The Work of American Artist-Activist Photographer Dona Ann McAdams 1973 - 2006

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ABSTRACT

American photographer Dona Ann McAdams, although the recipient of off-Broadway awards, is not widely known or researched. Her photographs document key episodes in American cultural history in the late twentieth century and bear witness to otherwise lost people, events and places. They intersect with feminist and queer histories, performance art and the representation of mental illness in the visual arts. This research provides new perspectives on her work, its impact and its place in the history of American photography. Chapter One describes McAdams' time at the San Francisco Art Institute and her early influences and evolving practice, as well as the later period when McAdams was the house photographer at non-profit performance space PS122, New York, between 1983 and 2006. Chapter Two explores the role of PS122 performance artists who were seeking social change in bringing the Aids crisis to public attention. Chapter Three follows McAdams' championing of the artists who became known as the NEA Four, and who protested defunding and censorship by the National Endowment for the Arts in 1990, and in the Supreme Court in 1998. Chapter Four details her longstanding workshops with institutionalised mental health patients. It explores the ethics of photographing and documenting marginalised communities and the relationship between McAdams' photographic technique and empowerment. Chapter Five explores McAdams' work on gentrification in the Lower East Side, Manhattan during the late 1980s. McAdams' images have memorialised many of the condemned, now lost, sites in a series of images incorporated into an artist's book in 1984. As the conclusion to this thesis confirms, her work witnesses and honours the underclass of society whose stories would otherwise be untold and provides a rich legacy for future scholars.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Background to the Study

This research documents a study of the photography of Dona Ann McAdams, (born 1954), in the period 1973-2006. McAdams lived in San Francisco from 1973 to 1979 and she studied at the Art Institute there. She was involved with non-profit performance space PS122 on Manhattan's Lower East Side from its inception in 1979 and where she was the house photographer there from 1983 to2006. PS122 provided an important outlet for growing agitation as the progress in civil rights made in the 1970s, and post-Stonewall easing of attitudes towards gay people were both pushed back by the rise of the political right in the 1980s. Although she is an award-winning photographer, earning a Bessie award for Sustained Achievement in Performance documentation and photographing for *Village Voice* and the *New York Times* among others, McAdams is not widely known outside her immediate circle. Existing research into her work and her role at PS122 is limited. This study has interrogated McAdams' role as a photographer who articulated the lived experience of marginalised people. It found that her ethical stance and her practice have remained almost unchanged since the 1980s. A detailed contextualisation of the United States in the latter part of the twentieth century is given throughout the thesis, to frame McAdams' pictures within their historical and cultural context.

McAdams' deeply held belief system and attendant activism placed her at the centre of protest events surrounding some of the key social issues of the time. The viewing of McAdams' pictures evokes emotional and physiological responses for those who saw the original event as well as those who are seeing them subsequently in her printed and exhibited work. Her archive bequeaths an extensive legacy that may be accessed by future researchers. This may encourage and enable the recollection of past events as well as the writing of new histories to further contribute to existing scholarship. This study is richly informed by her generosity in making her archive available to me, and by the collaborative spirit that she and her fellow artists embodied. McAdams has facilitated access to many who have shared their stories with me here, forming the basis of my case studies. A willingness to share and to witness is a strong thread running through this work.

This study tells the story of McAdams' role in documenting, publicising, and recording artists' work at PS122 and the emergence of PS122 as a pivotal site in the evolution of the art movement that came to be known as the "Downtown Scene". This work demonstrates the important role played by PS122, and by McAdams, in bringing to national attention and public record, the injustices suffered by those caught up in some of the key social issues of the time. It seeks to provide a unique contribution to scholarship on art and activism through McAdams' photographs which provide a complex and moving vision of the everyday lives of a community of artists and social outcasts in Downtown Manhattan in the latter half of the twentieth century. It examines her photographic record of performance art and ACT UP protests, Pride marches, and the Aids Quilt. Her work with the mentally ill and in documenting the gentrification of Alphabet City, her local neighbourhood is also shown. The work addresses the lack of in-depth research on the history and role of PS122 in the evolution of performance art, and as a centre for activists to meet and organise, and serves to recognise the importance of McAdams' photographic record.

The story is of a particular time and place in US history in late-twentieth-century New York. It was a coming together, where people and circumstances converged to spawn an arts scene in which PS122 was a key element. In the mid-to-late nineteen seventies, artists from across many disciplines came to New York, attracted by the potential for artistic and personal freedom. Pioneers in their various fields of dance, theatre, poetry, music, puppetry and more, they formed a community to create and to push the boundaries of their art. For most, this expression of art and selfhood meant separation and estrangement from their birth families. This made them reliant on strong community bonds quickly forged in their new Lower East Side homes (Desai 178).

At the time New York was in an economic crisis and was unable to maintain public facilities (Katz). The city had many abandoned commercial and residential buildings and drugs and crime rates were high. Consequently, rents were cheap and these artists were able to live in the same neighbourhood as the fringe performance venues that showed their work. Artists colonised abandoned Public School Building PS122 and McAdams joined them. Dancer Mark Russell also joined, working informally at first from 1979, and became PS122's first Artistic Director (1983-2004). It was his vision of the space as a venue for young and emerging artists to first show their work that led to its recognition as an important platform (Kurkjian 47). Russell invited McAdams to take up the position of House Photographer in 1983, formalising the work she had done there since 1979 (McAdams PI 2015).

McAdams has received increased critical attention in recent years, with the inclusion of several of her images in the New York University (NYU) *Art After Stonewall* exhibition (2019) and, 2020-2021, a roving exhibition at venues in her home state of Vermont. The latter is a two-year, state-wide, tour entitled *Performative Acts* and is curated by John Killacky, a former Director of The Walker Arts Center Minneapolis, and formerly Executive Director of the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts, Burlington, Vermont. The tour showcases a selection of her many important images but with limited text. McAdams' photographs are frequently included in journal articles about performance art as well as books on the history of the "Downtown Scene", such as *The Downtown Book* (Taylor, 2006) but with little more acknowledgement than a photographer's credit. Her images have been incorporated in several books and journals but she is mostly a footnote to someone else's story. Aperture published many of her performance photographs in *Caught in the Act* in 1996 (Carr et al). Cynthia Carr of the Village Voice wrote the foreword, but there was little about McAdams herself. Alice Maude-Roxby included a sample of McAdams' work in her exhibition *Live Art on Camera* (John Hansard Gallery University of Southampton, 2007). Maude-Roxby interviewed McAdams about her work because she was exploring the intentions of photographers and setting the work within McAdams ongoing, wider practice. McAdams' anti-nuclear work is held in the permanent collection at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, (MoMA), but is not on public display.

It is commonly understood that knowing our past provides a foundation that allows us to connect to our future. In the past, as this work will demonstrate, hegemonic, patriarchal, racist, misogynistic and homophobic ideologies sought to stifle the voices of those on the margins or co-opted those voices to instil socio-cultural fear. Gathering together queer history in archives such as McAdams' allows access to that history. As this study will demonstrate, her photography has helped to expand these activist/artists' profiles, dispel stigma and challenge taboos. This work will foreground the radicalism of queer and "othered" forebears in the face of threats of violence and arrest. Highlighting McAdams' work will enable a new generation of scholars to see this radicalism first-hand.

McAdams' photography sits at the intersection of key events in the US in the last decades of the twentieth century. Her photographs put her at the centre of community struggles against the authorities and policy-makers. The youthful exuberance and energy which had characterised those at PS122 were soon overshadowed by national crises, which struck at the heart of American national identity (Hartman 69). As my research revealed, their struggles with the Aids crisis, the withdrawal of funding by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and censorship and civil rights infringements exercised in the name of democracy seared their selfhood. It caused them to question democracy itself and their rights as US Citizens to protection under the constitution, particularly concerning free speech. Their art-making and street protests, incorporating symbols of national pride such as the US flag and the Statue of Liberty, and their occupation of the National Mall in Washington, D.C. and the steps of the Capitol Building, asserted their democratic rights as US citizens.

The story told through McAdams' photographs highlights the detachment of national, state and city policymakers from those whose daily lives were impacted by those decisions and lack thereof. The legislators in the US Congress, State and City authorities formulated policies remote from the consequences. Those in the medical profession, whose task it was to implement them, as well as the families and individuals whose lives were affected were not consulted. McAdams’ work links these groups together in a conversational exchange that was never had. In the US Congress and the media, assertions were made. On the streets or in their art, artists countered. McAdams’ photographs amplify the voices of those on the margins of society who were otherwise drowned out but who were determined to be heard.

In combination, these chapters will formulate a history of PS122, to situate it and the work of the performers and staff in the history of performance, and to position McAdam’s photography as a key component of it. Although research into this period in the history of art and activism of the Lower East Side has been conducted, it is fragmented. This study shows McAdams’ role in bringing together the various elements in the story of PS122 and its place in the evolution of Performance Art and Lower East Side history. McAdams’ work memorialises otherwise lost people, places and events. Taboos and fear of discrimination caused a lack of queer role models in wider society, as noted by Jeffrey Scharlach (*A Terrifying Era: The First five Years of Aids*).

Some have researched and written about individual performers at PS122, or their importance to a particular genre of performance, such as solo, monologue, poetry, choreography or dance. Individual performers or activists, for example, Larry Kramer, (*Reports from the Holocaust*, 1989), and Edmund White, (*City Boy*, 2009), have written their account. The changes in the neighbourhood populations, architecture, crime or homelessness at the time have been documented elsewhere, for example in Michael Smith’s *Marginal Spaces,* 1995. McAdams’ work incorporates all these elements. It provides the most comprehensive timeline, a chronological record, of the performances that were held at PS122 (Schlenzka PI 2021). It also spans the work of the majority of the artists who performed there, as she was present at, and photographed, almost all of the live performances. It captures the changes in the neighbourhood as a result of gentrification and it tells of the loss of cultural identity through demolition, displacement and vanished artistic output. The Aids Crisis took many of McAdams' artist friends and the community were deeply affected by the loss of their fellow artists and by the unfulfilled artistic potential. McAdams' photographs of the seminal 1980s activist campaign, *Artists Call Against US Intervention in Central America*, are to be included in a forthcoming exhibition *Art for the Future: Artists Call and Central American Solidarity in the 1980s*, and will be on view at the Tufts University Art Galleries from January 23 – April 26, 2021 (Covid-19 permitting).

McAdams' work highlights the experiences of women, people of colour, queers, the mentally disabled, and others who are mostly overlooked throughout history, perpetuating their erasure. McAdams emphasises the value of lost potentialities of artists who died too young and the importance of such reclamation of the past. In exploring and mapping her archive, I unpack and recover the hidden, damaged, forgotten and deemed "irrelevant". Data collection for this study has included conducting interviews, reviewing documents, and collecting physical artefacts, for example, photographs, letters, theatre reviews and flyers from McAdams' archive. This project has combined an engagement with primary archival sources research with in-person and Zoom interviews. It has also explored contemporaneous mainstream and alternative press coverage of the Aids Crisis and Culture Wars, attitudes towards minorities, and mental health.

McAdams and others have provided a series of interviews and constitute case studies that provide an in-depth appreciation of the events discussed, in their original, authentic context. These are a source of additional knowledge and insights not obtainable elsewhere. Oral histories included here ensure stories are handed down are the authentic accounts of the people themselves. They help to evaluate the effectiveness of the artists' protests on changing the perceptions of the wider community and the behaviour of government departments and officials and those in the medical profession.

The Researcher's Role

McAdams has allowed me unprecedented access to her archive. Her introductions have granted me that same level of trust from others who have generously shared their memories and views. I interviewed McAdams' collaborators from PS122, then and now, establishing relationships and building on them. Also, I was fortunate to obtain personal accounts from Professor Gerald Friedland, an Infectious Diseases doctor during the Aids years, and writer Jay Neugeboren who has written of his brother's experience in the US mental health system over thirty-eight years. Extended stays with McAdams at her home facilitated access to the archive and provided opportunities for discussion and story-telling that are not available to others. Some images here have not been published previously and some have been printed for the first time at my request (for example John Bernd in his hospital bed and Peter Rose's last performance at PS122 in 2006).

My work here aims to offer new perspectives on her (still) developing archive and its place in the history of American photography. The restrictions on movement due to Covid-19 prevented me from a final visit to the archive before completing this thesis. This stopped some planned in-person interviews from taking place but email and Zoom have served well. However, not being able to spend days at a time with McAdams has prevented deeper exploration of some subjects, in particular “gentrification”. Nonetheless, drawing together various contemporaneous threads of the interconnecting stories, capturing the accounts of the lived experiences of those who were there, affords a more complete picture than has hitherto been available.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter One describes McAdams’ move at the age of nineteen, from her home state of New York to San Francisco where she studied at the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI). It describes her early influences and evolving practice, to contextualise and situate her work within the field of American photography. McAdams’ time at SFAI allowed her access to teachers, amongst whom were pioneering photographers Henry Wessell and Garry Winogrand, who would influence her work. At the MoMA, New York, Director of Photography John Szarkowski curated a groundbreaking 1974 exhibition entitled *The Photographer’s Eye*, establishing photography within the broader world of artistic practice. McAdams met many activist friends in San Francisco and demonstrated on behalf of civil rights causes that she has maintained a lifelong commitment to. She returned to New York in 1979. There she met fellow artists who were establishing PS122 as an important centre for emerging and established artists to learn from each other and to push their creative boundaries. McAdams embraced this community and, eventually, in 1983, became house photographer there. A short history of PS122 is given to provide context.

Chapter Two explores the role of performance artists at PS 122 and others in bringing the Aids Crisis to public attention as recorded by McAdams. This chapter engages with McAdams' work commemorating the protests against the delinquency of the authorities from the earliest days of the HIV-Aids crisis. The lack of support for those suffering from HIV Aids further marginalised those already on the outer limits of society. This work invites discussion about how McAdams expressed her fondness for her friends, such as John Bernd, who was one of the first in her community to die from Aids, through her photography. It is a form of lamentation. It is an example of how the photograph memorialises and commemorates those who have died and whose artistic production was cut short creating a personal and cultural loss. The long term effects of constant fear of death, survivors' guilt, mourning and memory, the context of Aids representation, are important.

Chapter Three details McAdams' involvement with the artists who became known as the NEA Four. These had their funding withdrawn by the NEA in 1990, and took their case as far as the Supreme Court in 1998 to protest the removal of their art grants. This chapter discusses the censorship of performance art in the 1980s and 1990s as part of the Culture Wars, and the role of the photographer as “witness”. McAdams' photographs were employed as a defence against the allegations of indecency.

In Chapter Four, I tell the story of the interest that McAdams and her husband Brad Kessler had in another oft-forgotten group within society—those with chronic mental health disorders. Both have spoken and written of the incidence of mental health issues in their own families and how the stigma and taboo around the subject affected them growing up. *The Garden of Eden* is the record of a fourteen-year long weekly workshop project with institutionalised mental health patients on Coney Island, New York given by McAdams accompanied by Kessler. This work gave rise to a body of photographs overlaid with the patient's artwork that provides insights into the minds and lives of the workshop participants. This work was exhibited at the Robert B. Menschel Photography Gallery in Syracuse, New York in 1997, with Kessler writing the accompanying text for the catalogue. McAdams also recorded work in night shelters for homeless men in Manhattan which are included here. This chapter explores the ethics of photographing and documenting marginalised communities and the relationship between McAdams' photographic technique and empowerment.

Chapter Five explores McAdams' work on gentrification, in particular of Manhattan's Lower East Side during the late 1980s and into the mid-1990s. McAdams was acutely sensitive to the loss of culture that results from wide-scale demolition, having witnessed this in San Francisco's area of Fillmore in the mid-seventies. She regretted not photographing that and was determined not to repeat her mistake. Echoing the term coined by Henri Cartier-Bresson "the decisive moment" McAdams said: "Photography is about the moment and the moment is always changing or lost" (PI 2015). She is interested in photographing things that disappear, for example, neighbourhoods in transition. Her work on gentrification spans a number of her portfolios. This Chapter will focus on her work on Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and the Lower East Side where McAdams' images have memorialised many of the condemned, now lost, sites in a series of images incorporated into an artist's book, *Alphabet City*, in 1984. The chapter outlines the recent history of PS122 and its multi-million dollar remodelling completed in 2018.

This thesis has shown McAdams' and PS122's contributions to effecting social change through art-making and protests. It concludes with some final comments of the contribution to existing literature and the implications for my own and others' future research.

McAdams' Early Years in San Francisco and New York and Her Evolving Practice

In 1973 McAdams moved from New York to San Francisco, which was then a beacon of counterculture, with an established "out" gay community, and a natural centre of the gay rights movement. As Pauline Scholten has observed, "In the late '60s and early'70s both Polk Street and Eureka Valley experienced an upsurge in gay residents as well as businesses catering to them" (Scholten). Foreshadowing future events, which would see artists in vehement opposition to his policies, Republican Ronald Reagan was elected as Governor of California for a second term in 1971. Andrew Hartman observes that Reagan's popularity was fuelled by his hard-line on countercultural protestors and those he regarded as welfare fraudsters (Hartman 18). McAdams told me:

> On January 3, 1973, in the middle of a snowstorm, I drove my 1970 Volkswagen Fastback on highway 80 from the east coast to San Francisco. It was the time of the Zodiac Killings. I was nineteen years old. I moved to the Western Addition. A short time later Patty Hearst was kidnapped and held two blocks from my flat. (PI 2016)

She moved to what was then known as "the gay downtown" (Shelton) and described a pre-digital age, of chance meetings and personal encounters in a tight-knit community McAdams. (PI 2018)

> I lived in what was considered the Polk Gulch, a very gay part of town in the downtown of San Francisco. I did live in the Tenderloin on Fell Street when I first moved to San Francisco in a huge communal house in a room with sliding doors off the living room with 6 people. (PI 2020)

She met many people who would have a profound impact on her life among whom were photographer Hilton Braithwaite and Black rights activist and academic, Angela Davis, sex workers' rights activist Margot St James and others (PI 2018). McAdams observed:

> Between the Hookers on Farrell Street, the drag queens on the Tenderloin, and Hilton Brathwaite operating the elevator in the erotic art museum on Powell Street, I covered all the bases I guess. As you know, Hilton was a very important person to me. He encouraged me to get my first camera. (PI 2020)

Another lasting influence was Yvonne Owens, a writer and educator who credits McAdams as a major inspiration to her activism. Owens told me:

> [McAdams] introduced me to protests, actions and marches. Through her, I came to see events unfolding from an entirely different artistically and creatively empowered angle, as an active observer of, and commentator on, the events as they unfolded on the ground, and this gave me the opportunity to begin to write about them. (Owens PI 2020).

McAdams first lived in the Western Addition, a low-income neighbourhood, where she first witnessed urban renewal programmes that involved "large portions of the Western Addition around Fillmore Street getting bulldozed, and eventually rebuilt" (PI 2018). Although she did not photograph this, witnessing it made her attuned to the consequences of neighbourhood flux. McAdams recalled:

> they were taking all the beautiful brownstones and old Victorian flats and moving them to a different neighborhood. That's what Hilton Brathwaite was photographing with his 8 x 10 camera. They were just grabbing these beautiful buildings from the Western Addition and moving them to other places in San Francisco and leaving empty lots behind. It was really horrible. (PI 2015)

Initially, McAdams did not have a camera but was:

> …learning by looking at work. Then I tried an Olympus half-frame. I shot 26 rolls of film and realised the format didn't work. I bought the Leica in the end because my hands are small and the camera is small and it's a quiet camera. It was the camera of the San Francisco Art Institute. (PI 2015)

She was sitting in on photography classes at the Art Institute:

> I got a job in Daly City and started to sit in on photography classes at the San Francisco Art Institute. I bought my first Leica soon after trading in my Olympus Pen Half Frame. I was working with a ton of amazing

> photographers, but it was a woman who I met at work who changed the way I saw the world. It was my new friend who schooled me in the arts [Yvonne Owens]. She joined me marching in every Gay Pride parade down Polk Street. She was my first collaborator. (PI 2015)

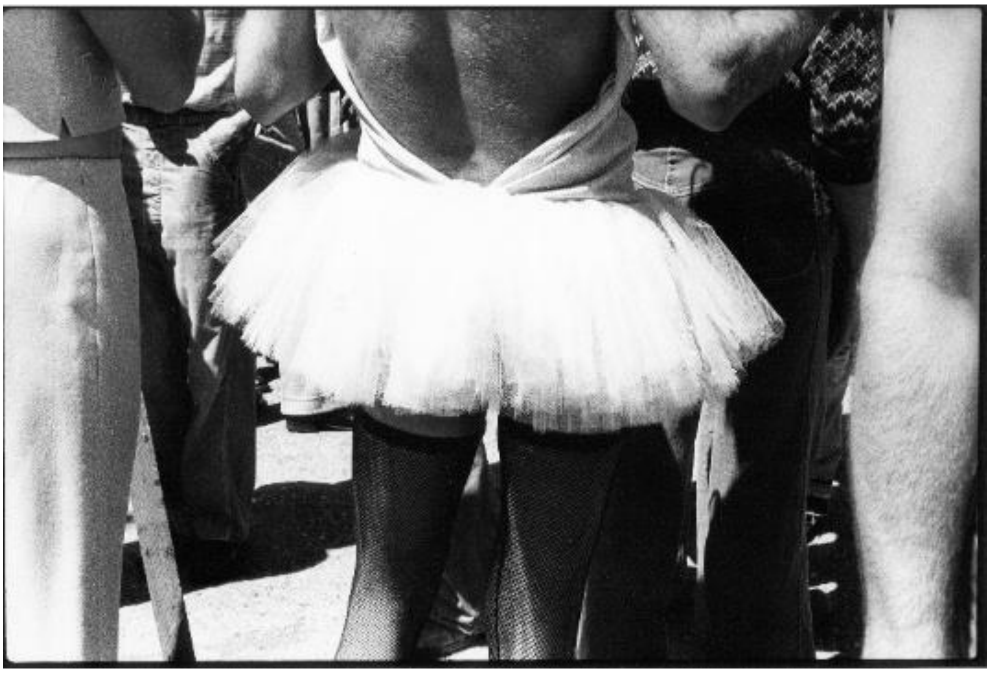


Fig.1.1. McAdams, Dona Ann. Gay Pride, Polk Street, San Francisco. 1974.

San Francisco's first Gay Parade was held in 1970 and went from Polk Street to City Hall (Scholten). McAdams found herself joining protest marches and capturing the community spirit of resistance in street parades which she attended with Yvonne Owens and other friends. Figure 1.1, above was taken at her first Gay Pride parade in 1974. She remembered:

> My first camera was an Olympus Pen F Half Frame camera that I bought at Adolf Gasser in San Francisco in 1973. I used Adox Rodinal film developer. This picture is from one of my first few rolls of film. I switched to a Leica M2 and D76 right away. But I like this photograph. (Figure 1.1, above)

She realised that her path was going to diverge from her that of her mentors:

> At the San Francisco Art Institute where I was studying, my mentors were mostly men. But when I bought my first Leica in San Francisco I had a different focus and objective than the men. Yes, I wanted to make interesting and beautiful photographs. Yes, I was interested in composition and light. But I was equally interested in empowering my subjects who were mostly women. (PI 2015)

McAdams continued: [At SFAI] “I was fortunate to have several amazing photographers as teachers: Hank (Henry) Wessel and Dennis Hearn”. Wessel headed the photography programme at the SFAI and McAdams recalled: “Hank brought in Lee Friedlander and Garry Winogrand as guest artists. The class went out shooting [film] with Winogrand”. Winogrand gave a very favourable critique of McAdams work, in particular this photograph (below) of Geary Street, San Francisco 1974. McAdams elaborated:

> The Geary Street photograph is important because I was a student at the SF Art Institute. As you know I sat it and was not enrolled. Hank (Henry) Wessel invited Garry Winogrand to teach and Hank let me put up work for critique even though I was not an enrolled student which upset a lot of people. Garry loved that photograph and went on poetic about it. It was taken down the street from my flat on Geary Street. (PI 2020)

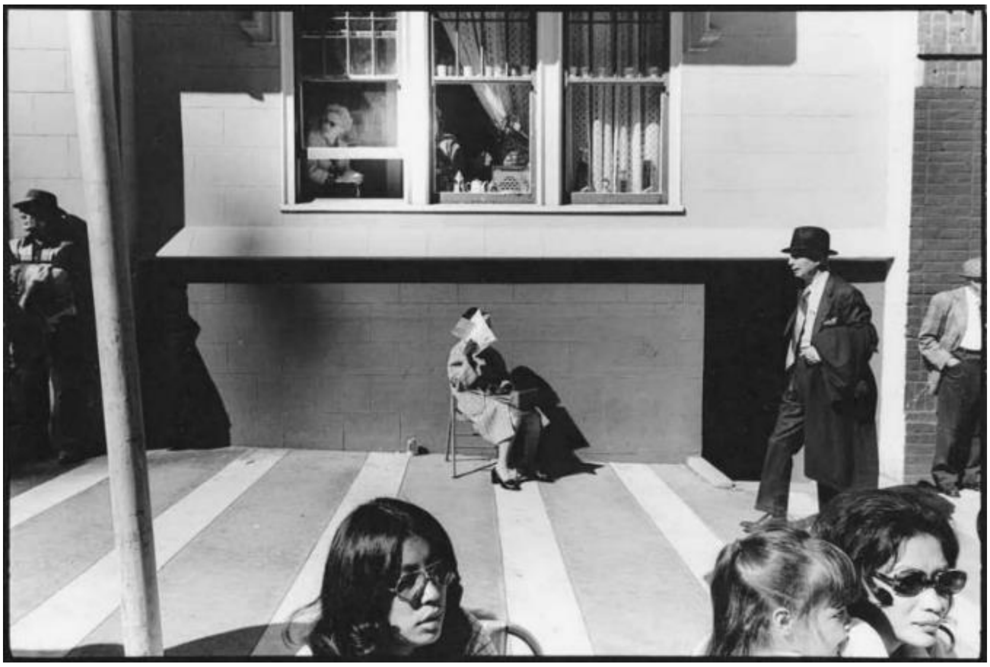


Figure 1.2. McAdams, Dona Ann. Geary Street San Francisco. 1974.

McAdams told me about this picture (figure 1.2, above):

> I made this in 1974 with an M2 [Leica] and a 35mmlens with Tri X [black and white Kodak film]. I love to use the edge of the frame and use objects to divide sections like that pole. So much happening in a small frame. (PI 2020)

This photograph was part of an exhibition in 2009. Jim Richard Wilson, the Director of the Opalka Gallery which hosted the exhibition wrote: “In Geary

Street, SF, 1974, we can already see the influence of her mentors being surpassed by her own sensibility” (McAdams, 2009).

When McAdams’ car was in for repairs she had to take the train to work, which allowed an opportunity for a chance meeting that brought her into the heart of a community whose circumstances were a cause she embraced:

> I had a car accident and had to walk to the Bart Station at Powell Street down O’Farrell street for the first train that left the station to Daly City at 5 am. I wore my little white dental assistant uniform complete with my black and white saddle shoes. There were many working women often in front [of the station]. I would always get there before the BART station opened and have to stand in front. They were all curious and a little concerned about this young woman in the white outfit. We all started to talk and I said why would you have to worry? I am a dental assistant. I’m not a threat. And they joked and said “No, we could get paid extra for that outfit”. We all became friends and they invited me to the Hookers’ Ball, where I got to meet [its founder] Margo St James. I was very supportive of the rights of sex workers because prostitution after all is, to my mind, the first profession. (PI 2021)

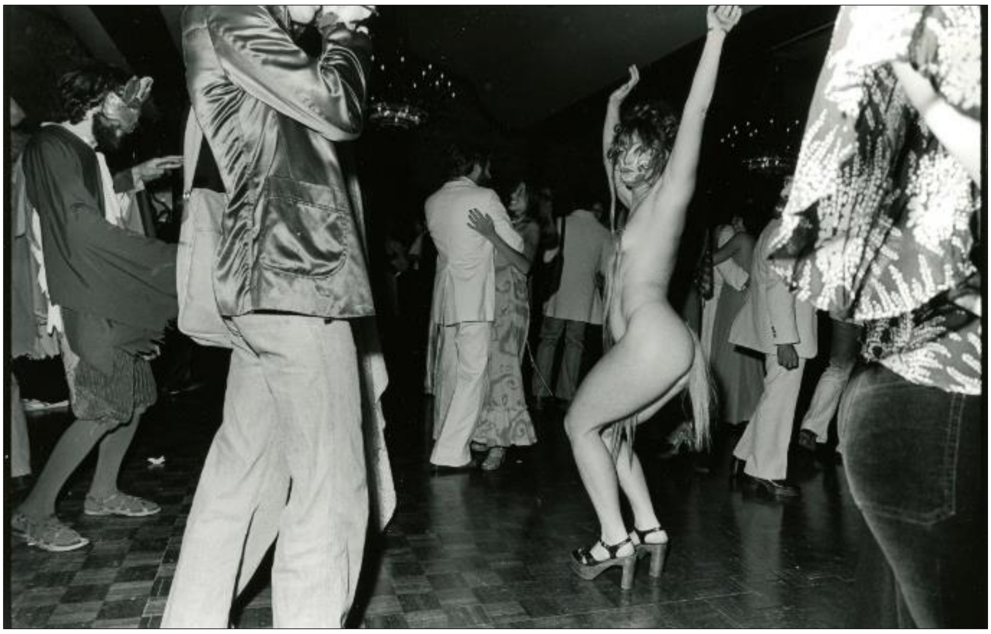


Figure 1.3. McAdams, Dona Ann. Hookers’ Ball, Hilton Continental Ballroom, San Francisco. 1976.

McAdams was, and remains, an ardent supporter of women’s rights and consciously documented instances of women “fighting back, demonstrating, celebrating, protesting, getting arrested” (PI 2020). Figure 1.3, above, was taken at the 1976 Hookers’ Ball, which had been established by Margot St

James in 1973 to promote sex workers' rights. St James, a former prostitute, founded COYOTE, (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics), an organisation that worked to decriminalise and stop scapegoating prostitutes through public education (Jenness 403). James also co-founded the St. James Infirmary Clinic, a medical and social service organisation serving sex workers in the Tenderloin district (Jenness 414).

An event that had a big impact on McAdams during her time as a student was the assassination of Harvey Milk, in November 1978. Milk was an openly gay member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and a leading political activist for the gay community. Milk helped pass a gay rights ordinance for the city of San Francisco that prohibited anti-gay discrimination in housing and employment (HUSL Library). Milk's assassination unleashed an outpouring of grief within the San Francisco gay community, thousands of whom marched in his memory (Eyerman 406). McAdams told me the following story she repeats every year on the anniversary of Milk's death:

> I was shooting in Dolores Park sometime back in 1974 and I ran out of film. Someone told me that there was a camera store on Castro so I made my way over. It was a sweet little store with a barber's chair right in the middle. A man with longish hair, moustache, and a very strong New York accent, like mine, asked me what I wanted. His accent was familiar. The same Long Island accent I was trying to lose. We talked. Rather, *h*e talked. I only had enough money for one roll of TriX, but he said I'd need more than just one roll and he handed me a little yellow card, my first, and at the time only, charge account. Before I left Castro Camera he said: "Whenever you need anything and I'm not here tell Scott you got the okay from Harvey Milk". (PI2015)

After Milk's assassination, McAdams decided to commit to her art and activism, a decision that gave her a foundation for her future. McAdams recalled this time in her life in an entry for the catalogue of Killacky's curation of an exhibition of her work, *Performative Acts,* at the Battleboro Museum and Art Centre, Vermont, in 2019.

> Harvey Milk taught me how to use that [my] art to encourage social change. Ever since those days in San Francisco, the artistic and the political have been inseparable for me. When Harvey was assassinated …in November 1978, and my father died the following month from a coronary, I was seared to the core… I vowed then not to compromise my work but to make it by any means necessary. Life was too fragile and unfair not to fight for what I believed in. I would use the tools I had available – a camera and a few rolls of film. The Tri X came from a charge account at Castro Camera. I've been shooting the same film ever since. (PI 2019)

It was at this juncture that she decided to move back to New York, encouraged by Hilton Braithwaite, who allowed her to stay in his illegal loft in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, while she established herself (PI 2021).

Back In New York 1979 – 1983: Anti-nuclear work: They're Juggling our Genes

At this time, PS122 was in its early, formative stages with rehearsal spaces and regular dance workshops, but was not yet a full presentation space nor the sole focus of McAdams' work (Kurkjian 50). McAdams was working on a portfolio about protesting nuclear power, before the Three Mile Island radiation leak at Harrisburg but with increased effort once it had happened (PI 2018). McAdams was part of a group of artists who at the time were employing what Chris Balaschak describes as "a strategy of harnessing print media and print techniques in works that graphically and symbolically 'recompose' nuclear landscapes" (De Baca, and Best xxv). McAdams explained:

> When I moved back east [to New York] from San Francisco I no longer had the light or open skies or topography that I liked working with, so I decided to shoot industrial landscapes particularly nuclear power plants. I first shot the Indian Point nuclear plant in Peekskill, New York, because it was a train ride away. But several months later, on March 28th 1979, Three Mile Island, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, changed the way I worked. Before I wanted to make potentially interesting or beautiful photographs, but after I wanted to do the same, and create social commentary or discourse. My work became politically engaged. (PI 2019)

She continued:

> I’ve always been as much an activist as an artist and believe in the marriage of the two. One of my first portfolios sprang out of my involvement with the anti-nuclear movement. In addition to photographing the early movement and the resulting demonstration, I made a portfolio called *The Nuclear Survival Kit*. This contained prints, artist’s books and street posters. (PI 2019)

She described how she travelled across the country:

> I travelled the country making images of myself in front of nuclear power plants. On a cross country trip on Route 80, a trip to New Orleans and then on to Berkeley on the Grey Rabbit bus and various road trips. [These] ironic self-portraits were later made into street posters, overwritten with text, and were wheat-pasted across New York City and other major cities. (PI 2019)

She photographed herself and two other women in front of the Turkey Point Nuclear power plant in Miami, Florida, in what she recalls as her “first performance show, one that I’d set up but was a live performance” (PI 2019). She had to learn to juggle to make the photograph *They’re Juggling Our Genes* in 1980, shown below, (figure 1.4). After Ronald Reagan was elected as President in 1981, and familiar with his policies from her time in San Francisco during his governorship, she intensified her efforts (PI 2019).

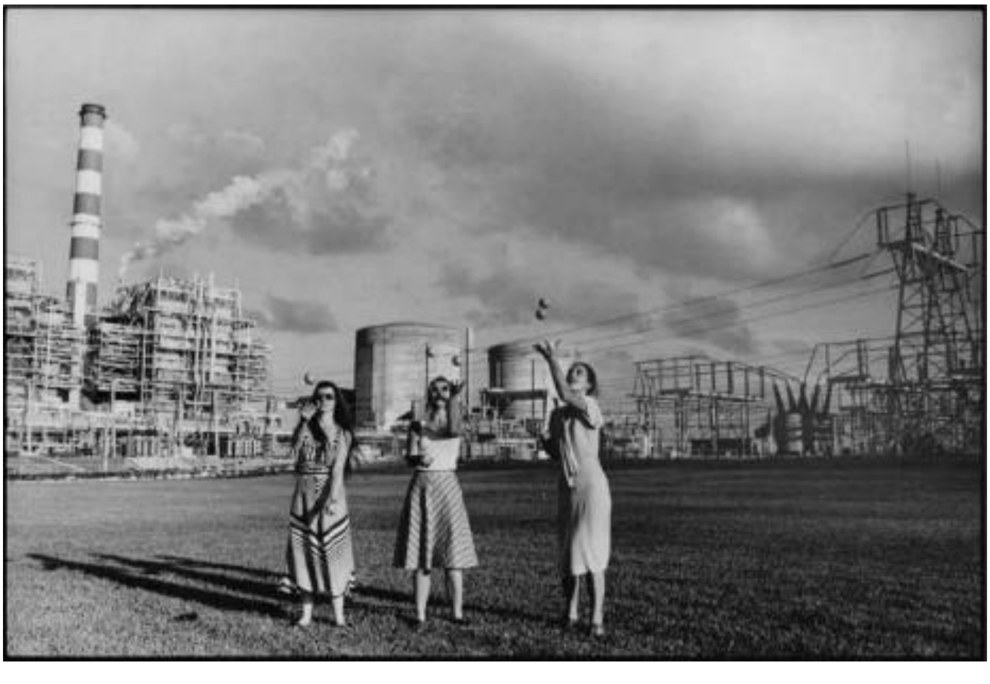


Figure 1.4. Arthur Owens with Dona Ann McAdams. *They’re Juggling Our Genes*. Turkey Point, Miami, Florida, with Yvonne Owens and Lesley Baxter and McAdams centre. 1980.

