

DO IT YOURSELF: HISTORIES OF ALTERNATIVES

Melissa Rachleff

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1. Stefan Eins interviewed by Herb Tam. New York, 2009. Note: This essay draws upon interviews conducted by former Exit Art curator Herb Tam. Audio excerpts from these interviews were presented as part of the "Alternative Histories" exhibition at Exit Art. The interviews are part of the Exit Art Archive at Fales Library & Special Collections at New York University. Transcriptions of the interviews will eventually be available online at the Art Spaces Archives Project (AS AP) at <http://www.as-ap.org/>.

2. Jacki Apple "Introduction," *Alternatives in Retrospect* (New York: The New Museum, 1987), 5.

New York City has long been a mecca for artists, but the emergence of "alternative spaces" in the late 1960s and early 1970s provided a kind of forum for the diverse cultural communities that sought edgy innovation and rejected market-driven concerns. These nonprofit galleries, theaters, performance spaces, ephemeral or site-specific projects, bookstores, and other organizations, often run by artists, adopted myriad approaches, some socially engaged, others not. Whatever their goals or intentions, the participants all shared an essential attitude—a spirit best described by one artist as "do it yourself."¹ Most histories of alternative spaces suggest that these vital catalysts for cultural transformation had an endpoint, and their time has passed. To portray that history as finite, however, suggests an "alternative space movement," a generalization perhaps necessary for traditional art criticism but not entirely true to the evolution of these varied endeavors. Yet the concept of a movement does imply the creation of communities, common practices, and networks, and in that sense, the term is appropriate.

This essay surveys some of the most important and influential texts regarding New York's alternative spaces with a view toward possible definitions of "alternative," and key themes related to these diverse venues and organizations. It is divided into four broad categories: "Anti-Organization: From Artist to Alternative," which explores a selection of pioneering artist-run spaces; "Blind Spots: From Activism to Alternative," which discusses the rise of gender- and ethnic-specific galleries, spaces often left out of historical overviews; "Parallel Histories," which looks at the late 1970s and early 1980s as a period of transition; and "Asserting a Mainstream," which

examines the maturation of nonprofit galleries and the democratization of the art world.

ANTI-ORGANIZATION: FROM ARTIST TO ALTERNATIVE

In 1979, Jacki Apple produced the first exhibition devoted to New York's alternative spaces: "Alternatives in Retrospect: An Historical Overview, 1969–1975," which was presented at the New Museum, then located at the New School for Social Research at 65 Fifth Avenue. At the time of the show, Apple was a curator at Martha Wilson's Franklin Furnace, at 112 Franklin Street in Tribeca, which was initially established in 1976 as a bookstore featuring artists' books, a form of work often marginalized by mainstream galleries. Almost immediately, Wilson and Apple began to hold related readings, performances, and exhibitions. Apple had also been involved with a number of the pioneering alternative spaces in the previous decade, including Apple, founded by her husband at the time, Billy Apple, in his loft studio on West Twenty-Third Street.

In the exhibition catalogue, Apple described her undertaking: "I came to this project not as an historian, critic or curator, but as an artist who entered into, grew up in, and emerged from the New York art world as an active participant in the formation, development, and decline of the alternative spaces."² Her efforts to help start Franklin Furnace notwithstanding, Apple saw 1975 as the endpoint for venues rooted in process-based art due to the evolution of many of these pioneering spaces into nonprofit arts institutions that were managed by administrators, overseen by boards of directors, and funded by financial sponsors, as well as the establishment of new organizations with similar

structures. Her selection featured early spaces that had ongoing programs of a year or more, such as Gain Ground, Apple, 98 Greene Street, 112 Greene Street Workshop, 10 Bleecker Street, Idea Warehouse, and 3 Mercer. In many instances, the subject of the work produced was its location and environment—Gordon Matta-Clark's alchemist projects in the basement of Jeffrey Lew's 112 Greene Street; Billy Apple scrubbing the floor, tile by tile, of Apple at 161 West Twenty-Third Street; Vito Acconci moving the contents of his apartment to Gain Ground at 264 West Eightieth Street; and Nancy Holt's *Crossed Locators*, at Alanna Heiss's 10 Bleecker Street, which was comprised of four steel pipes set up around the perimeter of the room, emphasizing the interior and making the space itself part of the artwork. Materials introduced into these venues referenced the gallery's physical components, but it was the *process* that was valued. Such work was radical in that it was participatory and ephemeral, existing later only as archival documentation in the form of notes and photographs. The motivation for these works was, in Apple's words, "the 'desire to break out of the frame,' to extend the boundaries and definitions of what was considered art, and to inevitably alter the established structure of the art world itself. Galleries and museums could not and did not recognize and accommodate this kind of work."³

These artist-run spaces were laboratories that functioned as collective studios, and thus operated from a different premise than traditional commercial galleries, given that they were loosely organized and unconcerned with the art market. There were few outlets for this new sensibility and the embrace of the ephemeral in the traditional art world. Apple's overview did not reference, for example, landmark New York exhibitions such as Kynaston McShine's 1970 "Information" show at the Museum of Modern Art, which featured documentation of Conceptual work and actions, or "9 at Leo Castelli," organized by Morris, for which nine artists created site-specific work throughout Castelli's West 108th

Street warehouse in December 1968.⁴ The latter exhibition is perhaps best known for Richard Serra's *Splashing*, a work that involved throwing molten lead into the angle formed by a section of floor and wall in the gallery. By and large, however, it was the pioneering alternative spaces highlighted by Apple that led the way. Her survey demonstrated how groups of artists coalesced around a particular space, exploring a range of ideas about context and materials, and engendering communities that often worked collectively. Robyn Brentano captured that collectivist spirit in her 1981 publication, *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street*, which documents this artist-run gallery's first decade.⁵ Begun in 1970, 112 Greene Street was one of the first galleries in New York's SoHo district; it survives to this day under the name White Columns, which it adopted in 1979 upon moving to Spring Street.⁶ Brentano's introduction incorporates complimentary reflections by the artists who established the gallery on the ground floor of the building, which was owned by artist Jeffrey Lew. Tina Girouard recalled, "Nobody knew what 112 Greene Street was going to be when it started. It was a process, not an idea."⁷ Dancer and sculptor Suzanne Harris observed, "We didn't think of it as an alternative space at the time. We just wanted to get our work out and it was fantastic to have a place that wasn't pristine, that we could knock around in."⁸ For his part, Jeffrey Lew said, "All I remember is this feeling that I had. I wanted the artists to go completely wild in there. Showing at 112 was license to do anything you wanted."⁹ Gordon Matta-Clark, one of Lew's closest friends, was especially energetic in transforming the former factory into an exhibition space: "'I was living in the basement of 112 Greene Street and doing things in different corners. Initially, they weren't at all related to the structure. I was just working within a place but eventually I started treating the place as a whole, as an object.'"¹⁰

In her text for *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street*, Brentano concentrates on the innovative projects that occurred during the founding years, from 1970

3. Ibid.

4. See the Museum of Modern Art catalogue, *Information*, ed. Kynaston McShine (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970). An excellent survey of the Castelli exhibition was recently published. See Mario García Torres, *9 at Leo Castelli* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriquena, 2009).

5. Robyn Brentano with Mark Savitt, eds., *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street: History, Artists, and Art Works* (New York: New York University Press, 1981), vii.

6. White Columns is currently located at 320 West Thirteenth Street, near the Westbeth artist-housing complex. Members of Colab formed a group called the Offices of Fend, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince and Winters, and were paid to name the new gallery for 112 Greene Street. They came up with the name White Columns. The Offices included artists Peter Fend, Coleen Fitzgibbon, Jenny Holzer, Peter Nadin, Richard Prince and Robin Winters, who worked out of an office on Broadway in New York City for a year, offering aesthetic services to "clients."

7. Brentano, vii.

8. Robyn Brentano, "Introduction," *112 Workshop/112 Greene Street: History, Artists, and Art Works* (New York: New York University Press, 1981), vii.

9. Ibid., x.

10. Ibid., viii.

11. Apple, *Alternatives in Retrospect*, 34. In 1988 the National Endowment for the Arts hired Henry Geldzahler to found a visual artist program, and in 1969 Brian O'Doherty succeeded Geldzahler and vastly expanded the program by encouraging organizations like the Clocktower and 112 Greene Street to incorporate as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization in order to be eligible for federal grants. See Michael Brenson, *Visionaries and Outcasts: The NEA, Congress, and the Place of the Visual Artist in America* (New York: The New Press, 2001), 46–59. The New York State Council on the Arts, which began in 1961, initiated their Visual Art Program in the early 1970s, under the direction of Lucy Kostelanez, and also began expanding funding opportunities available to artist-run galleries chartered as nonprofits. Indeed, NYSCA's Visual Art Program provided the seed money for founding Artists Space in 1972. See Trudie Grace and Irving Sandler interviewed by Joan Rosenbaum in *5000 Artists Return to Artists Space*, 25. Yvels, eds. Claudia Gould and Valerie Smith (New York: Artists Space, 1998), 20–21.

