

2013

Archiving the Vanishing City

James D. Estrada

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Archiving the Vanishing City

James D. Estrada

Media Studies

April 26, 2013

Senior Project

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Bachelor of Arts in Media Studies

Advisor Lisa Brawley

Advisor Stephanie Boluk

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Introduction

The aim of my thesis is to establish popular narratives of nostalgia and mourning as legitimate counters to a rapidly accumulating literature on contemporary urban change in Manhattan's East Village and Lower East Side. Official histories are those that have solidified the historical identity of the downtown neighborhood as a counter-cultural enclave, and those established by real estate developers and supported by government, which seek merely to profit from it. Alongside these, we must include those narratives that cry out when change disrupts everyday life and shakes the core of our identities. The primary subject of the following study is a community, residential and imagined, of East Village residents who use their memories of a vanishing city to construct identities that resist unwelcome change and development. In conversation with those voices is my own project: a subjective reflection on the changes I have experienced, manifested in an anecdotal thread that runs through my writing. It appears in reaction to scholarly voices and as a parallel primary source that relates to and empathizes with other nostalgia narratives. The authority of the subjective voice, coupled with my own emotional investment in this topic, makes this above all a polemical project. This means that at times, I take at face value those opinions and voices with which I agree. This stance, I argue, is not un-critical but rather, a necessary position to take when dealing with the marginalized voice. But by situating these voices within a chronological understanding of urban change in the neighborhood, by remembering and re-presenting the world that they mourn, and by comparing them with the rich literary tradition of grieving and longing for New York, I hope to open up this discourse to include narratives of nostalgia as significant and crucial ways of knowing the city.

First, I will trace the thread of gentrification through the history of the Lower East Side from the beginning of its decline in the 1960s and through the rest of a century in which the neighborhood has been interchangeably conceived of as a slum and dreamt up as a middle-class haven. This will lead us to understand how the change the city has undergone in the last ten years is like nothing it has previously experienced. The current discourse on those periods of investment has focused too squarely on the types of people and changes that it brings to a neighborhood. We have become overly familiar, both academically and in popular knowledge, with an optimistic and reproducible model of urban development that brings a “creative class” into previously non-productive post-industrial city centers. To be overly cynical, this period passed much too long ago and such concerns are much better suited to the study of so-called emergent neighborhoods like East Harlem and Bushwick that, of late, are just beginning to see the shift from an influx of a creative class and an uptick in real estate investment and luxury development. What we are left with in the East Village, after decades of gentrification is a community of holdouts. These are people who identify against the luxury and ‘bridge & tunnel’ bar culture of the neighborhood, but choose to stay out of emotional attachment to neighborhood institutions or because they have a rent-controlled apartment. This ranges from old hippies, to early gentrifiers, to families who live in the projects along the FDR. Although from diverse backgrounds, they all have played integral roles in the formation of the authentic urban identity of the East Village and Lower East Side through their emotional investment and personal engagement with different places, efforts, and within the neighborhood across time.

In Chapter 2 we will look at the neighborhood’s long history of housing activism, a tradition that comes out of Puerto Rican community who, during the worst period of decline,

demanded its *right to the city* and gained the support of incoming white population who advocated for and fought alongside them (Harvey 4). The product of this time (1960s-90s) is a place called *Loisaida*, a name that claims ownership of the city by the Latino community and which is being lost to and encroached upon by development that moves eastward. We will encounter those who draw on a nostalgic view of this period to establish identities of authenticity in response to urban change that threatens on the space they lay claim to either by seniority or through emotional investment.

The making of roots in New York City is a somewhat absurd idea. It has long been theorized as a dream city which lives in the future rather than in the past, chiefly by Rem Koolhaas who defines Manhattanism as a chaotic project that manifests itself in the wild utopian experiment of the skyscraper. Perhaps we can trace this to E.B. White's quintessential vision of the city in "Here is New York":

There are roughly three New Yorks. There is, first, the New York of the man or woman who was born there, who takes the city for granted and accepts its size, its turbulence as natural and inevitable. Second, there is the New York of the commuter--the city that is devoured by locusts each day and spat out each night. Third, there is New York of the person who was born somewhere else and came to New York in quest of something. Of these trembling cities the greatest is the last--the city of final destination, the city that is a goal... Commuters give the city its tidal restlessness, natives give it solidity and continuity, but the settlers give it passion. (White 25)

Such conceptions of Manhattan understand the island as a city of either suit-clad transients or wide-eyed dreamers, ignoring the many residential neighborhoods that give the city its weight and prevent it from floating off into the Atlantic every night. But Koolhaas also acknowledges that "each block is covered with several layers of phantom architecture in the form of past occupancies, aborted projects, and popular fantasies that provide alternative images to the New York that exists." (Koolhaas 9). These phantoms continue to haunt New York no matter

how much it changes, and New Yorkers themselves conjure them up nostalgically, but also as political responses to unwelcome and alien change. What Koolhaas misses in his *Delirious New York* is that the culture of congestion that defines Manhattan was not birthed in Midtown, nor in his fabled dreamland of Coney Island. Instead, the culture of congestion that dominates Manhattan is epitomized by the dirty, crowded streets of the Lower East Side, where immigrant families lived twelve to an apartment in tenements with no heat, light or water, where pushcarts roamed the city selling goods, where Italian, Irish and Jewish kids played stickball in the streets, where summertime meant fire hydrants gushing onto the asphalt. As a young Koolhaas wrote away about the dreamland that was Manhattan from the great reading room of the New York Public Library, another dream called Loïsaida was just being born, rising from the rubble of empty lots in the hearts of a people who dared to believe in what others considered a wasteland.

The Lower East Side has a rich history that extends vertically (through time) and horizontally (across groups). It has been where immigrants have laid their roots in America and where they continue to do so today. It is a quintessential breeding ground for New York-ness. The *New York Tenement Museum* is devoted to preserving this history in the form of an interactive theatrical performance housed in 97 Orchard Street. The building, preserved and decorated to reflect its 1900 state, has since solidified the neighborhood's status as a pilgrimage site for those who can trace their roots to it. I am interested in exploring the haunting qualities of New York's past; the way in which its heritage is remembered, spectacularized, co-opted, and forgotten. If, according to E.B. White, New York natives "give (the city) solidity and continuity" we are born with the task of ensuring continuity in a city of turbulence, and of holding on to a history while everyone else looks to the future.

As a child of immigrants myself, I am drawn to the collective memories of the Lower East Side and to the diverse narratives of American assimilation. I was raised in a Queens neighborhood probably designed to house upwardly mobile Lower East Side immigrant families between the 1940s and 50s, and have always been slightly aware of the fact that my now Latin American and South Asian neighborhood was once largely Italian and Irish. Remnants of this past include an abundance of Catholic churches and a few Irish pubs. Jackson Heights, a Garden City planned in the 20s as a quiet escape from the city for the wealthy, is now a densely populated immigrant enclave bustling below the elevated 7 train. Traces of these past experiments are hidden behind not only a vibrant and diverse street culture, but also by the immigrant population's drive and vision toward a self-made future with transnational rather than local ties. Jackson Heights has inherited the place of the Lower East Side as a place for root-making, and I am part of the generation who has the privilege of looking back on our parents' past and can take the time to appreciate the richness of the place that made our lives possible. It is with the hope that we will be able to one day look back and try to put together the pieces of my city that I embark on this project about the Lower East Side. Thus, my readings of the nostalgia texts I present are tinged with a deep-seated belief in the importance of memory and heritage. As a New Yorker, I identify with the hopes and dreams and memories that other New Yorkers have of their own neighborhoods. I understand the sense of ownership with which a New Yorker walks his or her streets and hope to represent in my thesis the requisite New York attitude that bolsters these claims. What I fear most is the decline of our "right to the city," to echo David Harvey (2012: 4). As Queens neighborhoods, with their cheap rents and quiet streets, become increasingly attractive to white, upper middle-class families, the need to establish such practices

has become increasingly salient to me. The Lower East Side, because of the constant threat to its history, and because of the attitude and passion with which which activists, bloggers, artists, and average New Yorkers have responded to these threats, is a key starting point for the development of this position.

It is easy to reach the conclusion that change is inevitable in New York City, that we always look back on the past with rose-tinted glasses, but such aphorisms merely glorify the new by silencing memories of the past. Rather than try to represent the past in a historical narrative, I have chosen to archive memories of the past without the filter of the scholarly voice. The story of the Lower East Side is much too rich to try to represent as a singular object. My account is therefore an intentionally incomplete one, speaking to the way in which one individual's narrative of the city will differ from another depending on *which* Lower East Side they consider themselves a part of. There are many Lower East Sides: The Punk Lower East Side, The Puerto Rican Lower East Side, The Ukranian Lower East Side, The Beatnick Lower East Side, The Junkie Lower East Side, and many, many more. Each of these has different landmarks and different boundaries. My research culminates in the production of a physical archive which seeks input from the multiplicity of narratives which have unfolded on the same city streets. I do not seek to paint a picture of The Lower East Side during a certain time, but to produce a database of the SPACE of the The Lower East Side by *collapsing* the passage of time in an attempt to view all the memories that the neighborhood has collected as they relate to specific places, buildings and blocks.

Chapter 1: A History of Gentrification- From Tenements to Condominiums

Scholarly studies of the gentrification of the Lower East Side allow us to draw on an already solid understanding of the sources and effects of local urban change, stretching from Sharon Zukin's 1980s account of Loft Living in neighboring SoHo to Christopher Mele's study which leads well into the early 2000s period of gentrification that just about precedes my own time in the neighborhood. Mele's *Selling the Lower East Side* tells the story of how throughout the twentieth century, developers imagined clearing the slums that stretched from the Financial district to 14th street in order to realize a modern vision for a middle class city to rival the growing suburbs. He begins with an account of the Lower East Side's dilapidating infrastructure. By the 1930s, a slowing influx of new immigrant tenants along with the upward mobility of previous tenants left the Lower East Side tenements at one third occupancy. Mele cites newspaper articles that state "Area One-Third Abandoned but Life Still Goes On" (1996: 7). Tenements, no longer overflowing with the needy masses, as the population dropped 60% from 518,292 to 205,663 residents, allowed for resources to shift away from "sentimental" concerns for the poor and toward "higher and better uses" (Mele 90). The decline of manufacturing jobs in Manhattan, and the movement of the working and lower middle class to new neighborhoods in Queens and Brooklyn was met simultaneously with the growth of financial industry downtown. Developers put their sights on the neighborhoods surrounding Wall Street, which they could envision as "walk to work" districts that could house middle class office workers. So began the push to re-brand the neighborhood once known as Manhattan's greatest ethnic slum. Planned in 1929, The Chrystie-Forsyth Parkway envisioned a massive slum-clearance project that made way

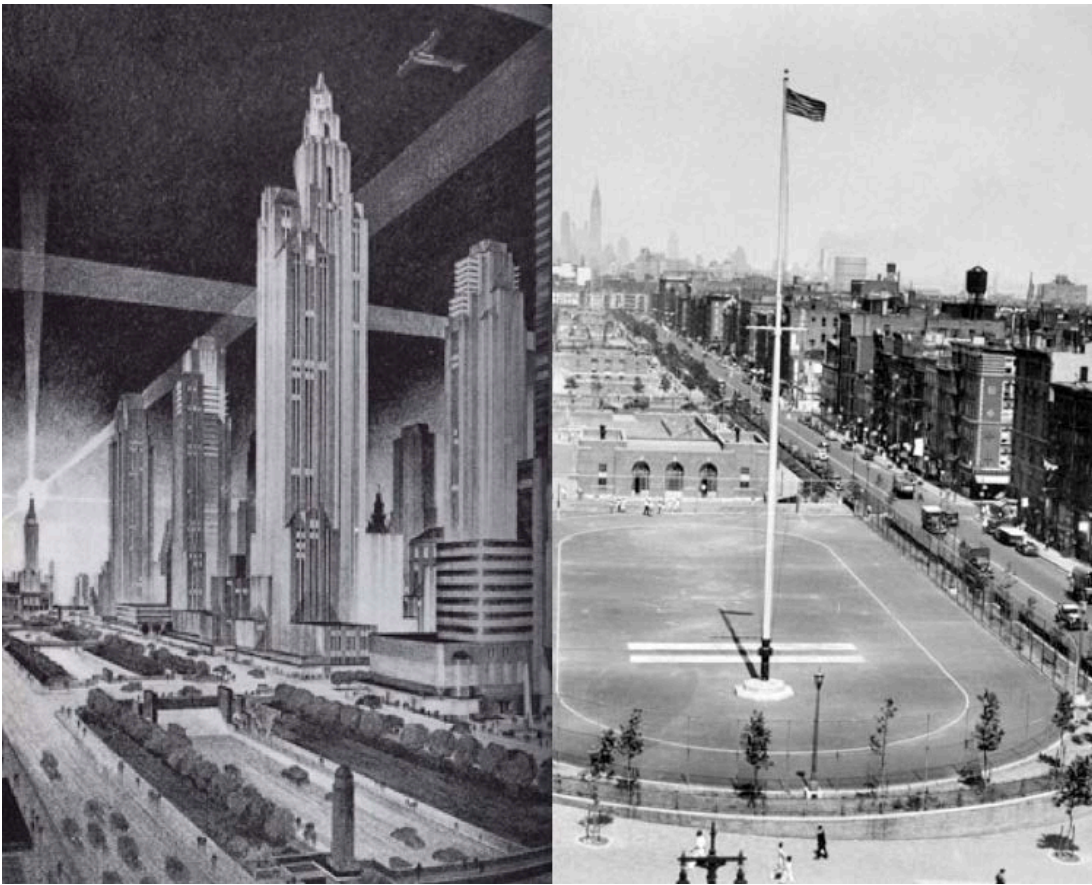


Figure 1:

RPA's 1929 Chrystie-Forsyth Parkway (left) and Sara D. Roosevelt Park 1934 (right).

The perspective of both views culminates at the Chrysler Building.

for high rise towers and a highway that stretched from the Financial District into Midtown (Fig. 1). The plan was rejected, and Sara D. Roosevelt Park was built instead. Twelve years later, Robert Moses would propose the Lower Manhattan Expressway, an elevated ten lane highway that crossed Manhattan and linked the Williamsburg Bridge in the Lower East Side with the Holland tunnel to New Jersey, effectively cutting through the densely populated neighborhoods of Little Italy and SoHo. The plan was delayed until 1962 when the project was finally rejected (Hunt, 1962).

This modernist vision of the city was based on the belief that “eradicating glaring physical differences between city and suburb would erase the rapidly emerging social distinctions in class, income, race, occupation, and educational levels between the inner city and the surrounding suburbs.” (Mele 8). In the name of progress, the city positioned itself against the tenement as an object which preserved the image of the LES as a working class ethnic slum. I

want to argue that such sentiments against the tenement are still alive, regardless of its (hardly new anymore) hip status. Still latent in the minds of the city and its developers is this utopian vision for downtown Manhattan, and nearly a century after it was first imagined, recent trends point to its fulfillment.



