Drop Dead:
Municipal Crisis and the Geographies of Performance in New York City, 1972-1982

by

Hillary Miller

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Abstract

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In this dissertation, I argue that the fiscal upheaval that occurred in 1970s New York did not only affect the budget sheets of city-funded organizations; it also stunted the distribution of theatre across the city and the movement towards decentralization that began in the 1960s. I demonstrate the ways in which the policy responses to the fiscal crisis-- which formed the early foundations of neoliberal governance in New York City—had contradictory results in specific localities and across institutional domains. In the examples presented within these four chapters, theatre mediated conflicts over public resources, spatial inequities, and community identity.

In Chapter 1, I argue that as performers reconfigured representations on stage, Off-Off Broadway evolved in a dialectical relationship with neighborhood groups and local politicians. In Chapter 2, I demonstrate the ways in which the municipal vision of a river-to-river expansion model grounded in a thriving Times Square led to initiatives that often ignored the fundamental characteristics of theatre production in the city, when its strongest currents lay in decentralization, not a central district.

Chapter 3 examines the dynamic theatre programming of the Brooklyn Academy of Music, which, I argue, was not the stable center of rebirth, but rather part of many overlapping zones of performance activity that re-shaped contested urban spaces during the 1970s. In Chapter

4, I investigate two performance troupes in Coney Island and establish the ways in which performers were separated from the contexts of their neglected home neighborhoods. This study interrogates theatre as a social practice in times of municipal crisis, and establishes the mid-1970s as pivotal in the institutionalization of the arts in New York City.

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The achievement of this dissertation is shared with Tracy Hazas, giver of the tripartite balms of faith, patience, and humor. I am certain this would not have been completed were it not for our enlivening partnership and her daily inspiration.

***

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My aunt, Fern Devlin, was a passionate and erudite follower of the theatre and of visual arts in this city. New York was a muse for her life and work; the Soho sunrise and the seats of the Broadway playhouse were as meaningful to her as the colors of the fall season. I wrote the final chapters of this project while cloaked in one of her woven creations, and my efforts were warmed and buoyed by her incredible artistry and rich life. I dedicate this project to her.

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Introduction

Beggars in a Castle

We hang on by our nails down here.
--Vinnette Carroll, 1976[1]

During the summer of 1973, Broadway producer Alexander H. Cohen went abroad with a pile of theatre-related reading.[2] Protracted conversations with the League of New York Theatres and Producers weighed on his mind; that spring, Cohen and others in the League engaged in a contentious search for solutions to Broadway's myriad problems. Hit shows did not sell out, fewer plays opened, financers for productions could not be found, and dark theatres proliferated as fast as the theories of the causes behind the troubles.[3] Some producers blamed the industry's defects on the condition and reputation of the home for the legitimate theatre, Times Square. They changed curtain times to cater to skittish audience members and lobbied the city for more law enforcement, but an oncoming financial crisis created deaf ears at City Hall. Cohen and fellow producer Gerald Schoenfeld dismissed piecemeal solutions, and rallied around the idea of a city-wide theatre conference that could address the vast industry while lobbying for political momentum on supposedly shared problems.

His fervor for such an event only increased after his summer travel, when he read journalist Margaret Croyden's volume on experimental theatre, *Lunatics, Lovers & Poets*.[4] The

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[1] Clifford Mason, "Vinnette Carroll Is Still In There Swinging," *New York Times*, December 19, 1976, X4.
[2] Stuart W. Little, *After the FACT: A Report on the First American Congress of Theatre* (New York: Arno, 1975), 19-21.
[3] Ibid., 16.
[4] Margaret Croyden, *Lunatics, Lovers, & Poets: The Contemporary Experimental Theatre* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974).

book defined the surrealist and symbolist antecedents of contemporary experimental performance, and presented dispatches from Happenings, Jerzi Grotowski's work, the Open Theater, environmental theatre, and Peter Brook's avant-garde performances. Stuart Little described Cohen's revelatory reading of Croyden's study: "Here was a world of theatre unknown to him although in his own backyard, whose influence had spread, and whose ideas indirectly affected him and his colleagues. Returning to New York, he was more than ever persuaded of the importance of a broadly conceived conference."[5] The conference that Cohen convened, the First American Congress of Theatre (FACT), ultimately revealed the great depths of divisiveness between artistic communities. FACT invited the have-nots of the funding landscape to confront large-scale for-profit producers who also argued for subsidies. It introduced artists who viewed their work as an extension of the social justice movements of the 1960s to those who fiercely believed in Broadway as the pinnacle of professionalism guarded by a foolproof meritocracy of taste. It introduced communal theatre makers to self-proclaimed "rugged individualists." It exposed the discrepancies between conditions in neighborhoods of the inner city, and opinions on the role that theatre might play in alleviating them. FACT delegates and panelists argued over recognition, subsidy, and support, in a city poised to enter one of the largest municipal bankruptcies in the nation's history.

One element of the divisiveness showcased at FACT stemmed from an ongoing battle for resources during a time of re-appropriation. Non-profits and experimental theatres held the perception that Cohen and his co-conveners were late to the table and motivated by self-interest, not the good of the city's rapidly diversifying citizenry. In 1973 the *New York Times* published Joseph Papp's opinion piece, "To Break Down 'The Wall,'" which argued that the New York

[5] Little, *After the FACT*, 20.

theatre was not yet awake to “the exodus of great numbers of white middle-class to the suburbs,” or the wall of poverty, ignorance, and historical conditions that “separates vast numbers of people from the arts.”[6] Since the late 1960s, population shifts had changed audience composition but went unacknowledged by many on the Great White Way. Artists who worked in theatres downtown and in the outer boroughs used FACT as a platform to argue for an increasingly varied—and often populist-- vision for the role and function of the performing arts in New York City. Yet in the harsh light of the municipal crisis, this vision began to crumble.

“Ford to City: Drop Dead.” This *Daily News* headline from October 29, 1975, captured the response to President Gerald Ford’s initial denial of federal assistance to the bankrupt municipality.[7] My study illuminates the role of the theatre within local cultural, social, political and economic transformations during and after this, one of the greatest public sector financial crises on record. The period of fiscal upheaval that occurred in 1970s New York had specific effects on theatre, particularly as it related to the evolving perception of neighborhoods as theatre districts and residents as theatregoers. In this dissertation, I argue that the fiscal crisis years did not only affect the budget sheets of city-funded organizations; it also stunted the distribution of theatre across the city and the movement towards decentralization that took hold in the 1960s. I also demonstrate the ways in which the policy responses to the fiscal crisis-- which formed the early foundations of neoliberal governance in New York City—had contradictory results for theatres in specific localities and across institutional domains.[8] In the examples presented within

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[6] Joseph Papp, “To Break Down ‘The Wall,’” *New York Times*, July 22, 1973, 89.
[7] The denial caused a furor that surprised the Congressmen who viewed New York’s profligate spending as undeserving of federal bailout. Ford later changed his mind and signed legislation to provide federal loans to the city. Sam Roberts, “Infamous ‘Drop Dead’ Was Never Said By Ford,” *New York Times*, December 28, 2006, accessed February 20, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/28/nyregion/28veto.html.
[8] “Neoliberal New York was birthed by fiscal crisis.” William Sites, *Remaking New York: Primitive Globalization and the Politics of Urban Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 35.

these four chapters, theatre mediated conflicts over public resources, spatial inequities, and community identity.

I investigate "the performance of neighborhood," and argue that the effects of the fiscal crisis period can only be understood through analysis of the multiple dimensions of place and space. For example, on the Lower East Side, policies inspired by theories of "planned shrinkage" pitted downtown theatres and artists against many community organizations, while Joseph Papp succeeded in consolidating continued municipal support. In Downtown Brooklyn, developments during this period assisted in the rebuilding of a broken neighborhood, but also evacuated community theatre groups from the very stages that anchored the resurgence. The support for the growth of the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) throughout this time of enforced budget-tightening contrasts with the same period in Coney Island, when the built environment was neglected and street theatre troupes addressed the impoverishment of daily municipal service provision. Across all neighborhoods, theatre artists, communities, and city officials waged contentious battles over resource retrenchment, fueled by the confounding logic of austerity. Many of the cultural initiatives intended to be temporary—such as the TKTS ticketing program—in fact became institutionalized, while others created new tensions and new points of encounter between neighborhoods and theatres.

To its critics, the austerity measures implemented after the 1974 fiscal crisis in New York City (including the controversial "planned shrinkage" approach to urban redevelopment) were little more than thinly veiled attempts at a spatial reordering of the city. In the most nefarious interpretation, these aimed at the displacement of less desirable residents—newly arrived African-American laborers from the South, recent Caribbean immigrants-- who could not find employment. Many theatre artists responded to these vast demographic changes, and argued for

new visions of the theatre in New York City. Still other theatre owners viewed the shifts as symptoms of an urban crisis that threatened theatre production and needed to be solved. Similarly, new collaborations between communities, theatres, and institutions emerge as a defining aspect of this period; desperate conditions and declining audiences led BAM to open its doors to a range of theatre groups for dynamic collaborations. The residents of the outer boroughs, fueled by the decentralization of arts training, appeared on its stages alongside the avant-garde programs that would later comprise the bulk of BAM's offerings. However, the larger shift in audience composition dovetailed with resource retrenchment in certain neighborhoods of the city. Theatres actively engaged in audience development and community theatre initiatives were often the first to be stung by the repercussions of the fiscal crisis. I therefore link the uneven distribution of austerity measures across the map of the city with the dismantling of a robust decentralized theatre and performance landscape.

The years of the fiscal crisis spawned a reimagining of many areas, including Times Square, the Lower East Side, as well as the outer borough neighborhoods of Downtown Brooklyn and Coney Island. The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze a cross-section of actors in the cultural landscape—theatre directors and playwrights, politicians, community activists, organizations, and city agencies—involved in mediating the city stages in specific neighborhoods. This study is a larger interrogation of the theatre as a social practice in times of municipal crisis; economic and cultural changes operated as a determining force for theatrical production both then and now. How have neighborhoods, audiences, and theatres changed as a result of austerity ideologies, and how have theatres flourished or floundered in specific locations?[9] And, as city officials sought to lean on a vision of New York's cosmopolitan culture

[9] While sociologist Sharon Zukin was among the first to explore the transformation of SoHo's loft conversions from industrial spaces to working lofts for visual artists with her landmark 1989 study, *Loft Living*, there has been a dearth

to improve its image as it ascended out of the crisis, what were the implications for theatre groups and artists who had weathered the difficult years of austerity?

One chief consequence of the measures implemented after the crisis was the rapid rollback of the successes of the decentralization trend that occurred in the arts sector during the 1960s and into the early 1970s.[10] Decentralization paralleled the expansion of the theatre across the United States, New York State, and the five boroughs of the city. For some, this trend presented a dilemma of diffusion, and prompted fears of diminished caliber and quality of productions. For them, decentralization meant removing theatres from "a concentrated and competitive environment where they can challenge each other."[11] Advocates of this decentralization defined it instead as expansion and equity: an in-progress movement with distinct political underpinnings, begun in 1966, in which neighborhoods and ethnic groups questioned the city's resources. Artists demanded local facilities for their own brand of training, experimentation, presentation, and audience building.[12] They also, crucially, demanded not only the spread of services, but of the decision-making behind allocations.

Artists, educators, and cultural workers labored for greater recognition and during the 1960s they argued for structural changes to support new artistic forms and movements. Monetary support from governmental sources should, they argued, reflect the city's ethnic and racial

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of comprehensive analyses of the various migratory patterns of live performance. See Sharon Zukin, "Art in the Arms of Power," in *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989): 82-111. Zukin emphasizes the role of the art market in the growth of SoHo artist lofts, arguing in part that artistic movements such as Abstract Expressionism, Conceptualism, and Minimalism motivated the urge for larger studio spaces. While the Fluxus Movement, Happenings, and other trends were behind the rise of the artist's studio that contributed to urban change, she cites other factors as well, including the increased palatability of becoming an artist among the middle-class of the nation post-World War II.

[10] For more on Lindsay's changes to the structure of the municipal government, see Vincent Cannato, *The Ungovernable City: John Lindsay and his Struggle to Save New York* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

[11] Joseph Wesley Zeigler, "Centrality Without Philosophy: The Crisis in the Arts," *New York Affairs* 4 (Winter 1978): 17.

[12] Courtney Callender, "Bringing It All Back Home: Community Access to the Arts," *New York Affairs* 4 (Winter 1978): 91.

diversity.[13] The fiscal crisis, however, drained services from vulnerable communities reliant on subsidies, and enacted a silencing of those voices. City officials and mainstream producers instead strained to attract the spectral "lost audiences" that had abandoned the city for the suburbs. The gains of decentralization increased the geographic reach and overall dispersal of theatres throughout urban communities, but were later aggressively counter-acted through a range of austerity initiatives. Proposed and designed during the intensity of the fiscal crisis management period, these initiatives took different forms, dependent upon the neighborhood in which they took root. The process of decentralization involved every aspect of the theatre industry and related closely to the redefinition of neighborhoods; as a consequence, the theatre in these neighborhoods bore the brunt of the overhaul. The movement for community control of arts resources reached a pinnacle in the late 1960s and early 1970s; by the middle of the decade, it was more vulnerable than ever to attacks of provincialism, political radicalism, and urban malaise, all of which ran counter to the city's new image agendas.

As a consequence, this dissertation is littered with the carcasses of theatre companies and artists who thrived before (and even during) the fiscal crisis, but could not maintain equivalent operations after it subsided. One such example is Vinnette Carroll's Urban Arts Corps. The gospel revue, *Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope*, conceived and directed by Vinnette Carroll with music and lyrics by Micki Grant, was developed by its mixed cast of African-Americans and Latino youths from the five boroughs, mentored by Carroll through rigorous actor training. The musical won multiple distinctions at the 1972 Obie awards, the annual ceremony created by the

[13] Arlene Dávila has examined the development of El Taller Boricua, a workshop of Puerto Rican artists, and El Museo del Barrio, a Latino and Latin American art museum, two institutions founded in the late 1960s that received grants from the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA), City agencies, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the New York Urban Coalition, and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. See Arlene M. Dávila, "Culture in the Battlefront: From Nationalist to Pan-Latino Projects," in Agustín Laó-Montes and Arlene M. Dávila, eds., *Mambo Montage: The Latinization of New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 167.

Village Voice to recognize accomplishments in Off and Off-Off Broadway theatre. Its score of jazz and funk-inflected songs like "Harlem Streets" pushed local concerns to the fore.[14] The Obie host, eighty-one year old Groucho Marx, playfully ribbed out-of-work actors and leered at the female award recipients.[15] His antics struck a note of incongruity with the lyrics of *Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope,* which presented a litany of the challenges facing urban African-American communities:

> You know I asked my boss for a raise in pay
> and he said, "you should've asked me yesterday.
> Wages were frozen today, you see,
> so all I can give you is sympathy."
> And I said: "Don't fool with me, man! I can't cope.
> You mean I've got to wait till a big freeze thaws?"
> Well guess who's comin' to dinner? Because when my stomach starts growling….
> I can't cope.

The ensuing years proved Carroll and Grant prescient in their choice of topics and themes. The "big freeze" described in the title song would not thaw for another decade; *Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope* transferred to Broadway in 1973, and by the time it closed a year later,[16] New York City's unemployment rate surpassed ten percent, and residents faced widespread layoffs across the public sector.

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[14] Audrey Berman, "17th Annual Obies," *Village Voice,* May 11, 1972, accessed October 7, 2011, http://blogs.villagevoice.com/runninscared/2011/02/groucho_marx_ho.php.

[15] The 1972 ceremony also praised *Free the Army*, created by Jane Fonda and Donald Sutherland's antiwar troupe, and Video Free America's staging of Allen Ginsberg's long-form poem of mourning, *Kaddish*. The Obies had been running for sixteen years, and during the previous past decade, the awards event celebrated the expanding scope of Off-Off Broadway. In its first years, the Obies had focused on theatrical imports and American realism, including productions of works by Anton Chekhov, Eugene O'Neill, and Jean Genet. The *Village Voice* has indexed all of the Obie winners on their website, from 1956 to the present day. *Village Voice*, "The Obies," http://www.villagevoice.com/obies/index/1956/, accessed December 1, 2011.

[16] "Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope," *Internet Broadway Database*, http://www.ibdb.com/production.php?id=3533, accessed October 7, 2011. Carroll left the Ghetto Arts Program to develop the Urban Arts Corp (funded by the State Arts Council). For more on the Ghetto Arts Program, see Dávila, "Culture in the Battlefront," 167-70, and chapter four in this dissertation. For more on Carroll—the first African-American woman to direct on Broadway-- see Calvin A. McClinton, "Vinnette Carroll: African American Director and Playwright," in James L. Conyers ed., *Black Lives*: *Essays in African American Biography* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1999), 32-44.

The three-year economic plan implemented in 1976 included wage freezes to uniform forces and educational personnel, tens of thousands of layoffs, salary cuts, furloughing, and numerous steps to avoid bankruptcy.[17] The cover art of Robert W. Bailey's book, *The MAC, The EFCB, and the Political Impact of The Crisis Regime* depicted two balding, spectacled officials of the Municipal Assistance Corporation (MAC) and the Emergency Fiscal Control Board (EFCB) who handed soup to a breadline of stunned laborers: a police officer, sanitation and transit workers, a New York University professor, an orchestra member, and an actor holding a copy of *Backstage*. New acronyms that represented hastily created institutions— the FCLG, MAC, EFCB, OSDC— thrust a diverse and burdened class of workers into a desperate situation together, all forced to absorb the shocks of austerity. These acronyms were formed seemingly overnight in response to the fact that the largest city in the United States could not meet its financial obligations; billions of dollars of short-term debt reflected long-standing deficits and poor accounting practices. Default loomed, and the crisis dragged on the very imagination of New York City residents and its boosters, as "the city most identified with Western capitalism was cash poor."[18] While analysts and historians have hypothesized the origins of and reasons for the onset of the fiscal crisis, economist William K. Tabb describes the ultimate impact of the austerity framework as thrusting New York City into a "retrenchment era…one of constant shrinking."[19] When former city Comptroller Abe Beame was elected Mayor in 1974, New York provided fifty million dollars annually to arts programs through budgets and agencies, and the

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[17] The city entered into a receivership model that would control budgetary surpluses for years. The Municipal Assistance Corporation (MAC) was created by state legislation and formed by a group of banking executives and the investment house of Lazard Frères to evaluate and implement economic policy. For a comprehensive account of the activities of MAC during the 1970s, see Robert W. Bailey, *The Crisis Regime* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984); William K. Tabb, *The Long Default* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1982); and Martin Shefter, *Political Crisis/Fiscal Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).
[18] Tabb, *The Long Default*, 1. The State Financial Control Board still exits today. Though the "emergency" designation was deemed unnecessary after 1978, it reviews the financial plan of the city and there are provisional conditions for it to become an active player in the city budget again.
[19] Ibid., 37.

pressure to do so effectively was greater than ever. The future of New York as both a cultural capital and a solvent city were understood as linked to the ability of the city to stimulate and revive "the nation's cultural heart."[20] The relative health and productivity of arts institutions--however the city chose to define them— became both a harbinger and an engine of the fiscal crisis rebound.

Yet a distinct tension remained. Organizations that pioneered a decentralized arts landscape were often located in the very neighborhoods (with the very audiences) that became the victims of 1970s austerity policies. The inciting incident of the fiscal crisis frames my examination of the theatrical practices in relation to arts funding, demographic shifts, and neighborhood cultural resources. The Beame administration did not attend to this careful linkage, and its actions towards strengthening and protecting the performing arts proved inconsistent and even hollow. In 1975, Beame expressed optimism about the power of the city's cultural offerings to repair the wounds of fiscal crisis. "There's nothing like New York," he proclaimed, when speaking about the economic importance of the arts in the city, "a factor that assumes even greater urgency when money is short."[21] Perhaps most compelling to Beame, a cultural Renaissance might soothe the image crisis that threatened New York's identity as a global cultural center and present an alternative in the face of "Drop Dead" headlines. Many city agencies believed that the global media capital was drowning itself in negative publicity.[22] *New*

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[20] Robert A. Mayer, "New York: The State of Art," *New York Affairs* 4 (Winter 1978): 7. See also Ada Louise Huxtable, "Art, Money and Impotence in New York," *New York Times*, December 15, 1974, 151.
[21] Richard F. Shepard, "Beame is Upbeat Over the Cultural Life of the City" *New York Times*, April 8, 1975, 30. Beame's confidence was undergirded by a major initiative to reposition and reevaluate the role of the arts within the city, headed by Martin E. Segal. Segal tirelessly advocated for the economic importance of the arts as the chairman of the City Commission for Cultural Affairs, charged with recommending policies for a newly created Cultural Affairs agency.
[22] Sociologist Miriam Greenberg's enlightening study focuses on the branding of New York immediately after the fiscal crisis, when negative depictions of the city within cultural production (such as Neil Simon's *The Out of Towners*) proliferated. As an early example of the "image crisis discourse" that heightened throughout the 1960s and 1970s, she describes an angry Robert Moses protesting the poor publicity received by his World's Fair. His primary

York magazine suggested that the arts could play a prominent role in sparing New York from the harsh judgment of the rest of the country: "New York's cultural life at all levels is what makes the city visible to the rest of the country and modifies the hinterland's resentful willingness to let the city slide into fiscal ruin."[23] In his rhetoric, Beame thrust a conveniently populist dimension behind the city's creative endeavors: "I doubt there is any other place in the world where cultural activities are brought as close to the man in the street as they are in this city."[24] In this dissertation, I argue that through the life of the fiscal crisis, the remove between theatre and those "in the street" in fact widened. As money for parks and plays diminished, street performance activities were defunded and curtailed; theatre centers on city-land proved most successful in their missions; and tenuous theatrical advocacy attempts failed. Beame sought to bolster a new image for the city amid financial disputes. But the expanding corners of the theatre production landscape tested the city's commitment, salvaged by the advocacy of arts leaders like Martin Segal and individual theatre producers. Meanwhile, artists continued to make the case that theatre activities in the areas of the city neglected by major cultural institutions—from Coney Island to Bedford-Stuyvesant to the Lower East Side—were in most dire need of performance resources.

Theatre production during the 1970s faced mounting obstacles: institutional deficits, salaries not keeping pace with inflation, skyrocketing production and maintenance costs, and escalating crime in their neighborhoods. As inflation, expansion to meet growing audience demands, and the "ever-precarious financial condition of a labor-intensive industry combined to keep arts organizations in (or near) the red, federal funds often acquired the status of making the

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concern was "the characterization of New York as a 'dying city full of wrath and tears,' from which tourists, investors, and the white middle class in general should flee." Miriam Greenberg, *Branding New York: How a City in Crisis Was Sold to the World* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 49.

[23] Carter Ratcliff, "The Culture Vulture Flies Higher," *New York*, April 10, 1978, 50.

[24] Shepard, "Beame is Upbeat."

crucial difference between survival and bankruptcy."[25] Just one month after Beame publicly advertised his "optimism" about the cultural life of the city, the paper of record reported the toll of cuts on cultural institutions and their public services: ten percent cuts were followed by 8.5 percent cuts, and cultural institutions threatened to leave the city.[26] Just one year after that, Claude Shostal, the new chief of Cultural Affairs, predicted bruising battles for money between Cultural Affairs, fire, sanitation, and police. The Department's budget was down to twenty-eight million dollars from fifty million dollars because of the City's budgetary squeeze.[27] The arts were officially pitted against the essential services of the city. Amid these high stakes, the legacy of urban renewal played a large part in the cultural positioning of the theatre in the city.

Urban Renewal

It would be unproductive to look at the cultural production of this period across multiple urban geographies without the context of post-World War II urban renewal strategies and approaches to cultural development. Since World War II, city boosters staked much of New York's urban identity (and economic vitality) on its status as an international arts hub. Historian Samuel Zipp argues persuasively that this Cold War-era urban renewal resulted in both the transformation of New York into a "world city" and one mired in urban crisis-- two elements crucial to future performance practices in the city.[28] "It is the *cultural* impact of the pro-growth

[25] Margaret J. Wyszomirski, "Arts Policymaking and Interest-Group Politics," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 14 (Oct. 1980): 29.
[26] Grace Glueck, "Cultural Agencies Reducing Hours and Security: Cultural Services Feel Impact of Cuts," *New York Times*, November 3, 1975, 1.
[27] Louis Calta, "City Cultural Affairs Chief Foresees Money Battles," *New York Times*, August 18, 1976, 46.
[28] In much scholarly writing, the concept of a "world city" is considered synonymous with the "global city"; that is, it refers to a city that maintains prominent standing as measured by the global economy and, specifically, its strength within the technology and finance industries. Economist Saskia Sassen is closely associated with scholarship on the "world city," largely due to her work on the global city as an emblem of globalization. While the global city connotes the primacy of the translocal forces over local economic policy, Sassen has also written of world cities as contested spaces, with multiple presences and multiple economies. Anthropologist Setha Low adds that the global

philosophy of the modernist urban renewal that needs to be emphasized," as this is what remade the space of the city.[29] The very projects that city leaders hoped would transform New York into an international destination also set off years of struggle between community interests, planners, and developers. For example, the Lincoln Square renewal of the 1960s was "the largest, most ambitious, far-reaching, and idealistic of New York's urban renewal efforts."[30] Spearheaded by John D. Rockefeller III and Robert Moses, Lincoln Square represented

> a symbol of national cultural maturity and urban resurgence that could be brandished in the Cold War with the Soviet Union. In a time when both urban renewal and the performing arts were envisioned as resources for shoring up the nation's internal cultural defenses, Lincoln Center brought these two cultural and urban missions together in one shining symbol and gave them concrete form in the cityscape. Rockefeller and his allies hoped that it would prove that Americans living in what he called the "affluent society" valued "spiritual" as much as material goods; they sought to symbolize these linked missions by providing Lincoln Center with a setting on par with classical European models of urban planning.[31]

Rockefeller's zeal for "public good" via the arts relied heavily on urban renewal practices and policies. And, as I explore in this dissertation, the 1970s tested the depth of commitment—and

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city must be understood in tandem with the "global factory," and, necessarily, migration. Thinking of New York in these terms places it within the context of changing global economies, and draws attention to the twin issues of economic polarization and migration. See Saskia Sassen, "Analytical Borderlands: Race, Gender and Representation in the New City," *Re-presenting the City: Ethnicity, Capital and Culture in the 21st Century Metropolis*, Anthony D. King, ed. (New York: NYU Press, 1996), 183-202; and Setha M. Low, "Introduction: Theorizing the City," in *Theorizing the City: The New Urban Anthropology Reader*, Setha M. Low, ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 1-35.

[29] Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[30] Ibid., 159.

[31] Ibid., 157. Another Rockefeller project motivated by similar philosophies was the Arts and Business Council, created in 1965 by a group of business leaders from the New York Board of Trade, with arts membership starting in 1970s, and non-profit incorporation in 1973. This was an early prototype of an advocacy model that has only increased in popularity, with a strategy that links business and the arts through organizational networks.

exemplified the contrasts in definitions—of art for the public good. During the fiscal crisis, the cultural jewels of the city, areas like Times Square, Lincoln Center, and Brooklyn Academy of Music, confronted issues of declining relevance, reputation, reception, and stability.[32] The scale of the Lincoln Center development had ramifications for uptown, downtown, and outer-borough theatre. Marvin Carlson writes of the ascendency of the arts complex phenomenon at this time, where performance structures were clustered together to form "a kind of supermonument, an entire artistic enclave within the city."[33] This twentieth-century development in the long historical trend of the theatre as public monument demonstrates municipal dedication to the arts while also integrating commercial concerns.[34]

My choice to focus on this time of fiscal crisis in New York City is therefore directly related to my interest in what David Savran describes as scholarship that specifies the relation between a given performance and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus*, the "'cultural unconscious' or set of principles which generate and organize practices and representations." In his article, "Choices Made and Unmade," Savran quotes Bourdieu in an effort to encourage inquiry in theatre studies that leans heavily on the interdisciplinary zones of cultural studies: "Even more important, too much [scholarship] ignores the social structures in which habitus operates, the 'arenas of production, circulation, and appropriations of goods, services, knowledge, or status, and the competitive positions held by [social] actors.'"[35] My analysis of performance in the 1970s therefore includes its organizing practices and representations in order

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[32] See Leonard Wallock and Dore Ashton, *New York, Culture Capital of the World, 1940-1965* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988).
[33] Marvin Carlson wrote about the Lincoln Center development as an example of a civic monument that controversially altered its surrounding neighborhood. Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 92.
[34] As Carlson points out, Lincoln Center did not fulfill all of its early publicity promises, and the Vivian Beaumont "never achieved a stable existence," but the development still remains one of the most successful projects in history by many measures. Ibid., 94.
[35] David Savran, "Choices Made and Unmade," *Theater* 31 (Summer 2001): 93.

to reach beyond the dualisms of professional versus amateur theatre; experimental versus activist cultural production; avant-garde versus commercial; uptown versus downtown. This allows me to also incorporate the spatial flow of performances, how they were marketed and sold, where they began and where they moved, how they were perceived or marginalized, and the struggles for power between the artists and the city, the producers and the theatres, and even the artists and the theatres. The ten-year period allows for a sharp and strategic analysis of these arenas, not least because it was a period of economic and social desperation in which resources within the city were drastically reapportioned and re-evaluated. Savran argues that Bourdieu's terminology distinguishing different forms of capital—economic, cultural, social, and symbolic—can be applied to any given performance. And as John Mollenkopf contends in his study of New York City politics under the coalition of Mayor Edward Koch, the cultural capital of arts institutions is difficult but necessary to assess, as prestige and resources absolutely played a role in the rebound of the economy during the early 1980s: "Elite cultural institutions have helped New York keep its competitive edge as a global city; as geography becomes less determinant for economic location, cultural amenities become stronger. The richness of the city's popular culture and its ethnic diversity reinforce this attraction."[36] I will investigate the tensions between its diversity and its cultural production, smoothed over in this formulation. Further, "elite cultural institutions" in this context appears to reference those institutions that would fall under Bourdieu's classification of "large scale" productions (in the case of New York, "commercial" productions such as Broadway, as well as large non-profit theatres). But scholars increasingly acknowledge the symbolic and cultural capital conferred upon neighborhoods by both "large

[36] John Hull Mollenkopf, *A Phoenix in the Ashes: The Rise and Fall of the Koch Coalition in New York City Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 53.

scale" and "small scale" productions.[37] In fact, they can both be seen as essential to the phenomenon that Mollenkopf describes; Bourdieu defines the generative opposition between these two forms as part of the very structure of "simultaneously economic and symbolic power relations which defines the field of production."[38] However, Robert W. Bailey acknowledges-- with some exasperation-- that measuring the impact of New York's near-bankruptcy is "easier said than done."[39] Indeed, to analyze the distributional effects of retrenchment *on the ground* in large scale and small scale theatre communities is one objective of this dissertation.

This calls attention to the sociological dimension of my methodology. According to Manuel Castells, the classic questions of sociological literature were, until the mid-1980s, as follows: Who holds power in the city? Whose interests are fulfilled by urban redevelopment and whose are undermined by it? Observing with approval the increased acceptance of the idea that cities are shaped by class interests, Castells frames the change in perspective across his field:

> The matter is not who has power *in* the city, but who controls (and whose interests are fulfilled by) what happens *on* the city. The city is no longer seen as an autonomous social system whose politics have to be deciphered, but rather as a social product resulting from larger societal forces and processes. Cities are far more complex than accounting systems; they are sociopolitical entities, and therefore their crises, their expansion, and their variations have to be understood as a social process of structurally conditioned conflicts.[40]

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[37] See David Savran's writing on *Rent*'s "grunge-chic" in, *A Queer Sort of Materialism: Recontextualizing American Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 35-47.
[38] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, translated by Richard Nice, edited and introduction by Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 83.
[39] Robert W. Bailey, *The Crisis Regime: the MAC, the EFCB, and the political impact of the New York City Financial Crisis* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984), 11.
[40] Manuel Castells, "Class and Power in American Cities," *Contemporary Sociology* 13 (May 1984): 270.

Since Castells noted this change, sociological understandings of the city have continued to shift; political systems analysis moves alongside neo-Marxist perspectives inspired by Michel de Certeau; Peter Marcuse's writings on the "right to the city" integrated the arguments of Henri Lefebvre to introduce new theories of urban space and justice. In theatre's relatively recent spatial turn, methodological challenges are ever present, and "the city" as a site of performance has been theorized in multiple ways across the discipline.[41] These imaginings have in common a particularly spatial awareness, and allow the tensions in the city—private space and political freedom, urban space and collective memory, and the very definition of "public"— to emerge. Radical geographer Edward Soja encourages utilizing the lens of spatial justice in order to recompose "our lived spaces of representation as potentially nurturing places of resistance,"[42] and this concept enlivens my readings of performance across the city in the 1970s.

Laura Levin and Kim Solga have similarly attempted to move existing critical discourse about urban dramaturgy in a more productively political direction—to incorporate autonomous, multifaceted critiques "of the political, economic, and social tensions bisecting public space."[43] If one endeavors to understand theatre in the city through this kind of layering of sociological questions as they intersect with urban space, it becomes possible to analyze the processes of both

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[41] There has been an influx of work within theatre scholarship that takes into account the social quality of space as essential to understanding artistic production. Recent scholarship includes D.J. Hopkins and Kim Solga, eds. *Performance and the Global City* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013); Nicolas Whybrow, ed. *Performance and the Contemporary City: An Interdisciplinary Reader* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010); Michael McKinnie, ed. *Space and the Geographies of Theatre* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2007); Marina Peterson and Gary W. McDonogh, eds. *Global Downtowns* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), Jen Harvie, *Theatre & the City* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); and Karen Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005). Bertie Ferdman's 2010 dissertation investigated the public/private tensions inherent in the spatial politics of performance in New York City with a focus on contemporary site-specific theatre. See Bertie Ferdman, "Contemporary Site-Specific Theatre in New York City: Performance, the City, and Spatial Politics" (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Center of the City University of New York, 2010).

[42] Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996): 12.

[43] Laura Levin and Kim Solga, "Building Utopia: Performance and the Fantasy of Urban Renewal in Contemporary Toronto," *TDR: The Drama Review* 53 (Fall 2009): 44.

municipal decision-making and instances of cultural production. While many economists and sociologists have given great attention to the impact of economic restructuring and urban redevelopment on class struggles and social movements, equivalent focus has not been given to the city's theatrical movements under this restructuring.[44] The assumption generally holds that the arts—and performance in particular—will proliferate like algae in any cranny they can find. Such an assumption, however, undervalues the role of decisions of local governance, the relationship between city, state, and federal governments in the arts, and the importance of geography to cultural production.[45]

The ten-year span I have identified was a time of vast change in New York, marked by two recessions (1969-1972; 1973-1975), and many other byproducts of the culmination of the city's postindustrial evolution. More than any U.S. city outside of Detroit, New York sustained the bruises of these twin recessions and the process of deindustrialization. The economy hit bottom in 1976, and historians, economists, and political scientists identify the period spanning 1974 and 1982 as a turning point in the city's political and economic history. These years, many argue, set into motion the inequalities now endemic to the city's economy. Kim Moody's analysis does not emphasize the usual "boom and bust" interpretation of economic machinations, but rather the wrenching of power by business elites, who consolidated control over much of the

[44] See, for example, Susan S. Fainstein and Norman I. Fainstein, "Economic Restructuring and the Rise of Urban Social Movements," *Urban Affairs Review* 21 (December 1985): 187-206.

[45] It must be noted that the assumption that the arts do not require institutionalized support is unique to the United States. The history and structure of funding for the arts in the U.S. have followed a vastly different trajectory from other countries. Michael Kamman writes that while most nations of the world have a ministry of culture in some form, the notion seems "politically inconceivable" in this country. Michael Kammen, "Culture and the State in America," Casey Nelson Blake, ed., *The Arts of Democracy: Art, Public Culture, and the State* (University of Pennsylvania Press: 2006), 70.

city's politics, budgets, and resources.[46] Where does this large-scale restructuring connect with the theatrical production of specific localities?

Progressive Capitalism

> Bernie [Gersten]…likes to insist that he and Joe [Papp] are "fiscally conservative." By that he means that if Jules Irving had run up a healthy two million dollar deficit instead of his chickencrap $500,000 he wouldn't be in such trouble at Lincoln Center, because you can't live like a beggar in a castle. Bernie calls the Public Theater style "progressive capitalism."
> --Catherine Breslin, "The Hottest Show in Town is Joe Papp!"[47]

Unsurprisingly, the climate of austerity exacerbated the competition between theatre companies, and enflamed fissures between theatres with different ideological, aesthetic, and political positioning. One manifestation of this is the conflict that grew from the city's generous policies towards Joseph Papp's "empire-building,"[48] or Harvey Lichtenstein's efforts at BAM in downtown Brooklyn. While many revered Papp for his bold successes at the helm of the New York Shakespeare Festival and the Public Theater, many others harbored bitterness in response to Papp's "multimillion-dollar dominance over New York theater" that had been amply subsidized.[49] In 1976, after two Broadway shows, Obies, and Tony-nominations, Vinnette Carroll, frustrated in a sixty-six-seat theatre with her nine-year-old company, Urban Arts Corps, vented to the press: "We can't afford the failures that other groups can. We don't get the kind of money that Circle in the Square or the Shakespeare Festival get."[50] Carroll recognized that funding did not signify improved costumes or sets or even advertising—true support meant room to fail and still continue to produce. True support meant a position in the priorities of the

[46] Kim Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate: Regime Change in New York City, 1974 to the Present* (New York: New Press, 2007).
[47] Catherine Breslin, "The Hottest Show in Town is Joe Papp!" *New York*, November 29, 1971, 36-37.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Callender, "Community Access to the Arts," 89.
[50] Mason, "Vinnette Carroll Is Still Swinging," 5.

metropolis, for her theatre, her work, and her audience development. As with Vinnette and Grant's *Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope* characters, smaller arts organizations felt the harsh winds of fiscal insolvency before they suffered alongside the rest of the city as it confronted the depth of the problem.[51]

These tensions present an under-explored aspect of the fiscal crisis: it did not only affect municipal salaries and social services such as public education and transportation, but destabilized a promising trend in support for the arts. New York was "the prototypical New Deal city in the prototypical New Deal state,"[52] and its support for the arts had a similarly progressive reputation. Throughout the 1960s, New York State established itself as a leader in arts support, and functioned as a national model for government funding: arts funding on the state level originated with Governor Nelson Rockefeller's 1960 creation of the New York Arts Council, now known as the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA). The federal government adopted a similar approach in 1965 with the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). In the late 1960s, the funding stream inched beyond mainstream arts organizations such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, with monies directed towards new programs that reflected some of the city's ethnic and racial diversity. While important gains were achieved, this trend would not be sustained, even with the support of a powerful advocate like Rockefeller.[53]

One-to-one correlations between theatre funding and austerity budgets are beyond the scope of this dissertation. Rather, I investigate the consequences of a broad array of initiatives by the government, private industry, and theatre artists—spread across the network of the city

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[51] Albert Poland and Bruce Mailman, *The Off Off Broadway Book: The Plays, People, Theatre* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), lxxi. The Off-Off Broadway Alliance (OOBA) was formed during the 1971-1972 season. Headed by Bill Gardner (Urban Arts Corps), Dick Bruckenfeld (*Village Voice)* and Virginia Aquino (Workshop of the Players' Art), its common objective was to focus public attention on the movement and to raise funds.
[52] Bernard R. Gifford, "New York City and Cosmopolitan Liberalism," *Political Science Quarterly* 93 (Winter 1978-1979): 560.
[53] Howard Taubman, "Governor is Seeking to Avert Bankruptcy in the Arts," *New York Times*, Jan. 30, 1970, 28.

stages—and its myriad effects. As New York City and State progressed through the stages of the "Long Default," the austerity conditions that began with the ascendancy of the MAC were institutionalized.[54] During a period in which the 150-year tradition of tuition-free City University was abolished, many city expenditures were viewed as suspect. Historian Mike Wallace defines the 1974-1975 fiscal crisis as "not simply a matter of a money shortfall because the city was spending too much, although certainly we had a level of social services that was higher than elsewhere," but part of a global crisis, a worldwide recession.[55] Banks in New York had tremendous exposure to New York City paper, third world debt, and bankrupt corporations. Wallace argues that they leaned on New York through a "proto-IMF strategy," and treated the city as a developing nation that needed to be reprimanded for wasting funds on social services, an area in which New York City had been historically liberal. "A city living on the precipice of national disgrace," Bernard Gifford explained, "is hardly in the position or the mood to equate expenditures of funds it does not have with the public good."[56]

It is during this period of economic stagnation that many historians and economists locate the creation of the conditions seized upon by the "neoliberal city." As described by geographer David Harvey, this term refers to a restructuring of the urban economy around "financial activities, ancillary services such as legal services and the media, and diversified consumerism (gentrification and neighborhood 'restoration' playing a prominent and profitable role)."[57] Harvey takes 1970s New York as a central case study in his book, *A Brief History of*

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[54] Political scientist Martin Shefter looks at the political and budgetary consequences of the fiscal crisis and concludes that the heaviest burdens of retrenchment were imposed upon the consumers of municipal services. "A retrenchment program as profound as the one New York City implemented in the years following 1975 cannot but have differential effects upon the interests of those individuals and institutions with a substantial stake in the city's fiscal policies." Shefter, *Political Crisis/Fiscal Crisis*, 139. William Tabb describes this trickle-down to nonprofit organizations and community groups. See Tabb, 43.
[55] Ellen Noonan, "Interview with Mike Wallace," *Radical History Review* 79 (Winter 2001): 49–74.
[56] Gifford, "Cosmopolitan Liberalism," 560.
[57] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 47.

Neoliberalism, and identifies 1978 to 1980 as a crucial pivot: China took steps toward liberalizing their economy, while in the United States Paul Volcker dramatically changed monetary policy with the aim of fighting inflation at all costs, and, in the United Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher moved to curb trade union power and dismantle welfare state policies. They created a new economic configuration that followed the principles of privatization, deregulation, and the withdrawal of the state. The development of this new economic paradigm is not only relevant to New York City's urban history; as labor historian Kim Moody shows, this period ushered in new dynamics of urban economies that were increasingly dependent upon international financial speculation. As global capital met local capital, the city enacted a rehearsal for a larger, national restructuring.[58] The following years saw a fast economic turnaround, one that reversed the city's swiftly declining population, and ushered in a decade of fiscal prosperity. It was also one that benefited a lucky minority.[59]

Numerous theatre scholars investigate the contours of neoliberal dispossession through performance practices, and performance scholarship now reflects growing concern with "the bitter quandaries of neoliberalism that affect the pasts and the futures of theatre and performance research in particular, and with social welfare as a whole."[60] The space of the metropolis presents a "stage" for these analyses of class relations, power, movements, economic justice, and security. As Loren Kruger has argued, that performance persists in urbanist discourse "highlights not only the contribution of embodied practices to the life and meaning of the city but also the tension

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[58] Moody, *Welfare State to Real Estate*.
[59] See notes 56-57. Lizzy Ratner's 2011 article in *The Nation* summarizes the findings behind this argument: the "boom years" of the 1990s saw the top five percent of income earners double their share of the city's total income, while the remaining ninety-five percent saw their median hourly wage shrivel. The poorest fifty percent of the city claimed less than eight percent of the city's annual income. See Lizzy Ratner, "Boom Town and Bust City: A Tale of Two New Yorks," *The Nation* (February 14, 2011): 11-14.
[60] Lara D. Nielsen, "Introduction: Heterotopic Transformations, The (Il)Liberal Neoliberal," in *Neoliberalism and Global Theatres: Performance Permutations*, Lara Nielsen and Patricia Ybarra, eds. (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2012), 1-2.

between order and disruption, between the modern civility of the urban planners," what Kruger calls "the 'uncivil modernity' of upstart cities."[61] In post-Fordist New York, the emergence of these neoliberal policies frames the tension between order and disruption, evidenced clearly in New York City during the volatile years between 1972 and 1982. Much of the secondary source material I reference in this dissertation reflects the desire of scholars to excavate linkages between this growth of neoliberal ideology in the 1970s and changes to the quality of local spaces—streets, theatres spaces, and architecture.[62]

Therefore, my interest in looking at the fiscal crisis in New York connects to the approach that Jason Hackworth has supported, in which institutional-urban domains are used to examine the processes of neoliberalization.[63] Given that two interrelated components of his definition of the sprawling concept of neoliberalism are downtown development projects and forms of urban resistance, cultural production remains a key category to investigate. And as Hackworth further argues, neoliberalism is not merely "absorbed" by cities, but rather experienced, across space, and differently (often unevenly) from place-to-place. This study of New York's fiscal crisis period therefore focuses with specificity one region and four different zones within it, in order to interrogate the neglected aspects of how theatregoers and theatre-makers experienced the manifestations of these policies.

Within this frame of the formation of the neoliberal city, my inquiry is informed by an analysis of a range of material conditions that relate to cultural production—including laws, regulations, and resource retrenchment. In this, I am influenced by theatre scholars like Michael

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[61] Loren Kruger, "Cold Chicago: Uncivil Modernity, Urban Form, and Performance in the Upstart City" *TDR: The Drama Review* 53 (Fall 2009): 5.
[62] See, for example, Laam Hae's writing on economic, social, and cultural geography of the period. She shows how the spatial reordering of Manhattan resulted in the disenfranchisement of minority groups through the targeting of dance clubs by the city's zoning regulations and cabaret laws. Laam Hae, "Zoning Out Dance Clubs in Manhattan: Gentrification and the Changing Landscapes of Alternative Cultures" (Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University, 2007).
[63] Jason Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

McKinnie, whose research on urban space and Toronto's theatre illuminates the many ways in which theatrical and urban development intersected during the twentieth-century.[64] Like New York's, Toronto's theatre industry is part of both a local and transnational service economy; from this context, McKinnie then extrapolates the factors of post-Fordism, suburbanization, and long-term property value inflation and its counterpart, gentrification. He also identifies the contradictory desires of various theatre artists, local government agencies, and cultural organizations. McKinnie raises critical concerns while accessing the role of theatre in the development of Toronto's neighborhoods. Has the theatre affirmed the market economy more often than it has resisted it? Did the particular urban geography of Toronto itself play a part in theatrical production in the city? While it is important to foreground the unique elements of each city's historical development, there are similarities between post-industrial cities during this period that can be drawn out, and this dissertation is illuminated by corollary research in other city centers, such as that of McKinnie, Kruger, Ric Knowles, Laura Levin, and Kim Solga.[65] J. Christopher Westgate's research combines the representations of urbanism with the geographic imagination. Westgate focuses on plays of the 1980s and 1990s that brought a polyphony of perspectives about urbanism to the fore; his inquiry builds on the work of critical geographers and the "spatial turn" of theatre and drama criticism championed by Marvin Carlson, Stanton Garner Jr., and Una Chaudhuri, to define a "rhetoric of sociospatial drama."[66]

The "Me" Decade

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[64] Michael McKinnie, *City Stages: Theatre and Urban Space in a Global City* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).
[65] See notes 40 and 42.
[66] J. Christopher Westgate, *Urban Drama: The Metropolis in Contemporary North American Plays* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

In addition to the influence of these scholarly works, another motivation of this study is the perfunctory scholarly treatment given to the dynamics of 1970s theatre in New York. My research conjoins with recent works, like Elizabeth Wollman's *Hard Times: The Adult Musical in 1970s New York City,* that analyze and reappraise the legacies of the 1960s in the 1970s performance culture.[67] The Seventies are a contested decade among historians of the United States. Many theatre historians emphasize the 1970s as a period of great division and splintering, and they draw from a rich well of fissures around identity politics and radicalism. The fall out from Sixties radicalism is usually portrayed as a bumpy ride. Yippie activist Abbie Hoffman in 1974 jumped bail and went underground to avoid a cocaine charge, while his former co-conspirator Jerry Rubin embraced Wall Street.[68] "Our strangest decade," according to historians Beth Bailey and David Farber, was an "era of incoherent impulses, contradictory desires…an age of limits and an age of excess."[69] They attribute these competing themes of excess and limitations to the very same economic transformations Harvey identifies, and to a broad reconfiguring of identities. A recurrent identity explored in the pages of this dissertation for its representational salience is that of the working class. While the decade has been denounced as a time of "narcissism,"[70] the theatre companies and artists described in this dissertation are examples of the radical formations that facilitated protests from, by, and about struggling inner

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[67] Elizabeth L. Wollman, *Hard Times: The Adult Musical in 1970s New York City* (Oxford University Press, 2012).
[68] Herbert Blau described it as "a participatory period of improvisational method and instant gratification." Herbert Blau, "Spacing Out in the American Theater," *The Kenyon Review* 15 (Spring 1993): 28.
[69] "Historians have been slow to put the 1970s into the narrative of American history." Beth Bailey and David Farber, eds., *America in the 70s* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 1.
[70] Edward Berkowitz identifies the commentators Tom Wolfe, Christopher Lasch, and Lester Thurow as the major proponents of the idea that the rights revolution led people to act in "self-absorbed, hedonistic, narcissistic, selfish, and uncompromising manner," and "retreat away from the social purpose that marked the liberal postwar era." Berkowitz believes these authors misunderstood the country's turn towards conservatism in the Seventies. Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 158. Many historians have argued that the movements influenced by the Kennedy era were not as fractured as some attest, and that the activist excesses of the late 1960s "brought forth a legacy of quieter, more mature, and more sophisticated social movements seeking change." Stephanie A. Slocum-Schaffer, *America in the Seventies* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 129.

city neighborhoods. A category much maligned in media accounts during the fiscal crisis woes, the working class emerged alternately as a desired or neglected audience for some theatres, and an associative symbol for certain zip codes. Historian Joshua B. Freeman describes this phenomenon:

> When in the 1970s, images and discussion of New York workers as members of a distinct class again became common, they were associated with marauding hardhats and Archie Bunker, symbols of Vietnam-era backlash. By then, shifting residential patterns and changing housing and health economics had reduced the ability of the labor movement to serve its members and their families. Internal disputes, over racial integration and foreign policy and over who should wield power, further robbed the movement of momentum. Soon after came the fiscal crisis, which proved more damaging to New York social democracy than the Cold War. Beneath the cover of assumed economic necessity, a wholesale shift in power and normative values took place.[71]

This shift can be tracked—and mapped—across the city grid and on its stages. As a politics of growth transformed into a politics of scarcity, the tenets of the progressive social welfare state were sculpted into a nearly permanent "austerity state." Many residents and officials blamed former Mayor John Lindsay's "handling" and acquiescence to unreasonable wage and pension agreements.[72] Because of this, while the fiscal crisis has been most frequently analyzed for its repercussions in the financial industry and the municipal sectors of hospitals, schools, and union workers, the ramifications to artistic communities and performance activities remain largely underexplored.

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[71] Joshua B. Freeman, *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor since World War II* (New York: New Press, 2000), 325.
[72] See Steven R. Weisman, "How New York Became a Fiscal Junkie*," The New York Times,* August 17, 1975, 9.

Contemporary theatre scholars tend to evaluate the theatrical output of the 1970s on the scale of the nation, drawing similar conclusions about its relative positioning within twentieth-century U.S. theatre. Theodore Shank identifies numerous alternative theatre groups birthed in the mid-1960s that greatly modified the development of theatre, in addition to the spread of university training programs, and the growth of Off-Off Broadway and large repertory theatres in major cities (thanks, again, to the formation of the NEA in 1965 and the expansion of the Ford Foundation in the 1960s).[73] The overall impact of many of these changes is understood by Shank, as well as theatre historians Arnold Aronson and Christopher Bigsby, as the "professional-ization" of theatre, a period in which union contracts, university programs (in part owing to the GI Bill), and increased institutional structures, contributed to the limiting of barrier-breaking, experimental avant-garde.[74] Historian Steven Adler emphasizes additional changes post-World War II, specifically a streak of Cold War conservatism that dovetailed with the advent of television and the growth of Hollywood in popular culture.[75]

These theatre historians illuminate prominent shifts in the characteristics of theatrical production from the 1960s to the 1970s. In this schema, the upheavals of the sixties led to societal fracturing around growing liberation movements, from ecology to anti-nuclear to anti-war. Since the rise of identity politics occurred in the 1970s, it is through the prism of identity politics that critics have analyzed many of the decade's plays and playwrights. As a consequence, companies like the San Francisco Mime Troupe, El Teatro Campesino, the Provisional Theatre, and the Negro Ensemble Company are primarily understood as collectives

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[73] Theodore Shank, *Beyond the Boundaries: American Alternative Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).
[74] See Christopher Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama: Volume 3, Beyond Broadway* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Arnold Aronson, *American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History* (New York: Routledge, 2000).
[75] Steven Adler, *On Broadway: Art and Commerce on the Great White Way* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 3.

within the context of responding to and engaging with the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, and, eventually, feminist and queer struggles. For Aronson and Shank, these agitations within the United States are an important set of circumstances for understanding the theatre of the 1970s, particularly as movements gave way to more militancy and separatism. As more people began to look inward, this shift to individual self-fulfillment held the potential to replace compassion with self-indulgence. But, as in many areas of urban performance (where, for example, the first signs of graffiti culture appeared), expressions of the self and investigations of identity also thrived on alternative stages— from the queer performances of Hot Peaches to the solo feminist performance work of Carolee Schneeman. Self-as-content became one prominent mode of exploration, such as the Hungarian Squat Theater or Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theatre.[76] In Aronson's look at the avant-garde of the 1950s through the 1980s, his section on the 1970s focuses on solo performance art that emphasized the individual over the commodified object. There were also economic factors in this development, and his argument considers the high rents and high cost of maintaining theatre companies. However, Aronson equates this increased self-reliance with increased self-reference, and an overall shift in political sensibilities: "By the 1970s… the impetus seemed more attuned to the self-absorption of the 'me generation' than to larger sociopolitical concerns."[77] But Aronson does not explore a thorough expanse of plays, playwrights, or performances; after he discusses the significance of the Performing Garage, he moves on to the 1980s, which he frames as a great experimental decade in New York theatre, one that he believes ushered in the changing economics that would alter the artistic production of the avant-garde.[78] Scholars have embraced the experimental dance and

[76] See Shank, *Beyond the Boundaries*.
[77] Aronson, *American Avant-Garde*, 159.
[78] Aronson centers this alternative theatrical activity in the East Village, where young people, entranced by the previous decades of avant-garde theatre, were congregating. He identifies a new "do-it-yourself ethic" that

visual arts of 1970s, but left aside many of the theatre companies that operated in smaller communities as niche enterprises that expressed the eccentricities of specific, radicalized ideologies.[79]

But there is another story of theatre in the 1970s in New York. I focus on playwrights and directors whose work illuminates the power relations between theatre spaces, audiences, and communities; represents the fluid crossing of neighborhood boundaries; attends to the spatial politics and urgencies of place; and reveals an awareness of the relationship between theatre and the culture of the city—including Vinnette Carroll, Julie Bovasso, the Everyman Theatre Company, Bread and Puppet Theatre, the Chelsea Theatre Center. I argue that definitions of the decade as hedonistic and self-indulgent can obscure a different scale of inquiry into the cultural production of the period. While not disregarding the significance of national movements or aesthetic trends, I argue that in New York City, the performance and politics of neighborhood are equally important to consider. Companies that gave voice to local concerns, urgent conditions, and social welfare needs often operated on the boundaries between community-based, amateur, and Off-Off Broadway performance.

Additionally, analysis of theatre during the 1970s requires a widened geographic scope beyond the 1960s paradigm of "downtown performance." One factor that is consistent through each chapter of this dissertation is that the Off-Off Broadway movement in fact had pan-

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discouraged virtuosity and was inspired by the Punk music of the late seventies. This mid-eighties East Village theatrical performance, he claims, owed a strong debt to the burlesques and travesties of Charles Ludlam's Ridiculous Theatrical Company of the 1970s, particularly in their commenting on popular culture and rejection of minimalism. See Aronson, 181-84.

[79] In terms of playwriting, the 1970s theatre did not fare much better; in their category of *USA Post-1944*, the Oxford Dictionary of Plays includes only nine plays between 1974 and 1982 (the same amount of plays listed for one playwright, Tennessee Williams). *The Cambridge History of American Theatre* focuses on the plays of Edward Albee, David Mamet, and Sam Shepard. It also includes brief mentions of Adrienne Kennedy and Amiri Baraka, and, for notable playwrights who emerged in the late 1970s, August Wilson, Wendy Wasserstein, and Marsha Norman. See Matthew Rudané, "Plays and Playwrights Since 1970," in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre*, Don B. Wilmeth and C.W.E. Bigsby, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

neighborhood reach even before the 1960s came to a close. At this time, Off-Broadway already faced mounting financial challenges as their subsidies dried up and the desperation for commercial successes increased.[80] Off-Off Broadway symbolized a new role for alternative theatre, experimental writing, and production styles, "became a vital participant in the transfer of plays from the non-profit to the profit-making theatres," and extended its reach across the city.[81] This blurring intensified through the mid-Seventies, and I explore variables across Off, Off-Off, and Broadway, tethered through artistry, financial concerns, changing tastes, and geographic realities.

I explore this phenomenon in neighborhoods where residents were increasingly isolated by deleterious housing policies and the disinvestment of mass transit. I have chosen examples in which downtown aesthetics and philosophies co-mingled with local performance practices to create a community ethos that both borrowed and revised the aspirations of many downtown performance artists. Crystal Field, co-founder of Theater for the New City, articulated the cross-fertilization of radical performance theories across the genres in 1977, when the desire for expanded audience composition led many Off-Off Broadway artists to redefine their concept of where, why, and how theatre events occurred:

> In the Seventies we have gone more and more to the "people" over the heads of the sick and elitist Press. To the People means to the poor neighborhoods— to the underprivileged and those living on the edge of this mechanistic and frighteningly inhuman growth we call civilization. These people are culturally far ahead of the critics. They know what is human and moving to their souls.... So we sing the praises of the public and see in the

[80] Samuel L. Leiter, *Ten Seasons: New York Theatre in the Seventies* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986), 26-30. The rules that had governed one aspect of official designation— audience size— changed as well: union-regulated Off-Broadway theatres were 299 or fewer seats until 1974, when it was 499 or fewer.
[81] Ibid., 26.

late seventies a change, a great change slowly coming our way, as our economy sinks slowly into the horizon and the services of our welfare state disappear in the face of a terrible depression-inflation. As the capitalist-welfare state becomes more and more ludicrous, and our natural resources become less and less, as we slowly choke from the auto fumes along the Westway, our theatre becomes more popular. An oasis in a desert of oblique suicide. We only hope that this ship stays afloat and that we can effect changes strong enough to allow our survival. After all, who needs huge funerals? We'd rather christen a new play, any day.[82]

As my analysis of the Coney Island project of the political performance troupe Bread and Puppet illustrates, the dynamics of this mission were more complicated than Fields readily acknowledged. These experiments forced the downtown avant-garde to abandon the artistic homes they had once known, and, in new geographies, to confront their own discriminatory practices and conflicts embedded in audience dynamics.

Chapter Descriptions

In Chapter 1, "The Lower East Side: Austerity Ideologies and Off-Off Geographies," I analyze the collision between austerity policies and the contraction of arts funding, as experienced by burgeoning theatres along East Fourth Street. The Lower East Side was particularly hard hit during the fiscal crisis period, and its embattled theatre scene challenged the logic of planned shrinkage. A central aim of this chapter is to explicitly define those

[82] "American Experimental Theatre: Then and Now," *Performing Arts Journal* 2 (Fall 1977): 18-19. Crystal Field founded Theater for the New City (TNC) in 1971 with George Bartenieff, Theo Barnes, and Lawrence Kornfeld. It spun off from the work of the Judson Poets Theatre, where Kornfeld was Resident Director. Field remains Executive Director of TNC and still produces summer Street Theater plays. Crystal Field, "Writing the Street Theater," *Crystal Field's Theater for the New City Blog*, July 14, 2012, accessed January 19, 2013, http://theaterforthenewcity.blogspot.com/2012/07/writing-street-theater.html.

developments in theatrical communities of the 1970s that were wrought by the preceding decade of Off-Off Broadway transformations. I argue that as performers reconfigured representations on stage, Off-Off Broadway evolved in a dialectical relationship with neighborhood groups and local politicians. I emphasize the efforts of its playwright advocates—including Julie Bovasso and Ellen Stewart—to reveal the obstacles at the intersection of funding battles, local politics, space, and critical reception. Chapter 1 also introduces the structural changes to city government, as officials tried to "catch up" with a decentralized cultural landscape. There were inherent tensions between a changed role for the Department of Cultural Affairs and the needs of Lower East Side communities. Conflicts over resources, ownership, and community identity enveloped the progenitors of downtown theatre, including Joseph Papp at the Public Theater, Ellen Stewart at La Ma Ma, Bruce Mailman of the Truck and Warehouse Theater, the playwrights of the New York Theatre Strategy and the Women's Theatre Council, and director Douglas Turner Ward. While the marginalization of vernacular culture by city mechanisms was not new, the 1960s counter-culture had married a reputation for drug culture and radical politics with specific geographic locations in the city, making them increasingly popular targets for city officials desperate to enact visible change in a troubled city in order to encourage tourism.

As conditions changed downtown, Off-Off Broadway playwrights looked to other neighborhoods to stage their work. Their ambitions sometimes included Broadway, and they envisioned a resurrection of the moribund theatrical giant. There was widespread agreement that Times Square as a collection of blocks and Broadway as a stretch of theatrical dynamism needed renewed attention if it was to survive. A question emerged: what should the future of Times Square—with or without Broadway playhouses—look like? City power players—from prominent producers, to the *New York Times*, to mainstream critics, to downtown theatre

impresarios, to politicians, all fought vociferously over the future vision of Times Square.

In Chapter 2, "The Disappearing Center: Fiscal Crisis on Broadway," I track this period on the Great White Way. During the fiscal crisis, Times Square was an emblem of the city's shattered spine, defined by the twin ills of crime and "deviant" behavior. Downtown theatrical production and Lincoln Center's growth threatened to upend the visual map of commercial theatre production. Due to the changes in the structure of central Manhattan at this time, it appeared that the "center" of theatrical production might again migrate. Advocates who argued for fundamental adjustments to the structure of Broadway—locational, operational, and aesthetic—were ultimately overpowered by city officials and developers focused on a Times Square renewal rooted in the mystique of its historic theatres. I demonstrate the ways in which the municipal vision of a river-to-river expansion model grounded in a thriving Times Square led to decisions and policies that ignored the fundamental characteristics of theatre production in the city, when its strongest currents lay in decentralization, not a central core district. While much attention within theatre scholarship has been paid to the subsequent Disneyfication of the area, city agencies, producers, and residents puzzled over the fate of Times Square for decades before Disney's arrival, and the 1970s is an overlooked period in this progression. While perhaps an unlikely player in the development of Times Square, one influential figure introduced in Chapter 2 is the economist William Baumol. His impassioned explanations of the "cost disease" theory and its implications for Broadway regularly went unheeded, but his influence was felt through the FACT conference and the TKTS discount ticketing initiative.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I move across the river to consider the expansion of "downtown" theatre into the outer boroughs during this period. Chapter 3 examines new networks of theatres in downtown Brooklyn during the 1970s, and attempts to push "beyond BAM" in

conceptualizing the growth of downtown Brooklyn as an arts neighborhood. In addition to the formation of coalitions that served the needs of growing artist populations and resident demographics, there was an impassioned neighborhood arts movement that sought to exert community control over cultural production. These companies created new models of collaboration, which sometimes complemented and other times contradicted a national and city-wide trend towards a civic center model of cultural development. This chapter links these demands for community control with the larger de-funding of grassroots theatre, often in competition with the institutional powerhouse of BAM for city money and resources. I examine the complex history of government support BAM, and show how demands for increased community control over theatre practices were neglected. BAM, I argue, was not the stable center of rebirth, but rather part of many intricate and overlapping zones of performance activity that re-shaped contested urban spaces.

The focus of Chapter 4 is the participatory dimension of street performance, framed as interruptions and protests within the dominant urban regime. On first blush, the "people's playground" by the sea represents diametric opposites of the downtown Brooklyn neighborhood, which was perceived as a business district that could regain its luster through investment, and had an entertainment history that veered more towards the upscale. Coney Island was a honky-tonk amusement destination for the laboring classes, with an ailing reputation and a long list of stubborn social problems. Yet Coney Island is a site of contradictions, and this was especially true during this period of profound neglect and divestment. In order to identify the shape and movement of Coney Island's itinerant theatres, I incorporate a second site into my analysis of Coney Island: Lincoln Center, and, specifically, its annual street performance festival. Through the movements of two companies, the Bread and Puppet Theater and the Everyman Theater

Company, I analyze the deterritorialization of street performance during the fiscal crisis, which frequently separated performers from the contexts of their neglected home neighborhoods.

As the fiscal crisis spread across New York's theatrical infrastructure, it stressed the points of connection between city politics, community affairs, and neighborhood health. Through the mid-1970s, debates around theatre, location, and access were publicly aired, often in the pages of the *New York Times*. The struggle for the equitable development of performance opportunities was crystallized in these conflicts: arguments over money for grassroots theatres versus a flagging commercial theatre; accusations of parochialism, radicalism, or traditionalism; advocacy on the part of playwrights and theatre owners to create spaces for the theatre in a city that was locked in crisis; and, finally, hostilities over the economic, racial, and cultural identities of neighborhoods. Across the map of the city, the players in the theatre landscape were locked in a constant negotiation of the social, political, and economic forces that affected the production and reception of performance in New York City.

Chapter One

The Lower East Side: Austerity Ideologies and Off-Off Geographies

> Suppose a consortium of foundations erected a replica of the East Village somewhere in the badlands of the Dakotas, a place where all the heroin anyone could want would be placed neatly in his veins. Would that draw dangerous street criminals away from the cities, as the Western frontier drew off some of the city's less docile residents in the nineteenth century?
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> --Roger Starr, "Build another East Village in the Dakota Badlands"[1]

Roger Starr, a frequent commenter on urban affairs who served as New York City's Housing and Development administrator from 1974 to 1976, had a penchant for colorful language and contentious proposals. Four years after he described his fantasy of wiping East Village residents off the city grid, he argued "that the golden door to full participation in American life and the American economy is no longer to be found in New York."[2] Throughout the early and mid-1970s, Starr was the embodiment of a municipal philosophy that preached divestment as the proper solution to the entrenched problems miring the city's declining industrial neighborhoods.[3] Starr reasoned that city funds should focus on repairing areas that were not experiencing population decline; in the process, city planning was consigned to new development, while older neighborhoods were left to the forces of urban decay until private

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[1] Roger Starr, "Build another East Village in the Dakota Badlands," *New York Times*, September 24, 1972, SM94.

[2] Roger Starr, "Making New York Smaller," *New York Times*, November 14, 1976, 225. The full quote is found in Starr's defense of planned shrinkage, "a recognition that the golden door" in New York had closed. After serving three mayors, Starr left public service in 1977 for a position at the *New York Times*, and later argued that his policy had been misunderstood. Even many of Starr's critics have conceded that he did initiate the public debate around issues that the city had already been thinking about and working on—the transition to post-industrialization.

[3] There is persuasive research arguing that these policies represent a larger orientation toward neighborhoods defined as "blighted." For more on the South Bronx see Joshua B. Freeman, *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor since World War II* (New York: New Press, 2000), 272-77; for planned shrinkage as predominant urban development thinking nationwide see Roberta Brandes Gratz, *The Living City: How America's Cities are Being Revitalized by Thinking Small in a Big Way* (John Wiley & Sons, 1994), 175-92; and for an indictment of its ramifications for public health see Deborah Wallace and Rodrick Wallace, *A Plague on Your Houses:* How New York Was Burned Down and National Public Health Crumbled (New York: Verso, 2001).

investment deemed them valuable again. Most crucially for my argument, under Starr's planned shrinkage, new megaprojects were promoted for jobs and taxes, while small, neighborhood-based programs were cut back because the city could not afford them. Rather than implement "smaller, less expensive, innovative developments fashioned to meet critical local needs," public resources available to certain neighborhoods-- the South Bronx, the Lower East Side, Bushwick—were shaved to the bone.[4] To its critics, planned shrinkage was little more than a thinly-veiled attempt at a deep spatial reordering of the city; in the most nefarious interpretation, it was aimed at displacing less desirable residents—newly arrived African-American laborers from the South, recent Caribbean immigrants-- who could not find employment. In this chapter, I look at one of these neighborhoods, the Lower East Side, and analyze the dramatic imprint of these austerity ideologies on the fractured development of downtown theatre. This area was particularly hard hit during the fiscal crisis period, and its embattled theatre scene confronted unique problems after the momentous years of the 1960s had entrenched it firmly in the neighborhood.

Some city officials publicly rejected the letter of Starr's policy suggestions, but in practice, a version of his philosophy was endorsed as a rational approach in a time of dwindling city funds—a phenomenon that was later reproduced around the nation. According to historian Joshua B. Freeman, this "planned shrinkage lite" meant that priority in public investment, tax relief, and economic development were given to the central business district, "while leaving outlying areas, including those undergoing devastation, to fend for themselves."[5] As both Freeman and Gratz describe, this translated into diminished public transit, cutbacks in police and

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[4] Gratz, *The Living City,* 177.
[5] Freeman, *Working-Class New York,* 277. Freeman notes that many union officials supported planned shrinkage "lite," leading to a flurry of "corporatist efforts" wherein the two wings of the labor movement-- private sector and public sector-- dealt with the business establishment.

fire protection, and curtailed sanitation services. Rather than renewal through incremental public investments (such as restoring older housing stock), "internal resettlement" in deteriorating neighborhoods plagued by job-flight became a goal. "Planned shrinkage lite" was the darker edge of a contradictory and even deluded outlook that ultimately engulfed entire segments of the urban ecology in a spiral of neglect.

At first glance, Starr's policy provisions may seem of little concern to the cultural history of theatrical production in New York City—especially Off-Off Broadway performance, a bastion of alternative expression of both anti-establishment and anti-commercial ideals. But geography and cultural policy knit them closely together, and three factors that I investigate in this chapter connect them most directly. One was the wave of experimental theatre that had by then taken root in one of the areas of Starr's derision; a second was the increasingly decentralized funding streams (and independent city boosters) that were supporting theatre initiatives in these very areas even as basic city services were ignored. Thirdly, while the marginalization of vernacular culture by city mechanisms was not new,[6] the 1960s counter-culture had married a reputation for drug culture and radical politics with specific geographic locations in the city, making them increasingly popular targets for city officials desperate to enact visible change in a troubled city in order to encourage tourism.[7] The dramatis personae of this urban melodrama coalesced around an unceasing struggle for real estate, funding dollars, and neighborhood character and control.

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[6] See Paul Chevigny, *Gigs: Jazz and the Cabaret Laws in New York City* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[7] Judith Rachel Halasz, "Questioning Work, Making a Scene: Bohemian Life on the Lower East Side of New York City" (dissertation, City University of New York, 2007), 150-65. Halasz, in her study of the LES underground and traditional paid work values, chronicles the tangled factors at play in the LES of the 1970s: declining employment and public assistance, the twin issues of landlord and government abandonment, the national recession, municipal fiscal crisis, and imposed austerity. Drug activity skyrocketed as the city made little effort to redress the area. Halasz's ethnography reveals the range of personal responses to these economic and social conditions, and illuminates the lived contradictions of a neglected neighborhood that offered some benefits to "bohemians" seeking adventure, or just a more manageable cost of living. Halasz's study is a dynamic accounting of artists across many genres not discussed here, including the punk and club scenes, visual arts trends, and new cinema. It is worth noting

During this period in New York, there was a distinct acceleration of the processes leading to the gentrification of many neighborhoods, and numerous urban sociologists have outlined the relationship between decaying streets and the "frontier" of gentrification. The Lower East Side (LES) was one of the areas left to decay while city services were funneled to areas with a higher (and whiter) tax base. Challenging the logic of planned shrinkage, it was here that local uprisings—such as the work of the Cooper Square Committee (CSC)—fought for the principles of spatial justice, while local performers reconfigured representations on stage, and within the built environment of the city. These conflicts amounted to a struggle for the very identity of the streets, stamped with the social, political, and economic implications of performance in urban space.

This chapter analyzes the collision between this type of shrinkage policies and the contraction of arts funding, as experienced by burgeoning theatres along East Fourth Street. While organizations like the CSC were consumed with their dauntless efforts to gather support for initiatives that could renew Cooper Square without razing it, prominent figures of the 1960s Off-Off Broadway movement were engaging in their own renewal attempts, seeking the means and support to continue their work within a hostile city. As political scientist William Tabb has commented, "periods of economic contraction always intensify interest group and class struggles."[8] By the late 1960s, amid a changing landscape of theatrical production in New York City, artists and city officials were articulating an increasingly populist vision for the role and function of the performing arts in New York City. But this did not mean that these changes could withstand economic contraction; many key figures worked valiantly to stave off the bleeding,

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that Halasz is the child of two members of the Squat Theatre, a company from Hungary that moved to New York City in 1977.

[8] William K. Tabb, *The Long Default: New York City and the Urban Fiscal Crisis* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 19.

while others saw the fiscal crisis as an excuse to kill the patient. Among those individuals were Martin E. Segal, whose heroic efforts forced to the attention of lawmakers the issue of arts funding; Joseph Papp, whose risk-taking required an aggressive straddling of the worlds of uptown theatre, downtown theatre, and City Hall; playwrights like Tom Eyen and Julie Bovasso, who joined together in coalitions as opportunities for staging their work rapidly disappeared; community activists like Val Orselli of CSC, who agitated against the displacement of low-income, working-class tenants on the LES; theatre owners like the visionary Ellen Stewart, who was once hospitalized for exhaustion during her quest to maintain the presence of a theatre that could commingle with the goals of innovative performance; and politicians like Mayor Abe Beame, who needed to balance austerity zeal with initiatives that would redeem the faltering image of what was once "Fun City."