12. Brentano, "Introduction," x.

13. *Ibid.* Artists Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol, curator/patron Henry Geldzahler, and curator Marcia Tucker formed an ad hoc advisory board for 112 Greene Street per grant requirements. Lew and Caroline Goodden recall that financial contributions were made by Kurt Vasserman, artist Alan Saraf's uncle, during the first year of operation; Rauschenberg donated funds on a continual basis.

through 1974, after which the core group dispersed as new administrative structures were adopted. These changes are not described as an outgrowth of artistic concerns; rather, the focus of the process shifted from materials to money. "Something special happened during the first three years, and after we got the grants it didn't happen any more," Lew told Jacki Apple in 1981.¹¹ To an unprecedented degree, contributors to both books regard government support with suspicion, not a surprising view given the political climate in the United States during the 1970s and the fact that the Watergate corruption scandal and the resignation of President Nixon were recent history. Beyond a general mistrust of government, there was the sentiment that money itself did not serve artists. Brentano reflected:

"Although the [government] grants insured that the workshop could continue free from commercial considerations and the special interests of private funding, their advent in turn created new demands—for policy, scheduling, budgets and record keeping—things which necessitated an administrator and threatened to put an end to the anarchic, spontaneous flow of events in the space."¹²

Apple went further in her critique of government support. None of the spaces she investigates in *Alternatives in Retrospect* survived on grant dollars; the funds came directly from the participating artists, other successful artists, or forward-thinking patrons.¹³ These places were short-lived, in part, because the funding structure was precarious, and this economic uncertainty led to spontaneity and risk-taking. Applying for grants meant conforming to an ideology and practices antithetical to a strictly process-based sensibility. Lew lamented the changes that had to be made after receiving grants, such as having to set up a formal exhibition schedule in place of a calendar that allowed artists to pencil in when they wanted to show.¹⁴ Spaces surviving on grants were perceived by this generation as mini bureaucracies run by non-artists, and by

1981, according to Apple, a number of them had operating budgets in the "six figures."¹⁵ She argues that the newer spaces—the Kitchen, Franklin Furnace, Artists Space—represented a new model:

"[One that could] no longer be identified, defined, or accurately referred to as alternative spaces in the spirit of what that originally meant in the early and middle 1970s. They have evolved into nonprofit arts institutions, governed by boards of directors and arts administrators, funded by corporations, private foundations, and government. It is only logical to expect that, under those circumstances, they would take on the same structural bureaucracy and operational policies as museums, or that they should resemble institutes of contemporary art, large and small, and that the guidelines and procedures for procuring funds should subsequently be reflected in the way in which programs are conceived and carried out."¹⁶

There were artists involved with this new financial system—most prominently, Brian O'Doherty, who exhibited under the name Patrick Ireland and was director of the National Endowment for the Arts's (NEA) Visual Arts Program from 1969 to 1976. Despite the O'Doherty leadership at the NEA, negative attitudes about his program and its requirements remained. Although by the mid-1980s government funding for the arts was more often associated with a progressive point of view, some artist communities in previous years had not associated this type of official patronage with radical, boundary-expanding art. Moreover, requirements for a transparent process meant no longer choosing friends as fellow participants and collaborators, but adapting to an open selection method and planning shows a year, or years, in advance.¹⁷ Such constraints ran counter to preserving communal exchange among self-selected groups. Brentano's essay concludes with an assessment almost identical to Apple's: artist-run galleries receiving public funding are not alternative; they are institutions with the goal of self-perpetuation, not experimentation. She writes:

"Administrative functions such as fund-raising, record keeping, and audience development absorb much of the funds while monies directly available to artists remains [sic] minimal. Artists, quite naturally, regard this development with suspicion, simply because an organization that behaves like an institution is no longer an alternative. Since most alternative spaces depend on state arts councils for a substantial portion of their funding (by law, never more than half of the annual budget), and the councils themselves are subject to the scrutiny of politicians, the priorities of alternative spaces are being eroded."¹⁸

Brentano and Apple saw government funds benefiting arts administrators (who were often, like Apple, artists, a fact under-analyzed in the literature); others saw government support as restricting personal autonomy. Holly Solomon—benefactor, collector, actress, and founder of 98 Greene Street with her husband Horace—was particularly outspoken on this issue. Her rejection of public funding was premised on its inhibiting a self-actualization process. Situating her views within the consciousness-raising idiom of the women's movement, Solomon reflected:

"[98 Greene Street] was also important for me in that it opened up my own sense of myself as an independent person. It contributed to my sense of being a capable human being, and as a woman that it was okay to make a living and help others make a living....I believe that artists should be dignified people, be able to live a dignified life, and that finding private support was a central part of cultured activity. It was more than just making a membership contribution to a cultural institution. Without taking the ultimate responsibility of selling the work, of clearing that space, making that vacuum for the artist to fill, [98 Greene Street] couldn't last."¹⁹

Although not representative of the majority of these early participants, Solomon was especially concerned with selling artists' works. She believed that business was a better model than public funding—a

point of view foreshadowing the predominance of the contemporary art market that would develop in the 1980s. Apple, on the other hand, concludes her essay with questions regarding artistic possibilities that entailed a more socially expansive vision: "Perhaps the issue now and in this next decade is not one of alternative spaces, but of alternative voices and visions that are meaningful and effective in the larger context of the world....This may well involve radical changes in our ideas about art, and it may require all of our collaborative energies, but it may also be our only chance for a truly relevant future."²⁰

BLIND SPOTS: FROM ACTIVISM TO ALTERNATIVE

Jacki Apple and Robyn Brentano's texts provide an important foundation for a selected history of pioneering spaces in New York. Omitted from these discussions, however, were numerous other organizations formed during the 1970s that involved different communities, neighborhoods, and concerns. Many artists engaged with activist groups also established alternatives to mainstream galleries and museums in relation to specific social issues. Support for such efforts came, in part, from new grant initiatives. In 1971, the National Endowment for the Arts initiated the Expansion Grants program, and the New York State Council on the Arts began a similar effort, the Special Arts Services program, that continues as of this writing.²¹ Both programs supported organizations associated with historically marginalized groups that were often located in communities of color. Unlike many of the artists associated with the previously discussed spaces, who were skeptical of bureaucracies and conventional institutions, the individuals associated with these more politically driven, ethnic-specific organizations saw government funding as facilitating a transformation of American values. Unlike the first "alternatives" whose histories were discussed, the oral testimonies in this section portray the participants' aspirations to create social change.

The Art Workers' Coalition (AWC), perhaps the best known of these groups,

14. Apple, *Alternatives in Retrospect*, 7.

15. *Ibid.*, 8.

16. *Ibid.*, 6.

17. There was an additional reason to be cynical about government support. Michael Brenson's study of the NEA's Visual Arts Program uncovers rampant favoritism in grantmaking during the program's first decade (1966–1976), when the visual art program was under the leadership of Geldzahler and O'Doherty. In addition to overtly advocating for grants to artists and organizations with whom they were familiar, both Geldzahler and O'Doherty selected peer panelists who were part of their social network, further ensuring that the outcome reflected their sensibilities and concerns. Thus, the requirement that artist-run galleries adopt democratic procedures in their program selection in order to comply with regulations would have been seen as hypocritical by artists who knew the NEA's grantmaking process was itself not immune to favoritism. See Brenson, *Visionaries and Outcasts*, 39–78.

18. Brentano, "Introduction," xi.

19. Solomon's remarks, made in 1981, were no doubt influenced by the establishment of her own gallery, the Holly Solomon Gallery, which she opened after 98 Greene Street closed in 1973. See Apple, *Alternatives in Retrospect*, 28.

20. Apple, *Alternatives in Retrospect*, 7.

21. Katherine Wood and Barbara Kostra, eds., *The National Endowment for the Arts: A Brief Chronology of Federal Support for the Arts, 1965–2000* (Washington, D.C.:

National Endowment for the Arts, 2000). For information on NYSCA's Special Arts Services Program, which began as the Ghetto Arts Program, see http://www.nysca.org/public/guidelines/special_arts_services/index.htm (March 4, 2012).

22 Julie Ault, in her *Alternative Art New York, 1965–1985*, discussed later in this essay, is an exception to this. See Julie Ault, ed., *Alternative Art New York, 1965–1985* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). 5. Other sources include: Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009); Beth Ann Handler, "The Art of Activism: Artists and Writers Protest, the Art Workers Coalition and the New York Art Strike Protest the 'Vietnam War'" (PhD diss., Yale University 2001); and Susan E. Canan, "Inventing the Multicultural Museum: A Critical Study of Harlem on My Mind" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2003). For contemporaneous accounts, see the compendium by Jon Hendricks and Jean Toche, eds., *Guerrilla Art Action Group, 1969–1976: A Selection* (New York: Printed Matter, 1978); and numerous essays by Lucy R. Lippard documenting her activities in AWC, including her essay in Ault's *Alternative Art New York*, "Biting the Hand."

