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THE EAST VILLAGE UNDERGROUND: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL MEANINGS
OF URBAN CHANGE IN NEW YORK CITY, 1978-1982

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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At the pinnacle of urban crisis that had ravaged cities across America, from the 1950s to the 1970s, New York City embarked on a complete transformation that afflicted a wider radius urban space and affected the population in a much different way than the earlier crises. Gentrification and privatization of Manhattan not only displaced working and lower middle-class residents from their homes; the implementation of neoliberal economic policies paved the way for an unprecedented growth of the private sector through the 1980s, which began to impose a homogenized, conservative, suburban culture onto a diverse and heterogeneous urban landscape.

In the late-1970s, artists in throughout Lower Manhattan reacted to the dramatic urban change that was taking place in New York City. They not only rejected the gentrification of urban space, which had displaced them from SoHo to the nearby Lower East and West Sides; their art and attitudes toward society was a direct response to the gentrification of urban culture. The counterculture that ensued originated in the East Village, taking shape around existing cultural institutions, but began to spread throughout Lower Manhattan, in isolated pockets, most notably at the Mudd Club, an underground salon in the Lower West Side. The art of the East Village underground was informed by two sources: first, through their collaboration with hip hop graffiti writers -whose subway graffiti was a direct protest to the substandard conditions of the South Bronx in urban

crisis- underground art collectives in Lower Manhattan developed a unique Punk Art aesthetic that was use similarly to protest the inequities of urban change in the late-1970s; second, deindustrialization not only left a plethora of abandoned buildings, in which art collectives staged consciousness-raising alternative art shows; the post-industrial cityscape became the primary cultural influence that pervaded the span of countercultural art in the East Village underground.

This perspective of urban change, from the point of view of artists in response, reveals the original effects of neoliberal economic policies on the urban landscape. Since the 1970s and 1980s, the growth of the private sector in New York City has dominated urban public policy; the public-private partnerships, first implemented in the revitalization of Times Square, have become mainstays in the administration of urban government and have set the tone for the increasingly expensive and gentrified urban landscapes we see today. Artists of the East Village underground sounded a concerning alarm in response to the city's transition into late-capitalism. As private corporate interests conquered the city, which became increasingly too expensive for working and middle-class people and artists to live and work, underground artists rejected social and cultural norms of the new ruling class; in response to the same conditions that dominate urban space today.

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Introduction: “Beyond Words”

Loosely spread sheets of purple drifted west over the Hudson River following the reds and oranges that had already dove below the horizon. It was April, and the days were slowly getting longer; sunsets were increasingly protracted; the colors of the sky were somehow more brilliant than in the colder winter months that went before. Yet it was still cold, and frost still formed in potholes in the street and clung to the curbs and windows of Lower Manhattan. Night swallowed the city. The crisp whiteness of a full moon shone down in place of streetlights that were either smashed or no longer functioned due to years of neglect and ruin in the urban crisis that ravaged the city during the 1960s and 70s.¹ It was now 1981, and despite the broken streetlights, the city was on the brink of complete transformation.

Boots and sneakers kicked broken pavement walking over White Street. Anonymous echoes reverberated from between the seemingly abandoned brick and limestone buildings down Cortland Alley- a narrow lane, barely wide enough for a truck to pass. NO STANDING EXCEPT TRUCKS LOADING AND UNLOADING, 7AM-7PM, MON THRU FRIDAY. It was Saturday, nearly 8:30 pm, and already a line of people had formed around the four-story brick building occupying the South East corner of the “T” intersection of Cortlandt Alley and White Street. Stenciled red lettering, illuminated by a dim, bare yellow light bulb hanging outside revealed words, victoriously etched across the dirty brick façade: MCL: Mudd Club and Lounge.

¹¹ Full Moon: 19 April 1981, 9:58:54 am. www.fullmoon.info – retrieved 8.12.13..

Midst the shadows and cigarette smoke; through the visible breath coming from mouths in the cold street; behind the heads and hair in all styles, a poster hung on the brick wall displaying a drawn hand holding a spray-can, spitting out dark blue words over a solid red field: “Beyond Words: Graffiti based-rooted-inspired-works.” Names appeared below: CRASH, DAZE, ZEPHYR, RAMALLZEE, FUTURA 2000, Lady Pink, SAMO©, Charlie Ahearn, Henry Chalfant, Martha Cooper, Iggy Pop, Dondi, Keith Haring. “April 9-24 Mudd 4th floor gallery 77 White St.”² Why were these people standing in the cold, waiting for a chance to enter this building? Was it the cheap beer, or the music? Was it the graffiti art that was being displayed? They all stood there, some of them with hands stuffed into their armpits to warm themselves, waiting to be let inside.

Past the line, inside the heavy steel doors, painted black in harmony with the drab-green brick facade, music pulsed in a throng of excited frenzy. D-Jay Anita Sarko mixed all types of music: 60s rock, punk, power-pop, reggae, hip-hop; all blended seamlessly as the people moved flowing in tandem with the current of the sounds.³ The wet sweet toxic smell of aerosol dripped down from the ceiling. On the fourth floor Keith Haring, a young, white art school dropout, and Fab Five Freddy, a black graffiti writer from the South Bronx who got his name from tagging the Five train, were adding decorative touches to their co-curated graffiti art show: Dayglo and backlight. This was the second Saturday their show was open to the public- doors opened at 10pm. Opening night, the

² “Beyond Words: graffiti-based-rooted-inspired-works” April 9-24 Mudd Club 4th floor gallery 77 white street (from a poster created by Fab 5 Freddie and Keith Haring)- in Dan Cameron ed. ex. cat., *East Village USA*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, December 9, 2004 – March 19, 2005 (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005).

³ Jim Farber, “The Mudd Club: Disco for Punks,” *Rolling Stone Magazine*, July 12, 1979, pp. 18; Michael Gross, “The Queen of the Discotheque Deejays: At Clubs and Private Parties. Anita Sarko Fiddles while Late-night New York Burns,” *New York Times*, January 16, 1987, Pp. A20.

week before, was a success. Small-time art collectors; rockers, famous and unknown; graffiti writers; and out-work teenagers all stood stunned by what they saw, which not only spoke to them more than any other art form or style they had ever encountered, but which they immediately knew was an intimate part of them; a genuine evocation of the unique spirit of their world and time- the East Village underground. The display of “punk art” was the meeting two worlds: Punk (and New Wave in extension) and Hip Hop. Together they comprised a new aesthetic imbued with the social, cultural, political and economic contours of New York City in change during the late 1970s and early 1980s.⁴

Where did it come from? What prompted this intense cultural innovation in New York City in the brief window from 1978 when young artists like Keith Haring and Jean-Micheal Basquiat first arrived in the East Village, to roughly 1982 when their art became famous and the artists emerged from the underground? What brought disparate figures such as Iggy Pop and Rammellzee together under one roof to collaborate so brilliantly? Furthermore, what did this new vibrant culture mean for the city and its people in the context of the dramatic urban change that took place during the late-1970s?

In his origins story, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation*, Jeff Chang makes the case that hip hop culture was a generational phenomena born out of the South Bronx as a response to urban crisis and the oppressive conditions of the ghetto. By the end of the 1950s, cities across the country were in decline due to two simultaneous processes: deindustrialization in North American and increased suburbanization. By the early 1960s South Bronx had become a slum, as a result of the

⁴ Steven Hager, *Art After Midnight: The East Village Scene* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), Pp. 19.

construction of the Cross-Bronx Expressway, and other harmful urban renewal projects under the supervision of urban planner, Robert Moses. The city government ran out of funds to support public services, and maintenance of the urban infrastructure South Bronx. Subsequently, the area continued to physically deteriorate. Hip hop developed as a self empowering culture that lifted the spirits of the inhabitants of the South Bronx slum. Chang carries this argument from the conception of hip hop in the mid 1960s to the late 1980s when it was radically transformed by drugs and the exposure hip hop received when it entered into mainstream media.⁵

Building off the ground work laid by previous scholars Chang claims that graffiti, an integral aspect of hip hop, was a defiant reaction against city government, which neglected South Bronx in urban crisis, and perpetuated the oppressive conditions of the ghetto.⁶ Graffiti writers tagged subway cars, attacking symbols of city government and of urban decline in protest to the substandard conditions of the ghetto. Chang provides an apt analysis of hip hop as it was produced in response to urban change; however, he neglects to explain the contingencies of the movement. Specifically, Chang fails to adequately cover the influence of South Bronx graffiti writers on underground artists in Lower Manhattan. The author does not highlight the significance the of this uptown-downtown convergence in the context of urban change; he does not convincingly demonstrate the impetus that brought these two groups together.

⁵ Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005).

⁶ Ivor Miller, *Aerosol Kingdom: Subway Painters of New York City* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2012); Joe Austin, *Taking The Train: How Graffiti Art Became and Urban Crisis in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Jeff Ferrel, *Crimes of Style: Urban Graffiti and Politics of Criminality* (Northeastern University Press, 1996).

Like Jeff Chang, Steven Hager's *Art After Midnight: The East Village Scene* effectively tells the story of a cultural movement that was generational effort to define itself; but whereas Chang focuses solely on hip hop artists, Hager concentrates his analysis on downtown artists in the East Village underground. The election of Ronald Reagan, in Hager's perspective, "Provoked an outbreak of doomsday fever across the country. For those who felt the world situation getting increasingly hopeless, throwing a party seemed like an appropriate response."⁷ Hager generally argues that East Village arts were responding to the increasingly conservative political climate that swept America during 1970s and 1980s; yet he does not effectively support this claim, but rather presents a cursory survey of underground arts. The author does not adequately clarify the motivation behind cultural production in the East Village. His story is well-suited for the general reader, but is hardly strong enough to stand academic scrutiny.

Also similar to Jeff Chang's history of hip hop, Hager's *Art After Midnight* is a one-sided account. While Jeff Chang's provides only a sparse analysis of the convergence between downtown arts during the late 1970s, Hager ignores hip hop altogether. This short sight, however, does not detract from the book's importance as being the first to historicize, and bring this formative window of American cultural history under a critical lens, albeit more geared toward the general reader than the academic. Not only does this book provide a treasure trove of sources, highlighting insightful interviews, and salient quotes from the prime cultural figures of the era; *Art After Midnight*, published in 1986, is itself an artifact of the cultural movement. Nonetheless, one must look elsewhere to find a convincing explanation for the impetus to, and rigorous analysis of the East Village counterculture.

⁷ Steven Hager, *Art After Midnight: The East Village Scene* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), pp.1.

Philip Glahn's essay, "Counter Public Art and Social Practice" hits closer to home in this regard.⁸ Like Chang, who argues that hip hop graffiti contained an inherent protest to the conditions of the ghetto, and to the negligence of city government in urban crisis, Glahn claims that public art in the East Village was directly reacting in protest the conditions of their times. But while Chang's graffiti writers were reacting to the decline of their urban environment, Glahn claims that East Village artists were responding to the rise neoliberal economics in the 1970s and 1980s. "In an era of renewed conservative politics and ever-expanding commodification and privatization of culture," Glahn writes, artists turned to public art to broaden their audiences and "to integrate excluded experiences and histories into the apparatus of cultural production that declares what is important and relevant to society as a whole." Like graffiti writers in the South Bronx, East Village artists challenged the dynamic "public" and "private" space, constituting in a "counterpublic sphere" (Glahn's term); or in other words, the East Village underground. Glahn claims that through public art, artists "engaged in a critical analysis and rearticulation of public and private as a fundamental element of modern capitalist culture," and in doing so protested the inequity of the late-capitalist society with the advent of neoliberal economic policies implemented towards the end of the 1970s.⁹

While Philip Glahn makes the most convincing claim to date for the impetus of the cultural production in the East Village underground, there are two points of contention that must be addressed. First, like Chang and Hager, Glahn neglects to investigate the uptown-downtown aesthetic convergence of hip hop and underground

⁸ Philip Glahn, "Counter Public Art and Social Practice," from Kimberly R. Moffitt and Duncan A. Campbell *The 1980s: A Critical and Transitional Decade* (Lexington Books, 2011).

⁹ Glahn, pp. 251.

arts, which was essential in the development of the counterculture. Such an omission detracts from an otherwise apt analysis of cultural production in the Lower Manhattan. Where, for instance, did East Village artists get the idea of creating public art? Who or what influenced young artists to take such a radical stance through their art? Second, while Gahln makes as strong argument for East Village artists, who, he claims, were challenging the increasingly privatization of New York City in the late-70s and 80s, he does not ground his argument in corporeal examples of this renegotiation. What role did urban change play in the relation between cultural production and the implementation of these neoliberal economic policies? Glahn's analysis is more concerned with the theoretical discourse of space in late-capitalist society than it is with the social and cultural meanings of underground arts.

I propose an alternative perspective of the East Village underground which places urban change at the center of analysis. In the early 1980s, two scholars put forward arguments for similar urban countercultural movements: the advent of early modern painters in Paris during the 1860s and 70s, and the Vienna Secessionist movement during the 1880s. T.J. Clark's *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* is now a classic art history text which postulates the idea that European painting was radically altered by the rise of industry and the transformation ('Haussmannization') of Paris. Paris, Clark argues, endured an "all-embracing economic change: a move to the world of grands boulevards and grands magasins"; through the intervention of café culture, fashion, recreation, and storefront displays, Paris was transformed into a society of spectacle, altering the relations of production in the city as

whole.¹⁰ As in urban renewal in New York City under master builder, Robert Moses, working class families of Paris were displaced from the center of the city. Urban planner Baron Von Haussmann transformed Paris into an entirely new city altogether, which included the construction of wide boulevards and promenades similar in scope to the grand expressways and urban renewal projects in New York City, under Robert Moses. As a result, European painting began to reflect and act within (as objects of symbolic capital) a new society of spectacle, in which “anyone could pretend to be anything he or she had many clothes for.”¹¹

Similarly, Carl E. Schorske makes a convincing connection between countercultural art and urban change in *Fin-De-Siecle Vienna: Politics and Culture*. Like Chang and Hager, Schorske presents the Vienna counterculture as a generational phenomenon during the end of the nineteenth century where sons, in attempt to define themselves, culturally and politically revolted against their fathers; a movement which Schorske’s views as a Freudian ‘Oedipal Revolt’.¹² At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the ascending liberal bourgeoisie symbolically rebelled against the crumbling Habsburg Monarchy of Austria by constructing the Ringstrasse, a circumferential urban plan that marked Vienna as a new city. The new urban plan left behind the ecclesiastical values of the past and instead championed a new liberal society and economy: instead of palaces, garrisons, and churches, centers of constitutional government and higher culture dominated the Ringstrasse. Coming of age in the 1870s, the sons of liberalism revolted against *their* fathers and the Ringstrasse became the symbolic focus of their critiques.

¹⁰ T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), Pp. 10.

¹¹ Clark, pp. 47.

¹² Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-De-Siecle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980).

Moreover, the economic crash of 1873 represented the failure of free enterprise and of classical liberal economics to equitably support society: the sons of liberalism did not only *want* to usurp their fathers, they believed that they *had* to for the good of society.

Just as Steven Hager, and Philip Glahn show how downtown artists in New York were responding to the politics of urban decline and economics of the 1960s and 70s, Schorske makes the case that the economic crash of 1873 strengthened the resentments of Viennese artists “who began to organize politically for a widened franchise and for economic protection.”¹³ The difference between Schorske, Hager, and Glahn, though, is that Schorske’s account of the Viennese counterculture hinged on urban change, whereas Hager and Glahn’s East Village counterculture was more so based on political and cultural opposition.

I propose that the East Village underground arts movement, like the art of Paris during the 1850s and 60s, and especially like the Vienna Secession, was rooted in the urban change in New York City during the second half of the twentieth century. Like Philip Glahn, I intend to show how young artists were challenging notions of “public” and “private” urban space in late-capitalist society; but rather than suspend my analysis in an abstract discourse, I will be telling this story through grounded instances of how culture responded to urban change in Lower Manhattan. This story involves a deep analysis of hip hop graffiti writers and their influence on downtown artists.

The built urban environment is the buffer between economic changes and society. People of New York City experienced the tumultuous growing pains of late-capitalist economy through urban change. Urban crisis ravaged the city. Public services were cut, infrastructure crumbled, and the people suffered. Gentrification white-washed Manhattan:

¹³ Schorske, pp. 67.

The New York art market turned Lower Manhattan, once the home of a bustling light manufacturing, and wholesale retail industries, into luxury residential lofts which began housing young urban professionals in the early 1970s. Gentrification transformed sites like Times Square, redeveloped through public-private partnerships, and SoHo which, through the influx of capital, became too expensive for young artists to live and work. Just as artists of the Vienna Secession rejects the Ringstrasse, gentrified spaces New York became symbolic targets for artists of the East Village underground to critique an attack through art. Whereas artists of the Vienna Secession struck out against the failure of classical liberal economics, artists of the East Village underground critiqued the flaws and faults of the neoliberal economic policies that changed New York City's built urban environment.

Furthermore, I propose that looking at the East Village underground through the lens of urban change suggests a continuity in the history of urban cultural production in New York City. In the late 60s when hip hop formed out of the duress of the ghetto, graffiti writers tagged trains as a direct assault on subway cars, the symbols of a negligent city government. As graffiti writers came into Lower Manhattan during the late-70s and early 80s, downtown artists were inspired by graffiti and produced their own public art in emulation of the hip hop movement. Eventually hip hop graffiti writers and East Village artists began working together making art that constituted an innovative hybrid aesthetic that similarly protested the inequities of urban change in New York City: the substandard conditions of South Bronx and gentrification and privatization of Manhattan. Hip Hop graffiti from the South Bronx and public art in Lower Manhattan were both responding to

urban change, and therefore must be considered as two aspects of the same voice of protest.

I draw from a wide range of sources which provide evidence supporting my claims. Sanborn issuance maps are excellent for uncovering the underlying urban infrastructure; they contain valuable information about the uses of buildings, the materials used in their construction and about zoning patterns that change over time. These maps were helpful in investigating the urban history of the Mudd Club, a discoteque that emerged amidst the desolation and squalor of the Lower West Side of Manhattan; and how this club embodied that same 'post-industrial aesthetic'. The Mudd Club became one of the most important sites of the East Village underground as an intellectual and artistic salon facilitating the convergence between uptown graffiti writers and downtown artists. Other sources include published interviews and personal writings of cultural icons of the East Village underground: interviews with Fab Five Freddy and other graffiti writers like Dondi, and Zephyr; with representatives of underground art collectives like Joe Lewis who worked with Colab, and Fashion Moda (two underground art collectives); and with Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat, two underground artists who became art stars during the mid 1980s. Finally, I draw from art reviews published in the popular press and in prominent art journals. Such sources reveal how the New York art market was receiving the new culture being produced in the underground. I have combed through these sources to discern how urban change influenced cultural production of art in the East Village underground, and how public art played a role in rethinking urban space.

Overall, studying the production of urban culture through the lens of urban change in New York City during the late 1970s and early 1980s can yield meaningful insights and understanding of our contemporary world. Today, Manhattan is exorbitantly expensive and increasingly gentrified, but the origins of this condition were cast in the 1970s. Coming out of a destructive urban crisis, which lasted from the mid-1960s through the 1970s, New York City government, under the leadership of Mayor Ed Koch (1978-1989), attempted to renew itself by adopting neo-liberal economic policies, fostering a fertile economic climate to feed private corporate interests.¹⁴ “A rising tide floats all boats,” so the logic went; and so, through public-private partnerships between private corporations and the city government, the city began to change.¹⁵ Public-private partnerships were, for instance, behind the transformation of Times Square from a site which had been historically known for erotic entertainment and commercialized sex in the form of pornography and prostitution to the theme-park attraction it is today. Similarly, through the 1970s the city government passed zoning laws in Lower Manhattan that enabled real estate developers to renovate abandoned loft spaces for residential use, to house a tidal wave of young urban professionals that spilled into the city over the 1970s, 1980s and still continues today.

The young artists of the East Village underground produced culture in direct response to gentrification in Lower Manhattan. Gentrification, however, was only

¹⁴ Miriam Greenberg, *Branding New York: How A City in Crisis was Sold to the World* (New York : Routledge, 2008).

¹⁵ Malcom Waters, *Globalization*, second ed. (New York: Routledge, 2001); Paul Treanor, “Neoliberalism: Origins, Theory, Definition,” web.inter.nj.net – retrieved 3.23.13; Susane George, “A Short History of Neo-Liberalism; Twenty Years of Elite Economics and Emerging Opportunities for Structural Change,” Conference on Economic Sovereignty in a Globalizing World, Bangkok, 24-26 March 1999, from globalexchange.org- retrieved 3.23.13; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

symbolic of the larger shifts in national and global politics and economy. Neoliberalism had changed the world by 1980. The Chinese communist economy, which had remained insular since Mao Zedong's rise to power in 1945, opened its markets to global trade in 1978. In 1979, Margret Thatcher became the Prime Minister of England, constituting a colossal conservative political shift in the United Kingdom which called for the destruction of workers unions and promoted the interests of the private sector by championing an unbridled free trade policy. In 1981, Ronald Reagan became president of the United States, setting the tone for conservative politics in America that carried through 1980s- a tone that still rings loudly today. In all, by analyzing the East Village underground, a movement that was itself a direct response to urban change, I hope to illuminate, in relief, the formation of paradigms that still govern contemporary society.

**Chapter 1: The Uptown-downtown Convergence: How
hip hop graffiti galvanized the East Village
Underground, 1969-1981**

People throw you out of your home, rip you off... What are you going to do? You gotta be positive. You can do some good. Make some public art.

Jean-Michel Basquiat in *Downtown 81* ¹

An artist is a spokesman for a society at any given point in history. His language is determined by his perception of the world we all live in. He is a medium between 'what is' and 'what could be.'

Keith Haring, journal entry from 1984²

There is a moment when artists who choose to show on the street are like artists who must show on the street, a point at which their aesthetics touch.

Richard Goldstein, *Village Voice* ³

Urban change is constant. The city is always growing, expanding and contracting, socially, economically and physically. People are always moving to and from the city. Buildings are always being demolished while newer structures are built in their place. Two dramatic changes, though, have shaped New York City in the last half of the twentieth century like no other. Urban crisis, which lasted from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, ravaged the city. The urban tax base was depleted through suburbanization and deindustrialization; the city revenue was diminished to the point of barely being able to sustain essential city services. Urban renewal, which was ultimately intended to revitalize the city, displaced and destroyed working and lower-middle-class communities in the

¹ Edo Bertoglio (director), *Downtown '81*, written by Glenn O'Brien; produced by Glenn O'Brien and Patrick Montgomery—Post-production by Maripol, executive producer Michael Zikha, Zeitgeist Films, 2000. 71 mins.

² Keith Haring, *Keith Haring Journal* with introduction by Robert Farris Thompson (New York: Viking, 1996).

³ Goldstein, "The First Radical Art Show of the '80s," *Village Voice*, Vol. XXV, No. 24, June 16, 1980, pp. 31.

South Bronx and in Lower Manhattan. The gentrification of Lower Manhattan, which began during the early 1970s, similarly affected the city.

Two politically and socially charged countercultural movements developed in response to urban change in New York City: hip hop in the South Bronx, and the East Village underground in Lower Manhattan. While these two culturally pervasive movements have not often been considered in the same light, I suggest that they were much closer than what has previously been thought. Both hip hop and the East Village underground were countercultural movements that were responding to urban change in New York; they both championed the use of public space to voice their protest in an increasingly privatized late-capitalist society; and finally, they even collaborated, sharing aesthetic, sub-cultural practice and style of urban social protest through art. A close study of hip hop and the East Village underground reveals that these two movements were not so different; rather, they were two aspects of the same voice of protest against the inequity of urban change in late-capitalist society during the second half of the twentieth century. Downtown artists learned from hip hop graffiti writers, emulating their graffiti aesthetic and the inherent social protest that it carried; thus the East Village underground of the late 1970s evolved from the hip hop movement that originated during the 1960s in the South Bronx during the urban crisis. Analyzing the cultural evolution of the East Village underground enables us to see the effects of urban change through cultural protest, defining the meaning of space in late-capitalist society as it transformed the urban landscape.

