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"Living big in a loft": Collaboration, community, and co-operatives in SoHo, New York

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In the early 1960s, the cast-iron loft district below Houston Street in Lower Manhattan was on the verge of demolition. Artists seeking large, inexpensive spaces to live and work in began moving into vacant industrial lofts, developing a community and new collaborative sites of performance and display that offered an alternative to the mainstream art world. By the end of the 1970s, the neighbourhood now known as "SoHo" was home to an increasingly affluent population living in co-operatively owned loft buildings, while alternative art spaces were closing to make way for commercial galleries and upscale boutiques. This paper explores the dramatic, artist-led transformation of SoHo by focusing on three texts from 1970: the inaugural show at the influential alternative art space 112 Greene Street; an LP recorded by jazz musician Ornette Coleman in his Prince Street loft; and an article from Life magazine that introduced loft living to a wider audience. 1970 is significant as the year in which the underground community of the 1960s became increasingly visible and professional, in an effort to secure the future of the neighbourhood for artists. By exploring the ways in which the space of the loft is articulated in each text, I attempt to understand the contradictory role played by artists in the development of SoHo, who were complicit in the rapid gentrification of the neighbourhood, while simultaneously conceptualising a swathe of genuinely radical collaborative practices that continue to be inspirational to artistic communities today.

By the early 1960s, the cast-iron loft district below Houston Street in Lower Manhattan—once the heart of New York City's textile industry, yet now home to struggling garment manufacturers and cheap warehouses—was known as "Hell's Hundred Acres" because of the fires that constantly broke out among its rundown lofts. As businesses closed down or moved out of the city, landlords rented vacant industrial units to any tenant they could find (Field and Irving 15). This practice increasingly included artists attracted by large, light-drenched spaces and cheap rent, living and working illegally in unfurnished lofts they renovated themselves. In the mid-1960s, George Maciunas, principal coordinator of the experimental collective Fluxus, began organising housing cooperatives. Maciunas dreamed of turning the neighbourhood into a communal artists' colony, and his *Fluxhouse* system allowed groups to collectively purchase—rather than simply rent—loft buildings (Bernstein). Artists had been living and working in lofts in nearby Greenwich Village and Coenties Slip for a few

decades, but the high concentration of loft buildings contained within this new district's small geographical area allowed a sizable community to quickly develop.

As the artist population grew, lofts not only functioned as apartments and studios but also became artist-owned and cooperatively-run galleries, rehearsal studios, and performance spaces. Artists such as the composer Philip Glass, the choreographer Yvonne Rainer, and the sculptor Donald Judd, formed part of a loose downtown art scene that situated "SoHo"—the catchy new moniker derived from its location "South of Houston Street"—at the centre of New York's artistic avant-garde in the 1960s and 70s, also described by curator Lydia Yee as "one of the most vital and artistically diverse periods in post-war American culture" (13). Early support from the institutional and commercial art world and the media legitimised and popularised artists' reconfiguring of "obsolete" loft buildings. In the early 1970s, city authorities increasingly recognised loft conversions as an inexpensive way of revitalising industrial neighbourhoods, legalising residential lofts and offering federal funding for alternative art spaces (Shkuda 197; Anderson 450). SoHo's spacious lofts and bohemian atmosphere offered a desirable new lifestyle that was gradually adopted by non-artists; throughout the 1970s and 80s artist-run art spaces closed to make way for commercial galleries, expensive boutiques, and upscale restaurants, catering to an increasingly affluent loft-dwelling population (Shkuda 158-181, Miles 28). By the early 2000s, the neighbourhood was described by Sharon Zukin as "no longer an artists' district; it was an urban shopping mall" (*Naked City* 239).