23 MoMA was targeted by activists due to then-Governor of New York Nelson Rockefeller's affiliation with the Museum. Rockefeller's mother, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, co-founded the Museum of Modern Art in 1929. Nelson Rockefeller was a trustee of MoMA from 1932 until his death in 1979. Rockefeller was therefore a highly

has been discussed extensively in histories of this period. However, its role in fostering nonprofit galleries has been relatively overlooked.²² The AWC was organized in 1970 to protest MoMA's exhibition practices. The group soon expanded its concerns, and its activities were representative of the wide-ranging actions and general strikes of the late 1960s and early 1970s that called for cultural change, enhanced human rights, and peace in opposition to the Vietnam War.²³ Many AWC members had deep roots in artist-run galleries and museums engaged with social and political concerns. Jon Hendricks revived the exhibition programming of the Judson Memorial Church Gallery on Washington Square in 1967. Established in 1959, Judson Gallery was a precursor to what would later become known as alternative spaces. Hendricks came to Judson Church in 1965 as a conscientious objector, lived at the Judson House's dormitory for students, and was soon curating many anti-war exhibitions, performances, and events.²⁴ Raphael Montañez Ortiz, who exhibited at Judson, founded El Museo del Barrio in East Harlem in 1969. In the following year, his friends Marcos Dimas and Adrian Garcia followed suit in East Harlem with El Taller Boricua, known as El Taller, founded to present Puerto Rican culture. Tom Lloyd, a member of the AWC, the Guerrilla Art Action Group (GAAG), and the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition,²⁵ inaugurated the Studio Museum in Harlem in 1969 with his project *Electronic Refractions II*. In 1971, Lloyd opened the Storefront Museum in Queens. These artist-organizers were interested in what the critic Lucy Lippard described as expanding art's relevance to local communities.²⁶

Adrian Garcia—whose work had been presented in the 1970 Brooklyn Museum exhibition "Contemporary Puerto Rican Artists"—recruited artists for an AWC Puerto Rican coalition, which numbered thirty artists at its height.²⁷ Patricia Wilson Cryer examines the coalition in her "Puerto Rican Art in New York: The Aesthetic Analysis of Eleven Painters and their Work," which includes extremely valuable oral histories. Garcia, Dimas,

Jorge Soto, and others, describe their activities related to AWC and two artist-run spaces, Friends of Puerto Rico—later known as the Cayman Gallery—and El Taller Boricua, a print workshop that was a direct outgrowth of AWC's artist activism. Dimas reviews attempts to initiate more inclusive programming at mainstream venues:

"There were proposals submitted to the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and other museums about having exhibits relevant to the community—relevant to Blacks and Puerto Ricans, relevant to Third World people, relevant to minorities.... We wanted MoMA to have—it's kind of ridiculous—but we were demanding a Pedro Albizu Campos Wing at the MoMA! Same thing with the Museum of the City of New York.... They didn't pay no attention to us, so we protested. We did guerrilla theater in front of the Museum of Modern Art...we closed [the Museum of the City of New York]...Everybody got in front of the stairs...When we had the sit-ins we got young politicians, friends, and supporters...[We also closed] the Metropolitan Museum by sitting in front and blocking all the exits and entrances and putting out flags and posters."²⁸

Both MoMA and the Metropolitan Museum of Art eventually added community liaison staff to their administrative offices. At the same time, Lippard recalled efforts by the AWC to establish art spaces in the predominately Caribbean, Latino, and African-American neighborhoods of Jamaica, Queens and East Harlem in order to "find out what various communities wanted in the way of cultural centers, somehow establish these centers, and then petition museums on their behalf to lend or donate relevant minor items from their collections, such as pre-Columbian artifacts to the Spanish Harlem Cultural Center and African art to Jamaica."²⁹ Reclaiming cultural identity was a central concern for many of the artists associated with these community-based spaces of the 1970s. Writing of Lloyd's electronic light installation at the Studio Museum, art critic Dennis Raverty noted that while the work shared an affinity with post-

Minimal strategies during the late 1960s, "the social and political 'relevance' of projects was key to success in the black community of those times."³⁰

Friends of Puerto Rico, established in 1953, was one of the first nonprofit galleries in New York and a forerunner of the types of organizations that developed in the 1970s. Administered as a foundation by Amalia Guerrero, the gallery was initially in a rented space at the grand Statler Hilton Hotel, across from Penn Station. Friends of Puerto Rico moved several times. In 1968, it was located at Third Avenue and Thirtieth Street, and included studios, a silkscreen workshop, and a theater, and also offered dance classes. Artist Marcos Dimas, who had a residency there, described a vibrant after-hours scene for artists such as García, David Cottes, Eduardo Ortiz, and Carlos Osorio: "When the people left after six o'clock, that place would turn into a bohemian type thing. This guy, Eduardo, his studio was a gym... We would bring a band in there and have great parties."³¹ By the early 1970s, the original board of Friends of Puerto Rico was sued by cultural activists over its lack of services toward the Puerto Rican community, a violation of their mission. Numerous Puerto Rican artists also found the organization unsupportive and in 1973, an entirely new board was appointed. They relocated to Fourteenth Street and Broadway and hired a new director, Jack Agueros, who changed the name of the organization to the Cayman Gallery and adopted a more engaged approach to Puerto Rican identity. As Agueros told one biographer,

"The name was very important to me. The Cayman is an aggressive animal. I was sick and tired of Puerto Ricans calling everything *el coqui* [tree frog], *el piruli* [lollipop], *la cosita* [little thing]...so—cayman. It's an amphibian. It can live on land and water, and I liked that as a duality of force. We live on the mainland and we live on an island...I liked it because it could be said in English and Spanish."³²

Agueros was succeeded in 1974 by board member Nilda Peraza, who moved the gallery to West Broadway in SoHo

and hired Susana Torruella Leval as a curator. Cayman underwent one further change in 1985, when the gallery moved to Broadway between Houston and Prince Streets. Still under the leadership of Peraza, it became the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, reflecting a broader mission as a space that would serve as a downtown alternative to El Museo del Barrio in East Harlem.³³

One of the most enduring artist-run organizations is El Taller Boricua, established in 1970 and still located in East Harlem. El Taller was a direct outgrowth of AWC's Puerto Rican coalition. Founded by Dimas and artist Carlos Osorio, its mission was to offer "cultural education to the community, deal primarily with Puerto Rican aesthetics, to be a place where Puerto Ricans could exhibit and develop their art, and to have a collective of artists."³⁴ El Taller was initially located in a storefront at 110th Street and Madison Avenue. Artists recall a spirited atmosphere, what Rafael Colón Morales characterized as one where "there was a romanticism with the Taínos"³⁵ (the aboriginal peoples of the island). Jorge Soto described the scene as a collaboration with community activists:

"People were constantly calling us to take shows out on the street...The Taller became like an extension of that time and space...We had panels we would take out to the street and put our paintings on. We used to line up this whole block...from 110th down to, say, 106th or 103rd...There were different activities...gatherings for *opresión político* [political oppression] at the church...It sort of fulfilled a double-fold thing: you were doing art, you were connected to Puerto Rican art, and it had a social, political relationship...If people needed a poster, *les tiramos un cartel* [we gave them a poster]—freebies galore."³⁶

Dimas describes the formative years of El Taller Boricua as providing more than a community service; he saw the organization as helping to forge a Puerto Rican visual art sensibility:

visible and powerful figure in both the arts, and specifically MoMA as an institution, and United States politics, having served in the Roosevelt administration as Assistant Secretary of State; as Governor of New York (1959–1973); and as Vice President during the Ford administration (1975–1977). There are many texts that deal with this history, including Ault, *Alternative Art*, 5, 23; Lucy R. Lippard, "Biting the Hand: Artists and Museums in New York Since 1969," in *Alternative Art*, 79–120; Alan W. Moore, "Artists Collectives: Focus on New York, 1975–2000," in *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, eds. Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 192–221; and Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), 263–269.

24. See Elly Dickason and Jerry G. Dickason, eds., *Remembering Judson House* (New York: Judson Memorial Church, 2000), especially 307–313.

25. The Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC) was formed in 1968 to protest the Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibition, "Harlem on My Mind," a project that excluded numerous African-American artists. "Harlem on My Mind" was organized by Allan Schoener, a program officer with the New York State Council on the Arts. Members of BECC included Faith Ringgold, Benny Andrews, and Cliff Joseph. For more information, see Benny Andrews, "Benny Andrews' Journal: A Black Artist's View of Artistic and Political Activism," in *Tradition and Conflict: Images of*

34. *Turbulent Decade, 1963–1973*, ed. Mary Schmidt Campbell (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 1985), 69–73.

35. Lucy R. Lippard, "Biting the Hand: Artists and Museums in New York Since 1969," in *Alternative Art*, 79–120.

37. Patricia L. Wilson Cryer, "Puerto Rican Art in New York: The Aesthetic Analysis of Eleven Painters and Their Work" (Ed D. Diss., New York University, 1984), 55.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Lippard, "Biting the Hand," 91.

40. Dennis Raverty, "Alternative Exhibition Spaces for Black Artists in New York City During the 1970s: Towards a Partial History," *The International Review of African American Art* 22, no. 2 (2008): 43.

41. Wilson Cryer, "Puerto Rican Art in New York," 50.

42. *Ibid.*, 51.

43. The Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art's archives are held by Hostos Community College archives in the Bronx, New York.

44. Wilson Cryer, "Puerto Rican Art in New York," 56.

45. Rafael Colon Morales recalled on August 4, 1981: "There was a lot of talk."

Here there was a nostalgic interest. There was a romanticism with the Tainos." See *Ibid.*, 57.

