

# Being There

## The Tribeca Neighborhood of Franklin Furnace

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*Alan Moore with Debra Wacks*

When Martha Wilson opened the Franklin Furnace in 1976, the downtown neighborhood called “Tribeca” was getting hot. It was full of artists, and the venues that served them were crowding in. But there were limits to the degree to which artists would be able to make this district their own. Ultimately, norms of quiet tastefulness would prevail over artistic fancy. An exemplary incident was the 1985 renovation of Teddy’s nightclub. This low-slung building was a streamlined survivor from a 1950s “rat pack” style. Renamed El Internacional, it was outfitted with a spastically colorful tiled floor, which extended out onto the sidewalk, and topped with a green verdigris crown. Inside, every room was painted a different color. Outside, the old name of the place, in a casual loungy typeface, was still visible beneath a black-and-white cowhide paint job. Once a neighborhood nightclub, it was now a trendy international tapas bar. Comment by locals to the *New York Times* was scathing (Miller 1985:B4).<sup>1</sup> Artists and politicians alike disapproved the garishness of the place and its foul cooking odors. Martha Wilson of the nearby art space Franklin Furnace was one of the few who voiced approval of the décor (1985:B4).

It’s no surprise that Martha Wilson would have a different take. As the founder of the artist books and performance venue Franklin Furnace, she is a champion of the avantgarde and an advocate for artists—and Teddy’s redecorator was the artist Antonio Miralda,<sup>2</sup> a Spaniard known for comestible spectacles. Miralda designed a stage set, complete with a facsimile of the Statue of Liberty’s crown—at a time when the real one was veiled during conservation. After it opened, Miralda put on a fabulous sidewalk “floor show” performance in front of the new El Internacional.

This little incident is about taste, about the look and feel of a neighborhood. By 1985, Tribeca had greatly evolved as a district since artists had first moved into its cold-water lofts in the 1950s (Allen 1999; Harvey 2000). It was already established as a genteel quarter of the city and one of its wealthiest. From 1792 to 1965, it was the hub of the wholesale food trade, the site of the city’s great Washington Market. Adjoining it to the south are the districts of government and finance, anchored until recently by the overtowering World Trade Center. To the north, Soho burgeoned as an artists’ district from the 1950s into the 1970s. Like Soho, Tribeca boasts mostly elegant, masonry-clad cast iron commercial build-

ings, many in the brick Romanesque revival style of the 1880s. With its wide quiet streets and amply proportioned old loft buildings, the historical character of this repurposed commercial district is held dear, which is why its denizens responded so strongly to the garish external redecoration of a restaurant.

This article will sketch the geographical background of the Franklin Furnace. We discuss the cultural district, the Tribeca neighborhood of downtown Manhattan, which was the context for this protean and bumptious little venue. This writing is distantly informed by Pierre Bourdieu's conception of fields of production (Bourdieu 1993). It is influenced too by the resurgent discourse in the work of artists and geographers around conceptions of psychogeography derived from the Situationists (Sadler 1998). This is some sort of philosophically inclined guided tour of the Tribeca art world of the 1970s and '80s, a beginning to a proper account of this vanished art world. To elucidate the complex aspects and



1. & 2. *Franklin Furnace, outside and in.* The view from the street shows Dara Birnbaum's 1978 installation A "Banner" as "Billboard": (Reading) versus (Reading Into) (Photo by Jacki Apple; courtesy of Franklin Furnace). The front window is visible in this interior shot of Dolores Zorreguieta's *Wounds*, from 1994. (Photo by Marty Heitner; courtesy of Franklin Furnace)

overlapping scenes we describe, this narrative tour stutters somewhat in regard to time and place.

The main artistic developments in Tribeca during the 1970s lay in the growth of demi-institutions: nonprofit places for art exhibition called “alternative spaces.” These proliferated below Canal Street, while the Soho district north of that street mainly saw a growth of commercial art galleries and shops. Franklin Furnace was founded in 1976, nearly 10 years before the makeover of Teddy’s. In the nation’s bicentennial year, Tribeca had just been named.<sup>3</sup> Also in that year, the exhibition venue P.S.1 opened in Long Island City, Queens, with a show called *Rooms*—which included Miralda’s work. P.S.1 was an abandoned public school, a sprawling 1893 Romanesque revival building. Its conversion to an art space was the greatest undertaking of the Institute for Art and Urban Resources, run by the redoubtable Alanna Heiss. The IAUR was formed in 1971 with the aim of prying loose vacant city-owned buildings for artists to use as studios and exhibition spaces. Inspired by similar projects in London, Heiss started her quest for space in New York in the late 1960s (see Greenberg, Ferguson, and Nairne 1996; see also Heiss 2003). She wasn’t particularly choosy. “We aren’t about fancy buildings,” she said in 1975, “We’re about the expansion of contemporary art” (in Davis and Rourke 1975). Heiss further explained that she was attracted to Tribeca because she found it “underdeveloped” (in Holland 1977).

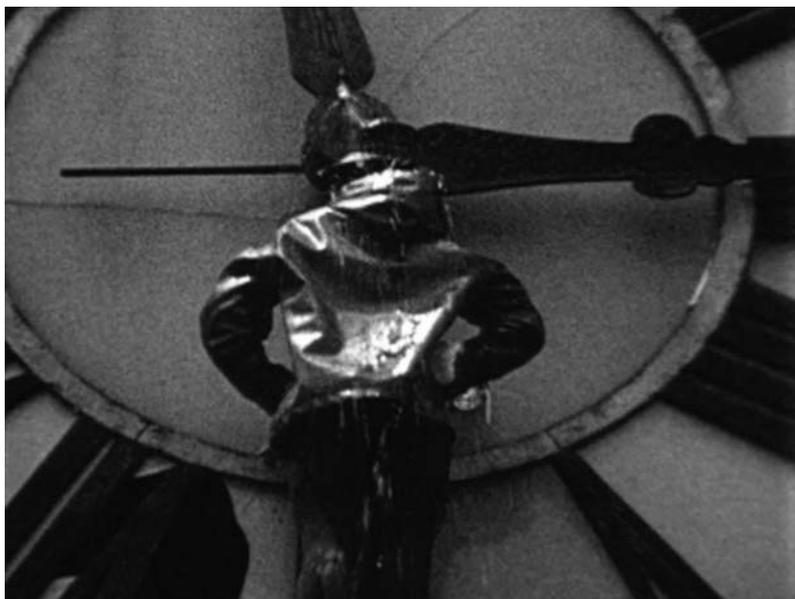
In her innovative administrative work, Heiss regularly made provision for the work of sculptors, obtaining the use of large industrial buildings and yards city-wide. This was sculpture in the modes called “minimal” and “process”—innovative, expansive, rough-hewn, and site-specific.<sup>4</sup> In Soho in the 1970s, sculpture was the art form of the moment, and the community was built by renovating abandoned factories that would accommodate this large-scale work. Soho was not a conventional bohemia in the romantic, Parisian aestheticist sense, but a converted factory loft district. In the 1970s it was full of serious, mostly college-educated, predominantly male artists, and imbued with the masculinist ethos of construction work.<sup>5</sup>

