Utopia of Possibility: Greenwich and the East Village, 1960-1970

By

Veronica Anne Rae Adams

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Author’s Signature
Veronica Anne Rae Adams

First Reader’s Signature
John Haddad, Ph.D.

Second Reader’s Signature
Kamini Grahame, Ph.D.

Program Chair’s Signature
Anne Verplanck, Ph.D.
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Greenwich and the East Village in New York City were witness to a countercultural renaissance in the late 1960s through the 1970s. This project sheds light on historical and cultural context in these neighborhoods by analyzing their cultural histories of rebellion. From the time of colonization in the 1600s and throughout the 20th century, Greenwich Village served as the cornerstone of activity for artistic, political, and unconventional identity. This thesis argues that Village’s renaissance, occurring in the decades of the 1960s through the 1970s, is essential to our understanding of the momentous cultural movements that trickled throughout the United States as the now famous decade of protest. Further, this project explores the concept of identity in cultural movements. In the process of a cultural-historical analysis, we are able to find gray areas of identity. Identity becomes a process rather than a fixed and rigid format. These movements put an end to segregation, gave black citizens the right to vote, increased awareness to queer and trans individuals, and acted as an overall showcase for underrepresented communities. If this counterculture, expanding across the nation in the 60s, provided power and solidarity to underrepresented groups, Greenwich Village was its headquarters. In these chapters, I assert that the microcosm of Greenwich and the East Village in the 1960s and 70s acts as a powerful and unique landscape of understanding the emergence of radical identity politics as they relate to defiance, rebellion, and cultural dissent in the United States.
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Introduction

Between April and October of 1964, the last Great World’s Fair took place in New York City. On the opening day of the Fair, Robert Moses, one of the most significant planners of the Fair and controversial city planner, made a declaration. “We invite visitors from every state and land, solicit their friendship and devoutly hope that in presenting here this Olympics of Progress we shall draw them closer together on our shrinking globe, and thus in the end promote peace.”\(^1\)

The irony of the World’s Fair was that, while inside a utopian vision of world peace and progress was being displayed, just outside the fairgrounds, civil rights protestors from the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) were using it as a platform for the egregious inequalities that existed in reality.\(^2\) New York City and the rest of the nation were becoming increasingly divided among social, economic, political, and generational lines and the happy utopian cocoon of the World’s Fair was not representative of reality. The World’s Fair exposed the steadfast contrast between a utopian vision of the Fair and the complexities of resistance, grounded firmly in reality.

On opening day, President Johnson gave a speech predicting the progress for the future of the United States. “I prophesy peace is not only possible in our generation,” he said, “I predict that it is coming much earlier.”\(^3\) Meanwhile, ironically, many visitors could not hear President Johnson’s speech because of the louder shouting of “Jim Crow Must Go!” by hundreds of civil rights activists just outside the fairgrounds. The glum juxtaposition between the romanticized


\(^3\) Samuel, *New York City 1964*, 91.
world of the Fair and the real world of segregation, police brutality, and racism in the United
States was eerily predictive of a soon-to-be contentious future in New York City.

The last World’s Fair was a tragedy in some ways, as the demise of the utopian idealistic
vision of world peace and understanding (the actual theme of the 1964 World’s Fair) paralleled
that of reality. Forecasted to gross $53 million in 1961, the Fair’s chairman of the executive
committee Thomas Deegan guessed the actual profit might turn out to be something closer to
$30 million. The reality was that the Fair would ultimately gross only $12.6 million for the first
season. If projected to the second season, the actual profit would not even make up half of the
projected profit. This shortfall would end up leaving the Fair incapable of paying back the city
for improvements made to the Fair site. The financial failure combined with the tone-deaf theme
meant that America’s last major World’s Fair was a far cry from an event that once truly was a
utopian dream of industrialization, invention, and mutual growth.4

The failure of the 1964 World’s Fair was not simply a blunder in New York City’s
history, but an apt foreshadowing of a major cultural shift between the dominant American
narrative and a growing countercultural movement. This project explores that movement through
the lens of Greenwich Village and the East Village in New York City, a geographic hotbed of
counterculture like no other in the United States. As Ronald Sukenick, author of The Death of the
Novel and Other Stories and major influencer of the countercultural scene, has said, “America
was one thing and Greenwich Village another.”5

In this thesis, I provide historical and cultural context to these neighborhoods by
exploring their past as having started as a hub for vagabonds and misfits. From the time of

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4 Samuel New York City 1964, 121.
5 John Strausbaugh, The Village: 400 Years of Beats and Bohemians, Radicals and Rogues: a
colonization in the 1600s and throughout the 20th century, Greenwich Village served as the cornerstone of activity for artistic, political, and unconventional identity. Further, I contend that the Village’s renaissance, occurring in the decades of the 1960s through the 1970s, is essential to our understanding of the momentous cultural movements that trickled throughout the United States as the now famous decade of protest. These movements changed laws related to segregation, gave black citizens the right to vote, increased awareness of queer and trans individuals, and acted as an overall showcase for underrepresented identities. The microcosm of Greenwich and the East Village in the 1960s and 70s acts as a powerful and unique landscape of understanding the emergence of radical identity politics as they relate to defiance, rebellion, and cultural dissent in the United States.

In my research, I have investigated a thorough history of Greenwich Village, dating back to the 17th century. With historical context provided by John Strausbaugh, alongside my own cultural analysis, I have not only pieced together the Village’s geographic and historical consistencies, I’ve also explained how its historical identity informed the Village Renaissance. My research, employing an interdisciplinary methodology, includes primary sources from newspapers, novels, music, poetry, and activists from Greenwich Village at the time. I take care to point out the influx of white youth moving to the Village as an encroachment on long-standing immigrant residents and see their infiltration through the lens of colonization. That being said, I maintain that the lens of colonization and an appreciation for the culture it manifested can exist simultaneously.

This thesis is not the first work to address the uniqueness of Greenwich Village. My project builds upon the work of authors, scholars, Greenwich Village enthusiasts, and activists who have contributed research to the understanding of counterculture in New York City in the
1960s. Meghan Warner Mettler, Matthew Bannister, and Patrick Burke have done work related to the cultural shifts and revolutionary politics of the 1960s as represented by counterculture. I am heavily indebted to Lawrence R. Samuel, whose book, *New York City 1964: A Cultural History*, explores the extreme events that occurred in New York City over that year and what those events represented in years to come. John Strausbaugh, author of *The Village: 400 Years of Beats and Bohemians, Radicals and Rogues*, conducted comprehensive research on the history of Greenwich Village and offers helpful parameters, drawing lines between influential decades.

While these authors have done extensive research and contributed much to the conversation, my hope is to interpret that history through a new and analytical lens. I aim to provide a different contextual framework, one related to identity. In this way, I plan to show how fundamental Greenwich Village is – its philosophy, politics, and endeavors – to radical thought and movement-making across the nation. Greenwich Village was a laboratory for reclamation of power of new and overlooked American identities. These identities – queer and trans individuals, Marxist and anarcho-syndicalist ideologies, and Blackness to name a few – are essential to our understanding of today’s movements as they relate to an anti-establishment framework.

This project consists of three chapters. Chapter one provides historical context of a contentious New York City. The cultural upheaval that led young and ambitious activists to Greenwich Village as adults is a level of nuance frequently overlooked in Greenwich Village research. Chapter one later identifies who this new influx of youth were, where they came from, and what interests led the countercultural movement in the Village. Chapter two explores queer culture in the Village. Centering on Stonewall, this chapter looks into the importance of anti-identitarian politics in queer culture before the famous 1969 Stonewall Uprising. Chapter three
uncovers radical left politics in Greenwich and the East Village. In this chapter, I observe cultural dynamics amongst different radical affinity groups through the lens of racism and class.

Since the colonization of the land that is now Greenwich Village, it has always been a home of vagabonds and those underrepresented. This project will explore what it means when a geographic location has a personality – a characteristic in itself – that seems to always attract those looking for non-dominant philosophical views, new ways of living and engaging with the world, and meaningful human interaction. Today’s movements draw upon these themes of identity in inextricable ways. In fact, I argue that analyzing this period in the East Village and Greenwich is essential to our understanding of the narrative of 1960s cultural dissent and protest. Histories of resistance tied to a geographic landscape shape the way people live and breathe in that landscape. The Village represents a home to these people – people whose sole act of existing threatens the dominant cultural narrative.
Chapter 1: The Self-Exiled

Dear EVO:

I’d like to know one thing. Is it legal to urinate in the voting booth?

Questioningly Yours,

Edward Rak

- East Village Other, 1968

The East Village Other, first published in 1965, was a local biweekly claiming to be the “hipper” version of the Village Voice. Leave it to Greenwich Village to demand an even more underground publication than the existing local independent. The publication goes into an editorial, “Why an East Village Newspaper?,” describing the demand. With the West Village, now gentrified, expanding into a “slideshow of gnawing mediocrity and urban renewal,” the East Village had become a haven for low rent bohemianism, and resistance. The editorial describes the acceptance of the new name, the East Village, to differentiate between “old-world immigrants” and the “more recent west-side immigrants.” That is, themselves. In other words, the article is formalizing a clear identity for East Villagers. This identity is rooted in the independent and countercultural narrative surrounding radical youth and artists. It is distinguishing itself from old-world repression and reclaiming a group identity. The publication began to fight gentrification in the East Village. The East Village Other claimed to be inspired by the format of a broadside, an abandoned tradition of publications appearing in times of crisis.