36. *Ibid.*, 56–57. Today El Taller Boricua is located in the New York City-owned Heckscher Building at 104th Street and Fifth Avenue, where they moved in 1979. El Museo del Barrio soon followed.

47. *Ibid.*, 104.

38. Raverty, "Alternative Exhibition Spaces," 43.

39. Fleur Paysour, "Joe Overstreet + Corinne Jennings = Energy Over Matter [squadded]."

"Puerto Rican art, as far as I can see, has always tended to interpret either European art or American art or whatever school is happening at the time. Part of the whole concept of dealing with El Taller and the group of us...was to get away from all the other influences...to diminish all those influences...use them—start leaning on our basics, our cultural heritage...After this it will be the writers and the critics who decide if it's going to go down in history, but I think we've succeeded in what we started out to do. We created a body of work, which has influenced the people who have come after us to El Taller."³⁷

The importance of cultural heritage and identity was not unique to New York's Puerto Rican activists. In Harlem, one of the first alternative galleries to open was aligned with the Black Power movement. In 1967, Malikah Rahman and James Sneed founded Nyumba ya Sanaa Gallery at 158 West 132nd Street. Run as a cooperative, Nyumba ya Sanaa was conceived for artists interested in exploring African culture and Afro-centric themes. They "wanted to create an alternative to the integration of black art into the mainstream," one of its members recalled.³⁸ This position was more militant than the Studio Museum's, reflecting the aims of groups like the Black Panther Party, which sought to establish social and cultural organizations that would function parallel to the mainstream.

Not every alternative gallery or museum established to feature diverse ethnic and racial perspectives was located in a community of color. Joseph Papp's Public Theater, in the former Astor Library in the East Village, donated lobby space to renowned artists Romare Bearden, Ernest Crichlow, and Norman Lewis in 1969. They called their endeavor the Cinque Gallery, named for the leader of the Amistad slave rebellion. Their strategy was to exhibit their own work with that of emerging African-American artists. Five years later, artists Corinne Jennings and husband Joe Overstreet founded Kenkeleba House in their loft on the Bowery. In 1979, Jennings and Overstreet moved to a tenement building

at 214 East Second Street and added artist residency studios, a sculpture garden, and subsidized apartments to the gallery space. Jennings recalled, "In the sixties and seventies Joe [Overstreet], [Samuel C.] Floyd, and I wanted to encourage interdisciplinary work mixing music, art, and poetry. We also took a close look at what prevented black artists from producing, and prefaced a lot of our activity on the fact that many artists simply didn't have a studio space."³⁹

Kenkeleba House was located in the East Village, an area of New York where landlords at times abandoned rundown property for its insurance value, leading to further decay.⁴⁰ Jennings and Overstreet needed to negotiate with New York City housing officials to make their purchase possible. They saw this collaboration with government as an overtly political activity. As Overstreet said, "Rather than complain and make lists of all the problems, the next best step was...to move to a position of activism."⁴¹ Ideologically, Kenkeleba House's members maintained a different position from Brentano and Apple. They regarded government alliances as a necessary aspect of their cultural strategy, not as a compromise of their principles. Similarly, Linda Goode Bryant considered government funding essential to saving Just Above Midtown (JAM), a gallery that fostered the careers of emerging African-American artists. Founded in 1974 in a gallery building on Fifty-Seventh Street, JAM was initially a commercial gallery; however, there was no patron base for the venture, and in 1977, with support from the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) and the NEA, JAM became a nonprofit and moved to Tribeca.⁴²

The merging of government support and artist-run galleries is perhaps best epitomized by the formation of Artists Space, founded in 1972 by Trudie Grace, an employee of the New York State Council on the Arts, and Irving Sandler, an art historian long associated with American abstraction, who was working as a consultant to the agency. Grace recalled:

"In the spring of 1972, in response to an obvious need, Irving [Sandler] and some of us at the Council began to mull over ways to fund more programs of direct benefit to visual arts. Lucy Kostelanetz, Director of NYSCA's Visual Arts Program...strongly encouraged Irving and me to develop some plans... The idea of establishing a gallery space where artists would select artists emerged from these meetings. Those of us involved were naturally surprised the plan met with such unqualified support... The first budget was \$100,000—all of it directly from the Council."⁴³

Artists Space first operated out of a loft at 155 Wooster Street in a building owned by Paula Cooper, who had opened her eponymous gallery, one of the first in SoHo, on the ground floor of the building in 1968. During its early years, the values of Artists Space were closely aligned with the goals of the Visual Arts Program. Artists comprised half of the board and curated the exhibitions. This structure and attitude led to the creation of the "File," now known as the "Irving Sandler Artist File," which documents artists' work and has become a distinctive art historical resource. As Grace recalled, her role as Artists Space's first director differed from that of her counterpart at P.S.1, Alanna Heiss, who was perceived as having "control over everything that happened"⁴⁴ and was seen to be a curator-director, and not primarily an administrator. Artists Space's 1998 publication *5000 Artists Return to Artists Space: 25 Years*, celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary, preserves this spirit of artistic diversity and democracy through its numerous oral histories, interviews, and testimonials, which frequently challenge and contradict any linear narrative.

Despite Artists Space's entrance into the field as a new model with ample government support, the mainstream art world remained uninterested in visual art made by not only ethnically diverse communities, but also by women. As an alternative to limited options, the all-women A.I.R. Gallery opened as a cooperative in September 1972 at 97

Wooster Street in SoHo.⁴⁵ The twenty founding members included Agnes Denes, Harmony Hammond, Rosemary Mayer, Howardena Pindell, and Nancy Spero. The attitude of this collective is beautifully represented by a 1976 collage by Mary Beth Edelson titled *Death of Patriarchy/A.I.R. Anatomy Lesson*, a send-up of Rembrandt's monumental *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632), in which medical students are taught anatomy through an autopsy. Done as a collage on a reproduction of the painting, Edelson's piece incorporates all twenty A.I.R. members' portraits in place of the male students posed around the cadaver, which she labeled "patriarchy." Edelson added a frieze border that incorporates installation views, articles, and images from A.I.R.'s programs. The work provocatively situates the founding members within art history, and portrays their solidarity and feminism. A.I.R. artists had important supporters, in particular Lucy Lippard, a member of AWC who used her insight and influence as a writer for numerous art magazines and as an independent curator to feature the work of women artists. During this period, Lippard also helped found the feminist cultural journal *Heresies*.

Martin Beck's essay on the design of downtown alternative galleries, "Alternative: Space," incorporates photographs documenting A.I.R.'s ground-floor space at 97 Wooster Street before and after its renovation, showing its transformation from a raw industrial interior to a clean, white-walled gallery. Beck sees this shift in design as parallel with a shift in the downtown artist-gallery concerns from process to art object. Indeed, the white-walled gallery signaled a return to tradition. As Beck notes, the "invisibility" of that kind of space allows the art exhibited there to be the primary attraction and the female artists whose works are being shown to be more visible.⁴⁶ The decision to make the space into a formal gallery was political, part of what Lippard saw as a "Trojan horse," or the infiltration of activist ideas into the mainstream by adopting the look of the mainstream gallery in order to subvert it.⁴⁷ By the

The International Review of African American Art 18, no. 1 (2001): 39.

40. For an overview linking favorable insurance policies during a period of deflated property value in New York City, see Evelyn Gonzalez, *The Bronx* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 109–129.

41. Paysour, "Joe Overstreet + Corrine Jennings," 39.

42. Raverty, "Alternative Exhibition Spaces," 46.

43. "Trudie Grace and Irving Sandler interviewed by Joan Rosenbaum," in *5000 Artists Return to Artists Space: 25 Years*, 20–21.

44. *Ibid.*, 23.

45. "A.I.R." is an acronym for Artist in Residence, an occupancy designation for commercial/industrial spaces established by New York City's Department of Buildings.

46. Martin Beck, "Alternative: Space" in *Alternative Art*, 267.

47. See Lucy R. Lippard, "Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power," in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, Boston: David R. Godine, 1984), 341–358.

48. See <http://www.nyc.gov/html/iaur/html/home/home.shtml>.

49. P.S. 1 was initially founded as part of the Institute for Art and Urban Resources, an organization devoted to organizing exhibitions in underutilized and abandoned spaces across New York City.

50. "Five hundred pork sandwiches were served—though only after the pig had fallen into the fire the night before—and a group of friends had come down to ensure that it cooked at least most of the way through. SoHo's *Wapman*, the longest hours FOOD & SoHo restaurant, *Wapman*, *The Journal of Food and Culture* 8, No. 4 (Fall 2005): 26.

51. The Clocktower is a free audio home page at www.kw570nair.com, an internet radio station that broadcasts audio archived at <http://www.kw570nair.com>.

52. Alanna Heiss, interview by Martin Sam, *New York* 3510, East Art Archive, Felix Dorey & Special Collections at New York University.

53. Andrew M. Glavin, "The Principal of P.S. 1: Can Alanna Heiss's vision for her museum come out of it?" *New York Magazine*, May 2, 2006.

54. See

early 1980s, the women's movement would become increasingly diversified, confronting such issues as racial bias, class, and sexuality. This led to the formation of a number of new artist spaces, including Alternative Museum, Art in General, and Exit Art, and different areas of focus for other organizations, such as multicultural issues at the New Museum.