The creative re-use of abandoned industrial space was in a sense the covert urban imperialism of a privileged class, with artists as the stalking horses for the well-to-do.<sup>6</sup>

Real estate values went up and artists were forced out of Soho, so they looked to the south and discovered Tribeca. As the Tribeca area became inhabited by artists, places sprang up to serve and exhibit them, and the neighborhood became a kind of playground, a ludic environment for contemporary art and cultural experiment. A new urban attitude grew up in the shell of the old. In the process, the area became attractive to the more venturesome rich.

After a critically well-received series of programs at a temporary venue called the Idea Warehouse, Heiss scored a real estate coup by taking over the Clocktower on Leonard Street in 1976. This was the ornate top of the New York Life Insurance Company building, finished by McKim, Mead, and White in 1898.

Like so many other buildings in the recession-plagued 1970s, this building had fallen into the hands of the City of New York for back taxes, and was being used for offices. Entering this spooky underused building to visit the Clocktower exhibition space was like stepping into a *noir* movie set. The space inspired numerous memorable site-specific works. For example, Gordon Matta-Clark, a central figure in the early days of the Soho art space 112 Greene Street, had himself filmed as he shaved while standing on the clock dial (*Clockshower*, 1973), a daredevil stunt that recalled one by silent comic Harold Lloyd in *Safety Last* (1923). Other works strove to match the oddity and theatricality of the architecture. In 1974, Dennis Oppenheim mounted a six-hour untitled installation in which the stiffening corpse of a dog lay on the keys of an electric organ that had been dragged through graphite on the floor. For *Eagles Nest* (1974), Richard Mock



3. Alanna Heiss founded the Institute for Art and Urban Resources to take over urban buildings and turn them into art spaces. At the Clocktower building, Gordon Matta-Clark's *Clockshower*, 1973. (Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix [EAI], New York)

bloodied the eagles on the parapet as a protest against the Vietnam War, then nearing its grisly conclusion (Mock).

Even as the IAUR opened the Clocktower, they were simultaneously running seven other spaces (Davis and Rourke 1975), a mini-empire, which bespeaks the cozy relationship between the government of NYC and supporters of the city's avantgarde.<sup>7</sup> The *Rooms* show that opened P.S.1 in 1976 was the high-water mark of the artistic fascination with raw space.<sup>8</sup>

As deindustrialization proceeded, and factories throughout the United States shut down in the 1960s and '70s, cheap raw space was widely available in the central cities. (This continues to be so in many smaller cities.) Most artists require space to make work and show it, and they need this space cheap. This material requirement led to the *Times Square Show* of July 1980, held in a derelict building in the heart of what was Manhattan's sex district. This show was key for the New York art scene of the 1980s since it exposed a new generation of artists working in styles called "punk" and "neo-expressionist," most of whom foregrounded social content. As in *Rooms*, many of these artists made the picturesque building site part of their work.

In 1976, however, simply to take over an abandoned commercial space was an insufficient *raison d'être* for an aspiring art institution. The basis of Wilson's Franklin Furnace was not the postindustrial urban site and its (re)uses as explicated through sculpture or painting. Franklin Furnace was initially concerned with artist books and soon would embrace installation and performance art.

The kind of artist books that the new venue exhibited is a different animal than the traditional deluxe edition, the *livre de peintre*, born of the collaboration of a famous painter and a poet and a printer's showpiece. Rather, this modern book was a principal medium of conceptual art.<sup>9</sup>

Teaching English grammar at the College of Art and Design in Nova Scotia, Wilson and her friends were making booklike published work. She found that art institutions would not handle this work, "So," she said, "I decided to be the institution" that would.<sup>10</sup> The founding of Franklin Furnace, then, is less about the place than it is about the placeless—the art concept contained in the form of the book.<sup>11</sup> Franklin Furnace joined an international network, like De Appel in Holland, and Other Books and So, Artwords, and BookWorks in London. None

of these enterprises were simply artists' bookshops; all had a broader agenda. Since the Renaissance, the book has been the traditional portable communications device. It can be a lovely, impressive and precious object, but the new wave of artist books sought mainly to distribute rather than to valorize artistic information.<sup>12</sup> Concern for this kind of book is concern with the communicative and social being of art.

In 1977, a few blocks down the street from Franklin Furnace, Printed Matter opened a store selling artist books in the Fine Arts Building on Hudson Street (see [www.printedmatter.org](http://www.printedmatter.org)). Among the founders of this venture was Edit deAk, the coeditor of a neighborhood newsprint arts monthly called *Art-Rite*, which had just come out with an issue on artists books (Frankel 2003:114–18, 162). Others<sup>13</sup> were the feminist critic Lucy Lippard and artist Sol Lewitt, who had defined the term “conceptual art” (Lewitt 1969).<sup>14</sup> The two spaces were “sororial twins,” Wilson explains. They divided up the tasks around artist books: The Furnace would archive and exhibit them, while Printed Matter would publish and sell them.<sup>15</sup> In 1980 Printed Matter moved to a storefront on Lispenard Street, just below Canal. They began a series of window exhibitions there, supported by Franklin Furnace as a means of drawing more attention to the publishing movement. While Franklin Furnace had no explicit artistic control over Printed Matter's exhibitions, Wilson was chosen as an artist in 1994 to be exhibited in the window of Printed Matter.<sup>16</sup>

The cooperative net lease for 112 Franklin Street was an unusual rental structure.<sup>17</sup> The co-op group needed Wilson to take the ground floor. One of the principals, former *Avalanche* magazine publisher Willoughby Sharp, followed her to the site of another rental that she was going to see and gave her a hard sell for Franklin Street. She caved. The early days of Franklin Furnace were hard-scrabble as Wilson lived in the space and took on roommates to pay the rent. The Furnace itself was at that point just “a clearing in the front” of the first floor, says Wilson.