In 2021 Yvonne Owens, who had accompanied McAdams, reflected on the importance of McAdams’ anti-nuclear work:

> That was an astonishing year of art actions and photographs. McAdams’ tour of the most dangerous reactors, from San Onofre, California, to Turkey Point, Florida, to New England-- directing Leslie Baxter and me and setting up the series, *They're Juggling Our Genes.* (PI 2021)

Owens echoes McAdams’ anger at the deception of the American people by their Government:

> Indeed, that seems the only feasible explanation for what's happened to conservative military/industrial brains in the years since the Pentagon sold the idea of “nuclear energy” to the utilities in the 1950s, to procure massive amounts of the highly fissionable plutonium for use in bomb triggers, lavishly reward the utilities for its manufacture in a cunning plan of misdirection, and get the public to pay for it. (PI 2021)

Owens considers it:

> Easily the sickest of the “the atom is your friend” public opinion pitches we witnessed in our travels...this brainwashing operation amounted to a military psi-ops influence campaign, cynically waged against American civilians in peacetime by the unholy trinity of their own government, military and energy corporations. McAdams’ photo, above, was the culmination of all the “parks”, beaches, and picnic areas we witnessed across the country, advertised as “safe” and proffered to the public to elicit public acceptance and approval of their production of plutonium, which doesn't exist in nature and can only be expensively and artificially created in massive degrees of intense heat, an amount the size of a fistful having the capacity to poison the entire planet. (PI 2021)

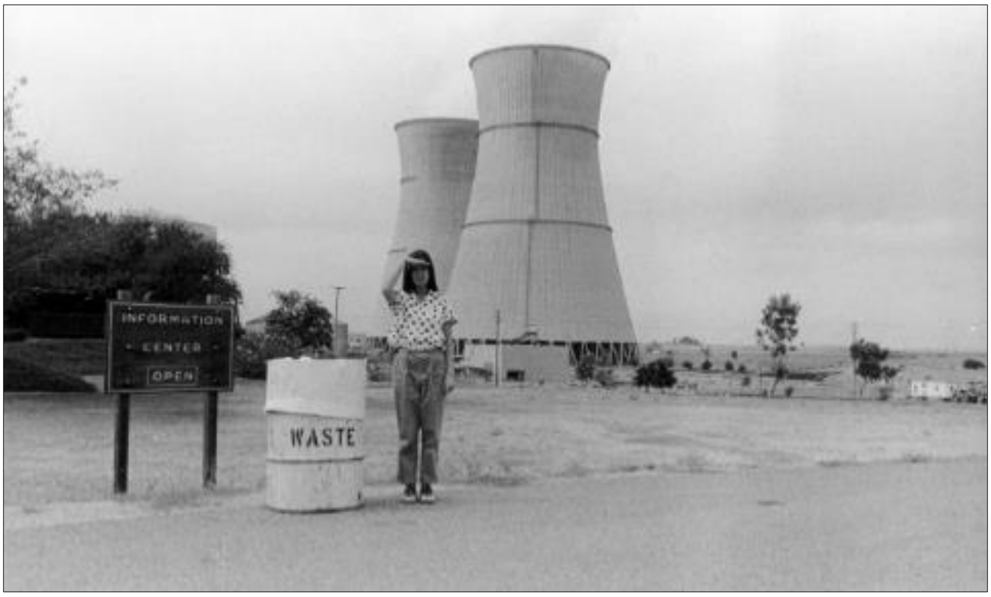


Figure 1.5. McAdams, Dona Ann. *Cooling Towers*, Racho Seco, Sacramento, California.1981.

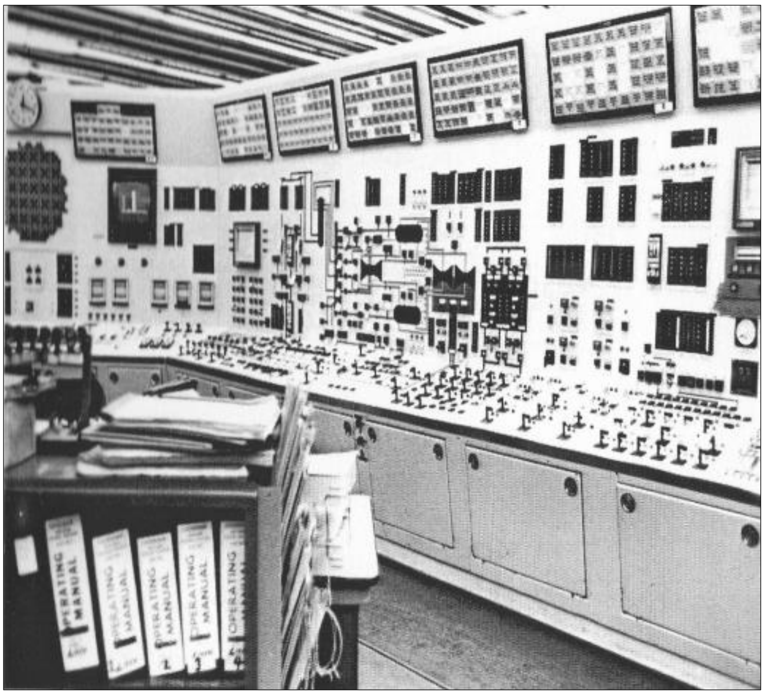


Figure 1.6. McAdams, Dona Ann. *Control Room*, Shoreham, Long Island. 1979.

This picture was “stolen” in that McAdams did not have permission to take it.

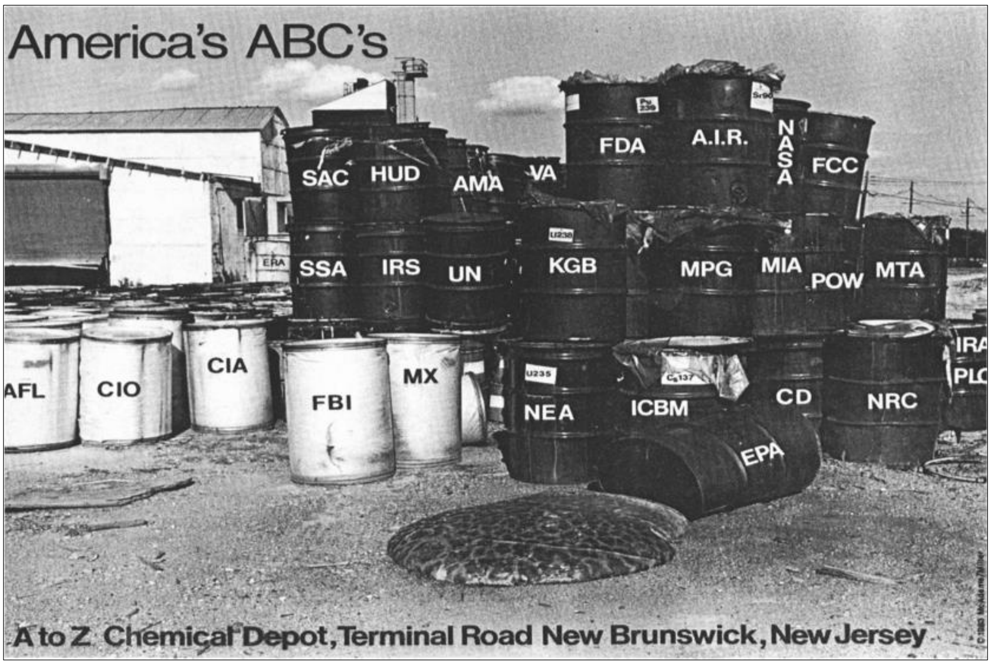
McAdams told me:

> This shows the control room of the Shoreham Nuclear Power Plant. Built by General Electric, a nuclear boiling water reactor. It’s located adjacent to Long Island Sound in East Shoreham, New York. The plant was built between 1973 and 1984 by the Long Island Lighting Company. In 1979 I went on a tour of the plant with an idea that I’d make a photograph of the control room. I did. There were a half dozen people on the tour. Two men

> were asked to leave their Nikon “big rigs” at the desk. The tour guide looked at me and I offered to give him my M2 [Leica camera]. He said, and I quote, “That’s ok honey”. (PI 2020)

The significance of this remark is that the man dismissed McAdams as harmless because she was a young woman, so he only “disarmed” the men in the group: relieving them of their photographic equipment. McAdams was astonished to notice the Plant Operating Manuals clearly visible on the shelf in the left, foreground of this picture (PI 2020). McAdams described how environmental activism stopped energy company plans:

> I grew up in Lake Ronkonkoma, Long Island, where because of all the opposition of the locals and the work of the Clamshell Alliance [an early environmental campaign group] an evacuation plan could not be approved. Eventually, on May 19, 1989, LILCO, The Long Island Lighting Company, agreed not to operate the plant in a deal with the state under which most of the $6 billion costs of the unused plant was passed on to Long Island residents. In 1992, the Long Island Power Authority bought the plant from LILCO. The plant was fully decommissioned in 1994. (PI 2015)


America’s ABC’s
SAC
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AMA
VA
FDA
A.I.R.
NASA
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SSA
IRS
UN
KGB
MPG
MIA
POW
MTA
AFL
CIO
CIA
FBI
MX
NEA
ICBM
CD
NRC
EPA
A to Z Chemical Depot, Terminal Road New Brunswick, New Jersey

Figure 1.7. McAdams, Dona Ann. *Chemical Depot*, Terminal Road, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Figure 1.7, above, shows one of McAdams’ ironic posters highlighting the scale of industrial waste and the damage to the environment. At this time, McAdams ventured into two new forms of work, 8.5 x 11 posters as seen here, and also 5 x 7.5 xeroxed images in postcard form. In conversation with her, she told me that the more she photographed for her *Nuclear Project* the more she realised the inherent dangers and it became important to her to make this work accessible to as many people as possible (PI 2019). Xeroxing was a quick way to achieve this, and she began to add messages and text to the images and started to pose and involve herself in them. McAdams calculates that “between November 1980 and May of 1982 more than 5000 posters had been posted all around the world” (PI 2019). This scale was made possible and affordable by McAdams’ job at the “Unsloppy Copy Shop” which she refers to below. The first postcard book of June 1981 contained 19 postcards and provided a more public and enduring vessel for her messages. It was “a more permanent statement as well as a way of organising the work” (PI 2019).

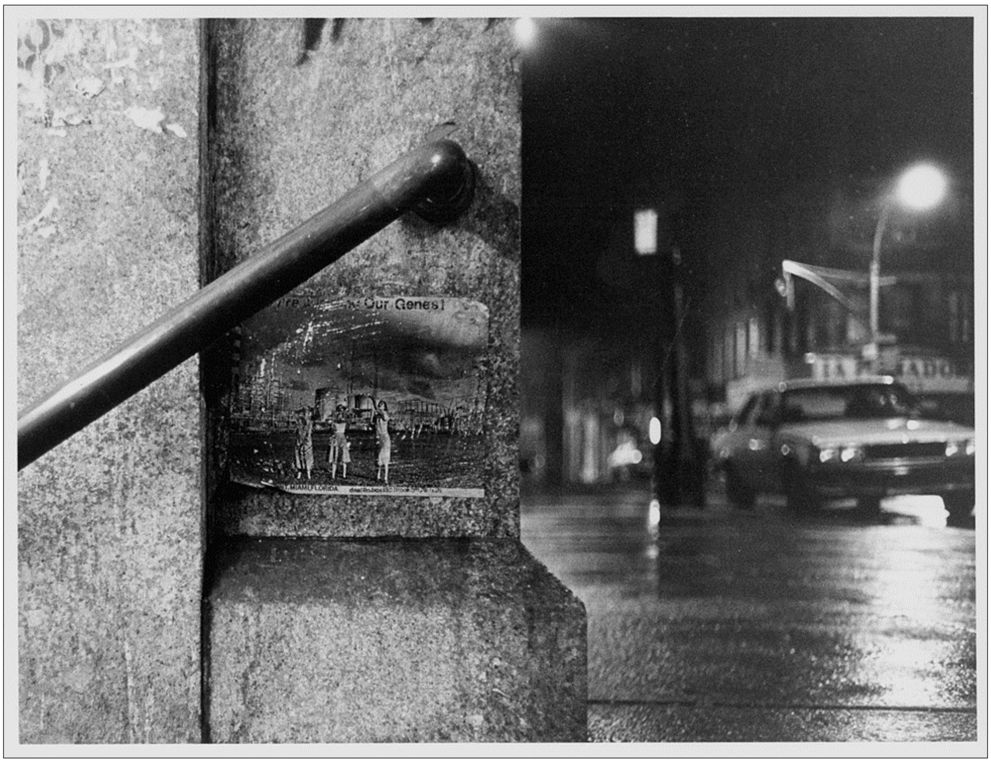

Figure 1.8. McAdams, Dona Ann*.* *Wheat-pasting*, Spring Street subway entrance NYC. 1980.

Figure 1.8, above, shows wheat-pasting at the Spring Street, Lexington Avenue line, subway street entrance, always at night to avoid detection, as it was illegal. Deborah Wye considers that “such ephemeral printed art was an important vehicle for social and political commentary” (Wye 8). Rather than her painstakingly hand-printed photographs, here McAdams employed the print medium most appropriate for her task, Xeroxed posters, which could be produced quickly, inexpensively and in quantity to convey her message. She recalled:

> From 1979 to 1984 I wheat-pasted thousands of 8 1/2 by 11-inch xerox posters in New York City, and across the country. This is one of many posters from my photographs and nuclear-related materials. There were also several artist’s books. I made them at the Unsloppy Copy Shop on 8th Street, the place where every artist working in the early ’80s made posters to advertise their work. We all just went out with a bucket of slop and postered them all over. This one is on the entrance to the subway station on Spring Street. We always wheat-pasted at night to avoid detection. (PI 2016)

As an illegal activity, wheat-pasting forges an intense bond between those engaged in this collective action. As McAdams observed:

> We needed to work quickly, with one person putting up the work and one keeping watch. The threat of arrest was real, and we good story if caught. The trust had to be there and we were totally in it together. It was an important element of my activist art practice. (PI 2016)

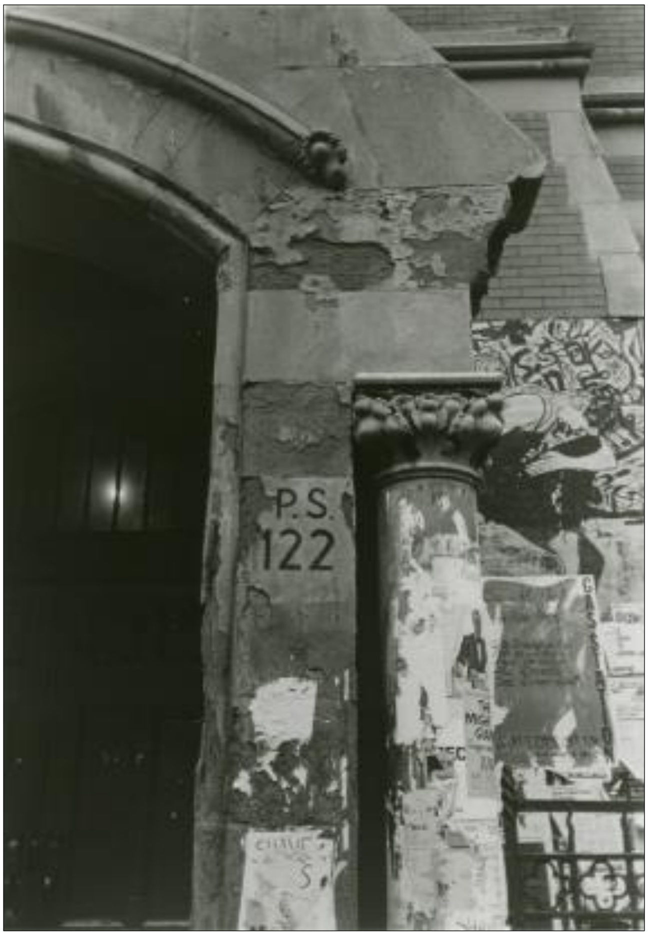

Figure 1.9. McAdams, Dona Ann. A close-up section of the entrance to PS122 at 150 First Avenue.

In figure 1.9, above, a close-up section of the entrance to PS122 at 150 First Avenue, we can see that an important community space such as PS122 with its busy entrance hall was a prime site for wheat-pasting. As McAdams detailed above, ephemeral materials were inexpensive and effective as tools of collective activism and the remnants of this activity can be seen here only partly intact.

History of PS122: The People, Place and Time

McAdams was part of an influx of creative talent that converged on New York City in the late 1970s. New York City then was bankrupt, with no money for essential services, and the streets were dangerous (Zacks). Parts of the city were no-go areas and gay people were susceptible to gang attacks (White 1). Despite these dangers, artists flocked to New York, as it was the centre of activist art where they could enjoy artistic and personal freedom. Edmund White has noted that:

> New York seemed either frightening or risible to the rest of the nation. To us, however, it represented the only free port on the entire continent. Only in New York could we walk hand in hand with a member of the same sex. (White 2)

Performance artist Karen Finley, who performed at PS122, recalled that “New York was the cultural capital [of America], the centre of the art world, despite the economic collapse” (Finley PI 2015). Finley was attracted by the idea of “infiltrating culture and contributing to a different understanding of what culture would be”, where she could add her voice (PI 2015). New York was a haven from the homophobia and discrimination that prevailed in wider American society at the time. Artist Keith Haring also believed that New York “was the only place where I would find the intensity I needed and wanted. I wanted intensity for my art and I wanted intensity for my life” (Killacky).

At PS122, on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, a community of performers, photographers poets and dancers came together, among whom were Karen Finley, Holly Hughes, David Wojnarowicz and Tim Miller, all of whom worked with McAdams. Their work gained attention owing to their defiant and controversial depictions of sexuality and its attendant politics, even before the outbreak of Aids in 1981. They were consciously looking to record their work as evidence, in the form of photographic documentation (Finley PI 2015). These artists were a source of opposition to federal and state government injustice and discrimination against minority groups.

McAdams moved to the East Village and based her darkroom at PS122, at 150 First Avenue and Ninth Street, in what was known as The Downtown neighbourhood. She began collaborating with artists and documenting performance. She explained:

> I’d always cast my lot in with the counterculture. It was no coincidence that I was living there as I’d been documenting the neighbourhoods there as well as photographing the anti-nuclear movement and a community of mental health patients out on Coney Island. (PI 2015)

Mark Russell, the first Artistic Director of PS122, observed that “their art was experimental, and their community was both their influence and their audience, and they collaborated across artistic disciplines”(Russell PI 2021). Then, the artists were restless and driven to effect change, and living and working together allowed them regular, frequent face to face contact. There was an immediacy, vibrancy and lively exchange of ideas which was key to Russell’s vision for PS122 (Russell PI 2021).

As described by Russell, PS122, formerly a public school, had been abandoned but was being used as a community facility, with a child-care day centre and artists’ squat (Kurkjian 47). Later, Peter Rose, a dancer and choreographer, along with Charles Moulton, Gabrielle Lansner and Charles Dennis began to rent rooms for rehearsal space. They were joined by Tim Miller who became group co-leader (Skura PI 2021). They had set up dance workshop *Open Movement* on Warren Street and needed a new site (Kurkjian 47). Rose was a founding member who had been to Poland in 1978 for *Tree of People,* and again in 1980 for *Theatre of Sources*. Rose, Stephanie Skura and others were influenced by the work of Jerzy Grotowski a theatre director later recognised as a key figure in the avant-garde for his movement known as *Poor Theatre*: this style favoured minimalism, rejecting stage, costume and commercialism, and was a adopted by the founders of PS122:

> This act cannot exist if the actor is more concerned with charm, personal success, applause and salary, than with creation as understood in its highest form. It cannot exist if the actor conditions it according to the size of his part, his place in the performance, the day or kind of audience. (Grotowski 262)

Working with Grotowski in his Polish Laboratory Theater, Rose was deeply inspired and came back to NYC with energy to fuel the original participatory activities at PS 122.

As described in an open letter to PS122 management from Peter Rose, Stepanie Skura and others, *Open Movement* was PS 122's original non-performative movement/dance weekly event and was integral to the development of fresh perspectives about performance during the early years (Skura PI 2021). Skura recalls the invitational “Sunday group”, that improvised together at PS 122 every Sunday afternoon, “developing a history, encouraging conceptual courage, performance intimacy, and psychic fearlessness, always with an interdisciplinary approach when interdisciplinary was not fashionable in the dance world” (Skura PI 2021). Russell has described it as akin to attending a weekly church service, such was the sanctity of its place in the schedules of those involved (PI 2021). The letter continued: “*Open Movement* and its participatory offshoots—invitational Sunday improvisation meetings, night readings, all-night improvisations, *Open Presentation, Open Performance*—had a profound influence on how PS 122 would grow” (Rose, Skura 2018). Skura elaborated: “A crucial aspect of *Open Movement* as a foundational generative spirit was its commitment to participation: not a class, not a rehearsal, no director, no watching. Also, no music!” (Skura PI 2021). Skura reflected:

> Importantly, Grotowski also rejected rehearsal & performance. He felt the most creative things happened in rehearsal, so he dispensed with performance altogether, and also dispensed with the audience! His lab was a *participation* event, and importantly, it went on 24 hours a day for several days. People who wanted to sleep or eat would go down to the basement. The improvisation went on upstairs for the duration. This sense of working beyond exhaustion, beyond resistance, beyond self-criticism, was an important influence in the activities that were offshoots of *Open Movement*. The exclusively participatory nature of O*pen Movement* was also influenced by Grotowski’s experiments. People who came had to participate not spectate. People were improvising, yes, but in all different “styles”. (PI 2021)

Open Movement endured until the mid-'80s and was the spawning ground for the innovative artists who performed there, many of whom went on to redefine the fields of dance, performance, and theatre (Rose, Skura 2018). The letter also emphasises “the interdisciplinary mindset, emphasis on process, inclusiveness, diversity, wildness and intimacy of *Open Movement* and its offshoots” which radically changed approaches and expectations in the field, and asserts that “the roots of PS 122's performance history were planted there” (Rose, Skura 2018).

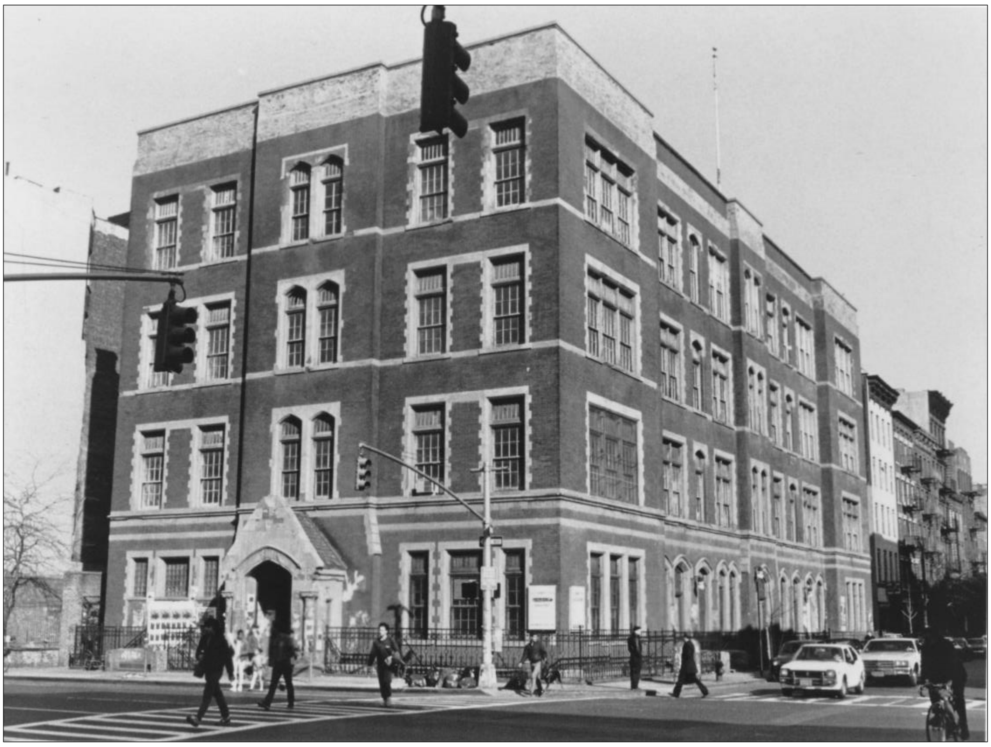

Figure 1.10. McAdams, Dona Ann. PS122, 150 First Avenue, NYC.

The PS122 building seen in figure 1.10, above, (before the renovations of 2011-2018), was temporarily taken over by MGM while filming the movie *FAME* and when it was returned, the artists inherited a newly fitted, sprung dance floor (Kurkjian47). McAdams described how she:

> Started photographing performance art at its inception, in the early ‘80s. My friends were artists and performers and since I was a photographer and a member of their community it was inevitable that I would collaborate with them. The nature of their work was that it needed

> evidence in the form of documentation. So that was the role, to take the moment and turn it into evidence. (PI2016)

PS122 later also came to be known for work by solo performers such as Karen Finley and Holly Hughes. Marvin Taylor noted that “the monologue with its emphasis on autobiography, individual identity and social commentary would take hold at PS122 as the ‘house style’” (Taylor 114). Solo shows were also inexpensive to produce as artistic Director Mark Russell noted (Kurkjian 54). Founding members Skura and Rose were attracted to PS122 as a “venue for experimental participation events”, because “it was an alternative to the persistent celebrity/fan mentality that existed seemingly everywhere else. It was non-commercial. It was ego-dissolving. And it didn’t last! It was a phenomenon of its time” (Skura PI 2021). Perhaps inevitably, PS122 evolved and became a venue for individual artists to market themselves and show their work setting the trajectory for what it is today, but this created tensions with the experimental purists who “wanted to show what was going on in the culture at the time and how art and artists both reflect and influence culture” (Skura PI 2021).

The artists were part of an artistic movement that has come to be known as the “Downtown Scene”, which originated, and was centred in the East Village. This scene was multidisciplinary, and simultaneously applied “punk”, countercultural, anti-authority, ideology to music, disposable painting, body art and performance at PS122 and other unconventional theatre spaces such as The Kitchen, Franklin Furnace, WOW and LaMama (McAdams PI 2015). Holly Hughes recalled PS122 as being an important experimental space open to both men and women performers, in contrast to the women-only WOW Café (Women’s One World) which she had spent time at since it began in 1980 (Hughes PI 2016). McAdams recalled appreciating the women-only space at WOW where she could completely relax (PI 2015).

> The art was improvisational, spontaneous, often unscripted. It explored and crossed boundaries, between art forms, between audience and performer, between sexes. It was concerned with gender and politics but it was not political for the sake of being political. (PI 2015)

As PS122 grew from an improvisational informal space into a fully-fledged fringe theatre, her work came to centre on documenting the performances held there. Here McAdams acknowledged the influence of renowned dance and performance photographer Peter Moore on her early work at PS122 (see figure1.15, below). For more than thirty years, until his death in 1993, Moore photographed some of the key developments in performance, documenting Fluxus, Happenings, and the pioneering events staged at Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village by Judson Dance Theater. In a 1974 interview, Peter Moore told Barbara Buscher:

> What you're trying to do is to do justice, as much as you are able to, to the intent of the artist, rather than impose our own will on it. There will be times when everything comes together; your personal aesthetic, their work, your reaction to it….Essentially I am still limited to photographing my reaction to the rhythm of the piece. (Buscher 7)

The work at Judson was an important influence on the artists at PS122. At Judson, briefly, in the early 1960s, a group of choreographers, visual artists, composers, and filmmakers gathered for a series of workshops that ultimately redefined "dance". The Judson workshops were unconventional and subverted the strict rules governing dance at that time. The Judson artists "deconstructed the fundamentals of choreography, stripping dance of its theatrical conventions such as virtuoso technique, fanciful costumes, complex storylines, and the traditional stage" (Custodio). They incorporated everyday movements to create their pieces, often performing them in ordinary spaces, to create a "manifesto of what was later to be called post-modern dance" (Siegel 9). As Siegel also explained: "The successful reform of dance aesthetics required performers with

Figure 1.11. McAdams, Dona Ann. Peter Moore at Judson Memorial Church, Greenwich Village.1992.

mind, imagination and collaboration – a sensitivity to the whole event, a responsiveness to their fellow performers and a highly developed ability to relinquish their ego demands for the sake of their work" (Siegel 9).

To its members, Judson was as much an expression of community as it was a site of radical experimentation which sought to democratise dance through collaboration (Custudio). This was a pivotal moment in the evolution of modern dance and later, dancers and choreographers Peter Rose, Charles Dennis, Charles Moulton, Stephanie Skura and Tim Miller, adopted and adapted it as co-founders of dance workshop *Open Movement* first at and then continued at PS122 in 1979 (Kurkjian 53). Dancer, choreographer and teacher,

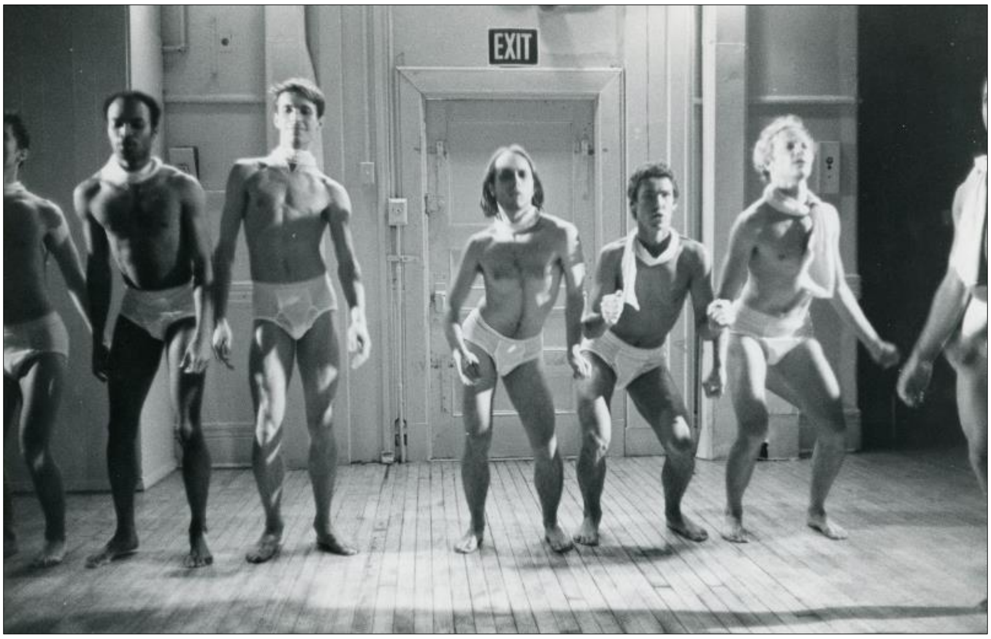

Figure 1.12. McAdams, Dona Ann. John Bernd (third from right) and
Go-Go Boys at A Full Moon Show, PS122. 1984.

Stephanie Skura told me: “*Open Movement* was the originating activity whose spirit gave rise to everything, performance-wise, that came afterward, when PS 122 became a known downtown performance venue” (PI 2021). Choreographer John Bernd was an early collaborator and an example of this experimental work can be seen in Figure 1.12, above. This picture exemplifies the informal, improvisational style of John Bernd, Rose, Skura, Miller, and others at PS122 dance and choreography style, a departure from the formality of earlier, traditional, practice.

When photographing performance, McAdams, like Moore, avoided photo-sessions and rehearsals, instead blending with the live performance from centre front, and using her almost silent Leica without flash to avoid distracting performer or spectator. Indeed, as McAdams recalled “in the earlier days the work was never ready to go before opening. There were no dress rehearsals” (PI 2015). McAdams acknowledged:

> Peter Moore was and always will be my inspiration….[Moore] held that a documentary photographer has a special responsibility to be sensitive, to be clear about our subject and who our audience is, who the work is for

> and of course how the work looks. How it is shot and how it is captioned. All of this is important. (PI 2015)

McAdams had travelled to Australia in 1979, to investigate aboriginal land rights and while there, worked in the darkroom of a photographer named Ponch Hawkes who was photographing Circus Oz[1]. McAdams elaborated: “It was her documentation of that circus that got me interested in performance photography but it was the work of Peter Moore that gave me permission to pursue it as art” (PI 2015).

McAdams at PS122 – Becomes House Photographer 1983

As has been evidenced above, by the time she arrived at PS122, McAdams was already a politically engaged activist who consciously documented events unfolding around her. She recalled when performance artist Beth Lapides first asked her to photograph her performance work, and then dancer and choreographer John Bernd asked her to make a publicity shot for him at PS122 (PI 2015):

> I was first invited into this world by (performer) Beth Lapides, who asked me to photograph her work, in the early 1980s. It (my performance work)was empowered by Ponch Hawkes’s photographs of Circus Oz, an Australian performance collective working in Melbourne, Australia. Also, I was very much influenced by the recognition of performance photography as art in the work of Peter Moore who was and always will be my inspiration. (PI June 2015)

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[1] Sections of this account are also included in Alice Maude-Roxby’s Live Art on Camera: Performance and Photography P103-109

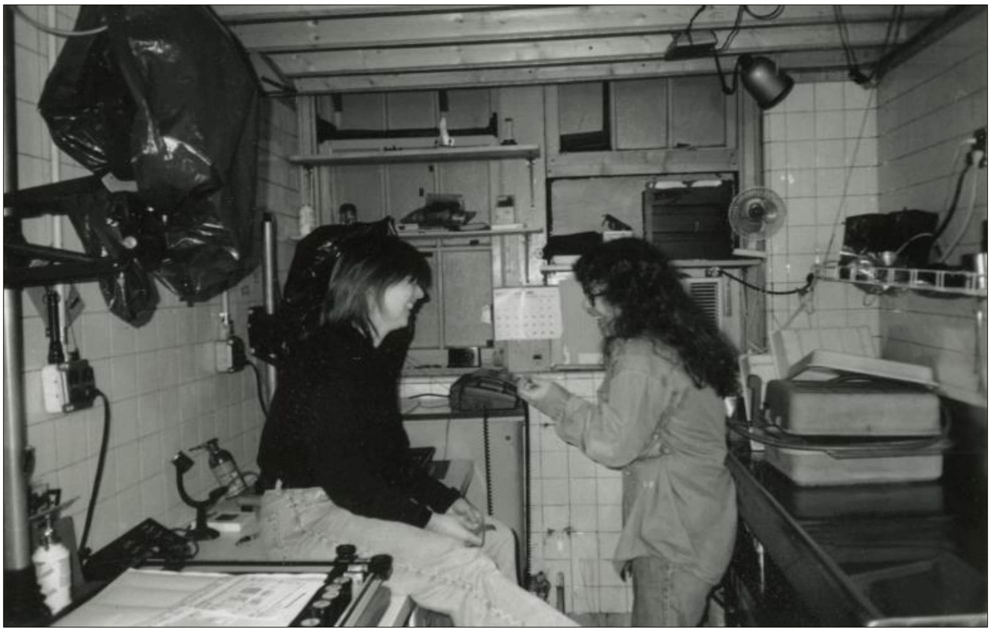

Figure 1.13. Kessler, Brad. McAdams and PS 122 lighting engineer, Lori E. Seid, in McAdams' darkroom at PS122. 1995.

McAdams recalled:

> Here, (figure 1.13, above), with Lori E. Seid (lighting engineer at PS122) in my cosy darkroom on the 5th Floor of 150 First Avenue in New York City. I was a lucky member of Painting Space 122 who has run PS122 gallery since they moved in back in 1979 or so. And yes I made photographs at PS122 too! Brad Kessler took this photograph of us in 1995 probably (PI 2015).

"It was inevitable that I would cooperate with [the counterculture], become their maker and keeper of images," McAdams told me in an interview (PI 2015).

McAdams went on to describe the early days at PS122:

> I loved the architecture of PS122. The blonde floor [white oak] and the trademark four columns, which I always wanted to incorporate into my work if possible. Later on, the floor was painted black and I felt this made it like any other 'black box' venue; it lost its reflective and interesting qualities.[2] Then the [theatre] space became fixed; it couldn't be moved around as it had in the early days. They covered the windows and put the technical booth over the stairway. To me, it lost something of its uniqueness after that. (PI 2015)

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[2] PS 122 underwent a partial renovation in the mid-1990s. A major project between 2011 and 2018 with grants from the City of New York, extensively upgraded the interior of the building, whilst maintaining the facade.

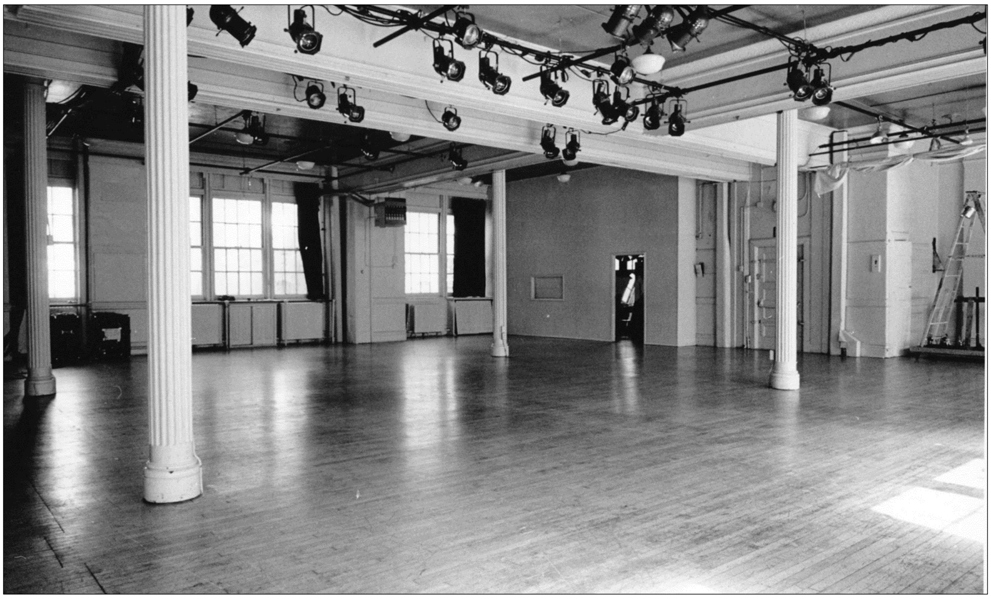


Figure 1.14. McAdams, Dona Ann. PS122 non-traditional performance space
with columns and clip (grid) lighting visible.

McAdams, like many at PS122, was fond of the trademark “blond” (white oak) sprung dance floor and of the open, non-traditional performance space, grid lighting and columns. She recalled:

> Holly Hughes always said PS122 was “a big blond”. Initially, seating was limited to the back of the hall because of inadequate lighting. Later, the installation of grid lighting meant that seating that was not fixed could be positioned to suit the performance. (McAdams PI 2020)

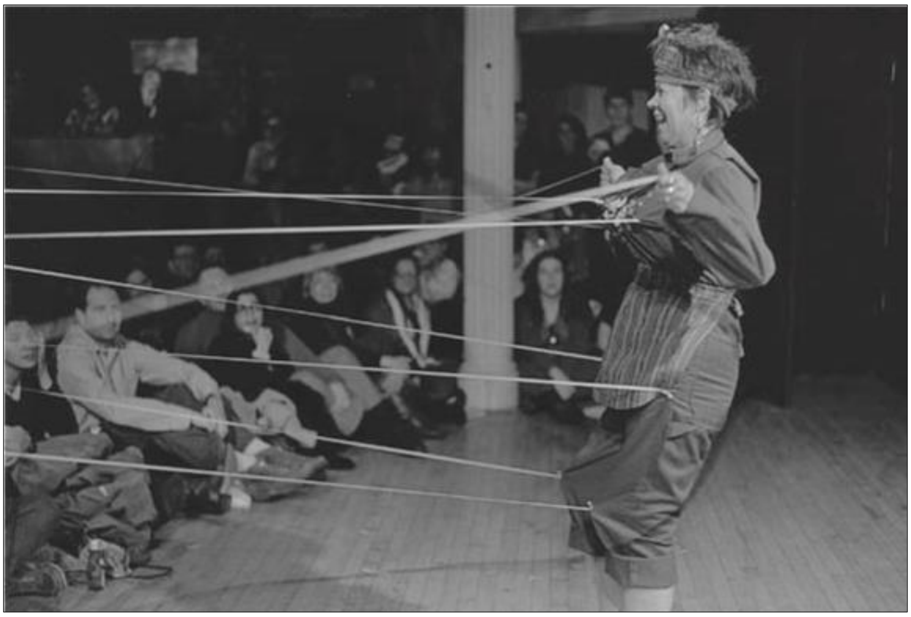


Figure 1.15. McAdams, Dona Ann. Judith Ren-Lay, The Last Taboo*.*
From a benefit performance for PS122. 1993.