A.I.R., which is still active today, was part of the migration of commercial and new nonprofit arts organizations that moved into the SoHo neighborhood in the early 1970s. Loft living became a popular subject and then a fashion, promoted in periodicals like *New York Magazine*, particularly in the years after the neighborhood coalition in SoHo helped to defeat Robert Moses's Lower Manhattan Expressway project in 1969. The protracted battle over zoning designation and live-work space culminated in 1982, when the New York City Loft Board was established "to regulate the legal conversion of certain lofts in the city from commercial/manufacturing use to residential use" under Article 7-C of the Multiple Dwelling Law, commonly known as the Loft Law.⁴⁸ SoHo was no longer a district of light industry; artists pioneered its transformation into a commercial art district, and by the 1980s, SoHo, Tribeca and the East Village—neighborhoods synonymous with Manhattan's edgy downtown—became the geographical center for alternative spaces.

PARALLEL HISTORIES

The 1970s and early 1980s were periods of cultural transition and growth. Progressive social, political, and aesthetic developments led to a wide variety of alternative spaces and in 1976 the most ambitious of these innovations, P.S. 1, opened in a former public school in Long Island City, Queens. P.S. 1, now a part of MoMA, was founded by Alanna Heiss and then-*New Yorker* critic Brendan Gill and provided a platform for cutting-edge contemporary art on a grand scale.⁴⁹ In 1971 Heiss founded the nonprofit Institute for Art and Urban Resources and used this as means to gain access to unused or abandoned

city buildings, which she repurposed as art venues. The Institute's first project was the pioneering outdoor exhibition "Under the Brooklyn Bridge" (1971), made famous by Gordon Matta-Clark's outdoor pig roast, which drew not only artists but also the general public to the event.⁵⁰ Heiss also created the Idea Warehouse at 10 Bleecker Street and the most long-lived of this group, the Clocktower Gallery, which continues to maintain artist residencies and to offer a wide range of exhibitions and performances at its Tribeca location.⁵¹ Both P.S. 1 and the Clocktower were established as activities of the Institute for Art and Urban Resources.⁵²

P.S. 1's inaugural exhibition, "Rooms," was a landmark event for which seventy-eight artists were invited to create site-specific pieces. In a profile on Heiss in *New York Magazine*, Andrew M. Goldstein credited P.S. 1 with establishing international post-minimal installation art as a new aesthetic force.⁵³ The repurposed school lent itself to associative, immersive works that were the hallmark of Heiss's experimental approach to managing the space, a process influenced by 112 Greene Street and artists like Matta-Clark, who took part in many of Heiss's projects until his death in 1978. Sculptor Richard Nonas, who participated in "Rooms," recalled that "Alanna started out as part of a group of artists, and her art was finding ways to get the art out in the world.... Alanna is probably the most important single figure in that effluence of another kind of art-making or art-doing in New York in the seventies—not only the art itself but also the way the art existed in the city."⁵⁴ The literature about P.S. 1 is distinguished by its attention to Heiss's role as an innovator; however, not all artists were comfortable with the growing public recognition accorded to arts administrators.

One way to resist administrating was to form art collectives unencumbered by leased gallery space and administrative staff. The new aesthetic and social terrain was mapped in David Little and Alan Moore's writings on the late 1970s and early 1980s in relation to Collaborative

Projects, Inc. (Colab), founded in 1977. Little and Moore were members of this artist collective, as were Charles Ahearn, Jane Dickson, Kiki Smith, Tom Otterness, and Robin Winters, among many others. Little sees the formation of Colab as a response to the "grand cultural and lived contradictions in New York" during an economic recession in the post-Watergate, post-Vietnam era.⁵⁵ As the City declared bankruptcy in 1976, the contemporary art market flourished, epitomized by the 1973 Scull collection auction, which marked the first time contemporary artworks were sold for over \$100,000.⁵⁶ The need for economic and creative autonomy outside this powerful new art market became a concern among the artist-run spaces by the 1980s. Moore's dialectical history of Colab considers its work more directly as an oppositional reaction to this status quo. He writes:

"The formation of Colab was in many ways a next step in the construction of a new infrastructure for the exhibition of contemporary art in New York City.... Run by younger artists, grounded in the needs of their practice, and burdened neither by theory nor rent, Colab quickly impressed an art world tired of the stasis of groups whose [subject was art and politics]. Colab also responded directly to the increasing institutionalization of the downtown spaces called alternative—particularly the resurgent power of curators and art managers—by reclaiming for artists the initiative in organizing exhibitions."⁵⁷

Young artists in the late 1970s encountered an art world unlike that experienced by their immediate predecessors. Artists in the United States now had the possibility of becoming extraordinarily wealthy, and galleries became increasingly corporate, banking primarily on Caucasian male artists whose prices vastly overshadowed those of women and artists of color. New organizations and collectives like Colab, Group Material (1979), and Political Art Documentation/Distribution (1980) were formed, and their ideas led to projects inclusive of non-artists, and deeply critical of the systems supporting art.

Like many of his colleagues in the late 1970s, Austrian-born artist and Colab member Stefan Eins had become increasingly troubled by the commercialization of contemporary art. As the demand for exhibition space grew and prices continued to rise, new galleries turned to the East Village, at the time a cheaper alternative to SoHo. In 1978, in the midst of the changes taking place downtown, Eins opened Fashion Moda, an alternative gallery in a former Salvation Army thrift shop on Third Avenue near 147th Street in the South Bronx. Joe Lewis, Eins's friend and collaborator at both Colab and Fashion Moda, recalled, "Stefan was just a little disenchanted with the downtown art scene as being elitist in a sense...We began talking about how one could address the elitism."⁵⁸ The South Bronx in the 1970s was a notable example of urban decay, and thus inexpensive relative to other parts of the city. For example, landlords preferred to destroy their buildings to collect on insurance rather than continue to maintain them.

Eins's aversion to market issues propelled his gallery experiments, and made him especially open to young people in the neighborhood involved in creating graffiti and hip hop, an interest several fellow Colab artists pursued, most notably Charlie Ahearn, who directed the 1983 film *Wild Style*. Moore and Little link Colab's 1977–1979 period, which focused on film and self-published zines, to a punk aesthetic, and indeed, several members were in punk bands.⁵⁹ These new music genres—punk and hip hop—were tremendously influential to a new generation of visual artists. Jane Dickson, also a member of Colab, was struck by the openness and experimentation of the period:

"It was a moment of cross-cultural fertilization. Straight people were going into gay clubs. Black people were going into white clubs. Latino people were going to white clubs. And whites were going to Latino clubs. There was a huge mixture, which unfortunately [ended] after that period when all the gay people started dying and many straight

55. David E. Little, "Colab Takes a Piece, History Takes It Back: Activity and New York Alternative Spaces," *Art Journal* 66, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 62.

56. Collectors Ethel and Robert Scull are best known for amassing a definitive collection of Pop art. Less known was their role in financially backing the Green Gallery between 1960 and 1965, from which much of the collection was purchased at favorable prices. The 1973 auction set sales records for artists Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and others. For an analysis of the Sculls and this pivotal event, see Baruch D. Kirschenbaum, "The Scull Auction and the Scull Film," *Art Journal* 39, no. 1 (Autumn 1979): 50–54.

57. Alan W. Moore, *Art Gangs: Protest and Counterculture in New York City* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2011), 81.

58. Joe Lewis interview by Herb Tam, New York, 2009.

59. According to Moore, "In the late 1970s punk rock, a marginal domestic genre in the shadow of disco music, had become a successful American cultural import.... New York nightclubs featured punk bands in venues hospitable to artists, like Max's Kansas City, and others not so, like the former motorcycle bar CBGB's. Artists active early on with Colab and the New Cinema played a role in establishing the Mudd Club on White Street in Tribeca in 1977. Diego Cortez and the late Anya Phillips, a punk stylist and manager of bands, persuaded entrepreneur Steve Mass to found the club during the course of a trip to see Graceland in Memphis," Moore, *Art Gangs*, 87–88.

60. Jane Dickson interview with the author, September 15, 2002. New York.

61. Moore, *Art Gangs*, 82.

62. ABC No Rio has a complicated history, including protracted struggles with New York City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development, and with other nonprofits also located in the facility. For a critical history, see Alan Moore and Marc Miller, eds., *ABC No Rio Dinero: The Story of a Lower East Side Art Gallery* (New York: Collaborative Projects, 1983).

63. Dickson interview.

64. Moore, *Art Gangs*, 102.

65. My discussion of Exit Art's history must be distinguished from any other analyses in this essay due to the fact that I was an Assistant Curator at the organization from 1989 to 1995.