Nonetheless the environment was congenial. Sharp planned to make an arts center at the building. He had been inspired by the Western Front in Vancouver, Canada, a building owned by artists with all sorts of facilities supported by generous government funding.<sup>18</sup>

Plans for the arts center included a “live injection point” (called a LIP) for cable TV in the basement. The Franklin Street tenants did eventually construct a video studio, which was active for a few months, but the grander scheme came to naught. These artists were looking to cable TV as a medium for artists to communicate directly with the public (Bear 1983).<sup>19</sup> As it happened, cable TV was quickly developed in commercial directions, leaving little room for artists. But the group at 112 Franklin is an early link between artist books and an interest in broadcasting artistic information through electronic means. This teleology is slowly unfolding in commercial publishing as well as artistic bookmaking.

In 1976 Franklin Furnace was the new kid on the block amidst a host of recently established alternative spaces and art organizations. After the Clocktower (where exhibition activity fell off with the opening of P.S.1), the most prominent was Artists Space. Organized in 1972, Artists Space opened in Soho in '73, and moved to Tribeca in 1976. This was their largest incarnation, with 6,000 square feet of galleries, performance spaces, and a visiting artist studio. Artists Space was established by the New York State Council on the Arts, and they supported other nonprofit exhibition ventures through regrants.<sup>20</sup>

Artists Space was housed in the Fine Arts Building at 105 Hudson Street, the same building that was Printed Matter's first home. The building had been net leased by Julian Pretto, and it soon became a vast warren of artists' studios and offices. The FAB brought overnight heft and depth to the Tribeca art scene. The artist Joe Lewis, who later joined Stefan Eins in founding Fashion Moda in the



Bronx, had a studio there. He recalls having coffee with Marcia Tucker, who had an office in the FAB before she launched the New Museum on 14th Street (Lewis 2003). The intense and cryptic performance artist Ralston Farina had a studio in the building. A prolific performer of his “time art,” Ralston, who died young, was a sort of Zeitgeist of downtown avantgarde performance.

Pretto soon opened his own gallery on three of its floors. In 1977, other galleries in the FAB included David Ebony, Ellen Sragow, Photo Works, and Marina Urbach’s C Space, which specialized in European and South American artists. (Annina Nosei Weber, who later opened a gallery in Soho, and Marcia Tucker curated shows at C Space [Holland 1977].)

The nonprofit alternative spaces were starting places for a number of dealers as well as artists. Helene Winer left Artists Space to start Metro Pictures with Janelle Reiring, the best known of these ventures (de Coppet and Jones 2002). Josh Baer, an artist’s son, worked at White Columns, a pioneer alternative space, which had moved from Soho to far west Spring Street. There the gallery operated a storefront in a sleek, art deco building opposite the picturesque Ear Inn, a bar owned by Fluxus-affiliated artists.<sup>21</sup> Baer soon started his own gallery. After him, Tom Solomon, dealer Holly Solomon’s son, did a stint running White Columns before starting his gallery in Los Angeles.

There was always more ambiguity in the makeup of the lesser-trafficked galleries in Tribeca than there was in the storefronts jostling with the couture shops in Soho. Those in Soho were clearly commercial galleries. But what to make of Oil & Steel, a gallery that rarely held shows? This was the venture of Richard Bellamy, famed director of the Hansa and the Green galleries. Bellamy’s chief artist was Mark di Suvero. The sculptor controlled an empire of city-owned spaces, including a 19th-century loft building on South Street (now part of the restoration), and what became the Socrates Sculpture Park in Queens (some of di Suvero’s monumental works are still there in his work yard). Bellamy preferred his Tribeca location on Chambers Street to Soho, he said, because there was “less public contact” (de Coppet and Jones 2002:129).<sup>22</sup> The Soho dealer Heiner Friedrich, a venturesome German, achieved a sort of apotheosis of dealerhood

4. Artists Space was housed in the Fine Arts Building on Hudson Street. The space had 6,000 square feet of galleries, performance spaces, and a visiting artist studio. Screening of Roger Welch’s *PersonA* series, 25 April 1974. (Photo by Yuri; courtesy of Artists Space)

through his leadership of the Dia Foundation (Glueck 1985:C13).<sup>23</sup> Formed in 1974, Dia's offices were across the street from Franklin Furnace, although relations were merely civil. This was the "empire of white male artists," Wilson recalls, and they were of "a much higher caste."

Just Above Midtown moved from the 57th Street gallery district into 178-80 Franklin Street in 1980, exhibiting contemporary work by largely African American and other minority artists. Another important Tribeca space in the 1980s was the Alternative Museum, formed in 1975 and set up at 17 White Street, a former egg-packing plant. Its director, Geno Rodriguez, described it as "the only alternative space at the time," by which he meant, a place that represented the disenfranchised rather than "emerging artists" (Rodriguez 2003).<sup>24</sup> The Alternative Museum was social, political, even didactic in its shows, exhibiting many political artists, artists of color from the United States, and Latin Americans. By 1982 the Alternative Museum was joined in its mission to represent diverse and political art by Exit Art, a small space opened on Canal Street by Jeanette Ingberman and Papo Colo. This project began as an exhibition at Franklin Furnace, *Illegal America* (10 February 1982), celebrating a past of radical political gestures by artists. (Exit Art soon moved to a large space on Broadway in Soho, and is presently in Chelsea.) And in 1981, two artists, Martin Weinstein and Teresa Liszka, opened Art in General in the General Hardware building on Walker Street in a multistoried venue. The gallery frequently exhibits Latin American artists as well artists from other countries and the U.S.