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The editorial points to author-activists speaking out against the King during the American Revolution and abolitionists during the Civil War as its influencers.8

What an entrance. Essentially, these folks were self-proclaimed exiles. But unlike the hippie movement across the nation, they were harsher, more militant. They didn’t “opt out” of politics. They demanded change through direct action, using their identity as a weapon. They found home in the East Village and Greenwich Village to become artists, slummers, slam poets, and radicals. This lifestyle, predicated on cheap rent, allowed for thorough opposition to the status quo. Here, the angry and desolate found utopia. Further, the history of resistance permeating Greenwich’s analyzed against the major cultural shifts occurring mid-decade in the 1960s weaves a clear narrative of political dissent. This particular narrative is tied to a location. Indeed, outcasts from nearly every area of the country migrated to the Village in search of community.

All of this is to say that Greenwich Village holds a special status in history as a home for beats, vagabonds, bohemians, and all the other misfits who didn’t or couldn’t fit into the status quo. This chapter explores that remarkable history. I begin in 1640, with European colonization of the land, analyzing the Village as a home for the “others” since its colonial emergence. In the next section, I jump to New York City in 1964, a pivotal moment in history, and one that shapes young minds that will eventually develop into young-adult minds later that decade and into the 70s. Finally, we unpack the culture of Greenwich Village. What kind of music did this counterculture listen to? What kind of drugs did they do? What made them different than youth counterculture in other parts of the country in the 60s? The answers to these questions and the

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history of the Village allow us to understand how essential this counterculture was to our current understanding of political identity as an act of resistance.

**1640: Kieft’s War**

Since European colonization of the land, Greenwich Village was home to outcasts. In 1640, what was then New Amsterdam was comprised of fewer than 500 extremely diverse non-native residents. The town of New Amsterdam was home to a predominantly male working class, who spent their non-working time drinking and enjoying brothels. It was identified, even in the 1600s, as a reckless party-town, full of working-class opportunity and hope for a new way of life. The native owners of the land had lived on a settlement called Sapponckanican, which was abandoned around 1660. Indeed, the Village was home to some of the most underrepresented peoples in history; alongside the mostly-white colonizer residents were half-free black slaves. These slaves had small parcels of land along the borders of the village, placed there as barriers to protect the town from the Lenape tribe, the area’s native population.\(^9\)

After European colonizers increased tensions with the Lenape tribe, a war ensued. Willem Kieft, New Netherland’s director general at the time, angered indigenous peoples by attempting to levy taxes against them. In February of 1643, Kieft led raids to their villages, massacring and mutilating approximately 120 indigenous people.\(^10\) A firsthand account recalls the gruesome affair:

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Infants were torn from their mother’s breasts and hacked to pieces in the presence of their parents, and pieces thrown into fire and in the water, and other sucklings, being bound to small boards, were cut, stuck, and pierced, and miserably massacred in a manner to move a heart of stone. Some were thrown into the river, and when the fathers
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and mothers endeavored to save them, the soldiers would not let them come on land but made both parents and children drown.\textsuperscript{11}

Here, a colonizer describes in vivid detail the egregious atrocities committed against the native Lenape tribe original to the land that now stands as Greenwich Village. The recollection of horror that spurs further outrage can be witnessed in centuries of oppression that follow this account. In the next few pages, I draw attention to a number of oppressive events that lead to uprisings, movements, or simply alternative cultural narratives.

The struggle against the Lenape tribe described here is not the only struggle for power in Greenwich Village’s genesis. Sixty years later, nearly a century of black slave land ownership had resulted in a sense of class-consciousness among black half-free slaves. Black slaves began to fight back, threatening colonial economy. When a new slave market opened on Wall Street in 1711, a group of nearly fifty black slaves carrying weapons staged a rebellion, setting fire to buildings, wounding and killing some of their white slave owners. Ultimately, new laws were enacted to prevent such uprisings, reallocating black-owned land to white citizens, and further repressing black rights.\textsuperscript{12}

This race and class struggle would continue and be ever-present three centuries later, where we begin our narrative. The late sixties and most of the seventies were tough years for New York as racial unrest; financial woes, crime and a cloud of other problems pushed the city into a new landscape. As we will explore over the next few paragraphs, chaotic events of 1964

\textsuperscript{11} Henry Cruse Murphy, \textit{Vertoogh Van Nieu Nederland: and Breeden Raedt Aende Vereenichde Nederlandsche Provintien; Two Rare Tracts, Printed in 1949-’50; Relating to the Administration of Affairs in New Netherland} (New York: Baker, Godwin & Co., Printers, 1854), 149.

\textsuperscript{12} Strausbaugh, \textit{The Village}, 234.
aptly frame a unique cultural clash. Put simply, the clash can be understood as a cultural conflict between of post-war conformity among older generations and the backlash to repression that youth and otherwise marginalized people responded with.

This response is where the politics of identity begin to shape our understanding of the cultural enclave in the Villages. Children who grew up through early to mid-60s witnessed a contentious environment where older generations were consistently fearful of change. These children grew up to be adults who demanded a new kind of music, a new kind of culture that would be more representative of the cynicism of their reality. They moved into the Village and found sanctuary in the slums. They rejected old-world policies of buying a home and settling down into dominant culture. Refugees of cultural repression would migrate to where they heard other queer people were, other genders, other people making similar art, or other radicals bent on eliminating capitalism and class divides.

Of course, we are mostly privy to 1960s youth, the Summer of Love movement, and all things *Dazed and Confused*. However, the young people who flocked to the city were different than young people migrating out west. These youth, filled with rage and rebellion, had grown up through these urban events that occurred in 1964, and were acutely aware of oppressive forces that seemed to control and repress their lives. A new kind of revolution was forming in this small part of the country. Greenwich Village was being overrun by a new wave of youth who hated capitalism, idealized slums as well as insanity and drug use, and demanded radical change. This cultural environment was drastically different than what was happening almost everywhere else in the 1960s.
West coast youth were listening to The Grateful Dead, using psychedelic drugs and marijuana, expressing mostly heterosexual free love, experiencing good times, optimism, transcendence, and community. Meanwhile, in the microcosm of New York City’s Greenwich Village, a more cynical counterculture was emerging. This group was listening to The Velvet Underground and the Fugs. They were using drugs like heroin and amphetamines. They were embracing a different kind of sex-positivism – one that included queerness and gender non-conformity. That is, the major differentiation between this group in Greenwich Village and the rest of “Summer of Love” youth culture was expressed in the resistance of the grand narrative of freedom and justice’s utopic vision. This idyllic vision is then replaced with a focus on action and resistance enacted through pragmatic interventions within existing power relations. But first, we travel back to before the movement began to explore the kind of upbringing these soon-to-be vagabonds experienced.

1964: The Upbringing of Change

Where did this unique, and polarizing generational voice emerge? To investigate the emergence of New York City’s youth counterculture, I begin with 1964, a pivotal year for New York City. Fifteen-year-olds influenced by the pulls and pushes of generational and racial divides in 1964 would, after all, go on to become 18-year-olds in 1967. Lawrence R. Samuel, writer of *New York City 1964: A Cultural Study*, identifies a number of major events that occurred in New York City in 1964, which changed culture in the city forever. In this section, we will focus on only a few: The Beatles’ first appearance on the *Ed Sullivan Show*, the murder of Kitty Genovese, the Harlem Riots, and the 1964 World Series. These events unfold as significant representations of cultural and generational conflicts. New York City in 1964 is a marker in history. The city served as an almost perfect microcosm of the United States, as it shifted from
old-world, pre-war ideology to post-war distrust, resistance, and identity. These events are necessary to understanding the uniqueness of New York City’s 1960s counterculture, which existed and flourished in Greenwich Village.

The Beatles
According to Samuel, The Beatles’ entrance in New York City in February 1964, sparked the dawning of a new era – one in which mop tops, beatniks, hippies and drug users were forming their own counterculture. The reception to The Beatles era was all but welcoming. Older generations protested outside of venues that housed The Beatles with signs that read “Exterminate The Beatles!” Confused adults and chaotic, screaming teenagers came to a head when The Beatles first entered New York City.13 An article in New York Amsterdam News from February 1964 describes the event. “During the latter part of ’63 we informed you about The Beatles. Now that we have been invaded by The Beatles, there is nothing more we can say.”14 This sentence embodies the divisions of age, race, gender, and class, which were on the verge of great emphasis. Critics viewed the band as a menace. The battle between critics of the Beatles and their fans foreshadowed the generational gap just around the corner. Many of these teenagers would be adults by 1967, a hallmark year for Greenwich Village’s new residents.