66. Ariana Goldbard, "When (Art) Worlds Collide: Institutionalizing the Alternatives in *Alternative Art* 194-195.

people too, and multiculturalism came in (which is sort of an infuriating term to me because it really seems to be about each culture having its own monologue and there will be no dialogue between cultures). In that moment, you'd go to a club and there would be the queens and the transvestites... And the graffiti kids and everybody else was making art and sharing ideas and it was extremely creative and dynamic."⁶⁰

Apart from the music and club scene, Moore traces the relationship among core Colab members to the Whitney Independent Study Program (ISP), a highly selective postgraduate art program at the Whitney Museum of American Art that began in 1968. The ISP operated as a seminar taught by artists like Donald Judd and Yvonne Rainer, and became known for investigating cultural theory that was critical of the inequities of Western capitalist societies. Artists Charlie Ahearn, Coleen Fitzgibbon, Jenny Holzer, Becky Howland, Tom Otterness, Walter Robinson, and Robin Winters, to name a few who went on to join Colab, were all students in the Whitney ISP, and their attitudes toward the subject matter of art were deeply influenced by that experience.⁶¹

In keeping with the collective's nonhierarchical method, different members created each Colab project. The collective's two largest and best-known events utilized entire buildings. The first, the 1980 "Real Estate Show," was held at an abandoned building at 125 Delancey Street and shut down by police for trespassing. Many artists protested, including Joseph Beuys, who participated in the demonstration and was followed by local media. Several Colab members negotiated with the city's housing department, and ultimately a space was secured at 123 Rivington Street, which became the gallery and performance venue ABC No Rio.⁶²

In June of the same year, Colab produced the "Times Square Show," which took place in a former massage parlor on Forty-First Street. Dickson recalled that the process was

deliberately inclusive. Colab members accepted work from children, amateurs, artists, and members of the collective, demonstrating that "white professionals did not have a lock on what art was."⁶³ More than one hundred people were included in the exhibition, housed in a location synonymous with the "lowbrow" culture that many Colab members found so liberating and enticing. So too did the critics: the *Village Voice* announced that the "Times Square Show" was "the first radical show of the decade," and critic Kim Levin linked its sensibility to the DIY music scene by referring to the exhibition's zeitgeist as "New Wave."⁶⁴

In addition to Colab, three spaces were especially important in the late 1970s and early 1980s: the New Museum, founded by Marcia Tucker in 1977; the Alternative Center for International Arts, later the Alternative Museum, founded by Geno Rodriguez in 1975; and Exit Art, founded by Jeanette Ingberman and Papo Colo in 1982.⁶⁵ These nonprofit spaces became synonymous with "pluralism" and "multiculturalism," two terms frequently employed during the 1980s. However, there was no overt agreement on goals. Artist-activist Arlene Goldbard posited that the motivations of nonprofit spaces from this period could be divided in the following way:

"I. artists wanted to show their work despite indifference or gender/racial bias; II. artists were 'fed up' with the 'cultural-industrial complex' with its market orientation, pecking orders, and functionaries, from critics to curators to collectors; III. 'artists wanted to change the world.'"⁶⁶

The funding mandates of the 1980s, particularly at the NEA and the New York State Council on the Arts, coalesced around art projects that examined under-recognized midcareer artists and the cultural diversity of American society. Both agencies established new media programs with separate panels and budgets to accommodate video, performance, and new technology, in addition to their longstanding art programs. For those

engaged in expanding opportunities for artists traditionally ignored due to bias, the 1980s meant growth, even during the decade-long Republican administrations of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush.

The New Museum exemplifies the contradictions faced by many alternative spaces. Although generally considered one of the most important and influential alternative spaces in the United States, founder Marcia Tucker repeatedly stated, from the organization's inception, that it was a museum and didn't belong in this category. "I wanted to redefine the concept of the museum altogether, to turn it upside down... When I was asked why it had to be an art museum and not an alternative art space, I responded by saying that I was an art historian who had always worked in museums and that if I was going to challenge a paradigm it needed to be the paradigm I knew best."⁶⁷ Many adventurous exhibitions representative of ideas and artists overlooked by mainstream galleries and museums were presented at the New Museum, including the 1978 show "Bad Painting," which was met with deep skepticism, and "Alternatives in Retrospect," the very first exhibition to deal with the subject of alternative spaces.⁶⁸ In the 1980s, the New Museum also published *Documentary Sources in Contemporary Art*, a five-volume series that supported a burgeoning intellectual engagement with cultural theory.

The next section explores three key texts that define the central concerns of nonprofit artist-run galleries in the 1980s and 1990s, a period now seen as a critical high point. First is a collaborative exhibition and catalogue, "The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s," co-organized and co-presented in 1990 at the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, the New Museum, and the Studio Museum in Harlem. The second is "The Hybrid State," an exhibition and catalogue organized by Exit Art in 1992 that was a culmination of the organization's first ten years, and the third is the 2002 publication *Alternative Art New York, 1965–1985*, edited by Julie

Ault, a text published in the aftermath of the "Culture Wars" that popularized the idea of nonprofit spaces as a cultural oasis from commerce.

ASSERTING A MAINSTREAM

In 1982, Jeanette Ingberman, a former curator at the Bronx Museum, began an alternative artistic endeavor with artist Papo Colo, whom she would marry a decade later. Operating out of Colo's Canal Street loft, they called their organization Exit Art, signifying a place that would be a departure from the conventional art world. Their first project, "Illegal America," was launched at Franklin Furnace—they would not have a gallery space until 1984—and was based on Ingberman's Columbia University master's thesis, which examined artists who came into conflict with the law in creating their work. The exhibition consisted entirely of documentation and related archival materials, including arrest records, affidavits, and photographs representing a broad spectrum of artists. Among the exhibited objects were the immigration "wanted" poster created by Tehching Hsieh, and posted in New York City as a counterintuitive way to combat his fear of arrest and deportation; documents related to cellist Charlotte Moorman's arrest for performing topless in 1967; Fluxus artist George Maciunas's protracted dispute with the New York State Attorney General over M-1 zoning violations; and Colab's confrontation with city officials during the "Real Estate Show." Ingberman wrote:

"The use of illegality is a commitment by the artist to deal with reality, often at dangerous risk. By consciously breaking the law, either with the intention to make something dissident, to challenge its constitutionality (as in the flag cases), or to provoke amazement (as in the obscenity/pornography cases), the artist exposes himself/herself to a vulnerable position outside the confines of the art world."⁶⁹

The project conveyed a spirited position: the artist outlaw deliberately transgressing the norms of society. This sensibility appealed to Ingberman

67. Marcia Tucker, *A Short Life of Trouble: Forty Years in the New York Art World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 121.

68. Marcia Tucker died in 2006, at age sixty-six, from complications due to cancer. Tucker resigned from the New Museum as director in 1999, and was succeeded by former Whitney Museum of American Art curator Lisa Phillips. Today the New Museum is located on the Bowery, on Manhattan's Lower East Side, in a state-of-the-art building designed by Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa, partners in the Japanese architectural firm SANAA. Their current programming is more reflective of artists exhibiting within the mainstream global art world, a direction that diverges from Tucker's original vision.

69. The catalogue for "Illegal America" was designed by Papo Colo as a box that held pages of artist statements and a curatorial statement printed on lightweight cardstock. The box was sealed shut with a dollar bill, and in order to read the contents, one "broke the law" by destroying the money. None of the pages were numbered. Jeanette Ingberman, "Illegal America," in *Illegal America*, ed. Jeanette Ingberman (New York: Exit Art, 1982).

70 Susana Torruella Leval, "Identity and Freedom: A Challenge for the Nineties," in *The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s*, eds. Nilda Peraza, Marcia Tucker, and Kinshasha Conwill (New York: The Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, and The Studio Museum in Harlem, 1990), 148–149.

71 Marysol Nieves, a former curator at the Bronx Museum, recalls that then-director Luis Carón frequently regarded this ceremony particularly as the occupation of mainstream-owned programs. Artists in the Marketplace (AIM), *Conversations with the Artist* (Summer 2011).

and Colo. "Illegal America" not only introduced the future ethos behind Exit Art, but can also be taken as a starting point for understanding the creative, expansive thinking that predominated among nonprofit spaces in the 1980s and 1990s.

Encouraging interplay among established artists, emerging artists, and artists whose work was ignored due to radical content or racial and gender barriers became a strategy among 1980s New York nonprofits and the programming was supported by government and private foundations. Additionally, the "second" generation of nonprofits rejected the term alternative, which they saw as marginalizing their work. Rather, they thought of their efforts as existing in the center; their goal was to make the art world more inclusive, and to create spaces as formidable and legitimate as the city's established venues.

This ambition caused tension when mainstream institutions became interested in showing work by artists of color. Art historian and curator Susana Torruella Leval described the "either/or" dilemma faced by Latin American artists about where to exhibit their work during the late 1980s:

"Partially responding [to the growth of the Hispanic population in the United States], a number of major museums and corporations organized large group exhibitions of Latin American or Hispanic artists, which brought them increased exposure and critical attention across the country. Organized by all-Anglo curatorial teams, these touring exhibitions posed difficult choices for the invited artists. Participation implied the longed-for possibility of entering the elusive 'mainstream.' It meant the expansion of their audience beyond that of the specialized Latin arts organizations and alternative spaces—for twenty years the only sources of support for their work. Participation held the prospect of shifting, within the traditional art world, from the perceived margins—where alternative spaces are thought to function—to within reach of a self-designated center."⁷⁰

For the younger generation, the dilemma described by Leval also brought up issues of criteria and insularity at ethnic-specific spaces. Nonprofits like Exit Art advocated a broader mix. By placing the work of artists of color directly into the vanguard through exhibitions focused on shared themes and sensibilities, these galleries offered new possibilities for broadening contemporary art. An oft-spoken phrase of the period summed up the strategy: multiculturalism doesn't just happen; you need to make it happen.⁷¹ If the 1970s was about separation from the mainstream, the 1980s saw artists and artist spaces demanding a re-centering of the art world. Using ethnic-specific organizations as a model, this new generation sought to, in Goldbard's formulation, "change the world" of the arts by establishing the legitimacy of artists too long ignored, and doing so positively through collaborative, creative exchange.