As an artists' neighborhood, Tribeca was the poor southern sister of Soho, which got most of the ink and magazine photo spreads. Canal Street was a kind of littoral zone of salvage commerce. Today it is lined with tiny stalls offering gimcrackery, many with vendors from nearby Chinatown. But at the western end of this odd shopping street, some of the shops selling army surplus, plastic or metal stock, old appliances, and assorted mechanical and electronic parts, remain. These were the places artists shopped for the effluvia of assemblages and components of installations. George Maciunas and the Fluxus artists combed this mercantile beach of industrial civilization for the little bits they boxed into "Fluxkits" and then sold for a while in 1964 at a "Fluxshop" in the front part of Maciunas's second-floor walkup apartment at 359 Canal Street. Fluxus artists remained in Tribeca and, in 1970, John Lennon and Yoko Ono produced a "Fluxfest" at Joe Jones's storefront on North Moore Street in Tribeca (Young and MacLow, 1963:n.p.). In the early 1970s, the Austrian artist Stefan Eins<sup>25</sup> opened his studio as a "store" called (and located at) 3 Mercer Street just above Canal Street. It was there that many who would form the artists' group Collaborative Projects (aka Colab) met.

At 59 Wooster Street, not too far north of Canal, the Kitchen opened in 1974.<sup>26</sup> This center for video and music was started by Woody and Steina Vasulka, video makers who had begun to exhibit artists in 1971 in the old kitchen at the Mercer Arts Center on lower Broadway (Gendron 2002:244-45).<sup>27</sup> At its Soho incarnation, the Kitchen provided an exhibition space by day and a performance space by night for cutting edge, multidisciplinary art (Goldberg 2003:24). As Franklin Furnace started to showcase performance art in the late '70s, Wilson synchronized schedules with Robert Stearns and Mary MacArthur at the Kitchen so they could see each other's offerings and not split their audience. Wilson notes that "it was basically the same herd of people" going from place to place.

The explosion of performance art in lower Manhattan in the early 1980s is a complex phenomenon, involving theatres like The Performing Garage, music venues like Experimental Intermedia, Roulette, and Stilwende, and film groups.<sup>28</sup> One of most complicated of these film institutions was the Collective for Living Cinema, which moved into a space on White Street in Tribeca in 1977. Started

by students of the avantgarde filmmaker Ken Jacobs in a church basement on the upper west side in 1973, Collective showed over a hundred films a year. Collective specialized in the difficult, abstruse, and politically troublesome—films with no mass market. They ran workshops in filmmaking, hosted symposia and special events, and published two magazines: *Idiolects*, on film, and *No Rose*, dedicated to nonfilm work by filmmakers. The group was undone by a combination of bad luck and cutbacks in state funding, and finally closed their doors in 1991.<sup>29</sup>

Downtown Manhattan was a community of art spaces concerned with new art in all genres. In terms of space, money, and attention, the places south of Canal in Tribeca were often poor relations, especially after the Fine Arts Building closed in the mid-1980s. Unlike Soho, Tribeca had the overweening presence of the downtown financial district. Neighbors were lawyers, brokers, bankers, and their families with a high-profile admixture of well-to-do artists—painters David Salle and Brian Hunt, and later entertainers Robert DeNiro and David Letterman. Bohemian impulses in the district were paralyzed by the proximity of wealth, whose scions slowly sucked up the marginal spaces artists had inhabited during the depressed 1970s.

This sense of the inevitability of being priced out—from Soho to Tribeca, and, after 1980, to the East Village—inflected the interventionist public art, the noncommissioned “guerrilla” art works that appeared on Tribeca streets in the late ’70s. Anne Messner, Rebecca Howland,<sup>30</sup> Beriah Wall and others made objects and produced performances on the streets. Such interruptions of the smooth rolling gait of the daily crowds of office workers gave artists a sense of belonging, a feeling of agency, and some fleeting visibility to a public largely unaware of their presence.

However disruptive the succession of displacements for the artists concerned, the gentrification of lower Manhattan was a happy outcome for the city’s tax base. It was a side dish to the commercial entrée, the development of lower Manhattan, which had been highly determined and carefully planned. The capstone to the first phase was the demolition of many blocks and then the construction of the titanic World Trade Centers between 1966 and 1977. With their millions of square feet of office space, the towers were to spur the revival of the district through what David Rockefeller called their sheer “catalytic bigness” (Darton 1999). Another mammoth complex of offices arose in the 1980s west of the Twin Towers called the World Financial Center, and next to it a geographically enclaved community called Battery Park City. During the 1970s, however, the land that would house these precincts of the well-to-do was still only landfill—great rolling dunes swaying with fields of cattailed reeds—which had to settle before it could support construction.

It was here that Art on the Beach, the most memorable of the numerous public art series sponsored by downtown cultural agencies, took place. Produced by Creative Time, the project responded via art to the emergent Oz of international finance capital through metaphor and comparison. Artists relied on the strange contrast of urban megalopolis and the neighboring wild, overgrown beachlike land. For instance, *Wheatfield—A Confrontation*, the 1982 work of Agnes Denes, was a material argument for sustainable uses of land, and evoked the beleaguered family farm. David Hammons built a decorated shanty “beach house” called *Delta Spirit* in collaboration with artist Angela Valerio and architect Jerry Barr in 1985, which was a set for a performance by art-jazz guru Sun Ra and his Solar Arkestra. In a recent article on the contention over cultural facilities in the post-9/11 downtown, Herbert Muschamp recalls Erika Rothenberg, Laurie Hawkinson, and John Malpede’s piece, *Freedom of Expression National Monument* of 1984 (Muschamp 2003, sec 2:1, 21), which was reinstalled in Lower Manhattan during the months prior to the hotly contested 2004 presidential election.<sup>31</sup> For this



5. Erika Rothenberg, Laurie Hawkinson, and John Malpede installed Freedom of Expression National Monument in 1984 as part of Creative Time's Art on the Beach program. Art on the Beach ran from 1978 to 1985 on the sandy Battery Park City Landfill created by the construction of the World Trade Center. The piece was reinstalled in Foley Square in Lower Manhattan from 17 August through 13 November 2004. (Photo courtesy of Creative Time)

work, a huge megaphone was pointed at the WTC towers, so that visitors might line up at the platform for turns to shout into the wind at the structures and what they symbolized. Art on the Beach was an annual circus of public art, new approaches, often audacious, freestanding all-weather installations and performance works.

