Photo: Lisa Kahane

Inherent Vice: Contagion and The Archive in *The Times Square Show*

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Abstract:
Times Square, June 1980. A diverse collective of artists invade a former massage parlor in the most notorious neighborhood in New York City. Within its grimy, crumbling walls, hundreds of paintings, sculptures, Xeroxes, drawings, graffiti, and performances rub up against each other, losing individual definition to the point where it becomes difficult to tell where one piece begins and another ends. As an event, *The Times Square Show* reconfigured New York's artistic landscape, defining the aesthetic of the following decade. Yet this essay examines how the show also operated as an archive of artifacts and affects that commemorated the chaos of Times Square – the productive, heady, unstable, interclass and intercultural mishmash that was then facing extinction by redevelopment. Three specific works, pieces by Christy Rupp, John Ahearn and Rigoberto Torres, and Jack Smith, unveil how the show revolutionized the art world by embracing the creative potential of contagion and decay.

Introduction

In early June 1980, the *New York Times* bemoaned mayor Ed Koch's decision to reject the 42nd Street Redevelopment Corporation's designs to transform Times Square into a shopping complex and theme park. "Many plans aimed at making Times Square something more than a breeding ground for prostitutes, pornographers and drug pushers have been announced over the years, only to fade without making a dent in the sleaze" (Goodwin 1980). Yet within a month, that pessimism had vanished, as the city took it upon itself to overhaul the beleaguered region. On June 27, Koch revealed his administration's own plans for a public redevelopment project, setting off a twenty-year campaign to clean up the streets, and aimed at restoring, in the words of Herbert J. Sturz, chairman of the New York City Planning Commission, "the ambiance that will make people want to come back." (Thomas 1980). Yet, contrary to the administration's depiction, Times Square was one of the most heavily trafficked spaces in New York City at that time, with up to 8,000 pedestrians per hour walking its streets (Riechl 1999: 62). This disconnect reflected a gap between the discourse of blight propagated by the government and developers and the complex realities on the ground of a diverse and highly populated region. Throughout its history as a liminal zone, Times Square has stood as "the battleground for a century-long struggle for dominance between three industries: real estate, the performing arts, and sex" (Chesluk 2008: 24). By 1980, the square's reputation as a zone of diversion and transgression had spiraled into a riot of competing factors: among them queer freedom, advertising overkill, cultural diversity, and brutal urban violence.

During the same month that the New York City government was charting the future of the neighborhood, those 8,000 hourly passers-by were being enticed to enter a dilapidated building at the south end of the square by a string of signs promising, among other attractions, a "thrift shop," "sex machines," "business advice," "real mermaid," and "accidental death." Throughout the month of June 1980, more than a hundred artists took over a deserted four-story massage parlor at the corner of West 41st Street and 7th Avenue, filling the building with a month-long glut of art and performance. The producing collective, Collaborative Projects, Inc. (Colab), a constantly shifting assortment of young artists from many disciplines, had scored successes with other communal art exhibitions, most notably the controversial *The Real Estate Show* six months earlier. But nothing compared to the scope and influence of *The Times Square Show*. The list of artists involved was a who's who of who would become the faces of New York art in the 1980s: Keith Harring, Jenny Holzer, David Hammons, Kiki Smith, Fab Five Freddy, Tom Otterness, Mimi Gross, Kenny Scharf, Jean-Michel Basquiat (showing as SAMO), to name a few. In a very real sense that transcended the attendant hyperbole, *The Times Square Show* transformed the New York art scene.

It did not go unnoticed. "…[T]he first consolidated efflorescence of punk in the visual arts" (*ArtNews* 1980: 213). "Some of the freshest art around came slouching off the streets… radiated genuine energy" (Levin 1980: 87). "…[A]n exhibition as ambitious as 1918's Armory

show” (Goldstein 1980). Lucy Lippard’s (admittedly highly ambivalent) review encapsulates the hype:

"[A] constantly changing panorama of esthetic neuroses; a performance and film festival; a throwback to the early ‘60s happenings-and-storefront syndrome; a sunny apotheosis of shady sexism; a cry of rage against current artworldiness and a ghastly glance at the future of art. It’s also a lot of knives and guns and money and dirt and cocks and cunts and blood and gore." (Lippard 1980: 51)

The Times Square Show, as an event, made a decisive mark on the New York art scene. Yet *The Times Square Show*’s singular impact, massive scale, and collective, anonymous marketing all overshadowed the nature of the individual elements that constituted the show. Viewing *The Times Square Show* as an event only reveals part of the picture. *The Times Square Show* made an equally revolutionary mark as an archive–a space and time in which a certain series of artifacts and their histories were, however briefly, collected and displayed.