One of the objectives of this multidimensional approach is to correct the occasional generalizing within scholarship that creates deceptive causality between artists in city spaces.[9] These analyses generalize the composition of the artist class, making assumptions about the linkages between "antibourgeois" values and a nomadic hippie counterculture invested only in translating downtown experience with little regard for community betterment or social movements unfolding right down the street. Of La Mama, for example, Christopher Mele writes that the lack "of pressures of commercialism," allowed performers to embrace "taboo issues…such as homosexuality, and presented the stories of marginal, underworld characters--

[9] While an indispensible resource in understanding the perception of a neighborhood and land use issues, Mele's writings on artist-residents have an accusatory air. He does identify the emerging cultural aesthetics of gentrification that lean on the display of affluence-- always defined in negation to existing residents (not poor, not ethnic, not deviant). His approach to "artistic subcultures," however, is overly generalizing. He views the "adherents" of subcultures, for example, as celebrating the lifestyles of prostitutes as "the authentic critique of bourgeois society." Christopher Mele, *Selling The Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate and Resistance in New York City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 25-27.

pimps, prostitutes and drug dealers."[10] Mele suggests that the 1970s "post-hippie" discourse was directly related to images of danger and decay that led to the neighborhood divestment between 1969 and 1979.[11] La Mama's relationship to the downward slope of the livability of the neighborhood is, as I will show, far more layered than purely one of representation. It is odd, then, to ascribe a fetishizing of "the underworld" to La Mama, where Ellen Stewart was emphasizing the internationalism of her stage, with invited troupes from all over the world—and was, in fact, criticized for that stance.[12] Stewart anchored her space in a commitment to global performance alongside her fidelity to the playwrights who had emerged in the 1960s.[13]

A central aim of this chapter is to explicitly define those developments in theatrical communities of the 1970s that were wrought by the preceding decade of Off-Off Broadway transformations. The progressive politics of the 1960s were in direct contradiction to the austerity approach, and a grand conflict was quickly shaping: organizations were regularly producing reports urging the expansion of city funding for theatre downtown and wider decentralization of cultural programming across the city,[14] but local districts found themselves with less and less funding to go around. Austerity ideologies undermined the security of arts groups in the LES and also ignited tensions between community members and resident artists. The organizations that were the beneficiaries of new funding were often located in areas of great

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[10] Ibid., 165.
[11] Ibid., 179.
[12] Some accused the NEA of lowering La Mama's funding because it disapproved of the "usage of American taxpayer's dollars for foreign participants." Erika Munk, "Scowls," *Village Voice*, October 8, 1979, 114.
[13] In her article, "La Mama of Us All," Cindy Rosenthal provides a helpful history of the years during which La Mama remained a "moving target," evading city regulations and moving spaces until enough private funds were secured for a permanent building. Cindy Rosenthal, "La Mama of Us All," *TDR* 50 (Summer 2006): 19.
[14] See *Report to the Mayor's Committee on Cultural Policy* (New York: New York City Mayor's Committee on Cultural Policy, 1974); *Growth in New York City Arts and Culture: Who Pays?* (New York: Cultural Assistance Center, Inc., 1976); and *Public and Private Support for the Arts in New York City* (Cultural Assistance Center, Inc., 1980).

social unrest; a decentralized approach to cultural affairs was at odds with the increased centralization that came about in the wake of the fiscal crisis.

Contemporaneously, in the small theatres dotting the East side of downtown, Off-Off Broadway was expanding the rules of theatrical representation: whose stories and whose bodies were seen on stage, and where those stages were located on the grid of the city. These loss leaders of the experimental theatre have been portrayed in various ways: hippies, bohemians, or intellectuals, but frequently in opposition to the goals of working-class tenants and activists. This created a paradox: state and local funds had finally begun to support a more expansive representation of the city's diversity on stage, just as neighborhood organizations like the CSC had cause to fear some of the diversity of their streets. The uprisings implicit behind this shift of embodied visibility were also a source of contention: battles over resources and representation increased in urgency as the City attempted to stage its own dramatic ascent out of fiscal chaos. Off-Off Broadway during this period evolved in a dialectical relationship with neighborhood groups and local politicians.

Many have typified the Off and Off-Off Broadway movements as motivated by the search for a home.[15] This dominant quality endows the geographic placement of these theatres with a sense of desperation or serendipity; however, the cultural geography of these performance spaces was ultimately significant. In 1966, Michael Smith described Off-Off Broadway as "theatre without theatres," a loose network centered in two churches and two cafes, with other groups (like Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theatre, which was then based out of a loft on

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[15] See, for example, Jack Poggi, *Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870-1967* (Cornell University Press, 1968); and Michael Smith, "The Good Scene: Off Off-Broadway," *Tulane Drama Review* 10 (Summer 1966): 159.

the LES) similarly nomadic and non-traditional in their variety.[16] As Marvin Carlson has argued, the empty spaces used for theatrical events are layered with meanings; even when locations "have been selected primarily because they were the most convenient or most available public space for a performance," they always to some degree have nontheatrical resonances.[17] The place of theatre is deeply involved with its meaning and reception, as it is part of what imbricates cultural practice with memory. Both spatial positioning and theatre architecture are essential in this equation. As championed by Starr, the planned shrinkage ethos was a marker of a broader turn towards conservatism in urban policy, a distinct reaction to the 1960s that dovetailed with the politics of place and performance to create a contradictory series of developments for theatre in the LES, which had a long history as a contested strip of land downtown. This chapter is organized as a journey through time and space to visit the places most altered by the years of the fiscal crisis: theatres and cafés, sidewalks and street corners, city offices and budget meetings, and advocacy organizations and protests. I first provide a historical overview of some of the important milestones in the relationship between the birth of Off-Off Broadway and its downtown environs from the late 1950s through the 1970s. One of my illustrative case studies is the career of Julie Bovasso, an overlooked but influential playwright and director who confounds assumptions about the path of Off-Off Broadway development, its successes and challenges.

This organization of this chapter necessarily encompasses the complex redefinition of neighborhood boundaries that occurred during this time, the convergence of diverse performance traditions downtown, and the movement of artists across the city grid. Ultimately, these threads

[16] Smith refers to Café Cino, La Mama, the Judson Poets' Theatre, and Theatre Genesis at St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery. Smith dates the "real birth" of Off-Off Broadway to September 27, 1960, when Alfred Jarry's *King Ubu* opened at the Take 3, a coffee house on Bleecker Street. Critic Jerry Tallmer dates the birth to the Tempo Theatre's production of Jean Genet's *The Maids*, in the summer of 1955, at 4 St. Mark's Place. Smith credits Tallmer with coining the term "Off Off-Broadway" two months after the Jarry opening.
[17] Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 134.

lead to a fiscal crisis story of promising playwrights who blazed restless paths between neighborhoods, advocates who fought for the sustainability of artists as well as abandoned city streets, and the many residents and theatre communities alike who bore the brunt of bitter competitions for diminished funding dollars.

East Village Othering: Downtown Boundaries

> It seems that everybody was doing the thing that was buried in his gut in the sixties. It was the era of protest, and the protest was against death itself, which gave the age more than a mere touch of anarchy. And it was good because so much of it was so rotten that it made rottenness a part of reality. We were fighting death in the sixties and we managed somehow to kill the real death, and then the real rottenness began to die.
> --Julie Bovasso, "A New Breed of New York Actor"[21]

By the late 1960s, the East Village was already considered a hotspot for Off-Off Broadway innovation, as the days of West Village cabaret theatres receded into the distance. "We seem to be inaugurating theatres left and right on East 4th Street," Julie Bovasso wrote in a letter to a member of the Rockefeller Foundation on 3 July 1969.[22] Bovasso had been performing in the East Village since 1953, and this flurry of activity as the 1970s approached was a positive harbinger for experimental theatre artists. Bovasso, who had a blue-collar upbringing in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, surrounded by the sounds of Armenian and Sicilian dialects, had begun her lengthy career path in downtown performance venues with a teenager's rebellious embrace of the stage, and she founded the pioneering Tempo Playhouse at age 23 in 1953.[23] Bovasso has

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[21] Julie Bovasso, "A New Breed of New York Actor," *New York Magazine,* February 11, 1974, 44.
[22] Julie Bovasso, "Letter to Dr. William Bradley," July 3, 1969, Julie Bovasso folder, La Mama Etc. archives. Bovasso also sent Dr. Bradley a tempura painting in gratitude for the support of the Rockefeller Foundation, and informed him that a producer had optioned her play, *Moon Dreamers*, after its run at La Mama.
[23] Bovasso's personal geographies spanned from Rome, her mother's birthplace, to the LES, her father's. Her family moved to Bensonhurst, which was at that time populated by Jewish, Italian, and Irish immigrants. Bovasso went to the high school of Music and Art and later enrolled at the City College of New York (which was tuition-free until 1976). In 1950, she debuted Off-Broadway at the Provincetown Playhouse, the Greenwich Village "Little Theatre" that opened in 1918 in the space of a former stable, 133 Macdougal Street, a block south of Washington Square. In 1953, she opened the Tempo Playhouse at 4 St. Marks Place, where she was both the manager and producer, and

not received adequate consideration for her role as a major force in the development of downtown theatre; after introducing many plays of the Theatre of the Absurd to avant-garde audiences in the 1950s, she later gained respect as one of the most playfully loudmouth and genuinely innovative playwrights of Ellen Stewart's cadre. (One reviewer called her 1969 play, *Moon Dreamers*, "like a floorshow in hell.") An inspired producer, Bovasso never again ran her own theatre space after the Tempo closed, but she recognized the link between theatre space and experimentation, and, during the 1970s, was a vocal advocate for the needs of Off-Off dramatists. Like many artists, Bovasso worked briefly in West Village locations, but her trajectory is not one of West to East, but illuminates the frenetic and zigzagging search for neighborhoods and theatres that could provide a launching pad for her brand of experimental theatre. By the late 1970s, Bovasso was relying on Stewart at La Mama to provide her with opportunities to stage her work, and she found the doors to funding for new plays and playwright organizations had all but closed.

Prior to establishing the Tempo, Bovasso had clashed with Julian Beck at the West Village Cherry Lane while cast in the Living Theatre's 1952 production of Paul Goodman's *Faustina*; still, while the easterly Tempo owed a clear debt to the Living Theatre, it "was in many respects a more representative precursor of the down-to-earth practicality of the Off-Off Broadway movement than was the more self-consciously avant-gardist work of the Living Theatre."[24] The Tempo was located in the parlor of a ground floor apartment next door to the St.

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acted in Jean Cocteau's *The Typewriter*, Eugène Ionesco's *Amadee*, and, in 1955, in the first New York production of Jean Genet's *The Maids*, as Claire. The website archiving her career and maintained by her brother, set designer and artist Bernard X. Bovasso, has a nearly complete listing of her production history: "Julie Bovasso: Actress, Poet, Playwright, Innovator," http://www.juliebovasso.tdparts.com, accessed August 20, 2012.

[24] Stephen J. Bottoms, *Playing Underground: A Critical History of the 1960s Off-Off-Broadway Movement* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 26. Was the Tempo Playhouse the *first* Off-Off Broadway house? According to Bottoms, María Irene Fornés described the Tempo as such, as did critic Jerry Tallmer, who frequently praised Bovasso in his *Village Voice* columns for introducing Genet, Ionesco, and de Ghelderode to audiences in the United States.

Mark's Place Steam Bath house for men. In the lobby, there was an art gallery that rotated avant-garde paintings; George Ortman, Bovasso's husband at the time, displayed his work there and helped her pay the rent from the sale of his art.[25] When critic Jerry Tallmer looked back at the Tempo Playhouse, he described it as the energetic spark for the first season of the Obie awards, 1955-1956: "I think it was those red serpents that set the whole thing off."[26] For her dexterity and ingenuity with the red plastic gloves that animated the serpents in Jean Genet's *The Maids*, Bovasso took home the best actress honor in the first year of the Obies.

It was not only the introduction of a formerly unproduced Genet that piqued the interest of audiences; in his reminiscences, Tallmer presents the location of the Tempo as equally noteworthy as the work on stage: "The playwright was a French criminal named Jean Genet, and the place turned out to be a tiny hole-in-the-wall called the Tempo Playhouse, up a rickety set of iron stairs at Four St. Mark's Place in what was not yet called the East Village, though it soon would be."[27] Urban sociologists have written extensively on the significance of terminology of this small neighborhood.[28] Greenwich Village lies due west of the area, with Fourth Avenue the border between the two. The name, "The East Village," was coined by real estate agencies "to capture some of the cachet and prestige" of its neighboring Village.[29] Fourteenth Street is the northern border of the Lower East Side, and Houston Street borders on its southern edge; these are also the borders of Alphabet City, a subsection of the East Village:

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[25] Ibid. Bovasso opened the theatre with an initial investment of $250, but according to 2012 real estate listings, a 1,000 square foot apartment in the same building is now listed for $3,999 per month. (More to the point, a theatre space nearby, The Wild Project, on East 3rd Street between Avenue A and Avenue B, charges $4,000 per week for performance rentals.) Four St. Mark's Place has since been designated a New York City Landmark.
[26] Jerry Tallmer, "Watering the Off-Broadway Garden," *Village Voice*, May 6, 2005, accessed May 20, 2012, http://www.villagevoice.com/2005-05-03/theater/watering-the-off-broadway-garden. The Tempo Playhouse received a special citation from the Obies in 1956.
[27] Ibid.
[28] In addition to books cited elsewhere in this chapter by Christopher Mele and Janet Abu-Lughod, see also Mario Maffi, *Gateway to the Promised Land* (New York: New York University Press, 1995).
[29] Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *From Urban Village to East Village: The Battle for New York's Lower East Side* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 14.

> There are three fairly distinct subdivisions from west to east: between Fourth Avenue and First Avenue, Avenue A to Avenue D; and east of Avenue D to the East River Drive. The nomenclature "East Village" includes the two most Westerly zones. The nomenclature "Alphabet City" is applied only to the subdistrict where the north-south avenues carry letter rather than number names. Interestingly enough, the easternmost zone occupied by the public housing projects is not considered part of either the East Village or Alphabet City, even in cases where a project lies west of Avenue D. The term, therefore, represents "social" or "cognitive" maps as much as they do maps of geographical space. Certain social groups in the area never use either of these terms— the East Village being associated with developers, and the Puerto Ricans preferring Loisaida.[30]

Prior to 1960, all documents and data regarding any part of this neighborhood refer to the Lower East Side; in contemporary use, four different place names signify that same area: Lower East Side, Loisaida, Alphabet City, and part of the East Village.[31] The "East Village" became accepted parlance among some segments of residents—and non-residents-- to describe the area that once was just a corner of the larger LES, and Christopher Mele emphasizes the cultural dimension of this "turf battle." The "Lower East Side" refers to its nineteenth-century working-class residential and industrial area that was feared by its upper classes as a "chaotic and threatening space that housed the great 'unwashed' foreign masses."[32] For many, then, the use of

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[30] Ibid.
[31] Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side*, x.
[32] Ibid. Because of this association, many community groups have chosen to incorporate the Lower East Side into their names, such as The Good Ol' Lower East Side, a neighborhood housing organization formed in 1977. Similarly, Loisaida, Inc., formerly the Loisaida Economic Development Corporation, grew out of the grassroots community development movements led by Puerto Rican activists in the 1970s. While beyond the purview of my study, Maffi's research on the Basement Workshop illuminates community arts activity not often researched. Founded on Elizabeth Street in 1970 by thirty Asian artists (second and third-generation as well as foreign-born), the Basement Workshop developed an Asian American Resource Center, *Bridge Magazine*, the Amerasia Creative Arts Workshop, and visual arts, performance, and literature programs. They also collaborated with other local arts

this term is synonymous with their commitment to maintaining its working-class character. Since Loisaida refers to the Puerto Rican enclave east of Avenue A formed in the 1950s and early 1960s, many residents of color (including Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and African Americans) opt to self-describe the streets as Loisaida, as would any others seeking to express solidarity with these residents.[33]

The significance of such self-identification reflects the specific historical contexts of each of the four names; this requires more explication than space allows, but Mario Maffi refers to this as the "multi-form tension" of the LES: within each immigrant group, within the quarter at large, between each group and the rest of the country, the culture of which they were "shaping and reshaping."[34] This reshaping lends both a fluid reality to the character of the LES as well as attendant frictions between groups and territories. Artists in the neighborhood were not exempt from these territorial configurations, and Maffi describes how this tension revealed itself in successive subterranean shifts of the neighborhood's composition:

> In the post-war years, the survivors of the old immigrant communities were in fact joined by new groups of Ukrainians and Poles, who—as "displaced persons"—often had political views other than those of former, more radical settlements from the same areas. Blacks also began to arrive—although in very small numbers….[A]n important foothold was established in the 1950s, when a group of black artists (poets Leroi Jones and Ted Joans, painters Bob Thompson, Benny Andrews, and William White, jazz musician Marion Brown) turned a nondescript Bowery bar on Cooper Square (the Five Spot) into a

groups, including the Lower East Side Printshop, El Teatro Ambulante, and the Fourth Street "i," all of which joined forces as the Seven Loaves, a Lower East Side support organization. See Maffi, *Promised Land*, 25.

[33] The name "Loisaida" is attributed to a 1974 poem by actor, playwright, director, and activist Bimbo Rivas. It also refers to Loíza, a town on the island of Puerto Rico. For an analysis of Nuyorican performance activism in New York City in the twentieth century, see Patricia E. Herrera, "Nuyoriquenas in the House: Performing Identity Through Hip Hop, Poetry, and Theatre" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2008).

[34] Maffi, *Promised Land*, 8.

> lively crossroads of poetry, jazz, and Black liberation. But the two, new major phenomena in the never-ending saga of immigration to the Lower East Side were the growth of Chinatown and the birth of Loisaida.[35]

The example of the Five Spot Café is a relevant reminder that particularly in the case of theatre artists, whose lives and careers are frequently (and often necessarily) defined by nomadism (regardless of official attempts to enshrine their activities in specific zones), any discussion of boundaries invariably leads to a line of thinking about how we define neighborhoods.

The fiscal crisis period exacerbated and intensified this question of boundaries, particularly due to the degradation of buildings and storefronts that came with divestment. And, as I explore further in this chapter, it intensified the emotions and stigmas attached to those who lived and worked there, by choice or by chance. Tabb explains:

> By defining the neighborhood in terms of its physical limits, rather than the people who reside in it, municipal governments can ignore the class nature of the process: in these terms, upgrading structures, converting to condominiums, and the general process of gentrification are indeed community renewal. If, on the other hand, a community is defined as its people, then displacement through forced evictions and rent increases is the destruction of a community.[36]

The slippery nature of the class positioning of the artist complicates this process, and the attempt to identify the character of neighborhoods by physical limits has been a convenient mechanism for establishing theatrical trends, even as it has presented a conundrum. The role of the theatre

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[35] Maffi, *Promised Land*, 21. In addition, it is important to note the history that immediately precedes this period. By the 1930s, many factors had slowed the influx of immigrants into the neighborhood; the population dropped as older immigrants left the crowded conditions of the Lower East Side for other landscapes (and social status). As early as the 1950s, the Lower East Side fell victim to absentee landlords and even insurance fraud; low-income families and disaffected post-war youth gravitated towards its abandoned buildings. Janet Abu-Lughod stresses the *legislated* decline in immigration to the United States in the 1920s that had a dramatic impact on the population until Puerto Ricans moved to the area in increased numbers in the 1950s. Abu-Lughod, *Urban Village*, 8.
[36] Tabb, *Long Default,* 89.

critic and historian within that presents its own challenges of identification, as in a 1985 special issue of *TDR* devoted to the "performance phenomenon" of the East Village. Various performance scholars of note, including Jill Dolan and Alisa Solomon, tackled the importance of its ambiance, its specific "urban" milieu, and, most crucially, its identity as a "neighborhood in transition."[37] The contradictions highlighted by these articles are enduring: the "East Village" as a Wild West for performers, and yet existing as a term coined by real estate brokers. For some theatre makers, from its inception, Off-Off Broadway had to take the play-goers "off the beaten track" as part and parcel of its experience; it offered a chance "to venture to some of the highways and byways of New York City."[38] As Joseph Papp wrote in a 1981 guide to Off-Off Broadway, "there's something inherently dramatic about visiting Off Off Broadway theatre."[39] He continued: away from the "glitter, glamour, and tinsel," the play-goer could find a sense of community, the strivings of people who have "a serious interest in theatre."[40] Embedded within the very genetics of Off-Off Broadway was a "left wing," something apart from the "center"—locationality was one variable that helped express this. While Papp's brand of neighborhood advocacy—theatre-going as a journey through the city-- is no doubt part of a strategy to have Off-Off Broadway work seen, the very language employed creates an unsettling erasure of what *else* might be found there.[41]

[37] Dolan, Jill, et. al., "An Evening in the East Village," *TDR* 29, East Village Performance (Spring 1985): 92. In order to capture the diversity and scope of performances occurring in the area, the editors presented reports on numerous performances seen in one evening. The map of theatre venues they provide suggests that by 1984 the activity was plotted much further East than it had been even just a decade earlier; the map only depicts between Second Avenue and Avenue C, with Tompkins Square Park in the center.
[38] Joseph Papp, "The Off Off Broadway Alternative," in, *New York's Other Theatre: A Guide to Off Off Broadway,* edited by Mindy Levine, (New York: Avon Books, 1981), xi-xii.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] It is counterintuitive to employ Papp as a symbol of this erasure, particularly given his earlier work with the Mobile Theatre Unit and his consistent championing of playwrights and actors of color. But his work does illustrate the very contradictory elements of this period in alternative theatre. Did the qualities of place change the politics of his stage? Jocelyn A. Brown acknowledges that while Papp was a pioneer in non-traditional casting, she distinguishes between his belief in "interracial casting" and the nature of the productions themselves: "Many of his

The map of the theatre district provided by Bruce Mailman and Albert Poland in their 1972 volume, *The Off Off Broadway Book,* shows thirteen prominent theatres across a small patch of blocks. The map is not rendered to scale; Avenue C appears deceptively close to Washington Square Park, and the distance between Caffe Cino, the most westerly establishment, to the Old Reliable, on Fourth Street and Avenue B, appears easily crossed. Still, describing the work of the playwrights included in the book, the editors emphasize the geographic continuity between writers who also shared stylistic and contextual similarities: "the writers worked in the same geographical area: below Fourteenth Street in Manhattan. The places were small, nontheatrical facilities, makeshift theatres in cellars, bars, lofts, storefronts, and coffeehouses."[43] This broad understanding of downtown theatre as defined by its proximity to Fourteenth Street is not concerned with the sociological implications (Maffi's "multi-form tensions") of territorial groups, and yet correlates with the experiences of certain theatre artists who searched for friendly spaces to mount their work, and were therefore not overly distracted by the east or the west side of downtown.

Yet for other observers of Off-Off Broadway activity, the political divisions between East and West Village performance were reflected in the work produced, and remained more important than any sense of dispersal or adventure that Papp highlighted. The LES is often characterized by ideologies distinct from Greenwich Village, due to its past as a stronghold for radical political organizing, in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The emergence of Off-Off Broadway in the East complicated predominant understandings about the spatial *and*

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productions were neither societal, cross-cultural, or color-blind. They were merely dramas written by Whites and cast with Blacks and Latinos." This would seem to be contested by certain works that Papp produced (such as the 1974 *Short Eyes,* by Miguel Piñero), but the free MTU presentations did not include new plays. Jocelyn A. Brown, "Assessing Color Blind Casting in American Theatre and Society" (PhD Diss., University of Colorado at Boulder, 2007), 22.

[43] Albert Poland and Bruce Mailman, *The Off Off Broadway Book: The Plays, People, Theatre* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), xi.

political relations of "commercial" and "non-commercial" theatre. In 1968, theatre historian Jack Poggi observed that while playwrights, actors, directors, and audiences of the Off-Off scene all seemed "to belong to the same community" of young people living in Greenwich Village or the East Village, differences between the two could be surmised by comparing the *Village Voice* with the "farther-out *East Village Other,*" suggesting that the East/West divide would "reflect to some degree these differences."[44] This perception of the East Village is an important and complicating legacy; the *East Village Other* pledged "the reorganization of an obsolete economy" developing alternatives "to the dreaded juggernaut of the American War Machine."[45] In its pages were interviews with Bobby Seale, Timothy Leary, Kate Millett, and Buffe Sainte-Marie, as well as other members of the Black Panthers, Young Lords, and the Weathermen. One example illuminating this split was the Old Reliable Theatre Tavern, a theatre with ample "antiestablishment spirit" understood as inseparable from its location—the Eastern outpost of Caffe Cino refugees, who were pushed to the geographic fringes of their former neighborhood.[46] The Old Reliable was, quite literally, a long way from the West Village bohemia of Cornelia Street: this "funky, junky, divey bar on Third Street between Avenues B and C" lay further East

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[44] Poggi, *Theatre in America,* 198-99. It is tempting to wonder how Poggi might have viewed these distinctions even a few years later. The radical politics and local organizing had increased in intensity, but among many theatre artists, the demand for successes that could transfer to Off Broadway and Broadway meant that even East Village theatre was hardly free of commercial considerations. And, while Poggi does not mention it explicitly, other accounts by writers and artists (particularly those of color) cite an Eastward movement away from the West Village that was partly motivated by conflicts borne of racial and cultural differences with older (white) immigrant residents that functioned alongside political differences. For more on Amiri Baraka's evolving frustration with the West Village bohemian scene, see Jerry Gafio Watts, *Amiri Baraka: The Politics And Art of a Black Intellectual* (New York: NYU Press, 2007), 44-171.

[45] Allen Katzman, ed., *Our Time: Interviews from the East Village Other* (New York: The Dial Press, 1972), 1.

[46] Bottoms, *Playing Underground*, 292-93. Bottoms creates a duality between the Old Reliable and the Circle Repertory Company— the first dedicated to spontaneity in the legacy of the Cino, and the latter looking to build on its "more polished achievements." But many of Cino's artists (such as Robert Patrick, William M. Hoffman and Neil Flanagan) were moving fluidly between any theatres that would produce their work. Circle Rep, directed by Marshall Mason, began on Broadway and 83rd Street, producing playwrights like Lanford Wilson and Mark Medoff, and later moved back downtown, to the Sheridan Square Playhouse. Still, some of the markings of "professionalism" eluded the Circle Rep for a number of years: "As late as 1974…the actors were still only being paid $12.33 per performance— less than Theatre Genesis had been paying in 1966, thanks to its federal grant." Bottoms, 299.

than any other significant Off-Off Broadway venue, in the rough, financially deprived neighborhood of 'Alphabet City'."[47] Off-Off Broadway's search for a home was more than just an accident of convenience, but rather equal parts necessity and proximity. The contentious relationship between real estate and theatrical offerings was clear, even if its relationship to the financial deprivation of the surrounding area was not. However, the appearance of performance spaces like the Old Reliable were not related purely to desperation on the part of the Caffe Cino regulars, but rather must be tracked to the larger relationship between theatre and the municipal government, and the city's methods for regulating space and performance downtown.

Tracking East/West Performance Lineages

The West Village had been a creative stronghold since the 1920s, and its artistic past has been richly catalogued.[48] Its most notable locations-- The Village Gate, the Village Gaslight, the White Horse, the Village Vanguard, the Limelight, Rienzi, Gerde's, the San Remo, Kettle of Fish— form a now-legendary map of bars and clubs that were magnets for artists, musicians, beatniks, and anyone looking to escape the normative encasings of the 1950s. These visual artists, poets, writers, and musicians who congregated in the neighborhood's cafés and bars throughout the 1950s and 1960s animated the forms of performance poetry, jazz, folk music, and performance. Simultaneously, the popularity of the neighborhood as a tourist destination also ballooned, often fermenting conflicts with the local residents. Joe Cino's Caffe Cino opened in 1958 on Cornelia Street and is popularly credited as the birthplace of Off-Off Broadway. By the

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[47] Poland and Mailman, lvii.

[48] See *Village Voice* editor and drama critic Ross Wetzsteon's book, *Republic of Dreams: Greenwich Village, The American Bohemia, 1910-1960* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993); for an engaging history of the historical development of the West Village, see Emily Kies Folpe, *It Happened on Washington Square* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002). For a more personal reflection, see the memoir about the Limelight, a coffeehouse and gallery, Helen Gee, *Limelight: A Greenwich Village Photography Gallery and Coffeehouse in the Fifties* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997).

1960-1961 season, the café scene had reached a sustained vigor, and was regularly presenting plays in addition to the tradition of jazz and poetry that had already inhabited the cozy spaces; the Take 3, the Café Roue, the Café Manzino, and the Phase 2 were among those locations.

In order to fully capture the ultimate dispersal quality of Off-Off Broadway performance throughout the fiscal crisis, it is important to acknowledge the many precursors, predecessors and identities of the West Village formations beyond Caffe Cino. One was based out of Judson Church, where Associate Pastor Bernard Scott penned a powerful sermon "The Church: The Frontier of the Arts" in March of 1960. Scott led the radical arts ministry at the Church before Al Carmines, and argued that it was more than just proximity to artist communities that compelled him to minister to this "frontier." Rather, new strains within theatre were acknowledging art forms as "ritual acts." He felt a connection to the Off-Broadway theatres affirming the "spiritual, visionary purpose of art," not just interpreted for entertainment.[49] Robert Nichols, a poet-playwright-architect, was a co-founder of the Judson Poets Theatre and epitomized this type of action-oriented plays that owed more to Elmer Rice than Eugene O'Neill. His 1964 *Street Play* was an adaptation of the English medieval play *Everyman*, produced by the Greenwich Village Peace Center and Bread and Puppet Theater, and performed in a series of Village locations: the corner of Sixth Avenue and Eighth Street, Washington Square, Sheridan Square, The Church of St. Luke in the Fields on Hudson Street, and the Gansevoort Street Pier.[50] Arthur Sainer's review described a street play that confronted the moral and political dilemmas of the period through the use of archetypes, contemporary characters, music, masks, and comedy:

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[49] "Right to Sing: Scott, Bernard essay: The Church and the Frontier of the Arts," March 1960, The Judson Memorial Church Archive; MSS 094; box 1; folder 2; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries. The Judson Poets Theatre dates back to 1961, with the Dance Theatre beginning in 1962, and many visual art collaborations throughout.
[50] "Robert Nichols – Scene from a Street Play," 1966-1967, The Judson Memorial Church Archive; box 11; folder 7; Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

> The street is traditionally a place of action—the community is summoned, the street offers no escape. …The play is ultimately magic—what is not here is here, what is not real is real—the play's impulse is to separate us from the street, to suggest that we are seeing beyond it, that we have converged for the purpose of merging ourselves into a collective will whose power is such that we are then able to be drowned and perhaps saved by myth.[51]

The hopeful vision of a powerful collective that could create a benevolent city to solve the moral concerns of the day was certainly in the air with John Vliet Lindsay's inauguration as Mayor in 1965.[52] However, it was during his tenure that the West Village proved ultimately inhospitable to many of the downtown experimenters; the coffeehouses that had once been the incubators of the movement came under fire by residents, politicians, and city regulators and inspectors.

Crime in the Village was on the rise, and many residents were complaining about the boisterous and unruly crowds attracted to the neighborhood on weekends. These downtowners formed the MacDougal Street Area Neighborhood Association (MANA) in an effort to provide an organization to counter the Greenwich Village Café Theatre Association (GVCTA), formed in 1964.[53] One of the leaders of the campaign to get the city to move beyond merely imposing fines as a corrective to the commercial street congestion was a young politician, Edward Koch. This evacuation of coffeehouse culture from the Village was only the first step in a massive shift in the geography of New York's cultural production, as well as to the ascent of Koch, a politician who would continue to affect the tenor of the cultural policy of the city for decades to come. Outside of some very real safety concerns, the tensions between the coffeehouse bohemians and

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[51] Arthur Sainer, "Theatre: Everyman" *Village Voice*, July 9, 1964, 10-11.
[52] For a full exploration of the Lindsay mayoralty, see Vincent J. Cannato, *The Ungovernable City: John Lindsay and His Struggle to Save New York* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).
[53] Wendell C. Stone, *Caffe Cino: The Birthplace of Off-Off-Broadway* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 132.

the residents reflected deep cultural schisms, as evidenced by a letter of protest posted on the window of one of the shuttered coffeehouses, Rienzi: "Dear Mr. Scrooge Koch, you didn't like the way we dressed, you didn't like the way we looked…it was really our zest and love of life that you did not like….Well, you might get rid of Rienzi's—You might get rid of MacDougal Street, but you will never get rid of us."[54] The triumphant tone of the posting heralded later spaces like the Old Reliable, yet a rebirth could never be as simple as moving spaces. The vision for the arts espoused by Pastor Bernard Scott may have cultivated an ethos at Judson Church, but it did not solve the problem that *where* one could present theatre was becoming as politicized as the issue of what one presented.[55]

As has been outlined elsewhere, a confluence of external and internal factors led to the foreclosing of West Village Off-Off Broadway activity. Stephen Bottoms draws attention to the influx of drug-fueled Andy Warholites stumbling downtown from the Factory, whose appearance at Caffe Cino signified changing aesthetics and artistic philosophies. Their presence, he argues, led to a decline in audience size, as all but the most loyal playwrights determined that the heyday of the Cino was over.[56] As MANA continued to pressure the city to enforce its licensing laws more strictly than it had in the past, the Caffe fell victim to the resulting crackdown. There were fires, tax delinquency, police violations, and, ultimately, after Joe Cino's death on April 2, 1967, his collaborators and successors (Charles Stanley and Michael Smith) tried but failed to continue

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[54] Stone, 132.

[55] See for example Michael Smith's reminisces of the final days at the Cino, when obscure child labor laws were used to shut down a production with vulgar language, and seemingly specious claims of proper zoning and restaurant licensing were used to issue summonses. Michael Smith, "Café Cino," http://michaeltownsendsmith.com/caffe-cino, accessed August 27, 2012.

[56] Stephen Bottoms emphasizes the playwriting that was showcased in the coffeehouse culture between 1960 and 1966. He argues that the legacy of Off-Off Broadway evolved in opposition to the commercial theatre and for the express purposes of supporting the new playwright with production opportunities; the move away from the West Village was therefore a death knell of new playwriting production. Others focus on the period for the substantial accomplishments by collectives, neighborhood theatres, The Black Arts Movement, new immigrant groups, and queer subjects. See James M. Harding and Cindy Rosenthal, eds., *Restaging the Sixties: Radical Theaters and Their Legacies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

the spirit of the Caffe and keep it open. In addition, a lawsuit filed by the community organization won, and the unlicensed cabarets were forced to close when the Department of Licenses declared that there were only six legal coffee houses in the Village. The rest—including Cino's-- were illegal.[57]

While multidimensional in their causes, these changes to the cultural geography of the West Village created a drifting effect, as those artists looking for venues for their work sought out new (and not so new) performance spaces. Moving east was logical; the Lower East Side had a long and pluralistic theatre tradition, and for all classes and communities, "theatre literally *saturated* the neighborhood."[58] When its 1.7 square miles was one of the most crowded places on earth in the early nineteenth-century, it had offered all of the popular entertainments of the day among its bustling pastiche of activity. The crowded hallways of its tenement buildings sheltered actors unions, immigrant organizations, residences, and leftist political groups, and its halls and theatres of various sizes presented farce, musical comedy, melodrama, dime museums, and vaudeville. Each building served an array of overlapping public functions-- 66 East Fourth Street, for example, was used as a public hall for concerts and lectures, as well as the headquarters of a German fraternal and gymnastic society, which sponsored the first performance of a Yiddish play in America, a production of Abraham Goldfaden's *The Witch,* on August 12, 1880.[59] German classics, Chinese opera, and Italian opera could be found in ample amount, as could an entire brand of theatrical diversions that took the very neighborhood as its subject, "city plays" like Charles B. Hoyt's "A Trip to Chinatown" (1892), Robert N. Stephens's

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[57] Bottoms, *Playing Underground*, 322.
[58] Maffi, *Promised Land*, 215. His chapter, "As Long As It Is Theatre," provides an excellent sweep of the heterogeneous fields of cultural production on the Lower East Side. See Maffi, 215-52.
[59] Ronald Sanders, *The Lower East Side: A Guide to Its Jewish Past* (New York: Dover Publications, 1980), 20-23. For a historical background of specific buildings, I am grateful to the Lower East Side History Project (LESHP) for materials about East Fourth Street.

On the Bowery (1894), and later farces and melodramas such as Benjamin Baker's *A Glance at New York* (1848) and Dion Boucicault's *The Poor of New York* (1857).

While there are few remnants today of these turn-of-the-century institutions, St. Mark's Church in the Bowery, located at the intersection of Ninth Street and Second Avenue, has remained. As a counterpoint to the Judson Church, St. Mark's Church provides another example of spatial politics dictating and reflecting theatrical departures.[60] In the late 1960s, Reverend Michael Allen, "a dynamic young minister with a hip vocabulary and modern sensibility" made a concerted effort to bring St. Mark's "into the present," and used the arts-- specifically the Theatre Genesis—to do so. "His task was to reopen communications between the church and its community—the Lower East Side (or East Village), which has replaced Greenwich Village as New York's Bohemia and is low-rent home to many of the city's most radical and far-out artists and thinkers."[61] The beautiful old church had "been deserted by its respectable congregation and left stranded in a near-slum."[62] These small, experimental opportunities for the theatre community continued to multiply on the Lower East Side, as they did across the city-- by 1972, Off Off-Broadway was staging some 500 shows around New York City, compared with 100 for Broadway and Off-Broadway combined.[63] By the late 1960s, the area had gained a reputation as the prime breeding ground for experimental work.

While many of the artists working downtown were deeply concerned about the events unfolding on the international and national stage, there was a simultaneous preoccupation with the energies of their new neighborhood and theatre spaces, going against the grain of the theme

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[60] "St. Marks in the Bowery had become a virtual headquarters for East Village radicals. The Theatre's writers and actors found themselves rubbing shoulders on a daily basis with members of groups like the Black Panthers, the Socialist Workers Party, and the Puerto Rican Independence Party, who used the church's meeting rooms." Bottoms, *Playing Underground*, 306.
[61] Smith, "The Good Scene," 173.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Douglas Martin, "Al Carmines, Experimental Theater Force, Is Dead at 69," *New York Times*, August 13, 2005, accessed December 1, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/13/arts/13carmines.html?_r=1&pagewanted=2

of "departures" that many theatre scholars have suggested typify the decade.[64] Bottoms quotes from Ronald Sukenick's colorful memoir to explain a shift from the 1960s to the 1970s downtown: "The economic grind was part of the reason that there was an exodus of subterraneans from the East Village at the beginning of the seventies. New York was getting more expensive. The question was what would make money, or where could you get along with less of it?" But Sukenick, a novelist, was not living in New York at this time, and his memoir is an extended meditation based upon visits to the city. Still, theatre scholars and sociologists alike cite his book with frequency in an effort to capture a movement of artists motivated by the hand of crime.

While crime is undoubtedly a favor in any discussion of New York City's quality of life for all residents at this time, the over-emphasis on its criminality does not tell the full story, and gathers a disproportionate weight in historical studies. Bottoms gives credence to Sukenick's description of an "ever more frightening spiral of drug-fueled crime and violence" on the Lower East Side, which pushed residents to start thinking

> about a way to live that made it possible to get home at night without getting mugged or raped on the way, to open the door without finding the place burglarized again, to send the kids to decent schools, to earn money without putting in long hours at mind-granulating low pay jobs….Subterraneans started moving at a rapid rate to Vermont and Maine, the west coast, or hospitable college campuses all over the country.[65]

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[64] Bottoms contends that this "sense of fragmentation was as apparent in the alternative theater community as it was among political alliances." He references the 1970 split of the Living Theatre's collective, the Judson Poet Theater's breakup, and the departure from Theatre Genesis of Ralph Cook (in 1971), Sam Shepard (to London, to kick a drug habit), playwright Anthony Barsha (who quit over creative reasons), and Murray Mednick (in 1973) to California. He describes a "general exodus of artists and activists from downtown Manhattan at the turn of the decade" due to rent hikes, the disillusionment after Kent State, the incoherence of the cultural movement, and even "landlord fascism." Bottoms, *Playing Underground*, 314-15.

[65] Ronald Sukenick, *Down and In: Life in Underground New York (*New York: Beech Tree Books, 1997), 42.

What Sukenick's emphasis obscures is the draining of funds that might have sustained these artists. While many major artists of the Off-Off Broadway scene left New York for a myriad of reasons during this period, it is therefore important to contextualize the systematic divestment of the LES and the energies of those who remained and the coalitions formed between them. Some were too involved in local or professional commitments to leave; others had no choice; perhaps still others just understood it to be home. Overemphasizing a version of artistic "white flight" from downtown areas calcifies the 1960s in a nostalgic register, and obscures the equally important role of artists and activists, dispersed throughout downtown and raging against the systematic neglect of the neighborhood. It also threatens to pursue a notion of "artist exodus" that can only be murkily verified through select anecdotes, reifying a "frontier" (or "pioneer") mentality towards the troubled neighborhoods. The more significant movement that is rarely highlighted is the one that arrived *after* the fiscal crisis, which Jim Sleeper called "the concomitant expulsion of cultural and other nonprofit institutions," and a final uprooting of perceived "low culture." By the early 1980s, city officials and developers understood culture merely as "loss leaders that soften the big boom's rapacity into something like verve."[66]

As I explore in my next section, while the economics of everyday life were indisputably changing, these accounts fail to explain the some artists at this time renewed their commitments to work in New York City, and especially the LES. They formed coalitions and mounted campaigns that might create a more vibrant landscape of possibility for supporting experimental theatres; they opened new theatres, wrote angry pieces in the press, and sought new avenues—not always successfully, of course—to work downtown.

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[66] Jim Sleeper, "Days of the Developers," in *Search of New York*, ed. Jim Sleeper (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1989), 36.

Moondreaming: Playwrights Advocacy

> La Mama's playwrights have turned contemporary culture into a condemned playground, a place of desperate masquerade and hysterical revel, an arena of total metaphysical neurasthenia where nothing is sacred except some unachieved or betrayed human possibility.
> --Jack Kroll, "Life With La Mama"[67]

If the 1960s Off-Off Broadway movement was built around new playwrights, the 1970s was the test of their mettle, and Julie Bovasso was time and again tested. As I have described, Bovasso was a prolific embodiment of avant-garde sensibility and an early originator of the Off-Off aesthetic, merged with the panache of a native New York street sense. She received support from various Off-Off institutions as a director, playwright, and actor. Given her infamous temperament, it would be inaccurate to describe her movement across the city grid as a light two-step; her path, however, did challenge tidy notions about theatre and place, often motivated by the increasing difficulty of staging her work. Her credits include stints performing on Broadway, directing at Lincoln Center, an epic writer's dispute with the creative team of Circle in the Square, an Obie win for a production of Genet's *The Screens* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and many, many returns to La Mama.

Bovasso's early writing makes use of a playful mashing of high and low. Bovasso relied on images dredged from dreams and the subconscious, and she designed chaotic pastiches that employed elements of 1940s film culture, war imagery, and satire. Defying the notion that stage limitations dictate aesthetic choices, Bovasso's playwriting was resolute in confronting these challenges; her 1969 play, *Moon Dreamers*, included 42 principals, shoved into the theatre.[68]

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[67] Jack Kroll, "Life with La Mama," *Newsweek* 73, April 28, 1969, 109, quoted in Barbara Lee Horn, *Ellen Stewart and La Mama: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), http://testaae.greenwood.com/doc.aspx?fileID=GR8734&chapterID=GR8734-3921&path=books/greenwood. accessed March 19, 2012.

[68] "The Largest Show Ever Presented Off-Broadway" claimed a publicity poster for *Moon Dreamers* at La Mama. Untitled, Julie Bovasso folder, date unknown, La Ma Ma Etc. archives. In his December 10, 1969 review in the *Wall*

Bovasso borrowed elements from the Follies and presented them alongside men in chicken costumes, hysterical secretaries, mad psychiatrists, uniformed officials, and IRS representatives. She was rarely shy about inserting her idiosyncratic presence; she directed the 1968-69 Obie ceremony, which even the *Village Voice* described as "bizarre," featuring glimpses of Bovasso's past productions at Café La Mama.[69] This included ballet dancers posed beneath colored lights as the audience gathered to the strains of "Les Sylphides," perhaps a nod to the very absurdity of a proper awards ceremony for the vanguard of theatrical experimentation. In an irreverent swipe at the bushwacking artist persona, Bovasso herself took the stage in a cowboy hat and bush jacket to introduce the judges, and that evening she collected an Obie for her play, *Gloria & Esperanza*.

The play puzzled audiences and critics with its unwieldy spectacle; in a bold decision, Ellen Stewart picked this sprawling three-hour epic to open the first season at her new Ford Foundation-funded La Mama space. It also represented a moment of continuity; while Bovasso's Tempo Playhouse lasted only a few seasons before succumbing to the pressures of city regulations, the map of her career was one of a constant return to Lower East Side performance spaces, and she endured its myriad fluctuations. Bovasso was an early decrier of the dwindling field of opportunities for playwrights who had been heralded as the dramatists of the future. *Gloria & Esperanza* is a writer's primal scream, sparing very few in its indictment of the professional quagmires steadily entrapping the artist. It was produced at La Mama in April of 1969, and moved to Broadway at the ANTA Playhouse (245 West 52nd Street) in February of 1970. Bovasso directed both productions, and the play received three Obies in the 1969-1970 season.

Street Journal, John O'Connor described the play as "complex, sprawling, hilarious, often brilliant and nearly as often puzzling."

[69] "15 Receive 'Obies' for '68-'69 Season," *The Village Voice*, May 29, 1969, http://blogs.villagevoice.com/runninscared/2010/07/its_the_1969_ob.php, accessed January 23, 2012.

Gloria & Esperanza is about a fragile poet and novelist, Julius (Kevin O'Conner), who is taken for all that he is and owns. Gloria, his petulant girlfriend (played by Bovasso), steals his poetry, and then schemes with Fred the Mailman (Ted Henning) and their landlord Terry Wong Fu (Dan Durning) to publish the work surreptitiously, making a fine profit along the way. When the Internal Revenue man, Eric Von Schtutt (Tom Rosica), comes calling, Gloria attempts to bribe him with Julius's new novel, but Julius has already escaped to an alternate world, where his exploits later constitute his secret novel. In between, chickens prance on stage, an ice cream seller doles out popsicles to mad men, and scenes are buttoned with grandiose chorus numbers. Julius is a writer victimized by his vulgar mistress and any number of random, undeserving and obnoxious characters who "live high off the hog of the writer's back," representing only a means of money for parasites who steal from him.[70] Bovasso's concern for the dignity and stability of the writer hums in the background as Julius's genius is both co-opted and mocked.

In this way, Bovasso's involvement in some of the artist advocacy efforts of the time—such as the New York Theatre Strategy and the Women's Theatre Council—presents another dimension to this period of downtown theatre's precarious foothold in the city. Bovasso was among the many playwrights that formed hopeful coalitions, lionhearted attempts to confront the debilitating twin issues of finances and theatre spaces. In 1972, with a group of female playwrights (Maria Irene Fornés, Rosalyn Drexler, Adrienne Kennedy, Rochelle Owens, and Megan Terry), Bovasso created the Women's Theatre Council (WTC). A *New York Times* article from 22 February 1972 announced that they were in the process of securing $400,000 for their first season, with the goal of finding a 300-seat theatre that would allow them to produce six plays in rotation, each running for six weeks, regardless of reviews or reception.[71] Within theatre

[70] Julie Bovasso, *Gloria and Esperanza* (New York: Samuel French, 1969), back cover.
[71] Mel Gussow, "New Group to Offer Plays by Women," *New York Times*, February 22, 1972.

scholarship, Bovasso is often mentioned in relation to the WTC, an organization that is cited in numerous books on feminist theatre but has a limited production record.[72] In fact, while many scholars use the creation of the WTC as evidence of feminist theatre activity in the 1970s, it stands as a potent example of women advocating for their own work amid a challenging economic climate, and to unsuccessful ends.

Theatre artists were working to ensure that the season of inclusion of the formerly marginalized would have a lasting effect on the theatre—and many believed that more autonomous theatre spaces was the way to guarantee that. In a remarkable essay in the *New York Times* on 23 September 1973, Tom Eyen celebrated the "Playwrights Strategy," a collective of twenty-three Off-Off Broadway playwrights seeking to produce their own work.[73] The aim of the writers' co-op (known elsewhere as the New York Theatre Strategy), was to "dilute the divinity of agents and producers," and their first outing was a month-long festival of plays in the spring of 1973.[74] The ultimate objective of the group was self-determination, to be achieved in the form

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[72] Lizbeth Goodman writes, "For American feminist theatres, 1972 was an important year, when the Women's Theatre Council was formed in New York by six playwrights." That is the only mention of the WTC in the book. Lizbeth Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own* (London: Routledge, 1993), 24. Goodman dates the Council's founding to 1972; Fornés and Kennedy both date the founding to 1971 in their website biographies. The *Cambridge Guide to American Theatre* lists New York Theatre Strategy as the same organization as the WTC. While playwrights like Rochelle Owens were active members of both organizations, others could not have been; in 1974, Terry left for Omaha to be the resident playwright at Omaha Magic Theatre, and the organizations were distinctly different entities. *Notable Women in the American Theatre* describes WTC as "short-lived." *American Women Stage Directors of the Twentieth Century* describes that New York Theatre Strategy as a writer's cooperative formed in 1972, with Fornés as managing director from 1973-1979, which later became the WTC. Anne Fliotsos and Wendy Vierow, *American Women Stage Directors of the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 186-87.

[73] Tom Eyen, "The Discreet Alarm of the Off Off Broadway Playwright," *New York Times*, September 23, 1973, 3, 15. Hereafter cited in text.

[74] "Off-Off And Running," *New York*, May 14, 1973, 80. The festival ran from May 16 to June 17, 1973 at the Manhattan Theater Club, then located at 321 East 73rd Street. The month-long festival included plays by Leonard Melfi, Megan Terry, Terrace McNally, Ed Bullins, Adrienne Kennedy, Sam Shepard, Rosalyn Drexler, Maria Irene Fornés, Tom Eyen, Julie Bovasso, and Kenneth Bernard.

of a writers' theatre— a particularly poorly timed endeavor, and a goal that also remained elusive to the cooperative.[75]

Eyen's essay describes a fictive dinner party attended by all twenty-three playwrights. Each writer makes an entrance appropriate to his or her persona: "Julie 'Gloria & Esperanza' Bovasso jumps through my front window wearing a French bra, screaming, 'I am Jean Genet!'" (3). Sam Shepard arrives and recites a stream-of-conscious monologue; Lanford Wilson looks hassled and pensive; Megan Terry delivers an Om chant; and all twenty-three gather around a waterbed to eat a dinner served by Madeleine Le Roux. This festive gathering is quickly dampened: once they arrive at La Mama for their meal, the lights suddenly go out. "We sit in silence. No one moves. We cannot find the food. Years pass. An era is over. An entire generation of Off Off Broadway playwrights emerged silently in the 60s and there were so few to realize the importance of the movement" (15). The imaginary power failure signaled that La Mama was not sufficient; the great playwrights of the Genesis, Cino, Old Reliable, and dozens of unsanctioned theatrical spaces now needed more. Not only were many of those venues gone by 1973, but Eyen cites with dismay the gaping hole where Off-Broadway once stood: the theatrical successes of Off-Off (such as Jean-Claude van Itallie's *American Hurrah,* and Rochelle Owens's *Futz*), occurred when they moved to Off Broadway. Eyen laments this: out of the over 2,000 Off-Off Broadway productions, not enough of them made money by the measure of the establishment to clear the path towards wider production opportunities. Off-Off Broadway playwrights, he concludes, are not capable of the "calculated sound" of the Broadway play, creating a perpetually

[75] Albert Poland was asked to be resident producer and manager of the Theatre Strategy. He recalls that although he "felt that a number of the playwrights in the book had now run their course," he agreed to participate due to his friendship with Bovasso and Fornés, who spearheaded the effort. "I remember we went to the Theatre Development Fund…and we went to the Rockefeller Foundation, and all of these people turned up their noses—they were not interested. Lynn Meadow was interested in having it become the resident company of Stage 73, which was then the Manhattan Theatre Club." Albert Poland, interview with the author, January 6, 2012.

unsustainable economic equation at the heart of their cultural production: “They are not going to write that inexpensive five-character, one-set comedy about the generation gap entitled, *The Moonshine Boys of Third Avenue*” (15). Broadway houses routinely celebrated a recycling of the past to which his imaginative compatriots could never warm. With originality frowned upon, and venturesome producers in short supply, the twenty-three writers of the Playwrights’ Strategy were in a state of “literary suspension,” a condition they hoped to remedy by creating a common producing entity.

Eyen continues: “There are many new exciting playwrights and composers. Yet so many theaters stand empty on Broadway (Off Broadway died in 1970 and no one even sent flowers)” (15). With Off Broadway passed on, and Broadway not producing the daring work of contemporary playwrights, the accepted formula of Broadway is suited only to the older critics seeking “plays marinated in 1950’s realism” (15). Still, at the beginning of the new decade, the moment seemed to hold the promise of a second act for these new writers; Eyen imagines the walls of his dining room opening not into an Off-Off theater, but the 1,675-seat Palace Theater, one of the Nederlander Organization’s nine Broadway theatres in the heart of the Theatre District, on Broadway and 47th Street. “We’re all on stage!” he exults, even while knowing that the darkness of the audience obscured an empty auditorium (15). The writers included Eyen’s essay supports the conviction that he was advocating on behalf of the dramatic writers of the future, among them Terrence McNally, Lanford Wilson, Rochelle Owens, Adrienne Kennedy, and Ed Bullins. It is similarly important to note that this advocacy was not confined to groups like the WTC; as the Playwrights Strategy attests, there were creative coalitions brewing that cut across the divisions of race and gender. There was a deep current of optimism regarding the expanding categories of representation in the theatre after the social movements of the 1960s.

This outcome was celebrated, and suggested a new potential for capturing and reflecting the city on stage in the 1970s.

Representing the City: A New Breed

> Apart from the problems of staying alive and the discouraging employment statistics from Actors' Equity, this period impresses me as one of the most important and exciting times for actors in New York. I can't help feeling that something new and quite extraordinary has finally taken shape and is finding its way onto the scene.
> --Julie Bovasso, "A New Breed of New York Actor"[76]

In a lengthy article published in *New York* magazine in early 1974, Bovasso struck an upbeat note and described a process—ten years in the making-- that allowed a "new breed" of New York actor to emerge, one more individual, independent, and representative of the city itself: "They appear to be on their way to reconciling two divergent principles which have always represented one of the greatest conflicts that actors face: acting as an art form and acting as a big business."[77] It is in some ways remarkable that Bovasso was able to write so hopefully about this period of theatre in New York— just months before, Joseph Papp had fired her from her position as director of the first production at the Vivian Beaumont theatre, David Rabe's *In the Boom Boom Room*. Bovasso's high-profile dismissal just one week before opening made the major newspapers, tainted an already high-pressure production, and left Bovasso publicly decrying Papp as "one of our theater's most prominent feathered snakes."[78] Still, she shouted over the din of the city's creeping fiscal crisis to argue in the pages of *New York* that stage actors were finally placing themselves at the center of the business process. No small part of that, she explained, was the opening up of opportunities for actors who had before been ignored "in the background slicing pizza." Homegrown actors, from many ethnic backgrounds and every

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[76] Julie Bovasso, "A New Breed of New York Actor," *New York*, February 11, 1974, 41.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.

borough, were emerging: "Irish from Queens and Brooklyn, Jews from Brooklyn and the Bronx, Puerto Ricans from the Bronx and Manhattan, blacks from all the boroughs."[79] The theatres along East Fourth Street were prolific showcases for this trend. In his review of the first production at the Truck and Warehouse Theater, on East Fourth Street, Clive Barnes criticized the industrial name of the theatre, but praised it as a performance site of great potential:

> Growing up black is the new subject of the new musical, *Billy Noname*, which opened last night at a great new Off Broadway theater bearing the unlikely name of Truck and Warehouse Theater situated opposite La Mama herself on East Fourth Street. First, the theater. It is a genuine acquisition for New York, fairly large by Off Broadway standards, obviously well equipped and looking rather like the Mermaid Theater in London, which is a fine example for this kind of theater. (But couldn't it call itself the Rialto, or at least something a little more ritzy than Truck and Warehouse Theater?)[80]

The year was 1970, and Bruce Mailman's new theatre was the latest arrival to an area teeming with new plays. The Old Grey Lady was already comparing a theatre in the East Village to one in London, expecting it to strive for "something a little more ritzy" than its drab moniker, "Truck and Warehouse."[81] But the theatre developed a record of production that now supports Bovasso's positive estimation of the opportunities available to a wider pool of actors. While the cast of *Billy Noname* was unknown to Barnes, one of its stars, Urylee Leonardos, had previously appeared on Broadway, and its writer, William Wellington Mackey, quickly garnered a reputation as an

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[79] Ibid., 44.

[80] Clive Barnes, "Billy Noname, Uneven Musical, Begins Run: Bright Cast Pictures Growing Up Black Production is First for Off Broadway House," *New York Times*, March 3 1970, 37.

[81] Bruce Mailman, the owner of the Truck and Warehouse, knew his way around Off and Off-Off Broadway Theatre; he was a producer and a businessman who bought two buildings on Astor Place in 1965, developing them into the Astor Place Theatre. In the 1980s, he was the impresario at the head of the gay dance hall, The Saint, in the space of the Filmore East on Second Avenue. "Bruce Mailman, 55, Owner of Businesses in the East Village," *New York Times*, June 12, 1994, accessed May 20, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/1994/06/12/obituaries/bruce-mailman-55-owner-of-businesses-in-the-east-village.html.

emerging African American playwright. The early seasons of Truck and Warehouse would distinguish it as a space that emphasized a diversity of perspectives, communities, styles, and genres. A dark comedy by Bruce Jay Friedman, *Steambath*, earned Héctor Elizondo an Obie award for portraying a Puerto Rican attendant at a steambath on the Lower East Side (who is later revealed to be God).[82] In his review of *Steambath*, Barnes does not mention that the role of God is played by a Puerto Rican actor, even as he describes the play as a reflection of its location, with characters that mimic "typical New York neurotics…scared representatives of urban blight."[83]

The third production at Truck and Warehouse, in December of 1970, would be John Guare's first full-length play, *The House of Blue Leaves* ("the most striking new American play, crowed Walter Kerr[84]) and later shows included the Tennessee Williams play, *Small Craft Warnings,* Al Carmines' revue, *Faggots* (June 1973), and Tom Eyen's *2008 ½ (A Spaced Oddity)* (1974) and *Women Behind Bars* in 1976. For seven years, the Truck and Warehouse producing team successfully mounted politically conscious theatre with consistently mixed race casts, and even occasional political imports. "Quick, send your money while it's still worth something," began a small blurb in the *Village Voice* on 3 July 1973, that encouraged readers to donate to a San Francisco Mime Troupe tour to the theatre.[85] The last company to perform at the theatre in its "Truck and Warehouse" incarnation was Charles Ludlam's Ridiculous Theatre Company. Ludlam mounted two productions there, but in 1977, Mailman was struggling under

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[82] Director Anthony Perkins also appeared in the production. The play was later adapted for television, and caused furors for its nudity and language. Louis Calta, "Rip Torn Dropped from *Steambath*, a New Play," *New York Times,* June 5, 1970, 18. Clive Barnes, "Anthony Perkins Directs *Steambath*: Friedman Casts Diety as a Bath Attendant," *New York Times*, July 1, 1970, 49.
[83] Barnes, "Anthony Perkins Directs," 49.
[84] Walter Kerr, "The Most Striking New American Play," *New York Times*, April 4, 1971, 3.
[85] "Off Stage," *Village Voice*, July 3, 1973, 58.

the financial burden of the theatre's operation, and the lease was transferred to an erratic utopian community group who waged a "quasi-military operation" to evict the performers.[86]

While Bovasso observed with relish both the activity on East Fourth Street and the opening of opportunities for once-marginalized actors, the realities of life on the LES clashed with the optimism of actors ascending.[87] By 1979, Off-Off Broadway had been severely bruised by the difficulties of fundraising during a crisis, and the perception of the neighborhood verged on comically dismal. A custody dispute between a part-time actor and his state employee and artist ex-wife cited the factors of crime, pollution, and burnt-out buildings as an unfit geography for child rearing.[88] (The mother insisted that the cultural and ethnic diversity of the neighborhood made it an ideal locale to raise a child.) The hard-won successes on the stage that were personified by Truck and Warehouse's programming seemed to exit as swiftly as they appeared. They were also not celebrated by many in the surrounding community, who were deeply invested in battles on the local and City level for self-determination in matters of housing and community control. "It's not that we are against artists; it's that we have no places to put them," said one Loisaida resident at a Board of Estimate hearing about proposed artist housing on the Lower East Side.[89] In the middle of the city's crisis, heated rhetoric around resources and space was a curious counterpart to the decentralization of theatre on national and city-wide levels.

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[86] The Sullivan Institute/Fourth Wall Community was an experimental therapeutic practice that evolved into a utopian community. In 1978, they created a political theatre company called The Fourth Wall Community. Amy Siskind describes the group's increasingly authoritarian practices: when they discovered that "some gay acting company" who were "killers as well as perverts" inhabited the Truck and Warehouse, they mounted an operation to take over the theatre. See Amy B. Suskind, *The Sullivan Institute/Fourth Wall Community: The Relationship of Radical Individualism and Authoritarianism* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003), 88-89. The New York Theatre Workshop purchased the building in 1992, and it remains their producing home.

[87] In nearby SoHo, amid the housing shortage of the 1960s, artists amassed political resources to convince the City Planning Commission to legalize artist residency. See Stephen Petrus, "From Gritty to Chic: The Transformation of New York City's SoHo, 1962-1976," *New York History* (Winter 2003): 50-87.

[88] Ari L. Goldman, "Lower East Side is Standing Trial in Custody Case," *New York Times*, January 18, 1979, B1.

[89] Yvonne Rainer's experimental film, *The Man who Envied Women*, includes documentary footage of a Board of Estimate hearing on an Artist-Homeowners' Program. Yvonne Rainer, *The Films of Yvonne Rainer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 180.

More and more colleges were creating theatre arts departments, and academic theatre productions were proliferating. This sent waves of eager artists into areas like the Lower East Side. The nineteen-sixties had created an environment of earnest grappling with the notion of a more decentralized arts landscape, in the visual arts, theatre, and music.[90] There was a push for the arts—and theatre specifically—to fulfill a more populist mission within the city, and this fit snugly with the needs of an administration searching for ways to repair the perception of a damaged and broken Big Apple—a nickname for the City that would become a centerpiece of its next marketing campaign. On the other side of this narrative, however, were the tensions of a city in crisis: the counter-weight of an austerity ideology and competition for resources that both created and revealed deep fissures between theatres and the communities in which they lived and performed.

Municipal Priorities and New Visions for Cultural Affairs

> While the avant-garde struggles somewhere out there, the rear guard holes up in City Hall.
> --Ada Louise Huxtable, "Art, Money, and Impotence in New York"[91]

The allure of Hollywood, political rifts, drug addiction, and artistic differences were all players in the fractious development of the Off-Off Broadway scene. In addition to these factors that threatened artists at the time, there was the very ecology of the city, and the growing reality that in the sphere of funding, public and private intervention ran along parallel tracks. While the funding decisions of the NEA, NYSCA, and the Department of Cultural Affairs in the early 1970s often reflected the political and social gains made during the preceding decade, the social

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[90] Major foundations had joined the efforts to evaluate the work of arts institutions in light of the community building emphasis of the1960s. *The Art Museum as Educator* was a 1978 report conceived out of a 1972 meeting of the Council on Museum Education, supported by the NEA and numerous private foundations. Through six case studies, the report analyzed outreach programs, community-based museums, teacher training, and special audiences. Barbara Y. Newsom and Adele Silver, eds., *The Art Museum as Educator: A Collection of Studies as Guides to Practice and Policy* (New York: University of California Press, 1978).
[91] Ada Louise Huxtable, "Art, Money and Impotence in New York," *New York Times*, December 15, 1974, 151.

turmoil of the 1960s had meant that in the areas of funding, geography, and even critical attention, the map was changing rapidly. Previously marginalized theatre artists and organizations received increasing recognition as institutions.[92] By the late 1970s, however, this was largely not the case; contemporaneous with these successes, the city had been strategizing ways to repair its image deficit, which led to a restructured emphasis on economic development. Theatres struggled against the forces of decreased funding, inflation, and the same image crisis that faced the tourism industry.

For years, New York had been sinking deeper into a crisis of its image, and many officials believed it should seek refuge in its cultural assets in order to revive its reputation as a destination city. There was a concern that New York was losing its international standing as a cultural leader due to its intractable urban ills, and some in the administration began to feel that the arts, if not protected and administered through official channels, would also fall victim to the push for austerity and further diminish its luster.[93] The city's mutually dependent relationship to the arts was the subject of increasingly vocal debate in the public sphere as columnists and politicians argued over expenditures during a time of enforced cutting back. Just as federal, state, and local governments were opening their funding streams to a more diverse population of artists

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[92] La Mama's performance archive from the 1960s is a testament to this. Outside of the international artists Ellen Stewart brought to La Mama (including Tadeusz Kantor, Andrei Serban, and Kazuo Ohno), her full-time resident companies included The Third World Theatre Institute, The American Indian Theatre Ensemble, and La Mama Chinatown, directed by Wu Jing-jyi and Ching Yeh, just a few of the hundreds of companies that performed on her stages. A full archive of show titles and dates produced is now available on their website, http://www.lamama.org. In 1979, the NEA "abruptly decreased" La Mama's funding, displeased that it was providing nearly one third of their overall budget. Playwright and poet Fay Chiang, who ran the AmerAsia Creative Arts in neighboring Chinatown, has discussed the challenges of funding streams to older versus newer organizations. Mia Kang, "Interview with Fay Chiang," *Nodutdol* (March 2009), accessed May 1, 2012, http://nodutdol.org/index.php/enews/march_2009/article/4/.

[93] In 1966, the city contributed $45-million a year to cultural institutions, but $30-million of that money went to finance three public library systems. The actual allocations are minimal when put into perspective of the larger city budget. In 1973, the City gave less than one-tenth of 1 per cent for the purpose of funding its major institutions--$7.1 million was devoted to 21 institutions in the capital budget. That year, Yankee Stadium had been allocated $21 million in capital funds; triple the amount allocated to all cultural institutions. McCandlish Phillips, "Candidates Assess City's Arts Future," *New York Times*, Nov 1, 1973, 50.

during the 1960s,[94] city officials were also slowly beginning to realize that their furtherance of the arts sector should not be restricted to the two dozen cultural organizations that traditionally comprised the portfolio of cultural affairs.

The first ingredient necessary was a mayor invested in the cultural life of the city; under the Lindsay administration (1966-1973), Thomas P. F. Hoving, the brief head of the Recreation and Cultural Affairs Administration (and later the Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1967-1977), was perceived as a formidable champion of the visual and performing arts, but in later years his tenure was harshly evaluated as a bureaucratic failure. Hoving was limited by the disparate and multitudinous entities clustered under one agency— including museums, libraries, zoos, and gardens. The processes of dispensing city support were labyrinthine, miring applicants and artists in red tape, as they scrounged for minimal funding. Additionally, there was the sense that the City offices were inhabited by the old guard, and that those nominated to positions in Parks and Recreation were too entrenched in outdated models to adapt to the new landscape that had been flourishing in the last decade.

While "cultural affairs" is a deceivingly muddy term, it is important to note that the economics of theatre make it a medium dependent upon public and private largesse.[95] In 1974, Martin E. Segal remarked in a commission report that the performing arts had been inconsistently funded, even while the producing realities of theatre meant that it was very often

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[94] In the early 1960s, the Ford Foundation generously funded the Phoenix Theatre, located on Second Avenue and Twelfth Street, and The American Place Theatre with three-year grants; the Rockefeller Foundation also gave to these Off-Broadway theatres. In 1967, the National Endowment for the Arts provided grants to seven Off-Off Broadway groups, including Café La Mama, the Judson Poets' Theater, the Open Theatre, the American Place Theatre, Albarwild Theater Arts, the Chelsea Theater Center, and the New Theater Workshop. Poggi, *Theatre in America*, 205.

[95] Bowen and Baumol's 1966 articulation of the phenomenon of "cost disease" applies; live performance faces financing problems as unit costs rise and a "productivity lag" persists. A play will always take the same amount of physical output per work hour; the very conditions of live performance create this static productivity because "the work of the performer is an end in itself, not a means for the production of some good." William Baumol and William Bowen, *Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1966), 164.

producing at a great deficit.[96] Mayor John Lindsay's downsizing of the entire arm of city government related to cultural affairs was seemingly related to his larger philosophy of the politics of aesthetics. He professed the belief that "the arts must remain the particular province of the private citizen,"[97] and oversaw a major reorganization of the fundamentals of the City's engagement with the arts, leaving the Department of Cultural Affairs with skeletal program funding in 1971. Lindsay's theory that governmental intervention in the arts can "lead to a degree of standardization of conformity which is antithetical to our best artistic traditions,"[98] was reflected in its low prioritization in both civic discourse and city administration.

Lindsay's concern that municipal interference in the arts might lead to conformity did foreshadow the contradictory outcomes that would emerge as successive administrations sought to boost the reputation and profile of the performing arts. During the 1973 mayoral election, the *New York Times* presented the four candidates with a series of questions about the relationship of the next mayoralty to the role of the city as an arts and cultural center. Even the Conservative candidate, Mario Biaggi, spoke with distress about the deterioration of "the whole quality of theatregoing in New York," pledging to restore it to "what it once was."[99] Other candidates spoke of decentralizing cultural opportunities ("I want Tebaldi to sing in the Bronx," said the Liberal candidate State Assemblyman Albert H. Blumenthal, in any effort to emphasize his belief in these opportunities away from Manhattan centers.[100]) While their prescriptions and plans differed, all four candidates shared the consensus that the city's official relationship to the

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[96] *Report to the Mayor's Committee on Cultural Policy* (New York: New York City Mayor's Committee on Cultural Policy, 1974). Many figures in the movement that germinated in churches, lofts, and cabarets had hopes of one day providing financial support to artists; others, like Murray Mednick of the Theatre Genesis, expressed ambivalence about accepting funding from organizations. For example, by the mid-1960s, Ellen Stewart expressed being deeply grieved by having her actors work "all day on a cup of instant coffee." Poggi, *Theatre in America*, 202.
[97] Richard F. Shepard, "Hoving is Named Cultural Chief," *New York Times*, Nov. 22, 1966, 1.
[98] Ibid. Also, see Grace Glueck, "Money Isn't Enough at City Culture Unit," *New York Times*, June 24, 1974.
[99] McCandlish Phillips, "Candidates Assess City's Arts Future," *New York Times*, Nov. 1, 1973, 50.
[100] Ibid.

arts was weakening. They were clearly all conscious of the imperative to project a favorable stance in the paper of record. Even Roger Starr publicly argued that the city needed to do more to tap the tourist business, which was not possible when visitors were confident they "risked their necks or their respectability" in New York City.[101]

When Democrat Abraham Beame was elected mayor in 1973, it seemed that the Cultural Affairs wing of the city mechanism would secure considerable and lasting support. Beame, who had called for a "major Renaissance" of the arts during his campaign,[102] very quickly implemented two of the proposals set forth by the candidates: separating the city's Department of Cultural Affairs from the Administration of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs, and the creation of an Advisory Committee on Culture and the Performing Arts. How much Beame himself was committed to the arts is unclear; what is clear is that there was a public conversation afoot, one which held "culture" as the great hope of a city that was facing a multi-dimensional crisis. Coalitions of city officials and private interests began to work together to subdue the image crisis that was threatening New York's identity as a global cultural center.[103] There was a sense that the global media capital was drowning *itself* in negative publicity. *New York* magazine suggested that the arts should play a prominent role in sparing New York from the harsh judgment of the rest of the country:

> New York's cultural life at all levels is what makes the city visible to the rest of the country and modifies the hinterland's resentful willingness to let the city slide into fiscal ruin. For New Yorkers, culture is the spiritual topping on the gritty, grinding reality of

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[101] This was not only about tourism, but also served to shore up their reputation as an address for major corporate headquarters. Starr, "Making New York Smaller," 3.
[102] Ibid.
[103] An early example of the "image crisis discourse" that heightened throughout the 1960s and reached a peak of intensity between 1976 and 1977, infuriated Robert Moses. Protesting the poor publicity received by his World's Fair, he expressed concern about "the characterization of New York as a dying city full of wrath and tears, from which tourists, investors, and the white middle class in general should flee." Miriam Greenberg, *Branding New York: How a City in Crisis was Sold to the World* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 49.

daily survival. It not only helps stabilize neighborhoods but also generates the largest part of the city's tourist industry. Churning up an estimated $3 billion of economic activity every year, tourism is second only to the $13 billion garment trade.[104]

This view of the arts as prized possession of all New Yorkers reflected one strand of the approach to the arts as an economic development tool for many areas, and not just for traditional tourist destinations like Times Square.

During the height of the fiscal crisis, New York was an island within a country that took a relentlessly anti-urban, conservative, and anti-cosmopolitan stance towards the city, whipped to a fever pitch during its most desperate hour. This was a larger theme identifiable in the relationship between the nation and its one-time capital. The infamous *Daily News* headline, "FORD TO CITY: DROP DEAD," barely concealed the larger dissonance behind the denial of federal help. Historian Joshua Freeman contextualizes President Ford's decision as the Republican president's seizing of an opportunity to "pursue both ideological and political ends…making an object lesson out of New York could serve as a national curative for overly generous social programs and attendant fiscal irresponsibility."[105] Outside of Ford's political motivations to add strength to his conservative portfolio, even Democrats in Congress responded with enmity:

"Cities are viewed as the seed of corruption and duplicity," Delaware senator Joseph Biden told a reporter. "There is a general negative feeling toward New York City," North

[104] Carter Ratcliff, "The Culture Vulture Flies Higher," *New York*, April 10, 1978, 53.
[105] Freeman, *Working-Class New York*, 259. Criticizing New York-style liberalism posed an opportunity for Ford, who feared a challenge within the Republican Party, from Ronald Reagan. The federal government's response infamously left the state to take the steps necessary to keep the city from defaulting. Governor Carey is now widely credited with saving New York from a financial catastrophe. Carey turned to the business establishment for counsel, and the Municipal Assistance Corporation (or, "Big MAC"), headed by Felix Rohatyn took direct control over the city sales and stock transfers. See Seymour P. Lachman and Robert Polner, *The Man Who Saved New York: Hugh Carey and the Great Fiscal Crisis of 1975* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).

