating violence, but also in confronting an escalation of repression that no longer even feels the need to be juridically legitimated — since its legitimation is carried out *in advance* by the Press, the media, the "organs of public opinion".

What we are witnessing here is an authentic judicial slaughter, by the modalities of the media, of men and women who have been interned, indefinitely, on the basis of legal "evidence" of which the least one can say is that it is as unsubstantial and vague as the accusations. Meanwhile, the long-awaited "proofs" are constantly put off until tomorrow. We do not in fact believe in these "proofs" that have so often been promised. We would like more information, instead, on the conditions of those being detained, and the solitary confinement to which they have been subjected. Perhaps we are to await another "prison catastrophe", which would no doubt give the Press their chance to find that elusive "definite proof" of Negri's guilt?

*Translated by Committee April 7,*
*London*

1. Piperno was arrested in Paris on September 18. The Italian authorities have asked for his extradition under the charge of "armed insurrection against the State."
2. Giuglio Andreotti: a leader of the DC. he often headed up the Italian government. Enrico Berlinguer: General Secretary of the ICP. He was instrumental in implementing the Historical Compromise.
3. This reproach was made by Italian politicians of both Left and Right, following the "Protest by French Intellectuals against Repression in Italy" in 1977.

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**Fig. 3.11  Outtake from Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Still #30*, 1979 (verso), published in *Semiotext(*e), vol. 3, no. 3 ("Italy: Autonomia," 1980): pp. 184-185.**

Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* series was first exhibited in 1979 at Artists Space, where Sherman worked as an administrator, and Hallwalls (1974 -) an alternative space in Buffalo founded by Sherman, Robert Longo, and other young artists who were finishing art school at State University of New York at Buffalo. Hallwalls was an important site of confluence between Colab, *Semiotext(e)*, and Sherman's own artistic community, which included "Pictures Generation" artists such as Longo and Sherrie Levine. The 1977 season included presentations or projects by Sherman, Kathy Acker, Diego Cortez, Edit DeAk and Walter Robinson, Stefan Eins, Judy Rifka, Robin Winters, among many others. The 1978 season featured projects by Sherman and Levine, in addition to an early screening of Kathryn Bigelow's *The Set-Up* (1978), which featured two men fighting in a dark alley as Sylvère Lotringer and semiotician Marshall Blonsky analyzed the scenario in voice-over. That an outtake from *Untitled Film Stills* appears in *Semiotext(e)*'s Italian issue points to an overlap of artistic scenes that remains to be fully explored.

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**Fig. 3.12 Installation view of the exhibition *New York/New Wave*, P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, Queens, 1981.**

In this installation view, graphic works by Keith Haring (top left, floor) were installed alongside an array of kitsch objects and Christian-themed artworks in a crowded display. The exhibition design for *New York/New Wave* was similar to both *The Times Square Show* and Fashion Moda's contribution to the New Museum's *Events* in two notable ways. First, artworks were installed "salon-style" and interspersed with kitsch objects and religious icons. Second, wall labels were not typed and printed, as was the convention at both museums and alternative art spaces. Instead, they were handwritten in pencil directly on the walls. The labels for *New York/New Wave* were written by Jean-Michel Basquiat.
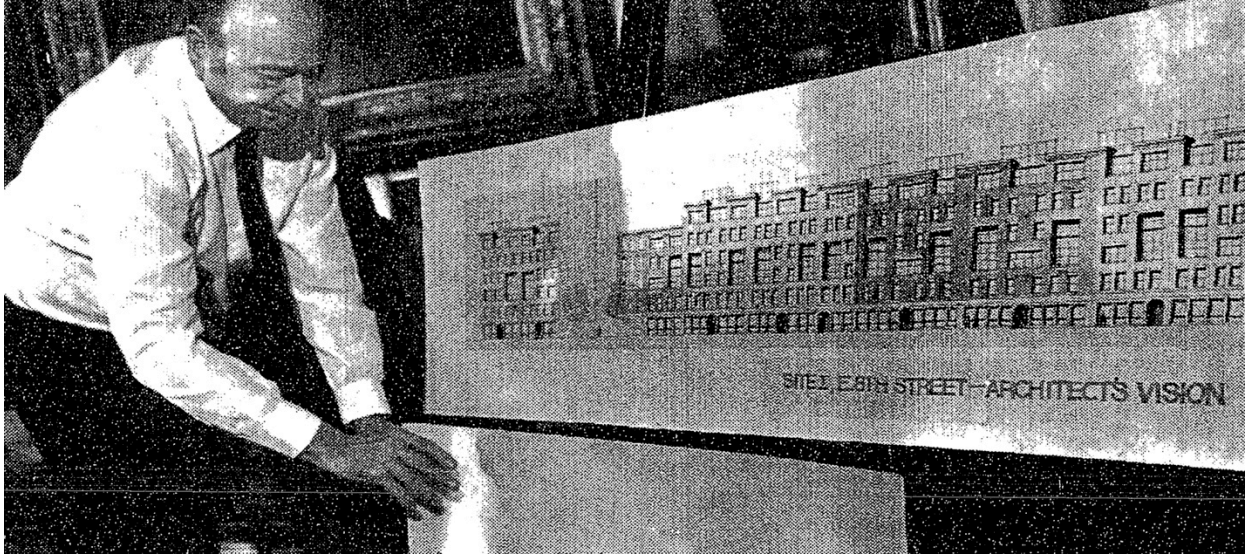
**Fig. 4.1 Mayor Ed Koch presents illustrations showing the proposed rehabilitation of buildings on East 8th Street on the Lower East Side, New York, 1982.**