These divisions emphasized by the severe critical backlash against The Beatles only scratch the surface on what would become a major political movement. That is, the movement of political identity. Queer and transgender rights, black liberation, anarcho-syndicalism, sex-positivity, bohemianism and slum culture would later explode into a new form of political

13 Samuel, New York City 1964, 40.
engagement. New York City would have only a month to recover from the menacing Beatles
until the next big event brought the city to a halt.

The Murder of Kitty Genovese
In the early hours of March 13, 1964, Kitty Genovese was murdered. Many Americans
viewed this tragedy as a disturbing sign that modern, metropolitan life was destroying human
connection and empathy. Her murderer, Winston Moseley, was charged with homicide,
explaining his crime as simply having “an urge to go out and kill somebody.” 15 The rumor
spread that Genovese called out for help multiple times, and that if someone had called the police
earlier, she may have still been alive. The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette writers covering the story
noted thirty-eight “respectable citizens” who “witnessed” the attack and “sat idly by.” 16

According to Samuel, despite the fact that many of the reported “facts” of the event
proving a new wave of apathy were not true, the case was still and continues to be used as proof
of modern dehumanization and apathy. It also spurred a new understanding of group psychology
that continues to proliferate psychological scholarship to this day. 17

Another major implication of the murder of Kitty Genovese was the perceived safety of
women. Directly following the Moseley case, another court case received national attention. In
July, walking home from the World’s Fair, Arlene Del Fava used an illegal knife to stab a sailor
who had attacked and tried to rape her. 18 Del Fava stated, in the midst of her distress of being
arrested, “that’s better than being killed.” 19 The grand jury, made up exclusively of men,
unanimously cleared Del Fava of any wrongdoing. Del Fava went free, and hatpin sales in New

15 Samuel, New York City 1964, 58.
17 Samuel, New York City 1964, 58.
19 Samuel, New York City 1964, 82.
York City skyrocketed in the year of 1964. According to an article in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* on Thursday, July 16 1964, Miss Del Fava claimed that she had started carrying a knife for personal protection after “Kitty Genovese was slain in a street attack…and 38 persons heard her scream but did not help.”

The murder of Kitty Genovese and the resulting collective reaction has much explanatory power in cultural distrust and disharmony. While adults living through this event in the city felt disillusionment in the old-world sense of the word “community,” youth were absorbing a greater understanding of what they wanted their community to look like moving forward. This meant that, in a world where women, black communities, queer and transgender communities, and poor communities were targeted, individual identity was an act of political resistance. Community meant protecting that at all costs and reacting in violence when met with external threats.

*The Harlem Riots*

The Harlem Race Riots constituted one of many violent racial conflicts happening throughout the United States in the 1960s. What sparked the riot? James Powell, a fifteen-year-old African American boy, was shot and killed by an off-duty white police officer on Thursday, July 16, 1964 around 9:15 in the morning. This event would have a major and lasting impact by helping to usher in a more contentious and combative era in the city and nation. Because of the shooting and a culmination of police violence against black communities in New York City, race relations in New York became even more severe. The murder was not an isolated event, argued the protestors, but simply the latest event in an extensive record of police brutality focused at black people and other people of color. It was, in short, part of a pattern. The day after the

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shooting, a group of black protestors gathered near the East 67th Street police station chanting and carrying signs that read “Killer Cops Must Go!” The request? Some wanted Lieutenant Gilligan, the police officer, who shot the boy, to be immediately suspended. Others demanded his arrest for first-degree murder.22

Black Nationalists met as a result of the incident, directly after the Powell viewing. They felt that civil rights leaders had not done as much as necessary to stop violence against blacks and that more extreme measures were necessary. A riot broke out, and newspapers jumped to describe the event. “The growl of anguish and frustration,” Samuel recaps in a newspaper article, “theme song of the racial hellhole known as Harlem, exploded this week into a howl of hatred and violence punctuated by the staccato sound of police gunfire, homemade bombs and flying bottles.”23 New York was embroiled in racial turmoil.

Black leaders disparaged the newspapers for embellishing the violence, arguing journalists should have focused more on the reasons for the violence rather than the violence itself. Reporters also excessively reported on the role of black Nationalists and other extremists. The *Irish Times* ends their article on the riot condemning communists and other extremist groups for the spark of the riots. “Communists are working with white hate groups and black nationalists to stimulate the riots and racial unrest in New York, officials said yesterday.”24 Similar to media reports today against protestors, newspapers in 1964 accused communists and extremist groups of instigating riots and violence, rather than acknowledging that regular citizens have finally

reached a breaking point. Finally, the media interpreted the riots as though rioting was somehow unique to blackness.25

The Harlem riots also revealed what would later, in 1967, become a major area of discourse among black opposition to white oppression: civil disobedience vs. direct, violent action. Jesse Gray, the leader of the Harlem rent strike that was held the previous winter and preacher of the Mount Morris Presbyterian Church said from the pulpit the Sunday morning following the beginning of the riots. “There is only one thing that can correct the situation,” Gray declared, “and that’s guerilla warfare.” Gray represents the militant side of the argument. Gray argued, “ninety-nine percent of Harlem’s police force was white, and that cops on the beat received regular payments from local white merchants in exchange for loyalty.” Other organizations and Harlemites had no interest in waging guerilla warfare against the police department. They were opting for non-violent protest.26

This rift between different methods of resistance would go on to be a prominent cornerstone in civil rights action throughout the rest of the 1960s and most of the 1970s. While much of white youth culture in Western United States was participating in political resistance through non-participation and passive protest, those in Greenwich Village were organizing to understand systemic oppression. Participating in dismantling the system and sharing propaganda related to anything from communism to destroying the male sex, these young people bore witness to a system no longer serving the people, and they were ready to change that.27

Each of these events represented a major transformation, from group to individual identity through generational, race, and gender lines. The final event that shook New York City

25 Samuel, New York City 1964, 128.
26 Samuel, New York City 1964, 142-144.
in 1964 would represent race and generational division altogether. It would go on to be remembered as a turning point in history, when post-war conformity was officially replaced with a new wave of culture. The 1964 World Series ended in the Cardinals’ win against the New York Yankees, surprising everyone, and proving once and for all that New York City was in tumbleweed of transition, and nobody could stop it.

*The 1964 World Series*

Age and race served as vital fodder through which the Cardinals would prove triumphant – a metaphor, claims Samuel, “for the nation’s increasing attention to youth and diversity.”

Injuries to their star player, Mickey Mantle, and the aging of Roger Maris and Whitey Ford heavily accounted for part of the decline of the New York Yankees, but a larger, more social issue also influenced the team’s regression. Other teams – teams like the St. Louis Cardinals – were more progressive about including black and brown players on their rosters giving them a larger pool of talent from which to choose. The Yankees, on the other hand, were notoriously unhurried in signing black and brown players. According to Samuel, the New York Yankees were secure in their success, their past, and of their own racial discriminations. The Yankees had sat in the benches in the fifties while many baseball teams, including the cardinals, had signed some of the best young, talented, and determined black athletes.\(^{28}\)

Although it may have been difficult to sense at the time, the Yankees’ charm of the 1950s and early 1960s was slipping away, mirroring changes taking place in New York itself. With their star players aging, and having lost the year before, there was an eager quality to the Yankees’ journey to gain traction again. Losing the 1964 World Series would mean two World Series losses in a row for the Yankees, the first time since 1922. The remarkable postwar run of the New York Yankees, where they dominated baseball as no other American team had in

history was over. New York City itself was headed in a different direction. The decline of the New York Yankees was hardly the stuff of Cultural Revolution, but it fittingly denoted the transition of the city in the mid-1960s. Change had caught up to New York, and its postwar culture was no longer relevant.  

The 1964 World Series carries a similar emblem, one that showed the world that those who refused to diversify, and change would be left behind. Something big was required to get teenagers to break free from the bind of postwar conformity. Here, a significant cultural shift is evident, represented through a series of unprecedented events. And these events that occurred in acted as fuel to the new generation of youth that would soon be taking over parts of the city, particularly the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

This revolution required an emphasis on identity, objective reality, and changing the system from within the current power structures. This was a stark contrast to what was happening across the country. While the rest of youth was focusing on universality, neutrality, and a utopic vision of peace, counterculture in New York City was a harsher reality.

The Greenwich Village Renaissance

In the mid to late sixties, the Lower East Side of Manhattan was witness to an invasion of white youth who endeavored to reshape society and themselves against the new urban landscape of grit. They came to the Village to escape America’s collective post-traumatic stress after the war. They had grown up repressed, lonely, and misunderstood. They were witness to an America that was colluded, confusing, and losing its trust. They were looking for refuge. A new, small, self-exiled community of bohemians was beginning to emerge.

Patrick Burke, in *The Fugs, the Lower East Side, and the Slum Aesthetic of 1960s Rock*, explains the new attitude of slumming. “The concept of slumming became part of youth culture, which paradoxically broke down barriers of race, class, and sexuality while also reinforcing the notion of a fundamental moral and cultural difference between white slummers and debased slum-dwellers.” Slumming was more than a living space. It was a mindset that liberated the Village’s new and growing population. Greenwich Village’s renaissance became the antithesis of postwar suburban society and more importantly, the antithesis of the Summer of Love movement happening elsewhere in the country.