As these images (1.15 above and 1.16 below, show), at PS122 the artists turned their backs on the formality and convention of the traditional theatre setting, the plinth, the white cube, and the proscenium stage. Judith Ren-Lay, seen in figure 1.15 above, told me that using the columns and the elastic bands:

> Was a way to connect myself physically to the audience and then tell them all to let go at once. The elastic bands snapped back to me in an incredibly visual way. At the beginning [of the show] I introduced Dona [McAdams] and she shot from the stage as though part of the action. (Ren-Lay PI 2021)

Figure 1.16, below), shows the unconventional seating and one of the trademark pillars in the space which performers of all styles used to demonstrate their talents. In the top right is the motto of Public School 122 etched into the stained glass window. Tim Miller has described the building as being almost like a church and this akin to an ecclesiastical stained glass window. The words are “Every waking hour we weave, whether we will or no, Every trivial act or word into the warp must go”. The performance art they practised drew on all disciplines, including dance, poetry and gymnastics in what RoseLee Goldberg has called its “boundless manifesto” (Goldberg 9). McAdams reflected that:

> Performance art had its first stirrings on the Lower East Side, and this was no coincidence, for the Lower East Side has always been a breeding ground for subcultures and countercultures, from the Yiddish Theatre in the nineteenth century to the Beats of the twentieth. (PI 2016)

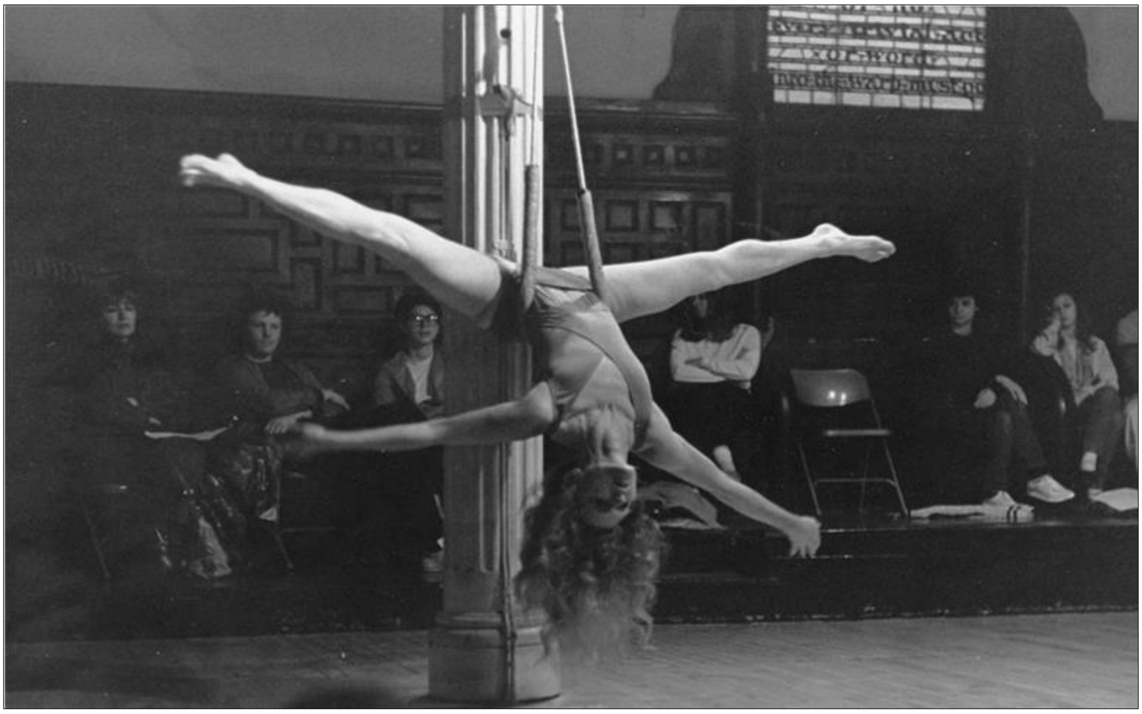


Figure 1.16. McAdams, Dona Ann. PS122 attracted performers of all disciplines. (Thought to be Batya Zamir). Stained glass visible, top right.

The importance of community is expressed by McAdams in an interview in which she described her collaborative approach to her photographic practice.

> As a photographer, I felt I needed to be invited into the situation. I need to be a part of the community—the process, the give and take. A photographer is always pulling their work from the experience of others [unless you are photographing yourself] and in this sense, all photography is collaboration. This quality of trust is essential to me, because if you lose sight of what the work is about, the subject, and don't address them with respect as individuals, it shows in the photographs, and the work suffers and is short-sighted. It becomes journalism. (PI 2015)

In a later interview, she emphasised the centrality of the local Ukrainian diner, Veselka, to their daily routine, as a meeting place and extension to home:

> Veselka was also the place we'd all meet before going to the busses to [attend the] Washington protests. There were marches for [Pro] Choice and against the war in Central America. When Aids hit in the early eighties we'd meet before ACT UP meetings, join an affinity group, celebrate a successful show at 122, a good or a bad review. (PI 2016)

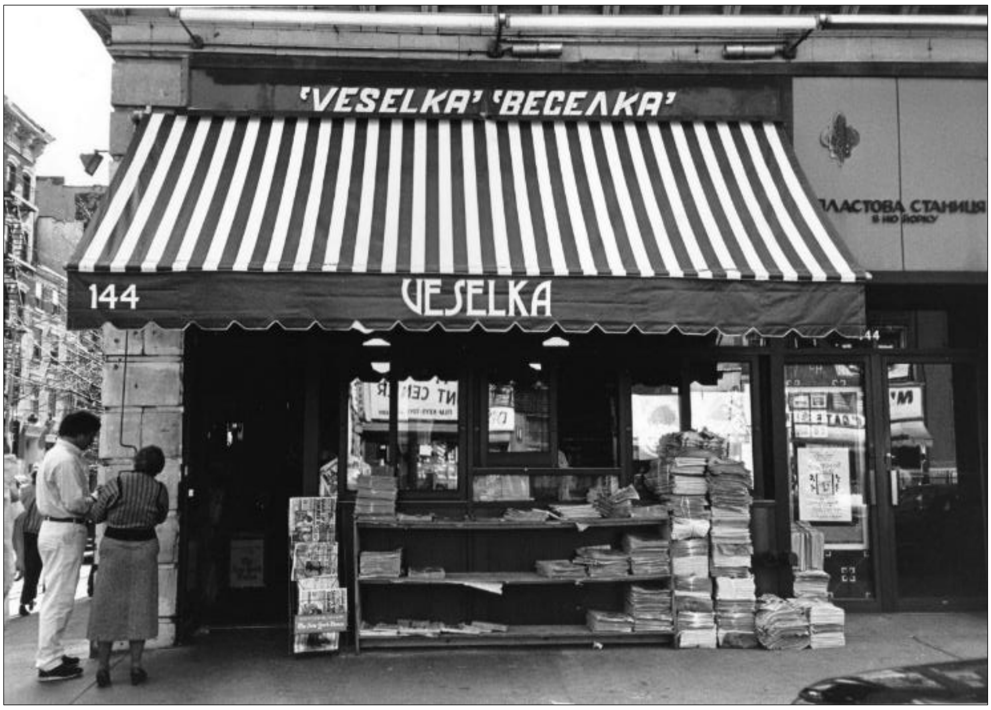


Figure 1.17. McAdams, Dona Ann. Veselka, Ukrainian Diner, 144 2nd Ave, New York.

At Veselka, creative people could meet spontaneously, but the predictability of their habits allowed artistic collaborations to develop. She described what she considers her good fortune in being selected to have her photographic studio at Painting Space 122:

> It all kinda [sic] happened at once. Some kind of magic. In 1983 I applied to Painting Space 122 for a darkroom. The building my studio was in sold and the wonderful Tom Birchard whose restaurant Veselka was my "go-to" bought it. Back to Painting Space 122. I wasn't their first choice I was the lucky smart second who jumped at the opportunity and I was accepted into the organization. I had started dipping my toe into the second floor of Performance Space 122 photographing friends. John Bernd was the first to invite me in and soon Mark Russell was the lucky man put in charge. (PI2016)

She described how:

> He [Russell] walked across the street to my studio and asked me to photograph. I said yes! Then soon after all this, I moved my studio into the 5th floor into what had been the women's teacher's bathroom and began my adventures with Mark. Lori E Seid helped me move stuff up those skinny stairs. Mark and I worked together from 1983 to 2004. He left to make the tremendously successful *Under the Radar Festival* at the Public Theatre. I left in 2006. But that's for another day. I am lucky to call him a friend and collaborator. His [Mark's] invitation to make photographs of his vision [for PS122] changed my life. It was a crazy and wonderful

> time. This is his office right off the second-floor space. In probably 1985 (Figure 1.18 below). (PI 2016)

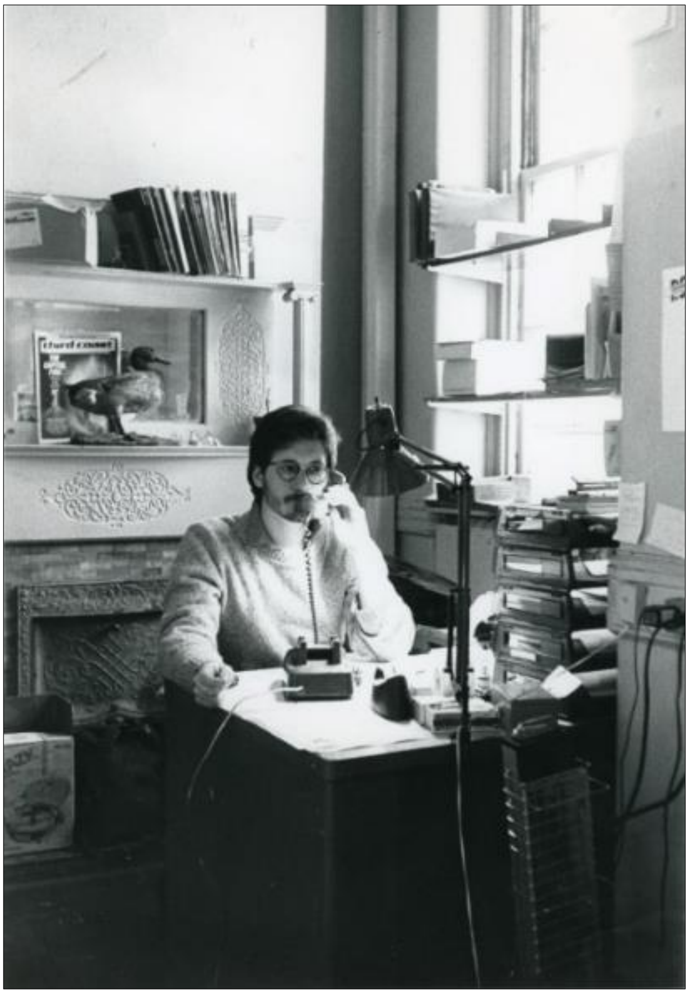


Figure 1.18. McAdams, Dona Ann. Mark Russell, Artistic Director 1983- 2004. 1985.

The performances at PS122 were improvisational and, in a similar vein, Russell's office was forged out of repurposed space. In a 2004 article, Beth Kurkjian described Russell's office as:

> …a tiny loft office at P.S. 122. His office felt like a ship captain's quarters. Constructed within a large, high-ceilinged bathroom, the office was reached by a ladder; every so often I could faintly hear someone flush a toilet. (Kurkjian 46)

Russell recalled: "I had 'in' and 'out' trays, a phone, a typewriter and a Rolodex. There was no technology as we know it now" (PI2021). The artistic practice that evolved at PS122 took shape under his tenure. With his vision, it gave a start to many artists who, otherwise, would not have had the opportunity to show their work but who would go on to define the downtown New York art world (Kurkjian 46).

McAdams, Finley and Russell have all stressed the importance of Veselka, as a meeting place, and a connection to the diverse mix of people in the neighbourhood. McAdams elaborated:

> The first time I went to Veselka, in 1978, was for a bowl of pea soup after seeing Meredith Monk at St Mark's Church perform her Plateau Series [a hybrid music/dance piece]. At that time I had no idea how important that soup and performance would be. I was living on the other side of the river then, in Williamsburg; but soon I'd moved my darkroom into the basement of a building on Ninth Street, a few doors down from Veselka. It turned it that Tom Birchard soon bought the building. We struck a deal: I'd move my darkroom out of the basement in exchange for Tom giving me an apartment when one became available. We've been friends ever since. Coincidence, maybe. I think it was the Pea Soup. Veselka has been a second home—a kitchen and dining room and living room—for more than thirty years. (PI 2016)

She recalled the habits of the artists and performers she worked with:

> Most of them used Veselka as an informal office and cafeteria. It was the hub. You could always find certain working artists at regular times of the day. Mark Russell had his usual window spot; Holly Hughes was often eating a bowl of oatmeal at the counter in the mornings; Kim Jones had his corner table by the window with the New York Times. The 5 Lesbian Brothers sat together in the back and a lot of the WOW Café people too— just to name a few. Tim Miller and John Bernd were counter guys. (PI 2016)

In the days before mobile phones and electronic contact records, they relied on public phone booths to maintain contact with one another.

> We all used the bank of old phones in the back to make our appointments—they were [made of] oak I believe and had important numbers [numbers that were significant for the group] carved into the wood [as a type of telephone directory]. The little room in the back (under the loft where Tom (Birchard) now sits) was where you'd go if you wanted to have a private talk or meeting. (PI 2016)

McAdams emphasised also that it was important to eat well but cheaply. As struggling artists, they lived frugally. "Perogies (dumplings) were required in the winter. Cold borscht (soup) in the summer. There was a cold fruit soup they used to make which was delicious. It was comfort food which filled you up for little money” (PI 2016). However, she noticed changes coming to the neighbourhood:

> As the East Village changed so did Veselka. The first of two renovations opened up space and now there was a big room with lots of light. Alas, the phones were gone but it was now 24 hours and you could buy a Ukrainian beer which became necessary as the Ukrainian Pizza place, Orchadia, was gone. As the neighbourhood gentrified eateries which had been neighbourhood institutions began to disappear. Restaurants like Kiev, Christine’s, and Second Avenue Deli, which are no longer around. Veselka was one of the few that remained. (PI 2016)

Meeting at Veselka fostered important collaborations in which artists could work together on shared creative goals. These took each beyond the boundaries of their individual artistic discipline and ability and provided a unique opportunity for artistic growth (Russell PI 2021). Veselka was a forum for socialising but also allowed artists to informally rehearse their ideas, challenge each other and ask questions about life and art. PS122 co-founder, Peter Rose, conceived his solo performance piece “Cleansing the Senses” at Veselka and described it:

> Sitting in Veselka’s Ukrainian Restaurant on 9th Street and 2nd Avenue after *Open Movement* in the summer of 1979 in New York City, it was always difficult talking about *Open Movement* and its influence on the East Village Dance and Performance scene. *Open Movement* was an occasion for dancers, actors and regular people to meet and improvise. Later we shared ideas over bowls of soup and challah bread….At Veselka the group was interested in discussing *Open Movement* and why we were moving in silence and not playing tapes of new wave music or experimental composers. (Origins of P.S. 122)

Rose was reflective of his artistic goals:

> When the food arrived I took a chance: Cleansing the senses, I said, to live and create more fully. That’s one of the goals. My friends looked at me strangely, enjoying the soup. At *Open Movement* everyone prepares and participates. Like preparing a field for planting corn, sweeping the space, changing a light bulb, opening a window. Sensing the air. Arriving, acknowledging one another, waiting. I gained confidence as the main dishes arrived: kasha, pierogis, kielbasa and cabbage soup. The space is a landscape. Floor, earth, beach. Safe for the body: breathe, heart-beat, rhythm, sweat, play, sense and sensuality. Present, attentive, still. Seeing, waiting, standing. Holding and letting go. Falling in the river. The rush and mix of spontaneous memories. New experiences. Exhaustion.

> Fresh inspiration. Cleansing the senses to live and create more fully. That’s it! (Origins of P.S. 122)

Rose returned to PS122 in May 2006 to reprise his original 1979 work. McAdams photographed him as her last assignment as House Photographer before she left. “John Bernd was as I mentioned my first friend and Peter Rose my last friend photographed” (PI 2020). She continued:

> When I went to Peter's dress [rehearsal] he asked me to come on the stage with him. He wanted me to photograph very close, his hands, his feet, his back. To move with him. So I did. The piece was about the spirit of *Open Movement* which he helped introduce to New York City in 1979. After the dress [rehearsal] we sat and talked for a long time and he said to me. This might be the last time we work together in this space. You and Me. I sat for a minute and said, well if it was, then I would be ok with that. John was the first and you the last. That would be a full circle. Complete. And it was the last time I ever shot at PS122. And the last time he ever performed there. I loved him. (PI 2020)

Rose was determined that *Open Movement* should be acknowledged as the important element it was in the origins of PS122 and be written into the historical timeline (Skura PI 2021). Unbeknown to many close to him, Rose suffered from bipolar disorder and he took his life in 2015: beforehand he spent time with Skura to ensure the place of *Open Movement* in the history of PS122 and the wider world of performance (Skura PI 2021).

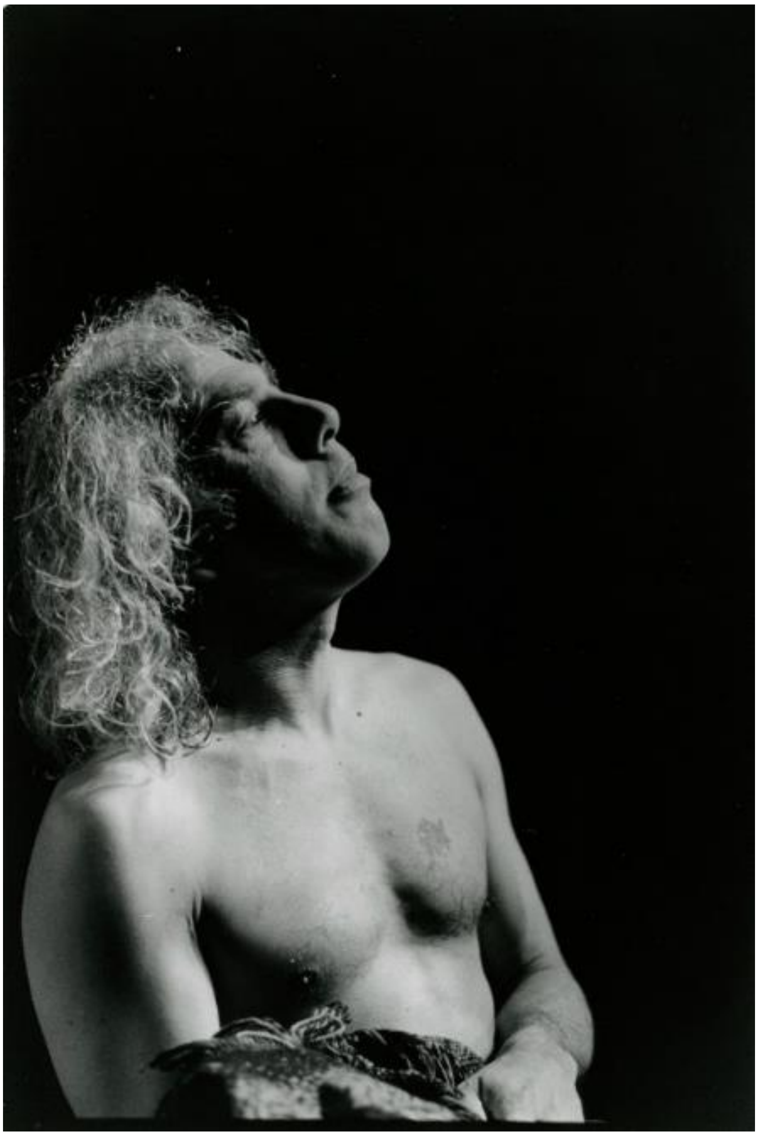
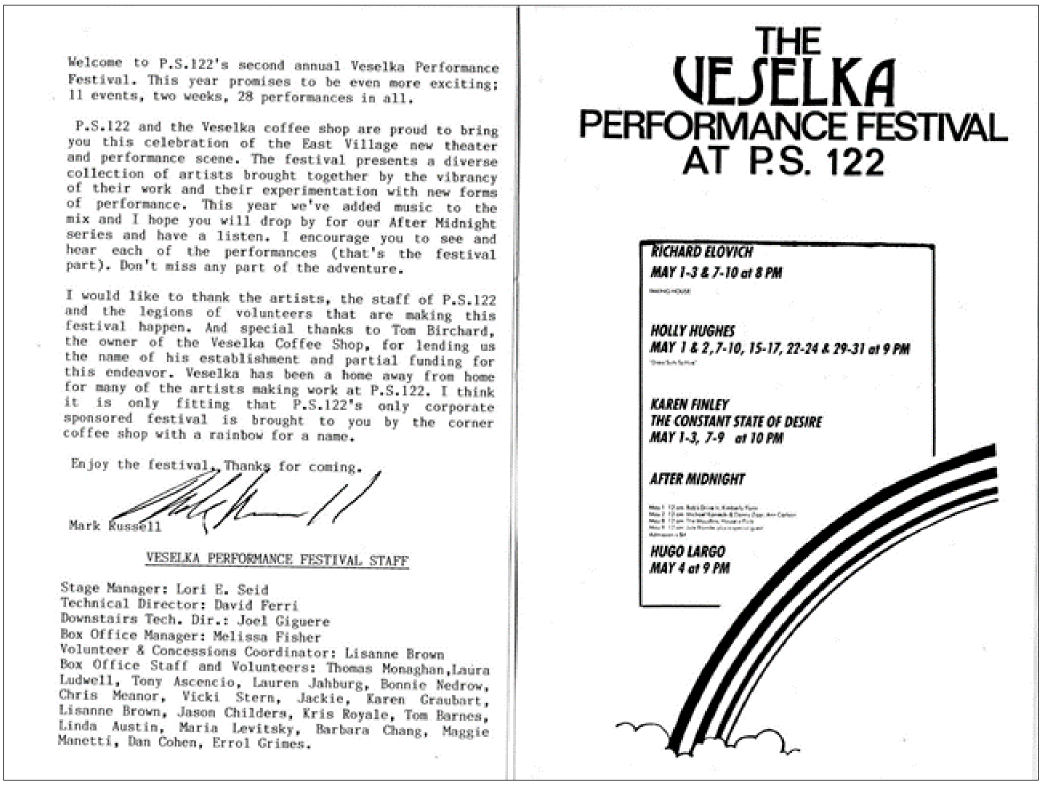


Figure 1.19. McAdams, Dona Ann. Peter Rose, *Cleansing the Senses,* PS122. May, 2006.

In their accounts of the centrality of the Ukrainian diner, Veselka, to their community, both Rose and McAdams validate Penny Arcade and Sarah Schulman's argument that the Downtown artists lived among their neighbours with no desire to gentrify (Schulman 30). The authentic experience of eating in an authentic Ukrainian kitchen, food cooked and served by Ukrainian people allowed for diversity and connection between artists of different genres and intergenerational and cross-cultural exchanges. McAdams acknowledges the importance of this local connection and its constancy in the lives of the artists (PI 2016). Veselka also helped raise funds for PS122. The typed, hand-drawn and Xeroxed flyer is seen here, (figure 1.19, below). Publicity material was so much “of the moment” that it was only necessary to specify the date and time, not the year.



Welcome to P.S.122's second annual Veselka Performance Festival. This year promises to be even more exciting; 11 events, two weeks, 28 performances in all.

P.S.122 and the Veselka coffee shop are proud to bring you this celebration of the East Village new theater and performance scene. The festival presents a diverse collection of artists brought together by the vibrancy of their work and their experimentation with new forms of performance. This year we've added music to the mix and I hope you will drop by for our After Midnight series and have a listen. I encourage you to see and hear each of the performances (that's the festival part). Don't miss any part of the adventure.

I would like to thank the artists, the staff of P.S.122 and the legions of volunteers that are making this festival happen. And special thanks to Tom Birchard, the owner of the Veselka Coffee Shop, for lending us the name of his establishment and partial funding for this endeavor. Veselka has been a home away from home for many of the artists making work at P.S.122. I think it is only fitting that P.S.122's only corporate sponsored festival is brought to you by the corner coffee shop with a rainbow for a name.

Enjoy the festival. Thanks for coming.

Mark Russell

VESELKA PERFORMANCE FESTIVAL STAFF

Stage Manager: Lori E. Seid
Technical Director: David Ferri
Downstairs Tech. Dir.: Joel Giguere
Box Office Manager: Melissa Fisher
Volunteer & Concessions Coordinator: Lisanne Brown
Box Office Staff and Volunteers: Thomas Monaghan, Laura Ludwell, Tony Ascencio, Lauren Jahburg, Bonnie Nedrow, Chris Meanor, Vicki Stern, Jackie, Karen Graubart, Lisanne Brown, Jason Childers, Kris Royale, Tom Barnes, Linda Austin, Maria Levitsky, Barbara Chang, Maggie Manetti, Dan Cohen, Errol Grimes.

THE
VESELKA
PERFORMANCE FESTIVAL
AT P.S. 122

RICHARD ELOVICH
MAY 1-3 & 7-10 at 8 PM

HOLLY HUGHES
MAY 1 & 2, 7-10, 15-17, 22-24 & 29-31 at 9 PM

KAREN FINLEY
THE CONSTANT STATE OF DESIRE
MAY 1-3, 7-9 at 10 PM

AFTER MIDNIGHT

HUGO LARGO
MAY 4 at 9 PM

Figure 1.20. Veselka sponsored a performance festival at PS 122 as a fundraiser. Hand drawn flyer.

Writing in the journal *Artspeak* in 1982, Vernita Nemec stated that there was a noticeable increase in ‘political art’ on the New York scene at that time. Russell reflected that at PS122:

> the dance work in the early days, with Tim Miller’s *Open Movement* workshops, was political. Contact was a political thing to do. Men lifted women, women lifted men, it was about shared weights and different hierarchies. Politics were happening on the street and the stage. (PI 2021)

Situated outside of the elite category of ‘Fine Art’, American artists had long avoided identifying themselves with political art, due to its association with communism and the McCarthy era. This was, however, changing, as Nemec noted: “Socially conscious art groups have been popping up…coming together for a variety of socio-political issues” (Nemec). At the Walker Center, in Minneapolis, Killacky observed “Art and culture were politicised; this is nothing new, and we were eager to support the present day provocateurs” (Killacky). A MoMA exhibition which included McAdams’ work *They're Juggling Our Genes* also noted that the 1980s saw an increase in the prevalence of art about social and political issues and acknowledged its contribution to “the visual vocabulary of the period” and “influence on the cultural mainstream” (Wye 8).

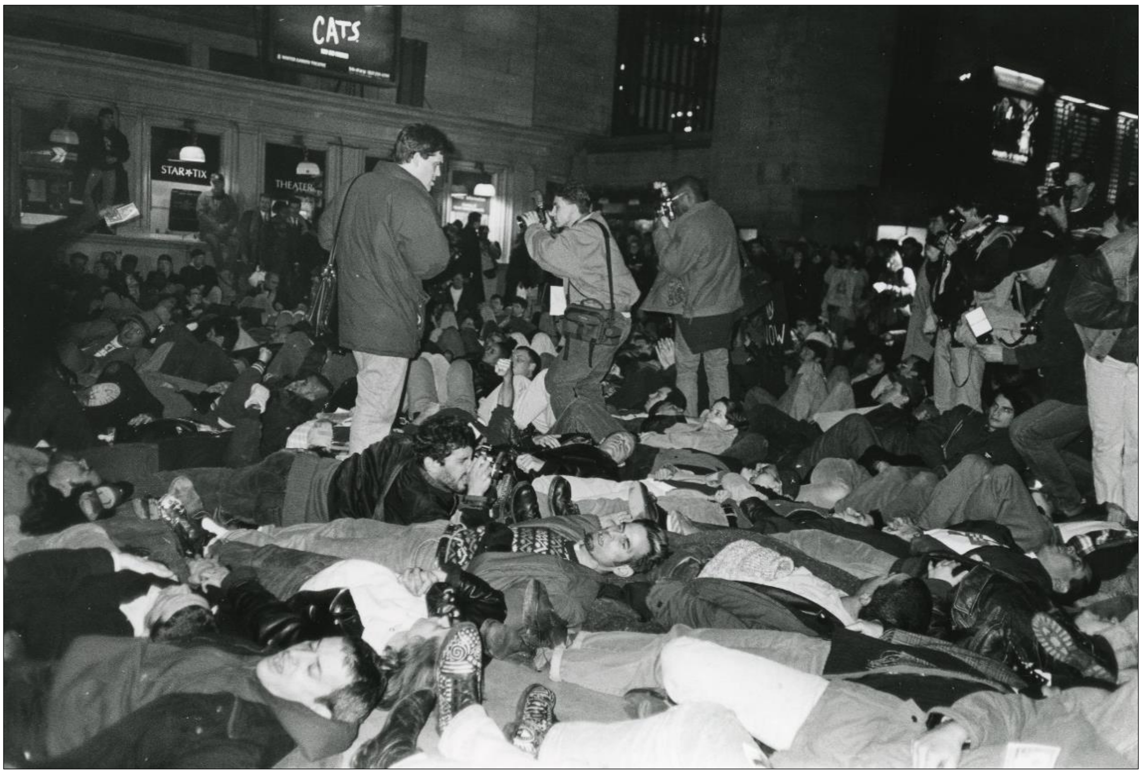


Figure 1.21. McAdams, Dona Ann. ACT UP *Day of Desperation* protests.
Rush hour at Grand Central Station, New York City, 23rd March 1991.

The coming epidemic later known as the Aids Crisis was to change everything. The growing awareness that many of their young friends were dying from a disease which as yet had no name cast a pall over those at PS122. The sick and the dying were abandoned by the authorities, leaving friends to demand action and mobilise support. The activism around Aids demonstrated the power of communities coming together to take care of one another. As part of protest movement ACT-UP’s *Day of Desperation* protests, demonstrators took over the Grand Central Terminal concourse at 5 pm to disrupt commuters (see figure 1.20, above). They were demanding that funding be directed towards Aids research, not war. This picture is part of a sequence, another of which is shown in the following chapter. In that picture, McAdams managed to obtain an image of the protestors scaling the information board (seen here illuminated top right), and attaching a fabric banner which read “one Aids death every 8 minutes”, but which was swiftly brought down by transport security. It was a stark message to passengers that in the short time before their train departed, many of their fellow Americans would be dead from an incurable illness.

As described above, performance artists such as Holly Hughes and Tim Miller used the physical movements and live-ness of their bodies in performance. Their physical and emotional bodies held their lived experience, their history. Where the artists had used their bodies on stage to challenge dominant discourses, they now took to the streets and used them to demand urgent action on behalf of those who had contracted the Aids virus and their loved ones. This is the subject of chapter two, The Aids Crisis.

CHAPTER TWO

The Aids Crisis 1981

Introduction

This chapter describes the responses of the federal government, the drug regulators and medical practitioners to the unfolding Aids crisis. It also details the response among the gay community, initially most affected by the illness, and of McAdams and artists at PS122. McAdams was aware of the emerging crisis at an early stage as many of her community of artists became sick. McAdams joined groups formed to protest the perceived failure of the responsible authorities to act urgently to provide diagnosis and treatment. Their actions, recorded in McAdams' photographs, raised public awareness of Aids, drawing attention to it as a life and death issue, and put pressure on politicians and others in authority to fulfil their obligations. Through contemporaneous personal oral or written memoirs, many who lived through those times have given eye-witness accounts and a voice to those who did not survive to tell their own stories and McAdams' photographs provide a visual record. The role of the press and the use of emotive language in coverage of the crisis is also explored. The chapter concludes with a discussion of art as an expression of grief and mourning.

The Political Backdrop

The Aids Crisis was a defining moment in cultural and public health history (Caruth et al. 539). Wider society was unresponsive to the epidemic due to what Douglas Crimp called the "incommensurability of experiences", which made the ordeal of Aids sufferers incomprehensible to the general public (Caruth et al. 256). The federal government were slow in responding, but in the medical community, many immediately grasped the significance of the threat posed by the newly emerging, then untreatable illness, and worked to find a route to prevention and/or cure (Francis).

The emergence of Aids in 1981 tested society's humanity, as those afflicted struggled to get adequate attention from the policymakers and authorities (Kramer xxxvi). The cultural and societal backdrop to the unfolding crisis helps explain the authorities' attitude. Aids was recognised early on as of epidemic proportions, but the federal government in the United States did not communicate the seriousness of the crisis. Dr Donald Francis was at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and in his view, the federal government also failed to provide leadership in setting health goals, policies and standards (Francis 292). McAdams photograph, figure 2.1 below, shows that even ten years later protestors were still demanding effective medical treatment.

The illness primarily affected marginalised social groups, initially referred to as "4H": homosexuals, haemophiliacs, heroin addicts and Haitian-Americans (Sharlach). These groups lacked political and financial authority and were discriminated against in law which subdued them and, in turn, made them suspicious and mistrusting of government agencies. Homosexuality was illegal in New York until 1981, and homophobic attitudes engendered a culture of stigma, fear and discrimination (Capozzola 221). It was legal to fire them from their job for being gay, a situation that was not changed by law in New York State until 2003. In that year, the Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act made it unlawful for anyone in New York State to be discriminated against in employment, housing, credit, education and public accommodations because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation (James).

There was only meagre funding to research a cure, a vaccine or to provide public health messaging to encourage safe practices. The first cases occurred in 1981, and “by January 1983, the full picture had emerged” (Francis 292). Tests for HIV were not approved by the FDA until 1985 (Sharlach). There was no effective medicine until 1996 (Capozolla 220). Presidential leadership was vital to establish a strategy to deal with the virus but was lacking (Francis). The authorities shifted the narrative from the need to manage the virus and, instead, championed traditional family values as a means of holding the country together. The focus was on government spending cuts (Francis 298).

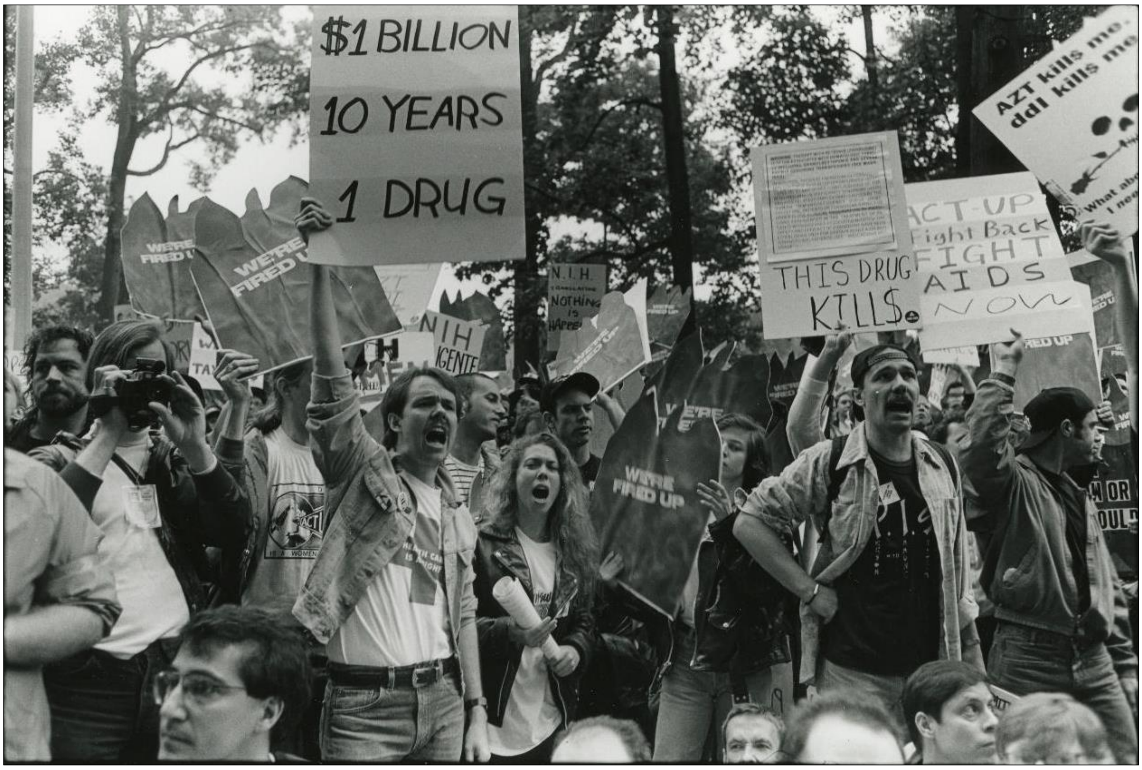

$1 BILLION
10 YEARS
1 DRUG
AZT kills me, ddI kills me
THIS DRUG KILLS
ACT-UP
Fight Back
FIGHT AIDS NOW
N.I.H.
NOTHING IS HAPPEN
NIH
WE'RE FIRED UP

Figure 2.1. McAdams, Dona Ann. ACT UP protesting the lack of effective medical treatment for HIV Aids ten years after it first emerged. 1991.