> Carolina representative Richardson Preyer said, “New York City had a certain overtone of sinfulness about it.”[106]

Freeman attributes much of this response to New York’s role in the postwar years as a symbol of “profligacy, moral laxity, and social chaos.”[107] So while Mayor Beame was keen to use the arts to make the case for the continued vibrancy of the city—“one of the most exportable things we have”— it was also true that the City needed to tread carefully. These arts had been simmering in a cauldron of 1950s Beat irreverence and 1960s anti-establishment questioning; its most vibrant examples were occurring far from the once safe, sanctioned spaces of Broadway. This was, of course, the city that had brought the nation *Hair*, which, on its national tour in 1971, was met with protests, pickets, and, in some states, banning.[108]

In a divided country, the predominant response to the 1960s was, as William K. Tabb argues, an assertion of conservatism; monies once earmarked for low-income, inner-city neighborhoods evaporated as stagflation developed, programs were dismantled, and unemployment rose.[109] This was made clear in the federal rebuke to New York’s request for help through its financial troubles, and, its exportable resource, culture. The arts needed additional value beyond “expression” if city officials and the nation at large could be persuaded of its import. Indeed, in 1975, Mayor Beame continued to take an optimistic stance on the reach of its cultural offerings, speaking passionately about the economic importance of the arts: “There’s nothing like New York, a factor that assumes even greater urgency when money is short.”[110] His

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[106] As quoted in Freeman, *Working-Class New York*, 260.
[107] Ibid. In this chapter, Freeman relies heavily on an account of these years in New York City written by a then-journalist for the *New York Times*. Fred Ferretti, *The Year the Big Apple Went Bust* (New York: Putnam Books, 1976).
[108] John Moore, “The Dangerous History of Hair,” *The Denver Post*, Nov 1, 2011, accessed March 18, 2012, http://www.denverpost.com/theater/ci_19007349.
[109] Tabb, *Long Default*, 11. As many others have done after the publication of his 1982 book, Tabb provides an early, persuasive account of the urban crisis *behind* New York City’s fiscal crisis.
[110] Richard F. Shepard, “Beame is Upbeat Over the Cultural Life of the City,” *New York Times*, April 8, 1975, 30.

confidence was undergirded by a major initiative to reposition and reevaluate the role of the arts within the city, headed by Martin E. Segal. Segal tirelessly advocated for the economic importance of the arts as the chairman of the City Commission for Cultural Affairs, charged with recommending goals for the policies of the city to be carried out by the newly created agency. It was Segal who motivated Beame's pro-arts zeal, and together they tried to reform the business of the arts in the city. Eager to dismantle the "superagencies" that Lindsay had created, Beame split Cultural Affairs from Parks and Recreation. This abolished the "Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs" monolith that was deemed "unsuccessful," having effectively submerged cultural affairs within the administrative overlay of the massive agency.[111] He also created a new advisory panel for cultural matters: the Cultural Affairs Agency, and named Segal, an investment banker and president of the Film Society of Lincoln Center, as its Chairman.[112]

It sounds like Beame's administration was committed to making the case for the arts, but in fact he announced many of these changes not long after he had instituted drastic steps to *reduce* city spending. In October of 1974, he had ordered a freeze on most city hiring and pay increases; shortly thereafter, he ordered large-scale layoffs. The department's budget had been decreased by forty-five percent in the city's "crisis" slash, and had received no restorations. Undeterred, Segal presented a larger budget to the city council, but called it "an austerity budget," justified by "a $3-billion cultural industry in the city that created $100 million in taxes, with some $40-million in direct support funding by the city of cultural institutions."[113] Members of the council responded with indignation that Segal could propose a larger budget for a new agency in such "parlous times."[114]

[111] Grace Glueck, "City Council Acts on New Arts Agency," *New York Times,* October 2, 1975, 44.
[112] Steven Weisman, "Beame, Naming Advisory Panel On Culture, Plans New Agency," May 23, 1975, 38.
[113] Glueck, "City Council Acts," 44.
[114] Ibid.

While many had been searching for ways to make the argument that the arts deserved assistance during times of crisis, Segal had been particularly effective. A former accountant, Segal provided the figures revealing culture's measurable economic importance to New York. As a close advisor and friend to the mayor, Segal was able to influence policy in a unique way; "the dollar approach to culture inspired Beame."[115] Yet even considering Segal's level of access, while he protected the arts sector from some degree of cuts, his protestations arguably had more significance in the long-term approach of the city than in short-term successes. Just a month after Beame publicly advertised his "optimism" about the cultural life of the city, it was reported that the crisis was "deeply affecting its cultural institutions and their services to the public." Cuts of 10% were followed by more cuts of 8.5%, and ominous news articles predicted that cultural institutions would have to leave the city.[116] Just one year later, the new chief of Cultural Affairs, Claude Shostal, was predicting bruising battles for money between Cultural Affairs, fire, sanitation, and police; the Department's budget was down again due to the City's budgetary cuts.[117] The conversation had changed; the arts were now pitted against the essential services of the city.

There was soon another fundamental change, in the form of the city's swelling public relations efforts. In 1971, the Association for a Better New York (ABNY) and the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) initiated the "Big Apple" publicity campaign "to stem the tide of corporate move-outs and declining tourism."[118] (It was retired in 1974 with the onset of fiscal crisis, but was embraced again between the summers of 1976 and 1977.) This new PR campaign

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[115] Ratcliff, "Culture Vulture," 53. Ratcliff contends that it was Segal's approach that led Beame to pry Cultural Affairs loose from the Parks Department, where it had been since Thomas Hoving's term as parks commissioner under Lindsay.
[116] Grace Glueck, "Cultural Agencies Reducing Hours and Security: Cultural Services Feel Impact of Cuts," *New York Times*, Nov 3, 1975, 1. Segal publicly protested these actions, demanding that the New York State Council on the Arts restore funds that had been taken away.
[117] Louis Calta, "City Cultural Affairs Chief Foresees Money Battles," August 18, 1976, 46.
[118] Greenberg, *Branding New York*, 165.

drew on "mythic, transhistorical representations of the city as a national and global capital."[119] A battle for representation had developed; the city employed its new Office of Economic Development (OED) in the hopes of broadcasting images of a safe and productive financial district, a tourist-friendly vision not marred by blackouts, strikes, deepening inequality, arson, or closing hospitals. The municipal restructuring that Beame and the Department of City Planning devised in 1976 was spelled out in an economic recovery report, which created the new OED:

> …[T]he first city-wide administrative division devoted entirely to generating new income for the city through its dealings with the private sector. In creating this new office… Beame and the DCP [Department of City Planning] merged previously separate departments like Cultural Affairs, Public Events, and Budget and Finance under one roof. The office was then placed under the jurisdiction of a new "Deputy Mayor for Economic Development," whose position of authority was second only to that of the Mayor himself.[120]

While financial haggling at the city level may seem highly bureaucratic, when combined with restructuring, this period amounted to a fundamental re-envisioning of the definition of "a cultural institution" in the city, which affected the perception of the arts, and broke down the traditionally centralized way of understanding cultural production on the map of the Big Apple.

Before its separation, Cultural Affairs had been lumped with Parks and Recreation for many reasons, one being a matter of geography: historically, major cultural institutions had been built upon officially designated city parkland that the city provided to a group of patrons, clearing the way for philanthropists to develop a cultural institution of the highest order. Janet

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[119] Ibid., 161-62.
[120] Ibid., 165.

Langsam, who served in three mayoral administrations and was the First Deputy Commissioner of Cultural Affairs under Beame, remembers it as a time of upheaval and changing approaches:

> [B]y the time I got to Cultural Affairs…there was a whole group of organizations that were important to the city that were new and fledgling but were not part of the system. They were getting some funds from Cultural Affairs through some other competitive process, through member items from the Board of Estimate or that kind of thing. So at that point, [Martin] Segal was able to move the idea that culture in New York City was important to the economy—or should be seen as economic development and certainly should stand on its own as an agency.[121]

As the old model was being reconfigured, occurring simultaneously within civic and municipal discourse was an expanding definition of *which* cultural institutions were important to the city, and why.

This change can be exemplified in the theatre with Joe Papp's successful wrenching of power and money from a deeply skeptical City Council and Board of Estimate. It likely helped his case that Papp began presenting the classics on the LES at the East River Amphitheatre, which ran in step with populist "education and awareness" goals for the performing arts. By 1975, Papp was running a theatre company that even Mayor Beame included among his list of favorite institutions, alongside the Museum of Natural History.[122] In fact, Papp himself received the ultimate nod from the rarefied world of arts institutions when he was brought on to manage

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[121] Janet Langsam, interview with author, January 11, 2012. Langsam was very involved in efforts to create artist housing on the LES. While outside the focus of this chapter, artist housing initiatives are an attendant concern; during the course of our conversation, Langsam wondered aloud if incorporating Cultural Affairs under the OED umbrella contributed to hostility towards their initiatives from LES residents. "As I'm sitting here talking about it and thinking about it…maybe the [artist housing] experience in the East Village had more to do than I thought or realized with this whole notion of the arts as an economic driver. [T]he arts are out there, trying to survive: 'Why are we attached to the Parks Department? That doesn't really make sense in terms of the whole of what the arts are, so let's move over to the economic development bucket.' …[B]eing in the economic development bucket, maybe that turned off those housing folks in the LES."

[122] Shepard, "Beame Is Upbeat," 30.

the Vivian Beaumont theatre at Lincoln Center in 1973, endowing his downtown institution with even more uptown cachet.

Progressive Capitalism at the Public

In 1971, some officials were beginning to indicate to budget-makers that the city was facing fiscally precarious times ahead. At this time, Papp was also pushing for an ambitious deal to save the Public from its own financial troubles. The calendar for the 11 March 1971 Board of Estimate hearing is cluttered with zoning changes, requests for sidewalk cafes, and purchases of buildings for city childcare facilities. In "Cal. No. 281," a proposed amendment to the Capital Budget for 1970-1971, over $2 million is requested to acquire the Public Theater at 425 Lafayette Street. That the City would even consider purchasing the old Astor Library building for $2,600,000 speaks to Papp's persuasiveness, as well as to the foresight of some well-placed city leaders. Papp was wise enough to make the survival of the Public Theater about more than just the Public in New York; it was also about New York in the nation. In a 1973 opinion piece disparaging the recently elected Mayor Beame, Richard Reeves suggested that while John Lindsay had not been a good mayor, he at least had style, running the town "as if the whole thing were Lincoln Center."

> We can't let the opposition, which these days seems to be everybody outside the city limits and a lot of those inside, think that New York isn't much more than style. If somebody offered enough money to get Joseph Papp to consider moving his bag of tricks to Minneapolis, Beame would probably react with a 62-page audit showing that Papp had

> created only 112 jobs, while the city had recently added 186 jobs in a hubcap factory in Greenpoint.[123]

For Reeves, Beame was not stylish enough; while a nice, decent man, he had a reputation as a nit-picker, someone who could not understand New York's core assets as imagination and ferment, not security and certainty. Reeves contrasted this with former Mayor Lindsay, who "did understand Joe Papp." Joe Papp, however, did not take kindly to being used as fodder for a take-down of Beame, and protested with a letter to the editor: Beame had always answered his phone calls, listened understandingly, and voted support for the New York Shakespeare Festival four times at the Board of Estimate.[124]

The five borough presidents sat on the powerful (and now defunct) Board of Estimate, and many of them chafed at the idea of giving $2.6 million dollars to purchase a theatre building in Manhattan. The Public had spent nearly $2 million in renovation and theatre-construction in the landmark building, and the next phase of the plan was contingent on the City using capital funds to purchase the building and then lease it back to the Shakespeare Festival for a dollar a year; in this way, the Festival would get back the purchase price of the building. Lindsay had supported this plan, but when Papp brought his appeal to the City Council Committee, members questioned why local needs "considerably more modest than Papp's $2.5 million request" were being denied. Papp argued that holding smaller needs like park improvements alongside the survival of a cultural institute was a false comparison, but politicians frequently measured every request against their own stalled projects. They were—and perhaps understandably, given the imperatives of holding public office—more concerned with their districts and boroughs than with a vision for a public theatre.

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[123] Richard Reeves, "Abe Beame: Looking Ahead with the Mini-Mayor," *New York*, September 17, 1973, 42.
[124] Joseph Papp, "Help me, Cassius, or I sink!" *New York*, November 5, 1973, 5.

Papp was desperate for the intricate real estate plan to work; the city's annual contribution to the Public had recently been cut from $500,000 to $350,000, scenery costs were up 100 percent in two years, actors' salaries were up, and fundraising was at a standstill.[125] At the same time, the Mellon Foundation and the Ford Foundation had both rejected Papp's pleas for help. In November of 1971, Papp was again told that the deal was off; the city was in a financial crisis and the money was not there for the giving. In a swipe at the theatre versus the city services argument, Papp defiantly proclaimed: "As long as the garbage is still being collected, our deal with the city must go through."[126] Papp was unhappy that their compromise—to license the use of the theatre from the city, not lease it—was handing over too much control, and now he was concerned that the compromise deal might not even go through.

Still, with city help, Papp was able not only to keep his institution afloat, but to expand. It is impossible to measure the direct impact of critics like Clive Barnes, who were singing Papp's praises in the national media; the Shakespeare Festival and the Public Theater were not just successes within the city limits, but constituted the "most vital theatre in North America and could well become the most vital in the world."[127] According to John Guare, Papp had built an "extraordinary institution," one "as close as America has come to a national theater."[128] Papp's reputation as a the man who delivered Shakespeare to the Lower East Side, the city, and even the nation, added to the prestige of the Public as an entity ready to compete in the halls of City Hall with the storied arts institutions of the city.

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[125] Stuart W. Little, "Another Opening, Another Show?," *New York*, June 29, 1970, 6-7.
[126] Catherine Breslin, "The Hottest Show in Town Is Joe Papp!" *New York*, November 29, 1971, 33. Ironically, in just a few years time, further cutbacks meant that it the trash went uncollected in certain neighborhoods for long stretches of time. Also in this interview, Papp discusses his idea for a National Theatre, based out of Washington, D.C. and New York, which he was also pursuing.
[127] Ibid.
[128] John Guare, "Papp and Circumstance" (Letter to the Editor), *New York,* December 13, 1971, 5.

In this and in other examples, the social movements of the 1960s had slowly—and slightly-- pried open the City's most venerable institutions into a more inclusive present day. No longer could a few institutions dominate the funding streams, as they came under fire from arts groups arguing that these organizations were not connecting sufficiently to the city's diversity of communities. Groups such as the Art Workers Coalition and the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition demanded that the city's museums increase representation of minority artists, extend community services, and alter their facilities to be more "relevant and available to minority people."[129] Notwithstanding his storied nitpicking, Beame sought to bolster a new image for the city and relied upon a kind of energy that could not be captured by the Metropolitan Museum. To do so, he thrust a surprisingly populist dimension behind his description of the city's creative endeavors: "I doubt there is any other place in the world where cultural activities are brought as close to the man in the street as they are in this city."[130] In theatre, due in part to competition for resources centered around struggles for performance space, this vision of culture was often harder to implement in practice than in theory, and in fact, the period ended with a deeply contentious relationship between the arts and "the man on the street" in the case study of the Lower East Side. For while Papp's building (and productions like John Guare's musical version of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*) were receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars, the Lower East Side Community Workshop received just $538.00 in the 1973-1974 fiscal year.[131]

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[129] The Museum of Modern Art was responding with a trustees committee and the Brooklyn Museum had already made similar steps towards an evaluation of its outreach efficacy. The Whitney Museum, which was already running the Arts Resources Center on the Lower East Side, began sponsoring a series of one-man shows by black artists. The Metropolitan Museum of Art had been interested in expanding, and in 1970, the Metropolitan trustees formed a committee, on "Decentralization and Community Needs," questioning the role of the Met in relation to various communities. Grace Glueck, "Metropolitan Museum to Study Its Role in City's Communities," *New York Times*, February 24, 1970, 51.
[130] Shepard, "Beame is Upbeat," 30.
[131] Segal's Committee Report includes both capital expenditures and the city-wide appropriations budgets from the Department of Cultural Affairs for the prior years. *Report to the Mayor's Committee on Cultural Policy* (New York: New York City Mayor's Committee on Cultural Policy, 1974).

The hunger for real estate ownership was not unique to Gersten and Papp. As Papp's theatre on Lafayette Street was deemed just as worthy of big sums as one uptown, a similar dynamic could be seen across the United States. Theatrical activity had expanded in the 1960s as the regional theatre movement grew, and organizations were successfully obtaining funding for the theatre buildings that held the potential to access a wider vision of "community" than before.[132] The Public Theater's building sits on the border between the East Village and the West Village—Lafayette Street, which converges into Fourth Avenue. This was a convenient border to straddle, as it placed the Public further from the locus of impact of the austerity policies in the Lower East Side.

Ever since Segal's Committee on Cultural Policy concluded that the city was doing an inefficient job serving the area's more than 1,500 cultural institutions and organizations, many prominent voices of the city were demanding a more thorough cultural policy, one that wouldn't subsume cultural activities in the maelstrom of fiscal crisis. In an essay responding to the Segal's Committee's findings, architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable acknowledged the vice grip that the New York legend still had on the city: that there existed an endless stock of the young and talented who would continually make history in the sophisticated settings of theatres on and Off and Off-Off Broadway, in galleries and lofts, in penthouses and apartments. "It is a popular mythology compounded of art and money," and while creativity endures in spite of high rents and crime and potholes, she demanded that New Yorkers make the case for their cultural life.

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[132] Rachel Shane, "Negotiating the Creative Sector: Understanding the Role and Impact of an Artistic Union in a Cultural Industry: A Study of Actors' Equity Association and the Theatrical Industry" (dissertation, Ohio State University, 2006), 241. Between 1962 and 1969, over 170 theatres and arts centers were built. Nationally, over 60 percent of all government, foundation, and private funding dedicated to the performing arts was earmarked for the construction of facilities, meant to be contributions to the community, which would develop "reciprocal relationships with their audiences." This was also occurring in Europe, as neighborhood arts initiatives gained currency in both France and Germany. In 1968, Andrew Malraux, France's first Minister of Cultural Affairs, proposed the establishment of cultural centers throughout France. See Otis L. Guernsey, Jr., *Curtain Times* (New York: Applause Theatre Books, 1987), 143.

Not to do so, she cautioned, is to adopt an "attitude that to outsiders is a more unpardonable sin than chauvinism or pride."[133] Economic fringe benefits of the arts aside, there were clear obstacles: institutional deficits, salaries not keeping pace with inflation, skyrocketing production and maintenance costs. New York was providing $50 million annually to arts programs through budgets and agencies, and the pressure to do so effectively and productively was greater than ever. But never far from the dialogue around the troubles facing the arts were the wider deficits in New York City; Segal's committee explicitly linked their recommendations (and any ensuing actions on them) to the future of New York as both a cultural capital and a solvent city. The relative health and productivity of arts institutions-- however the city chose to define them— was quickly becoming both a harbinger and an engine of the fiscal crisis rebound. For downtown theatre in particular, this meant that the vision of the Office of Economic Development was now folded into decisions of cultural policy, a position that led to complex relations on the ground between artists and neighborhood activists in the Lower East Side.

Making the Lower East Side Smaller

In January of 1975, a Kathakali dance troupe inaugurated a new season at La Mama, and, on January 15th, the theatre produced a series of one-act plays by Julie Bovasso: *The Super Lovers, Schubert's Last Serenade, The Final Analysis.* (Mid-month, Ellen Stewart's recreation of the Cotton Club, *Cotton Club Gala,* made waves, and became a tradition.) *Standard Safety* is a departure from Bovasso's full-length plays; she traded aggressively non-linear structures and chaotic stage pictures for a structure that observed the unities of time and place, in a disarmingly average office setting. She replaced the bohemians and lunatics with tidy insurance types. The play takes place at the World Trade Center, in the company cafeteria of the Standard Safety

[133] Huxtable, "Art, Money and Impotence," 151.

Insurance Corporation, Inc. Soft muzak is heard in the background while two members of the auditing department discuss their bouts of unexplained fatigue and depression. They try to recall parties that they attended in years past, but cannot. At regular intervals, their lunch is interrupted by a public address sound system that berates the employees with a range of infractions, birthday announcements, and inane bureaucratic requests. The office workers yearn to defy the choking hierarchy and pervasive weight of authority, but they are covered in a paralyzing pall; they can merely daydream about taking up painting and running out to have illicit lunches outside of the cafeteria (against company policy).

The time of the play indicates "the present," but every line is weighted down by an allegiance to a conservative mentality that seems to bear more resemblance to the 1950s than its contemporary setting. Behind the carefully orchestrated procedures for every aspect of their office life, a deep racism and chauvinism simmers under every scene, as when a young, attractive executive seeks a more attractive secretary. He moves from table to table, quizzing the prospective candidates. "Do you have negro blood in you?," he asks one, just as Mr. Weinrib, the company president, matter-of-factly reveals his own repressed homoerotic desires for the godlike young executive. The company, however, does boast a Ballet Team, led by its recreation director, a Monsieur Jacques Le Fracques, who has trained the gentlemen from Fidelity Bonds and Surety to Fandango. Mr. Weinrib announces the event:

> As you know, this event is of personal importance to me because it was my beloved late wife who suggested—nay, insisted on her deathbed—that we implement this Ballet Team here at Standard Safety. You will be pleased to hear that my son Phillip is interrupting his

> own daily routine to be on hand today to dedicate to the memory of his mother this first demonstration of Standard Safety terpsichorean skill.[134]

When Mr. Weinrib's son, Phillip, finally arrives at the World Trade Center (which had opened in 1973), he makes a short speech in his mother's memory before the performance. After describing her dashed dreams of becoming a ballerina—she was not tall and thin with high cheekbones—he makes an impassioned plea for the arts:

> And so she became a victim of injustice, a victim of a stupid prejudice; but she vowed in spite of that to carry out her inner vision which told her that everybody can dance. Everybody, ladies and gentleman, has ballet in their bones—regardless of height, weight, size or shape… *(Applause.)* regardless of sex, religion, nationality, race, or economic background…I share my mother's vision, and I feel that it is up to the leaders of industry, like my father, to develop and nurture an olden age in which art, music, drama, poetry and the Dance will flourish.

While his impassionate speech can be seen as a naïve espousal of the arts as spiritual uplift rather than craft, the sharpest critique of the play seems aimed at the titans of business who would sponsor their maddeningly out of touch visions for the arts. Phillip's is a milquetoast and acceptably pluralist vision of the arts, contingent, of course, on the clueless leaders of industry who wrap even the announcement of office birthdays in red tape. Bovasso may have felt optimistic about the new breed of actor, but *Standard Safety* asks larger questions about the arts in the country, and, in New York City. She eliminates the lively and unpredictable artist characters of *Gloria & Esperanza*; the concern is not the thievery of the artist's livelihood, but the unholy fandango between business and the arts. Gone are the raving men in the asylum, the young poet confounding his psychologists, the gay Asian landlord presiding over the chaos. The

[134] Julie Bovasso, *Standard Safety* (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1976), 23.

multitudinous wash of those old stage pictures was replaced with an office. Her image of a culture that exiles art as "recreation" to be enjoyed in the company cafeteria on one's lunch break might have seemed absurd in the new theatre at La Mama, but it was an appropriate leap. As the bigotry of the past marched up the ladder in the offices of Standard Safety, the company men looked to art to smooth over their rough edges. In a city that was increasingly left to appeal to the private sector for funding with so much of the city and state coffers off limits, the short play offered a vision of an encroaching reality.

While there was ample political performance to be found in Roger Starr's aggressive style of writing and argumentation, his philosophy is a perfect exemplar of this historical moment, described by Allen J. Scott as "an overriding turn to neoliberalism in governmental policy stances" that ushered in "a climate of increasing fiscal austerity, and is associated, among other things, with massive public withdrawal from all forms of redistributive policy, both national and local."[135] In Starr's extended defense of planned shrinkage (later known as "benign neglect"), he personalizes the fiscal crisis that left an army of public servants traumatized by the looming threats of insolvency:

> Every New York City commissioner who lived through the first days of the city's financial crisis— from the shutting off of bank credit in early 1975 to the approval of the Federal loan near the end of the year— remembers it as the time when the future was hidden behind the doomsday of the next payroll date, or the next call from City Hall setting a quota of new firings.

Unless additional cuts (to the tune of $800-million) or increased revenues could be found, the new doomsday, Starr cautioned, was not far off: July 1, 1978. The city government "does not

[135] Allen J. Scott, *Social Economy of the Metropolis: Cognitive-Cultural Capitalism and the Global Resurgence of Cities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 21.

receive enough wealth to sustain the city at the level to which its citizens have been accustomed."[136] In response to the litany of crisis symptoms, Starr proposes a third, less familiar solution than taxation or cuts: New York City could continue to be a "world city" if it shrinks its population. "We could simply accept the fact that the city's population is going to shrink, and we could cut back on city services accordingly, realizing considerable savings in the process." Starr suggests that the federal government might assist in relocating residents to areas of the country where jobs exist. "Rather than wasting services on neighborhoods that are not at full capacity, the city should instead provide services more efficiently to fully populated areas" and local community groups too often pressure the city to make futile investments and improvements. Internal resettlement could be "a natural flow" out of these areas. What of the families who might remain? "Frequently, the distress is so general in such an area that whole tax districts can be cleared by taking properties for tax delinquencies…given the wherewithal to move to a better apartment, families begin to question whether the ties that bind them to a grossly deteriorated neighborhood are as important as they seemed." The black and Puerto Rican caucus of the City Council condemned Starr, picketers flocked to the Regional Plan Association meetings where he spoke, and he was denounced as a "genocidal lunatic and enemy of man."[137]

Roger Starr's policies were just one more plot twist in a long drama of urban planning on the Lower East Side post-World War II. Emma Goldman had lived in a bordello on East Fourth Street and the Bowery, and the immigrant and working class neighborhood boasted the origins of the labor movement (the headquarters of the Industrial Workers of the World), the women's movement, and all shades of lefty pedigree through the decades. Alongside its history of labor organizing, immigrant theatre, and political dissent, the Lower East Side also now has the

[136] Starr, "Making New York Smaller," 225.
[137] Jack Rosenthal, "Roger Starr: The Lives They Lived," *New York Times*, December 12, 2001.

distinction of some of the earliest examples of community input in planning.[138] The Cooper Square Committee (CSC) has worked for years to maintain the diverse social and physical aspects of the neighborhood, encouraging tenant rehabilitation with protections. As the organization evolved, they increasingly sought to safeguard some of the residential communities most vulnerable under the City's changing plans for the area; the Puerto Rican population there had the area's second lowest incomes, and displacement would have been both inevitable and disastrous under the City's original urban renewal plan.[139] The CSC's vision of the LES as it is expressed in the final document that they presented to the City as an alternative to urban renewal, is a hopeful, methodical approach to maintaining the unplanned heterogeneity of the area through planning. It even gave special consideration to artists—a reflection of the artist citizens who were active in the CSC, as well as a less volatile relationship between artists and other residents--including studios for artists on most of the north side of Second Street between the Bowery and 2nd Avenue.[140]

Val Orselli, a longtime housing activist in the area, explains that the CSC took a sizable risk in accepting the City's challenge to propose an alternate plan: once it was CSC's plan, the

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[138] The Cooper Square Committee (CSC) was formed in 1959 to oppose the City's urban renewal designation that would have resulted in the clearing of the entire 12-block area from Delancey Street to East Ninth Street, and from First Avenue to Third Avenue, for 2,900 units of middle income cooperative housing. Slum clearance and urban renewal emerged in New York City in the 1930s, and Marci Reaven describes the tortured development of these "strategies for remaking urban space and the spatial relations of class." The City's approach would have resulted in the displacement of 2,400 tenants and 500 businesses, but its aim was progressive, deeming existing public housing in the area at that time to be inadequate. After successfully protesting the City's plan, the CSC emerged as the drafters of an alternative plan. In 1970, Cooper Square activists joined with the Esperanza Coalition, Chinatown Advisory Committee, and Action for Progress to form the Lower East Side Joint Planning Council (JPC) to continue their fight for control of neighborhood land, against the tides of federal, state, and municipal fiscal problems. See Tom Angotti, *New York For Sale: Community Planning Confronts Global Real Estate* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008). For a history of the Cooper Square Committee and the expansion of citizen activity in city planning during the three decades after World War II, see Marci Reaven, "Citizen Participation in City Planning: New York City, 1945-1975" (PhD diss., New York University, 2009).

[139] Reaven, "Citizen Participation," 238.

[140] Helen DeMott, a painter active in the CSC, stood to lose her home under the City's original plan, and ultimately played a large role in advocating for artist housing and work space. Reaven, "Citizen Participation," 91. While there were suspicions of "East Villagers"-- professionals and single women who had moved there from elsewhere-- long-standing artists played a role in the community planning.

burden was on the small volunteer organization to establish that it could be done. “First we were fighting the City and it was easy to say, ‘we don’t want it.’ It’s another statement to say, ‘we have a better plan,’ because then all the resources of the City were used against us to say, ‘this plan is not feasible.’ How is it going to be paid for?” Indeed, the plan that was accepted by the City was adopted in 1971, over a decade after the area was first deemed blighted and in need of demolition and renewal. The drying up of federal spending for subsidized housing— thanks to a 1973 moratorium by President Nixon— put a halt to the implementation of the plan in Cooper Square. City and state agencies then deemed the proposal of CSC unacceptable, operating under the belief in a theory of the “tipping point.”

> Tipping point means if you have a white neighborhood, and you start moving more and more black or Hispanic families in, you reach a certain point that the whites start leaving, and therefore you create a ghetto—that’s the theory behind tipping point. But how was that applicable to the Lower East Side?—we have Black, White, Asian, Ukrainian, you name it we have it—so it could not be a racial tipping point, because the people that we wanted to house were already here.[141]

It was, rather, an economic tipping point—the belief that if a certain number of low-income people or moderate-income people were to be housed, the whole neighborhood would decline economically. Based upon this premise, the City forced the CSC to modify many of their proposed percentages for low income versus middle-income apartments—a compromise Orselli now regrets. When the city and state went into fiscal crisis, there was no money to build; the housing organizations attempted to keep the housing occupied, even if it meant breaking in to

[141] Val Orselli, interview with author, December 19, 2011.

city-owned properties.[142] Incidents of arson multiplied, creating abandoned buildings where drug dealers proliferated; a reduction of police presence exacerbated the perfect storm of conditions. To counteract these policies, when the CSC's plans could not go forward because of the lack of funds to build affordable housing, they made buildings slated for demolition "available to cultural groups. That's how La Mama got its annex, it's also how the [Rod] Rodgers [Dance Company] and Teatro Duo got their building on 4th Street," Orselli explains.[143]

These were not small incidents; La Mama was locked in a fickle embrace with federal monies towards the end of the 1970s. On the one hand, Ellen Stewart's reputation and connections had given her a position with the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) Artists Program, and La Mama was receiving funds from this ground-breaking federal program designed to support unemployed artists across many fields during the recession.[144] In 1979, the *Voice* mounted a scathing and skeptical critique of Stewart and the work of the theatre:

> It seems that La Mama has become less experimental an institution, more interested in the acquisition of assets. Very little radical theatre happens at La Mama these days. Whenever some agency wants to invest in some remembered notion of the avant-garde, however, Stewart is there with a proposal to absorb some of the funding. Having the right

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[142] Ibid. Orselli remembers that time with frustration: "Basically, [Starr] said, the city is in the middle of a fiscal crisis…we don't have enough money to take care of all the neighborhoods, so who do we help? We help the better off neighborhoods and the other neighborhoods will have to deal with benign neglect, and that translated politically into a cutback of like 20 to 30 percent in police and fire protection."

[143] Ibid.

[144] Nixon and Ford created CETA in 1975. At its height in 1979, the Department of Labor estimated two hundred million dollars invested in CETA arts jobs alone. Reagan ended the employment program when it was pilloried as one that enabled "taxpayer-subsidized employees goofing off in painting and theatre workshops." See Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard, *Creative Community: The Arts of Cultural Development* (New York: Rockefeller Foundation, 2001), 54. One of the notable La Mama productions made possible by CETA was a mounting of *Faust I* with twenty-two actors, an eight-person chorus, six musicians, dancers, and an eighteen-member crew, in 1978. See David G. John, "The First Black Gretchen: Fritz Bennewitz's *Faust I* in New York," *Monatshefte* 94 (Winter 2002): 447-63.

connections, she got her piece of the CETA art lines. When the City divested itself of abandoned property, she was there to propose a neighborhood renaissance.[145]

Taking into account La Mama's long history of financial instability, it is perhaps a product of the great demand for resources that had reached a fever pitch by 1979 that, rather than receive praise for her wily efforts at staying afloat, she is instead criticized for being too well funded, and, for attending too much to the question of property to attend to the work on her stages.

On the other hand, the National Endowment for the Arts was abruptly decreasing its funding to the Stewart's theatre, arguing that the panel could not longer "afford the luxury of providing one third of the La Mama budget."[146] While some may have been critical of Stewart, she was persevering within a local and national context that was deeply inhospitable to her brand of international theatrical production. In fact, as the early 1980s would arrive, La Mama and many of the theatres along East 4th Street would become embroiled in conflicts with their own neighbors, creating an uneasy coexistence of politics, neighborhood identity, and, most crucially, resources.[147]

The streets of the Lower East Side would not make an easy recovery from the destructive policies of the 1970s, and elements of the alternative plan the CSC had developed were continually postponed; its vision of heterogeneity was compromised by more than just lack of

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[145] Richard Goldstein, "Sites," *Village Voice*, April 9, 1979, 43.
[146] Erika Munk, "Scowls," *Village Voice*, October 8. 1979, 114.
[147] Relationships between housing activists and artists in the neighborhood ranged from contentious to symbiotic. There were attempts to create a mutual cultural association that would function under a collective ownership model. Some did not support teaming relatively well-off groups with weaker organizations. Instead, the favored model was to purchase buildings from the city for $1 in as-is condition that would leave the groups free to engage in individual fundraising for renovation and operations. When the Department of Housing Preservation and Development sold arts groups—Rod Rodgers and Teatro Duo-- their buildings *plus* adjacent vacant lots that had previously been intended for affordable housing, tenants were outraged. Later, when Downtown Art was given the vacant lot behind their building as well (which had been torched in the 1970s by the super of the building), it further instigated local anger. Val Orselli, Interview with author, December 9, 2011.

federal funds.[148] Theatre in the city has always been implicated in the shifting tides of public policy; in the context of the competing interests within the larger goal of delivering New York City from a crisis, there were many players operating in the tangle of city networks. As an early marker of the process known as gentrification in the Lower East Side,[149] the decades since the fiscal crisis have fulfilled Starr's hope that the market would return to deem certain neighborhoods of "value," but it was to the detriment of populations who had endured years of diminished city services. The ideological underpinning to Starr's desperate suggestion that citizens should be moved not only within cities— which had been a staple element of urban renewal policies— but to entirely new states, smacked of a frenzied white-washing and spatial reordering of the city. Who and what would remain?

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[148] The reality on the street was bleak. The need for public services increased just as the real estate market collapsed, leading property owners to postpone paying their taxes. In a complex process the city changed its procedures for foreclosing on real property in tax arrears; owners who once had three years before their properties were taken away now only had one. The City almost immediately regretted this decision; it led to a rash of tax delinquencies, arson, and the abandonment of housing in neighborhoods with high poverty rates, like the South Bronx, Bedford Stuyvesant, and the Lower East Side. See Abu-Lughod, *Urban Village*.

[149] In an article by Neil Smith, Betsy Duncan, and Laura Reid focusing on the "economic frontiers" that divide divestment and reinvestment, they include the caveat that the study "should in no way be construed as denying the importance of cultural, social, and labor market changes in giving gentrification much of its form, significance and specific local character. Especially in an area like the East Village, it is impossible to attain a comprehensive view of gentrification without considering cultural and social institutions and transformations." Neil Smith, Betsy Duncan, and Laura Reid, "From Disinvestment to Reinvestment: Tax Arrears and Turning Points in the East Village," *Housing Studies* 4 (1989): 239.

Chapter Two

The (Never-Quite) Disappearing Center: Fiscal Crisis on Broadway

> The real question is should Broadway continue to exist? Should it continue to exist as a neighborhood? Should it continue to exist as an economic operation, a particular kind of exploitative producer-director dominated economic arrangement? One must ask whether the whole structure must be ripped down or allowed to die. We are here because a moribund economic structure is about to go out of business, and we are asked to resurrect it on fantasy grounds, that it is the fountainhead of theater art, which it is not; that it is a place of individualistic creativity, which it is not; that it is a place for new plays to be done, which it is not....Why not say let this aspect of our art go down the drain and take the individual talents that have abilities and structure a new place or many new places. Why should we be working to decentralize the theatre and then centralize it again?
> --Richard Schechner, *First American Congress of Theatre*[1]

In their descriptions of the relationship between Times Square and local or national culture, writers have explored a great expanse of spatial metaphors: Times Square as "the symbolic soul of New York,"[2] an "historical prism" that refracts "elements of a changing national culture,"[3] and a "hugely formless eruption, a growth, a kind of civic spasm,"[4] is "surrounded by too many in the midst of too much."[5] Or this description from 1960, penned well after the boom years of the early 1940s, as the area sat on the cusp of decades of grit, grime, and girly shows:

> Geographically it lies out on the country's extreme edge. But swarms of people of all languages, colors and races, rich and poor, lame and strong, honest and not, the man in sweater, in Levis or fez or silk hat, the woman in obi, sari, sack, slacks or jewels, the

[1] Transcript, Banquet and Plenary Session, June 2-5, 1974, Box 1, Folder 4, First American Theatre Congress Records, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library.
[2] Lynne B. Sagalyn, *Times Square Roulette: Remaking the City Icon* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 49.
[3] William R. Taylor, ed., *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1991), xxi.
[4] W.G. Rogers and Mildred Weston, *Carnival Crossroads: The Story of Times Square* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1960), 14.
[5] Marshall Berman, *On the Town: One Hundred Years of Spectacle in Times Square* (New York: Random House, 2006).

> countless millions attracted to it hypnotically day and night, haul it back by sheer weight into the demographic American middle.[6]

It is this identity as a contradictory "center" that has endured, even through Times Square's evolution as a liminal space both represents and challenges the mainstream. The invention of Times Square transformed the spatial orientation of cities, as the center of the metropolis was no longer City Hall or the central market, the forum or the agora, but the vast intersection of commerce, entertainment, and civic life.[7] In this chapter, I argue that if Times Square formerly represented an "extreme edge" but catered to the middle, the 1970s were an exhaustive drive to push it into the upper registers of culture—as producer Gerald Schoenfeld explained, to give it a more "statesmanlike" character[8]-- that would rescue it from the fringes of the cultural, aesthetic, and geographic imagination of the city. But within the twin contexts of fiscal crisis and austerity measures, there were competing pressures that vied for the future orientation of Times Square, and, more specifically, the legitimate theatre. During the mayoralty of Abe Beame (1974-1977), Times Square was viewed as central to the future economic organization of the city. His administration imagined a renewed cultural mecca—size notwithstanding—as a major player in an urban resurgence. The long history of Times Square as a geographic and spiritual inner core meant that any crisis of confidence in the future of 42nd Street was a most troubling alarm. The legitimate theatre fit perfectly with this philosophy of cultural upgrade as a path to economic revitalization. Whether the theatres should be relocated or preserved was a matter of extensive debate, shadowed by their potential to provide the city with more money in tax revenue and tourist dollars.

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[6] Rogers and Weston, *Carnival Crossroads,* 23.
[7] Taylor, *Inventing Times Square*, xxv.
[8] "Meeting Minutes," 23 June 1974, Box 1, Folder 1, Minutes and Correspondence, First American Theatre Congress Records, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library. The coordinating committee of FACT operated out of the Shubert offices.

While government officials used the historic theatres to sell their overhaul of a contested neighborhood, the next wave of theatrical innovators rose up from downtown and applied pressure from below. Tom Eyen published "The Discreet Alarm of the Off Off Broadway Playwright," a 1973 *New York Times* op-ed piece, in which he revealed his wish to play Broadway's 1,675-seat Palace Theatre, his dream of theatrical legitimacy and stability.[9] Eyen, a prolific writer on the Off-Off-Broadway scene, was more accustomed to the fringes, in the form of the tiny stages of La Mama and Caffé Cino. As the master of risky and irreverent downtown plays, Eyen argued that the cadre of writers who had plied their trade in Village cafes and cabarets with few thoughts of remuneration were overdue for a space upgrade. The greats who once played the Palace—Sarah Bernhardt, Judy Garland, Lauren Bacall, Eddie Fisher—left ghosts behind, and Eyen claimed the title of heir.[10] The alternative, Eyen feared, would be to turn the gilded theatres of Broadway into museums: "The past had a beauty we'll never find again, no matter how many old musicals they revive."[11]

Calcification fast approached, but a more ignominious end was in sight: demolition. While Eyen targeted his wrath towards producers and critics, the encroachment of office buildings in the theatre district and the demolition of longstanding theatres were related concerns.[12] No new theatres had been built between 1930 and 1960, and the ones that survived into the second half of the twentieth century were "totally depreciated and paid relatively low

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[9] Tom Eyen, "The Discreet Alarm of the Off Off Broadway Playwright," *New York Times*, September 23, 1973, 15.
[10] Sarah Bernhardt was the subject of Eyen's play, *Sarah B. Divine!*, produced by his Theatre of the Eye Repertory Company at La Mama in June 1967.
[11] Eyen, "Discreet Alarm," 15.
[12] For more on the fight to preserve the interiors and exteriors of theatres of 42nd Street, see Nicholas Van Hoogstraten, *Lost Broadway Theatres* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997). During the Lindsay administration, many buildings were demolished, including the Loew's State (a former vaudeville palace) and Stern's retail store on the corner of Avenue of the Americas and 42nd Street. During Lindsay's eight years in office, five more high-rises went up in Times Square before the 1972 recession brought a halt to the cycle of demolition and construction. Marc Eliot, *Down 42nd Street: Sex, Money, Culture and Politics at the Crossroads of the World* (New York, Warner Books, 2001), 129.

taxes."[13] When compared to the revenue that medium-sized office buildings provided to the government in property taxes, Times Square was untapped potential. Worse, its high-crime reputation meant that it could not attract the kind of private investment that the city so desperately wanted to take root in the area. The numbers of people employed in legal businesses in Times Square had dwindled dramatically. Pitted against all of these challenges, many theatres stood empty and endangered on Broadway while the playwrights could only wait, "like Beckett characters in the ancient dumps of Manhattan."[14] *Waiting for Godot* was an appropriate theatrical metaphor for the legitimate theatre district, locked in a perpetual stasis as city officials wrung their hands over its distressing status as an icon for urban excesses: pornography, prostitution, loitering. As once-colorful characters turned unsavory in the harsh light of the fiscal crisis, so began a spate of committees, councils, and task forces aimed at brainstorming away the perceived problems of the district.

This chapter investigates the 1970s in Times Square and on 42nd Street, when it earned its nickname of "the deuce," and the historical path of Broadway on the map of the city was halted.[15] Due to the changes in the structure of central Manhattan at this time, it appeared that the "center" of theatrical production might again migrate.[16] In accordance with the historical trend of

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[13] Richard F. Babcock and Wendy U. Larsen, *Special Districts: The Ultimate In Neighborhood Zoning* (Cambridge: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 1990), 27.
[14] Eyen, "Discreet Alarm," 15.
[15] "The Deuce" (as in, "forty-deuce"), was a late-twentieth-century moniker for 42nd Street that referred to its seedy underbelly and underground subcultures. It is still used to describe the stretch of blocks up to 8th Avenue. See for example, Wendy Ruderman, "For Times Square Patrol, A Stage Tourists Don't See," *New York Times*, September 2, 2012, accessed September 10, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/03/nyregion/for-times-square-police-a-stage-tourists-dont-see.html?pagewanted=all; and gay rights activist Warren Allen Smith's pseudonymous memoir, Allen Windsor, *Cruising the Deuce: In Movie Houses on 42nd Street, Times Square, and Greenwich Village in the 1940s to 1980s* (New York: ChelC Press, 2005), 23.
[16] The terms describing downtown, midtown, and uptown theatres are relative to historical context. In the late nineteenth century, the *New York Times* described a new Oscar Hammerstein theatre on 42nd Street as "downtown." The descriptor made sense in the context of Hammerstein's other theatres, all located at least fifty blocks north, including the Harlem Opera House. "The Murray Hill Theatre: Mr. Oscar Hammerstein to Build a Handsome Playhouse," *New York Times*, April 27, 1890, 12.

the city's theatre district, Broadway could have continued moving northward.[17] Advocates who argued for fundamental adjustments to the structure of Broadway—locational, operational, and aesthetic—were ultimately overpowered by city officials and developers focused on a Times Square renewal rooted in the mystique of its historic theatres. Broadway producers and many of the city's institutions, including relatively new arrivals, like the Theatre Development Fund (created in 1968), depended upon the longevity of a legitimate theatre on 42nd Street. It was their collective influence that led to a prioritization of business incentives for theatre owners in lieu of confronting the issues that economist William Baumol had identified as the real problems of Broadway: not the much talked-about issue of pornography, but economics. I argue that the fiscal crisis period in Times Square is distinguished by this struggle for the center—a quest on the part of producers and city leaders to maintain a stable entertainment hub that would signify health for a bruised city. Downtown theatrical production and Lincoln Center's growth threatened to unsettle the visual map of commercial theatre production. Crime and the purported ills of the street further challenged a geographic city center when it was imperative to project a vision that could be understood as more big apple and less rotting core. I examine the ways in which the municipal vision of a river-to-river expansion model grounded in a thriving Times Square led to decisions and policies that ignored the fundamental characteristics of the changing landscape of theatre production in the city, when its strongest currents lay in decentralization, not a central core district.

This decentralization was directly related to the larger trend of the increasingly fluid movement of plays between Off, Off-Off, and occasionally Broadway, venues. While frequently

[17] Mary Henderson, *The City and the Theatre: The History of New York Playhouses* (New York: Backstage Books, 2004). Henderson describes the nodes of theatrical movement north over two hundred and fifty years, beginning downtown at Bowling Green.

characterized as an iconic low point of legitimate production, the 1970s should in fact be seen as a turning point for theatre in Times Square. Eyen, for example, was buoyed by the handful of contemporaneous playwrights who had already made inroads in legitimate theatre houses; there was a growing indication that new plays and perspectives could be seen on Broadway, thanks to the successful transfer of plays from Off and Off-Off companies.[18] The desperate fiscal environment was also a factor; it encouraged certain kinds of artistic risks. New plays that had succeeded on Off-Broadway, such as Joseph A. Walker's *The River Niger* at the St. Marks Playhouse, surprised critics and producers. This led to a swelling of new work written and directed by African-Americans that producers were willing to take a chance on.[19] This was particularly true for musical revues with minimal production requirements like *Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope* (1972), *Bubbling Brown Sugar* (1976), *Your Arms Too Short to Box With God* (1977), and *Ain't Misbehavin'* (1978). The explosion of Off and Off-Off activity in the previous decades changed the relationship between uptown and downtown theatre, but it also made an imprint on the conversation about audiences. The influx of transfers brought new patrons to Times Square, and producing teams grew adventurous in their appeals to potential audience members-- especially the under-fifty crowd. In the small theatres downtown, more and more scouts searched for ways to duplicate the successes of *Hair, Godspell*, and *A Chorus Line*.[20]

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[18] Eyen would eventually fulfill his ambition to play in a Broadway house in December 1981when *Dreamgirls*, inspired by the history of Motown, opened at the Imperial Theatre and ran for 1,521 performances. Eyen wrote the book and lyrics for the show (music by Henry Krieger), which he developed with Michael Bennett after Eyen's 1975 *The Dirtiest Show in Town*. For more on the evolution of *Dreamgirls* see Ken Mandelbaum, *A Chorus Line and the Musicals of Michael Bennett* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

[19] *The River Niger* won many accolades including the 1973 Obie Award for best Off-Broadway play of the 1972-1973 season, and the Best Play Tony for the 1973-1974 season. Walker won the Dramatists Guild Award and a Guggenheim Fellowship after the production.

[20] Downtown theatre was locked in a reciprocal dance with commercial theatre. Some artists continued to protest the nomenclature of "Off-Broadway" or "Off-Off Broadway" and the definition of their work in contradistinction to the commercial theatre, but the coherence of these labels deteriorated throughout the 1960s. For more on the fantasy of the vanguard noncommercial realm versus the staid commercial, see David Savran, "The Death of the Avantgarde," *TDR* 49 (Fall 2005): 10-42.

Even still, it was an uncommonly difficult time for financing shows,[21] and the fiscal crisis created an imperative to improve the Broadway theatre district itself in order to convince residents and out-of-towners that there was an entertainment center worth traveling to the Big Apple for. In her history of adult musicals—a genre that thrived just before and during the fiscal crisis-- Elizabeth Wollman explains:

> Economic pressure can take its toll on creative output, and this was certainly the case when it came to the commercial theater in 1970s New York. Weakening attendance, both on and Off Broadway, combined with skyrocketing inflation, forced producers to slash the costs of production while simultaneously boosting ticket prices, thereby offering audiences much less for much more.[22]

Wollman focuses on the escapist fare, but these realities forced all productions at every level to evaluate their methods of attracting audiences during the fiscal crisis years.

The innovations developed by Off, Off-Off, and Broadway as a response to these conditions ultimately formed the foundations of its present day incarnation as a showcase for corporate entertainment. As Susan Bennett describes, the significant changes between the tourist environment of Broadway in 1975 and that of 1995 attest to the flourishing of corporate spectacle over aesthetic and literary values, and important within that conclusion is the work of the city brand.[23] During the mid-1970s, however, it was not clear that legitimate theatre would even remain on 42nd Street, let alone that its future would be written in the gleaming smile of

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[21] In his theatre round-ups after the 1975-1976 and the 1976-1977 seasons, Otis Guernsey remarked on the "pitiful levels of support" that remained the norm for both private and public subsidy. Otis L. Guernsey, *Curtain Times: The New York Theater, 1965-1987* (New York: Applause Theatre Books, 1987), 342-43.

[22] Elizabeth L. Wollman, *Hard Times: The Adult Musical in 1970s New York City* (forthcoming, Oxford: Oxford University Press), 31, unpublished manuscript quoted with permission.

[23] Susan Bennett, "Theatre/Tourism," *Theatre Journal* 57 (October 2005): 411. Copious research analyzes the birth of twentieth-century corporate spectacles and economic development in Times Square. See Maura Wickstrom, "Commodities, Mimesis, and *The Lion King*: Retail Theatre for the 1990s," *Theatre Journal* 51 (October 1999): 285-98; and Maura Wickstrom, *Performing Consumers: Global Capital and Its Theatrical Seductions* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

Mickey Mouse. In this highly charged period of consolidation, city boosters adopted a neglected Times Square as the object of their obsession within a New York renaissance. But, as William Sites has pointed out, it was ultimately an "uneven renaissance."[24] In a handful of years, the city moved from the brink of bankruptcy to a new relationship between government and economic development. While the fiscal crisis temporarily halted the large-scale public and private projects that later overwhelmed the theatre district with corporate-led initiatives, it created the context for the emergence of influential yet under-studied projects, such as the First American Congress of Theatre (FACT) and the TKTS booth. Through these and other initiatives, city agencies, developers, and theatre owners clung to a vision of "uptown theatre" that had a stable center in Times Square, even as Lincoln Center loomed as both a competitor and a model. Throughout, the cash-strapped city supported changes to the district aimed at improving theatre going, and new patterns of audience composition were shaped by these initiatives. Many artists, particularly those nurtured in downtown theatre communities, continued to question whether this vision of a reborn Broadway was sustainable. Worse, geographic polarization slowly stranded the district in a sea of zoning deals and new high-rise office buildings that hid their very function as theatres. Once the fiscal crisis had abated, the thirst for more and more tax revenue in the form of lucrative, large office spaces and other corporate uses took over, and the limited protections for the theatre district instituted in the late 1960s and 1970s proved as ineffectual as many had feared.

To understand the complex urban processes of the period as they relate to theatrical development, this chapter necessarily builds upon my previous chapter, in which I established the shrinking opportunities for Off-Off playwrights that were a consequence of divestment and

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[24] Williams Sites, *Remaking New York: Primitive Globalization and the Politics of Urban Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 35.

planned shrinkage policies, coupled with rampant scapegoating that blamed downtown theatre artists for exacerbating and personifying the imagery of urban decline through their work. As the government scrambled to use cultural development policies to strengthen the Broadway area, fears of a decentralization of the arts that signaled greater community control surged (which I explore more deeply in Chapter 3). Richard Schechner, at the 1974 FACT event at Princeton University, typified the attitude of many downtown theatre artists in response to the calls to preserve a commercial theatre industry centered around a troubled 42nd Street: "Why should we be working to decentralize the theatre and then centralize it again?"[25] I begin my analysis of Times Square during the fiscal crisis with this landmark event, where the key topics of this chapter were discussed amid great contention: competing visions for the development map of the city, the role of theatre in urban revitalization, the anxiety surrounding Broadway's perceived decline, and the institutionalization of a ticketing discount program, TKTS.

First American Congress of Theatre

> Money encourages art, but it doesn't create it.
> --Harold Prince, "The Box Office Boom: Broadway"[26]

The First American Congress of Theatre (FACT) showcased the fierce argument over the best methods to insure the survival of Broadway in the 1970s.[27] There was a pervasive fear that

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[25] Transcript, Banquet and Plenary Session, June 2-5, 1974, Box 1, Folder 4, First American Theatre Congress Records, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library.
[26] Margaret Croyden, "The Box-Office Boom: Broadway," *New York Times*, May 10, 1981, 1.
[27] Out of five hundred invitees, two hundred and twenty-four theatre professionals from theatre companies, arts foundations, educational institutions, and government agencies attended the conference as panelists or delegates. The three hundred and fifty dollar registration fee was likely a prohibitive factor for many artists. For a list of steering committee members and registered delegates, see Stuart Little, *After the Fact: Conflict and Consensus, A Report on the First American Congress of Theatre* (New York: Arno, 1975), 21-22, 101-9. The second FACT was twenty-six years after the first. In 2000, a group of theatre professionals met at Harvard for the Second American Congress of Theater (ACT II). Rocco Landesman, "Broadway: Devil or Angel for Nonprofit Theater? A Vital Movement Has Lost Its Way," *New York Times*, June 4, 2000, accessed June 5, 2012,

the ascendance of Lincoln Center created competition for highbrow audience members who could afford to purchase Broadway tickets and support live performance. Others argued that Broadway's solution lay in the embrace of the generation of playwrights nurtured by the previous decade of theatre experimentation; only then could they attract a new generation of spectators. Others exulted at the emergence on the legitimate theatre scene of downtown impresarios like Joseph Papp, and rejoiced over a newly heterogeneous landscape of Broadway production that had room for a scrappy counter-culture upstart like *Hair* (1968; 1977 Broadway revival). They delighted in offerings on Broadway that were increasing in diversity, even as challenges remained. During the 1971-1972 Broadway season, Otis Guernsey wrote frankly about the perils and pleasures of the trend:

> There was a day when the New York theater audience was one big, admiring unit of homogenized taste, and the theater art grandly homogenized in form and style to suit the massive majority. Over the last decade, however, American theater artists have been struggling to emerge from this cocoon. They have been experimenting— often successfully— with new forms, new means of expression, new theatrical language. In doing so, they have divided the audience, carrying some along with them on the adventure of change but repelling others.[28]

The season to which Guernsey referred was indeed ambitious and wide-ranging in scope and in style: Vietnam, war resistance, colonial violence, and inner-city poverty were presented in plays including *Sticks and Bones*, David Rabe's tragedy about a Vietnam veteran; the Off-Broadway transfer *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine,* a free verse play by draft resister Fr. Daniel Berrigan; and two musicals from Melvin Van Peebles that depicted the tribulations of an African-

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http://www.nytimes.com/2000/06/04/theater/theater-broadway-devil-angel-for-nonprofit-theater-vital-movement-has-lost-its.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm.

[28] Guernsey, *Curtain Times*, 213.

American neighborhood, *Ain't Supposed to Die a Natural Death* and *Don't Play Us Cheap!*[29] Notwithstanding their innovations and frequently positive critical receptions, however, many of these shows struggled to stay open. In the years to come, the need to attract new audiences to the area was of paramount concern; in addition to the diminished perception of the district as unsafe, demographic studies showed that the age and profiles of Broadway audiences were stagnant.

Even old-guard producers recognized the need for change; when Bernard B. Jacobs, president of the Shubert Organization, became responsible for the seventeen Shubert houses in 1972, only eleven were lit.[30] The often novel marketing and promotion strategies of new plays were ignored by those who sought to emphasize the dangers of Times Square as somehow linked to the poor quality of its Broadway offerings. Stanley Waren, writing in *PAJ*, drew false parallels between the decline of the theatre and the decline of the neighborhood: "The decline of legitimate theatre on 42nd Street historically parallels the economic, cultural and social decline of the street and its contiguous neighborhoods."[31] By intertwining urban socio-cultural issues with theatre's perceived decline, many theatre productions were trapped in a net of guilt by association at a time when a wide variety of substantial new plays were in fact being produced. And as I will describe in greater detail, studies indicated that Times Square was still a popular destination, even if the new arrivals were choosing to frequent the area movie theatres.

If the decline of the neighborhood was incorrectly conflated with the decline of the work itself, one factor knit them together: economic problems mounted through the early 1970s, when "the word 'subsidy' was on the tip of every theater tongue."[32] The work of Joseph Papp was

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[29] Ibid., 220. Other plays include Stephen Sondheim's musical about ex-showgirls on a crumbling Broadway stage, *Follies*; Harold Pinter's *Old Times;* and *Murderous Angels* by Conor Cruise O'Brien, a dramatization of the Dag Hammarskjold-Patrice Lumumba confrontation in the Congo in the 1950s.
[30] Quoted in Croyden, "Box-Office Boom," 1.
[31] Stanley A. Waren, "The City and the Theatre," *Performing Arts Journal* 4.1/2 (May 1979): 120.
[32] Guernsey, *Curtain Times*, 235.

intoned as an all too difficult-to-duplicate exemplar of "how much subsidy can accomplish when it links arms with imagination."[33] The pain of limited subsidy was not isolated to the non-profit sector. Even the commercial theatre had become increasingly vocal about its financial predicaments. In the case of Broadway, the argument for government funding was particularly contradictory; while many non-profit administrators in attendance at the FACT conference reasoned that commercial enterprise should be the last beneficiary of government arts funds, there was agreement that the larger district needed stimulation in the midst of the corrosive fiscal crisis. It was to address these questions that some of the key players on Broadway had created FACT, an organization that targeted the business, media, foundations, and government sectors to counteract what producer Gerald Schoenfeld called theatre's "urban environment problem."[34] Their distinguished steering committee boasted producer Richard Barr (The Playwrights Unit), economist William Baumol, Huge Southern (TDF), W. MacNeil Lowry (Ford Foundation), and other members of some of the most esteemed funding and producing organizations of the time.

The transcripts of the FACT conference event—held on Princeton University's campus from June 2 through 6 of 1974—catalogues a series of fiery debates about the competing needs of small, alternative, or not-for-profit theatres and the commercial theatre producers. This meeting between arts industry leaders[35] highlighted the deep aesthetic, philosophical, and political divisions of those convened, though the stated goal of the event was to unite in common cause for financial health:

> [T]o overcome the effects on attendance of urban deterioration, the disastrous conjunction of inflation and economic recession, the need to relate to and stimulate more

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[33] Ibid.
[34] "Meeting Minutes," 23 June 1974, Box 1, Folder 1, Minutes and Correspondence, First American Theatre Congress Records, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library.
[35] Mel Gussow, "Broadway Producers and Institutional Theaters Air Divergent Views at Stage Congress," *New York Times*, June 5, 1974, 56.

effectively the young and minority audiences, rising production and operating costs, the unpredictable nature of financial support, and to emphasize the need for the theatre community to speak with one voice on all matters concerning public subsidy and other forms of aid.[36]

In order to analyze the success of these aims, the four-day conference must be contextualized within the larger structure of FACT. Its convener, Alexander P. Cohen, was a Broadway producer who slogged through the difficult years of commercial theatre during the 1960s and early 1970s, and sought to forge ties where few existed. However, while the conference event brought together many disparate artists and arts-affiliated individuals, the panelists, plenary speakers, and internal FACT committees represented a relatively narrow group of Broadway producers and, most importantly, property owners. Additionally, the entire event appeared orchestrated to curry favor with legislators and various levels of government; Jacob K. Javitz, Senator William Conklin, and Congressman Edward Koch all participated. The figures involved in the early stages of FACT, and who continued to plan for the future orientation of the organization beyond the four-day conference included Barr, Cohen, Southern, Schoenfeld (Shubert Organization), Stephen Benedict, Lewis Lloyd (NYSCA), T. Edward Hambleton (The Phoenix Theatre), Isabelle Stevenson (The American Theatre Wing), Peter Zeisler (Theatre Communications Group), and Ruth Mayleas (NEA). Few of the representatives from the Off or Off-Off Broadway spheres, from black theatre, children's theatre, or community theatre, who spoke so passionately at the panels, were included in the continued work of the organization.

The minutes from FACT's July and August meetings after the June conference, for example, reflect preparations on a list of priorities selected from—but not always representative of-- the conference. Initiatives included a coordinated lobby for all theatre that would make it

[36] Erika Munk, "Second Thoughts on a First Try," *Village Voice*, June 20, 1974, 73.

available to congressmen and other legislators, especially Koch; a fund to support a massive survey by economist William Baumol to look at the economic factors involved in Broadway; a "continuing personnel group" to provide information on federal, state, and local taxes for all theaters; preparation of legislation regarding the 1969 Tax Reform Act; a tax incentive for theatre investors; a proposal to remove theatre from anti-trust laws; a push to repeal real property tax laws affecting theatres; another TKTS booth on Wall Street and the pursuit of a system of selling block tickets to business interests; and investigations of affiliations with the *New York Times* that could produce directories of plays. While this is a broad list, each item centered on the needs of Broadway, and the recommendations that made it through the conference intact related most directly to Broadway producers and theatre owners in the 42nd Street district.

Although the committee members received transcripts of each FACT panel and discussion session, many issues raised at the FACT conference in June appear to have been skipped over in the post-conference review. This included heated discussions about support for playwrights, labor issues, the meaning of the "non-profit" designation, the specific challenges that faced black theatres, the role of small theatres around the country, the neglect of theatre in youth education, and the importance of theatre in rebuilding urban communities. Each FACT panel reflected the difficult interrelationship between the haves and the have-nots of theatre producing--- or, at least, the perceived haves and have-nots. Joseph Papp articulated the concern that the landmark gathering was a pretense for commercial theatre operators to rally for government support and "exploit the energy" of the nonprofit theatre; Joan Sandler, the head of the Black Theater Alliance, discussed the economic plight of "the disenfranchised theaters"; Woodie King of the New Federal Theatre drew clear dividing lines between producers who

innovated for the future of the theatre, and those who "[kept] doing what they were doing."[37] For King, Papp's work downtown signified an understanding of changing audiences; Maxine Fox and Ken Waissman also changed with the times, whereas the elder statesmen of Broadway, David Merrick and Alexander Cohen, ignored the population upheavals and ethnic changes in the city.[38] André Gregory argued with Richard Barr's contention that all artists orient their dreams towards Broadway, and implored, that they must not "deal with fantasies….[I]t is no longer true that Broadway is the goal." Gregory then relayed a message to the panelists from one of his friends: "please tell the guys in the 40s (streets, not age group!) to close down their theaters, take out the seats, and open a place of surfaces, magic, and marvels."[39] For a new generation of artists, the status quo of Broadway—as a nexus for professional goals and a space of dreaming-- no longer held a deadlock on their imaginations.

Others challenged FACT's Manhattan-centric focus; those outside of New York State chafed at the limits of the exclusionary conversations. Even those who created work within the five boroughs resented the slant of the conference towards Times Square. Hazel Bryant, during the discussion session of a "Stimulating Creative Resources" panel, spoke passionately of the dissonance between the plenaries and her own work, which she described as "trying to rebuild communities."

> While it's true that some theaters are in poor neighborhoods and you're afraid to go there, that doesn't mean that it is not important what goes on there...if you would take off those words that make some of us pure and some of us illegitimate or a little bit dirty or I

[37] "Panel 9: Stimulating Creative Resources," June 2-5, 1974, Box 1, Folder 13, First American Theatre Congress Records, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library.
[38] Maxine Fox and Ken Waissman had a Broadway hit with *Grease*, which they discovered in Chicago and debuted off-Broadway before moving uptown.
[39] "Panel 9: Stimulating Creative Resources," June 2-5, 1974, Box 1, Folder 13, First American Theatre Congress Records, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library.

> wouldn't go there.... Even the word alternative is a word like "white" and "non white," "real" and "not real," words like that are being used and making it impossible for some people who are looking for new ideas to come to the places were there are also very interesting things being done.[40]

The conference was filled with a variety of detailed pleas for changed definitions of audience and theatre districts. The odd assemblage of colorful characters and dissenting viewpoints largely overshadowed the nuance of these conversations.

For this reason, FACT's efficacy in assessing and solving common economic problems was also debatable. After the event, critic Erika Munk described it as a "most histrionic if not historic event" that largely deserved the superficial media coverage it received. "There was a sort of flowering, but it grew from a very large manure heap."[41] Like Papp, Munk's primary suspicion was reserved for commercial producers who appealed for tax relief and subsidies; Broadway already received foundation subsidy through TDF for its risky ventures,[42] so the argument that it deserved more was disingenuous, with or without the questionable effects of urban deterioration on theatre attendance. Since the steering committee included representatives from TDF, the NEA, NYSCA, and TCG, FACT was insulated from criticisms of an overtly commercial orientation-- but the overarching emphasis of the panels caused immediate friction, and threatened to reflect blind spots in the major funding organizations.

The dire prognosis for arts funding made it natural that theatre artists in the non-profit world would be prickly about the question of government help for the legitimate theatre. From

[40] Ibid.
[41] Munk, "Second Thoughts."
[42] During the 1968-1969 season, the Theater Development Fund began to aid selected productions on and off Broadway by purchasing subsidized tickets with a combination of federal and private money. TDF has no influence on which plays are produced.

the perspective of commercial operators, the beating heart of theatrical production—Broadway--was showing crisis symptoms that went far beyond the negative publicity that tugged at the headlines. They would not, however, question its identity as the geographic center of the legitimate theatre, and rather sought to re-instate its perception as such. There were hints that Broadway producers sought to maintain the legitimate theatre's geographic positioning at 42nd Street by situating the theatre arts as one of the answers to the question of the city's larger economic development—even if the theatre itself also cried out for economic salvation. The conveners of FACT were ultimately engaged in a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy: their focus on governmental relations and the question of public funding was a signal to deepen and expand the city's involvement in their goals, through the politicized process of urban zoning, preservation initiatives, and policy changes.

The Western Frontier

These actions could not have been achieved without the unique context of a contemporaneous and fundamental shift in urban development philosophies that played a large role in the socio-spatial development of Broadway. Traumatized by the clean-sweep destruction and modern rebuilding of the 1950s and 1960s, New York City now looked more favorably on projects that adhered to principles of "adaptive reuse."[43] This had implications for the development of legitimate theatre houses in Times Square, and worked in favor of theatre owners. The ascent of preservation and restoration strategies dovetailed with broader cultural goals for the neighborhood, and the city framed them within the expansion and rejuvenation of a

[43] "The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the disintegration of any consensus over the aim and method of urban planning. This transitional period was marked by the declining power and prestige of technical and professional elites in urban government….The perceived urban crisis of the late 1960s and 1970s shattered preconceived approaches to the management of urban space inherited from the Progressive era." Matthew Gandy, *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 53.

theatre and entertainment district, though the discourse around the project did not always accurately portray what was ultimately built.[44]

On a national scale, arts funding was still a hard sell in the halls of Congress, but the idea that there was something to be gained in urban areas from investment in the arts had grown in currency. In his plenary speech at FACT, then Congressman and future mayor of New York, Edward I. Koch, undergirded his argument about the difficulty of appealing to Washington for arts funding with this anecdote: during a floor debate on June 14, 1973 about the bill that had previously established the NEA, he quoted Vice President Ford as saying, "when this program started I did not support it. I must say that I did not really understand it, and I do not today, what Mr. Calder was trying to tell us, but I can assure the members that Calder in the center of the city in an urban redevelopment area has really helped to regenerate a city. It doesn't matter by which path you get there!"[45] With the growing acceptance of culture as one path by which the nation's battered cities might regenerate, the rise of advocacy planning in the form of citizen activism and public planning had mounted many successful campaigns to introduce new ideas for neighborhoods. In Times Square, however, while the idea of culture as a tool for urban development was approved in theory by numerous mayoral administrations, the fiscal distress tempered these movements and expanded the "bargaining for zoning" and "let's make a deal mentality" which had become the common denominator of zoning by the 1980s.[46]

From the perspective of city officials, Times Square represented a black hole of missed opportunities on the development map. The east side of Manhattan from 42nd to 89th Streets had

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[44] Alexander J. Reichl, *Reconstructing Times Square: Politics and Culture in Urban Development* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999).
[45] Transcript, Panel 1, Box 1, Folder 5, June 2-5, 1974, First American Theatre Congress Records, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library. While it is not identified in the transcript, Ford is presumably referring to Alexander Calder, a sculptor who created the first public work of art in the United States funded with federal money as part of the NEA's "Art for Public Places Program."
[46] Babcock and Larsen, *Special Districts*, 2.

seen the spread of commercial and office space for years, and in the 1960s, Mayor Lindsay believed that "rezoning Midtown West was the best way to shift commercial development from the overcrowded East Side" to the underdeveloped Times Square.[47] Lindsay's quixotic search to improve and expand the theatres westward went against the grain of the movement of the legitimate theatre; the prior decades evidenced a narrative of north-south movement across the city grid.[48] Before the fiscal crisis, office building development just east of Sixth Avenue signaled to many a start of the long-awaited shift, as did Mayor Lindsay's announcement of plans for a convention center at the Hudson River and 42nd Street. The economic downturn put an end to those plans, and the residential, garment and warehouse uses that stretched from Ninth Avenue to Twelfth Avenue remained dispiriting carcasses of the once-thriving industrial area. All around, the eroding infrastructure of the city laughed in the face of west side development dreams.[49] The belief that office, retail, and residential development should be encouraged on the west side proved decisive to the argument in favor of an enduring entertainment center in the heart of Times Square.[50]

[47] Eliot, *Down 42nd Street*, 119.
[48] This had proven an unattainable dream for others before him; after the northward movement of the theatre district in the 1920s established 42nd Street as the Southern-most boundary, plans for West Side development had been made and then abandoned, with the end of the building boom and the Depression. Margaret Knapp, "A Historical Study of the Legitimate Playhouses on West 42nd Street Between Seventh and Eighth Avenues in New York" (PhD diss., Graduate Center of CUNY, 1982).
[49] The dilapidated West Side Highway and its extension north of 72nd Street, the Henry Hudson Parkway, was a subject of contention and embarrassment for the Beame administration. They struggled to find the funds for emergency repairs after a dramatic collapse. Westway was a controversial touchstone in the politics of urban development in New York City at the time. The major project to rebuild the West Side Highway was initiated in 1972, and underwent extensive public debate before it was derailed by litigation that stretched until 1985.
[50] William Kornblum et al., "West 42nd Street: The Bright Light Zone," Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York, 1978, 76. This sociological study was commissioned by the Ford Foundation as part of its efforts to assist the government and the business community in revitalizing 42nd Street. Lynn Sagalyn critiqued the study's methods, as it was designed to assist a specific audience of government and business leaders formulate proposals for investors. Sagalyn, *Times Square Roulette*, 495.

Lindsay was later harshly criticized for the office space boom over which he presided pre-crisis.[51] In the four years from 1969 through 1972, an incredible total of 72 million square feet of office space was erected or planned. "Now that everyone knows that millions of square feet of this space have not been rented….[I]t is easy to see that the boom had been fed by a number of speculative factors whose shaky underpinnings escaped the notice of some very clever people."[52] The 1973 election was to be a referendum on Mayor Lindsay's handling of the thorny issues of municipal debt, union protests, and racial unrest. In anticipation, he searched for projects that would raise his economic development profile; he chose Midtown West to do that, and attempted to cast Times Square as being on the cusp of a major "real estate boom."[53] In order to make room for developer demands, additional buildings were slated for demolition: the Gaiety, a former Broadway Burlesque house that had been converted to a movie theatre, the Astor, the vacant Bijou in the Piccadilly Hotel, the elegant Helen Hayes, and the "gloriously intimate" Morosco.[54] In addition to the corporate construction, Lindsay also intensified his involvement in a seventeen-hundred-apartment complex being developed for Ninth Avenue and 42nd Street, Manhattan Plaza, which would prove to be one of the unexpected and landmark successes for residential development in the area.[55]

Nearly century-old zoning limitations stood in the way of the implementation of Lindsay's plan to expand the theatre district westward; his urban planning team found a solution

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[51] Under Lindsay, city agencies assumed the demand for office space was unlimited. For more on the misplaced faith in New York as a "national center" for commercial growth during the Lindsay administration, see also Robert Fitch, *The Assassination of New York* (New York: Verso, 1993), 122-24.
[52] Roger Starr, "The Decline and Decline of New York: Urban Renewal Has Become a Subsidy for the Affluent," *New York Times*, November 21, 1971, 70.
[53] Eliot, *Down 42nd Street*, 135-36.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Manhattan Plaza is a striking case study in artist housing and community development. It loomed as a failure of Lindsay's term, but after he had left office, by 1977, it was considered a model success; 1,688 units that operated under a federal subsidy program and rented mainly to performing artists. Sagalyn, *Times Square Roulette*, 53.

in a trailblazing use of "special districts" to consolidate theatrical practices.[56] It was also a way to solve the image problems of concern to the city: visitors were still traveling to New York to be entertained, even as the theatre industry and its neighborhood were perceived to be in decline and as successful west side development remained elusive. The Special District was a solution to the twenty-five year search by various city administrations to alter the characteristics of Times Square in order to be more consistent with Sixth Avenue or Fifth Avenue. The impetus for formalizing this desire came about when Sam Minskoff, a developer, wanted to tear down the old Astor Hotel and erect a high rise office building in 1967. The Lindsay administration saw a solution: if Minskoff could be persuaded to put a legitimate theater in his new building, it would ease the issue of dwindling theatres and take a step towards neighborhood "clean up."[57] Minksoff, however, felt that it was an impractical request, and there was a general lack of information regarding the actual cost of building a theatre in the third floor of a high-rise.[58] Lindsay's planning team devised a special zoning district: between Sixth and Eighth avenues, from 40th to 57th Streets, developers that included new theatres in their projects would receive a bonus of square footage that exceeded regular zoning limits for the area. This special district, however, did not mandate the building of theatres, and did not offer the same bonus elsewhere.[59] Descriptions of the early process of creating this special district tell the story of a blind-leading-

[56] Special Districts are different from historic zoning in that the justification is not related to historical significance, but rather broad plans to "enhance and preserve" areas deemed to be troubled. New York is now called the "undisputed monarch" of special district use, as there are thirty-seven separate special districts in New York City. Babcock and Larsen, *Special Districts*, 4-5.
[57] In the space of two years, Lindsay's position on 42nd Street went from a focus on saving existing theatres to a plan to tear them down and replace them with office buildings housing new theatres. Knapp, "Historical Study of the Legitimate Playhouses," 421.
[58] Babcock and Larsen, *Special Districts*, 29.
[59] Ibid., 31.

the-blind folly; most of the players involved were unknowledgeable insofar as the amount a theatre would cost, as well as the "value" of convincing a developer to make such an alteration.[60]

The Lindsay administration's strategy to "upzone" the Midtown West Side had many critics.[61] Kent Barwick, the president of the Municipal Arts Society, argued that it had social and economic repercussions that paved the way for the coming decade of degeneration: "In fact, for all the self-kudos this mayor and his appointees gave themselves for finally having done something about the so-called problems in Times Square and on 42nd Street, his plan for upzoning led to a decade-long cycle of *dis*investment that in turn led to the further social, cultural, and real estate *de*valuation of the entire area.[62] Property owners knew that their sites would one day be sought after by developers to erect lucrative office buildings, so they were less inclined to invest in improvements in the meantime. Land-owners gave short-term leases to disreputable businesses, less concerned with the impact on the neighborhood than on the payday that would arrive when large-scale developers bought up their properties. As a consequence, after the City Planning Commission approved the first phases of the West Side upzoning plan, hard-core pornography establishments intensified along 42nd Street.[63]

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[60] This represented a major change in zoning, and was an extension of the 1965 Landmarks Preservation Law Preservationist Norman Redlich recalled an early conversation about the idea. "To encourage people to build in Times Square, and to preserve the theaters that they would otherwise tear down, we would give them extra development rights. They would get three more floors, whatever it was, in exchange for that, they would have to build a theater. Now, the standard shibboleth in those days was, 'You can't sell the zoning power.' But of course, that's what we were doing. We were selling the zoning power. We were saying, 'We want a theater so if you'll agree to build a theater, we will give you more development rights.'" Susan DeVries, "Norman Redlich: An Oral History Interview," The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, 1997.