This new expansiveness was fully explored in "The Decade Show," co-organized and co-presented by the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, the New Museum, and the Studio Museum in Harlem in May 1990. The directors of the spaces—Nilda Peraza, Marcia Tucker, and Kinshasha Conwill, respectively—and their curators met frequently over the course of a year and selected more than fifty artists according to the theme of "identity," which the organizers considered the central issue of the 1980s. Bracketed by significant social markers—"Homelessness and the AIDS Epidemic," "Democracy: At Home and Abroad," and "The Global Environmental Crisis"—the exhibition revealed a tremendous shift away from materials and process toward self-reflective work, dealing with questions of subjectivity, everyday conditions, and the cultural relativity of perception.

The juxtaposition of well-known, even established artists, with artists whose work was seen as "ethnic specific" or "political" began to break down the barriers surrounding these artists' critical reception in favor of a broader perspective. Artists whose work investigated representations of self

included John Ahearn, Rigoberto Torres, John Coplans, Yong Soon Min, Cindy Sherman, Coreen Simpson, and Lorna Simpson. The show also incorporated activist groups like the Epoxy Art Group, Guerrilla Girls, and Gran Fury, and individual artists such as Jenny Holzer, Alfredo Jaar, and Barbara Kruger. Painters ranged from Ida Applebroog to Emilio Cruz, Robert Colescott, and Eric Fischl. Abstract, allusive pieces by Liliana Porter, Ana Mendieta, Maren Hassinger, and Martin Puryear were also incorporated into the theme.

"The Decade Show" also privileged installation, demonstrating how process had receded as a strategy in favor of tableaux. Work by artists as diverse as Dara Birnbaum, Houston Conwill, David Hammons, and Amelia Mesa-Bains actively confronted the viewer, and art historian Eunice Lipton took up the notion of confrontation in her catalogue essay. She wrote, "One of the most ruinous traits of the urge to 'identity' is its tendency to essentialize. At its heart is the alienating mechanism I am/you are. Such a model supposes a subject position and an object position, domination and subordination.... This dualistic structuring of one person's identity marks someone else's otherness."⁷² However, such confrontation was the point of the work, and emblematic of the period.⁷³ While spaces like those involved in "The Decade Show" and Exit Art, the Alternative Museum, the Drawing Center, Art in General, and Artists Space functioned as laboratories for issue-based art, established institutions were not yet convinced of the work's validity. Despite the continual disavowal of art produced by women and artists of color in the mainstream art world, New Museum director Marcia Tucker observed that the decade's end inspired several other projects in the vein of "The Decade Show," particularly in Europe. She found these severely limited by what she described as:

"[their] very white, very male, very mainstream view of what happened during the eighties. My sense of it was a much more slippery, heterogeneous,

complicated, and difficult one. My idea included work of people who were invisible in the mainstream but who seemed to be really critical to an understanding of the period."⁷⁴

Another way to consider the period was summarized by Nilda Peraza:

"The eighties saw the move out of obscurity of what I call the 'parallel cultures' and 'parallel aesthetics.'... What I mean by 'parallel cultures' has very much to do with issues of exclusion and alternative aesthetics. Out of those social forces, the artistic orientation of the artists of our community developed, apart from the primary concerns of the mainstream....[Alternative spaces are] working towards the creation of a very generous and open art environment in this country, one that will allow and accept artists from all backgrounds, without stereotyping and pigeonholing."⁷⁵

The notion of a parallel history dismantled the "melting pot" myth, more accurately reflecting the nuances existing within numerous cultures. Peraza's point of departure was nearly identical to that of another decade project titled "The Hybrid State," presented by Exit Art in 1992 at the gallery's ten-year mark. The show was part of a two-year series of programs under the umbrella title "Parallel History," defined by Jeanette Ingberman and Papo Colo:

"The reality is that there is no longer a mainstream view of American art culture, with several "other" lesser important cultures surrounding it. Rather, there exists a "parallel history," which is now changing our understanding of our transcultural society and building new attitudes for analyzing the aesthetic distribution of cultural power and interpretation."⁷⁶

"The Hybrid State" also eschewed standard exhibition conventions. In lieu of working with the artists to install the show, Colo created installations related to the themes in the artists' work in which the objects were situated. His approach was not unlike that of a director's to a play: aspects of the story

72. Eunice Lipton, "Here Today, Gone Tomorrow? Some Plots for a Dismantling," in *The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s*, 25–26.

73. The issue came to a head in the 1993 Whitney Biennial, organized by Elisabeth Sussman in collaboration with Whitney curators Thelma Golden, John Handhardt, and Lisa Phillips. The exhibition became known as the "political Biennial" and included many of the artists featured in "The Decade Show." The critical reception was extremely negative, in regards to both the message of the exhibition and the mode of presentation. However, for the first time in the history of the event, only thirty-six percent of the artists were white, heterosexual males. The inclusion of so many artists of color, women, and gay artists was a breakthrough that had dramatic consequences for the composition of the art world. For an account of the criticism and its aftermath, see Elisabeth Sussman, "Then and Now: Whitney Biennial 1993," *Art Journal* 64, No. 1 (Spring 2005), 74–79.

74. "Directors' Introduction. A Conversation, Nilda Peraza, Marcia Tucker, Kinshasha Conwill," in *The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s*, 9.

75. *Ibid.*, 9–10.

76. Jeanette Ingberman and Papo Colo, eds., *The Hybrid State* (New York: Exit Art, 1992), 109.

77. Colo would go on to found the Trickster Theater group in 1992, which can be described as being "in dialogue" with visual art and has a history of situating pieces within Exit Art's exhibition installations.

78. Reagan-Bush NEA appointees objected to contemporary art agency-funded projects that had unconventional and, in particular, sexual content, and were especially virulent in their objection to subjects related to AIDS and queer lifestyles. Robert Mapplethorpe's 1989 retrospective exhibition, "The Perfect Moment," which was organized by Philadelphia's Institute of Contemporary Art and toured Washington, D.C., was singled out for condemnation. The controversy engulfed the ICA, the Corcoran Gallery of Art, and the Washington Project for the Arts. That same year, Artists Space in New York presented "Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing," a group exhibition organized by photographer Nan Goldin that featured work by artists living with AIDS. "Witnesses" also generated major debate, and in both cases—for the first time in the agency's history—NEA funding to the organizations involved was rescinded. For an overview of the protracted struggle regarding NEA policies and freedom of expression, see Richard Bolton, ed., *Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts* (New York: The New Press, 1992).

79. See Julie Ault, *Alternative Art*.

80. The catalogue, "Cultural Economies," was a special issue of *REAL LIFE Magazine*, an artists' publication edited by Thomas Lawson and Susan Morgan, which was founded in 1978. It included an essay by Julie Ault, "Why is today the same as every

are foregrounded in the staging, and the design of the production conveys a particular point of view. As in a performance, there is shared ownership in the result.⁷⁷ In an extension of this approach, visitors were considered participants, not spectators. The exhibition was entered from the back of the gallery through a series of three doors of increasing size marked "Colonial," "Post-Colonial," and "The Hybrid State," emphasizing a historical passage and changes in social consciousness. The physical characteristics of the entrance were the first indication of a participatory installation design. Such curatorial intervention made the curator's power explicit and emphasized how installation strategies frame the reception of a work.

"The Hybrid State" catalogue included some of the same artist-authors who participated in "The Decade Show"—Luis Camnitzer and Jimmie Durham among them—as well as critical essays by Ingberman and Colo, Joshua Decker, and Celeste Olajugbaja. Each took Ingberman and Colo's curatorial statement and elaborated on the theme, refracting current events: the fall of the Soviet bloc states, the Los Angeles riots after the acquittal of white police officers in the beating of Rodney King, the rise of the patriarchal "men's movement," Tiananmen Square, and the invasion of Iraq during George H.W. Bush's administration. Curiously, nowhere in the volume did the essayists consider the controversies related to government funding of contemporary art, which were taking place at the same time.⁷⁸

The question of funding for the arts was a featured theme in one of the seminal texts on the history of alternative spaces, Julie Ault's edited volume, *Alternative Art New York, 1965–1985*, published in 2002.⁷⁹ In a number of the essays, the role of public funding is examined as a defining issue for these organizations. *Alternative Art New York, 1965–1985* was based on a 1996 exhibition and catalogue Ault produced for the Drawing Center titled "Cultural Economies: Histories from the Alternative Arts Movement, NYC."⁸⁰ That same year, an exhibition dealing with related subject

matter was held at Exit Art, for which I was a curatorial assistant: "Counter Culture: Alternative Information from the Underground Press to the Internet, 1958–1995." The Visual Arts Program at the New York State Council on the Arts funded both shows.⁸¹ While Exit Art's project investigated the way in which artist- and activist-produced periodicals proliferated as a "cultural space" independent from the art market, "Cultural Economies" more directly addressed the history of alternative spaces, events, and groups and the battles surrounding the preservation of public funding. This focus on the "Culture Wars" might have been determined by the Visual Arts Program mandate, which sought to reclaim the history of alternative spaces from their critics and show the value of their legacy.