During a press conference on May 3, 1982, Mayor Ed Koch presented plans for rehabilitating sixteen former tenements on East 8th Street and Forsyth Street. At that point in the development of AHOP, forty-five artists working in five discrete groups had been selected to renovate eight buildings for their own use, and a private developer had been selected to renovate another eight buildings. This second complex would be divided into sixty-five units to be marketed and sold to moderate-income artists living in New York.

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**Fig. 4.2  Photograph from *Save the Lower East Side*, an anti-gentrification march held on the Lower East Side, New York, 1981.**

In the summer of 1981, a group of community organizations devoted to housing rights, including CHARAS, Pueblo Nuevo, and the Lower East Side Joint Planning Council organized an anti-gentrification march on the Lower East Side in collaboration with Artists for Social Responsibility, a little-known activist art group that was working closely with PAD/D's Anti-Gentrification Subcommittee (discussed at the end of Chapter Four). An early and rare example of collaboration between the Lower East Side's housing rights organizations and progressive art groups, the anti-gentrification march was remembered by Lucy R. Lippard as a significant moment in the history of activism on housing issues in the neighbourhood. See Lippard, "Too Close to Home" *Village Voice* (June 14, 1983): p. 94.

**Fig. 4.3  Members of CHARAS construct a geodesic dome in a vacant lot near their loft at 303 Cherry Street on the Lower East Side, New York 1972.**

CHARAS had been building geodesic domes on rubble-strewn lots on the Lower East Side since 1970. The domes were intended to function as practical shelters for the homeless, but also as conceptual statements on community-led redevelopment. The above-pictured dome was constructed from cardboard and wood and covered in polyethylene film. It was the larger of two domes constructed on the Cherry Street lot, mounted in view of the Manhattan Bridge on the East River. CHARAS's dome experiments garnered the group significant and immediate press coverage, including an article in *The New York Times* and a report on CBS-TV's evening news in 1972. Not long after the Cherry Street domes were constructed, the larger one was accidentally burnt to the ground.
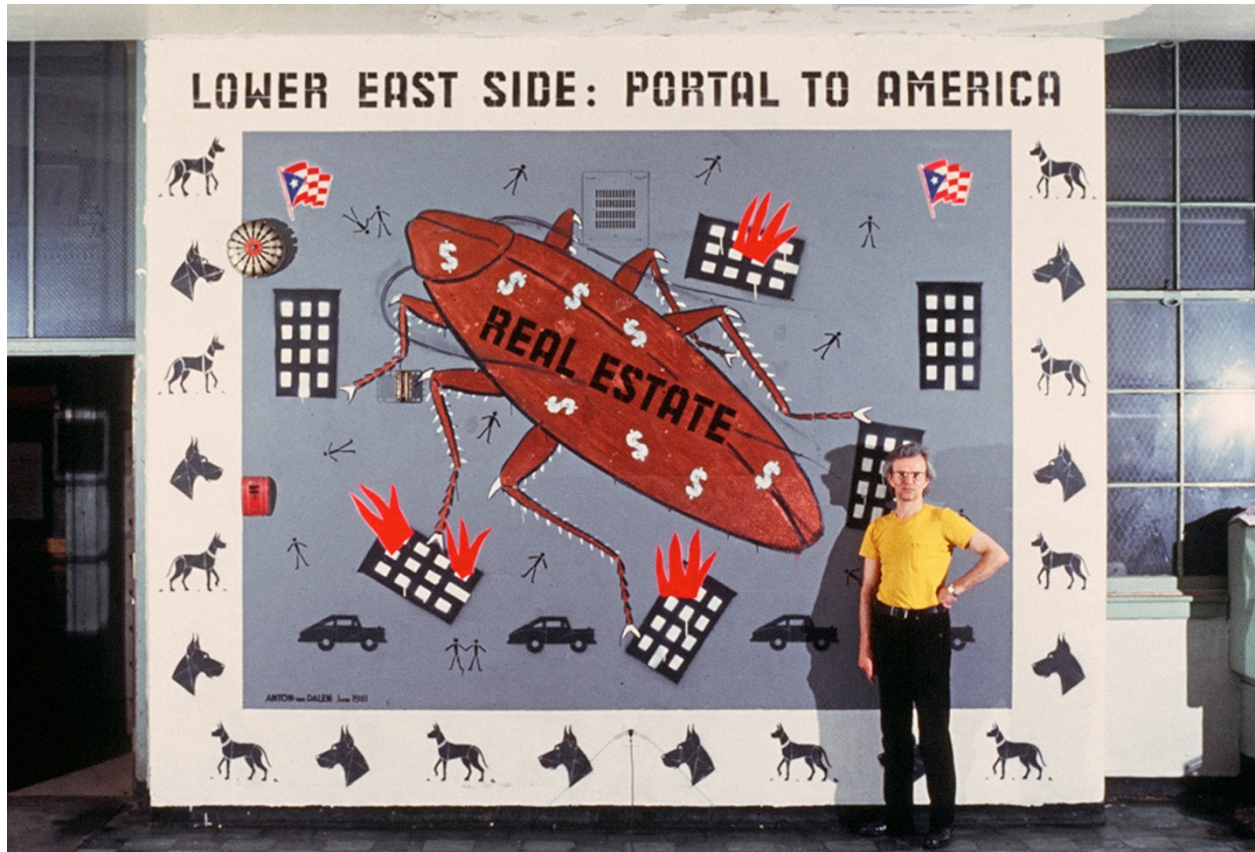
**Fig. 4.4 Anton van Dalen, *Lower East Side: Portal to America*, mural installed at El Bohio, New York, 1981.**