[61] See Laura Wolf-Powers, "Up-Zoning New York City's Mixed Use Neighborhoods: Property-Led Economic Development and the Anatomy of a Planning Dilemma," *Journal of Planning, Education and Research* 24 (June 2005): 379-93.

[62] Quoted in Eliot, *Down 42nd Street*, 123.

[63] Landowners had been sitting on nearly worthless property and let their properties sit vacant or be filled by short-term uses. This included some of the biggest names in New York real estate, Seymour Durst and Edward R. Finch II. Eliot, *Down 42nd Street,* 121. The Supreme Court obscenity decisions of the late 1960s and early 1970s were a major factor in the proliferation of pornography alongside the older forms of illicit nightlife in the Square, burlesque and prostitution, that had both flourished there for decades. Laurence Senelick, "Private Parts in Public Places," in Taylor, *Inventing Times Square*, 340. See also Wollman, *Hard Times*, chapters 6-9.

From this special theatre district, the City could take partial credit for the four new theatres built in addition to the Minskoff,[64] but for many theatre advocates, the trade-offs would linger. Critic Walter Kerr expressed feelings of betrayal about the zoning changes; six years after the zoning was passed, he recalled sitting in the offices of the City Planning Commission and listening to the promise of new legitimate houses in office buildings. "One of the stipulations at that time was that their marquees were to be on Broadway, sustaining the busy and inviting character of the street. Well, there are four new office building theatres now and not one has a marquee on Broadway."[65] Rather than marquees, these new theatres had only slender vertical signs and hidden entrances. To this complaint, detractors added the lifeless design of the high-rise theatres, the dull experience of taking an elevator to the lobby of a theatre, and the removal of the theatre-going experience from the street. There was a basic incongruity embedded in the attempt to solve the myriad problems of Broadway with office towers and bonus square footage as a way to maintain a theatre district. Further, the on-going debate about the changing demographic of audiences frequenting the Times Square area suggested that new theatres tucked away in office developments would not appeal to new audiences, and would also not alleviate the problems producers faced.

The continued loss of historic theatres also pained observers who once had high hopes that the old venues would be protected, not victimized by Lindsay's office-building boom.[66] Theatres-within-offices could either be the vanguard, or the death knell. For its critics, it was not a true replacement of the old, and the change in the size and shape of the playhouses were of as

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[64] The Marquis Theater in the Marriot-Marquis Hotel, the Gershwin and the Circle in the Square in the Uris Building, and the American Place in the Stevens Building. The Minskoff Theatre is on the third floor of One Astor Place (1515 Broadway), now the home of Viacom, where the Best Buy Music Theatre is located.
[65] Walter Kerr, "Can Broadway Move?" *New York Times*, June 3, 1973, page unknown.
[66] Guernsey, *Curtain Times*, 141.

much concern as the diminishment of the compact, showy flavor of a Broadway with ground-level theatres. Guernsey articulated these frustrations:

> [T]he Broadway sound of 1968-1969 was the sound of the jackhammer, as the office-building boom crept over westward and penetrated the theater district like the prongs of an exercise in military strategy. The Playhouse went the way of the Astor, Capitol, Paramount and Roxy, with office towers mushrooming on the sites. True, city authorities have bargained with the developers for new theaters: zoning laws limiting the size and shape of new office buildings are to be relaxed slightly in exchange for the inclusion of new theaters within the construction. Many "official spokesmen" for various branches of the theater think this is an adequate safeguard for the legit stage's physical future.... While the arguments continue a theater vanishes— and at least half a dozen of the old legit playhouses, maybe as many as a dozen, face the imminent and deadly threat of progress.

As the city government hurtled into the precarious 1970s, the theatres themselves temporarily receded from the public debate, and the larger preoccupations of those concerned about the theatre district became the streets outside the theatres.

Paranoid Urbanism

> Preserve the Empire State Building— if you can. It was built from over three hundred years of black poetry, 'cause sweat is poetry too, son. Kick out the money changers and reclaim it. Ain't none of us gonna be free until poetry rides a mercury-smooth silver stallion.
> --Joseph Walker, *The River Niger*[67]

The stage was thusly set for fiscal-crisis Broadway, the period in which Mayor Abe Beame shifted the focus to its public relations problems. Abe Beame was Lindsay's Comptroller, and was widely viewed as the best choice for the city's next mayor: a civil servant who could

[67] Joseph Walker, *The River Niger* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1973), 123.

balance the books after Lindsay's excesses and municipal mismanagement. While Lindsay had attempted to zone the neighborhood into a new direction-- without the demolition derby of urban renewal policies—Beame's focus would be on citizen's committees, police raids, and tourist-ready spaces, all achieved under severely curtailed police budgets. Beame had inherited Lindsay's new zoning regulations after he won the 1973 election, but he expressed little interest in the west side of 42nd Street. In the early years of his administration, he paid scant attention to Times Square, until he began to search for a signature issue that could carry him into his second term as mayor. One of his aides suggested that they target 42nd Street; Beame was loath to be associated with the area, but his staff convinced him that it was exactly the right locus of his energies. "Mind you, as far as I was concerned that street had turned into a sinkhole of immorality, and for all I cared it could stay that way. What was the point in trying to do something about an area overrun by pornography, drugs, and street crime?"[68] 42nd Street as a consummate issue for the upcoming election proved too tempting to resist. The possibility of fresh tourist dollars loomed.

Beame's aides were not the only advocates of a focused effort on 42nd Street. Producer Gerald Schoenfeld was deeply involved in the push to change the theatre district in long-term, meaningful ways, and with seventeen theatres on Broadway owned and operated by his Shubert Organization, he had much at stake.[69] Although there were feuds and conflicts between producers—particularly over the power of the Shubert organization-- millions of dollars were spent on the improvement of the image of Broadway, and the initiatives ranged from audience research to laws and ordinances to new relationships between the theatre, the city, and dependent

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[68] Quoted in Eliot, *Down 42nd Street,* 139.

[69] The Nederlander organization, the second largest theatre owner in Broadway and the Shubert's main competitor, owned eight Broadway theaters and another seventeen owned or leased out of New York.

businesses.[70] Shoenfeld set up a "Special Projects Division" within the League of New York Theaters and Producers, and agreed to chair the Committee on Urban Environment to focus on Times Square.[71] When Beame became mayor, Schoenfeld advised him strongly to achieve a 42nd Street cleanup in his second term. Beame explained it this way:

> I had a conversation with Gerald Schoenfeld, who told me the reason the industry of Broadway was still in such financial straits and now was in danger of being totally dismantled, theatre by theatre, was that 42nd Street had become the porn capital of America. This disturbed me quite a bit and that same year I asked Schoenfeld to chair a new organization, the Mayor's Midtown Citizen's Committee to help me revive the area.[72]

This pat explanation for Broadway's precarious financial position was a matter of debate and far less certain than Beame suggests. Economist William Baumol believed that the view that pitted the porn capital with Shubert's Alley was a misconception; or, at the very least, an exaggeration. Baumol argued that it was not the porn, but something endemic to the theatrical production that required attention. Even commercial theatre required subsidies, Baumol claimed, but this was an unpopular admission during an enforced austerity period in New York. Instead, Beame deployed a flurry of organizations, some of which had been started under Lindsay. The Mayor's Midtown Citizens' Committee, the Midtown Enforcement Project,[73] and the Mayor's Office of Midtown Planning and Development had all been at work to improve of the theater as a piece of their activities (and state agencies were involved, as well).

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[70] Croyden, "Box-Office Boom," page unknown.
[71] Quoted in Eliot, *Down 42nd Street*, 131.
[72] Ibid., 139.
[73] Since Beame had limited funds and his administration had been laying off police, he turned to the federal government for aid to start the Midtown Enforcement Project. This money—a half-million dollars—allowed for a permanent police presence on 42nd Street. Some argued that the approach was wrong—"porn, as bad as it was, was not the real problem. Drugs were fueling the craziness." Eliot, *Down 42nd Street*, 142-45.

Beame's efforts to instill law and order in the peep show district, however, were roundly criticized by many as crude election year tactics. His first actions, two flashy raids of establishments by the task force, were mocked as overblown public relations stunts. "Going in would turn my stomach," Beame said as he taped a vacate order on the doors of yet another topless bar.[74] "We can make Times Square the Great White Way that it used to be."[75] The crowds heckled ("Forget porno. We need jobs!"), the press criticism was swift, and Beame was made to look foolish when many of the closings were overturned. His well-publicized Times Square cleanup was just one prong of a four-part concentration on crime that escalated in 1977, along with violent crime, reorganization of the criminal justice system, and proposals for new legislation. City officials were distracted by the poor public perception of the deuce, and many residents feared that the small stretch of blocks at the symbolic heart of the city had destroyed the image of New York as a tourist attraction and cultural stronghouse. Beame's administration received still further criticism for attacking the perception of crime more concertedly than what some felt were the serious problems in law enforcement at the time.[76] Nicholas Scoppetta, the Deputy Mayor for Criminal Justice, did not deny the emphasis placed on the city's perception problem: "The crimes may be down, but the perception of crime is up. We can't ignore the perception. This is a serious problem, people are afraid of it, and their fears are hurting the city."[77] Through the 1970s, the areas adjacent to 42nd Street and Eighth Avenue were undeniably troubled; the question was diagnosis and way forward.

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[74] Anna Quindlen, "Mayor Gets Some Bad Notices After Second Raid on Times Square Show," *New York Times,* March 26, 1977, 30.
[75] "Mayor Beame Leads Pornography Raids," *New York Times*, March 25, 1977, 36.
[76] Steven R. Weisman, "The AntiCrime Drive: Beame's Stepped-Up Emphasis on Law and Order During an Election Year Raises Some Questions," *New York Times*, April 15, 1977, 26.
[77] Ibid.

The clash of visions for the area meant that the limits of its real crime problem were difficult to determine, as was the ultimate effect of these conditions on audience attendance. How dangerous was theatre-going in Times Square? In an article written when he assumed leadership of the Vivian Beaumont at Lincoln Center in 1973, Joseph Papp argued that it was dangerous enough to drive spectators further uptown, to the Beaumont. Theatre in New York needed to "respond to the reality of what is happening in the city," by which Papp principally meant white flight and rising crime.[78] Papp did not necessarily suggest that this response would be found on stage, but that a larger shift in the geography of theatre attendance and neighborhood identity had to be accepted. Papp isolated real estate and demography as the key factors to be considered amid "the exodus of great numbers of white middle class to the suburbs."[79] In this not-so-veiled attempt to distinguish a night out at the Vivian Beaumont as safer than a night out on Broadway, Papp explained that many New Yorkers and suburbanites did not want to venture out in the evenings to Times Square, and would rightfully prefer to go to places like the Delacorte or the Beaumont, which hold "far less fear for the average theatergoer than Broadway."[80]

Papp attempted to position his new Lincoln Center theatre as a potential solution to the questions of the city's crime problems and the demographic changes threatening theatre attendance, but this proved more difficult than he hoped. However auspicious Papp's arrival at the Beaumont, he left in June of 1977, decrying its artistically oppressive environment and fiscal difficulties. His tribulations at the Beaumont created public debate around subsidized versus commercial theatre, particularly in relation to audience demographics. In his first statements after joining Lincoln Center, he had cited suburbanization as a necessary factor to consider when programming Lincoln Center for new audience dynamics and the future of the city. There was a

[78] Joseph Papp, "Break Down the Wall," *New York Times*, July 22, 1973, page unknown.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.

clear backlash in response to Papp's sentiments. In a 1975 *New York Times* essay, Charles Marowitz criticized Papp's blatant disinterest in the white audiences who had left for the suburbs. "To follow this belief to its logical conclusion is to create a theater patterned to the needs of poor whites, blacks, and Puerto Ricans: again, a laudable intention but not reconcilable with the needs of a professional, privately subscribed artistic enterprise."[81] Marowitz emphasized the various foundations and city and state organizations that endowed the theatre at Lincoln Center. According to Marowitz, it was for this reason that "multi-ethnic" theater did not belong "at the level of Lincoln Center," and for an institutionalized theatre to devote itself to "the disenfranchised" amounted to inverse snobbery. At issue was Papp's decision to showcase his favorite young playwrights—"often notably raw in language and subject matter."[82] These producing choices betrayed a "throw of the dice" mentality, one more akin to the credo of Broadway than a new vision for a national theatre that could "tower over and…shame the Broadway stage."[83] In August 1976, Papp reduced by half the 1976-1977 season of plays at the Beaumont Theater. He committed to Andrei Serban's production of *The Cherry Orchard* and to continuing Richard Foreman's successful *Threepenny Opera* from the prior season, but left his options open as to other productions, claiming that his three Lincoln Center seasons were "put together under economic pressure" and distracting financial problems, including a $1.2 million deficit in his operation.[84]

Lincoln Center grappled with deficit spending in their operations before. William Schuman, the former president of Juilliard and the President of the entire Lincoln Center complex between 1961 and 1969, believed that the integrity of the programming was of

[81] Charles Marowitz, "The Trouble With Papp," *New York Times*, September 21, 1975, 5.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Mel Gussow, "Papp Halves New Season at Beaumont," *New York Times*, August 24, 1976, 20.

paramount importance and had to be maintained, regardless of budget deficits. In a speech, he went so far as to articulate "Schuman's Law and Postulates," which held that, "nonprofit institutions in the performing arts compromise their reason for being in direct proportion to the programs and policies which are adopted for fiscal reasons extrinsic to artistic purpose."[85] Imagination, not timidity, should be asserted in programming, since everyone in the performing arts swims in the same "sea of deficit…. [A] red sea, and only a p-r-o-f-i-t can part it. Now, as deep as that red sea is, I think it should be deeper. Basic to our problem is not that our deficits are too large, but that they are too small."[86] Schuman boldly argued for larger budgets that would enable arts centers to do their jobs properly, as deficits in the performing arts exist to provide latitude for experimentation and foster artistic health. Rockefeller was disturbed by the provocative remarks, and believed a deficit philosophy would lead down a path of unsound financial planning and the eventual downfall of Lincoln Center. The Executive Committee chided Schuman and stated their position that the Center had to live within its means, but for years many of its programs-- such as the Film program-- had already operated with a growing deficit and no sign of change in sight.[87] Schuman was chastised for expressing a principle that was already practiced in some measure, but was considered too publicly unpopular to voice.

Similar dynamics arose in the tortured—and failed—attempt to create a repertory theatre at the complex. Arthur Miller observed with dismay the skittishness over arts funding at Lincoln Center, amplified within the context of the fiscal crisis sensitivity towards city expenditures in the early 1970s. Miller was deeply committed to the development of a "true" repertory company at Lincoln Center, which he believed could represent an "alternative to the commercial

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[85] Edgar B. Young, *Lincoln Center: The Building of an Institution* (New York: New York University Press, 1980), 283.
[86] Ibid.
[87] To help save the Film program, Schuman turned to his friend, Martin E. Segal, who was founding president and CEO of the Film Society of Lincoln Center, from 1968 through 1978. Ibid., 286-87.

Broadway theatre."[88] The problem, he observed, was that the decision-makers at Lincoln Center had avoided the issue of economics. The idealistic underpinnings of Lincoln Center crumbled in the light of Miller's contemptuous attack on its board, which he depicted as clueless as to the actual cost of supporting the arts culture that Rockefeller imagined would offer "a new kind of city therapy."[89] Miller was incensed by the board's miserly approach to the repertory company, after they poured millions into the building in which a repertory was to be housed. In an article in the *New York Times,* he described the cultural life of a metropolis that was being nickel-and-dimed to extinction:

> Our cultural life seems to be drying up, we're becoming a utilitarian society in the crudest sense, namely, that which is not bought cannot be art. Whole sections of the New York Public Library, one of the greatest libraries in the world, are closed. Museums have short hours. Even the hospitals have to curtail their services and are threatened with closing because they have no money. We are becoming a second-class cultural power and in theater we are neck and neck with the Congo.[90]

Miller contextualized Lincoln Center's problems within the austerity framework of New York's operations. The scale of Lincoln Center and its very costly obstacles during its early years had only enflamed already heated questions of city involvement in direct funding of the arts. Miller revealed the lack of commitment to the real cost of the theatre on the part of even the Lincoln Center board. He described a group of arts supporters who craved monuments, not theatres: "It was simple as that. They were building a twelve-million-dollar monument, period."[91] From the

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[88] Miller, "Arthur Miller vs. Lincoln Center," 5.
[89] Zipp, *Manhattan Projects*, 161; and Julia Foulkes, "Streets and Stages: Urban Renewal and the Arts After World War II," *Journal of Social History* 44 (Winter 2010): 415. Foulkes describes the annual Out of Doors festival as one of the efforts in the 1970s that attempted to connect the original, populist definition of the center—to expand the definition of the arts and democratic ideals—with a time of dramatic change in the city's demographics.
[90] Miller, "Miller vs. Lincoln Center," 5.
[91] Ibid., D1.

beginning, Miller believed they had been fixated on the building; the operational budget turned their sea legs into cold feet.

> These great giants of industry, banking and commerce can't get it through their heads that the more successful a repertory theater is, the more it must cost. It contradicts all business principles. The only explanation of their behavior I've ever come up with that made any sense was that they see credit to themselves in building monuments but not in paying actors.[92]

While Miller didn't employ William Baumol's phrase, the phenomenon he described is essentially Baumol's "cost disease"—the very same set of issues that Joseph Papp later argued had destroyed his tenure at the Vivian Beaumont Theater.

Miller's writing foreshadowed Papp's later resignation in his public insistence that even though the audience response had been strong, it remained an impossibility to run a repertory theatre through selling tickets or subscriptions. Also similar to Papp, Miller raised an attendant issue: the intersection of public funds and public land. Lincoln Center was a massive urban renewal project, and Miller argued for continued public involvement with a unabashedly populist zeal: "It's not entirely the board's business how Lincoln Center is run, because public money is involved and it's New York City's land, our property, that they're sitting on. It doesn't belong to them."[93] In a time of fiscal severity, in which the financial decisions of the municipality were in the hands of the state-created Municipal Assistance Corporation (also known as the "Big MAC"), Miller's impassioned plea for increased theatre funding and public control of renewal lands were both radical and largely ignored. The board seriously considered liquidation of the repertory company; when it failed by their standards, Papp entered the Beaumont in the fall of

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[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.

1973 and continued for six years. The Lincoln Center development had changed the way the public conceived of the arts and neighborhood; Papp took over during the very early days of the fiscal crisis and met years of challenges. The prior controversies had embedded skepticism in much of the public towards large city cultural planning, public money available for arts, and the very concept of deficit arts spending.

The irony that Papp's financial predicament came at a time when he had four palpable hits did not escape critics and confounded some Lincoln Center supporters.[94] *A Chorus Line* and Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf* were Broadway successes; the David Rabe play *Streamers*, directed by Mike Nichols at the Mitzi Newhouse Theatre, was a sell-out, as was Foreman's *Threepenny Opera*. Papp was left to explain the basic truths that had been ignored throughout most of Lincoln Center's theatre operations: "the more we do, the more it costs, because the price of a ticket never covers the cost."[95] Even when operating at capacity, the Lincoln Center plays did not make profits, and the task of moving a successful play from the Public to Broadway required large expenditures. Papp's most sizable triumph, *A Chorus Line,* was not yet making a profit, even though it was running simultaneously in companies at the Shubert Theater, in Los Angeles, and in London. One major cause was the spiraling inflation, coupled with lowered amounts of subsidies. "For the present he has to worry about cash flow, and one principal problem…that all major foundations have dried up" their support.[96]

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[94] Ibid.
[95] Carey Winfrey, "Papp Quits Lincoln Center, Citing Artistic-Fiscal Trap," *New York Times*, June 10, 1977, C17.
[96] "Joseph Papp, NY Impresario, Says He'll Leave Lincoln Center," *Toledo Blade*, June 14, 1977, 2, accessed September 12, 2012, http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1350&dat=19770614&id=hj5PAAAAIBAJ&sjid=cQIEAAAAIBAJ&pg=6831,5094404.

Still, when Papp departed from Lincoln Center a few months later, he attributed partial blame for his departure on a combination of audience and location. "You can't operate an ice-cream stand next to a French restaurant."[97] Papp described an "essentially middle-class" audience only interested in classical theatre on the order of a museum, not new playwrights and a place where new work is created and developed.[98] The critics had not been kind to Papp's choices of plays since his inaugural production in the Beaumont, Rabe's *In the Boom Boom Room*. The play, about a bisexual go-go dancer, was a critical and costly failure, and sparked a theatre world controversy when Papp fired director Julie Bovasso from the production and removed actors during a contentious rehearsal process. The next year, Erskine Caldwell's dark drama, *Mert and Phil*, directed by Papp at the Beaumont and starring Estelle Parsons, "unsettled some of the playgoers who hissed and booed it on opening night, as well as several of the critics."[99] Rarely did dramas elicit "such exacerbated responses," as this play about a middle-aged couple whose marriage disintegrates after the wife undergoes a mastectomy, severing an already despondent union riddled with infidelity and alcoholism. Still, it is impossible to ascertain what hurt Papp's tenure more; unsafe streets seem relatively inconsequential when compared with the twin problems of poor critical reception and the fiscal woes that Papp declared unsolvable. He left Lincoln Center with a $1.6 million deficit, and, on the occasion of his exit, released a financial statement that showed that government support of his Lincoln Center operations "accounted for only fourteen percent of income over the four years he operated the theaters," and only five percent during his final year.[100]

[97] Winfrey, "Papp Quits Lincoln Center," C17.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Anne Burr, "Tweaking Raw Nerves," *Time*, November 18, 1974, 102.
[100] "Joseph Papp, NY Impresario," 2.

And yet, many interpreted the social factors of suburbanization and crime to be so detrimental to the patterns of theatre-going that at the height of the fiscal crisis Walter Kerr argued for a twentieth-century change of location for the theatre. In an emotional nine-page article in the *New York Times* magazine in 1975, Kerr donned an urban planner's hat to argue for a new Broadway. "I'd pluck up Broadway by the roots and string its theaters out along the East River, nearer audiences, nearer where films are now, nearer busy department stores and flourishing restaurants, nearer highways, possible parking and all of that."[101] Kerr's plan was not just impractical from a purely economic viewpoint (he conceded that the price tag would likely near four hundred million), but also from a policy stance, given the deep investment in a westward pattern of development across the city. His wish for a theatre district nearer to highways and parking also ran contrary to the long-held belief that Times Square's proximity to a major transit hub was one of its defining features, the very characteristic that positioned it at the symbolic "crossroads of the world." This, Kerr argued, had changed. "People simply don't want to come into midtown Manhattan at night any more."[102]

While impractical, Kerr's argument for a relocated Broadway revealed a dominant strain of what I will call the "lost audiences" theory. This was a largely spectral force that also motivated the choices of producers and officials. Kerr's dogged attachment to an "old" Broadway audience—or, more to the point, his resistance to understanding a new audience for Broadway—infused his obsession with the notion that the financial realities of theatre producing would be irrelevant if the location were changed. Kerr sought "Broadway's audience— the old Broadway audience, the big Broadway audience," and he was not alluding to quantity of spectators alone:

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[101] Kerr, "Can Broadway Move?" page unknown.
[102] Ibid.

> [W]e need Broadway and all its actual or potential denizens. We need a vast number of people to keep an expensive production alive, we need them concentrated in one place and not dispersed in small pockets across the land, we need them where influential critics can depend upon a theatergoing habit to get them to attend the "best"…we need a focal point, an apex, a professional top. We need busyness and business, contrast and competition, one thronged center where the ultimate struggle toward quality can be fairly thrashed out.[103]

This notion that quality theatre-going could only be thrashed out in one "thronged center" disregarded the prior two decades of Off and Off-Off experimentation and clung to a central marketplace and standard, one established and judged, presumably, by the paper of record. It should be noted that the *New York Times,* Kerr's employer, had its own stake in the future identity of Times Square. Longacre Square was named Times Square in 1904, when the *Times* moved its headquarters there. Over the century since, the paper has inhabited three different homes in the area, and the company was intricately involved in the successive phases of development planning for the area.[104]

Kerr's argument against the decentralization of theatres and audiences is clear. His assumption that Broadway audiences need to be "concentrated in one place" can also be read as a clarion call against the kind of heterogeneity about which Guernsey wrote so passionately. The outlands needed something to aspire to, and Kerr feared that without this, work may go on being done, "but standards will be vaguer, parochialism come to prevail."[105] Kerr's attachment to

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[103] Ibid.

[104] William J. Stern, the former Chairman of New York State's Urban Development Corporation, is deeply critical of the role that the New York Times Corporation played in the remaking of 42nd Street, and argues that their decision-making power nearly paralleled that of the city or state government. William J. Stern, "The Truth About Times Square," *Perspectives on Eminent Domain Abuse* 5 (April 2009): 8-10, accessed September 10, 2012, http://www.ij.org/stern-perspective.

[105] Kerr, "Can Broadway Move?" page unknown.

Broadway as a professional apex is not surprising, and yet it did ignore the complex interrelationship between commercial producers, arbiters of taste, and Off-Broadway. The anxiety brought about by a diminishing central space is therefore tethered closely to the shaky ground of clear critical judgments, professional standards, and a legible, recognizable audience. Rather than conceive of the relationship as interwoven with economic accessibility and financial availability, Kerr insisted that a meritocracy could be deciphered in the fog. "Off Broadway, remember, is called Off *Broadway*. It exists because Broadway does.... Take away 'Broadway'— in whatever form and whatever location— and half, maybe all, of Off Broadway will go with it. Take away 'Broadway,' and the outlands, having nothing to compare themselves with and nothing to aspire to, will lose energy."[106] Kerr's argument is strikingly similar to Richard Barr's pronouncement that Broadway should be understood as an aspirational space, one that facilitates the work of alternative theatres. If Tom Eyen was interested in the dark theatres as playgrounds for the Off-Broadway experimenters, Kerr argued that Broadway existed in order to exclude them.[107] He suggested abandoning the low brow Times Square in an effort to reclaim audiences that had abandoned the city. Perhaps this suburban audience could be wooed back, if even for a night, if Broadway were closer to the aggressively elite Museum Mile?

This perspective dovetails with a kind of paranoid urbanism, in which confidence in the city's infrastructure, such as its transit system, was at such a low point that it overshadowed the reality of government neglect of that system itself. Paranoid urbanism is a phenomenon identified by Matthew Gandy, who, in his writing about the water system in New York City observed that the "maintenance of physical infrastructure represents only one side" of the water crisis; "the other dimension is provided by declining public confidence in the safety of the

[106] Ibid.
[107] For a critique of the economic and cultural hierarchy that segregates Broadway from Off-Broadway from the avantgarde in the twentieth-century (and the role of the critic within it), see Savran, "Death of the Avantgarde," 11.

drinking water."[108] Gandy's theory is instructive when applied to the approach of many city planners, residents, and critics towards Broadway and the city services that facilitated it, from the transit system to policing to the upkeep of city property. More broadly, it is an articulation of the response to the urban crisis of the late 1960s and 1970s, when "fears of crime and social disorder…began to resurface."[109] These fears about Times Square, with its abandoned theatres and vanished audiences, provided the other side of the City's disinvestment in theatre architecture and other infrastructure needs.

The depth of these fears is exhibited in the language employed throughout the 1970s, which relied on the metaphors of disease to describe an ill theatre that resided within the body of a sick municipality. This worked in tandem with the discourse established about a Times Square that had been taken over by an illegal and dangerous street culture: Times Square as "cancer."[110] Kerr argued that drama as an art was not even "mildly healthy," and becoming less so. In the theatre, this legitimated a view of Broadway as one coherent—albeit sick-- district, disconnected from a network of artists, theatres, and audiences that might themselves be the picture of health. Richard Schechner, frustrated at the emergence of these assumptions in the conversations at FACT, admonished, "If this is the First American Theatre Congress [*sic*], it should not start out with the assumption that we have this invalid that has to be resurrected. Maybe the terminal disease is very good, and maybe the institution has served its purpose and now we can say rest in peace and let's get on with the work of the theatre."[111] To be fair, the obsessive debate over the health of the theatre had traded in these metaphors since Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman wrote *The Fabulous Invalid* in 1938, but the terms were aggressively revived in the 1970s, as

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[108] Gandy, *Concrete and Clay,* 60.
[109] Ibid., 52.
[110] Reichl, *Reconstructing Times Square*, 61.
[111] "Panel 9: Stimulating Creative Resources," June 2-5, 1974, Box 1, Folder 13, First American Theatre Congress Records, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library.

Broadway was repeatedly declared dead, ailing, and beyond recovery. The use of health metaphors to describe Broadway persisted during the fiscal crisis, just as many referred to the city itself—and even the country—as trapped in a "malaise."[112] The problems were seen as nationwide, with New York City as the apex; Kerr contextualized the challenges that faced Times Square within a broader urban condition in the mid-70s, similar to Chicago's Loop and other central cities.

Cultural critics like Philip Lopate warned that proposed initiatives to "clean-up" Times Square would leave behind something less "bright and never as satisfyingly central."[113] High-tourist and high-traffic areas were often more safe, operating in a zone of surveillance that should comfort, rather than threaten, the average tourist. Crime-in-the-streets publicity had the little-known ability to hurt Off and Off-Off Broadway even more adversely than Times Square "because its little theaters are scattered in many dark corners" of Manhattan.[114] The media discourse around Times Square relentlessly obscured this reality. Critics like Kerr were jumping on the bandwagon; his description of opening day in 1975 declared Broadway had become "a cowpath."[115] This rhetoric signified a dangerous nadir during the time of fiscal crisis: as costs rose, the *New York Times* already held sizable sway in the fate of productions, and now Kerr used his pulpit to signal the death knell of the entire neighborhood. Kerr observed that ticket orders were heavily weighted towards matinees, as people sought to avoid the hookers, porno

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[112] Daniel Horowitz, *The Anxieties of Affluence: Critiques of American Consumer Culture, 1939-1979* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 203-25.

[113] Philip Lopate, "42nd Street You Ain't No Sodom," *New York Times*, March 8, 1979, A21. Lopate's article was in response to Papert's proposal for the area, which Lopate believed would "cement over the whole beehive with a dipsy-doodle exhibition hall and kick out those people so they'll congregate on another block and make a new heaven and hell somewhere else."

[114] Guernsey, *Curtain Times*, 266. Guernsey claimed that while the extent and the frequency of crime in the city were exaggerated, the crime-in-the-streets publicity was traveling to audiences in the city, suburbs, and outside of New York City. The increased police visibility programs organized by the city and theater committees had to meet the problems of civil disorder "without turning the world's most interesting city into a police state."

[115] Kerr, "Can Broadway Move?" page unknown.

houses, massage parlors, and "junkies needing cash."[116] Guernsey believed that high-publicity incidents inflamed this perception, as did the bigotry of commentators too jaded by their own racism and norms of cultural segregation to look more deeply into the mix of social forces and entertainments occurring in Times Square.

This phenomenon cut across lines of class and race. In a debate about the district's pornography that was published in the *New York Times*, Guy Talese argued that the area was still a center for entertainment, even if some officials did not regard it as such.

> What some people can't stand is that it is today a center of entertainment for the working class instead of for the elite. There are two kinds of pornography. You have the pornography for the working man, like the 42nd Street peep shows, and you have the "legitimate theater," where the elite can see *Let My People Come, Oh Calcutta!* or the works of Edward Albee or Arthur Miller or Tennessee Williams. The government does not as readily interfere with the pornography of the elite…. [P]ornography is primarily denied to the blue collar classes.[117]

Taste and class were not the only contradictions of Times Square: politics of space and use value weighed heavily on the public discourse about its renewal. Unlike other neighborhoods neglected throughout the crisis, the properties of Times Square remained, first and foremost in some people's minds, wasted revenue potential for the city. While others valued the strip as a kind of ineffable projection of the New York state of mind, with all of the messiness and color implied therein, the factor of real estate was never very far from the discussion of the proper uses for its blocks and the appropriate path to get there. For those proponents, any development that could attack the massage parlors and the porn houses, as well as the sticky problem of tax revenue, was seen as a non-negotiable good:

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[116] In addition to the special zoning, other disappointments listed by Kerr included the smaller number of daily newspapers to promote the shows, replaced by too-brief television reviews.

[117] Guy Talese, as quoted in Walter Goodman, "What Is a Civil Libertarian To Do When Pornography Becomes So Bold?" *New York Times*, Nov 21, 1976, 77.

> [42nd Street] is not only dirty and filled with businesses of which most of us do not approve, at least not publicly, but the tax base on that block is very low. The poor uses to which the block has been put create an extraordinary dichotomy between the tax revenues it generates for the city and the cost to the city of providing police and sanitation services on that block. The block includes theaters with some of the most beautiful architecture the city has to offer. In fact, they may easily be landmarks. However, because of what the theaters have become, it is difficult to see that today.[118]

Arguments about the lost tax revenue were frequently couched in palatable discussions of theatre preservation, an easy rallying point and nostalgia-generator. Just as Beame provided the press with a sound bite about the return of the Great White Way as he taped a vacate notice to a topless bar, the majestic venues from a romanticized era were deployed as selling points for future development, regardless of specific plans for their reactivation.

This strategy also managed to sidestep discussion about how the patrons of Times Square and 42nd Street had changed. One of the most frequently cited studies of the "blighted" deuce was commissioned by the Ford Foundation and conducted by William Kornblum and a team of social scientists at the City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center. "The Bright Light District" studied the street life of 42nd Street between Sixth and Eighth Avenues. (At that time, the Graduate School was located on West 42nd Street.) The study authors assumed that change in the area was desirable but sought to understand the conditions in the Bright Light District first.

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[118] Eric J. Lobenfeld, "The 42nd Street Development Project: How Litigation Obstructs Public Goals," *Pace Environmental Law Review* 7 (Spring 1990): 348. (And, while few in Lobenfeld's circle might publicly admit to frequenting the area for its prostitutes, porn palaces, or peep shows, studies consistently evidenced that it was the professional classes that patronized the sex industry establishments. Reichl, *Reconstructing Times Square*, 62-66.

They were quick to foreground their conclusions with the fact that hundreds of thousands still passed through the area every day, for work, pleasure, entertainment, and leisure.[119]

The researchers counted among the assets of the area 42nd Street's appeal across racial and ethnic lines. This, they argued, created a market for "all forms of popular culture" including jazz, dancing, sports, ethnic entertainment, programming for children, and rides. As the study showed, the decline of legitimate entertainment along the 42nd Street corridor predated both the rise of television and the metropolitan demographic shift that accounted for the racial and ethnic change in the street. Some of their most pertinent observations derived from their analysis of this phenomenon: "The CUNY survey of pedestrian traffic along West 42nd Street indicates that during the peak entertainment hours black, latin, and white working-class populations are the dominant groups who seek entertainment there. It is incorrect to view the Bright Light District as a 'Ghetto Street.'"[120] This was, however, the minority opinion; the majority saw little need to distinguish between the "large groups of young black and Latin men" who were there for movies and those who were part of the "drug traffic, sale of stolen goods, male prostitution, or the con games which proliferate in the Square."[121] Broadway plays were depicted as the victims of these neighborhood predators. Kerr's extended essay argued that Broadway itself was to blame for the vacuum into which the predators entered, and he invoked Jane Jacobs to support his perception that Shubert's Alley was missing vitality and diversity, its former "skylarking multiplicity."[122]

Kerr was not alone; lower- and middle-class moviegoers and homosexuals, pimps, prostitutes, and petty criminals were considered part of a wider swath of unsavory characters

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[119] They also noted three reasons for optimism, and none were related to office development. In 1978, the Off-Off Broadway Theater Row was inaugurated; Manhattan Plaza, the rental building for artists, had a waiting list of three thousand; and there was a third consecutive year of record theater sales for Broadway theatres.
[120] Kornblum et al., "The Bright Light Zone," 7.
[121] Jill Stone, *Times Square: A Pictorial History* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1982), 136.
[122] Kerr, "Can Broadway Move?" page unknown.

with deviant behaviors. Reichl argues that the racial integration of the Square was viewed as a "minority takeover," and that the definition of a loiterer had grown so vast, so politicized, and so fear-based that even shoeshine men were included.[123] The marking of certain bodies in the Times Square area as "deviant" through official mechanisms such as sweeps and police dragnets has been well researched. Historian Themis Chronoupoulos established that the mass arrests that occurred in Times Square during this time may have been aimed at decreasing crime numbers but in practice blurred the definition of undesirables— vagrants, homosexuals, and loiterers were lumped together under broad charges that were often later declared by the courts to be invalid; still, police used them to arrest people who "simply happened to be in public space."[124]

While "sinful behavior" could be found in plentiful amounts in Times Square well before the 1970s, many saw the degradation of 42nd Street as an opportunity to indict the moral laxity of the time, and the profile of its visitors was bound up in those critiques.[125] This was a common assumption regarding the patrons of Times Square and the pleas for the return of lost audiences. Theatre producers, however, did not uniformly share in it. In order to broaden the audience for legitimate theatre, they consistently targeted this desirable population of moviegoers, and believed that they could be lured from the movie seat to the theatre seat. Papp singled out these audiences as of specific concern to the new Vivian Beaumont theatre at Lincoln Center: "Special attention will be given to the casting of black plays with the purpose of bringing into the theater not only those blacks who are already theatergoers, but those who attend movies only. To help

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[123] Reichl, *Reconstructing Times Square*, 62-65.
[124] Themis Chronopoulos, *Spatial Regulation in New York City: From Urban Renewal to Zero Tolerance* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 59.
[125] Some scholarly accounts of Times Square compound these elements as well. Sagalyn's book is critical to understanding the long process of development in Times Square, and yet on the level of a sociology of culture, she errs in her choice to lump the "average lower and middle-class moviegoers" into the mélange of social misfits. "The particular permissive sociological context of the 1970s, however, drew to the street, like moths to street lights, a motley cross-section of people— social misfits, sexual deviants, hustlers of all types, pimps, and buyers of sex, along with the unwary and unprotected, as well as average lower and middle-class moviegoers. By middle-class standards, it was an intense scene of social depravity: sin in depth." Sagalyn, *Times Square Roulette*, 6.

achieve this, we are planning to cast the most popular black movie and television actors, so many of whom began their careers on the stage."[126] Papp both heeded and contributed to the "upsurge of black artistic participation in the commercial theater" that was credited with bringing "a new spirit and a new audience to Broadway."[127] While *The Jeffersons* and *Good Times* made waves on primetime television, the commercial theatre endeavored to find their own audience of black theatre patrons. By 1975, the past decades of civil rights activism and work by leading African-American artists had pried open Broadway to provide black people "a choice among Broadway shows that offer them something to identify with."[128] Articles that described this trend proliferated, and observed that the "predominantly black crowds, and particularly families with young children" now greeted passers-by near West 44th Street, thanks to shows like *The Wiz*.[129] Theatre criticism at the time made no attempt to distinguish between the perceived decline of Times Square and the inroads made on stage; a multi-fold anxiety regarding the changing of New York's population blurred the two together.

There was a tension between the push to make Broadway more accessible, and the rampant conflation of young people of color with the unsavory aspects of the area.[130] For this reason, it is disturbingly difficult to disentangle the social problems from the successes of the period-- like the surging of black patrons in Broadway houses. It is, however, undeniable that producers were desperate to stimulate theatergoing and expand audience profiles beyond certain

[126] Papp, "Break Down the Wall," 8.
[127] Judith Cummings, "Blacks Gain on Broadway, Lag in Two Other Arts," *New York Times*, June 6, 1975, 10.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid. See also Elenore Lester, "We Exist to Create a Real Black Theater," *New York Times*, March 2, 1975, 95.
[130] Alexander Reichl argues that the politics surrounding the redevelopment of Times Square were led by a fear of diversity; West 42nd Street was home "to an assortment of inexpensive entertainment (not including adult entertainment) that attracted lower income African-American and Latino youth into an otherwise pricey Broadway theatre district." Reichl, *Reconstructing Times Square*, 2. Reichl uses the work of urbanists Robert Beauregard, Christine Boyer, and David Harvey to argue that while the dominant narrative of public and political discourse clung to the definition of Times Square as a symbol of urban decline, lurking beneath the surface of redevelopment was a potency borne from racial anxieties.

segments of brave Manhattanites and intrepid tourists. Often, these were aimed at widening the geographic profile of audiences. The long-running Micki Grant musical, *Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope*, offered ticket purchasers from all New York City boroughs (except Staten Island) a free taxi ride one way, either to the theater or home after the show.[131] While this was an attempt to confront the reluctance to venture into Times Square in the evenings, it also signified a proactive step towards culling audiences from neighborhoods that might not have a tradition of Broadway attendance, but might begin at an all-black revue like *Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope*.

The knotty questions of ticket access and audience composition cannot be analyzed without taking into account the city's efforts to tackle the sociological problems of the area, and the concurrent audience development initiatives. Mayor Lindsay started the Times Square Task Force (after, some say, he was prodded to do so by producer Hal Prince), a vague assemblage of city agencies set up to address the many aspects of Times Square's regression. In 1972, three city agencies announced that they would implement recommendations made by a citizens committee convened under the auspices of the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) and the New York City Cultural Council.[132] The content of their nineteen recommendations reveals the extent of the competing diagnoses and solutions. (Recommendation number thirteen, for example, "combining of the Tony and the Obie award groups," suggests that there was not a unified sense among the committee of the specific forces that undermined Broadway.) The committee did agree that the character of Times Square was transformable but was pitted against its intractable "sociological problems." Jaquelin Robertson, director of the Office of Midtown Planning and

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[131] Guernsey, *Curtain Times*, 290.
[132] Louis Calta, "City Aides Act to Implement Theater Report," *New York Times*, January 27, 1972, 43. The citizens committee "of 19 well-known persons," conducted the study "under the guidance" of Eugene R. Black, an investment banker, government advisor, and playwright. Black was chairman of a committee that advised Lindsay on cultural affairs in 1966, and was also chairman of the Circle in Square Theater and served on the boards of the Lincoln Center Repertory Company and the Stratford Shakespeare Theater. He was as a general partner in the Wall Street investment firm of Lazard Frères & Company, and wrote plays under the pen name Franklyn MacGregor.

Development, remarked that among the physical improvements to the streets and the lighting, the removal of "undesirable characters from the area and a special zoning designation" would provide a physical "face lift" to the theatre district.[133] All changes would serve the greater goal of a restoration of "the legendary Great White Way," and drew upon romantic imagery of the theatre district that had only a "slight basis" in reality.[134] The committee pronounced the theatre to be healthy and sound, but acknowledged that it should be made "more attractive to larger audiences," especially younger audiences. The head of the committee argued for federal and city subsidies to "the serious and classical theater, such as Lincoln Center," the establishment "of a better system of ticket distribution," and repeal of regulations inhibiting the sale of theatre tickets. Within a year, a new system of ticket distribution, The Times Square Theatre Center (TKTS), would be created.

TKTS and the Myth of Broadway's Decline

> It seems to take a convulsion of nature to keep the impulse buyers away.
> --William Baumol and Hilda Baumol, *Last Minute Discounts on Unsold Tickets*[135]

TKTS was a marketing initiative that opened in June 25, 1973, under the sponsorship of state and city agencies and the Theater Development Fund (TDF).[136] The program distributes unsold seats for same-day Broadway and off-Broadway offerings at half-price, and was rightly

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[133] Ibid.
[134] Reichl, 2-3.
[135] William J. Baumol and Hilda Baumol, *Last Minute Discounts on Unsold Tickets: A Study of TKTS* (New York: Theatre Development Fund, 1974), 17.
[136] Hugh Southern of TDF credited Anna Crouse with the original concept for TKTS. Crouse was the wife of playwright and producer Russel Crouse, a TDF board member and a member of the theatre committee of the New York City Cultural Council. The Office of Midtown Planning and the League of New York Theatres and Producers were also involved. James Stevenson, "Cut-Rate Tickets," *New York Times*, March 7, 2009, accessed July 30, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/imagepages/2008/03/07/opinion/08oped.ready.html. Marc Eliot tells a different origin story of the booth. He credits the inspiration almost wholly to Mayor Lindsay, who had an old campaign gift of a trailer that was unused, and apparently thought up a discount ticket booth in collaboration with Gerald Schoenfeld. See Eliot, *Down 42nd Street*, 130.

lauded for improving box office sales at a crucial moment of flagging confidence in both Broadway offerings and Times Square viability. As a study by William Baumol attests, the program was a startling success on many levels from its very first year—for relatively little cost. Theatre artists and producers, however, did not uniformly support the new program; some felt that it ran counter to their initiatives to expand the audience for legitimate theatre. At a time when Off and Off-Off Broadway theatre companies, plays, and playwrights were beginning to make inroads in Broadway houses, TKTS—which was primarily marketed to tourists and out-of-towners—was viewed by some as a force that could undermine ticket sales. At its worst, it represented a missed opportunity to effectively expand audience demographics. At its best, it provided a renewing jolt of energy to the midtown theatre district, and planted a flag that would claim Times Square for Broadway into the future.

TDF and Mayor Lindsay's Office of Midtown Planning and Development created a barebones capital budget for TKTS that left two enterprising designers with only $5,000 and a can of paint to create the original structure.[137] The architects, John Schiff and Robert Mayers, used rented pipes from a scaffolding company in the Bronx to create a framework around a donated trailer to expand its volume, and then stretched panels between the pipes. In a large Helvetica font, they painted "TKTS" in letters six feet high. To protect against the wind, they used steel cables with concrete anchors at each corner. This simple construction would become a central box office that sold tickets to Broadway, Off-Broadway, Lincoln Center, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, City Center, and others. Today, TKTS is virtually inseparable from the experience of Broadway, but at the time of its inception, it was an experiment intended to be

[137] There is some evidence that the shoestring start of the TKTS booth has been embellished in contemporary accounts; to establish the booth, individuals and foundations gave over $60,000, including $35,000 from the Ford Foundation. They also received space rent-free and advertising space donated. Baumol and Baumol, *Last Minute Discounts,* 5.

temporary. It was also directed towards easing the fiscal strain at the heart of William Baumol's cost disease in the performing arts. In its earliest years, the TDF staff studied the experimental operation of the booth, and, with Ford Foundation money, William and Hilda Baumol worked on a comprehensive study. William Baumol, an economist, had already been engaged in a deep analysis of the functioning of the theatre in Times Square; in addition to his participation in the evaluation of the booth, he broadly studied the facts and the fictions behind the supposed decline of Broadway, versus its habitat.

Baumol believed that events like FACT and initiatives like TKTS were long overdue reckonings with the financial impoverishment of theatres. In an opinion piece timed to publicize FACT, Baumol wrote with distinct optimism that the theatre might put aside its distractions and instead confront its permanent financial crisis and economic problems: skyrocketing inflation, near recession, stiff competition from the mass media, and a deteriorating urban environment.[138] While he was ready to articulate the many problems of the theatre sphere, Baumol's writing in both mainstream and academic publications at the time provided a refreshing antidote to the doomsday tracts written about Broadway by many critics.

The battle over Broadway's supposed decline was fierce, and one of the major flashpoints was the question of public stimulus. Just one year before, Baumol and Baumol argued publicly that due to the progressive nature of cost disease, the commercial theater "will need more and more subsidization if it is to survive and provide a product of substantial quality."[139] The suggestion of subsidies to commercial theatre during a time of austerity was controversial; additionally, audience analysis became essential to those who sought to support—or dispel—Broadway's slump. There was ample evidence, in fact, that the ballyhooed decline of Broadway

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[138] William J. Baumol and Hilda Baumol, "What Ails the Fabulous Invalid? It's Not What You Think!" *New York Times*, June 2, 1974, 1, 22.
[139] Ibid.

was in the eye of the beholder.[140] In their opinion piece on the occasion of FACT, Baumol and his co-author, Hilda Baumol, took "a cold-eyed look" at the commercial theater and offered a diagnosis. They first dismissed some of the problems that they believed to be exaggerated in importance: "featherbedding" by stagehand unions and the profiteering of greedy producers.[141] They hinted instead at a problem of perception: it is not that tickets are too high, but that theatregoers perceive ticket prices to be high, which leads producers to avoid raising ticket prices to reflect production.[142] They also dismissed unsavory urban conditions as a core concern of Broadway: "The difficulty of transportation to and from the Broadway area, the deterioration of the area and the fear of crime in New York City" were factors that had some bearing, but could not be described as "critical." Transportation was not impossible, the crime rate was declining, and neither sex-oriented entertainment "nor Runyonesque characters" were newcomers. The two fundamental problems were: competition from the mass media and cost disease.

The Negro Ensemble Company (NEC) provides a case study in the intersection of audience analysis, cost disease, and TKTS adoption. At about the same time that the plan for the TKTS booth was being hatched, economic troubles mired the NEC. With production costs rising and an original grant from the Ford Foundation gone, even standing-room-only audiences at their St. Marks Theater could not generate enough revenue to meet the budget. They took drastic steps to ensure that some elements of their activities could move forward: the resident company was

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[140] Actors and organizations engaged in a range of activism aimed towards the improvement of the theatre district. In 1972, actress Joan Hackett circulated a petition in favor of a "red light district," in an attempt to convince the city to isolate the sex shops. In 1975, a crew of two hundred Broadway celebrities took to the streets with brooms in a street-cleaning demonstration and publicity stunt. Eight thousand people attended massive anti-pornography rallies in 1977, including one that featured the casts of twenty-five Broadway shows in full costumes. Samuel L. Leiter, *Ten Seasons: New York Theatre in the Seventies* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986), 2.

[141] They found that outlays for stage crews often constituted less than 5% of production of operating costs. They also dismissed the stereotype of profiteering producers: relative to general ticket price and after inflation, the price of theatre seats had not increased with any severity.

[142] They similarly argue that ticket scalping had limited reach, although they viewed regulations on ticket sales as deeply harmful-- many of which were created to avoid scalping.

disbanded, salaries were deferred, training programs were canceled, and the staff was cut during the 1972-1973 season.[143] The creative team decided to produce one new play a year, and the first play, *The River Niger*, by Joseph A. Walker, proved to be their largest success yet— it ultimately helped support the company into the next ten years. The play opened on December 5, 1972, at the St. Marks Theatre, and after one hundred and twenty performances and three OBIE award wins (two for distinguished performance, one best play), it became the first NEC production to move to Broadway, and transferred to the Brooks Atkinson Theatre on March 27, 1973, for two hundred and eighty performances before closing on November 25, 1973 (five months after the TKTS booth opened). The play also won Walker the 1974 Tony Award for Best Play and largely critical accolades. A review in the *New Yorker* described the unlikely ascent of this intimate rendering of a Harlem family whose alcoholic patriarch confronts his golden child, an air force veteran who returns from his training a changed man:

> A considerable risk was involved in moving from the pleasantly ramshackle little St. Marks Playhouse…to the commodious Brooks Atkinson, with its touch-me-not, unbridgeable gulf between the audience on one side of the proscenium arch and the actors on the other. The risk has proved eminently worth taking, and the play speaks to us with undiminished zest and power, just as *That Championship Season* proved able to do after making a similar journey uptown.[144]

Notwithstanding the challenges, *The River Niger* enjoyed an eight-month Broadway run.

The head of the NEC and the director of *The River Niger*, Douglas Turner Ward, observed upticks in their white audience numbers after praise in the mainstream press, but

[143] "About Us," The Negro Ensemble Company, accessed August 24, 2012, http://www.necinc.org/about/about-us.
[144] Edith Oliver, "The Theatre: Welcome Additions," *The New Yorker,* April 7, 1973, 58. In 1976, *The River Niger* was adapted into a film with James Earl Jones, Cicely Tyson, and Louis Gossett Jr. For more on the decision to transfer the play from the theatre at 145 St. Marks, see Mel Gussow, "Negro Ensemble Finds Hit Play Poses Problem," *New York Times*, February 7, 1973, 30.

proceeded with advertising innovations to attract new black audiences to the theatre. "The white component might contract according to what the critics say but our core audience come because what we're doing on stage is in one way or another relevant to them. With *The River Niger* on Broadway it was the black audiences that kept us running for as long as we did."[145] Years later, Ward expressed continued frustration at the difficulty of undertaking serious audience development given the reality of Broadway ticket prices, which, even in 1973 were quite high.[146] That difficulty, he argued, transcended geography; Ward equated the audiences at the Brooklyn Academy of Music with those on Broadway, and suggested its subtle repercussions could be found in the plays that artists wrote, and the audiences that artists directed their work towards.

> Whether it's BAM or the New Wave or whoever, who are they playing to? Shit, as an artist, a black artist on Broadway, who the fuck am I playing to? What audience am I playing to? Nothing much, I'll tell you. Not a goddamn thing. So except for making me personally rich to have a Broadway quote hit there's just no reason for me to have a play done there with the ticket prices being what they are. That's why when we did *The River Niger* there we insisted that we keep a certain amount of ticket prices down so that they were affordable to our core constituency. We made them the price of what people were paying for movie tickets because we wanted to go directly to the black public and get them to witness what was being presented. In that way our artists write and play to a real public. Because you have to ask yourself: who are those others playing to? They don't think that because they want to idealize their audience. They want to think that everybody

[145] Gus Edwards, "On Black Audiences," *The Douglas Ward Quarterly*, March 21, 2012, accessed June 27, 2012, http://douglasturnerward.com/2012/03/21/on-black-audiences.
[146] Guernsey, *Curtain Times*, 406-7; Leiter, *Ten Seasons*, 6-8, 19. Sets, costumes, actors, real estate taxes, advertising expenses, and eighteen trade unions: all expenses were rising, from wage increases to fuel bills to television commercials.

> wants to come out and see a play by Shaw. That everybody wants to be cultured in some way. That's bullshit of course. Fuck being cultured. Who are they playing to?[147]

Broadway might not have attracted diverse crowds, but Times Square certainly did. In a 1973 article about NEC, Ward described his desire to engage some of the audiences who flocked to the area for diversions other than theatre. "In addition there is the altered nature of Broadway, which now draws a black audience to the movies. 'Drive through Broadway on a Saturday night, [Ward] said, 'and it's like 125th Street.' The hope would be to divert this audience to see theater."[148] The TKTS booth would have seemed the perfect opportunity to experiment with this goal. But Ward opted out of the program.

It is worth questioning why Ward refused to participate in the initiative with *The River Niger*. Historical record suggests that the focus on tourists in TKTS marketing was not consistent with the aims of companies like NEC. That the NEC refused to participate in the ticket incentive deal also perhaps reflects a concern that their precarious financial existence would be hurt by the new box office, or that the booth would not substantially attract new audiences, but rather provide deals to old ones. (Some sellout shows at the time— like *Uncle Vanya*, *Pippen,* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*— chose not to participate because they found it superfluous.[149]) For small theatres with high running costs, discounted tickets would cut close to the bone when audiences dwindled. At FACT, Woodie King, founder of the New Federal Theatre, expressed his own reservations about programs that focused on providing discounted seats: "We can say there

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[147] Edwards, "On Black Audiences."
[148] Gussow, "Negro Ensemble Finds Hit Play Poses Problem," 30.
[149] Baumol and Baumol, *Last Minute Discounts*, 2; Guernsey, *Curtain Times*, 263.

are cheap seats, but that is exactly what the audience doesn't want. His whole life has been a series of cheap seats."[150]

King was of the same philosophy as Papp in this domain; the issue was demographic, and too many ignored demographics and resisted making meaningful changes in the way they operated their theatres. "I see middle class whites vacating the city for the suburbs and leaving it to the blacks and Puerto Ricans, but the theater owners don't want to leave the theaters to blacks and Puerto Ricans."[151] This tension extended to the marketing and publicity choices of the theatres; not only was an ad in the *Times* too expensive for King's theatre to afford, but it also did not necessarily reach those that he believed were in his core target audience. These were the same audience members who were reluctant, King argued, to spend fifty dollars for an evening at the theatre, dinner, and a taxi.

All of these elements were considered to varying degrees in the evaluation of the TKTS program. While it has not been written about extensively— its citation is restricted to economics journals— the analysis of TKTS published by Baumol and Baumol is a work that merits extended discussion.[152] Like most initiatives begun during the austerity period, TKTS was meant to be temporary. From the first page of their study, Baumol and Baumol discuss the reservations of some members of the theatrical community, which existed alongside uniformly favorable reception from patrons: "While it has been welcomed as a means to attract new and more varied audiences, and its financial support has been partly underwritten by theatrical groups, some persons have felt that it undercuts the normal, full-price sales of the theatre."[153] This notion of

[150] "Panel 5: The Audience for the Theatre Today," June 2-5, 1974, Box 1, Folder 9, First American Theatre Congress Records, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library.
[151] Ibid.
[152] The study used financial and sales data and sixteen hundred questionnaires filled out in three different months, between 1973 and 1974.
[153] Baumol and Baumol, *Last Minute Discounts*, ix.

"more varied audiences" was relative, given the lack of variety existing in Broadway's audiences at the time. TKTS clearly brought in new patrons, but it also attracted those who would have paid full price; Baumol and Baumol provide primarily anecdotal evidence that this was inevitably the case. (They describe meeting the president of a top corporation who gleefully recounted his experience buying half-price tickets at the TKTS booth.) Other theatre members feared that the booth would habituate patrons to buying at a discount, leading to fewer profits for theatres. If patrons begin to see the half-price sale as the normal transaction— and as a guarantee for most shows as they near closing— only a smash hit could protect itself. Additionally, more last-minute purchases meant that the risk borne by theaters would increase, as a snowstorm could have acute repercussions for unplanned theatre-going. Still others did not see the logic of advertising the fact that a show was not a sellout.

The most relevant issue for the long-term viability of the booth may have been the TKTS advertising practices that located billboards at airports and railroad stations where full-priced-paying tourists could be found. (They note that theatre producers were "particularly appalled" at radio spots that invited ticket buyers to "beat the system" by buying tickets at TKTS.[154]) Ward's question—who are they playing to?—was urgent, although considered deeply by some theatres and not at all by others. This again points to the question of centralization and audience. "A small number of these critics of TKTS has also argued that the booth should be relocated to take it out of the theatrical district where the purchasers can conveniently stroll from TKTS." Baumol and Baumol dismiss this as a suggestion "obviously intended primarily to undermine the operations of TKTS altogether."[155] But producers like Papp, King, and Ward came from the tradition of community-oriented theatres, and held philosophies of public access and

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[154] Ibid., 35
[155] Ibid.

performance that would have indicated that a TKTS booth nearer to where some of the fifty-two member theatres of the Black Theatre Alliance were located, for example, would be worthwhile.

Baumol and Baumol offered evidence that TKTS patrons come from a "wide variety of areas," given that, in the year studied, purchasers hailed from Manhattan (between 20-31%), other boroughs (between 15-20%), Long Island (between 9 and 11%), other states (17-29%), as well as New York State and abroad, in lesser numbers. Their surveys did not pursue this question of residence, so that further detail is not available— the Manhattan-centric orientation of the study precluded this. Patrons from Manhattan were understood to be the norm, with some variety spread over the boroughs, regardless of population numbers or contiguous arts outreach programs at the time. Branches of TKTS in Brooklyn, or the Bronx, or on a university campus, would not be desirable without "the volume to justify the undertaking," they concluded.[156] This remains a limitation of the study; if the goal of the booth was to cultivate new and larger audiences, a satellite booth and accompanying public relations campaign elsewhere could have stimulated the demand for ticket buyers in those areas. Perhaps they underemphasized this not out of an exclusionary concept for the booth, but due to the fact that TKTS was initially a temporary project; as such, the goals were short-term, and the desire to find new audiences was defined vaguely. Still, it is interesting to note that in 1974 it was announced that a downtown TKTS booth would open in the financial district.[157] (Brooklyn received a ticket booth in the downtown Metrotech Center in 2008.)

Reservations about the method of advertising the TKTS booth were not specious; recent successes had shown that many black audiences attracted to the commercial theatre by shows like the *The Wiz* had learned about productions "almost wholly" through "word of mouth within

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[156] Ibid., 36.
[157] This Lower Manhattan TKTS opened on William Street and moved to 2 World Trade Center in 1983. It was destroyed on 9/11 and reopened at the South Street Seaport in 2002.

the black community that stretches from city to city."[158] Organizations like the Harlem-based Audelco (Audience Development Committee) began organizing theatre parties for both commercial and non-commercial productions in 1973, and added to the impetus to look past a myopic view of out-of-town audiences as prime Broadway customers.[159] A focus on advertising to tourists in major news outlets threatened to ignore and discount the ways in which other communities were learning about plays.[160] In 1975, Eleanor Lester in the *New York Times* credited Melvin Van Peebles's two shows in the 1971 season with bringing black audiences in larger numbers to Broadway, and his success was not limited to the stage content. His efforts to publicize the shows through different strategies-- commercial spots on black-oriented radio stations, for example—were then copied by other Broadway shows. There is no evidence that this model influenced TKTS.

By many standards, the TKTS booth was a massive success— in one year, it sold four hundred and fifty thousand tickets and paid two million dollars to participating theatres (compared with a total Broadway gross of forty-six million dollars).[161] According to Baumol and Baumol, in the summer of 1974 it was selling fourteen thousand tickets per week, and the profile of newcomers to theatre and to TKTS was a heartening nine percent of the sample. The booth did attract people who had not previously attended the theatre, and many were impulse buyers who considered attending only days before. On a deeper level of audience analysis, however, the results appear contradictory. To determine the characteristics of the TKTS

[158] Cummings, "Blacks Gain on Broadway."
[159] Lester, "Real Black Theatre," 95. Audelco was established in 1973 by Vivian Robinson, and is still an active organization.
[160] More broadly, while almost half of their opening budget was spent informing the public about TKTS, "despite all of the publicity received, approximately 40 percent of TKTS patrons learned about the booth from friends, while about 9 percent simply noticed it while passing by." Baumol and Baumol, *Last Minute Discounts,* 6. This was no doubt also the case even for some tourists, who would have learned about TKTS when passing Duffy Square, or through hotel services.
[161] Baumol and Baumol, *Last Minute Discounts*, ix.

audience, three hundred and seventy-five patrons of the booth were interviewed, in August 1973, February 1974, and May 1974. Across all three interviews, median age (thirty), income (roughly $15,500), and education (four years of college) were "remarkably consistent."[162] In comparison with the general Broadway audience, TKTS users included a higher share of professionals (60 vs. 56 percent) and a higher proportion of blue-collar workers (5 vs. 3 percent). TKTS users were also younger (median age thirty) than the Broadway audience, and better educated (70 percent having completed college, as opposed to 45 percent). It was also noted that TKTS users seemed to be less affluent (median income $15,800) than Broadway audience as a whole (median income $17,100), although this appears likely to be correlated with age, rather than class identity. While the study attended to age, economic, and educational characteristics, race was not mentioned once in the report. This is a significant omission, especially given the plays on Broadway at the time of their study. Baumol and Baumol also did not analyze which plays were selling TKTS tickets in what proportion. The study had other shortcomings in its failure to fully investigate the perspectives of the producers that abstained from participating during that trial season of TKTS. For example, the authors do not mention the *River Niger* among the plays that did not take part in TKTS, or consider why its producing entity, the Negro Ensemble Company, would opt out of the TKTS initiative when they transferred the play from the St. Marks Playhouse to the Brooks Atkinson Theatre in 1973. This is an odd exclusion given that *The River Niger* won the Tony award for best play in 1974. (They do mention other Broadway shows in that season that did not offer discount tickets through the program, including sellout shows like *Uncle Vanya*, *Pippen,* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*.)

Baumol and Baumol did acknowledge the difficulty in predicting audience outcomes; while TKTS clearly contributed to audience size, it did not reach that holy grail of shifting

[162] Ibid., 13. Adjusted for inflation, the medium income would be roughly $79,000 today.

audience demographics. And, as Baumol and Baumol repeatedly note in their report, it is inevitable that a discount box office would attract some numbers of lower income groups (4.9 percent blue-collar patrons overall), and occupations ordinarily less inclined to attend the theatre, but also attract those who could afford to pay full price. In this way, it fulfilled the worst fears of theatre producers in that it did compete with the theatre box offices for customers.[163] Further underlying this realization was an anxiety around the value of theatre; if a top corporate executive chooses to purchase discount theatre tickets, what are the implications to the perceived worth of a Broadway show, whose production costs were rapidly rising? Additionally, the small volume of Off-Broadway and Lincoln Center tickets sold had held "fairly steady apart from the first month of operation,"[164] so the booth was doing very little to encourage and centralize ticket purchasing for performances outside of the Times Square area.

Baumol and Baumol's study attempted to determine how the effects of the booth would continue into the future, but it is interesting that it continued at all. Despite the "unfortunate state of the nation's economy," the summer of 1974 on Broadway was relatively prosperous.[165] As with so many adjustments made during periods of fiscal crisis, the TKTS booth was intended to be not a permanent installation but rather an experimental program to contribute to the relief of their financial problems. The donated city trailer with holes cut into it and electricity taken clandestinely from a nearby street light was never intended for decades of use. It certainly achieved a long sought-after centralized ticket area; it also marked Times Square as a theatre "center" in more ways than one. Long lines of tourists and vacationers waiting to purchase tickets staked a clear claim on the streets of a contested area and publicized a sense that the

[163] Some two-thirds of those who attended the theatre before the booth opened switched their purchases from theatre box offices.
[164] Baumol and Baumol, *Last Minute Discounts,* 6.
[165] Ibid., 35.

theatres were open for business and that the space was public. But given that TDF originally launched TKTS "to increase accessibility of their performances for less affluent individuals," the development of Times Square ultimately meant that TKTS was increasingly viewed as another service for a targeted tourist sector.[166]

A Gift to Midtown: Theater Row I

> Let's clear the air. There could be no Kabuki, No, Ballet Theater, opera, hospitals, or libraries without an act of will. No marketplace ever has or can support such things.
> —Arthur Miller, "Arthur Miller vs. Lincoln Center"[167]

In 1978, four years after TKTS was up and running, the opening of the new Theater Row I further transformed the area. For the dedication ceremony, the block of 42nd Street west of Ninth Avenue featured street performances and a visit from Vice President Mondale, who declared New York City to be the country's "visible symbol of aspiration and faith."[168] Mayor Koch praised the three-year project as a testament to the success of private partnership working with state organizations, city agencies, foundations, and banks. Right across the street from the new Manhattan Plaza apartment complex, Theater Row I housed six small Off-Off Broadway theatres in the space of former tenements and empty lots, at 42nd Street between Ninth and Dyer Avenues. The Vice President observed selections from performances by two of the incoming

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[166] Ibid., 1. TDF, the organization that operates TKTS, has expanded throughout the decades to include a wide range of theatrical advocacy programs.
[167] Arthur Miller, "Arthur Miller vs. Lincoln Center," *New York Times*, April 16, 1972, 5. Miller made these comments at a symposium, and originally published them in the *Dramatists Guild Quarterly*. The *Times* publication came in the same year that Lincoln Center revived Miller's *The Crucible*. The larger context for Miller's appeal to the Lincoln Center board was the effort to prevent the demolition of the Forum Theater and the Beaumont's repertory storage space. For other Forum Theatre controversies, see Guernsey, 225-32.
[168] Judith Cummings, "42nd Street Theater Row Dedicated as a Rundown West Side Looks Up," *New York Times*, May 14, 1978, 1.

theatres, I.N.T.A.R. and the Lion Theater Company.[169] When reporters asked Mondale when money "might be made available to aid the city's financial plight," he was non-committal about a timeline, and responded with a guarded reference to his "optimism."[170] The development was a step forward for the city, even if Mondale's attendance did not necessarily signal an increase in federal support as it struggled its way out of the fiscal crisis. It did represent the long sought-after westward move, expansion of both newly constructed theatres as well as residential units. To many, Theater Row was the official starting point in the chronology of redevelopment of Times Square West and West 42nd Street.[171] Times Square had among its advocates those who believed it should be developed with neighborhood interests in mind, particularly for residents living in the Hell's Kitchen area north from 38th Street to 59th Street and west from Eighth Avenue to the Hudson River.[172] By 1977, three housing conversion projects in the area were nearing completion, and private investment had enhanced the Art-Deco McGraw-Hill building (42nd Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues), Restaurant Row (46th Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues), and Theater Row I.

While the inspiration for Off-Off Broadway experimentation on 42nd Street between Ninth and Tenth Avenues had in fact been initiated in 1960 by realtor Irving Maidman, the true turning point did not come until Frederic Papert, a former adman and president of the Municipal Arts Society, founded the non-profit 42nd Street Development Corporation (42RC) in 1976.[173]

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[169] Nine new theatres were planned for residence at Theater Row I: The Black Theater Alliance, the Actors and Directors Lab, Playwrights Horizons, Harlem Children's Theater and INTAR, Lion Theater Company, South Street Theater Company, and the Nat Horne Theater Company. Playwrights Horizons and the Lion Theater Company had already been working out of the space for nearly two years. C. Gerald Fraser, "In Theater Row, 9 New Leases on Life," *New York Times,* March 22, 1978, C23.
[170] Cummings, "Rundown West Side Looks Up."
[171] Sagalyn, *Times Square Roulette,* 597.
[172] Ibid., 52.
[173] Sagalyn, 59. Theatre Row II was completed in 1982. Lynn Sagalyn argues that Papert and Maidman's vision became a reality only because the "development path of commercial real estate" did not get in the way of their risky concept, due to depressed property values and the lack of competing land uses for the site.

His larger vision for Times Square had "entertainment for the middle class" as a programmatic centerpiece, inspired by world's fairs, theme parks, exhibit centers, and restored theatres, paid for by admission charges and corporate sponsorship. Papert stepped into a market inertia around 42nd Street west; thanks to the national recession and the local fiscal crisis, development at the time was limited to isolated speculation and minimal small-scale investment activity, not large complexes. Many of Papert's ideas, whether implemented or left unrealized, were ahead of their time. In 1978, Papert described elements of his future vision for 42nd Street, which included a massive year-round farmer's market, pedestrian plazas, and an electric light-rail system that would travel west from the United Nations and decrease pollution and traffic.[174] (Pedestrian plazas arrived in Times Square in 2010.) Papert was wedded to river-to-river development and the ability of the legitimate theatre to spur the transformation of a neighborhood.[175] In order to make Times Square and 42nd Street the magnet that it once was, Papert's non-profit worked with the Port Authority, the MTA, and the Ford Foundation to develop plans to eventually "link a strengthened west end to the strong east end of 42nd Street."[176] These aspects of Papert's plans were not achieved, as it remained largely confined to its western outpost, although many of his individual projects, including Theater Row I, did come to fruition. One of Papert's stated inspirations for the complex was Lincoln Center, and, as a consequence, his larger plan for the area beyond Theater Row, *City at 42nd Street*, received critical comparisons to the urban renewal

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[174] Barbaralee Diamonstein-Spielvogel, *Barbaralee Diamonstein and…Alan Sagner and Fred Papert,* 28 min., 42 sec.; from Duke Library Digital Collections, Diamonstein-Spielvogel Video Archive, accessed July 18, 2012, http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/dsva/.

[175] While outside of the scope of this chapter, Papert's organization next pursued a bold plan, *The City at 42nd Street*, for which the Ford Foundation paid the major predevelopment expenses. In 1980, Mayor Koch dismissed the proposed $600-million plan, and initiated a public development project, 42DP. Ironically, Koch referred to Papert's plan as "Disneyland on 42nd Street," but the plan's backers saw the political realities; Koch wanted total control, not a plan passed down from the Lindsay administration. See Sagalyn, *Times Square Roulette*, 60-68; and Andrew Jacobs, "After Years of Sleaze and Decay, the Great White Way 'Suddenly' Looked White Hot," *New York Times*, December 29, 1996, accessed July 20, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/1996/12/29/nyregion/after-years-of-sleaze-and-decay-the-great-white-way-suddenly-looked-white-hot.html.