Ed Sanders, poet and cofounder of the Fugs, one of the first musical groups to come out of Greenwich Village’s counterculture, wrote about the uniqueness of Greenwich Village. “[The Lower East Side] had been discovered over and over for two hundred years by the beaten-down, the broken, the rebellious, the radicals, the socialists, the anarcho-syndicalists, the suffragettes and feminists, the Trotskyites, and in our time by the bards and pot-heads, the jazz hips… and those just passing through on the way to the gold-paved streets of the American dream.” Sanders speaks to the fantastical nature of the Village and its status as sanctuary for the self-exiled. Burke’s examination of the slum aesthetic paints a more nuanced picture of this novel urban counterculture. This group of youths resisted the political agenda of repression, through art, music, clothing, and lifestyle.

To understand the specific resistance that proliferated in Greenwich Village, we must combine the theories of idolized writers with the counterculture’s interpretation of those theories. Foucault represented an intellectual resistance that the Village mentality quickly adopted, discussed, and developed into art. Foucault’s interpretations of power and sexuality

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were the major points of discussion for the Villagers. While primarily academics, intellectuals, and a few artists read Foucault, his ideas nevertheless permeated life and protest in the Village. Foucault reminded readers that living in the present, a tagline for the hippie movement, would not remove us from power relations. Power is ubiquitous and expansive. Instead, living in a state of resistance may interrupt power relations, allowing for new experiences to emerge. His ideas on power disparities, though not widely read, pervaded art, activism, and life almost through osmosis. Another major product of this counterculture of criminality was The Velvet Underground.

Deconstructing the conventional hierarchies of music, the Velvet Underground produced queer rock that challenged gender roles in music. Writers like Foucault inspired anti-repressive politics through existing power structures represented New York City’s counterculture through philosophy and writing; the Velvet Underground represented it through music.

The Velvet Underground represented through music Foucault’s vision that “to resist is not simply a negation but a creative process.” According to Matthew Bannister in “I’m set free...”: The Velvet Underground, 1960s Counterculture, and Michel Foucault, the Velvet Underground was the antithesis of youth culture, thereby representing New York City counterculture. The points of difference were almost endless. While hippies were doing LSD, slummers in New York were doing drugs like heroin and amphetamines. Those at Woodstock were focusing on good times and pick-pocketers and panhandlers in New York City focused mostly on bad times. Queerness and gender-fluidity was emphasized in New York, while

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34 Mark Murphy, Social Theory and Education Research: Understanding Foucault, Habermas, Bourdieu and Derrida (Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 32.
35 Bannister, “‘I’m Set Free...’”, 166.
heterosexual free love was practiced elsewhere. While most youth was practicing non-conformity through the act of non-participation, youths in New York City were practicing non-conformity through active resistance and a focus on real, individual problems.

The Velvet Undergrounds and the philosophers reading Foucault represented the zeitgeist of the time and place. Unflinching realism vested in specificity became more important than a universal idea. A new form of expression was taking over.

Because of the culture made up almost entirely of vagabonds, the glorification of madness in 1960s counter culture encouraged a level of absurdity and humor in resistance art. Meghan Warner Mettler argues in If I could Drive you Out of your Mind: Anti-Rationalism and the Celebration of Madness in 1960s Counterculture that counterculture of the 60s saw madness as the ultimate form of rebellion. “If conventional ways of thinking were responsible for society’s problems,” Mettler identifies, “who better to provide new insights than those who were at times unable to think in conventional ways?” Mettler goes on to provide examples from 1960s counterculture that show an emphasis on insanity as a form of transcendence. As evidence, she cites Kurt Vonnegut’s God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater (1965), King of Hearts (1966), and of course One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest by Ken Kesey. The counterculture’s embrace of absurdity as the most complete form of protest led many of its members to develop a new outlook toward madness.

Insanity was also considered an appropriate response to oppression. The youth who grew up through the aforementioned New York-specific events in 1964 had seen the transformation of culture from post-war conformity to a disproportionately loud resistance against minor changes in youth culture, diversity, and identity. They were radical and repressed. They saw insanity not

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as transcendence from normative culture, but as an appropriate response to oppression and repressive cultural values. They wanted transcendence and independence.

In fact, Greenwich Village attempted to declare independence and secede from the United States in 1964. *New York Folklore Quarterly* published a work entitled “The Declaration of Independence for Greenwich Village” by Charles A. Huguenin in 1964. In it, he describes, somewhat satirically, a small rally of Villagers attempting to declare independence and establishment as a free republic. Their concerns were suppression of free speech and assembly, imprisonment of working-class leaders, and the continued support of the war efforts. Huguenin described demands were a friendly and cooperative society instead of living under “hypocritical capitalism in which every man’s heart is filled with suspicion and hatred, and every man’s hand is raised against his brother.” Huguenin observed the rain as putting a damper on the event. “It appeared that the radicals hated the rain almost as much as they hated the ‘insidious capitalist class.’” The protestors had, indeed, dispersed rather quickly when the rain began.

And while this humorous understanding of modern bohemianism unfolds in history, it is clear that the Village was, or at least aspired to be, another country, as Ronald Sukenick declared. The long history of resistance in Greenwich coupled with New York City’s contentious year, 1964, made headway for a new cultural vision. Children who grew up in the early-to-mid 60s were witness to generational and racial divides and violence. Many of them, in early adulthood made their way to the Village to find a different way of life. I contend that the Village was not simply a random magnet that attracted cultural dissenters, but that, in fact, its

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38 Strausbaugh, *The Village*, 69.
history insists on it. Further, in order to understand political and cultural rebellion in the 1960s, we must look to the Village.

One Villager described the Village as a Utopia; deliberately embracing, “socialism, sex, poetry, poetry, and dawn-greeting – anything so long as it was taboo in the Middle West.” ³⁹ It is essentially this that we will explore in chapter two. In post-war United States, what was considered taboo? One of the most taboo and dangerous actions was free gender and sexuality expression. Many of those who did not fit in to cisgender and hetero-normative identification migrated to the Village.

Chapter 2: The Perpetuity of Queerness

On the evening of June 27, 1969, New York Police raided a well-known, underground gay bar in Greenwich Village. This was not a unique event. Police constantly raided unofficial gay bars in New York and other cities across the U.S., often loading up paddy wagons with patrons, hoping to terrorize an already subjugated community. This raiding was unlike all the others before them. In a spontaneous rebellion against the years of police repression, the bar patrons led a rebellion that lasted into the night and continued on and off over the next two days. The uniqueness of this particular response is not to say that gay people had never fought back before; but this event was commemorated in history and collective memory as the start of the gay liberation movement. It marked an international commemorative ritual: the annual gay pride parade. The Stonewall Uprising is commonly referred to as a divide in gay history: before Stonewall and after Stonewall.  

This chapter explores queer culture in the East Village and Greenwich Village before Stonewall. Traversing the undefined nature of queerness, this chapter identifies a few key queer figures in Village history such as Valerie Solanas, The Velvet Underground, Sylvia Rae Rivera, and Marsha P. Johnson. What narrative do these figures’ lives string together in the long history of gay life and gay rebellion? It is undeniably evident that the Stonewall Uprising opened up a world of pride for gay struggle in the U.S. and around the world. “There was no gay pride,” Edmund White, novelist and one of those present at the Stonewall Uprising has said, “there was

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only gay fear and gay isolation and gay distrust and gay-self hatred.” Nevertheless, it is
equally important to reflect on what was lost after Stonewall. That is, formalization and
formatting of queer identities. In other words, it is essential to understand Stonewall’s impact on
the fluidity and expansiveness of queer culture.

I will be using a framework established by Jose Esteban Munoz in his book, *Cruising
Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, to explore queer culture in this specific
geographic location and time. Munoz outlines that queerness is necessarily exploratory and in the
process of becoming rather than a finished product. “Queerness is not yet here,” Munoz opens
his book with, “Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer.” That is,
especially before Stonewall, the process of queerness should not be defined, but rather, may
better be defined by an absence of heterosexuality. Queerness is rejecting the dominant narrative,
insisting on possibility, and denying exclusivity.⁴²

This was indeed true for queer culture and much of the radical thought processes of
1960s Greenwich and East Villages. Deep in range and wide in variety, the opportunity for queer
expression in the Villages was endless. There were radical feminist women who loved women,
like Audre Lorde and Valerie Solanas. These women were especially prominent due to a
permanent fixture in Greenwich Village, the Women’s House of Detention, which housed “unfit
women” ranging from lesbians to radicals to sex workers.⁴³ There were transgender and gender-
queer Village characters like Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rae Rivera, who were drag queens,
street sex workers, activists, or “bodhisattvas,” as it were. Marsha was often referred to as Saint

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⁴¹ Dwight Garner, “In The 70s All New York Seemed Young and Gay,” *New York Times*,
September 29, 2009.
⁴² Jose Esteban Munoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York:
⁴³ Before Stonewall: The Making of a Gay and Lesbian Community, directed by Greta Schiller
and Robert Rosenberg (1985; Toronto: First Run Features), Stream.
Marsha.\textsuperscript{44} Then, there were the artists and musicians like Andy Warhol and members of the Velvet Underground who had undefined queer characteristics, but could be defined through the explicit denial of heterosexuality.