Born in Amsterdam, Anton van Dalen emigrated with his family to Toronto in 1954 before moving to the Lower East Side in 1966. In the early 1980s, he frequently collaborated with political art collectives and organizations such as ABC No Rio, Carnival Knowledge, Group Material, and PAD/D, where he contributed stencilled illustrations in response to social and political issues ranging from American imperialism to gentrification on the Lower East Side. Installed in the lobby of El Bohio for the *Ninth Street Survival Show*, a group show at El Bohio in June 1981, van Dalen's *Lower East Side: Portal to America* was a graphic monument to the institution's anti-gentrification politics. The mural was later reproduced on the cover of the Summer 1983 issue of PAD/D's *Upfront*, in relation to the collective's two-part exhibition *Not For Sale: A Project Against Displacement*.

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**Fig. 4.5 Artists celebrate the New Year's Eve opening of *The Real Estate Show*, 123 Delancey Street, New York, 1979.**

The 123 Delancey Street storefront, which had been filled with cardboard boxes and other detritus from its previous tenant, was cleaned up and repaired by members of the Committee for the Real Estate Show before the exhibition's New Year's Eve opening. The opening was mainly attended by Colab artists and their friends, including (from left), Keith Haring, Eva di Carlo (seated), John Ahearn, Stefan Eins, and William Scott.
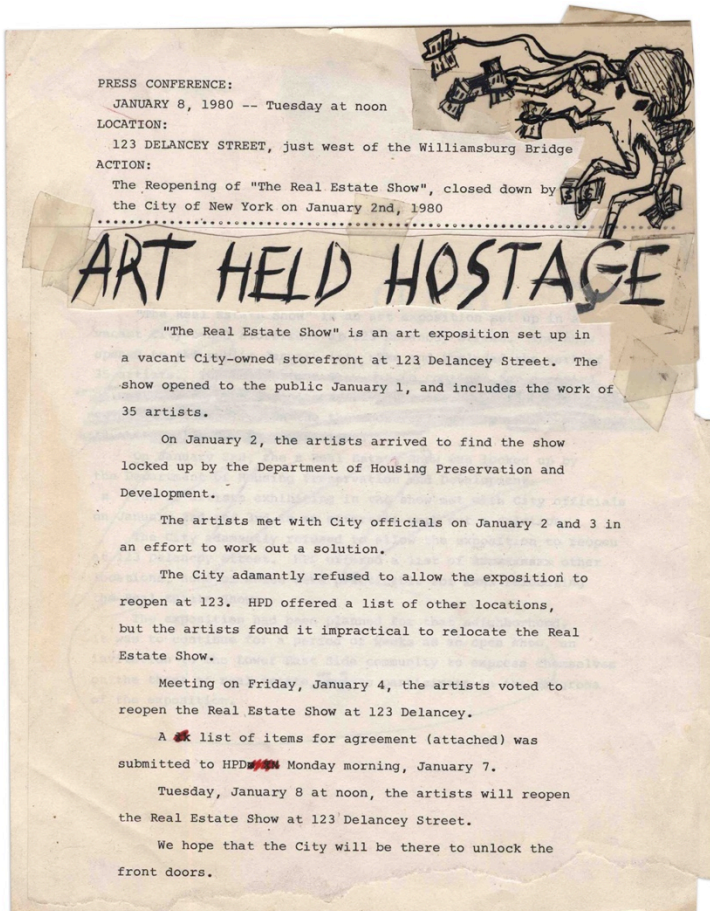
**Fig. 4.6  Becky Howland, announcement for a press conference scheduled at 123 Delancey Street, New York, January 8, 1980.**