In *Loft Living*, a study of Manhattan lofts, Zukin argues that "the housing that the middle class builds or buys necessarily reflects new ideas about space, and what it represents, in each time period" (66). In this paper, I explore the role that artists played in shaping these new ideas in SoHo, by analysing three texts from 1970, a year that bridges the gap between the underground SoHo of the 1960s and an increasingly visible and professionalised community that emerged in the 1970s. I begin by exploring the inaugural show at the influential alternative art space 112 Greene Street, in particular, the role that *rawness* played in this space. I then consider an LP recorded by free jazz pioneer Ornette Coleman, and the community he helped to foster in his loft at Prince Street. Finally, I consider a *Life* magazine article that introduced loft living to the magazine's large readership, and explore how the article articulated the often-contradictory relationship between SoHo's industrial past and artistic present. I am interested in exploring the alternative ways of living and working that artists collectively developed in SoHo lofts, while keeping in mind the problematic position they occupied within this industrial neighbourhood.

This paper draws on Michel De Certeau's distinction between "place" and "space". A "place" is defined by its "proper" function and location; place implies fixity, death, and "an indication of stability" (117). "Space" has "none of the univocity or stability of a 'proper'"; "space" is conceptualised in terms of transition, movement, and shifting relationships between elements. In De Certeau's words: "*space is practiced place.* Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into "a space by walkers" (117). De Certeau's work offers a way of thinking about the emancipatory potential of the loft, as an open and fluid "space" mobilised by artists within the static "place" of the building's physical structure, that offered the formation of radical new communities and practices that ran counter to the loft's original purpose.

This paper is not a historical study of SoHo, however I rely on a number of studies charting the complex narrative of SoHo's development for invaluable analysis and historical context (Zukin *Loft Living*; Simpson; Shkuda). The dramatic transformation of SoHo has contemporary significance. Aspects of this artist-led gentrification have been observed in many other North American and European cities, from SoHo-style naming of neighbourhoods—such as NoPa (North of the Panhandle) in San Francisco or SoFo (South of Folkungagatan) in Stockholm—to the redevelopment of industrial districts, such as London's Clerkenwell or Vieux-Montreal, into upscale loft neighbourhoods (Shkuda 234-235). In many cities in the United Kingdom, the redevelopment of abandoned industrial buildings for publicly funded cultural institutions, such as Tate Modern in London or the BALTIC in Gateshead, have figured centrally in cities' culture-led urban renewal programmes (Miles 15-16, 76-77).

112 Greene Street

In the early 1960s, argues Robyn Brentano, experimental groups living and working in SoHo such as the Judson Dance Theatre and Fluxus, attempted to "break through the institutional isolation of art, making more direct, personal, and often collective presentations of their work in studios, storefronts and on the streets of the city" (vii). Artists emphasised collaboration and working across disciplines. The open space of SoHo's lofts and streets, deserted outside of working hours, allowed ostensibly obsolete industrial places to be re-inscribed as spaces of new artistic practice that shifted focus away from the art *object* and towards *process*, *performance*, and *time-based* work (Yee 143). This early work was stimulating to a younger generation who arrived in SoHo in the late 1960s and 70s. Politicised by activist movements of the time and distrustful of the commercialism and sexism of existing art-world institutions, these socially oriented artists began opening their own galleries and performance spaces in lofts

(Yee 13; Anderson 449). These self-organised, communal, non-commercial spaces became known as "alternative art spaces", and 112 Greene Street is an influential early example. Known simply as 112, it occupied two floors of an old rag-salvaging factory owned by sculptor Jeffrey Lew. Lew did not renovate before opening 112's doors as a workshop-cum-gallery in October 1970: old coats of paint in various colours covered the walls; pipes and fixtures were not cleaned, painted or removed; the damaged wooden floor was left un-sanded and un-polished (Beck 254).

Figure 1: Installation in progress at 112 Greene Street, 1970 (Photograph by Alan Saret. In *Alternative Art New York, 1965-1985*, edited by Julie Ault. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, 255).