[176] Diamonstein-Spielvogel, *Barbara Diamonstein and….*

excesses of Lincoln Center.[177] The architects of a renewed 42nd Street aspired to Lincoln Center's agenda of arts facilities as an anchor for renewal, bolstered by supporting attractions and a large arts-oriented population entering the community as residents.[178] Lincoln Center programming became the uptown rivals for the legitimate theatre audiences, and had "lured away many of those seeking high culture" from the seats of Broadway houses.[179]

While Theater Row is rightly lauded as an unmitigated success in many respects, in the realm of Off-Off Broadway theatre production, there were contradictory results. Papert did what so many others could not achieve: he built new, ground-level theatres on the far west side, and initiated enough supporting projects to spur changes to the streets of Times Square and the surrounding neighborhoods. But while it was a development success, Theater Row illuminated the depths of economic problems in theatre producing. Barely three years later, many of the original companies installed in the ambitious project were facing financial ruin. In October 1980, a star-studded event marked the beginning of its $9.6 million phase two of redevelopment; Jackie Onassis lifted a shovel, as politicians, bankers, and officials circled the dais. The actress Estelle Parsons told the audience that in this "barbaric and nonartistic country" it was good to see more theatres being built, and she was particularly heartened to see small and experimental work being given a home: "those afraid to go downtown can go to West 42nd Street for the unexpected in theatre."[180] This second phase harbored great promise-- a new dance facility, a postproduction

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[177] Reichl, *Reconstructing Times Square*, 82.
[178] Lincoln Center continued to be the major precedent for the development of 42nd Street through the Koch administration. In the 1990s, Cora Cahan, a veteran of the Lincoln Center development, signed on to the Times Square development team and became President of the New 42nd Street. See Elliot, *Down 42nd Street*, 191-92, 238. Lincoln Center supporters like Stanley Waren argued that the complex was capable of a "ripple effect" and this "alters life in the community, halts the process of decay, and leads to the creation of a new and more desirable urban environment." Critics of the plan were dismayed by the role of the city government in engineering a new neighborhood and displacing residents. Waren, "City and the Theatre," 121.
[179] Kornblum et. al, "Bright Light District," 78.
[180] C. Gerald Fraser, "West 42nd Street Theater Row Begins $9.6 Million Phase 2," *New York Times*, October 9, 1980, C17.

facility, and a New York venue for three regional theatres. There was also the fantasy of a new, ambitious complex that could heal divisions in the theatre community and the city at large, by drawing together disparate elements of the theatrical world. Parson's comments reveal the fissures in New York theatre that she hoped would be closed: "[There are] white theatre and white audiences, black theatre and black audiences, Hispanic theatre and Hispanic audiences, Asian theatre and Asian audiences… In the next phase, we will be able to bring all these groups together to work together, to create profound theatre for intelligent theatergoers and everyone else besides."[181] But the vision of Theater Row as a centrally located beacon of Off-Off Broadway inclusivity proved somewhat incongruous to its lived realities. First, its location might have been close to Times Square, but it was still a ways west from the transportation hub of 42nd Street, in a time when the residue from the city's crime fears still lingered. The obstacles that faced the small companies that inhabited the complex were many. By 1981, the *New York Times* reported that Theater Row was no longer considered the "gift to Midtown" as it once was, and was now threatened with collapse as seven of the eight companies installed had fallen behind on their rents:

> Simultaneously, they have found that their operating costs are exceeding their incomes, and that the money they had planned to use for plays and musicals must now be used to pay for the operating costs of their small theatres. The consequence is that while the companies are unable to mount the plays and musicals, their incomes are declining even further; so is their inability to pay the rent. Only Playwrights Horizon is up to date.[182]

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[181] Ibid.
[182] John Corry, "Theater Row May Fold, A Victim of Hard Times," *New York Times*, February 18, 1981, C25; and, Eleanor Blau, "Theater Row at 3: Jubilation and Anxiety," *New York Times*, May 14, 1981, C21.

Papert, their landlord in his capacity as the president of 42RC understandably took a hard line: "the companies on Theater Row have to pay rent."[183] Though much of Theater Row existed thanks to a combination of private philanthropy and subsidies and donations from city agencies, paying rent for the early years of its companies was not seen as an appropriate use of funds.

For their part, the companies argued that their overhead was "extraordinary"—fuel bills of $1,200 a month, and a new lease that called for a $2,500-plus rent per month. "Our poverty has been chronic," Jean Sullivan, the director of the South Street Theater, said, "but now there's a certain cumulative effect."[184] There were limits on how much money a small company like Sullivan's could raise, and once they spent that money on capital needs, they also had to account for staff and productions. Meanwhile, Theater Row, Inc., the umbrella company for the organization (that also invested in renovations), pursued a simultaneous fundraising drive on the order of $200,000 to cover capital improvement costs and allow the companies to focus on paying rent. The 1981 article described Theater Row as "a victim of hard times," but it would seem that the project was instead a victim of Baumol's cost disease. The very same issues that had been articulated just a few years before at FACT, by Baumol in opinion pieces and reports, and by small, upstart theatres across the city, were the same issues that were ignored in the frenzied rush to utilize the Off-Off Broadway theatre as a lynchpin of west side development plans. After years of austerity budgets for the arts, the leaders behind Theater Row still imagined that these small companies could reverse the dismal trend in the finances of arts groups, and rebound from years of fiscal hardship. Papert and the head of the Port Authority worked in close collaboration to change these blocks; both were passionate about the potential it held to improve the tourism, the Port Authority, and the neighborhoods that abut the area. That they were more

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[183] Ibid.
[184] Quoted in Corry, "Theater Row May Fold."

experienced in developing real estate and transportation networks, rather than theatre companies, was decisive in the ultimate contours of Theater Row.

The resident Off-Off theatres of Theater Row 1978 comprised a very different Theater Row from that of 2000, when it was again making headlines, this time for its "upscale march."[185] By then, the Shubert Organization, Broadway's most powerful landlord, had built the 499-seat, $12-million Little Shubert, and many of the smaller companies that had endured the difficult years of the late 1970s had been vacated. This, one of "the biggest Off Broadway theatre redevelopment[s] in New York history," had a price tag of $15 million, included five new Off Broadway theatres under one roof, a new café, and top quality lighting and sound systems, dressing rooms, and box office.[186] These amenities—while major improvements to the original Theater Row spaces—invariably increased the cost of utilization. Rental prices for the theatres increased to $3,500 to $8,000 a week, a prohibitive amount for new companies, especially those developing showcase productions. "These are state-of-the-art theatres with state-of-the-art prices," said a member of the non-profit Amas Company, who feared for companies that previously rented space there and could not afford the new complex.[187] Papert argued that nonprofit companies would be offered lower rates, and believed that they could strike a balance between "making rent and making art."[188] Still, it was difficult not to interpret the generation of companies that worked with Papert from 1976 to 1981 as fulfilling the very definition of urban "loss leaders" within the drama that was, according to public relations campaigns, finally over.[189]

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[185] Jesse McKinley, "Upscale March of Theater Row," *New York Times*, November 21, 2002, E1.
[186] Ibid. This was part of a building boomlet of Off Broadway theatres. Dodger Theatricals built five new Off Broadway theatres at Eighth Avenue and 50th Street, where discount movies were once shown; West 37th and West 39th Street also had theatre construction activity at the time.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Playwrights Horizons was the exception; in 2000, when the new five-theatre complex and the Little Shubert opened, they moved into their new home at 416 West 42nd Street, which included two theatres, offices, and rehearsal space. Above the theatres is a forty-story apartment complex, the air rights of which paid for the building below.

Conclusion

> Economic development of West 42nd Street is no panacea for the 40% unemployment rate which plagues the city's minority youth. But it can, nevertheless, set precedents for the intelligent and equitable development of cultural and human resources in the nation's entertainment industry.
>
> --*The Bright Light Zone: West 42nd Street Study*[190]

Times Square as the unimpeachable center was supported by audience and ticketing initiatives. Theater Row, a success by certain urban development standards, proved that theatre artists do not always benefit from such cultural development; the longevity of companies and organizations can be left out of the blueprints, as audience development does not coincide neatly with artistic development. While the full arc of the legitimate theatre's development in Times Square was a complex and protracted process, the growth of New York City during this period was surprisingly quick, especially as the strong public/private coalitions formed in the fiscal crisis continued to develop rapidly.[191] The legitimate theatre district had been slated for economic redevelopment for many years before the fiscal crisis neutered the possibility of large-scale overhaul, especially one government-led. Once New York had crawled out from the shadow of its near-bankruptcy, it became "ripe politically and economically for new investment," and, aided by a pro-business political order, birthed the explosive real-estate boom that came to define the 1980s.[192] It took two decades to transform 42nd Street from a symbol of

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Ralph Blumenthal, "Transforming Theater Row: An Unlikely Urban Drama Heads for a Happy Ending," *New York Times*, May 11, 2000, E1.

[190] Kornblum et. al, "Bright Light Zone," 8.

[191] Joshua B. Freeman, *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor Since World War II* (New York: The New Press, 2000), 256-58.

[192] Reichl, *Reconstructing Times Square,* 16-17; and Sagalyn, *Times Square Roulette*, 5-6. According to Sagalyn, the fiscal crisis undermined the government's ability to move forward with a comprehensive plan that was publicly driven.

urban decline to a "Disneyspace," and scholars have chronicled the impact on the Broadway musical, alongside its potent blend of nostalgia, consumerism, tourism, and commodification.[193]

As I have argued in this chapter, the crisis period left city officials desperate to create the appearance of a stable center for a specific brand of cosmopolitan culture,[194] and, perhaps even more importantly, to satisfy the need to raise tax revenue. By 1981, the paper of record was heralding a rebirth in some decisive areas: "In less than ten years, Broadway producers have created new audiences, lured television viewers away from the home screen, made friends at City Hall, and got involved with cleaning up and redeveloping the Times Square Theater district."[195] But the paper of record was based in *Times* Square, and had more at stake than most in the public relations battle over the district. Within these successes, a fight still raged. Whose voices would be heard on Broadway, and who would be the audiences of the future?

Roger Starr viewed the future course of Times Square through a duality of cosmopolitanism versus what he dubbed the "contemporary spirit." The latter term signified backwardness and the denial of cultural values. In the struggle between these two poles of his devising, decentralization and anti-cosmopolitanism marred the vision of the entire city, not just specific neighborhoods:

> While the cosmopolitan spirit exalts the importance of the city as a whole, the contemporary spirit exalts the importance of the specific neighborhood, the particular

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[193] See Bart Eeckhout, "The 'Disneyfication' of Times Square: Back to the Future?" In, *Critical Perspectives on Urban Redevelopment,"* Kevin Fox Gotham, ed. (Emerald Group Publishing, 2001); Mark Sussman, "New York's Facelift," *TDR* 42 (Spring 1998): 34-42; Maura Wickstrom, *Performing Consumers: Global Capital and Its Theatrical Seductions* (New York: Routledge, 2006); and Elizabeth L. Wollman, "The Economic Development of the 'New' Times Square and Its Impact on the Broadway Musical," *American Music* 20 (Winter 2002): 445-65.
[194] At one time, the term "cosmopolitan" denoted a sense of status, a particularly urban arrogance inspired by the metropolitan ideal to which the nation at large should aspire. There is a large body of scholarship in which scholars question the idea of a "universal cosmopolitan," and in doing so interrogate the notion of a "global city." See, for example, Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo, *Performance and Cosmopolitics* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007); Thomas Bender, *The Unfinished City: New York and the Metropolitan Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); and Engin F. Isin, ed., *Democracy, Citizenship, and the Global City* (London: Rutledge, 2000).
[195] Croyden, "Box Office Boom," SM7.

block, the individual house. While the cosmopolitan spirit accepts the importance of taste, and fosters style established by an elite, whether selected by birth, by wealth, or by cultural attainment, the contemporary spirit decries taste, calls imposed patterns of behavior hypocrisy, and puts what used to be secret in the windows of 42nd Street.[196]

Starr's formula is relentlessly top-down, a vision of New York with stable standards set by an established elite. Times Square became a front in the ground war that would unseat or reinstall this elite, tasteful style for the metropolis. Decentralization was equated with a rebellion against cultural standards and a general disorderliness in the urban fabric. Those who would blame the fiscal crisis on the influx of residents that drained city services and did not contribute enough tax revenue saw the protection of this elite culture as an essential step in any recovery. In this way, the cultural ideologies of the fiscal crisis transcended accounting ledgers and financial statements to encompass an unruly populace that swallowed up municipal resources while imposing on formerly glittering areas like Times Square.[197]

There is paranoia in Starr's conceptual leap that hedonism resided in the choice to exalt a specific neighborhood (and its residents) over the good of the entire city. But many city officials shared the belief that the Big Apple needed to be buttressed by a healthy and magnified city center. This led the city, Joshua Freeman argues, to become less exceptional. Times Square was no longer a theatrical nucleus, but transformed into a "benign amusement center where locals and tourists attended Disney shows and bought food and souvenirs at restaurants and stores

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[196] Starr, "The Decline and Decline of New York."

[197] In the introduction to his book, Robert Fitch opens with an anecdote that captures this thinking precisely: when on assignment for *Mother Jones* in the mid-seventies, he called a public relations official from the Municipal Assistance Corporation (the state-backed corporation formed to help restore the city's finances) and asked about the underlying reasons for the fiscal problems: "It's the fucking blacks and Puerto Ricans. They use too many city services and don't pay any taxes." In more polite parlance, this was identified as a "job-skills mismatch" as the city shifted to white-collar industries. See Robert Fitch, *The Assassination of New York* (London: Verso, 1993), vii-viii.

owned by Disney, Warner Brothers, ESPN, and other national corporations."[198] This contradictory influence resonates in the public imagination, personified by the institutionalization of TKTS. In March 2000, two architects from Australia won an international competition to create a new TKTS booth for Duffy Square.[199] The two winning designers admitted that they had only visited the city once-- their design was based on impressions from film and television culture.[200] That they were inspired by the "visual buzz" rather than embodied experiences in the space only added fuel to the fire of dissent around the project, particularly for those activists who sought to have "Father Duffy Square" retain characteristics of a public space memorializing something other than snaking lines for half-price tickets to musicals. Other preservation advocates questioned the wisdom of removing the original, which had been so valued for its innovative and thrifty design, as well as its status as a relic from the penny-pinching 1970s. The existing TKTS booth, "that wonderful, ramshackle, pipe-and-canvas construction which has come to represent Broadway theatre to an entire generation since its inception 26 years ago," deserved landmark status, they argued, even if it had not yet reached its thirtieth year.[201] An ambivalent article in the *New York Times* took a stance both contrary and mournful when the author contemplated the loss of yet another structure from Broadway's architectural past, a final victim of the erosion of "what was once a splendidly pungent esthetic

[198] Freeman, *Working-Class New York,* 336.
[199] Clyde Haberman, "The Crusade To Honor Father Duffy," *New York Times*, December 7, 1999, accessed June 27, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/1999/12/07/nyregion/nyc-the-crusade-to-honor-father-duffy.html. The new structure would rise from the base of the statue of Father Francis Patrick Duffy, an army chaplain and pastor in Hell's Kitchen until his death in 1932; the Coalition for Father Duffy had sent the mayor's office over seven thousand postcards to protest the plans for a new booth.
[200] Kati Kormendi, "Darkhorses Win International Competition for TKTS Booth," *Gotham Gazette*, March 1, 2000, accessed July 18, 2012, http://www.gothamgazette.com/article/arts/20000301/1/88.
[201] The original design for the TKTS booth won a design award in 1973 from the New York Society of Architects, a Bard Award in 1975 from the City Club for merit in civic architecture. While preservation advocates believed a case could have been made for granting the booth landmark status, according to the rules, it would not have been eligible to apply until 2003.

amalgam, made of dozens of incongruous icons layered one on top of the other."[202] As in the past, the controversy was more focused on buildings than on audience analysis, more attached to the structures than attentive to individuals. The battles to save the theatrical icons had been lost decades before, but so had the battle to diversify the Broadway audience and offerings. By 2000, Broadway was infamous for bloated ticket prices and a specialized, upper-middlebrow consumer base, undeniably focused on tourists and featuring relatively few Off or Off-Off Broadway transfers.

Still, the booth was a powerful symbol of a protracted and contentious development process that left no easy victors. Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani referred to it as one of the "symbols of the renaissance" of New York City. Ron Silver called it "Times Square's centerpiece."[203] The ramshackle solution to the entrenched problems of 1973 along 42nd Street no doubt signified a level of simplicity and scale that harkened back to the messy diversity before the "static festival" of massive towers and corporate insignias had arrived.[204] Regardless of whether the comparison was between orange juice and seltzer, or Mickey Mouse and strip clubs, the fear of office encroachment on the part of the theatres had come true, and the choice of preservationists to defend a tin can for ticket sales was perhaps a last stand. The area that in 1932 had boasted ninety theatres in the blocks between Times Square and Columbus Circle had only 48 by 1987.[205] Save The Theatres Inc. had been formed in 1982 to prevent the razing of the Helen Hayes, Morosco, and Bijou theatres, and they had failed in their mission.[206] The cries of outrage over the small TKTS booth a decade later articulated conflicts and bruises that never

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[202] David W. Dunlap, "A Tough Act to Follow," *New York Times*, July 8, 1999, accessed July 31, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/1999/07/08/garden/a-tough-act-to-follow.html.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Sussman, "Facelift."
[205] Sagalyn, *Times Square Roulette*, 266.
[206] For more on the preservation campaigns for theatres, see Portia Dyrenforth, "Joe Rosenberg: An Oral History Interview," The New York Preservation Archive Project, October 17, 2007, accessed July 20, 2012, http://www.nypap.org/content/joe-rosenberg-oral-history-interview; and Van Hoogstraten, *Lost Broadway Theatres*.

faded into the history books, but remained a fresh instigator of passions around the small district.

By the time the champagne was popped on the $19 million redesign of the TKTS booth and Duffy Square, it was October 2008. After eight years of cost overruns, political squabbling, and construction problems, public officials celebrated “a new standard for the public realm in Times Square.”[207] The centerpiece of the redesigned TKTS booth is a red cascading glass staircase of twenty-seven steps that rises sixteen feet above twelve ticket windows and functions as a public amphitheatre for visitors looking out on a refurbished Duffy Square. In addition to the enlarged costs of the project (of which the city paid $11.5 million), more urgent factors marred the opening day festivities. Lehman Brothers had collapsed just weeks before, and their former headquarters was visible two blocks north. A *New York Times* reporter commented optimistically on the importance of the polished staircase with the “kinetic panorama” of Times Square on view for all: “And could there be a better moment for a truly public amenity, where the price of admission is zero, than now, when the clouds of a long recession are gathering? ‘It’s a bright light in a dark economic time,’ said Tim Tompkins, president of the Times Square Alliance.”[208] While enormously different in size and scale, there was a cruel symmetry between the contexts of the new TKTS booth and its rickety predecessor.

In his book on Broadway, Stephen Adler questioned this assumed tenet of popular culture to launch his analysis: Why does Broadway remain the center?[209] Part of the answer is revealed through the fiscal crisis period, in which the city’s allegiance to the symbolism of Times Square was exposed as decisive to its efforts to emerge from the crisis. Chronopoulos explains that the intensity of police interventions in Times Square through the late 1960s and into the 1970s did

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[207] David W. Dunlap, “Atop the New TKTS Booth, Ruby-Red Stairs With a View of the Great White Way,” *New York Times*, October 18, 2008, accessed January 5, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/17/nyregion/17tkts.html.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Stephen Adler, *On Broadway: Art and Commerce on the Great White Way* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004).

not occur because "Times Square was central to the city's actual spatial and economic organization but because of its centrality to the image of New York City."[210] As the 1980s approached, the city's focus on encouraging high-rise developments increased as a strategy to boost confidence and prove that the fiscal crisis was not lingering. The city government for years had harbored hopes for large redevelopment plans that would undergird a general westward expansion of office spaces and retail, but until the late 1980s and early 1990s, they needed to content themselves with smaller-scale "clean-up" efforts, achieved mostly through enhanced police presence, initiatives to combat undesirable uses of the area, and zoning deals that incentivized developers to both invest and support the theatre district.[211] The symbolic and spatial significance of Broadway— both historically produced and culturally amplified as a cultural symbol—therefore tether it tightly to question of geographic considerations. The fiscal crisis period in Times Square was a beehive of civic activity as much as it was perceived as a space of urban decline— concerned citizens councils, zoning changes, preservation advocacy. All of these efforts worked to maintain the center, even as theatre artists across the city demanded increased decentralization.

[210] Chronopoulos, *Spatial Regulation,* 59.
[211] Adler describes fears that corporate sameness had bled into the work itself, not just the producing mechanism. Adler, *On Broadway*, 201-22.

Chapter 3

Beyond BAM:
Neighborhood Arts or Arts Neighborhood?

> Rain, rain keep on coming down! Come on, come on! Wash the whole city nice and clean. Come on rain! Wash the roof tops, the dirty windows, wash the gutters. Clean away all the dog shit! Rain, rain don't go away. Come on down rain, harder. . . harder. Wash the cars, the steps on all the streets in the ghetto.
> --Roger Furman, *The Long Black Block*[1]

In the fall of 1983, playwright Charles Mee, Jr., sat rapt in the audience of the first performance of the Brooklyn Academy of Music's (BAM) *Next Wave* Festival. He watched *The Photographer/Far from the Truth*, directed by JoAnne Akalaitis of Mabou Mines, with a remarkable group of artists from New York City's downtown theatre scene: designer Santo Loquasto, composer Philip Glass, lighting designer Jennifer Tipton, and choreographer David Gordon. Over thirty years later, in a reflection on this early exposure to BAM, Mee wrote: "We live in a world these days where it's taken for granted that the Brooklyn Academy of Music is one of the greatest cultural institutions on the planet. And yet, not long ago-- certainly within my own lifetime-- it was a big, old, dark, neglected pile of stones off Flatbush Avenue where no one I knew ever thought to go."[2] Mee's narrative falls in line with the popular origin story of BAM's twentieth-century renaissance: post-1983, it ascended to cultural prominence on the strength of its experimental productions. The players were the all-stars of the avant-garde: Laurie Anderson, Tricia Brown, Lucinda Childs, Lee Breuer and Bob Telson, Meredith Monk, Remy Charlip,

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[1] Roger Furman, *The Long Black Block* (Electronic Version, Alexander Street Press, L.L.C., 1972, 2012). Furman was the founder and director of Harlem's oldest active theatre company, the New Heritage Repertory Theater, and began his career as an actor at the American Negro Theater. For more on Furman's work, see Mance Williams, *Black Theatre in the 1960s and 1970s: A Historical-Critical Analysis of the Movement* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985), 39-46.
[2] Charles Mee, "Introduction" in *BAM: The Complete Works*, ed. Steven Serafin, 16-60 (New York: Quantuck Lane Press, 2011), 8. It should be noted that Mee lives in Brooklyn, an identification that likely contributed to his sense of pride regarding the theatre-going opportunities available at BAM.

Philip Glass, Robert Wilson, Pina Bausch, Richard Foreman, Merce Cunningham, John Cage, John Zorn, and Peter Brook. They began with performances in lofts on Broome Street where their audiences sat cross-legged on the floor, and they graduated to the plush seats of proscenium theatres. Its critics contended that this programmatic focus of the *Next Wave* Festival exacerbated BAM's reputation for alienating the largely African American and Caribbean immigrant populations of downtown Brooklyn in favor of elite Manhattanites.

This polarizing and oversimplified formula for BAM's success in Fort Greene elides a rich period of BAM's history between the late 1960s and the early 1980s. During this phase of its development in the urban hub of Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues, the institution presented the work of both avant-garde artists and new grassroots cultural formations inspired by philosophies of community control. The development of theatrical production in downtown Brooklyn influenced spatial practices through a complex interplay of local and centralized cultural organizations. This is evidenced in the relationship between BAM and smaller theatre groups that sought increased control over local cultural facilities and funding opportunities.

In this chapter, I augment the individual case study of BAM to identify branches of theatrical development during the decade before the 1983 inauguration of the *Next Wave* festival. It is the swelling of theatre and performance in Brooklyn's downtown area at this time that emerges most dynamically from the historical record, alongside the achievement of BAM's renewal. For BAM was not the stable center of rebirth, but rather part of many intricate and overlapping zones of performance activity that re-shaped contested urban spaces. I argue that this vigorous neighborhood theatre arts movement faded from the urban landscape of downtown Brooklyn after the fiscal crisis, when new austerity policies championed the transformation of

urban space for uses leading to "culture as enterprise."[3] As an arts center on city land, BAM was uniquely positioned to fill a perceived cultural void in the area, understood in the late 1960s and early 1970s to be an exemplar of urban decline. By the 1980s, spaces that once represented and engaged audiences on the scale of the local were overshadowed by an approach that actively sought a clear division between elite tastes and neighborhood arts practices. Rather than delineate a simplistic "Manhattanization" of Brooklyn's formerly working class associations, I investigate multiple nodes of performance, and an arc away from community-based cultural goals and resources. The complex and even contradictory history of government support for the landmark BAM building led to uneven development of cultural production in the area throughout the 1970s. While BAM's rejuvenation fueled a centralized vision of outer-borough theatre during a formative period in New York City, many organizations were involved in the creation of performance practices that both demonstrated and produced changing dynamics in downtown Brooklyn.[4]

These processes intensified during the fraught decade of New York City's financial crisis, with its implementation of austerity measures and eventual fiscal recovery. Due to the near-bankruptcy in 1974, public services were vilified in political and popular discourse during the 1970s. Theatre and the arts were cultural fields upon which people projected their anxieties about the city, its direction, and its deficiencies. The role of the neighborhood arts movement presents an alternative case study and provides a counterbalance to the bleak images that

[3] Arlene D'Avila uses this phrase to describe a similar process that occurred in East Harlem during the 1980s, leading to initiatives like the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone legislation (EZ) and its Cultural Investment Fund. See Arlene D'Avila, "Empowered Culture? New York City's Empowerment Zone and the Selling of El Barrio," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 594 (July 2004): 49-64.

[4] Following the theories of David Harvey, Jen Harvie emphasizes cities as urban process, something ever changing. As a social activity, theatre does more than just demonstrate the structures and social power dynamics of politics and economics, but is also part of the urban process, as a set of urban cultural and labor practices. For more on the dominant theories related to how theatre produces urban meaning, see Jen Harvie, *Theatre and The City* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 1-11, and Jen Harvie, *Staging the UK* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

proliferated in 1970s popular culture. The villains of film and television narratives were the people themselves; neighborhoods were unsafe bastions of modern urban ruin. Films like *The Out of Towners, The Warriors*, and *Taxi Driver* showcased a violent and even apocalyptic strain of the Big Apple. In his writing about the popular culture of the fiscal crisis period, Max Page identified a recurrent trend of imagining New York City's demise through narratives of disaster that help resolve society's anxieties.[5] But austerity measures were excluded from these visual depictions; the sensational snapshots of crime and fear overpowered the dull reality of bank notes, city debt, and interest rates. The embodied reality of theatrical practice, however, revealed the lived realities of struggling residents and companies, both on stage and off. In the mid-1970s, many theatre artists and institutions dramatized the uneven effects of austerity measures. They did not emphasize the threat of crime as embodied by other residents, but looked to define the street outside the theatre as a space capable of expanding its boundaries into the realm of performance and self-representation.[6]

On stage, artists who had trained in their crafts during the revolutionary ferment of 1960s theatrical innovation, created works concerned with the private and public dimensions of neglect, such as Roger Furman's play *The Long Black Block*, which dramatized the realities of spatial segregation. Furman believed that playwright Ed Bullins's concept of Street Theatre should move beyond overly didactic theatre that merely preached about justice and equality.[7] Street Theatre should "deal directly with the life of the black community, such as housing, drugs,

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[5] Max Page, *The City's End: Two Centuries of Fantasies, Fears, and Premonitions of New York's Destruction*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 28. Page suggests that the view that blames the 1975 fiscal crisis on liberal policies (as embodied by John Lindsay's acquiescence to unions) misses the point: municipal debts came from subsidizing huge building projects (such as the World Trade Center) and public policy.

[6] While dramatic writing is not included, Tyrone R. Simpson's insightful book explores how writers responded to the racialization of U.S. frostbelt cities, particularly the subjective experience of remaining or attempting to leave it. Tyrone R. Simpson II, *Ghetto Images in Twentieth Century American Literature: Writing Apartheid* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[7] For more on Bullins's criteria for Street Theatre, see Williams, 25.

welfare," to present moving and humorous panoramas of the community that "told of the community's problems, of its hopes and dreams."[8] *The Long Black Block* captured the frustrations of residents in a row of dilapidated brownstone houses, an indictment of its decay in full view of the *polis*. When *The Long Black Block* debuted in Harlem at the New Heritage Repertory Theater in 1972, it elicited glowing notices from some African American publications, which heralded the production as "beautifully written and acted," "pure dynamite," and "one of the most courageous and serious pieces of Black Theater."[9] The play also enjoyed a short run at BAM. For three nights in January of 1975, actress Leila Danette starred in the New Heritage Theater production of *The Long Black Block* at BAM's Lepercq Space.[10]

Furman's play opens with a blues prologue that laments the youth of the neighborhood who have been sent off to fight the war, and those left behind with dope and alcohol in their restless bodies. Chorus cries of "What is the Ghetto made of?" are answered with, "Let me go away from here."[11] The building's super, Mrs. Zelda R. Howards, is a tired guardian who watches over the house and the block, while she lives in a lonely basement flat with the water pipes clanging beside her. She bitterly rails against the malaise as she sweeps the stoop: "I'm talking about the breakdown of the Black race. All day long records blasting all over the place….We ain't got no real leaders so to speak. We don't have any kind of real Black power

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[8] McCandlish Phillips, "Message of Street Theater Is Strong," *New York Times*, June 22, 1971, 28.
[9] Peter Bailey, "Annual Round-Up: Black Theater in America," *Black World/Negro Digest*, April 1973, 14; M. Cardell Thompson, "New York Beat," *Jet*, March 2, 1972, 63; Peter Bailey, "Annual Round-Up: Black Theater in America," *Black World/Negro Digest*, April 1972, 35.
[10] Paul Lepercq was a French investment banker who played a crucial role in transforming "a collection of political hacks, social ornaments, and noncontributors into a working board finally ready to raise money to ameliorate BAM's chronic deficits." See Serafin, 85-86. In 1973, when the current lease with a school expired, the second floor ballroom was transformed into a versatile black box theatre, the Lepercq Space. Peter Brook and the International Centre for Theatre Research inaugurated the new space with performances and workshops of *The Conference of the Birds*. The Lepercq Space became the BAM café in the 1990s. Video on BAM's website includes footage of the intimate space from 1973. "To Elizabeth Swados, the Badass Bird Woman," *BAMBlog*, November 22, 2011, accessed January 6, 2013, http://bam150years.blogspot.com/2011_11_01_archive.html.
[11] Furman, *The Long Black Block,* 3.

like they've been talking about. And you know damn well that we don't have any money."[12] We meet a young couple whose plans for transcending their situation diverge. Lottie dreams of entering the theatre, constantly reigniting her belief that she will one day perform alongside her stage idols, Ruby Dee, Earl Jones, Diana Sands, and Diahann Carroll. Her boyfriend, Van, instead plots a path of political action: community control that could take over the derelict buildings. Lottie mocks Van's "Mickey Mouse revolutionary jive," and when she reveals that she might have an opportunity to go on the road with a touring production of a play, Van retaliates:

> VAN: You know damn well niggers ain't raising no hell on Broadway or any other way. (*Hugging her*) Girl, you know you've got to have a big name to make it in this country. Why don't you join the little theatre group over at the women's Y? At least you'll be doing something that you like. Forget all about that big time stuff.
>
> LOTTIE: You never once encouraged me to do what would make me happy. I've tried to understand the things that you've been rapping about. That's why them simple ass White chicks make it. Their men say, go on baby, do yo thang! Big Daddy's right here to catch you if you fall.[13]

When the play was first presented in Brooklyn as part of BAM's 1973 Black Theater Alliance (BTA) festival,[14] Mel Gussow's review in the *New York Times* critiqued overly long scenes and "too broad" characters with repetitive themes; still, he singled out Furman's play as clearly

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[12] Ibid, 4.
[13] Ibid, 9.
[14] The BTA Festival at BAM in 1973 included the following companies and founders: Afro-American Studio for Acting & Speech (Ernie McClintock, founder); New Federal Theatre (Woodie King, Jr.); Demi-Gods; Afro-American Total Theatre (Hazel Bryant, founder and BTA secretary); Bed-Stuy Theatre, Inc. (Delano Stewart, founder); Voices, Inc. (Jesse Devore); Cornbread Players; Black Vibrations (Carol Williams); Weusi Kuumba Troupe (Yusef Iman); Brownsville Lab Theatre (Yvonne Madison); New Heritage Repertory Co. (Roger Furman); The East River Players (Mical Whitaker); Theatre Black (Sati Jamal); Urban Arts Corps (Vinnette Carroll); Afro-American Singing Theatre (Ed Taylor, founder).

deserving of "an extended engagement."[15] This would prove difficult to achieve. The material and philosophical challenges explored in the play were resonant with Furman's struggle to build his New Heritage Repertory Theater, Harlem's oldest active theatre company. Space for performance and rehearsal was a distinct problem; in 1971, after five years of operating, the New Heritage still had not received any grants.[16] At a forum on Black Theatre in the same year, Furman described his plight, shared between so many BTA companies:

> We have a loss. We have to pay $300 a month, and we miss the rent one time and that man, you know what to call him, is going to be there to put our ass out—chairs, seats, scenery, flats—right on the street. So, to sit and talk and say how beautiful it is…all the people in my company are working like hell. They are all workers, they have no money. We put in our own dues to pay the rent, to get the lights on, to get our scenery, to get the scripts mimeographed off, and we even pay our authors royalties—we have the nerve to give somebody a royalty.[17]

The BTA had been formed to address exactly these issues.[18] It sought to increase box office revenue and audience base with stronger publicity, fund raising, and advertising.

Gussow referred to the companies that formed the Black Theatre Alliance as "vital grass-roots community centers," but their broad missions and geographic and ideological diversity resisted easy description. Their categorization on the Off and Off-Off Broadway spectrum

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[15] Mel Gussow, "Theater: Black Portrait: Furman Work Offered at Brooklyn Fete," *New York Times*, November 17, 1973, 28. It appears that the 1975 return engagement of the play was not reviewed in the *Times*.

[16] "Talking of Black Art, Theatre, Revolution and Nationhood, Part II: Black Theatre, A Forum," *Black Theatre 5: Waitin' For the Seventies* (1971): 34. *Black Theatre* was the magazine of the New Lafayette Theatre, and Ed Bullins was the chief editor.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Delano Stewart, the director behind the Bed-Stuy Company in Brooklyn, was a driving force in the formation of the BTA in 1965, initially a coalition of seven theatres. For a list of participating companies as it expanded in the earl 1970s, see note 14. The BTA's constant financial crisis was somewhat alleviated in 1972 by a grant from the NYC Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs Administration to sponsor a promotional theater festival. Anthony D. Hill with Douglas Q. Barnett, *A to Z of African American Theatre* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 46-48. See also Samuel A. Hay, *African American Theatre: A Historical and Critical Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 204-6.

troubled critics, who admitted to difficulty in reviewing the works.[19] The paper of record was flummoxed; in 1972 Gussow articulated ambivalence about methods of evaluating this grassroots theatre, which had a potentially "traumatic effect on the audience" if it were the viewer's first encounter.[20] In his review of Furman's play, he overlooked the hopefulness that contradicts the bleak conditions in the broken-down apartment building. The characters disagree in philosophy, but all provide street-wise analyses of the power dynamics that left certain city blocks abandoned. The play captured the textures of community action: anger, political will, and artistic visions co-existed in the places where the cutting of city services signified a deepening of long-standing spatial injustices.

As a consequence, 1975 witnessed intense local activism off-stage as well as on. In the predominantly middle-class black neighborhoods near BAM, residents took action against cutbacks to services as basic as trash collection. These areas had been directly affected by the laying off of more than ten percent of the sanitation workforce due to the fiscal crisis, a reduction that led to a fifty percent cut in collection.[21] In nearby Crown Heights, residents living at the intersection of Brooklyn Avenue and Dean Street had gone nine days without garbage-pick up when infuriated protesters piled plastic bags of trash and metal cans in the middle of the street, obstructing traffic and forcing sanitation workers to pay attention. It was between the years of 1972 and 1976 that Crown Heights and other minority neighborhoods faced impending fire and abandonment disaster; throughout the decade, these neighborhoods were "dismembered and displaced into adjacent middle-class communities, while these themselves crumbled and were

[19] Mike Sell has written insightfully about the Black Arts Movement, including negotiations between its theatres and the press. Mike Sell, *Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism: Approaching the Living Theatre, Happenings/Fluxus, and the Black Arts Movement* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2008), 260-75.
[20] Mel Gussow, "Theatre: In the Streets: Lincoln Center's Open-Air Festival Ends with Reaffirmations of Black Message," *New York Times*, September 4, 1972, 6; Mel Gussow, "Theatre: Rock vs. Junk: Street Festival Offers Anti-Drug Musical," *New York Times*, August 24, 1972, 52.
[21] David Vidal, "City Removes Garbage Tossed in Street Protest," *New York Times*, July 25, 1975, 36.

dispersed."[22] Resident-led street blockades of garbage was just one form of urban activism inspired by municipal cutbacks, as already underserved New Yorkers fought intensely local battles for the maintenance of city services. A significant segment of residents "felt shortchanged even before the reductions came into effect."[23]

A few years before, in a desperate bid to affect municipal priorities, Joseph Papp had proclaimed the theatre to be as essential to urban life as trash collection.[24] But now the city faced a moment of reckoning as street corners were masked by heaps of refuse. The Crown Heights garbage action drew a flicker of press to a neglected area, even as the city seemed to be saying that more had to be done with less. In response to municipal neglect, many community leaders argued for increased autonomy, which extended into the realm of cultural production. To rely on city services was an inner city fool's errand in a time when "cutback" was rapidly becoming "the most odious word in the lexicon of our daily lives," as editor Charles Reichenthal wrote in a 1977 newsletter for The Brooklyn Arts and Culture Association (BACA). "We must analyze, to a man, the priorities of our society-- and, of vast importance, to project the effect of today's cutback on tomorrow's community."[25] The warning was prescient, but went unheeded: as I argue in this chapter, cutbacks leveled a decentralized and varied neighborhood theatre arts movement that had been developing through the 1960s. Funding eventually shifted towards what would emerge in the 1980s as the predominant form of municipal arts support: policies that favored a

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[22] Fire service reductions were made in minority neighborhoods that were already tagged as high-risk for fire destruction (particularly due to their high density). This was a devastating example of fire service "redlining" that came about in an effort to improve efficiency models and implement planned shrinkage cuts. See Rodrick Wallace and Deborah Wallace, "Origins of Public Health Collapse in New York City: The Dynamics of Planned Shrinkage, Contagious Urban Decay and Social Disintegration," *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 66 (September-October 1990): 391-434.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Kenneth Turan and Joseph Papp, *Free for All: Joe Papp, The Public, and the Greatest Theater Story Ever Told* (New York: Random House, 2010), 237-38.
[25] "BACA Newsletter, March 1977," Brooklyn Arts and Culture Association Publications, 1969-1997, The Brooklyn Historical Society, Brooklyn, New York.

centralized vision of Brooklyn "culture," to the exclusion of community-based cultural services and the expression of local, heterogeneous concerns. The fiscal crisis strained all arts organizations across the city, but it crippled a neighborhood arts movement that had connections to the Black Arts Movement, avant-garde theatrical practice, street theatre, and community-based arts. Simultaneously, the Brooklyn Academy of Music (which began to use the acronym BAM in 1973), the best-known arts institution in downtown Brooklyn, had little to lose after years of decline. BAM steadily built a new reputation within the shell of the old, as Harvey Lichtenstein shifted from a focus on dance in the late 1960s to cultivate theatrical offerings. Lichtenstein used bold presentations of international theatre ensembles and gave emerging avant-garde figures the opportunity to work in impressively refurbished performance spaces. The rise of BAM, however, benefitted not only from its intentional synergy with the stirring "Brownstoner movement,"[26] but also from a strikingly large and consistent amount of support from every funding outlet available-- including the cash-strapped city government.

Most of the downtown Brooklyn artists discussed in this chapter did not fit snugly within the categories of Off, Off-Off Broadway, or avant-garde theatre, or even as community-based or amateur theatre, but rather as hybrid forms that responded to the breakdown of these categorical distinctions and the calls for increased community control. Included in this formulation were companies in BTA who defined themselves as both cultural and educational centers that explored new models of producing work and audiences. It also included dramatists who had swapped the downtown theatrical community in Manhattan for that of downtown Brooklyn, frequently forging ties in spaces shared with religious institutions. An additional legacy of the

[26] This movement began in Brooklyn Heights, where homeowners formed the Brooklyn Heights Association to promote their neighborhood. In 1965, the fifty-block area was declared the city's first Historic District. Brooklyn Union Gas became active in the movement that same year with their Cinderella Program that invested in buildings and gave grants to developers to restore facades and landscapes. Martha McGowan, *Growing up in Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Academy of Music, Mirror of a Changing Borough* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Academy of Music, 1983), 26.

1970s fiscal crisis was therefore an attendant change in the ways in which the theatrical community—as well as residents--- thought about alternative theatre production in the outer boroughs. In order to investigate how participation in the arts revival of downtown Brooklyn was shaped by space, place, and locality, I will analyze how residents cultivated ownership over their local cultural institutions, the forms of participation across fields of cultural production, and how that participation was valued by arts organizations, governmental agencies, and media entities.

Livable Cities, Neighborhood Arts

> In my opinion, this movement will not be denied. Sooner or later it will demand more of its rightful share of the public funds now supporting established institutions of the arts. The fact that these [established] institutions themselves are in a state of constant and ever-worsening financial crisis does not substantially alter the case. It only makes the solution harder.
> --Junius Eddy, *Government, the Arts, and Ghetto Youth*, 1970[27]

The Brooklyn Arts and Culture Association (BACA) began in 1969 as primarily an advocacy organization for the arts, but by the mid-1970s it had waded into the austerity debates. Charlene Victor, a former Broadway actress and wife of a Brooklyn politician, formed BACA in her Flatbush basement to redress the uninspired event programming of Brooklyn's city agencies. Specifically, Victor was infuriated by the Parks Department's plans to celebrate the Prospect Park Centennial with little more than a maypole dance, and she gathered a team to organize visual art exhibits and student performances for the Centennial. BACA expanded steadily to become the umbrella council for more than 500 civic, educational, cultural, and business

[27] Junius Eddy, "Government, the Arts, and Ghetto Youth," *Public Administration Review* 30 (July/August 1970): 404.

institutions that promoted cultural programs in the borough-- professional, non-professional, and somewhere in between.[28]

BACA proved to be a highly adaptive pan-neighborhood organization, and was part of the movement of neighborhood arts councils and coalitions.[29] These councils sought to organize and tether companies to neighborhoods, and to counter the image of the outer boroughs as cultural wastelands: "What goes on in Manhattan is known all over the world. The boroughs are very slighted."[30] These new borough-specific organizations were beginning to demand a share of public funds that had previously supported only established institutions of the arts. It is in part for this reason that BACA always had a complex relationship with its neighbor, BAM, one of the country's oldest performing arts centers.

Large or small, all organizations had two preoccupations: the need for space, and the need to cultivate local audiences. There was, however, a disparity in the potential for funding and support, with the bulk of public monies still directed towards older institutions on city property, like BAM. Despite the best intentions of some of its commissioners and deputy commissioners, the hulking machinery of Cultural Affairs was just not nimble enough to create the new systems to fit the model of organizations that had emerged during the explosion of 1960s theatrical movements.[31] Even after Mayor Beame—a Brooklyn native-- successfully detached Cultural

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[28] Before she retired from the theatre in the 1940s, Victor appeared in several Broadway shows and worked with Orson Welles and the Mercury Theater, and with Imogene Coca, Bob Fosse, and Mel Brooks, under the name of Charlene Harris. "Charlene Victor, 71, Arts Council Director," *New York Times*, January 30, 1991, accessed January 6, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/1991/01/30/obituaries/charlene-victor-71-arts-council-director.html.

[29] The Harlem Cultural Council was founded in 1964, and was one of the first broad neighborhood arts organizations. To add organizational strength— and, ideally, security— to these emerging groups, umbrella organizations formed swiftly, and with varying degrees of success. In the early 1970s, the Brooklyn Association of Theater Arts was formed to mount publicity campaigns for the borough's performance activities; the Boardwalk Arts and Theatre Association (BATA) was based in Coney Island, and in 1972, the Alliance of Brooklyn Theatre (ABTA), the performing arts arm of BACA, had a membership of over 100 performing groups in the borough.

[30] "Culture Popping Up in All Boroughs," *New York Times*, March 26, 1970, 56.

[31] Should they have been more prepared? Perhaps-- as early as 1970, the paper of record was announcing lively new theatre and dance companies cropping up in all boroughs, and reporting on the lacks and needs of the dynamic constellation that had emerged. Far from the spotlights of Manhattan, "the arts are in bloom in all the boroughs of

Affairs from the Parks Department, a move intended to liberate the constraints on supporting the arts, there still remained structural hurdles to surmount before the balance could be tipped away from the traditional arts institutions on city land.[32] Cultural Affairs had begun to realize that the cultural life in New York City stretched far beyond institutions built on city property (and therefore had access to the city capital funds), and they did expand their mission.[33] This change on the municipal level (discussed in Chapter 1) acted as a palliative, but its reach was softened by austerity measures.

Simultaneously, social equity movements pushed the visibility of arts access to the forefront of cultural debates and sought municipal and state support. A report by Alvin H. Reiss articulated the reality that predominantly affluent, educated, white-collar or professional people attended cultural performances in Manhattan. Blue-collar workers, he explained, feel "graceless" in the setting, and it was therefore necessary for performing groups in the neighborhoods "to cultivate a taste for culture in new sectors of the population."[34] As a bastion of blue-collar workers and former stronghold of industrial labor production, Brooklyn arts were seen by

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the city," in the form of several hundred local groups, some very new and some old, "devoted to nurturing culture on postage-stamp budgets." Ibid.

[32] For example, waiting for the Department of Budgets and the Department of Parks to transfer the capital budget and move it to Cultural Affairs took one year. The distinction of budgets is important; an institution on city land, in a city-owned building (like BAM) could get capital support for their building, whereas other organizations could not be supported through the capital budget. Janet Langsam recalls occasions during the crisis when small companies would appeal to Cultural Affairs for help through difficult times: "While there were things we could help them with through our accessibility to people and to the Mayor, the fact that they weren't in a city-owned building, we weren't able to do much for them. So the rules somehow needed to be changed." Janet Langsam, interview with author, January 11, 2012.

[33] Organizations such as BAM were positioned to benefit from certain funding that was made available because of the fiscal crisis. The recognition of cultural affairs being its own economic driver was crucial to their ability to access federal program money. One of these was CETA: Comprehensive Employment Training Act, a job program in which money was allocated to the city to disperse to city agencies to hire people within a year of training. (This was the same source of federal money that supported La Mama CETA productions, with Ellen Stewart at the helm, discussed in Chapter 1.) John Zuccotti, an official who became Beame's deputy mayor in 1975, dispensed both the CETA funding and construction funding, which was malleable enough to include construction workers and artists. (Zuccotti was also on the Board of Directors of BAM Board of Directors, and numerous other arts institutions.) The CETA monies were in the millions of dollars; had Cultural Affairs still been buried in the Parks Department, "that money might have gone for another purpose." Janet Langsam, interview with author, January 11, 2012.

[34] "Culture Popping Up In All Boroughs," 56.

mainstream publications as analogous to working-class arts. A 1970 *New York Times* article covering cultural activity in the outer boroughs reported that "poorer sections" of the city were "stirring." The article quoted Reiss, who described an "indigenous arts impulse" that could lead to a mutually beneficial relationship for "the so-called established arts" if they "would pay it more heed."[35]

By 1974, there was significant frustration on the part of all of Brooklyn's institutions that the government was not responsive enough to outer-borough cultural needs. With 2.6 million people, Brooklyn had 33 percent of the city's population but received only 19.8 percent of the funds for institutions. Additional city funds for cultural programs (such as those dispensed by Parks, or the State Council on the Arts) were going to Manhattan in the greatest number — 41.8 percent, and the Bronx, 29.5 percent.[36] Martin E. Segal, the chairman for the city's Commission of Cultural Affairs, pressed Mayor Beame to address "the fact that there is no coherence in the way the city has traditionally been involved in its support of cultural institutions."[37] Defining these "institutions" was growing more challenging, as they increased in variety. Calls to support the arts in some of the most troubled areas of the city created tenuous coalitions between the old guard institutions and younger upstarts (who often coalesced around specific political aims), as organizations of every size sought to survive funding contractions.

Notwithstanding funding battles, during the 1970s in downtown Brooklyn, the decentralized network of theatre production showed signs of growing in vitality. Groups influenced by the Off-Off scene in Manhattan took up residency in under-utilized church

[35] Ibid.
[36] Louis Calta, "Brooklyn Asks More City Aid For Cultural Institutions," *New York Times*, September 22, 1974, BQLI 1. In Cultural Affairs funding, Brooklyn was also third, receiving 21.5%. The article uses population figures from the 1970 Federal Census.
[37] Quoted in Calta, "Brooklyn Asks More City Aid," BQLI 1. Borough distribution of New York City's 1974-75 tax budget appropriations to museums and zoos showed a total of $23,858,342 disbursed to the various arts institutions.

facilities, new coalitions between theatres formed, and both large institutions and small upstarts inched towards cooperation. Even the oldest educational and arts institutions negotiated "the changing interests and needs of the people of Brooklyn," while economic pressures forced them "to find new solutions for survival."[38] In 1979, Carol Lopate wrote that because of the increasing difficulty for isolated schools, museums, or libraries to survive, "mergers, branches, multiple campuses, reliance on public funding, and various cooperative ventures have all become strategies of the urban institution."[39] While not all efforts were successful, "cooperative ventures" became the predominant trend during the 1970s, as a philosophy of intentional cooperation developed. As a hunger for new stages grew, so too did the need for institutions to identify new audiences in a downtown that was increasingly distinguished by its changed composition.

BACA grew quickly as a booster organization with a new ethos for downtown: its members refused to perceive Brooklyn as a rotting appendage on the body of a bruised city. They instead intoned a vibrant (but distant) legacy of theatres in Flatbush, Brighton Beach, and Downtown Brooklyn, with glittering stars and great plays.[40] "Brooklyn is a theatre town!!" Each exclamation point was filled with the hope that the injustices of daily life— the trash piles, the teacher lay-offs— could be remedied. "For decades, the City of Brooklyn has remained

[38] Carol Lopate, *Education and Culture in Brooklyn: A History of Ten Institutions* (New York: The Brooklyn Educational & Culture Alliance, 1979), 57.

[39] Ibid. This was clear in initiatives like the Brooklyn Educational and Culture Alliance (BECA), which was formed in 1975 by ten institutions: BAM, Brooklyn Botanic Garden, the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn Public Library, Long Island University, Polytechnic Institute of New York, Pratt Institute, St. Francis College, St. Joseph's College, and the Long Island Historical Society. It was supported by NEA grants, as well as private funds. BECA increased the sense of competition between coalitions with initiatives like a voucher program through which community groups purchased services from the BECA institutions. The BECA-BAM project presented BAM performers in demonstration classes at BAM and other BECA institutions. They also subsidized reduced rate tickets for regular BAM performances for members of the BECA alliance. Lopate, 60-1.

[40] Vaudeville theatres included ornate landmarks like the Palace Theater, the Pitkin, the Fox, the Paramount, the Albee, the Kings, the Strand, and the Coliseum. See Cezar Del Valle, *The Brooklyn Theatre Index, Volume I* (New York: Theatre Talks, 2010). The heyday of the Brooklyn Academy of Music began with the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883; artists, operatic stars, dramatic artists, and major political figures appeared there.

entrenched as a major fortress of live theater, with its output second only to the main steam legitimate houses of Manhattan."[41] Since these individual fortresses no longer existed, in their place BACA committed to new, often homeless, theatre companies that had recently formed in (or had migrated to) the borough.[42] Their promotional materials retained this outer-borough folksiness and transmitted a contented amalgamation of the borough's diverse cultural interests, from student dance troupes to community theatres to newly professional arrivals like the Chelsea Theater Center at BAM.[43] An urban toughness and immigrant pride co-existed with BACA's insistence on a level of professionalism to which many companies aspired; these were not exclusively "community theatres." Yet there was a palpable working-class undercurrent to BACA's identity; their bumper stickers ("Be a BACA Backa'") playfully alluded to the dialect of Brooklynese.[44] The BACA materials also smoothed over tensions of race, class, gender, and even geo-spatial differences: its small, printed listings of performances and companies and enthusiastic "theatre spotlight" sections lacked privileging of cultural hierarchy, with political affiliation and location neutralized. The great hope of organizations like BACA was that the structures of society— the churches, theatres, museums, parks— could function again and convince the people of their own health.

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[41] "BACA Newsletter, September 1973," Brooklyn Arts and Culture Association Publications, 1969-1997, The Brooklyn Historical Society, Brooklyn, New York.

[42] BACA companies included: The Chelsea Theater Center, Festival Repertory Company, Everyman Company, Gallery Players, Bed-Stuy Theatre, Brownsville Laboratory Theater, The Alonzo Players, Brooklyn Heights Players, Narrows Community Theatre, On Stage Players, Bed-Stuy Drama Workshop, Dorchester Masquers, Harbor East Players, Focus Workshop, Kings Drama Workshop, and Stuy-Heights Co.

[43] BACA's activism was not confined to cultural organizations; in 1975, BACA rallied against the imposition of tolls across the free East River bridges (which, they noted, had ironically been constructed to link Brooklyn and Manhattan together in productivity, and now threatened the outer borough with isolation). "BACA Newsletter, October 1975," Brooklyn Arts and Culture Association Publications, 1969-1997, The Brooklyn Historical Society, Brooklyn, New York.

[44] For more on changing definitions of high, low, and middle brow affiliations—and the eventual pigeon-holing of theatre as a middle-brow form during the second half of the twentieth-century in the United States, see David Savran, *A Queer Sort of Materialism: Recontextualizing American Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 3-25.

By mid-decade, in an effort to alleviate the struggles of artist groups during the crisis, BACA had departed from its primary function as a programming organization and offered free workshops for performing arts groups to learn about funding, foundations, and fiscal survival. As the 1970s wore on, the organization took a vocal stance against austerity measures that threatened neighborhood libraries, school arts programs, and upstart theatres.[45] Beginning in late 1973, the tone of the BACA newsletter theatre spotlight was clouded with pessimism, as their usual enthusiasm gave way to ominous warnings about the future of theatrical production in the borough. In December 1975, BACA urged against "LIFE WITHOUT THE ARTS," unless readers pressured their city officials: "Inform them of the fact that, during a fiscal crisis, the arts are an anchor in the maintaining of civic equilibrium."[46] However, as the Crown Heights protesters had argued, in the years prior to the harsh fiscal crisis this "equilibrium" was not a given for all residents. The austerity measures had heightened the demand for diminishing urban amenities. Both basic and non-basic services were engulfed by the threat of cuts, and a civic dissonance resulted from the fears that outer-borough arts would be entirely abandoned.

The issue of Brooklyn's perennial short shrift in cultural matters highlighted problems of perception. For many reporters, the borough was a signifier of urban blight, and they wasted no time in projecting the image of a shadowy territory, low on cultural capital and high on criminal malfeasance and blue-collar backwardness. But while some city leaders were promoting Lincoln Center and the Brooklyn Academy of Music to satisfy their thirst for "world class" institutions,

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[45] BACA's focus and function changed throughout the years. In 1980 it expanded to encompass more grant-making. It changed its name to the Brooklyn Arts Council in 1987, and now offers education, arts consultancy, and fiscal sponsorship to arts organizations. For many years, BACA ran BACA Downtown, also known as the Downtown Cultural Center, a space near the Fulton Mall where playwright Mac Wellman set up an experimental playwriting workshop. A young Suzan-Lori Parks received one of her first productions there, of *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom*. Liz Diamond's recollection of this production can be found in the transcript of a symposium event: "Remarks on Parks: A Symposium on the Work of Suzan-Lori Parks," *Hot Review,* April 30, 2004, accessed January 7, 2013, http://www.hotreview.org/articles/remarksparks2.htm.

[46] "BACA Newsletter, December 1975," Brooklyn Arts and Culture Association Publications, 1969-1997, The Brooklyn Historical Society, Brooklyn, New York.

the national movement of “neighborhood arts” took a different approach towards changing the perception and the reality, neighborhood by neighborhood. New York State was at the forefront of this trend that linked local arts activity to urban decline, and they provided early nourishment by sponsoring studies and experiments for neighborhood arts resurgence.

There were, then, two major currents developing. These were not defined polarities, because the two overlapped and borrowed from each other in a web-like fashion, but they did represent different philosophies of performance and the city. In one, high-profile boards with private support pushed a brand of cultural production that followed a traditional model of centralized culture on city-owned land. This view also stressed the city stage as a locus for tourists, a showcase for high culture, and an international art center. In this vision, the surrounding communities would benefit from these activities in a spillover effect, with or without direct participation. In the other, culture was decentralized, organized by local community leaders, and never viewed as ancillary cultural activities; they *were* the culture, and, as such, had the power to jumpstart the urban core while acting as an extension of its services. While both visions arguably had a place in the city that never sleeps, these were contested positions. As budget contractions created a competition for priorities, they were pitted as antagonists.

It is therefore necessary to consider a series of dramatic changes to the funding landscape that had distinct repercussions on the geographic distribution of arts activities during a time of incredible need in urban centers. By 1980, scholar Margaret J. Wyszomirski had already diagnosed a newly hostile funding environment. The growth of the college-educated population along with improved technology that could facilitate wider access combined with an “expansion

of direct public support for the arts at both the state and national levels" during the 1960s.[47] The decisive move on the part of the federal government was the establishment of the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities, with its administrative arm, the Federal Council and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Between 1965 and 1975, there was a public funding boom that Wyszomirski suggests was welcomed by arts communities but remained somewhat irrelevant; government subsidies were generally too small to be crucial to individual artists or institutions. By the second half of the 1970s, however, this changed: arts organizations and service groups proliferated, and created severe competition for available monies just as manna of public funds for the arts began to "level off."[48] (And, due to the rate of inflation, the "actual worth" of NEA funds also fell.) Additionally, the expansion of federal support had inadvertent results for private and corporate giving: some foundations deemed their role less necessary, while others made funding decisions based upon the "official seal" of government funding, shifting previous criteria for giving.[49]

Demand increased, numbers of artists increased, and the amount and value of support decreased. It is perhaps no surprise that these conditions led to a very different arts funding landscape. By the late 1970s, the previous decade's positive harbingers of broad, general support by the federal government had proved deceiving. As the demand had intensified, the process had become increasingly politicized, and arts funding now required "the formulation of policies about how choices will be made about who will get how much and why."[50] As increasingly

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[47] Margaret J. Wyszomirski, "Arts Policymaking and Interest-Group Politics," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 14 (Oct. 1980): 28.
[48] Ibid., 29.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid. This formulation meant that the stakes also increased. Given the "ever-precarious financial condition of a labor-intensive industry," even small amounts of federal funds could spell the difference between survival and bankruptcy. Wyszomirski explains the significance of the Carter administration's decision to locate their Special Assistant to the Secretary for Cultural Affairs, Louise Weiner, within the Commerce Department, a placement that

militant factions of social movements cried out for equal opportunity, and new groups were demanding support for their activities amid a broken-down hierarchy of culture, these choices transcended questions of artistic merit.

One important experiment that occurred before this leveling off was a progressive policy intended to support very small, intensely local cultural opportunities. In cooperation with the President's Council on Youth Opportunity, in 1968 the National Endowment for the Arts made matching grants available to support a series of summer workshops in the arts for inner-city youth.[51] All of the cities eligible jumped at the $25,000 per city, with a two-to-one matching requirement, and the money allowed indigenous artist-leaders to facilitate "an extraordinary series of training and production workshop programs for poor, mainly nonwhite, young people."[52] The council had been concerned about youth employment numbers, with arts and culture at the bottom of the list of priorities. As Junius Eddy of the Ford Foundation argued, this category of "arts and culture" was strictly cultural enrichment, and followed a troubling philosophy:

> [A] kind of loosely organized exposure of poor youngsters (mainly nonwhite) to enriching experiences from the Western middle-class cultural tradition, intended to compensate for presumed deprivation in their own lives and backgrounds. One does not have to deny the true richness of the Western cultural tradition to point out the presumptuousness, arrogance, and racism inherent in this simplistic approach to the culturally different person in our pluralistic society.[53]

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underscored the strategy of looking foremost at the arts in economic life—as a philosophy but also as a legitimization of the arts as a contributor to the nation.

[51] Eddy, 399.

[52] Ibid., 400.

[53] Ibid.

Eddy's contemptuous critique is well placed; this approach was exemplified in the educational programs supported by Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as well as the "arts and culture" programs of youth agencies. Cultural enrichment was translated into "passive" practices: entertainment and admission costs were underwritten, or popular entertainers were sponsored to appear in stadiums or parks. Performing arts organizations were occasionally utilized to present productions of classical drama, music and ballet, and opera, and a third variation employed touring mobile versions of such productions.

New York and a handful of other cities experimented with widening the scope and reach of arts funding to move beyond these models. "Instead of bringing 'culture' to the people of the ghettos, or ghetto youth to cultural events, the best of these municipal arts agencies were beginning to invest more and more of their own hard-pressed budgets and support of arts groups and activities established and run by ghetto artist-leaders themselves."[54] This novel approach was a significant outcome of the NEA money, as it created a counterthrust to more passive forms of support, which was geared towards already established theatres. It was, most importantly, the first time that a federal agency had allotted monetary support— with no strings attached— squarely behind the principle of direct involvement in the arts by young people in impoverished neighborhoods.[55]

It was also a formative step towards a dispersal model of cultural development that identified geographic location as one indicator of arts availability and need. Reiss, in his study of neighborhood "artistic impulses" in poorer neighborhoods heralded this as a wave of "arts

[54] Ibid., 401.

[55] NYSCA had previously invested in the inner city workshop model. Beginning in 1967, the New York agency used $300,000 of its $1.5 million appropriation to investigate "how the arts could help illuminate some of the frustrations of the ghetto" without investing in "hit-and-run cosmetics" or sponsoring a performing group that would "return downtown after the show ended." Eddy describes the importance of federal spending for this purpose, rather than city or state spending. Ibid.

democratization and decentralization," necessary in part because the arts offerings in Manhattan were attended by only "a very special speck" of the general population.[56] More crucially, it was a political statement towards the principle of cultural autonomy: NYSCA "wanted to find out what the ghetto community wanted rather than what we, as an outside agency, decided it should have."[57]

Community Control versus Community Relevance

> You should take the material to the people.
> If you wait for them to come to you, you'll play to nobody.
> --Cecil Alonzo, the Alonzo Players, 1973[58]

These local eruptions within the basic schema of the city's cultural production should also be contextualized within the political and cultural milieu of the late 1960s, "a period of intense racial turmoil, when demands for African American autonomy and community control were increasing."[59] As Kimberley Johnson explains, while motivations ranged from a genuine desire for positive change to "rank opportunism," politicians, foundations, and activists all responded to the urban crisis. Among artists and critics, there was a vibrant, and often contentious, discussion in major media venues about the form and function of new African American theatre. In a 1972 *New York Times* opinion piece, playwright Ed Bullins identified fresh organizations that personified the "artistic and psychic thrust of Black intellectual self-determination" growing out of the Black Power impulse of the mid-sixties:

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[56] "Culture Popping Up in All Boroughs," 56. Reiss's study had considerable reach, and was cited in numerous articles in the *New York Times*, as well as policy reports and academic papers, such as Eddy's.
[57] Eddy, 402. This was essential given the makeup of the State Arts Council, which had been criticized as being a homogenous body representing primarily middle- and upper-middle-class, white values.
[58] Kenneth P. Nolan, "Brooklyn Streets Become Stages: Van Arrives, World Is a Stage," *New York Times*, August 19, 1973, 99.
[59] Kimberley Johnson, "Community Development Corporations, Participation, and Accountability: The Harlem Urban Development Corporation and the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 594 (July 2004): 110.

> The young Black artists that formed LeRoi Jones' (Imamu Baraka) Black Arts Repertory Theater School in Harlem, Marvin X and Ed Bullins' Black Arts/West in San Francisco, Woodie King's Concept-East Theater in Detroit, John O'Neal and Gilbert Moses' Free Southern Theater in New Orleans, Robert Macbeth's The New Lafayette Theater of Harlem, and later, Spirit House, Black House, The Negro Ensemble Company, the National Black Theater, The Afro-American Studio and, presently, the more than 60 functioning Black community theaters throughout America, were mainly from the Black urban ghettos of America....[60]

Bullins, a member of the New Lafayette Theatre, where J.E. Gaines' play, *Sometimes A Hard Head Makes a Soft Behind*, was produced, was incensed by a critical review of the play by Peter Bailey, associate editor of *Ebony* magazine. He believed that Bailey could not admit that his "middle-class consciousness had been mugged by a work of art that came from the hard core of the dispossessed Black ghetto of Harlem. He was literally disoriented and alienated by a true depiction of current Black street/life."[61] These strands of self-determination extended to arts advocacy. One critical development occurred when the State Arts Council supported director and arts administrator Vinnette Carroll's study of the cultural needs of the Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant communities. This was the first seed of their Ghetto Arts Program (which later became the Urban Arts Corps, an active theatre company and member of the Black Theatre Alliance). These efforts were not therapy, Carroll explained, but an arts program capable of developing talents, validity, and community relevance. All of this depended upon the role of a

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[60] Ed Bullins, "Black Theatre, Bourgeois Critics," *New York Times*, August 27, 1972, D10. Bullins was a prolific dramatist and writer of dramatic criticism. See Ed Bullins, *Twelve Plays and Selected Writings*, ed. Mike Sell (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).
[61] Ibid., 25.

professional artist who could encourage professional standards, effective teaching, and a focus on product and performance.[62]

There was evidence that a robust demand for such activities existed, and a proliferation of governmental reports on the power of community arts followed. *Arts and the People,* a 1973 report sponsored by NYSCA and the National Research Center of the Arts, indicated that within the state's urban areas there existed a "culturally inclined coalition" that was not yet actively engaged.[63] Among urban residents with a high school education level, blue-collar workers, and those in the $5,000 to $15,000 income brackets, proportionally "non-white," there was a clear pattern of "cultural frustration."[64] Regardless of New York's international reputation, those who lived in the city felt more strongly than upstate dwellers that they did not have access to the arts, and the preferences for the types of performance differed: 75 percent of the "nonwhites" polled favored seeing amateur actors from the neighborhood or community, and one-third of New York City residents said it was important to have activities that they "could take part in."[65] All New Yorkers surveyed expressed a desire for culture, yet many felt that it was not within their reach.

More revelatory—but left uninvestigated at the time-- was the study's finding related to culture and the definitions of community and proximity. While personal importance was consistently placed on cultural facilities in their community, the data suggested that the "horizons" of community arts and feelings of ownership over public culture were variable.

[62] See note 27. In his article, Eddy profiles Carroll's work with the Ghetto Arts Project as actively pursuing these goals. He believed that more public funding for state arts councils was the only viable way to support such projects, and warned that money would remain the distracting obstacle unless overall funding for state arts councils increased. Eddy also provides a compelling analysis of the bifurcated nature of city services that allow the arts to fall between (and within) numerous categories.

[63] *Arts and The People: A Survey of Arts and Culture in New York State* (New York: American Council for the Arts in Education, 1973), 91. This survey is still cited as one of the major regional studies of arts participation in the past thirty years. For a listing of available data on arts and arts participation since the mid-1970s, see Cultural Policy and the Arts National Data Archive, "CPANDA Audiences: Overview of Available of Data," accessed January 7, 2013, http://www.cpanda.org/stage/research-guides/audiences.

[64] Ibid., 28, 92. Common to policy studies at the time, the report made no attempt to distinguish between different races or ethnicities, and has only two categories: white and "nonwhite."

[65] Ibid., 7, 28.

> [S]ignificant percentages of people living in the five NYC boroughs...feel a real lack of access to cultural facilities….. Conversely, the data suggests that a person's "horizon" of what constitutes a neighborhood or community expands as income and education increase, and for this reason the higher socio-economic groups tend to see the availability of cultural facilities in broader terms.[66]

This phenomenon held true in the case of downtown Brooklyn. BAM was located barely a ten-minute drive and twenty-minute subway ride from the trash revolt block in Crown Heights, but there was evidence to suggest that many of its residents did not consider BAM to be a cultural resource available to them.[67] Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, the institution underwent a phase of self-reflection regarding its relevance to the "community," in an effort to redress their flagging audience numbers. The staff expended enormous effort to reach and activate audiences that they perceived to be geographically close.

This self-reflection, however, was a difficult task for many leaders in the downtown Brooklyn area who still clung to the top-down approach to urban and cultural development that had once been ascendant. In December 1959, a *New York Mirror Magazine* had featured a sweeping forecast for the decade ahead as the city embarked on an unprecedented building blitz of construction and large-scale projects.[68] Amid the flurry of outsized municipal spending, the reporter, Hyman Goldberg, predicted the imminent shaping of an "unrecognizable" city,[69] and

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[66] Ibid., iv.

[67] Julia L. Foulkes describes an Academy conference in 1966 that confirmed the Academy's invisibility to adjacent neighborhoods like Bedford-Stuyvesant. Foulkes highlights Lichtenstein's strategy to remedy this first through programming, and the mixed successes of that approach. Foulkes, 423.

[68] Hyman Goldberg, "Forecasting the Decade: New York's Reach for a New High," *New York Mirror Magazine,* December 27, 1959, clippings file, the Downtown Brooklyn Development Association, Brooklyn Historical Society.

[69] The notable projects included two new bridges: the Throgs Neck Bridge would connect the Bronx to Queens, and the Verrazano-Narrows would connect Staten Island to Brooklyn, alleviating traffic and achieving the arguably more important symbolic victory of bypassing Manhattan entirely. Foresighted new zoning laws were put in place to plan for life in the growing metropolis, a vision of which would soon be on display in the 1964/1965 World's Fair booths that prized expansion and tantalized with Space Age enchantments.

viewed the New York of the future decade as "awe-inspiring." Her prose neared giddy when she described the lynchpin of this development: the $75 million Lincoln Center, understood as a bold step towards continued relevance in the international arts represented by a major investment in the ambitious complex.[70]

In the outer boroughs, at the same time, plans for a revitalized waterfront in Brooklyn were being developed, and business groups were doing their own work to launch downtown into a decade of prosperity. "Brooklyn has an immense and growing payroll, a progressive, cosmopolitan populace, a teeming harbor meeting the commerce and the people coming to our land."[71] An ad for the *Brooklyn Daily* capital stock sought to dispel myths about the borough, and implored "Do you know these facts about Brooklyn?," before listing the many banks, churches, colleges, factories, housing, naval shipyards, parks, roads, and transit systems that were a part of Brooklyn's vast offerings to both the investor and the relocating resident.[72] Cultural institutions were conspicuously absent in their sales pitch; it had been decades since Brooklyn was heralded for its performance activities.

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[70] The article made no mention of the dissonance surrounding the project's formulation by the controversial master planner Robert Moses. Samuel Zipp's chapter on Lincoln Center contextualizes the arts complex as one of the large projects that city leaders hoped would transform New York into an international destination, but also set off years of struggle between community interests, planners, and developers. Zipp's study of the unprecedented planning that occurred from 1948 through the late 1960s also clearly shows the public's encroaching fear of homogenization. Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). See also Julia L. Foulkes, "Streets and Stages: Urban Renewal and the Arts After World War II," *Journal of Social History* 44 (Winter 2010): 413-34. Marvin Carlson has written on the Lincoln Center development as an example of a civic monument that controversially altered its surrounding neighborhood. Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).
[71] "Don't Just Watch Brooklyn Grow: JOIN US!" exclaimed an ad from the Downtown Brooklyn Association. *New York World Telegram Sun,* January 12, 1959, F20, clippings file, the Downtown Brooklyn Development Association, Brooklyn Historical Society.
[72] *Daily News*, April 21, 1960, [page unknown], clippings file, the Downtown Brooklyn Development Association, Brooklyn Historical Society. In fact, large-scale office development outside of Manhattan would not become a reality in a large measure until *after* the 1975 fiscal crisis; for more on the urban renewal area of the Atlantic terminal, and the business coalitions that changed downtown Brooklyn during that decade, see Perry Davis, "Partners for Downtown Development," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 36 (1986): 87-99.

By late 1963, the tone of reporting about the borough had changed as journalists began cataloguing the creeping problems that had taken root years earlier. The downtown area that was to be the heart of the borough's industrial renaissance was looking more "shabby" than shiny.[73] Signifying the wounded heart of the borough's vitality, one of Brooklyn's few remaining cultural institutions, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, was suffering due to the growing reputation for rampant crime that plagued its surrounding neighborhoods. Women in the nearby Fort Greene Housing Association had begun to organize against a wave of purse snatchings, rapes, and robberies, and local boosters were forced to beg businesses to remain. The many single-screen cinemas that had thrived in neighborhoods like Downtown Brooklyn were closing down in favor of large multiplexes, leaving behind darkened streets and few patrons for restaurants.[74]

During this difficult period, the Brooklyn Academy of Music sought explanations and tried to implement changes that would boost their flagging reputation and ticket sales. In 1965, William McKelvy Martin, then director,[75] argued that the exodus of middle-class residents from the area was to blame for low attendance at their programs: the Academy suffered because of its

[73] Mary O'Flaherty, "Downtown Brooklyn: Shiny and Shabby Meet," December 8, 1963, *Brooklyn Section of the Sunday News*, B2-B3, clippings file, the Downtown Brooklyn Development Association, Brooklyn Historical Society.
[74] An area that previously boasted twenty-one cinemas has dwindled to two-- both owned and operated by BAM. Cinema Treasures, "Movie Theaters in Fort Greene," accessed January 7, 2013, http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/united-states/new-york/brooklyn/fort-green. It would be impossible to tease apart how much of BAM's isolation was related to its outdated "enrichment" programming. In the early and mid-1960s, "travel and adventure" still received top billing, and a group of all male, all white faculty members at Brooklyn College led a lecture series. The Academy's arts programming included the Brooklyn Opera Company, the Brooklyn Philharmonic, Paul Taylor Dance Company, and some evidence of interesting collaborations that presaged its later focus, including the McCarter Theatre Repertory Company of Princeton. By the late 1960s, dance became a centerpiece of BAM's offerings, particularly due to Lichtenstein's background as a dancer, but it was the theatre that would draw focus in the later 1970s and early 1980s.
[75] While described as an ineffective leader, William McKelvy Martin is credited with maintaining or instigating relationships with the Brooklyn Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein, Duke Ellington, Martha Graham, and Anna Sokolow. This suggests that the avant-garde was "welcomed into the programming mix…prior to the tenure of Harvey Lichtenstein. There would seem to be more continuity between the former, allegedly impossibly frumpy, musty Academy and the hip, post-1967 one that is generally acknowledged, but the cutting edge element was not formatted or packaged as such, in so clever and insistent a manner. Perhaps too, there was less of a distinction then between blue chip high culture and bohemian downtown culture." Steven Serafin, ed., *BAM: The Complete Works* (New York: Quantuck Lane Press, 2011), 53.

location. Though his tenure as director began with a pledge to reverse the toxic pessimism of the prior director, Julius Bloom, Martin had difficulty changing the script in meaningful ways.[76] In her history of the organization, Barbara Parisi describes the dire situation: "Despite the fact that an Academy Centennial campaign for funds raised $100,000 in private donations in 1959, membership subscriptions had dropped steadily. The situation was so bleak that it was suggested that the Academy be demolished or sold to Long Island University for use as a gymnasium."[77] Through these years of frustration for administrators at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences (the Academy was underneath the Institute's umbrella until 1971), they were surprisingly frank about their pessimistic outlook about the future. The board and its supporters argued that there was a sociological frame for the Institute's difficulties, but negative comments and general confusion about the Academy's role in the borough betrayed anxiety regarding cultural and demographic changes and the fate of the arts center. In 1968, John R.H. Blum, the vice president of the Board, tried to imagine the Institute as a constructive force that might "resolve many of the biting animosities that divide the City."[78] He wrote of the wound of the Budget Cut, and then identified an attendant problem: "the resentment stirred by militant demands for minority control" being replaced by recognition of "the underlying feelings of opportunity long denied."[79] To place blame on both insufficient monies and "militant demands" was a revealing admission for a board member to make, especially given the many factors—

[76] In 1962, McKelvy Martin adopted an admonishing tone in his annual report. He doubted that the borough even wanted such an institution: "If there are not enough Brooklynites who care about these interests, then Brooklyn will have to wait until those of us who do care add to our ranks." Brooklyn Institute Annual Report, 1962, BAM Archive. Bloom blamed the audience erosion between 1948 and 1957 on popular entertainment (movies, radio, television) as well as the Brooklyn Prejudice, which led audiences to see the same artists perform in Manhattan, but not Brooklyn. Barbara Parisi and Robert Singer, *The History of Brooklyn's Three Major Performing Arts Institutions* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 20-1.
[77] Parisi and Singer, 21. The structure of the Brooklyn Institute created administrative issues which led to contentious committee meetings, political wrangles over plans and projects, and litigations.
[78] Brooklyn Academy of Music, Annual Report, 1968.
[79] Ibid.

including the growth of television and the city's population decline—that were altering the patterns of cultural attendance and added to the complex mix of the Academy's problems.

