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Abstract of Dissertation Project

Initial Position:

In my M.A. thesis in Hamburg I analyzed two works by Hans Haacke and Gordon Matta-Clark in the New York City space. This work led to the conclusion that artistic interventions in decaying inner city areas became a phenomenon at the beginning of the 70s. Simultaneously these decaying areas became the sites of growing urban subcultures such as the youth gangland of the Lower East Side, the gay cruising area on the West Side Piers or Hip Hop culture in the South Bronx. With regard to the dissertation, I want to extend on these findings. My first aim is to explain the reasons why artists were attracted by such places, and why they did not choose cheaper areas like Hoboken in New Jersey or Staten Island?

Artistic Strategies in Public Spaces:

Despite the wealth of extremely different approaches, there are some noticeable similarities in artistic strategies: The use of photography to document site-specific work as well as to represent it in artist-driven off-spaces like "112 Workshop/112 Greene Street" in SoHo is just one example to mention. This approach includes socioeconomic inquiries such as Hans Haacke's "Shapolsky et al." as well as Richard Serra's street-sculpture "To Encircle Base Plate Hexagram", a work which established its reputation in the art world by means of a single photograph.

If photography is an instrument to represent ephemeral site-specific works away from their place of origin, the question arises what impact on the independence of the often glorified attempt by artists go beyond the so-called limitations of the commerce-oriented art world needs? In this part of my dissertation, my aim is to reveal the implicit role of alternative art spaces as an outpost for social upheaval in the aforementioned areas to alter the social structure of urban spaces.

Interdisciplinary Discourses on Space in the 1970s

During the same period, the idea of modernist architectural solutions such as slum clearance and public housing projects came into crisis in New York and elsewhere, and a new sensibility for the "ordinary space of the everyday" as Miwon Kwon pointed out, generated interest in long-neglected inner city areas. Writings like "Learning from Las Vegas" by the architect Venturi or "The Production of Space" by the French sociologist Lefebvre were highlights of this interdisciplinary discourse to reevaluate urban space.

It needs to be considered whether the consequences of this discourse and of artistic intervention are both a part of an ongoing reclamation of neglected city areas by the New York City Council. Furthermore, these examples could be seen as the blueprint for future gentrification all over the world. Artists are a part of such developments and the groundbreaking experience lies in the aforementioned spaces at the beginning of the 1970s in New York City.