112's fluid, unfinished nature was reflected in its nameless inaugural show. The installation process was considered part of the exhibition; with no fixed opening date, it "began" gradually as artworks were installed or created (Beck 252). In installation photographs, it is difficult to distinguish between the material space of 112 and the pieces on display (Fig. 1). 112 was open twenty-four hours a day, and participants from Lew's wide circle of downtown artist friends—seventeen altogether, including Gordon Matta-Clark and Alan Saret—worked together to continually update the show, adding new pieces and destroying, removing, or amending existing ones. Participants worked in myriad formats and mediums, and there was an emphasis on intervening in the space, using its fixtures as raw material for artmaking. Martin Beck describes *Building Work #1*, in which Marjorie Strider installed

brightly coloured plastic foam in 112's upstairs windows, "thus expanding the gallery space to the building's exterior as well as into Lew's private space" (254). Other artists cut holes in the 112's floor, hung metal from the ceiling, and even dug through the basement floor to the earth below (Beck 252).

Regarding 112's aesthetic, in 1981, Alan Saret recalled: "we were reluctant to fix it up, not wishing to disturb the raw power of the space" (quoted in Brentano xii). Saret's comment has elements of the *tactical*; rather than renovate the building, artists simply adapted the potentially limiting environment to their needs. The installation also draws a parallel between 112's industrial past and the labour-intensive work that was being undertaken there. This emphasis on labour, readily apparent in 112's inaugural show, is echoed in an interview by Lew, who asserts that "concepts are derived … by physical activity, not intellectual thoughts" (quoted in Anderson 450). The visible trace of industry was an important part of the lofts' visual appeal, as Zukin notes: "a sense that the great industrial age has ended creates melancholy over the machines and the factories of the past"; out of this came a desire to preserve these supposedly "obsolete" buildings, and the objects they contained (*Loft Living* 59). At 112, industry was not just an aesthetic, but provided justification for co-opting these buildings. In a 1963 report prepared for the New York City Planning Commission, urban planner Chester Rapkin advocated preservation of SoHo, on the basis that the neighbourhood's industrial businesses provided valuable employment for low-income minority New Yorkers (45). Alan W. Moore argues that artists claimed a working-class identification to ease their "guilt over the certain displacement of low wage workers from the SoHo district where they have found employment" (58).

Beck argues that in 112, the "raw power" of the space became "a metaphor for freedom from restrictive definitions of art making, alluding to a frontier state where boundaries are negotiated and challenged and where space is explored and extended" (254). Negotiating this boundary was a moral imperative for Lew, who opened 112 because "it's time for action and clear thinking … the things which make you an artist can make you a revolutionary, can make you change your own environment" (quoted in Brentano vii). In SoHo, artists aligned themselves with the powerless—their own underdog image was an important part of battles with the city to legalise their lofts—while ignoring their own problematic position within the neighbourhood. Additionally, 112's emphasis on "hard work" speaks, whether intentionally or not, to the misogyny of the art world that women artists of the period were attempting to dismantle. In the early 1970s, in the wake of Linda Nochlin's influential 1971 essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?", collectives such as Women Artists in Revolution

(WAR) and the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee began demanding adequate representation in New York's art museums, while feminist artists and critics founded co-operative non-profit spaces in SoHo, such as A.I.R Gallery. In this context, notes Reesa Greenberg, the avant-garde's turn towards the factory and warehouse can be seen as a reclaiming of the spaces *of* and *for* work as exclusively masculine (18). Fiona Anderson similarly notes that "[l]ike the rhetoric of the 'raw' and authentic space, of the 'unconventional beauty' of the derelict building, Lew's description is highly masculine" (450).