Blum's accusations belied changes that had been brewing for years; attendance at the Academy's slate of "enrichment" programs had been flagging well before they acknowledged the need to reconsider operations and programming in light of its social and cultural context. By 1960, the population of Brooklyn had already plummeted—the first significant drop since the eighteenth century.[80] By the middle of the decade, the downtown area was not described as merely "shabby," but was making headlines for its crisis symptoms. At a community meeting held at the Academy in 1965, the head commissioner of city planning, Elinor C. Guggenheimer, argued that the flight of the white middle-class exacerbated their problems, and the City was resolved to "keep the white middle-class in Brooklyn."[81] Unless they enhanced life in Brooklyn, "the borough would become a tremendous lower income bedroom, a desert of urban renewal projects and a vast concentration of unsolvable racial segregation. No master plan exists." She lamented that the current city projects slated for Brooklyn would "produce more problems--more overcrowding in schools and no way out of the integration crisis."[82] She praised small bursts of neighborhood enthusiasm in Park Slope, Brooklyn Heights, Cobble Hill, Coney Island, Bedford-Stuyvesant. But the "hub" was of concern-- the area around the Long Island Rail Road depot, right near the Academy, where stretches of Flatbush Avenue were popular corridors for

[80] Parisi and Singer, 21.
[81] Lawrence Farrant, "City Planner Pleads: Do Something Unique," *Brooklyn World Telegram,* Tuesday, 30 November 1965 (B1), clippings file, the Downtown Brooklyn Development Association, Brooklyn Historical Society. Guggenheimer had a distinguished career as a child advocate and was among the most prominent female figures in city government at the time.
[82] Ibid.

prostitutes and drug-peddlers,[83] and crime was on the rise just as the city was coming to grips with its "Dixie style" housing.[84]

Guggenheimer's comments reveal a resistance to engaging the communities that remained throughout the suburban exodus, in favor of activating a population they feared losing to the suburbs entirely. As was the case in many cities across the nation at this time, people of color had clustered downtown in amounts disproportionate to the rest of the city. The neighborhoods of Fort Greene and Bedford-Stuyvesant had changed from Irish, Italian, and Scandinavian families to predominantly African-American, Puerto Rican, and Caribbean families.[85] In 1963, Fort Greene already had one of the highest populations of African Americans and Caribbean immigrants, 33% (topped only by the neighboring Bedford-Stuyvesant, at 70%), and its Puerto Rican population had grown to 17%.[86] The African American population grew from 7.6% of the total population in the borough in 1950 to 32% in 1980— but "the increase in African American and Puerto Rican residents on the streets directly around BAM was even more divergent, becoming close to sixty percent of the population there by 1970."[87] Veiled behind arguments for the resuscitation of the Academy was, then, the nation-wide belief that investing in a civic center could reverse population decline.[88] In the case of Brooklyn, it was direct

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[83] By 1970, the sleaziness of "the strip"-- Flatbush Avenue--was regularly making front-page headlines. "And This Shows the Seamy Side of Brooklyn," *Sunday News,* February 22, 1970, clippings file, the Downtown Brooklyn Development Association, Brooklyn Historical Society.

[84] "Segregation? Our Housing Is Dixie Style," *Brooklyn World-Telegraph,* July 11, 1963, clippings file, the Downtown Brooklyn Development Association, Brooklyn Historical Society.

[85] Foulkes, "Streets and Stages," 422.

[86] Ibid. This area was a belt of communities that began in Red Hook and ran through Downtown, Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brownsville, and Crown Heights, and up to Bushwick and Williamsburg.

[87] Ibid.

[88] In his urban analysis of theatre in Toronto post-World War II, Matthew McKinnie notes that the late-60s "edifice complex"—a focus on civic centers and/or large theatrical sites—was prevalent even in Toronto, a city that was growing, not depopulating as was the case in U.S. cities. Toronto was expanding as both a center of financial industries and a theatrical center. See Michael McKinnie, *City Stages: Theatre and Urban Space in a Global City* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

competition with Manhattan's elite cultural offerings that was employed in a bid to reverse the trend.

Historian Suleiman Osman describes this moment of demographic and cultural change as the borough's once thriving industrial economy faded and large numbers of working class white residents anxious about the changing racial composition of the area and declining work opportunities fled for the suburbs.[89] At the same time, African American and Puerto Rican migrants arrived, only to find themselves trapped in "decaying tenements surrounded by abandoned townhouses," with few job prospects. Osman eschews the "declension narrative,"[90] which emphasizes misguided city leaders, racial uprisings, and the decline of postwar liberalism. He stresses the postindustrial elements, not deindustrialization:

> Rather than the site of a bipolar conflict between black and white, Brownstone Brooklyn was a multiethnic, multiclass, and polyglot landscape with multiple and shifting conflicts and coalitions.... Rather than a flat space, Brownstone Brooklyn's deindustrialized landscape was a layered landscape that retained the imprints of previous eras of economic structuring. The palimpsest of empty factories, waterfront piers, and Victorian townhouses was a repository of symbolic value for white-collar enthusiasts, black power activists, white ethnic homeowners, and a variety of neighborhood groups. Brownstone Brooklyn's symbolic landscape was crucial in shaping its political and economic landscape.[91]

Arts organizations in Brooklyn found themselves at the crosshairs of this conflict.

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[89] Osman, *Brownstone Brooklyn,* 3. Osman's fascinating account tracks the evolution during which these Brownstoners, in revolt against sameness, were, by the 1980s, sitting on some of the most expensive real estate in the nation, and accused of being gentrifiers and displacers.
[90] Ibid., 9.
[91] Ibid.,11. Artists are included in the new middle class that is at the heart of his formulation, but he does not look closely at the institutions that changed the patterns of consumption and production in the postindustrial downtown Brooklyn.

Residents, activists, city officials, and funders, all demanded a reshaping of the constellation of performance practices in the area. For Osman, this development of postwar urban history-- the influx of white-collar professionals into low-income central city areas—brought a flood of Brownstoners distinguished by cultural and social capital, who did not fit easily into "a binary of rich and poor, or bourgeoisie and proletariat."[92] Osman argues that Brownstone Brooklyn was "an invented landscape"-- a "powerful repository of symbolic value," created by enthusiasts in the early 1970s. They did so in neglect of traditional methods and monikers used by residents to orient themselves, often by city district lines or Catholic parish boundaries.[93] Previous attempts to locate Brooklyn's "authentic neighborhoods" were the work of community organizers or real estate agents. When the Brooklyn Council for Social Planning drew a map of social enclaves in 1941, interviews with residents revealed approximately one hundred overlapping neighborhood names.[94]

Crucially, these Brownstoners (a term Osman uses interchangeably with geographer David Ley's "new middle-class") had a specific sense of identity and consumption/lifestyle patterns. It is here that issues of taste, class, and proximity collide. Could a centralized arts center like BAM stake a claim between the goals of the neighborhood arts movements—and appeal to new populations on a local level—while also re-creating itself as an international cultural destination? Commissioner Guggenheimer understood the role that lifestyle, culture, and leisure could play in the borough: "Brooklyn must produce something unique," she argued at the community meeting. "Perhaps the new city administration may help-- with money."

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[92] Ibid. David Savran argues that the economic, social, and cultural hierarchies implicated in matters of taste are always "interactive and always determined by many different factors." Highbrow taste is not the exclusive province of the upper classes, or even those with the most education. "It is, in fact, more often than not associated with intellectual rather than economic elites," but hierarchies of taste become intelligible only when linked to class relations. David Savran, *High Brow/Low Down: Theater, Jazz, and the Making of the New Middle Class* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 9.
[93] Osman, *Brownstone Brooklyn,* 19.
[94] Ibid., 19-20.

Guggenheimer proposed five major steps to “create a better living environment, to keep and attract the young marrieds with children.” The first was “cultural upgrading” of Brooklyn institutions.[95] Her advice was intended to address the dispirited residents who wanted to advance the borough into future prosperity: “The Brooklyn Museum should be made a unique cultural center for the entire city. And the Academy of Music should not just limp along, running second-best to Manhattan’s attractions.”[96] A refashioned and refurbished cultural jewel was the kind of civic monument that the borough needed to convince the city—and the nation—that it was more than the sum of its bad press.

The City had not turned its back on these institutions and had been relatively generous with money to the Academy throughout the 1960s even before Lichtenstein arrived. In 1962, Mayor Wagner and the Board of Estimate approved a $750,000 rehabilitation project at the Academy; in 1964, they installed new heating systems, new equipment, new staircases, newly painted dressing rooms, and new carpeting, in addition to upgrades in the surrounding area.[97] This was a municipal leap of faith, as the institution faced fiscal insolvency with few optimistic markers for the years ahead. In 1967, when Lichtenstein was hired, there were more infusions of money from the City coffers under Mayor Lindsay, as well as Ford Foundation money that had begin secured by W. McNeil Lowry, an influential member of the foundation.[98] The hope was that Lichtenstein would build upon these monies to revive the Academy, especially its subscriber numbers. His administrative career began in 1964, when he initiated and ran subscription campaigns for the New York City Ballet and the New York City Opera Companies. Plus, he was

[95] Others included modernization of piers, improved express subway service, and an airport at Floyd Bennett Field.
[96] Guggenheimer, quoted in Farrant.
[97] Marlyn V. Baum, “The Brooklyn Academy of Music: A Case Study of the Rebirth of An Urban Cultural Center,” Ph.D. dissertation, CUNY Graduate Center (1983), 52. See also Parisi, 20-25.
[98] Baum, 60. Lowry had a remarkable career at the Ford Foundation, and is considered a hero of arts funding in the second half of the twentieth-century. Because of his role, the Foundation supported a great number of repertory theatre companies, and assisted with the founding of the Negro Ensemble League in 1967, as well as many dance companies.

a Brooklyn Boy. The child of Polish and Russian immigrants who settled in Bushwick, and the brother of the painter Roy Lichtenstein, Harvey discovered dance while a student at Brooklyn College and abandoned his plans to study engineering. He later studied modern and ballet with Merce Cunningham, Martha Graham, and at the experimental Black Mountain arts school.[99] Still, in the years to come there would be a growing chasm between Lichtenstein, who came from working-class immigrant stock, and the new immigrants to the neighborhood. While no one would begrudge Lichtenstein a vacation, publicized anecdotes—like when he needed to rush to Brooklyn from East Hampton in 1977, when a water main broke beneath Ashland Place next to BAM—enflamed the sense that he could not fully address the needs of the surrounding neighborhoods.[100]

Indeed, the cultural context at the time was tense, as funding sources diversified their support to consider the role of cultural production in hard-hit urban centers. The streets were also being re-envisioned and rebuilt, as the burgeoning brownstone movement (aided by tax policies and support from corporations like Con Edison) grew, and leaders like Shirley Chisholm fought for improvements and the destruction of racial and gender barriers in districts like nearby Bedford-Stuyvesant.[101] A major question then remained, however: for whom were they renovating the Academy?

Further, even as data supporting neighborhood arts programs accumulated, a distinct problem remained: the ethos of the neighborhood arts program ran diametrically counter to

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[99] "He Introduced Avant-Garde to BAM," *The Brooklyn Eagle,* April 9, 2012, accessed January 7, 2013, http://www.brooklyneagle.com/articles/day-history-april-9-he-introduced-avant-garde-bam.

[100] See Serafin, 88 and BAM Annual Report, 1977-1978, BAM Archive.

[101] The Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration program was supported by federal funding, directed related to the "Special Impact Program," an amendment to the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. This seven-point action plan was created in collaboration with Senator Jacob K. Javits and Mayor John W. Lindsay, and Senator Robert F. Kennedy, and would serve as a national model for community development. The plan called for the formation of the Bedford Stuyvesant Renewal and Rehabilitation Corporation and the Development Services Corporation, with assistance from business leaders. The Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation was formally established in 1967, and still exists today. See Johnson, 109-24.

austerity ideology. Many viewed the funneling of arts money to troubled neighborhoods as downright irresponsible, and the debate had national salience. In a two-article spread on federal arts funding in the Pittsburgh *Post-Gazette* in 1977, Neil R. Pierce advocated a kind of middle road between pulling arts funding entirely and supporting the arts for the purposes of urban rejuvenation: "Can the artistic community, armed with minuscule grants, succeed where multi-billion dollar bureaucracies have so often failed in bringing new life and pride to cities, neighborhoods and towns across America? At best the idea sounds wide-eyed, at worst like putting inmates in charge of the asylum."[102] This argument suggested that a livable city would arise not from the standards and guidelines of legislative action, but from an opening up and refurbishment of neighborhood landmarks by giving them a new setting and status. This course of action was well suited to the austerity landscape; the NEA's *smaller* grant programs were the very best hope to create "Livable Cities" again. Since 1966, only $17 million had been dispensed, and Pierce argued that the $25,000 grants were proving more effective than large aid programs to theatres and museums.[103] While these grants were blissfully unencumbered by the usual red tape, their bias towards planning instead of capital construction meant that companies still relied on large institutions for their space needs. This approach seemed to suggest that there was a bargain basement way to remedy the problems of urban decline; yet it still followed a civic center model that advocated small grants to cultural centers, and disregarded the need to decentralize via geography and socio-spatial concerns.

There was, however, a growing belief that these cultural centers needed to accommodate the shifting demands of their urban environments. At the end of the decade, in a 1979 booklet published as part of a "Brooklyn Rediscovery" campaign sponsored by ten major institutions in

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[102] Neil R. Pierce, "And What the Arts Can Do For You," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, September 16, 1977, 10.
[103] Ibid. There was, of course, a catch: that money required a 50 percent local match and could be used only for planning, not actual capital construction.

the borough, Carol Lopate optimistically concluded that each of Brooklyn's institutions had "adjusted to the changing patterns of social class and ethnicity of the modern city."[104] This was easier said than done; in the realm of culture, new structures, forms, and hierarchies continued to render the programming of large institutions increasingly obsolete. In his essay "Middlebrow Anxieties," David Savran marshals the work of scholars such as Michael Kammen to establish the breakdown of clear taste hierarchies in the 1950s and early 1960s. For Savran, this represents "the very end of the era during which hierarchy of taste was a useful and accurate guide to the disposition of economic, educational, and cultural capital in the United States."[105] Political and social radicalism, cultural nationalisms, a youth culture explosion, pop art, minimalism—all of these trends (and more) challenged the opposition between elite and mass culture. The Academy administrators were tastemakers coping with the twin problems of their own increasing obsolescence in culture and their seemingly unsettled urban environment. The stewards of theatre spaces worked to redefine their audiences in accordance with demographic and social change, but were often limited in their abilities to maintain the vibrancy of a dispersed theatrical landscape, bifurcated in part by the disparate cultural needs of residents across the borough. In downtown Brooklyn in particular, this was seen in a curiously centralized funding trend towards the long-suffering Academy of Music, even as theatre makers were experimenting with new ways of collaborating, and new visions for the role of theatre in combating urban malaise autonomous from the mechanism of large institutions.

Guggenheimer believed that the "Brooklyn Syndrome" or "Brooklyn Prejudice" could be mitigated with funding and attention to unique cultural attractions. Others felt that BAM's target

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[104] Lopate, 6.
[105] Savran, *A Queer Sort of Materialism,* 12. See also Michael Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the Twentieth-Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2000) and Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

audience—Manhattan theatre patrons—would never be attracted to the outer-borough backwater for serious theatre. A cultural alienation endemic to Brooklyn was perceived to be so deep that it extended even to BAM's resident theatre company, the Chelsea Theater Center. The Chelsea had produced their work in non-traditional spaces far from the theatre district for years, and built a reputation for appealing to diverse audiences. "We were into a lot of theory then about developing an audience," explained Michael David of the Chelsea. "Overtheorizing, really. We kept asking ourselves, 'What kind of theater do we want?'"[106] When the Chelsea was invited to be the resident company at the Academy for their 1968-1969 season, George Bari, one of the co-founders of the Chelsea, feared that the move would be their death knell as they confronted a space rendered placeless by dint of its location and associations: "There was no there there" (32). Both longtime residents and newcomers saw a "there," and perceived a potential for more.

Contemporaneous with these debates, the renovations of homes in some dilapidated neighborhoods of downtown Brooklyn gained momentum. This movement was constituted by long-time and new residents, with rebuilding efforts by private entities like ConEdison. Seth Faison, Chairman of the Board of BAM's governing committee, identified "a new potential audience…out there among the brownstoners and the black middle-class in the surrounding neighborhoods."[107] By the late 1970s, BAM was marketing directly to the sensibilities of potential homebuyers. An ad in the program for *Everyman & roach*, a play performed in the Lepercq Space by the Everyman Company of Brooklyn and written by Geraldine Fitzgerald and Brother Jonathan Ringkamp, O.S.F, appealed to residents: "The rebirth of the city has begun in Brooklyn. It was incubated in the brownstone houses of Brooklyn. Nurtured by energetic people

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[106] Davi Napoleon, *Chelsea on the Edge: The Adventures of an American Theater* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1991), 59, hereafter cited in text. Napoleon follows the rich and tumultuous history of the company through its inception in a small church in Chelsea to its demise as a tattered organization facing obscurity.
[107] Baum, 57.

creating new homes, new neighborhoods and a new Brooklyn."[108] The ad lauded the five "Cinderella" restoration projects that Brooklyn Union Gas had undertaken in the borough, and its most recent project, Cinderella V, underway on St. Felix Street, adjacent to BAM. "The rebirth of the city," it explained, was "sparked by people who with paint brush and hammer are creating a bright future for themselves and the community."[109] BAM's potential and the city's potential had become one. While these ads would have appeared in many programs during BAM's season, there was a inspiring symmetry between this vision of Brooklyn and the ethos of the Everyman company, which typified the "wealth and vitality" of the do-it-yourself street theatre movement,[110] showcased at the off-beat and experimental Lepercq space. In fact, many small theatre companies in downtown Brooklyn at the time performed in the Lepercq space; others found refuge in the neglected physical plants of community spaces that increasingly hosted theatres with both professional and community aspirations.

The Specter of Social Work

Almost a dozen theatre companies collaborated with churches to present plays around the borough.[111] The religious institutions of downtown Brooklyn faced similar challenges to arts groups, and some carved themselves anew as the demographic make-up of their constituencies changed. There was a convenient symmetry borne from the mix of demographic changes and the

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[108] "*Everyman and Roach* Program," Everyman Company, May 13-16, 1976, Archives of the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Brooklyn Union Gas also advertised a "Brownstone Information Center," where all of your questions about buying the "right Brownstone" could be answered. The Everyman Company was formed in Coney Island, and is explored in more detail in Chapter 4.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Nolan, 99. Mimi D'Aponte has written about the blossoming of the city's street festivals during the 1960s and 1970s, including the Desfile Hispano in Queens (1976), Harlem Week (1975), and Midwood Mardi Gras (1979). Mimi D'Aponte, "Fairs and Festivals," in *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, ed. Kenneth L. Jackson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 387-88.

[111] Limited documentation exists from many of these collaborations, but it appears that the majority of the offerings were not explicitly religious in nature, and that there was a wide range of involvement between the performers and the institutions, depending upon church leadership.

inventory of available urban space. For the theatre companies, church facilities were uniquely located to reach the dizzying mix of cultures that were converging upon the small area, and alleviated the need for complex publicity mechanisms. As early as 1969, there were a handful, including the Gallery Players, then operating out of the Flatbush Unitarian Church. This was the beginning of what would be a decade of small troupes and companies performing at religious institutions that had suffered swift contractions of their congregations and were eager to tempt neighbors into their under-used facilities.[112] By 1975, collaborations between theatre companies and religious institutions seemed like the rule, rather than the exception, for theatre troupes in search of stages: The Gallery Players of Park Slope, based at the Old First Reformed Church; the Festival Repertory Company, producing at the Flatbush Y; On Stage Repertory Company, located at the Church of the Advent; Encore Studio, at the Windsor Terrace Church; and Master Works Laboratory Theater, at Spencer Memorial Church. In the next years, more were added to the ranks; the Clinton Hill Repertory Company had produced a version of Peter Copani's well-reviewed street theatre musical, *Street Jesus,* at Emmanuel Christian Center on St. James Place, and the Flatbush Repertory Company and The Dorchester Masquers were at the Flatbush-Tompkins Church. These were neither amateur nor considered Off-Off Broadway, and many mounted full productions with long runs. While the benefits of such arrangements were clear, the collaborations with churches also had the potential to alienate companies further from audiences and did little to solve the question of permanent facilities.

One of these theatres, the Big Apple Theater, formed in the wake of a failed stint at the Public Theater. Jan Barry was a poet and a founder of Vietnam Vets Against the War, and he

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[112] There were many elements motivating individual companies to set up in Brooklyn; producing Off Broadway, costs had risen in multiples, not just percentages. Its programming had been steadily declining between 1969 and 1974, a situation that encouraged Off-Off and Off-Broadway experimenters to find new venues. Guernsey, 283.

moved to Brooklyn in the late 1960s with his wife, theatre director Paula Kay Pierce.[113] Pierce had adapted Barry's poetry collection about the war into dramatic form, which was scheduled for production at the Public before being abruptly canceled by Papp during previews. (According to Barry, Papp wanted to replace Pierce as director, and the couple refused to comply.) This experience, and other forays into the theatre by director and actor Pierce, motivated the couple to create Big Apple Theatre (BAT), with a mission to avoid stereotyping by race and sex, and end "the tyranny, exploitation and oppression of talent" in theatrical production. A *New York Times* article in July of 1975 about their young company, "Brooklyn Theatre Is Trying to Be Different," described their desire "to be involved with the theater of ideas and social comment."[114] BAT strove for integration, both "ethnically and sexually," and, in addition to a mixed core of twelve members, held open casting calls in *Backstage*.[115]

Financing presented a problem for the company. They had received small grants from BACA, but Pierce was herself supporting the three-to-four-hundred-dollar production costs with her job as an executive consultant on television commercials for an advertising agency.[116] In April 1975, the BAT Company began a residency at the Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church,

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[113] Pierce was also involved in one of the more interesting projects to emerge from this period, The St. Boniface House of Expressions, which BACA dubbed "Downtown's first center for all the performing arts." It opened at 111 Willoughby Street at the corner of Duffield. St. Boniface developed the cultural complex in a two-story former school building and envisioned it as an oasis for the surrounding business, shopping, and residential community. Headed by Father Anthony Faiella and Sr. Sally Butler in collaboration with Brooklyn performing artists Pierce, singer Deborah Smith, and jazz pianist Kenny Gates, the House of Expressions had a long trajectory as an arts space, later morphing into BACA Downtown.

[114] Phyllis Funke, "Brooklyn Theatre Is Trying to Be Different," *New York Times*, July 13, 1975, 77.

[115] BAT did not describe itself as amateur or community theatre, and had aspirations of becoming a repertory company. The young actors interviewed-- whether members of Actors Equity or not—considered themselves "professionals because they aim to make their living in the theatre." Ibid.

[116] It is here that the BAM's financial exceptionalism is highlighted. In its 1974-1975 Annual report, BAM boasted that a positive business approach helped to decrease its accumulated deficit by $140,000. In the 1977-1978 annual report, Lichtenstein wrote, "I won't pretend that we did not at times feel deeply depressed and pessimistic about BAM, its ability to attract an audience, and its financial viability." BAM, however, would always be given more chances, and its space—owned by the city, provided rent-free—was a crucial stabilizer, especially through the years as it struggled to decrease its accumulated deficit by hundreds of thousands of dollars. BAM Annual Report, 1977-1978, BAM Archives.

at the corner of South Oxford Street in Fort Greene, down the street from BAM's Lafayette Avenue building. One of the earliest productions at the church was Lorraine Hansberry's 1964 *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*.[117] This, Hansberry's second play, is produced infrequently, and Pierce's decision to mount the play suggests she was eager to create a venue for discussing its themes of local concerns, racial tensions, and ideological hypocrisies during the fallout from 1960s idealism. The play's protagonist, Sidney Brustein, is nearing forty and clinging to his Left political ideals even as his eager ventures fail. He impulsively buys a radical weekly newspaper and campaigns earnestly for his friend, Wally O'Hara, a reform candidate running against a machine politician in Greenwich Village. By the end of the play, his marriage has crumbled and his faith in O'Hara, revealed as a puppet for the political machine, has been destroyed.

Robert Nemiroff, one of the producers and champions of the play, wrote an extended essay on the obstacles during the original production's 1964 Broadway run, as it faced a climate of distinct hostility from reviewers who saw it as a work of ideas, without dramatic merit. For Nemiroff, the play enlivened the intellectual debates of the day.[118] The play has proven Hansberry prescient in her depiction of a crisis in New York City's neighborhoods, fractious communities in the rubble of short-circuited activism. Nemiroff described the play in relation to Hansberry's earlier *A Raisin in the Sun*:

> Only five years before, at the curtain of what is by now one of the best-loved plays in America, the Younger family had decided to risk all for the new home in the white

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[117] "BACA Newsletter, April 1975," Brooklyn Arts and Culture Association Publications, 1969-1997, The Brooklyn Historical Society.

[118] When it opened in 1964, Hansberry's play almost closed after just one week of performances due to financial troubles, but a remarkable campaign to keep the show open—which involved prominent clergy members, celebrities, politicians, and others—led to a continual process of rebirth that amounted to one hundred additional performances.

middle-class neighborhood; now their creator was saying that that house was on fire, the community a disaster area of the soul, and that a great deal of rebuilding would have to be done from the ground up if the neighborhood was to be fit for the Youngers to live in at all.[119]

Hansberry's depiction of 1960s radicals who awake to the dysfunction of the street, local political system, and fragmentation of their ideals resonated strongly with the zeal which with the Brownstoners undertook neighborhood rejuvenation. Not merely a restoration fad, Osman explains that theirs was a "cultural revolt against sameness" that shunned suburbia and actively sought "diversity, authenticity, community, historicity."[120] This led to renovated housing as well as block associations, food cooperatives, tree planting, and all forms of betterment; the poorer neighborhoods, he argues, "eyed them warily," and, by the 1980s, it was the Brownstoners who were being protested as villains behind displacement.[121]

Pierce's BAT Company was resolute in its conviction that there was a local need (and an audience) for probing professional theatre along the road of progressive neighborhood reform, and integration was a philosophical underpinning to that belief. As Barry recalls, a minister's wife in their neighborhood who led writing classes for area children impressed both him and Pierce. The energy from BAM's renewed theatre programming also electrified the couple and their contemporaries. The first poetry reading Pierce and Barry organized "was meant to try to see how we could add to that sense of making neighborhoods livable communities through the arts."[122] At the time, their neighborhood association was working to have the neighborhood declared a historic district ("or else the city would put a thoroughway in it"), and even as the

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[119] Robert Nemiroff, "The 101 'Final' Performances of *Sidney Brustein*," in Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun and The Sign In Sidney Brustein's Window* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 167.
[120] Osman, 5.
[121] Ibid., 5-6.
[122] Jan Barry, Interview with author, April 9, 2012.

murder rates remained alarmingly high, Pierce and Barry quickly identified a community of people looking to "connect with the neighborhood in every way, including block associations, poetry readings, and plays."[123]

There was, however, a sense of inequity among theatre organizations, as small, aspiring companies that presented their work in church venues just blocks from BAM struggled for funds. It was not dissimilar to the frustration that brewed as Joseph Papp claimed more and more city money for his endeavors in Manhattan. In his annual theatre review, Peter Bailey wrote bleakly, "Probably the most meaningful statement I can make about Black Theater in New York in 1972 is that it survived. And this was no easy task in a year when tight money got even tighter, when Black folks by the thousands were flocking to the exploitation films and when the new king of New York Theater, Joseph Papp, seemed to be raking in most of the available money."[124] BAM received large sums from public and private sources, and it presented itself publicly as a cultural center capable of meeting community needs. In 1974, Lichtenstein pushed Brooklyn Borough President Sebastian Leone for a one hundred percent funding increase for the coming year-- from $700,000 to $1.5-million.[125] As he explained to the *Times*, "With our newly established alliance with the School of Performing Arts at Brooklyn College, we are of more and more service to the community. With increased capital over the next 5 to 10 years, the building could be utilized

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[123] Ibid.

[124] Peter Bailey, "Annual Round-Up: Black Theater in America," *Black World/Negro Digest*, April 1973, 14. According to Bailey, it was due to the "prodding" of actress and singer Novella Nelson that Joe Papp presented two series of one-act plays by seven Black playwrights, including Sonia Sanchez, Neal Harris, and Richard Wesley. "Novella definitely made 1972 a year for Black Theater at the Public Theater, which is only right since we pay taxes, and the city practically gave Papp the place, but it seems to have been too Black for old Joe to deal with. The only thing scheduled for 1973 is an all-Black version of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. What else can I say?" Bailey, 18.

[125] On the state level, 1974-1975 was a record budget year for the NYSCA— more than twice the amount of the previous year, and it was geared towards the concept of dispersal: "The budget stipulates new patterns for the distribution of the arts. It contains a requirement that at least 75 cents worth of arts services for each resident be given to each of the 62 counties in the state. Under this 75-cent provision there will be dramatic increases in arts for the outlying urban areas." Calta.

doubly, air-conditioned and more programs made available at a lower price."[126] Lichtenstein's demands might have seemed tone-deaf to companies who had a fraction of that funding, but his circumstances allowed for boldness: renovations in the nearly seventy-two year-old building were costly. BAM had access to capital funds for building improvements because of its location on city-owned property. A lack of available money for groups looking to secure their own performance spaces dovetailed with BAM's historically privileged status as a city institution enjoying rent-free accommodations and deficit spending, while smaller groups remained nomadic, homeless, and far more precariously pitched towards bankruptcy. This acceptance of deficit spending among arts institutions grew to ethical proportions: which arts groups survived the fiscal crisis period through deficit spending, and which could not?[127]

BAM's production history from the 1970s shows compelling variety and a nearly frenetic embrace of a wide range of companies across styles, political interests, and definitions of "professional" theatre. There is ample evidence to suggest that alongside the "three phrases" often emphasized in BAM's rejuvenation (dance, theatre, Next Wave), there were concurrent phases related to their community engagement approach: first "passive" (discounted tickets for school children); then a deeper partnering with minority companies and presenting of work from "alternative" communities; and, ultimately, a diminished attention towards neighborhood arts showcases in favor of their successful avant-garde programming. Throughout this production

[126] Ibid.
[127] Marlyn Baum describes this deficit spending in her dissertation, and in its own publication BAM acknowledges this practice as a kind of quirk of its daring leader, whose habit of overreaching was "often abetted by larger economic crises in the city and the country." Serafin, 76. One additional factor before 1971 was BAM's status under the aegis of the Brooklyn Institute, a financial structure that allowed the larger body to cover some of the Academy's deficits. When the other institutes involved no longer wanted to continue this practice, the Academy spun off on its own into the St. Felix St. Corporation in 1971. The city owned the land, the building, and even the parking lot, which meant that the Academy paid no rent. "Still, sudden responsibility for his own budget, laboring under the deficit of the demise of the Feld ballet company and the expenses of the RSC production left BAM in a hole. Lichtenstein at this period was in constant fear as payrolls were delayed; the board was not financially supportive, and its function as a fundraising arm was underdeveloped." The crisis reached a nadir in 1971, and as Lichtenstein remembers, the years of 1971 to 1973 were among the most difficult. Even as he scaled back, Lichtenstein and his staff always kept BAM in the public eye by spending considerable amounts of money on advertising.

history, there is a growing tension between conflicting definitions of the representation (or "reflection") of difference on stage and the development of an institution seeking plaudits from a critical establishment that had more conservative interests. Early in his tenure, Lichtenstein sought a different degree of relevance for the performing arts at BAM and expressly wanted a black theatre to be in residence; he renovated the lecture hall being used to present travelogues to senior citizens to make way for a new repertory company.[128] His first choice for an artistic director, Robert Macbeth, instead founded a theatre at the New Lafayette in Harlem, and Lichtenstein continued to search for someone else "to develop a third world theatre" (32). After hearing of Robert Kalfin's thirty-six plays in three years, Lichtenstein decided to commit to the Chelsea Theater Center (32). One of the Chelsea's most popular plays in Manhattan, *Junebug Graduates Tonight!*, was a "jazz allegory" with music and lyrics by jazz saxophonist Archie Shepp. Originally titled *The Communist*, the play dramatizes the mental conflict of an African-American high school graduate preparing to make his valedictory speech. He confronts the state of race relations in the United States through meetings with allegorical figures; the white liberal, the Black Muslim, and the Uncle Sam figure. The play provoked the vestry of their home, Church of the Holy Apostles, to vote to evict the Chelsea Theater Center mid-production (18).[129] It also proved that the company did not shrink from controversial political positions and was capable of creating new work and new collaborations. A *Times* reviewer, Dan Sullivan, was particularly critical of the play; he cited elements of value but disapproved of its polarizing

[128] Napoleon, *Chelsea on the Edge,* 32-33. Napoleon's use of undefined terms like "third world theatre" confuses the issue, as it is unclear if the work of a "black repertory company," or a company that engages neighborhood residents of color in performance fall into this category. Since the scope of her book remains focused on the Chelsea Theater, Napoleon does not explore other BAM programming at the time, such as the 1971-1972 Afro-Asian festival (troupes from Sierra Leone, Cambodia, Senegal, Morocco, Turkey, and India), or the creation of *Dance Africa* in 1977, which presented companies directly from Africa. See Foulkes, "Streets and Stages," 425.
[129] The eviction was supposedly not due to the content of *Junebug*, although Napoleon makes it clear that Father Griswald and his parishioners were not excited by the play. A larger issue was the size of the production; Kalfin went over-budget, the parishioners felt displaced by scenery, and rehearsals infringed on the church activities.

allegorical approach that left the "white side of the aisle" with no integrity or sincerity.[130]

BACA heralded the arrival of the Chelsea Theater Center as a natural extension of a "cultural revolution" that debunked "that long unquestioned misconception that Manhattan holds all the franchises on exciting theatre."[131] The Chelsea no doubt won good will early in its tenure at BAM through its free performances in their comfortable, refurbished Third Theatre, alongside an adventurous producing history that made them the borough's most highly anticipated theatrical migrants. Under Kalfin's leadership, the company mounted controversial imports, newly translated international works, and political theatre. Their opener was *Christophe* by John Gay (1968), followed by: a series of short plays by African-American playwrights LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), Ed Bullins, Ben Caldwell and Ronald Milner (1969);[132] Edward Bond's *Saved* (1971); *The Water Hen* by Polish dramatist Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz (1971); *La carpa de los rasquachis* by El Teatro Campesino (1973); Leonard Bernstein's *Candide* (1974); and Megan Terry's *Hot House* (1974). Yet a tension surged through the Chelsea Theater residency at BAM: the balancing act between pragmatic concerns and the creative vision of its co-founder and artistic director, Kalfin. The company had an antagonistic and exploratory relationship between aesthetic practices and the increased pressure to mount work for "social reasons" (14). This connection was in part created by funding agencies, but the realities of the neighborhoods outside of the doors of their performance spaces became major factors for a company preoccupied with audience analysis. The Chelsea wanted to maintain a dynamic sense of audience and theatre space, but the "specter of social work" haunted Chelsea's church residences and its stormy decade at the BAM. In one of their earliest spaces, an Episcopal Church in

[130] Dan Sullivan, "Theatre: *Junebug Graduates Tonight!" New York Times*, February 27, 1967, 35.
[131] "BACA Newsletter, March 1969," Brooklyn Arts and Culture Association Publications, 1969-1997, The Brooklyn Historical Society, Brooklyn, New York.
[132] Harry Gilroy, "Stage: Chelsea Center 'Black Quartet,'" *New York Times*, April 27, 1969, 92.

Chelsea, on 28th Street and 9th Avenue, sandwiched between predominantly Jewish and Puerto Rican housing projects, Kalfin staged *Las Ventanas* by Roberto Rodriguez, and transformed the inside of the church into a Puerto Rican tenement (13). Admission was free, the crowds were full, and local Spanish-speaking audiences raved.

Chroniclers of his work suggest that Kalfin was rarely striving to make a political statement, but rather to fulfill his relentlessly varied visions for his theatre; as Davi Napoleon explains, he was appalled by "senseless clashes between people of different races, religions, sexes, and generations" (20). His "eclectic bag" approach to theatre was perhaps anachronistic for its lack of definition during a time when many theatre companies in Brooklyn were circling their wagons around defined political positioning and community involvement. His was "not the absence of a point of view but was in itself a point of view" (36)-- a stance that explains the remarkable breadth of styles, and, as his critics contended, disconcerting lack of consistency, in production choices. It also served to heighten the stakes of Chelsea's tenure at BAM and, more broadly, remains one reason why the company was perhaps an ill fit with the neighborhood arts revolution brewing in the neighborhood at the time.

The theatre's founders were wary of what they considered to be extrinsic elements taking precedence over the art itself. Still, it is not entirely clear that the visions of Kalfin and Lichtenstein were matched when it came to incorporating the reality of BAM's socio-spatial specificity and the importance of location in its production choices. As part of their original agreement, Lichtenstein committed to work with Kalfin to maintain the Chelsea's free admission policy, which had clearly been a great help in attracting past diverse audiences. But he also gave Kalfin access to "special funds available to neighborhood-development projects near Bedford-Stuyvesant" (32), an initiative about which there is little information or research in existence. But

the Chelsea did continue to make bold producing choices; a 1972 collaboration between the Academy and Chelsea led to the play *Lady Day: A Musical Tragedy*, which revived their collaboration with musician Archie Shepp, written by Harlem playwright Aishah Rahman and directed by Paul Carter Harrison.[133] Tellingly, *Lady Day* was the opener of the season in the 1,200-seat music hall, not the quirky, offbeat Lepercq blackbox; this seemed to articulate an institutional commitment to works that positioned African American concerns centrally, with a black creative team. But the issue of black representation within the administration of the theatre company would emerge very soon after the Chelsea joined BAM; according to Napoleon, when Kalfin was searching for a replacement for his Chelsea colleague David Long in 1968, the issue of race was prominent. "Because the theatre reflected the concerns of all peoples, his offstage casting was always color blind and indifferent to other socioeconomic categories." But the location of BAM demanded vigilance from a theatre company that was expected to do more than just represent diversity on stage; because "Chelsea was reopening its doors in a ghetto," the Chelsea board felt the "ideal replacement" should be black.[134] The board forgot its earlier commitment upon meeting the eventual replacement, Michael David, who was white.

The Chelsea was therefore a complex choice for BAM's Theatre Residency during the fiscal crisis years. For one, Kalfin was utterly unconcerned with financial limitations, an unsustainable approach within a non-profit theatre model and as part of an institution that was struggling to pay off its considerable deficits. Secondly, though Kalfin made daring artistic choices, his producing mentality remained, as Napoleon argues, *in* Brooklyn but never was "of

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[133] Shepp also worked on the music for *Slave Ship*, the first Chelsea production of their second season at BAM, and their fifth season as a company. See Mike Sell, *Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism,* 248-54. See also, BAMblog, "Jazz at BAM, 1956-1981," January 5, 2012, accessed January 7, 2013, http://bam150years.blogspot.com/2012/01/jazz-at-bam-19561981.html.
[134] According to Napoleon, David had impeccable credentials in art administration: an MFA from Yale University, with experience consulting theatre departments in black colleges, he had created the Hill Arts Co-operative in New Haven funded with Rockefeller money. Napoleon, *Chelsea on the Edge,* 29-30.

Brooklyn" (115). This distinction might seem imprecise, but within the broader salience of the cultural activity that emerged near BAM at the time, it has resonance. "Kalfin did not ignore the larger society beyond the stage door-- Chelsea plays often spoke to or about it-- but he treated it with a respectful distance, as a president of one country might treat the population of a bordering country with which he wanted to maintain good relations" (21). The Chelsea never pretended to be an indigenous theatre group; their ability to attract Manhattan audiences was generally seen as a sign of success for BAM and the critics, while a disproportionate ratio of Manhattan visitors to Brooklyn locals at BAM was frowned upon by BACA.[135] The Chelsea and Lichtenstein were part of a project enamored with the vision to offer Manhattanites enticements to travel across the bridge. But this was a recipe that demanded a consistent string of splashy productions, and the formula did not always incorporate the slow build of a local, theatre-going audience if their success was judged through Manhattan attendance. And, beginning in 1973, the Chelsea decided to present their plays in Brooklyn *and* on the West Side of Manhattan, a logistical and artistic undertaking so ambitious that it nearly broke the company.

While the Chelsea Theater was closer to Lichtenstein's vision than lectures and travelogues,[136] Lichtenstein continued to experiment with the form of presentations most suited to the new BAM. Even while the Chelsea continued to perform there, Lichtenstein pushed forward on his dream of a BAM-based repertory company (The BAM Theatre Company,

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[135] It is difficult to find conclusive numbers regarding BAM's audience composition. Parisi writes that "by 1971, 40 percent of the Academy's audience came from Manhattan," and considers this "a sign of the Academy's success." Parisi, 31. According to Foulkes, BAM's audience grew a remarkable 600% between 1967 and 1976, with the majority of the subscription tickets bought by Brooklyn residents. The bus service between Brooklyn and Manhattan was instituted in 1968, but it incited complaints from Brooklyn residents (and, notably, Alvin Ailey), who desired bus service between BAM and *other* neighborhoods in the borough. Foulkes, "Streets and Stages," 424.
[136] See Parisi, 18-23, for a listing of entertainments at the Academy pre-Lichtenstein. In the twenty years between 1936 and 1956 (when Julius Bloom was director), it hosted many ballet companies, modern dancers, and dramatic recitals. The programs between 1957 and 1967, under William McKelvy Martin, added solo musical programs, a jazz series with Count Basie and others, and symphonies, including the Brooklyn Philharmonic, and the Brooklyn Opera Company. Theatre and drama was represented to a more limited extent. See also, Maurice Edwards, *How Music Grew In Brooklyn: A Biography of the Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2006).

directed by Frank Dunlop).[137] Its multiple stages allowed BAM to host companies that contradicted their reputation for purely focusing on the avant-garde—at least in the 1970s. There were exciting glimpses of cross-pollination between so-called community groups and Lichtenstein's avant-garde fare. Brother Jonathan Ringkamp, a high school teacher and Franciscan brother, ran the Everyman Theatre Company, which started working with youth in Coney Island. It returned to the stages of BAM numerous times to present new work and for benefit performances. In their program notes for the Everyman Company of Brooklyn's January 1974 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Ringkamp, the director of the show, explained that the production had first been conceived of in 1970 "as a product of a Grotowski workshop with high school students at Bishop Ford H.S." Using *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Brother Jonathan followed Grotowski's exercises, with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as their guiding text. When Peter Brook (who had directed the RSC's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in London in 1970 and on Broadway in 1971) and his company, The International Centre for Theatre Research, arrived at the Lepercq space, many community groups, including the Everyman Company, had the opportunity to work with him. Ringkamp wrote, "Peter Brook was an inspiration. His gentle persuasiveness and genuine concern for art, plus his real desire for research and discovery affected us all."[138] Fresh from their workshops with Brook, the company resuscitated their *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with "renewed inspiration," using "Everyman exercises" developed through their street theatre, their Grotowski work, and, finally, what they had learned from Brook. They dedicated their production to Peter Brook.

The unique mentorship between Brook and a youth theatre company from the edges of

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[137] While Lichtenstein invited the Everyman company to perform at BAM on multiple occasions, he did not offer residencies or a deeper level of support (of the kind provided to Twyla Tharp, Merce Cunningham, the RSC, the Chelsea, and director Dunlop) to any indigenous Brooklyn companies.
[138] "*A Midsummer Night's Dream* Program," Everyman Company, January 2-6, 1974, Archives of the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Brooklyn revealed the dimensions of a growing challenge: could an expanding cultural center like BAM aid in the development of artistic practices that germinated in nearby neighborhoods? Was there another model possible? Perhaps tellingly, these instances are still much overlooked, even in BAM's own institutional history.[139] If the social relations of theatre demonstrate and produce the city, BAM's role as a presenting organizing with the means to bring Brook's company to the same space where Everyman performed months later, underscores a model for fruitful symbiosis between the two. For a short time, it resulted in dialectical opportunities for the host institution, the visiting company, and the neighborhood arts participants.

The Everyman Company and workshops with Brook did not necessarily undergird the project of diminishing the Brooklyn Syndrome in the same way that a monthly run of the RSC's *Richard II* could. The Company presents a contradictory case study of the uses of performance in the midst of the fiscal crisis. As I will explore in more detail in Chapter Four, their work was hopeful and affirmed a populist, educational theatre, and yet it also enjoyed a stamp of professional credibility due to Fitzgerald's work both behind the scenes and on stage (she occasionally appeared in small parts in Everyman shows). Brownstoners envisioned renovated landscapes and refurbished landmarks, and the do-it-yourself ethos of Everyman projected a vision of Brooklyn that found redemption through the arts. Yet their performances potentially exacerbated the borough's reputation with representation of urban strife, which clashed with BAM's identity as an arts center and civic space focused on uplift through innovative avant-garde performance. The outdoor performances that caught on across the city cemented the reputation of Everyman through reviews in major newspapers, but always within the limited context of street theatre about urban ills—the drugs, gangs, and crime from which Brooklyn

[139] The "BAM Highlights" included as a downloadable PDF on their website begins in the Fall of 1981 with artists like Philip Glass and the Trisha Brown Dance Company, and its pre-1975 "highlights" in theatre mention only Robert Wilson, Peter Brook, and the BAM Theatre Company.

boosters were eager to gain distance.

Between 1968 and 1978, BAM supported the residency of the Chelsea Theater, a company which provided a clear bridge to the Manhattan performance scene. The Chelsea had acquired a courtesy Off-Broadway classification in theatre listings, even though the company never performed in Off-Broadway theatre houses. They could transcend the geographic distinction between Brooklyn and Manhattan and enact a redefinition of the outer borough space. This coincided with a renegotiation of theatre space and hierarchy writ large; at the time there was a growing lack of clarity around theatrical hierarchies, particularly related to location and professionalism. As formal distinctions dissolved, "inclusion" became the mode of the day. Otis Guernsey described this in his recap of the "seething ferment" of theater activity in 1977:

> [Y]ou have to follow the action to the ends of the narrow alleys undisturbed since Peter Stuyvesant's day; to lofts reachable only up multiple flights of stairs that would tax the stamina of a Sherpa guide; even across bridges to the *terra incognita* that Brooklyn has become since the Dodgers left. It's been many years since one "off" sufficed to identify this bubbling cauldron of theatre; and now off off scarcely suffices to cover all the contingencies of stage production in New York…. No dimension of off Broadway can be applied exactly. In each *Best Plays* volume we stretch these definitions somewhat in the direction of inclusion— never of exclusion. For example, the word "Manhattan" means what we want it to mean, *Alice in Wonderland*-wise, when we include Brooklyn's Chelsea Theater Center and Academy of Music programs…. The point is that off Broadway isn't an exact location, it's a state of the art (generally advanced), a structure of production costs (generally reduced, but climbing), a level of expertise and effort. The point we must make with increasing emphasis as the seasons pass is that the borderline

between professional off-Broadway and semi-professional off off Broadway (OOB for short) has all but disappeared.[140]

Guernsey's description of this anything-goes state of affairs appropriately emphasizes the confusions, but obscures the distinctions that did remain, and were often coded by factors like sponsor, location, and affiliation. For these crumbling boundaries either made room for hybrid companies like BAT and Everyman, or just marked a continuing inequity along socioeconomic lines. Off-Broadway could be found in Brooklyn, but without a frame of the historic BAM building or the fundraising muscle behind it, other efforts remained in the category of community theatre. The Chelsea was certainly savvy to the shifting standard, and they feared that their art and expertise might be disregarded by virtue of geography. As a consequence, the Chelsea succeeded in bringing Off-Off and Off-Broadway to Downtown Brooklyn, and with it came the theatre-goers with the means to call the Brownstone Assistance Center for details about moving to Brooklyn. With shows like the Chelsea's five-hour long, Obie-winning production of Genet's *The Screens* (with more than forty players) Manhattan theatre-goers could be tempted to the seats of BAM, and later return on a bus that Lichtenstein had chartered for the purposes of shuttling them back. But BAM desperately wanted its gamble of rejuvenation to succeed on a large scale, to create a model that could be sustaining; it was experimenting with many different initiatives at one time, and many of their programming innovations were deemed to be unsustainable.[141]

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[140] Guernsey, 377. Guernsey defined an Off-Broadway production as one with an Equity cast, giving eight performances a week in an Off-Broadway theatre after inviting public comments by critics. The League of Off-Broadway Theatres defined an Off-Broadway theatre as a house seating 499 or fewer and situated in Manhattan outside the area bounded by Fifth and Ninth Avenues between 34th and 56th Streets, and by Fifth Avenue and the Hudson River between 56th and 72nd Streets.

[141] While the BAM Theatre Company is considered a failed endeavor, BAM experimented with many aspects of its programming in these years. The blues/jazz series inaugurated during the 1973-1974 season, for example, featured Odetta, Joe Newman and Friends, John Lee Hooker, Sonny Terry, and many others, but could not be sustained after one more year.

During the height of the fiscal crisis, many residents and city officials were grateful to BAM for its contributions to the mainstream artistic life of the city, and BAM was recognized as a true force in the neighborhood. At BAM, artists of the downtown avant-garde were offered a chance to frame their work in a proscenium setting, no longer confined to the small lofts where they shared their first experiments. Lichtenstein was not just a prescient producer; his loyalty mixed with intuition and foresightedness to lead him to take repeated gambles on artists who initially did not draw crowds, and were occasionally critical failures, as well. But as Julia L. Foulkes argues, BAM's involvement in area development (including the achievement of historic district designations for both Fort Greene and the area immediately surrounding BAM) stayed strong while its relations with neighbors through education and youth grew less visible.[142] The popularity of the *Next Wave* Festival, which began in 1983, only "reinforced the gap" between BAM's programming "and its culturally, economically, and ethnically diverse neighbors."[143] There was a growing schism in its operations that created a bifurcation between its community ties, local development, and embodied theatrical practice.

It Takes a Building

> Well, I'd like to ask where uptown do you perform? I mean, it takes a building. It takes money. It takes an audience to maintain a theatre. With my play, I tried to move it uptown and I couldn't find nothing. …I think that it is the substance in a play and not the location, the substance in a play.
> --Dick Williams, director[144]

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[142] Foulkes, 426. Lloyd Hezekiah, formerly a director of a repertory company at the Bedford-Stuyvesant Youth in Action, had been hired by Lichtenstein to facilitate these goals, but he was not often involved in decisions related to what appeared on BAM's stages, and, more importantly, was at BAM for less than two years before leaving to became Director of the new Brooklyn Children's Museum in 1969. While at BAM, Hezekiah started a concert series featuring young black artists, brought Alvin Ailey to teach affordable dance lessons, and distributed tickets to non-profit organizations and schools. Foulkes, 423. See Edwin Bolwell, "Assistant Director is Appointed by Brooklyn Academy of Music," *New York Times*, July 11, 1967, 28; and Grace Glueck, "No Rush for Reservations," *New York Times*, July 6, 1969, D21.
[143] Foulkes, 427.
[144] "Talking of Black Art, Theatre, Revolution and Nationhood," 31.

In the years after the fiscal crisis, BAM was able to rebound, thanks in part to steps taken by the city government to continue its support. This suggests that the sustained investment in an institution like BAM during times of fiscal austerity does in fact pay increasing returns in the landscape of urban arts activity. However, it raises questions regarding a municipal philosophy: if smaller organizations are neglected during lean periods, what of the delicate ecosystem will be left? BAM proved itself resilient, even in the face of a major flooding in 1977— when BAM's coffers were at its lowest— with the assistance of a high-powered relief committee.[145] Throughout the 1970s, "with government and foundation grants and increasing board support, BAM was able to upgrade and reinvent its physical plant."[146] 1978 brought the long-planned renovation of the entire building, including the opera house. In that period, BAM transformed their second-floor ballroom into the Lepercq Space (now BAM Café), and in 1976, the smaller of the two ground-floor theatres was redesigned into the 1,000-seat Carey Playhouse (now BAM Rose Cinemas). This evolution is significant; the BAM Café and the BAM Rose Cinemas ultimately displaced two theatres dedicated to live performance, leaving only the two larger performance spaces.[147] While grand (and beneficial in terms of optimizing ticket sales), they do not have the flexibility or intimacy of the Lepercq or the Carey.

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[145] In 1977, when a water main broke beneath Ashland Place next to BAM, the city, staff, and Board were all involved in the rescue effort, with an emergency campaign led by Helen Hayes. Mayor Beame appointed an eleven-agency task force, and funds came from the city, state, federal government, foundations, and corporations. After a clean-up crew of 400 city workers moved in, the fall season opened on schedule. See Serafin, 88; and BAM Annual Report, 1977-1978, BAM Archive.

[146] Serafin, 87.

[147] BAM café, which is accessed through the building via escalators, is structured as an open hall, and does occasionally offer free music performances in addition to rentals and patron events.

During Lichtenstein's tenure, BAM delivered new images, new marketing, and a new definition of the neighborhood as performance space.[148] BAM's transformation is justifiably viewed as a success story of urban arts revival, historic preservation, and arts administration, but its rebirth depended upon the energies of many local theatre groups working in tandem with cultural coalitions who consciously dispersed theatre across the network of neighborhoods in need. As neighborhood arts initiatives multiplied and expanded across the borough, they created a wide geographic net of artists who entered into reciprocal arrangements with each other and community. Major institutions—including BAM and Lincoln Center—regularly invited companies indigenous to Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brownsville, and other communities to perform as part of their free outdoors programs, bolstering the artistic reputation of the groups as well as the institution's own profile as responsive to community needs. Demographic change led to new pressures on organizations both large and small to engage the increasingly multi-ethnic communities surrounding their physical plants, birthing a complex record of programming initiatives.

While journalists enjoy the drama of writing about the "lonely crusade" of "presiding genius" Lichtenstein,[149] there were, of course, many other, perhaps even lonelier crusaders. The impact of small theatres—every one that operated out of a church, or performed on Bed-Stuy street corners—might be impossible to quantify or archive, but it is extant in the community histories. Alvin Reiss remained resolute that small, local efforts would have long-standing impact on the country's flailing cities: "Grants should be given openly to culture, not disguised

[148] Charles Ziff, BAM's one-time director of promotion and audience development, is largely credited with BAM's visual reinvention and savvy market segment tailoring. For more on BAM's marketing, see Sandra Tisiot, "Marketing the Avant-Garde at the Brooklyn Academy of Music," MA thesis., American University, 1990.
[149] James Traub, "The (Not Easy) Building of (Not Exactly) Lincoln Center for (Not Manhattan)," *New York Times,* April 25, 2004, accessed January 7, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/25/magazine/the-not-easy-building-of-not-exactly-lincoln-center-for-not-manhattan.html.

as grants for training, education, or anything else. A performing arts group in the ghetto is providing an essential service to the community, not unlike welfare, education or health care. It should not be seeking a handout, but reimbursement for its services."[150] Brooklyn's working-class image threatened to unsettle stable barriers between Off-Off, Off-Broadway, and location; was it something for the "dems" and "douse" to enjoy in the outer boroughs, or for powerful Boards to save and exalt? Was there physical space and political viability for distinct theatrical practices in a protracted funding landscape? BAM facilitated the intellectual and cultural elite's recast of Brooklyn as relevant during a time of dire need. *Next Wave* literally meant that there was a future, and it was international and avant-garde in its scope, less concerned with racial tensions and urban blight. If all of the bifurcation of aesthetics, the segregation of communities, and the pathetic funding landscape could be subsumed by the great possibilities of BAM, theatre in Brooklyn could represent a new vision of urban outer-borough performance.

Some critics argued that the Next Wave neglected emerging experimental artists and focused only on commissions for high-profile artists. Critics noticed the departure of the companies that "helped define a purpose and a philosophy" for BAM.[151] Others remarked on the inverse relationship between the Next Wave box office gross and its willingness to challenge; its failure to engage or acknowledge an audience in any way; and the "self-congratulatory air" in its lobby where patrons toasted their "being in the right place seeing exactly the right work."[152] A related issue was the loss of performances by companies relevant to audiences on a more local scale: community-based theatrical groups that tethered BAM to the surrounding neighborhoods.

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[150] Quoted in Eddy, 405.
[151] Gautam Dasgupta, "BAM's Next Wave II: The Avant-Garde in the Marketplace. What Next?" *Performing Arts Journal* 8 (1984): 52.
[152] Gerald Rabkin, "The Academy of Fashion: Beach Hits the Wave at BAM," *Performing Arts Journal* 9 (1985): 47-53; Brian Walsh, "Murder by Timidity: BAM's Next Wave and Classic Revivals," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 25 (May 2003): 83-87; Jill Dolan, "Seeing and Being Seen: The Avant-Garde and Other Egotists," *The Hudson Review* 39 (Spring 1986): 114.

Many of these companies were not able to sustain themselves through the fiscal crisis, or to engage in extended experimentation.[153] While the city cautiously emerged from the throes of fiscal crisis, BAM benefitted from support for *Next Wave* from a range of governmental agencies.

Those theatre-goers who "met" BAM through its *Next Wave* Festival in 1983 missed a decade of experimentation that showcased a changing Brooklyn through the lives of its residents. But as *Next Wave* became the centerpiece of BAM's seasons, the question of local audiences lost currency. As the local turned to the global, a utopian understanding of diversity displaced the impetous to acknowledge differences in cultures and lives that might exist mere blocks away from BAM's doors and require their own time on its stages. There was a growing sense that BAM could be seen as not a part of, but rather interchangeable with the borough. This trick of branding-- just as luxury apartment complexes would soon be marketed as stand-in for *being* the borough—allowed BAM's stage to become a representative of a borough-wide ethos of diversity that did not need to extend to philosophies of community control or local, autonomous cultural organizations. Mee described a 1999 performance at BAM of *Morning Song*, by Jan Lauwers' Needcompany from Brussels:

> In short, Lauwers lives in a multination democracy, where no one story is privileged above all others, no one destiny, no one family narrative dominates the known world, but rather many points of view, many sets of values, many histories and ideals for the future learn to coexist. This is called globalism, but it might also be called Brooklyn, a cluster of

[153] As with many companies, BTA members struggled with material realities as well as relationships between community leaders, boards, donors, and artistic directors. Robert Macbeth's New Lafayette Theatre (1966-1972) was among the first to close; Stewart's Bed-Stuy Theatre was open from 1965 to 1973. The Everyman Theater, which I expand upon in Chapter 4, extended through the decade in numerous incarnations. Financial deprivation only added stress to divisions around programming choices, and artistic mission and vision. Unfortunately, many of the companies could not sustain themselves long enough to draw conclusions through extended experimentation. See Hay, 177; and Sell, *Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism,* 260.

> neighborhoods whose population is largely foreign-born-- not second or third generation, but foreign-born-- the embodiment of a vibrant, resourceful cultural identity.[154]

While Mee points to a level of diversity that exists across the entire borough, his essay casts BAM not in the category of the nation, the city, or the neighborhood, but as the global. BAM endeavored during the 1970s to attract audiences that might reflect the census data version of the city in its diversity, located near the heart of Brooklyn's uniqueness as a borough. But it now flirts dangerously with a mere commercialization of difference, one that avoids engagement with the borough's continued racial segregation and class apartheid.[155] As a consequence, Mee's attempt to integrate coexistence with Brooklyn and BAM's stages feels misplaced, the victim of a cosmopolitan vision of globalism that is a "cluster of neighborhoods" within which socioeconomic difference melts away.

In Miranda Joseph's critique of the fetishization of "community" (especially during times of crisis), she cautions against discourses of globalization that build temporal narratives "of historical rupture" that supplement a spatial narrative "that renders the local" autonomous from other communities or localities.[156] While there is reason to be cautious, the case study of BAM's progression does provide a glimpse at how the particularity of certain social relationships in the city were increasingly evacuated from the stages at BAM. If the two—"globalism" and "Brooklyn"-- comfortably co-exist at BAM, the conspicuous absence on BAM's stages of companies that operated similarly to Everyman or the BTA indicates changed political and fiscal contexts, as well as a loss of continuity for a brief legacy of neighborhood arts.

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[154] Mee, 12.

[155] "Racial separation by itself might not be of any great concern, but it also correlates strongly with class apartheid," writes urban planner Tom Angotti, whose 2008 book includes maps of the below poverty-level neighborhoods in New York. Tom Angotti, *New York For Sale* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 49.

[156] Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 149.

On the one hand, Downtown Brooklyn's theatrical development during this period is an argument for organizations like the Lower East Side's Cooper Square Committee (discussed in Chapter 1): a mutual association that acted as intermediary for the neighborhood priorities and adjudicated questions of unused buildings in the 1970s. With their facilitation, independent theatrical upstarts like La Mama acquired permanent spaces. In the absence of such an organization, BAM was able to become a unique cultural center on the order of what city officials had imagined in the early 1960s. However, even the achievement of the BAM Cultural District suggested that inclusion was not necessarily the dominant trend. The brief period in which a combination of pan-neighborhood, local, grassroots theatre companies like BTA and traveling street theatre all converged on BAM's stages suggests that organizations like BACA as well as an established, "elite" institution like BAM were both essential. While it is true that Lichtenstein battled heroically, he had an army— comrades, in fact— of theatre artists who redefined the cultural spaces of the borough. Unlike the Lower East Side, however, very few of those companies were then installed with longevity on the map of downtown Brooklyn.

Chapter 4

Cooling the Slums:
Coney Island, Lincoln Center, and the Long Shadow of Moses

Fair? Well, there's no fairness in war, is there?
--Ed Bullins[1]

The inclusion of Coney Island in a study of the relationship between the fiscal crisis and localized performance during the 1970s in New York City may at first appear counter intuitive. By 1972, decades of failed policies had transformed the seaside neighborhood into a graveyard of large-scale urban projects and weathered amusement icons. The majority of the district's traditional performance venues (such as Henderson's Music Hall and the Shore Theater) were closed, relegated to inoperable shells that commemorated past glories. Its historic amusement areas—Dreamland, Luna Park, and Steeplechase—held currency as nostalgic keystones, but its built forms, like the Parachute Jump and the Ferris Wheel, were aging, sentimental landmarks. The neo-burlesque revival that has received attention from some performance scholars and many mass media outlets did not wash up on its shores with vigor until 1983.[2]

Yet Coney Island is a site of contradictions, and this working-class neighborhood is also an amusement district and entertainment zone, one that averts and inverts efforts to situate it in a stable location. This is especially true during this period of profound neglect and divestment. In order to identify the shape and movement of Coney Island's itinerant theatres, I incorporate a second site into my analysis of Coney Island: Lincoln Center. The arts complex has surfaced

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[1] Ed Bullins, *Ed Bullins: Twelve Plays and Selected Writings*, Mike Sell, ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 3.
[2] Trav S.D., "New Burlesque: Old Enough for a Look Back," *The Villager* 80, May 12-18, 2011, accessed January 22, 2013, http://www.thevillager.com/villager_420/newburlesque.html; and Jane Rose, "Should You or Shouldn't You?: A Guide to Experiencing the Great Fredini's 'This Or That!'" *Free Williamsburg* 29, August 2002, accessed January 22, 2013, http://freewilliamsburg.com/august_2002/burlesque.html.

previously in this dissertation—as a foil for Joseph Papp and as competition for Broadway audiences. Lincoln Center and Coney Island are in many ways historical opposites and opposing sites; one born at the turn of the century and invested in vulgar, colorful thrills, the other at the height of the Cold War and oriented towards high-brow audiences. The latter is the most elite performance destination in New York City; it houses the Metropolitan Opera, the New York City Ballet, The Juilliard School, and seven other cultural organizations. Located on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, Lincoln Center is in walking distance to Central Park and is surrounded by gourmet restaurants, designer retail stores, and five-star hotels. Coney Island inhabits a different end of the cultural spectrum of the city: known for hotdogs and cotton candy, it attracts subway-riding beach-goers and offers seasonal, outdoor amusements that elicit shrieks and screams. (Lincoln Center's website, on the other hand, includes instructions on "when to applaud" during events.[3]) Their socioeconomic characteristics evidence the polarities between neighborhoods: Coney Island's poverty rate is over twenty-eight percent with an unemployment rate of ten percent, compared to the Upper West Side's poverty rate of ten percent and almost five percent unemployment.[4] A shared figure and influence between them, however, is Robert Moses, and both spaces factored into the propagation of street performance during the 1970s.

Whereas in previous chapters I focused on discrete spaces, in Coney Island I investigate a district constantly moving, shifting, and changing—what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari refer to as the desire to escape codification or to "de-code."[5] I intentionally do not incorporate the lineage of thought that inscribes Coney Island as a "non-site." I eschew theories centered on a

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[3] Lincoln Center, "Attending an Event," http://lc.lincolncenter.org/visitor-guide/attend-an-event, accessed March 15, 2013.

[4] All data is from 2010. Residents of Coney Island (fifty-three percent) are also more likely to have been born outside of the United States than residents in the city as a whole (compared with twenty-two percent of foreign-born residents on the Upper West Side). "State of the City's Housing and Neighborhoods," Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy, New York University, http://furmancenter.org/research/sonychan/, accessed March 14, 2013.

[5] Gilles Deleuze and Féliz Guattari, "What is a Minor Literature?" trans. Robert Brinkley, *Mississippi Review* 11 (Winter/Spring 1983): 13.

reading of Coney Island as a "heterotopia," for while I have benefitted from their insights, this category relies on the isolation and emphasis of its carnivalesque characteristics.[6] I choose to focus instead on ideas of territorialized space, employed by a wide range of scholars critiquing a place-focused concept of culture and the decontextualization of a set of relations. Frequently employed in descriptions of the cultural effects of globalization, this language captures unstable borders and sweeping migrations of people in the last half-century. Adapted from Deleuze and Guattari's lexicon of political and aesthetic philosophy, de- and re-territorialization illustrate the philosophers' "consistent desire to demonstrate the ways in which aesthetic forms can denaturalize the social and political differences that we take as natural."[7] This term is particularly appropriate for a study of street performance during a period of vast population change in New York City, accompanied by the re-coding of certain neighborhoods during the crisis. In Coney Island, I emphasize "shifting locations rather than bounded fields" to analyze the creation of new territorialities.[8] Rather than finding reproductions of old territory in a new environment, constant negotiation "avoids the assumption of an essential past and suggests creativity on the part of people using space to construct meaning."[9] (It should be noted that a thorny problem in writings about performance in Coney Island is the unending return to an essentialized past.) Rather than contribute to the body of work that investigates the contours of Coney Island as a bounded space

[6] Michel Foucault theorized carnivals as "temporal heterotopias," and in part owing to Rem Koolhaus's 1978 evocation of Coney Island in *Delirious New York*, numerous scholars have written about the amusement area as a heterotopic space. See, for example, Eliza Darling, "Nature's Carnival: The Ecology of Pleasure at Coney Island," in *In the Nature of Cities: Urban Political Ecology and the Politics of Urban Metabolism,* ed. Nik Heynen, Mari Kaika and Erik Swyngedouw (New York: Routledge, 2006); Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (New York: Monacelli, 1997).
[7] Ian MacKenzie and Robert Porter, *Dramatizing the Political: Deleuze and Guattari* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillian, 2011), 47.
[8] Nicholas Harney, "Building Italian Regional Identity in Toronto: Using Space to Make Culture Material," *Anthropologica* 44 (2002): 44.
[9] Ibid.

of urban spectacle, I seek to maintain the Lefebvrian rhythm of everyday life, to conceptualize Coney Island not only as a place for play, but as a place to live, work, and perform.

I will use performance examples to denaturalize certain social and political differences between Coney Island and other neighborhood performance practices. This will demonstrate the ways that performances during the fiscal crisis frequently separated performers from their context as residents of neighborhoods of neglect. As specific spaces were swapped for the new territories of performance, specific class relations and political necessities were submerged. Which subjects had the ability to cross boundaries into new locations? What was generated, and what was hidden? Radical performance was re-territorialized to enact the exclusions and significations it sought to address. This chapter investigates the variables that circumscribed movement: the transition of Bread and Puppet Theatre from the Lower East Side to Coney Island (and then to rural Vermont); and the corner performances of the Everyman Company reterritorialized in the supposedly neutral square of Lincoln Center. As with every process of de-territorialization, something new was produced; new representations of Coney Island, or institutions and organizations involved, of street performance practice.

This framework is particularly useful for understanding the structure of encounters in Coney Island. Class divisions were encoded in the amusement area geography, but as a "stage" for the city, Coney Island historically attracted people of different classes and backgrounds, with an emphasis on the movements of masses, crowds, and immigrant populations. Its amusements relied on new technologies of transportation, from time travel to simulations of lands far away. On the map of the city, Coney Island, far from the downtown of Brooklyn or Manhattan and perched on the Atlantic Ocean, symbolized escape and arrival. During the 1970s, when the subway system was in disrepair and its streets suffered fires and abandonment, the peninsula

signified a space that was difficult to leave; a failed story of misguided urban policies delimited the "upward" mobility of residents. Coney Island then served as a potent visual signifier of urban blight, a representational trope that has been enshrined in film, television, and theatrical depictions of urban loss.

While I take into account the force of these popular media images that grabbed hold in the late 1970s, I focus on the local, participatory arts initiatives by theatre companies impelled by the philosophies of accessibility. These were viewed in the early years of the 1970s as mechanisms for urban regeneration but lost support through the decade. Coney Island was a hostile and fertile terrain for street performance, a genre in which the temporal context is "the duration not of the show but of the struggle."[10] In order to convey the complexity of the struggle in Coney Island as it unfolded in the arena of performance practices, I will analyze performance migrations to and from Coney Island and the space of Lincoln Center. This configured new spaces of representation, and, I argue, re-territorialization, of urban street performance. To do this, I first look briefly at the post-1950s history of street performance in "ghetto neighborhoods" as part of anti-poverty programs. I highlight the formation of the Lincoln Center Street Performance Festival, which capitalized on the diverse street performance explosion of the 1960s and early 1970s to recast itself as a space for egalitarian and democratic performance. I then analyze two companies that operated in Coney Island during this period, the Bread and Puppet Theatre and the Everyman Company, and contrast their working processes and production methods. In both examples, the movement of residents and performers between racially polarized public spaces produced forms of intercultural performance that showcased the divides and

[10] Jan Cohen-Cruz, ed., *Radical Street Performance: An International Anthology* (London: Routledge, 1998), 2.

conflicts across the city and the great distances between the sites of Coney Island and Lincoln Center.

Street Performance: Ghetto Arts, Urban Coalitions

Many city arts programs for minority youth in inner city neighborhoods in the 1960s operated on the assumption that restless youth, with "their older brothers raring to rumble, their oldest brothers off in Vietnam with the volunteer army," needed to be engaged "to cool it in the streets."[11] One precedent for these engagements in New York City was the work of playwright Maryat Lee, credited by some as the pioneer of this brand of street and community-based performance.[12] In April 1951, *Dope!*, her play about the drug trafficking that flourished in Harlem after the war, was performed outside of a decaying tenement on 100th Street and Lexington Avenue.[13] Later, when Lee taught a course in street theatre at the New School, a VISTA volunteer familiar with *Dope!* connected Lee to students at Benjamin Franklin High School, a school in East Harlem with one of the highest addiction levels in the state. Lee's collaborations with them became East Harlem's Soul and Latin Theater (SALT).[14] Lee created scenarios that she developed and rehearsed with an untrained group of Black and Puerto Rican teenagers, always inspired by social problems: *After the Fashion Show* (homosexuality); *Day by Day* (drugs); and *The Classroom* (impoverished schools).[15] In his review of SALT's 1968 show on 117th Street off First Avenue, critic Dan Sullivan praised the company for its evocation of "the fabled ritual power of drama, its ability to speak not just to an audience but for it, and with

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[11] Stefan Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1988), 191, vol. 2.
[12] William W. French, *Maryat Lee's Ecotheater: A Theater for the Twenty-First Century* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 1998).
[13] Ibid., 2.
[14] Dan Sullivan, "Theater in East Harlem: The Outdoor Audience Gets Into the Act," *New York Times*, August 30, 1968, 101.
[15] Ibid.

it," an experience "our finest downtown playwrights and directors try for and miss."[16] The company was a beneficiary of 1960s federal anti-poverty programs that included arts and culture, and received subsidies from the government and the Vincent Astor Foundation.[17] This public money provided sources of income for many African-American and Puerto Rican artists at a time when opportunities to develop their training were far and few between.

Inched along by this national trend and the city-based efforts of major figures like Joseph Papp (who battled Robert Moses over his theatre in Central Park in the 1950s), the city now acknowledged the arts as a useful tool against urban disintegration. They imagined that performance on street corners could keep the unruly streets safe in the summer, and Mayor John Lindsay's deep-seated fear that the race riots of Detroit and other urban areas would spread to his city[18] positioned New York State at the forefront of the movement to replace passive forms of arts support in "ghetto" areas with participatory ones.[19] Courtney Callender, who served as deputy commissioner of the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA), associate director of the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), and director of the Studio Museum in Harlem, believed that as far as the arts were concerned, the segment of New York's population that was most able to take advantage of Mayor Lindsay's brand of open governance were African Americans in the city. For a brief period, the DCA worked to set the pace in the trend that dominated the

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Anti-poverty packages commonly consisted of a pre-school program (Head Start), an economic development program, and an arts and culture piece that was often recreational. The performing arts became a popular element for the latter, as it generated "a better head count of both participants and audience." Courtney Callender, "Bringing It All Back Home: Community Access to the Arts," *New York Affairs* 4 (Winter 1978): 90.