During the first four decades after World War Two, cities across America embarked on a process of radical transformation. First, suburbanization began to drain

city populations. In the past, cities were able to grow by expanding their boundaries, annexing surrounding suburbs. Suburban annexation provided the city with a larger tax base to support efficient services for the people as it grew.⁴ This was especially the case in New York City in 1898, when its five boroughs (Manhattan, Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island) were incorporated under one central city government. Consolidation and suburban annexation increased property tax rates and assessments, which increased urban revenue and provided city services like sanitation, mass transportation, and public education and recreational facilities like public parks and swimming pools. In New York, the five boroughs were joined in a federated partnership, sharing services and improvements that would benefit the city as a whole.⁵ However, as personal automobiles replaced mass transit systems like trolleys and cable cars, and as highways emerged as the “future” of American transportation, the bulk of public and private investment took place outside of cities through the 1940s and 1950s.

Suburban America grew rapidly through the first half of the twentieth century; large-scale urban consolidation like that of New York City at the end of the nineteenth century was no longer beneficial for suburban communities. By the outset of the Second World War, the country split in two. Suburban America enjoyed an increased tax base, and could afford their own public services, while urban American began on a slow process of decline as middle-class residents whose tax bases sustained city services reestablished themselves in the spacious and comfortable suburbs.

⁴ Kenneth T. Jackson, “Metropolitan Government Versus Suburban Autonomy: Politics on the Crabgrass Frontier,” From Kenneth T. Jackson and Stanley K. Schultz, eds, *Cities in American History* (New York: Knopf, 1972), pp. 444-457.

⁵ David C. Hammack, “Consolidation,” from Kenneth T. Jackson, ed. *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 277-278.

The rise of the American suburbs through the 1940s and 50s can largely be attributed to the decline of urban public transit. As a result of the Federal Highway Act of 1916 and the Interstate Highway Act of 1956, the private automobile and the newly constructed highway systems across the country encouraged the spatial, economic and residential divide between cities and suburbs.⁶ From 1950 to 1960, New York City lost 1.4 percent of its urban population, while suburban population increased by 75 percent.⁷ Between 1950 and 1970, the suburban population doubled from 36 to 74 million, and 83 percent of the nation's total growth took place in the suburbs.⁸

As Kenneth Jackson argues, suburbanization has been as much a governmental as a natural process. As early as 1933, the Greenbelt Program called for state Federal government supported suburbanization, as part of president Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal. The Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) was instituted to refinance mortgages at lower interest rates, enabling families to own their own home in the suburbs. HOLC in conjunction with the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) appraised properties and neighborhoods along maps depicting socio-economic and racial breakdowns, which in effect, according to Jackson, "discriminated against racial and ethnic minorities, and against older, industrial cities," like New York.⁹ These policies were the preconditions for the phenomenon known as "white flight"; when a large population of white urban residents picked up and moved out to the suburbs.

Furthermore, New Deal policies diverted Federal funding away from the cities,

⁶ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 188-191.

⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, U.S. censuses of 1950 and 1960 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952 and 1961), as cited in Jon C. Teafor, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Baltimore: John's Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 124.

⁸ Jackson, pp. 283.

⁹ Jackson, pp. 195-215.

neglecting urban public housing as a low-priority, shaping the inner-city as a “dumping ground for the poor.” American housing policy was “not only devoid of social objectives, but instead helped establish the basis for social inequalities,” said Kenneth Jackson. “Uncle Same was not impartial, but instead contributed to the general disbenefit of the cities and to the general prosperity of the suburbs.”¹⁰ As Thomas Sugrue points out, “government housing programs perpetuated racial divisions by placing public housing in already poor urban areas and bankrolling white suburbanization through discriminatory housing subsidies.”¹¹ Thousands of white urban residents relocated to the suburbs, extracting a large portion of the tax base on which city services depended.¹² The fate of the city was soon clear as revenue decrease while expenditures remained high.

Deindustrialization compounded the loss of city revenue due to suburbanization as urban based industries began to close-up shop en-mass as early as the 1930s. Rising labor costs, production expenses, factory obsolescence, and increased international industrial competition following World War Two, forced several industries to leave North Eastern urban based manufacturing centers, and relocate to areas where labor and production was cheaper (i.e. the South/South West America and overseas locations like South America and the Caribbean.)¹³ The size of New York’s industrial workforce peaked in 1947, and soon after began to decline. Between 1958 and 1963, manufacturing

¹⁰ Jackson, pp. 225-230.

¹¹ Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 9-10.

¹² U.S. Bureau of the Census, U.S. censuses of 1950 and 1960 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952 and 1961), as cited in Teaford, pp. 124.

¹³ East See Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and The Dismantling of Basic industry* (New York: basic books, 1982); Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, eds, *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*, foreword by Barry Bluestone (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); and Steven High and David W. Lewis, *Corporate Wasteland: The Landscape and Memory of Deindustrialization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

employment dropped 6 percent in New York City, while it grew 14 percent in suburban counties; between 1960 and 1965, New York City lost 16,000 manufacturing jobs, a rate which increased as the city sank deeper and deeper into urban crisis.¹⁴ Between in 1970 and 1974, the city lost a total of 300,000 manufacturing jobs. Over the next year another 80,000 jobs were gone.¹⁵ Suburbanization depleted New York of its tax base, and deindustrialization laid a crippling blow by removing the majority of its light manufacturing industry, a historical staple of the city's revenue influx. By 1974, New York City could no longer support itself financially; it was broke.¹⁶

The South Bronx is a section of New York City that was, perhaps, most affected by urban crisis. From 1967 to 1977, the Bronx lost over 300,000 residents, more than 30 percent of the city's total loss.¹⁷ Like the rest of the city, the South Bronx suffered from cuts to city services due the diminishing tax revenue through the 1960s and 70s; the most severe damage though came directly from the city authority. The Cross-Bronx Expressway, an urban renewal project conceived and carried out under the direction of urban planner Robert Moses, was constructed between 1948 and 1972. The expressway

¹⁴ Management and Economics Research, *Economic Development Program: Saint Louis*, 2 vol. (Palo Alto, Calif.: Management and Economics Research, 1968) 1:3, as cited in Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance*, pp. 135

; Michael R. Greenberg and Nicholas j. Valente, "Recent Economic Trends in the Major Northeastern Metropolises," in George Sternleib and James W. Hughes, ed.s, *Post-Industrial America: Metropolitan decline and Inter-Regional Job Shifts* (New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Urban Policy Research, 1975), pp. 77-99, cited in Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989) pp. 24-29.

¹⁵ Michael R. Greenberg and Nicholas j. Valente, "Recent Economic Trends in the Major Northeastern Metropolises," in George Sternleib and James W. Hughes, ed.s, *Post-Industrial America: Metropolitan decline and Inter-Regional Job Shifts* (New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Urban Policy Research, 1975), pp. 77-99, as cited in Zukin, pp. 24-29.

¹⁶ Sam Roberts, "When the City's Bankruptcy Was Just a Few Words Away," *The New York Times*, December 31, 2006

¹⁷ Robert Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Knopf, 1974) as cited in Miriam Greenberg, *Branding New York: How a City was sold to the World*. (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 146

was intended to alleviate the perpetual traffic in New York City that made transportation by automobile almost unmanageable. However, in its construction the Cross-Bronx Expressway leveled several neighborhoods and communities of the South Bronx, contributing to the decaying conditions due to urban crisis. On top of the ill effects of urban renewal in urban crisis, the world financial crises of the 1970s hit New York City hard, further crippling the South Bronx. Youth in particular were so hard pressed that many turned to gangs and committing crimes to survive in their neighborhood, which by the mid-1960s was a barren ghetto.¹⁸

Hip Hop in Urban Crisis

Hip hop culture was a product of urban crisis in South Bronx; it emerged out the ghetto as a form of cultural empowerment for disenfranchised communities.¹⁹ Journalist Jeff Chang has noted in *Can't Stop Won't Stop: a History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, that hip hop culture contained a “unifying power” that brought the community together, despite the substandard conditions of the inner-city ghetto.²⁰ Hip hop strengthened communities in South Bronx amid the deteriorating urban environment and the lack of support from city government. What is more, hip hop was a culture of protest against oppressive urban authority.

Originally, there were three core branches of hip hop culture that developed in the South Bronx: rapping and dj-ing, break dancing and graffiti.²¹ Of these three forms,

¹⁸ Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005) 46-51.

¹⁹ Norman Mailer and Jon Naar, *The Faith of Graffiti*. (New York: Praeger, 1974).

²⁰ Chang.

²¹ Tony Silver (director), *Style Wars*, produced by Tony Silver in collaboration with Henry Chalfant, directed by Tony Silver, (New York: Public Art Films, 1983).

graffiti was the most direct response to the decadence of the ghetto and the negligence of city government in urban crisis. Graffiti fought “the fascism of design,” said Glenn O’Brien a journalist and art critic that wrote in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Graffiti rejected “the hideous barrenness of ‘clean’; urban design.” According to O’Brien graffiti scribblers, known as *writers*, were “individual identities asserting themselves in wild color and bold hand across the tabula rasa of modern corporate planning.”²² Similarly, urban historian Joe Austin has argued in *Taking the Train: How Graffiti Art Became an Urban Crisis in New York City* hip hop graffiti writers saw themselves as “embodying an (illegal) urban beautification and education program for a fading city.”²³ Subway cars were the canvas of choice for many graffiti writers; subway cars symbolized the oppressive control of city government and urban planners who created the conditions of the ghetto.²⁴ Many graffiti writers felt that producing graffiti was a creative release from the oppressive conditions of the ghetto: “For lots of us, the subways remain the only outlet: A moving vehicle,” said graffiti writer Futura 2000. “The work has to be done quickly; its finest hour may be when it’s just rolling by.” WASP, another graffiti artist from the South Bronx explained that, “graffiti helps you out; in the neighborhood I grew up in [...] you do it to get out of the atmosphere of the ghetto, where everyone is desperate.”²⁵

Graffiti writers saw the subway as a form of imperialism, a symbol of the very policies that created the slums of the South Bronx; extensions of corporate America, used

²² Glenn O’Brien, “Graffiti ’80: The State of Outlaw Art,” *High Times* (June 1980), pp. 48-54.

²³ Joe Austin, *Taking the Train: How Graffiti Art Became an Urban Crisis in New York City*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 4.

²⁴ Ivor Miller, *Aerosol Kingdom: Subway Painters of New York City*, foreword by Robert Farris Thompson (University of Mississippi Press, 2002).

²⁵ As quoted from Suzi Gablik, “Report from New York: The Graffiti Question.” *Art in America*. October, 1982, pp. 34-35.

by white-middleclass workers to commute from the suburbs to the city they left. Graffiti was thus a way to defy a hostile world and a challenge to city authority a protest from a disenfranchised community.²⁶ As urban sociologist Miriam Greenberg put it, “Graffiti helped politicize the urban crisis,” specifically the deteriorating conditions of the inner-city neighborhoods.²⁷ Graffiti was an assertion of identity; it was, according to art critic Jack Stewart argues that graffiti a “consequence of the deep human need to be counted ‘here’.”²⁸ While the city neglected South Bronx in urban crisis, hip hop was a way of hoisting a flag, saying ‘hey, we’re still here!’

The Hip Hop Graffiti Subculture

Hip hop graffiti flourished in New York in two large waves which correspond to two generations of graffiti writers. The first wave of hip hop graffiti occurred from roughly 1968 through 1973; the second wave took place from 1974 to about 1982. While there were two distinct movements of graffiti production, there was significant overlap between the both periods; many graffiti writers from the first generation continued producing graffiti alongside the second generation. The fundamental break between the two movements was punctuated by a series of anti-graffiti actions put forward by the city against graffiti writers and the subway graffiti. After the MTA repainted the entire 6,800 car subway fleet in the fall of 1973, hip hop graffiti experienced a renaissance in style and form. Graffiti writers suddenly had a clean surface on which to create. Tags, which once consisted of a small name drawn by marker in the late-1960s became bigger and

²⁶ Chang, pp. 124-5.

²⁷ Greenberg, pp. 147.

²⁸ Jack Stewart, *Graffiti Kings: New York Mass Transit Art of the 1970's* (New York: Melcher Media, 2009), pp. 228; See also Austin, pp. 105-6; Tracy Fitzpatrick, *Art and the Subway: New York Underground* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), pp. 182; and Jeff Ferrell, *Crimes of Style: Urban Graffiti and the Politics of Criminality* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), pp. 197.

more dynamic in style during the second half of the 1970s.²⁹ The first *top-to-bottom-whole-car* was completed in 1975 by an anonymous writer; which, from that point on, became a top standard for the best graffiti writers.³⁰ Aesthetically, there was no real break between the two movements, but rather the second wave grew out of the first with subtle, distinguishing markers. While the first wave of graffiti writers centered in South Bronx, the second wave of graffiti writers became more prevalent downtown in Lower Manhattan, among countercultural artist in the East Village.

Hip hop graffiti writers of the first wave came from all walks of life; the cohort was comprised of sever different identities based on race, religion and gender; most though, came from working and lower-class families. Graffiti writers were as racially mixed as the communities of the South Bronx during the late-1960s. Many graffiti writers were Latino and African-America, while others were white. Taki 183, the first graffiti writer to be publically recognized in the *New York Times*, was Greek-American and became the most famous hip hop graffiti writer within the subculture for being the first graffiti writer to have captured the attention of the popular press. The first wave of graffiti writers was predominantly comprised of males between the ages of 12 and 20. As urban ethnologist Nancy Macdonald explains, the hip hop graffiti subculture fostered and protected masculine identities for youths living in the South Bronx, and northern Manhattan. Females were marginalized in the hip hop graffiti subculture; however there

²⁹ Chang, pp. 122-123.

³⁰ Cooper and Chalfant, pp. 15-17.

were some expectations to this trend, especially in the second wave of graffiti writers among whom Lady Pink, a Latina, was one of the most famous within the subculture.³¹

The hierarchy of hip hop graffiti subculture functioned on a basis of social capital. As Norman Mailer observed in the mid-70s, “In the ghetto it is almost impossible to find some quiet location for your identity. No, in the environment of the slum, the courage to display yourself is your only capital.”³² To be seen, and to receive recognition among graffiti writers were the highest achievements. The subway was a communications network on which names and messages that graffiti writers produced could circulate throughout the city; “getting up” or being seen on as many subway trains as possible was the ultimate goal of many graffiti writers.³³ The wider the audience a graffiti writer reached, the bigger his reputation, increasing his social standing in the graffiti subculture throughout the city.³⁴ Recognition meant respect. The degree of respect which a graffiti writer earned also depended on the style and placement of the tag: the greater the danger; the greater the respect.³⁵

The hip hop graffiti subculture had its own ethical codes of conduct and physical spaces where graffiti writers would meet. Writers were forbidden to *go over*, or cover another writer’s work; *biting*, or copying another writer’s work was also looked down upon. Any violation of these codes of conduct damaged the reputation of the violating offender and could set them as outcasts from the subway graffiti community. Respect, above all, was prized within the community. The 149th Street Grand Concourse subway

³¹ See Cooper and Chalfant; and *Style Wars*.

³² Norman Mailer as quoted in Fitzpatrick, pp. 175.

³³ Cooper and Chalfant, pp. 23.

³⁴ Fitzpatrick, pp. 176-180.

³⁵ Nancy MacDonald, *The Graffiti Subculture: Youth, Masculinity and Identity in London and New York*. (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 6,84-87.

station was the most famous space for graffiti writers of the first wave to meet. While the negotiation of social capital within the subculture took place in the public sphere, i.e. on subway cars or on the streets where graffiti was produced, their sense of community was bolstered by meeting spaces like the 149th Street Station where writers could share notes, design ideas and exchange accounts of their experiences tagging trains, communicate about their goings on and generally avoid persecution by the police and transit workers.³⁶

Tagging was illegal, and part of its appeal was the sense of adventure and danger writers felt while tagging trains. Mare, a 16 year-old graffiti writer explained, “I see myself as a Tom Sawyer, wanting to seek adventure in everyday I live. The last time I went piecing I didn’t finish my piece, but I found a lot of adventure in this crazy journey.”³⁷ Nancy MacDonald argues that the danger of graffiti affirmed the masculine identity of young writers within the community. It was a thrill for writers to evade the police, but more than that graffiti was style of protest; a challenge to an authority bent on denying the city its own “magnificent cultural dynamics.”³⁸ Members of the predominantly male graffiti subculture in the South Bronx experienced a sense of empowerment by writing on trains illegally. The illegality of writing and the idea of subverting authority strengthened their sense of masculinity. But writing was also a criticism against authority and the conditions of the South Bronx created by urban crisis and destructive urban renewal projects like the Cross-Bronx Expressway. In all, hip hop graffiti was an urban cultural movement that developed as a response to urban change.

Urban Change in Lower Manhattan

³⁶ *Style Wars*

³⁷ Cooper and Chalfant, pp. 39.

³⁸ Cooper and Chalfant, pp. 39.

Lower Manhattan suffered during urban crisis, albeit not to the extent of the South Bronx. By the early twentieth century, Lower Manhattan largely became a center for light manufacturing industry, retail, and food wholesale, whereas the South Bronx had generally remained a residential area. Deindustrialization thus contributed to a greater degree of urban change in Lower Manhattan than it did in the South Bronx. Most of the deindustrialization took place in the Lower West Side, where urban change was directly responsible for to the production of culture during the late-1970s and early 80s.

In the 1940s and 50s a large percentage of industrial and commercial firms concentrated in Lower Manhattan followed the migration of white middle-class urban residents to the suburbs.³⁹ Manufacturing employment dropped 6 percent in New York City between 1958 and 1963, while manufacturing rose 14 percent in the suburbs.⁴⁰ Between 1960 and 1965, Lower Manhattan was losing 16,000 light manufacturing jobs annually. This number decreased to 400 between 1965 and 1969, but spiked again to 15,900 lost jobs between 1969 and 1970.⁴¹ From 1967 to 1977, New York City lost 270,100 manufacturing jobs, as the job market was impacted by the global economic slumps of 1973 and 1977.⁴² The New York region's share of the Gross National Product dipped from 12.3 percent in 1972 to 11.3 percent in 1975.⁴³ By 1977, light manufacturing, which has been a staple of the urban economy in the Lower West Side, was virtually non-existent, and hundreds of manufacturing lofts were left abandoned. The

³⁹ Jackson, pp. 188-9.

⁴⁰ Teaford, pp. 129.

⁴¹ Zukin, pp. 24-28.

⁴² Teadford, pp. 213.

⁴³ Zukin, pp. 29-30.

extraction of capital due to deindustrialization left Lower Manhattan a ghost of its former, bustling industrial character.

As in the South Bronx, urban renewal projects also contributed to the devastation Lower Manhattan experienced during urban crisis. Robert Moses' plan to construct the eight-lane Manhattan Expressway in 1962, for instance, entailed clearing slums in Greenwich Village, little Italy, Soho and Chinatown. This plan, though ultimately unsuccessful, displaced and destroyed many lower-income communities in Lower Manhattan which mostly consisted of minorities.⁴⁴

The most drastic urban change in Lower Manhattan, however, was due to gentrification. Throughout the 1960s as light manufacturing decline throughout Lower Manhattan, more and more buildings were being left abandoned.

The SoHo (South of Houston Street) section of Lower Manhattan had been a thriving commercial center known for dry goods, china, glass, silks, satin, lace, ribbons, furs and tobaccos throughout the nineteenth century. However, by the twentieth century, the economic vitality of the area began to fade, as facilities were ill suited to compete with modern corporate industries; the area at large declined throughout the fifties to slum status, acquiring the name "hell's hundred acres."⁴⁵

As light manufacturing and retail businesses closed throughout SoHo, new inhabitants took their places; over time, spaces that were zoned for commercial and light industrial uses became residential spaces. In her analysis SoHo during the 1960s and

⁴⁴ Chang, pp. 45-52.

⁴⁵ Wendy Schuman, "SoHo a 'Victim of its Own Success': Landlords Seek a Broader Legality," *New York Times*, November 24, 1974; Joyce Gold, "SoHo," in Jackson, ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, pp. 1088

1970s entitled *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*, Sharon Zukin argues that the rise of “loft living” meant the annihilation of the majority of light manufacturing zones in Soho: “Lofts changed from sites where production took place to items of cultural consumption.”⁴⁶

During the 1960s and 1970s SoHo began attracting artists looking for low rents and large space to produce their work. As Sarah Schulman claims, artists were drawn to the city for a number of reasons including affordable rents, “diversity of thought and experience,” artistic stimulation, and “regular access to great artists and their work.”⁴⁷ These early inhabitants lived illegally in the abandoned lofts and warehouses throughout SoHo; the area was zoned for light manufacturing and commercial use, not residential. In 1971, after several unsuccessful attempts to discourage the illegal loft conversions, the City Planning Commission rezoned SoHo, rezoned the area, permitting residence in lofts to registered artists, legitimizing “some 600 families” living illegally in lofts zoned for manufacturing; transforming the area into an exclusive hot spot for young artists.⁴⁸ By 1968 the first galleries started setting up shop. Early gallery owners included Andre Emmerich and John Weber while larger names like Ileana Sonnabend and Leo Castelli followed in their wake.

The sudden rise in SoHo’s popularity, along with its designation as a historical district in 1973, drove-up the cost of living in the area. As an artist living in SoHo at the time Dan Wyman’s rent doubled from \$250 a month in 1973 to \$425 in 1974.⁴⁹ In the

⁴⁶ Zukin, *Loft Living*, pp. 3, 174, 20.

⁴⁷ Sarah Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), pp. 81-7.

⁴⁸ Schulman.

⁴⁹ Schulman, pp. 409.

1960's, one could rent a 2,500 square foot loft for as low as \$100 a month; but by 1975, co-opt apartments were being sold for as much as \$150,000.⁵⁰ As Wendy Schuman of the *New York Times* explained in 1974, "On weekends, the narrow streets are filled with gallery-goers and those curious to see *La Vie De Boheme* being played out behind grimy cast-iron facades."⁵¹ This scene depicted by Schuman, was the selling point for the real estate developers in SoHo. But this same be-jeweled image eventually became the reason that many artists left SoHo, as well as rising rents. As SoHo became more expensive and less appealing to young artists, they moved to the nearby areas of Washington Market and the East Village, taking with them the creative vitality that give SoHo its commercial appeal. This was how SoHo became a 'Victim of its Own Success.'

In her memoir, *Gentrification of the Mind*, Sarah Schulman makes the case that gentrification of urban space essentially kills art by destroying the conditions that foster creativity, namely low rents and diversity.⁵² This same phenomenon was especially evident in SoHo by 1975 when, as art critic Judy Beardshall said, "Soon it will be Greenwich Village, a completely fake Bohemia, filled with dead ideas and dead art."⁵³ Like many artists at that time, Judy Beardshall picked-up from SoHo and relocated to the old Washington Market section in the Lower West Side; other artists relocated the East Village.⁵⁴

The East Village Underground

⁵⁰ Fred Ferretti, "SoHo Grows Up and Grows Rich and Chic," *New York Times*, October 12, 1975, pp. 184.

⁵¹ Wendy Schuman, pp. 409.

⁵² Schulman, pp. 81-85.

⁵³ Ferretti, pp. 184.

⁵⁴ Ferretti, pp. 184.