Figure 2:

The fulfillment of a modernist dream for the Lower East Side

Photos (left to right):

The Sculpture for Living
The Standard East Village
52 E 4th Street
51 Astor Place

Glass Houses.... Dreams of the Neoliberal City

The gentrification of the East Village began long before the period we are concerned with in the present work. The name of the “East Village” itself emerged in the sixties as a device used by the real estate industry to lure Greenwich Village artists to move in to the tenements of the Lower East Side- a neighborhood that was largely black, Puerto Rican and Eastern European, and which as a result of white flight, boasted a large and cheap housing stock left over by families who could move to the suburbs. From its very birth, the East Village has been about bringing whiteness and money into a neighborhood otherwise marked as undesirable. Cheap rent

continued to draw mainly white artists who sought to escape the mainstream and to live on the fringes of society along with the poor who could not afford to leave. But it is only in the post 9/11 world that the white (read: monied) population of the East Village has grown so astonishingly. The 2010 census revealed a 0.9% increase in the white population of Manhattan, for the first time in thirty years, putting to rest any concept of “white flight” left over from the 20th century (Duncan 2011). This population “boom” is most visible in the East Village, which in the same period saw an even more unprecedented 25% surge in its white population. The latter half of this decade (2005-2010) was the period that I experienced as a teenager (and which I describe anecdotally in the following form for the rest of this paper).

The East Village I remember is a city that lasted five years, a city on its last legs that tried achingly to defended itself against development and failed miserably. It was a city being wiped clean of bums and junkies and bongos and grungy tattoo shops. This moment in the history of gentrification is not about the displacement of residents, but rather the eviction idea that the East Village was a place in which one could reside. The East Village is no longer a neighborhood as much as a playground for the global superrich who invest in, purchase and stay in the luxury condominiums and hotels that sprout up and down the Bowery like weeds between the tenements and soup kitchens.

This phenomenon is a radical departure from the consumer-driven process we understand as gentrification. Jason Hackworth calls this newest trend “financification, wherein workers and capital from the finance industry pour into already gentrified neighborhoods, accentuating previous levels of exclusivity” (Hackworth 820). If we read processes of urban change primarily

as the production of spatial artifacts, then the product of the past decade has chiefly taken the form of the glass condominium tower.

Le Corbusier proclaimed that the history of architecture was a history of windows through the ages” (Friedberg 104). Corbusier’s windows, like that of his Villa Savoye, are intentional frames, capturing views of nature, extending horizontally to define the landscape at human scale. But Anne Friedberg, tracing her own history of the window in *The Virtual Window*, turns her attention away from the many manifestations of the window after Le Corbusier. She looks instead to the computer screen as the contemporary manifestation of the window, to argue that the frame of the window has altered our perception from its inception in the Renaissance, and that it defines a view of the world as virtualized re-presentation (Friedberg 8). We will continue to look to the place of the window in contemporary architecture, in which “view” has come to dominate *form*, and fenestration has become a mode of building. Architecture has become the frame in which we live. What shall we make of a building that is all window? To what does Walter Benjamin refer when he proclaims that “To live in a glass house is a revolutionary virtue par excellence” (Benjamin 6)?

To approach the question of the glass house, let us think here of Mies Van der Rohe’s Farnsworth House (1951) or Philip Johnson’s Glass House (1949) (Fig. 3), both icons of modernism, but are both anti-modern “retreat” houses in rural locations, unlike International Style icons such as Gordon Bunschaft’s Lever House or the Seagram Building, which are purpose-built Park Avenue office buildings. The transformation of the office tower into a residential typology is something we will explore later, but in their decidedly single-level nature, and by virtue of transparency, they blend in to the nature around them almost seamlessly. The



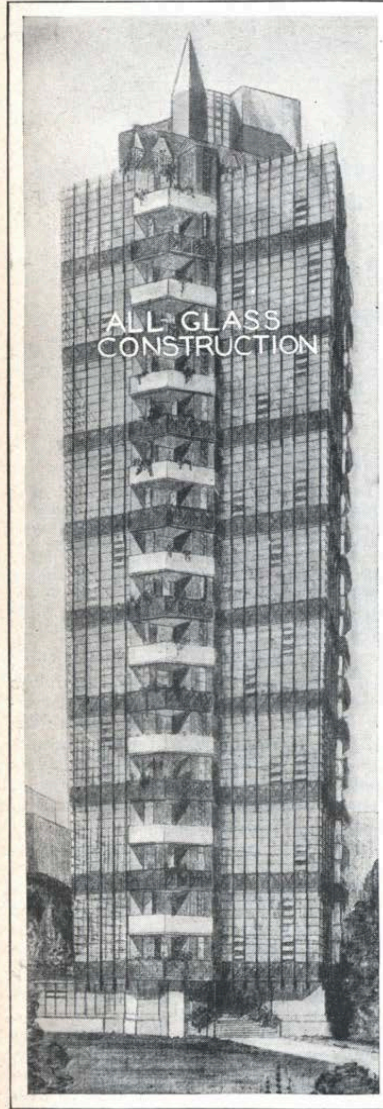
Figure 3:

Glass House (left)
Photo: Thomas Loof/
Trunk Archive

Farnsworth House
(right)
use, Photo: Birds of
Ohio

“virtue” of living in the 20th century glass house, then, is the fulfillment of a romantic pastoral dream through the building technologies of the modern age. It is a vision taken from a rural landscape and translated into the urban environment. It *almost* makes sense, using this logic, that the first proposed glass tower was designed in 1930 by Frank Lloyd Wright, an architect famed for his Prairie House style and commitment to nature and context, in none other than the East Village (Fig. 4). The eighteen story tower was to be built at 11th street and 2nd avenue alongside St. Mark’s Church on the Bowery, but was shelved when the Great Depression rolled in. The story gets even weirder: Wright’s design *was* built, in 1954, and not in New York but in the small town of Bartlesville, Oklahoma. He described it as “the tree that escaped the crowded forest,” continuing the metaphor of nature (Price Tower). Somehow, it is more fitting for Wright’s “tree” to have risen on the prairie, away from the forest that Manhattan became. But Frank Lloyd Wright’s dream has been fulfilled in today’s East Village, which is beginning to look a lot like his 1929 drawing (Fig. 4). The glass tower, is “[drained] of its revolutionary potential” according to Mark Kingwell in his study of urban materiality and consciousness in *Concrete Reveries*, by its modular deployment in generic ocean front condominiums, office towers, and other unitary, sanitized spaces (2008: 8).

First All-Glass Building Soon to Rise in City of New York



FROM designing the Imperial Hotel in Tokio, Japan—the only structure of any importance that stood up under the earthquake a few years back—to building the first all-glass house in the heart of New York City is a pretty long step. But it is being taken by Frank Lloyd Wright, world-famed architect, who proposes to erect a building along the lines of that shown in the illustration, at Second Avenue and 11th Street. It is the first of several that Mr. Wright plans to build within the next few years.

One of the unusual features of this building is that no structural steel will be used anywhere in the glass house. In detailing his idea, Mr. Wright pointed out that he plans to build this all-glass tower to a height of 18 stories and set a two-story penthouse on top of it for his own personal use. The walls of the building will be made of clear, heavy plate glass and the floors will be of concrete inlaid with a rubber composition to deaden noises. For decorative purposes, balconies and parapets, Mr. Wright proposes to use copper.

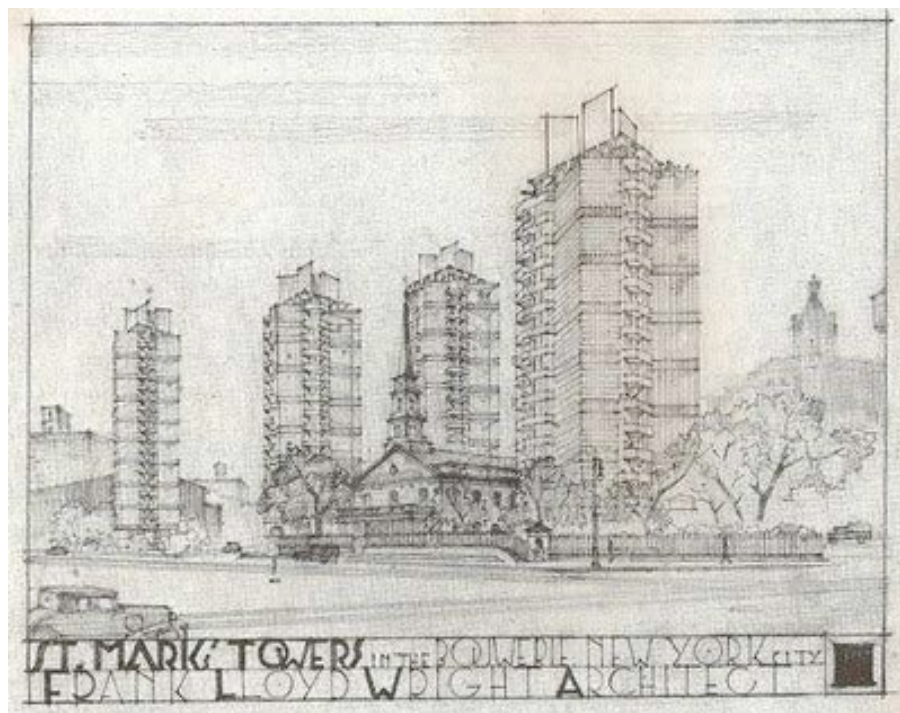
No structural steel will be used in this building.

Figure 4: Gentrification in 1929

(left) Frank Lloyd Wright-designed glass towers surround St. Mark's Church on the Bowery

(above left) Price Tower in Bartlesville, Oklahoma

(above right) Wright's original design



What is the purpose then, of the glass condominium? And what do we make of its long history? David Harvey's *Rebel Cities* (2012) presents us with the idea that "the buildings we see around us in New York City... represent 'more than an architectural movement; they were largely the manifestation of a widespread financial phenomenon.'" (Harvey 32). This certainly agrees with Julian Brash's depiction of the city, in *Bloomberg's New York* (2011), as one which serves the interests of capital. Brash describes the neoliberal political agenda of the Bloomberg administration (2002-2013), or "The Bloomberg Way" as a strategy for advancing the interests of desirable and wealthy clients and the marketing and branding of the city as a luxury good. The Bloomberg Way promotes an economic climate which manifests itself architecturally in the kind of context-less glass tower present on the cover of Brash's book. We see two brick tenements, one red and one white, behind which stand a pair of brand new condominium-style towers, their glass facades gleaming blue in the daylight. It is hard to place the image on a map, as tenements line city streets in swaths of neighborhoods like the East Village but also in pockets such as Hell's Kitchen, Yorkville, and East Harlem. But this is precisely the object of today's urban development. By smoothing over residential Manhattan with glass towers, developers open up the possibility of lending to any neighborhood in the city a special brand of Midtown sleekness that will attract the wealthiest investors and the largest and most powerful corporations. Let us continue to use this as the primary metaphor by which we understand the spatial logic of the Bloomberg Way.

"Starchitect" Charles Gwathmey's *Sculpture for Living*, a residential tower at 445 Lafayette Street on Astor Place marks the beginning of this boom in 2005, but also, because of dismal sales, the failure to fulfill them. The "palatial" 3,174 sq ft #15B, which features



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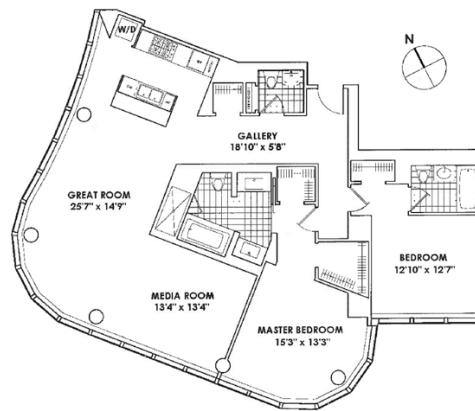


Figure 5: Gwathmey-Siegel’s Sculpture for Living

“panoramic skyline views from south, west and north exposures across 168 linear feet of continuous floor-to-ceiling undulating glass walls” is currently listed at \$6,995,000 by Sotheby’s International Realty on the real estate website trulia.com. But at the time of its building in 2005, *The Sculpture for Living* was the only building of its kind in the area, and initially, sales were dismal, or so we can infer from a 2006 *New Yorker* article titled “What Went Wrong at Astor Place?”

The people who do buy in glass towers, on the other hand, still think of the East Village as “not the greatest place in the world,” as one developer put it. “For a drink maybe, but to live there?” Another broker who works with developers both uptown and downtown asks, “Who’s going to spend \$5 million there? If I’m spending that money, I’m not living on Astor Place. I’ll have skateboarders outside my window and the subway underneath me. (Robledo 2006)

A 2005 ad for *The Sculpture for Living* proclaims “Experience it from within,” depicting a view from inside of the 20th century modernist architect’s undulating blue tower, which *New Yorker* architecture critic Paul Goldberger described as “an elf prancing among men”:

By designing a tower with such a self-conscious shimmer, the architect has destroyed the illusion that this neighborhood, which underwent gentrification long ago, is now anything other than a place for the rich. (2005:1)

What we are pointing to here, as Goldberger states, is the loss of the *illusion* of roughness and grit that the wealthy can hide behind, the illusion that had been sustaining the East Village’s authenticity for the many years that it has already been gentrified. The focus of the building is on its “assertive, sensual spaces that evoke the classic modernist houses of Le Corbusier” (Goldberger 1). The “intimacy” and privacy with which the building advertises itself emphasizes the building’s draw, which is the experience of the East Village and of the skyline within a safe, clean domestic space. The lifestyle that Gwathmey produces is one which is desirable precisely *because* it allows one to dwell in luxury, while the gritty urban theatre of Astor Place unfolds in

your front yard. For Beatriz Colomina, the object of architecture is not the production of this view but rather of the subject who is engaged in the viewing. Much like Anne Friedberg's argument about the window, she suggest that architecture itself is "a viewing mechanism that produces the subject" (Colomina 250). Benjamin's follows up suggestion, stated above, by saying that to live in a glass house is also "an intoxication, a moral exhibitionism, that we badly need. Discretion concerning one's own existence, once an aristocratic value, has become more and more an affair of petit-bourgeois parvenus." (Surrealism). The subject, drawn to and produced by the condominium tower, ascribes to, and is contractually obliged to engage in an always-on-display lifestyle. The city has ceased to be the subject of living. Instead, the subject in this position of power has come to dominate it with his or her gaze.