This flyer chronicles the ongoing conflict between CRES and HPD before announcing CRES's intentions to reopen *The Real Estate Show* with or without the City's consent. Several of Howland's posters, advertisements, and flyers for the exhibition featured the stylized image of an octopus grasping at banknotes and low-rise tenements, which, like the cockroach featured in Anton van Dalen's *Lower East Side: Portal to America*, functioned as a stand in for the landlords and real-estate developers whose interests directly conflicted with the interests of the working class and poor residents of the Lower East Side. According to Gregory Sholette, this figure was likely inspired by *Chi Lai—Arriba—Rise Up!* (1974), a well-known mural by Alan Okada located five blocks south of the Delancey Street location. As Sholette explains, "Within Okada's four-story-high painting a squirming cephalopod, draped in a U.S. flag, clings like a parasite to the figure of a money-grubbing landlord." See Sholette, "Nature as Icon of Urban Resistance: Artists, Gentrification and New York City's Lower East Side, 1979-1984," *Afterimage*, vol. 25, no. 2 (September-October 1997): p. 18.

**Fig. 4.7 Joseph Beuys (left), Ronald Feldman, Keith Haring, and Peter Mönnig outside _The Real Estate Show_ for the scheduled press conference, 123 Delancey Street, New York, January 8, 1980.**

Joseph Beuys, a hero to many artists in the Colab milieu, attended the January 8th press conference called for by CRES with his dealer Ronald Feldman. His attendance was deemed significant by the members of CRES, who, in a slightly conspiratorial tone, hypothesized that "[i]f it were not for the brief attendance of Joseph Beuys in support of our action there may have been more severe consequences." See Ann Messner, quoted in Moore, et. al., "Excavating Real Estate," p. 16.

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**Fig. 4.8 Group Material, installation view of *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* at Group Material's East 13th Street storefront, New York, January 10-February 1, 1981.**

**Fig. 4.9 Political Art Documentation/Distribution, installation view of the second version of *Not For Sale: A Project Against Displacement*, New York, 1984.**

The first version of *Not For Sale* assembled over two-hundred artworks at El Bohio. The exhibition was accompanied by agit-prop theatre performances, concerts by downtown punk bands such 3 Teen Kill 4, and graffiti actions by local stencil artists. In an article titled "Pioneering in New Territories," *New York Times* journalist Grace Glueck described this first exhibition as an example of East Village art, frustrating the Anti-Gentrification Subcommittee. As a consequence, the exhibition organizers decided to host the second version of *Not For Sale* outdoors, where they "hoped to distance [them]selves from the gallery situation while in the process reaching a broader audience." This second project consisted of four open-air "street galleries," featuring anti-gentrification posters and artworks wheat pasted on the exterior walls of specific Lower East Side buildings. Mocking the numerous storefront galleries then dotting the Lower East Side, each site was given a name: The Discount Salon, Another Gallery, The Leona Helmsley Gallery (named after a prominent real-estate family), and the Guggenheim Downtown. The Guggenheim Downtown is pictured above. See Ed Eisenberg, letter to Keith Christensen, no date, p. 1.

**Fig. 5.1 Ronald Reagan speaking in front of John Fekner's *Broken Promises* (1980), Charlotte Street, South Bronx, August 5, 1980, reprinted on Fashion Moda letterhead.**

As a participant in the Fashion Moda public program *Road Kills* (August-September 1980), John Fekner produced a set of stencilled murals on abandoned buildings around the convention site for the Counter-Convention for the People's Alternative, including *Broken Promises*, pictured above. This mural repeats one of the slogans used by the Coalition for a People's Alternative at the associated protest outside the Democratic National Convention at Madison Square Garden: "Too many years of BROKEN PROMISES / Now we will be heard!" Fekner's mural had the misfortune of being selected as the backdrop for a widely circulated photo-op by presidential candidate Ronald Reagan, who stretched the phrase "broken promises" to fit his own narrative about the failure of the welfare state. The initial activist context for Fekner's work remains largely overlooked.