For their annual beach series, Creative Time arranged architects with visual and performing artists into "teams" to make collaborative pieces. This program was coordinated with the Battery Park City Authority, which was planning the apartment complex and was interested in involving artists with the new buildings. The outcome was a series of remarkable temporary works, integrated installations, and performance environments. Did the model succeed? It is not clear whether the artists were successfully insinuated into the planning process for the completed development. Today there are some permanent works scattered about Battery Park by artists including Louise Bourgeois, Mary Miss, Brian Tolle, and Martin Puryear. Anita Contini, who produced Art on the Beach is presently serving as "art czar" for the Trade Center site rebuild. Even so, the role artists will be allowed to play in the highly capitalized development in downtown Manhattan is likely to be a small one.

Rosalyn Deutsche recounts the story of the development of Battery Park City. Built by a semipublic corporate "authority," BPC was financed through a combination of municipal bonds and tax abatements (1991). The low- and middle-income allowances were gradually stripped from the project over the years of planning; subsidies were to be used to make low-income housing in other parts of the city (Lipton 2001:A1, B4).<sup>32</sup> As a result, the completed BPC was entirely luxury housing. Deutsche contends that the public art made at BPC was used to legitimate this economic segregation of the city.<sup>33</sup> Art on the Beach was a sort of isolated laboratory space for this collaborative public art experiment, well separated from any urban social context. Still, there were continuous allusions to the

world beyond the beach in the work of many artists over the years, with shows featuring oversize Reagan photos, docked pirate ships, ruined nightclubs, and dried fish evoking an earlier urban era of the Tribeca area.

The moment when artists predominated in the Tribeca neighborhood is not the story of the self-determination of an artists' community. It is not a junior version of the Soho story, nor is it a more sedate version of the East Village do-it-yourself artists' bohemia. Rather, Tribeca may be about the rise of a new corporate culture of the arts in tandem with the redevelopment of lower Manhattan. Through downtown arts agencies and the Tribeca alternative art spaces, the avantgardism of the downtown scene was in some measure inscribed into corporate culture.<sup>34</sup>

While none of these venues would have existed without state support, a great deal of this inscription is due to both private patronage and corporate support. The outlines of this story have yet to be written. The more public face of this activity was the aggressive art-buying practices of the fedora-wearing Jack Bolton for the Chase Manhattan Bank collection. Jeffrey Deitch, a well-informed former Sohoite and occasional critic working for Citibank's investment services was also a visible figure on the art scene. The munificent albeit discreet examples of Dia Foundation patronage, providing artists like Lamonte Young and Robert Whitman with entire buildings to work in, offered a new model of grand patronage as the scions of a Texas oil drilling equipment fortune embraced avantgarde art.

The 1970s also saw a warmer relationship between municipal government and the advanced arts, left over from a period of moderate Republican amity under Governor Nelson Rockefeller and Mayor John Lindsay. The city's Department of Cultural Affairs was far more visible, maintaining offices and a gallery at Columbus Circle in the building put up by Huntington Hartford for his museum, the New York Cultural Center, which had fallen to the city for back taxes. Federal arts funding through the National Endowment for the Arts reached a high-water mark during the Carter presidency (Jensen 1995).<sup>35</sup>

The public agencies supporting culture downtown grew up in this atmosphere. In addition to the IAUR and Creative Time, there was (and remains) the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council. This was primarily a networking agency, which published a newsletter during the '70s and early '80s. Their activities expanded significantly in later decades. In 1989, well into the Reagan years, the LMCC dared to sponsor a politically charged exhibition of signs on the street by the collective RepoHistory.<sup>36</sup> The RepoHistory signs challenged the bland and fixed face of history presented in the financial district with strong and often controversial revisionism. This was an evolved work of political art, and a significant step toward a new kind of public art nationally.

A sharp crack in this apparent climate of amity between business, government, and art was the controversy over the federal commission of Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* that arose in 1981, after the piece was in place. The story of the struggle over this cyclopean slab of steel plate erected like a fence across a plaza used by lunching workers is well known.<sup>37</sup> After a federal hearing, which turned out anxious members of the art world in force,<sup>38</sup> Serra's piece was dismantled in 1989 (Jordan 1987). That a work of such aggressive avantgarde aestheticism should have been built at all indicates how far "difficult" high art had advanced in favor with government funding agencies—or how hands-off they had been, letting arts people in peer review panels decide what should be funded. But the controversy also revealed how wide the gap between artists and the public had become. This presented a populist political opportunity which right wing politicians quickly exploited.

As an avantgarde venue, Franklin Furnace was well-situated to receive some of the first blows of the "culture wars." The venue hosted the Second Sunday events



6. A crowd waits outside to be selected for admission to “Combat Love” night at the Mudd Club, 17 June 1979. (Photo by Allan Tannenbaum, from *New York in the '70s*, © 2003 Allan Tannenbaum)

of the PADD (Political Art Documentation and Distribution) group, which formed in 1981. These monthly evenings included performances, slide shows, and talks. One of these meetings was put on by a feminist collective formed within PADD called Carnival Knowledge. Their concern for reproductive rights issues led to a full-dress exploration of sexual political issues. They proposed and produced an exhibit at the Furnace in 1984/85 called *Second Coming*. A performance at this show featured former pornographic film star Annie Sprinkle.<sup>39</sup> This occasioned one of the opening public battles in the culture wars, as a Christian group picketed the show and put pressure on the Furnace’s corporate sponsors (Exxon and Woolworth withdrew support).<sup>40</sup> At the same time, the show split feminist opinion between those who had been battling the porn industry since the 1970s, and those who called themselves “sex positive” and opposed any kind of censorship.<sup>41</sup>

In the years to come, Wilson increasingly found herself defending her institution from spooked cultural bureaucrats and often hostile media attention. In this sudden role of spokesperson for artistic freedom, her performance background helped, and she was able to inflect her administrative role with humor during a period of high-pitched anger in the art community.<sup>42</sup> She often appeared as a stand-up comic type of spokesperson, first performing as Barbara Bush at a 1987 benefit at the Public Theater, “Franklin Furnace Fights Back for First Amendment Rights.”

Wilson founded Franklin Furnace in 1976 as a space dedicated to a particular mode of artmaking: the book. But over the next several years a clear shift in public perception occurred, so that by the mid-1980s, the Furnace was clearly seen as a performance space. How do we understand this?

A complex of impulses were involved. First, Wilson’s own work began to revolve increasingly around performance. The art world heated up considerably in the 1980s, so that a greater diversity of work was being shown and discussed as art. Then too downtown Manhattan became a nighttime entertainment destination, and art venues showing performance became part of that.