"Gentrification" is a word that describes the movement of people, namely the *gentry*, or the middle class, into blighted working class and poor neighborhoods. Sociologist Ruth Glass coined the term in 1964 in a study of urban change in London to describe the process by which the "shabby, modest mews and cottages" of working class neighborhoods became "elegant, expensive residences" when invaded by the middle classes who sought to drive out the original population (Glass 104). For the East Village, this is something that began sometime in the sixties when white, middle-class hippies moved in to a still very Ukrainian immigrant neighborhood. with very cheap rents. In the years that followed, the East Village continued to attract artists who sought a space on the margins of society that would allow them to be creative. The very first luxury apartments opened in 1985 at The Christodora Apartments on Avenue B and ninth street on the eastern edge of Tompkins Square Park. Built in 1927, the renovated eighteen story tower was once "The Christodora House" a "skyscraper settlement house... the world's tallest structure

devoted to social service” (Blunt). Its transformation after years of abandonment came at a time when Tompkins Square was in pure squalor. The New York Times describes the area surrounding Tompkins as a” smattering of newly renovated dwellings where apartments sell for as much as \$450,000. It is a base for nearly 150 homeless people, a playground, sometimes a drug market.” (Purdum 2). The violent Tompkins Square Park riot of 1988, a four hour confrontation between police, the homeless, and activists, that produced nearly one hundred complaints of police brutality, in which the police attempted to clear the park of its homeless population who made the park their home. The Christodora apartments became a major point of contention during the riot, as activists and protesters broke in to the Christodora, chanting “Die Yuppie Scum,” damaging property and threatening residents. Again in 1989, the NYPD returned to Tompkins dismantled tent cities occupied by the homeless population who protested the park’s closure and enforced curfew hours in “a long planned, long announced operation of nearly military complexity” (Kifner 1). “Stop the War on the Poor! Gentrification is Genocide” reads one sign (Fig. 6). Today, an annual punk show in Tompkins Square Park commemorates the anniversary of the riots.

Figure 6:
Protests at Tompkins Square Park.
“Gentrification is Genocide”



The phenomenon we are concerned with here is not about the movement of people; we know that they are already here. Surely, we can not use the same term we have been using since the sixties to encapsulate the conditions of urban change that the city experiences today. Political feelings like those described above are not necessarily nonexistent, but when they are garnered, they are not directed at *The Sculpture for Living*, for example, mostly because in the neoliberal city, poverty has become much more invisible. In her article *Loft Living as Historic Compromise in the Urban Core*, Sharon Zukin describes a period of gentrification, leading up to the period of the Tompkins Square Riots, that differs from our own primarily in its relationship to the built environment. The so-called “urban pioneers” who move in to the post-industrial city indicate the preference for a lifestyle which “negates the dominant mode of contemporary urban renewal: the high-technology new construction which, ignoring social context, has decimated much of the built environment” (Zukin 256). In her memoir, *Just Kids*, punk pioneer Patti Smith reminisces on the years she spent with photographer Robert Mapplethorpe and recalls the labor that went in to the renovation of a loft space at the time”

He cleared, scrubbed, and painted the space. We borrowed buckets from the hotel, filled them with water, and carted them over. When we were finished, we stood together in silence, imagining the possibilities. We'd never had so much light. Even after he cleaned and painted the windows black, light still flooded in. We scavenged for a mattress, worktables, and chairs. I mopped the floor with water boiled with eucalyptus on our hot plate. / The first thing Robert brought over from the Chelsea were our portfolios. (Smith 129)

Architecturally, gentrification is associated with the conversion of industrial buildings to lofts, supported by government policies such as the Artist-In-Residency policy that allowed artists to live in non-residential buildings by registering as an artist through the city's Department of Cultural Affairs. The East Village of late 20th century gentrification was one concerned with

re-appropriating *interior space*, but which left its exteriors to weather and deteriorate poetically as an authentic, artsy veneer. The problem we face today is primarily one of landscape, or cityscape rather. *The Sculpture For Living* represents a moment in which gentrifiers cease to have an interest in the surrounding neighborhood, and even less with blending in to it. 2005, then, is the beginning of a shift in the image of the city, where contextual or even critically contextualized architecture was thrown out the window, or more appropriately, the glass curtain wall. As NYT architecture critic Nicolai Ouroussoff put it,

Astor Place would seem more comfortable in a suburban office park. The East Village is saturated with memories of youthful rebellion. In recent years it has emerged as a crossroads between the world of would-be punks, awkward students, and rich Wall Street types. The Gwathmey building serves only the last camp: it's a literal manifestation of money soothing over the texture of everyday life. (Ouroussoff 3)

The texture of everyday life is the object of my study. The archival of this texture, however endangered it may be, is crucial to developing a critical understanding of this moment in New York's history. Marshall Berman's South Bronx saw the demolition of entire neighborhoods for the construction of Robert Moses' Cross Bronx Expressway, which linked the Long Island suburbs to the George Washington Bridge into New Jersey, effectively bypassing the City and allowing for an inter-suburb commute that magically wished Manhattan away. We understand the highway now as a synecdochal object in relation to its time. It is the symbol of the 20th century as it defines the principal action that has since defined it, namely the movement out or through the city. It is the object of white flight. The urban condominium or boutique hotel, in much the same way, is the object of this century's new urban metaphor- white flock. When Marshall Berman returned to the South Bronx with his child on a school trip, passing over the streets on an elevated 4 train, he looked out and saw brand new neighborhoods (Berman33). He

describes, most optimistically, the brand new public housing and the clean streets in which the children can play. Once upon a time it seemed to Berman that New York had forgotten the Bronx, that it would be left in ruins forever. Similarly, the marking of the East Village as a space of luxury with hulking glass towers denies the possibility might ever be something different here. It is hard to picture an economic situation in which abandoned towers would stand vacant and crumbling, or even be demolished one day. I am reminded here of something from Slavoj Žižek's address to Occupy Wall Street. The Chinese government has banned film, media and novels that contain elements of alternate reality or time travel, he tells us, but this is a good sign because it means that the Chinese are still dreaming of alternatives that need to be banned. But at home, he says, "the ruling system has even oppressed our capacity to dream. Look at the movies that we see all the time. It's easy to imagine the end of the world... But you cannot imagine the end of capitalism" (Žižek 2011). The tower stops all conversation and dictates history. Verticality is permanence. It watches over the the city in judgement, while the rest of us can only look up and wonder. The glass tower defies the wrecking ball, as delicate glass panels must be painstakingly removed one by one, lest they shatter and shower the city in sparkling fragments.

Creative Destruction

Architect Charles Jencks "happily" marks the date of the death of modern architecture as the 15th of July 1972, at 3.32pm, when the Pruitt-Igoe Housing complex in St. Louis, Missouri "went out with a bang" (Jencks 9). Designed in 1954 by World Trade Center architect, Minoru Yamasaki, the 57 acre complex of 33 buildings, 11-stories each, they were the first modern architecture project to be demolished, symbolizing the failure of the modernist dream that drove so much urban development in the first half of the twentieth century, including those Lower East



Figure 7: Pruitt-Igoe Housing Complex, St. Louis, Missouri. Creation (1954), Destruction (1972)

Side projects I presented earlier. A recent documentary of the same title suggests that the above narrative is “The Pruitt-Igoe Myth,” and instead suggests that placing the blame on modernist architecture is completely misguided, that it “inflates the power of the architect to affect social change...[and] masks the extent to which the profession is implicated, inextricably, in structures and practices that it is powerless to change” (Bristol 169). I agree that the failure of public housing cannot be attributed to the architectural forms it takes, and instead the blame needs to be placed on divestment from urban centers, the decline of manufacturing jobs, and the decline of social services to those in need. But it is important to note that Housing Authorities nationwide implemented such modernist planning strategies and codes with the hope that rationalism and technology of the 20th century really could improve life. In Jencks’ words:

Moreover, its Purist style, its clean, salubrious hospital metaphor, was meant to instill, by good example, corresponding virtues in the inhabitants. Good form was to lead to good content, or at least good conduct; the intelligent planning of abstract space was to promote healthy behavior. (Jencks 9)

If projects like the Christie-Forsyth Parkway and Frank Lloyd Wright’s towers represent a modernist dream for the Lower East Side, and Charles Gwathmey’s *Sculpture for Living* represents its near-fulfillment, then the Fumihiko Maki designed 51 Astor Place, developed by

A Sleek Office Building Rises Over Gritty Astor Place



Figure 8:
Remembering “grittiness” at
51 Astor Place.

A new high-rise building at 51 Astor Place in the East Village of Manhattan.

51 Astor, refers to the neighborhood as “Midtown South,” securing the neighborhood’s position as as part of the once foreign world that existed above 14th street (Fig 8)(Hughes 1). As a commenter on East Village blog EV Grieve notes, “Savor that word: "gritty." We swim to that word, hoping to cling to it like a shipwrecked sailor to a spar. But it's a mirage..” (EV Grieve 2013a). While Manhattanism moves in to the East Village, it grows even more astonishingly on the narrow streets of the Lower East Side below Houston Street. Visitors to the eighteen-story Thompson Hotel, a self-described “design lover’s paradise” on Allen and Houston Streets are drawn by the hotel’s strategic co-option of history and memory. The hotel “[radiates] the creativity of its surrounding neighborhood” from its outdoor pool positioned not at the roof but on a balcony parallel to the ornate and colorful cornices of the neighborhood’s tenements (Fig 9).

Taken from its website is the following description of the Lower East Side:

The Lower East Side features a unique juxtaposition of the historical and the modern. You’ll find a great mixture of spots that haven’t changed in many decades, and new that are just designed to look that way. During the day, a walk through the LES will be peppered with high-end boutiques, family owned shops passed through generations, and historical food and religious landmarks. (Thompson Hotels)

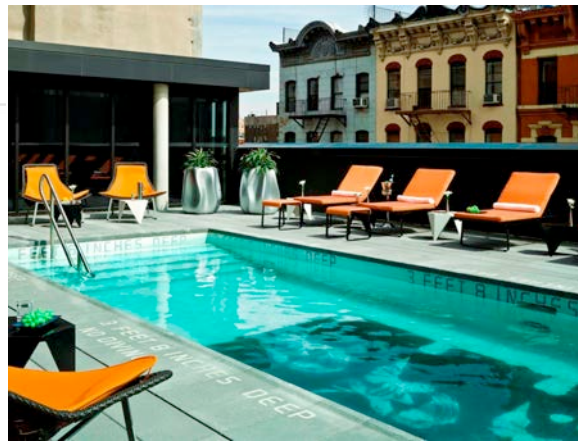
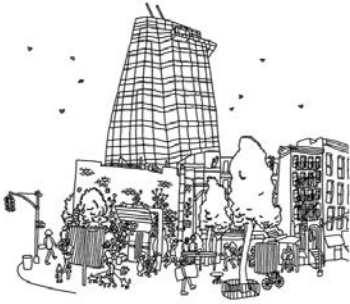


Figure 9:

Lower East Side hotels,
(left) The Standard
EastVillage, from homepage

(right) Thompson LES, from
homepage

Julian Brash agrees that the notion, which I will trace through Manuel Castells and Rem Koolhaas, that the proliferation of spaces like 51 Astor and the Thompson Hotel “radically abstract elites from the localized social worlds they inhabit, [result] in an overemphasis on mobility, networks, the ability to transcend space, and a relative neglect of the sites in which production, consumption, and class formation actually ‘take place’” (Brash 12). Manuel Castells thinks of these contemporary spaces as “spaces of flows,” and includes “VIP lounges, the virtual office... standardized international hotels.” (Castells 296). This bifurcated notion of urban space cannot be regarded as only theorization, nor can it be merely criticized as a naive misunderstanding of everyday life. Instead, it speaks to a vision of the city which we have inherited from modernity, a deep-seated need to codify urban space as either this or that. It must be ours or theirs, it must be residential or commercial, it must be rich or poor. But in order to think about how “place” and “flows” are not singular categories but rather, relative terms that depend on one another (and the distance between the two), Castells (1996: 295) explains spaces of flows as those in which “material arrangements allow for simultaneity of social practices without territorial contiguity”. If we equate the term “territorial contiguity” with “integratedness with urban context,” the condominium can be understood as a space of flows existing within but not interacting directly with the “space of place” that is the neighborhood.

For Rem Koolhaas, the homogenous space of flows is “junkspace” or “the residue mankind leaves on the planet... what remains after modernization has run its course, or what coagulates while modernization is in progress” (2002:175). The periods of intense construction which precede modernist visions of the future are marked by “a language of apology” in which “pardon our appearance signs.... announce momentary discomfort in return for imminent shine” (2002:179). I want to think more deeply about the moment of discomfort that precedes future perfection, and more specifically, about what it means to dwell in this moment. A 2008 New York Magazine article states that for the previous fifteen years in New York City, eight buildings had been demolished and thirteen were built per day (Davidson 1). Although many have theorized that New York has always shed its old layers in favor of trying on the latest fashion (Koolhaas included), during this period, creation/destruction have come in full force to neighborhoods that have been traditionally residential and unaffected by Manhattanization. I believe that when Koolhaas asks at the end of his essay, “Is each of us a mini construction site?” he is speaking to the unique potential of the vacant lot in its relation to the urban subject, a space in which “the body is generally liberated from the usual self-conscious performative constraints of the city” (Edensor b. 217) Tim Edensor describes the dirtiness of urban ruins as “disordered materiality” as opposed to the sterile, ordered materiality of the contemporary city. The material of the construction site “cannot be confined within a single narrative of the past” because it leaves no architectural, visual or symbolic traces, and thereby “it opens up possibilities for alternative, more personal and less ordered histories,” leaving the subject with the opportunity to form a narrative through the examination of the vacant lot and the production of imaginings for the potential of that space (Edensor a. 165). The examination of the liminal space

of the construction site, and by extension (according to Koolhaas) the imaginary space that it produces in relation with the urban subject, is key to reaching an understanding of the importance of urban space in a time of change.

Chapter 2: (Re)constructing Loisaída: Memories of a Radical History

“I don’t mourn the old days of drug dealers and crime, but I do resent everything that Starbucks represents, including the new high-rise hotels and restaurants that make the Bowery shiny and expensive and the real estate speculation that drives rents so high. I mourn the end of the local struggles against wealth and power that have produced the East Village’s reputation for authenticity.” (Zukin 121), my emphasis

“Listen. The Lower East Side’s getting gentrified. Pretty soon they’re gonna burn down this whole neighborhood and then a bunch of people are gonna come in and claim it, and then all these people are gonna have to move out and a lot of high rises, and lot of people with expensive rents, and stuff like that are gonna come in.” (Pupa Santiago, in Sevckenko 301)

In 1988, protests at Tompkins Square, described earlier in relation to the Christodora Apartments, painted a clear picture of the political feelings that were garnered in opposition to the influx of “Yuppie Scum.” But the Lower East Side had been fighting for its right to the city since the 1970s, when community groups and tenant organizations in the largely Puerto Rican neighborhood came together in the form of rent strikes and urban homesteading projects that empowered residents as threats of displacement and eviction came from landlords and the city. The Nuyorican community re-named their home Loisaída. I am interested in uncovering the lasting spatial effects (and affects) of those movements, thereby reconstructing an image of what Loisaída meant to its residents, and imagining what it might still mean in regard to the neighborhood’s recent spatial transformations. In the Post-Tompkins East Village, resistance is no longer visible in the form of protests and community action, but this does not mean that the sentiments upon which the Lower East Side has built its roots are absent. The streets of New York City are spaces are much too tightly controlled and surveilled for such action to take place. David Harvey wants to argue that “the freedom to make and remake ourselves and our cities is...

one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights. How best then to exercise that right?" Harvey asks." (Harvey 4). In her study of Puerto Rican community gardens, *Power at the Roots*, Miranda J. Martinez points out that "There is no longer much chance of the Lower East Side becoming the utopian autonomous zone people imagined when they planted gardens, renovated abandoned buildings, and took their art and protests into the street." (Martinez 127). My answer to Harvey, and also to Martinez, is that we have been robbed of the ability to exercise that right, and of that utopian vision. The lack of this agency, and the feeling of hopelessness in regard to change, is what I am responding to in this project. What I offer here is a collection of narratives, anecdotes, voices, images, and objects which suggest the emergence of a different kind of politics, one in which sentiment and memory and language can be held on to and referenced by those who continue to dream. They sustain a vision of a world that is slowly disappearing.