In this sense, as shelters and catalogues of objects, all gallery shows are archives of a sort. Charles Merewether provides a particularly succinct definition of the archive as “a repository or ordered system of documents and records, both verbal and visual, that is the foundation from which history is written” (Merewether 2006: 10). Within this definition, any museum or art show can be viewed as an archive; the show’s systemization, whether authorial, stylistic, or thematic, is an ordered system, and the works themselves are the documents. Art exhibitions, through publicly highlighting particular works, attempt to establish narratives that refine or redefine aesthetic histories; some, such as the 1913 Armory Show and *The Times Square Show*, have more lasting impact than others. More than a simple container, Paul Ricoeur reminds us that the archive is inextricably tied to preservation. “[P]utting documents produced by an institution (or its juridical equivalent) into archives has the goal of conserving or preserving them” (Ricoeur 1988: 116). This focus on the safeguarding of the institution is echoed in Diana Taylor’s assertion that “the archival, from the beginning, sustains power” (D. Taylor 2003: 19), and suggests that the archive has a primarily politically conservative function.

But forms of power differ with each archive. *The Times Square Show* worked to sustain the chaotic affective power of Times Square, a power threatened by the city’s plans for redevelopment. Jonathan Flatley defines affect as the relational and transformative connotation of emotion (Flatley 2008: 12), and defines mood as an affective atmosphere. “(I)t is through the changing of mood that we are most able to exert agency on our own singular and collective affective lives; and it is by way of mood that we can find or create the opportunity for collective political projects” (Flatley 2008: 20). Affect and mood are sources of transformative political power rarely acknowledged, though powerfully deployed, by mainstream archival tactics. In conventional archives, the layers of administrative authorization, the physical isolation, the gloves, and the silence serve a mood that perpetuates the authority of the institution’s materials

by deploying a form of power both antiseptic and hierarchical.

In contrast, the affective atmosphere of Times Square in 1980 demanded risk, humility, and constant vigilance, but rewarded with energy, creativity, and opportunity. This was an affect wrapped in the unpredictable, the heterogeneous, and the dirty. To properly preserve it, *The Times Square Show* needed to embrace these dangerous qualities. Rather than a methodology of regulation, *The Times Square Show* chose a methodology of contagion.

Contagion is transmission, but of a particular sort. *Contagion* literally derives from the terms *con*-, "together," and *tangere*, "to touch," and thus entails some type of physical contact with a vector, whether person or object. What distinguishes *contagion* from other forms of body-to-body contact or communication is its insinuation of disease and contamination; *contagion* carries the threat of destruction both for the subject and for the vector by which the quality is passed. *Contagion* is body-to-body transmission of a quality that carries risk, either real or imagined, to the integrity of its carriers.

Affect, like contagion, is dependent on an object. Flatley reminds us that "(s)trictly speaking, affects (unlike moods, for example) are always experienced in relation to an object or objects. Indeed, affects need objects to come into being" (Flatley 2008: 16). While imaginary and conceptual objects are included in this equation, for art exhibitions like *The Times Square Show*, the objects in question are clearly primarily material; specifically physical artworks that produce affect. Yet a fundamental crisis arises in the conceptualization of an archive of affect when the experience of that affect risks the destruction of its object. For most archives, the preservation of the object is prioritized, accomplished through isolation and sacrificing considerable affective potential to distance, decontamination, and authority. *The Times Square Show* subverted this model by privileging preservation of affect, by means of contagion, even if that resulted in risk to the object.

Three specific examples serve to illustrate various modes of contagion *The Times Square Show* employed in reproducing the chaos of Times Square. Christy Rupp's *Rat Patrol* marks contagion across boundaries of sanitation and across public and private spaces. John Ahearn and Rigoberto Torres' *South Bronx Hall of Fame* destabilizes borders of territories, traditions and state hierarchies. Jack Smith's *Exotic Landlordism of the World* breaks down artistic disciplines, even going so far as to contaminate the nature of the event with the qualities of an object.

1. Rat Patrol

Few events better reveal the fragility inherent in the delicate balance of the urban ecosystem than a garbage workers' strike. Within a preposterously short period of time, the quality of city life is suffocated, overwhelmed by bags of decomposing refuse. Beyond the unavoidable aesthetic and olfactory damage, there is something philosophically excruciating when the

metropolis is forced to confront its own abjection, when it is faced with a record of its own processes of decay, when accumulated and commingling rejects reassert their presence.

In May 1979, New York City faced a garbage emergency when an apartment workers' union went on strike. In a moment symbolic of the failure of the urban network, the city government was humiliated when a horde of rats attacked a downtown office worker on her way home from work. When the Health Department responded, it uncovered thirty-two tons of garbage and an estimated 4,000 rodents in the neighboring vacant lot. And as Douglas Crimp tells it:

"[T]hey also found something else, even more difficult to explain to the public. Pasted to the temporary wall barricading the vacant lot from the street were pictures of a huge, sinister attacking rat, reproductions of a photograph from the Health Department's own files." (Crimp 1984: 52)

The offset lithographic prints were a project by Crimp's neighbor, Christy Rupp, and with the event of the rat attack, the media discovered that the images were posted around garbage piles throughout the city, exposing and suspending the city's rodent residents in flaking black-and-white ink.