Artist House

Around the corner from 112 Greene Street, another prototypical space was emerging in 1970: the *jazz loft* inside Ornette Coleman's home at 131 Prince Street, eventually known as Artist House. Coleman is absent from most histories of the downtown scene, a "racial blind spot" that José Esteban Muñoz also identifies in accounts of 1960s Greenwich Village, which exclude black authors and musicians such as Samuel R. Delany, Amiri Baraka and Cecil Taylor (84). Coleman's exclusion is in spite of the fact that he was an early resident of George Maciunas' *Fluxhouse* co-operatives, purchasing two floors of 131 Prince Street in 1968 (Edwards "The Two Ages of Artist House"). Coleman lived on the third floor of 131 Prince Street, while the ground floor was used for rehearsal; Michael Heller notes that, by 1970, he had begun "hosting occasional performances of music and dance, fostering an informal atmosphere that was typical of loft gatherings" (35). Lofts offered performance opportunities and rehearsal space for a young generation of avant-garde jazz musicians, inspired by the experimental style Coleman helped pioneer in the late 1950s, who found few chances to perform in New York's mainstream nightclubs (Heller 3).

Coleman does not appear to have been as inspired by the material space of his loft as the artists of 112 Greene Street. In 1969, the jazz writer Kiyoshi Koyama visited 131 Prince Street for an article in Japanese jazz magazine *Swing Journal*. Observing a rehearsal, Koyama notes that "music stands and instruments were set up in the middle of the almost 3500 square foot space"; in Takahashi Arihara's accompanying photograph, Coleman and his collaborators take up very little space, clustering around a central pillar in the vast open space of the loft (quoted in Edwards "Ornette at Prince Street"). Heller notes that in his interviews with loft musicians, conversations "never veered toward attempts to hold on to vestiges of the past. Instead, what emerged over and over were stories about altering and renovating the spaces to make them usable" (134). Jeffrey Lew's devotion to the "raw power" and industrial past of 112

speaks to his relatively privileged relationship to SoHo's real estate market. At a time when gaining residential mortgages for these illegal properties was practically impossible, even obtaining a loft through a co-operative was difficult enough; purchasing an entire loft building, as Lew did, required access to amounts of capital that remained far beyond the reach of most loft musicians (Shkuda 54; Heller 132).

Figure 2: Ornette at the pool table (Photograph by Takahashi Arihara. In *Swing Journal*, October 1969).

The first recording Coleman made at Prince Street, 1970's *Friends and Neighbors*, was not recorded on the ground floor, but in Coleman's residential loft upstairs. During his visit, Koyama describes Coleman's home as a comfortable, almost luxurious space (Fig. 2)—aside from the essentials, the loft contained a nine-foot pool table and a sauna (quoted in Edwards "Ornette"). I argue that Coleman's desire to record inside his home was partly pragmatic—the downstairs space was not renovated—but also because his conception of the loft, as a "blank space" in which an avant-garde musical community could come together to rehearse and perform, did not rely on a fetishisation of its industrial history. It is worth noting that many of the loft jazz venues were not in lofts *per se*, but tenements, apartments and commercial retail spaces found throughout Lower Manhattan and Harlem (Heller 130). Bob Thiele's liner photographs for *Friends and Neighbors* show a mixed-race, mixed-gender group that includes children (Fig. 3). In contrast to the intense work found at what Peter Schjeldahl calls the "arduous and exhilarating 112", Bill Shoemaker describes the "hootenanny-like audience participation" of *Friends and Neighbors*'s title-track (125). The repeated refrain "Friends and

neighbours, that's where it's at!"—chanted by Coleman's actual friends and neighbours—signals the emergence, as Baraka argues, of a new community "more willing to sit on the floor in a loft and hear good music than go to the formal clubs downtown and hear well-known chumps" (98).

Figure 3: *Friends and Neighbors* LP, back cover (Photography by Bob Thiele, Flying Dutchman, 1970).