An example of such a politics is present in the recently opened Museum of Reclaimed Urban Space which preserves both Latino and Squatter histories "as a living archive of urban activism" (MoRUS brochure). It is housed in the storefront of the historic C-Squat on 9th Street and Avenue C, preserving a time that seems so distant to my generation, in which residents of a piece of urban land, even one in such neglected conditions as that of the LES, could take it upon themselves to make the city in their own image, with minimal resources, all the while negotiating competing racial, class, and neighborhood identities. The spaces we mourn in the East Village and Lower East Side are precious and valuable because of *sweat equity initiatives* that rescued dilapidated buildings from demolition, which offered LES residents not just a place to live, but also collective ownership of the space in exchange for their hard work. Long before any of its

streets would come to be considered “Historic Districts” as St. Mark’s Place and Second Avenue now are, people worked to preserve their buildings and homes from demolition. They worked to beautify their streets and turned vacant lots into community gardens and social centers.

The utopian vision to which Martinez refers is a place called Loisaida, the ideology of which Sevcenko, in *Making Loisaida*, describes as:

a spirit of working-class activism and ethnic pride expressed in a defined geographic area... designed as a tool to mobilize residents to roll up their sleeves and physically take over their environment....[a name] created to defend a working-class neighborhood from developers. (Sevcenko 307)

Miguel Algarin, founder in 1973 of the Nuyorican Poets Cafe on 3rd street between Avenues B and C, defined the boundaries of Loisaida in terms of the reach of his poetry, “the poet juggles every street corner east of First Avenue and south of Fourteenth Street ending at the Brooklyn Bridge... Poetry is the full act of naming. Naming states of mind... It is to take over your immediate environment.” (Sevcenko 301). Algarin, along with fellow poet and playwright Miguel Piñero in their 1975 *Nuyorican Poetry: An Anthology of Puerto Rican Words and Feelings* describes Nuyorican language as one “full of muscular expression. It is a language full of short, pulsating rhythms that manifest the unrelenting strain that the Nuyorican experiences” (Algarin and Piñero 16, quoted in Mele 203). I want to latch on to this notion that “naming,” through poetry, is to take over your immediate environment, because the name Loisaida, which is a Spanglish pronunciation of Lower East Side (*Low-ee-Sigh-da*), is derived from a 1974 poem of the same name by Bimbo Rivas (Algarin and Holman 361). It is with the “pulsating rhythms” of his words, that he guides us from “Lower East Side, I love you” to the end of the poem which exclaims, “Loisaida, my love, Te amo,” definitively naming not just a place but a relationship to urban space exemplified by his love letter to his “lady fair.”

Loisaida

Lower East Side
I love you.
You'er my lady fair.
No matter where I am,
I think of you!
The mountains and the
valleys cannot compare,
my love to you
Loisaida, I love you.
I dig the way you talk,
I dig the way you look.
Me vacila tu cantar
y yo me las juego
fria pa' que vivas
para siempre.
En mi mente, mi amada,
yo te llamo Loisaida
Increible
una mezcla, la perfecta
una gente bien decente
de to 'as rasas
que estiman
que te adoran
que no saben explicar
lo que le pasa
cuando ausente de
tus calles peligrosas
si te aman
A ti, mi hermosa Loisaida
O what a town.....
even with your drug-infested
pocket parks, playgrounds
where our young bloods
hang around
waiting, hoping that
one day when they too
get well and smile again
your love is all
they need to come around.
Loisaida, I love you.
Your buildings are
burning up
that we got to stop.
Loisaida, my love,
Te amo.

-Bimbo Rivas

(*my translation)

I'm fascinated by your songs
and I play'em
cold so that you live
forever.
In my mind, my beloved,
I call you Loisaida
Incredible
a mix, the perfect one
a real decent people
of all races
who esteem you
who adore you
who don't know how to explain
what is happening to you
when absent from
your dangerous streets
they do love you*

According to Michel de Certeau, the proper naming of a place, as with Rivas' "Loisaida," "make[s] habitable or believable the place that they clothe with a word" (de Certeau 105). The livability of the neighborhood is one of Rivas' main concerns (Your buildings are/ burning up/ that we got to stop) (drug-infested/ pocket parks, playgrounds/where our young bloods/hang around) but it is the poet's goal to instill a sense of pride in the neighborhood despite its many ills, and to dream, perhaps, that the love of Loisaida can cure them all. Rivas noted that the children of Loisaida played in the empty lots "where proud edifices once stood built by immigrants whose children used the very same stone to climb away from the Lower East Side and into the voids of the American Dream" (Sevcenko 307). The name Loisaida offers residents an alternate and permanent place in which they can reside which does not carry the baggage of the Lower East Side, a space which by the seventies had been constructed as a slum that needed to be escaped. The naming and invention of a new, Puerto Rican space called Loisaida, "provides a way of conceiving and constructing space on the basis of a finite number of stable, isolatable, and interconnected properties"- ones that defined itself against trends of suburbanization, and which produced a new aesthetics which valued the urban landscape to which "the mountains and the/ valleys cannot compare" (de Certeau 94).

"Mejore, No Se Mude," or "Improve, Don't Move" was the motto of neighborhood cleanup campaign, responding to the mass exodus of Puerto Ricans who left the neighborhood and moved to housing projects in the outer boroughs (Sevcenko 307). Those who stayed often did so out of commitment to their neighbors and their city. Supported by community organizations and empowered by Rivas' vision of Loisaida, they got to work. The products of their labor are preserved and commemorated in the eighty-five community gardens that dot the



Figure 10: Community Gardens in the Lower East Side

streets of the Lower East Side, most densely in the area east of Avenue A. For years, the gardens held an extra-legal status. Activists fought to keep them for decades until they were either sold to developers or co-opted by the Parks Department in the 90s. The great victory of Loisaida is that majority remain today.

Nostalgia Narratives

La Plaza Cultural, on 9th street and Avenue C (#35 in Fig. 10, left), is a particularly rich memory space for many reasons. The plaza was founded by residents and members of CHARAS/El Bohio, a community center founded by Armando Perez housed in an abandoned school on tenth street near Avenue B (MoRUS 2012). La Plaza now bears his name to commemorate his 1999 murder. The CHARAS building was sold to a developer during the Giuliani administration and the community was evicted, although not without a huge political struggle. It remains abandoned to this day. Artist Gordon Matta-Clark, who participated in events at CHARAS along with



Figure 11:

A still from Don Yorty's "*After Irene: the Death of a Friend*" (Vimeo)

artists Jean-Michel Basquait, Keith Haring, Andy Warhol and Jenny Holzer, helped construct an amphitheater at La Plaza using rubble from abandoned buildings and old railroad ties. Working with architect Buckminster Fuller, CHARAS members built a geodesic dome to stage cultural events in the Plaza. CHARAS members planted the mighty willow tree in the 1970's. But 2011's hurricane Irene pulled the sixty foot tree from its roots knocked it to the ground (Fig. 11). The sorrow of neighborhood residents and garden volunteers is represented in an August 30, 2011 NYT City Room article, "An East Village Symbol of Survival Succumbs to Irene" (Moynihan 1).

"Everybody loved that tree... It had a very special place in the hearts of people around here."

"It was so alive... This has been kind of like the death of a friend."

An account preserved in a 90s website, written at a time when the future of La Plaza and other community gardens was still uncertain, give insight to the deep emotional roots that mourning for the willow tree is based upon:

It has given many a cause to fight for in a neighborhood quickly slipping away. It has been for 20 years an incredible catalyst for many incredible things.... Destroying this park and garden will destroy all that is mentioned above. What's more, it will make this block, this neighborhood and this city all that more bleak. It would destroy two decades of community involvement, of social statement, of art and culture that is imbued in its many forms of this space. It will take away the roots that connect the community and that make the fabric of community life. (New York City Gardens Coalition)

Memories of Loisaida are fading. They have been for decades, as the previous account suggests, and traces of it are hard to read in the Lower East Side unless one is actively looking for them, and some are being wiped away by mother nature herself. Claims to memories of Loisaida, then, are re-enactments of a political identity and memorializations of the neighborhood “are more broadly about the right to be represented as a community as New York’s redevelopment sweeps on. (Martinez 149). For Algarín, Loisaida has always been a place of mourning:

Lost love is often rediscovered here in our barrio. Loisaida is our home, a place to mourn the loss of major players on the street of Loisaida, too often fallen to the plagues of violence and illness (Algarin 74)

One such player was playwright Miguel Piñero, who after leaving Sing Sing prison on parole in 1973, produced the play he wrote in prison called “Short Eyes,” which was then nominated for six Tony Awards and won a Pulitzer Prize. Leon Ichaso, who directed the 2001 biopic starring Benjamin Bratt as Piñero, remarked that ‘Everyone you meet who knew Piñero got pleasantly ripped off or hustled or enchanted or taught a lesson about the street,” (Shewey 1). His Lower East Side Poem immortalizes not only his attitude but also the identity of the Lower East Side as a place that on the brink of a similar fate (Piñero 7).

A Lower East Side Poem (excerpt)

Just once before I die
I want to climb up on a
tenement sky
to dream my lungs out till
I cry
then scatter my ashes thru
the Lower East Side.
-Miguel Piñero

Piñero's words are poignant, not only because they precede his untimely death in 1988, but because they presage the death of the a world he so loved. The literature we inherit from Loisaida, with all its references to the struggle to stay alive in the hood, speaks to the precarious position Loisaida occupies, both in the collective imaginations of a city who has forgotten it, and on its streets where hotels and condominiums block out Piñero's "tenement sky."

The nostalgia narrative is "a social construction of the past that is specifically triggered by a sense of loss" (Ocejo 286). My history of Loisaida, above, is itself a social construction produced out of my own nostalgia for a time I never experienced, a feeling produced through engagement with the social artifacts of the bold Nuyorican poetry that inspires me and community gardens that I frequented in my youth and still cherish. I owe these experiences to Loisaida and the labor of love that went into creating it. Opposite Loisaida (literally just on the other side of Tompkins Square) is the "East Village," another city of the mind, another name which, claimed by a different constituency, is mobilized to call upon very different memories of the Lower East Side. In his own ethnographic research of the East Village, Richard E. Ocejo (2011) identifies how those who he terms "early gentrifiers" use a "nostalgia narrative" to buttress their identities and establish notions of ownership and authenticity in a rapidly changing neighborhood. Their "personal experiences with the neighborhood's gritty past, ethnic and cultural diversity, and creativity and creative production, all of which they identify as authentic" 286. Although references to Loisaida are not present in the largely white East Village, the words "gritty" and "diverse" speak to the value of its proximity, of East Villagers' interactions with Loisaideños.

Narratives of collective memory are powerful ways in which people make sense of their lives and the places they hold dear. The nostalgia narrative is a specific form of

collective memory that concerns itself with the past, but is a stronger reflection on the present.” (Ocejo 306).

East Village blogger Jeremiah Moss’ *Jeremiah’s Vanishing New York*, is an example of such a nostalgia narrative. His blog, in which he writes about the closure or endangerment of East Village stores, buildings and cultural institutions. His narrative of ‘Vanishing New York’ is based on the use of nostalgia to uncover the value of such places. As an early gentrifier himself, Jeremiah reflects on the effects of his own presence by differentiating himself from a group of more recent “imports” who differ from him and his contemporaries.

“When I think about gentrification and my own role in it, I parse it this way: do you come to a neighborhood because you like the way it is, because you like not just the cute cafes, but also the down-at-the-heels bookshops and delis, and the old people on their stoops, the corner psychotics, and even the stink of the garbage at high summer? Or do you come to a neighborhood with the wish and the intention to change it? Do you see a “project” that needs work? (Waterman 2009).

Jeremiah Moss recognizes that the newest generation of imports: “want backyards, bicycles, and barbecues. They want Greenwich Village to be like their hometowns in Wisconsin,” he says.

“Underneath this—and not very far underneath—there’s a seething hatred of urban life. They don’t like the dirt or the smells. They don’t like the kvetching and the neuroticism. They don’t like the layers of history. They want to tear it all down and make it clean and new.” (Village Voice, Jen Doll 2011).

Sharon Zukin begins *Naked City* by proclaiming that “In the early years of the twenty-first century, New York City lost its soul.” (Zukin 1). It is apparent that Neil Smith was radically mistaken 1994 prediction about the fate of the city and in his use of the word degentrification. But rather than considering the state of the 21st century city a resurgence of “gentrification,” I suggest that we take a look at the key differences between the pre-Tompkins period of

gentrification and the development of the “soul-less” city of today. For Sharon Zukin, the term gentrification is simply inadequate to describe the kinds of urban restructuring we see today; the use of the word “minimizes and oversimplifies the collective investment that is at stake.” (Zukin 221). Zukin’s allusion to “collective investment” is interesting here, and there are two ways I think we can understand the term in relation to the neighborhood’s political economy. One is the emotional investment on the part of a community, namely Loisaideños, deeply committed to the space it has had to work for. The other is the financial investment pouring in to the neighborhood from every corner.

Our New York is a city of constant hurt. It hurts to see Avalon on Bowey boutique “Blue and Cream” hang photographs of the now demolished Mars Bar. It’s a stab to the heart of the city to see designer label Rag & Bone take up three whole storefronts in a pair of the city’s oldest buildings, while a market of vintage jewelry, decor (and most notably, giant subway signs) just across the street, is forced to close. I remember how sad it was to watch the Tower of Toys come down on Avenue B, only to see the garden in which it once stood cleaned up and used as the backdrop for a scene in a JLo movie only a few years later. It literally stinks to watch Subways pop up left and right. It pains me to watch as Santa Con takes over the streets every December and fills bars with an absurd amount of Santa clad frat boys. I hate that my favorite pizza place in the city closed this past year, and that it was replaced instantly with a wood-clad community table- style pizza shop (recently closed, thankfully).