By 1976, the creative energy that roused the Lower West Side into a frenzy of artistic production, and subsequently a site of real estate speculation, had began shifting to the East from the stagnating SoHo gallery and loft communities to the punk and new wave music scene in the East Village.⁵⁵ Part of this shift was due to economics, real estate and the price of living in Lower Manhattan. Gentrification in SoHo and the West Village drove up the cost of living in those sections of Lower Manhattan, causing bohemians and artists to migrate toward the cheaper, albeit more rundown East Village.⁵⁶ In 1975 the rising cost of living caused Sal Calcaterra, a young writer and independent scholar, to disband the commune he founded in the West Village and relocate into an apartment on St. Mark's place in the East Village between 2nd and 3rd avenues, where he lived till 1979. "[A] recession allowed the underground to happen," recalled fashion designer Anna Sui. "There were cheaper places to live [in the East Village], \$200-a-month lofts with four people sharing. You could go out every night, all night, having a good time, maybe hold down a job in the daytime and still be able to pay for rent. That will never happen again."⁵⁷

During the late 1970s a whole generation of young artists and intellectuals from across the country moved to the East Village; many of them grew up in the suburbs and craved the diversity, low rents, and creative atmosphere that the city provided. "A vast migration of young people, fresh out of college arrived in New York City in the late-70s," said Eric Bogosian, an actor and a novelist working in the East Village at the time.

⁵⁵ Jeffrey Deitch, "1981: Studio of the Street," Jeffrey Deitch ed., *Jean-Michel Basquiat 1981: The Studio of The Street* (New York: Deitch Projects, 2007), pp. 8.

⁵⁶ Jay Gorney, "The East Village, Latest Lure for the Art World" *The Washington Post*, February 12, 1984, pp. E11.

⁵⁷ Anna Sui as quoted by Tim Blanks in "Mudd Quake," *The New York Times Magazine*, February 25, 2001.

“We were young rats, restless, eager to create, eager to gnaw on something, with young, hormonally enriched bodies... By any measure it was a golden area.”⁵⁸ Artists from different disciplines and backgrounds came together in the East Village to form a general “scene” or atmosphere that was defined by attitude, appearance, and type of cultural production. It is important to note, though, that downtown artists were not at first a definitive movement; as cultural historian and director of New York University’s Downtown Collection at Fales Library has stated “There is no one unified downtown aesthetic, nor are there easily definable genres.”⁵⁹ Instead, what coalesced in East Village during the late 1970s was a heterogeneous fusion of subversive art and politics that collectively became known as “the East Village underground.” Lynn Gumpert, who wrote the forward to Marvin Taylor’s *The Downtown Book: The New York Art Scene, 1974-1984* claims that while the East Village drew together all types of people with various identities “what so many downtown artists of this era did share is that they conceived their work as alternative, if not outright subversive, vis-à-vis traditional curatorial and exhibition practices.”⁶⁰ This unique social, intellectual and cultural movement lasted from roughly between 1974, when the rising cost of living on the Lower West Side forced artists to move to East, and 1984 when a number of factors led to the collapse of the counter culture. Such factors include the AIDS and crack cocaine epidemics which decimated the community, the advent of MTV which commercialized the East Village underground and diminished the integrity of the art, and last,

⁵⁸ Eric Bogosian, quoted in Marvin J. Taylor, ed., *The Downtown Book: The New York Art Scene, 1974-1984* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); David Sheff, “Keith Haring, An Intimate Conversation,” *Rolling Stone Magazine*, August 10, 1989.

⁵⁹ Marvin J. Taylor, “Playing the Field: The Downtown Scene and Cultural Production, and introduction,” in Taylor, pp. 23

⁶⁰ Lynn Gumpert in Taylor, pp. 14

gentrification which drove up the cost of living and displaced the young artists living in the East Village.⁶¹

While the name “East Village underground” refers to a specific section of New York City located in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, this counter cultural movement was in no way limited to or bound by this geographic locus. Rather, the underground was a subculture not unlike the graffiti writers of the South Bronx, which took shape in a central area of New York City and dispersed throughout the surrounding areas as the movement grew. The East Village underground formed around cultural institutions that had existed in the Lower East Side since the 1960s early 1970s such as experimental performance spaces like La Mama Experimental Theatre Club (founded in 1961 at 74 East 4th Street), Danspace Project (founded in 1974 in St. Mark’s Church), and other communities like the Poetry Project at St. Mark’s Church (founded in 1966), 3rd Street Music Settlement (at 235 East 11th Street), and Anthology Film Archives (founded in 1970 at 32 Second Avenue).⁶² The movement spread in locations throughout the Lower Manhattan as the East Village underground grew to incorporate more and more artists that came to the city through the late 1970s. According to Steven Hager in *Art After Midnight: The East Village Scene*, the most significant artists of the East Village underground movement emerged from the clubs, which doubled as alternative art galleries.⁶³ Chi Chi Valenti, an experimental performance artist remembers that “The invisible boundaries of this universe extended from the Mudd Club to the South,

⁶¹ Steven Hager, *Art After Midnight: The East Village Scene* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986), pp. 14-15 ; Blanks; Alison Pearlman, *Unpackaging Art of the 1980s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 17- Alison Pearlman marks the collapse of the East Village Underground in 1986 rather 1984.

⁶² Dan Cameron, “It Takes a Village,” Dan Cameron, ed. ex. cat., *East Village USA*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, December 9, 2004 – March 19, 2005 (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2006), pp. 47--3rd Street Music Settlement is this earliest of these institutions, founded in 1894.

⁶³ Hager, pp. 19; Pearlman, pp. 17.

Danceteria to the North, The Pyramid Club to the East, and the desolate stretches of the after-hours Wild West.”⁶⁴ By 1978, The East Village Underground, which originated in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, had become a vast movement that engulfed Lower Manhattan, alternatively known as the “downtown scene.”

The East Village Underground and Urban Change

The East Village Underground evolved as an interdisciplinary milieu of underground music, film and visual art.⁶⁵ According to artist Keith Haring the underground art scene was “exploding. All kinds of new things were starting.”⁶⁶ It was a fertile hotbed of cross cultural creativity: visual artists like Jean-Michel Basquiat alternatively created experimental music, which crossed dub music with William Burroughs’ cut-up poetry; photographers Robert Maplethorp and Nan Goldin both worked danced and infused eclectic soundtracks with slideshows of their work; rocker Iggy Pop produced graffiti-inspired paintings.

Art collectives were the engines that drove artistic collaboration in the East Village underground. Artists were responding directly to gentrification; not only to the socio-economic gentrification of Lower Manhattan, which had priced artists out of their homes in the Lower West Side -particularly SoHo- but to the gentrification of the art world, which underground artists felt had cloistered art from society. In 1977, artists Michael McClard, Alan Moore, James Nares and Robin Winters formed an underground art collective called Collaborative Projects (Colabs) in order to secure Federal grants for

⁶⁴ Chi Chi Valenti, quoted in Bernard Grendon, “The Downtown Music Scene,” in Taylor, pp. 64.

⁶⁵ Pearlman, pp. 17.

⁶⁶ Keith Haring, quoted in David Sheff, “Keith Haring, An Intimate Conversation,” *Rolling Stone Magazine*, August 10, 1989.

public art projects in New York City. Other underground collectives included Group Material, Fashion Moda and Taller Boricua, all of which were geographically scattered; Fashion Moda established a space in the South Bronx, for instance, while CoLab, a more nomadic collective, set-up temporary spaces throughout the city.⁶⁷ Collectives reconceived the role of art in society as a force that could bring harmony and peace to the violent world of urban change; they felt that art was a public right rather than a private luxury. They wanted to “get the hell out of the art world,” said Charlie Ahearn of Colab; to “get the hell out of the art galleries and find a way to be creative in a larger sense.”⁶⁸ According to Tim Rollins, director of Group Material, the mission of the underground art collectives was “to fill the gap between artists and the American working class [; to restructure] a different set of social relations that connects art with neighborhood communities.”⁶⁹ Stefan Eins of Fashion Moda said that underground collectives were “interested in bringing the community people and artists together. We want to challenge the assumption that art is an elitist thing [.]”⁷⁰ Art collectives opposed SoHo galleries that showed and sold in the Manhattan art market; which also drove-up the cost of living, displacing many of the existing communities in Lower Manhattan. “What we’re about is artists using the power that we have,” said CoLab member Walter (Mike) Robinson. “A lot of our original inspiration was based on opposition to the established gallery situation [.]”⁷¹

⁶⁷ Fashion Moda was an off shoot of CoLab, founded by Stephen Eins on E 147th street and 3rd Ave in 1978.

⁶⁸ Charlie Ahearn, quoted in Chang, pp. 147.

⁶⁹ Tim Rollins, quoted in Gablik.

⁷⁰ Stefan Eins, as quoted in Grace Glueck, “The New Collectives- Reaching for a Wider Audience,” *The Sunday New York Times*, February 1, 1981, pp. 45.

⁷¹ Glueck, pp. 44.

Just as the hip hop graffiti writers of the South Bronx produced graffiti on the subways and in the streets to protest the oppressive conditions of the ghetto, art collectives in the East Village underground occupied alternative spaces to produce art in opposition to gentrification in Lower Manhattan. Art historian Alison Pearlman has argued that New York City artists of the late 1970s and early 80s “represent a generational shift toward a new orientation to categories of both fine-art and mass-cultural style.”⁷² Similarly, art critic Carlo McCormick has noted that underground artists’ use of alternative spaces “signaled a new subversive interface between the private realm of the studio and the fluid commerce of the mass market.”⁷³ Underground collectives began experimenting with alternative art styles in alternative spaces such as abandoned buildings, counter cultural night clubs, and on the street. They rejected the expensive, overly produced galleries that took over SoHo and the Lower West Side; art produced in these ‘elitist’ galleries were sterile, empty and meaningless to underground artists like Jean-Michel Basquiat called it “pseudo art bullshit.”⁷⁴

Moreover, their rejection of art world was a survival instinct in period of tumultuous urban change; expensive art galleries drove-up the cost of living in SoHo, and presented an eminent threat to the creative verve of the East Village and the counterculture as a movement. From 1979 to 1982, Colab organized several underground exhibits throughout the city in abandoned buildings in protest to the gentrification of Lower Manhattan. Exhibits included *The Manifesto* and *Income and Wealth* shows in 1979, the *Real Estate Show* in January 1980 and the *Times Square Show* that summer.

⁷² Pearlman.

⁷³ Carlo McCormick, “A Crack in Time,” in Taylor, pp. 85.

⁷⁴ Jean-Michel Basquiat as quoted in Hager, pp. 40.

Artists invited local citizens to participate in discussions about political and social issues that affected downtown communities and the greater New York City. In a show called *Murder/Suicide/Junk*, for instance, CoLab artists engaged the public with issues surrounding drug addiction in the East Village.⁷⁵ There was “lots of revolutionary talk in the days leading up to the occupation of the commercial property used for the *Real Estate Show*,” said Joe Lewis of CoLab. “We were going to show the establishment! Man the ramparts! Power to the artist! We would hold our own- until the police came to shut us down, that is.”⁷⁶ Over all, uptown graffiti writers and downtown artists both used public space to lash out against the increasingly privatized, late-capitalist society in New York City during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Not only did hip hop graffiti writers and downtown artists both use public space to critique the privatization of the urban landscape; the two groups started working together, combining style and means of protest. The meeting of hip hop graffiti and downtown arts was mythologized in Charlie Ahearn’s film *Wild Style*, which debuted in 1983, telling the story of a young journalist, played by actress Patti Astor, who set out

⁷⁵ Glueck, pp. 44; Michael Brenson, “Art People: Art Lights up Times Square,” *New York Times*, June 25, 1982

⁷⁶ Joe Lewis from Taylor, pp. 104- Aside from staging underground exhibits, CoLab had its hands in a number of different projects. They ran a weekly half-hour cable TV show called *Potato Wolf* on Manhattan Cable Channel C; an underground theatre group called *Nightshift Theatre*; they published *Spanner*, a journal of artist’s works; and *Bomb Magazine* for alternative film, video and performance art which is still in print and on line today. In June of 1982, CoLab teamed up with George Stonbely, owner of the iconic Specacolor Screen in Times Square. Their program, called “Artists with a Message,” displayed 30 second animated shorts produced by 12 artists each month that would run every 20 seconds. Keith Haring’s “radiant baby” tag and graffiti inspired works by a South Bronx writer named CRASH (Johnny Matos) were featured on the Spectacolor screen was.

from midtown to report on the hip hop scene that was taking place in the South Bronx.⁷⁷ Starring Fab Five Freddy, *Wild Style* was symbolic of the influence hip hop had on downtown arts. For the art collectives of the East Village underground, graffiti represented a new and unique art form that directly communicated to the general public. Graffiti was “extremely important,” said Tim Rollins, director of the Group Material collective. “It’s a radical art with a radical methodology, because it’s illegal. It’s radical because, mostly, the artists are non-artists. Formally it’s not like anything else.”⁷⁸ At the same time it was inherently political and radical; graffiti “falls out of a social condition,” said Rollins, “and that helps us to find out about what the art means to everybody.”⁷⁹ As an art form, graffiti stood in stark contrast to the SoHo art world that underground collectives opposed: “It is difficult to accept it [graffiti] on white gallery walls. Then it becomes part of the commodity market,” said Rollins, “The social context is what gives it its meaning.”⁸⁰ And so through the late 1970s, underground art collectives were inspired to collaborate with uptown graffiti writers from the South Bronx.⁸¹

According to curator Dan Cameron, South Bronx graffiti writer Fab Five Freddie was the “quintessential uptown-downtown catalyst” because he introduced the downtown collectives to the second wave of South Bronx graffiti writers and he brought hip hop artists to the East Village.⁸² Similarly, Rene Ricard, the famous poet and art critic of the East Village underground wrote that Fab Five Freddy, “more than anyone else has

⁷⁷ Charlie Ahearn (director) *Wild Style*, produced by Charlie Ahearn (First Run Feature, 1983); Chang, 186-87- Jeff Chang maintains that “*Wild Style* remains the only hip-hop film and soundtrack that adequately conveys the communal thrill of merging with the tide, riding the lightning.”

⁷⁸ As quoted from Gablik, pp. 37-39.

⁷⁹ As quoted from Gablik, pp. 35-37.

⁸⁰ Tim Rollins, quoted in Gablik.

⁸¹ Fitzpatrick, pp.188.

⁸² Dan Cameron, “It Takes a Village,” Dan Cameron, ed. ex. cat., *East Village USA*, pp. 50-51; Guy Trebay, “Art in the Privates Sector,” *Village Voice*, June 9, 1980, Voice Centerfold.

entrepreneured the crossover,” from uptown to downtown.⁸³ “I was representing the subway school,” said Fab Five Freddie, “but I was aware of the art world, how it worked, and why. That’s what drew me” to the downtown scene.⁸⁴ John Ahearn, Charlie Ahearn’s twin brother, vividly captured this colossal meeting of two worlds when he said,

“I think the graffiti movement and the downtown movement were like two electrical charges that created lightning bolts. There were these indigenous street artists and then there were these middle-class artists who were looking to get out of the art system. They didn’t know much about each other, and when they connected it created a tremendous amount of energy.”

Curator Dan Cameron also makes the case that South Bronx hip hop culture “was the fundamental catalyst that enabled everything to occur” in the East Village underground.⁸⁵

The infusion of hip hop into downtown arts resulted in a hybrid, graffiti-inspired aesthetic that has been called *punk art*, and which became iconic for the East Village underground. Moreover, the inherent protest imbued in this new aesthetic was the “Flash Point the forced the art world to pay attention to the East Village.”⁸⁶ Their work “tends to celebrate urban decay” wrote critic Grace Glueck in a lengthy profile of the collectives in *The New York Times*. “It has a raw, gritty vitality that is influenced by comic strips, commercial signs and symbols, street culture and the energy of Punk Rock.”⁸⁷ Influenced by hip hop graffiti, downtown art collectives developed a style of art that enabled them to protest the inequity of urban change in Lower Manhattan during the late 1970s. Moving

⁸³ Rene Ricard, “The Pledge of Allegiance,” *Art Forum*, November 1982.

⁸⁴ Fred Brathwaite, as quoted in Elisabeth Sussman, pp. 152-153.

⁸⁵ John Ahearn, quoted in Phoebe Hoban, *Basquiat: a Quick Killing in Art* (New York: Viking, 1998), pp. 37- John Ahearn famously produced iconic plaster casts of South Bronx residents during the late-1970s and throughout the 1980s which stand as documents to the social trauma that urban renewal caused in the South Bronx.

⁸⁶ Dan Cameron, “It Takes a Village,” in Dan Cameron, pp. 49.

⁸⁷ Glueck, pp. 44.

forward, a brief, but close analysis of the early career of artist Keith Haring –whose art was iconic to, and therefore representative of the East Village underground- reveals the ways in which hip hop graffiti disseminated from the art collectives to the broader countercultural movement that took place in Lower Manhattan.⁸⁸ Furthermore, Haring’s cultural production from 1978 to 1980 demonstrates the degree to which the East Village underground hinged on the influence of hip hop graffiti from the South Bronx.

Keith Haring came to New York City in 1978 as a young white artist from the suburbs. Like so many others, he was drawn to the East Village by its low rents and diverse, creative atmosphere. Furthermore, like many of his contemporaries, his artistic production was propelled by a communitarian ideal of art acting as a positive force throughout society. His notebooks and journals are filled with musings of art as a social good. “The public has a right to art,” Haring wrote in journal entry dated October 14, 1978. “The public needs art, and it is the responsibility of ‘self-proclaimed artists’ to realize the public needs art, and not to make bourgeois art for the few and ignore the masses.”⁸⁹ Moreover, “Art can be a positive influence on a society of individuals,” he wrote in 1979, “art is a necessary part of our environment, our society [sic].”⁹⁰

Keith Haring rejected the SoHo gallery world, which had not only displaced artists and working-class communities from the Lower West Side; but stood as an obstacle in achieving an art form that worked harmoniously in society. “The public is

⁸⁸ Jeffrey Deitch quoted in John Gruen, *Keith Haring: The Authorized Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), pp. 86-87- Jeffrey Deitch: Keith Haring was “Not just a product of his own time, but has, in fact, shaped his time. In him I see an extraordinary convergence of street style, rap music, and graffiti art that sums up the spirit of the early to mid-eighties.”; David Galloway, “Drawing the line: the graphic legacy of Keith Haring,” published in *The Keith Haring Show* (Milan, Italy: Skira, 2005), pp. 61-65.

⁸⁹ Haring, pp. 13.

⁹⁰ Quoted from Keith Haring’s journals- entry 1979, Haring, pp. 14, 34.

being ignored by most contemporary artists,” Haring wrote in his journal in 1978. The SoHo gallery world cloistered art from working-class people and from society at large where Haring knew it could play a positive role. “Art can be a destructive element and aid to the takeover of the ‘mass-identity’ society [sic.],” Haring wrote. He felt that art could work in opposition to the increasingly privatized, consumer driven forces in late-capitalist society that were homogenizing culture in America during the 1970s and early 80s.⁹¹ “I am interested in making art to be experienced and explored by as many individuals as possible with as many different individual ideas about the given piece with no final meaning attached.”⁹²

Haring began working with the Colab art collective which was very active within the East Village underground by 1978; he participated in the *Real Estate Show* on November 20, 1979, then again in the “Times Square Show” in the summer of 1980.⁹³ Through his involvement in underground collectives, Haring began learning about hip hop by collaborating and talking to graffiti writers like Fab Five Freddie. “I remember we would have these conversations about graffiti,” said Fab Five Freddy, “[Keith Haring] would love it, He understood what it was, he felt the energy.”⁹⁴ Haring first came in contact with hip hop culture in 1977 when he worked at the Pittsburg Center for Arts and Crafts where his co-workers “were mostly black, and mostly from Pittsburgh’s inner

⁹¹ Quoted from Keith Haring’s journals- entry on October 14, 1978, Haring, pp. 13-14.

⁹² Keith Haring quoted in Alexandra Anderson-Spivy, “Bathed in Heraclitian Fire,” The Keith Haring Foundation Archives, haring.com—retrieved 11.21.12

⁹³ Quoted from Keith Haring’s journals- entry November 20th, 1979, Haring, pp. 65; Sheff.

⁹⁴ Fred Brathwaite, as quoted by Sussman, pp. 153-154.

city... I was being exposed to a whole other culture, which was completely different from the sixties, the leftover hippie thing that I was still living out.”⁹⁵

Haring’s world changed when he came to the East Village. New York subway graffiti was at its peak late 1970s; as Haring explained, “this being 1978-1979, the war on graffiti hadn’t really begun yet. So the art was allowed to blossom into something amazing, and the movement was really at its peak.” “Almost immediately upon my arrival in New York in 1978, I had begun to be interested, intrigued, and fascinated by the graffiti I was seeing in the streets and in the subways.” He was hypnotized by the graffiti he saw: “Sometimes I wouldn’t even get on the first trains. I’d just sit and wait to see what was on the *next* train [original italics].”⁹⁶

Aside for the aesthetic beauty of these rapid transit works of art, Haring was fascinated by the fact that subway graffiti “was reaching all kinds of people in different levels from different backgrounds.”⁹⁷ Haring and other artists, especially those working in underground art collectives, were drawn to graffiti for its universal communicative potential; it was as if the style of protest for which they searched to oppose the SoHo gallery world, and gentrification had existed all along. Graffiti writers used public art to protest urban change in the South Bronx; and downtown artists learned to use it to protest urban change in Lower Manhattan.

Between 1979 and 1980 Keith Haring developed the graffiti-inspired aesthetic which he carried throughout his career and that which became iconic to the East Village

⁹⁵ Keith Haring quoted in Gruen, pp. 28.

⁹⁶ Jack Stewart, *Graffiti Kings*, pp. 227-9; Keith Haring quoted by John Gruen, “Conversation with Keith Haring,” The Keith Haring Foundation Archives, haring.com—retrieved 12.2.12.

⁹⁷ Keith Haring quoted in Sheff, pp. 6.

underground. Haring created a series of tags or signatures like those used by hip hop graffiti writers; but whereas hip hop graffiti writers traditionally used stylized lettering in their tags, Haring employed various figures and characters. “I was becoming more and more involved in the underground art scene,” Haring said in 1989, “doing graffiti, and then I would use peoples studios and do paintings.”⁹⁸ In 1979, Haring began experimenting with “symbols that were non verbal,” trying new methods of communication through art.⁹⁹ Then in the winter of 1980 he started drawing graffiti on the street with a marker, developing characters like the “barking dog” and the “radiant baby” which became ubiquitous throughout Lower Manhattan. “I juxtaposed these different tags or signatures or images, which would convey different meanings depending on how you combined them.” Keith Haring developed a graffiti-inspired symbolism that was meant to directly communicate to the public, and which inherently stood in opposition to the private galleries in SoHo.

Fab Five Freddy noted that while Haring emulated and was inspired by hip hop graffiti writers, his style diverged from the tradition ‘subway school’ which Fab Five Freddy represented: “He wanted to be part of it, but he wanted to do his own individual thing [too]... which was cool.”¹⁰⁰ Ultimately, what emerged was a hybrid, uptown-downtown aesthetic which evoked a style of urban protest that was particular to the East Village underground.

Keith Haring was so influenced by hip hop graffiti that he even attempted to work within the graffiti subculture by adhering to the two foundation principles on which the

⁹⁸ Keith Haring, as quoted from Sherff.

⁹⁹ Keith Haring quoted in Gruen.

¹⁰⁰ Fred Brathwaite, as quoted by Sussman, pp. 153-154.