In 1972, Coleman renamed Prince Street's renovated ground floor 'Artist House', and began presenting other musicians, taking out advertisements in *The Village Voice*, and charging admission (Edwards, "The Two Ages"). Although the arrival of loft ownership through Maciunas' co-ops had facilitated the growth of SoHo's artistic community, it also introduced a greater degree of self-interest to the neighbourhood; by 1974, Coleman was the target of noise complaints from his neighbours. Shoemaker notes that shareholders in the co-op building,

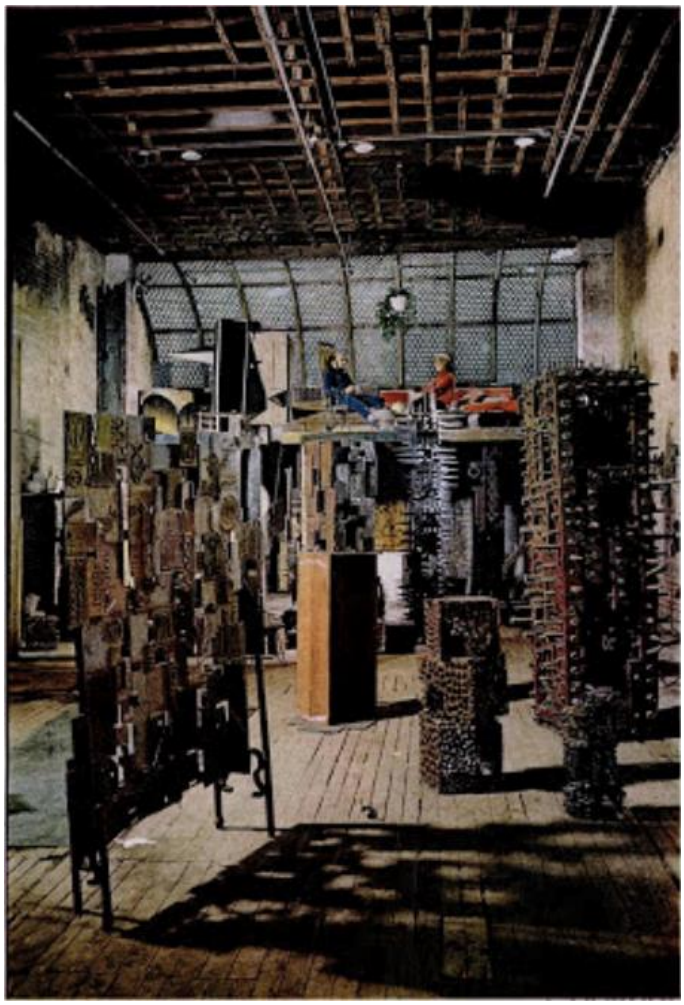
"undoubtedly motivated by the performance space's potential drag on their investment in a market poised to boom, first forced Coleman to close Artist House and, eventually, to sell his loft" (127). As an older, more established artist, Coleman was more of a supporter than a direct participant in the loft jazz scene, offering free rehearsal space and somewhere to stay to many young musicians (Heller 102). Artist House's open, informal atmosphere—emphasised by the presence of women and children, and a lack of alcohol—suggested ways of bringing people together that later spaces adopted. The jazz lofts were still gendered spaces: there were few women performers, and in journalist Susan Mannheimer's description of a jazz loft as somewhere "that women can feel free to come unaccompanied" on account of the presence of children, femininity remains tied to domesticity and the family (quoted in Heller 141). Despite this gendered space, the jazz loft's embrace of a "domestic" atmosphere in which different spheres overlap stands in contrast to 112's overtly masculine conception of space.

"Living Big in a Loft"

From the beginning of its transformation, SoHo was a site where de Certeau's conceptions of "place" and "space" came into contact. If, as de Certeau insists, place "excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location", then SoHo was no longer a "'proper' and distinct location" defined by the stable presence of industry in its lofts and streets. From a city planning and civic improvement perspective, the neighbourhood should therefore be demolished, and something new built to replace it: proposals in the 1960s included Robert Moses' ten-lane Lower Manhattan Expressway (LOMEX) and a middle-income housing project supported by residents of nearby Greenwich Village (Shkuda 35-38). Artists took SoHo's unloved industrial buildings, and began inscribing them with new meanings; creating transgressive, alternative spaces that undermined city planners' spatial mapping of the neighbourhood, and the linear narrative of progress represented by large-scale urban renewal projects. As early as 1961, loft-dwelling artists received support from powerful art-world institutions and the local press, that made the case for them to be understood as a unique and homogenous group of workers. Aaron Shkuda notes that artists were perceived as "relatively poor people with distinct housing needs but who also had the power to drive the city's economy and give it its unique identity" (Shkuda 93). As New York City slid closer to bankruptcy, artists' ability to see value and beauty in "obsolete" industrial structures centred them in discussions about how best to redevelop cities during moments of urban crisis. From the start, artists situated themselves as underdogs fighting a bureaucratic and uninspired city leadership (Shkuda 93). This status allowed artists to ignore their significant role, whether intended or not, in hastening the demise of industry in