Rupp's *Rat Patrol* reappeared a year later, scurrying through the grimy halls and staircases of *The Times Square Show*. A chain of identical images of a rat large enough to fill a 7" x 16" sheet of paper, it stretched in single-file across the length of whatever wall it found itself on. Its unbounded and reproductive character reflected both the ubiquity of the species and the insidious presence of the vectors of contagion in the urban environment. Significantly, it lay along boundaries: staircases, water taps, baseboards. In this respect, it clearly tapped into the power Mary Douglas ascribes to dirt, or any “matter out of place” (Douglas 2002: 50).

"Order implies restriction; from all possible materials, a limited selection has been and from all possible relations a limited set has been used. So disorder by implication is unlimited. […] We recognize that it is destructive to existing patterns; also that it has potentiality. It symbolizes both danger and power." (Douglas 2002: 117)

Disorder is confronted at boundaries, since “[a]ny structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins” (Douglas 2002: 150) and “[t]he danger which is risked by boundary transgression is power” (Douglas 2002: 199). *Rat Patrol* draws attention to this powerful decay of boundaries through its subject matter, its materiality as disposable reproduction, and in its broad dissemination throughout both the show and the city at large.

Rupp's *Rat Patrol* was one example of how the New York City, and particularly Times Square, diffused its influence into *The Times Square Show* from every front, breaking down the boundaries between indoor and outdoor, private and public spaces. Indeed, the show's very presence in Times Square immediately exposed it to an inherently contagious

environment. Joesph Roach's concept of the behavioral vortex, "a combination of built environment and performative habit that facilitated not simply the reproduction but also, according to circumstance and opportunity, the displacement of cultural transmission," (Roach 1996: 86) seems a particularly apt image for Times Square. This was a space that sucked people, communities, cultures, meanings, sights, sounds, and smells into a maelstrom of cultural affect that, at the end of the 1970s, had finally reached the city's breaking point, leading to the machinations of the 42nd Street Redevelopment Plan.

Yet, in the final throes of its voluptuary chaos, Times Square's particular blend of semiotic and transgressive excess was celebrated throughout *The Times Square Show*, apparent in the title of one of the theme galleries, the "Money, Love, and Death Room," as well as in subject matter that ran throughout most of the work.

"[The Times Square Show] was ostensibly about Times Square–that is about sex and money and violence and human degradation. It was also about artists banding together as pseudo-terrorists and identifying with the denizens of this chosen locale–envying them and imitating them at the same time as colonizing them, thus rebelling against the cleanliness and godlessness of the artworld institutions." (Lippard 1980: 52-3)

More important than any rational representation of the themes or politics in Times Square was *The Times Square Show*'s affective integration of the anarchy and overload of Times Square itself. The powerful forces of sex, money, and violence spilled through the open doors and oozed up from the streets. The second floor windows were dislodged explicitly to let the chaos of Times Square into the space in an "Open Air Fashion Lounge" (Levin 1980: 87). Tom Otterness designed a series of titillating placards that both replicated and lampooned the sideshow-esque triple-X signage that ringed the square. Colab member Jane Dickson held a job designing the Square's electronic billboard and arranged to have the show advertised there through a series of giant animations depicting a game of three-card Monte. The result of this purposeful artistic confusion with the space was a real confusion among the spectators. During a theatre performance, a reviewer overheard a man at the ticket counter outside cry, "Is that a sex show? I want to see!" A man is caught masturbating in Eva Di Carlo's installation, *Love Nest* (*Times Square Show* narrative 1980).

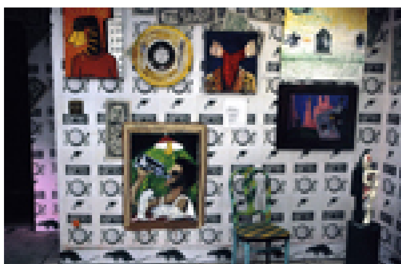

Fig. 1: "Money, Love, and Death" room at The Times Square Show, 1980

Christy Rupp's Rat Patrol scurries beneath other works in the second floor gallery.

Photo: Andrea Callard

Underneath it all ran Rupp's *Rat Patrol*, lining the floorboards and staircases, occasionally achieving three dimensions in the form of life-size concrete statues huddled around drinking fountains and heating vents. The harsh, vicious black-and-white image of the snarling rat was somehow simultaneously exacerbated and tamed by its immobilization and multiplication. On their own, they could be read as a record of what is not seen, the frozen photographs of the hordes that normally lie in the shadows, making "visible during the day what went on at night," as Rupp herself puts it (Wye 1988: 86). By containing the Rat Patrol*, The Times Square Show* held a record of the particular events of the 1979 garbage strike, the broader dynamics of the urban ecosystem, and the disgust underpinning the urban project. But *The Times Square Show* didn't simply "contain" the *Rat Patrol*. It let it loose to crawl among the artworks, contaminating each with new connotation. Thus, in installations immortalized by Andrea Callard's photographs, Coleen Fitzgibbon and Robin Water's *Gun, Dollar, Plate* (installed wallpaper effectively indistinguishable from Rupp's rats) becomes charged with the threat of infestation, Tom Otterness' *Man with Visible Insides* harkens back to the violence and violation of 1979's vermin attack, and Richard Bosman's *Three Blind Mice* no longer seem quite so lonely.