The performance component of the Furnace arose in part from the relation between the two forms in Wilson’s own artwork, begun in the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design during the heyday of conceptual art, and continuing in New York. In addition to making books, Wilson performed in Nova Scotia “for the benefit of the camera.” When she came to New York, “I was traumatized by the idea that people were going to be sitting in chairs” watching her perform live, but she soon recovered from the shock. Between 1978 and 1982, Wilson formed the a capella art rock band called Disband with friends.<sup>43</sup> Later, Wilson stood up as an ironic spokesperson for artists when, as a solo performer, she impersonated Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush, and Tipper Gore.

Political position-taking was definitely a vital aspect of both media. In the case of artist books, many who promoted them in the mid-1970s were veterans of artists’ political organizations. A show called *Vigilance*, which Lucy Lippard and Mike Glier curated at Franklin Furnace in 1980, brought together many such uses of the book by artists. Lippard was also key in the formation of PADD in 1981, which was tied to both Printed Matter and Franklin Furnace—not only by overlapping personnel, but in its archival intentions as well. PADD was to be a repository for posters and other political art materials to be “documented and distributed.” Finally, through the agency of Clive Philpott, PADD’s archive was brought into The Museum of Modern Art library in 1989. Franklin Furnace’s collection of artist books was acquired by MoMA in 1994.

The concern with books has an ideological root. First is the precept of enlightenment, the idea that spreading information through exhibiting and selling books is a good in itself. Books contain, and libraries represent, ideas and knowledges that are not always instrumental. There is a chance for change, somehow, sometime, if the messages only can be kept.

Performance is overt: instead of sitting in a corner and writing, the artist is present to deliver the message, openly saying something to a crowd. That there is a continuity between all these forms of artistic endeavor is an article of faith for Martha Wilson. She believes that artists make no distinctions between genres and modes of production, rather it is the public that makes the distinctions. Contemporary art is idea-driven, and whatever works best to convey the idea is what the artist will do.

This catholic philosophy of opportunistic forms was called “intermedia” in the early 1970s, a word coined by Fluxus-affiliated artist and publisher Dick Higgins.<sup>44</sup> The international Fluxus movement of the 1960s was proto-conceptual, and there is a regular connection between books and performance in the works of its artists. The Fluxus book, in fact, is part of a family of object works produced

in multiple editions. Most of these works require viewer participation to complete them. Many text works—most notably by George Brecht and Yoko Ono—are in fact scores, instructions to the viewer to perform specified actions. These actions, or “events,” are the stuff of Fluxus performances.<sup>45</sup> The formulation of performance as event drew together art and everyday life in a way similar to the contemporaneous Happenings and the work of the Judson Dance Theatre.

By the 1980s, performance art had expanded far beyond the Fluxus event. At the same time, the Furnace’s focus on performance coincided with a rebirth of nightlife in downtown Manhattan. This began with the emergence of a radical stripped down New York–based rock ’n’ roll style called punk. Punk music headquarters was the CBGBs nightclub that opened in 1973 on the Bowery at the end of Bleeker Street (see Kozak 1988).<sup>46</sup> This gritty motorcycle bar was the polar opposite of the uptown glittery celebrity disco scene of Studio 54. The punk music movement gathered steam and depth from progressive loft jazz, art music, and art rock.<sup>47</sup> Musicians played for and starred in quick super-8 films (Hoberman 1979), and the No Wave/New Wave scene coalesced into the semblance of a broad cultural movement which found expression in nightclubs. One of the first of these new clubs was in Tribeca.

Tribeca already had a number of bars frequented by artists, among them Puffy’s, McGovern’s, and Mickey’s (later called the Raccoon Lodge). At Magoo’s Tavern, just a block below Canal Street, the owner Tommy gave generous tabs for artworks he hung on the walls.<sup>48</sup> At Barnabus Rex (Barney’s) near Chambers Street, the tiny bar rocked with jukebox dancing into the wee hours. But the big sparkplug for the new nightclub scene and its art world echo effect was the Mudd Club on White Street, just below Canal (see Gendron 2002; Hager 1986; Frank and McKenzie 1987). Started by Steve Maas in a building owned by the then little-known painter Ross Bleckner, the ground floor bar soon blew up into a coke-laced party palace, which drew celebrities like flies.

Artists played a central role in making the Mudd Club glamorous,<sup>49</sup> and their work set a trend for nightclubs in the 1980s. For instance, in 1978, Keith Haring curated the *Graffiti* show upstairs at the Mudd Club. This signaled the vivifying injection of hip hop energy that helped to remake the downtown scene. Hip-hop culture grew out of a block party mix of rap, turntable music, graffiti, and break dancing (Fricke and Ahearn 2002).<sup>50</sup> It soon began to reconfigure the anemic disco scene, and the stage was set for the Chelsea mega-clubs.

The first step was made in the tracks of the Mudd when Rudolf (a German entrepreneur who went by one name) tried to open Pravda on Crosby Street in lower Soho. The place was explicitly intended to “establish a total interaction between art and entertainment” (Pravda Project 1979), but it was open only for one night, then closed by neighborhood opposition. By 1982, Rudolf had partnered with Jim Fouratt, a veteran of the 1960s hippie era club scene, to open Danceteria on 21st Street near 6th Avenue. For many years this full-building venue was the democratic alternative to celebrity-luring clubs, and a place where artists had a free hand—for a while, until they were replaced by new artists.