This chapter presents the concept of identity as it relates to my argument that the Village Renaissance is essential to our current understanding of cultural rebellion. Queerness, before the Stonewall Uprising in particular, did not fit into an identifiable box. In a dominant culture dedicated to rules, gender roles, and conformity, non-identity is perhaps the most rebellious political act. This chapter showcases characters in the Village as representations of the larger cultural narrative surrounding queerness. I argue that queerness, specifically in the Village, was a fundamental cornerstone in the countercultural life that spurred radical identity politics and cultural dissent in the 1960s and subsequent years.

Queer people of varied and numerous identities flocked to Greenwich Village in the 1960s. In 1958, twenty-year-old Randy Wicker had seen his first copy of \textit{Mattachine Review}, one of the first independent gay men’s magazines, on a Greenwich Village newsstand and met up with new, likeminded people. He had read that Greenwich Village was a gathering spot, went to gay activist and political meetings, and went to his first gay bar in Greenwich Village.\textsuperscript{45} “There were women that looked like men,” Audre Lorde has recalled, “and men that looked like women. It didn’t matter. And we were the gay girls’ version of the beatniks.”\textsuperscript{46} That is to say, Greenwich Village and the East Village held open space for possibility in queerness. It did not define queerness or any other identify, for that matter. Identification itself found home in the endless expansion of possibility. In this counter culture of queerness, race relations, politics, and

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{44} Strausbaugh, \textit{The Village}, 468-469.
\bibitem{45} Strausbaugh, \textit{The Village}, 260-261.
\bibitem{46} Greta Schiller and Robert Rosenberg, dir. \textit{Before Stonewall}.
\end{thebibliography}
community, radical identity exists not in its clear-cut lines, but rather, in its grayness, its incompleteness, and its potential.

Valerie Solanas

Valerie Solanas was one of the queer people that had flocked to Greenwich Village in the mid 1960s. She wrote the *SCUM Manifesto* between 1965 and 1966. Then, in 1967, she self-published the first edition, making two thousand mimeographed copies and selling them on East Village streets in New York City.47 *SCUM* is a radical feminist manifesto and, in it, Solanas argues that men have ruined the world, that life in this society contains no aspect at all relevant to women, and that “there remains to civic-minded, responsible, thrill-seeking females only to overthrow the government, eliminate the monetary system, institute complete automation, and destroy the male sex.”48 Revolutionary in thought and satirical in content, the *SCUM Manifesto* represents what Breanne Fahs, fervent Solanas researcher and scholar, described as nuanced contradictions of Valerie Solanas’s life and work.49 Further, Solanas fits into Munoz’s theory encompassing the perpetuity and anti-identitarian aspects of queerness in her contradiction.

Solanas’s contradictions within her own body, identity, and work exemplify the grayness of queer radical politics. A sex worker, activist, self-published writer, performance artist, queer, imprisoned and institutionalized person, whose politics are varied and contradictory in themselves, Solanas’s complexities and ironies range beyond definition. She has refused to identify as a feminist and yet has become a symbol of radical feminism throughout history. “She situates herself between several defining dichotomies,” Fahs has observed in her writing, “Purity and contamination, bodily integrity and bodily violation.” She had never fully defined her

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sexuality and, in fact, adamantly denied an association with queer culture, reflecting some consistencies in her anti-establishment, anti-assimilatory mindset. Solanas rejected even the comforts of fringe cultures, finding peace, rather, in her adamant self-actualization. She represents Village counterculture perfectly in this way: that the act of becoming is more important than the act of being.

Later, however, in a 1977 interview in the *Village Voice*, Solanas offers some hint at her sexual fluidity. “I have been a lesbian, and I consider the part [where I was accused of not being a lesbian] serious libel,” Solanas argued. Though at the time, I wasn’t sexual. I was into all kinds of other things. The way it was worded gave the impression that I’m a heterosexual, you know…” Solanas was clear that she absolutely did not want to be defined through the lens of heterosexuality. In an apt representation of the counterculture in which she resides, Solanas casts a shadow of fear and rejection in being aligned with anything of the dominant narrative. She was appalled at the idea of being accused of being straight.

Valerie Solanas suffered sexual abuse from her birth father, subsequently fought with her stepfather, and was sent to live with her grandfather who also physically abused her. She ran away at fifteen and was impregnated by a married man. After her child was taken from her, she lived on the streets until her imprisonment, psychiatric institutionalization, and subsequent death. After Valerie Solanas ran away from home, she ended up a sex worker and panhandler in Greenwich Village in 1966. Freddie Baer notes in his epilogue in the 1991 edition of *SCUM*, that while selling her mimeographed copies of *The Manifesto* in the streets, she met Maurice Girodias

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of Olympia Press (French publisher of *Lolita, Candy*, and *Tropic of Cancer*) who gave her an advance of $600 to write a novel based on the manifesto.\(^{52}\)

Later, according to Baer, on June 3, 1968 at 12 PM, after multiple attempts by Solanas to retrieve a play she had written and given to Andy Warhol, Solanas went to Andy Warhol’s studio. After at least six months of a continuously declining mental state, Solanas and waited there for approximately two to four hours. She had gone up and down the elevator at least seven times before she finally arrived with Warhol at 4:15 PM. Solanas then shot at Andy Warhol three times, missing the first two times, and hitting him in the left lung the third. She then went on to find a police officer, gave him her gun, and told him she shot Andy Warhol. She explained, “He had too much control over my life.”\(^{53}\)

Solanas was to be charged and sentenced to three years in prison for “reckless assault with intent to harm.” On April 26, 1988, Valerie Solanas died without any money and alone of emphysema and pneumonia in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco at the age of fifty-two. She was a continuing sex worker, with an unstable mental illness and substance use disorders. Solanas died in the same fashion that she lived and represented her culture and community.\(^{54}\)

Like so many other queer and radical women from the 1960s, Solanas was found slumped over in her San Francisco hotel bed, covered in maggots, her body, like her work being destroyed. She represents many women, mentally ill, people of color, queer people, and those who find their homes only in the gray areas of identity who suffered the ultimate consequence of a system that tried to subdue or destroy them. She represents a counterculture that was trying to reverse that cycle. Perhaps the most contradictory aspect of her story is that Valerie Solanas,

\(^{52}\) Freddie Baer, “Valerie Solanas,” *SCUM Manifesto*, 82-84.

\(^{53}\) Baer, “Valerie Solanas,” *SCUM Manifesto*, 82-84.

\(^{54}\) Baer, “Valerie Solanas,” *SCUM Manifesto*, 86.
having claimed that Warhol had too much control over her life, has rarely been remembered outside of her association with the Andy Warhol shooting. It was not only Solonas’ work that represented the culture in which it was created; her life of complexity and contradiction acts as a memorial to all those who suffer at the hands of oppressors, and all those who were fighting in New York City in the 1960s to change that.

**The Velvet Underground**

The Velvet Underground was another Village fixture that represented a vague countercultural narrative. Never explicitly queer, but actively devoid of heterosexuality, the Velvet Underground’s lyrics and performances imbued gray sexuality, androgyny, gender-queerness, and sado-masochism. The non-heterosexual content in the Velvet’s personae gave rise to new, sexually ambiguous artists like David Bowie, who would dress outside of gender norms and discussed his sexuality as sometimes bisexual, however, more often, through the lens of non-heterosexuality. In a 2002 interview, when asked to name his sexuality, David Bowie hedged the question, and rather, offered an observation about the expansiveness of sexuality. “Such a serious and life-challenging and changing question,” offers Bowie. “The answer that I have for you would probably create such turmoil in your soul. I’m not sure you could, in fact, withstand it or last the rest of the show, so I will politely and reluctantly not answer that question.”

That is, Bowie’s relationship to his sexuality is so transcendent above dominant narratives surrounding hetero-normativity, that his interviewer would fall apart at the seams having to face it.

The Velvets were a huge inspiration for Bowie. They established camp and avant-garde as a rock and roll category. According to Matthew Bannister in his essay, “I’m Set Free…The Velvet Underground, 1960s Counterculture, and Michel Foucault,” the Velvets produced queer

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The Velvet Underground’s lyrics embody and hold space for non-conformity in more than just sexuality. For example, one of the most famous Lou Reed songs, “Walk on the Wild Side,” tells a narrative of gender transitioning: “Holly came from Miami, F.L.A / Hitch-hiked her way across the U.S.A. / Plucked her eyebrows on the way / Shaved her legs and then he was a she / She says “Hey, babe, take a walk on the wild side.” Here, Lou Reed from the Velvet Underground brings the listener through an experience of gender transition and gender repositioning in a matter-of-fact manner.