SoHo. It also meant that conversations surrounding class, race and gender disparities between artists—inherent to the art world, but exacerbated by the introduction of private loft ownership—did not take place.

Although the first commercial gallery had opened in SoHo in 1968, throughout the 1960s artists living illegally in the neighbourhood maintained a low profile. This practice changed in 1970, when the SoHo Artists Association (SAA)—who would soon secure artists the legal right to live in lofts—made overt efforts to acquaint the public with SoHo. The SAA organised the SoHo Artists Festival in May 1970: over 70,000 people attended from all over the city, observing artists at work in their studios, and taking part in almost 100 music and performance events in SoHo's lofts and streets (Simpson 183). SAA members also opened their lofts up to a writer and photographer from *Life* magazine, in order to show the public that that loft dwellers "lived like human beings" (quoted in Simpson 183). As one unnamed member stated: "we stressed the middle-class virtues—like hygiene, and the city's definition of a bohemia got radically altered" (quoted in Simpson 183). In 112 and Artist House one can see elements of the aesthetic that would soon be used to advertise the "loft lifestyle"—industrial



fixtures, open plans, exposed brick walls—yet both spaces are radically different, reflecting each owner's distinct sense of the freedom that lofts afforded.

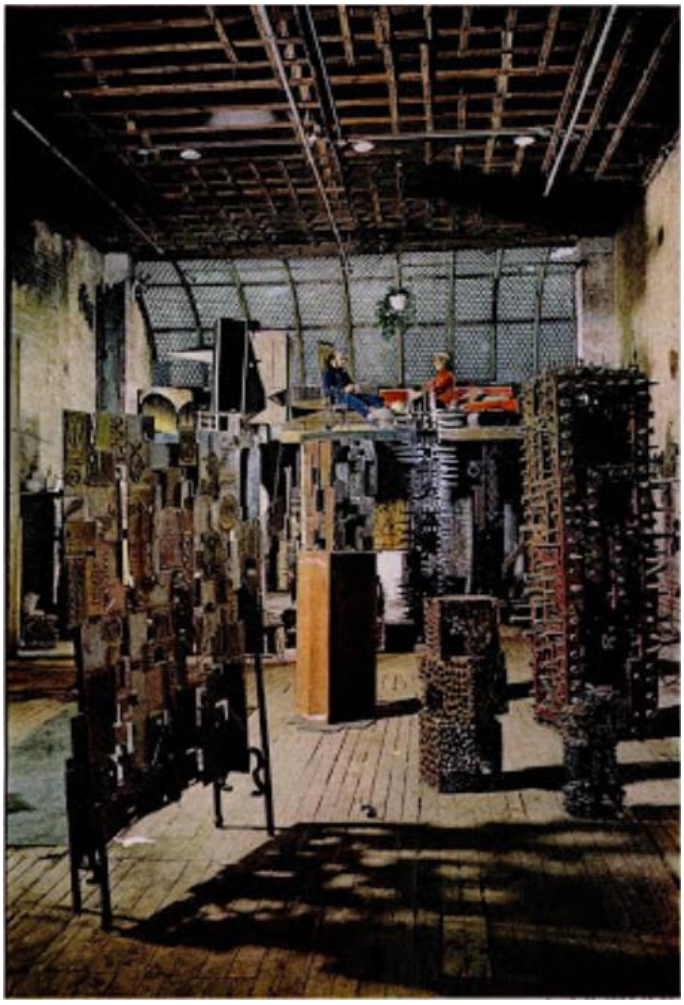


Figure 4: Bill and Yvonne Tarr's loft (Photograph by John Dominis. In Life magazine, 27 March 1970, 62).