Alternative Art New York was a landmark, historiographically, because alternative spaces were framed as a manifestation of a social movement. Ault's introductory essay presented a chronology of selected New York City spaces, events, and organizations and adopted an approach similar to her previous work as a member of the collaborative Group Material. Both "Cultural Economies" and *Alternative Art New York* included materials that ranged from images of artworks and gallery spaces to ephemera. Both characterized nonprofit and artist-run galleries as operating within an economy made possible through public funding, but also, as Ault noted, to see "the growth, decline, and then-current potential of the alternative arts network."⁸² Crucially, Ault maintained that alternative galleries were at an endpoint, and much like Jacki Apple in 1981, she believed the problem was structural. Nonprofit art galleries were eventually run like institutions, and institutions, because they are bureaucratic, cannot by definition be alternative. Moreover, the change in funding policies at the NEA (what Ault referred to as its "collapse")⁸³ meant that it was only a matter of time before these spaces closed for good. Ten years after she published *Alternative Art New York*, Ault considered these questions in her essay "Of Several Minds Over Time:"

"A significant dilemma facing alternative spaces and structures is the onset of bureaucracy and hierarchy. Openness and commitment to flexibility in programming as well as in daily operations are frequently sacrificed to the demands of funding constancy, which mandate conventional, static administrative processes. Financial stability takes center stage when salaries and rent are past due. Under these conditions it's difficult to be spontaneous or debate essential questions about philosophy and purpose."⁸⁴

Throughout her writing on the subject, Ault has persuasively framed the history of alternatives as an experiment that never achieved its goal: the "overhaul of the art industry and its social relations."⁸⁵ Yet within *Alternative Art New York*, Ault unifies these galleries, groups, and events as elements of a counter-cultural movement, and also offers contrasting visions of the achievements and fates of these activities. Lucy Lippard's "Biting the Hand: Artists and Museums in New York Since 1969" and Martin Beck's "Alternative: Space" describe successful creative efforts by artists and alternative spaces, while Arlene Goldbard's "When (Art) Worlds Collide: Institutionalizing the Alternatives," and Brian Wallis's "Public Funding and Alternative Spaces" are examinations of failures and unrealized goals.⁸⁶ In an epigraph, Wallis cites a 1980 quote from Carl Andre that reads, in part, "Alternative spaces which depend on elites for their support are not really alternative to anything and are not even reformist."⁸⁷ This statement harks back to the early literature, in which artists objected to the administrative rules imposed by government funders, which some deemed irreconcilable with the values of artists. Wallis depicts alternative spaces as compromised: galleries that accepted government monies in the post-"Culture Wars" era would ipso facto come under the "social control" of the state, resulting in the end of their creative and political autonomy.⁸⁸

The level of influence many writers attributed to entities like the National Endowment for the Arts in determining

the cultural discourse was directly related to the general despair among progressive communities as a result of the controversial election of George W. Bush. Taken as a whole, Ault's book defines alternative galleries as deeply entrenched and locked in a perpetual struggle with forces more powerful, a dramatic shift in tone from the optimistic search for cultural pluralism in the 1980s and early 1990s. Situating *Alternative Art New York* within the historical literature, the book relates most closely to cultural studies compendiums—edited volumes that incorporate work by writers with shared affinities. Models include the aforementioned series published by the New Museum, particularly Brian Wallis's *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, Richard Bolton's *The Contest of Meaning*, Carol Squires's *The Critical Image*, and *Democracy: A Project by Group Material*.⁸⁹ *Alternative Art New York* represents the maturation of the more than twenty years of criticism about the motivations of "alternative actors" and offers one of the more sustained examinations of not only these communities' influences and successes, but also their limited role in radically changing the mainstream art world.

CONCLUSION

Remarking on the Museum of Modern Art's groundbreaking 2010 survey exhibition of Marina Abramović, "The Artist Is Present," and the extraordinary international public reception and visibility of her endurance performance, in which she sat silently for entire days, staring at museum visitors who chose to sit in a chair opposite her, Jeanette Ingberman observed, "Marina's show could have been a show at Artists Space fifteen years ago." She continued, "The alternative space needs another mission, or it needs to be doing something else. The museums are doing it better, they have usurped the role of alternative spaces, so alternative spaces need to make a break and go in another direction."⁹⁰ If artists are acting as living sculptures in museums, and museums, in concert with artists, are asking the public to join performances, the mainstream has certainly become adventurous. Moreover, museums

other day?" in which she began to formulate her conception of alternative spaces that would be fully realized in *Alternative Art New York*. See Julie Ault, ed., *Cultural Economies: Histories from the Alternative Arts Movement*, NYG (New York: The Drawing Center; Valencia, CA: REAL LIFE Magazine, 1996), 7–10.

81. "Counter Culture: Alternative Information from the Underground Press to the Internet, 1958–1995" was organized by curator Brian Wallis. Both "Cultural Economies" and "Counter Culture" received special, discretionary funding (approximately \$50,000 each) from the NYSCA Visual Arts Program after a 1995 open call for proposals for projects that would evaluate and assess the alternative arts movement, its history, and contributions made to the understanding of contemporary visual art. Exit Art's and the Drawing Center's proposals were selected as recipients of the grant award. See Catherine de Zegher, "Preface," in *Alternative Art New York*, vii.

82. Julie Ault, "Of Several Minds Over Time," in *Playing by the Rules: Alternative Thinking/Alternative Spaces*, ed. Steve Rand (New York: apexart, 2010), 94.

83. Ault wrote, "Yet just when many mainstream cultural institutions sought to critically redress elitist museological practices, the virtual collapse of the NEA functionally undermined the potential civic roles they, and art, might play." Ibid., 98.

84. Ibid., 95–96.

85. Ibid., 98.

86. See: Lippard, "Biting the Hand;" Brian Wallis, "Public Funding and Alternative Spaces;" Goldbard, "When (Art) Worlds

Collide," and Beck, "Alternative: Space," in *Alternative Art*, 79–120; 161–182; 183–200; and 249–280.

87. Wallis, "Public Funding," 161.

88. *Ibid.*, 177.

89. Brian Wallis, ed., *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984); Richard Bolton, ed., *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989); Carol Squires, ed., *The Critical Image*, (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1990); Brian Wallis, ed., *Democracy: A Project by Group Material* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press; New York: Dia Art Foundation, 1990).

90. Ann Philbin interviewed by Jeanette Ingberman and Herb Tam, New York, 2010. Ingberman expresses a similar sentiment in her introduction to the panel held in conjunction with the "Alternative Histories" exhibition, "Activism and the Rise of Alternative Art Spaces," reprinted in this volume.

91. *Ibid.*

possess the financial resources to produce such spectacles under conditions closer to the way in which an artist envisions them. Today's art world is vast and complex, and its expansion shows no signs of abating. Risk is no longer the domain of the small nonprofit gallery or the collective. Museums embrace new challenges and are willing to work outside of their adopted conventions. Will there still be a need in the future for smaller, experimental spaces?

In all likelihood, there is no clear end to the alternative gallery, only an end to specific concerns. The experience of the 1970s through the 1990s taught a generation of artists and art workers that being female, and/or African American, Hispanic, Asian American, Native American, and/or GLBT was no longer a tolerable reason for being left out of the mainstream. Rejecting the idea of "alternative," spaces were formed to push a new dialogue that was far more inclusive, unconcerned with art market trends, and immediate. These spaces altered the composition of the art world, though they did not undo capitalism and its attendant values. Ann Philbin, formerly the director of the Drawing Center in New York, and currently director of the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, observed:

"The galleries and the museums learned from the alternative art spaces. At one point we were the red-hot center of the art world, and then they basically adopted the practices of the alternative spaces to enliven their own programs, and galleries too. This leaves an identity crisis for all of these spaces to say, what is our job now, why are we important now? I do believe that they will always figure something out."⁹¹

The DIY approach prevails, and the contributors to this book take up Philbin's question and reward her faith in the enduring spirit of the "alternative." The history of New York's nonprofit galleries offers wonderful lessons about the power of acting with autonomy, the rewards of taking risks, and the benefits of working collaboratively. The fact that so many of these venues persist is a testament to their adaptability to the changing times and the ongoing need for experimental spaces.

Melissa Rachleff is a Clinical Associate Professor in the Visual Arts Administration Program at New York University. From 1989 to 1995 she was an Assistant Curator at Exit Art and has also worked at the Brooklyn Museum and the Museum of the City of New York. She was an associate in the Museum Program at the New York State Council on the Arts from 2000 to 2007. Rachleff is currently working on an exhibition about artist-run galleries during the 1950s and early 1960s for the Grey Art Gallery at New York University to open in Fall 2015.

This essay is dedicated to Jeanette Ingberman (1952–2011), my friend and mentor, who saw the arts as a strategy to democratize America, and as an adventure, permeated by risk.