Chapter 3:

“The New York Version of Nostalgia”

Starbucks, an elegy

*The East Village has never been my home, and yet I feel that I have spent more time on its streets than I have on any block of my hometown of Queens. For the urban teenager, St. Mark's Place is a pilgrimage site. Armed with student metrocards valid until 8pm, we roamed the streets after school (sometimes a little earlier). We got piercings in a tiny back room for five bucks. We tried on leather pants and rock star gear at Trash & Vaudeville 'til Jimmy, the owner, kicked us out (and banned us forever). Once upon a time, there was an automat called BAMN! where grilled cheese sandwiches and curly fries sat in compartments waiting for you to drop some quarters into the slot. We sat on stoops and hung out with squatters and crazy folk of all kinds. We ate whole Entenmann's cakes in Tompkins Square Park. We met a red squirrel and named her Lindsay, and a black one who we named Henry. We had our first, real, restaurant dates on St. Mark's- anniversaries, Valentine's day. We shared ice cream cones and held hands. We admired the expensive clothes in the windows of boutiques. We spent New Year's at Nino's and ate the best Sicilian slice in town. You always ate the cheese off of mine. And we could sit in front of Starbucks all day, undisturbed. We could be loud and obnoxious and we scraped up change to share Java Chip Frappes that weren't that good anyway. We staked out our spots at a table and watched people walk by from behind the hedges, we eavesdropped on other people's conversations. When we had nothing to do on a summer afternoon, we would walk here from blocks and blocks away- just to **sit**.*

On July 1st, 2011 the East Village of my memory came crashing down. Like Marshall Berman returning to the wasteland of his South Bronx, I returned to the East Village in search of memories- but all I found was rubble (Berman 1988). But my ruins, unlike Berman's, were only temporary. Empty lots and construction sites litter the streets- but soon these too will disappear in favor of glass towers. This is not a charred landscape like that of the South Bronx. Instead the ruins are distributed across the city as sites marked for development. In this case, our site is the boxy yellowish brick Cooper Union Engineering building that sits in the center of Astor place, across from the beautiful brownstone facade of Cooper's original 1859 building. The street that runs between the two marks the entrance to St. Mark's Place. The seating space outside of Starbucks, which occupied just the corner of the block, was once the perfect space for people-watching some of the most perfectly watchable people in all of New York. Now, the entrance to St. Mark's is bounded by blue post-no-bills sidewalk sheds- enclosing the site which is now nothing more than a gaping hole smack in the center of the East Village. Often a gap in the fence offers one the opportunity to take a peek at the steel beams of a black glass office tower rising from the the ground. From Poughkeepsie, I cannot watch it as it grows. Instead, I check up on my one time home through East Village mourning blogs like *EV Grieve* and *Jeremiah's Vanishing New York*. In the introduction to his study of New York's lost places of leisure, *Automats, Taxi Dances, and Vaudeville*, David Freeland mentions how the "the process of coming to terms with architectural loss occurs in stages: first shock that something beautiful could have been destroyed.... and finally, determination to appreciate the treasures that remain." (Freeland xvii).

“Appreciating what’s here while it’s still here. Remembering what’s no longer here.

Wishing some things weren’t here that are here.” -EV Grieve

The above line, which reads like an epitaph for the East Village, is taken from mourning blog *EV Grieve*. I use the term “mourning blog” to describe a blogging practice that defines itself against gentrification and is concerned with documenting change, writing obituaries for closing shops and empty lots, a virtual gathering ground for mourners of a city that is disappearing. As described in *New York Magazine*, Jeremiah Moss, author of *Jeremiah’s Vanishing New York*, “is the defender of all the undistinguished hunks of masonry that lend the streets their rhythm and give people a place to live and earn a living: bodegas, curio stores, a metalworking shop in Soho, diners, and dingy bars.” (Davidson 2).

The city, then, is above all a representation. By analogy with the now familiar idea that the nation provides us with an ‘imagined community’, I would argue that the city constitutes an imagined environment. (Donald 422)

Arjun Appadurai, in *Modernity at Large*, describes how “electronic propinquity” such as that afforded to us by these hyper-local blogs, produces a sense of placeless-ness, but nothing could be further from the truth (Appadurai 29). Reading EVGrieve from my room in Poughkeepsie I am reminded of how far I am from “home.” Each time I emerge for the first time from the subway on Delancey Street I am conscious that I am returning to a neighborhood that has changed somehow. Translating Benedict Anderson’s claim about print media’s relationship with nationalism to our current age means coming to understand how the hyperlocality of digital media redefines the *imagined environment* of the city. My virtual interaction with the imagined

East Village, then is constructed as a conversation between my own memories and those of blogger Jeremiah Moss and others.

Liveblogging the Apocalypse

As spaces for the activation of collective memory, both Jeremiah's Vanishing New York and EVGreive have established mourning as a political practice in order to mobilize the community against development, or at least call their attention to it. They establish "mourning" as a language and a metaphor for which to describe the very local, emotional and tangible effects of neoliberal hypermodernity. Jeremiah's blog, "reads like an obituary to a disappearing city, with Astor place as the 'epicenter of evil.'" (Berger 2007). This obituary however, is one which since its birth in 2008 is constantly being added to. It does not seek to provide closure for mourning but instead seeks to add to the wreckage, so to speak. The notion of "evil" that is brought up here is pervasive throughout Jeremiah's blog, which he admits is "a kind of outlet for my most curmudgeonly self, for the anger and powerlessness I experienced watching the city I love disappear. Writing is a kind of action, as opposed to passivity.... As Jeremiah, I can be staunch." (Waterman 2009). Jeremiah's blog began as a novel titled "Jeremiah's Lamentations," which also provided him with a personality to embody in his now extended project. He chose the pseudonym because Jeremiah was "the prophet of doom who nobody listened to until it was too late" (Berger 2007).

This rhetoric of prophecy and apocalypse constructs the East Village as not a noir filmset, but rather a blockbuster action flick, in which we simultaneously dwell and watch an apocalyptic narrative unfold. In the post 9/11 world, we are familiar with suggestions like those by Žižek that we have dreamt of such destruction long before it occurred (Žižek 2002). Surely, the New York Apocalypse has seen its fair share of representation in Hollywood, in films ranging from *King Kong* and *Cloverfield*, to natural disaster films like *The Day After Tomorrow*, to 2012 blockbusters *The Amazing Spiderman* and *The Dark Knight Rises* in which the Williamsburg bridge is destroyed, and *The Avengers* in which Grand Central Terminal was the site of the major action scene. The now hundred year old station (2013), it is important to note, is the granddaddy of the Historic Preservation movement in New York City, when in 1956, plans to raze it in favor of an 80 story tower by designed by I.M. Pei garnered (perhaps for the first time) within the hearts of New Yorkers a wish for permanence in an ever changing city. Jackie O, who was an integral part of the establishment of the Landmarks Commission which saved the terminal in 1965 said it best herself:

Is it not cruel to let our city die by degrees, stripped of all her proud monuments, until there will be nothing left of all her history and beauty to inspire our children? If they are not inspired by the past of our city, where will they find the strength to fight for her future? Americans care about their past, but for short term gain they ignore it and tear down everything that matters. Maybe... this is the time to take a stand, to reverse the tide, so that we won't all end up in a uniform world of steel and glass boxes. (Roberts 181)

Penn Station was not so lucky, as it succumbed to progress in 1963. In what has been perhaps the greatest architectural tragedy of American history, the station went out “not with a bang, or a whimper, but to the rustle of real estate stock shares.” (Huxtable 405). Lower East

Side landmarks may not be as grand as the twin stations of midtown, but, as David Freeland notes, these “quotidian places... might allow us to see and appreciate how New Yorkers actually lived, are often overlooked as sites of preservation” (Freeland xvi).

“Aware that time and progress were conspiring against these structures... Soon I came to understand buildings as having lives much like people, imbued with human histories that encompasses birth, growth, tragedy, and finally, when their usefulness has been outlived, deterioration and death (Freeland xxvii).

Imaginings such as these situate us well within the questions we are trying to approach, ones about the city in relation to its history, and therefore we can point (critically) to what we call “Preservation” as a starting point for the projects and thought experiments carried out in this paper.

In 2008, luxury construction projects all over the city came grinding to a halt as a result of the recession. The city was littered with half-built structures, empty lots, and demolition sites, some of which are only being picked up by developers today. New York Times Architecture critic Nicolai Ouroussof’s request, in this moment, was that we shift our attention from construction to destruction. “Instead of crying over what can’t be built, why not refocus our energies on knocking down the structures that not only fail to bring us joy, but actually bring us down?” (September 28, 2008). Where do we aim the wrecking ball next?

Walter Benjamin’s prophecy was that “Mankind[’s] ... self alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order” (1986:242). This is abundantly clear in Hollywood, but also, clearly, in the realms real estate and architectural criticism. Moving back downtown, both Jeremiah and the author behind EVGrieve have the opportunity in their writing to compile and narrate these events as they

unfold. They are in some sense, liveblogging the apocalypse, writing away as we soak up the all sad news in a state of distraction, ensuring that rather than experiencing it as an aesthetic pleasure, we consider the very real consequences that destruction has on the city, its people, and its history.

Signs of the Apocalypse

“We’re losing another bookstore. It’s an apocalypse.” (JVNY Thursday, August 2, 2012)

“Is artisanal Brooklyn a step forward for food or a sign of the apocalypse?” (JVNY Tuesday, April 17, 2012)

“Doomsday is upon us- can the Manhattan Apocalypse be far behind?” (JVNY Thursday January 6, 2011)

“Professional caregivers often talk about “empathy burnout”... You feel like everything you do is futile in the face of an unalterable horror- like death or serious illness- so you stop feeling. This is how I feel towards Coney Island. When I think of the apocalypse that is going on there right now, I disengage... Truth is, right now I never want to visit Coney Island again.” (JVNY Thursday, September 30, 2010)

“(On a visit to the New York City panorama) I felt my heart racing with anxiety, as if I would somehow lose control of myself and topple into Brooklyn, taking Downtown Manhattan with me, inadvertently realizing a New York Apocalypse fantasy in miniature” (JVNY Thursday, April 2, 2009)

“Today’s sign of the Apocalypse: 7-Eleven on St. Mark’s Place now delivering” (EVG Saturday, January 19, 2013)

“How many more Subways will arrive here before the apocalypse?” (EVG Thursday, January 12, 2012)

Blogging as Melancholic Practice

An Urban Convalescence (excerpts)

“Out for a walk, after a week in bed,
I find them tearing up part of my block”

And, chilled through, dazed and lonely, join the dozen
In meek attitudes, watching a huge crane
Fumble luxuriously in the filth of years.
Her jaws dribble rubble...

As usual in New York, everything is torn down
Before you have had time to care for it...

Head bowed, at the shrine of noise, let me try to recall
What building stood here. Was there a building at all?

Wait. Yes. Vaguely a presence rises
Some five floors high, of shabby stone
—Or am I confusing it with another one
In another part of town, or of the world?—”

- James Merrill

In his 1962 poem, “An Urban Convalescence,” James Merrill captures the sentiments of loss and bewilderment that Jeremiah Moss echoes in his visions of the Apocalypse (Merrill 21). The image of the crane and the act of demolition plays a central role in the imaginations of both authors. We have come to accept this image is one that is all too prevalent in New York City, but which, as we see, has long occupied a defining place in the imagination and identity of the New Yorker. What makes Merrill’s account most interesting is his struggle with his own memory. There is so much destruction in his city that he can no longer remember the building that once stood there.

“As usual in New York, everything is torn down before you have had time to care for it”

Pete Hamill, in his memoir *Downtown: My Manhattan*, describes this phenomenon as “the New York version of nostalgia”, which is “not simply about lost buildings or their presence in the youth of the individuals who lived with them. It involves an almost fatalistic acceptance of the permanent presence of loss. Nothing will ever stay the same.” (Hamill 19). Permanent presence is a key term here, as I believe that blogging seeks to have the same kind of existence. Situated within the deep tradition of New York nostalgia narratives, the blog allows the feeling of loss that is so key to the New Yorker identity to occupy a ubiquitous place in our everyday lives. Rather than remaining a subjective process, the public writing of the mourning blog demands reflection and contribution from the public who interacts not just by reading but also in the form of comments, which are always extensive.

The form of the blog itself is one which is hyper-present but which is always looking to the past. It is simultaneously concerned with the instant dissemination of information and with the archival of those updates. The blogger, in turn, as an urban agent, is in a mode of highly productive hyperattentiveness. The anonymous figure behind *EV Grieve* describes his experience as a blogger, constantly thinking and writing about the permanence presence of loss:

I'm the same person as before, but now it just takes me longer to run an errand. I'll meander more and scope every storefront, apartment entrance, etc. At times I'm worried might find my behavior a bit daft... I've sort of lost my speedy NYC gait. (Waterman 2009).

Like Walter Benjamin's *flaneur*, who combines “the casual eye of the stroller with the purposeful gaze of the detective,” the blogger has emerged as a model for 21st century urban subjectivity (Rignall 113). But those streets which Benjamin's *flaneur* regards with curiosity and wonder, the blogger walks with a sense of paranoia. A January 2, 2013 post on EV Grieve, titled

“East Village Stories to watch in 2013” lists the many sites which have the blogger’s constant attention (2013 b.):

- The reopening of St. Brigid’s on Avenue B
- Filling in the Mystery Lot
- The end (and new beginning) of Astor Place
- 84 Third Ave. grows taller
- A dorm for 35 Cooper Square
- Something* for 100 Avenue A
- Development for the former Mary Help of Christians school, church, and lot
- New housing at the former Cabrini Center
- David Schwimer moves to East Sixth Street
- Welcoming a 7-Eleven to Avenue A
- New Development for East 14th Street
- A new bar-restaurant at the former Holiday Cocktail Lounge

In Mourning and Melancholia, Freud describes the melancholic figure as an individual who “has a keener eye for the truth than other people who are not melancholic” (Freud 246). This speaks to Jeremiah Moss’ pseudonym, which, as mentioned before, is derived from the biblical prophet Jeremiah. In his “Lamentations” (below, Moss 2007), he chastises “moneyed suckers” for their greed and speaks of his pilgrimage to sites “that bore the obvious look of inevitable doom.” Jeremiah has constructed for himself not just a pseudonym, but a figure that allows him to take a position of moral superiority: the prophet speaks to and for God. It is not narcissism that drives Jeremiah to this position but rather, as Freud explains, symptoms of melancholia, including “insistent communicativeness, a desire which “finds satisfaction in self-exposure.” (Freud 247). The exposure through an anonymous online identity of pure, unfiltered, emotion speaks to the value of the blog as a melancholic platform. Jeremiah’s writing is not just prophetic, it is rhetorical. It is political. His final prophecy, which states that “In the end, we will

Jeremiah's Lamentations

"They are everywhere, the predatory derrick cranes, angling over corniced rooftops, ten stories high, the sunlight gleaming on their latticed booms"

"Their hooks dangling like baited lures over the streets where moneyed suckers stroll dreaming of luxury condo lives..."