2. South Bronx Hall of Fame

Rupp's rats weren't the only invisible city residents collected and made visible by *The Times Square Show*. In several rooms of the exhibition, most notably in the "Portrait Gallery," colorful plaster busts erupted from the walls, reproducing a wide cast of characters drawn from the streets. These were emissaries from *The South Bronx Hall of Fame*, life-casts executed by John Ahearns and Rigoberto Torres, depicting residents of their neighborhood.

The presence of denizens from the South Bronx marked something of a territorial breach. Though Times Square itself provided the most dramatic context for *The Times Square Show*, it's important to note that it was just one of many converging behavioral vortices. Geographic space was contained within *The Times Square Show* as a site of intermingling territories. The most important auxiliary zone was Downtown and its decades-long history as a harbor for alternative artists (see M. Taylor 2006), but the artists who claimed Downtown as their home were met by those from neighborhoods across the city. Among them, the South Bronx was and remains today the poorest region in New York City. There the images of blight and violence that circulated around Times Square were redoubled, but with none of the facade

of exuberant license. In 1978, Stephan Eins established the Fashion Moda gallery near the South Bronx's shopping center, beginning a micro-exodus from the saturated Downtown scene—an exodus largely consisting of politically oriented artists eager to engage disadvantaged communities. Ironically, these Downtown artists were frequently overshadowed by their collaborators from the Bronx, as Fashion Moda helped bring a particular new urban style to New York's attention, marked most notably by hip-hop and graffiti art.

The intermingling of territories naturally led to the interplay of traditions. John Ahearn was part of the Downtown scene until he joined Fashion Moda in 1978. His first exhibition there was a series of plaster face-casts of his Downtown artist friends, but after meeting Rigoberto Torres, a young Puerto Rican immigrant, he decided to move to Torres' block and collaborate on a series of castings of people in the South Bronx. The result was a kind of continuous collaboration rarely seen in the contemporary art world, particularly between Hispanic and Anglo-Americans, and this partnership was one of the few enduring manifestations of Fashion Moda's mission to inspire cooperation between Downtown and Bronx artists. These disparate backgrounds blended differing sculptural techniques. Ahearn had learned casting as an outgrowth of work in video, as a way to construct elaborate makeup effects for downtown filmmakers. Torres, on the other hand, came at the work through his uncle, who ran a religious statuary factory in the Bronx, manufacturing devotional saints for practitioners of Santéria (Delehanty 1991: 7). In this respect, their work represents a particular, rich, combined archive of technical knowledge.

Each bust is an archive not only of a person, a personality, a neighborhood, and a combined technique, but also of a unique event, the casting of the face itself. "The casting process happens in a very public way, a minor fiesta. The event usually occurs out on the sidewalk in front of friends, family, and neighbors. Everyone knows everyone else. The moment is loaded." (Zeitlin 1991: 18) As the local fame of Ahearns and Torres' project grew, the act of creating the work gained fame as well. It became a kind of rite of passage to surrender to the casting process, to submit to the clammy sludge of plaster, to risk a purposefully accumulated filth, to undergo the brief moment of suffocation in order to form one's own doppelganger. The casting procedure itself is a dramatic and public performance of accumulation, inscription, and contamination: the resultant sculpture is both literal metonym of the subject and figurative metonym of the moment. Both physicalized and risky, this process' mixed genealogy of craftsmanship celebrates a contagion much more explicitly constructive than that of disease and decay.

Yet it was this very same cultural contagion that was implicitly vilified by the Times Square redevelopment project. "The imagery of blight transformed the area's legacy of urban heterogeneity, public spectacle, and contact across race and class lines into a problem – pure negativity, providing nothing to the city other than the need for immediate, drastic solutions" (Chesluk 2008: 38). In planning documents produced by the Urban Development Corporation, no distinction is made between minorities visiting Times Square for legitimate purposes and the small percentage there to engage in illegal activities. Thus, the high

percentage of racial and ethnic minorities was not “a valued element of diversity to be worked with in a positive way; instead, the population was defined as a negative feature that provided a justification for remaking the area” (Reichl 1999: 63). The rampant cultural exchange contained within Times Square was particularly vulnerable to a polemic of corruption and disease. This polemic was only amplified, particularly at the expense of the homosexual community, as the AIDS epidemic came to obsess public consciousness in the years after *The Times Square Show*. In his mourning for the kind of random cross-cultural contact that Times Square historically provided in spades, Samuel R. Delany descries the:

"[...] conservative, stabilizing discourse already in place that sees interclass contact as the source of pretty much everything dangerous, unsafe, or undesirable in the life of the country right now – from AIDS and “perversion” in all its forms, to the failures of education and neighborhood decay, to homelessness and urban violence." (Delany 1999: 164)

It is precisely this discourse of state-sponsored hierarchies that the *South Bronx Hall of Fame* project seeks to subvert. The title of the project is a direct response to the open-air Hall of Fame of Great Americans located on the Bronx Community College campus. Founded in 1900 by New York University before its campus relocated to downtown Manhattan, the Hall of Fame of Great Americans features busts of 98 famous Americans that were slowly accumulated through public elections every five years until funding ran dry in the mid-1970s. Only eleven of these busts are women, two are Jewish, and two are African-American. Now all but forgotten by the majority of the city’s residents and visitors, this site’s remains still speak to flagrant historical biases in the nation’s self-image.

The exclusive realm of the Hall of Fame is not the only archive the *South Bronx Hall of Fame* subverts. Alan Sekula recognizes that portraiture, specifically in the photographic age, represents “a double system: a system of representation capable of functioning both *honorifically* and *repressively*” (Sekula 1986: 6). The honorific is represented by collections such as the Hall of Fame, historically exclusive of diversity. For large segments of the population, representation in the state’s archive is limited to the repressive. In the most banal of cases, these are portraits on driver’s licenses and passports, but for many, particularly undocumented immigrants, representation, if it exists at all, is in the flat, colorless frame of the police mugshot. The scope of state-sanctioned archival representations outlines

"[...] a *shadow archive* that encompasses an entire social terrain while positioning individuals within that terrain[…] The general, all-inclusive archive necessarily contains both the traces of the visible bodies of heroes, leaders, moral exemplars, celebrities, and those of the poor, the diseased, the insane, the criminal, the nonwhite, the female, and all other embodiments of the unworthy." (Sekula 1986: 10)

The *South Bronx Hall of Fame* attempts to destabilize both sides of this shadow archive, not only by implanting the “unworthy” within the honorific, but also by contaminating the

repressive with diverse personalities, vivid color, and a third dimension. A more accurate cross-section of the urban population, the *South Bronx Hall of Fame* attempts to infect the archive with a more accurate conception of America's grandeur.

With the representatives of *The South Bronx Hall of Fame*, *The Times Square Show* contained the record of dozens of peoples, classes, and professions. These characters emerged from the walls not only in the proscribed "Portrait Gallery," but also along hallways and around the souvenir shop, in unpredictable spaces throughout the building. They mingled with other works, leaking personality into unexpected places, from the shy quiet of a couple in love, to the wary glance of a scarred teen, to the explosive grin of Torres' own bust. And while *The Times Square Show* contained a record of the exchange played out in each and every displayed casting, it also contained the event itself when, one night, Torres and Ahearn performed the casting of the night watchman (Zeitlin 1991: 20).

3. Exotic Landlordism of the World

This was just one of a plethora of performances and screenings that took place within *The Times Square Show*. The lobby of the building had a convenient preexisting stage—with mirrored panels to reflect its shady past—and a full schedule of events was advertised. Gary Indiana, Jim Jarmusch, and Alan Moore were among the performers and filmmakers whose work was presented every night of the month-long spectacle. But among the diverse band of performing artists, none could then boast a more enduring or bizarre legacy than Jack Smith, who presented a work called *Exotic Landlordism of the World* the nights of June 13 and 14.

By all accounts, *Exotic Landlordism* was typical of the Jack Smith model of performance, meaning it was anything but typical. Since 1965, Smith's performance work had accrued a passionate and eclectic following, inspiring figures such as Andy Warhol, Laurie Anderson, and Robert Wilson, and leading Richard Foreman to call him "the hidden source of practically everything that's of any interest in the so-called experimental theater today" (Carr 2008: 325). Smith's stage work was a muddy jumble of objects and accidents, a seemingly random assemblage of campy B-movie allusions, lewd gestures, absurdist imagery, audience members conscripted to act, and Smith's eclectic record collection. The Soho News review of *Exotic Landlordism* describes a typical sequence:

"Jack Smith lights a bunch of incense and his veil catches on fire. The belly dancer helps put it out. A guy wearing ripped pantyhose, binocular-shaped false boobs and leather boots falls down the steps to join them. Nothing really happens, just a lot of bumbling. Jack Smith smokes a pipe of dope or something, holds up an empty beer can, shakes it, strokes it (hoping for a genie?), picks up an overloaded extension cord and pronounces it "the Octopus of Atlantis." He asks "Sinbad" (the Brassiere Boy) to read a story—"Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves"—aloud from a children's picture book. The guy does so in a flat, fast monotone." (Shewey 1980)

Through all this “bumbling,” Jack Smith’s performances activated objects, reconfiguring their affective relationships with the audience and transforming them into events. Yet the event itself was simultaneously polluted with the qualities of the object—qualities including materiality, duration, and mutability. And it is the material presence of the event as a whole that allows us to consider it a vector for contagion.