Gender and bodily recognition are also addressed throughout Velvet lyrics from earlier on as well. Their 1969 song, “Candy Says,” explores a common concept in transgender communities surrounding body dysmorphia. “Candy says I’ve come to hate my body / and all that it requires in this world / Candy says I’d like to know completely / what other so discretely talk about.” Candy is unpacking their severe discomfort in their body and the way it relates to the world. The lyrics describe someone so out of sync in their body, perhaps the only inherent home we contain and can strap our identities to. The guaranteed safety of bodily autonomy is assumed for many, but transgender people aren’t awarded that same safety. This gives way for new safe homes, created out of necessity. These safe, expressive cultural enclaves were created in Greenwich and the East Villages. They exist in revolutionary spirit and group identity. They exist in the non-identity formation of ideas. Gender binaries, which leave many people without identified gender homes, are questioned in the Velvet’s lyrics.

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56 Bannister, “‘I’m Set Free...’: The Velvet Underground, 1960s Counterculture, and Michel Foucault,” 175.
Further, the Velvet Underground explores sexuality through different modes of sex in general. While much of rock and roll is defined by free expression of sex, often that sex is linked to a hetero-normative structure. Conversely, the Velvet Underground represented the antithesis of west coast counterculture, emerging, as Bannister describes “in 1966 like a hideous carbuncle on the face of a beautiful hippie child.” That is, unlike west coast culture, the Velvets did not proclaim a path to spirituality or transcendence. They explored sex and sexuality, rather, through an objective lens. Objectivity in power structures, particularly in sado-masochistic power dynamics, is evident in their song “Venus in Furs.” “Kiss the boots of shiny, shiny leather / Whiplash girl child in the dark / Comes in bells, your servant, don’t forsake him / Strike, dear mistress, and cure his heart.” Gay sexuality and fringe sex culture is a dynamic mode of performance for the Velvet Underground in its explicit refusal to adhere to a more traditional lifestyle, even that of west coast counterculture. It’s camp. It’s performance. It’s a fluctuating concept of identity, rather than identity itself.

This is not to say that the Velvet Underground or David Bowie, whom they inspired, was necessarily queer idolatry. Because their queerness was rooted in a campy performance of queer identity rather than identity itself, it meant that it could be taken off or replaced, mutated and mutilated, or manipulated to serve any singular purpose. However, through the lens of Munoz’s framework, we can explore queerness as a performance of inexactness. Through that lens, we may find that these performances are as queer as any queer purist who has their identities specifically laid out. In a 1973 newspaper, The Gay Alternative, an author by the name of Tommy addresses this issue of anti-identitarian stances taken by potential queer idols in his

59 Bannister, “I’m set free...: The Velvet Underground,” 164.
editorial “David Bowie, Friend or Foe?” “The thing that bothers me,” argues Tommy, “is that here we have a vehicle for raising people’s consciousnesses, but with nothing to show for it.”

What cannot be denied is that the Velvet Underground was not heterosexual. And, further, they represent the ambiguities in queer culture, specifically in Greenwich and the East Villages, especially before the Stonewall Uprising. Indeed, the Velvet Underground embodies the complexities in this counterculture, further differentiating it from countercultures in other parts of the country in the 1960s. Jonathan Richman pays homage to The Velvet Underground in his 1992 album, I, Jonathan. Richman reminisces about the Velvet Underground’s distinguishability, “They were wild like the USA / A mystery band in a New York way / Rock and roll but not like the rest / And to me, America at its best / How in the world were they making that sound? / Velvet Underground.” Here, Richman likens the Velvet Underground to culture in New York City, America at its best.

**Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rae Rivera, and Stonewall**

Along with the slum-dwellers like Valerie Solanas and those in the art scenes like the Velvet Underground, were the gender-queer and transgender personalities that roamed the streets as sex workers and performers in nature. These are folks who would dress in full or partial drag, and they came from places where dressing that way would get them beaten to death, institutionalized, or imprisoned. While these consequences still existed in New York City, the probability of them decreased substantially. Street Queens, as they were referred to, had become a visible part of Greenwich and East Villages. Tough waterfront bars often served dockworkers and truckers by day and sailors and gay men at night. It was also familiar territory for gay-

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bashers who would have sex with locals and rob them, beat them, or push them off the edge into the river.\textsuperscript{63}

Marsha P. Johnson was one long-time drag queen and hustler who frequented the docks and the waterfront. “Johnson” was taken from the Times Square Howard Johnson’s and the “P” stood for “Pay It No Mind.” Marsha had started dressing femininely by age five but had given it up when a neighbor boy raped her. According to Strausbaugh, she became “one of the most outrageous and flamboyant queens on the streets and piers.” A friend of hers, Randy Wicker, recalled that she was the most campy and low-budget drag queen who impressed people, not in her ability to “pass” but in her gender-queer and charming character. People in the Village treated her as a holy deity.\textsuperscript{64}

Johnson would take younger queers under her wing, a den mother to new and younger queens, offering them guidance and safety standards. She would tell stories about mistakes she had made working the streets and hustling. Her body and mind had gone through turmoil. She was once pushed into the river. She was shot in the back. She was often arrested and beaten several times. And Marsha P. Johnson wasn’t the only queen who was abused on Village streets. Sylvia Rae Rivera was one of Marsha’s students.\textsuperscript{65}

Sylvia Rae Rivera described a typical raid at the Stonewall: bright lights would replace the mysterious darkness in the room. The music stopped. Cops would saunter in and divide up the patrons by perceived sexuality and gender. “F**s over here, d***s over there, and freaks over there,” recalled Sylvia. On the night of the Stonewall Uprising, the mood started to shift. A cop shoved a queen. The queen hit him with her purse. But, the real turning point was when a

\textsuperscript{63} Strausbaugh, \textit{The Village}, 468.
\textsuperscript{64} Strausbaugh, \textit{The Village}, 468-469.
\textsuperscript{65} Strausbaugh, \textit{The Village}, 470-471.
butch lesbian fought cops in a ten-minute fight before she was subdued. The crowd saw that fight and grew emboldened. And those emboldened were the gender-queer queens and those ambiguous in identity. White, middle class, gay men who generally conformed to gender identity were able to pass through life more protected than those who were visibly not heterosexual. Because of this, they were not the most ready for violent uprising.\textsuperscript{66}

Those who were ready, who had been sacrificing their bodies and their minds on the streets and the docks, like Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rae Rivera also started organizing and politicizing people after the uprising. After the uprising, talk on the street was more militant, more direct. Gay folks in the streets were angrier, ready to rise up again. Then, various gay liberation organizations, like the Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Activists Alliance, started meeting up and Sylvia Rae Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson were there along the way. Regardless of their involvement from the beginning, gender-queer people were initially barred from entering the pride parades and marches because organizers were worried it would send the wrong message to the public. That’s when Sylvia and Marsha started their own group, Street Transvestite Activist Revolutionaries, or STAR, in the East Village.\textsuperscript{67}

Marsha P. Johnson’s body was found floating in the Hudson, off the Village piers, where she spent so much of her time, in 1992. Police recorded it as a suicide, though her friends were certain she was murdered.\textsuperscript{68} Regardless, we may witness her death much like the death of Valerie Solanas, who died alone in the Tenderloin District of San Francisco, or Lou Reed who died of Liver disease much later in 2001. Cultural dissent, and especially queer cultural dissent in Greenwich and the East Village presented the concept of queer utopia, put forth by Jose Esteban

\textsuperscript{66} Strausbaugh, \textit{The Village}, 476-481.
\textsuperscript{67} Strausbaugh, \textit{The Village}, 481-483.
\textsuperscript{68} Strausbaugh, \textit{The Village}, 483.
Munoz. That is, these countercultures were essential to our understanding of politics of cultural dissent and rebellion. The project in this chapter is to understand queer culture as an endless communal existence, and not to cast these characters as individualistic heroes. Rather, I aim to showcase them as examples of a whole cultural feeling that existed in Greenwich and East Village queerness, the lack of heterosexuality, and the perpetuity therein.

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69 Munoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 115
Chapter 3: A Revolutionary Heart

Greenwich Village and the East Village took on a new, radical, and militant left ideology in the late-1960s and throughout 70s. The Yippie movement (The Youth International Party), a radical offshoot of the 1960s free speech and anti-war movement, began to take off in the Villages among a multitude of other radical left groups. In one incident, Yippie leaders Abby Hoffman and Paul Krassner were high on LSD in a Lower East Side apartment. In the midst of their merriment, they received a notice that a young group of black kids were arrested for smoking marijuana. In an act of what Krassner and Hoffman perceived as solidarity, the two ran down immediately to the Ninth Precinct house. Hoffman proceeded to insist that the police arrest him as well. When the police refused multiple times, Hoffman kicked through a glass trophy case in the lobby. His wish was ultimately granted. This act aptly represents the contrast in New York’s white leftist movements of the 1960s compared to more complicated and race-centered movements like the Black Panthers or the Puerto Rican Young Lords. White revolutionaries and leftists were frequently offered more leniencies in their criminal dissent and protest than black revolutionaries.