South Bronx-based community hinged: first, that the authenticity of the graffiti tag depended, in part, on its illegality; and second, that the hierarchy of the subculture was based on respect within the community that could be achieved by producing graffiti illegally.¹⁰¹ In emulation of hip hop graffiti writers, Keith Haring began drawing on canceled advertisement posters on the walls of subway stations in the winter of 1980 using various combinations of his newly developed characters or tags. The panels were covered with a soft matte black paper that he said “was dying to be drawn on.”¹⁰² Instead of marker, Haring used white school chalk because it worked well in contrast to the black surfaces; and because he did not hold a permit to make his public art, he was persecuted by the Metro Transit Authority and New York City Police for vandalism, he was even arrested twice. “Over the four or five years I drew in the subways, I probably had over a hundred of these summonses,” Haring said, “all of which I paid.”¹⁰³

Haring was motivated to produce his subway chalk drawing by a sense gaining the respect of hip hop graffiti writers. “In the back of my mind was this idea of wanting the respect of the graffiti artists,” Haring mention in an interview, “it was much more important to me to have their respect for the work rather than that of the art world.”¹⁰⁴ Keith Haring’s subway drawings enabled him to work within the boundaries of the hip hop graffiti subculture: “I found a way of participating with graffiti artists without really emulating,” he said, “because I didn’t want to draw on trains and sneak into the yards and cover the sides and insides of subways trains.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ MacDonald; Mailer and Naar

¹⁰² Keith Haring quoted in Gruen, pp. 65

¹⁰³ Keith Haring quoted in Gruen, pp. 68

¹⁰⁴ Keith Haring quoted in Gruen, pp. 70

¹⁰⁵ Keith Haring quoted in Gruen, pp. 68

Overall, Keith Haring's early career, from 1978 to 1980, demonstrates the degree to which hip hop graffiti as an art form, imbued with urban social protest, influenced the East Village underground and enabled artists to protest urban change in Lower Manhattan. Downtown artists not only produced a graffiti-inspired aesthetic that was particular to the East Village underground; but they were compelled to work within the boundaries of the hip hop graffiti subculture which was based on the illegality of the public art and respect earned among the hip hop graffiti writers of the South Bronx. This evidence suggest that the influence of hip hop graffiti onto to the East Village underground was as deeply ingrained as it was culturally pervasive.

In conclusion, we can see that the hip hop movement heavily influenced the East Village underground as a counter cultural protest to the inequities of urban change in New York City. Downtown artists not only developed a graffiti-inspired aesthetic that opposed SoHo galleries and the gentrification of Lower Manhattan; they also adapted a similar use of public space in their protest; and even attempted to work within the sub-cultural boundaries of the hip hop graffiti community. Furthermore, evidence suggests that these two cultural movements were actually two aspects of the same voice of protest propelled by urban change. The East Village underground essentially grew out of the hip hop graffiti movement as downtown art collectives collaborated with South Bronx graffiti writers, occupying abandoned buildings to stage consciousness-raising alternative art shows that were integral to the overall cross-cultural creativity that came out of the downtown scene. Moving forward, we can see how urban change propelled the East Village underground in other ways; while the cost of living in Manhattan became

prohibitively expensive for artists and working class families, private corporations took over midtown and completely changed the urban environment.

Chapter 2: The *Times Square Show*: The Privatization of Midtown Manhattan and the Right to the City, 1976-1980

Multi-colored strips of cloth hung from painted windows, blowing gently on the second floor of a ratty building on the corner at 41st Street and 7th Avenue. Landlord Mark Finkelstein came to check on his new tenants, Collaborative Projects Inc., an underground art collective based in the Lower East Side; he wanted to see the progress they were making with the art show they intended to stage, right in the heart of Times Square. Finkelstein was happy to have a tenant; his space at 201 West 41st Street had been empty for far too long, ever since the Office of Midtown Enforcement shut down the Girlesk massage parlor in 1978 under allegations that they had been running an illegal brothel. His new tenants, young artists, were not ideal, but they were the first proposition to come across his desk in a while. Times Square was changing. Finkelstein owned the New Amsterdam Theater, once the home to *Ziegfeld's Follies* during the early twentieth-century, and an adult movie house since the 1930s. However, in 1980, and the city government, in collaboration with private sector, had been cracking-down on erotic entertainment, along with small independent retailers and low-income residents; Finkelstein's properties were not secure. In the long history of Times Square, privatization had finally struck the death knell of its erotically enticing aura.¹

From Long Acre Square to Times Square

Before it was ever called Times Square, the section midtown-Manhattan that centered on Broadway and Seventh Avenue was known as Long Acre Square. In the late-

¹ John Ahearn, "accounts," timessquashowrevisited.com—retrieved 8.18.13.

nineteenth century, it was a crowded horse stable district, swamped in muddy hay pouring out of pungent carriage barns that lined the streets. Notably, Long Acre Square was home to William H. Vanderbilt's American Horse Exchange, as well an important commercial center built around the illustrious Astor family's retail stores established between 1830 and 1860. Over time, the area developed into a major commercial hub that served Manhattan and the surrounding region; in 1904, acquired the name *Times Square* after the *New York Times* newspaper erected a new headquarters on 42nd Street.²

At the turn of the century, a newly constructed subway station in Times Square brought increased capital to the area, transforming the built urban landscape of midtown with the erection of new buildings and infrastructure like the Hotel Astor (built in 1904) and the Grand Central Terminal (built in 1913). The Inter-borough Rapid Transit (IRT) subway line increased the commuter influx through Times Square and fed the commercial businesses in the area.³ By 1913, most of the vaudeville and dramatic theatres, which were located in Lower Manhattan, had moved to Times Square, crowning the area as a capital of entertainment; theatres, hotels and restaurants thrived and by the 1920s Times Square had become a national tourism destination.⁴

The Great Depression also changed Times Square. Although few new structures were built during the 1930s, many theatres were converted into penny arcades, and cheap "grinder" houses that showed sexually explicit films, burlesque shows and peepshows

² William R. Taylor, "Times Square" in Kenneth T. Jackson, ed. *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 1185-1187.

³ Clifton Hood, *722 Miles: The Building of the Subways and How they Transformed New York* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), pp. 104-105.

⁴ William R. Taylor, "Times Square" in Jackson, pp. 1185-1187; Lynne Sagalyn, *Times Square Roulette: Remaking the City Icon* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 32.

which provided sexual relief for the economically depressed. The area became a center for commercialized sex; a haven for male and female hustlers, prostitutes; and other purveyors of erotic entertainment such as adult book stores, sex shops and pornographic cinema. Times Square retained its identity as the sexual sinew of New York City through the first half of the twentieth century and even through the advent of urban crisis after World War II.

Times Square in Urban Crisis

Suburbanization and deindustrialization began to deplete urban tax bases throughout America as early as the 1940s. As more and more capital and resources were diverted to the suburbs, away from cities, economic polarization in metropolitan areas became so dramatically pronounced that downtown areas lost their commercial hold on the middleclass.⁵ Many businesses in commercial districts like Times Square moved to the suburbs, following the flight of white middle-class residents as lower-income minority populations increasingly grew in urban areas through the 1950s and 60s.⁶ With the decline of urban tax bases, city governments increased other non-property taxes including retail, business, and financial taxes to cope with the loss sustained by suburbanization and deindustrialization. The sales tax in New York City, for example, rose from one percent to three percent between 1946 and 1951; similarly the city raised the rate of financial business tax four times during that same period, producing an overall

⁵ Sagalyn, pg 20.

⁶ Jon C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 23.

tenfold increase of one-tenth of one percent to one percent.⁷ In short, New York City placed a heavy burden on retail and financial businesses as the urban crisis ensued.

Faced with an increased tax burden, many businesses and stores in New York City that did not relocate to the suburbs could not carry the weight. Between 1952 and 1972, eight major stores in New York City went out of business as urban crisis progressed. The city government continued to increase non-property tax rates through the late 1950s and 60s as a means to upkeep urban public services: in 1959, New York City increased a cigarette tax, sales taxes on meals and liquors, and general business and finance tax; and increased the sales tax again in 1963 dramatically from 3 percent to 4 percent.⁸ Midtown Manhattan's commercial and business center was barely existent in 1975 when New York City was on the verge of filing for bankruptcy; while nonetheless Times Square's historical erotic entertainment and commercial sex industries remained strong.⁹

As theatres, movie palaces, and deli-style restaurants closed due to increased tax burdens and tourism declined during urban crisis, the area's erotic entertainment and commercial sex industries expanded and grew in volume; the number of peep shows and prostitutes increased in Times Square, as well as the number of pawn shops and petty retail stores. Subsequently, Times Square became a symbol of urban denigration throughout the urban crisis. The area, which had long since been a bastion of erotic entertainment, came to represent the nation's moral and fiscal ills during the 1960s and

⁷ Teaford, pp. 76-79.

⁸ Teaford, pp. 129-166.

⁹ Teaford, pp. 230.

70.¹⁰ The image of Times Square was pictured as a “sink hole, a civic disgrace,” according to twentieth century philosopher Marshal Berman, “a place where no decent person would willingly go, and where the only helpful thing would be to blow it away.”¹¹ Negative publicity surrounding Times Square exacerbated the fiscal problems of New York City that stemmed from urban crisis. Not only did suburbanization and deindustrialization drain New York City revenue; the negative media coverage of Times Square constituted an image crisis that discouraged corporate investment in the city, and thus prevented an influx of tax revenue.¹²

The negative publicity that Times Square received, however, was not invalid; even the residents of the area remarked on the increased seediness through the 1970s. “Johns” or potential clients looking for prostitute services could be found everywhere in the mid to late 1970s, remembered an anonymous woman who lived in the Carter Hotel on 43rd Street between 7th and 8th Avenue: “[O]ne or two on each corner. They’re impression is that every girl, every woman that passes by is a hooker. I mean- you know- really. And I always try [sic] to stay upstairs. I just hated the time that I was there.”¹³ Times Square was “male turf,” according to urban historian Lynne Sagalyn. It was a “world full of sex shops, action movies, and retail stores that catered to primarily male tastes.”¹⁴ Not only did the negative publicity of Times Square detract corporate investment and business, the actuality of increased commercialized sex also played a role in this process. “It visibly became worse,” exclaimed Sal Calcaterra, an independent

¹⁰ Sagalyn, pp. 6.

¹¹ Sagalyn, pp. 16.

¹² Miriam Greenberg, *Branding New York: How a City was Sold to the World* (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 61-69.

¹³ Steven Siegel (director), *Dream City*, produced by Steven Siegel (New York: S. Siegel, 1986).

¹⁴ Sagalyn, pp. 16

writer living in the Lower East Side during the late 1970s. Coming to Times Square was like “stepping into a William Burroughs novel: prostitutes, junkies and pimps were everywhere.” Nonetheless, Times Square embodied a distinct character; a type of sour charm that, while it was not attractive for corporate investment, was indigenous to the area, and appealed to local residents like Sal Calcaterra who “went to Times Square to feel *bad*.”¹⁵

The Redevelopment of Times Square

At the height of urban crisis, New York City government turned to private interests for help in rebuilding the cityscape. Through public-private partnerships, between the city government private corporations, the private sector grew and the built urban environment subsequently transformed. Not only did the city government enjoy increased tax revenue overtime from more and more corporate investment, bolstering city services; private corporations redeveloped a favorable business environment in midtown Manhattan, which encouraged even more growth in the private sector. Moreover, New York City became a proving ground for neoliberal economic policies developed in the 1950s and 1960s at the Chicago School of Economics; policies which became dominant, first domestically in the U.S. under president Ronald Reagan, and then globally through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) during the 1980s; policies which still dictate the global economic and political landscape today.¹⁶

Neoliberalism, according to the legendary Marxist-geographer David Harvey, emphasizes the role of the government to create a good business climate for the private

¹⁵ Sal Calcaterra. Telephone Interview. 11.20.12.

¹⁶ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 48-62.

sector rather than look to the needs and well-being of the public at large.¹⁷ On the scale of individual cities, there are two defining characteristics to this advanced stage of capitalist economy, says Harvey: (1) inter-urban competition through public-private partnerships, which amounts to a “subsidy for affluent consumers, corporations, and powerful command functions to stay in town at the expense of local collective consumption for the working class and the impoverished”; and (2) in doing this, urban governments attempt to make their cities more attractive to draw more corporate investment.¹⁸ Neoliberalism is an elite class project that ensued as a response to the economic downturn marked by the urban crisis of the 1960s and 1970s: at the pinnacle of financial devastation city governments turned to private corporations and bankers to help rebuild the cityscape; and in turn, the private sector used “public largesse to rebuild the city around their project.”¹⁹ Under neoliberalism, the speculative urban property market is the prime engine of capital accumulation; it is thus the interest of the private sector, and the city government to develop a favorable business environment, both physically and economically.²⁰

The Association for a Better New York (ABNY), formed in 1971-1972, was one of the first organizations tasked with the revitalization of Times Square. Under the administration of Mayor John Lindsay, this non-profit organization not only produced a positive marketing campaign to counter the negative publicity that Times Square received during the 1960s and 70s. ABNY aided in the physical redevelopment of the area;

¹⁷ Harvey, pp. 48-62.

¹⁸ David Harvey, “Flexible accumulation Through Urbanization: Reflections on ‘Post-Moderism’ in the American City,” *Perspecta*, Vol. 26, Theatre, Theatricality, and Architecture (1990), pp. 256.

¹⁹ Joseph Choonara and David Harvey, “A War Waged By the Wealthy,” *Socialist Review*, February 2006.

²⁰ Harvey, pp. 157.

funding the installment of surveillance cameras throughout Times Square, for instance, which were used by New York City police to enforce laws against prostitution, drug trade and use, as well as any ‘quality of life offenses’ deemed so deemed by law enforcement that contributed to the negative image of Times Square.²¹ Positive media campaigns, says urban sociologist Miriam Greenberg, drew attention away from urban problems in New York City such as the dilapidation of the South Bronx. Eventually, they led to free market growth in the private sector, which added to the disparities of wealth and inequality in New York, eliminating well-paid, unionized jobs; privatizing public amenities; and contributing to the decline of affordable public housing in city, including the erosion of rent control and special services.²² “Of course, it’s all very American,” says Gary Jardim urban historian who has written about the similar revitalization technique attempted in downtown Newark during the 1980s. Revitalization of this sort entailed the cooption of public policy by private businesses; the isolation of minorities in decaying urban pockets of concentrated poverty; and the collapse of community values.²³ By the mid-1970s, while urban crisis brought New York City to complete financial ruin, New York City government came to fully support the aid of private sector in the redevelopment of Times Square.

Under the assumption that ‘a rising tide lifts all boats’ or of ‘trickle down’, neoliberal theory holds that unbridled, deregulated free market trade yields a more robust economy which would generate capital and support services for the public sector. Moreover, privatization of the public sphere encourages conditions favorable for private

²¹ Greenberg, pp. 120.

²² Greenberg, pp. 14.

²³ Gary Jardim, “The Myth of the Renaissance City,” from Gary Jardim, ed, *Blue: Newark Culture. Volume Two* (Orange, New Jersey: Village Press, 1993), pp. 77.

sector growth as it eliminates political ‘red tape’ and enhances the flow of capital.²⁴

“Neoliberals define anything public as *ispo facto* ‘inefficient,’” says social scientist Susan George. “The whole point of privatization is... simply to transfer wealth from the public purse—which could redistribute it to even out social inequities—to private hands.”²⁵

Privatization was the driving force in the redevelopment of Times Square.

When Mayor Edward I Koch came to office in 1978, he came with the promise of restoring the economic vitality of New York City.²⁶ Under the previous administration, Mayor Abe Beame made several pleas to the Federal government for financial assistance, all of which were denied. In an effort to manage the city’s debt, Mayor Beame cut city services: garbage piled up; subway systems deteriorated; and crime rates soured to unimaginable heights. Teetering on the brink of bankruptcy, the city sank deeper into urban crisis by the end of the 1970s.²⁷ Mayor Ed Koch, however, hoped to reverse urban crisis through an increased focus on public-private partnerships with the existing private corporations in city, brokering deals with city-owned land, pushing hard for financial returns. Through the Public Development Corporation (PDC), set-up by Mayor Koch in 1978-79, the city government provided lenient zoning laws, and corporate zoning initiatives to build high-density office buildings throughout midtown, as well as tax incentives for construction and corporate investment in the redevelopment of Times Square.²⁸ Times Square was especially a focal point in the revitalization of midtown

²⁴ Harvey, pp. 64.

²⁵ Susan George, “A Short History of Neo-Liberalism: Twenty Years of Elite Economics and Emerging Opportunities for Structural Change,” Conference on Economic Sovereignty in a Globalizing World, Bangkok, 24-26 March 1999, from globalexchange.org—retrieved 3.23.13.

²⁶ Teaford, pp. 269.

²⁷ Sam Roberts, “When New York City Teetered on the Brink of Bankruptcy,” *New York Times*, July 25, 2013; Sewell Chan, “Remembering the ’77 Blackout,” *New York Times*, July 9, 2007.

²⁸ Sagalyn, pp. 70-92.

during the early years of the Koch administration, according to urban historian Lynne Sagalyn. As a politician, Ed Koch wanted the “credit and the glory that would come from cleaning up the intractable civic disgrace.”²⁹ Through the efforts Public Development Corporation, and other private business communities, Times Square was transformed into a profitable business environment that supported the growth of the private sector throughout the 1970s and early 1980s.

According to cultural critic Sarah Schulman, the gentrification of New York City through the 1970s and 1980s “replaced urbanity with suburban values” so that the “suburban conditioning of racial and class stratification, homogeneity of consumption, mass-produced aesthetics, and familial privatization” were situated into the big buildings, attached residences and apartments throughout the city. In short, gentrification sought to homogenize heterogeneous urban values and culture with conservative suburban values and culture.³⁰ Similarly, urban sociologist Sharon Zukin has argued that “shifts in a dominant class’s accumulation strategy involve new cultural norms in order to justify and facilitate the exercise of unaccustomed forms of social control.”³¹ In the redevelopment of Times Square, public-private partnerships sought to create a favorable business environment, and in doing so, imposed conservative values and cultures in order to appeal to suburban consumers and tourists: the commercial sex industry had to go, along with petty retail stores, peep-shows, drugs and sex shops. Through the late 1970s and early 1980s, public-private partnerships replaced the iconic grime and sleaziness of

²⁹ Sagalyn, pp. 66-67.

³⁰ Sarah Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), pp. 28-30

³¹ Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), pp. 176.

Times Square with a clean, market oriented aesthetic; in other words, says Lynne Sagalyn, “the middleclass was reclaiming the city’s image, its symbolic soul.”³² More than any other public-private partnership, 42nd Street Development and the Office of Midtown Enforcement were responsible for redevelopment of Times Square; a closer look at these two organizations reveals the intricate ways in which the private corporations and the public sector worked hand-in-hand in transforming the urban environment.

The Office of Midtown Enforcement (OME), established under the Mayor Beame administration in 1976 with the task of “cleaning up” Times Square, did not start making significant headway until the late 1970s. In 1978, under Mayor Koch, OME increased police presence with the construction of a police substation at 42nd Street and Broadway, the heart of the commercial sex industries in Times Square.³³ Working hand-in-hand with corporate interests that began taking root in the area toward the end of the 1970s, OME was committed to revitalizing Times Square by addressing “dangerous condition of properties” throughout the area. According to the New York City Mayor’s Office, OME was “responsible for coordinating enforcement efforts across city agencies to address quality of life issues related to notorious adult use locations, lawless clubs, trademark counterfeiting bazaars, and illegal conversions of apartments into hotels.”³⁴ OME encouraged landlords in Times Square to evict tenants like massage parlors, peepshows, and other adult entertainment businesses; offering to help them find “good use” tenants to

³² Sagalyn, pp. 5.

³³ Sagalyn, pp. 18 .

³⁴ *Mayor’s Office of Special Enforcement*. Nyc.gov. The Office of Special Enforcement (OSE), succeeded OME in November 2006 under Mayor Michael Bloomberg. Keeping to the same mission of revitalizing vital economic areas throughout the city, the OSE expanded its jurisdiction of to cover all five boroughs of NYC. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/cjc/html/quality/mose.shtml> -- retrieved 8.17.13.

take their place.³⁵ It was, in other words, OME's responsibility was to transform Times Square into an economically favorable climate for private sector growth in such projects like John Portman's Marriott Marquis, which began construction in the early 1980s and became an important center for business conventions, and accommodation for affluent corporate clientele throughout the 1980s.

Like OME, 42nd Street Development Corporation was established in 1976, but did not start making change until the end of the 1970s; but whereas OME was a public organization, 42nd Street Development was instead a private initiative in the redevelopment of Times Square, set by marketing executive Frank Papert, the senior partner of Papert, Koenig, Lois advertising firm, along with Jacqueline Onassis Kennedy. 42nd Street Development Corporation was directed by a board of economic advisors called "The City at 42nd Street" (CA42) selected by Frank Papert, and headed by John Gutfreund, the managing partner of Salomon Brothers financial corporation in the late 1970s.³⁶ Their plan to revitalize Times Square entailed selling corporate sponsorships to pay for projects to redevelop the built urban environment; raising millions of dollars "to renovate the bottoms of buildings" said Frank Papert.³⁷ Initially, the corporation's efforts covered all of 42nd Street, westward of Duff Square; however, their projects were scaled down Times Square's central area, where 42nd Street meets 7th Avenue and Broadway.³⁸ Eventually, 42nd Street Development secured the backing of the Ford Foundation which, according to urban historian James Traub, unlocked a "limitless

³⁵ Richard Goldstein, "The First Radical Art Show of the '80s," *Village Voice*, Vol. XXV, no.24, June 16, 1980, pp. 32.

³⁶ Sagalyn, pp. 62-54.

³⁷ Alan S. Oser, "Spotlight on Fred Papert." Eldercountry.com June 2008, retrieved 11.30.12.

³⁸ Martha Rosler, "The 42nd Street Development Project" from Brian Wallis (ed.s), *If You Lived Here: The City in Art Theory, and Social Activism. A projects by Martha Rosler*. Dia Art Foundation, Discussion in Contemporary Culture, Number 6. (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), pp. 144.

resource of funds.”³⁹ The Ford Foundation, whose offices were located on East 42nd Street, had a vested interest in the redevelopment of Times Square; they were committed to the historic preservation of a number of theatres throughout the area, and with the help of the 42nd Street Development corporation, revitalized a nine-house theatre complex, known today as Theatre Row, which is still owned and operated by the 42nd Street Development Corporation.⁴⁰

In all, the redevelopment of Times Square which began in the late-1970s depended on public-private partnerships, which paved the way for exponential growth of the private sector in the 1980s. Collectively, the Office of Midtown Enforcement, the 42nd Street Development Corporation, and the Public Development Corporation, under Mayor Koch’s administration, transformed Times Square into a profitable business climate where private corporations flourished through the end of the twentieth-century. From 1976 to 1980 more than 100 sex-related businesses were closed down due to pressure from public-private partnerships that imposed conservative suburban values and culture onto the Times Square Area.⁴¹ Among the business closed was a restaurant that catered a transvestite clientele and a gay male bathhouse called the Barracks. Public-Private partnerships acted as a “quality control” in Times Square, according to journalist Richard Goldstein.⁴² The homogenization of Times Square culture and economy through the implementation of neoliberal economic policies, however, was only a small fraction of

³⁹ James Traub, *The Devil's Playground: A Century of Pleasure and Profit in Times Square* (New York: Random House, 2004), pp. 140.

⁴⁰ <http://www.theatrerow.org/> Retrieved 8.17.13.

⁴¹ Goldstein, pp. 32.

⁴² Goldstein, pp. 31.

much larger conservative, neoliberal takeover that came to dominate the global economic and political landscape through the 1980s, and even today.