Like rubbing Aladdin’s lamp, introducing performance into *The Times Square Show*’s constellation of archival objects undoubtedly unleashes a string of complications. Yet, to maintain this archival frame, it is critical to do so, lest the physicalized archive contributed by *Exotic Landlordism* and other performances is reduced to their prop lists. The problem of the performance in the archive is one of the particular epistemological crises of the field of performance studies—one that produces convincing assertions that performance itself, unlike the object, cannot be archived. Peggy Phelan declares that “[p]erformance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance” (Phelan 1993: 146). In this light, performance can never be archived as performance—only as a record of performance, a shadow of the lived experience. Diana Taylor’s valuable contribution to this crisis is the concept of the repertoire, systems of “embodied practice/knowledge” (D. Taylor 2003: 19) that are the means by which performance is preserved through reiteration, ritual, internalization, and other processes. The repertoire is an extremely valuable concept, and one that is applicable to many aspects of Smith’s work. Yet by privileging repetition and body-to-body transmission, it focuses attention on the immaterial relationships between successive performances, perhaps at the expense of the immediate physical substance of the performance itself. If, as Stanley Eveling has asserted, “an object is a slow event” (quoted in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004: 59), then perhaps an event can be thought of as a fast object. If thinking of an object as a slow event allows us to experience its temporality, then thinking of an event as a fast object reminds us of the event’s materiality.

Jack Smith’s performances are especially ripe realms for considering the event-made-object. One of the most significant reasons is the specific materiality of the objects he brought into play during the course of his performances. His early works set the stage for the types of items he collected. For example, from 1970 until 1972, Smith mounted spectacles regularly in his loft dubbed “The Plaster Foundation,” and in this two-level space, he began accumulating a dramatic array of detritus.

Included were empty bottles and tin cans, old magazines and fallen pieces of plaster, a toilet, crutches, a number of commercial signs ("Free All Day," "U.S. Gypsum"), a large heart-shaped candy box and several dried-out Christmas trees, feathers and streamers, a rubber dinosaur, a teddy bear, various dolls and parts of mannequins. (Hoberman 1979: 6)

In these performances, the audience was required to visually (as well as physically) negotiate a maze of ephemera, while the performers “buried and exhumed various artifacts”

(Hoberman 1979: 6). Both the action and perception of these performances were profoundly shaped by the forms and textures of the apparently random objects with which Smith littered the stage, infecting them with a sense of accrued materiality all their own. Like Rupp's *Rat Patrol*, these objects were models of decay, though for Smith they were much less morally ambiguous. Nayland Blake pinpoints Smith's loyalties when he notes that "rot is presented as a desirable state, a condition in which boundaries break down and rebirth becomes possible. Rot is contrasted in Smith's work with encrustation, a process he continually derides, linking it to plaster, falseness, icing, sugar" (Blake 1997: 173). Smith's use of decaying objects corroded both the objects' permanence and the event's ephemerality, introducing contaminating physical presences into the performance event.

Materiality also infected time in Smith's radical use of duration both in and around his spectacles. Showing up to *Exotic Landlordism*'s Saturday performance, Blake fell victim to Smith's extremist exploitation of his audience's patience. After waiting for an hour, "[h]aving had no previous experience with Jack's audience 'winnowing,' I finally gave up, baffled, and went home" (Blake 1997: 173). Smith's pieces were studies in endurance both before and during the performance itself. Richard Foreman describes watching Smith perform as watching "human behavior turn into granular stasis, in which every moment of being seemed, somehow, to contain the seed of unthinkable possibility" (Foreman 1997: 26). Foreman goes on to quote Smith advising Robert Wilson, a director not known for his alacrity: "it has to be… sadder, Bob, it's not saaad enough… make it… slow.. er, much slower… er, just much slow… er" (Foreman 1997: 26). In Smith's work, slowness' sadness is exactly that recognition of decay that is unveiled by the extension of duration, and for Smith, this decay is expressly material. The extended and unpredictable temporality of Smith's performances prolonged contact, and with it, opportunities for contagion.

A final element of materiality in Jack Smith's performances, and perhaps its most revolutionary, was his use of film. Smith gained his notoriety with the irreverent underground film classic, 1962's *Flaming Creatures*, a film whose frank nudity and bemusing pornography were censored practically everywhere it screened. After *Flaming Creatures*, Smith continued to make films, however they were increasingly incorporated into his performance work as projected images. During these performances, he recut the film live, presenting random and chaotic sequences out of his archive of surrealist images:

He used tape splices. Sometimes the tape was conventional film splicing tape, most of the time it was cheap masking tape, paper tapes, even duct tape. The bits of tape were just large enough to hold the film strips together, and small enough to pass through the projector gate. The visual result of this method was astonishing. The splices were visible, of course, but the material was re-woven into a new tapestry of visual excess with each screening. One hour of film material, in this way, could be transformed into a three-hour film experience. (Tartaglia 1997: 209)

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Film is perhaps the perfect figure of the event-made-object, time that is congealed onto a filmstrip. Jack Smith's onstage tinkering with the composition of the film itself drew attention to the materiality of the celluloid moment, and demonstrated the myriad techniques that time can be handled, shuffled, scraped, juggled, and cut.