In Tribeca proper, the bar Tier 3 began to book bands in the late 1970s. Artist Gerry Hovagimyan tended bar and Kiki Smith painted murals. Perhaps the apogee of the art-based nightclub was Area, opened on Hudson Street, Tribeca, in 1983 by a group of Californians. Eric Goode and his friends got a loft on Walker Street and researched the club scene: the big uptown discos like Studio 54, Mirage, the Saint, Xenon, and New York New York. In response, the spot they opened was styled more like a museum than a dance club with themed exhibits—such as “Natural History,” which featured display cases with live-in performers and celebrities. Here Andy Warhol rubbed shoulders with Mayor Ed Koch. As

Stephen Saban writes, “At Area the artists had the star power. Every night throngs of hopefuls gathered outside the club, waving hundred-dollar bills to get in. Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat sailed past the ropes. Donald Trump [the millionaire real estate developer turned TV celebrity] didn’t” (Saban 2003).<sup>51</sup>

There was constant visible evidence of a new culture on the street posters put up to announce events. All along Broadway in Soho between Houston and Canal Streets—near bus stops, subway stations, photo shops, or other places artists would see them, like outside friends’ houses or on street corners—posters papered downtown streets. These notices were not just posted anywhere, but along affectional routes. They formed an external cognitive map of networks within urban spaces, hinting at the relations that formed within these spaces.<sup>52</sup> They were then accreted onto by others who wanted those connections, so that the encrusted streets of downtown New York became routes of affiliation and supplication. These were the scabs of publicity, the backdrop for the street paintings of Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring, and Richard Hambleton. Street displays became outright aesthetic and propagandistic arrangements, which, like subway graffiti, issued a graphic challenge. Today strenuous enforcement of city laws have made this kind of display a thing of the past (although there is still a de facto enforcement exemption for commercial bill posters).

As this fluid and exciting network of nightlife began to absorb the attention of young artists interested in popular audiences, the world of the Tribeca alternative spaces began to seem staid. At the same time, cuts in federal funding during the Reagan presidency led to closings and the scene contracted. The most dramatic years for the Franklin Furnace lay ahead. During the late 1980s and into the ’90s, Wilson found herself hip deep in the alligators of reaction as the culture wars took hold across the American art scene. The Furnace was a frontline institution in a national battle between puritanical reactionaries empowered by a conservative government and artists whose work was rooted in expression of sexuality and gender. In the face of sustained political attacks and a steady retraction of government arts funding, Wilson managed her place with aplomb and perspicacity.

As this is written, the restaurant El Teddy’s has been closed, a victim of the post-9/11 downtown business slump. It seems as if this monument to decorative excess, this most flamboyant reminder of the period when Tribeca was an artists’ district doesn’t really fit anymore. The quiet luxury of a well-appointed dining room and the Euro-bistro-styled bar café have become the new norms. Just as punks are still to be seen on the streets of the East Village, Tribeca still bears traces of its artistic past. Yet the district today is unequivocally wealthy, and its days as a stomping ground for the most venturesome artists are over.

## Notes

1. Wilson also told the reporter, “We are in an aesthetic dogfight. This is not about smells or regulations. What is really going on is freedom of artists to manipulate buildings.” Jeanette Ingberman, who curated at Franklin Furnace before starting the alternative space Exit Art with Papo Colo, also commended Miralda’s project to the *Times*.
2. It seems ironic that Miralda, who has had an active career in Europe, is not better known in New York today. He is, after all, an artist of food, an aesthete of the restaurant, and downtown New York today is crowded with pricey restaurants and bars.
3. The name “Tribeca” derives from “Triangle Below Canal Street” (see Goldman 1974).
4. The history of the concept of site-specificity and its permutations as an issue in contemporary art are succinctly discussed in Kwon (2002).
5. Stephen Koch, in “Reflections on SoHo,” describes this masculine ethos of work (1976). His observations are matched by Richard Kostelanetz in his *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of an*

- Artists' Colony* (2003). The rhetoric of space is examined by Pamela Lee in her book on Gordon Matta-Clark (1999).
6. This analysis is closely reasoned by Zukin ([1982] 1989). It is also a theme in the work of Neil Smith (2000) and Christopher Mele (1996).
  7. This seeming generosity with city-owned spaces for cultural purposes in Lower Manhattan extended to more traditional cultural groups and social movement organizations as well, such as La MaMa E.T.C. on the Lower East Side, and city schools given over to community groups there.
  8. Nancy Foote's review in *Artforum* was titled "Apotheosis of the Crummy Space" (1976; see also Beck 2002).
  9. Wilson called this kind of book the "luncheonette" version compared to the deluxe editions (in Padon 1998:108). The artist book, like the photograph, was revalued by the conceptual art movement as a form of evidence, documentation of artistic actions performed. The photograph makes an appeal to the eye much like that of a painting, and it has proved more marketable as an art medium than the book. For more on artist books, see Lyons (1985).
  10. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Martha Wilson are from conversations with the authors (Wilson 2004).
  11. This premise was literalized in the 1980 series of shows called *The Page as Alternative Space*. Clive Phillpot curated 1909–1929, Charles Henri Ford 1930–1949, Jon Hendricks and Barbara Moore did 1950–1969, Ingrid Sischy and Richard Flood 1970–1980.
  12. The development of this essay's argument leaves aside New York City's important centers of creative book production conceived on the alternative space model, most notably the Center for Book Arts and the Dieu Donne papermaking center. These places are dedicated to the production of fine artists' books and editions.
  13. The founders of Printed Matter are listed on a flier as Carl Andre, Edit deAk, Lucy Lippard, Walter Robinson (deAk's coeditor on *Art-Rite*), Pat Steir, Irena von Zahn, Mimi Wheeler, and Robin White.
  14. Henry Flynt has priority in use of the term "concept art" in 1963 (see Higgins 2002).
  15. Wilson notes that Printed Matter began as a profit-making venture to avoid censorship of their publishing projects. Later on, Ingrid Sischy successfully applied for nonprofit status.
  16. Window exhibitions were a popular way for artists to reach new audiences. The Lower Manhattan Cultural Council newsletter *Downtown* (1980) contains a roundup of window exhibitions around downtown New York, including the long-lived "10 on 8" exhibits in windows on 8th Avenue.
  17. In a net lease, the lessee takes responsibility for an entire building, writing individual sub-leases to each floor's tenants. In a city of many empty buildings, this was a way for artists with some capital to get raw space. At 112 Franklin Street, a group took on the net lease, including Sharp, Wilson, Virge Piersol, and Duff Schweningen (Franklin Furnace 1999).
  18. Willoughby Sharp recounts the story of his developing interest in artists' television in a talk he gave to Victor Azevedo's class at the School of Visual Arts on 5 October 2001 (Sharp 2001).
  19. Liza Bear was Sharp's partner in *Avalanche* magazine and produced a number of video works on the mechanics and politics of early cable and satellite television.
  20. These funds included the independent exhibition program for group shows and the emergency materials fund. Small grants were given to artists to help only with nonprofit shows, i.e., shows at other alternative spaces or artists' lofts. The funds quietly sustained a lively and diverse exhibition scene.
  21. The Ear Inn was started (or, rather, the bar in the building was continued) by artists Rip Hayman, Sari Dienes, and Paco Underhill (see Coe 2002).
  22. Bellamy in 1984 dealt only in the work of di Suvero, Myron Stout, and David Rabinowitch.
  23. This article relates how the building at 6 Harrison Street bought for composer La Monte Young had been put up for sale owing to the strain put on the Foundation by a lawsuit by Donald Judd.
  24. Rodriguez's space consistently exhibited Leon Golub, Nancy Spero, Adrian Piper, and David Hammons. Clearly many of the artists exhibited at the Alternative Museum did "emerge," and ultimately became well known.
  25. In 1978, Eins went on to the South Bronx to found Fashion Moda with Joe Lewis. Fashion Moda papers are at Fales Library, NYU. Eins recalled that Wilson told him the 3 Mercer Store influenced her conception of Franklin Furnace. "The store, yes," she replied (in the videotape cited above).