The cultural and societal backdrop in America, which, under President Reagan’s conservative government, “asserted cultural power through their claim on the definition of family”, shaped the handling of the Aids Crisis (Cappozola 227). As Thomas Long notes, “within two years of the Stonewall riots, homosexual visibility had become a serious concern for Christian fundamentalists” (Long 5). Ronald Bayer in *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry*, (1987), notes that the voting power of political action groups such as

Moral Majority, and evangelists like Jerry Falwell, was harnessed by the Republicans and fuelled the rhetoric of “epidemic” “apocalypse” and “plague” which spread into public opinion, causing panic. In the *Chicago Tribune*, Senator Jesse Helms suggested HIV positive people should be quarantined, in the *New York Times*, conservative commentator William F Buckley proposed that everyone with Aids should be tattooed, and in the *Washington Post*, Falwell claimed that Aids was divine retribution for homosexuality (Bayer 200). In *The New York Post*, Pat Buchanan, White House Director of Communications, wrote “The poor homosexuals. They have declared war on nature and now nature is exacting an awful retribution” (Bayer 200).

It was not until 1990 that Congress allocated millions of dollars for the care of People with Aids with the Ryan White Comprehensive Care Act (Feldman 161). Government officials were reluctant to upset the religious right, valuing political popularity and office above the lives of Aids sufferers and their families.

The Emergence of the Illness

Jeffrey Sharlach has remembered:

> Life in the city was suddenly overshadowed by this new demon plague that went on to ravage a generation and transform the creative world. How to communicate the absolute terror of those first five years of Aids for those who lived through it.... no one had any idea who was infected and who wasn’t. Even dying was complicated. Since everyone was still so closeted, many gay people were totally isolated from families and co-workers. (Sharlach)

Aids was originally feared as an epidemic with unlimited reach, for which there was no cure. It soon became clear that this was “not a collection of isolated events but an epidemic of death and dying among the young” (Friedland 1989 67). The artistic community was hit particularly hard, owing to “the important role gay men have played in the arts, literature, the entertainment industry and other creative domains" (Kramer xxxiii): Kramer remarked that "its ravages are more visible there and have an impact on everyone whom culture touches" (51). As my research shows, these details were part of a complex and evolving story that took time to understand.

In 1979 American doctors with predominantly gay patients had begun to notice an increased incidence of Kaposi's sarcoma, disfiguring cancer, and PCP, a rare form of pneumonia (Kramer 13). As David Román observes, "we do not have a precise origin, a beginning, a key event or date that marks the official arrival of the epidemic" (Román xiv). The story broke in June 1981 in *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (MMWR). The CDC reported that five gay men had become sick and two had died. Eleven weeks later, *MMWR* reported seventy more cases, mostly in California and New York City. The *New York Times* mentioned 41 gay men diagnosed with Kaposi's sarcoma (Altman). This incidence was unusual—the disease was usually seen in older men and was not fatal but here, the men were young and died because of their compromised immune system.

The epidemic initially had three distinct epicentres in the United States: New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles. New York and San Francisco were both centres of gay communities but had very different experiences. Extracts from the San Francisco Oral History Records Office detail the response of the authorities there. What emerges from these statements is a picture of a well-defined and recognised gay community, supported by local public health and medical personnel. Personal testimonies from the Online Archive of California, Berkeley, describe the complex interactions between disease and its social and cultural context:

> They indicate how the unique circumstances of San Francisco in the early 1980s— its large and vocal gay community, its generally

> cooperative medical and political establishments, the existence of a city budget surplus— shaped the response to the epidemic. (San Francisco Regional Oral History Office)

In San Francisco, doctors, epidemiologists and researchers banded together early on to combat the disease stating “even before HIV was discovered, we knew we were witnessing a new page in the history of science and medicine” (Oac.Cdlib). In San Francisco, there was concern for an “articulate, informed, and youthful patient population, with whom some identified and for whom most felt great sympathy”. Cooperation among the agencies assembled at the University of California San Francisco (UCSF) and San Francisco General hospitals set aside personal and professional differences to establish the Aids clinics and wards, which were among the first in the US (Oac.Cdlib).

These accounts are in stark contrast to the experience in New York described by Kramer and others. Estimating the number of homosexuals in the city at around one million (as against San Francisco’s 100,000), Kramer began articulating his message that New York homosexuals must organise, prepare accurate demographics and harness their power (Kramer 5). This was in 1978, after the assassination of Harvey Milk, some three years before the alarming death rate showed something very serious was happening within the gay male community. Kramer states that “the New York Mayor’s office was completely unresponsive to our request for any kind of help” for research and treatment (15). Kramer’s descriptions highlight the disagreement within the gay male community about their representation and policies, such as safer sex, “petty jealousies and political irrelevancies” (Kramer 21). These debates “threatened the entire sexual culture around which gay liberation had been built” (Kim).

The Role of the Medical Profession

Reflecting in 2012, Dr Francis at the CDC felt that the lack of both policy and financial support from the Reagan White House left the CDC powerless and conflicted with good public health practices (Francis 291). He remembered he had called for a new approach, what he termed “behaviour change medicine” (296-297). Francis contends that “the elite of the Reagan administration, and later the Bush administration, had no idea of their responsibility to protect the health of the people who had elected them” (297-298). He saw the problem escalating out of control and “rapidly turning into a pandemic” (298). Francis alleged that ignoring Aids was “an active policy of the Reagan Administration”, a degree of neglect that may be deemed of criminal proportions (298).

Presenting a different perspective, Cappozola argued that “the power of Ronald Reagan and national conservatism as mobilizing symbols may well have been more central to Aids and gay activism” than was realised and that “the anger that catalysed around the Reagan administration” resulted in the volume and range of cultural artefacts produced by people with Aids in the early 1980s (226).

At the NIH Dr Anthony Fauci was a focus of the activists’ displeasure. Providing daily briefings on the work for a vaccine, Fauci was the spokesperson of the federal government, and in the eyes of the protestors, the personification of their callous indifference. He was seen as responsible for blocking access to clinical trials, in which volunteers could receive potentially life-saving medications. Kramer attacked Fauci relentlessly in the media calling him an “incompetent idiot” and a “pill-pushing” tool of the medical establishment (Specter). In 1988, in an open letter, he wrote: “Anthony Fauci, you are a murderer. Your refusal to hear the screams of Aids activists early in the crisis resulted in the deaths of thousands of Queers" (Specter).

More recently Dr Fauci has provided an account of those days in an interview with Michael Specter for *The New Yorker* (Specter 2020). He describes a time of archaic practices in clinical trials and, far from being indifferent, Fauci recalled the time he first noticed the emergence of some unusual cases in 1981: "Everybody in the field knew that it had to be a virus...destroying the human immune system" (Specter). Fauci was alarmed by a report from the CDC and he decided to get involved as, "deep down, I knew that this was going to explode" (Specter). Fauci wrote a paper in which he warned, "Any assumption that the syndrome will remain restricted to a particular segment of our society is truly an assumption without a scientific basis" but was criticised for being alarmist and his warnings went unheeded (Specter).

In 1987, the Food and Drug Administration, (FDA), the federal agency responsible for ensuring the safety of treatments, approved the first drug to treat HIV, azidothymidine, or AZT, providing a ray of hope for a cure. When new clinical studies began, involving cocktails of AZT and similar compounds, tens of thousands of people asked to participate but were excluded if they used other experimental drugs. Very soon it demonstrated harsh side effects, the benefits wore off and the virus itself soon became resistant to the drug (Park). With more of her artist community at PS122 becoming sick, such as David Wojnarowicz and Ethyl Eichelberger, McAdams was determined to attend protests to draw attention to the failings of the drug and demand improved treatments (figure 2.2, below). McAdams and others at PS122 were devastated to see the rapid deterioration of their friends' health (PI2018). Eichelberger was among many who found the adverse effects of AZT treatment intolerable and, unable to continue, he took his life in 1990 (McAdams PI 2018). Their experience has been described by Marvin Taylor: “Within ten years the downtown scene would be decimated, many of its active artists dead from Aids, drug overdose, and others suffering from burnout or grief moved away from New York” (Taylor 36).

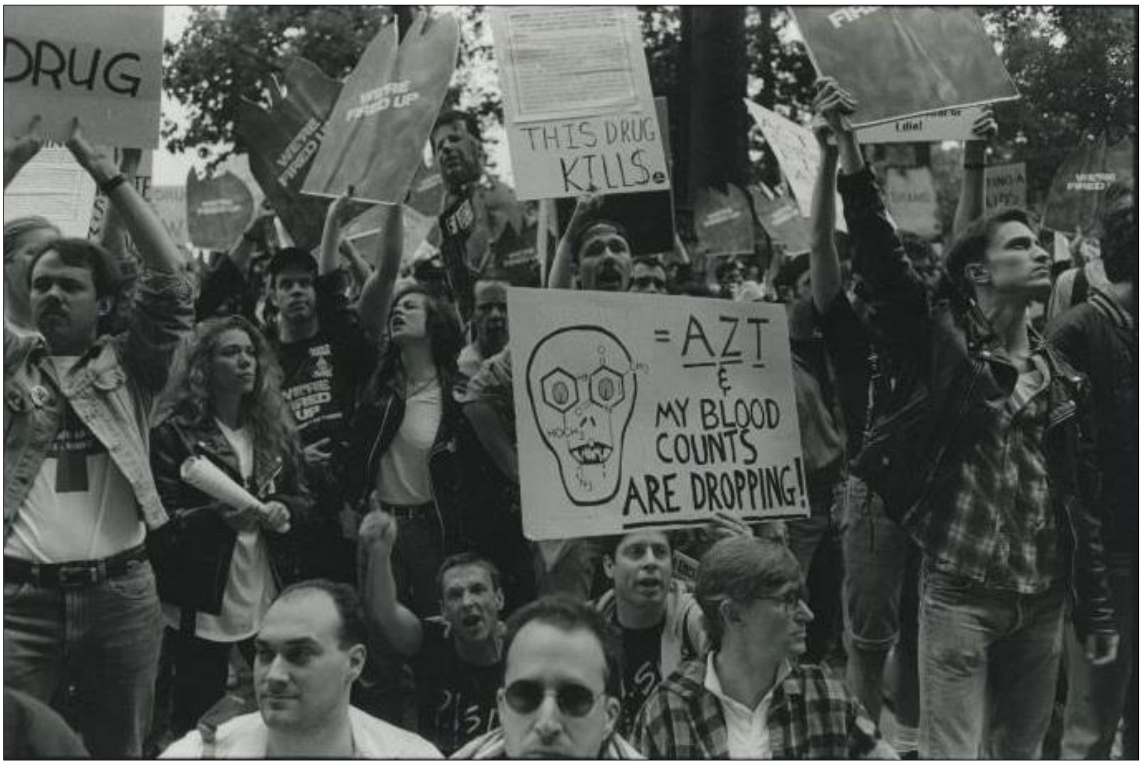

DRUG
WE'RE FIRED UP
THIS DRUG KILLS.
= AZT
&
MY BLOOD COUNTS ARE DROPPING!

Figure 2.2. McAdams, Dona Ann. ACT UP NIH demonstration highlighting the devastating side effects of AZT. 1990.

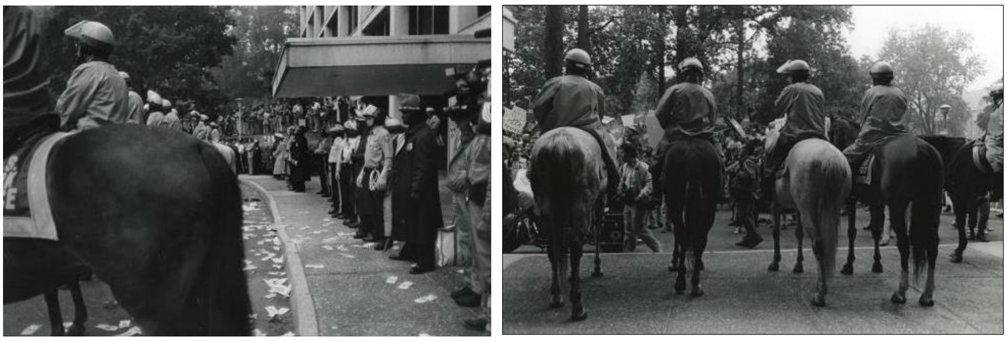


Figure 2.3 and 2.4. McAdams, Dona Ann. ACT UP NIH demonstration.1990.

Above, figures 2.3 and 2.4, show a line-up of mounted police at the demonstration against the NIH. McAdams commented on the formation of people and the size of the horses. Although used for crowd control, “horses are not threatening to humans as they are so sensitive” (PI 2018). McAdams has remarked:

> At every big protest, there are horses. The silent animal witness. A symbol of authority. They form an unusual third party with the police – the point of the triangle between opposing humans. Horses are prey animals, but in protests, they are asked to pursue and subdue. Most are having a second career on the streets. Once they broke from the gate and ran counter-clockwise around an oval at top speed; now they move through crowds of shouting people. The last thing a horse wants to do is step on a protestor. (PI 2018)

Fauci came to understand the activists’ conduct and recalled: “I was used to treating people who had little hope and then saving their lives—that was so wonderful. But, with Aids in those days, I saved no one. It was the darkest time of my life” (Specter). Fauci witnessed activists gathered outside the headquarters of the FDA, in Rockville, Maryland, to demand urgent action.

In Bethesda, Maryland, protesters marched to the building which housed the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. There, Fauci watched from his office window as activists tried to scale the walls. Some were dressed in black robes and carried scythes, some waved pink-and-black banners, bearing the words “NIH Wake Up!” or “Stop Killing Us” and “Fuck you, Fauci!” (Specter). The demonstrators that Fauci was observing were ACT UP, and McAdams was among them. In May 1990, she photographed ACT UP’s large demonstration at the NIH Campus. Looking out, Fauci saw “people who were in pain” he recalled and asked the police and the FBI not to arrest them and invited some protest leaders to his office (Specter).

> I discussed the problems they were having, the degree of suffering that was going on in the community, the need for them to get involved in clinical trials since there were no other possibilities for them to get access to drugs. And I earned their confidence. (Specter).

Fauci created a division within his institute devoted to Aids and liaised closely with Mark Harrington, ACT UP's spokesperson on drug treatment trials (Specter). Harrington persuaded Fauci to speed up drug approvals as soon as they had been proven safe, even if their effectiveness remained unknown. Harrington committed to strictly monitored drug trials, expanded to include women and people of colour, and patients were consulted about their treatment plans (Specter).

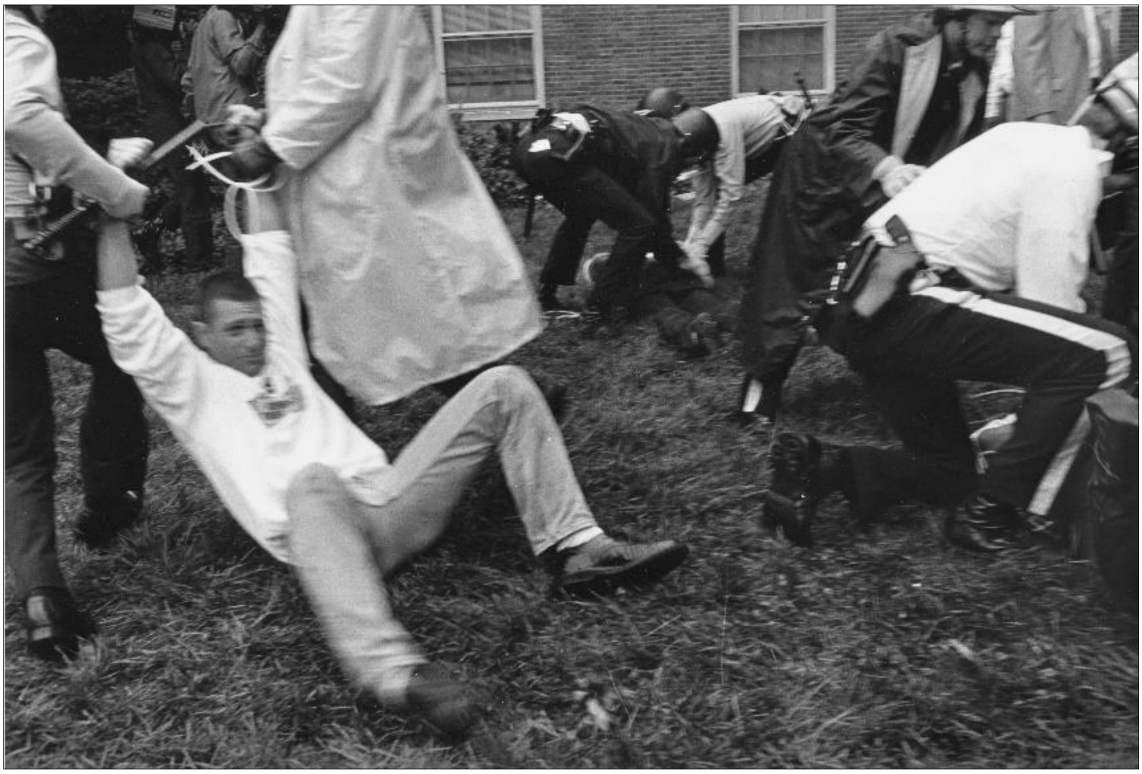


Figure 2.5. McAdams, Dona Ann. Police intervention, NIH Demonstration. 1990.

Figure 2.5, above, shows police intervening to arrest some protestors who had broken away from the main group, seen peacefully demonstrating in figures 2.3 and 2.4 above, and were trespassing on government property (McAdams PI 2016).

The Role of Dr Gerald Friedland and Colleagues in The Bronx, New York

Not everyone in the medical profession was indifferent to the crisis. Personal accounts from Dr Friedland in the Bronx, and Dr Fauci at the National

Institute for Health, (NIH), provide a counterpoint to accounts of callous treatment of Aids patients and their families. Gay rights activist Kramer wrote that whilst they and some other medics were “passionately determined to take care of us”, funding was not forthcoming for research, treatment or welfare support (Kramer 9). At Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx Dr Gerald Friedland was amongst the first to treat women and children presenting with symptoms of Aids. In 2017, pre-Covid 19, he reflected:

> [HIV/Aids] has been the most defining and central event of my career and intellectual trajectory and, arguably, the most devastating and important epidemic of the past and present century. (Webcast 2016)

Dr Friedland and his colleagues saw the earliest cases in 1981 and recalled:

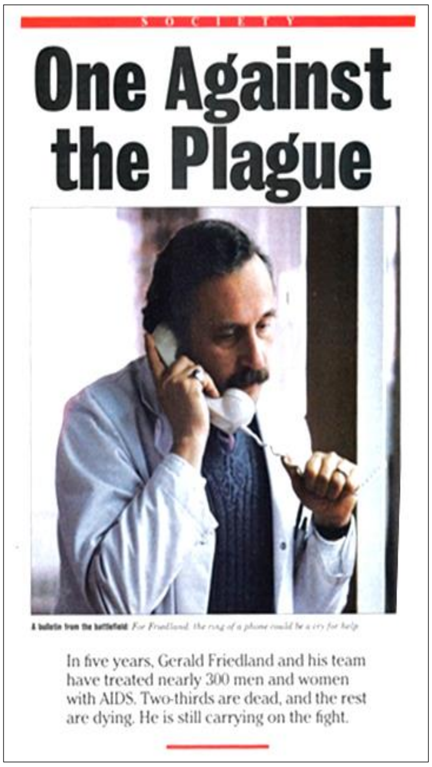
> Rather than being repelled – along with many others, I was attracted towards it. I have thought a lot about why. I have…[assessed] prior events and circumstances in my life, both deeply personal and intellectual that, taken together, attracted me, prepared and provided me with the tools to confront the Aids epidemic. (Webcast 2016)

Friedland had experience in internal medicine, infectious diseases and public health, and “understood the interrelationships between environment, culture, behaviour, biology and disease. [This] was “critically important in preparing me to approach and understand the similarly exotic, complex and new Aids epidemic”. Looking back to the first cases to emerge he wrote:

> In July 1981, I saw the first three patients with what we now routinely call Aids ... by the end of the year [there were] 50. The hospital wards began to fill with young men and women and most would die. (Webcast 2016)

Dr Friedland continued:

> But I can still remember the mixture of feelings surrounding those first cases – great personal distress at the terrible suffering and seemingly inevitable premature deaths of those early appearing and young patients… and, very definitely, as the numbers of new cases and deaths grew, a deep and clear sense of denial, disbelief, fear, foreboding and despair. I knew from the beginning that something very different, devastating and destructive was occurring. If one can attribute character to disease, I felt that something new, previously unknown, cruel and malevolent had now appeared. (Friedland 2016)



SOCIETY

One Against the Plague

In five years, Gerald Friedland and his team have treated nearly 300 men and women with AIDS. Two-thirds are dead, and the rest are dying. He is still carrying on the fight.

Figure 2.6. Dr Gerald Friedland was in the front line of responders to the earliest Aids cases. (Source: Newsweek, CVlll No 3 July 1986).

He and his colleagues made some important strides forward in establishing a treatment programme for the patients:

> We identified and defined the epidemiology of HIV infection and disease in people who inject drugs and….We defined the complexity of behaviors and social context associated with transmission risk. We also defined the intertwined relationship between TB and HIV and, because the population included women and children, were the first in the US to describe heterosexual HIV transmission. (Webcast 2016)

Friedland’s work was also crucial in bringing about an understanding of how HIV was *not* transmitted, helping to dispel stigma and “human rights abuses” directed at individuals through misunderstanding (Friedland 2016). Their study determined that HIV was not transmitted by close and prolonged household contact and Friedland regards this as his most important contribution as it helped to destigmatise people with HIV/Aids. Dr Friedland was featured in Newsweek Magazine in July 1986 (figure 2.5, above) with the article employing biblical and military language: “plague” and “battlefield”.

The Activist Role of the Artists

The vigorous response from artists was a direct consequence of inaction by the authorities. Commentators such as Douglas Crimp, Larry Kramer, Christopher Capozzola and Ellen McCallum have condemned the Reagan administration for a policy of silence towards the epidemic, explaining “silence generates the illusion of safety” (McCallum, et al. 713) and “the President did not even mention the word “Aids” publicly until more than 21,000 Americans had already died of the disease” (Capozzola 226).[3]

The artistic community across the United States alerted America to the need for change (Hartman Intro 2). They wanted to make the authorities, whom they saw as intransigent and oppositional, more responsive to the people. Through increasing political activism they demanded the right to be involved in decisions that affected their lives (Groys 6). In New York City, artists reacted to the unfolding crisis by making Aids-specific art to demand greater medical and welfare support for patients and their dependents. Outrage at the perceived lack of a suitable response by the authorities grew into a vehement protest movement. The artists under discussion here were opposed to a strong government message that promoted wholesome, normative, American family life: one which did not include gay people. Gay people were doubly excluded as they had often removed themselves from their birth families and conventional family units (Capozzola 227).

With the advent of the Aids Crisis from 1981 onwards, their politically-engaged art would take on a new focus. During this time PS122 provided an important platform for agitation against Aids, which was destroying the Downtown community (Taylor 36). In conversation together, former New York

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[3] When he addressed the opening ceremonies of the Third International Conference on Aids, May 31, 1987.

School poets, Dennis Cooper, and Eileen Myles, looked back at the unravelling of the poetry scene as they had known it. Substantiating the important role played by PS122 and McAdams, Cooper recalled:

> My group of artist friends was decimated by Aids . . . it was just bam, bam, bam one after another in really quick succession. And then other artist friends were just drinking and drugging themselves into oblivion and hardly writing or making art any more. Everything was just falling apart...the joy and fun were gone....The fear and horror of it splintered my group of writer friends. (Stosuy 469)

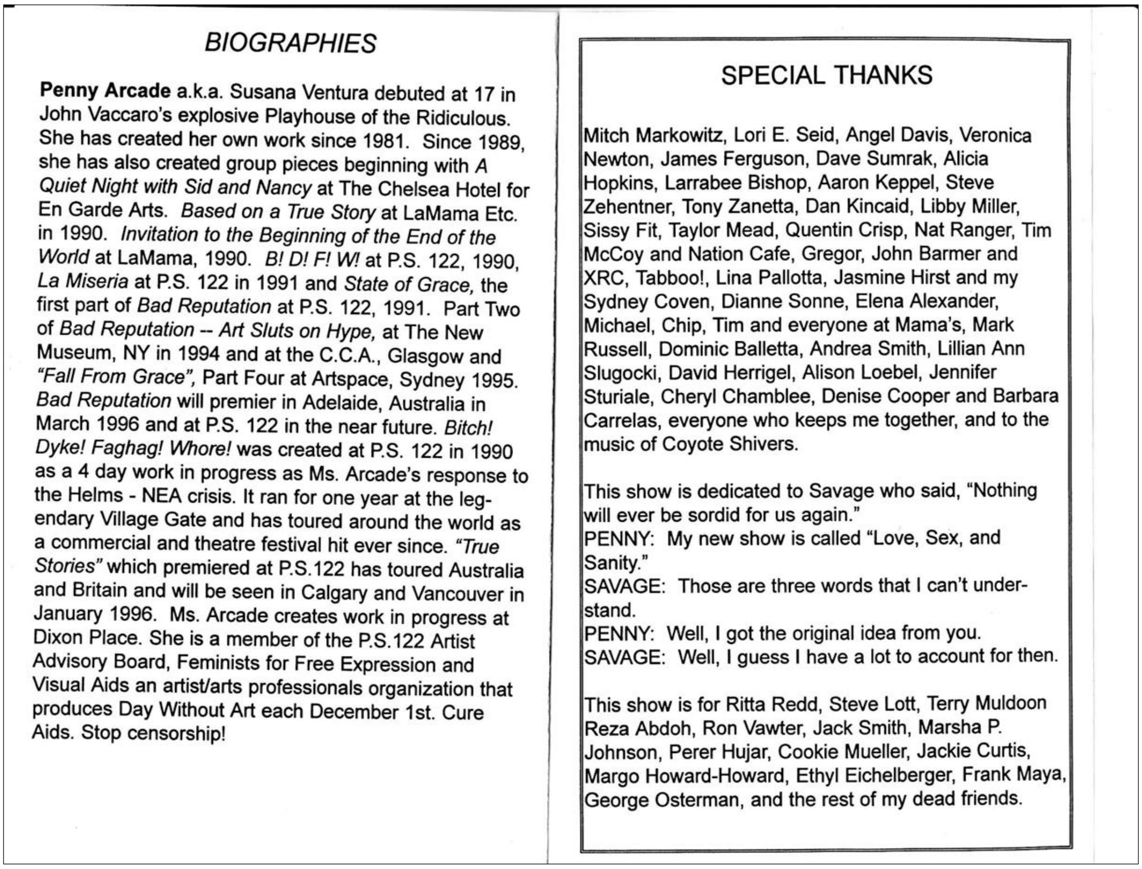
Cooper continued:

> We were almost all gay and no strangers to the baths and sex clubs like the Mine Shaft and we got hit particularly hard. I found myself gravitating …to the performance art scene in the East Village where, for whatever reason, Aids was a bit more of a distant concern at that time, and there was still a ton of fun and hope and vitality in the performance art crowd. (469)

He went on:

> So I ended up spending much more time at PS122 and the Kitchen and Franklin Furnace than I did at the Poetry Project. I saw the poets less and less, and my really close friends were performance artists and people associated with that scene like Anne Lobst and Lucy Sexton of Dancenoise and John Kelly and Lori Seid and Dona McAdams, especially Ishmael Houston Jones with whom I started collaborating on performance art pieces. (469)

Fellow writer, poet and performer Eileen Myles also recalled that homophobia was on the rise in the poetry world and there was a deliberate move to push aside any talk of Aids (Stosuy 470). Many artists continue to make work to honour and preserve the memory of those who died.



BIOGRAPHIES

Penny Arcade a.k.a. Susana Ventura debuted at 17 in John Vaccaro's explosive Playhouse of the Ridiculous. She has created her own work since 1981. Since 1989, she has also created group pieces beginning with *A Quiet Night with Sid and Nancy* at The Chelsea Hotel for En Garde Arts. *Based on a True Story* at LaMama Etc. in 1990. *Invitation to the Beginning of the End of the World* at LaMama, 1990. *B! D! F! W!* at P.S. 122, 1990, *La Miseria* at P.S. 122 in 1991 and *State of Grace,* the first part of *Bad Reputation* at P.S. 122, 1991. Part Two of *Bad Reputation -- Art Sluts on Hype,* at The New Museum, NY in 1994 and at the C.C.A., Glasgow and *"Fall From Grace",* Part Four at Artspace, Sydney 1995. *Bad Reputation* will premier in Adelaide, Australia in March 1996 and at P.S. 122 in the near future. *Bitch! Dyke! Faghag! Whore!* was created at P.S. 122 in 1990 as a 4 day work in progress as Ms. Arcade's response to the Helms - NEA crisis. It ran for one year at the legendary Village Gate and has toured around the world as a commercial and theatre festival hit ever since. *"True Stories"* which premiered at P.S.122 has toured Australia and Britain and will be seen in Calgary and Vancouver in January 1996. Ms. Arcade creates work in progress at Dixon Place. She is a member of the P.S.122 Artist Advisory Board, Feminists for Free Expression and Visual Aids an artist/arts professionals organization that produces Day Without Art each December 1st. Cure Aids. Stop censorship!

SPECIAL THANKS

Mitch Markowitz, Lori E. Seid, Angel Davis, Veronica Newton, James Ferguson, Dave Sumrak, Alicia Hopkins, Larrabee Bishop, Aaron Keppel, Steve Zehentner, Tony Zanetta, Dan Kincaid, Libby Miller, Sissy Fit, Taylor Mead, Quentin Crisp, Nat Ranger, Tim McCoy and Nation Cafe, Gregor, John Barmer and XRC, Tabboo!, Lina Pallotta, Jasmine Hirst and my Sydney Coven, Dianne Sonne, Elena Alexander, Michael, Chip, Tim and everyone at Mama's, Mark Russell, Dominic Balletta, Andrea Smith, Lillian Ann Slugocki, David Herrigel, Alison Loebel, Jennifer Sturiale, Cheryl Chamblee, Denise Cooper and Barbara Carrelas, everyone who keeps me together, and to the music of Coyote Shivers.

This show is dedicated to Savage who said, "Nothing will ever be sordid for us again."
PENNY: My new show is called "Love, Sex, and Sanity."
SAVAGE: Those are three words that I can't understand.
PENNY: Well, I got the original idea from you.
SAVAGE: Well, I guess I have a lot to account for then.

This show is for Ritta Redd, Steve Lott, Terry Muldoon Reza Abdoh, Ron Vawter, Jack Smith, Marsha P. Johnson, Perer Hujar, Cookie Mueller, Jackie Curtis, Margo Howard-Howard, Ethyl Eichelberger, Frank Maya, George Osterman, and the rest of my dead friends.

Figure 2.7. Flyer for *Sex Love and Sanity*, 1995. Source: Archive of Dona Ann McAdams.

Penny Arcade dedicates work and performance to friends she lost to Aids; figure 2.7, above, shows a simple hand-drawn and typed flyer, xeroxed for her 1995 show *Sex Love and Sanity*. Karen Finley wrote *Written in Sand,* grieving for friends lost to Aids as recently as 2015. Schulman has called the Aids experience an "American experience" to draw attention to the important place that the syndrome occupies in the cultural and physical space that is America (Schulman 69). Adding that the process of gentrification has removed geographic spaces from the collective memory, but also the memories of those who died from Aids, who are absent from the collective consciousness of those now occupying those spaces, calling the mourning over Aids deaths "the disallowed grief of 20 years" (46).

Aids, until the medical breakthroughs in1996, meant a certain, slow, agonising and lonely death. To draw attention to the increasingly dire plight of those who contracted HIV/Aids, members of the artistic community organised themselves into a vocal protest group and fought for the rights of all patients, not just gay men. Artists of the time created some very important testaments to the impact of Aids on society. Dean and Ruszczysky recount: “Performers died and their performances were not always recorded or preserved in scripts: fatal illness exacerbates the ephemerality of physical presence” (McCallum 722). The literature on Aids evolved to provide a legacy and at least a partial history of the syndrome. Scrutinising the evolution of a distinct genre of ‘Aids Literature’, Dean and Ruszczysky assert that the theatre of Aids challenges literary and cultural history because although Aids performances had a significant local impact, they did not leave reliable documentary traces (McCallum 722). This underscores the importance of McAdams’ photographs as a record.

One of the most recognisable works of art to emerge from the Aids crisis was the Aids quilt. The idea was conceived by Cleve Jones, in San Francisco, November 1985, during a candlelit march in remembrance of the assassinations of Harvey Milk and George Moscone.[4] Jones had people write the names of lost loved ones on signs that were taped to the San Francisco Federal Building. To Jones, these looked like a patchwork quilt, and he was inspired to make the first panel. The quilt became an example of “activism through mourning” (Rand 659). It provided an “alternative site of memory for many who have been excluded from traditional means of mourning” (223). The quilt allowed the expression of grief through the medium of “an American symbol of domesticity and family heritage” placing the quiltmakers within the traditional family and collective memory from which they had been excluded (Literat and Balsamo 139).

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[4] Prominent gay rights activists, assassinated in San Francisco in November 1978, an event which triggered McAdams’ move back to New York.

As described by Philippe Ariès in his 1980 book, *The Hour of Our Death*, communities practice particular rites around death, burial and mourning as a public expression of grief and acknowledgement of the life lived and lost. It was often very different for Aids deaths: “As late as 1987, *The New York Times* reported that many funeral directors in New York City still refused to touch patients who had died of Aids” (Gross 2017). The report described how the owner of one Funeral Parlour said he had embalmed bodies for twenty funeral directors elsewhere in the city [so that] “all they have to do is close the casket'' (Gross). This lack of access to “existing cultural forms for mourning” forced friends and loved ones to seek alternative ways to express their feelings as exemplified by the creation of the Aids Quilt (Capozzola 219).

Crimp has weighed the merits of the Quilt as a private and public expression of grief. For Crimp the Quilt served as a “spectacle of mourning, [a] vast public-relations effort to humanise and dignify our losses for those who have not shared them” but he wondered if this second function of the quilt provided “catharsis, an easing of conscience, for those who have cared and done so little about this great tragedy?” (Crimp 198). The Quilt, laid out on the Washington Mall and photographed by McAdams, (see figure 2.6 below), in what was its penultimate showing. Taken “to the political seat of power”, the Aids Quilt was displayed in its entirety on the Mall in Washington DC for the last time in 1996 (Literat and Balsamo 139). Due to the increasing fragility of the quilt itself, it is now only displayed in individual panels by permission and at the time of writing is being digitised to protect and preserve its cultural legacy (Literat and Balsamo 139).

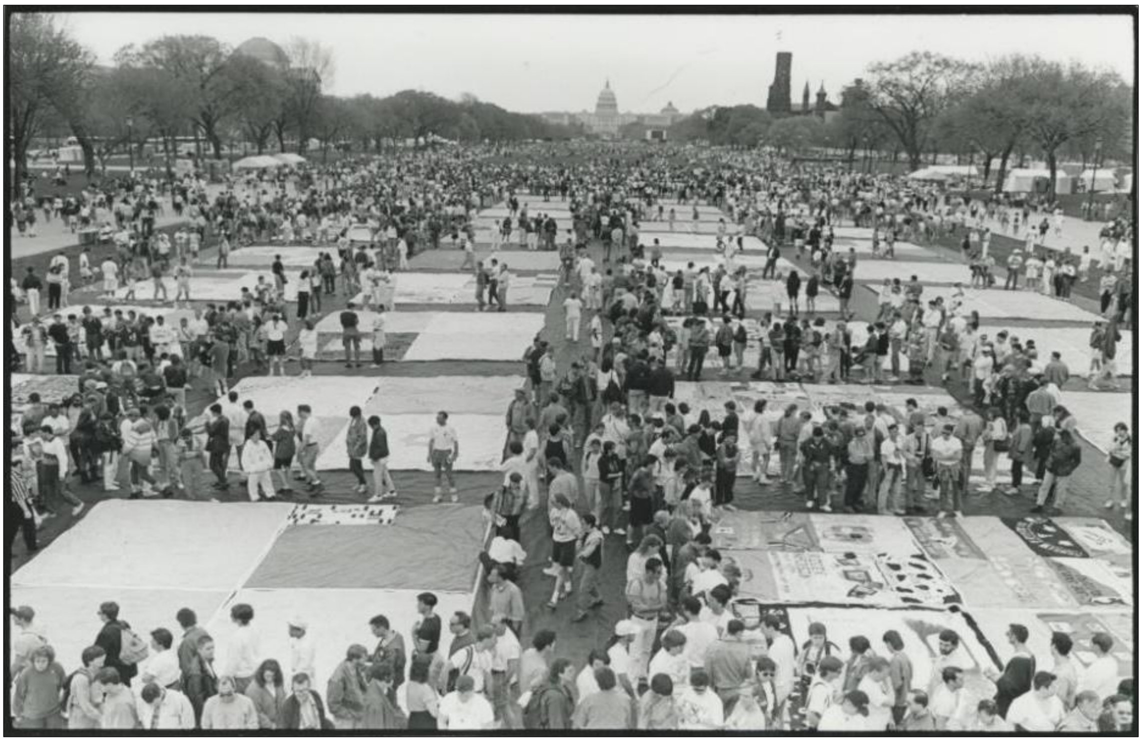

Figure 2.8. McAdams, Dona Ann. The Aids Quilt, National Mall, Washington D.C., 1993.

McAdams and PS122

McAdams' reaction to the unfolding crisis affecting so many of her community of artists was a profoundly personal one. McAdams recalled:

> In New York City in the early 1980s, a lot of people I knew began to fall ill. It was an odd kind of sick; it had no name at first. It affected people in my community—artists, dancers, performers. Gay men, mostly. They called it GRID [gay-related immune deficiency]. Gay Cancer. My friend John Bernd was one of the first to fall ill. By the late eighties, it seemed we spent half our time preparing for, or going to, funerals. John died in 1988. He was my first friend to die of Aids, but not the last. (PI 2016)

McAdams noted that the emergence of the Aids Crisis, the fear it engendered, and its prevalence among their close friends, she and her community were forced to consider their mortality (PI 2016). She considers her photographs as a tool for the preservation and expression of personal and community connection

(PI 2016). McAdams remembered “the first person I photographed, as House Photographer, at PS122 was John Bernd in 1983 (see image 2.9, below). The last person was Peter Rose in 2006. This is not lost on a few people. Both were founders [of PS122]” (PI 2020).