The Yippies, while offering a politically aligned alternative to the 1960s hippie movement, were often young, white intellectuals who enjoyed recreational use of drugs with loose ideological political values. Alternatively, groups like the Black Panthers and the Puerto Rican Young Lords had core ideologies and agendas. They were organized and militant in their actions, rather than fully reactionary. This chapter will analyze the different leftist political parties that sprung into existence in New York City, specifically making their marks in Greenwich and the East Villages, in the late-1960s and 70s. Further, I contend that the

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unprecedented aggregate of radical left affinity groups emerging in Greenwich and the East Village were not accidental. Indeed, their emergence follows a historical pattern of rebellion in these neighborhoods. By analyzing these revolutionary groups and organizations in their cultural context, we may further understand acts as Greenwich and the East Village a powerful and unique engine of radical identity politics as they relate to defiance, rebellion, and cultural dissent in the United States.

Unlike queer culture discussed in chapter two, these radical affinity groups and individuals found homes deeply rooted in clear identity. There were Leninist-Marxists, anarcho-syndicalists, communo-anarchists, black nationalists, Trotskyites, those who were simply antiwar, those who were militant and violent in their politics, and everything in between. One thing for certain, however, is that these revolutionaries all had one thing in common: They demanded a new world. The world that they were born into, one of repression, oppression, and violent authoritarianism was not built for the new, revolutionary ideology. When identity (or non-identity) and the simple act of existing in authenticity become threatened, new solutions are required.

In Chapter One, this thesis briefly explores the history of unrest and rebellion in Greenwich Village in the early start of colonization. Greenwich was always home to the working class. Kieft’s War in 1640 brought on massive dispute and rebellion from the indigenous land protectors. Later, half-free black slaves occupied much of the land, which economically allowed for a massive slave rebellion in 1711. This final chapter expounds on that history as it relates to the late-1960s and through the 1970s in Greenwich and the East Village. Further, it explores the entire nature of movement building in these neighborhoods. How did these revolutionary groups interact with each other? What imprint did it leave on the nation? Where did they come from?
Bill Weinberg, author of *Tompkins Square Park, A Legacy of Rebellion*, traces the history of resistance back to the period of antebellum. Rebellion did not stop in Greenwich in 1711. The large influx of poor Irish and German immigration to the area combined with factory exploitation resulted in many working class riots. In Greenwich, a still mostly-black district, in 1837, a group of black citizens rescued a captured runaway slave and physically raised up against the judge who was hearing the case. Later, in 1863, after President Abraham Lincoln announced an official draft to raise the army against the Confederacy, riots ensued on the streets. Later again, with industrialization came great working class unrest. From the late-1800s through the mid-1900s, ideologies of every sort came to the streets. Women’s suffrage, anti-prohibitionists, and socialists were in the streets in the face of starvation, poor housing, and dilapidated neighborhoods. In short, the history of rebellion in the Village was long, ever-present, and always revolutionary.

Greenwich Village was also home to Emma Goldman, anarcho-communist, feminist, and resistance icon. Goldman was arrested in New York under the charges of inciting a riot, resulting in her imprisonment. “It is ridiculous to think that society cannot get along without government,” Goldman declared at her hearing. “We will say to the government: give us what belongs to us in peace, and if you don’t give it to us in peace, we will take it by force. As long as I live and am able to explain myself, I will be opposed to the government; and as I live and as my brain dictates, will use force against the government.” Goldman’s statements reverberate the sound of rebellion and anti-authoritarianism in the geographic center of the nation’s resistance. It is this declaration that carries the backdrop for the new wave of revolution, which takes hold in the 1960s and 1970s.

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This chapter begins with the arrest and life of Angela Davis, communist, activist, and professor who was detained at the Women’s House of Detention in Greenwich Village. Moving forward, I explore the influence of the Black Panther Party on the Puerto Rican Young Lords, both of which had branches affiliated with Greenwich and the East Villages. These groups are directly related to the history of immigration and inhabitation in this section of the city. Finally, this chapter analyzes other radical leftist groups that emerged, like the anti-war movement and other revolutionary leftist affinity groups. It is my hope that by understanding the revolutionary leftist movements emerging in the late 60s, we will begin to understand the full picture of the countercultural movement, and how distinguishable it was from the rest of the country. These neighborhoods were unique in the volume of revolutionary activity. The uprisings, protests, and occupations were frequent, violent, or sometimes, simply absurd. Analyzing them helps us develop a more nuanced socio-political identity for this geographic, countercultural period.

Angela Davis

In October of 1970, within about thirty minutes of Angela Davis being locked inside the Women’s House of Detention in Greenwich Village, a gathering of protestors arrived outside the large, oppressive structure to demand her release and show solidarity. Prisoners inside the detention center stood with their fists raised at the windows, while NYPD in riot gear showed up to fend off the protestors. Women inside the center had set small fires in their cells and demonstrators cheered on from the outside. Davis was placed in isolation, where she engaged in a ten-day hunger strike. Protestors demanded her release and humane treatment for the entirety of her nine weeks in the detention center. They also fought against her extradition to California, where she was being acquitted of charges in relation to a hostage and assault trial.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{73} Strausbaugh, \textit{The Village}, 442-443.
Davis was born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1944, to a car mechanic father and a civil rights activist, and educator mother. Her family lived in a black neighborhood, called Dynamite Hill, because the Klan would frequently firebomb homes in that community. She and her mother moved to New York when Davis was in high school. Davis would go on to study philosophy and earn her PhD at the University of California. By the late 1960s, she was an avid communist, affiliated with the Black Panther Party. This is to say that Davis was shaped by her time in New York City and California equally. She was revolutionized by her past, like the young people who migrated to Greenwich Village. She was further revolutionized when she was fired from her teaching job at the University of California for being a communist. And now, she was revolutionizing a generation.

In August 1970, Jonathan Jackson, a black teen, took arms against a judge, a district attorney, and three jurors in demand that his brother, Panther member George Jackson, be released from prison. In the getaway, the judge, along with one other person, were shot. Angela Davis was the owner of the guns used by Jackson in the hostage. Since the shootings, Davis had been on the run, until her capture in New York in October. She had been on the FBI’s ten most wanted fugitives list. Previous to this, Davis had been discharged from her doctoral position at the University of California for her affiliation with the Communist Party and the Black Panther Party. Angela Davis was, therefore, a perfect candidate for a revolutionary superstar. The political repression of her life made way for anger and fueled the countercultural leftist groups in the city. The fact that she was housed in Greenwich Village allowed for a permanent focus of that anger.

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74 Strausbaugh, *The Village*, 442.
During her time in New York, Davis’s presence incited a major rebellious spirit. Her presence acted as fodder to the already boiling, leftist and racial unrest within the city and especially in Greenwich Village. Indeed, the Women’s House of Detention was a long-standing physical emblem of state violence. Audre Lorde, famous Greenwich Village resident and poet, has described the Women’s House of D. as “a defiant pocket of female resistance, ever-present as a reminder of the possibility, as well as the punishment.” People in the Village knew it. They protested it. It was a permanent Village fixture that could not be uprooted or torn down. Women of all ages were housed there, often, taken in when they were protesting. The mistreatment was rampant and well known also spurring built up resentment and providing a proxy for State violence.

During her time in the detention center, the Village Voice conducted an interview with Angela, discussing her treatment at the House of D. and her ideology. “Roaches literally cover the walls of our ceilings at night, crawling across our bodies as we sleep…the medical conditions here are abominable…I am convinced that authorities in this place have been instructed to make life as difficult as possible for me, probably in order to convince me to stop fighting extradition.” Davis’s recounting of the terrible conditions, while simultaneously linking her own, personal treatment to her call for extradition, spurred protestors in the Village to act on an already-contentious issue.

Angela Davis was ultimately acquitted of all charges in the case. After thirteen hours of deliberation, her all-white jury found her not guilty in kidnapping and criminal conspiracy charges. Davis declared at the time that it was the happiest day of her life, but ultimately said, “A

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77 “Prison Interviews with Angela Y. Davis,” The Village Voice, October, 1970.
fair trial would have been no trial.” There was much argument surrounding whether Davis would have been prosecuted at all if she had not been Angela Davis, famous Communist Party member and member of the Black Panther Party.\footnote{Earl Caldwell, “Angela Davis Acquitted on All Charges,” \textit{The New York Times}, June 5, 1972, 1-3.} She was the last celebrity to be housed at the House of D. and the facility would eventually close down. During her time there, the already pent up emotion of the Village counterculture had a focus for their anger and rebellion. They had a singular cause in which they could unify and direct their energies, a factor to rally political identity out of.

**The Puerto Rican Young Lords**

In the 1960s and early 70s a new wave of immigration took place in Greenwich and the East Village. This migration contributed to a long history of racial violence in relation to immigration in these neighborhoods in New York City. Early century immigrants like the Irish and Italians used threats and gang violence to push out black communities from Greenwich Village to Chelsea, and finally to Harlem. A new wave of Puerto Rican and black Americans fleeing poverty relocated to Greenwich and the East Village in the 1960s and were met with contempt in what Bill Weinberg describes as “an ironic cycle of history. Just as the Irish had been met with contempt by the Germans…as the Italians, Jews, and Slavs had been met with contempt by the Irish and Germans.” Friction had always existed in these neighborhoods between Puerto Ricans, black communities, and the new element of unpredictable relations between the new, white counterculture that was taking over large parts of the neighborhoods.\footnote{Weinberg, \textit{Tompkins Square Park, A Legacy of Rebellion}, 15-21.}

This friction resulted in increased police violence. Thus, the Black Panthers were formed and the Puerto Rican Young Lords took hold shortly after. The Black Panthers were a
communist, militant black power group that advocated, essentially, for full black sovereignty by any means necessary. Taking their lead, the Puerto Rican Young Lords advocated for Puerto Rican sovereignty under in the same nature. In this way, the Young Lords found their political identity in Puerto Rican sovereignty and Marxism. Their movement was rooted in socialism and anti-colonialism much like the Black Panthers.