These attitudes of radically different aesthetics can be observed in the *Life* article. Although an industrial aesthetic is prevalent, each of the artists featured reconfigure the space in their own way. The title of the article—"Living Big in a Loft"—refers to their size, but also alludes to the comfort lofts offer, a new form of "good life" that comes with "sixteen- ceilings, 45-foot rooms, and community spirit" (62). Most of the lofts are closer to the luxurious space of Coleman's Artist House than 112's "as-is" architecture, yet Bill and Yvonne Tarr's loft is shown mid-renovation; Bill's huge metal sculptures almost indistinguishable from the industrial surfaces surrounding them (Fig. 4). Masculine language pervades "Living Big in a Loft": Nobu Fukui suggests that "big ideas" that can only develop in a "big space", while the unnamed author describes the work made within the lofts in terms of "canvasses as large as billboards" and "pieces the size of cars" (61). A nostalgic fetishisation of the "great industrial age" is woven throughout the article, even though SoHo's continued use as a site of industry is

obvious (Fig. 5); John Dominis' photograph of a crowded Greene Street in the middle of a busy working day sits uncomfortably next to the author's assertion that SoHo's industry "long since went broke or fled to the suburbs" (61). Similarly, Tom Blackwell describes prowling nearby surplus and hardware stores for "artistically curious objects", as though these were antique stores rather than businesses forming an important part of the local industrial infrastructure (quoted in "Living Big in a Loft" 63). The language of the article makes it clear that this new community, comprising "one of the greatest concentrations of serious artists in the world", is

using the space in a preferable way to the industry that "spews out tons of machine parts, reprocessed rags and cardboard boxes daily" ("Living Big" 61).

Figure 5: Greene Street, SoHo (Photograph by John Dominis. In Life magazine, 27 March 1970, 61).

"Living Big in a Loft" successfully helped the SAA gain public support for the fight for loft legalisation; it also highlighted the broader appeal of loft living. Readers of *Life* and other glossy magazines such as *New York* and *The New York Times* magazine saw that one could live a bohemian yet luxurious lifestyle in lofts. Loft living was perceived as an "authentic" way of life; as Zukin notes, lofts had continuity with historical American housing types that emphasised exposed materials, open plans, and unpretentious decoration (*Loft Living* 69-70). The 1960s and 70s were marked by challenges to many dominant norms governing Western society, including a questioning of traditional gender roles and a breakdown of the gendered distinctions between 'private' and 'public' spheres. The fluid space of the lofts, in which one space flowed directly into another, support this breakdown, but it is worth noting the masculinisation of the domestic sphere represented by a rise in oversized industrial

appliances for residential use. Of the five lofts photographed, at least three are occupied by a couple or family unit, and there is reference to just one woman artist, sculptor Sandra Beal. In the space of the loft, middle-class "creative" professionals—the first wave of non-artists to move to SoHo mostly worked in academia, advertising, and publishing—could envision a life freer and more exciting than that which was offered by the suburbs, yet that did not contradict suburbia's emphasis on property accumulation and the nuclear family (Shkuda 187-188).

Conclusions

As seen from today's vantage point, what happened next in SoHo appears inevitable. The scrapping of Robert Moses' LOMEX plan in 1969 stabilised prices in the neighbourhood, as did the legalisation of artists' lofts in 1971 (Simpson 224). In 1973, SoHo acquired landmark status, ensuring the preservation of its architecture, while alternative art spaces such as 112 Greene Street began to receive federal grants from the National Endowment for the Art and the New York State Council for the Arts (Anderson 450). More commercial galleries opened, along with boutiques and restaurants catering predominantly to non-resident visitors to SoHo. Rental and co-op prices continued to rise; by 1975 landlords could get more money from a residential tenant than an industrial one, and by 1978 two-thirds of SoHo's loft residents were non-artists. Co-op ownership and property speculation meant that some got rich—artists *and* non-artists, commercial developers *and* individuals—while those who could no longer afford to stay in the neighbourhood moved to nearby TriBeCa and the Lower East Side, neighbourhoods at the beginning of their own periods of *embourgeoisement* (Shkuda 171-181).