If Jack Smith's work destabilizes the border between object and event, all other categories begin to break down. Qualities jump from discipline to discipline; theatre takes on the texture of collage, the pace of sculpture, the splintering of film. As the features of its constituent elements spread and merge, it becomes difficult to define *Exotic Landlordism*, and, beyond that, *The Times Square Show* as a whole. Is it an event or an object? A long instant or a short era? A space or an activity or an exchange? Just as distinctions between the specific artworks on display and the genres they represent begin to evaporate, distinctions between basic ontological concepts dissolve in the chaotic play of objects housed in a four-story massage parlor. This was the particular, disorienting contamination of power wielded within the bounds of *The Times Square Show*. Not only materials, but genres, categories, sensibilities, even whole realities met, merged, and infected each other with the tumultuous interplay of their qualities, their meanings, and their histories.

Conclusion

During the month before the opening of *The Times Square Show*, amidst the ongoing Iranian hostage crisis, a surging Cuban and Haitian refugee emergency, the dramatic explosion of Mount St. Helens, and Reagan's clinching of the Republican nomination to the presidency, the New York Times front page ran a remarkable series of articles as three successive records for art sales at auction were smashed. First, on May 12, 40 paintings from the Garbisch collection sold for $14.8 million at Sotheby's. Then 10 paintings from the collection of Henry Ford II sold for a total of $18.3 million at Christie's on May 13. On May 29, J.M.W. Turner's *Juliet and Her Nurse* (1836) sold for $6.4 million, the most ever paid for a single painting until that time (Rief 1980).

These events were extreme outbreaks of Arjun Appadurai's "tournament of value." Building from Baudrilliard's vehement analysis of the art auction, Appadurai conceives of tournaments of value as:

"[...] complex periodic events that are removed in some culturally well-defined way from the routines of economic life. Participation in them is likely to be both a privilege of those in power and an instrument of status contests between them. The currency of such tournaments is also likely to be set apart through well understood cultural diacritics. Finally, what is at issue in such tournaments is not just status, rank, fame, or reputation of actors, but the disposition of the central tokens of value in the society in question." (Appadurai 1986: 21)

What is critical on every level of this definition is the principle of separation as tactic of valuation.

Even outside the competitive hotbox of events such as an art auction, the principle of separation-as-value is reproduced in the methodology of a typical gallery installation, where art objects are theoretically placed far enough apart to command individual attention. It is also clear in the methodology of a typical archive, where objects and records are separated and boxed in the name of order and preservation.

This principle of isolation in galleries, museums, and archives seeks to maintain Walter Benjamin's "aura of the work of art." Loosely defined, an artwork's aura consists of the indivisible and individual qualities of its authenticity, its testimony, and its authority (Benjamin 1968: 221) and is dependent on the artwork's distance (Benjamin 1968: 223). The aura of a work of art is thus precisely that affect of distance conventional archives seek to preserve, an authority that rests in the object's remoteness. Yet while Benjamin's essay examines the decay of this aura in the modern era, he glosses over the artwork's aura of decay. Even when not as explicit as in *Rat Patrol* or Jack Smith's performances, all artwork takes power from its process of decomposition. As Mary Douglas elucidates, the creation of all forms of order–Benjamin's authenticity, testimony, and distance among them–is a cyclical process of differentiation into dissolution (Douglas 2002: 197-8). For Douglas, the power in any system of organization is generated from the oppositional pressure of its disintegration, like the upward force generated from the downward pump of a pedal. The power of any work of art is thus inextricably wrapped in its potential for dissolution, its continuous and losing battle for permanence.

The complicated science of archival preservation seeks to eliminate the evidence of this decay, a corrosion exacerbated by contemporary art practice.

"Some contemporary art is doomed to disintegrate because of poor media selection or material incompatibility. Conservators call this "inherent vice." Self-destruction can come from under-engineering or material interaction, as when one metal corrodes in contact with another through galvanic oxidation. Widening the scope of art media in the twentieth century led to material experiments that sometimes failed. In acquiring works with unstable "found" objects, synthesized modern polymers, and other new technologies, museum collections shifted from the predictable to the unknown." (Wharton 2006: 166)

In the course of this disintegration, the effluence of one object might infect another, increasing the rate of its breakdown. This is the dark and insidious underside of Benjamin's aura, the foul fumes that emanate from every testifying object. Yet as *The Times Square Show* demonstrates, it is a contagion that is as creative as it is destructive.