The Times Square Show

People have a right to the city, declares David Harvey. Much more than individual liberty or access to urban resources, people have a “right to change” themselves “by changing the city.” Since the rise of neoliberalism, which took form in the redevelopment of Times Square in the late 1970s, the right to city has been increasingly restricted to the upper-class: while affluent consumers and private corporate interests conquered urban space, independent businesses, and lower and middle-class residents have been forced out, and relegated to the periphery of the city center. The right to the city, Harvey adds, is one of our most precious yet neglected human rights.⁴³ Midst the redevelopment of Times Square, however, artists and social activists asserted the public right to city. In summer of 1980 in the *Times Square Show*, Colab, an underground art collective based in the Lower East Side, occupied an abandoned massage parlor and staged a month-long extravaganza, displaying art that protested the inequities of urban change, and commented on the conservative cultural values imposed by the burgeoning private sector in Times Square. As a phenomenal event, the *Times Square Show* bucked the private conquest of the public sphere in midtown Manhattan.

Between 1977 and 1979, under the “encouragement” of the Office of Midtown Enforcement, landlord Mark Finkelstein, evicted his tenant at 401 West 41st Street, Girlsle a massage parlor linked to an abandoned bus terminal that had been defunct since

⁴³ David Harvey, “The Right to the City,” *New Left Review* 53, September-October 2008.

the onset of the urban crisis. Girlesk was in the heart of Times Square, just one block South of the Allied Chemical Building, at 1 Times Square, the former location of the *New York Times* headquarter that gave the district its name at the turn of the century. Typical of its sexually lurid environs in the 1970s which included shops and shows like Peepland across the street, and an adult book store called “Teach Hubby How” next-door, Girlesk was washed away as an ‘unclean’ establishment that posed a detriment to the growth of private sector interests in Times Square.⁴⁴

In the Spring of 1980, John Ahearn and Tom Otterness, two artists who worked with Collaborative Projects (Colab), an underground art collective based in the Lower East Side, walked down 41st Street, taking in the sights of Times Square; enjoying the grit and grim it had always been famous for, however fading, while remarking on the revitalization that was taking place throughout the area. As an underground art collective Colab was committed to positive social change through art; they staged art shows in alternative spaces throughout the city including abandoned buildings as a way of protesting the inequities of urban change in New York City. Since their founding in 1977, all of Colab’s alternative art shows took place in Lower Manhattan. *The Manifesto Show*, for instance took place at 5 Bleeker Street in 1979 while *The Real Estate Show* was staged on Delaney Street in January of 1980; up until the summer of 1980, Colab had never staged a show above 24th Street.⁴⁵ After noticing the “for rent or sale sign” in the window of 401 West 41st Street, the former location of Girlesk, Ahearn and Otterness,

⁴⁴ Guy Trebay, “Art in The Privates Sector,” *Village Voice*, June 9, centerfold; Goldstein, pp.1.

⁴⁵ Walter Robinson and Allan Moore, *Colab Daily Purge*, May 1982 – from Allan Moore and Marc Miller, ed.s, *ABC No Rio Dinero: The Story of a Lower East Side Art Gallery*, (New York: ABC No Rio with Collaborative Projects, 1985)—98bowery.com—retrieved 8.18.13; Becky Howland, *Re-inventing the Oil Rig Fountain and Octopus Window*, from *Times Square Show Revisited* at Hunter College, Sept. 14 – Dec. 8, 2012.

and a committee from Colab approached landlord Mark Finkelstein with a proposition to rent the space for an art show. “John had looked at other places,” remembered Otterness, “but as soon as he showed me the 41st Street building it was kind of a lock for us.”⁴⁶ The space had remained empty since Finkelstein evicted Girlesk, and in his appreciation of their proposition, generously offered Ahearn and Otterness one month’s rent for free, and even allowed them to use the abandoned bus terminal which he also owned.⁴⁷ From the end of May to the end of June, Colab rented the large space at 201-205 West 41st Street at \$500.00 per week (a sum that was accumulated through fundraising, and private donations), to stage their first alternative show in Midtown.⁴⁸

The floor was ankle-deep in sawdust and sludge; the windows were paneless and open to the streets; “free sex” was scrawled in spray-paint across the entrance; music blared and people in open second-floor windows shouted down to passersby: the *Times Square Show* was “first radical art show of the ‘80s,” declared Richard Goldstein in the *Village Voice*.⁴⁹ More than 100 artists were represented in a space all too well suited for exhibition. Filling three floors and a basement, the *Times Square Show* “documented the convergence of punk/ no wave, wild style, conceptual street work, radical feminism, gay liberation and a burgeoning neo-expressionism” reported art critic Jeffrey Deitch writing for *Art in America* in 1980.⁵⁰ A myriad of styles, and mediums filled the vast space: a shop was set up in the first floor lobby; a portrait gallery on the second floor contained 34

⁴⁶ Tom Otterness, “accounts,” timessquareshowrevisited.com—retrieved 8.18.13.

⁴⁷ Jeffrey Deitch, “Report from Times Square,” *Art in America*, September 1980, pp. 60.

⁴⁸ *Times Square Show* budget (for grant proposal), 1980. Collection of Charlie Ahearn and Jane Dickson, from *Times Square Show Revisited* at Hunter College, Sept. 14 – Dec. 8, 2012.

⁴⁹ Goldstein, pp. 31; Coleen Fitzgibbon, “accounts,” timessquareshowrevisited.com—retrieved 8.18.13.

⁵⁰ Jeffrey Deitch, ed., *Jean-Michel Basquiat 1981: The Studio of the Streets* (New York: Deitch Projects, 2007), pp. 8-10; Tom Otterness and John Ahearn, *Times Square Show* floor plans (3 pages each), 1980. Collection of Keith Haring Foundation Archive and Collection of Robert Goldman.

pictures in one room; art projects, installations, and fashion was on the third floor; while the fourth floor was reserved for film screenings; and even the basement was filled with art and décor.

As an art collective committed to social change, Colab was interested in “approaching art as a radical communications medium,” according to Jeffrey Deitch; they were “more concerned with social than personal issues, and more interested in subject than form.”⁵¹ Colab asked the artists who participated in the *Times Square Show* to present works that commented on the Times Square environment; to comment on the legendary seediness of the area and on the recent redevelopment that began during the late 1970s.⁵² “Although this is a porno area,” said Beth B, one of the founding members of Colab, “we are not trying for a porno show.”⁵³ Instead, according to John Ahearn, they were interested in “activating” people, raising consciousness to the effects of urban change that was taking place in Times Square.⁵⁴ As Jeffrey Deitch wrote, the *Times Square Show* was a “post-SoHo phenomena,” which meant that underground artists based in Lower Manhattan, like Colab, were committed to producing art, and staging shows that protested the gentrification of SoHo which priced many artists out the area, and displaced them to the Lower East and West Sides. The redevelopment of Times Square was another instance of urban change in which inhabitants were displaced from their dwellings and stores closed or were bought-out by large corporation: thus the *Times Square Show* was an attempt by Colab to address larger issues of surrounding urban change; not just in Lower Manhattan, but city-wide.

⁵¹ Deitch, pp. 61.

⁵² Goldstein, pp. 31.

⁵³ Beth “B” Billingsley quoted in Trebay, centerfold.

⁵⁴ John Ahearn quoted in Goldstein, pp. 31.

The art at the *Times Square Show* directly addressed the economic inequities of urban change throughout New York. According to cultural critic Michael Shore, the show “reveled in vulgarity and urban blight.”⁵⁵ The show foisted the inequities of urban change into the public sphere, in the heart of Times Square, where Colab intended to create controversy and discussion about the art, and subsequently about urban change. As cultural critic Grace Glueck commented, the show’s “Street-smart display engendered a lively exchange with the neighborhood people.”⁵⁶ The show was a “chance to relate this neighborhood, which is the best in New York, as far as I’m concerned, to our work,” said artist Beth B.⁵⁷ “For a number of these artists, commitment to social transformation... is more than a liberal fantasy,” reported Jeffery Deitch, “it is a matter of survival.”⁵⁸ Christy Rupp’s iconography of rats, which commented on the human condition in urban crisis, suggested an ecology of city life in the 1970s- “It rats don’t survive, neither will we,” said Rupp.⁵⁹ Similarly, John Ahearn’s plaster-casts of South Bronx residents commented on the life in the ghetto, offering “startling images that” were “hauntingly alive,” wrote Jeffrey Deitch, “a raw slice of South Bronx life.”⁶⁰ Works like SAMO’s graffiti manifestos decrying the ‘BOOZH-WAH-ZEE’; Ann Marie Rousseau’s portraits of Times Square homeless women; director Jack Smith’s film “Exotic Landlordism of the World,” or Coleen Fitzgibbon’s studies of police sharpshooters stalking and taking aim on targets,

⁵⁵ Michael Shore, “How Does it Look? How Does it Sound?” *Art News*, November 1980, pp. 85.

⁵⁶ Grace Glueck, “The New Collectives Reaching for a Wider Audience,” *The Sunday New York Times*, February 1, 1981, pgs. 43-45.

⁵⁷ Beth B as quoted in Trebay, centerfold.

⁵⁸ Deitch, pp. 60.

⁵⁹ Rupp quoted in Goldstein, pp. 31.

⁶⁰ Deitch, pp. 61.

all flashed economic inequities of urban change in bright lights, loudly for all to see and hear.⁶¹

Whereas more traditional art shows, in SoHo galleries for instance, or in major cultural institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art, historically displayed the work of artists with high pedigrees, the *Times Square Show*, like all of the alternative art shows produced by Colab through the 1970s and early 1980s, accepted the work of artists regardless of their education, socio-economic standing, race, or even ability. “Everyone just sort of rushed in,” said Charlie Ahearn, the twin brother of John, “bum rushing the place throwing art workup... there was a lot of street art at the time, and there was a lot of homeless people making sort of weird things on the street [sic].” Colab was committed to the integration of art into society; they believed that art had the potential to communicate pressing issues to the public, but also to foster a sense of community, where urban change destroyed it. According to writer and artist Sarah Schulman, “Colab was not looking at their art as a product but rather for social impact, there were no labels or tags, no commercial intent.”⁶² The art at the *Times Square Show* looked beyond any one artist, and instead emphasized a community of artists providing a communal experience in urban space that was becoming increasingly privatized by the late 1970s and early 1980s.

In all the *Times Square Show* was a social and cultural response to the inequities of urban change in Midtown Manhattan; but more than that, it was an integral event in the formation of the East Village underground movement, in which a whole generation of

⁶¹ Shore, pp. 85; Goldstein, pp. 3; Detich, pp. 60.

⁶² Schulman, pp. 87.

artists -not only those in underground collectives- developed a completely original style of art that reflected and commented on the turbulent urban and economic shifts of the late-1970s and early 1980s. In dialogue with the hip hop graffiti movement, which came out of the South Bronx during the late -1960s, underground artists forged a new aesthetic which critics called “punk art.” Hip hop graffiti writers, whose style of subway graffiti was a direct assault on negligent city authority in urban crisis, as well as an expression of the substandard living conditions in the ghetto, began collaborating with underground artists in the East Village as early as the mid-1970s.⁶³ The *Times Square Show*, however, was the first time that a shared aesthetic started to emerge. “Artists with a certain affinity somehow band together to form an unstructured synergistic association which might almost be called a movement,” Jeffrey Deitch wrote in 1980, commenting on the *Times Square Show*; the show “literally forged the uptown-downtown,” between hip hop graffiti writers and downtown artists that developed through the early 1980s into a massive cultural phenomenon.⁶⁴ “There is a moment where artists who *choose* to show on the street are like the artists who *must* show on the street,” said Richard Goldstein, “a point at which their aesthetics touch.”⁶⁵ The “visual punk aesthetic” was “three-chord art that anyone could play,” heralding a new democratic paradigm of art in New York.⁶⁶ The *Times Square Show* announced the emergence of a “punk art” aesthetic that propelled cultural protest throughout the East Village underground movement.

⁶³ Suzi Gablik, “Report from New York: The Graffiti Question,” *Art in America*, October 1982, pp. 34-35; Glueck: “Graffiti surfaced in a big way as art after the ‘Times Square Show’”.

⁶⁴ Jeffrey Deitch quoted from Phoebe Hoban, *Basquiat: A Quick Killing in Art* (New York: Viking, 1998), 37; Deitch, pp. 59; Fab Five Freddie quoted from Elisabeth Sussman; Steven Hager, *Art After Midnight: The East Village Scene* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986), pp. 112.

⁶⁵ Goldstein, pp. 31.

⁶⁶ Goldstein, pp. 32.

While the *Times Square Show* announced a new aesthetic of cultural protest in New York City, the event was also important for bringing together a wide variety of artists together in collaboration; it brought the future icons of the East Village underground to the forefront where they could influence others and spread art and protest throughout the city. According to Keith Haring, the *Times Square Show* “was the first time that every kind of underground art could be seen in one place- and that included graffiti art. It was the first time that the art world acknowledged that the underground existed.”⁶⁷ “It was the first time the art world really paid attention to graffiti and to these other outsider artists.”⁶⁸ Artists including Kenny Scharf, Keith Haring, and Jean-Michel Basquiat, were all singled out for special recognition for the first time in their careers.⁶⁹ Eventually, they achieved international art fame, boosting the “punk art” aesthetic and its inherent protest to urban change up onto the world stage.

While Times Square was being swallowed by private corporations, displacing independent businesses, and pushing lower and middle-class residents out onto the street, artists in the *Times Square Show* were asserting the public right to urban space. They protested the inequities of urban change in midtown and throughout the city; as foundational moment in the larger East Village underground movement, the *Times Square Show* forged a culturally pervasive aesthetic that at once integrated art and society while fostering a warm inviting community where urban change destroyed it. As the East

⁶⁷ Keith Haring quoted by John Gruen, *Keith Haring: The Authorized Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), pp.65; Keith Haring, with introduction by Robert Farris Thompson (New York: Viking, 1996), pp. 65.

⁶⁸ Keith Haring quoted in David Sheff, “Keith Haring, an intimate Conversation,” *Rolling Stone Magazine*, August 10, 1989, pp. 6.

⁶⁹ Shore, pp. 85; David Galloway, “Drawing the Line: The Graphic Legacy of Keith Haring,” *The Keith Haring Show* (Milan, Italy: Skira, 2005), pp. 61-65; Tamra Davis and David Koh (directors), *Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child*[documentary] (New York: New Video, 2010).

Village underground movement grew, it came to influence other sections in the city such as the Lower West Side, where urban change of another kind contemporaneously affected society.

Chapter 3: Washington Market: An Economic and Cultural History of the Lower West Side, 1962-1977

While the East Village underground movement originally took root in the Lower East Side, the development and growth of the movement was directly linked to the transformation of the Lower West Side of Manhattan during the second half of the twentieth century. Not only did the gentrification of SoHo, which began during the late-1960s, spill over into the Lower West Side by the early 1970s and amplify the cause for concern from artists in the East Village; the economic history of the Lower West Side also reveals perhaps an even greater impetus to the East Village underground.

Washington Market, the foundation of economic stability in Lower Manhattan through the first half of the twentieth century, was largely responsible for the development of the built urban environment in the Lower West Side; its ports and trading centers along the Hudson River fed the growth of light manufacturing industries throughout Lower Manhattan. As Washington Market and its subsidiary industries dissolved due to the larger shifts in the national economy during the second half of the twentieth century, real estate developers appropriated the spaces they occupied for conversion into residential lofts.

However, more importantly for the purposes of this paper, artist communities, displaced by the gentrification of SoHo, were the first to begin living illegally in abandoned industrial spaces in the old Washington Market section preceding the real estate speculation in the Lower West Side. They founded institutions like underground print shops, art studios and especially the Mudd Club, which was a countercultural night club that doubled as an underground art gallery and salon enabling growth East Village underground. In all, the history of economic and urban change in the Lower West Side is

the history is the history of the development and expansion of the East Village underground. From this perspective, we can see that the countercultural movement was in no way geographically limited to the East Village, but it occurred in pockets through city in direct response to urban change.

The area of Lower Manhattan known today as “TriBeCa” (Triangle Below Canal Street) was only given that name in 1974 when real estate developers needed a trendy name to sell residential lofts in the battered deindustrialized section of the city.¹ For nearly two centuries before that point, this same area was known as the Lower West Side, or as Washington Market, the economic, social and cultural nucleus of the area.²

Bear Market was established in the Lower West Side of Manhattan in 1813, after the Atlantic trade routes reopened at the conclusion of the War of 1812; and the area soon became an important wholesale and retail supplier of goods to the city.³ The Market was located along the western edge of the neighborhood bounded by Washington, Vesey, and Fulton Streets, and overtime became known as Washington Market because of its proximity and prominence along Washington Street. During the first half of the nineteenth century, Washington Market was the best place in the city to shop for the freshest fruit and produce: clumps fresh spinach and kale from New Jersey; bundles of rhubarb and asparagus from Long Island; baskets of strawberries from the Carolinas. The

¹ Hecht Group. Licensed Real Estate Brokerage, “Neighborhood Guide: TriBeCa,” www.hechtgroup.com accessed 2.18.13; Daniel Shaw, “Tribeca: On the Quiet Streets, the Ghosts of the Washington Market,” *New York Magazine*, May 4, 1987: 96-- The land was once used as farmland by Dutch settlers, and a large tract was granted in 1705 by Queen Anne (of England) to Trinity Church, an Episcopalian congregation that built St. John’s Chapel on Varick Street in 1807.

² In 1636, Roelf Jans, of the Dutch East India Company, operated a farm here. Joyce Gold, “Tribeca” from Kenneth T. Jackson, ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (London: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 1199-1200

³ Marjorie Pearson, *Tribeca West Historic District Designation Report*. NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission, May 7, 1991, pp. 7-9; Joyce Gold, pp. 1199-1200.

air was filled with smells of Flemish hams, Norwegian sardines, codfish tongues, and bear steaks.⁴ Dairy was also a hot commodity in the market. Overall, Washington Market was a kind of early “urban supermarket,” according to Hal Bromme, co author of *Texture of Tribeca* and founder of the Committee for the Washington Market Historic District.⁵ “It started outdoors, then moved indoors,” says David O’Neil, a public markets expert with the Project for Public Spaces, “and then grew enormously over the years to include retail, wholesale, cold storage space, commission houses and brokers.”⁶ By 1859, Washington Market had become the America’s largest food market; in the 1880s, there were more than 500 vendor stands and over 4,000 framers wagons operating in Washington Market.⁷

Not only did Washington Market supply the region with fresh foods and produce; it laid the economic foundation for the prosperity of Lower Manhattan, preceding the establishment the World Trade Center which crowed New York City a financial capital of the world. The New York Mercantile Exchange was originally founded in 1872 as the New York Butter and Cheese Exchange by a group of wholesale grocery merchants in Washington Market. The location moved to a loft building at 6 Harrison Street and Hudson Street on the north end of Washington Market in 1882 when the institution changed its name to the New York Mercantile Exchange; where in the 1890s more than 300,000 eggs were sold daily on the second floor. Finally, the New York Mercantile Exchange moved south during the construction of the World Trade Center in 1977.

⁴ Shaw, pp. 96.

⁵ Hal Bromme is co author of *Texture of Tribeca* and founder of the Committee for the Washington Market Historic District. Patra Jongjitirat, “How Markets Grow: Learning from Manhattan’s Lost Food Hub,” Placemaking Blog, *Project for Public Spaces*, November 25, 2012. <http://www.pps.org> accessed 2.18.13.

⁶ David O’Neil, as quoted in Jongjitirat.

⁷ Jongjitirat; Suzanne R. Wasserman, “Washington Market,” from Jackson, pp. 1243.

Overall, the evolution of the New York Butter and Cheese Exchange demonstrates how Washington Market laid the ground for New York City's economic vitality through the twentieth century.⁸

The growth of Washington Market was also responsible for the physical development of Lower Manhattan. As Washington Market expanded, it gave rise to new diverse businesses; "When markets grow," says David O'Neil, "You get to a certain scale of operations that gets other people providing supplies." Washington Market of the early nineteenth century gave impetus to the growth of the textile and paper making industries that became the powerhouses of Lower Manhattan in the first half of the twentieth century.

Textile Industry

Early American textile mills were generally located away from city centers because of the space they required to produce their goods, and because they needed access to natural running waters to operate machinery. However, improvements in technology and transportation through the nineteenth century soon brought textile industries to urban centers like New York where they could tap into the distribution centers and market hubs throughout Lower Manhattan.⁹ Landmark improvements in transportation like the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 enabled larger ships to navigate the river systems of the American North East, delivering essential supplies and goods to support a bustling urban economy. But since large ships could not easily navigate the shallow shoals of the East River, piers were built along the much deeper Hudson River,

⁸ Shaw, pp. 97; George Winslow, "New York Mercantile Exchange," from Jackson, pp. 837.

⁹ David M Breiner and Margaret M.M. Pickart, *The Tribeca East Historic District Designation Report*, NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission, December 8, 1992, pp. 10.

stretching from Vesey to King Street where early textile industry concentrated, East of Washington Market.¹⁰

The growth of railroads in the 1840s and 50s also opened up the Lower West Side to increased trade and capital. In 1867, Trinity Church and the owners of the houses facing St. John's Park, adjacent from the chapel, sold the park to Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, who transformed the site into the St. John's Freight Terminal. In 1869, the Hudson River Rail Road merged with the New York Central Rail Road to form the New York Central and Hudson River Rail Road which effectively brought even more goods and products to the retailers and light manufacturing industries in Lower Manhattan.¹¹

In the 1850s the textile industry exploded with an intense burst of construction in the Lower West Side of Manhattan. Five- and six-story buildings were built with marble, sandstone, and cast-iron facades to house stores, lofts, factories, storage facilities and administration offices for the burgeoning textile and light manufacturing companies. 75 percent of the structures that exist today in the Lower West Side were built between 1851 and 1892 to accommodate the expanding textile trade as well as storage for food wholesalers operating along the Hudson and the paper manufacturing trade that developed in the 1880s. This burst of development constituted the first major wave of loft construction in the Lower West Side of Manhattan; 1866 marked the highest degree of construction activity in the history of Lower Manhattan. This was the peak of the American textile industry and the dry goods trade in New York City: Halsted and Stiles Company, one of the largest American importers of cloths, cashmeres and heavy wool,

¹⁰ Pearson, pp. 9; Breiner and Pickart, pp. 10.

¹¹ The site of the depot is now the exit of the Holland Tunnel, connecting New Jersey to New York City. Joyce Gold, pp. 1200; Pearson, pp. 10.

began operating at 43-45 White Street during this time.¹² By the 1870s a booming light-manufacturing textile industry in Washington Market was well known for its high quality linens, Irish linens, cottons, and bleached white goods; the area became a distinguished textile marketplace, on top of its existing reputation as an important food wholesale market.¹³

The Paper Trade on White Street

Printing and paper manufacturing was the second economic pillar that stood alongside the textile industry during the nineteenth century.¹⁴ Like the textile industry in the Lower East Side, the paper trade prospered because of the capital and consumer demand fostered by Washington Market. The center of the New York City's paper making industry was originally located near the East River, in what is now Park Row (near the entrance to the Brooklyn Bridge), where several newspapers were based throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. Although larger wholesalers like Hudson River Pulp and Paper (154 Nassau Street) were located in this area, some paper manufacturers and wholesalers, such as Diamond Mills Paper Company (44 Murray Street), developed among textile industries closer to the West Side.¹⁵ In 1891 Bulkey, Dutton and Company moved from 111 Beekman Street (along the East River), then known as "paper street," to 75-77 Duane Street (in the Washington Market area), and eventually grew into New York City's largest paper supply firm.¹⁶ Overtime, the center

¹² Breiner and Pickart, pp. 17.

¹³ Breiner and Pickart, pp.13.

¹⁴ Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), pp. 24-8.

¹⁵ Irmengarde Eberle, "Paper" from Jackson, pp. 878.