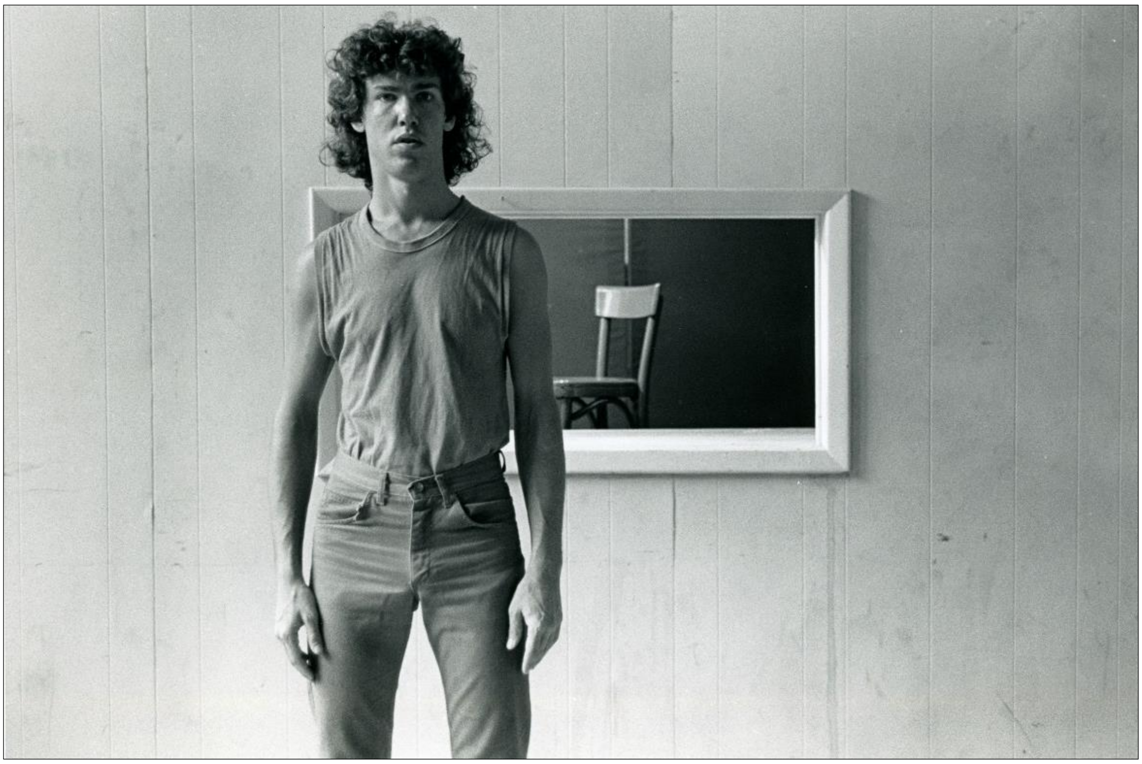

Figure 2.9. McAdams, Dona Ann. John Bernd *Lost and Found,* PS122. 1983.

McAdams was attending and photographing protests in New York City and Washington, D.C., as well as photographing performances at PS122. Her work was recognised early on as an important contribution to the effort to educate the wider community on the facts of the illness, helping to remove misinformation and taboo (visualAids).

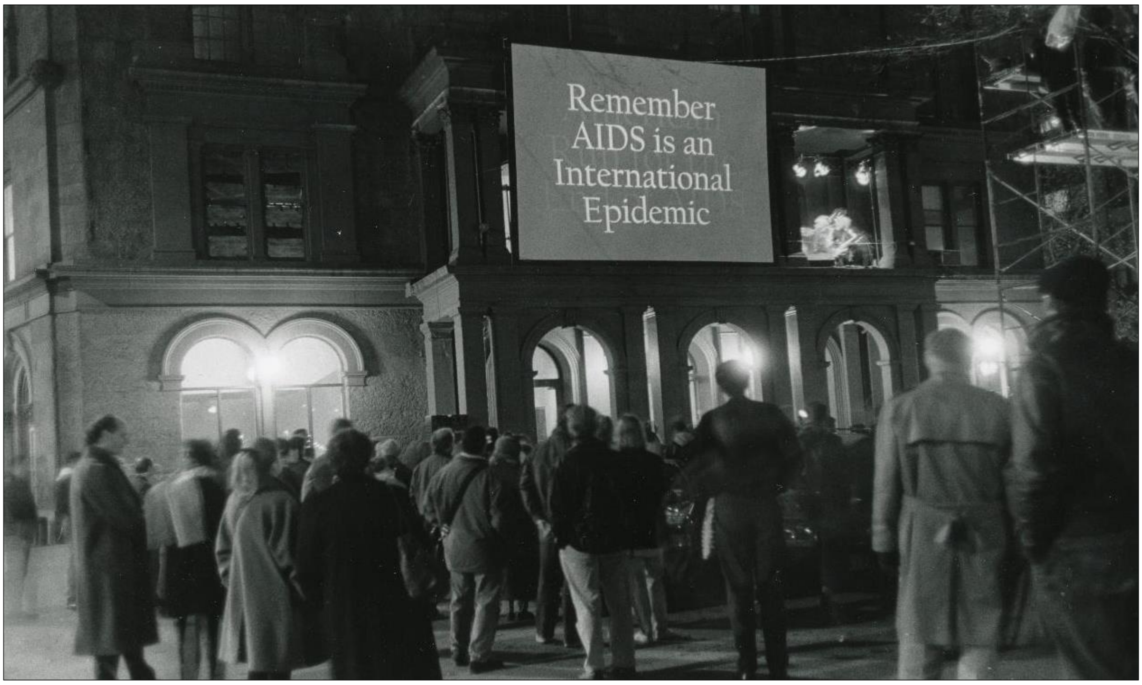
Remember
AIDS is an
International
Epidemic

Figure 2.10. McAdams, Dona Ann. Electric Blanket for *Day With(out) Art* Dec 1st 1990. Façade of Cooper Union, New York City.

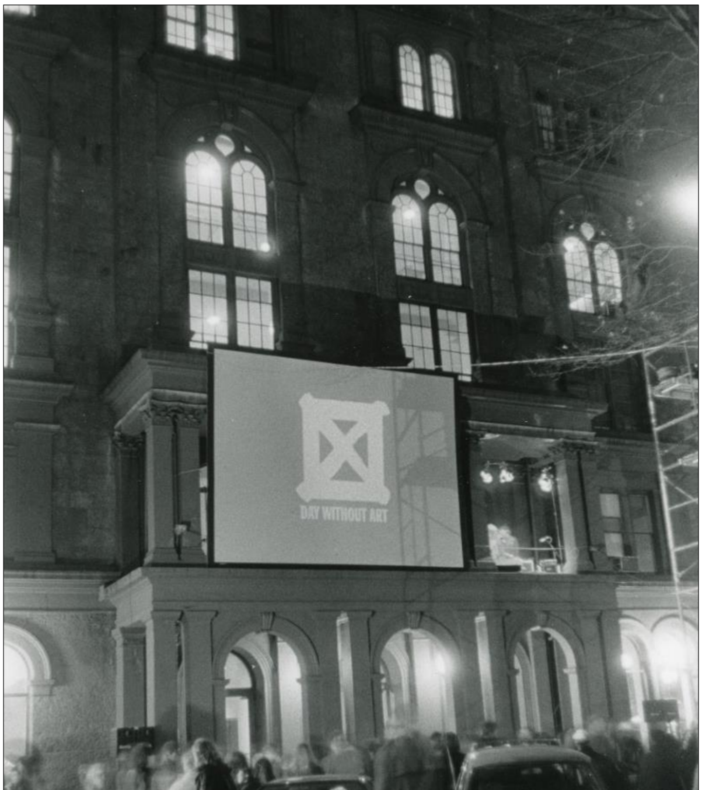
DAY WITHOUT ART

Figure 2.11. McAdams, Dona Ann. Electric Blanket 1991. Artists used their work to raise awareness of the plight of people with Aids.

As seen in figures 2.10, and 2.11 above, McAdams' work was included in Electric Blanket's slide-show projections onto the Cooper Union building which showed photographers' work along with information and facts about Aids (visualAids). December 1st is *Day With(out) Art*, held each year as an international day of action and awareness in response to the Aids crisis.

The idea behind *Day Without Art* was "to address the creative cost of Aids" (visualAids). This project situated McAdams' work alongside artists who included, according to Electric Blanket, "Nan Goldin, Peter Hujar, Robert Mapplethorpe, Brian Weil, Dona Ann McAdams, Ann Meredith, and many others" (visualAids). McAdams recalled that, also in 1991, photographer Allen Frame and members of Visual Aids, including McAdams, gathered at PS122 to discuss new ways to raise awareness of HIV/Aids and to show support for those who were affected (PI 2018). McAdams recalls the meeting taking place in the gallery of Painting Space 122 (PI 2021). The idea for the simple red ribbon emblem was the outcome, which soon became instantly recognisable as a symbol of solidarity.

The Role of Gay Men

Drawing on their earlier experience in the Gay Liberation Movement, gay men, many of whom were part of McAdams artistic community at PS122, were at the forefront of early protests. Activist Kramer angered the gay community by implying that gay men were both the victims and the cause of their misfortune with HIV/Aids. He advocated modifying sexual behaviour, for which criticism was played out publicly in the Letters section of the gay newspaper *The Native*, and Kramer was derided as a "gay homophobe" (Kramer 11). Initially, he did not see himself as politicised, but he later became instrumental in founding organisations to help people with Aids and their families (xvi). First, he set up the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) activist group and later, when he considered this did not go far enough, he established ACT UP, which was more militant, and focused on social reform. McAdams was part of ACT UP early on, and her photographs are an important record of the group's disruptive street protests as seen in figure 2.12, below, showing the ACT UP banner silence=death and slogan "Aids: Where is your rage?" In testimonies provided to ACT UP, witnesses have attested to the importance of PS122 as a meeting place for them to plan protests (Act Up Oral History Project).

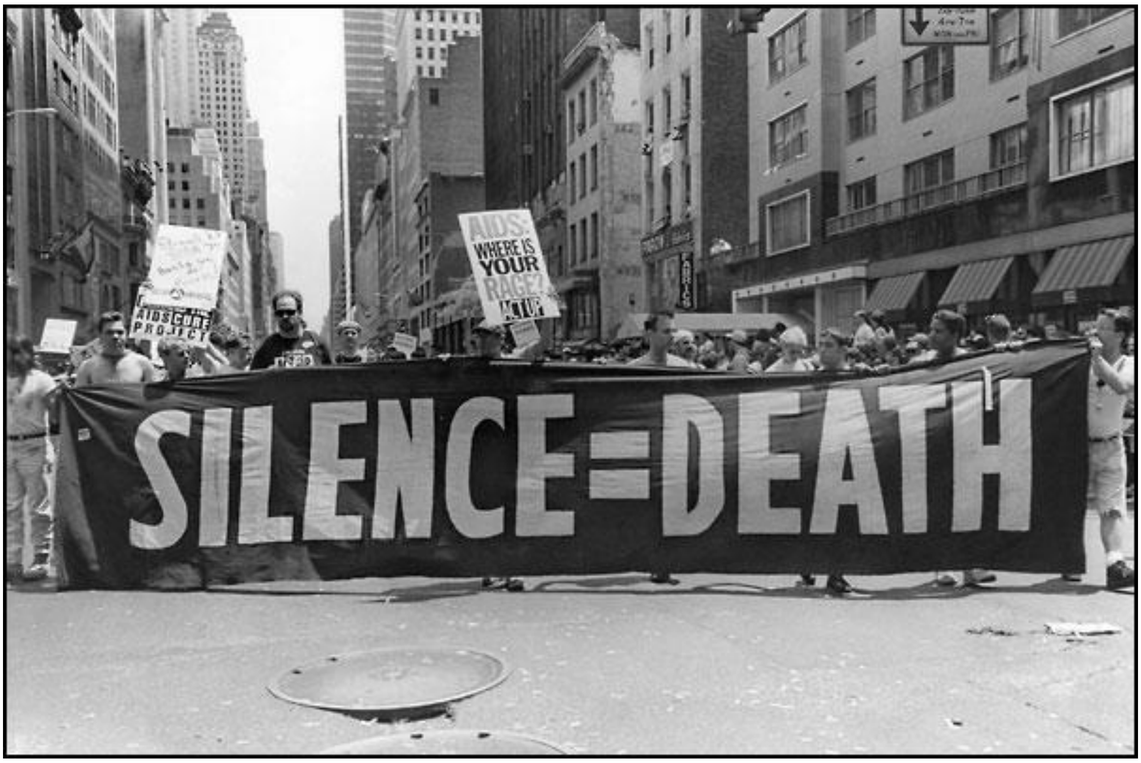

Figure 2.12. McAdams Dona Ann. ACT UP Banner, SILENCE=DEATH.

Kramer realised early on that the disease would become an epidemic and campaigned for what he estimated to be around one million gay men in New York to "come out", to unite and organise to exert their power to win benefits for Aids sufferers (Kramer 3). He founded the GMHC to provide education and financial support, and to lobby for more mainstream newspaper coverage, and more pledges from Washington of research funding. GMHC retained its name to be faithful to its history of providing essential services to gay male community volunteers, but it expanded its remit to care for any man, woman or child with Aids (Feldman 163). In 1988 GMHC had its grant of $600,000 from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) withdrawn as Senator Jesse Helms and others objected to queer content in educational material despite this being a vital source of information on safe sex practices (Killacky).

Edmund White, GMHC's first president, wrote that the epidemic "ended the sexy seventies" and the sexual liberation and promiscuity that characterised them (White 285). Through GMHC Kramer advocated safe sex practices to protect men from the spread of Aids but after the hard-won sexual freedom and civil rights post-Stonewall, many gay men were unwilling to modify their practice. Crimp explained this as follows:

> Unlike today, gay men in the 1970s in urban America had a highly creative ethos about sexual pleasure; it was one of the few movements in the history of this country that built a culture on a great variety of forms of affectional and sexual relationships, a proliferation of variously organized friendships and community relations, which made for a great many options for obtaining pleasure and forming human connection and intimacy. The normative couple was only one of many possibilities, so if you weren't inclined toward that form of connection, you didn't feel weird, left out, and miserable. (Takemoto 86)

Reflecting the prevailing social and cultural values, these accounts highlight the tension between individual rights and social welfare. The moralising, reductive opposition of 'fidelity' versus 'promiscuity' overlooked the point that it is not being gay that puts you at risk, it is how you conduct yourself sexually (Feldman xxxiii). Kramer compared the Aids Crisis to gay men participating 'in their own genocide" (Kramer 148). Later, his play *The Normal Heart* (1985) would vociferously condemn *The New York Times's* silence on Aids. However, from another perspective:

> Such bifurcations – of mainstream versus marginal, straight versus gay, or HIV-positive versus HIV-negative – unhelpfully reproduce the paranoid logic of us-versus-them that organized public discourse about the epidemic from its inception. (McCallum 714)

Later, Crimp would observe:

> We still suffer from the notion that all gay sex is an indulgence and thus that you must either be ashamed of having gay sex or just give it up. The whole discourse about sex is a shaming one, a moralistic one, and what people tend to forget is that within much of mainstream culture all gay sex is seen as wrong because it's not reproductive and because gays can't be married.[5] (Takemoto 86)

ACT UP was a militant, direct action group with a clear agenda for reform whose adopted logo was a combination of the words 'SILENCE=DEATH' and an inverted pink triangle, a reminder of the symbol worn by homosexuals in Nazi concentration camps (Feldman 176). Figure 2.13, below, shows lively discussion at an ACT UP meeting and the symbol is seen in figure 2.14 below.

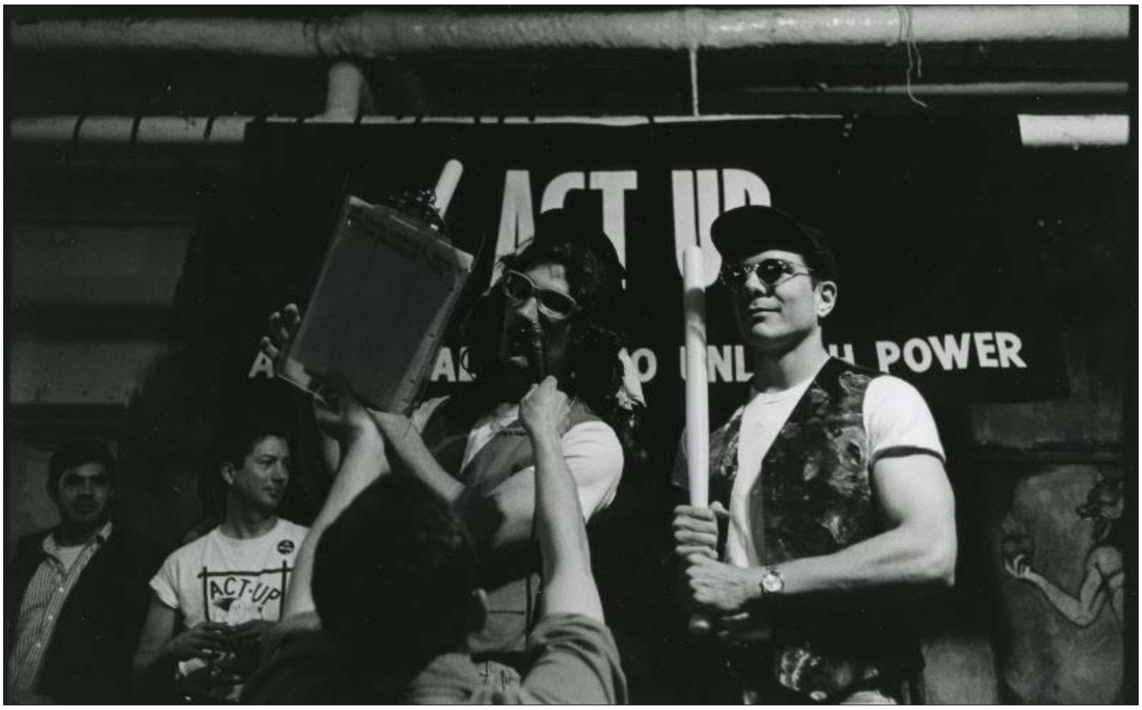

Figure 2.13. McAdams, Dona Ann. ACT UP meeting New York City, 1991.

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[5] At the time of writing, 2003. The US Supreme Court legalised gay marriage across the United States in June 2015.

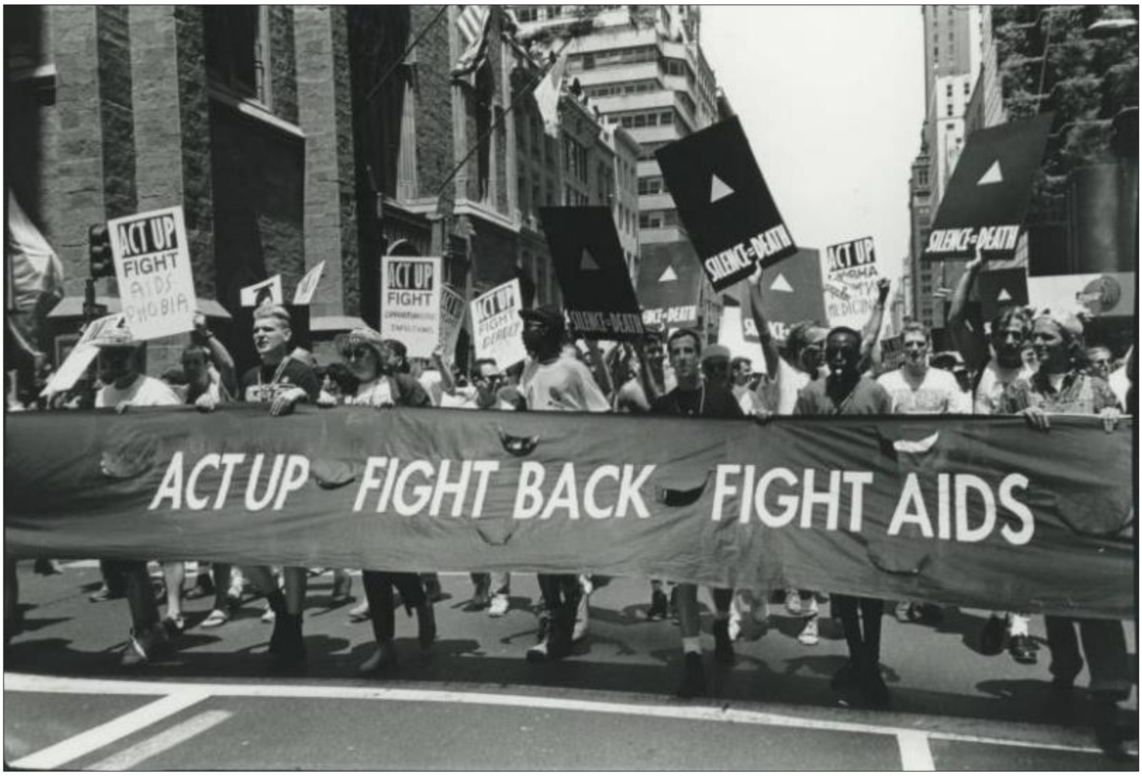

Figure 2.14. McAdams, Dona Ann. ACT UP Gay Pride NYC, 1992.
The ACT UP poster Silence=Death can be seen centre and right.

Douglas Crimp recalled that ACT UP had a sophistication and awareness about the uses of representation for activist politics:

> The idea of doing press kits and producing a graphic identity, for instance, did not come from the art world but from people working in publicity and advertising. So ACT UP was a weird hybrid of traditional leftist politics, innovative postmodern theory, and access to professional resources. (Takemoto 83)

Crimp eventually became aware of the toll on ACT UP members:

> [I] became very aware that there was a denial of a pervasive sadness. All along, people in the activist group were dying. At the same time, we were trying desperately to uphold a rhetoric of survival that was necessary against the kind of fatalism that was rampant, in the media…ACT UP was never good at acknowledging the feelings of cumulative loss…and that this was a battle we were not winning. (Takemoto 87)

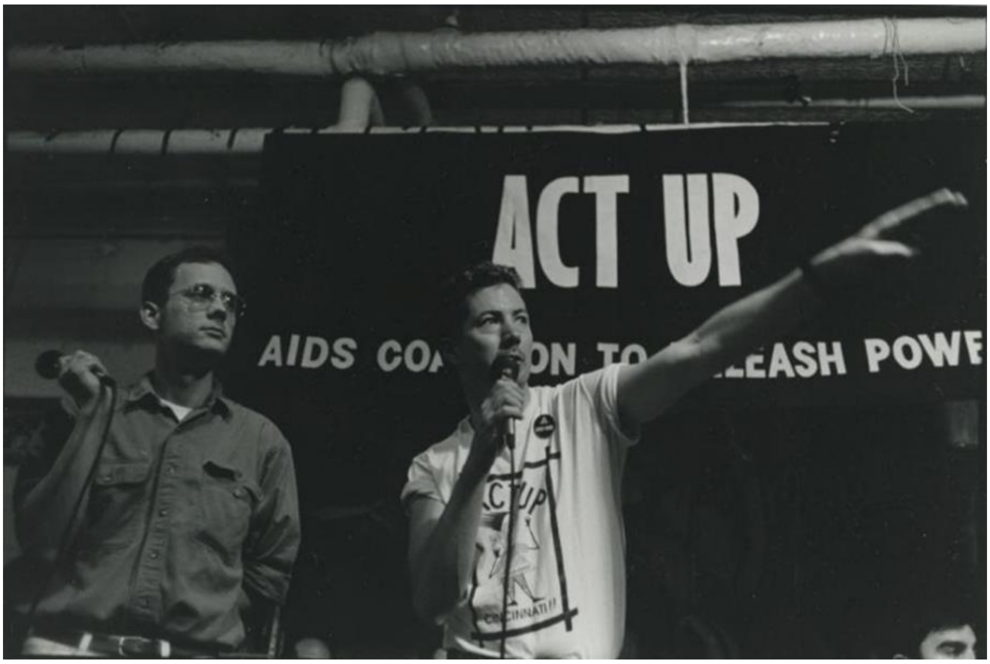

Figure 2.15. McAdams, Dona Ann. ACT UP meeting at The Center (left to right Brian Zabcik, Aldyn McKean), New York City.1991.

Women and Aids

Women gave vital support to those who were dying in isolation from their families and partners: donating blood, campaigning for welfare provision and providing personal care (White 285). In an initiative driven by photographer Professor Mel Rosenthal, McAdams and other artist colleagues spent time at St Clare’s hospital in the Hell’s Kitchen district of New York visiting Aids patients as well as caring for fellow artists from PS122 who were sick, at home or in hospital as shown in Appendix One (McAdams PI 2018). Due to the first cases arising among gay males, much of the early discourse around the Aids epidemic centred on this demographic, while Aids among women was separate and unseen. Alongside street protests, ACT UP produced a book examining the experience of women and Aids, *ACT UP NY Women & Aids Book Group, 1990* and revealed: “Women are excluded from the total statistical picture” (Banzhaf 3). Figure 2.16, below, shows women demonstrating for their rights at the NIH, 1991.

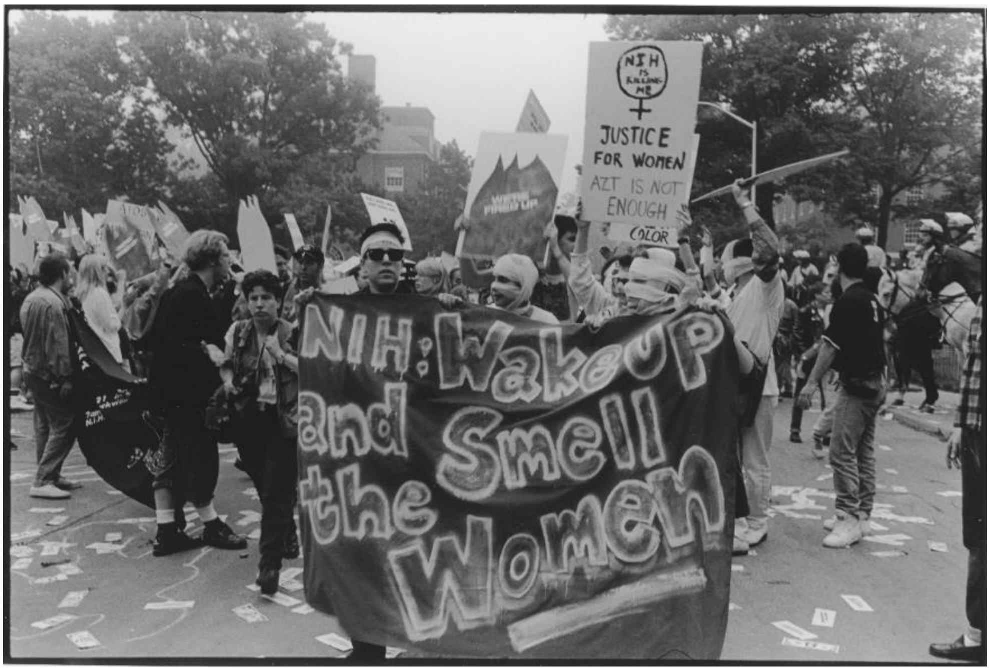

Figure 2.16. McAdams, Dona Ann. Women demanded to have their needs recognised. At the NIH. 1991.

ACT UP also compiled an oral history project in which interviewee Terry McGovern, (No 76), revealed that she came to realise that HIV-positive women routinely did not receive the same benefits as HIV-positive men (Actuporalhistory.org). These interviews illustrate the efforts of these activists to expand the definition of Aids to include symptoms experienced by women but which were not recognised as Aids-related. To qualify for any medical or social welfare support required a formal diagnosis, as defined by the CDC, “which was developed from the infections first observed in gay men in the United States in 1981” and, although revised in 1985 and 1987, was still based on infections in gay men (Banzhaf 3).

Research carried out by Dr Friedland and his colleagues in the Bronx, confirming heterosexual HIV transmission, discussed above, was vital. McGovern campaigned on behalf of women who were being denied disability benefit because of misdiagnosis or badly defined eligibility criteria and said: “I always felt like I kind of had to exist between the cracks” (Banzhaf 11). Women were not allowed to take part in clinical trials, and it was initially believed that lesbians could not get Aids because they only slept with other women. In an interview with Sarah Schulman, Polly Thistlethwaite recognised that Aids is a lesbian issue, and observed that “lesbians can get Aids because we share needles and because sometimes lesbians sleep with men and [are] bisexual” (PollyThistlethwaite, interview no 154).

McGovern remembered the people at PS122 in the heat of the protest meetings (Actuporalhistory.org). McGovern understood that “Social Security Administration was violating its responsibility to fairly define disability by using a definition that was based only on one portion of affected populations” so she “took up issues like the plaintiffs’ dying without ever having gotten disability”, an inequity which mainly affected women (33). McGovern’s partner, Katrina, had died from Aids in December 1993 without getting the care she needed:

> [President] Clinton had been elected and there were a bunch of blowout meetings at PS 122, with some people storming off, and unclear about whether we should stay in or not stay…ultimately…we took the position that we were going to push for cervical cancer and push them to expand the definition. (Banzhaf 35)

From 1988 to 1994, McGovern was at the forefront of the campaign to promote awareness among women of how they were affected by Aids and HIV, to effect change within the CDC, and also to educate the general public; “and suddenly, it went from women cannot be [at risk], let’s just ignore women, to let’s blame women….Which came as a bit of a shock to me” (Terry McGovern Interview 50). The issue was further complicated because women could lose custody of their children if they came out as a lesbian. McAdams and others have reflected that the Aids Crisis drove the fight for marriage equality, survivor benefits, access to medical records, next-of-kin rights over funeral arrangements and tenancy rights (McAdams PI 2018).

McAdams and ACT UP

McAdams made sure to stay close to the grassroots of the protest movement and accompanied ACT UP protestors, documenting their efforts, see Figure 2.17, below (PI 2018).

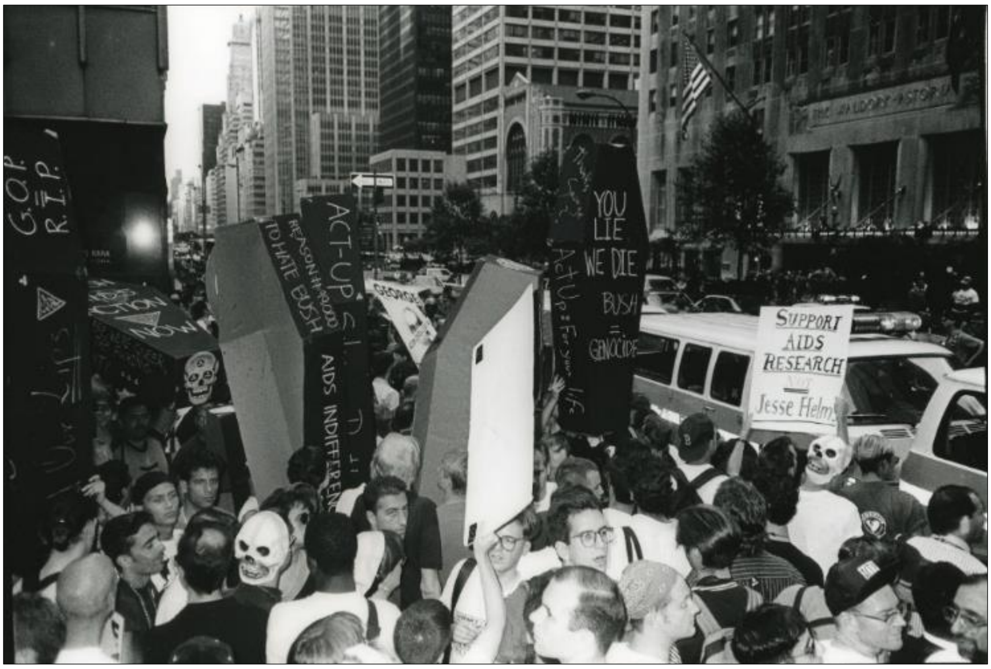
G.O.P. R.I.P.
ACTION NOW
ACT-UP
REASON ENOUGH TO HATE BUSH
AIDS INDIFFERENC
YOU LIE WE DIE
BUSH = GENOCIDE
SUPPORT AIDS RESEARCH
Jesse Helms

Figure 2.17. McAdams, Dona Ann. ACT UP at Waldorf Astoria, New York City. 1990.

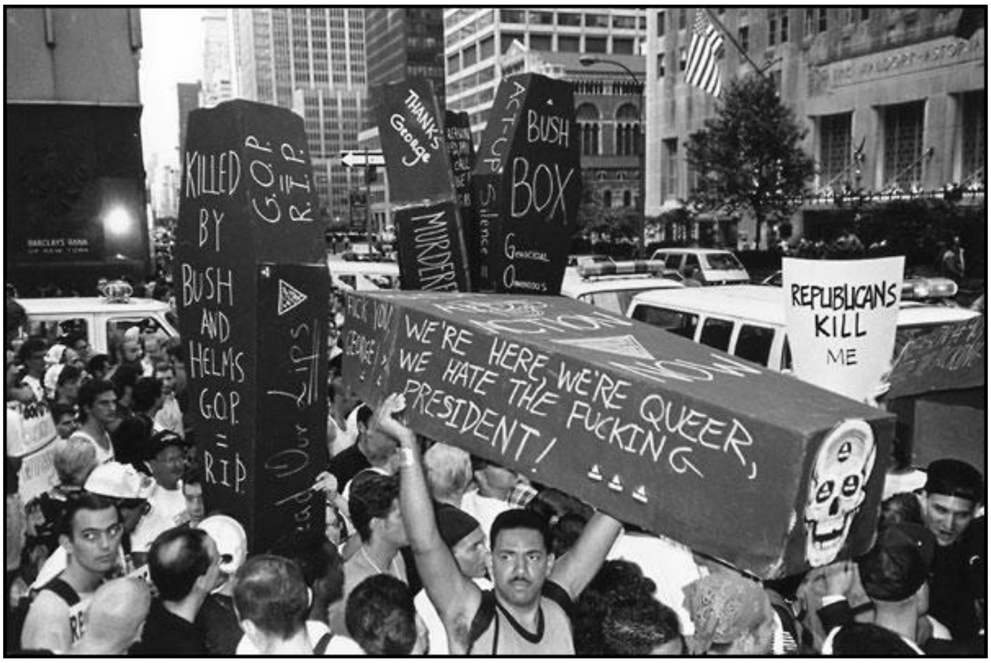
KILLED BY BUSH AND HELMS G.O.P. = R.I.P.
G.O.P. R.I.P.
THANKS George
MURDERER
ACT-UP Silence
BUSH BOX
WE'RE HERE, WE'RE QUEER, WE HATE THE FUCKING PRESIDENT!
REPUBLICANS KILL ME

Figure 2.18. McAdams, Dona Ann. ACT UP at Waldorf Astoria, New York City.
July 1990.

Figure 2.18, above, shows a protest against the presence of then-President George H W Bush, who was addressing a Republican fundraising event inside the Waldorf Astoria hotel in New York City. This picture is important because it shows a demonstrator, identified as Assotto Saint, holding the horizontal mock coffin, situating him at the heart of the protest. Saint was a Haitian-born American artist and LGBTQ activist, beloved of Black gay people, who died from Aids in 1994. McAdams' photograph of Saint memorialises him and is important in its ability to trace the movements of the protestors, as the signage can precisely geolocate it (Park Avenue at E 49th).

As part of a coordinated protest called *Day of Desperation* on January 22, 1991, during Operation Desert Storm, (Gulf War 1991), ACT UP activists disrupted the CBS Evening News at the beginning of the broadcast and later demonstrated at the studios of the award-winning and greatly respected PBS MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour (actupny.org). The next day activists displayed banners in Grand Central Terminal that said "Money for Aids, not for war" and "One Aids death every 8 minutes" (actupny.org 1991). One of the banners was handheld and stretched across the train timetable, and the other attached to bundles of balloons that lifted it to the station's ceiling, as shown in figure 2.18, below. McAdams recalled:

> The protest organisers told me to be at Grand Central Station in New York City for 5 pm. I arrived and looked around for fellow protestors. They were being as unobtrusive as possible but, eventually, I noticed some people above the announcement board and made sure not to look directly at them, to avoid attracting attention. I readied my camera. I turned and was able to take this shot before the banner was swiftly removed by the authorities. (PI 2018)

Two hundred and sixty-three people were later arrested as the group attempted to march to the United Nations Building, a symbol of their cause of improved human rights and social betterment (actupny.org).