[18] Coney Island experienced rioting in 1968, ten days after Martin Luther King was assassinated. Writer Charles Denson argues that this was the beginning of a negative publicity onslaught by the press, from which Coney Island did not recover. Charles Denson, *Coney Island: Lost and Found* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2002), 142-43. See also, Alexander Von Hoffman, *House by House, Block by Block: The Rebirth of America's Urban Neighborhoods* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

[19] SALT in 1968 was not an isolated example; Lyndon Johnson's Office of Economic Opportunity funded the formation of Amiri Baraka's (then LeRoi Jones') Black Arts Repertory Theater School (BARTS) in 1965, through a federal antipoverty program, Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited (HARYOU). See Harry Elam, Jr., *Taking It to the Streets: The Social Protest Theater of Luis Valdez and Amiri Baraka* (Ann Arbor: the University of Michigan Press, 1997), 2.

community arts movement: decentralization.[20] This created tensions that weighed heavily on considerations of performance practices throughout the 1970s. In a public debate between Robert Macbeth of the New Lafayette Theater and Mel Gussow of the *New York Times*, Macbeth chided Gussow for referring to an Ed Bullins production at the New Lafayette Theater as "defiantly parochial." Although Gussow had written a glowing review, Macbeth took exception to the suggestion that the theatre

> should have been something other than what they were, or that they would have been more universal "on or off Broadway"…. Gussow, it seems, is saying that Black artists can and will and should only achieve full presence in his view when they are performing in *his* theatre, for *him* and *his audience*, like it was during slavery time…and still is for some. Then he would be spared the long journey to the "narrow province" of Harlem. Harlem would come to him. And the artists of the province would insure that a transistorized translator would interpret their petty offerings for his "more universal" intelligence.[21]

Macbeth articulates the fear that the expectation that a company would leave its home base to perform in a location deemed more suitable for critics might deterritorialize his theatre, and divorce the play for another, seemingly more universal context. For Macbeth, this signified an attempt to re-order the values and priorities of the work—including the rules by which it was critically evaluated. Callender understood decentralization to be inextricable from the demand for local facilities by communities motivated by ethnic pride, opportunity, and a richer quality of

[20] Callender, "Bringing it All Back Home," 90. Callender was appointed in 1966 to serve as the head of the Park's Department's first office of Community Relations, and was the agency's first high-ranking African-American official. For more on Callender's later influence as the head of the Studio Museum, see Andrea Alison Burns, "'Show me My Soul!': The Evolution of the Black Museum Movement in Postwar America" (dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2008).
[21] Robert Macbeth, "Parochialism," *New York Times*, April 11, 1971, D18.

life in their neighborhoods. But an equally vocal viewpoint saw decentralization as a crisis: with its relentless focus on quantity, not quality, it threatened to privilege "opportunities" over merit.[22] It also represented increased demands for arts resources.

This trend to expand and decentralize theatre across locations in the city was related to—although not synonymous with—actions on the state-level that were meant to bring equity to arts funding and support. Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller founded the Ghetto Arts Program (GAP) in 1966, and in 1967, John B. Hightower, the Executive Director of NYSCA, appointed Vinnette Carroll as Director. Carroll viewed it as an overdue and yet potentially misguided initiative. After an experience in Watts, Los Angeles with the Inner City Repertory Company, Carroll did not want "the Ghetto Arts project to be an ineffectual community unit because of Eurocentric male autonomy in the governance of the program."[23] Hightower heeded Carroll's warnings, and they founded GAP on a radical premise: "to find out what the ghetto community wanted rather than what we, as an outside agency, decided it should have."[24] Carroll's background was appropriate for the challenge; she studied with Erwin Piscator at the New School and with Lee Strasberg at the Actor's Studio, and after years of stage appearances in New York, she joined the federally subsidized Inner City Repertory Company in Watts. "I got a great deal of satisfaction from it and I think I learned a lot about how it helps to divert hostility…. I think the whole thing with art is that anger is healthy because it's a positive state. If you can find a way to harness it, I believe you'll have fewer riots."[25] Following Carroll's NYSCA-funded study of cultural deficits in urban neighborhoods, they empowered her to direct a $350,000 budget, and she undertook two

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[22] Joseph Wesley Zeigler, "Centrality Without Philosophy: The Crisis in the Arts," *New York Affairs* 4 (Winter 1978): 12-23.
[23] Calvin A. McClinton, *The Work of Vinnette Carroll: An African American Theatre Artist* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), 94.
[24] Junius Eddy, "Government, the Arts, and Ghetto Youth," *Public Administration Review* 30 (July/August 1970): 402.
[25] Vinnette Carroll, quoted in Louis Calta, "Vinnette Carroll Gets a State Post: Actress-Director is Head of Ghetto Arts Program," *New York Times*, March 23, 1968, 23.

projects: the Urban Arts Corp and "Summer on Wheels," the latter of which provided free theatre performances to ghetto residents.

Carroll was a savvy administrator, and she no doubt sensed that the program's support hinged in part on the belief that theatre in communities could "cool" slum areas, an upside she eluded to in interviews about GAP. In 1968, she described her design of the state-wide project as one that would "involve community participation in the arts, train Negroes and Puerto Ricans as performers and develop opportunities for professional artists to perfect their craft," and noted that "in addition, she hopes to help keep the slum areas cooler this summer."[26] She eventually trained a core of twenty-five performers, and the project expanded from summer to year-round. Hightower explained GAP's goal this way: "Community theater in the ghetto is a startling thing. There is no interest in rehashed versions of *Our Town* or *The Matchmaker*. The themes are drugs, Black-White intransigence, family strain. Theater can articulate these concerns in a way that other things don't. The aim is for participation, not just spectator audiences."[27] This was a sea change from the vision of recreation for inner-city neighborhoods in the past, dominated by the delivery of the classical canon, or one-time visits from established arts institutions.

The Urban Arts Cops became the Urban Arts Theatre when Carroll resigned from her NYSCA position, and it maintained its emphasis on accessibility for both audiences and performers. McCandlish Phillips of the *Times* penned one of the company's first reviews, at the very beginning of its decade-long career: "The audience, half-black, half-white, included boys off the playground in tee shirts and sneakers in the first row, college-age youths in open-neck shirts in the second row, middle-aged couples, an editor, and at least two artist's agents scouting

[26] Hightower, quoted in Ibid.
[27] McClinton, *The Work of Vinnette Carroll,* 96.

talent. The range of sophistication was as broad as that of the Manhattan telephone book."[28] Carroll was adamant that without the state-subsidy for the Urban Arts Corp, her only stage life would be "that 'Dinner is served' stuff," and her company never abandoned its two-pronged mission: to showcase new, young black talent, and to "bring theatre to the people" by performing all over the city.[29] In 1971, their *Croesus and Witch*, conceived and directed by Carroll and dramatized by composer Micki Grant, traveled the city's neighborhoods, touring parks and streets before returning to their west side location.[30] Yet even with the success of *Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope*, which performed at the Edison Theater on Broadway for more than two years, the 1970s was a time of unending fiscal stress for Carroll's organization. Their non-profit budget of $120,000 per year was nurtured by funding from NYSCA, box office receipts, Carroll's and Grant's royalties from *Cope*, and contracts from the city to perform during the summer in city parks—although that money eventually dried up, too.[31] Until the fiscal crisis, the city's support of outdoor theatre was comparatively robust, and it is therefore not surprising that Carroll's troupe and others like it continually gravitated towards street theatre. While money is not the sole determinant of the stability of a theatre, its proportional influence is articulated by Ric Knowles, who defines money and working conditions as fundamental framing circumstances that "shape meaning in the theatre to a degree that equals any other."[32] In the case of Carroll's group, financial predicaments constantly shaped the scope and range of her theatre activities. It was therefore a marriage of necessities—the city's search for ways to temper the streets, and arts groups engaged with the fabric of ghetto communities—that street performance produced moments of encounter between them.

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[28] McCandlish Phillips, "Urban Arts Corps Offers Two Plays on Negro Life," *New York Times*, August 29, 1969, 25.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Mel Gussow, "'Croesus and Witch' Goes to 20th Street," *New York Times*, August 27, 1971, 18.
[31] Ronald Smothers, "Black Repertory Troupe is 'Coping' With Success," *New York Times*, March 23, 1975, 49.
[32] Ric Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 53.

The Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs administration sponsored a growing number of street theater groups; in 1966, it financed four groups, and by 1971 that number was twenty.[33] In 1970, during a summer that boasted 1,250 performances and a budget of $800,000 from the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Administration, one company, Ernie McClintock's Afro-American Street Theater, used a three-level platform stage and a generator truck to perform on Evergreen Avenue in Bushwick, Brooklyn.[34] *Where It's At—70* was sponsored by the Mayor's Urban Action Task Force and the DCA, and the six-member troupe became accustomed to the mixed reactions evoked by their messages of black pride and avoidance of drugs, depending upon the neighborhood. The subject matter of these shows featured topics of relevance to urban communities, and the "cooling the streets" philosophy was challenged by a newly diverse administration. The Parks Administrator, August Heckscher, "thought the proliferation of street theater groups, reaching into poor neighborhoods, had helped the city 'cool' during potentially explosive hot summers."[35] Callender, his African-American Deputy Commissioner, challenged that idea: "I don't have much faith in keeping people cool by entertaining them, but maybe that's because I'm black. But people do give money for that reason and we're happy to take it."[36] This is an early intimation of a viewpoint that Callender would express more forcefully in the years to come: the arts in New York City had undergone a great change since 1966, and severe fiscal problems meant that the cultural resources of the city were highly dependent on the quality of leadership at City Hall.

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[33] James M. Markham, "Street Theater Troupes Find the Play's Their Thing," *New York Times*, August 6, 1971, 62.
[34] McCandlish Phillips, "1,250 Performances Are Given Here During Season," *New York Times* August 27, 1970, 41. About nine hundred and eighty of the summer's 1,250 free shows were mounted by the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Administration, working with the Urban Coalition, foundations, block associations, civic groups, and private donors.
[35] Heckscher, quoted in Markham, "Street Theater Troupes Find the Play's Their Thing," 62.
[36] Callender, quoted in Ibid.

Callender realized that this was not an insignificant source of support for the city's minority artists; two-thirds of the twenty troupes financed in 1971 identified as black or Puerto Rican companies, and received $120,000 from the city and $120,000 more raised by the Urban Coalition, as well as an additional $100,00 given directly to the street theater groups by foundations and private companies.[37] Many presented theatre in the streets during the summers as corollaries of their larger performance activities, with one funding stream feeding the other. This was a high point for the production, promotion, and support of street theatre troupes across the five boroughs of New York City. The Alliance of Latin Arts performed *West Side Story* in Damrosch Park to audiences four thousand strong, and the "message of community-pride-through-theater" was broadcast across media outlets.[38] In addition to the companies that received direct monies, dozens and dozens of other groups operated independently. These street theatre events were direct descendents of the concerns—and contradictions-- of the activists who argued that "public space belongs to the people, whether for performance or protest."[39] Joseph Papp's Mobile Theatre Unit was one node of this movement; the Street Theatre of the Black Arts Movement represented another.

Local initiatives evoked the frustrations of inner city neighborhoods tethered to the public crisis. Some of these performance disruptions can be understood in the context of dissent against austerity measures and governmental neglect. But they should also be understood as cross-cultural theatre practices that entailed "a process of encounter and negotiation between different

[37] Markham, "Street Theater Troupes Find the Play's Their Thing," 62.
[38] Ibid., 33.
[39] Mimi Gisolfi D'Aponte, "*Everyman and roach* in Retrospect: A Study of Street Theatre that Worked," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (Spring 1990): 165. D'Aponte has also researched the phenomenal growth of street festivals during the 1970s. Mimi Gisolfi D'Aponte, "Good Friday: Street Theater in New York," *Other Stages* 5 (March 24, 1983): 8.

cultural sensibilities," to varying degrees and in varying forms of development and execution.[40] At the time, Callender acknowledged the need for sensitivity around neighborhood placement and cultural boundaries. He noted that "if a musical group playing nothing but hepped-up muzak comes into a black neighborhood it may be met with fruit, eggs, rocks."[41] Callender emphasized the meeting of artists and residents/spectators, but equally significant were the engagements between residents/artists and host institutions. Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert provide imprecise yet helpful terminologies for this brand of theatre: in multicultural theatre, the terms ghetto theatre, migrant theatre and community theatre offer different nuances and shadings, with social engagement emerging most strongly in community theatre through oppositional practices and a concern for cultural democracy.[42] Intracultural theatre is described as cultural encounters between and across communities and regions within one nation-state and highlights the deep fragments and divides in society.[43] There was a gaping divide between cultural hierarchies and their inscriptions in spatial politics. Its textures are evidenced by the development of Lincoln Center's annual outdoor summer festival: the complex provided a Manhattan platform for these locally based energies in an effort to reflect the ideals of the civic center. As an institution, Lincoln Center strained to build a reputation as a community resource, not destroyer. Historian Julia Foulkes describes the annual summer street festival as one of their efforts in the 1970s that attempted to connect the original, populist definition of the center—to expand the definition of the arts and democratic ideals—with a time of dramatic change in the city's demographics.[44] But

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[40] Lo and Gilbert employ "cross-cultural" theatre as an umbrella term encompassing a range of theatrical practices. Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert, "Towards a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis," *The Drama Review* 46 (Fall 2002): 31.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 34.
[43] Ibid., 38.
[44] Julia Foulkes, "Streets and Stages: Urban Renewal and the Arts After World War II," *Journal of Social History* 44 (Winter 2010): 415.

in the street theatre carousel of New York City, the slums visited Lincoln Center, and in doing so highlighted the failed aspects of urban renewal policies.

Lincoln Center and the Public Good

Historian Samuel Zipp articulates the ways in which the Lincoln Center project exhibited both the promise and the perils of urban renewal. Lincoln Center was the "largest, most ambitious, far-reaching, and idealistic of New York's urban renewal efforts."[45] In addition to the performing arts center, it also included a luxury housing complex, a campus for Fordham University, and a headquarters for the Red Cross. It is seen either as "the crowning achievement of renewal" under Robert Moses and as envisioned by John D. Rockefeller III, or the bulldozing of working-class communities in favor of institutional projects that fit the urban liberal mission to provide a "symbol of national cultural maturity and urban resurgence that could be brandished in the Cold War with the Soviet Union."[46] On April 21, 1955, the Mayor's Slum Clearance Committee (of which Robert Moses was chairman) designated Lincoln Square for urban renewal. Moses admitted that the public purpose of Lincoln Center "was not to build theatres or to build anything else. The public purpose was to clear slums."[47] Over the next two years, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc. was formed and incorporated, with Rockfeller as President, and prominent individual arts organizations signed on one-by-one as constituents. In 1959, President Dwight D. Eisenhower celebrated its groundbreaking, and throughout the 1960s its component parts opened, including the Philharmonic (1962), the Film Festival (1963), the

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[45] Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 159-61.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Robert Moses, quoted in Alvin H. Reiss, "Who Builds Theatres and Why?" *The Drama Review: TDR* 12 (Spring 1968): 83.

Lincoln Center Fountain (1964), and the Vivian Beaumont Theater and the Forum (1965).[48] By the time the majority of Lincoln Center's planned physical infrastructure and programming initiatives developed, it was the 1970s, and the fiscal crisis exacerbated the urban renewal fatigue brought about by large projects like Lincoln Center.[49] Disagreements over individual elements of the development simmered and occasionally flared. A debate raged over whether the transformation of the Lincoln Center area was worth its difficulties; its theatres met constant financial problems, leadership changes, and public criticism. Lincoln Center theatres suffered bruising early years in its finances and programs, plagued by a series of embarrassments in the press regarding corrective work on the finished buildings.[50] Its many infrastructure problems—which often required expensive solutions, paid for by the city— challenged the bedrock commitment of the government (and its residents) towards the ambitious complex. The litany of costly material problems that confronted the Lincoln Center Executive Committee sparked debates regarding public expenditures for the arts-- the size, shape, and philosophy.[51] Still, Lincoln Center benefitted from a continual outpouring of funds and structured support, proffered

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[48] Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, http://www.aboutlincolncenter.org/about/history/archive-1960, accessed March 5, 2013.

[49] As I described in Chapter 2, any large-scale public development represented a remarkably ambitious political undertaking at this time. Mayor Beame had lost political currency in the forfeiture that gave the bankers who held the city's bonds, and then the state-created Municipal Assistance Corporation, "decision-making powers over the life of the city." Sagalyn, *Times Square Roulette,* 5-6.

[50] On the day of the first subscription performance of *La Traviata* at the Opera House, the stage was immobilized when the stage elevators jammed. In one evening, there were nineteen accidents in the plaza outside of the Opera House. The steps leading down to the plaza needed repair, but since they were owned by the city, months passed before action was taken. In the State Theater, a basement rehearsal room floor cracked and sank after a water main break; acoustical problems in Philharmonic Hall required complete replacement of the entire ceiling; the budget for the Juilliard complex ballooned to $29.7 million by 1967; the Library and Museum were plagued with ventilation problems; and in the Vivian Beaumont Theater, the central issue was a malfunctioning automated lightboard. Even the outdoor reflective pool had problems, in the form of leaks that the city's contractor was unable to fix. Edgar B. Young, *Lincoln Center: The Building of an Institution* (New York: New York University Press, 1980), 263-71.

[51] By 1968, the total capital requirement was $178.2 million, and a capital fund raising campaign commenced in earnest. An important factor was the collaboration between private philanthropic and governmental efforts. For each dollar of public funds, four came from the private sector. Ibid., 278.

by both public and private sources; the parallel and systematic disinvestment in Coney Island's sites of performance in the same decades emerges as particularly glaring.

Lincoln Center's critics were not limited to displaced residents. The Center desired creative partnerships and solid constitutent relations, but awakened to the reality that they could not even make peace among their nine autonomous organizations, many of which resented that the Center itself was a competitor in fund raising.[52] The Executive Director of NYSCA, Eric Larrabee, feared since the inception of the Center that it "would become an isolated fortress, sealed off in monolithic separation from the city," and admitted that he "must have said all the mean things one can think of about Lincoln Center."[53] Its Board held fast to the idea that the cultural center would eventually enjoy greater participation from a broader representation of community leaders. Lincoln Center addressed unfavorable impressions of its activities through numerous mechanisms, including the annual Lincoln Center Community/Street Theater Festival (now called "Out of Doors"), which harnessed the enthusiasm around outdoor performance across the city and forced Larrabee to admit to "eating crow" as an "enthusiastic convert."[54]

In 1971, Lincoln Center hired a full-time liaison for community relations, Leonard de Paur. He worked with borough arts councils, created educational initiatives, and planned the August street theatre festival. De Paur acknowledged that he had a difficult job, and pledged to "try to dissipate the resentment some people still have against Lincoln Center as a place only for the well-to-do."[55] In August of 1971, the Everyman-Community Theater Festival was launched as a two-week festival of street theater groups, with Broadway actress Geraldine Fitzgerald one

[52] These organizations faced higher costs of operations in their new homes at the complex, and feared that Lincoln Center's appeals for contributions could reduce the amount that they could raise. In 1969, the Executive Committee blamed their fundraising difficulties on "racial tensions," as corporations had changed their level of giving in order to divert the funds to "more pressing urban problems." Young, *Lincoln Center*, 295.
[53] Larrabee, quoted in "Lincoln Center Opens Free Outdoor Festival," *New York Times*, August 21, 1974, 29.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Raymond Ericson, "Changing Lincoln Center's Image," *New York Times*, October 10, 1971, D15.

of its founders.[56] Fitzgerald, Brother Jonathan Ringkamp, Mical Whitaker, and Hazel Bryant, all involved in Coney Island's Everyman Theatre Company, co-coordinated the first years of the Everyman Community/Street Theater Festival.[57] De Paur believed that the street theatre "phenomenon" was expanding, and the first year of the festival established it "as the best possible showcase for street theatre."[58] De Paur was committed to the growth of the festival, and in 1972, its second year, it doubled in size to include fifteen hundred performers. Rather than auditions or interviews, de Paur's only criterion was "evidence of a sincere commitment to street theater."[59] In August of 1974, Lincoln Center Out-of-Doors began as a two-week summer festival, subsuming the Everyman Street Theater Festival.

Three thousand audience members gathered in the plaza for the presentations by participating companies, which included the Everyman Company, the Festival Repertory Company, and the Alonzo Players (*400 Years Overdue*). Yvonne Madison (also known as Lubaba Lateef), a student of Amiri Baraka, participated with her Brownsville Laboratory Theater (*Variations of Freedom*). Madison started the Brooklyn-based company in 1969 with the explicit goal of reaching neighborhood artists and "the neighborhood youngsters who roamed the street aimlessly."[60] She derived her material from the players: "Because of the depressed surroundings in which we operate, I try to build the project around the family concept."[61] The New York Shakespeare Festival, BAM, the Negro Ensemble Company and the Lincoln Center Festival had

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[56] D'Aponte writes that Jules Irving, the producing director of the repertory company at Lincoln Center, was inspired to create the Lincoln Center Outdoor Festival when he saw an Everyman performance in Brooklyn which Geraldine Fitzgerald invited him to attend. See D'Aponte, "*Everyman and roach* in Retrospect," 176, note 12.
[57] In addition to being the Artistic Director of the Afro American Total Theatre, Hazel Bryant was also the President of the Black Theatre Alliance (BTA). Mical Whitaker was BTA's Theatre Coordinator and the Artistic Director of the East River Players, a professional repertory company in East Harlem founded in 1964.
[58] Leonard de Paur, quoted in Edward Hudson, "Festival Leader Is Really Its Juggler," *New York Times*, August 24, 1972, 52. See also Foulkes, "Streets and Stages," 415.
[59] Hudson, "Festival Leader Is Really Its Juggler," 52.
[60] The Black Theater Alliance (BTA) Touring Brochure, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, 1977, 6.
[61] Hudson, "Festival Leader Is Really Its Juggler," 52.

all hosted her Brownsville troupe. The shift from supporting these groups in their own parks and streets to officially "hosting" them in major venues like the Brooklyn Academy of Music or Lincoln Center fulfilled a desirable vision of civic centers as populist arts resource, but it created an explicit movement away from their home territories. Margaret Kohn configures public space as a cluster concept with multiple criteria: ownership, accessibility, intersubjectivity, and the structure of the street festival raises questions about all three.[62] As Arthur Miller argued in his public feud with the Center's Board over a repertory company, the arts complex was built on public land, with a great deal of public monies invested.[63] The questions of who and what performed there, and under what agreements, were therefore intensely political. Since one primary impulse of street performance is the desire for popular access, Kohn's three elements serve to inspire, limit, and measure the efficacy of street performance, within the social dimensions of that space.

Lincoln Center's support of street performance in the early 1970s through the outdoor performance festival can on the one hand be viewed as meaningful for its incorporation of a performance practice that, by all accounts, produced new definitions of the public space with altered social relations, one accessible to young people of color and residents from communities across the boroughs. While the politics and conditions of daily life for Madison and other participants were reflected in their performance practices, these were deeply connected to their location. As the performers traveled to Lincoln Square, a process of de-territorialization occurred, as they were divorced from their origin context and presented anew in the civic center.

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[62] Political scientist Kohn conceives of public space as owned by the government, but capable of fostering public communication and interaction, unplanned contact with people, and legal consequences related to civil rights and political activity. *Brave New Neighborhoods* draws upon the theorists across disciplines that have employed "public" to describe the political community distinct from the economy, household, administrative apparatus of the state, and its relationship to the private realm. Margaret Kohn, *Brave New Neighborhoods: The Privatization of Public Space* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
[63] Arthur Miller, "Arthur Miller vs. Lincoln Center," *New York Times*, April 16, 1972, 5.

If the troupes changed the reputation of Lincoln Center, did the support and exposure of Lincoln Square change the home neighborhoods of the troupes?

The figures behind the festival's earliest incarnation—Fitzgerald, Ringkamp, Whitaker, and Bryant—cannot be seen as representing Lincoln Center's interests before those of their communities: all were experienced in the politics and polarization of community performance. They likely hoped that the reciprocity would translate into improved funding for their theatre groups and enrichment for the individual performers.[64] Yet there is minimal evidence that the two weeks of the annual festival extended connections with these companies past its bounded temporal stretch, or conferred feelings of ownership. Many cultural and performance studies scholars have theorized the public realm as an arena of sociability and a stage for appearing before others,[65] and while this conceptualization influences my analysis of outdoor street performance during this period, it must be combined with Henri Lefebvre's famous admonishment: when space is understood as an "empty area"—in strictly geometric terms-- the social dimensions of that space are ignored.[66] (This includes the social relations that produce inequalities in race, gender, or class.) Lincoln Center was not a neutral space; if the Brownsville Laboratory Theatre enjoyed the cultural capital conferred by the uptown performance opportunity, it was not an evenly reciprocal arrangement. Artists at the helm of these companies risked being stymied in their career ambitions and marginalized as outsiders, as Vinnette Carroll herself had experienced. Lincoln Center did not cover the transportation and lodging of the invited community groups, which were therefore dependent on the state, city, or national

[64] While some accounts of the Everyman Company suggest that Ringkamp and Fitzgerald rejected public funding in favor of autonomy, there is ample evidence of fundraising efforts by the company. One example of the troupe's fundraising was a spate of December 1974 performances at the Brooklyn Academy of Music of *Elena*, a musical directed by Tom La Grua with book and lyrics by Jonathan Ringkamp. "*Elena* Program," Everyman Company, December 1974, Archives of the Brooklyn Academy of Music.
[65] Setha M. Low, "Introduction: Theorizing the City," in *Theorizing the City: The New Urban Anthropology Reader*, Setha M. Low, ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 1-37.
[66] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans., Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

agencies for funding to attend. The festival's $53,000 budget in 1972 was supplied partly by the United Brands Company, which also distributed free root beer and bananas.

There was something incongruous about an alternative theatre group traveling from Coney Island and Brownsville to perform in the plaza of the master builder, a liminal space between the street and high-brow performance culture.[67] The expectation that community-oriented theatres needed to travel to centralized institutions created resentment during a period when artists fought for community control of performance spaces in their own neighborhoods, and argued for critical recognition of their work. For the companies that performed on Robert Moses's turf of Lincoln Center, the fraught relationship between space and social relations birthed a performance of both inclusion and exclusion. Mel Gussow reviewed the Bed-Stuy Street Academy Drama Workshop's *Nigger Gangs, Nigger* (also called *An Experience in Reality)* when it was featured alongside Peter Copani's Inwood People's Performing Company and the Puerto Rican Traveling Theater. He praised the "refreshing comic perspective of the troupe," and its "moral" that "Black people been running games off black people for five hundred years."[68] There is a strange relief articulated in the review, as if the comedic remove of the play invited the critic to recast the "reality" of the ghettos of their city as over-dramatized, to defuse the threatening edges that might have remained had the work been presented elsewhere. Just as many critics never saw the Brownsville company in Brownsville, or the Everyman Company on Surf Avenue, it is also true that the companies hosted in Lincoln Square would never be transferred to one of the official Lincoln Center theatres. This inability highlighted the

[67] Foulkes, Robert Bennett, and others have argued that the ideology of the spatial practices employed at Lincoln Center had been previewed at Moses'1939 World's Fair: suburbanism and machine-age aesthetics were privileged, while the fair's marginal spaces-- peep shows, consumption zones, amusement rides-- traded in more hedonistic dimensions than the corporate tents. See Robert Bennett, *Deconstructing Post-WWII New York City: the Literature, Art, Jazz, and Architecture of an Emerging Global Capital* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 29-30, 49.
[68] Mel Gussow, "Theatre: In the Streets: Lincoln Center's Open-Air Festival Ends with Reaffirmations of Black Message," *New York Times*, September 4, 1972, 6. See also Mel Gussow, "Theatre: Rock vs. Junk: Street Festival Offers Anti-Drug Musical," *New York Times*, August 24, 1972, 52.

distinctions between the zones through which they traveled. Subjects are reflected in spatial boundaries—rooms, buildings, neighborhoods, cities, and nations—as well as in textual ones.[69] The separateness produced by these boundaries disabled the kind of mingling for which the space of Coney Island was infamous.

Coney's Vulgar Passions

Although Lincoln Center was a public space, the movement between Coney Island and the Upper West Side cultural institution often neutralized the locally concerned political content of many street performances. When presented as part of an outdoor festival alongside groups that represented a number of localities, each individual work was transformed without its framing conditions of urgency. This is understood most vividly when Coney Island circa 1974 is rendered clearly, and if the activities of two troupes in Coney Island are delineated. The Coney Island of the 1970s was markedly different from the nineteenth century amusement zone that boasted not only the seaside resort location but also embodied forms of recreation where the working class mingled; these accounted for a vast part of its wide appeal but they had dwindled by the 1960s.

In the late nineteenth-century, the area accommodated dance halls, piers, barrooms, and bathhouses; by the early 1900s, fashionable hotels and homes sidled up against middle-class Brighton Beach, and working-class West Brighton Beach.[70] Steeplechase's "ten hours of fun for ten cents" ethos catered to a more working-class clientele, while Luna Park catered to the middle-class.[71] Steeplechase featured rides that transformed patrons into performers: the

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[69] Amy Bingaman, Lise Sanders and Rebecca Zorachin, "Embodied Utopia," in *Embodied Utopias: Gender, Social Change, and the Modern Metropolis*, Amy Bingaman, Lise Sanders and Rebecca Zorach, eds. (London: Routledge, 2002), 7.
[70] Raymond M. Weinstein, "Disneyland and Coney Island: Reflections on the Evolution of the Modern Amusement Park," *Journal of Popular Culture* 26 (1992): 141.
[71] Fred Thompson, the creator of Luna Park, as well as the Hippodrome Theater and various Broadway offerings, received his training at early World's Fairs. His *Trip to the Moon* was so popular that George Tilyou of Steeplechase

Wedding Ring, Dew Drop, Human Roulette Wheel, and the Barrel of Love all utilized spinning platforms and high speeds to encourage close physical contact (and entanglement) among the disoriented participants. The Blow-Hole Theater (immortalized in Tom Eyen's *Why Hannah's Skirt Won't Stay Down*) was one of the more bawdy, brash, and theatrical innovations of Coney Island's amusement area. An institution at Steeplechase Park from 1908 until 1961, the attraction began as thrill-seekers exited the Steeplechase Horses. Led through a tunnel that deposited them onto the stage of a theater, an audience watched as a dwarf and a clown prodded the patrons towards the exit, through obstacles that included a system of compressed air jets installed under the floor. Licking the wounds of their humiliation, the patrons shifted into spectators when they re-entered the theater as audience members for the next group of unsuspecting victims.

Steeplechase Park was a minefield of blowholes, with air vents embedded in the sidewalks and ramps around the Pavilion of Fun. Another ride, The Flopper, personified Coney Island's ability to merge pleasure, industrial innovations, and the body of the laborer: visitors rode an industrial conveyor belt. (It provoked a landmark lawsuit in 1929 when a patron fell off and suffered a broken knee.[72]) The other two parks, Luna Park and Dreamland, highlighted foreign travel, spectacular exhibits, realistic drama, and aesthetic sights, but always coexisted with the shooting galleries, freak shows, dance halls, picture arcades, saloons, and bathhouses.[73] Early initiatives towards enclosed amusements during the 1890s were linked to a desire on the part of showmen to keep out "roughnecks" and charges of moral depravity.[74] Pre-1907, fences

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lured Thompson to Coney Island in 1903, where he created Luna Park, twenty-two acres of towers, minarets, and domes, half a million electric lights. It was named after "Luna," the airship in *Trip to the Moon*, inspired by utopian science fiction writings. Participants were brought in an airship to the moon, where they disembarked on the surface and ate slices of green cheese.

[72] Robert N. Strassfeld, "Taking Another Ride on Flopper: Benjamin Cardozo, Safe Space, and the Cultural Significance of Coney Island," *Cardozo Law Review* 25 (August 2004).

[73] Weinstein, "Disneyland and Coney Island," 141-43.

[74] Woody Register, *The Kid of Coney Island: Fred Thompson and the Rise of American Amusements* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 89-90.

were one relatively easy way to move from vulgarity to respectability. The boisterous public bathhouses, saloons, beer gardens and penny arcades that comprised West Brighton were considered unrefined by enterprising men such as George Tilyou, the founder of Steeplechase. "As important as their rides," Woody Register explains, "was the showmen's idea to set their collections of amusements inside fences, which defined their geographical identity and supposedly kept out Coney's notorious undesirables."[75] Behind the fences, Coney Island's infamy centered on its crass commercialism, technological innovations, pioneering steel structures, unscrupulous entrepreneurship, and antagonisms encircling social class and geography. In a 1909 article in the *New York Times*, a fictive "Philosopher" and "Radical" debated the merits of the resort area: the Philosopher declared the island a blessing, "a place where the poorest man can take his family and get a little draught of ozone and real life with it." The Radical growled in response:

> You talk like a social settlement…. Is it possible that a man of your intelligence can spout Rousseau at this late date? Don't you know, as a matter of fact, that your east siders hate nothing more than the country? And, for that matter, they don't differ in any respect from the west siders, or even from commuters like you. You live in Lonesomehurst because it's cheap and a long way from Broadway. When your west sider goes away to the Berkshires he does just like the east sider who goes to Coney Island—he goes for the sake of the ride, and tries to surround himself as far as possible with city inconveniences. Mankind is all alike in this age—hopelessly urban.[76]

The Radical disregarded the Coney Island of working-class leisure and fresh air away from Hester Street sweatshops, and preferred instead to exalt the journey itself: the chance "to

[75] Ibid., 90.
[76] "Why Do New Yorkers Go to Coney Island? Radical and Philosopher Take up the Question—and Settle a Bet," *New York Times*, July 4, 1909, SM10.

see Broadway and Third Avenue for five cents." Others have expanded at length on this period in Coney Island,[77] and every account of its Golden Age rightly emphasizes the vast local variations that comprised its heterogeneous cultural production.[78] Dreamland, with its religious panoramas and disaster spectacles, closed in 1911 after a fire. Luna Park closed in 1944, after a blaze at the Dragon's Gorge, a rollercoaster that traversed Africa, the North Pole, the Grand Canyon, and even Hades. Steeplechase suffered a tortured demise. In 1964, Robert Moses sold the land to Fred Trump, who had visions of beachfront condos. But after the Lindsay administration denied Trump's rezoning requests, the developer bulldozed it in 1966 to keep the city from anointing it with landmark status. (He eventually sold it back to the city in 1969.) The 1966 destruction of Steeplechase signified to many an advanced phase of the displacement of both working class people and amusements from the area. This sentiment would only increase as the power of the city's working class declined in the wake of the fiscal crisis.[79]

Attempts to improve and transform the neighborhood through regulations or urban renewal policies have long been bound up these competing visions of working-class amusement versus more respectable middle-class leisure culture. Tensions flared between neighborhood residents and amusement operators, as well as area organizations like the Chamber of Commerce and the aquarium. In 1971, the city purchased the Cyclone roller coaster for $1 million dollars, with intentions to expand the nearby New York Aquarium (which Moses had relocated there from Battery Park in 1941). In 1975, the Aquarium lobbied to have the Cyclone demolished, and

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[77] See John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); and Richard Snow, *Coney Island: A Postcard Journey to the City of Fire* (New York: Brightwaters Press, 1989).
[78] Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 4. Peiss argues that the leisure sphere under industrial capitalism offered an independent space in which "class consciousness and conflict could be articulated along with ethnic, religious, and other divisions."
[79] See Miriam Greenberg, *Branding New York: How a City in Crisis Was Sold to the World* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 230.

the residents of the nearby high-rise Luna Park Houses agreed. The New York Zoological Society's director summarized the coaster's potential demolition as "a clear choice between honky-tonk and culture," and denounced "the noise and the shrieking and the visual pollution" of the nearby amusement.[80] The language of this conflict was not new: Coney Island's primary historical amusement areas were geographically bound and highly differentiated in terms of the visual and physical style of diversions offered.

As arguments persisted, the entire urban ecology of Coney Island suffered during the difficult fiscal crisis years, when middle-class residents bypassed the peninsula and sought recreation outside of the city limits. Those who could not do so endured the needle-strewn beach, streets, boardwalk, and parks. The fight over transit, the budgeting of public funds, and the scars of urban renewal all figure centrally in the legacy of street performance in Coney Island. Highways had choked off revelers from Coney Island immediately following WWII; New Yorkers with cars had options, thanks to decades of furious highway building orchestrated by Moses. Marshall Berman describes this period of modern urbanism as one in which the government viewed "the diversity of people, places and activities in the city" as an incitement to "control urban life."[81] He compares the late-nineteenth-century Coney Island with Moses' modernist Jones Beach State Park: "The intensity, noise, chaotic motion, mixing, and 'seedy vitality' of Coney Island were absent by design from Moses' Jones Beach." The latter exemplified a culture of segregation, and the former was the epitome of congestion, "vulgar passions."[82] The Coney Island of the second half of the twentieth century is therefore dominated

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[80] William Conway, quoted in Denson, *Coney Island: Lost and Found,* 147.
[81] Marshall Berman, quoted in Gareth Millington, "'Man Dem Link Up': London's Anti-Riots and Urban Modernism," *Sociological Research Online* 17 (November 30 2012): 2.3, accessed February 8, 2013, http://www.socresonline.org.uk/17/4/12.html. See also, Barbara Hooper, "Urban Space, Modernity, and Masculinist Desire: The Utopian Longings of Le Corbusier," in Amy Bingaman, Lise Sanders and Rebecca Zorach, eds., *Embodied Utopias: Gender, Social Change, and the Modern Metropolis* (London: Routledge, 2002), 55-79.
[82] Millington, "London's Anti-Riots and Urban Modernism," 2.3.

by considerations of Moses' legacies.[83] Appointed Commissioner of the New York City Department of Parks under Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia in 1934, Moses made radical changes to Coney Island in accordance with his urban renewal philosophy; and his feelings on the area were clear: "I wouldn't want to sink Surf Avenue, but just get rid of about a third of it," said Moses.[84] Miriam Greenberg has written about Moses's strict prohibitions against a "Coney Island atmosphere" at the 1964-1965 World's Fair. Burlesque shows and hot dog vendors were outlawed in favor "of an aesthetic mix of high art, corporate logos, and religious motifs—from Michelangelo to Disney to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir."[85] Conditions in Coney Island deteriorated after the implementation of the city's plan to devote large sections of the neighborhood to high-density residential uses.[86] In the early 1950s, he began construction on one of his biggest superblock high-rise housing projects, the Coney Island Houses. Moses, at the head of the City's Slum Clearance Committee, had swaths of land rezoned for these projects, and many older and middle class houses were replaced.

The area became synonymous with messiness and disorder, and this characterization continued as population shifts and relocations brought increased numbers of African-American and Latino residents. The contemporaneous decline of mass transit meant that fewer New Yorkers viewed traveling to Coney Island as safe or desirable. Charles Denson, a dedicated chronicler of Coney Island, described the 1970s as a decade of transition and revolution in the

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[83] The theatre group Les Freres Corbusier seized the dramatic potential of Robert Moses in their 2005 play, *Boozy: The Life, Death, and Subsequent Vilification of Le Corbusier and, More Importantly, Robert Moses.* Alex Timbers, "Boozy: The Life, Death, and Subsequent Vilification of le Corbusier and, More Importantly, Robert Moses," *Theater* 35 (2005): 92-133. The legendary master builder also inspired Theodora Skipitares' *Radiant City* (1991), a play with one hundred and fifty puppets and a five-piece band, with lyrics by Andrea Balis. Theodora Skipitares, "The Radiant City," http://theodoraskipitares.com/projects/radiant.htm, accessed March 9, 2013.

[84] Denson, *Coney Island: Lost and Found*, 73-76. For additional analysis of Moses and Coney, see Stephanie McGowen, "The Coney Island Experience: A Case Study in Popular Culture and Social Change" (masters thesis, Universitat Bremen, 1994).

[85] Greenberg, *Branding New York,* 47.

[86] Juan Rivero, "Coney Island: Planning Nostalgic Space" (master's thesis, Columbia University, 2004), 2.

neighborhood, when it seemed "as if the city government had abandoned the island, just cut it loose, hoping that it would float away."[87] There remained an awareness of Coney Island's potential as a geographic destination and its association as a retreat for the masses. This dialectic is be found at nearly every moment in Coney Island's development, and this designation re-emerged as decisive during the fiscal crisis period, when the working classes—"the influx of impoverished blacks, Puerto Ricans, and other immigrants"—were demonized as the problem behind the depletion of city resources without the qualification of the contemporaneous industrial job drain.[88] Coney Island's surfeit of symbolic capital as a place for the lower or working classes coded the space as an intolerable stain on the city. A January 1974 article in the *New York Times* surveyed New Yorkers about their affective relations with different parts of the city, and forty-eight percent agreed, "no one should go" to Coney Island.[89] The article cautioned:

> As the people-strewn summer beach attests, this does not mean that Coney has become a wasteland, but it does indicate change and perhaps some racial polarization. More than half the whites surveyed felt that no one ought to go to Coney Island. The breakdown showed that 56 percent of Jewish New Yorkers felt this way; 58 percent of the Irish, 57 percent of the Italian group, and 57 percent of those who say too much attention is being paid to minorities. In all, only 22 percent of the city whites surveyed said they go there. Half of the people in Brooklyn itself felt no one should go to Coney Island and only 31 percent said they did go there themselves. However, the ethnic analysis reveals that among the blacks, 49 percent go themselves, 29 percent recommend Coney and 30

[87] Denson, *Coney Island: Lost and Found*, 147. Denson pegs 1965 as the year that the "war on Coney Island" began. The razing of buildings under Mayor Wagner led to unfulfilled promises of Mayor John Lindsay, and then to the bankrupt administration of Mayor Abraham Beame, who further eliminated funding for services and infrastructure.
[88] Steven R. Weisman, "How New York Became a Fiscal Junkie*," The New York Times,* August 17, 1975, 9.
[89] Dierdre Carmody, "Where New Yorkers Go—and Don't Go," *New York Times*, January 18, 1974, 19.

> percent feel no one should go there. Fewer Puerto Ricans (32 percent) visit the beach, while 34 percent recommend it to tourists and 43 percent say it should be avoided.[90]

The article's delicate language regarding racial polarization was somewhat disingenuous. A 1974 report composed in response to a desegregation crisis at a junior high school in Coney Island stated it more plainly: Coney Island was at "the cross roads of its existence," a neighborhood scarred by "neglect, non-planning, and bubble-headed decision[s]," on its way to becoming "another graveyard for the urban dream."[91] In 1975, the *New York Times* printed a full-page article that labeled Coney Island a "war zone" and a "ghost town," with testimonies from residents who accused housing agencies, the government, middle-income residents, police, and private business of abandonment. Fires were rampant, and the West End of Coney was institutionalized, with drug treatment centers and nursing homes where beach bungalows once stood. Perhaps the most troubling state of affairs was the "wasteland of unfinished projects"[92] that came about after the federal government cut off funding for the area: of the four hundred and ten vacant lots that had been acquired by the city for housing, the head of the city's Coney Island project said there were "no plans at present for the vacant lots because there is no money for the 1,200 units of low-rise housing that were planned when the city began acquiring land."[93] The urban renewal area stretched across almost all of Coney Island: three blocks wide and twenty blocks long. Bankrupt, the city government refused to help with tax relief, businesses closed or were burned, and Surf Avenue West became a haven for prostitutes and drug addicts. A five-year study indicated that major crime increased 112 percent between 1968 and 1973 and continued to

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[90] Ibid.
[91] Curtis J. Berger, "Hart et al. V. Community School Board, et al.: Report of the Special Master," United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York, 1974, i-ii, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library.
[92] Denson, *Coney Island: Lost and Found*, 147.
[93] Leslie Maitland, "Air of Uncertainty Dogs Coney Island," *New York Times,* November 3, 1975, 39.

rise.[94] Amid these troubled conditions in Coney Island, the city was reluctant to put funds towards the promotion of the few attractions that still existed, leading to a vacuum of activity.

The case study of Coney Island, however, offers the opportunity to analyze the interplay between institutional forms and emergent neoliberal projects in New York City's cultural policy. With the concept of creative destruction as a reference point for understanding its contradictions, Coney Island, long a symbol of leisure for the mass industrial class, was trapped between an old and new geographical order. Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore identify the early 1970s as the time when the "key link between (national) mass production and (national) mass consumption was shattered due to a range of interconnected trends and developments."[95] These trends gathered strength in the city's 1974 financial collapse, as issues of growing national and international concern were evaluated: escalating costs of federally sponsored and locally delivered social programs were high among them. This included cultural programming. Performance practices that evoked socio-political struggle previously gathered strength through engagement with public spaces, but as those spaces were impoverished, the visibility of these practices faded. In applying these concepts to the theatrical activity in Coney Island, I keep in mind the authors' cautions regarding the transformations of older industrial cities in the United States:

> [T]he creative destruction of institutional space at the urban scale does not entail a linear transition from a generic model of the "welfare city" towards a new model of the "neoliberal city." Rather, these multifaceted processes of local institutional change involve a contested, trial-and-error searching process in which neoliberal strategies are being mobilized in place-specific forms and combinations…. [N]eoliberal strategies of localization severely exacerbate many of the regulatory problems they ostensibly aspire

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[94] Ibid.
[95] Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, "Cities and the Geographies of 'Actually Existing Neoliberalism,'" *Antipode* 34 (July 2002): 359.

to resolve—such as economic stagnation, unemployment, sociospatial polarization, and uneven development—leading in turn to unpredictable mutations of those very strategies and the institutional spaces in which they are deployed.[96]

As with my analysis of the "uneven development" of theatrical practices and resources in Downtown Brooklyn, Coney Island shared the conditions of many urban zones under the erosion of day-to-day municipal service provision. While the fiscal crisis period also wrought changes to the amusement area core, my excavation of performance practices outside of its mass entertainment offerings is undergirded by a recognition of the many aspects in which the fiscal crisis period deterritorialized vernacular and radical street performance.[97] The struggle between seeing the arts as a "coolant" for inner city passions versus a provocative and even combustible force, lasted through the decade. On a basic material level, companies that formerly received money to perform in the streets lost their funding, and the decimated landscape of parks and beaches in Coney Island discouraged the public visibility and performance of neighborhood that had long been impossible to separate from its attractions.

Everyman and the Death Machine

> [Commissioner] Heckscher said that street theater is at its best when 'the audience, the play and the action are the same thing.'
> --James M. Markham, *New York Times*[98]

Policies that exacerbated the very problems their architects attempted to solve; the erosion of municipal services; the deployment of minimal cultural resources to calm urban

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[96] Ibid., 375.

[97] Jan Cohen-Cruz's excellent anthology serves as a reminder that the term is deceptive, as it can equally refer to right-wing agendas as well as left, can operate on an individual level or in terms of mass movements, and is manifested in rallies, puppet shows, marches, vigils, choruses, clown shows, and the conventions of presentational theatre pieces. Jan Cohen-Cruz, ed., *Radical Street Performance: An International Anthology* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

[98] Markham, "Street Theater Troupes Find the Play's Their Thing," 62.

youth; the politicized boundaries between cultural spaces; and the deterritorialization of performance practices-- it is within this complex framework that I analyze Coney Island's Everyman Theatre Company. This street theatre troupe consistently questioned the concepts of accessibility, ownership, and location: to whom does theatre belong, and who belongs in theatre? Jacques Rancière provides the theoretical language for this interplay of activism and politics, as performed in the peripheries of global cities: "insurgent citizenship" that challenges inequalities. Rancière's concept of *dissensus* is not an institutional overturning, but "an activity that cuts across forms of cultural and identity belonging and hierarchies between discourses and genres, working to introduce new subjects and heterogeneous objects into the field of perception."[99] The architects of Everyman, Ringkamp and Fitzgerald, imagined a vehicle for original work, and within which every young person would be recognized as having talent. This would, they hoped, upset cultural hierarchies while also introducing new forms to the impoverished neighborhoods in which they worked. From this formula, the company garnered glowing reviews across the many years of their productions, 1968-1979.[100]

Actress Geraldine Fitzgerald was an unlikely figurehead, but not a small part of their success. In 1971, at age fifty-seven, after a long career largely absent of critical accolades, she received adulation for her portrayal of Mary Tyrone in a Broadway revival of Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night* at the Promenade Theater. In a *New York Times* profile that celebrated this professional apex, a journalist covered her biography and career before detailing her passion for street performance: "Theater should belong to everyone…it can *not* be elitist,

[99] Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010), 2.
[100] The later years of the company are not well documented. According to *New York* magazine listings, in 1977 the company performed a disco musical outdoors, *St. Joan of the Microphone*, and then, two years later, indoors. Given that many chapters with the same company name were created, it is difficult to discern the path of the Coney Island company under Ringkamp's supervision.

arcane…*anyone* who needs to share it must simply go and do so."[101] In 1968, Mayor Lindsay asked Fitzgerald, who was a member of the city's Cultural Council, to find ways to "help the people in ghetto areas."[102] Thus began her collaboration with Brother Jonathan Ringkamp, an artist, high school teacher, and Franciscan brother. Both felt "frustrated by the inability of the Council to directly affect the quality of life on New York City streets."[103] Their egalitarian performance troupe fueled by street theatre philosophies received attention across media outlets due to Fitzgerald's appeal. It began in Coney Island and proliferated through splinter chapters formed across the city in areas as disparate as Mount Morris, and eventually gave rise to an arts school in Washington D.C led by former company member Mike Malone.[104] By the end of the decade, their achievements in Coney Island appeared ephemeral; the government was eager reinstate a vision of Coney Island more appropriate for casino speculation than populist performance efforts.

Ringkamp and Fitzgerald penned a modernized version of the medieval play *Everyman*, to be cast by any youth interested in taking part in their arts outreach in Coney Island. The 1971 profile of Fitzgerald described their efforts, and *Everyman and roach* [*sic*], their first and oft-produced folk-rock play:

> [W]hen the play was finally done, on a corner of Surf Avenue in Coney Island, the cast was huge, the sidewalks could barely contain the audience, and the response was so vociferous that Geraldine and Brother Jonathan promptly formed The Everyman

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[101] Fitzgerald, quoted in Tom Burke, "Geraldine's Long Journey," *New York Times*, June 13, 1971, 7.
[102] Ibid.
[103] D'Aponte, "*Everyman and roach* in Retrospect," 170.
[104] Malone brought the work of the Everyman Street Theatre to Washington D.C. with his co-founder Peggy Cooper Cafritz; they created Workshops for Career in the Arts in the late 1960s, and, in 1974, the Duke Ellington School of the Arts. See C. Gerald Fraser, "Street Theater to End Outdoor Festival," *New York Times*, September 4, 1976, 7; and Yvonne Shinhoster Lamb, "Director and Teacher Mike Malone: Nurtured D.C. Black Theater Scene," *Washington Post*, December 6, 2006, accessed February 8, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/05/AR2006120501511.html.

> Company, wrote an updated satirical rock-opera version of Macbeth, and played it to SRO crowds on corners in Red Hook. Now the Mayor wants free street theater in all five boroughs, and that may just be just the beginning.[105]

The summer of 1971 saw three hundred New York City teenagers involved in five Everyman companies, not only in the five boroughs of the city, but also in showcases like the Lincoln Center Community/Street Theater Festival.[106] As evidence of the company's influence on the lives of these teenagers, six Everyman members at this time were scholarship students at Juilliard, and the Washington D.C. Chapter is still functioning today as Duke Ellington High School of the Arts.

More than five hundred thousand spectators in New York City saw *Everyman and roach*,[107] a play about a Coney Island discotheque owner. The development of the piece and methods of the company typified a radical form of performance in Coney Island that grew out of the street theatre movement and gave voice to the discontentment of residents in one of the most challenged neighborhoods of the city. To develop *Everyman and roach*, the Brooklyn Arts and Cultural Association (BACA) publicized the Everyman workshops to attract fifty-to-one-hundred people per session in Coney Island in a room over Nathan's in the evening. Brother Jonathan would begin with exercises like "CHANGE & SUPPORT," designed to teach the group "trust essential for both physical and vocal improvisation."[108] They held auditions for vocal principals, open rehearsals, and company discussions. Charles Reichenthal remembers the neighborhood as "perfect for putting together a mixed group of young people. Nobody was

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[105] Burke, "Geraldine's Long Journey," 7.
[106] D'Aponte, "*Everyman and roach* in Retrospect," 172.
[107] Earl G. Schreiber, "*Everyman* in America," *Comparative Drama* 9 (Summer 1975): 99. Schreiber compares *Everyman and roach* and Walter Sorrell's *Everyman Today* (1948) in light of Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Jederman* (1911). He praises Fitzgerald and Ringkamp for transforming the play, but his analysis is largely thematic ("How can the spectacle of theatre be transformed for a visually jaded audience?").
[108] D'aponte, "*Everyman and roach* in Retrospect," 170-71.

turned away. It was a multiethnic, multiracial, multieconomic production, which was the purpose. Our rehearsals were held on the Boardwalk, in the parks, on the beach, and upstairs in the Tilyou Theater."[109]

An iteration of the company was filmed in 1972 performing *Everyman and roach* at the Lincoln Center Community/Street Theater Festival. The quality of the aging film is poor, but the vitality, energy, and scale of the production is discernable. There is a small band, and a large chorus of young people are gathered around a Preacher/narrator figure: they form the choreographed death machine that goes from town to town, "and up and up and up, it don't care who you are, when your number's up." The Preacher steps forward: "It's a funny thing about death, your name might be John V. Lindsay, trying to get all the rats and all the roaches to pay taxes, so he can get policy parity. You're gonna die."[110] These lines are not included in the text of the script; it was one of the many mutable sections of dialogue that took its cue from the specific dynamics of the community in which it was performed. The style of the music in the Lincoln Center production is similar to the jazzy, bluesy rock of *Hair*, with deep base lines and lively keyboard, but the musical medium of the play was flexible, as its creators specified that the play should be performed in the common musical idiom of the audience.[111] They codified the flexibility of the performance itself in specific ways: the device of the Death Machine—created improvisationally in rehearsals-- "became the brilliant means of maintaining the company's policy of including, on any evening, any newcomer who might wish to be a performer."[112]

[109] Reichenthal, quoted in Denson, *Coney Island: Lost and Found*, 200.
[110] *Everyman and roach*, VHS, Billy Rose Theatre Division, Theatre on Film and Tape Archive, New York Public Library, 1972. This production was performed by the Mt. Morris-Everyman Theater; co-produced by Hazel Bryant, Geraldine Fitzgerald, Mical Whitaker and Brother Jonathan, O.S.F.; written by Geraldine Fitzgerald and Brother Jonathan O.S.F.; directed by Hazel Bryant; choreographed by George Faison.
[111] Schreiber, "*Everyman* in America," 106.
[112] D'Aponte, "*Everyman and roach* in Retrospect," 171.

Part of the play's efficacy hinged on this adaptability: while *Everyman and roach* germinated in a rehearsal space above Nathan's restaurant and was performed on the sidewalks of Coney Island, the company maintained a nomadic touring schedule, and in 1971 added indoor venues (La Mama, the Society for Ethical Culture, BAM) to their outdoor street performance repertoire.[113] Embedded in the *Everyman and roach* text is improvisatory possibility around definitions of the local. When the Preacher introduces Everyman to the audience, the stage directions indicate: "Preacher opens a very large book inscribed with large letters, 'Who's Who In Brooklyn.' The entries in the 'who's who' can be adapted to suit the various communities in which each production takes place. Also, Everyman's occupation can be changed whenever some other would be more appropriate to another locality."[114] Each individual in the Death Machine that stalks Everyman represents a concept of death: disease, time, suicide, accident, violence, fear, superstition, old age, and pallor (3). Engagements with the "crowd" of the Death Machine, who double as spectators for the main action, are included in the script. When Everyman intones the name of his new disco, "The End is Near," the chanting of the crowd gains strength, and the Angel of death arrives with dire proclamations.

The Preacher introduces Everyman, the owner of the dance hall, "A Small Place," and Everyman's crew: Amico, his best friend and eventual betrayer; No-Count, his business manager; Broad, his girl; three bodyguards, Bull, Whip, and Knife; and roach, a young boy who represents the most marginalized of their society and is undeserving of even a capital letter in his name. Roach idolizes Everyman and is drawn to his power, but he "is the poorest, lowest

[113] Performances at locations like the Society for Ethical Culture brought increased numbers of reviews. D'Aponte provides a summary of critical responses to *Everyman and roach*. See D'Aponte, "*Everyman and roach* in Retrospect," 173-74. Clive Barnes of the *New York Times* was among the negative reviewers. He declared its achievements to be "more in the realm of sociology than art." Clive Barnes, "From Street Theater, an 'Everyman,'" *New York Times*, October 6, 1971, 42.

[114] Geraldine Fitzgerald and Jonathan Ringkamp, *Everyman and roach*, undated, unpublished playscript courtesy Mimi D'Aponte, 3. All future references to the script are in parenthetical.

creature they know…. He is pushed, ignored, shunted" (6). Whenever roach pledges his allegiance to Everyman, the protagonist reacts with disgust. Everyman explains his theology to roach, a believer:

> You a friend of His. I bet. Well now, every so often, about twice a month. He starts makin' himself a big man. Now he takes this one big man and he places him over there. Then he makes another and places him over here. Now that first one he might call….(*Insert appropriate name of important person known to community*) an' that one over there he might just call him ….(*Insert name of President of U.S.*)…..But now, after he makes a few big men like that God goes out an makes hisself a real big man. He makes one of them about every ten or twenty years. An' you know who one of those big men is? (14)

Everyman's business is lucrative, but he yearns for a larger discotheque that will allow for more patrons and more profits. In order to finance the new space, Everyman forces Amico to call in all of his small loans, which, Amico reminds him, are with his old friends. Pompous and cruel, Everyman tortures each one of his friends and debtors—hookers, fat men, and the junkie Harry the Head. Each time he demands his money, Everyman yells his magic word, "SOCKIT." Dolores the Gypsy (occasionally played by Geraldine Fitzgerald in performance) enters screaming for the police, who never arrive. The play's turning point is a moment of violence: Harry the Head is stabbed by thugs after Everyman refuses to help him when unable to pay his debts.

The energy and brutality of the play comes from the same source: crowds. Crowds of thugs, bodyguards, children, debtors, dancers, and onlookers (24, 31) shadow Everyman, mercilessly taunt one another, alternately plead for help and direction. In one instance, the crowd

mollifies Everyman with facile praises, and the stage directions indicate "general jubilation and fast dancing" as the "noisy unruly crowd yells, 'sockit sockit sockit.'" The repetition fades into a slow movement of pot-smoking, with lethargic action and intonation of "Everyman" as the crowd scream, insane, and runs in a panic. When the police finally enter, no one will reveal the crimes they saw, and the police exit as quickly as they came. Everyman is diminished; he hears voices, receives visions, and is overcome with nightmares of mortality. The crowd mimics the contorted eerie sounds of "slowed down records and echo chambers," as the Ghost of Harry the Head mocks Sockit and his life, "a bag of worms" (37).

As the church bell tolls, the Death Machine finally summons Everyman. In an attempt to avoid this fate, he offers money to the debtors and hanger-ons in his crew. Without pity, they all "enjoy the drama, shouting comments and insults," which rise to a frenzied incoherence (43). Roach offers to accompany Everyman to the Death Machine, and Everyman, in his only generous act, saves roach's life by preventing him from making this sacrifice. The Preacher returns, and leaves it to God to decide Everyman's fate; he then asks the audience for their judgment. The text provides for two possible endings—Everyman is killed, or spared—depending upon the answer of the audience assembled. "After the response is given and repeated so that all may hear, the Preacher says, 'so be it.' According to what God determines one of the following two endings is played" (48). In this coda, spectators engage in the decisions made in the public sphere. The energy and power of youth culture-- through the bodies of youth and youth aesthetics-- are displayed centrally. D'Aponte notes the significance of an Everyman younger than traditional depictions of Everyman. "His youth is epitomized, of course, by the young players who, by virtue of their willingness to improvise in a street theatre experiment, became co-authors of an allegorical drama in which their own potential destinies were under

discussion and, theatrically speaking, at stake."[115] Fitzgerald and Ringkamp insisted on the direct participation of the community and designed the company to interest both restless and disheartened young people willing to join their workshops, as well as the passersby on the Surf Avenue street corner. Public engagement in both the production and reception of the play was inscribed in the text, the action, and the performance methods. As I described in Chapter 3, Everyman was among the few groups that worked with Peter Brook and thirty members of his International Centre for Theatre Research during Brook's BAM residency, and his philosophy infused and informed the Everyman Company. The 1973 workshops were associated with Brook's *The Conference of the Birds,* named for a twelfth century Persian poem. The structure of their residency at BAM was split between private exercises, public demonstrations, and performances:

> Brook and the Centre would begin in the Lepercq [Space] at 10:30am with mostly private demonstrations and exercises. In the afternoon, an audience would be invited to participate in improvisation and debate. The day would culminate with an evening performance of *The Conference of the Birds*, which according to Brook was not so much a play but "a possibility." The idea was "to make, in a very special form, something that really comes from the people and the place—and everything that's in the air at the time of the performance."[116]

While Jill Dolan's utopian performative is an appropriate framework for analyzing this play, my emphasis is less on the company's capacity for wish-oriented envisioning of a more radical

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[115] Ibid., 175. Sandra Gattenhof argues that performances generated by young people are uniquely animated by the concept of deterritorialization, as the process allows for the synthesis of new cultural and performance genres. Sandra Gattenhof, "The Poetics of Deterritorialization: a Motivating Force in Contemporary Youth Performance," *Youth Theatre Journal* 18 (2004): 122-37.

[116] "This Week in BAM History: Peter Brook, Barbra Streisand, and Africa," *BAMblog*, September 16, 2011, accessed January 20, 2013, http://bam150years.blogspot.com/2011/09/workingthis-week-in-bam-history-peter.html. After they developed and performed the piece in Central West Africa, the Centre collaborated with el Teatro Campesino and performed for migrant farmworkers across California.

future than the “possibility” to cross contested urban zones. Individual company members and spectators might have experienced personal, future-looking epiphanies, but the strongest expression of Everyman was rooted in the place-based “present-tenseness” of their performances. The *Everyman and roach* script can be read as radical even today for its ability to make visible the conditions of neglected urban areas and the cost of the neglect.

Coney Island was the object of extreme fetishization by both city planning and private developers, and *Everyman and roach* offered inhabitants a range of representational devices in the public realm. The editors of a collection of feminist scholarship on social change and the metropolis articulate the stakes of this visibility:

> Physical zones are read through psychological landscapes of comfort and danger so that neighborhoods experienced as the simple—if sometimes frustrating—everyday by their inhabitants are fetishized as unlivable by other populations. Such fantasies of danger normalize neglect and decay, justify the implementation of development plans without the input of neighborhood residents and regulate bodies marked by race, gender, sexuality and disability, among other things.[117]

These fantasies overwhelmed popular culture depictions of Coney Island. But in a neighborhood marked by the normalization of neglect, economic devastation and top-down decision-making were countered with activist cultural production; public spaces changed—if briefly—by the lived representation of the crowds. These disruptions formulated utopia as a practice, not a vision. Theatre scholar Eva Urban, in her study of the arts amid the peace process in Northern Ireland, presents utopianism as an aspiration, with the strategy and implementation of improved relations

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[117] Amy Bingaman, Lise Sanders and Rebecca Zorachin, “Embodied Utopia,” 7.

between communities in the foreground.[118] Everyman similarly demonstrated oppressive social conditions in the specificity of their work and rehearsed acts of insurgency, although their sanctioned movement between zones of the city threatened to reify the "dangerous" space of the street corner in favor of the safety of Lincoln Center Plaza.

A Blessing for the Poor

> Sometimes you make your point because your point is simply to be there in the street.
> --Peter Schumann[119]
>
> The problem of racism does not arise in the same way; it does not arise ideologically, in philosophical or moral terms of human rights, but in terms of energy, virulence, and space. American thought is spatial thought.
> --Jean Baudrillard, "Hyperreal America"[120]

In addition to Everyman, the buildings owned by Nathan's Famous provided shelter to another company of artists in Coney Island during the 1970s: the Bread and Puppet Theatre.[121] During their Coney Island project, this company employed very different working methods—and elicited contrastive outcomes-- from that of the Everyman Company. Murray Handwerker, then the president of Nathan's Famous, attempted to form a Coney Island Cultural Center in 1969, but the project stalled. He owned the Old Boston Theater, an abandoned 1907 vaudeville venue

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[118] Eva Urban, *Contemporary Politics and the Peace Process in Contemporary Northern Irish Drama* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011).
[119] Stefan Brecht*, Bread and Puppet Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1988), 192, vol. 2.
[120] Jean Baudrillard, "Hyperreal America," trans., David Macey, *Economy & Society* 22 (May 1993): 248.
[121] There is some confusion in the historical record regarding the companies that utilized the space, and when. A 1989 article on street performance reports that Marketa Kimbrell's New York Street Theatre Caravan (founded in 1970) borrowed members from Everyman company, moved to Coney Island, took over a storage space at the original Nathan's on the boardwalk, and rehearsed there for nearly four years in the early '70s until the space was sold. This chronology suggests that Kimbrell's group operated out of the storage space while Bread and Puppet would have been performing at the Old Boston Theater. Thomas Walsh, "Street scenes: The Art and Science of Street Theatre," *Back Stage* 28 (July 1989): 1A.

located at 1205 Surf Avenue, and invited Everyman to make a permanent home there.[122] It was in such disrepair that the Company could not accept his offer.[123]

The itinerant Bread and Puppet Theatre had minimal requirements for a habitat, save that it be large enough for their immense sculptural creations. Throughout the 1960s, they moved between spaces in Lower Manhattan, and the company returned from their second European tour with money but unable to afford rent.[124] In March 1970, they needed to vacate a space Joseph Papp had provided to them for free, and they made their first difficult foray into Brooklyn. An old bank building under the Brooklyn Bridge, One Front Street, brimmed with potential as the company crossed the East River in their van, but lack of heat and dangerous disrepair made it nearly impossible to use for work or performance.[125] They were soon helped to acquire the Old Boston Theater, which Handwerker leased to Schumann in March, and the announcement of their new home appeared in their April 1970 newsletter, *Bread & Rosebuds*:

> Hurrah! It's the Old Boston Theater on 1205 Surf Avenue which used to be a people place where you had a movie and a beer for 15 cents. We got there through the friendliness of Nathan's Mr. and Mrs. Handworker [*sic*], Dick Levy and Marketta [*sic*] Kimbrell of the City Street Theater and the New York Shakespeare Festival. It costs only 4 hotdogs a year and we have a one-year lease. And it belongs to Nathan's Famous

[122] Denson, *Coney Island: Lost and Found*, 200.
[123] For actor and former resident Lou Gossett Jr. and arts administrator and writer Charles Reichenthal, the activities of Everyman were a beginning point for their Boardwalk Arts and Culture Organization, which later merged with BACA activities. See chapter three for a full description of BACA's development. Reichenthal is now district manager of Community Board 13, which is headquartered at 1201 Surf Avenue, on the same parcel of land where the Old Boston Theater once stood.
[124] Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre*, 184, vol. 1. Brecht catalogues many of their New York locations; their first stay from the autumn 1961 to spring 1962, on East Fourth Street, between Avenues C and D, then to 148 Suffolk Street, and then to other locations on the Lower East Side. See Brecht, 61, 159, 161-63, vol. 1. Schumann describes: "New York was a very refreshing, very shocking, refreshing experience there. It was just the idea to go with pieces into the street. I really got that in New York— I really saw it in that scene. It seemed to me that suddenly there were *people* there— on the Lower East Side— really, specifically where we *lived*— for whom it would make sense to produce *art*." Schumann, quoted in Brecht, 163, vol. 1.
[125] They only performed two shows at the Old Courthouse in 1969, *The Cry of the People for Meat* and *Blue Raven Beauty*.

> Superhotdogs Inc. The ceiling is leaking, there is no heat and hardly any light and water yet— but the place is ideal for us and besides Nathan's wants to help us find more light and water. No more *Village Voice* or other publicity necessary— the world is all there, especially kids, superlarge families and old people.[126]

The Old Boston and its environs represented an intersection of Schumann's long-standing commitments and aesthetic ideals. He founded the Bread and Puppet Theatre after work in Germany during the mid-fifties with his New Dance Group, and his influences were manifold: Sicilian puppetry, Bunraku, Oskar Schlemmer and the Bauhaus movement, Kurt Schwitters and other artists who pioneered new thinking about theatre as an art form and popular entertainment.[127] After emigration to the United States, Bread and Puppet drew from these forms and encountered newfound inspirations in New York City, when he met Yvonne Rainer at Merce Cunningham's studio and absorbed the intensity of Happenings.

But there was a distance between Schumann and his contemporaries; he was drawn to art-making that "deliberately gives up that intensity for the sake of a communal act, for the sake of doing it *with* others *for* others."[128] On the surface, then, Bread and Puppet Theatre appeared to be well matched with Coney Island post-1960s. Coney Island was the birthplace of genre-defying amusement parks, and it always transcended the mechanics of rollercoasters to offer entertainments both participatory and theatrical. Downtown, Schumann was an anti-power outsider, and the streets of Coney Island were waiting platforms for radical philosophies of nourishment through free art and street spectacles. For some onlookers, however, the enticement of new spectators could not be divorced from the reality of Coney Island's urban hollowing: Erika Munk praised the troupe's Coney Island project as "brave and honest," and reported,

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[126] Schumann, quoted in Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre,* 173, vol. 2.
[127] Françoise Kourilsky, "Dada and Circus: Bread and Puppet Theatre," *The Drama Review* 18 (March 1974): 105-6.
[128] Ibid., 107.

"Bread and Puppet has moved away from the lefty-Village audience which followed them in the 'peace churches,' to another one of *Daily News* readers, television watchers living in the unrelenting ugliness of the New York ghettos. They have not patronized this audience with agitprop messages or an 'attention-getting' pace."[129] As I have described, there was a very recent history to these attempts to deliver performance to "New York ghettos." The earlier experiences of Ghetto Arts impresario Vinnette Carroll suggested that the dominant view that separated the liberal converted audiences from the ghetto television watchers was oversimplified and harmful. This crude articulation captured a tension that disturbed the company throughout their tenure in Coney Island.

Bread and Puppet's ambivalence toward this creative period is perhaps best summed up by a quote from Schumann's wife, Elka: "I remember Coney Island being sort of a problem."[130] Peter Schumann gravitated towards the circus as a child for its promise of an *other* world beyond the "life of the bourgeoisie," and it was this idea of a "marginal world outside 'normal' social life,"[131] that painted Coney Island with such possibility for the company. Yet Schumann's love of Dada, respect for Gypsies and circus, and allegiance to political agitating could not create a successful marriage with the cultural dynamics and demographics of Coney's audiences. Stefan Brecht, author of an exacting two-volume history of Bread and Puppet Theatre, which contains the most detailed published account of the company's time in Coney Island, puts a more provocative point on it: Schumann was "rejected by the Blacks" in Coney Island, "the inner city demos, the living heart of his chosen country," the People.[132] Material factors also motivated the move to Coney Island, including the availability and cost of spaces big enough for Schumann's

[129] Munk, quoted in Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre*, 19, vol. 2.
[130] Elka Schumann, quoted in Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre*, 21, vol. 2.
[131] Kourilsky, "Dada and Circus," 107.
[132] Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre,* 10, vol. 2.

puppets. But the "sodom by the sea" held an allure for Schumann, who felt disenchanted with the company's downtown reception and embittered by the New York critics.[133] Schumann readied his embrace of the new neighborhood as his frustration with Off-Off Broadway fashion trends expanded after 1968. His resistance to conform to these audience proclivities pushed him towards Coney Island, but eventually pushed him out. He was thoroughly uninterested in theatres "that inclined audiences to relate to shows as entertainment,"[134] rendering his decision to move the center of his operations from Manhattan to Coney Island equal parts masterful and foolish.

Critical responses to the company's exodus from Manhattan capture the hard edge of contradictions behind the move. Some, like Munk, identified an authenticity in their new landscape, as the troupe separated from the safety of liberal audiences and the known contours of Lower Manhattan's urban forms. Others praised them for their embrace of the popular: "Coney Island. A remarkable choice! Where else do representatives from all layers of New York societies get a chance to rub shoulders?"[135] Another chorus of voices animated the reason why the company continued to bring their Coney Island shows to Joseph Papp's theater on Lafayette Street: they were not yet ready to relinquish the cultural and symbolic capital conferred by downtown Manhattan, even as they gained a very different currency from their embrace of Coney Island.[136] "Even on the boardwalk half the concessions are shut down, though there are still masses of people. Everything is crumbling and dirty. The wax museum and pony rides have been replaced by fortunetellers. It's a place for the bottom poor. Black and Puerto Rican."[137] The

[133] Ibid., 175, vol. 1.
[134] Ibid., 192, vol. 1.
[135] Eileen Thalenberg, quoted in Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre*, 21, vol. 2.
[136] In September 1972, Bread and Puppet presented three plays at the Public Theater under the collective title, *Coney Island Cycle.* The short plays were: *Revenge of the Law, Harvey McLeod*, and *Hallelujah, or St. George and the Dragon, or Laos.* Mel Gussow, "Theatre: Bread and Puppet Troupe," *New York Times*, September 17, 1972, 59.
[137] Attribution unknown, quoted in Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre*, 19, vol. 2.

company discovered a performance site bound by race, audience, and the politics of performance.

Bread and Puppet designed their new vaudeville house as an untamed performance space that dissolved the distinction between the street and indoor theatre. Their marketing strategy consisted of theatrical temptations for the Surf Avenue *flâneurs* of all ages and many races. Bread and Puppet volunteers constructed a giant papier-mâché puppethead atop the Old Boston Theater's entrance in lieu of a marquee, and decorated the outside like a sideshow, with Jenny the flying lady, the thin man, and the fat lady painted on its wooden panels. Inside they painted colorful flowers and posted a recipe for BREAD on the wall, to be used in their bread and puppetry workshops. In addition to children's workshops, they would "bally" on the streets of Coney Island, winding their way to the boardwalk and back down Surf Avenue with oversized marionettes. Charles Denson remembered the troupe's publicity methods as homage to older amusement forms: "Bally was a traditional Coney art form that hadn't been used since the days of the sideshows in the 1950s, and no one knew what to make of it…. I remember spending wild nights in the musty old theater, and the group's presence was reassuring at a time when nothing positive was happening in Coney Island."[138] They posted a placard advertising their free puppet shows, which they performed continuously, with weekend audiences typically exceeding five hundred people per day.[139] After shows, the puppet operators passed the hat for donations, while primary company actors received salaries from the cobbled together resources of the company.[140]

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[138] Denson, *Coney Island: Lost and Found*, 200.
[139] Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre,* 21, vol. 2.
[140] Schumann was hesitant to accept grant money, but he did accept grants from NYSCA in 1967/1968, and for the Coney Island theatre 1971 and 1972. Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre,* 191, vol. 1.