¹⁶ Eberle, "Paper" from Jackson, pp. 878.

of the paper trade in Lower Manhattan gravitated west toward the thriving Washington Market.

The expansion of the paper manufacturing industry sparked the second largest wave of commercial loft construction in the history of the Lower West Side, which took place in the Washington Market area in the late-1870s, following the recovery of the World Financial Panic of 1873. Although the paper trade was a late-comer to the Lower West Side, by the 1890s it was just as viable as food wholesale in Washington Market to West or the textile industry; and the paper trade further contributed to the erection of loft spaces and administrative office buildings in the Lower West Side. In 1880, D.S. Walton and Co, America's largest Manufacturer of printed and wrapping paper operated a factory and store front at 1-9 Varick Street.¹⁷ Then in 1888, real estate developer John M. Dodd commissioned Auguste Namur, a civil engineer and architect and the Robison and Wallis construction company to construct a six-story neo-grec loft building on the southern corner of White Street and Cortlandt Alley.¹⁸ This building, No.77 Whit Street, was originally used by dry goods firms for office and storage space; in 1978, almost 100 years after its construction, 77 White Street became home to the Mudd Club, a nest of cross-cultural fertilization and nebulous of the East Village underground that that swept the city through the late-1970s and early 1980s.¹⁹

Paper manufacturing and distribution continued to developed the built urban environment in Washington Market through end the nineteenth century, and into the 1920s when John F. Sarle Company, constructed a three-story factory building solely for

¹⁷ Pearson, pp. 13.

¹⁸ Breiner and Pickart, pp. 158.

¹⁹ This location was also known as No. 3 Cortlandt Alley.

the purposes of paper manufacturing at 46-50 Hudson Street.²⁰ The second wave of commercial construction, prompted by the growth of the paper trade, continued until the Great Depression of 1929, which was a major blow to food wholesale, textile industry and paper manufacturing in the Lower West Side, as it was for other sectors of the national economy. Nonetheless, while companies dissolved, the physical shells of their enterprises remained; wholesale retailers and light manufacturing industries were responsible for the construction of buildings throughout the Lower West Side of Manhattan. As the city changed through the twentieth century, the buildings were put to different uses.

Washington Market, the Lynchpin of Economic Stability in Lower Manhattan

During the first half of the twentieth century Washington Market remained a potent economic staple of New York City; from its humble beginnings, nearly a century before, the Market had become a Regional Food Distribution Hub. The growth of the city paralleled the increase of consumer influx through Washington Market: in the 1930s, Washington Market operated eleven ferry services that carried 60 million passengers and 10 million cars each year to and from riverside New Jersey cities like like Hoboken, Jersey City, and Weehawken; the market was a convenient location for commuters to do their grocery shopping on their way home from work.²¹ Washington Market had grown so large that the New York City's Office of Public Markets began to regulate the

²⁰ Pearson, pp. 11-13.

²¹ Shaw, pp. 97.

competitive relations between farmers, wholesalers, and consumers in the area, ensuring the stability of the market as a valuable municipal asset.²²

In the 1930s and 40s Washington Market reached its peak total volume as over 90 percent of the butter, eggs, cheese and fresh food items consumed in the greater metropolitan area passed through the Lower West Side of Manhattan.²³ By 1939 the market stretched from Washington Street to West Street and had a greater volume of business than all the other markets in the city combined.²⁴ The entire area grew as the Washington Market thrived; it was the economic and cultural life-force of the Lower West Side: “The market’s commercial clout gave the neighborhood its character,” reported *New York Magazine* in the 1980s, looking at Washington Market in retrospect.²⁵ The Lower West Side retained its culturally and economically diverse ethos through the first half of the twentieth century; and preserved this same character even as deindustrialization and urban renewal processed to tear the market down through the second half of the twentieth century.

Deindustrialization of Washington Market

There are two parallel stories to the decline of manufacturing and the deindustrialization of the Washington Market area of Lower Manhattan. On one hand, the decline was due to large-scale shifts in America’s basic industry; on the other hand, it was a political imperative for state and local officials acting on the interests of corporate

²² Jongjitirat.

²³ William Strong, “Melting Away-The Butter, Eggs, and Cheese Market,” *World Trade Community News*, March 16-29, 1976, pp. 6-7.

²⁴ Joyce Gold, pp. 1200.

²⁵ Shaw, pp. 96.

benefactors- which, perhaps, are examples of the earliest application of public-private partnerships, the trademark policy of neoliberal economics.

In their study of plant closing in North American through the twentieth century, Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison defined deindustrialization as the “widespread, systemic disinvestment in the nation’s basic industries.” They argued that the movement of capital came about by decisions made by corporate managers in conjunction with the effect of government policy. Deindustrialization of North America started with the U.S. post-War economic boom which fostered international competition; in the 1960s new international companies began threatening manufacturing industries in America. By the end of *Pax American*, an era of economic stability that lasted from 1946 to 1971, the industrial base of American economy “began to come apart at the seams.”²⁶

Essentially, there are three major causes that lay at the heart of the economic shift that led to urban deindustrialization, and which all give rise to the centralization of control and the concentration of corporate power (fewer, more powerful corporations). (1) The development of new telecommunication technologies, and more efficient travel provided by airplanes and automobiles decreased the need for manufacturers to remain concentrated in urban centers like New York City. Industrial companies relocated their factories to areas where labor and production was cheaper, relying on advanced communication and transportation technologies to make transactions and deliver their goods wherever they pleased. (2) U.S. tax codes throughout the twentieth century also

²⁶ Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closing, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), pp. 6,16; Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), pp. 38.

accelerated the depreciation of allowances and increased investment credits, fostering a greater corporate concentration. (3) Finally, deindustrialization and corporate concentration can also be credited to the rise of the global capitalist system, where heightened international competition created a sharp squeeze on profits in American manufacturing industries.²⁷ All of these conditions contributed to the deindustrialization of urban America, setting the stage for the information services economy that now dominate late-capitalist society and all the inequities that have come with it. A closer analysis of urban deindustrialization reveals how the maturation of the capitalist system in America leveled small independent commercial interests in Washington Market; paving the way for enormous disparities of income and wealth, as well as contributing to urban crisis which devastated the city during the 1960s and 1970s.

Deindustrialization in New York City began in the 1920's with the slow decline of the New England textile industry.²⁸ This gradually affected textile manufacturing plants throughout the North East; the trend persisted through the 1920s and 30s, and was compounded by the Great Depression. The decline of textile manufacturing was most pronounced during the early post-World War II period when a series of post-war corporate mergers and Federal tax policies, made it more expedient for firms to liquidate their factories and increased the outsourcing of jobs. During the 1950s, the government granted rapid tax write-offs, and low cost loans for building new plants for the purposes of manufacturing military goods. Many firms, especially textile producers, took advantage of these incentives, building new facilities in Southern States where land and

²⁷ Bluestone and Harrison, pp. 119-141.

²⁸ Tami J. Friedman, "A Trail of Ghost Towns Across our Land': The Decline of Manufacturing in Yonkers, New York," from Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, ed.s, *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*, foreword by Barry Bluestone (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 20-7.

labor was cheap. In effect, textile firms began phasing out their factories in northern cities like Manhattan where Washington Market played a vital role to the urban economy.²⁹

While the deindustrialization of the New York City was due in part to large economic trends affecting basic industry in North America, state and local politics also had a significant role in this process. Urban historian Sharon Zukin argues that New York City's "patrician elite," comprised of upper-class corporate executives and wealthy statesmen had vested interests in deindustrialization of Manhattan as early as the 1910s. In Zukin's estimation, this elite class of urbanites "had a serious aversion to the presence of workers" who were primarily immigrants from southern and eastern Europe working in factories "so close to the heart of Manhattan's elite locale, fifth avenue." Through their influence and connections, this "patrician elite" conspired with local and state politicians, forming plans to "upgrade" Manhattan by relocating manufacturing activity and working-class housing to the outer boroughs (especially Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Queens). The first of these plans was The Regional Plan of 1929, which was ultimately scratched before construction got underway, due to the revenue lost with the fiscal crisis that same year. However, the intention of The Regional Plan of 1929 was reincarnated in various urban renewal projects that changed the urban landscape of Lower Manhattan throughout the second half of twentieth century, mostly under the direction of urban planner Robert Moses.³⁰

Urban Renewal

²⁹ Friedman, "A Trail of Ghost Towns Across our Land': The Decline of Manufacturing in Yonkers, New York," from Cowie and Heathcott, pp. 20.

³⁰ Zukin, pp. 37-40.

Faced with the decline of light manufacturing in cities across the country, the Urban Land Institute was formed in 1936 as a non-profit organization sponsored by the National Association of Real Estate Boards for the purposes of assessing the early causes of urban decline in America and to prescribe cures. In a study conducted in 1940, the institute concluded that the cause of the decline of light manufacturing in the North East was rise of the personal automobile. American cities were not properly suited for the automobile that had come to dominate American society and culture through the first half of the twentieth century, the Urban Land Institute concluded, and so cities were declining in contrast to the growth of suburban America. The only way to cure this urban ailment, they suggested, was to “modernize” the cities of America. The institute began proposing plans with local and state governments in which super highways, parking lots, tunnels and bridges would be integrated into the urban spaces throughout the country, funded through public-private revitalization initiatives.³¹ Soon, with the added aid of the Federal Government, cities across American began their own “modernization” projects. New York City was one the largest recipients of federal aid for urban renewal receiving \$34,064,229 in Federal support between 1949 to 1958 for projects that included the construction of bridges, tunnels, highways, and expressways which, over time radically transformed the city.³² During the 1940s, Mayor Florio La Guardia and Parks Commissioner Robert Moses designed a system of limited-access parkways that would

³¹ Teaford, pp. 26.

³² *Urban Renewal Project Directory*, March 31, 1958 (Washington D.C.: Housing and Home Finance Agency, 1958), pp. 4,6-7,9,11-12,17-21, 23, as cited in Teaford, pp. 107.

criss-cross the city-- Moses even planned a “circumferential Parkway” around the city (The FDR and East River Drive are what remains of the unsuccessful plan).³³

The Voorhees Plan, proposed in 1958, was one of the largest urban renewal projects conceived for New York City. Headed by master builder, Robert Moses and James Felt, chairman of the City Planning Commission (and president of his own real estate company at the time), the Voorhees Plan was the namesake of the architecture firm hired for the massive project, Voorhees, Walker, Smith & Smith. However, the Voorhees Plan was essentially the Regional Plan of 1929 under a different name. It called for the relocation of modern industrial plants to the outer boroughs of New York City, through a series of zoning laws. In effect, districts throughout Lower Manhattan were cleared of potential industrial uses and rezoned to various commercial uses.³⁴ However, the Voorhees Plan was only the first step toward a much larger plan to transform Lower Manhattan.

The Lower Manhattan Plan, conceived by Robert Moses in the 1940s entailed the construction of a Lower Manhattan Express Way (LOMEX), a massive eight-lane expressway from the Holland Tunnel to the Williamsburg and Manhattan Bridges, running along Broome Street the entire width of the island.³⁵ In preparation, Robert Moses devised a series of urban renewal projects throughout Lower Manhattan to transform the urban landscape and facilitate the construction of the Lower Manhattan Expressway; he started in Washington Market in the Lower West Side.

Washington Market Urban Renewal

³³ Teaford, pp. 30.

³⁴ Zukin, pp. 41.

³⁵ Zukin, pp. 44.

Robert Moses designated Washington Market for demolition in 1962. Since its peak in the 1940s, Washington Market slowly deteriorated with the tide of corporate conglomeration that swept American industries through the second half of the twentieth century. Washington Market began eroding just as the textile and light manufacturing industries of Lower Manhattan began slipping away with the maturation of the advance-capitalist system in America during the 1950s and 60s. “There was a lot of consolidation going on in the food industry,” said David O’Neil, “with bigger and bigger users and suppliers and small vendors falling to the wayside or going out of business. Washington Market was antiquated. There were all sorts of problems with aging infrastructure and accessibility, not being close to the highways.”³⁶ By 1956, the retail section of Washington Market had dwindled to a mere shadow of the large food importer and wholesaler center it once was.³⁷

In 1962 the Washington Market Urban Renewal Project demolished and cleared old Washington Market from the site.³⁸ “The City’s goal was to get everyone to move to Hunts Point,” says Hal Bromme, “where they could have a concentrated location that would make [food distribution] more efficient.”³⁹ What was left of the massive wholesale market was relocated to Hunts Point, Bronx in 1967 where it eventually faded away without the commercial influx it once had in the Lower West Side. Before its completion, however, Robert Moses’ Lower Manhattan Plan was untimely scrapped by Mayor Robert

³⁶ David O’Neil as quoted in Jongitirat.

³⁷ Wasserman, pp. 1243.

³⁸ The Washington Market Urban Renewal tract was market between Greenwich, Washington and West streets, roughly from Lighthouse Street and the North end all the way down to what was to become the World Trade Center.

³⁹ Hal Bromme as quoted in Jongitirat.

F. Wagner, soon after Washington Market was destroyed. By the mid-1960s, deindustrialization and suburbanization took its toll on urban American, plunging cities across the country into a devastating fiscal crisis that lasted through 1970s. The fiscal crisis depleted revenue; city services were reduced to a bare minimum while the municipal aid focused on areas of the city deemed viable enough to save: mid-town Manhattan was selected for redevelopment while the ghettos in Harlem and the South Bronx were considered lost causes. Overall, the city could not afford the construction of Robert Moses' dream of a Lower Manhattan Expressway, but the "renewal" of Washington Market remained a priority despite the cancelation of the larger plan, and the Washington Market urban renewal portion of the larger plan continued to completion.

The 38-acre site of old Washington Market was turned into Independence Plaza, a high-rise housing project for middle-income residents that eventually housed up to 5,000 residents as well as the Manhattan Borough Community College when it was completed in 1975.⁴⁰ The area surrounding Independence Plaza, however, suffered a much worse fate. With the destruction of Washington Market, the textile and light manufacturing industries lost their hold in the turbulent economic shift that transformed urban American through the second half of the twentieth century; dissolving in the tide of corporate conglomeration; many smaller companies shut their doors, unable to sustain business. Hundreds of buildings were left abandoned throughout Lower Manhattan during the fiscal crisis of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The streets of the Lower West Side, turned barrenly surreal, resembled no trace of the market center they once were: trash and debris drifted in the wind like tumbleweeds of a ghost-town; dirty plywood covered the first

⁴⁰ Shaw, pp. 96-98; Gold, pp. 1200.

floor windows of buildings. But out of the carnage, the desecration of a thriving community, the pilfering of a vital urban economy for the sake of corporate greed, a new trend developed. Artists and squatters began occupying the abandoned buildings of Lower Manhattan in the early 1970s and issued forth a series of urban transformations unlike anything New York City had ever seen.

TriBeCa Artist Lofts

Through the late-1960s and early 1970s, squatters began inhabiting abandoned buildings in the Lower West Side. Some of them were working class families that could not afford the expense of moving and so remained in the increasingly desolate area; most, however, were artists, attracted by the large abandoned loft spaces where they could work and live at a very low cost. The *New York Times* reported that by 1975, “several hundred” people had been living illegally in the desolate Washington Market area, despite the fact that this area had long been zoned for light manufacturing since the glory days of the late Washington Market; this kind of illegal settlement happened in much the same way that artists inhabited SoHo in the 60s.⁴¹ Artists that moved to Washington Market were displaced by the rise of art galleries in Lower Manhattan and the gentrification of SoHo (South of Houston Street). Spaces in the Washington Market section of the Lower West Side were not only “bigger and less beat-up than SoHo,” wrote Grace Glueck for the *New York Times* in 1976. The old Washington Market section became a “magnet for the artists who shun the crowds, boutiques and restaurants that now jazz up the SoHo scene.”⁴² Just

⁴¹ Glen Fowler, “Lofts in TriBeCa win Zoning Change: City Votes Residential Use in Area Below Canal St.,” *New York Times*, June 12, 1976, pp. 15.

⁴² Grace Glueck, “Art People: The Name’s Only SoSo, But Loft-Rich TriBeCa is Getting the Action,” *New York Times*, April 30, 1976, pp. 67; Laurie Johnston, “TriBeCa Follows SoHo Footsteps, gingerly,” *New York Times*, August 25, 1977, pp.21.

as East Village underground art collectives formed in the mid-1970s through a mutual resentment of the gentrification of SoHo, art communities contemporaneously coalesced in the abandoned industrial buildings of the Lower West Side for same reasons.

Over time, though, while underground art collectives formed in the East Village, during the mid-1970s, art communities contemporaneously coalesced in the abandoned industrial buildings of the Lower West Side; both groups of artists were fueled by their desire for affordable living, to escape the gentrification and protest the inequities of urban change throughout the city, broadly. The New York City government, noticing the trend decided to capitalize on the increase of illegal settlements in the Washington Market area. In 1976, the City Planning Commission proposed the designation of a large portion of the area as a Special Lower-Manhattan Mixed-Use District (LMM). This legislation allowed residential lofts to exist legally alongside light manufacturing companies, as opposed to an earlier zoning law in 1971 which eliminated light manufacturing zones from the SoHo.⁴³ According to Glen Fowler who wrote a regular real estate column for the *New York Times*, the 1976 zoning law in the Lower West Side meant that artists could live and work in the Lower West Side legally provided they received certification for the Department of Cultural Affairs- the same caveat carried over from the 1971 zoning law in SoHo.⁴⁴ The zoning law of 1976 essentially opened the area for real estate developers to buy and sell lofts throughout the Lower West Side. Developers cycled through a list of names in search of a more catchy title for the old Washington Market area, with which they could market properties. “NoHo” (North of Houston Street) first appeared in headlines as early 1974; however “TriBeCa” (Triangle Bellow Cannal Street) replaced it

⁴³ Breiner and Pickart.

⁴⁴ Fowler, pp. 15.

as early as 1976 when the area was legally open for real estate speculation, and still carries that name today.

TriBeCa underwent a massive transformation during the mid-to-late 1970s. The buildings that were constructed by the paper and textile industries were appropriated for different uses by both artists and real estate developers. By 1977, young entrepreneurs opened up shops in storefronts and office buildings long since used by light manufacturing companies while artists set up studios and underground salons. Jullian Pretto, an artist who opened a Fine-Arts Building in 1976 along with a Loft-Gallery-Center on 105 Hudson Street, was just moving as the previous food-importer-tenants were gradually leaving. In that same year a young artist collective began leasing out an entire building on Franklin Street which previously had been occupied by a firm of ship chandlers. The new owners refilled the building with arts and arts related businesses: on the ground floor of the building, Martha Wilson managed “The Franklin Furnace”, a bookstore selling counter cultural publications; on the second floor, Duff Schweniger and Patrick McEntee operated a radio and television performance facility, which was used by underground artists to practice and record experimental music.⁴⁵ Arts and developers took the place of retail wholesalers and light manufacturing companies, constituting the most dramatic urban transformation in the history of the Lower West Side.

Steven Bleckner was among the cohort of underground artists that came to Tribeca midst its evolution as a pre-yuppie artist community. Aesthetically, Bleckner was part of an emerging group of artists including Julian Schnabel, Donald Newman, among other that came to be known as neo-expressionist, and eventually became very famous;

⁴⁵ Glueck, pp. 67.

Bleckner specifically became known for his “heavily impastored black canvases scoured by etched scrawls” and by 1980, came under the representation of gallery owner Mary Boone.⁴⁶ Bleckner purchased the a 6-story building at the corner of White Street and Cortland Alley in 1976, the same year TriBeCa was designated a “mixed-use” zone, and opened up to real estate speculation. But while many spaces were bought up by developers, Bleckner’s space was devoted to his art, and its contribution to the downtown scene.

77 White Street had once been the home to the Reem Paper Corporation, a large paper manufacturing and distributing company that owned spaces throughout Lower Manhattan and one of the last remaining vestiges of the once thriving paper trade on White Street.⁴⁷ “Reem is one of the many phantoms in this rundown section of Lower Manhattan,” the Washington Post reported in 1979, “made up of warehouses that are either abandoned or have long been converted into artists’ lofts.”⁴⁸ The site was converted into an artist’s loft like so many of the abandoned buildings in the old Washington Market area, where the textile and paper trade thrived years before. 77 White Street is therefore symbolic of the transformation of the Lower West Side through the twentieth century: the structure was built during with the growth of Washington Market; and when the market collapsed along with the surrounding light manufacturing industries, the building was abandoned, and eventual converted for commercial and residential uses. However, in the context of the East Village counter culture, 77 White Street was most

⁴⁶ Michael Shore, “How Does it Look? How Does It Sound?” *Art News* (November 1980), pp. 81.

⁴⁷ “Trucking Center on 19th St. Sold,” *New York Times*, March 26, 1955, pp. 28.

⁴⁸ Gary Kenton, “Here’s Mudd in your Sleaze: Disco and Decadence at Lower Manhattan’s After-Hours ‘In’ Club,” *Washington Post*, June 22, 1979, pp. E1, E3.

significant as the location of the Mudd Club, a night club that doubled as an underground art gallery and served as a melting pot for countercultural artists.

Therefore the history of Washington Market demonstrates how underground arts depended on urban change: not only were artists responding to gentrification; the postindustrial cityscape became the catalyst that fomented their rebellion. As the East underground grew through the 1970s, spreading throughout Lower Manhattan, the Mudd Club became an important meeting place for artists to collaborate and develop a unique post-industrial aesthetic that combined art and protest.

Overall, the economic history of the Lower West Side of Manhattan demonstrates that the origins of the East Village underground were largely dependent on the transformation of the built urban environment. Through the first half of the twentieth century, the urban landscape of the Lower West Side grew around the bustling ports and trading centers of Washington Market. After the collapse of the market and its subsidiary industries that sustained the economic vitality of Lower Manhattan, the Lower West Side was laid to ruin as infrastructure crumbled due to neglect and hundreds of loft buildings, which housed light manufacturing industries, were left vacant. By the 1970s, squatters and artists inhabited these spaces preceding the massive wave of real estate speculation, as the gentrification of SoHo spilled over into the Lower West Side. While art collectives based in the East Village staged consciousness-raising art shows in abandoned spaces throughout the city, art communities in the Lower West Side founded countercultural bookstores, art studios, and underground clubs like Mudd Club, all of which helped expand and contribute to the East Village underground.

Furthermore, this history of economic and urban change in the Lower West Side demonstrates that the East Village underground was not geographically bound to the Lower East Side; it occurred contemporaneously in pockets throughout Lower Manhattan during the late-1970s in response to urban change. In conclusion, a close analysis of the Mudd Club, a countercultural nexus of the East Village underground reveals how underground arts solidified the post-industrial aesthetic that began to come together through the collaboration between hip hop graffiti writers and underground art collectives, most evidently in the Summer of 1980 at the *Times Square Show*.

Chapter 4: “Sleaze by Design”: Punk Art, The Mudd Club, and the Post-industrial Aesthetics of the East Village Underground, 1978-1981

Steve Mass, who was born in Macon, Georgia in 1942 and studied philosophy at Northwestern University, moved to the East Village in 1977 where he rented a small duplex on East 8th Street. Like Mass was attracted to the East Village by the underground art scene that was already thriving by the mid-1970s, just like Keith Haring and so many other young artists of his generation; the underground film-community was particularly inviting to him. Once in the city, started working with Jack Smith, an experimental film director; he came into contact with several different types of artists in the downtown scene through the underground film-community.¹ Mass became close friends with Amos Poe, another film-maker who became famous for developing “punk” film, a style of film-making that preceded the development of the graffiti-inspired art of the East Village underground that became known as “punk art”. Eventually, Steve Mass and Amos Poe began collaborating in film-making and experimental street theatre; together they founded “Mudd Films”, their own film production studio based in Mass’ 8th Street duplex. Amos Poe introduced Steve Mass to Anya Philips, and Diego Cortez two performance artists who acted in movies directed by Mass and Poe.