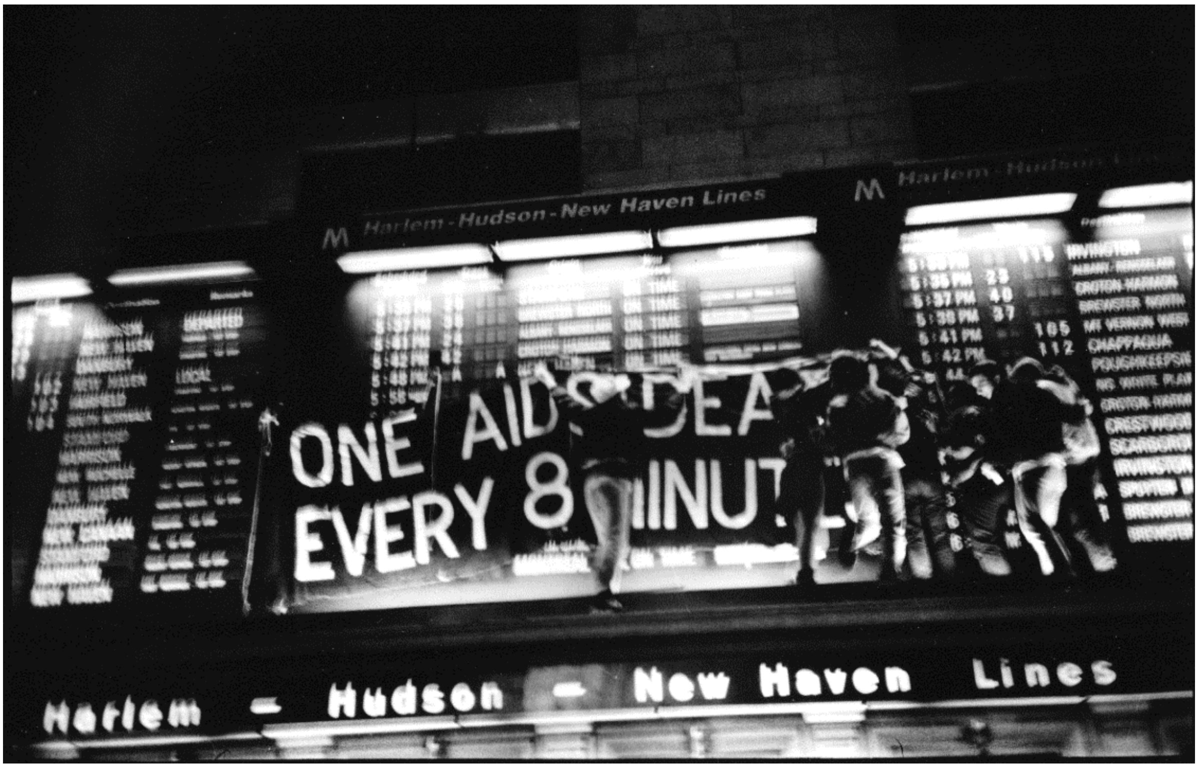
Harlem-Hudson-New Haven Lines
ONE AIDS DEA
EVERY 8 MINUT
Harlem - Hudson - New Haven Lines

Figure 2.19. McAdams, Dona Ann. ACT UP: *Day of Desperation*, Grand Central Station announcement board. 1991.

The next morning, simultaneous actions took place in different locations. On Wall Street, at the heart of the Financial District, more than 2000 protesters delivered coffins to city, state and federal officials whom they held responsible for perpetuating the Aids epidemic (actupny.org). Figures 2.20 and 2.21, below show the demonstrator's progression downtown, to the Financial District, shown here at City Hall, Broadway.

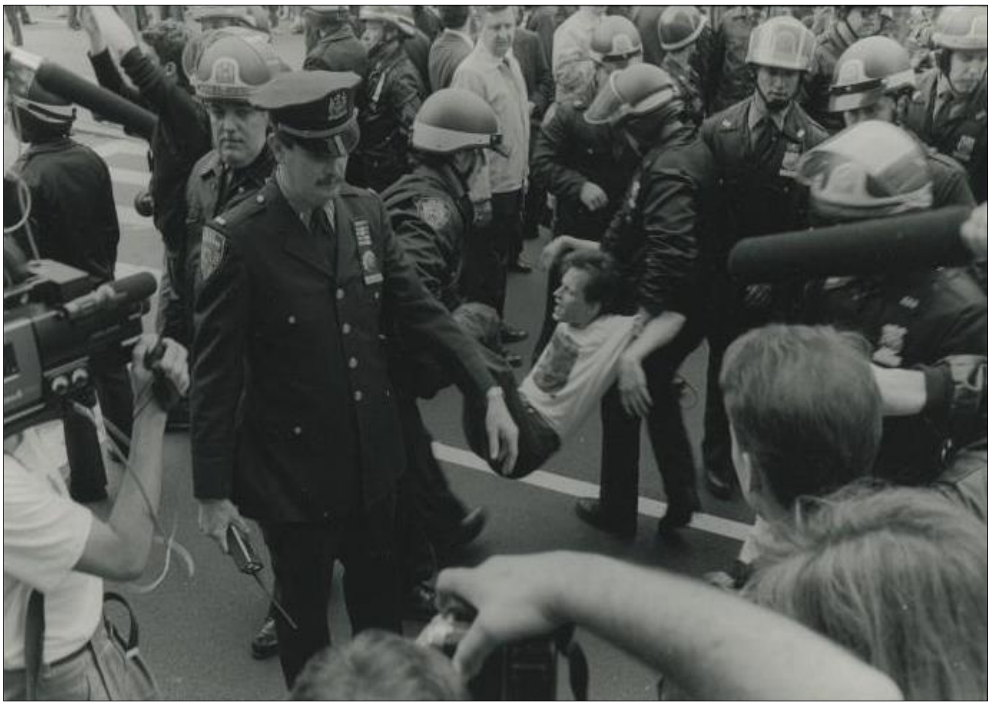

Figure 2.20. McAdams, Dona Ann. ACT UP, *The Government Has Blood on its Hands*, City Hall, New York.1991.

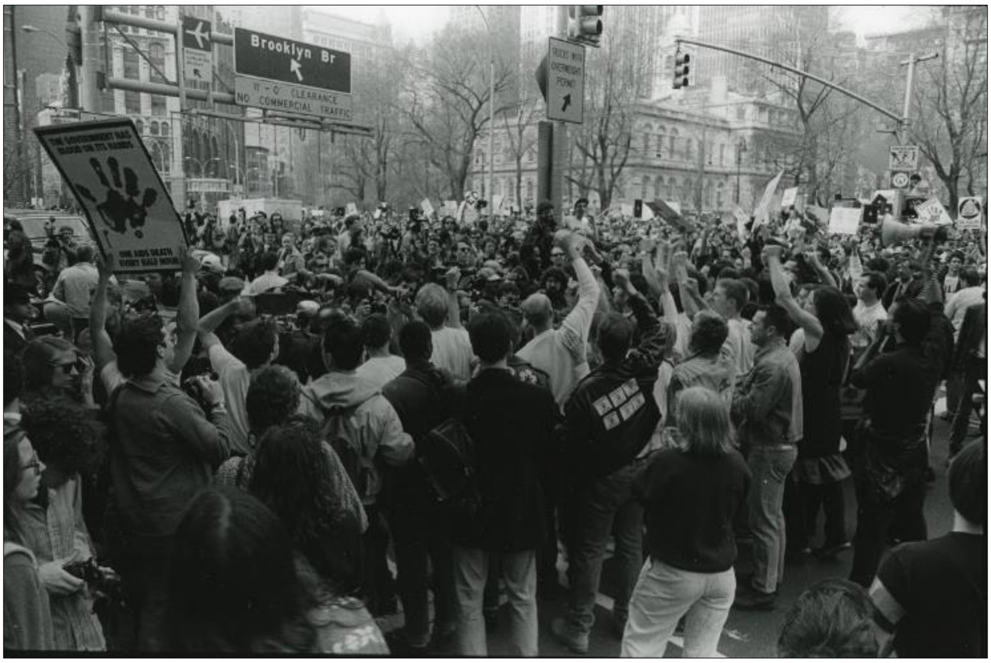
Brooklyn Br
11'-0 CLEARANCE
NO COMMERCIAL TRAFFIC

Figure 2.21. McAdams, Dona Ann. ACT UP *Day of Desperation* protest, City Hall, New York. 1991.

Dying, Death and Photography

McAdams' work at St Clare's Hospital was part of Mel Rosenthal's "Triage Project", a section of a 1996 flyer to promote the project, featuring McAdams as a Workshop Leader, is shown in Appendix One. The medium of photography has long been linked to death and funerals: "At its most literal, photography is a photochemical process capturing the trace of something past, and therefore lost" (Rosengarten 58). In *The Hour of Our Death*, Ariès wrote of a thousand years of changing attitudes towards death and dying. Susan Sontag has written: "All photographs are memento mori. ... To take a photograph is to participate in another person's mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt" (Sontag 15).

The indignities associated with suffering from Aids carried on after death in that the deceased were denied public acknowledgement through obituaries and headstones. Often deaths were not posted in the "Memoriam" columns in newspapers or, if they were, the cause of death was not given as Aids-related but gave descriptions such as "died of pneumonia, lymphoma, leukaemia, meningitis" (Alali 276). A. Odasuo Alali has argued that readers learned to decode the language of obituaries which "ironically clues the reader about the cause of death and may perpetuate stigmas" (Alali 276). McAdams' photographs commemorate those who would otherwise be an Aids death statistic and demonstrate her care for her subjects, a subculture that was feared and publicly shunned.

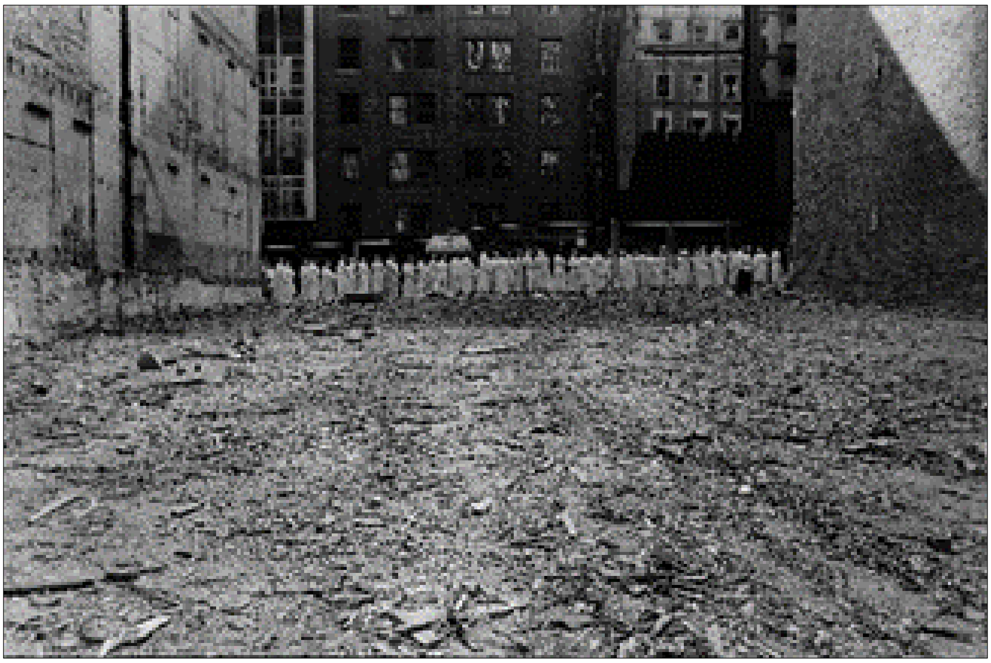

Figure 2.22. McAdams, Dona Ann. Cardinal Cooke's funeral, New York City, October 1983.

In October 1983, McAdams witnessed the funeral procession of Cardinal Cooke, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of New York and Military Vicar, as seen in figure 2.22, above. Cardinal Cooke was prelate to two million Roman Catholics in the armed forces in addition to his responsibilities as archbishop (Briggs). In *The New York Times*, Kenneth Briggs reported that "seven cardinals, 15 archbishops, 80 bishops and nearly 1,000 priests took part in yesterday's procession along 50th Street from Madison Avenue to Fifth Avenue and into the [St Patrick's] cathedral through its huge bronze doors" (Briggs). Cooke presided over the Catholic Church's homophobic teaching that to be gay was a sin and that no member of any branch of the armed services was allowed to be openly homosexual. Figure 2.23 below, shows activists protesting on behalf of gay people in the military, as well as those diagnosed with HIV/Aids whose careers were adversely affected (Bakarat).

McAdams noted that Cooke's successor, Cardinal O'Connor, authorised the opening of a special Aids unit to provide medical care for the sick and dying.

This was at St Clare’s, in the Hell’s Kitchen district of Manhattan, one of the first hospitals to take in Aids patients. McAdams was volunteering there as part of Mel Rosenthal’s *Triage Project*, a collective of photographers, doctors, and writers who documented homelessness and the healthcare crisis in New York City. In December 1989, ACT UP demonstrated in front of St Patrick’s Cathedral, holding placards which read “Cardinal O’Connor Loves Gay People ….If They Are Dying Of Aids” deriding O’Connor’s efforts to assist Aids patients at St Clare’s as a hollow gesture (actupny.org).

The irony of Cooke’s funeral with its pomp and ceremony, in stark contrast to the fear, suspicion and secrecy afforded to those who had died from Aids and Aids-related sickness, was not lost on McAdams (PI 2016). She observed that many who died from Aids were excluded from traditional means of mourning: given no obituary to mark their passing, not buried but cremated, and often no gravestone, “the archetype of the commemorative”, was erected, (Capozzola 222).

ACT UP-NJ
FIGH
CK !!
DON'T END IT
EXTEND IT
BAN PEOPLE OF ALL SEXUAL PREFERENCES FROM MILITARY SERVITUDE
WAKE UP! THE AIDS CRISIS IS NOT OVER
O IS PRESIDENT

Figure 2.23. McAdams, Dona Ann. Artists and activists align the cause of discrimination against gays in the Military with demands for help for those with Aids.

The Death of a Friend

As well as volunteering at St Clare's, McAdams was a carer, along with Lori E Seid and others, for her friend John Bernd who was, by 1988, hospitalised and dying. McAdams' photograph of Bernd's window from his hospital bed in New York University Hospital, figure 2.24, below, epitomises the love and care she and fellow artists extended towards him. The photograph shows that they have transformed the clinical setting and monotonous view from his room into a vibrant fairy-tale world of dragons and mythical figures. Bernd, a choreographer and dancer, was one of the first PS122 artists to be diagnosed with Aids. He is considered to be one of the first to use his practice to deal directly with the crisis surrounding the Aids virus (Gere 116). McAdams particularly recalls his 1992 work, *Surviving Love and Death,* which was made the year he contracted Aids, and references his illness (McAdams PI 2018).

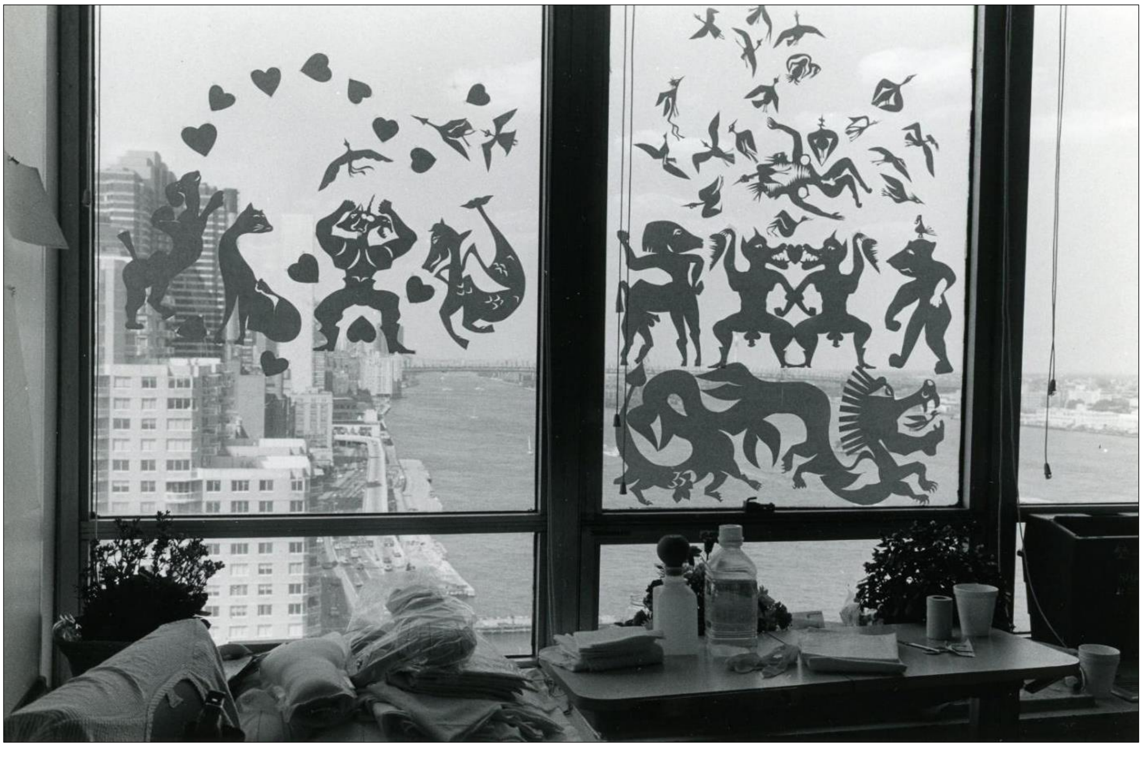

Figure 2.24. McAdams, Dona Ann. John Bernd's window in his hospital room at New York University Hospital. 1988.

McAdams and colleagues at PS122 watched with dread as Bernd's health declined, and formed a caregivers group. Lucy Sexton, of Dancenoise, as well as Ishmael Houston-Jones, Lori E. Seid and McAdams, remember that Bernd was not realistic about how very sick he was. He performed up until the end, with his last performance at PS122, a duet with Jennifer Monson, *Two on the Loose*, when he weighed no more than 100 pounds (see figure 2.25, below). When Sexton last saw John he was "a skeleton lying on a pile of sheets that looked like they would swallow him" (Sexton, Danspace).

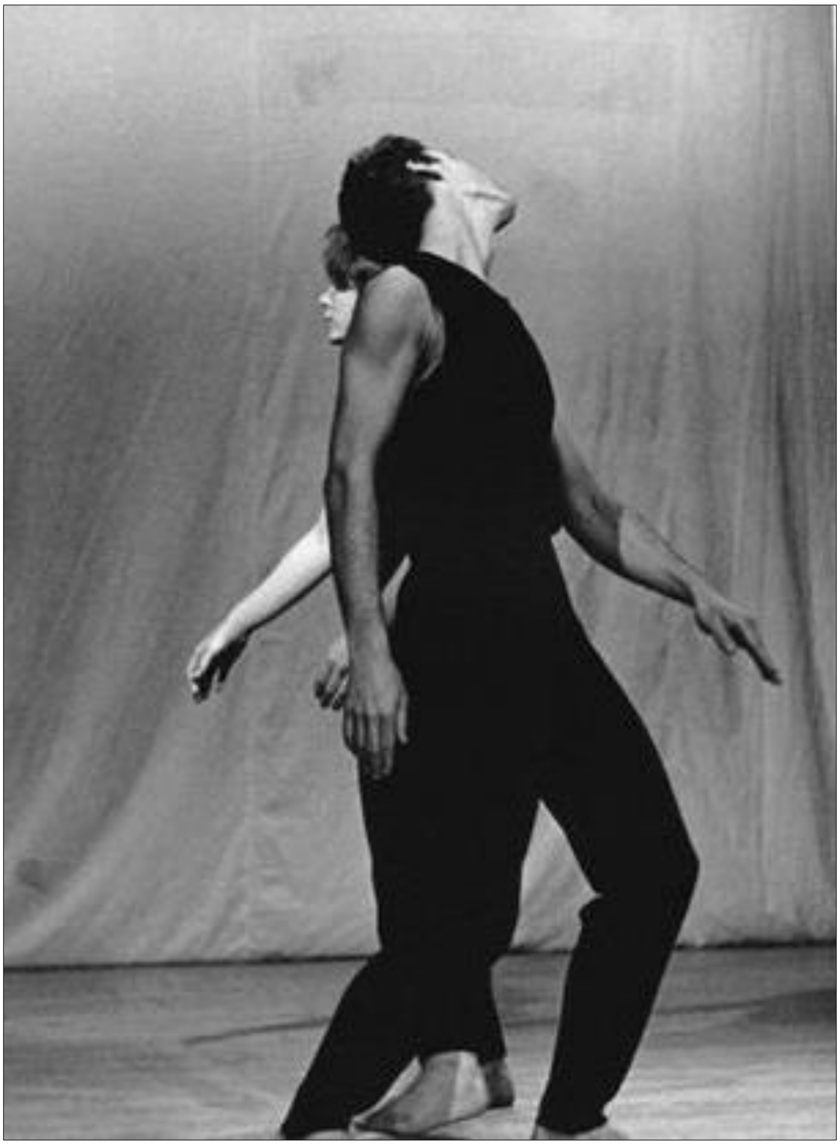

Figure 2.25. McAdams, Dona Ann. John Bernd and Jennifer Monson, *Two on the Loose*, PS122, 1988.

As described by Russell below, Bernd approached death as he had lived life; he faced death creatively and wrote his own end-of-life experience. Leaving his hospital room for PS122 that final time, he tried to snatch back a bit of his stolen future. Russell recalled:

> John was my first employee [at PS122] and essentially taught me how to do the books. John was compelled to make art if he was to stay halfway sane. It was transformative for him. He was pushing away his looming absence. [But] even in his deepest sickness he was beautiful, he could still move. (PI 2021)

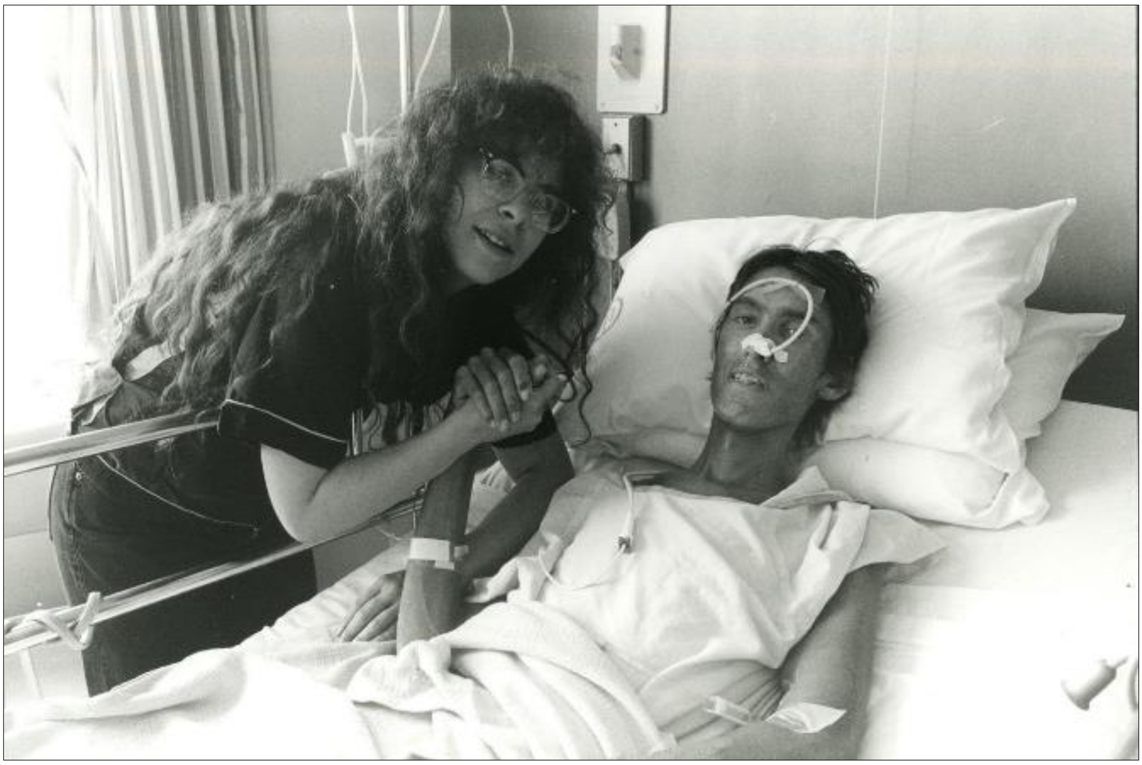

Figure 2.26. McAdams, Dona Ann. John Bernd in his hospital bed at New York University Hospital, NYC. With Lori E. Seid. 1988

The grim reality for Bernd and others in his situation was that he had bills and rent to cover and needed to work to receive his grants to pay them. This was another imperative to make art. This picture of Bernd, figure 2.26, above, has not been seen before. McAdams made it for Lori E Seid, a fellow PS122 artist, and part of Bernd’s carer rota, and Bernd’s mother, Dorothy, who was also present. McAdams printed it for me at my request. It is an important image, as it conveys John’s frailty and mortality and the futility of resisting loss

(McAdams PI 2020). Russell remembered that the PS122 community were attending memorial services for deceased friends at least once a week, in St Mark's church, or sometimes in their building. Invoking the language of war he recalled:

> We knew we were in the trenches: we knew it was a fight but we were busy. Protesting, keeping the doors open, fighting for funding. We feel more trauma now because there just wasn't time back then. (PI 2021)

McAdams observed:

> It was like being at war. Allegiances were forged fast. People were on the streets demonstrating alongside you one week, and a week later they were dead. As if picked-off by a sniper, an invisible killer. (PI 2018)

The Bravest Man

The photograph at St Clare's, below, is the result of a chance encounter between McAdams and the subject. McAdams recalled that while volunteering at St Clare's hospital:

> I was trying to take photos of people with Aids on the wards where I had been working for over a year. I seemed to do everything but: reading, writing letters for people and just listening a lot. (PI 2018)

McAdams continued:

> I met a man in the hallway and he asked me to take his picture in his room. He had the *New York Post* on his tray table. I saw the headline and asked him if I should move the paper. He said, "No. I am the bravest man". (PI 2018)

The resulting photograph, *The Bravest Man*, figure 2.27, below, shows a patient in a hospital room bare of personal effects, and few indications of the person and the life they have led. It has a clinical sterility to it, mitigated only by the presence of the newspaper and the religious artefact on the wall behind the patient. The patient is not named, but he is not just another "Aids patient". McAdams established a personal connection with him through her photography and ensured his memory would endure and, for her, this photograph "marks an intimate moment, a consensual, trusting exchange between photographer and subject" (PI 2018).

McAdams consciously did not habitually photograph the terminally ill, recognising that there are questions as to the appropriateness and responsibility of spectatorship in cases of terminal illness, as it might be considered exploitative (PI 2016). McAdams did not want to engage with the commodification of suffering or its appropriation by portraying "death-bed victims" (PI 2016). Here McAdams' photography functions as a catalyst for memory, and, as examples of a documentary record of the collective narrative, they contribute to post-Aids discourse. McAdams' photographs also evoke a sense of time passing and the melancholy associated with loss and mortality.

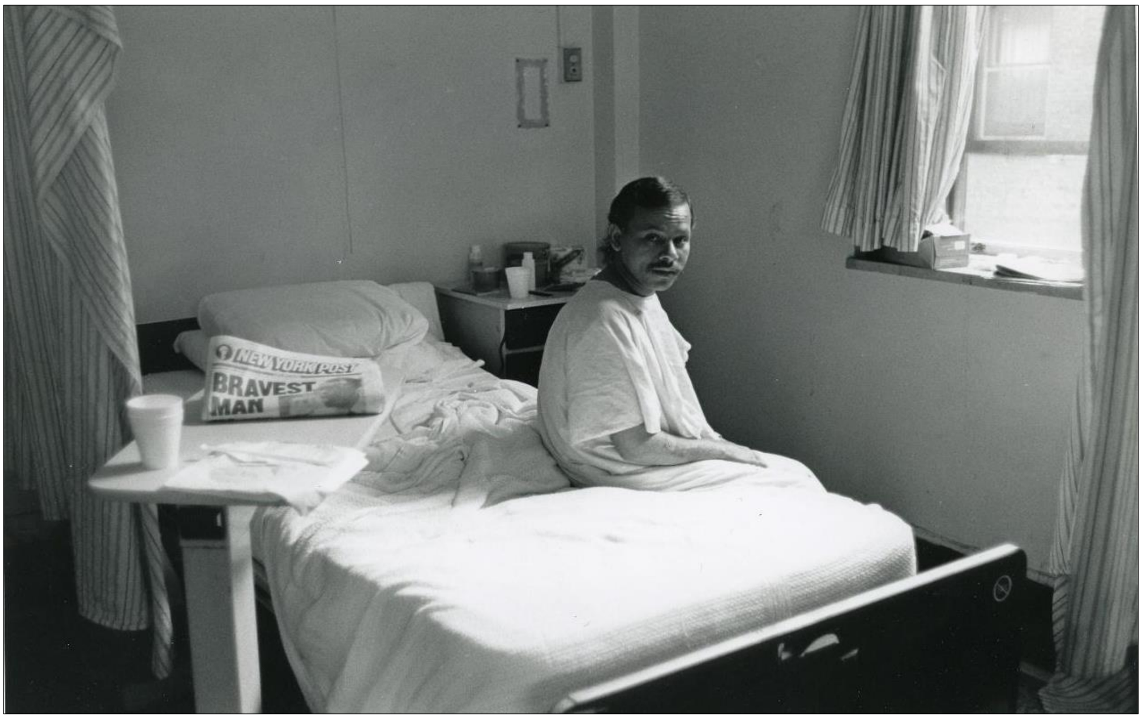

Figure 2.27. McAdams, Dona Ann. *The Bravest Man,* St Clare's Hospital, New York City.

This chapter has highlighted the ways in which artists responded to the Aids Crisis. Particular attention has been paid to McAdams' role as a photographer and the part her photographs play in drawing attention to the plight of people with Aids and their loved ones. As verified by Dr Fauci's statements outlined above, this exposure brought changes to the way drugs were trialled and to the way Aids was defined, giving more people access to welfare assistance. Creating new art provided a means of memorialising those lost and a route for survivors to grieve. Grief takes many forms and is enduring. As described by Karen Finley and Penny Arcade, who lived through the Aids Crisis, artists are processing their grief by re-working old performances or creating entirely new works as a form of purgative process. This work feeds into trauma theory and memory studies but these are beyond the scope of this thesis.

Next, in chapter three, I will consider the role of McAdams and her fellow artists at PS122 in the US Culture Wars of the 1990s.

CHAPTER THREE

McAdams’ Role In Documenting The US Culture Wars Of The 1990s and The NEA Four

Introduction

Developing themes of art activism introduced in chapter one, this chapter examines interpretations of the role of art and the artist in society, as well as performance art as a theatre of resistance. It further elaborates on McAdams’ role within the community of artists at PS122 in which she immersed herself. While there, she photographed, documented and preserved the work of important performance artists in the 1980s and 1990s and many of the performances were by artists whose work became embroiled in the funding controversies of the 1990s.

As will be shown later in the chapter, McAdams used her photographs to disprove allegations of indecency on the part of the artists and exercised her artistic authority to withhold images that would inflame the controversy. Case studies of performance artists are provided in this thesis as well as a discussion of McAdams’ support for the rights of sex workers. Further elucidating the intertwining of art and politics, this chapter will also touch upon the wider socio-political environment in the United States at the end of the twentieth century, with its prevailing homophobic attitudes and privileging of so-called wholesome national values. Whilst the main focus is with McAdams and her collaborators at PS122 from 1979 onwards, this chapter begins with a brief consideration of the pivotal, transformative period of the 1960s and 1970s which set the scene for these later cultural protests.

The Political Backdrop

The 1960s was a period during which, according to Andrew Hartman “a new America was born” and discourse around citizenship generated “conflicting articulations of America itself” (Hartman 2). It was a turbulent time when American society was divided between those who embraced the new more liberal post World War ll America and those who did not. The deeply held conservative values of normative America upholding American national ideals and respect for traditional forms of authority were seen as holding the country together (Hartman 67).

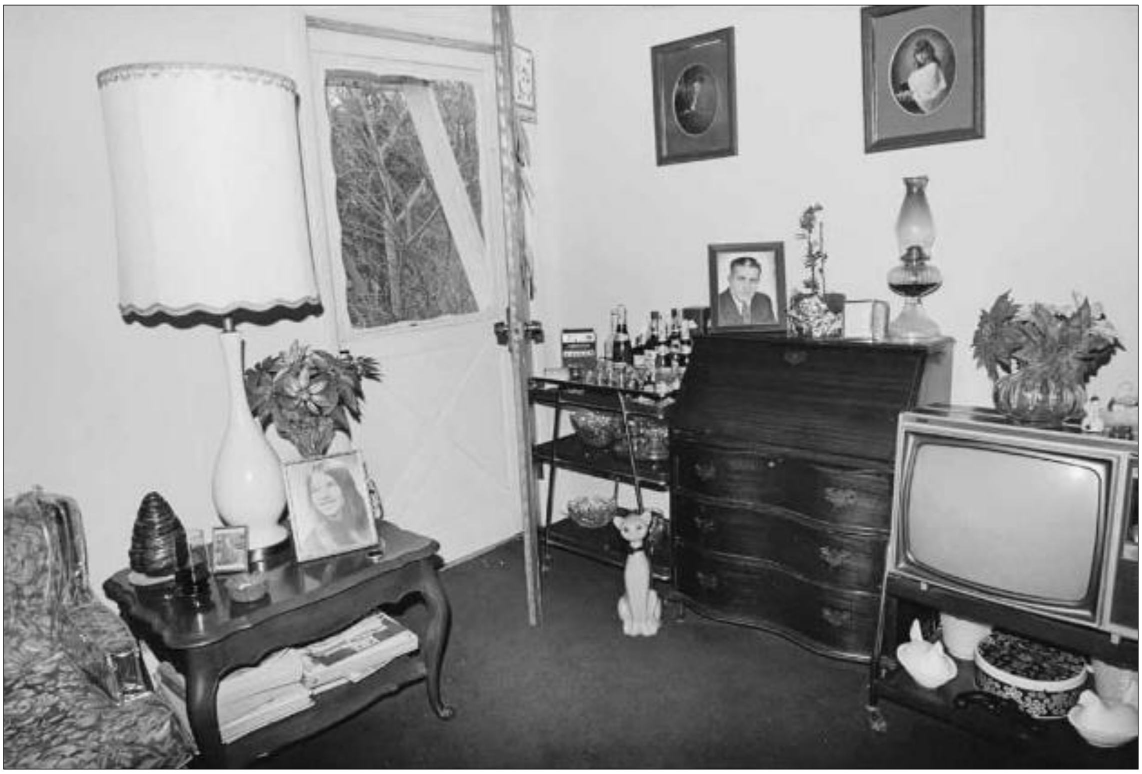

Figure 3.1. McAdams, Dona Ann. The living room at McAdams’ family home on Long Island, New York, late 1950s.

Figure 3.1 above, McAdams’ family home on Long Island, New York, epitomised the idealised American middle-class family experience. Net curtains, a coffee table, family photographs on top of the television, and soft furnishings constitute the visual props of suburban domesticity, an “ideal” promoted by the White House and religious influencers. Jerry Falwell, the founder of the Moral

Majority, declared: “We are in a holy war for the survival of the family” (Hartman 87).

The shift in the American political landscape in the 1960s brought into opposition the youthful “New Left”, manifested in student protests, and the neoconservatives, who personified the “white working-class ethos” and were opposed to the campus protestors, in opposition to each other and reportedly felt that “orderly society began to unravel” (53). Hartman sees these divisions as instrumental in the advent of the culture wars of the 1990s (69). Thomas Long tells us:

> in the second half of the 1970s, religious conservatives in the United States began to consolidate their cultural and political power around the social anxieties of “middle Americans” who had been characterised earlier in the decade as a “silent majority”. (2)

Long traces the oppositional stance of the Christian conservatives during the Aids Crisis to this time when they became united against gay and lesbian equal rights (2-3). During this time of historic change, “the performing and visual arts and the media were seen as the cause, rather than the reflection of social instability” and countercultural activist movements were targeted by the political right (Davies 92-93). Angry exchanges arose between social commentators, politicians and artists among others, concerning American culture and morality. In Congress, artists were denounced and there were calls for censorship through the withdrawal of federal funding for artistic output that certain politicians considered subversive and pornographic. These heated debates went to the heart of what it is to be a good American citizen. Dominating the US national press headlines over those two decades, this discourse over national identity characterised American society as politically and socially polarised and came to be known as the “Culture Wars”.

David Schlossman observes that by the 1980s these “earlier social developments had encouraged the next generation of performance artists…to take on an actively political stance” (212). He points out that Holly Hughes, Karen Finley, Tim Miller, and John Fleck were individual solo performers denied funding by the NEA on grounds of indecency who came together as a group to challenge the decision, taking their case to the Supreme Court. Before considering those events it is useful to understand the history of the NEA.

The Origins of the NEA

The NEA grew out of President John F. Kennedy’s vision. In the autumn of 1963, Kennedy spoke at Amherst College affirming his commitment to the arts and celebrating the role of the artist in society, sentiments which he had earlier expressed at his inauguration in 1961. At Amherst, he said, “If art is to nourish the roots of our culture, society must set the artist free to follow his vision wherever it takes him. We must never forget that art is not a form of propaganda; it is a form of truth”. Kennedy added:

> The artist, however faithful to his personal vision of reality, becomes the last champion of the individual mind and sensibility against an intrusive society and an officious state…In pursuing his perceptions of reality, he must often sail against the currents of his time. This is not a popular role. (Kennedy)

Three weeks later, Kennedy was assassinated and it was left to his successor President Lyndon Johnson to implement his dream. Within two years, President Johnson duly signed the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act, which created the NEA, as well as the National Endowment for the Humanities, (NEH) (Bauerlein and Grantham 18). The Act had bipartisan support in Congress from within “the well-established liberal strains of the Democratic and Republican leadership in the 1950s and 1960s” (Bauerlein and

Grantham 14). A specific policy of non-interference was written into the act which created the NEA and the NEH (Bolton 17).

The United States was founded on principles of freedom of speech and the First Amendment of its constitution protects the views of minorities. As Bolton points out, these principles “give(s) dissent a central role in our democratic system” (17). Accordingly, when the NEA was first established, President Johnson “stressed the importance of facilitating artistic speech while limiting government interference” (Bolton 17). Initially, therefore, the NEA could take risks. The first NEA grants in 1965 were made out of a budget of $2. 5 million and they “demonstrated that the NEA was closely involved with the current movements and trends in American creative life” supporting pop art and neo-surrealism (Bauerlein and Grantham 22). At the same time, the NEA was “fostering an appreciation of other styles and genres”, from both established artists and young emerging talent (22). By 1968 the NEA budget had increased to $72. 2 million with grants made to 187 individuals and 276 organizations.

That year the NEA underwent the first critical Congressional review of its programs, and the scrutiny extended to fellowships for individual artists. Already there was anxiety among legislators and artists that the NEA would escape federal oversight, as well as bypass the cultural norms of the American majority by favouring new, avant-garde art over more traditional styles (Bauerlein and Grantham 27). These emerging artists included Leon Polk Smith, a Cherokee-American painter whose work blended Native American design and hard-edge geometrically-oriented abstract paintings on unframed canvases of unusual shapes but had been overlooked (27). During the early 1970s, President Nixon’s support for the Arts Endowment had transformed the NEA from a tiny

Federal program into a significant policy leader in the arts (Bauerlein and Grantham 38).