"Up there, the new New Yorkers nest, oblivious in their glossy towers, as down below the lower buildings slump beneath rusted tin entablatures, bricks shrunk and shivering, waiting their turn to crumble to dust."

"For a while, I was making pilgrimages to sites that bore the obvious look of inevitable doom, following rumors of closure before the doors were locked for good.... I took notes and snapshots and watched them all breathe their last gasps before my eyes. I could not reach them all in time. They passed away much too fast. And then they began to go even faster."

"In the end, we will all be lost in the pile of this vanishing city"

all be lost in the pile of this vanishing city," is a warning and a call for readers to imagine this vanishing city, and to reflect on their own place within it.

Judith Butler's reading of Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia*, in *A Precarious Life*, is incredibly helpful in helping me unpack the political underpinnings of grief, which we conventionally understand as an internal subjective processes. For Butler, grief can be made into a resource for politics by forcing us to reflect on the core of our being as it exists in relation to the world around us. Grief, for Butler is:

"...the slow process by which we develop a point of identification with suffering itself. The disorientation of grief- "Who have I become?" or, indeed, "What is left of me?" "What is it in the Other that I have lost?"- posits the "I" in the mode of unknowingness. (2004: 30)

I suggest that much of our identity is constructed spatially- that the city and the architecture around us mediates our everyday experience and therefore acts as a stable repository for our memories- both individual, collective, and historical. The loss of these places, and thus of the stability of everyday life, requires a shift in the individual's subjective ordering of the world,

and thus an “[agreement] to undergo a transformation... the full result of which one cannot know in advance.” (Butler 21). I am interested in what Butler calls “the transformative effect of loss,” because when we mourn the loss of a beloved place in the city, for instance, we too often focus on the physical and economic transformations that this brings rather than the transformation this brings about in ourselves. Here, it is key to understand the role of memory in keeping alive a world of the past, not to dwell in statically, but to produce in the imaginations of the larger public who may have forgotten an alternative and now invisible world. When we ask ourselves “What do we grieve?” we question the structures and social formations that define our lives, and open up a space for imagining alternatives.

The disorientation that comes with loss manifests itself as a state of *being lost* when that loss is spatial or architectural. Landmarks, in the sense that Kevin Lynch describes in his *Image of the City*, are the “ innumerable signs, store fronts, trees, doorknobs, and other urban detail, which fill in the image of most observers” (Lynch 100). They are the visual aspects of the city that “imprint” themselves on our memories, and therefore they are the way we navigate space, give directions, or even map out an image of the city for ourselves. The loss of an urban landmark, (which need not be a monumental or official marker) causes an instant disparity between the real world and the world of our mental map or “image of the city.” Benjamin describes the experience of disorientation with the vision that “to lose oneself in a city... as one loses oneself in a forest... calls for a quite different schooling. Then, signboard and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks, or bars must speak to the wanderer like a cracking twig under his feet in the forest” (1986:8). Heidegger, too, sees the value of the *uncanny* as a fundamental mode of existence. The German term that Heidegger uses- *unheimlich*- is normally used to describe fear,

or *angst*, but its literal meaning is more like “un-homelike.” His is the same discomfort that Butler points to as the transformative potential of loss.

All things, and we with them, sink into indifference. But not in the sense that everything simply disappears. Rather, in the very drawing away from us as such, things turn toward us. This drawing away of everything in its totality, which in angst is happening all around us, haunts us. There is nothing to hold on to. The only thing that remains and comes over us--in this drawing away of everything--is this "nothingness." (Bramann 2009)

The Poetics of (Urban) Space

Here I would like to go back to my own nostalgia narrative, one which we can now understand as an exercise in reflective nostalgia. The time of which I speak, roughly 2005 to 2009, were the years I attended the High School of Art & Design in East Midtown. My recollections of the East Village, then, are tinged with a mourning for lost youth. It is important here to define within the context of this study the distinction between mourning, as a reaction to the onslaught of time, and melancholy, as a reaction to urban manifestations of finance capital. While the former is an inevitable experience of living in the city the latter accelerates this process at an inhuman scale. I would say that there is probably a bit of the two in the nostalgia narrative, but that this is not something unique to my own. Because both “early gentrifiers” and long-time residents have “grown up” and seen the neighborhood change simultaneously, they see the spaces of their youth disappear, perhaps into spaces for a new generation, but more often than not, into banks or chain stores.

For Gaston Bachelard, the childhood home is a space deeply embedded in our unconscious. “If I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in

peace.” (Bachelard 6). The mystery of one’s childhood home lies in the fact that often, one no longer has access to it. Unless it is a home in which one’s parents still live, we can access it only from the exterior, on a walk through the neighborhood. Watching from the curb, one imagines the lives that play out in the rooms which we once inhabited, the floors on which we walked, the walls on which our family pictures once hung. My own memories, the spaces I grieve, then, are also intimate spaces of my childhood that I have left behind. “Of course, thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed, and if the house is a bit elaborate, if it has a cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated. All our lives we come back to them in our daydreams” (Bachelard 8). Unlike childhood homes, urban spaces, and especially youth spaces like Astor Place, lack the attics and corridors that Bachelard traverses in his daydreams. But I would argue that the streets of the city have this same capacity to “house” memory. All built space does. Flanerie, for Benjamin, “can transform Paris into once great interior- a house whose rooms are the quartiers, no less clearly demarcated by thresholds than are real rooms.” (Benjamin 422). And although the streets of St. Mark’s place lack the covered arcades of Benjamin’s Paris, its many “thresholds” and storefronts and street corners demarcate space (however subjectively) into distinct *loci*. But what sets the urban stage apart from the house is its lack of permanence. Regardless, we live our lives with the expectation of continuity. The city, dynamic and disjointed as it may be, is a home like any other, we expect continuity within at least a generation. The dynamism of the city is a kind of poetry in itself, one that reflects the character of memory much more closely than does the home. And although, in Bachelard’s words, “memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of

home,” they occupy a much more precious place in the mind as it is the only place in which they can dwell (Bachelard 6). These are memories that are always on the brink of being wiped away.

Chapter 4: Toward an Archive of Urban Memory

Postcards from the EV: Consuming Memory (but is that a bad thing?)

In *Selling the Lower East Side*, Christopher Mele describes the gentrification of the city as the production of desire, or the consumption of consumption, in which “the neighborhood’s funkiness seems to include graffiti-covered buildings, garbage strewn by the homeless collecting redeemables and heavy drug traffic... the allure of bohemian decadence keeps housing prices up.” (Mele 294). If we understand *desire* as the driving force of gentrification, by relation we can consider *production* a means by which to control it. I am interested in the *desire* of memory, desires which seek permanence and which long for lost grace, and in the production of “spaces of hope” that archive feeling and allow for reflection. As Harvey puts it:

Memory, unlike history, can “flash up” uncontrollably to reveal new possibilities.... And if, as Balzac once put it, “hope is a memory that desires” then the creation of a “space of hope” requires that memory be internalized there at the same time as a space is left open for the expression of desire. (2004 14)

For Bachelard, “we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost” (Bachelard 6). I want to shift focus, for the rest of this project, away from attempting to be a historian of change and from grappling with the onslaught of time, and instead toward a mode of poesis.

Marita Sturken, who begins her study of memory kitsch in *Tourists of History* by examining a pair of snow globes commemorating the World Trade Center and Oklahoma City bombing, suggests that these mass-produced objects “offer a sense of containment and control over an event; the very object-ness of these snow globes narrates particular stories...” (Sturken 2). The enclosure of such urban scenes offers its owner a chance ‘visit’ it by giving it a shake

and watching the snow settle down on the scene. Once the scene settles, so is the mind of the visitor.

In Italo Calvino's novel *Invisible Cities*, an imaginary Marco Polo tells an imaginary Kublai Kahn of his travels to the many cities throughout his vast empire. One of the cities of which Polo tells is called Fedora, and in it he found a building with a crystal globe in each room. The globes contain a blue model of a city, each a different Fedora, representing the many forms the city *could have* taken (Calvino 32).

Cities and Desire 4 (excerpt)

In every age someone, looking at Fedora as it was, imagined the way of making it an ideal city, but while he constructed his miniature model, Fedora was already no longer the same as before, and what had been until yesterday a possible future became only a toy in a glass globe.

-Italo Calvino

There is power in the production of the miniature and the model; it is a dream materialized, built to scale. I have imagined what my own crystal globe of the East Village might be like, a manifestation of not just my desires but also of my anxieties. I have not chosen a few "landmark" buildings and housed them in in a glass dome for safe keeping. Doing so would give in, in an almost defeatist gesture, to the idea that they will soon be gone, that they need to be contained. Instead I have picked out some of the newest and largest buildings in the area surrounding Astor Place. By choosing to contain the new buildings in a glass globe. By historicizing the present, or the very recent past, I appropriate the events and objects, as Sturken's snow globes encapsulate instances and places of tragedy.

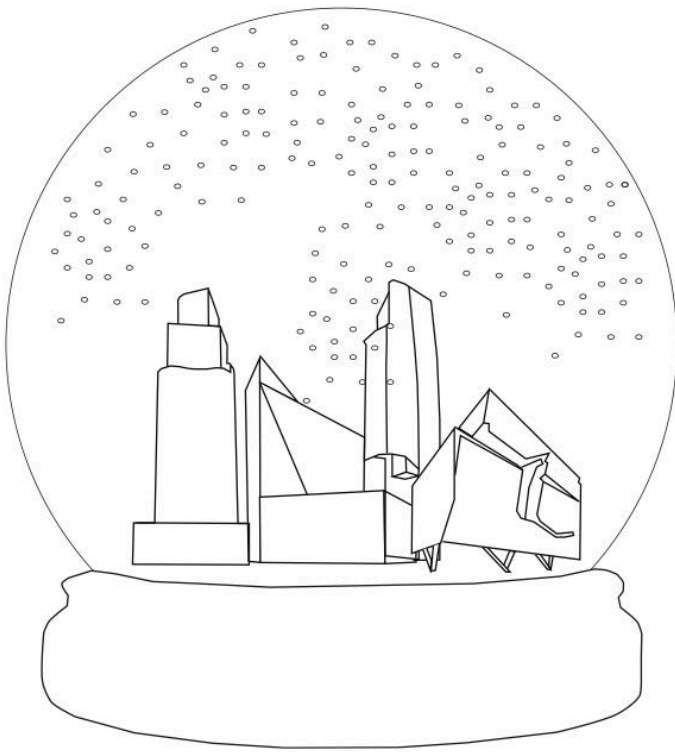


Figure 12:
Astor Place snow globe



Figure 13:
Astor Place postcards

The concept that a person has of an urban artifact will always differ from the concept of someone who ‘lives’ that same urban artifact... To ‘live’ an artifact is to appropriate it, to make it one’s own (Connerton 32)

It is through the production of artifacts and through appropriation of the symbols and images that comprise memory that we can begin to redefine this moment for ourselves and for the city. Just as for Derrida, “There is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory,” these projects take hold of the past and choose specific moments, things, and places that we wish to relegate to the past or re-imagine the future of (quoted in Manoff 9). More eloquently put, *Stuff = Power*: Marita Sturken asks, “What aspects of American culture specifically encourage a “tourist” relationship to history? How can the tourist be seen as an icon of how American culture relates to, processes, and consumes history? (Sturken 4). The tourist relationship with history is a double edged sword. The musealization of the city can be a dangerous thing. Our experience

becomes one of a very controlled and curated space. But the museum space also has the potential to make us confront the onslaught of time. In another one of Marco Polo's cities, Maurillia, where visitors must examine the city as it appears in old post cards, the ubiquitous souvenir that frames iconic locations and offers us the chance to send it across the world. But those who visit Maurillia, Polo tells Kahn, must proclaim their preference for the postcard city, and regardless of the prosperity of the current city mourn the "lost grace" of the old (Calvino 30).

Cities and Memory 5

Through what it has become, one can look back with nostalgia at what it was..... It is pointless to ask whether the new ones are better or worse than the old, since there is no connection between them, just as the old post cards do not depict Maurilia as it was, but a different city which, by chance, was called Maurilia, like this one.
(Italo Calvino)

The notion of a "different city" by the same name is crucial to my somewhat ironic take on Sturken's analysis of tourist-history. I base these projects upon the understanding of this moment as one in which I can inhabit the mode of being a tourist in my own city, as the "East Village" becomes "Midtown South" (NYT). I can relate to the distance and objectivity with which a tourist or outsider may view the city, and by using objects and media of the tourist-gaze I can approach a mode of critical subjectivity with which memories and futures of the East Village can be manipulated.

Tenememories: A Wunderkammer /Memory Palace



Figure 14: Tenememories, James Estrada 2013

Marita Sturken's study of memory objects has driven me to pursue this mode of sentimental production as a testing ground for my ideas. Having already thought through "kitsch" as a metaphor for the memory object, including the snow globe and the post card, I turn to the concept of the Wunderkammer as a spatial construct and as a mode of memory storage for my final project entitled *Tenememories*, a cabinet of four drawers, scaled and decorated to mimic the form of the tenement building (Fig. 14). *Tenememories* is a spatial argument in support of the idea that our memories are stored in urban space. Each drawer of the cabinet represents a corner of the Lower East Side, and is divided (like a card catalog) in the pattern of the street grid of Manhattan, which originates in the East Village at 1st Avenue and 1st Street (see Appendix). Dividers in each drawer provide slots that form city blocks into which site specific memories, images, data and anecdotes are inserted in the form of board-game style cards. Four drawers, four corners of the neighborhood, and four distinct journeys through space, mediated as a Cartesian representation of subjective spatial experience.

The purpose of this project is to present the stories and images which I have come across in my research, not as an historical narrative, but rather as pieces of a physical location that serves as an archive of diverse memories. If nothing else, the aim of this thesis has been to spur an often very personal conversation that involves the sharing of memories as they relate to beloved spaces, lost, endangered, or otherwise. I have seen this manifested online in various forms, but the literal *weight* of all this data was lost on the hypermediated form of the blog. Comments posted in response to specific blog posts do not speak to the site to which they were directed, nor do they speak to neighboring sites, or to neighboring comments. My project, then, remediates the hypermediacy of the spatially located blog, by re-presenting it and re-organizing

it through the spatial metaphors of the Wunderkammer. As such, it requires participation from a larger community, just as the blog does. I have already started to have such conversations with the Vassar community through the overwhelmingly enthusiastic responses I have received from professors, students and alumni who have contacted me after seeing fliers I placed around campus which ask the public to share their “EAST VILLAGE MEMORIES.” All of the “data” I collected in these conversations is represented on the cards that make up my archive. Whenever I interact with memories that are not my own in these conversations with others, I relate to Marco Polo whose past “changes according to the route he has followed [upon] arriving at each new city” and in exploring those other cities “finds again a past of his that he did not know he had” (Calvino 28). Sharing memories of the past, as Polo does with Kahn, is itself the act that constructs a past. Collecting these recollections, then, is just the first step in the the construction of a collective memory which gives attention to the diverse world that the Lower East Side has been across time and space. It is through interaction with this microcosm that I hope individuals can reconstruct a tangible image of the vanishing city.