On January 21, 1970, an *East Village Other* article, “Was Jesus a Young Lord?,” covered an action the Young Lords demonstrated in one of the most revolutionary left movements in the Village. The Young Lords walked into a service at the First Spanish Methodist Church, also known as Peace Church, and occupied the space for several days. During their time there, they provided breakfast to the people, offered liberation education, and served the community. For eleven days, the Young Lords ran a breakfast program, offered health testing, offered Spanish classes and Puerto Rican history, and held adult events with discussions and performance nights. Over one hundred supporters of the Young Lords were arrested for failure to disband the occupation. The Young Lords were different from their white, revolutionary counterparts in that they had grown up in the community. Their politics were rooted in long-standing members of the neighborhood. Conversely, radical leftism in the more social or cultural context of choosing a life of slumming and revolutionary politics actively separated many of the “self-exiled” from the community.

Later, in October, the Young Lords called for an action outside of the United Nations for a national demonstration against the colonization of Puerto Rico. “Que Viva Puerto Rico Libre! Young Lords call for a march on UN,” the *EVO* article reads. The demands were to 1) liberate Puerto Rico, 2) free all political prisoners and prisoners of war, 3) end the genocide of all third

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world people, and 4) smash U.S. imperialism. The Young Lords particularly pressed for the release of Puerto Rican liberation fighters.81

While there was sometimes contention between the Puerto Rican Young Lords and other, whiter leftist organizations, they would frequently unify in action and ideology. One example of this is the occupation of the Christodora House. The Christodora, a building of high-rise apartments, and symbol of gentrification to the residents of the Village, was left vacant and decaying under city ownership for several years before the squatting began. Repurposing the building, several groups including the Young Lords, the Diggers, the Black Panthers, and community individuals, occupied the space until the city finally offered it to them as a community center.82 This is one example of the ways that groups would coincide peacefully. Aside from specific causes, however, the groups tended to their own organizations.

The Anti-War Movement and Revolutionary Affinity Groups

The Yippies made way for more openly revolutionary groups like the Weathermen and the Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers. UATWMF, an absurdly long acronym, started as a group called Black Mask. Black Mask was a Lower East Side anarchist group that later turned into UATWMF, and then even later, transitioned into the Family. Most of their action had taken place between 1967 and 1969. They organized a protest at the MoMA, which included a group of three hundred people, sneaking inside with live chickens and stink bombs.83 In his essay, “Poetry Written In Gasoline,” Gavin Grindon quotes a poem from a UATWMF poster:

Let a way of life
Numb whole sectors of mankind
And only half-stroked thoughts of

81 “Que Vive Puerto Rico Libre!,” East Village Other, October 20, 1970, 8.
82 Weinberg. Tompkins Square Park, Legacy of Rebellion, 22.
Something should be done
Are nodded over tea.
Now,
So late
We only hope
That others dare
Those things we thought
Too bold.  

This group was unique in that they combined avant-garde artistic culture in the Village with direct action protest and revolutionary ideology. They redefined artistry to encompass the political in acts of radical defiance. They openly called for revolution.

Another group, distinguishable from UATWMF in its Marxist ideology, was the Weathermen. The Weathermen was an offshoot of the Students for Democratic Society, separating themselves after feeling frustrated with SDS’s policy of nonviolence. Their goals were to radicalize the nation’s working class, disrupt the government, and bring about revolution by any means necessary. One original member, Cathy Wilkerson, was attached to the New York City branch. She occupied her parents’ Greenwich Village house with her fellow revolutionaries as a headquarters for their operations while her parents were on vacation. They were planning firebombs, like many of their revolutionary comrades across the country, when, just before noon on March 6, 1970, there was a series of explosions that came from the basement of her parents’ home. “Young Radicals Elude Authorities’ Search,” read a 1970 Chicago Tribune headline. Neighbors gathered instantly while Wilkerson, along with a comrade, escaped. They and sixteen

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84 Grindon, “Poetry Written in Gasoline,” 1.
85 Strausbaugh, The Village, 438-439.
other Weathermen went into hiding, becoming the Weather Underground and appeared on the FBI’s most wanted list.86

Aside from specific, radical affinity groups, the more popular antiwar sentiment that rang across the nation didn’t evade the Village. In fact, the Greenwich Village antiwar sentiment was very high. The Washington Square United Methodist Church, nicknamed the Peace Church, became the heart of the city’s antiwar movement. Home to the Greenwich Village Peace Center, volunteers counseled people facing draft and multiple antiwar organizations focused there attentions and efforts there. The War Resisters League’s “underground railroad” helped draft resisters relocate to Canada and other groups like the Catholic Workers and the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy congregated in that location.87

The discussions in these three chapters all contain radical and countercultural ideology. However, this chapter focuses in on explicitly revolutionary and radical left individuals as well as organizations. The culmination of racial and class divide alongside oppressive city and federal forces resulted in a wave of New Leftism, militancy, and radicalism in the late-60s and throughout the 1970s in New York City. These forces came together in an upsurge of repressed anger and rebellion that was the heart of the radical movement happening across the nation. Greenwich and the East Village were particularly well suited to house a multitude of revolutionary groups. Their histories of rebellion and resistance, the contentious years leading up to the late 60s, and the countercultural youth that had recently migrated to and inhabited the neighborhoods all contributed to this development. I argue that these groups help us further

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87 Strausbaugh, *The Village*, 434.
understand the unique cultural resistance in these neighborhoods that shaped radical identity politics in the United States.
Conclusion

Did the slummers, the artists, the political activists, and all of the intersecting identities of Greenwich Village and East Village counterculture in the 1960s and 70s find their utopia? What message have they left for us to receive? In my research, I have found more undeveloped thoughts than concrete answers. The history of resistance in this part of New York City is long, brutal, violent, and inspiring. It intersects with colonization, slavery, exploitation of the working-class, and immigration. The residents of Greenwich and the East Villages have never fully known who they are, but rather, are distinguishable in who they are not. They are not patriots. They are not heterosexual. They are not willing to engage in passive resistance to state-instituted suffering and violence. Rather, their group identity may be observed through the lens of revolutionary activity. That is, this counterculture’s identity is observable in the rejection of all forms of formalized dichotomies. Through this lens, we find that analysis of this particular counterculture is crucial to understanding radical identity politics, political dissent, and cultural rebellion.

In chapter one of this thesis, we analyzed the clashing cultures of old-world and new world ideology. Blatant racial discrimination was being challenged. Women were not willing to take violence any longer. People were beginning to feel unsafe in their urban communities and no longer felt a sense of security in their neighborhoods. Generational and class divides were growing more and more contentious. This made way for a new kind of thought. Easy, defined understandings of the way families worked, male-female roles, sexuality, music, and everything pervading American cultural and political life was changing. The farthest extent of that exploratory process was in Greenwich and the East Village.
Chapter two discovered the identity in non-identity. Through the lens of queerness and specifically 60s queer culture in Greenwich Village, we find home in the gray. It is in this chapter that we break through not only non-identity in queer culture, but in understanding this, we also clarify our conceptualization of anti-formalization in the counterculture as a whole. The Perpetuity of Queerness allows us to understand the perpetuity of the entire countercultural identity. That is, so many of these individuals lived in the borderlands of the unknown. They found solace in the pure rejection of that which is clearly labeled.

Finally, chapter three recognizes a more identifiable aspect of this counterculture. Revolutionary politics were rampant throughout the Villages in zines, newspapers, radical groups, actions, and art. Even positions as street sex workers or the act of slumming were revolutionary in their illegality. Revolutionary politics provides an alternative answer to a world that didn’t work for this counterculture. The systems that they rejected – capitalism, systemic racism, classism, hierarchies, and political repression – were clear acts of violence on the identities or non-identities that shaped this counterculture. Greenwich and the East Village provided a political home.

Part of this project is to understand how these neighborhoods are geographic centers of a communal atmosphere. I also argue that the Village’s renaissance is essential to how we perceive the momentous cultural movements that trickled throughout the United States as the now famous decade of protest. Further, these small, cultural worlds are influential landscapes that contributed deeply to the emergence of radical identity politics as they relate to defiance, rebellion, and cultural dissent in the United States. We have uncovered that this counterculture’s identity lies in what it is not. It is not stagnant or still. It is a perpetual, unfinished system that, by its very nature is unformatted. It is expansive. It is perhaps what every single young refugee of repression was
looking for in the 60s and 70s when they came to Greenwich and the East Village. That is, a manifestation of energy creating a utopian world of possibility.
Bibliography


“Que Vive Puerto Rico Libre!” *East Village Other*. October 20, 1970.