By the 1980s, neo-conservatism dominated politics in the United States and the focus was on cultural output as an expression of societal values (Thompson 181). As Bauerlein and Grantham's *History of the NEA* explains, there followed decades of strained relationships between it and members of Congress who objected to art that offended public decency (Bauerlein and Grantham 28). The founding NEA principles of artistic freedom came under threat from the political right, who questioned the judgement of the NEA and were pressing to cut its funding if not eliminate it (Andrews). There was a perception that artists had grown accustomed to federal funding for their work and felt entitled to it, whereas as a public agency the NEA was answerable to the American public (Bauerlein and Grantham 38). Later, President Ronald Reagan would become the figurehead of neo-conservatism and his Administration took up the quest to discredit the arts and thereby pacify the religious right (Chapman). By 1989, at the end of Reagan's Presidency, the NEA budget had grown to $169. 09 million of which $8. 4million went to fund artists' fellowships (Killacky). If this significant sum had been withheld it would have a profound impact on the artists and their output.

In a 1992 speech before the Republican National Convention in Houston political commentator and columnist Pat Buchanan declared “a war for the soul of America” (Hartman 1). His speech coined the phrase “Culture Wars” and identified a struggle within American society: Buchanan decreed: “We must take back our cities, and take back our culture, and take back our country” (buchanan). This was intended to ignite the wrath of the conservative American public against the artists agitating for social change. A battle ensued between politicians and artists over the budget allocation and reauthorisation of funding for the NEA. The heated debates about what constituted art, and whether the federal government should subsidise it, threatened the most cherished beliefs of millions of Americans (Hartman 7).

The National Endowment for The Humanities, (NEH)

Republican Lynne Cheney, chair of the NEH from 1986 to 1992, was using her skills and connections to steer the NEH clear of the bitter divisions sweeping its sister organization, the NEA (Trueheart). Cheney expanded the NEH budget, which grew by a third to $177 million in her time in office, but she resigned in December 1992 after becoming politically isolated within the incoming Clinton Democratic administration (Trueheart). Representing a conservative viewpoint, Cheney’s views were out of step with her predominantly left of centre humanities constituents who accused her of politicising the endowment's grant-making by favouring traditional proposals over those with multicultural themes (Kilian).

According to Michael Kilian, Cheney “was often embroiled in classic liberal-versus-conservative duels on the state of American culture”, and failed to understand the role of the NEH as a “bridge between American academic thought and the American public” (Kilian). Cheney regarded her principal achievement at the NEH as the expansion of its mandate beyond the support of individual scholarship to improving classroom teaching at college and university level and supporting libraries, museums, public television stations and state humanities councils (Trueheart). Her position became untenable as she attempted to install conservative scholar Carol Iannone on the NEH advisory panel, the National Humanities Council, but was overturned by the Senate (Kilian).

Stanley Katz of the American Council of Learned Societies acknowledged her achievements "at a time when the sister endowment went through an extremely perilous time and came out diminished by the experience" but also accused her of "the radical politicization" of the NEH (Trueheart). He said she had turned the NEH's advisory council of scholars "into a narrow organization representing a tiny spectrum of the ideological reality of the American intellectual community" and that she had "loaded the endowment's peer review committees with people who rejected individual grants on partisan grounds" (Trueheart).

Conflict over Artworks Perceived as Controversial

The founding NEA principles of artistic freedom came under threat in the 1980s when disagreements over NEA funding of artwork deemed to be provocative escalated into arguments over morality, censorship and taxpayers money. The NEA itself was in the middle of the controversy surrounding the left-leaning artists it was funding. It chose to defund the artists and pacify the political right, rather than face penalties itself. In 1987 the NEA had funded an artwork called *Piss Christ* by Andres Serrano which caught the attention of Senator D'Amato who then ripped up a reproduction of the work on the Senate floor (Fitch-Little). Countering artists' claims that they had a right to free speech under the First Amendment, D'Amato declared: "This is not a question of free speech. This is a question of taxpayers' money" (Fitch-Little). Serrano wrote to the NEA defending his piece, describing the photograph as "a condemnation of those who abuse the teachings of Christ for their own ignoble ends" (Capps).

Another controversial artwork was *The Last Temptation of Christ*, a film directed by Martin Scorsese. Andrew Hartman, interviewed by Micah Eutricht, explained that the film portrayed Jesus with human failings, subject to temptations that challenged the traditional view of heterosexual marriage (Uetricht). Hartman elaborated: “To me, this is a key moment in the culture wars because it demonstrated the cultural gap between mainstream Hollywood and many Americans who completely rejected the film” (Uetricht). There was outrage when it emerged that Congress had authorised the NEA to fund the film. The work shocked politicians and the wider American public. To Christians this was not “shock art” but state-funded blasphemy. This serves as a useful example of the tension between public and artistic standpoints on broader social issues. Schlossman points out that it relies on an interpretation of American society as polarised between extremes of right and left whereas there was a middle ground with people who were unaware of these arguments. Also, within the left and the right, are various communities each with their mores, proving that society is not a homogeneous body (27).

Republican Senators Jesse Helms and Alfonse D’Amato brought the question of offensive art to the attention of Congress. They were concerned with the use of religious imagery or symbolism and with what they deemed to be obscene content in the works. Peggy Phelan has considered the possibility that the senators may have even felt obligated to raise the issue of “controversial art” because there was attention paid to violent crime and child molestation cases and the prevailing homophobic rhetoric linked gay men with sex crimes (Phelan 4 and 6). In an attempt to highlight, and indeed obliterate, the “deviant” members of society, Phelan suggests: “The New Right wishe[d] to obliterate homosexuality and [would] tolerate a public recognition of it only as ‘the cause’ of Aids and death” (Phelan 13).

In Congress, Helms and D’Amato were joined by a further 50 Senators and 150 Representatives who within a month had contacted the NEA and questioned its funding procedure (Kastor). The floor of the Senate was kept busy with objections, such was the influx of artistic material deemed “obscene”. For example, just before his death from Aids, a retrospective of Robert Mapplethorpe’s photography was put on display. Funded by an NEA grant and entitled *The Perfect Moment* the collection included images from New York’s gay S&M scene (Wingfield Walker 942). The NEA had $45,000 cut from its proposed budget, a sum corresponding to the two grants that funded Mapplethorpe and Serrano (Andrews). The Director of the Corcoran Art Gallery, (situated next to the White House) in Washington D.C., Christina Orr-Cahal, controversially cancelled its showing (Hartman 193). Helms was not placated, Orr Cahal resigned and later told the *New Art Examiner*: “The first time [Helms’s office called] they basically expressed displeasure that we had withdrawn. I have to conclude they really wanted that exhibition in Washington, so it would fuel their fire” (Capps). Thus artists such as Mapplethorpe and gallery directors such as Orr-Cahal became pawns in a wider political game.

The Artists’ Response to the Controversy

McAdams and others at PS122 felt that the stance against these controversial artistic practices was a denial of artistic discussions of sexuality and evidence that the Senators considered counterculture at the root of societal ills (McAdams PI 2018). McAdams observed these events and became aware of the risks of releasing photographs into the public domain. She realised:

> photographs can’t exist on their own. If you let that happen, they become the subject of the viewer, audience or publisher. They can make it whatever they want and turn it on its head. I realised that you can do two things You can let an image speak for itself or you can take responsibility for what is happening in the photograph. (PI 2016)

This realisation informed her response to the demands by the press and others for her images of the work of artists caught up in the indecency controversy.

Denouncement in the Senate by public figures such as Helms and D’Amato focused attention on the significance of the taxpayer-funded NEA grants to motivate their voter base and away from their contravention of the First Amendment right of freedom of expression (Capps). In 1990, during the presidency of George Bush Senior, Congress amended the statute governing federal funding for the arts to include considerations of “general standards of respect and decency and respect for the diverse beliefs of the American public” by the Chair of the NEA when evaluating applications (Finley v. NEA).

Rhetorics of decency are deeply embedded in American heritage (Davies 92). Supported by members from both sides of the House, Helms proposed an amendment in the Senate, in July 1989, “To prohibit the use of appropriated funds for the dissemination, promotion, or production of obscene or indecent materials or materials denigrating a particular religion” (Bolton 4). “Had the amendment passed into law as proposed it would have allowed the government to withhold funding from art critical of almost any subject” (4). In 1990, a “Decency Amendment” clause was added to reauthorisation language for the NEA, and all grant recipients were required to sign a “decency” form. This required grant applicants to give an advance certificate guaranteeing that they would not use government funds to promote obscene materials (Wingfield Walker 944). In Minneapolis, at The Walker Arts Centre, the then director John Killacky signed the clause, as he believed there was nothing “indecent” in the artwork that the centre was showing whereas others regarded signing as a capitulation and refused (Killacky). At PS122 McAdams and artists like Holly Hughes, whose work would be defunded, foresaw that this policy change went beyond individual artists and as Hughes feared, affected “funding in areas as diverse as education, housing, and healthcare” (ayers).

The Senate’s attempts to control artistic output moved through various rhetorical arguments, from concerns over “decency” to measuring “artistic merit”, but with the consistent intention of imposing censorship. Consequently, artists were deterred from including sexuality in their subject matter and organisations were less inclined to present it. The decision to defund artists would have future repercussions as the discourse “led to the enactment of the first content restrictions of government-sponsored art” (Wingfield Walker 937). Phelan, in line with President Kennedy’s earlier vision, called for the artistic community to make a broader argument for artistic freedom than one of avoiding censorship and insisted that “the health of art influences in a direct way the health and wealth of the nation” (Phelan 8).

McAdams and her community at PS122 demonstrated in New York City and Washington D.C. against the threats to NEA funding integrity. As seen below, in figure 3. 2, artists from across different disciplines came together to protest. The image shows Jenny Romaine on stilts, Sharon Jane Smith on Cymbals, Geoff McMahon holding the sign. These artists exemplify Schlossman’s “seeking social change through direct action such as demonstration” while borrowing from “theatre props, clowning, masquerade and carnival as part of the performance of protest” (80). Schlossman has described the act of street demonstration as performative and “doubly resistant”, voicing an “opinion that authority sought to discount and at the same time transgress the normal boundaries of space and behaviour” (Schlossman 88-89). He also notes the importance of onlookers and authorities alongside the protestors and demonstrators as part of the mixture of ideological messages present, which underscores the importance of attendees like Allen Ginsberg, (see figures 3.3, and 3.4, below), publicly lending their support (Schlossman 89).

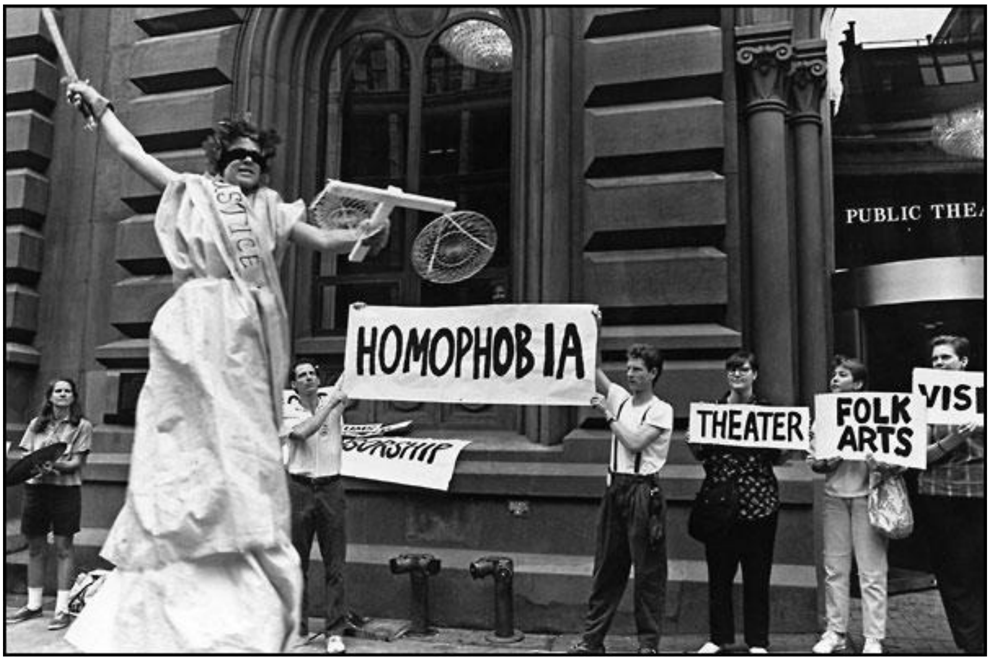

Figure 3.2. McAdams, Dona Ann. Demonstrating outside Joe Papp’s Public Theatre, Astor Place, New York City. 1990.

In figure 3.2, above, demonstrators photographed by McAdams, protesting outside the Public Theatre, Astor Place, NYC. Its founder, Joseph Papp, had a lifelong commitment to promoting new playwrights and contemporary plays of social significance and these developments struck at the heart of his philosophy. Papp turned down $323,000 in grants from the NEA in February 1990 explaining: “The [indecency] law introduces a moral tone with the implication that the arts need to be watched, that the arts are inextricably bound with immorality, with obscenity” (Fraser, *NYT* 1990). In a letter to NEA chairman John Frohnmayer, Papp said he found that the new legislation for the continuance of the NEA was “punitive and an infringement on the civil rights of artists and arts institutions″ (Fraser, *NYT* 1990).

At Union Square, Allen Ginsberg, a well-known poet from the “Beat” generation, allied with others to add his voice to the protest. Russell has noted that “the elders would sometimes be in the audience at PS122. It was exciting that they were still curious, still supporting the form, maintaining a conversation between the generations” (Russell PI 2021). In figure 3.3 and 3.4 below, Ginsberg can be seen demonstrating to preserve the integrity of the NEA at Union Square, New York, with puppeteer Ralph Lee to his right, and to his left author Joan Schenkar and playwright Migdalia Cruz.

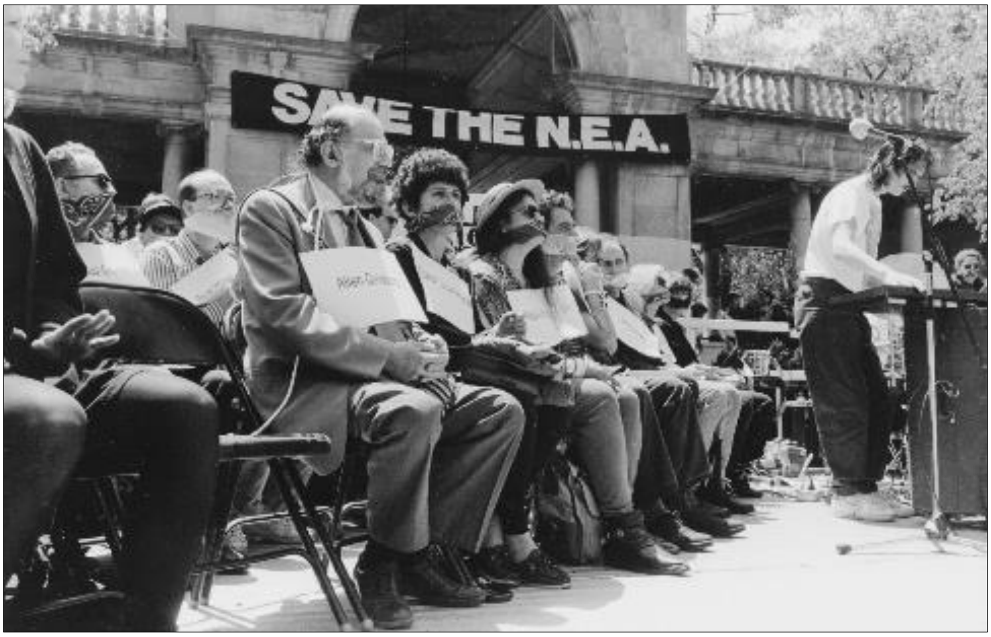
SAVE THE N.E.A.

Figure 3.3. McAdams, Dona Ann. Demonstrating to “Save the NEA”, Union Square, New York City, 1992

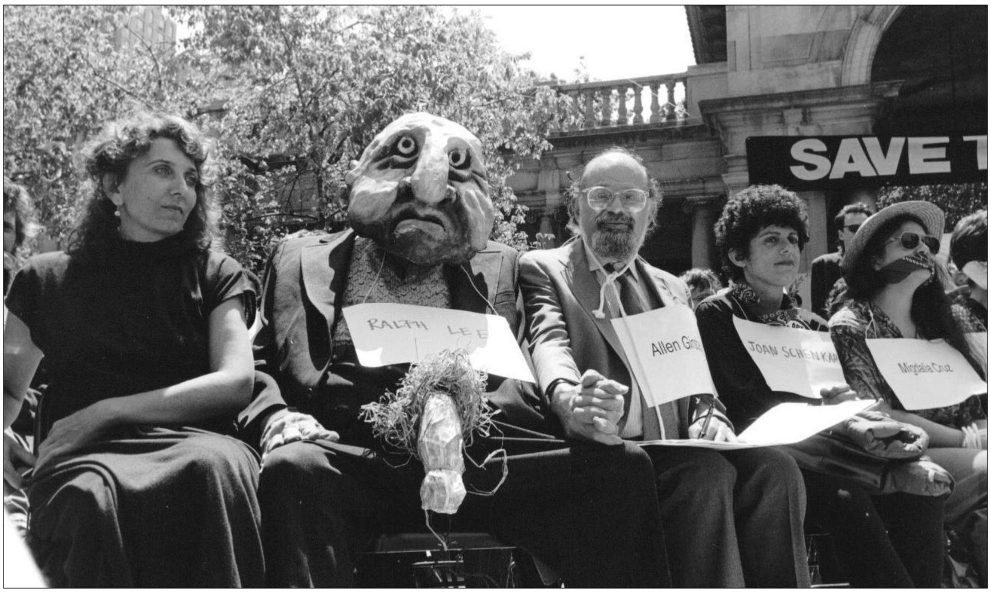

Figure 3.4. McAdams, Dona Ann. Artists demonstrating to preserve the integrity of NEA grant-making, Union Square, New York City, 1992.

In Washington, writer and monologist, Spalding Gray, see figure 3.5, below, demonstrated against the new NEA policies by holding a book over his head to symbolise literary freedom (McAdams PI 2020).

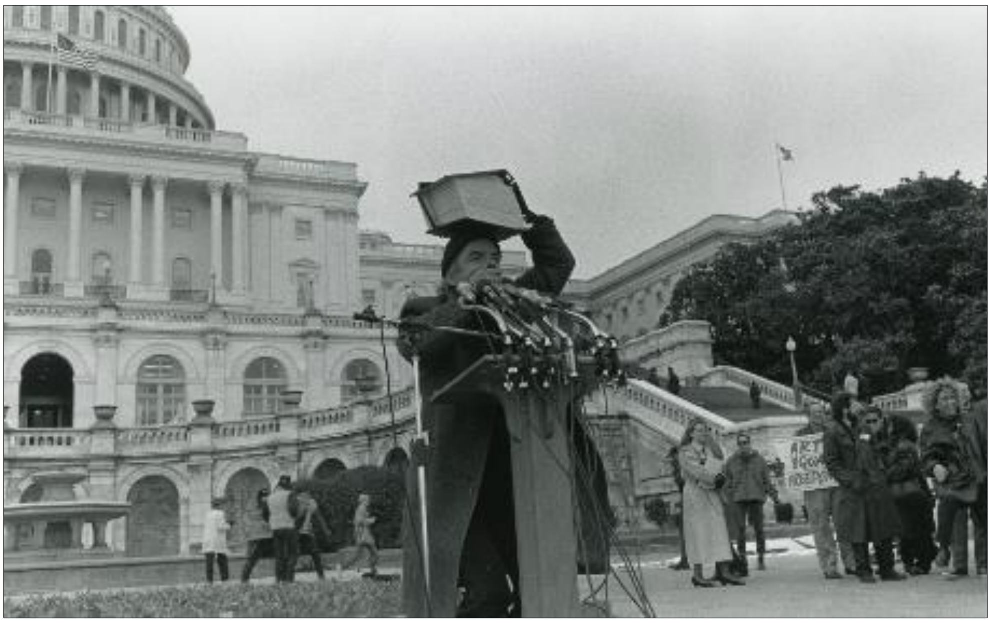

Figure 3.5. McAdams, Dona Ann. Spalding Gray demonstrating in Washington, D. C., at NEA changes to grant applications. 1992.

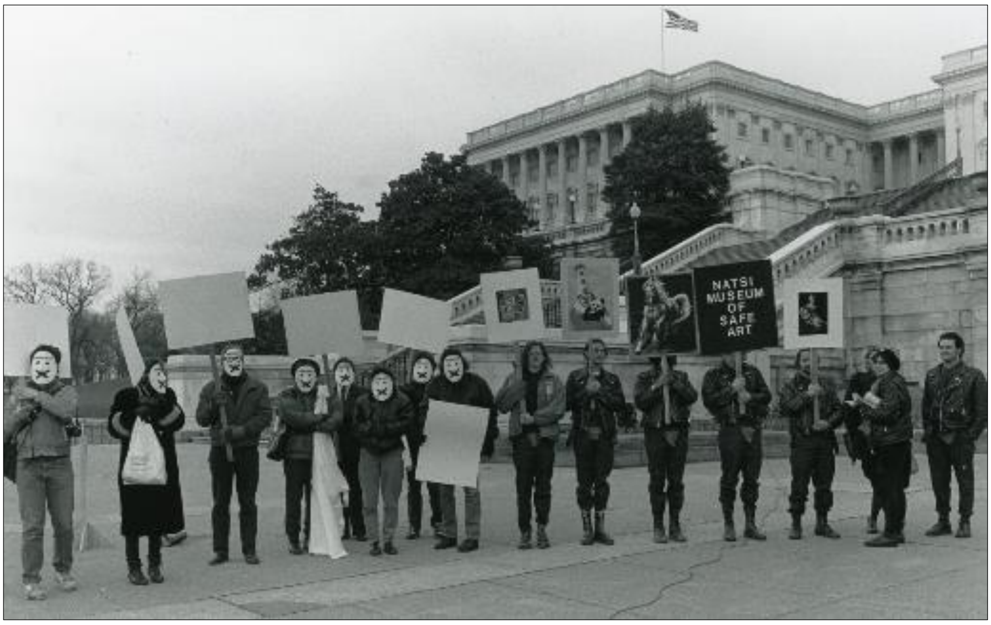

Figure 3.6. McAdams, Dona Ann. Demonstrators at the Capitol Building Washington, D. C., against censorship. 1992.

In figure 3.6, above, artists have masked faces and taped lips to indicate being silenced by the NEA’s requirement to sign the decency clause and by the new application process. As Holly Hughes has recalled:

> Up until 1995, the NEA gave grants and fellowships to a wide variety of individual artists, visual artists, filmmakers, theater artists, dancers, musicians and so on. And these, (too small), grants made a huge impact for a diverse pool of artists across the country. I thought the NEA was the fairest and most careful funder out there, in the application process. (PI 2020)

Despite the unity among artists, shown here in McAdams’ photographs, there was disappointment among performance artists at the lack of solidarity with other creative arts groups. Hughes later enquired how writers were able to retain their fellowships while others were eliminated and learned that:

> Apparently, the entire world of literature lobbied hard to keep the fellowships. And I also remember the early nineties the deafening silence of the established cultural organizations when artists and small scrappy but essential spaces like Franklin Furnace were getting raked over the coals. Some of us got death threats. (PI 2020)

Karen Finley also referred to the big impact that NEA had on alternative art spaces like Franklin Furnace (PI 2015). Franklin Furnace’s Visual Artists Organization grant was rescinded by the NEA and its Street Performance space was closed down during the culture wars. The New York Fire Department claimed that Franklin Furnace was an "illegal social club", it was audited by the tax authorities and attacked by Jesse Helms for exhibiting Karen Finley's *A Woman's Life Isn't Worth Much,* (1990), and closed down (Wilson et al 56). Franklin Furnace confronted such opposition by continuing to present artists who were seen as “transgressors of the body politic” and was supported by artists like Holly Hughes, Tim Miller, Karen Finley as well as Spalding Gray and Allen Ginsberg, who showed solidarity (56).

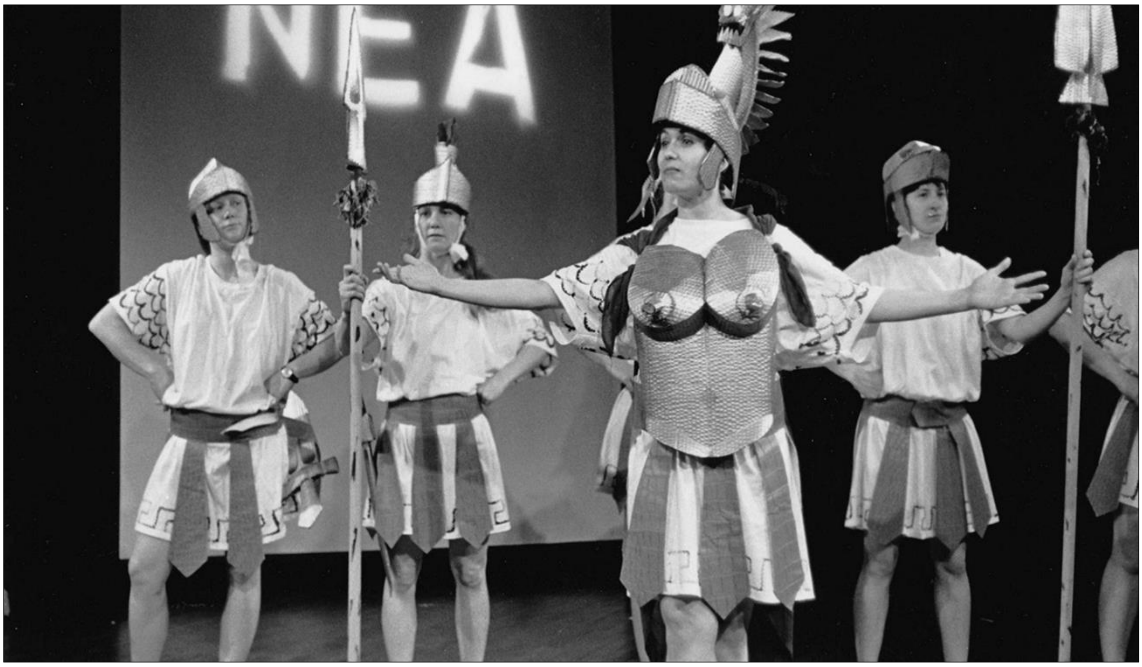

Figure 3.7. McAdams, Dona Ann. *Modern Art, 1990* (Part Two) by Poet Eileen Myles and choreographed by Eileen Fischer. Carol McDowell and Jennifer Monson are the two dancers at the back on the left. PS 122, in the downstairs theatre. 1990.

At PS 122 artists incorporated specific messages concerning the NEA in their performances as well as attending protests to protest censorship. These were captured by McAdams, as seen in figure 3.7, above, where New York Poet, Eileen Myles' gladiators are symbolic of the artist fighting for social justice and change. In a 2011 interview, Myles, whose recollections of meeting at PS122 during the Aids Crisis were described in chapter two, reflected:

> 1990 was a totally political time; George Bush was president, people were dying of Aids, a lot of our friends, and there was no money being spent by the government either on Aids or art. So a lot of extreme sexual and political work was made at that time. (Nalbantyan)

They added:

> I had personally grown up in a world of total censorship, so I wasn't surprised to see politicians wanting to take money away from the art that was explicitly talking about this entire reality of ours. And artists were getting defunded, fired essentially, for speaking the truth. (Nalbantyan)

Highlighting the irony of the situation, they continued:

> Part Two of *Modern Art* was a course of women in Roman legionary costumes. I thought theater should always have a dance scene like on

> TV. The legionaries were funded in the play, but also in reality by the NEA, to recite bad, feminist poetry, which I had written. (Nalbantyan)

PS122 and NEA Funding

As well as fighting the grant-making changes in the Courts, artists at PS122 and elsewhere demonstrated on the streets to preserve the principle of freedom of expression. The culture war in which these artists found themselves caught up damaged the climate in which artists in the United States make art (franklinfurnace). McAdams and her fellow artists at PS122 consider the NEA to have been critically weakened during this period of attack from conservative politicians and religious figures, and reduced to “a shell of its former self” (PI McAdams 2018). Prohibitively complicated application procedures and a requirement to pass the “decency” test forced artists to label themselves and stifled originality which produced “increasingly bland, inoffensive and mediocre work” (PI 2018). This was counter to PS122’s founders’ ethos which was to present challenging new work by emerging artists and to provide a home for voices that could not be heard elsewhere. However, the artists remained committed to their radical art and what they regarded as their right to artistic freedom of expression (PI 2018).

As an institution, PS122 itself was embroiled in the national controversies around decency and NEA funding withdrawals. Mark Russell, the then Artistic Director, recalled that in the early 1980s he would apply to the NEA and be granted sums in the range of $60,000 annually under the category of “interdisciplinary art” or “presenting programs” and felt that the NEA then was “a very effective federal agency” whose support he came to rely on (Kurkjian 56). In the 1990s when the grants were withdrawn from artists deemed to be producing indecent work, PS122 had produced many of these presumed controversial works but managed to hold on to its funding. Russell felt (Senator) “Jesse Helms couldn’t figure out whether we were a school or not and we just hadn’t come up on the radar that much” but eventually “the federal money went away completely in the mid-1990s. I used to call PS122 the NEA-free zone” (Kurkjian 55-56).

Russell continued “the new NEA guidelines meant you could apply for fewer categories” and “they took away an important program of fellowships … weakened their connections with the field and the young ideas. They became more isolated” (Kurkjian 57). The NEA forfeited multiculturalism and international exchange according to Russell (Kurkjian 58). As a result, PS122 suffered financially and pressure to balance his finances eventually led Russell to an impasse with his Board of Directors. The Twin Towers terrorist attacks of November 2001 kept audiences away and added further pressure. Russell’s desire to maintain his creative freedom led him to the reluctant realisation that his vision of growing new talent and “shaping the ecology” was incompatible with the aims of his Board to move towards a subscription-based programme, and he left PS122 in 2004 (Russell PI 2021).

McAdams at PS122

McAdams has observed: “My photographs of performers are meant to document the existence of the performance, but they are also meant to be another thing. They are of a certain movement of art which existed once in a time and place” (PI 2016). From 1983 onwards, as House Photographer at PS122, McAdams photographed almost every performance there, including the work of performance artists Holly Hughes, Tim Miller, Karen Finley and John Fleck. She recalled:

> As a photographer of performance and dance in the late eighties and nineties, I found myself again in the familiar crossroads of art and

> activism. I was the only photographer who had worked closely with the artists who became known as the “NEA Four” (PI 2015)

Although they were all solo artists and had never performed as a group, they were united when the NEA rescinded their grants. They came to the attention of Senator Helms and other conservatives who objected to their work and came to be known as “the NEA Four” or “Karen Finley and the Three Homosexuals”, which diminished them as individual solo performers (Meyer 548). Hughes later recalled:

> With the NEA debacle, I clearly felt my queerness both as a point of attack and a point of resistance. It overrode everything else about me, whether it was my privileged status as a white person from a middle-class background or my disadvantaged status as a woman. (Hughes PI 2020)

In 1990, Miller, Fleck, and Hughes had their grants vetoed by NEA chair John Frohnmayer, because their work dealt with gay subjects and, in Finley’s case, the sexual objectification of women (Meyer 543). Senator Helms pressured the NEA and individual grants which had been awarded to these four artists were denied, despite having been recommended by a peer panel which was the practice then. The National Council, the body of Presidential appointees which oversees the grants made by the NEA, were asked to reconsider the grants awarded to these artists for reasons of indecency described above. Assisted by the National Association of Artists' Organizations and other groups, the artists argued their case at a series of hearings between 1993 and 1996 in which they challenged the so-called “decency clause” (law.cornell.edu). In 1993 the Justice Department paid the grants and awarded damages for breaches of privacy and court costs but eventually, in 1998, the Supreme Court overturned this and delivered a verdict that re-affirmed that the decency clause was, after all, constitutional (law.cornell.edu). The NEA eventually ceased funding for individual artists.

McAdams was pressured by the press to release images of the artists in the performances that had attracted national attention but was aware of the importance of maintaining control over images in the public domain. Recalling the Press furore around the NEA Four, she said “particularly as performance art is political…I am very aware of the context in which the [photographs] might appear. I have a responsibility as the archivist…I’m going to talk to the artists first” (McAdams PI 2015). McAdams went on to describe how she was the only photographer with pictures of the performances of all four artists and that she was offered money by the media to release them. “They were disappointed that I wouldn’t sell them a photograph…they were abusive…I didn’t want the photo(s) to be used in the wrong way and taken out of context” she explained. Her inability to control the caption material accompanying the publication of the photographs was another reason she held back (McAdams PI 2015). She was aware of the importance of her role as “documentarian, and a collector of pieces of passing history”, and of the photographs themselves. “My photographs are meant to document the existence of their art and place it in the history of performance. But I am a collaborator and I will not feed into controversy” she elaborated (PI 2015).

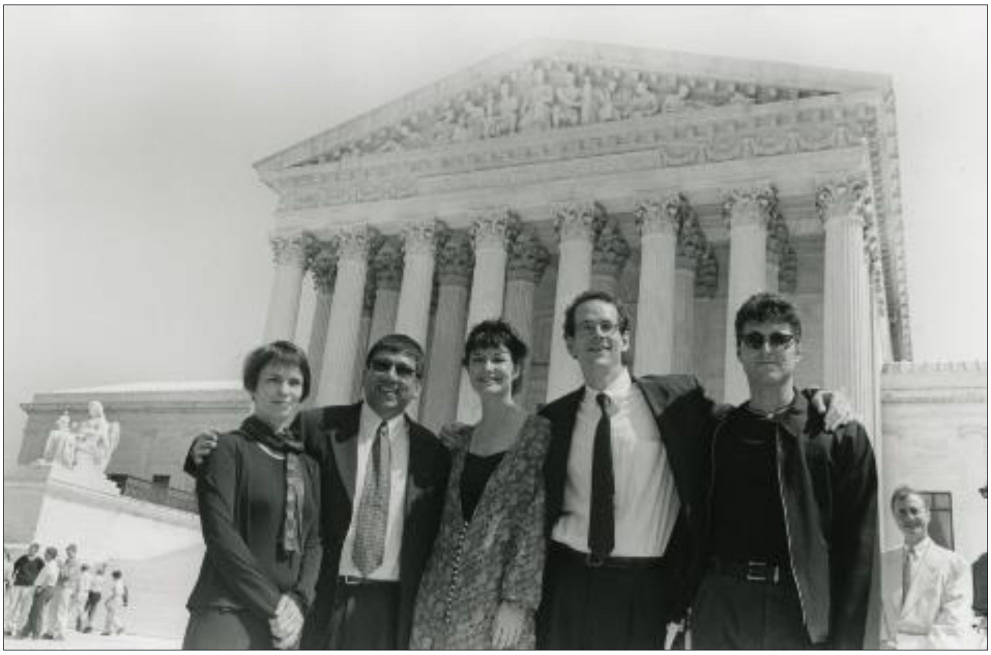

Figure 3.8. McAdams, Dona Ann. Holly Hughes left, Karen Finley centre and Tim Miller right, outside the Supreme Court with their Legal Team, Washington D.C.,1998.

McAdams accompanied the artists to the Supreme Court hearing. In figure 3.8 above, McAdams explained that “their case challenging the ruling on the decency clause had been heard but the verdict had not yet been given. John Fleck was absent as he had an interview for a television role. They lost the case” (PI 2018).

In his email to McAdams following the Supreme Court hearing (Appendix Four), Tim Miller noted that Hughes made the point that the reason they were there, was that Bill Clinton “did not allow the finding of the lower court that ‘standards of decency’ were an unconstitutional criterion for the funding of the arts”. In a statement, Hughes had said: “It's another one of his (Clinton’s) betrayals of the people who elected him, right up there with DOMA [Defense of Marriage Act], so-called welfare reform, don't ask, don't tell” (Hughes). Clinton had promised to end the ban on gays in the military service but was blocked by the Senate Armed Services Committee and by General Colin Powell, the departing Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In 1993 a compromise was that they would not be asked about their sexual orientation and would be required to keep it private, referred to as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Pursue” (Chapman 208). Figures 3.9, and 3.10, below show demonstrators in Washington DC in 1993 protesting this.

Hence Hughes’ and others’ sense of betrayal articulated above at Clinton’s contempt for the gay vote, by white male authoritarian figures whose “commitment is shallow and always contingent” (Hughes PI 2019). Hughes has little faith in gay or straight men being political allies on feminist issues. Such expediency is “[Its] just another form of male supremacy and white supremacy asserting itself” (Hughes). In 1993 McAdams was in Washington for a weekend of activism, “Rage Against the Dying of the Light”, which included a display of the Aids Quilt and marching for the rights of gay people in the military, protesting Clinton’s abandonment of them (PI 2016).