This was all in accordance with Schumann's conviction that the rides and shows were already priced higher than local kids could afford, from twenty-five to seventy-five cents.[141]

The shows created and performed in Coney Island comprise important chapters in the company's repertoire.[142] Brecht's appendix of the company's performance history attributes the following performances to the Old Boston Theater: *The Difficult Life of Uncle Fatso; Marriage & Revenge of the Statue of Liberty; Tristan & Isolde; Lamentation for Phillip Gibbs and James Green; Mississippi; Bread & Dragon Circus; The Birdcatcher in Hell; Hallelujah; St. George the Dragonkiller; The Story of Harvey McLeod;* and *Revenge of the Law.* Schumann's work was progressing from the street pageants of his Manhattan years, but he and collaborator George Konoff still crafted political theatre pieces, often inspired by news articles or events.[143] During the summer of 1972, Konoff took the "news nonsense" political theatre pieces the company built in Goddard, bundled them with older works, and brought ten people to perform them in Coney Island for the summer season. This included the street shows *Hallelujah* (an anti-war pageant), *Laos* ("a refugee's report from the Plain of Jars"), and the three short plays *Harvey McLeod, Revenge of the Law,* and *St. George the Dragonkiller*.[144] Schumann scaled these down for a simplified summer season: they needed only a band, a barker, and an open door. The company performed the shows at intervals, playing out in the street until a crowd formed and they coaxed them into the Old Boston Theater.

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[141] Ibid., 185-87, vol. 1.

[142] Brecht's book, while labyrinthine, compiles the scripts and a performance timeline for their Coney Island project period which also includes their political demonstrations.

[143] Ibid., 50, vol. 2.

[144] Ibid. Brecht refers to *McLeod, Revenge of the Law*, and *Mississippi* as Bread and Puppet's "Black Pieces." Schumann's shock over the massacre at the New York State Attica Correctional Facility, between September 9 and 13, 1971, when forty-three people died and more than eighty others were wounded when the police attempted to retake the prison, led to *Revenge of the Law*. The eight-act play featured a puppet labeled The Governor, who wore the sign "Rockefeller," oblivious to the carnage of prisoners killed by the National Guard.

A closer look at the creation and reception of two short plays, *Harvey McLeod* and *Mississippi*, animates some of the frustrations of Bread and Puppet in Coney Island, and the complexity of its attendant political project. Schumann based *McLeod* on a shooting in a Raleigh, North Carolina shopping center by an unemployed African-American janitor, Harvey McLeod. The play was produced on their framed proscenium stage at the Boston Theater, and the puppets were "bulbheads," the bulbous puppet heads that rest on the shoulders of operators. During the performances, Schumann played the electric fiddle in a band with three musicians, while Konoff read the dialogue and announced the scenes from off-stage. Subtitled "a tragedy in eight scenes," Schumann's text is sparse and fragmented, reminiscent of a contemporary *Woyzeck*. The play was presented on a marionette stage and the scenes—some as short as six lines of dialogue—set in McLeod's home, school, jail, the store, and the street where he fired into a suburban crowd. In the first scene, McLeod, just twenty-two years old, mourns his grandmother's death and delivers a few cryptic lines, "No nature, just garbage."[145] At school, McLeod declares hatred for his job in one line of dialogue. Back at home in scene three, his wife is in labor, and she sings:

> I am alone
> I am alone
> I am not here
> I am not there
> I am in America
> O my feet have walked from the ocean[146]

McLeod asks where the child is, and the wife responds, "it is dead." (In an interview with Brecht, Schumann explained that the doctor arrived late; this might not have been apparent from the performance, and was not from the script.) McLeod gets into a street fight, goes to jail, buys a gun from a grocer, goes to the shopping center, and shoots. For Schumann, the play evoked grief and desperation, and was reminiscent in theme with the murders of Malcolm X, Dr. Martin

[145] Ibid., 99, vol. 2.
[146] Ibid.

Luther King Jr., and John F. Kennedy, but audiences did not respond favorably to the play.[147] The style was similar to the first Coney season's *Revenge of the Law*, but company members admitted that they had a harder time attracting audiences for the second year. This was in part because of the choice to embrace "less people and more movement,"[148] with an emphasis on silence and without a big band of performers. This direction was motivated by Schumann, but caused division among the company members. Schumann believed the form and content of *McLeod* "addressed politics and dealings," and in a 1982 interview with Brecht, he conceded that he did not succeed in making a "popular theatre" in Coney Island because he just did not want to.[149] He wanted to invent one.

The company's years in Coney Island were troubled on both artistic and organizational levels, and these issues were inextricably linked to context and reception. The constant travel stretched resources thin but also frayed relationships between the puppeteers. Schumann and Elka attributed the failure of the Coney Island project shows to Bart and Brigitte Lane, artists who took over the operations during Schumann's many absences from the Old Boston Theater. Because Schumann had so many artistic commitments at once, he did not realize "how complicated or difficult" the Coney Island project was, and at times Elka was "really embarrassed about how bad it was," particularly the children's shows mounted by the Lanes, and other projects presented under the Bread and Puppet name, but not under their official aegis.[150] The pressure on the Lanes was great, due to the structure of operations set up between Vermont and Brooklyn that made it difficult to recruit the numbers of volunteers required for more spectacular puppet shows. Paul Zaloom began his career with the company, and recalled

[147] Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre* ., 98, vol. 2.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre*, 25, vol. 1.
[150] Elka Schumann, quoted in Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre*, 21, vol. 2.

different crews of company members that shuttled the four hundred miles between Goddard College, Cate Farm Barn in Plainfield, Vermont, and Coney Island to build and perform the plays. Their pace and geographic sprawl could not efficiently incorporate the neighborhood residents as trained participants, even if they once envisioned them as eager spectators. Konoff explained the protracted process of one season of shows, during which they hoped to build a new work:

> We built the other two shows in Vermont, and we were just going to build the fairy tale [*St. George the Dragonkiller*] with these people [the Lanes and others down in Coney Island] and work with them. There wasn't enough time, or—it just wasn't happening, so we never did do it—I mean we *tried* to do it a couple times, but—we tried to re-rehearse it [for Papp's place in the fall]—we got Joe Papp to book it, and the idea was that we would try to do *Saint George* again, with *puppeteers* now, you know, and wound up doing *Hallelujah*. [151]

The work of Bread and Puppet was highly dependent on willing manual labor; Konoff and Schumann never considered the Coney Island resident volunteers as puppeteers, and lacked the time to sufficiently train a crew. Still, the company has achieved its longevity because of Peter Schumann's continued involvement and clear position in the company's hierarchy. His attempts to maintain control over the work coexisted with his absences, which stamped their Coney Island work with a rogue and unruly sensibility.

The Bread and Puppet process in Coney Island points to an uncomfortable question: was the company "slumming"? The momentum Bread and Puppet built during the 1960s steamed them through the Coney Island project's founding, and "a great mass of sort of socially interested young performers" flocked to their Coney Island base, even if they lacked training; the housing

[151] Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre*, 97, vol. 2.

was cheap, and Peter Schumann's itinerant schedule empowered the splinter groups to innovate.[152] The growth of the group's size and its revolutionary context continued to gather strength, a fact that occasionally frustrated Schumann.[153] His vision of a company with many tentacles-- a touring circus, a college residency and home base at Goddard College in Vermont, and associated puppeteers functioning out of the Old Boston—crumbled in Coney Island. The internal discord, grueling touring demands, and scattered operations might have been reason enough for Schumann to distance himself from the Coney Island project. But Brecht intimates that it was primarily Schumann's disappointment in the audiences that led him to drive a wedge between corollary Bread and Puppet activities and his own work. "We were talking about Schumann's discontent with the reaction of a Coney Island audience to his play *Birdcatcher in Hell*, July 4, 1972. They were 'unresponsive,' he didn't like either the audience or the response."[154] Coney Island once held the promise of a space that could enact Schumann's belief in street agitation as a movement that went beyond the single issue of war, particularly given that his publics had in the past generally been non-theatre-going, lower or middle working class.[155] But the distance from the Lower East Side to Coney Island proved formidable. Brecht frames the Coney Island project in this way:

> Coney Island in a sense was Schumann's big chance. He finally had a definitely popular audience, the black proles and welfare clients of New York City whom he could address as he had by his street agitation six years earlier his Latino neighbors on issues of immediate concern to them, viz. not the war in Asia and he could amalgamate his high

[152] Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre*, 239-46, vol. 1. Some of these volunteers lived in vacated houses slated for demolition by the city.
[153] During this period, Schumann designated Konoff and Bill Dalrymple as "lieutenants." Dalrymple left the group before *Difficult Life* opened in Coney Island to start his own puppet street theatre, Stomachache Theatre.
[154] Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre*, 325, vol. 1.
[155] Ibid., 596-97.

> culture ambitions as an Artist with reasonable facsmile of the existence of a folk artist, a carny man's. Playing here was half-way street theatre.[156]

Indeed, the foundations of Bread and Puppet's artistic communication strategies were developed as early as 1961, when their aesthetics rested on the live relationship between artist and public, art as a "part of living," engagement with "spontaneous community efforts" (notably rent strikes on the Lower East side), and, after the influence of the Living Theatre, an involvement in the pacifist Peace Movement to oppose war.[157] By 1970, however, Schumann entered into a phase that clashed with the garishness of Coney Island.

Schumann initially forecasted that their puppet shows inside the Old Boston would be "huge horrible puppet meetings between Mother Earth, Nixon, Uranos, Supercrook, Rats, Pigs, Lovers, Nightengales. These have to be short big spectacular pieces on reality, politics, war and love for 440 passersby. As I said there is a lot to learn. Coney Island is decadent and frightening, but it has a style, which is expressive and pretty real and close to the heart of the consumer."[158] The company tried to counter the frightening decadence with quiet performances that explored mime puppetry forms, nearly in the style of *Noh*. This reflected a larger shift in the methods of Schumann's engagements; after 1971, he participated in fewer street demonstrations, opting instead for peace parades around the war issue.[159] This trend is consistent among many prominent figures of 1960s social protest theatre; Harry Elam's landmark book, *Taking it to the Streets*, focuses on the social protest performances of Luis Valdez's El Teatro Campesino and Amiri Baraka's Black Revolutionary Theater (BRT) between 1965 and 1971. After that period,

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[156] Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre*, 18, vol. 2.
[157] Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre,* 59, vol. 1.
[158] Peter Schumann, quoted in Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre*, 17, vol. 2.
[159] Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre,* 31, 234, vol. 2. Brecht dates Schumann's "break" with the 1960s to 1973 and the death of his street agitation. "All of Schumann's appearances during the early '70s on campus, supervised islands of tranquility, or at the contrived and commercialized profoundly conservative small town festivities contrast with his combatively pacifist big city exploits of the '60s." Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre,* 47, vol. 2.

both moved away from active, agitational protest theater. Their intense performance activity influenced contemporary theater performance practices, but "with the dissolution of the conditions of urgency in the 1970s," both men experienced ideological shifts that exemplified cultural permutations.[160] The schism between Bread and Puppet and its audience belied conditions of urgency, in part due to the chasm between the activities considered urgent for Schumann and the spectators.

As a consequence, Schumann challenged audiences with an obscure presentational style and actively sought clashes with the vulgar passions of the streets outside the theatre. He presented work more appropriate to Lincoln Center than to Coney Island, in its avant-garde pedigree and Leftist foreign policy concerns. Brecht's analysis blends a critique of this style with Schumann's personal politics, and he insists that Schumann's racism was a factor in his frustrations with their Coney Island reception. These were, Brecht claims, borne of difficult days living with his family in the crime-ridden Lower East Side (where his wife was robbed at knife-point and his children were bullied in public school).

> The basic fact was that Schumann didn't like Coney Island—we have seen that he considered it decadent and consumerist—and wasn't, as he might have been during the '60s, willing to adjust his output to the people and conditions there, but on the contrary worked against them—to some small extent, perhaps, because the audience out there was mostly Blacks and Schumann isn't, I suspect, too fond of the American Negro; and he was in a phase where he wanted not to agitate but to show his vision of the essential reality of the human condition retaining all the obscurity attaching to visions and essences, and this made communication in an amusement park difficult. He hated the

[160] Elam, *Taking It to the Streets*, 133.

place and couldn't overcome his antipathy for the audience. But basically he got there too late. He was no longer interested in delivering a clear message and getting it across.[161]

Brecht qualifies his charge of racism somewhat by articulating an incompatibility between Schumann's aesthetic sensibilities and the audience demands, but there remained a discomfiting reality to Schumann's insistence on a slow motion performance style that could calm the chaos of the streets outside. The emphasis placed on the question of clarity—whether the audience understood the message that Schumann wanted to impart—is a knot from which neither Brecht nor Schumann can escape. For example, *Mississippi*, a success of their repertoire in Coney Island, was based on a May 1970 news article, "Two Negro Students are Killed in Clash with Police in Jackson."[162] A puppet play in seven scenes proceeded with short spoken news text, the dialogue was not spoken by operators but displayed on signs held up and recited through a microphone with distortion. They employed large slow gestures, unintelligible sounds, and rhythmic repetitive devices. Brecht believed that *Mississippi* achieved an extreme simplicity and clarity of words and action by sacrificing "esoteric symbolism…for the sake of coming across to his Coney Island audiences."[163] Many artists involved were moved by its marriage of accessibility and the artistic opulence of his previous works. Irène Leherissier, an artist involved in the production of *Mississippi*, remembers:

> We performed *Mississippi* on the 4th of July in 1970—I think 26 times in all…. It was a very short little piece but it was very clear and succinct. Coney Island was going wild on that 4th of July, but inside that theatre…there was a realm of solemn, very quiet, people would cry during the show. And then you would go outside again and it was like (makes

[161] Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre*, 24-25, vol. 1.
[162] Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre*, 90, vol. 2. *Lamentations* and *A Man Says* were also based on the text.
[163] Ibid., 94.

> noises). (I: Black people?) I would say mostly. Very few white people go to Coney Island even then.[164]

Brecht's interjection suggests—perhaps exaggeratedly—that the racial polarization in the neighborhood was mirrored in the relationship between the company and their audience. Another description of a performance of *Mississippi* also emphasizes the silence at the end of the play, "which contrasted so violently with the brouhaha outside," a key signal of "the impact the Bread and Puppet shows can have on a 'popular' audience, and by the same token understand why Peter Schumann dislikes the term, 'entertainment.'"[165] Schumann's extended discussion with one audience member after the play is relevant:

> We had some strong reactions from people out there. But it was certainly not the thing they wanted, or—it wasn't hand-clapping shows. They were not geared that way—we didn't want that. We wanted to see how that kind of material fares with people. It seemed to me very justified to do just that out there in Coney Island. I remember having discussions with the company, who wanted more outgoing stuff, more story-telling stuff—about how good in this hocus-pocus of Coney Island it was to open the door and people come in, sit still, and show silent shows to them: that were totally unexpected and didn't do this trick, this overwhelming trick to them that they are used to. So to me, this first summer seemed very successful of what was done in Coney Island…. See, we did that show [*Mississippi*] and I remember talking with a black woman who very much agreed with the show and *did* understand it and telling me, furiously, why don't you make it about a kid from our neighborhood here. Do you know how many kids get shot by cops here? I remember that discussion—I mean, so I know it *did* come across

[164] Irène Leherrissier, quoted in Brecht, Ibid.
[165] Kourilsky, "Dada and Circus," 109.

> somehow, you know, whether it provoked people or what it did to them I don't know, but there was an audience if not a big one. But we certainly did *not* succeed to make a popular theatre. (I: Succeed—you weren't interested in that at the time.) Right. No, I *wanted* to make a popular theatre but I didn't want to do it with the established means and how one could make a popular theatre. I wanted to invent that—what that was—and I thought one could be as esoteric as one *wanted* to be. And still deal *with* the people who were there—and, as I said about silence and the *manner* of these show—I felt very strongly that to not give in—to not open the door and come with a fantastic spectacle and loud clashes but to confront this very hectic scene of Coney Island with *this* type of slow motion theatre would be *strong*. And I think it *was* strong.[166]

Schumann struggled with the form of theatre that would capture his interpretation of the style and energy of Coney Island and yet perform acts of resistance against its blatant consumerism and laws of greed. Brecht suggests that Schumann's resistance was in fact not to the ethos of the place, but to the spectators. All of the accounts of their time in Coney Island—both laudatory and critical—depict the company as distanced from the every day life of the very audience—or the imagined audience—that drew them to Coney Island.

This conflict is also related to questions of authenticity, an element rarely touched upon in Brecht's voluminous interviews with Schumann; as Elam argues, audience members base their perception of authenticity on a variety of factors,[167] and these factors were both essential to the performance context and also difficult to control in Coney Island. In his efforts to transcend the gulf between the disposition and cultural backgrounds of their audiences and the performers, Schumann believed the silent, abstract symbols and atonal sounds could communicate (and

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[166] Schumann, quoted in Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre*, 24-25, vol 2.
[167] Elam, *Taking It To the Streets*, 111.

equate) similar thematic ideas (violence and death) that would connect with his Coney Island audiences. That the specificity of these issues varied so greatly might have been further explored and even negotiated, had the company remained in Coney Island for more seasons.

Accounts suggest that Bread and Puppet attempted to create a unification of their work and Coney Island street culture by employing a strategy that Patrice Pavis describes as "a metacultural vision," or "the neutralization of one theatrical and cultural tradition by another."[168] Pavis employs the terminology in relation to the intercultural work of Eugenio Barba, and here it is Schumann, not Barba, who stands as the unifying force. And it is Schumann who presents us with questions of exchange. "It is almost impossible to think the 'inter' in the 'intercultural,' except in terms of concentric metaphors: exchange, sharing, contact, barter, revitalization, appropriation, a stealthy imperialism that has swapped the gun for theatre interculturalism?"[169] It casts the company's ritual of bread baking in a different light, as the gesture of nourishment is turned on its head in Schumann's "we-have-what's-good-for-you" stance. Bread and Puppet were destined for carpetbagger status in Coney Island; not quite traveling carnies who repaired to Florida in the off-season, they exhausted themselves with four hundred mile drives between bases of operation. Elka's family had a dairy farm in Glover, and the Goddard residency would last four years; they soon rejected their urban geographies for the homogenous audiences of New England entirely. The company faced the reality that their communalism—usually reconciled by Schumann at the helm—was compromised by his split attention between Vermont and Brooklyn.

This, of course, only magnifies the conflict: the ability of Bread and Puppet to take refuge in their mobility, to cross state lines, to view the territory of Coney Island as an error in judgment—all of this implicates Schuman nearer to the "imperialistic" side of Gilbert and Lo's

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[168] Patrice Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture,* trans. Loren Kruger (London: Routledge, 1992), 177.
[169] Ibid., 179. And yet, Pavis's reluctance to reproach Barba mirrors my own hesitations with regard to Schumann, who, like Barba, *did* theorize and attempt to resist codification.

continuum of intercultural theatre.[170] Bread and Puppet's working methods in Coney Island appear to have been initially motivated by a range of approaches to collaborative exchange, but the across the life of the project it veered towards an imperialistic mode and static transaction.[171] It is perhaps for this reason that, outside of Brecht's voluminous treatment, histories of the company relegate the Coney Island chapter to a very brief few lines.[172] It remains a stain on the performance history of a company whose efficacy hit a dry run in one of the more troubled and confounding landscapes of the city. Or perhaps it just raised too many contradictions about the direction of the troupe's work; the back-to-the-land mentality of their next move dovetailed nicely with their ecological pageants, and Schumann's propensity for over-reaching could be contained in a communal living setting. More suited to the ascetic possibilities of Vermont, the troupe embraced new iterations of their work within a setting far less racially polarized or ethnically heterogeneous at the time. They gave up on Coney Island's messy mixture of social protest at the crossroads of high and low, too discontent when it boldly thrust itself in the center of low. Schumann had voiced his distaste for "popular entertainment," and felt uncomfortable with the terms "popular" and "unpopular," as he reached for an equilibrium between them: "In fact it is the same thing that a piece of drama, a piece of Beckett, a piece of Shakespeare, or a piece of an Oldenburg Happening, or circus or carnival wants to do to people. It is uncritical to

[170] Lo and Gilbert, "Cross-Cultural Theatre Practice," 38.
[171] Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre*, 96, vol. 2. Brecht suggests that racial friction played a large role in the company's disintegration in Coney Island, but their previous work in communities across the city remains a part of their history, one that Brecht only incorporates in fragments. In fact, critics accused Schumann of selling out by abandoning his company's projects in East Harlem when they moved to Coney Island, but all signs suggest that he imagined similarly productive dynamics in Coney Island, and their puppeteers embarked on an ambitious plan for both children's workshops at the Old Boston Theater and Coney Island hospital. A full appraisal of their work with inner city residents is beyond the scope of this chapter, but is worth noting that city programs for minority youth sponsored Bread and Puppet's work in inner city neighborhoods in the 1960s. Bread and Puppet's first project in the Bronx birthed a giant Uncle Fatso puppet, which was paraded in an anti-landlord demonstrations in Spanish Harlem, before it graduated to peace protests and plays.
[172] "Neither the Coney Island project nor the traveling circus provided to be particularly successful, and gradually attention shifted entirely to the new base in Vermont." John Bell, "Bread and Puppet and the Possibilities of Puppet Theater," in *Restaging the Sixties: Radical Theaters and Their Legacies*, James M. Harding and Cindy Rosenthal, eds., (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 355.

define that as something as flat as the word entertainment means."[173] Not interested in manipulating the audience towards moneymaking, their pageants through the park and barker-style appeals to spectators seems hopelessly 1960s.

In analyzing Bread and Puppet's work in Coney Island, Kourilsky suggests that the problem was the site: an amusement park could not connect people. Ultimately, though, the tensions between entertainment and political theatre, or popular versus elite, were tangential to the central theme of Bread and Puppet in Coney Island. Schumann's interests lay in creating the possibilities for communality, not collectively devising representational narratives for Coney Island. The audience member responding to *Mississippi* protested the image reflected back to her, and argued for control over that image. Schumann contended that *Mississippi* being "about the shooting a black man,"[174] should have been simultaneity enough. The design of the project lionized communality through shared space, without clear mechanisms for audience participation in terms of the content and urgency of the work. His vision for the Old Boston involved a set of references to circus culture and investment in an escape and division from what was happening "outside." Schumann hoped that esoteric symbolism could connect with audiences and somehow mirror their experiences. Puppet workshops aimed to educate families on the materials and methods of the productions, not the questions of representation. Every aspect of the Everyman approach valorized the strength and image of the crowd, while Schumann departed from it; as the summers continued, they presented shows with fewer band members and puppeteers. Everyman sought to involve and expose the neighborhood residents in an evocation of their frustrations, while Bread and Puppet hid their few operators with bulbheads and exhausted their efforts to lure passersby into the dark silence of the Old Boston.

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[173] Kourilsky, "Dada and Circus," 108.
[174] Schumann, quoted in Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre*, 94, vol. 2.

Bread and Puppet departed after the summer of 1972, and Denson calls it "the end of a creative era for Coney Island."[175] It was not very much later, in 1974, that Schumann disbanded the company, having endured a "horrible" fourth tour at the end of 1973, during which they traveled with many of the Coney Island shows on a tour that required twenty-five traveling puppeteers, and at least twenty volunteers in each location they traveled.[176] With their departure, the life of the Old Boston Theater as a performance space ceased. It became a storage warehouse for Nathans, and was demolished in the early 1980s.

The utopian longing of Bread and Puppet and the participatory gestalt of the Everyman Company opened out into long company careers, but not in Coney Island. Coney Island lost Everyman, Bread and Puppet, and Marketa Kimbrell's Street Caravan, and this reflected a wider dismantling of street performance troupes by the end of the decade. The agreement on the part of city officials that street theatre could palatably calm the fires of racial polarization lost much of its goodwill by the late 1970s, and this dovetailed with the austerity measures of the fiscal crisis. In 1976, a *New York Times* article warned that due to budget cuts, grasses would not appear lush for the summer, the boardwalk would not be spruced up, and there would be fewer lifeguards and more litter. An outdoor schedule of events would nonetheless proceed. "The Parks Department, as devastated as all the other city agencies by cutbacks in money and personnel— more devastated, in fact, than some— has managed to pull on its fraying bootstraps and step ahead with a vigorous summer schedule."[177] This rhetorical flourish that personified the government as an individual in hard times has more than limited resonance: it reflected one strain of the very

[175] Denson, *Coney Island: Lost and Found*, 201.
[176] Brecht, *Bread and Puppet Theatre*, 197, vol. 2. This was a NYSCA tour of twelve universities in the State University of New York (SUNY) system, during which Bread and Puppet encountered unresponsive college crowds and the drudgery of budget touring.
[177] Mary Breasted, "Parks to Bustle Again in Summer," *New York Times*, May 16, 1976, 47.

definition of neoliberal philosophy.[178] It also reflects a recurrent tension of this chapter: while the local, participatory arts initiatives were viewed in the early part of the 1970s as mechanisms for urban regeneration, a resistance among many officials towards artists (who had been weaned on a 1960s-style aesthetic and political radicalism) foreclosed performance practices motivated by the philosophies of accessibility and participation.[179] These artistic forms were tethered too closely to the liberal policies that were seen as particularly dangerous in a neighborhood known for racial unrest and polarization. This school of thought blamed spend-happy liberal governance for the city's bankruptcy; if its social welfare policies were unsustainable, so too were the democratic visions of streets and parks as public spaces for the articulation of social justice goals that represented the demands of these segments of society.

In the cutback summer of 1976, the bootstraps of the Parks Department were pulled up with the aid of numerous corporations which stepped to help neighborhoods like Coney Island. With twenty-three percent of Parks personnel lost along with forty million dollars in its capital budget funds, Commissioner Martin Lang augmented its crippled operations with private industry sponsorship.[180] Rheingold funded street games Olympics, Pepsi backed a mobile tennis unit and a bike race, Mobil Oil sponsored a series of youth street games, and French's Mustard sponsored a bike safety check. There was, conspicuously, no summer theatre sponsored. But by mid-decade, as the government increasingly turned to corporate interventions to fill the

[178] One common definition for neoliberal governance is adherence to the theory "that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade." Jonathan M. Soffer, *Ed Koch and the Rebuilding of New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 3.

[179] Historian Julie Stephens's research evidences how the conflation of "art in the streets" with "revolution in the streets" was a characteristic feature of the anti-disciplinary politics of the sixties. Julie Stephens, *Anti-Disciplinary Protest: Sixties Radicalism and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[180] The toll taken on the city's parks during the fiscal crisis was particularly severe, and this state of deterioration continued until at least 1982. There was a sixty percent cut in Parks appropriations between 1974 and 1980, and the summer work force was cut from six thousand to fewer than two thousand and seven hundred. "In the absence of regular maintenance, supervision, or policing, many parks and playgrounds suffered vandalism and were filled with piles of garbage." Ray Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 502.

budgetary gaps that so weakened agencies like the Parks department, the media spin on the ailing amusement area of Coney Island worsened by the day. The paper of record rarely deviated from the "bootstraps" discourse to describe the pitiful state of municipal provisions in the city, and this ideological frame enforced a larger message: just as the government would muster the determination of an individual down on his luck, so too should the citizens of the metropolis. But behind this turn of phrase was a literal draining of funds and systematic impoverishment of the Coney Island neighborhood.

As a form, however, street theater was uniquely vulnerable to official regulations and surveillance: the necessity of proper permits, the ease of being seen, and its very public presence in areas already highly-policed made it difficult to continue the mildly sanctioned performance that flourished before the fiscal crisis fallout. Some of the companies I described in this chapter were vulnerable to cuts to both arts agencies as well as parks, and there was an ideological component of this retrenchment. The political currents and cultural experiments of the 1960s opened up the parks, but these gains were diminished during the financial crisis and resurgent conservatism.[181] Historians have noted that following the evolution of city park spaces into public venues for mobilizing and expressing oppositional politics (during and after the fiscal crisis), these new democratic uses were largely foreclosed. "In the new urban liberalism of the 1960s unprecedented uses of the park were permitted: new forms of 'community control' began to influence the use of public facilities. But the fiscal crisis of the 1970s provoked a questioning of such experiments and sharply undercut the city's commitment to public services—the maintenance of public parks among them."[182] Vast sections of the troubled neighborhood and amusement district of Coney Island were particularly vulnerable to this curtailment, as the beach

[181] Ibid.
[182] Ibid., 471.

environs had been under heavy Parks Department jurisdiction since Moses' reign. Moses, as has been detailed elsewhere, had a deep distaste for the ethos and aesthetics of Coney Island.

Another clear articulation of the sea change in the municipal attitude towards street theatre across the difficult decade is found in a city-produced book, *On the Streets: A Guide to New York City's Buskers*, released around 1979 by the DCA.[183] The book opens on a populist note with an epigraph from the Pablo Neruda poem "For Everyone," and an introduction from the DCA commissioner extolling the "liveliness and spirit" of the streets of New York City.[184] But the book's final section, "Theatrical Groups," includes blurbs for only seven street theatre groups, alongside a concise explanation for the limited listing:

> The reason is that most theatrical groups are no longer performing informally and extemporaneously on local corners. They have come of age. Groups are organized with administrators and directors and they actively pursue public grants. These grants enable various funding organizations to program the theatre groups so that the South Bronx and South Ferry are served equally. The style of the theatrical trouping, whether scheduled or impromptu, remains the same. Wagons, carts and trucks move Punch and Judy, comedia del'arte *[sic]*, and theatre caravans around New York City. The groups are totally self-contained. Stages unfold, technicians become actors, paper bags are masks, and the audience sits on steps or milk crates to watch the show. Historically, street theatre has been largely political in nature. The actor can assault the king, attack the taxes, or wreck Westway with comedy and symbols, without having to resort to directly pointing fingers

[183] Wickham Boyle, *On the Streets: A Guide to New York City's Buskers* (New York: New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, 1981?). The book does not have a copyright date, but online out-of-print book listings date its publication to 1979 or 1981.
[184] Ibid., 4.

> or making speeches. The entertainment mode is an effective sugar coating that lets the actor make points about the states of various unions.[185]

This presents a questionable narrative, particularly in its reference to new mechanisms that could provide a more equitable distribution of funds for public performance—there was, in fact, a slow accrual of the uneven development of performance practices across neighborhoods. The text neatly divorces performance from the place-based imperatives of street performance companies. It expresses clear ambivalence about the overt political edge of much street theatre, and fails to disguise a discomfort with the ability of street performance to animate the public dimension of the streets. It also omits one of the primary conceits of the form: to bring theatre directly to underserved communities, and to represent resident-performers in their own territory. This is a stark change in the orientation of city and state government, and it arrived at the tail end of a decade in which "arts for the people" had been put forth as a viable salve for inner city ills. As I have delineated, this philosophy evolved through the revisions of civil rights movements; it originated in the 1950s as an approach of ghetto education programs that delivered the western canon for civilizing ends. That discriminatory stance frayed as companies inspired by the Black Theatre Movement's street theatre and other radical formulations began gaining control over the definition of performance in areas across the city. This form of performance was systematically de-funded and dismantled by an administration concerned with white flight, urban youth revolt, and supposed budgetary laxity.

The DCA's *Busking* publication acknowledged the tacit association of inner city performance with street agitation. Street performance tapped into anxieties regarding the distribution of power in the city, particularly as experienced by the populations that bore the brunt of austerity measures. It is the reference to "Westway" in the *Busking* text that chiefly

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[185] Ibid., 73.

reveals this associative link between urban issue protest and street theatre, particularly after the tumultuous decade of anti-war demonstrations. One of the most contentious planning debates in New York City's history, Westway was a $1.16-billion dollar, twelve-lane highway and waterfront development project proposed for the West Side of Manhattan. The accusation that street theatre wrecked Westway "with comedy and symbols"—could be interpreted as an admiring nod to the efficacy of political protest in street theatre. Or, it sought to demean the practice with its uninformed interruptions in citywide issues of import while skirting direct political combat. While not particularly known for its street performance protests, the protracted Westway debate was a flashpoint for citizens groups, who saw it as a dangerously pro-car initiative. Westway was a melee over the extent of the public's input in the spending of city and federal money, one that stretched over ten years (1971-1985) until the project was deemed illegal on environmental grounds. While the resolution of the Westway drama held significance for the future of mass transit in the city,[186] there were no clear victors. The triumphal opposition crafted a story of public good over government folly and the misprioritization of funds; its proponents blamed anti-government fanatics who meddled in the urban planning affairs of the city and state and imperiled millions of dollars in federal highway funds. Competing visions of urban renewal were at war.[187]

The 1981 DCA *Busking* guide reported that the concept of street theatre had already changed, "in that most of the groups are now hired to perform in set sites by groups such as Lincoln Center or the Department of Cultural Affairs."[188] The move to these set sites drew

[186] Roberta Brandes Gratz, *The Battle for Gotham: New York in the Shadow of Robert Moses and Jane Jacobs* (New York: Nation Books, 2010), 228.
[187] Gratz, *The Battle for Gotham*, 211. Although no neighborhoods would have been razed or bisected in the construction, many considered Westway a symbol of the city's past mistakes under Moses.
[188] Boyle, *Busking*, 75.

attention to Lincoln Center as the frame for these performative practices.[189] The architecture of the plaza had a way of swallowing up the political salience of these inner city visitors; set apart from the street by multiple lanes of traffic, the high modernist buildings stood in contrast with the low-density honky tonk of Surf Avenue. Yet there was a consistency to be found between the cultural aspirations of Lincoln Center and the same era's urban renewal policies that created the landscape of urban hopelessness in Coney Island. As spatial theorists have cautioned, the dominant fiction that space is somehow visible or legible creates dangerous assumptions; it threatened to obscure the fight for city resources at the heart of these social relations. Performance theorist Stanton Garner Jr. has articulated the tendency of performance in theatre to render invisible the spatial and temporal fields of actual location; the street performance in Lincoln Square threatened the same.[190]

Coda: Freaks of the Future

> But, in the long-run, even good-will and talent may fail to bring stability to our urban centers unless the rest of the nation decides that its cities, and the people who live there, should no longer be a neglected resource.
> --Curtis J. Berger,
> *Hart et al. v. Community School Board, et al.: Report of the Special Master*[191]

As the decade closed, wars over representation in Coney Island intensified as the island was fetishized in popular depictions. Representation had the power to produce and maintain common notions of its urban form, without an implicit challenge or question. In the late 1970s, a film crew commandeered an abandoned boardwalk bathhouse, Stauch's Baths, for a set of the

[189] Foulkes, "Streets and Stages," 413. That "certain performances were conducted just outside the newly completed theaters of the largest performing arts complex in the world suggests the framing power of place in experiencing the arts." She aptly describes the "persistence" necessary to access the vacuum-like hole of the car-centric plaza.
[190] Stanton B. Garner, Jr. "Urban Landscapes, Theatrical Encounters: Staging the City," in *Land/Scape/Theatre,* Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri, eds. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 94-118.
[191] Berger, *Hart et. al.,* vii.

gang movie *The Warriors*. The film crew decorated the exterior with a bloated red-lettered graffiti tag of "WARRIORS," and left it so marked even after shooting completed.[192] Stauch's remained a shell: an icon to a fictive gang territory, on actual gang territory. When the film opened in 1979, a Coney Island street gang, The Homicides, believed the film's Coney Island gang, the Dominators, was based on their exploits. They packed the Oceana Theater in Brighton Beach, which led to one of many small outbreaks of vandalism and violence that occurred on its opening weekend.[193] These disturbances became a publicity engine for the film, and even *New Yorker* critic Pauline Kael used her farewell review space to exalt *The Warriors* with a provocative endorsement. "Probably the assumption was that the audience for this picture doesn't read reviews. The literate shouldn't miss out on it."[194] Kael responded to the movie's narrative of male-tribalism and the landscape of cops and kids in which the urban dispossessed believed that they owned the streets. Sol Yurick, whose book provided the foundations for the story, speculated that the film frightened some people because it appealed "to the fear of a demonic uprising by lumpen youth" and captivated others because it hit "a series of collective fantasies."[195]

Yurick's theory about the audience's fears and fantasies encapsulates one dominant form of representation that would come to typify performance in Coney Island, which, after 1979, traded in the visualization and display of the freak. In cinemas, *The Warriors* began the decade introducing the abject freak on the margins of urban society, who violently pursued his own

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[192] Denson, *Coney Island: Lost and Found*, 165.
[193] Ibid., 151.
[194] Gary Arnold, "Two Movie 'Sleepers' That Woke Up Fast; Neighborhood Rumble; *The Warriors*-- Surly Kids Pack a Box-Office Wallop," *The Washington Post,* March 18, 1979, H1. According to Yurick, Kael called him before writing her review, to know if the movie and book were based on a classic; she sought "a hook for intellectuals upon which to hang her review." Yurick knew that Kael's review, featured in an ad in the *New York Times*, would give the movie "the proper cachet." Sol Yurick, *The Warriors* (New York: Grove Press, 2003), xxxvi.
[195] Arnold, H1. Critics depicted the director, Walter Hill, as an effete, irresponsible Californian unaware of the true threat of gang pathology, eager to glamorize the problem with sensational techniques.

fantasy of the ownership of public space. As Bob Beauregard observed, "cities are narrative objects," and their nature, past, and future are documented and predicted through mediated forms of representation.[196] Coney Island exemplifies his notion of cities and neighborhoods as passive receptors of meanings; each interpretation seeks to persuade readers and listeners of the credibility of their attached meaning. Within this formulation, urban decline is frequently employed as a "symbolic lightning rod rather than an indicator of objective trends."[197] In the 1980s, the cultural work of assigning meaning to Coney Island enacted a slow crawl away from the fantasy of performance for social good; the freak was de-politicized and street performance in Coney Island was eventually accused of homogenization. The flavor of the neighborhood's artistic renaissance rested upon a vision of performance that borrowed more heavily from Coney's historical affiliation as a showcase for freaks than with the material engagement in its residents and surroundings.

Rachel Adams, in her book, *Sideshow USA,* a study of the freak show in twentieth-century United States, is critical of the sideshow that opened in Coney Island in the 1980s, which I will briefly discuss as a conclusion to the period in Coney Island that I have bracketed from 1972 to 1982. Adams persuasively argues against the freak show genre as an ephemeral form of amusement, but rather important cultural work that allows people to confront, and master, forms of Otherness. "With its heterogeneous assemblage of bodies, the sideshow platform is both a source of entertainment and a stage for playing out many of the century's most charged social and political controversies such as debates about race and empire, immigration, relations among

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[196] Bob Beauregard, "Representing Urban Decline: Postwar Cities as Narrative Objects," *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 29 (1993): 188.
[197] Ibid.

the sexes, taste, and community standards of decency."[198] In Coney Island, the freak performer moves to the fore as the urban freak is relegated to the decrepit amusement park district. On display, these freaks "are creatures who lurk in the unsteady seams where corporeal matter meets with fantasy, drama, and promotional hype."[199] Part of the impetus for this shift was Coney Island's appeal as a space of intrigue, inspiration, and fantasy for the freaks of the downtown theatre movement.

Coney Island had been a point of fascination for the downtown avant-garde, enshrined in the songs of Lou Reed and poems of Patti Smith, and before them, the Beat Generation writers. Charles Ludlam was one of the first *freak flâneurs* to adopt the cityscape of Coney Island as a representational space.[200] He found both creative inspiration and representational salience there, and he shot his silent horror film, *The Museum of Wax,* in "Coney's World in Wax Musee" in the Henderson building on Surf Avenue.[201] Henderson's Music Hall was built in 1899 to replace a vaudeville house destroyed in a fire, and, before it closed in 1926, Al Jolson and the Marx Brothers appeared on its stage. Later, the building housed a dime museum, and eventually, barker Lillie Santangelo's World in Wax Musee, which was open from 1926 until 1984. Ludlam performed in "Trick and Treats," a 1981 Halloween show at the Musee, described as "eight hours of contemporary performance pieces in an effort to raise money for the museum and to

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[198] Rachel Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001,) 2-3.
[199] Ibid., 6.
[200] Coney Island has been the subject of cinematic appropriations since the beginning of moving pictures; early one-reel shorts were produced there in the late 1890s. Ludlam was not the first Off-Off Broadway artist inspired to use the Coney Island location; among the most memorable was Tom Eyen's 1965 *Why Hanna's Skirt Won't Stay Down*. In it, a woman who works in the glass-enclosed ticket booth of a Forty-Second Street movie house takes the subway to Coney Island every payday to stand over one of the Steeplechase breeze holes. Set in a Coney Island fun house, this was the first play of a trilogy that enjoyed a long run Off-Off-Broadway beginning in 1965 at La Mama E.T.C. Tom Eyen, *Ten Plays* (New York: Samuel French, 1971), 5-71.
[201] Thor Equities, the owners of the building, demolished the Henderson in the fall of 2010.

bring a new clientele to the old establishment."[202] The producer of "Tricks and Treats," Dick Zigun (of the newly formed organization, Coney Island, U.S.A.), celebrated the dime museum form of popular entertainment and "spectacle requiring neither education nor money," which "appealed readily to the tastes of recent immigrants and the working poor."[203] "Tricks and Treats," however, one of his first events in Coney Island, targeted working poor artists more so than residents of the neighborhood, or the masses of patrons at the amusement park. During the show, Paul Zaloom, in a tour guide's cap, created a Circle Line Tour of the Lower East Side, the Bronx, the subways, and the World Trade Center. Performance artist Sandra McKee presented "Stories My Mother Told Me," a narrative of violent crimes her mother would read her from the newspaper, told as McKee sat in a chair on a blood-spattered floor and jabbed her hand with a pocket knife.[204] Ludlam performed "Escape from a Regulation Straightjacket as Used on the Murderous Insane," his homage to Harry Houdini's dime museum feats. Everett W. Quinton, dressed in a nurse's uniform, bound Ludlam in a straightjacket for being "bad" and lectured him on "transgressions and the necessity of punishment."[205] During "Tricks and Treats," Ludlam also screened his short film, *Museum of Wax*, which he projected with recorded music accompaniment while members of the Polar Bear Club recreated their icy swims by sitting in large metal tubs of crushed ice.

Ludlam's experiments in film began in the late 1970s. He created "Shadowgraph Photoplays" with a donated box of 16mm camera equipment. Quinton was his muse and partner in mastering the technique, and they shot their first film, *The Sorrows of Dolores*, in locations around New York City that included the San Gennaro festival and storefronts in Chelsea.

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[202] John Frick and Stephen Johnson, "Tricks and Treats on Coney Island," *The Drama Review: TDR* 26 (Spring 1982): 132.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Ibid., 134.
[205] Ibid., 135.

Ludlam claimed to have based *Museum of Wax* on French surrealist cinema. He shot the film in a few days, and wrote excitedly about the project: "[It's] a horror movie that we shot in the wax museum of Coney Island for a benefit for Lillie Santangelo, who had been running that wax museum since 1929. I tried to use everything I knew from *The Sorrows of Dolores* to do it quickly and efficiently. *Museum of Wax* is much more controlled. [T]he overall concept is very unified."[206] The spooky black and white short film is about an escaped convict who emerges from the desolate streets of Coney Island. In the opening shot, a ghostly Ludlam in prison stripes peers around a corner, spying on the barker outside of the Musee. The Ferris Wheel towers behind him. The amusement park appears deserted—there are no people save Ludlam and the characters he meets once inside the Musee. Ludlam hides among illuminated display cases of wax babies-- fifty wax heads culled from the museum's storage area form a sinister backdrop—and eventually disguises himself as an old lady in a wheelchair to evade the officers in his pursuit. The film is a memory chamber of references, with Ludlam's prisoner outfit harkening back to chain gangs of old, and visual spoofs of both silent films and queer camp.

Off screen, residents in Coney Island endured the tumultuous aftermath of 1970s disinvestment. Wholesale neglect dotted the landscape in the form of abandoned houses and boarded up shops. Its residents suffered with twenty percent unemployment, and drug abuse and prostitution proliferated along Surf Avenue.[207] Many resented the contrast between the emerging

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[206] Charles Ludlam, *Ridiculous Theatre: Scourge of Human Folly*, Steven Samuels, ed. (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1992), 213. Ludlam felt bogged down in postproduction and considered the film unfinished. In 2010, the Coney Island Film Festival screened *The Museum of Wax* for the first time in twenty years. Peter Golub, the composer for the Ridiculous Theatre Company, contributed a new score. Zigun, still in Coney Island at the helm of Coney Island U.S.A., introduced the film as "a work of film genius." Queer/Art/Film remastered the 16mm film as part of the Outfest Legacy Project for LGBT Film Preservation and the UCLA Film and Television Archive. See Tricia Vita, "Video: The Museum of Wax by Charles Ludlam," *Amusing the Zillion*, September 27, 2010, accessed January 13, 2013, http://amusingthezillion.com/2010/09/27/video-the-museum-of-wax-by-charles-ludlam.

[207] Colin Campbell, "Beleaguered Coney Islanders Rally With Sense of Affection: The Talk of Coney Island," *New York Times*, August 29, 1981, 25.

city and their own conditions; that same summer, subway car interiors were repainted as the city polished its tarnished image. Coney Island residents viewed the city's mayors through the prism of broken promises, men who "had let burned-out buildings stand and had allowed Surf Avenue to become a flea market on one side and a sleazy honky tonk on the other."[208] Could Coney Island transform itself into a beachfront residential area, or as a potential tourist destination, with restored historic uses? Some of its residents still remembered the 1940s with fondness, when George Burns and Jimmy Durante performed, alongside Cary Grant on stilts. The Koch Administration robustly supported proposals to build casinos in Coney Island, and many developers presented plans for full-scale rejuvenation of the amusement site.[209] Meanwhile, as New York sweltered in record 101 degree temperatures, more pleasure-seekers were heading to Coney Island in a phenomenon the press dubbed "half a tank" leisure: with gas prices spiraling and supply uncertain, Coney Island businesses experienced the best sales days in twenty years.[210]

At the same time, Zigun, a Yale theatre graduate, and Richard Eagan, a cabinetmaker and artist who founded the Coney Island Hysterical Society with artist Philomena Marano, worked to champion a modest arts resurgence.[211] Coney Island U.S.A. and the Coney Island Hysterical Society revived the wax museum and the Coney Island Spook House, held break-dance festivals and bathing suit contests, and created the long-running Mermaid Parade. Soon after he arrived in Coney, Zigun attempted to mount performance art for one-dollar admission, but could not attract an audience. He changed his tactics after receiving pointed advice from

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[208] Ibid.
[209] Denson, *Coney Island: Lost and Found*, 211.
[210] "Subway Car Interiors to Be Painted," *New York Times*, July 21, 1980, 3; "'Half a Tank' Leisure: The Latest Boom," *U.S. News & World Report,* August 6, 1979, 41.
[211] Coney Island U.S.A. (CIUSA) was official founded in 1980 by Costa Mantis, Jane Savitt-Tennen, and Dick Zigun. Eagan's Coney Island Hysterical Society folded in 1987. CIUSA grew into the amusement area's primary non-profit arts performance space, and it remains the only regularly producing arts organization in Coney Island. Its headquarters also houses the Coney Island Museum, dedicated to its amusement history. CIUSA is funded by foundations, city agencies, local government funds, and individual members.

former Bread and Puppet member Zaloom, who instructed him to "do the carny thing," since "it's not like there's a bunch of highfalutin' season-ticket-holders schleppin' up and down the boardwalk. It's people who are broke."[212] Zigun did direct a few plays in Coney Island in addition to his sideshow offerings, including experimental playwright Len Jenkin's *Kid Twist*, performed in Coney Island in 1987 and starring Eagan. In the play, written in 1977, detectives guard the infamous 1940s mobster in a witness protection hotel room at the Half Moon hotel in Coney Island.[213] As he awaits his testimony at a high profile murder trial, Kid receives visitors from his subconscious—the random interlopers include The Joker, Babe Ruth, Captain Max Pruss of the Hindenburg, a rabbi, and his wife. The District Attorney, caught up in delusions of grandeur, rejoices that a "clean city" will be the outcome of finally having cornered the big-time hitman-turned-informant: "This city is gonna be clean again. It is gonna be clean. Decent people gonna have a chance for a decent life. Everything's gonna be coming up roses. *(Sings.)* Zipadee doo dah, zipadee ay, my o my…."[214] The men who protect Kid are also on the payroll of New York crime families, and they shove the valuable informant out of a window and into the sea.

It is the icons of popular culture that besiege Twist and Zigun; Captain Max Pruss describes the skyline of Brooklyn as if in a dream, bewitched by the power of the city's landscape, while Kid Twist looks out the window and wonders, "How the hell they ever build that boardwalk? Miles of fence to keep us outta the sea."[215] The ghosts traverse associative historical moments, and Jenkin's dramatization of Twist's final hours seem to echo the dashed optimism seething through Coney Island's history. Zigun worked relentlessly to discover the right medley of popular entertainment and amusement nostalgia that would not sink into the

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[212] Denson, *Coney Island: Lost and Found*, 233.
[213] Len Jenkin, *Kid Twist*, in, Mac Wellman, ed., *Seven Different Plays* (New York: Broadway Play Publishing Inc. 1988), 57.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid., 64.

waves like so many flash-in-the-pan Coney entrepreneurs. He did not attempt to produce plays like *Kid Twist* very long and Zigun eventually became Coney's dominant showman. He caters to an audience of "transients in search of hedonism and vicarious thrills," and gleaned that local crowds preferred drag queens to performance art.[216] He was drawn to the amusement park's popular history, and traded in its fun house vestiges to build his brand of "honky tonk chic," with two regular offerings that are now the hallmark of Coney Island U.S.A.: Sideshows by the Seashore, and the annual Mermaid Parade.[217]

Zigun has described sideshow entertainment as the ultimate art form for the neighborhood, "not Stanislavsky," but rather "in your face, crack-you-up, lowest common denominator," "immigrant theatre, beyond language."[218] Although there is now just one sideshow performance venue where there were once hundreds of performance events, Zigun's recipe of performance-art-meets-side-show gained potency with persistence and has lasted decades, to the surprise of onlookers.[219] There have been detractors: Adams notes that "many of the more troubling aspects of the freak show's history remain unresolved" even through Zigun's reimaginings.[220] For Adams, Zigun's inspired appropriation of contemporary artists recuperating an antiquated form "relies on an ironic and politically progressive audience, while erasing the more unsavory aspects of the freak show's history."[221] Urban planner Juan Rivero aptly described the Burlesque revival

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[216] Rivero, *Planning Nostalgic Space,* 39-40.
[217] The Mermaid Parade is a campy homage to the Mardi Gras Parade, which ran annually from 1903 until 1954.
[218] John Istel, "Boomtown on the East River," *American Theatre* (December 2004), accessed February 8, 2013, http://www.tcg.org/publications/at/dec04/boom.cfm. For more on historical immigrant performance in Coney Island, see Peter Conelly-Smith, *Translating America: An Immigrant Press Visualizes American Popular Culture, 1895-1918* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2004); and Edward Portnoy, "Freaks, Geeks, and Strongmen," *TDR: The Drama Review* 50 (Summer 2006): 117-35.
[219] Sideshow performance has become a rarity in an amusement industry dominated by multi-million dollar theme parks, which, outside of their enormous financial risk, have "no room for dangerous-to-emulate or morally questionable entertainment." Fred Siegel, "Theater of Guts: An Exploration of the Sideshow Aesthetic," *TDR* 35 (Winter 1991): 107.
[220] Adams, *Sideshow, U.S.A.,* 211.
[221] Ibid., 212. Adams writes about the reemergence of the freak show within the context of the Giuliani administration.

at Coney Island U.S.A. as “post-modern girlie revues.”[222] And Zigun himself has been implicated in the homogenization of the Coney Island style. In 2007, downtown artist Taylor Mac presented *Red Tide Blooming* at HERE Arts Center, a play that lamented the gentrification of Zigun’s Mermaid Parade. He explained:

> *Red Tide Blooming* is a reflection on the revitalization and homogenization of Coney Island, New York City, and the world at large…. I suppose you could call it a ridiculous-absurdist-agit-prop-vaudevillian-musical-allegorical-epic-dramedy…. In *Red Tide* I didn't want to stop the action of the play in order to have a strip-tease but felt highlighting the burlesque movement and community was important to my metaphor (Coney Island and downtown New York are a hot-bed of burlesque performers). To me, *Red Tide Blooming* is a call to arms for people to chose to create a counter-culture, rather than mourn its appropriation.[223]

This charge gathered steam when the city proposed controversial new rezoning regulations for Coney Island. When the contentious rezoning process landed on Coney Island’s shores, Zigun filled an uncomfortable role as entertainment impresario, serving as *de facto* spokesperson for

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[222] Rivero, *Planning Nostalgic Space,* 37.
[223] Michael Criscuolo, “An Interview with Taylor Mac, *Red Tide Blooming*,” NYTE Small Press, February 2007, accessed January 13, 2013 http://www.nytesmallpress.com/pp07int_mac.php. Recent developments in Coney Island suggest that Mac has reason to worry about counter-cultural public sites. Architecture professor Michael Sorkin characterized the administration’s economic development program as “distorted in favor of a trickle-down theory of benefits from development…heavily weighted in favor of office development and housing for those who can best afford it.” Sorkin, quoted in Charles V. Bagli, “Mayor Pursues Plans Outside Manhattan and Even Critics Applaud,” *New York Times*, July 11, 2005, accessed January 31, 2012, http://travel.nytimes.com/2005/07/11/nyregion/11development.html?pagewanted=print. Susan Fainstein has also criticized development projects which aim at major changes of use, favor large over small business, and incorporate highly risky financial commitments. Susan S. Fainstein, “The Return of Urban Renewal,” *Harvard Design Magazine* 22 (Spring/Summer 2005): 2.

the amusement district interests and small-business owners, while straddling his identity as a non-profit friend to the city.[224]

Briefly, the 2009 rezoning passed by the Land Use Committee and the City Council changed the area's C7 amusement district zoning, a low-density zoning that encourages outdoor amusements and prohibits residential and community uses. Opponents argued that the zoning prevented out-of-scale development and helped to protect the historic structures on Surf Avenue; sixty-one acres formerly zoned for "outdoor amusements" were reduced to about twelve acres.[225] The plan aimed to generate new housing units and retail footage, and established a "Special Coney Island District" zoning to "guide development of the amusement and entertainment area as well as the residential developments surrounding it."[226] Those who had long chided the city for its lack of action on behalf of all Coney Island residents took a hesitantly optimistic stance that their needs would be addressed. Zigun sat on the board of the Coney Island Development Corporation (CIDC), an entity formed in 2003 to spearhead the comprehensive planning process to revive the area. But he publicly resigned from the CIDC in 2008 in the pages of the *Observer*, and declared the city's new plan as merely a final chapter of the work Robert Moses began:

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[224] See Alessadro Busà, "Rezoning Coney Island: A History of Decline and Revival, of Heroes and Villains at the People's Playground," in *The World in Brooklyn: Gentrification, Immigration, and Ethnic Politics in a Global City*, Judith N. DeSena and Timothy Shortell, Eds. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 147-85.

[225] Denson, now the Executive Director of The Coney Island History Project (CIHP), criticized the development efforts as a "razzle," carny lingo for a complex carnival game, a flashy display designed to confuse or deceive its players. Charles Denson, "Answers About the Preservation of Coney Island," *New York Times,* July 15, 2009, accessed February 8, 2013, http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/07/15/answers-about-the-preservation-of-coney-island/. See also, The Coney Island Development Corporation (CIDC), accessed February 2, 2013, http://www.thecidc.org; Charles V. Bagli, "Seeking Revival, City to Buy Land in Coney Island," *New York Times*, November 11, 2009, accessed February 8, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/12/nyregion/12coney.html; Megan Barnett, "Urban Makeover Artist," *U.S. News*, August 16, 2004, accessed February 2, 2013, http://www.usnews.com/usnews/biztech/articles/040816/16eespotlight.htm; and Greg Sargent, "The Incredibly Bold, Audaciously Cheesy, Jaw-Droppingly Vegasified, Billion-Dollar Glam-Rock Makeover of Coney Island," *New York Magazine*, September 25, 2005, accessed February 8, 2013, http://nymag.com/nymetro/realestate/features/14498.

[226] Busà, "Rezoning Coney Island," 156.

> My fantasy municipality is 61 acres zoned for amusements. A hundred years ago Coney Island's amusement core covered hundreds of acres and even in the mid-20th century it was over 70 acres before Robert Moses stole Luna Park and the east end for high rise housing. Instead the core will now be rezoned for a shopping mall full of NikeTowns, Toys R US and 4 thirty story hotels. One of these massive hotels is even proposed directly in front of The Wonder Wheel, a NYC Landmark. Only 9 acres out of 61 will be reserved for amusement park rides. The original CIDC Plan promised that any condos built within the empty lots of the 61 acres would have Entertainment Retail on the ground floor such as bowling alleys and theaters. Instead the 61 acres now crams in 26 new high rise towers up to 30 stories each with dry cleaners and hardware stories no tourist will ever visit.[227]

Zigun's primary concerns are amusements and tourists for a Surf Avenue that can support his Sideshow offerings. But his protestations denounced the impending alteration of the character and quality of Coney Island's streets as open-air, accessible, low-density, and public. Yet as the director of a city-funded arts organization, his autonomy was compromised; he continued to speak out against the plan at public hearings after his resignation, but later shifted to again support the City's strategic plan. Zigun relies on the city for funding, and while the CIDC enjoys some of the benefits of a community non-profit, it is an official arm of the City's Economic Development Corporation.[228] For Zigun, this signified yet another round of exhausting private

[227] Dick Zigun, quoted in Tom Acitelli, "The Mayor of Coney Island's Resignation Letter," *New York Observer*, June 4, 2008, accessed February 8, 2013, http://observer.com/2008/06/the-mayor-of-coney-islands-resignation-letter.

[228] Eliot Brown, "At Coney Hearing, City Bused Supporters to Boost Its Own Plan," *New York Observer*, July 3, 2009, accessed February 2, 2013, http://observer.com/2009/07/at-coney-hearing-city-bused-supporters-to-boost-its-own-plan-2; Ray Rivera, "New York Paid to Lobby Itself, Group Claims," *New York Times*, August 20, 2009, accessed February 2, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/21/nyregion/21lobby.html?pagewanted=all.

development battles, municipal capriciousness, business closures, not to mention the periodic ecological ravages and constant financial deprivation that confronted his operations.

In the nascent days of Zigun's Coney Island, U.S.A., over twenty years earlier, the same issues festered in Coney Island: from poorly maintained housing stock to racial polarization to police harassment to poverty conditions to lack of basic neighborhood amenities to limited funding for community organizations to few cultural options for youth. Unemployment rates in Coney Island are double that of most of the city.[229] As journalist Suketu Mehta writes, "income disparities are as big as Brooklyn itself; in 2000, the median household income in the wealthiest census tract-- in Brooklyn Heights-- was $112,414. In the poorest tract, in Coney Island, the median income, at $7,863, was not even one-tenth of that."[230] While Coney Island's neighborhoods have many needs, "Coney Island" enjoys a strong identity as a creative brand, for commodities like beer, and for ephemeral art world cache. In 2009, Jeffrey Deitch, the founder of the SoHo gallery Deitch Projects, called Coney Island "the essential art neighborhood"; Paris Hilton, on her first visit to the new West Village nightclub, Carnival NYC, modeled after Coney Island, commented, "I just thought it was such a fun idea, to bring Coney Island to the city"; and Andrew Lloyd Webber has set his sequel to *Phantom Of the Opera* in Coney Island, "where all the freaks went."[231] With the specter of homogenization hovering over the shrinking amusement area and its newly found cultural currency, Coney Island has received very few concrete benefits

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[229] Neil deMause, "Coney Island's Invisible Towers," *Brooklyn Bureau*, July 2, 2012, accessed February 8, 2013, http://www.bkbureau.org/coney-islands-invisible-towers#.URcEqIVJ83Y.

[230] Suketu Mehta, "The Great Awakening," *New York Times*, June 19, 2005, accessed December 19, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/19/nyregion/thecity/19feat.html. Mehta has called attention to diminishing accessibility of Coney Island to working-class visitors. Cassim Shepard, "Coney Island: Which Way Forward?" *Urban Omnibus,* May 5, 2009, accessed August 20, 2010, http://urbanomnibus.net/2009/05/coney-island-which-way-forward.

[231] TJ Carlin and Kate Lowenstein, "The Essential New York Art Neighborhoods," *Time Out New York,* Nov 5–11, 2009, accessed August 20, 2009, http://newyork.timeout.com/articles/features/80197/essential-new-york-art-neighborhood; "Carnival, Presented By Bowlmor," http://www.carnivalnyc.com, accessed February 10, 2013; Linda Holmes, "Andrew Lloyd Webber Sets The 'Phantom' Sequel at…Coney Island? *NPR.org*, October 8, 2009, accessed February 10, 2013, http://www.npr.org/blogs/monkeysee/2009/10/andrew_lloyd_webber_sets_the_p.html.

from the renewed attention of the *Time Out* set. In the global transitions from factory to finance, Coney Island had no niche.[232] Trapped in the cogs of narratives of decline, its residents suffered at the hands of austerity, were blamed for its side effects, and, two decades later, associated with its images.

[232] An inquiry into Coney Island's attempts to shift into a dominant mode of "post-Fordist entertainment" are beyond the scope of this chapter, but the 1990s and 2000s birthed an unending stream of proposals for its development; see deMause, "Coney Island's Invisible Towers."

Conclusion

The Myth of Self-Sufficiency

> In the face of such financial adversity, how did these institutions last so long? Look at the leadership; what's driving the leadership? It's certainly not money! The institutions are still here because the managers and artistic directors came of age during the Fifties and Sixties; we had "isms"—Communism, Marxism, Radicalism (the Radical Left), and Nationalism.
> We must find "isms" again.
> --Woodie King, *The Impact of Race*[1]

> Without the stabilizing environmental influence of its powerful arts contingent,
> New York would become just another city, just another desert on the edge of a jungle.
> --Otis L. Guernsey, *Curtain Times*[2]

In 1983, Mayor Edward Koch proposed limiting the city's financial contributions to cultural institutions to fifty percent of their budgets. In his announcement of the proposed cap, he sternly warned arts groups: "There's nothing like a gap in your budget to concentrate your attention.... Better get cracking."[3] The Commissioner of Cultural Affairs, Bess Myerson—who later resigned amid an ethics scandal—acknowledged that the limit would "affect the small institutions," but reasoned the cap incentivized funding sources to give more. Martin Segal, by then the chairman of Lincoln Center, expressed dismay at the proposed policy, about which there had been no public discussion.[4] Outer-borough neighborhood organizations that catered specifically to minority populations complained that the policy hurt them most directly, and limited the access of the poor to cultural institutions. Arts administrator Lloyd Hezekiah argued

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[1] Woody King, *The Impact of Race: Theatre and Culture* (New York: Applause Theatre and Cinema Books, 2003), 22.
[2] Guernsey, *Curtain Times*, 214.
[3] Fay S. Joyce, "Koch to Impose Cultural Aid Limit," *New York Times*, July 8, 1983, C17. William Sites and others have depicted Mayor Koch's legacy as one in which the less affluent bore the brunt of economic change. William Sites, "Public Action: New York City Policy and the Gentrification of the Lower East Side," in *From Urban Village to East Village: The Battle for New York's Lower East Side,* ed. Janet L. Abu-Lughod, 189-213 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).
[4] Joyce, "Koch to Impose Cultural Aid Limit," C17.

that the new policy might "eliminate a whole segment of the population" if his museum charged increased entry fees.[5] The vice chairman of the Mayor's Advisory Commission for Cultural Affairs maintained that the change promoted self-sufficiency so that institutions "can withstand whatever the winds of politics are."[6] In this dissertation, I have analyzed the winds of politics during the 1970s, as performance practices mediated and were mediated by the upheavals of municipal crisis. Spatial inequities dictated that in some neighborhoods, these winds were gale force; in others, their reach was tempered. On every scale—from the politics within individual institutions, communities, and on the city, state, and national stages—the fiscal crisis altered material conditions and shaped assumptions about the relative value of theatre and theatres in neighborhoods. The rhetoric of self-sufficiency of theatre companies and other arts organizations was a natural complement to the crisis discourse, as officials sought distance from the perceived past errors of profligate liberal governance. It ignored the new groundwork promoted by Segal and economist William Baumol as well as the protestations of theatre artists Joseph Papp and Vinnette Carroll. They all argued vociferously throughout the 1970s that self-sufficiency among theatres of any stripe was a fallacy. The price of this continued myth landed squarely on the shoulders of under-resourced communities.

New York City has the largest municipal budget in the United States and the fourth largest government budget in the country; with over eight million residents, it is the most populous city in the nation, and its five boroughs cover more than six thousand miles of streets to be paved, plowed, towed, and cleaned.[7] But a budget is "more than an accounting tool; it is a

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[5] Ibid. Hezekiah had ample experience in such matters. He previously worked at the Bedford Stuyvesant Youth in Action Project and joined the Brooklyn Academy of Music as Assistant Director in 1967, but left soon after to head the Brooklyn Children's Museum.
[6] Quoted in Joyce, "Koch to Impose Cultural Aid Limit," C17.
[7] Adrienne Kivelson, *What Makes New York City Run?* (New York: The League of Women Voters of the City of New York Education Fund, 2001), 13.

public statement reflecting the priorities and political philosophies of the Mayor who proposes it and the Council that passes it."[8] Similar to the effect of surpluses, fiscal crises create questions of value, and these consumed the field in the 1970s, further enflamed by the urban conditions of the 1960s. This dissertation has investigated how that value was discussed, discerned, fought for, and represented. In doing so, I have attempted to disentangle the myriad roles of theatre and performance within specific neighborhoods during the 1974-1975 fiscal crisis, using representative case studies as indicators. Activist and social scientist Ruth Gilmore encourages thinking about political economy "in an everyday way" to understand local manifestations of economic and political restructuring.[9] These chapters have rendered visible the strained connections among theatre, material conditions, municipal politics, and spatial practices. For while budgets are decisive in the material realities of many theatrical productions, my primary space of investigation is not the budget sheet, but the spatially and sectorally uneven sites of crisis. "Crisis is not objectively bad or good; rather, it signals systemic change whose outcome is determined through struggle," writes Gilmore.[10] I have attempted to acknowledge the agency of theatre artists in my historical treatment of these economic and cultural struggles, as I analyzed how the plays, performances, and advocacy of theatre artists and community participants challenged the neutrality of geography, and exposed the relations between theatre, urban space, and cultural equity and access.

One of my original impetuses in undertaking this research was my desire to complicate two misperceptions: that *all* artists flourish during times of urban crisis, and that the goal of government involvement in the arts is to foster eventual economic self-sufficiency on the part of

[8] Ibid., 49.
[9] Ruth Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 131.
[10] Ibid., 54.

organizations. Elizabeth Currid-Halkett argues that economic factors during the 1970s

> created an environment that allowed artists to cluster in the same neighborhoods, paying rents so cheap that instead of working a second job, they were able to focus completely on performing and exhibiting nonstop in rock venues, clubs, galleries, and cafes. The downturn in the economy that negatively affected much of society was significantly positive for creativity in the long term.[11]

This may have been true for the founder of CBGBs, who recalled low rents and fertile congregations of artists like Patti Smith, Allen Ginsberg, Jeff Koons, and Andy Warhol. But this formulation positions artists outside the reach of social, cultural, and economic conditions when in fact, in the case of many Off, Off-Off, and Broadway theatres, additional narratives emerged, with other urgent variables.

I did not attempt to draw generalizations about the vast population of artists, but to dismantle the myth that economic downturns inherently deliver conditions for creativity. Such an assumption ignores the many spaces and places of the city in which theatre production struggles to take root, is short-circuited, or devalued. A myopic focus on "downtown" performance during this time period facilitates such erasure. Indeed, the Warholian bacchanalia that enchants popular culture depictions of 1970s artists tends to omit the 1975 bankruptcy altogether, or to cast it in a nostalgic register. Currid-Halkett severs the links among artists, neighborhood, material conditions, and the reigning economic order, to argue that creativity germinated in austerity. But theatre as an embodied performance practice illuminates socioeconomic forces as well as hints of

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[11] Elizabeth Currid-Halkett, *The Warhol Economy: How Fashion, Art, and Music Drive New York City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 28-29. Currid-Halkett depicts the years following 1975 not as ones of retrenchment for creative communities, but rather as fertile because of economic deprivation. David B. Cole and others have investigated the romanticization of artists as "urban pioneers," another aspect that contributes to the popular representation of artists thriving during recessions. David B. Cole, "Artists and Urban Redevelopment," *Geographical Review* 77 (Oct. 1987): 391-407.

"the human experience and psychic life that these forces create."[12] A careful excavation of performance practices in neighborhoods across the city shows contradictory ramifications of austerity ideologies-- spatially, racially, and culturally coded. The "geographies" in the title of this dissertation therefore reflect the theoretical underpinnings of cultural geography and spatial analysis, but it also indicates my continued belief that plays and performances must be understood within new critical models—that the "performance of neighborhood" emerges through more dimensions than just narratives of decline, rebirth, or revitalization. Currid-Halkett emphasizes a "clustering" phenomenon: facilitated by the low rents of the economic downturn, artists concentrated in "particular neighborhoods."[13] But for many artists, particularly those in under-resourced communities and living in *other* neighborhoods, the cumulative effects of initiatives only emphasized the spatial inequities across city blocks. In a rousing speech at the FACT conference, Hazel Bryant, who directed the Black Theatre Festival U.S.A., described how differently fiscal instability was experienced across the field:

> What we are really talking about is the haves and the have-nots. What we have brought to this conference is people who have money and people who do not and people who do not have the slightest idea how to get the kind of money you are talking about, and people who glory in finding ways to go what they want to do without money…. In a society where money is so desperately important, it becomes very difficult for people who do not have money to have a strong voice. That is one of the ways that you who have money can help us…. So now it is about how do we make all of us important and by so doing, we

[12] Tyrone R. Simpson II, *Ghetto Images in Twentieth Century American Literature: Writing Apartheid* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 15.
[13] Currid-Halkett, *The Warhol Economy*, 30.

make people important.[14]

Bryant presented a cogent plea on behalf of artists committed to and representative of small-scale institutions and their audiences—the grassroots, radical, or neighborhood theatres. While large-scale institutions weathered their own fiscal crisis tumult, the city's disinvestment hit small-scale institutions triply: in their theatre company's operations, on their stages, and in their communities. I have therefore focused on the material development of the idea (or ideology) of culture, to understand "how the idea of culture functions within systems of production and reproduction in the contemporary city."[15] How has "the idea of culture" been developed and deployed as a means of attempting to order, control, and define 'others'? And how did cultural producers in turn create their own definitions, and their own representations?

To interpret and measure the cultural and social costs of deindustrialization and disinvestment during the 1970s, I have "traveled" to many different performance sites and spaces, to public street corners and neglected theatres, to the desks of critics and the offices of arts administrators and officials. Artists themselves are not easily categorized in terms of class, but they operate within fields that are defined by their class struggle. Individual artistic instability must therefore be distinguished from the austerity conditions that wield the power to diminish spaces of representation for the city's publics. It is the latter force that has the potential to drain communities of cultural autonomy and social cultural welfare.

I hope that my approach confers meaning and significance to the sacrifices made by so many theatre artists in the years of this study, while also appraising their missteps and

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[14] Stuart W. Little, *After the FACT: A Report on the First American Congress of Theatre* (New York: Arno, 1975), 55-56. Bryant founded the Afro-American Total Theater Arts Foundation (1963) and the Richard Allen Center of Culture and Art (1968). She was also president of the African-American Federation of Arts and the Black Theater Alliance (1971).

[15] Don Mitchell, "There's No Such Thing as Culture: Towards a Reconceptualization of the Idea of Culture in Geography," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20 (1995): 102.

assumptions. Many of the artists I have chronicled fought against the popular perception that community-oriented artists are doomed to peripatetic and impoverished careers. I have therefore emphasized performance examples that interrupted discourses of dominant cultural ideologies. Sociologists increasingly use the term "creative underclass" to describe the "expressive resistance that usually forms part of larger political movements seeking to destabilize entrenched and unequal social relations, moralities, and economic power."[16] While I have been mindful to avoid romanticizing forms of local cultural production, I was guided by theories that attest to the ways in which the quality of space is produced by interaction and embodied practices. As Sonja Arsham Kuftinec describes, even small-scale productions can challenge narratives, animate difference, perform and reform culture, and attest to a community's "inherent instability."[17] Further, the relative influence of municipal agendas was not restricted to New York City. "The New York City fiscal crisis— with its resolution in budget cuts and austerity measures on the one hand, and incentives to business, the substitution of economic rationale for social welfare as the guiding force behind government spending, and taxation policy on the other— evolved as the model for the national economic policies of presidents Ford, Carter, and Reagan."[18] On a national scale, these austerity solutions reverberated out from the Big Apple.

Global, national, and local conversations today continue to grapple within the rhetoric and regimes of austerity. Indeed, there is much evidence that the overwhelming trend to define the arts in terms of its economic value to a city must be balanced with alternate frames and ways

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[16] George Morgan and Xeufei Ren, "The Creative Underclass: Culture, Subculture, and Urban Renewal," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 34 (2012): 128-29. They distinguish the term "creative underclass" from the common sociological category "the underclass," which in the United States has been used to refer to the African-American poverty groups that formed in inner-city neighborhoods as results of economic shifts from manufacturing and services in the second half of the twentieth-century.

[17] Sonja Arsham Kuftinec, "Theatrical Imaginaries in the Balkans and Jerusalem," in *Considering Calamity: Methods for Performance Research*, ed. Tracy C. Davis and Linda Ben-Zvi (Tel Aviv: Assaph Books, 2007), 97-98.

[18] Tabb, *The Long Default*, 9.

of understanding. For example, though this period was one in which there was a widespread recognition that many voices needed to be heard in the city design process, architectural and planning professionals "worried in a depoliticized way about the city in global restructuring," and focused myopically on improving the city's "marketability by enhancing its imageability, livability, cultural capital" rather than questioning the ways in which we experience space and true social transformation.[19] This dissertation points to the need to explore new ways of communicating theatre practices of the city—not theatre buildings—as generative public infrastructure, in order to address performance, space, and social transformation. As a facilitator of economic and social relations, theatre is always a contested presence, and the "performance of neighborhood" a contested site. This is especially true when the "needs" of any community are isolated and demonized. Critical debate about neighborhoods and the field of cultural production, however, can encourage a rethinking, one that moves towards more generative, inclusive, and egalitarian practices.

[19] Christine M. Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 4-5.

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Interviews

Bernard X. Bovasso, set designer, artist, and brother of Julie Bovasso. Interviewed by Hillary Miller. December 30, 2011.

Janet Langsam, First Deputy Commissioner of Cultural Affairs under Mayor Abraham Beame. Interviewed by Hillary Miller. January 11, 2012.

Val Orselli, Executive Director, Cooper Square Mutual Housing Association. Interviewed by Hillary Miller. December 19, 2011.

Albert Poland, former theatre manager. Interviewed by Hillary Miller, January 6, 2012.

Charles Reichenthal, former Brooklyn Arts and Culture Association Editor, interviewed by Hillary Miller, April 4, 2012.

Jan Barry, poet and former Big Apple Theater member. Interviewed by Hillary Miller. April 9, 2012.

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