What the participants in *The Times Square Show* discovered was that rather than devaluing the artworks, the process of breaking down boundaries and allowing contamination to run its course significantly increased the cumulative value of the show. This sentiment is seen in the responses of their contemporaries: "…[T]he first major

exhibition of radical art in the '80s, not because of individual pieces but because the way they work together announces the emergence of a new aesthetic…" (Goldstein 1980) "While the energy of the whole heady mixture was a much-needed antidote to the mechanical novelty of today's art world, I didn't admire the contents of *TTSS* as much as I enjoyed them" (Lippard 1980: 53). "Admittedly much of the work seen alone or spotlit in a conventional gallery space just would not hold up. However all of these projects crammed into this dilapidated building made for a powerful experience" (*Art News* 1980: 213). Joe Lewis, one of the show's organizers, is quoted as saying, "Rather than one person's consciousness, it's directed toward a mass esthetic. If you isolated it, most of the work is pretty academic" (Levin 1980: 89). Even in its time and place, the work on display was, on its own, not necessarily innovative. Even the pieces referenced in this study hardly stand up to exacting critique as individual works. Their aesthetic, social, and political power only truly arises when they are considered within larger networks or series (i.e. the *South Bronx Hall of Fame* project as a whole), and, of course, in the context of *The Times Square Show*.

Silvan Tomkins' theory of value is "that for human subjects, value is any object of human affect. Whatever one is excited by, enjoys, fears, hates, is ashamed of, is contemptuous of, or is distressed by is an object of value, positive or negative" (Tomkins 1995: 68). If the value of an object is dependent on affect, and affect is dependent on contact, it would appear that the isolationist practices of the conventional art economy severely curtail the value of archival or artistic objects. In fact, they limit potential relations with art to affects based in privilege and value based on rarity. *The Times Square Show* in many ways represented the polar opposite of this "tournament of value" mentality. To be sure, works were for sale, and money was one of the primary aesthetic themes–the show had a souvenir shop with collectible figurines after all. But *The Times Square Show* was as much a parody of the art world as a participant. Unlike the smooth machinery that props up exclusive auction houses like Christie's and Sotheby's, Colab was an unstable organization that as little as two months before the opening of *The Times Square Show* was in danger of imploding due to internal conflicts involving grant dispersals, the high cost of video equipment for their public access cable programs, and a controversy surrounding Tom Otterness's "Shot Dog Film" that almost sank their NEA funding. Yet, the team managed to coalesce around *The Times Square Show*, and while the motivations for this disparate bunch of artists were by no means unified, *The Times Square Show* brought them into an intimate contact where their divergent artworks and philosophies lost individual distinction.

The result was an unexpected reversal of the "tournament of value": an event that celebrated the collective over the competitive, the indistinguishable over the distinct, vice over value. And more than simply upending the dominant hierarchies of American art exchange, *The Times Square Show* initiated a culturally significant intervention on its own terms. In exposing the affect of urban disorder and decay, it was as potent as a garbage strike, yet the communal frame of ludic art brought this revelation into the realm of play and possibility.

Of course, it couldn't last. Artists in the show were snapped up by gallery owners, their pieces re-inscribed and delimited in order to return as gladiators in established tournaments of value, and the twisted contradictions of 1980s New York art were born. But for one month, an abandoned four-story massage parlor briefly became an electrifying space of "human complexity, theatres of love and death, invention and phenomena, a gift shop of original objects, daring performance, comic relief, arcades of fiction, and halls of art from the future–all beyond the horizon of your imagination" (Times Square Show press release 1980).

Epilogue

Almost thirty years later, the Times Square improvement projects have largely run their course. The Square has been cleaned up. Nearly all the peep shows and porn shops have been banished to the area around the Port Authority Bus Terminal. In their place rest a host of chain shops and restaurants. A sleek glass high-rise now stands where *The Times Square Show*'s massage parlor once lay. A Red Lobster restaurant occupies its ground floor.

Yet in spite of its domestication, Times Square still possesses a sense of absurdity and possibility. In the semiotic overload of commercial development, the delirious weight of the American capitalist project still bears down on the square. In a sense, this mass of advertising is oppressive, but there are other fashions of experiencing it. As Brian Chesluk eloquently puts it,

"What on a theoretical level seems like precisely the most demoralizing and exploitative kind of place—a streetscape defined by powerful imagemakers imploring and ordering us to soak up their ads and desire their goods—is experienced as something quite different, a place where ordinary people are exalted by the light and motion that these corporations focus on our streets and our lives. We feel that Times Square is there for us—and, of course, it is." (Chesluk 2008: 192)

There remains a tournament of vice and a festival of value in the commingling displays that play—in all that term's definitions—across the screens that ring Times Square. Candy, beer, cars, cartoons, underwear models, bank logos, and Will Smith all rub up against each other, their boundaries losing coherence, their cross-contamination unleashing unforeseen messages and unexpected assemblages.

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