26. It remained at the Wooster Street location until 1985 when it moved to West 19th Street.
27. Bernard Gendron writes that concerts by the New York Dolls rock band paid the bills for the Kitchen at the Mercer Arts Center. He sees this as a key event in the conjunction of high avantgarde culture and popular music. The building housing the Mercer Arts Center collapsed in 1973.
28. Many are listed in a 1982 issue of *Downtown* (1982).
29. This information was gleaned from a folder of publicity materials from the Collective for Living Cinema records at the Anthology Film Archives library.
30. Messner and Howland were among the mostly Tribeca artists who produced the Real Estate Show on the Lower East Side in 1980, a key event in the resurgence of political art in the '80s (see Moore and Miller 1985). Soho had a number of "volunteer" public artworks, like the welded assemblage metal sculpture set up in the '70s and only recently removed from a traffic island at Broome Street and West Broadway.
31. This section of the *Times* is devoted to the redevelopment of the Ground Zero site.
32. This money, given to the City by the Battery Park City Authority, was not used to build public housing. Instead it simply disappeared in the general budget.
33. Deutsche references the sociology of Peter Marcuse. In a critique of the completed project, Abby Bussel picked up the cudgel: "BPC is an uptight imitation of the city that it was designed to extend. Its architecture is antiseptic, and the regimented zoning of its parks, commercial, retail, and residential areas discourages a free-flowing street life" (Bussel 1994:72).
34. For the venturesome Franklin Furnace, however, survival was more a matter of tenacity and art community support, since, as Wilson notes, after the 1984 imbroglio over the *Carnival Knowledge* exhibition (see text below), corporate support for the Furnace fell off completely.
35. Martha Wilson said that when she opened, representatives from the NEA actually came to her door to ask if Franklin Furnace had applied for funds [see the interviews with Wilson in this issue].
36. This group evolved out of the PADD group (see text below). The RepoHistory files on this exhibition at the Fales Library, New York University, show that relations with the LMCC were not always easy.
37. Principle accounts of this incident are Jordan (1987), Buskirk and Weyergraf-Serra (1991), and Senie (2002).
38. Wilson defended *Tilted Arc* (in Jordan 1987:64).
39. Wilson notes that the *Carnival Knowledge* group was selected to exhibit at the Furnace by a peer review panel. The Annie Sprinkle performance *Deep Inside Porn Stars*, Wilson said, was about "dual citizenship in self-love and self-loathing," since Ellen Steinberg is a fat girl from Southern California while Annie Sprinkle is a voluptuous porn star who lives in New York. The show received extensive publicity.
40. Reagan's NEA director Francis S.M. Hodsoll overrode the peer review panels' decisions and canceled the 1984 grants to PADD for the journal *Upfront*, and to the feminist collective publication *Heresies*. Franklin Furnace received a reprimand. The radical Lower East Side art space ABC No Rio was also refused funding by the NEA during this season. These events are discussed in an article by Lord (1983). Wilson said this was the first time she knows of that the NEA peer review panel process was overridden. In 1990 the Moral Majority group came after Wilson and the Furnace with senators behind them.
41. Dubin (1992:147-49) has a succinct account of the Furnace's troubles around presenting Sprinkle's work. See also Brownmiller (1999) for an account of the politics of the anti-pornography fight among feminist activists.
42. Wilson wrote her performance work together with the history of Franklin Furnace in "The Personal Becomes Political in Time" (2000).
43. Members of Disband included Martha Wilson, Ilona Granet, Diane Torr, Donna Henes, Ingrid Sischy, and briefly Barbara Kruger, Dale Kaplan, and April Gornik. Wilson tried earlier to form a band called the Administrators, but her fellows running other alternative spaces would not join her.
44. A similar kind of diversity of approaches within the oeuvre of one artist is now common in contemporary art. The Furnace exhibited the work of Higgins' Something Else Press in 1979.
45. This is the central thesis of Hannah Higgins (2002). She emphasizes this component of Fluxus against the view of it as a politicized avantgarde defined by leader George Maciunas.

46. Punk as a cultural style was strongly taken up by British youth, and the music soon rebounded from England. Now “punk” signifies more than this moment of popular musical style. It is a deep-rooted youth subculture, which together with hip-hop has continued and transmuted worldwide.
47. A key event in this scene was the No Wave series of concerts at Artists Space. From this series English avant-rocker Brian Eno produced the first art rock compilation album (see Gould 1999). The 1981 film *Downtown 81* is a pictorial tour of the nightclub scene.
48. This was an extensive collection, including work by Richard Artschwager, Ron Gorchov, Elizabeth Murray, David Reed, Dorothea Rockburne, Judy Rifka, and John Torreano. According to the agent for the sale, Tommy’s collection was sold to a Japanese client when he retired (Colin 2003).
49. See the interview with Diego Cortez by Edit deAk in Moore and Miller (1985).
50. Jim Fricke and Charlie Ahearn (2002) tell the story of “old school” hip-hop, “back in the day” (the 1970s) in the South Bronx.
51. Saban was a founder and columnist for *Details* magazine during the 1970s and ’80s, covering New York nightclubs.
52. This idea of “intelligence networks,” the external signs of “swarm brains” or “hive minds,” relates to the contemporary interest in psychogeography as first elaborated in the work of the Situationists.

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