At a moment of economic crisis, when questions were being asked about what to do with America's disappearing industrial centres, Marcus Field and Mark Irving argue that artists "nurtured a new aesthetic vigour" within "husks of the nation's former industrial sector" (11). Shkuda suggests that "by inventing the loft, an attractive new mode of urban living, and helping to build an amenity-rich neighbourhood in SoHo, artists created an atmosphere that attracted wealthy 'creative' New Yorkers, such as 'ad men,' architects, and stockbrokers" (237). In SoHo, argues Zukin, "the sequence of users converts loft space to increasingly 'better' use and, in so doing, alters the quintessential form in which that space is used" (*Loft Living* 173). With the support of the art world, the media, the public, and (eventually) city leadership, artists staked a moral claim to these spaces, arguing that theirs was the only appropriate use for "obsolete" industrial buildings. This claim, made despite the presence of industry in SoHo until the early 1980s, was made possible in light of the central role that art played in New York's cultural and economic life in the second half of the twentieth century.

Recent decades have seen the artist-led gentrification of many industrial neighbourhoods, and the rise of "creative city" policies that explicitly aim to attract young creative professionals (artists and non-artists) to urban centres as agents of gentrification—often branded as "regeneration" or "renewal" (Miles 30-35). In this context, it is easy to dismiss SoHo as an early example of a relatively privileged class colonising spaces deemed disposable by those in power, expediting the destruction of any existing communities in the process. Artists reshaped SoHo's public sphere—cleaning up the streets, opening space for galleries, restaurants, and shops—while also reformulating its private sphere, and the relationship between the two domains. Loft living has long been established as a highly marketable aesthetic and way of life, while the transformation of SoHo has been subsumed into a broad linear history of New York City's changing fortunes since the crisis-filled 1970s.

Despite the commodification and simplification of the neighbourhood's history, the lofts of SoHo should be remembered as sites of complex and contradictory negotiations between different artistic individuals and groupings, that produced a swathe of genuinely radical collaborative cultural forms and practices, a number of which are discussed here. By highlighting the distinct yet interconnected approaches to space articulated by Jeffrey Lew, Ornette Coleman, and the artists seen in *Life* magazine, I have attempted, as Ben Highmore notes, to consider the past "as the living, breathing and partly inchoate traces of experience (of experience in the making)" (38). Keeping SoHo's complex, multivocal past alive is vital, particularly for artists such as Coleman, who are rarely included in histories of New York's fervent downtown scene. Situating the radical alternative history of SoHo within that which Fiona Anderson calls our current "time of financial austerity and rampant cultural gentrification", allows it to act as a vital resource for present and future cultural communities (449). In *Limits to Culture,* Malcolm Miles documents the recent work of artists and collectives whose practices intervene in contested urban sites; work such as Ivan Puig and Andrés Padilla Domene's documentary exploration of abandoned railway lines in Mexico, and the takeover of billboards in Sheffield by Andy Hewitt and Mel Jordan for critiques of "public art". Miles describes this work as "dissident, or at least as outside the strictures of redevelopment" (5). At a moment when "culture has become a mask of social ordering under neoliberalism", Miles argues that these diverse practices should be celebrated as offering "alternative imaginaries which might one day be realised as a better world" (1-2).

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Author Biography

Alex Hoyos Twomey has recently completed a Master of Science by Research in Cultural Studies at the University of Edinburgh, where his research was focused on queer world making practices in the experimental comics of downtown New York artists David Wojnarowicz and Joe Brainard.