This is why the Wunderkammer is so important, as it represents the origins of the museum and allows us to trace the institutional histories produced by the museum to a much more personal and imaginative place. Whatever its form, the “wonder chamber” or “curiosity cabinet” or “room of wonder” is meant to be a microcosm, an object which holds symbolic control as an archive of its subject. My Wunderkammer is an archive for memory, but its spatial logic is a reproduction of the streets, and thereby it is also a representation of the city made up of a variety of spatially located fragments.



Fig 15: Dutch Cabinet

Fig 16: Cabinet of Curiosities



Dutch baroque cabinets, or Wunderkammern, are highly ornate pieces of wood furniture, housed in palaces and churches containing upwards of fifty drawers and panels, each of which is decorated by a perspectival landscape or genre painting. Inside the drawers of the Wunderkammer was an immense collection precious “wonders,” rubies, art pieces, animal bones and other “objects of amazement” human and divine made (Olalquiaga 2005). In *Remediation*, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin use the example of the cabinet to suggest that

older media forms “re-mediated” by new media (Bolter and Grusin 35). They speak of the hypermediacy of baroque cabinets, which much like a “windowed” graphic-user-interface, presents the user with an interactive external image which he or she can “open” to explore a set of contents that have been codified as corresponding to that image. In its movement from Renaissance palaces to the bourgeois salons of the nineteenth century, the Wunderkammer became The Cabinet of Curiosities, and in turn, its neatly subdivided drawers and shelves become the organizing principle



Fig 17: Sir John Soane's Museum

that gives way to the scientific classification of the natural world. Its purpose became exhibition of natural curiosities, that is, taxidermed animals organized by genus and species, minerals organized by elemental composition, and so on.

The next iteration of the Wunderkammer, particularly interesting because of its architectural nature, interprets the word “Wunderkammer” as “Room of Wonder.” Most notable is the 1809 home and

museum of neo-classical architect Sir John Soane in London, which represents one man's desire to devote the space of an entire home to the collection and exhibition of some 253 architectural models, of classical architectural details, and some 30,000 architectural drawings, and 700 antiquities including an Egyptian sarcophagus (Sir John Soane's Museum) Its purpose, like the Cabinet of Curiosities, is to serve as an educational tool for students and teachers of architecture. But Soane's archive is less of a classification system and more of a *Gesamkunstwerk*, or total work of art, in which juxtaposition of architectural fragments (Fig. 17) produced a space dominated by vast contrasts time and space which would enthrall the imagination. The work that Soane put in to designing his home and its spaces was meant to be a reflection of the architect's essence.

Foucault discusses the nature of the organizing principles of the archive in an analysis of Jorge Luis Borges' description of a Chinese encyclopedia, which organizes the animal world into the following categories:

(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off" look like flies' (Foucault xv)

Entertained by the arbitrary nature of these categories, Foucault reflects on “the disconcerting effect of the proximity of extremes, or... with the sudden vicinity of things that have no relation to each other,” and tells us that really, the creation of categories is always somehow absurd, as it codifies the world into linguistic terms that are much too impoverished to represent its totality (Foucault xvi). The building pictured in Fig. 18, 35 Cooper square, is something out of Borges’ encyclopedia. It shares spatial proximity with the buildings directly adjacent to it (Cooper Union to the left and Standard Hotel to the right), but is deeply removed in time, in meaning, and use. The “proximity of extremes” is what makes the city an exciting place to begin with, but, as is the case with 186 year old 35 Cooper Square, wedged between two brand-new buildings, the city



Figure 18:
35 Cooper Square
1825- 2011

tends towards those extremes which are more profitable. The building was demolished in 2011 and will soon become a thirteen story dormitory (EV Grieve c).

Using place, that is, Cartesian location, as the organizing principle of my archive, I also speak to a method of mental archival known as the memory palace. The “Memory Palace”, or *method of loci*, as described by Frances A. Yates in *The Art of Memory*, is a mnemonic device originating in classical Greek rhetoric. Orators, by imagining an intricate architectural space of many rooms, nooks and crannies, could commit entire speeches to memory and remember specific details with unfailing accuracy by “placing” things in a particular *locus* (Yates 2). “We have to think of the ancient orator as moving in imagination through his memory *whilst* he is making his speech” (Yates 3).

Quintilian describes the process:

Some place is chosen of the largest possible extent and characterised by the utmost possible variety, such as a spacious house divided into a number of rooms. Everything of note therein is carefully committed to the memory, in order that the thought may be enabled to run through all the details without let or hindrance... The first thought is placed, as it were, in the forecourt; the second, let us say, in the living-room; the remainder are... entrusted not merely to bedrooms and parlours, but even to the care of statues and the like... as soon as the memory of the facts requires to be revived, all these places are visited in turn and the various deposits are demanded from their custodians, as the sight of each recalls the respective details (Quintilian XI.2 18-19).

The method is essentially an exercise in the spatial grounding of the symbols and images by which we speak and think. Unlike a list, which is linear and merely sequential, the method of loci offers its user a coherent image of a whole in which a set of images or objects are related and thereby more easily solidified in memory. By placing each memory of my archive in a specific

box, I am also committing it to memory. Regardless of what that “memory” may be of, or what form it may take, once it is given its place in the archive, it is also permanently linked to a corresponding place in the world. Through juxtaposition with those memories which surround it (but are also neatly bound by their own box), we create a memory palace, a space through which we can wander, made up of things remembered, things we consider precious, endangered, or which we wish were still here.

What I have spoken of as being done in a house, can equally well be done in connexion with public buildings, a long journey, the ramparts of a city, or even pictures. Or we may even imagine such places to ourselves. We require, therefore, places, real or imaginary, and images or symbols, which we must, of course, invent for ourselves. (Quintilian XI.2, 21)

It is clear to me in the following recollection from my own memory that in order to narrate “when we return to a place after considerable absence, we not merely recognise the place itself, but remember things that we did there, and recall the persons whom we met and even the unuttered thoughts which passed through our minds when we were there before” (Quintilian XI. 2, 17). By imagining a mental stroll through Tompkins Square, I conjure up memories of specific days, smells, people, and foods. Decontextualized, the objects which I recall would comprise a absurd list (pizza, rain, Blackfoot Indian, Janet Jackson, 7-Eleven, Hare Krishna). But in my own mind, those things are intricately organized by a spatial principle which is the layout of Tompkins Square. The intuitive functioning of these memories of place is what I seek to replicate in my own archive. The urban landscape, like Bachelard’s house, is also a place for daydreaming.

Tompkins Square Park. Sushi Village. Nino's Pizza. A bus stop and a playground. There are usually people walking their dogs over here. There is a long, long line of people waiting for food and I just found out that the people giving out the food are from Food not Bombs. There are shrubs? You enter the park and on the left you can enter the playground and it used to not look as communist/futurist/ stark as it does now. We were like fifteen and we played on the slides and the swings and for some reason I don't remember there being any children there which is strange. It must have been rainy because it was probably like March or April because that's what it smelled like- rain and beer and grass and that's what St. Mark's smells like to me. That is the best season except for the summer when it's usually too hot anyway. Also New Yorkers are so fed up after the winter that once it hits 50 degrees it feels basically appropriate to go to parks and eat outside and do all that fun stuff again. We are sick of our coats but some of us may keep them on until May because we are cynical in that way. It was early spring and we laid on the astroturf in the playground. On sunnier days we sat in the grass at the center of Tompkins, but the patch of grass is fenced in and gated and only has one entrance and that seems really weird

to me right now. People do all sorts of things here but lately I feel like everyone sunbathes and reads but we would eat Entenman's cake bought at Kmart and we probably ate it with our hands and rolled around in the grass like idiots. There's a small pine tree in here that gets Christmas lights put on it every year. We were sitting in a circle I think and we were sitting near the entrance. A man named Sincere sat down and he told us he was Blackfoot Indian and that he killed a panther with his bare hands during an initiation ritual with his tribe. Sincere looked like rapper Flavor Flav. We were scared I think but there's nothing you can do when crazy people talk to you in the East Village you just listen to them and go with it. We also talked to (or got talked to by) an Eastern European drunk who was always passed out on one stoop or another and he would always call you beautiful. I haven't seen him in years. I have s e e n S t o r m y recently and he looked like a totally normal. Stormy was super tall and gay and dirty and a squatter-type but he was also in his mid to late thirties and was more of a full blown punk than a teenage runaway like you usually see sitting on Avenue A (update, they now sit in front of 7-11 on St. Mark's). Stormy wore a leather hat like Janet Jackson and loved to say that when

he ordered Chinese he always asked for “cream of sum yung gai.” On the south west end of Tompkins there is the bum section where all the drunks and the crusties and the old men sit around the chess tables and occupy rows and rows of benches. A little further up is the Hare Krishna tree and the open space where punk shows go on sometimes.

Conclusion

“Memory’s images, once they are fixed in words, are erased,” Polo said, “Perhaps I am afraid of losing Venice all at once, if I speak of it. Or perhaps, speaking of other cities, I have already lost it, little by little.”

-Italo Calvino

The carrying out of this project has been a difficult one, not in terms of its actual execution but rather in the cultivation of a language by which I can critically approach my memories. Memories change as they are told and retold. I now know, through a re-collection of the history of place, that the random punk shows I remember in Tompkins from my youth were memorials to the anniversary of the Tompkins Square Riots. I learned how precious of a space La Plaza Cultural really is and I came to appreciate the meaning of Loisaída as a place of the imagination where the value of space can be measured by the commitment and love that poet Bimbo Rivas shows to his “lady fair.” These discoveries changed the way I interact with my city and the way that I imagine it. I hope that with the archive I have produced in Tenememories will allow me to do the same for others who may often feel they are, as Jeremiah Moss tells us, “lost in the pile of this vanishing city.”

Appendix: Tenememory Cards



Eagle from Old Penn Station



Edward Minskoff 51 Astor Pl

One of the smallest buildings I have developed in the last 25 years.... But I think it's the coolest. It's not just another tall box. It will have an identity. It's going to be very, very, very visible. It's going to be an iconic building.

February 01, 2012 By Adam Piore

http://therealdeal.com/issues_articles/astor-master/



Memory: 20 St. Mark's Pl

My grandparents Bela David and Adele Barna lived at 20 St. Marks place in the '30s and ran a rooming house. 1930 census lists Bela, Adele, Eugene (my father), a stepson Barak and 28 roomers residing there and listed as "household". They both were immigrants from Hungary. When my father was alive he would point out the building where he lived when we visited New York City.

— Bradley Barna

December 22, 2011, 3:11 pm

<http://eastvillage.thelocal.nytimes.com/2011/03/14/looking-back-20-st-marks-place/>

8. THE DOM, 19-23 St. Marks Place. 777-2210. Everything poor, unpretentious Stanley touches, lately, seems to turn into cash and Herald Tribune copy. He started The Dom, a bare six months ago, as a groovy get-together place for the neighborhood cats and chicks who dig dancing and Polish food at Avenue A prices. Somehow another element snuck in and made this sweet scheme impossible. To discourage the strong-arm types who have absolutely no cool whatsoever, Stanley has had to charge an entrance charge to the dance floor in the large back room. It's still pretty packed, though weekend minimums are \$3 per couple, \$2 on weekdays. Insiders can get club cards that cut the cost lower. As long as he was going this route anyway, Stanley hired the 9th Circle's ex-cook and installed a full line of food--Polish dishes from 95¢; a steak dinner tops the menu at \$3. On weekends there is a \$1 minimum at the bar. Beer 50¢ and mixed drinks start at 75¢. Stanley's traditional hot sandwiches are still 50¢ (something is sacred). Dancing starts at 8:30 and this is by far the liveliest discotheque in the city. Breakfast served at 12:30 a.m. Bar from 4 p.m. - 4 a.m.



Jared Kushner

325 East 10th Street on Tompkins Square Park, 329, 331, 333 and 335 East 9th Street, 118, 120-122, 195, 199, 201 and 203 East 4th Street, between Avenue B and Second Avenue,

History: 20 St. Mark's Place

When it was conceived in the 1830's by developer Thomas E. Davis, 20 St. Marks was part of one of the first housing developments in New York. The house was sold on Dec. 19, 1831 to Daniel LeRoy, the husband of Susan Fish. The building's elegant architecture was not the only reason that No. 20 acquired historic status later in life. Susan Fish's mother, Elizabeth Stuyvesant Fish, was a descendant of Peter Stuyvesant, the last governor of New Netherland in the late seventeenth century. The walls, if they could talk, might tell tales of of New York's oldest and richest families in the 1830's....

<http://eastvillage.thelocal.nytimes.com/2011/03/14/looking-back-20-st-marks-place/>

Tompkins Square Park. Sushi Village. Nino's Pizza. A bus stop and a playground. I saw celebrity chef Aaron Sanchez here getting into a cab. There are usually people walking their dogs over here. There is a long long line of people waiting for food and I just found out that the people giving out the food are from Food not Bombs. There are shrubs? You enter the park and on the left you can enter the playground and it used to not look as communist/futurist/stark as it does now.

-JDE

We were like fifteen and we played on the slides and the swings and for some reason I don't remember there being any children there which is strange. It must have been rainy because it was probably like March or April because that's what it smelled like, like rain and beer and grass and that's what St. Mark's smells like to me that is the best season except for the summer when it's usually too hot anyway. Also New Yorkers are so fed up after the winter that once it hits 50 degrees it feels basically appropriate to go to parks and eat outside and do all that fun stuff again. We are sick of our coats but some of us may keep them on until May because we are cynical in that way. **-JDE**

It was early spring and we layed on the astroturf in the playground. On sunnier days we sat in the grass at the center of Tompkins, but the patch of grass is fenced in and gated and only has one entrance and that seems really weird to me right now. People do all sorts of things here but lately I feel like everyone sunbathes and reads but we would eat Entenman's cake bought at Kmart and we probably ate it with our hands and rolled around in the grass like idiots. There's a small pine tree in here that gets Christmas lights put on it every year.

-JDE

We were sitting in a circle I think and we were sitting near the entrance. A man named Sincere sat down and he told us he was Blackfoot Indian and that he killed a panther with his bare hands during an initiation ritual with his tribe. Sincere looked like rapper Flavor Flav. We were scared I think but there's nothing you can do when crazy people talk to you in the East Village you just listen to them and go with it. We also talked to (or got talked to by) an Eastern European drunk who was always passed out on one stoop or another and he would always call you beautiful. I haven't seen him in years.