Anya Philips and Diego Cortez, both innovative and inspired artists, like many of their contemporaries, were overflowing with ideas for art that positively influence society. According to cultural historian Steven Hager, Diego Cortez was the first to suggest the idea of founding an underground night-club to Steve Mass. “I had always been fascinated by the concept of a club,” said Steve Mass in an interview with the

¹ Steven Hager, *Art After Midnight: The East Village Scene* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986), pp. 46-50.

Washington Post in 1979. He immediately started exploring different themes and concepts for a night-club: “I did a lot of research in Northern New Jersey industrial towns to find a genuine sleaze,” said Mass, “where people were attempting to be glamorous but weren’t sophisticated enough to know how to do it.” Mass was interested in working-class bars set in rusted-out, often dilapidated, industrial towns that, by 1977 had suffered the hardships of de-industrialization in America. Although their post-industrial environments were threatening and lifeless, these bars, in Mass’ opinion, were “very friendly,” they were “homely bars” that provided warmth to the inhabitants of the corroded Northern New Jersey towns.²

Mass searched for a similar post-industrial setting in Manhattan and was drawn to the Lower West Side, where art communities began inhabiting abandoned industrial spaces in the early 1970s. The Lower West Side was not only the ideal post-industrial setting that Mass had been searching for; Mass felt a kinship with the art communities in the area, which developed as an extension of East Village underground movement in response to urban change in Lower Manhattan. Quaintly snuggled between other brick and limestone industrial buildings 77 White Street was a corner building at the intersection of White Street and Courtlandt Alley. It once housed the Reem Paper Corporation, but had been converted into an artist’s loft during the early 1976 after the dissolution of Manhattan’s manufacturing base. The old streets were intimate and narrow; the pavement was torn, strewn with potholes, garbage and other debris. Many windows that were not boarded-up with dirty plywood were either broken, or the glass had been

² Steve Mass quoted in Gary Kenton, “Here’s Mudd in Your Sleaze: Disco and Decadence at Lower Manhattan’s After-hours ‘In’ Club,” *Washington Post*, June 22, 1979, pp. E1, E3.

missing all together. 77 White Street was an ideal location for a post-industrially themed underground nightclub.

The Birth of The Mudd Club and the Post-industrial Aesthetic of the Underground

In 1978, Ross Bleckner, the owner of 77 White Street, accepted Steve Mass' proposition to rent his building for the night club that Mass envisioned.³ The Mudd Club and Lounge (the namesake of the film studio founded by Steve Mass and Amos Poe in the East Village) opened at 77 White Street in January 1979, incorporating the post-industrial aesthetic that appealed to Mass.⁴ According to Steven Hager, the interior was decorated with the "crudest and cheapest materials available [;] the plastic bar was covered with airplane maps"; Tim Blanks, a patron of the club recalled that the interior "décor spared all expense."⁵ In 1979, *People Magazine* called the newly founded club a "dingy disco lost among the warehouses of Lower Manhattan"; while the *New York Times*, commenting on its post-industrial setting, said "it's not a place one simply happened upon."⁶ In all, the Mudd Club was "sleaze by design" as the *Washington Post* reported in 1979: Steve Mass created the club with a post-industrial aesthetic in-mind.⁷ Not only was the Mudd Club set among the abandoned manufacturing buildings and the ghosts of old Washington Market in the Lower West Side; the concept of the club incorporated post-industrial themes which ran through the interior décor, the music played on the dance floor, and even the fashion styles and attitudes of the club's clientele.

³ Hager, pp. 50; Steve Mass quoted in Kenton, pp. E1, E3.

⁴ Jon Pareles, "Dance and Music Clubs Thriving in Era of Change," *New York Times*, November 12, 1982, pp. c1, c14

⁵ Hager, pp. 50; Tim Blanks, "Mudd Quake," *New York Times Magazine*, February 25, 2001.

⁶ "Why are Lines Shorter for Gas Than At the Mudd Club in New York? Because Every Night is Odd There," *People Magazine*, July 16, 1979, Vol. 12, no.3; Suzanne Slesin, "Making the Scene at the Mudd Club," *New York Times*, April 21, 1979, pp. 20.

⁷ Kenton, pp. E1, E3.

According to historian Jefferson Cowie, nightclubs of the 1970s “negated the gloom and the emptiness [of the post-industrial landscape] by manufacturing a spectacle of meaning out of the very same void that others feared.”⁸ In the “last days of the working class,” nightclubs thrived throughout urban America; they provided a space where people could escape from the drudgeries of a stagnating economy. Lower Manhattan had been laid to waste during the urban crisis that plagued cities across the country during the 1960s and 70s; the working class was squeezed of its power as the America industrial based dissolved, leaving the empty shells of manufacturing centers and warehouses. Historian Peter Shapiro has suggested that nightclubs were the coping mechanisms of a generation that dealt with the deviation and disillusionment of the American capitalist system.

“As New York’s manufacturing base evaporated into empty factories and bolted warehouses of New York City,” Shapiro wrote “discotheques moved into those abandoned locations, recolonizing the dead industrial space, replacing the production of goods with the production of illusions. The economy was in tatters and people wanted to do what they did during the great depression- dance.”⁹

The founding of the Mudd Club was the expression of a generational ethos during the crisis of capitalism of the 1970s. Like the bars set in the corroded towns of northern New Jersey, that were “friendly” and “homely” and which provided comfort for an oppressed

⁸ Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010), pp. 319.

⁹ Peter Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco* (New York: Farber and Farber), pp.s 4, 195 quoted in Jefferson Cowie, pp. 317.

people, Steve Mass intended the Mudd Club to a warm home –albeit countercultural in nature- for the young artists of the East Village underground.¹⁰

The Mudd Club was a countercultural nightclub, rooted in the punk/new wave movement that grew out of the East Village underground. According to historian and cultural critic, Marvin J. Taylor, punk was a rebellious art form that began in New York City during the early 1970s; it “rejected the market place of commercialized music and returned rock to its roots.”¹¹ Cultural critic Micheal Shore understood that “the punk sensibility vulgarly celebrated urban decay with its surreal perversities and existential anguish.”¹² Indeed, even Richard Hell, the self-proclaimed ‘godfather of punk’, called the genre an “assertion of formless, inarticulate anger of ignored youth.”¹³

New wave evolved out of the punk movement in the mid-1970s, however with subtle differences in meaning. According to musicologist and cultural historian (and Mudd Club regular) Bernard Grendon, new wave was the juncture between punk rock as a popular art form and as an avant-garde movement: “What made ‘new wave’ especially pertinent ... were the tides that joined the New York art community with the Rock’n’roll world.”¹⁴ As punk evolved with the East Village underground through the mid-1970s, it took on a general revolutionary attitude toward late-capitalist society; and, along with new wave, supplied the downtown art scene with an aggressive, reactionary aesthetic that eventually informed the graffiti-inspired “punk art” which came out of the counterculture

¹⁰ John Rockwell, “Rock Meets Disco: Where to try it,” *New York Times*, April 27, 1979, pp. c1, c23-- Mudd Club became a “Lower Manhattan New Wave community center”; Pareles, pp. c1, c14.

¹¹ Marvin J. Taylor, “Playing the field: The Downtown Scene and Cultural Production, and introduction,” from Taylor, pp. 19.

¹² Micheal Shore, “How does is Look? How Does it Sound?” *Art News*, November 1980, pp. 78-86

¹³ Richard Hell quoted in Hager, pp. 11.

¹⁴ Grendon, pp. 273.

by the end of the 1970s. “Punk and New wave rock were followed by punk and new wave art,” says Grendon. “[T]hese symmetrical crossings peaked at the Mudd Club.”¹⁵

As a punk/new wave “community center,” the Mudd Club placed itself in opposition to disco as a musical genre, and even more so against Studio 54 which, through 1970s, was an icon for disco music and celebrity. According to Bernard Grendon, punk and new wave were “the first of the seventies rock genres to assume an explicitly hostile posture toward disco.”¹⁶ Punk and new wave opposed the glamour of disco and over-produced quality of its music, and the glittering decor of its clubs; punk rejected the clean and suave style of the disco clientele, who, with silk or polyester clothing, gold or silver jewelry, displayed opulent symbolic representations of wealth –if only illusionary. According to DJ Anita Sarko, the Mudd Club was the “antithesis of disco... it was a joke on Studio 55.”¹⁷ While Steve Mass did not have a problem with disco as a music genre, personally, he understood that the “crowd here [at the Mudd Club] is rabidly anti-disco.”¹⁸ Ronnie Cutrone who worked at the Mudd Club said, “You don’t have to be fabulous here [at the Mudd Club]. It’s not bourgeois like [Studio] 54.” As a punk/new wave center of the East Village underground, the Mudd Club and its post-industrial aesthetic imbued the anti-disco protest of its clientele: the music –however eclectic- was radically anti-disco; as was the dirty décor and urban setting. Steve Mass even went so far as to use a “punkish” metal chain to form lines out-sides in opposition to

¹⁵ Grendon, pp. 7.

¹⁶ Grendon, pp. 284.

¹⁷ Anita Sarko quoted from Michael Gross, “The Queen of the Discotheque Deejaays: At Clubs and Private Parties, Antia Sarko fiddles while Late-Night New York Burns,” *New York Times*, January 16, 1987, pp. A20; Hager, pp. 17.

¹⁸ Steve Mass quoted in Rockwell, pp. c1, c23.

Studio 54 and other disco clubs that used velvet ropes.¹⁹ Moreover, the Mudd Club's anti-disco ethos contributed to the overall countercultural atmosphere that thrived throughout the East Village underground.

The Mudd Club doubled as a countercultural salon and as an alternative art gallery for the downtown scene. According to cultural historian Carlo McCormick, underground night clubs during the late-1970s and early 80s were incubators for the arts; they provided an "exit strategy from the elitist art market" – which not only encouraged gentrification, pricing-out many artists from their residences in SoHo and displaced them to the Lower East and West Side; but ultimately galvanized the underground in protest to urban change throughout Lower Manhattan.²⁰ Similarly, art critic Micheal Shore made the case that underground night clubs blurred the lines "boundaries between visual art, performance art and rock concerts, between high and low culture, and between who is 'qualified' to be an artist, musician- or both."²¹ Glenn Branca a guitarist the Theoretical Girls, a punk band that frequently played at the Mudd Club, said, "To me, the really exciting thing is to go into a rock club and just do anything, pardon the expression, without trying to change anyone or force them into this false reverence for art."²² The Mudd Club was an alternative space which removed preconceived notions of culture; the club invited underground artists to redefine art for late-capitalist society.

The Mudd Club, by design, facilitated an interdisciplinary, cross-cultural environment. The sound system was designed by Brian Eno who persuaded Steve Mass

¹⁹ Hager, pp. 55; "Why are Lines Shorter for Gas Than At the Mudd Club in New York? Because Every Night is Odd There," *People Magazine*, July 16, 1979, Vol. 12, no.3; Rockwell, pp. c1, c23.

²⁰ Carlo McCormick, "A Crack in Time," from Taylor, pp. 81.

²¹ Shore, pp. 78-86.

²² Glenn Branca quoted in Shore, pp. 78-86.

to let him install a reggae reverb speakers units.²³ According to Diego Cortez, friend of owner Steve Mass, “I told Ross [Bleckner, the proprietor of 77 White Street] we wanted to open an artsy cabaret with Laurie Anderson-type performances. He didn’t want any loud music... [But] As soon as the contracts were signed, we brought in the big speakers.”²⁴ The sound system, which was rigged for reggae music, also functioned well playing several other types of music: punk, hip hop, power-pop, oldies, and retro-trash. “It could be punk one night and Puerto Rican the next,” said Steve Mass, “I have total control.”²⁵ According to Bernard Grendon, the Mudd Club’s eclectic music selection was modeled on an underground club in Chicago called *Mere Vipere*; indeed Tim Blanks remembered that music in the Mudd Club would “swing from funk to punk to junk in the space of three tracks.”²⁶ The Mudd Club’s diverse range of music drew its clientele; the music brought different types of artists together under one roof.

As an underground salon, the Mudd Club was a site where artists of all kinds could collaborate and develop innovative concepts that aesthetically and intellectually propelled the East Village underground. Bernard Grendon argues that the late-1970s and early 1980s were marked by explicit collaborations across cultural divides (e.g., David Byrne and choreographer Twyla Tharpe); all of this “criss-crossing,” he suggests, originated at underground nightclubs like the Mudd Club.²⁷ “Back then, it seemed all you needed was a liquor license and a sound system and you’d have a packed house,” said David Hershovits artist and writer. “Open to new experiences, people flocked to meet

²³ Jim Farber, “The Mudd Club: Disco for Punks,” *Rolling Stone Magazine*, July 12, 1979, pp. 18.

²⁴ Diego Cortez quoted in Hager, pp. 50.

²⁵ Steve Mass quoted by Farber, pp. 18.

²⁶ Grendon, pp.299; Blanks.

²⁷ Grendon, pp. 228.

their kindred spirits, exchange ideas and phone numbers, maybe hook up together on a project.”²⁸ The Mudd Club was not only about dancing, said the artist Maripol, “There was lot of intellectual exchange in art literature, music and film.”²⁹ “The Lower East Side was the Hollywood Studio, supplying all the actors, musicians, and fashion designers,” remembered another artist named DeAk,”but the Mudd Club was the office. No one had telephones, so everything was arraigned in the club.”³⁰ The Mudd Club was an aesthetic melting pot that blended art forms; it was a common watering hole where artists working in a diverse range of mediums came together to share their work and ideas, to collaborate and develop new styles and concepts that contributed to the East Village counterculture.

While the Mudd Club functioned as an underground salon, fostering a diverse and creative crowd it was also a place where in Andy Warhol’s words, “mistakes” could be called “experiments”³¹ The Mudd Club facilitated social transgressions, which entailed the mixing of class, race and gender; it was a Bourdieu-ian “habitus,” where cultural and social dynamics of power were renegotiated. “There was an anti-branding mentality throughout the club,” remembered performance artist Ann Magnuson, “it was the spirit of counter culture, with an emphasis on counter.”³² Most social interaction in the Mudd Club took place on the first and second floors. Through the entrance of the Mudd Club at the ground level there was a hardwood dance floor; exposed plumbing and sprinklers hung from the ceiling; the brick walls were painted black. Mostly-non verbal social

²⁸ David Hershovits quoted by Hager, pp. 123-124.

²⁹ Maripol quoted in Blanks

³⁰ DeAk quoted in Hager, pp. 56, 51-- Tina Lhotsky (who crowned herself “queen of the Mudd Club”): “The early crowd [at the Mudd Club] was one-third CBGB punk, one-third art scene, and one-third uptown elite. A lot of new fashion ideas were popping-up and a lot of personality cults were developing.”

³¹ Andy Warhol quoted by Grendon, pp. 300.

³² Ann Magnuson quoted in Elisabeth Vincentelli, “Its name was Mudd: Artsy Set Celebrates former Downtown Scene,” *New York Post*, October 23, 2010.

interactions took place on the dance floor; it was where people were seen and felt, rather than heard: young bodies moved together on the dance floor in loud music that made conversation difficult. The “no-dancing” room, however, was located on the second floor where atmosphere music played, and people could mingle.³³

The Mudd Club was a site of spiritual liberation for the young artists and patrons who came to dance, spinning madly in the music and lights. According to cultural historian Gary Jardim, night clubs are inherently spiritually transcendent places; the combination of the music, lights, and dancing “breaks down the mind/body duality.” Night clubs facilitate a Dionysian experience: “the goal... after all,” said Jardim, “is to transcend the ‘real’ world, to connect with the spirit.”³⁴ Going to the Mudd Club was an escape from the threatening and desolate streets of the Lower West Side; more than the “homely bars” of Northern New Jersey that inspired Steve Mass, the Mudd Club was a sacred temple- a sanctuary: performance artist Chi Chi Valenti considered the Mudd Club “really in the mystical tradition of clubs.”³⁵ According to historian Jefferson Cowie, nightclubs “dissolved the pain of the past into the celebration of the present, allowed indulgence to be the salve for the wounds of hop, and embraced the cult of celebrity in lieu of a generation’s search for authenticity- all mixed with a splash of Weimaresque fatalism.”³⁶ Tim Blanks remembered how the Mudd Club “created a liberating environment, most singularly and romantically in the way it exalted art as a way to set

³³ Anita Sarko quoted from Gross, pp. A20.

³⁴ Gary Jardim, “Al Murphy and the Club Music Aesthetic,” from Gary Jardim, ed., *Blue: Newark Culture, Volume Two* (Orange, NJ: Village Press, 1993), pp. 143.

³⁵ Chi Chi Valenti quoted by Blanks.

³⁶ Cowie, pp. 319.

yourself free... it was a magnet for free spirits from all over America.”³⁷ The Mudd Club was the refuge of the East Village underground and the spiritual center of the countercultural movement.

While the Mudd Club was a site of spiritual transcendence it was also site of sexual liberation. Most night clubs have identity in terms of sexual orientation, says cultural historian Shelton Hays. But in the Mudd Club, “You could be male, female, gay, straight, it did not matter. Whoever, whatever you wanted, you could do it. No one looked upon you strangely or questioned what you were doing.”³⁸ The Mudd Club was liberating environment that created a “sense of wild freedom.. [and] cultivated an anything-goes attitude” according to the *New York Post*.³⁹ “[F]or sheer kinkiness, there has been nothing like it since the cabaret scene in 1920s Berlin,” said *People Magazine* in 1979.⁴⁰ *Queerbeat* magazine called the Mudd Club a “homohangout” where “cult figures” of the downtown scene like Allen Ginsberg often made appearances.⁴¹ The sexually liberal and spiritually transcendent environment at the Mudd Club broke the chains of late-capitalist society; by dancing and reveling in orgiastic pleasure, patrons bucked the social norms of an increasingly morally conservative America during the late-1970s and early-1980s.

The Mudd Club promoted progressive gender norms through the radical and sexually transgressive acts that performed. By 1981 “an increasing number of all girl rock

³⁷ Blanks.

³⁸ Shelton Hays, “The Club,” from Jardim, pp. 130.

³⁹ Vincentelli.

⁴⁰ “Why are Lines Shorter for Gas Than At the Mudd Club in New York? Because Every Night is Odd There,” *People Magazine*, July 16, 1979, Vol. 12, no.3.

⁴¹ “On the Beat...,” *QueerBeat*- Gay Community News, 10, 8-8, July 24, 1982 (Bromfield Education Foundation).

bands” played in underground nightclubs throughout Lower Manhattan reported the *New York Times*. Joan Jett and the *Runaways*, formed in 1975, was the first of these female-fronted, girl bands, followed throughout the late-1970s and early-1980s by the *Bush Tetras*, *Delta 5*, *Babylon Dance Band*, the *Bloods*, and the *Plastics*, constituting a “full-scale sex revolution in rock.”⁴² The *Bush Tetras* were a very popular girl band that originated in Lower Manhattan. The band formed in 1979 and was featured as a semi-regular act the Mudd Club. “Rock-and-roll started off being male-dominated... but I think times are changing,” said guitarist Pat Place in 1981. “There are a lot more women doing a lot of things now. Seeing people like Patti Smith and also Tina Weymouth [the bassist for the Talking Heads]... was important... they showed that women could get out there and play rock-and-roll and be accepted.”⁴³ Girl bands like the *Bush Tetras* promoted progressive gender norms; they put females in leading roles and, as a girl band, were part of larger a movement of girl bands that countered the male-dominated music industry.

The B-52s were another Mudd Club band that pushed a progressive attitude toward gender in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The band formed in Macon, Georgia in 1977 and came to New York City in 1978 to become the “unofficial house band” at the Mudd Club. Their performances critiqued conservative gender norms by dancing and singing “deck out in dime-store wigs and suburban house wife garb.”⁴⁴ In all gender norms were up for renegotiation; as a counter cultural melting pot the Mudd Club was forum where artists and patrons came together to define an alternative society, where

⁴² Robert Palmer, “Rock’s New Women are going it Alone,” *New York Times*, May 22, 1981, pp. c1.

⁴³ Pat Place quoted by Palmer, pp. c1.

⁴⁴ John Rockwell quoted in Grendon, pp. 289; Hager, pp. 57.

experimentation and dialog ultimately shaped attitudes towards gender through the 1980s and even inform contemporary society.

While the Mudd Club fostered countercultural values like progressive attitudes toward gender, it was also an egalitarian space across broader racial, social and economic lines. Nightclubs of the late 1970s promised “a new inclusiveness that could bring that could bring together the races, the sexualities, the classes, and the ideologies into one big –if fleeting- social triumph over the fragmentation of social life,” according to historian Jefferson Cowie. “[Night clubs] were a hedonistic and solipsistic response to an economy gone bad, a state revealed as corrupt, and a nation bereft of its mission.”⁴⁵ Indeed the Mudd Club was one of the only places in the country where graffiti writer, Fab Five Freddy and beat poet William S. Burroughs could be seen together.

Inclusivity at the Mudd Club and at most clubs throughout Lower Manhattan depended on door policy. 77 White Street, the building that housed the Mudd Club, had a 400 person capacity; exceeding this limit was not only illegal, and considered a fire-hazard in a night club, but it also made the club experience uncomfortable with so many people packed into one place.⁴⁶ A door policy at the Mudd Club was essential. “Rock is supposed to be democratic,” said owner Steve Mass in 1979, “but democracy doesn’t dictate that anyone can cram into a small club. We can’t make it first come, first serve, otherwise my personal friends, the people who started this whole thing and made it what it is, would come late and couldn’t get in. That would be awful.”⁴⁷ VIPs, who were mostly the friends of Steve Mass, were given laminated ID cards that read “Mudd

⁴⁵ Cowie, pp. 320.

⁴⁶ Kenton, pp. E1, E3.

⁴⁷ Steve Mass quoted in Farber, pp. 18.

College of Deviant Behavior,” and featured a photo, printed name, and address of the member.⁴⁸ According to Bernard Grendon, the door policy at the Mudd Club was based on fashion and symbolically represented socio-economic status: “Making a fashion statement is the criterion,” said Steve Mass. “[It] very important... there’s poor chic and rich chic” ; ‘poor chic’ was ranked above ‘rich chic’.⁴⁹ According to the *New York Times* in 1979, the door policy at the Mudd Club admitted those with a “funky, lower-East – Side-Chic dress code.”⁵⁰ Moreover, the door policy wasn’t “‘rich and famous’,” according to DJ Anita Sarko. “Our door policy was ‘tonight no plaid shirts’.”⁵¹

The Mudd Club was the home of the underground; it catered to the artists and young bohemians of downtown scene who rejected symbolic representations of wealth: “I actually instruct my doormen to make anyone who comes in a limo wait at least ten minutes at the door,” said Steve Mass, “I don’t think I’m an elitist.”⁵² The door policy critiqued symbolic representations of wealth such as ‘rich chic’ clothing and fashion, and limousines; and in doing so, enforced the founding mission of the Mudd Club as a countercultural center. Furthermore, the door policy at the Mudd Club reinforced the boundaries of the East Village underground subculture on the basis of fashion and attitude. “Recognition at the door is the acid test of where you stand on the below-23rd Street hierarchy,” said record producer Jerry Vogel.⁵³ “It’s not really a private club,” said

⁴⁸ Vinventelli.

⁴⁹ Steve Mass quoted in “Why are Lines Shorter for Gas Than At the Mudd Club in New York? Because Every Night is Odd There,” *People Magazine*, July 16, 1979, Vol. 12, no.3; Steve Mass quoted in Farber, pp. 18.

⁵⁰ Rockwell, pp. C1, C23.

⁵¹ Anita Sarko quoted from Gross, pp. A20.

