

Avant-Garde Cultural Production in NYC (London, 11-14 Jul 22)

Centre for American Art, The Courtauld Institute of Art, Jul 11-14, 2022

Deadline: Sep 12, 2021

Tom Day, Courtauld Institute of Art

Approaching Downtown: Avant-Garde Cultural Production in New York City, 1970s-1990s - An Interdisciplinary Workshop

The avant-garde art, film, music, television and writing produced by figures living in and associated with lower Manhattan in the period between New York City's fiscal crisis in the 1970s and Michael Bloomberg's mayoral election in 2001 have seen an explosion of popular, academic and curatorial interest in the past 10-15 years. Retrospective and thematic exhibitions on different Downtown scenes and key figures, collectives and spaces indicate a keen global interest in this period of cultural production. These include 'East Village USA' (New Museum, New York, 2005); 'The Downtown Show' (Grey Art Gallery, New York, 2006); 'Mixed Use Manhattan: Photography and Related Practices, 1970s to Present' (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2010); and 'Laurie Anderson, Trisha Brown, Gordon Matta-Clark: Pioneers of the Downtown Scene, New York 1970s' (Barbican, London, 2011), as well as exhibitions and documentaries exploring individuals such as Kathy Acker, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Lorraine O'Grady, Keith Haring, Tseng Kwong Chi, Zoe Leonard, David Wojnarowicz, and Martin Wong, spaces like Club 57, the West Side piers, and Pat Hearn Gallery, and cultural exchange between Manhattan and Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, and the Bronx.

Recent publications, particularly from the US academy, have extended scholarly enquiry into this field, including work by Joshua Chambers-Letson, Douglas Crimp, Joan Hawkins, Daniel Kane, Tim Lawrence, Peter L'Official, Ricardo Montez, Adair Roundthwaite, Jordana Moore Saggese, Sarah Schulman, Andrew Strombeck, Brian Tocterman, and Jonathan Weinberg. Attentive to the multi-faceted and deeply interdisciplinary nature of Downtown cultural production, we envisage that 'Approaching Downtown: Avant-Garde Cultural Production in New York City, 1970s-1990s' will create opportunities to further examine this period as an opportunity for global cross-disciplinary exploration and exchange, taking its messiness and its interdisciplinarity as an opportunity for productive thinking across different scholarly boundaries and national contexts. Underpinning our investigation is a desire to bring together differing methodological approaches to the study of Downtown New York - its artists, archives, institutions, and histories.

Bringing together scholars from fields including art history, film and media studies, literary studies, performance studies, queer studies, and visual culture, this four-day workshop will engage with an expansive view of downtown avant-garde cultural production in New York City. Contributors are invited to offer a session (c. 45 minutes in length) that explores an aspect of

avant-garde cultural production in this period and that connects with broader themes or issues impacting new approaches to Downtown New York's histories. This may take the form of a traditional paper, but we encourage attendees to think beyond this format and towards other generative modes such as interviews/in-conversation-style talks (live or recorded), archival explorations, screenings, and collaborative workshop activities. The main roster of speaker-orientated sessions will be supplemented by site visits to galleries, museums, archives, and artist's studios in London, and performances, film, video and TV screenings on the Courtauld campus. We hope to gather workshop contributions into an edited anthology. Areas for consideration include, but are not limited to:

- Activism•HIV and AIDS
- Archives
- 'Broken windows' theory and policing
- Collaboration, e.g. between artists/cultural producers, between boroughs
- East Village scene/s
- Experimental writing (literature, criticism)
- Film and television as subject and practice
- Institutions and their histories
- Interdisciplinarity
- Gentrification
- Performance
- Methodologies
- Nightlife and club cultures
- Popular and experimental music
- Race, racism, ethnicity
- Retrospective views (exhibitions, popular and academic histories) •Spatial politics
- Urban and economic change (histories, policies, politics)

Spaces on the workshop are very limited. We will cover the cost of travel and accommodation for those leading sessions. Lunch for each day of the workshop and a group dinner following one of the evening performances will also be included. We are also happy to accommodate virtual contributions. We have funds available to ensure that the event is fully accessible – please get in touch if you have any questions about accessibility, including childcare, or specific needs that you would like to discuss. We invite proposals for sessions from doctoral, post-doctoral, early career, mid-career, and senior scholars, whether formally affiliated with an institution or not. Please send a short proposal (c.300 words) to the workshop organisers Fiona Anderson (Fiona.Anderson@newcastle.ac.uk) and Tom Day (Tom.Day@courtauld.ac.uk) by September 12, 2021. If possible, please indicate where you will be travelling to London from. Please reach out to the organisers if you have any queries or wish to discuss a potential contribution.

Reference:

CFP: Avant-Garde Cultural Production in NYC (London, 11-14 Jul 22). In: ArtHist.net, Jul 12, 2021 (accessed Apr 9, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/34580>>.