-JDE

I have seen Stormy recently and he looked like a totally normal. Stormy was super tall and gay and dirty and a squatter but he was also in his mid to late thirties and was more of a full blown punk than a teenage runaway like you usually see sitting on Avenue A (update, they now sit in front of 7-11 on St. Mark's). Stormy wore a leather hat like Janet Jackson and loved to say that when he ordered Chinese he always asked for "cream of sum yung gai." On the south west end of Tompkins there is the bum section where all the drunks and the crusties and the old men sit around the chess tables and occupy rows and rows of benches.

-JDE

"The way I do it is I stand by *The Alamo* and scan the customers for the guys that are checking out the boxes on the far right—the gay stuff. If there's a hot piece perusing, I'll soon be cuh-ruising!"

"Hold up though. The Alamo? Are we talking Texas?"

"No, you uneducated slingbanger, you know that cube in Astor Place? That's its name. Earl sets up by the parking lot just to the south, on the corner of Astor Place and Cooper Square."

"Oh, dude, that's not a parking lot any more. Heh. Granted, you could still find dicks there. And lots and lots of assholes."

-<http://gawker.com/248124/past-over-the-astor-place-porn-vendor>

I'm an NYU student who lives in Coral Towers, that place above Duane Reede with the Buddy Booths. If you really want some action, just come into Coral and look into any of the adjacent buildings. There are perverts out there who watch us all the time. On Monday night my roommates and I faced a major problem. Our "peeping Tom," who has been watching us since the first week in September, took things too far. (His apartment is also backlit with a red light). He had binoculars and proceeded to take his shirt off, rub his stomach and press himself against the window for 3 hours. The RA on duty, two campus safety officers and the NYPD came to investigate. Turns out, this has been a problem before with onlookers from other surrounding buildings. The NYPD went to our peeper's apartment at 3am. Apparently his name is Todd and he received a stern warning.

<http://gawker.com/246763/nyus-coral-towers-dorm-has-peeping-toms?tag=past-over>

"Wig-stock. Wigstock! For years now there has been this gigantic gathering of drag queens, trannies, and all the other best people on stage on Labor Day. This year Lady Bunny has no money."

"Lady Bunny? Is she, like preppy English royalty?"

"No, merkinmouth, she's drag queen royalty. Back in the 1980s, after a late night at Pyramid, she and a bunch of others went over to Tompkins Square and just kept the party going, putting on a show for hours into the morning. One year later, they made the show into a dragstravaganza—Wigstock

<http://gawker.com/295116/the-death-of-wigstock?tag=past-over>

"Around 1 we head over to Palladium. We walk under all of those blinking bulbs on the marquee, pass the rope and kiss-kiss, hug-hug our way up to the bar. The music is way too electronica for us, but we still do our routine: Walk along the right side of the columns surrounding the dance floor. Look to see if we know the go-go boys, but there aren't even any dancing tonight and the pedestals are peopled with full-price entry types. From there we walk to the middle of the dance floor. The giant disco ball is up in the rafters and obviously not coming down to us. We stand there for a minute attracting attention, then head over to the left side of the stage to make fun of anyone we know making out in the dark over there." <http://gawker.com/259333/the-palladium?tag=past-over>

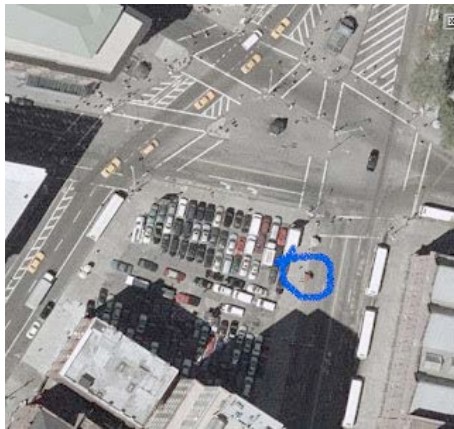
TUESDAY, JULY 17, 2007

[The Astor Place parking lot & the guy who sold used porn](#)

VANISHED: 2004

In this Google Earth satellite photo, you can see the old parking lot that used to front the Carl Fischer Music Publishers building. It was a pleasure to get off the subway on Broadway and head east for home, avoiding the crowds by cutting through this lot. On the sidewalk, milk crates full of used porn magazines (you can just make out [the porn peddler's red umbrella](#) circled in blue). A parking lot and a porn peddler may be odd things to wax nostalgic about, but certainly not when they've been replaced by a [monster](#).

<http://vanishingnewyork.blogspot.com/2007/07/astor-place-parking-lot-guy-who-sold.html>



Before the monster, before the parking lot, this is what stood on the spot, captured here by photographer Rudy Burckhardt. If anyone knows the name of the building behind the Coca-Cola billboard, please let me know



This vintage photo gives us a taste of what the old parking lot at Astor Place, now a highrise designed by architect Charles Gwathmey, used to look like in the 90's. In fact a year ago we posted a photo of some of this graffiti being revealed, particularly the fill-ins from MQUE from 1994 and S! and SP fill-ins up above by Sare and Spec TMK from around the same period. Here we get a better look at what else was in the lot in that period including a Cope2 fill-in at ground level as well as P.Soup, Deter, Rog Roc, Ant2, AME, Ark, and many more. This photo was snatched up from the Stop and Look tumblr and posted in the New York City thread in the Writers Forum by nycisdead106

<http://direct.12ozprophet.com/news/12ozprophet-forum-shot-of-the-day-astor-place-parking-lot-in-the-90s>

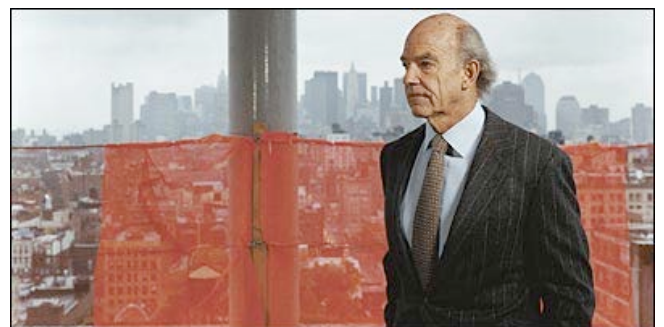


Bill said...

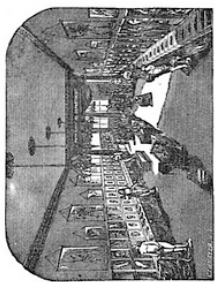
It's so true. Saturday May 1st I was in NYC to see Bernadette Mayer (one of Patti's peers) Read @ The Bowery Poetry Club. I walked down east 4th from 2nd and as I turned South on Bowery I had no idea where I was for a minute. The cityscape had changed so. I was freaked by the steel and glass and Blue & Cream on East 1st and thought to myself "It really is finished! It's all gone!"

MAY 3, 2010 AT 11:17 AM

Architect Charles Gwathmey atop his own contribution to the Manhattan Skyline. Credit: Mark Heithoff <http://nymag.com/nymag/features/10183/>



DR. KAHN'S
GRAND MUSEUM



ANATOMY, SCIENCE AND ART,
No. 688 BROADWAY,
Between Great Jones and Fourth Sts.,
NEW YORK.

ONE VISIT TO THIS UNRIVALLED AND
MAGNIFICENT PALACE OF WONDERS
WILL CONVINCE EVERY ONE OF THE
SUPERIORITY OF THIS INSTITUTION TO THAT OF EVERY OTHER.

FOR GENTLEMEN ONLY.
ADMISSION, 50 CENTS.
N.B.—Every Visitor to the Museum is presented with a copy of DR. KAHN'S
LECTURES. [Jan., 1876, &c.]

235 Bowery

<http://leshp.org/features/165-kahns-anatomical-museum-35-years-on-the-bowery>

Almost every day, my mother openly mourned the loss of her West Village studio apartment. The cross-section of Bleecker and Perry became almost mythic to my young ears, ears belonging to a reluctant Upper East Sider-- my parents moved to the neighborhood so that my sister and I would be zoned for good public schools. My mother always made it clear that a good public school education came at the cost of an enriching, thriving world of excitement, fun, and entertainment. Living on the East River, in the 80s, was almost akin to a suburban upbringing, and I learned that Downtown was the place to be. So at age thirteen, feeling out of place in my Good Public School, where all the girls wore low-rise flared jeans and Juicy Couture sweaters, I knew I needed to go downtown to find the perfect pair of jeans. Jeans that looked as though they'd been sprayed-on, pitch-black, the kind that make your legs look like sticks, also known as "skinny jeans," but they didn't become a staple of every Midwestern girl's closet for another two years or so.

When I was thirteen, only city kids could wear them because you could only get them at one place: Trash and Vaudeville, the legendary St. Mark's Place store for punks, metal heads, and middle-schoolers who were repulsed by anything the Popular Girls wore. The music at Trash and Vaudeville was thrashing; it made me feel alive. I walked down winding steps onto the first floor and marveled at the glamorously standoffish, bleached-hair, black-clad, tattooed cashiers and workers. I wanted to look just like them one day (my ideal has changed, but whenever I go to Trash and Vaudeville I still feel a tinge of longing, of wanting the cashiers to like me). When I went upstairs, rows of pants greeted me. The Pants. The perfect pair of black skinny jeans, before anyone called them by that name. An impossibly thin, worn-out looking Iggy Pop doppleganger (the famous Jimmy) prowled the floor, and chanced upon me, calling me "honey" and helping me find the right fit.

"Smaller, smaller" he urged, "you must be a zero." I wasn't a size zero, but the idea that Jimmy thought I could be still makes me smile (problematic as it may be that this satisfies me). I wore those jeans for four years until they ripped everywhere on the crotch. Now you can get black skinny jeans anywhere, and St. Mark's is infested by Upper West Side-like shoe stores. But for a brief moment, the East Village made me finally feel at home, and, when I put on the perfect pants, in the right skin.

-Zoey Peresman, 2013, Vassar College

292 E 3rd Street

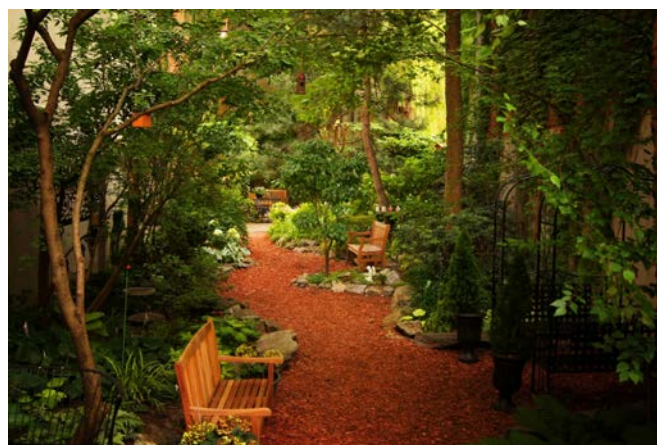
My favorite stop on the Saturday afternoon (MoRUS) walking tour, other than viewing Rolando Politi's trash art at La Plaza Cultural community garden, is the backyard cistern excavation exhibit at Bullet Space at 292 East 3rd Street. Bullet Space and its squatter art history is intriguing in and of itself, but what makes it even more special of a trip is the large collection of artifacts found in a former well, which has also been used as an outhouse and garbage pit, in the back of the property. Items ranging from the near present (methadone bottles) to "New York Pennies" from 1863 have been unearthed and archived in the basement over time.

There are shards of blue and white china plates, chamber pots, old nails and building equipment, and many more buried treasures to view. Excavation is an ongoing process, as well. One of the child residents might be Bullet's best archaeologist, finding new items every day, which he did when I visited. He showed me how he digs in the dirt, and together we found a piece of blue and white china, and he offered it to me as a gift. As silly as it might sound, being a young woman, I sometimes need to be reminded that history, even squatter and homesteading history, goes back much, much further than the 1970's to the present. In the city, we all live on hundreds of years of those that came before us, and Bullet Space is an excellent example of that.

-Nicole Turcotte, March 19, 2013

Whenever I do a MoRUS garden tour I stop at Creative Little Garden on 520 E. 6th Street. Throughout the late 1990s, early 2000s, the garden was an organizing hub for the Lower East Side Collective. In the East Village since 1982, it was long the backyard of garden advocate Francoise Cachelin, who understood what was truly radical about a community garden and why they were threats to the established order, and who passed in October 2003. "Tout alors we all hate these stinking wars," she helped us chant in protest against the rising wars, six decades after her struggles as part of the French resistance to the Nazis. The beauty of the garden movement is all the people we come to know through the years, from Michael Shenker, to Aresh, to JK, LA Kauffman, Ariane B, and so many others. Images of all of them churn through my head as I walk through these tours. -Ben Shepard, April 2, 2013

520 E. 6th Street



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Figure 1

Chrystie- Forsyth Parkway: <http://www.thecityreview.com/books1.htm>

Sarah D. Roosevelt Park: <http://sdrpc.mkgarden.org/about-the-park/>

Figure 2

Sculpture for Living: <http://www.flickrriver.com/photos/ggnyc/3265039056/>

The Standard East Village: <http://evgrieve.com/2011/11/standard-east-village-makes-it-official.html>

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Figure 3

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Figure 4

Wright (bottom): http://newamericanvillage.blogspot.com/2009_08_01_archive.html

Wright (left): http://www.greatbuildings.com/cgi-bin/gbi.cgi/Price_Tower.html/cid_price_tower_001.html

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Figure 5

Sculpture for Living (floorplan): <http://img.streeteasy.com/nyc/attachment/show/1335288-astor-place.gif>

Sculpture for Living (interior): <http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-JO-w0SqU8zo/UDpR6f3fZNI/AAAAAAAAIK0/7-IBYj7fcNo/>

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Figure 6

Protests: <http://insidenewyork.com/tag/tompkins-square-park/>

Figure 7

Pruitt-Igoe: <http://www.capitalnewyork.com/article/culture/2012/02/5195485/new-documentary-pruitt-igoe-myth-tells-rise-and-fall-americas-most-i>

Figure 8

51 Astor Place: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/27/realestate/commercial/51-astor-place-rises-over-east-village.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

Figure 9

The Standard East Village: <http://standardhotels.com/east-village>

Thompson Hotel: <http://www.cntraveler.com/hotels/north-america/united-states/thompson-les-new-york-new-york>

Figure 10

Map of Community Gardens: from Martinez, Miranda J., 2010 p34

Figure 11

La Plaza Cultural, Willow: Yorty, Don, After Irene: The Death of a Friend <http://vimeo.com/28276513>

Figure 12

Snowglobe, James Estrada

Figure 13

Postcards, James Estrada

Figure 14

Wunderkammer, James Estrada

Figure 15

Baroque cabinet: http://www.bareo-isyss.com/20/period_style.php

Figure 16

Cabinet of Curiosities: 18th C. Bibliothèque centrale du Muséum national d'Histoire Naturelle
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Figure 17

Soane's Museum: http://www.soane.org/venue_hire

Figure 18

35 Cooper Square: <http://eastvillage.thelocal.nytimes.com/2011/03/10/conversation-35-cooper-square/>