⁵² Steve Mass quoted in Farber, pp. 18.

⁵³ Jerry Vogel quoted in Kenton, pp. E1, E3.

an anonymous patron, “but the owners do try to make it nice for the cool people.”⁵⁴

Overall the door policy bolstered the creative atmosphere at the Mudd Club and ensured the club remained an underground haven.

The Mudd Club and the East Village Underground

Overall, the Mudd Club was important because it enabled the East Village underground to grow and expand through the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, not only geographically throughout Lower Manhattan, but culturally and intellectually as well. The Mudd Club was a proving ground for a whole host of young artists that spearheaded the East Village underground movement. The most influential artists of the downtown scene came out of the Mudd Club; Jullian Schnable, Kenny Scharf, Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat all got their first exposure at the Mudd Club.⁵⁵ Jean-Michel Basquiat is a particularly instructive example in this regard.

In 1979 Basquit was living in the East Village, producing graffiti throughout Lower Manhattan. “Since he didn’t have a fixed address,” said Steven Hager, “he showed-up at the [Mudd Club] every night hoping to find someone to take him home.”⁵⁶ Like many of his contemporaries in the East Village underground, Basquiat was drawn to the Mudd Club and it quickly became his second home. Not only was the club a refuge for Basquiat, but its liberating and creative atmosphere enabled him to collaborate with different artists and develop a distinctive aesthetic. According to Bernard Grendon, Basquiat spent his early days of obscurity moonlighting at the Mudd Club; he performed with his ‘noise’ band, *Gray*, mixing ambient noises with random sound clips of radio or

⁵⁴ An anonymous patron quoted in Slesin, pp. 20.

⁵⁵ David Hershovits quoted by Hager, pp. 123-124.

⁵⁶ Hager, pp. 55.

television commercials or recorded telephone conversations, cutting and looping the pieces to create music by chance in the same way William S. Burroughs made cut-up poetry. “I was inspired by John Cage at the time,” said Basquiat. “[T]he music isn’t really music. We were trying to be incomplete, abrasive, oddly beautiful.”⁵⁷ The Mudd Club gave Jean-Michel Basquiat and other artists the creative space and the inspiration to produce innovative concepts that culturally and intellectually propelled the East Village underground.

1981 was the peak of the aesthetic collaboration in the East Village underground. South Bronx Graffiti writers and downtown art collectives began collaborating in the mid 1970s, fusing together public art and urban protest. Hip hop swirled with punk, as new wave became the third-element of what became known as “punk art”. 1981 marks the point when all the elements of punk art coagulated into a definable movement and art form, and the Mudd Club was at the center. Art critic Andreas Schallhorn has argued that underground nightclubs facilitated an “osmotic relationship between spray painters and artists.”⁵⁸ Similarly, Bernard Grendon has stated that the Mudd Club “provided the opportune time, a facilitating setting for the coalescence of those previously disparate components that together were to constitute this ‘punk art’.”⁵⁹

In 1981 owner Steve Mass hired artist Keith Haring to work at the Mudd Club. “I didn’t even have a job title,” Haring said. “He just wanted me there so my friends would come.” Eventually, Haring organized art shows inviting his friends from St. Marks Place,

⁵⁷ Jean-Michel Basquiat quoted in Grendon, pp. 302.

⁵⁸ Andreas Schallhorn, “Body Language: Keith Haring and the Renaissance of Figurative Paintings in the Eighties,” The Keith Haring Foundation Archives- haring.com—retrieved 10.1.12; Blanks.

⁵⁹ Grendon, pp. 301.

and artist who he had met through Colab, the underground art collective. “There was an empty room on the fourth floor,” said Haring, “so I thought, ‘what the hell, I’ll make this a late-night art gallery.’”⁶⁰ Throughout 1981 Haring curated three different shows at the Mudd Club, bringing together a wide variety of artists who had never worked together before: hip hop graffiti writers, punk and new wave rockers, underground artists, activists, photographers and bohemians of all kinds.

“Beyond Words- Graffiti-based-rooted-inspired-works,” was Keith Haring’s third show at the Mudd Club; co-curated by graffiti writer Fab Five Freddy, it ran three weeks, April ninth through the twenty-four.⁶¹ The show featured graffiti canvases and punk art works done by both South Bronx hip hop graffiti writers, and downtown arts; it was meant to “make people realize that graffiti went beyond words,” said Fab Five Freddy, “that it wasn’t just tags- that graffiti artists were also trying to develop as painters.”⁶² By the early 1980s graffiti art was highly controversial in the New York art world; many galleries did not consider graffiti ‘art.’⁶³ Graffiti art only circulated through the downtown art scene, produced on the subway or the streets, or displayed in abandoned buildings with the help of underground collectives.

“Beyond Words” was the first time a defined punk art aesthetic was presented to the public, albeit in a countercultural night club, and it caused quite a sit. A star-studded crowd appeared to see the punk art show: Andy Warhol and David Bowie were among the most glamorous, while influential art collectors like Jeffery Dietch and Henry

⁶⁰ Keith Haring quoted in Hager, pp. 106.

⁶¹ Jeff Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation*, introduction by DJ Kool Herc (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2005), pp. 151.

⁶² Fab Five Freddy quoted in John Gruen, *Keith Haring: The Authorized Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), pp. 66.

⁶³ Suzi Gablik, “Report from New York: The Graffiti Question,” *Art in America*, October 1982, pp. 33.

Geldzahler, Commissioner of Cultural Affairs in New York from 1977 to 1982 perused the displays. Among the people who came to see the seminal show were Mera and Donald Rubell, both private art collectors who were enamored by the art they saw at the Mudd Club.⁶⁴ “It was the most astonishing thing I ever saw,” said Donald. “It was an original movement!” Similarly, Donald’s wife Mera loved the show: “What we saw was a new vocabulary- a new idea.” The art show changed their opinion about graffiti as art and about public art. “We actually came face-to-face with the humanity behind the subway train-decoration movement,” said Mera. “These were real people, real artists. These were not criminals. These were young people who made a decision to communicate with the world. They decorated the trains because the art was addressed to their own peers- to their own social class.”⁶⁵ As the first public definitive display of punk art, “Beyond word” opened the world to an aesthetically original and politically potent art form that ultimately spoke to the inequities of urban change.

In all, the Mudd Club was important for number reasons: it was not only an underground center where the social dynamics of power were renegotiated; it was a countercultural melting pot where the ‘punk art’, the iconic style of the East Village underground coalesced. It was a post-industrially-themed club, set in the post-industrial Lower West Side; a haven for artists and activist who spoke out against the gentrification of SoHo; an incubator for the downtown arts scene, which helped expand the scope and depth of the East Village underground movement. Fundamentally, the Mudd Club was

⁶⁴ Donald Rubell is ironically the brother of Steve Rubell, the owner of the Studio 54 and co-owner of other clubs like Paladium.

⁶⁵ Mera and Donald Rubell quoted in John Gruen, pp. 76-77.

both a product and reaction to urban change, and was a staple of the East Village underground movement.

Conclusion: The Collapse of the Downtown Counterculture and the “Gentrification” of the Underground, 1981-2013

If 1981 marked one of the most creative flourishes in the East Village underground movement, it also marked the germination of two diseases that ultimately led to its dissolution: overtime, drugs and AIDS had a catastrophic affect and contributed to the collapse of the East Village underground.¹ AIDS spread virulently on the underground, in clubs where sexual promiscuity peaked.² “[I]t was still a mystery,” said Fred Schneider the front man of the *B-52s*, the un-official house band at the Mudd Club. “[N]o one really knew anything and you just heard about this horrible disease and you sort of know [sic.] you got it sexually.”³ Similarly, cultural critic Glenn O’Brien remembered “talk of something called ‘gay cancer, but AIDS wasn’t yet feared.”⁴ In 1982 AIDS emerged in a “big way,” according to cultural historian Steven Hager, when Klaus Nomi, musician and East Village icon was diagnosed and hospitalized with the virus.⁵ By 1984, more than 11,055 cases of AIDS were diagnosed in the United State, and 5,620 men were already dead.⁶ While AIDS killed off a significant population of the East Village underground, drugs also played a role in the attrition of the movement. The Mudd Club became a “downer” club, according to Steven Hager; over time, heroin decimated

¹ Bernard Grendon, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), pp. 315; Tim Blanks, “Inside Nostalgia: Mudd Quake,” *The New York Times Magazine*, February 25, 2001; Richard J. Goldstein, “Art: Patti Astor,” *Bomblog*, February 27, 2013. Bombsite.com--- retrieved 3.1.13.

² Sarah Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), pp. 26.

³ Fred Schneider quoted from Elisabeth Sussman, *Keith Haring* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1997), pp. 156; “Rare Cancer seen in 41 Homosexuals,” *New York Times*, July 31, 1981.

⁴ Glenn O’Brien, “Culture Club,” *New York Times*, T Style Magazine, August 27, 2006.

⁵ Steven Hager, *Art After Midnight: The East Village Scene* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986) pp. 119.

⁶ Marvin J. Taylor, “Playing the Field: The Downtown Scene and Cultural Production, an introduction,” in Marvin J. Taylor, ed., forward by Lynn Gumpert, *The Downtown Book: The New York Art Scene 1974-1984* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006) pp. 36.

the club crowd.⁷ Throughout the 1980s, crack cocaine also destroyed thousands of lives, devastating the East Village underground.⁸

In June 1981, Anya Philips, one of the original founders of the Mudd Club, along with Steve Mass and Diego Cortez, died of cancer, preceding the ultimate failure of the club.⁹ After the seminal “Beyond Words” exhibit, formally exhibiting the punk art aesthetic that became iconic for the larger East Village underground, the Mudd Club embarked on rapid downhill financial descent that ended with it closing within two years. The volume of people coming to the club had steadily decreased with the early onset of AIDS in New York City; similarly drugs played a key role in the lack of patrons to the club by the end of 1981. “[A]t the end it wasn’t much fun anymore,” remembered founding member Diego Cortez. “I mean, it had just become kind of like the hangers-on to the hangers-on at the Mudd Club.”¹⁰ Aside from these factors, the Mudd Club had been mismanaged: after being investigated for income tax evasion, managing owner Steve Mass was accused of attempting to bribe a city tax auditor, and paid several fines to avoid jail time. Mass liquidated his major assets and closed the Mudd Club in the spring of 1983; and subsequently dropped out of the underground scene all together.¹¹ The Mudd Club was a countercultural salon that supported the cultural and intellectual vitality of the East Village underground. After the collapse of the club, the larger movement soon met its demise.

⁷ Hager, pp. 119.

⁸ Elisabeth Vincentelli, “Its Name was Mudd: Artsy Set Celebrates Former Downtown Scene,” *New York Post*, October 23, 2010.

⁹ Hager, pp.119.

¹⁰ “A dialogue between Diego Cortez and Glenn O’Brien,” in Jeffrey Deitch, ed. *Jean-Michel Basquiat 1981: The Studio of the Street* (New York: Deitch Projects, 2007) pp. 15.

¹¹ Hager, pp. 122.

While urban change played a fundamental role founding and sustaining the East Village underground, it also contributed to its demise. By the late-1970s, increased corporate investment in cities throughout the country drew a new generation of affluent young professionals to the urban centers. “What is happening,” said Blake Fleetwood writing for the *New York Times* in 1979, “is that the basis of New York City’s economy is shifting from manufacturing goods to providing services and generating ideas, and as the nature of the jobs the city has to offer is changing, so is the population the city attracts.”¹² This new urban “gentry” drove-up the cost of living in Lower Manhattan, and displaced artists and working class people from the Lower East Side, where the East Village underground held a vital presence.¹³

The East Village gentrified in much the same way as SoHo in the early 1970s; new galleries, boutiques and chic restaurants began populating the area, attracting more wealthy residents who eventually displaced artists and working class families. Between 1982 and 1984, the East Village experienced its most intense commercial growth: in 1983 alone 12 new galleries opened in the East Village; 20 more galleries opened in 1984.¹⁴ “Suddenly,” said Steven Hager, “all conversations in the East village seemed to revolve around money.”¹⁵ The East Village experienced a burst of media exposure in the early 1980s, which drew “busloads of tourists” and ultimately transformed the downtown scene according to cultural critic Liza Kirwin.¹⁶ “One of the earliest signs of gentrification,”

¹² Blake Fleetwood, “The New Elite and an Urban Renaissance,” *New York Times*, January 14, 1979, pp. SM4

¹³ Hager, pp.118.

¹⁴ Perlman, *Unpackaging Art of the 1980s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 17.

¹⁵ Hager, pp. 118.

¹⁶ Liza Kirwin, “Hybrid Spaces, Polymorphous Creativity,” in Dan Cameron, ex. cat., *East Village USA*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, December 9, 2004 – March 19, 2005 (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005), pp. 85.

remembered Keith Haring, “was that it was safe for the gay clones [from SoHo] to come over here [the East Village].”¹⁷

Writer Sarah Schulman argues that creativity in urban spaces flourishes when artists thrive on affordable places to live; the diversity of thought and experience; as well as the stimulation the city; and the regular access to great artists and their work. If any of these factors are diminished, says Schulman, creativity in the city is destroyed.¹⁸ The gentrification not only out-priced artists and working class people of the East Village; the new white-collar labor force replaced the areas diverse atmosphere with a homogeneous culture that dried out the creative verve of the Lower East Side.

The media exposure of the East Village arts centered around two artists who became iconic, not only to underground arts, but to New York City in the early 1980s: Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat. Art critic Jeffrey Deitch purchased five of Basquiat’s drawings, all for \$250 at the *Times Square Show* in the summer of 1980; which, according to Steven Hager, was the first sale of Basquiat’s work.¹⁹ Between 1979 and 1980 interest in the art market grew around Basquiat’s street art under the pseudonym “SAMO”; he finally came under the representation of a major art dealer in March 1981: Annina Nosei was a highly regarded art gallery at 100 Prince Street, in the heart of SoHo. By 1982 Basquiat’s art commanded prices ranging from \$500 to \$4,000 each. As the artist was surrounded by increasing media attention in 1983, the average

¹⁷ Keith Haring quoted in Hager, *Art After Midnight*, pp.75.

¹⁸ Schulman, pp. 81-100.

¹⁹ Hager, pp.83.

selling price for a Basquiat painting went from \$5,000 to \$30,000; in 2013, one of his paintings was valued at between \$23 million to \$30 million.²⁰

Keith Haring's art began selling regularly after the "Beyond Words" show at the Mudd Club in April 1981; and by 1982, the artist came under the representation of Tony Shafrazi who, like Annina Nosei, was also a major art dealer in New York City throughout the 1980s.²¹ By 1984, Keith Haring no longer produced the graffiti inspired chalk drawings in the subway that he started in the winter of 1980 in emulation of hip hop graffiti writers. "[T]he subway thing started to backfire," Haring later said, "Everyone was stealing the pieces. I'd go down and draw in the subway, and two hours later every piece would be gone. They were turning up for sale."²² Haring, like Basquiat, experienced a meteoric rise to international art stardom in the early 1980s. The intense media exposure surrounding these two artists, brought their punk art aesthetic, created in the East Village underground, to the mainstream as a marketable, commoditized style which subsequently diminished the integrity of the aesthetic, and contributed to the collapse of the counterculture.

The economic, social and cultural gentrification of Lower Manhattan during the early-1980s erased the diversity, individuality, and creativity of the East Village underground. The influx of capital and the introduction of white-collar residents displaced artists and working class and poor families from the city, and replaced the

²⁰ Hager, pp.112; Tamra Davis, and David Koh (directors), *Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child* (New York: New Video, 2010); Marvin J. Taylor, "Playing the Field: The Downtown Scene and Cultural Production, an introduction," in Taylor, pp. 35; Carol Vogel, "Basquiat Painting Draws Top Price at Christies," *New York Times*, June 25, 2013.

²¹ John Gruen, *Keith Haring: The Authorized Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), pp. 74-85.

²² Keith Haring quoted from David Sheff, "Keith Haring, An Intimate Conversation," *Rolling Stone Magazine*, August 10, 1989; Phoebe Hoban, *Basquiat: A Quick Killing in Art* (New York: Viking, 1998), pp. 10; Keith Haring, "Remembering Basquiat," *Vogue*, November 1988: 234-236.

heterogeneous character of urban spaces with a homogenized, market-oriented aesthetic that paralleled New York City transition into late-capitalist economy. However, with the gentrification of urban space, according to Sarah Schulman, comes the “gentrification of the mind”; that is, gentrification erases the identity and memory of urban space, along with the corporeal conditions that constitute its character.²³ While historians and cultural critic have claimed that the memory of AIDS has been “white-washed” in the recent history Lower Manhattan, the influence of hip hop graffiti within the East Village underground has similarly been “white-washed.” Artworks by East Village artists like Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat sold well in the early 1980s, Steven Hager claims. Graffiti artists, however, had difficult time selling their works; although hip hop graffiti writers energized the East Village underground, few galleries were interested in their work. Throughout the 1980s and 1990, there was hardly any recognition from the art world of hip hop graffiti art, despite its historic catalytic role in the downtown scene. “The Whitney Biennial ignored graffiti art,” said Hager, “as did every other important American museum.”²⁴ More than two decades later, *East Village USA*, an exhibit at the New Museum in New York City in 2004, was one of the first exhibits in a major museum to consider the influence of graffiti art in the East Village underground.

Moreover, the historiography of the East Village arts during the late -1970s and early 1980s has similarly forgotten the fundamental role of hip hop graffiti; conversely, hip hop scholars have failed to adequately cover the East Village underground.²⁵ Part of

²³ Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind*; Dan Cameron, “It Takes a Village,” in Dan Cameron, ex. cat., *East Village USA*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, December 9, 2004 – March 19, 2005 (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005), pp. 64.

²⁴ Hager, pp. 128-129.

²⁵ Taylor; Pearlman; Steven Glahn, “Counterpublic art and social practice,” in Kimberly R. Moffit and Duncan A. Campbell, ed.s, *The 1980s: A Critical and Transitional Decade* (New York: Lexington Books,

this paper has attempted to fill the gap in this scholarship by showing how hip hop graffiti writers and downtown artists worked together during the late-1970s to produce a shared aesthetic that protested the inequities of urban change.

An analysis of a countercultural movement, such as the East Village underground, yields a unique perspective of a society and culture in relief; that is, from the point of view consciously rejecting social and cultural norms. As historian Philip Glahn has argued, downtown artists in New York City during the late 1970s and early 1980s produced public art in response to an ensuing wave of conservative politics and an ever-expanding commodification and privatization of culture; artists demanded “the inclusion of a plurality of experiences” rather than a homogeneous “prescription of moral standards.”²⁶ This perceptive account of the East Village underground is, however, incomplete without the consideration of urban change and its affect on cultural production.

Throughout this paper, I have argued that the East Village underground was a countercultural movement, rooted in artists’ response to urban change in New York City in the late-1970s. Foremost, artists reacted to the gentrification of SoHo, which had priced artists out of their dwellings, and displaced them to surrounding areas; chiefly to the Lower East and West sides of Manhattan. Once the locus of the avant-garde relocated from SoHo to the East Village a countercultural movement formed around existing cultural institutions, such as Film Anthology Archives, St. Marks Church, La Mama

2011); Jeff Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation*, introduction by DJ Kool Herc (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2005); Joe Austin, *Taking the Train: How Graffiti Art Became an Urban Crisis in New York City* (New York: Columbia University, 2001); Jack Stewart, *Graffiti Kings: New York Mass Transit Art of the 1970s* (New York: Melcher Media, 2009).

²⁶ Glahn, in Moffitt and Campbell, pp. 251-252

experimental theatre, and around underground art collectives such as Collaborative Projects Inc. Similarly, in the Lower West side, artists took-up illegal residence in abandoned buildings that once housed New York City's light-manufacturing base in the first half of the twentieth century. Underground artists in the Lower West Side also created countercultural institutions including an underground press, bookstores and, most famously, the Mudd Club.

Urban change in New York City created the nodal points through which the communication of ideas, styles and social groups circulated in the underground; urban change created the spaces where downtown artists collaborated and the movement took shape. Not only did deindustrialization leave a swath of abandoned buildings throughout Lower Manhattan which were used by underground artists through the late-1970s; the counterculture was informed by a post-industrial aesthetic that became distinctly apparent in the art produced by underground artists. The Mudd Club, the premier countercultural salon of the East Village underground, was also consciously based on a post-industrial aesthetic, which not only structured one the most important spaces of the movement, but also influence the art produced and displayed in the club. Similarly, the redevelopment and privatization of Midtown Manhattan beckoned the voice of downtown artists who protested the inequities of urban change. In an abandoned massage parlor that had been closed by the city government as a result of powerful public-private partnerships responsible for transforming Times Square, underground artists staged a countercultural art show to raise-consciousness to, and protest urban change in Times Square. As in the Mudd Club, urban change not only created the space where artists worked and presented, but inherently influenced the content of their art.

Urban change lies at the root of the convergence between hip hop graffiti writers and downtown artists, and the shared aesthetic they produced which became the iconic style of the underground movement. During the late-1970s, hip hop graffiti writers, whose art was a direct response to urban crisis and the substandard conditions of South Bronx, began collaborating with downtown artists first through alternative art shows staged by underground art collectives, and then through their mutual association to spaces like the Mudd Club. Downtown artists not only emulated the hip hop graffiti style; artists like Keith Haring even attempted to work within the hip hop graffiti subculture which depended on social capital and the legality of the graffiti art form. Hip hop's influence on the East Village underground was thus as deeply ingrained into the movement as it was culturally pervasive, informing art throughout Lower Manhattan during the late-1970s and early 1980s.

The East Village underground arts movement hinged on the influence of hip hop graffiti writers who emerged in the South Bronx in the second half of the 1960s. Hip hop graffiti writers sparked an aesthetic revolution when they started collaborating with underground artists in the East Village; downtown artists learned from hip hop's manner of public art as a vehicle of urban social protest, and as a means of communication between and within subcultures. Both movements were responding to urban change, and thus must be considered two aspects of the same voice of protests: the East Village underground, which took shape during the late-1970s, grew as an evolution of the hip hop graffiti movement started a decade earlier. Whereas hip hop graffiti was originally a protest to the physical deterioration of the South Bronx during the late-1960s, "punk art"

was adapted to protest the inequities of urban change in the late 1970s, which included the gentrification of Lower Manhattan and the privatization of Midtown.

Going forward, there are many avenues of inquiry into underground arts of the late-1970s that, because they fall outside the scope of this paper, were not addressed. Underground clubs like the Mudd Club and alternative art spaces like the *Times Square Show* were not only aesthetic melting pots, where various styles and mediums coalesced; they were sites of liberation, where social norms were renegotiated and identities were formed. Future research projects would do well to investigate how these spaces have informed our present attitudes toward race and gender. Broadly, how has the late-capitalist urban landscape influenced contemporary attitudes toward these same categories? Public health is another issue that, because of the narrative frame of this paper, was omitted from analysis. The first reports of AIDS in New York City surfaced in 1981, just as the vitality of the East Village underground was quickly fading. Future research projects should investigate the role of urban change in the proliferation of AIDS in New York City: did gentrification, for instance, restrict or exacerbate the spread of AIDS?

Investigation of this recent history is pressing for two reasons. First, there is a plethora of sources still widely available, and witnesses to this formative period of American history, though numerous, are not getting younger. Second, and perhaps more importantly, social, economic, and political paradigms that dictate present society took shape in the late 1970s; 1979, one historian has recently postulated, was the “birth of the

21st century.”²⁷ If we are to understand the crises and issues that afflict contemporary society, and in doing so begin to address them, we must first begin to understand their origins; many of which can be traced back to urban change in New York City during the late 1970s.

²⁷ Christian Caryl, *Strange Rebels: 1979 and the Birth of the 21st Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2013)

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