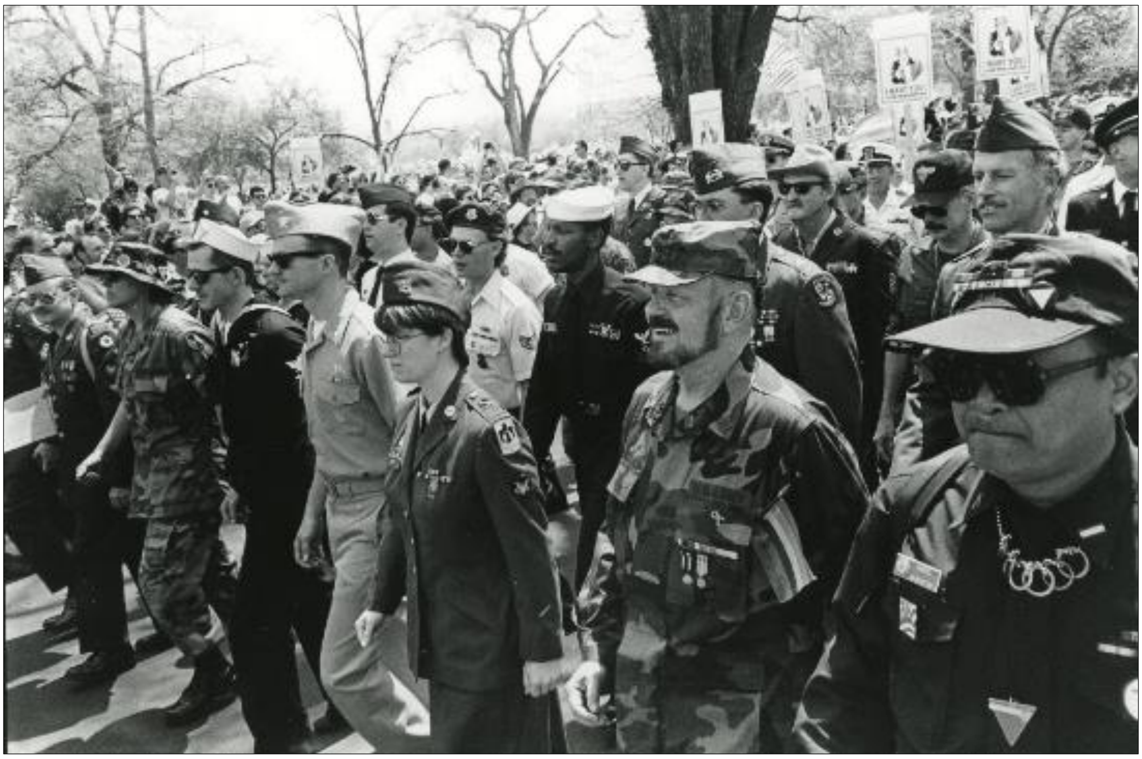

Figure 3.9. McAdams, Dona Ann. Members of the military and supporters marching for the right for gay people to serve in the armed forces, Washington D.C. 1993.

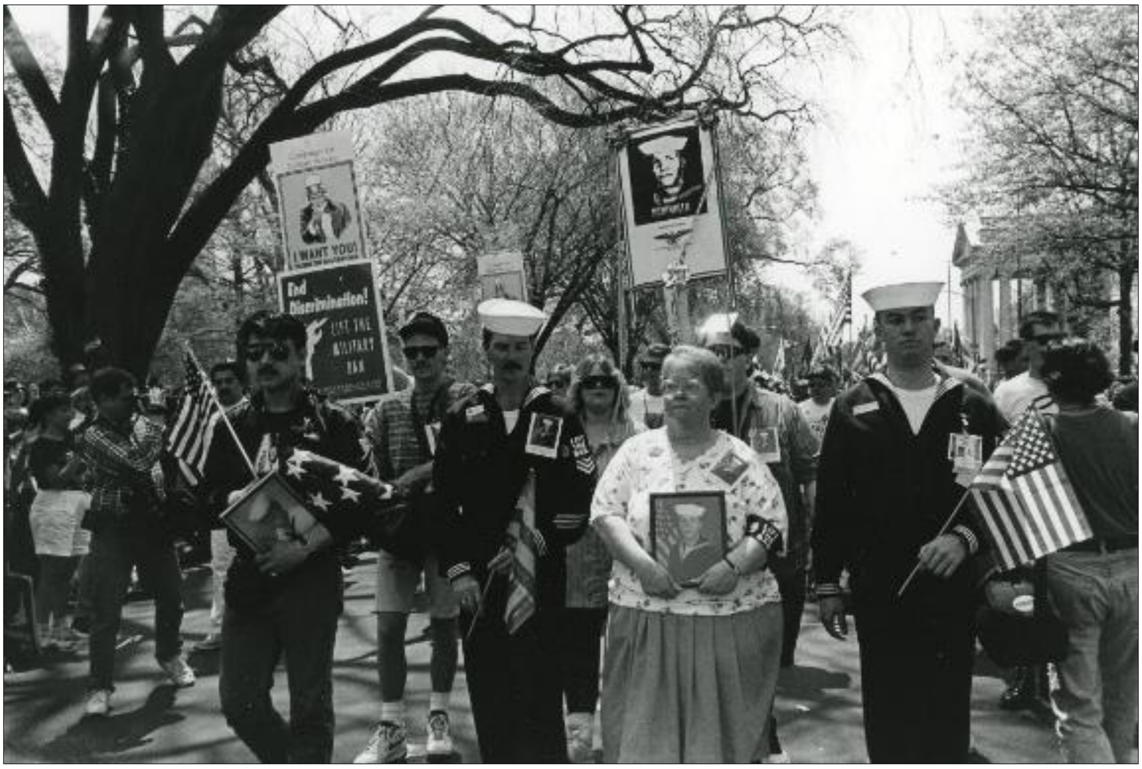
I WANT YOU!
End Discrimination!
LIFT THE MILITARY BAN

Figure 3.10. McAdams, Dona Ann. A mother marches on behalf of her son. Washington D.C. 1993.

McAdams remarked on the incongruity in this picture (figure 3.10, above) which shows a mother marching for her son “who can lay down his life for his country but cannot be openly gay and true to his sexuality” (PI 2018).

Some years later at a group discussion with Robert Ayers at the Fales Library, New York University, in 2004, which brought all four artists together again, John Fleck recalled of the period: “It politicised me. It made me realise that there are these lines and that you have to decide, which side you are on” (ayers). At the same gathering, Tim Miller said, “when all this shit hit the fan, it was already an extremely political era” (ayers). Through his involvement with the ACT UP protest movement, Miller was frequently being arrested. Karen Finley stated that it was not about four individual artists: “This was a collective battle… this was America working…and the reason why [the conservatives] were so angry with us was that progress was being made” (ayers). Holly Hughes expressed regret at “the failure of the left to engage with the issue -

because anxieties about work that was provocative, anxieties about sexuality, the body, and race, are not just anxieties of the right, they are anxieties also of downtown artists" (ayers). Addressing deeper-seated issues discussed above, Hughes mentioned the "long tradition of censorship in this country" and what she called the "unwillingness to see [this episode] as anything other than a problem for a number of individual artists". In a statement after the hearing, Hughes elaborated:

> They [the political right] have successfully used attacks on art as a giant bake sale to build up bucks for other less profitable causes such as killing abortion doctors, gutting the social safety net and fighting affirmative action. (Hughes)

Hughes believed the Supreme Court ruling would have ramifications in many areas from Aids education to public health and education, higher education and reproductive rights (Hughes). Karen Finley added later:

> We've lost sight of what made America so innovative – we were daring, original and not afraid of offending the old guard. We have lost our inventiveness for the sake of appearances….Art cannot afford to be controversial, so it resorts to the standard of a PG rating or what has already been tested. (Finley 1996)

Holly Hughes

Holly Hughes (Hughes) began her career at Women's One World, (WOW) a feminist theatre space in New York's Lower East Side which at one time was the most important venue for Lesbian Theatre. Here Hughes was free to explore her own sexuality "and to understand larger questions about identity and a larger political landscape, about feminism and what was then known as the gay liberation movement" (Aistars). McAdams remembers WOW Café as a place where she could forget everything and "just be among my community and peers", relaxing in the company of women who loved women (PI 2018).

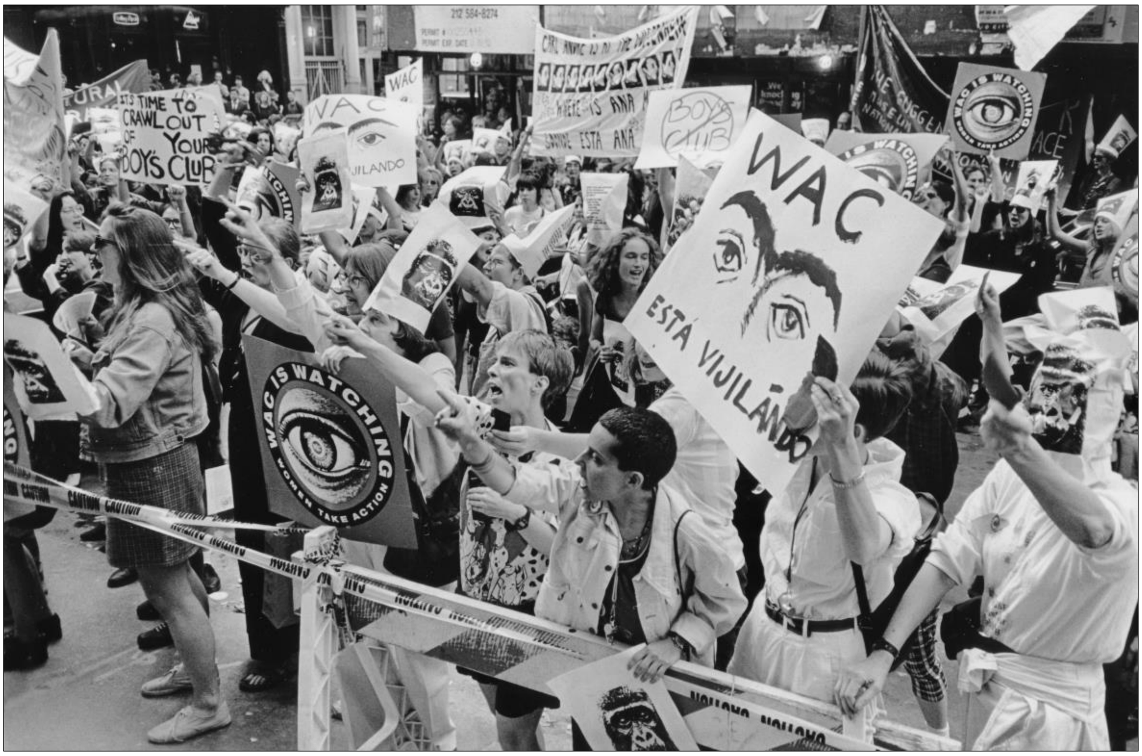
ITS TIME TO CRAWL OUT OF YOUR BOYS CLUB
WAC
VIJILANDO
BOYS CLUB
WAC ESTÁ VIJILANDO
WAC IS WATCHING
WOMEN TAKE ACTION
CAUTION

Figure 3.11. McAdams, Dona Ann. Hughes (centre front) demonstrating with the Women's Action Coalition (WAC) at the lack of representation of women artists in the Guggenheim Museum. 1992.

Along with McAdams Hughes was and remains an ardent supporter of women's rights. In figure 3.11, above, she is seen demonstrating with an activist group addressing women's issues, The Women's Action Coalition (WAC). This was founded by New York artists in 1992 in response to Anita Hill's allegations of sexual misconduct against Supreme Court judge, Clarence Thomas. WAC created its signature "blue dot" logo, seen in the banners above, modelled after television's way of obscuring rape victims' faces on camera. Here the demonstrators are protesting the lack of representation of women artists at the Guggenheim Museum, New York City (McAdams PI 2016).

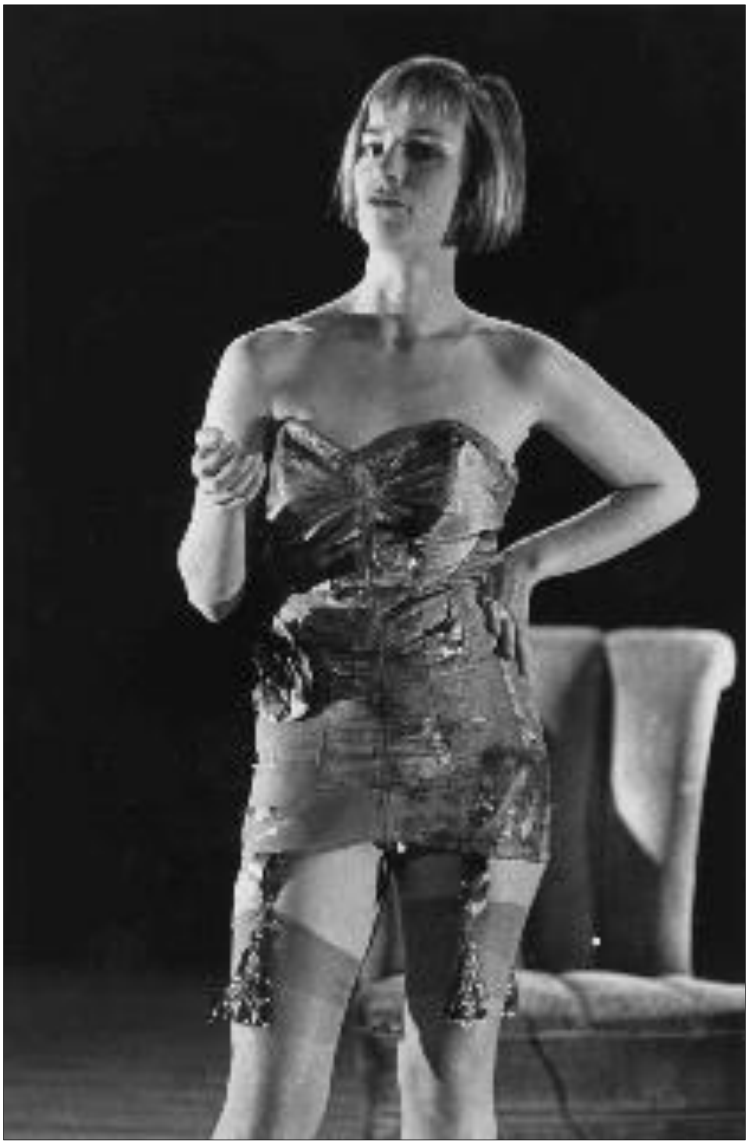

Figure 3.12. McAdams, Dona Ann. Holly Hughes in *World Without End*, her 1989 show that caused her grant to be revoked by the NEA

Hughes identifies as both an artist and a playwright and asserts the rights of gay and solo performance artists to participate in mainstream theatre (Schlossman 209). She is an overtly political performer and acknowledges that “making the lesbian experience visible is a profoundly political act” (Schlossman 215). In 1990 Hughes had found herself at the centre of the funding controversy following her 1989 show, *World Without End*, a monologue inspired by the death of her mother. This piece provoked extreme reactions from conservative critics. Robert Hughes (no relation) called Hughes and fellow NEA Four plaintiff

Karen Finley "emblems of everything that is wrong with American art today" and the Reverend Donald Wildmon (of the American Family Association) had her investigated as a child pornographer (McGrath). Later, in her 1999 performance *Preaching to the Perverted* Hughes reported on her appearance before the US Supreme Court and exposed the hypocrisy of American democracy as she saw it. Hughes emphasised the wider consequences of taking grants away from artists:

> There are reverberations that people are maybe not even aware of — like the fact that that moment became an excuse, basically, for all individual funding for artists to go away. That’s had such a huge impact on cultural institutions large and small, and artists. And also audiences. Because everything gets way more expensive without funding. (Clements, Alexis)

Highlighting the ignorance of her critics, later Hughes wrote “I’m tired of having Pat Buchanan confuse me with Karen Finley, turning us into one big two-headed fem-Nazi he calls ‘the chocolate-covered lesbian’” (Hughes and Román 10).

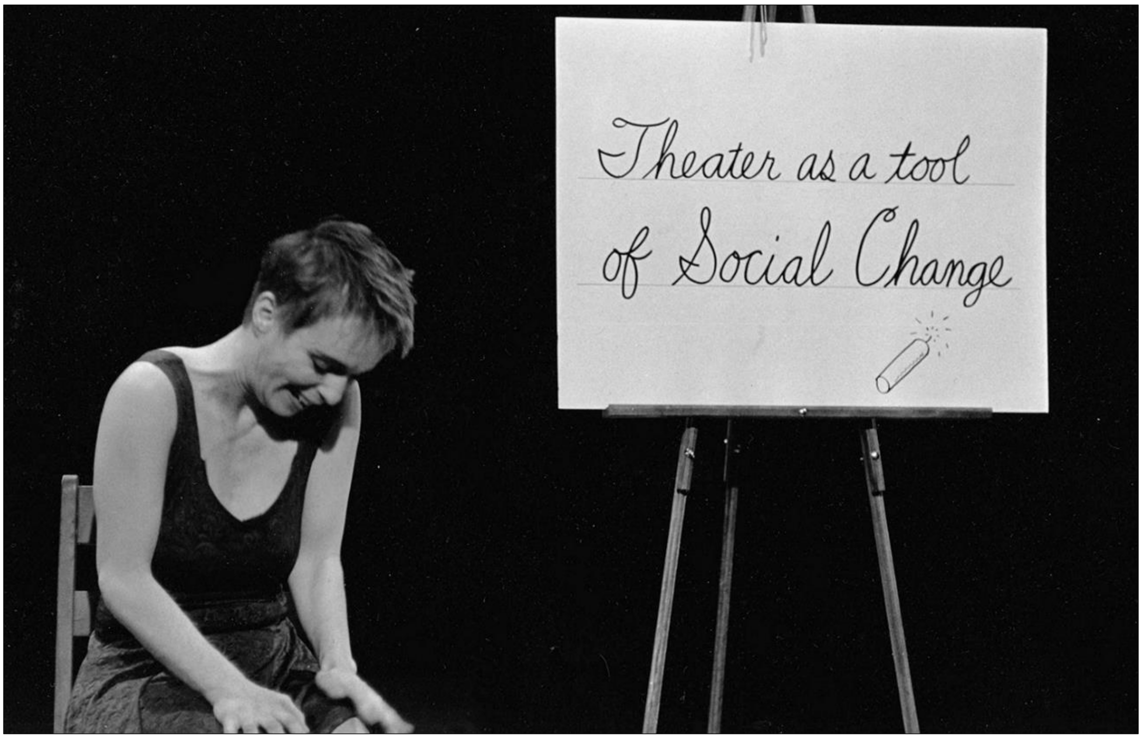

Figure 3.13. McAdams, Dona Ann. Holly Hughes, *Clit Notes*. 1993.

In *Clit Notes*, shown in figure 3.13 above, Hughes turned her experience of the funding controversy into a performance piece and engaged the audience to help with resisting censorship (Meyer 544). Hughes believes she and her fellow defendants were a “lightning rod for larger concerns” at the time of the grant denials:

> We were making work that was about sexuality and gender at a time when there was heightened anxiety about the emergence of new LGBT activism, and anxiety about it because of the Aids epidemic. (Fitch Little)

She had no doubt why her funding was withdrawn. “I lost my funding because I was an out lesbian making work about being a lesbian in a year that Congress had passed a law banning the funding of homoerotic art” (PI 2017). Her legal team advised against the use of the term lesbian, insisting on “homosexual”. Hughes recalled:

> I don’t think anyone wanted to use that term in 1990. Queer theory was already happening. There were heated conversations back then about the words “gay” versus “queer” in academic and activist communities, and the acronym LGBT was beginning to emerge. But mostly *the (New York) Times* and all of the media wanted to avoid allowing any of us a chance to represent ourselves at all. We were talked about through the lens of the Aids panic that rendered us all diseased child molesters. (PI 2017)[6]

The point is that instead of helping people with HIV, the authorities attacked art and deflected attention from their failings on education on public health, Aids, higher education and reproductive rights. Those in need of a welfare safety net were expendable in a global free-market system. Hughes dismissed the decency argument saying “As a queer feminist I know what

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[6] Possibly a reference to the work of celebrity singer Anita Bryant who spoke for the Moral Majority against gay rights and founded a campaign, ‘Save our Children’, which saw homosexuals as predators and a threat to children (Long 3).

‘decency’ means. It’s another code word along the lines of ‘states’ rights’ and ‘family values’” and further stated:

> After all, we are living in a time when we’d rather let people die than promote drug use through needle exchange, we are willing to let people die rather than get safer sex information, we’d rather send African Americans to jail than school. We have successfully scapegoated immigrants, poor women, queers, people of color, unions and intellectuals for the economic devastation brought about by global capitalism. (Hughes)

Hughes was dismayed at the apologies and disclaimers from the political left in response to the distortions of the right. She denounced the Save-the-NEA forces as sidestepping the issue, frequently disowning the work under attack and bragging about how little controversial work had been made while admitting that “some mistakes had been made”, thereby delegitimising the original grant award (Hughes, and Román, 8).

Hughes performed her version of the experience of attending the Supreme Court hearing of National Endowment for the Arts v.Finley et al., in *Preaching to the Perverted (1999)*, (shown in figure 3.14, below). The incorporation of the national flag into performances might have been provocative to viewers as US national flags are sacred and governed by a strict “Flag Code”. Simon P. Newman notes the presence of the national flag at key moments in the national calendar and concludes that from the earliest days, “a shared language of political activity bound Americans together” and gave them “a heightened awareness of their right to participate in political life”, exemplified by Hughes in the photograph (186). Meyer concludes that her “appropriation of the U.S. flag as a mock dress also recalls…the public accusation that her performance art—along with that of Finley, Fleck, and Miller—constituted an assault on American values” (546).

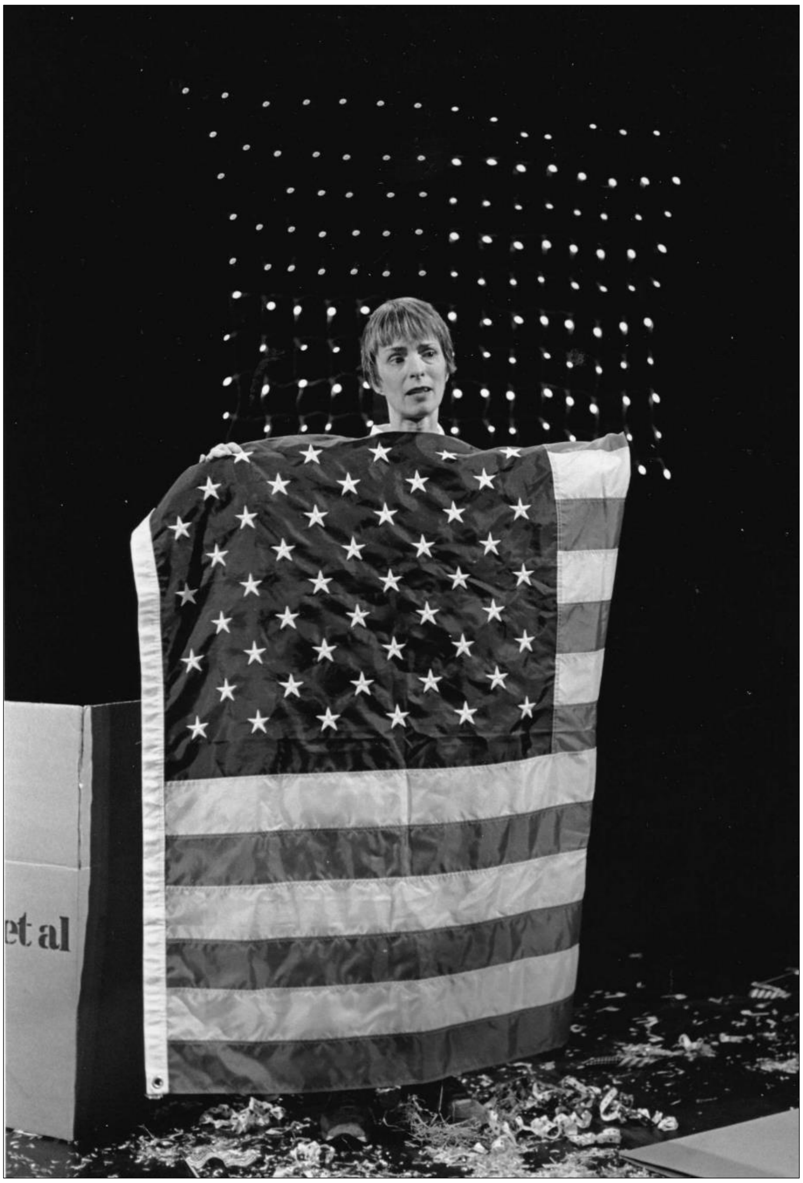

Figure 3.14. McAdams, Dona Ann. Holly Hughes *Preaching to the Perverted,* PS122. 1999.

Tim Miller

As discussed earlier, the community of artists at PS122 saw each other every day, developing their work for and alongside each other, as performers and audience. This is personified in Tim Miller (Miller), a solo performer who incorporates Christian themes in his work, has been described as “an evangelist, a preacher, and a pastor...A queer evangelist whose audience are his congregation” and with whom he may hug and shake hands (Long, 38). Miller grew up in a conservative evangelical California family and draws on this heritage, regarding sacred spaces, like churches, as stages for deep self-expression (Clupper). In 2016, Miller recalled that, although it is a former Public School:

> PS122 even feels like a church. It has this stained glass window there with a great message on it: “Every waking hour we weave, whether we will or no, Every trivial act or word into the warp must go”. Now PS122 is the main center, for contemporary performance in the United States, and I co-founded it thirty years ago. So, I feel them both as churches and see people relate to them as churches. (Miller PI 2016)

In his early work at PS122, such as *Cost of Living* (1983), Miller explored “Middle America”, covering topics such as gender and immigration: “It was about everybody, you, me and the boy next door” and McAdams recalls these early works as containing subtle references to sexuality (McAdams PI 2018). In *Live Boys* (1981), Miller had worked with his then partner John Bernd and this piece was about being gay. Far from preoccupying himself with thoughts of shocking the general public as Senator Helms and the Christian right would later interpret his work, Miller was motivated by his desire to make a difference through his personal experiences and unique perspective as an artist:

> If you look at people’s narratives, and for me, I would say… visiting my boyfriend at Bellevue [Hospital] who was going to die in his mid-20s, and then figuring that out and taking that in and thinking okay, how can I be a community-based performer that also does community practice workshops with non-artists? Each moment offers that challenge, to figure out why is my creativity essential to life on the planet. And to me everything spins out of that, all of the marketing or the professional plan should come out of that—what crucial role do I play at this moment in human history that might actually need my creative two cents? (Clements)

McAdams has worked extensively with Miller, who told her “Most people, if they can conjure an image of me, it’s probably one of Dona’s photos” implying that she had captured the essence of him (McAdams PI 2018). McAdams recalls that Miller was one of her first subjects when she began photographing performance in the early 1980s. She would get involved with all his pieces including at the initial research phase, dialoguing around it, photographing it, being in it, as with *Democracy in America* (1984), the cover of which is shown below.

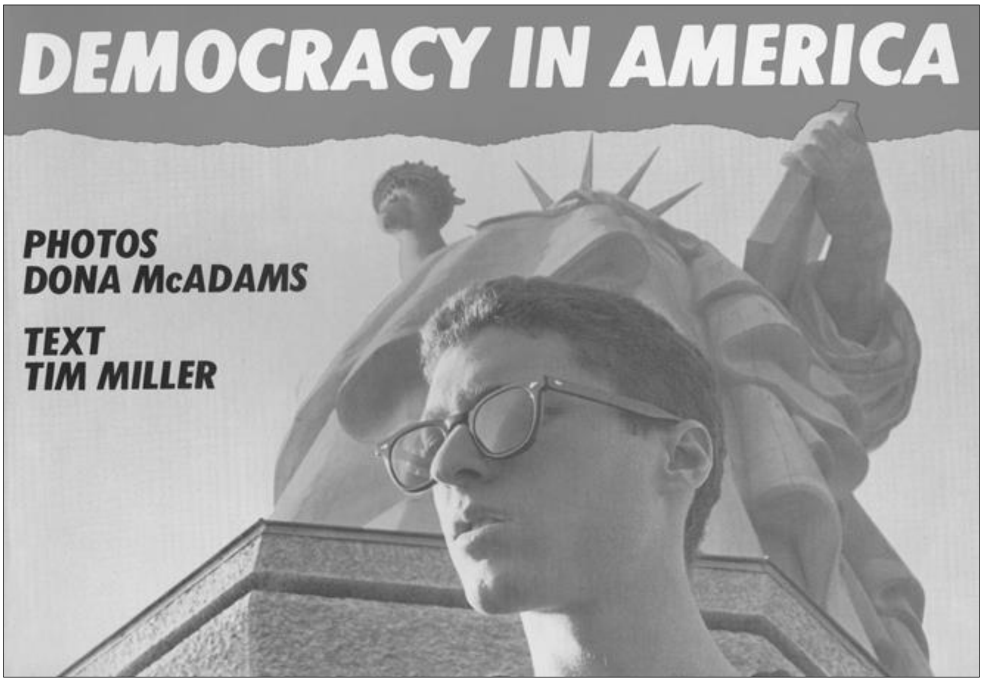

Figure 3.15. McAdams, Dona Ann. Democracy in America, Artists' Book. 1984. Front Cover.

Democracy in America was both a staged performance and an artists' book, that she and Miller co-produced and was supported by a grant from the NEA. In the performance, McAdams played the part of a photographer and shot from the stage, as opposed to her usual viewpoint, shooting from the audience's perspective. In a 2016 interview, she told me that she considers *Democracy in America* her best documentation of Miller's work as she took numerous photographs from a variety of angles and felt she was "integrated into Tim's work, his process and indeed his life, which *is* his work". McAdams also appeared in *Some Golden States* and *Shirts and Skin* and mentioned that she likes to feel fully integrated into performance art, that she regards Miller as having a deep understanding of her as an artist and a person, not only in her performance work but also in her other art-making[7] (PI 2016).

Democracy in America was an early and ambitious work: “a big ‘ensemble’ piece”, by Miller and McAdams (PI 2016). McAdams recalls that “after this Miller moved on to write and perform solo pieces” (PI 2016). It is an intensely personal portrait of America, questioning what it is to be American and what is democracy. In *Democracy in America,* Miller writes:

> When I saw Dona’s pictures, I thought they could give me a platform to support these stories I wanted to tell. That there’s a sort’ve [sic] bigger calling other than just art-making which goes with the art impulse. Feeding the thing… There’s a dilemma about being an American. I look for any articulation of this American dilemma. (*Democracy in America,* Introduction)

Undeterred by the national press and congressional outrage over controversial art and a narrative of a “wholesome” nation, they self-consciously “entered the fray” (Introduction). “It wasn’t as if one image happened to look like America. But these pictures were the ones that had an idea of my interpretation about the way things looked” *(Democracy in America* 3). Miller was searching for meaning, for an idea of “America” and for a place to fit in. “How it all works. What it all means. How I fit in” (5). He describes finding an abandoned American flag on the street and taking it home to clean and repair. He put it over his bed “cause it made me remember where I was” (7). He mentions losing the flag but still wanting “to fix it up”, perhaps symbolic of his frustration in his search for meaning and belonging and how to make a difference in society. This was in 1984, during the emerging Aids Crisis, and their friend and Miller’s former partner, John Bernd, and others in their community had become sick.

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[7] In particular, she referred to her work with the mentally ill in a project that came to be called *The Garden of Eden* and is the subject of the next chapter.

ACT-UP and the NEA controversy would come later but the beginnings of the Aids Crisis had cast the shadow of mortality over them. McAdams refers to the making of *Democracy in America* as “the lost innocence. It was a pure and happy time, but with an undertow. We were in the ocean…but the storm had not hit, it was on the horizon” (PI 2018).

In 1988 Bernd died from Aids complications and Miller had moved to Los Angeles. Later, Miller expressed his grief in writing and performing *Naked Breath*, begun in 1992 and staged in 1994. McAdams situates the emotional core of the piece in the washing scene where a naked Miller is bathed by an anonymous performer, recalling that “a man comes back from the audience to wash Tim [Miller]and for a moment it is as if John is back. The theme is purification, purification of blood” (McAdams PI 2018). Miller wanted to connect with another man and “honor, the small human-sized victory of remembering what has happened” (Hughes, and Román 51). Fear of HIV contaminated blood abounded owing to the lack of understanding about how the virus was transmitted.

In *Stretch Marks*, 1990, figure 3.16, below, Miller addresses the sociopolitical climate of HIV/Aids in the United States and the homophobic agendas of President Ronald Reagan’s administration “envisioning a queer futurity beyond the stigma of HIV/Aids where gay men are free to be themselves” (Tim Miller - Franklin Furnace). Franklin Furnace had footage of this performance but went bankrupt during the height of the culture wars, and the footage was later preserved by the Hemispheric Institute Digital Video Library (Tim Miller - Franklin Furnace).

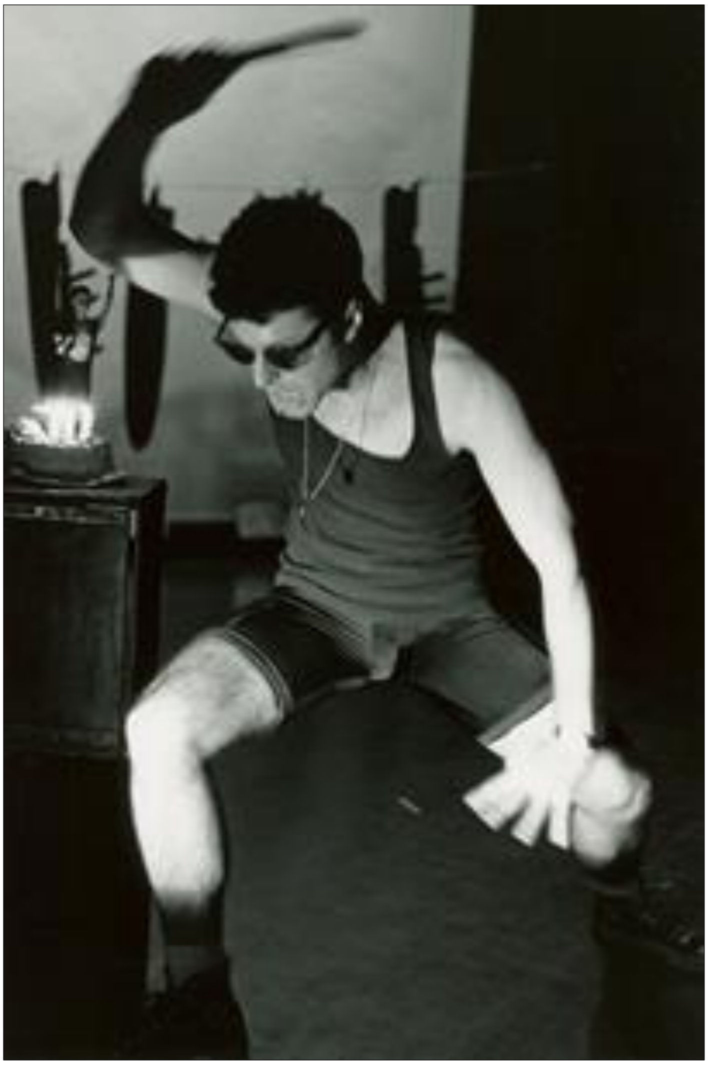

Figure 3.16. McAdams, Dona Ann. Tim Miller, *Stretch Marks, PS122.* 1990.

McAdams had travelled to Washington to support Miller, Finley and Hughes at the Supreme Court hearing. Miller wrote of his experience there in an email to friends from April 1998 in which he dubbed himself “your Court Reporter” (Appendix Four). He noted the irony of his adventure in court beginning with spending the previous night at his brother’s house, “in the lap of a heterosexual family unit”, being woken the next morning by his nephews bouncing up and down on his bed and shouting “Uncle Tim!, Uncle Tim!” while they pummeled him with pillows (Appendix Four). This evokes an image of wholesome family life, in contrast to the accusations of deviance from those who decried his work and lifestyle as “un-American”. He goes on to mention arriving at the Supreme Court to see McAdams already there, along with Karen Finley and Holly Hughes waiting in line as well as Willem Defoe and other Wooster Group members. “Walking up the long steep marble steps felt like a sword and sandals epic from the 50s” and was, owing to many familiar faces present from the years the controversy had lasted, “strangely like a high school reunion” (Appendix Four). The point Miller wanted to get across to the media after the hearing was that “younger artists all over the country have got the message loud and clear that work about sexuality, politics or gender gets in a whole mess of trouble” (Appendix Four). He thought of his students at Cal State (California State University) “who struggle through all this censoring shit to try to claim their expression” to emphasise that it is the emerging artists who “are really getting f***ed by this “chilling” limiting of free speech” (Appendix Four).

Miller reflected on what being an American meant to him, noting his usual enthusiasm for Civics Class, “Democracy in Action”, had been depleted by the Supreme Court battle and on the irony of having lunch in the restaurant named “America” at Union Station to debrief the day (Appendix Four). For McAdams and Miller, the irony lay in not knowing what America was and whether or not they were a part of it. Miller was mindful of a “zillion little struggles that are really where my work needs to be done” among which were “dismantling the censor in his head which got put in there through a thousand (discriminatory) experiences in my life” (Appendix Four). Particularly important to him was to continue to provide a performance space for his students at Cal State and elsewhere, “to do our wildest and most truthful work” (Appendix four).

Miller had co-founded *Highways* with Linda Burnham in 1989, a Santa Monica performance space for LGBTQ artists which provided a safe space where artists could improve work and perfect it, and where they could be validated (Cheng 452). Miller relished seeing his students “sift through their own issues of identity and come up with powerful and specific statements of self. Their skin and their history their voices alive in the room” (Appendix Four). Miller’s sense of civic duty shines through in his concluding comment to the email in which he identifies important work to be done: (to) “dig deep into my life as a queer citizen and trying to figure out what the stories are that I need to bring forward as an artist for myself and my community” (Appendix Four). In 1992 the NEA revoked all the institution’s visual arts programme funding (Cheng 452). Once again Miller found himself courting controversy while championing the rights of marginalised artists to hold performances. At Highways, during the early 1990s, “Miller's free performance workshops with gay men were literally life-saving” in that they taught performance and provided education about HIV/Aids (Cheng 453).

Years later in an email to McAdams from September 1999, Miller related his experience of loud protests outside the theatre before his show each night, as he performed in Chattanooga, southeastern Tennessee. He described “local right-wing church and political types” hassling the Arts centre that brought him in, forcing the full strength audience to walk past “a couple of dozen freaks protesting outside with confederate flags” and yelling “Faggots. Burn in hell!” (Appendix Three). Miller relished that his presence in some small way can “really change the local brew of homophobia, make it publicly reveal itself” and that the performances provided “a gathering place for the local forces of diverse (queer and otherwise) progressive hipness to come forward and embolden one another” (Appendix Three). Whilst there Miller visited the Civil War battlefield of Chickamauga on the border with Georgia, a significant Confederate victory over the Unionists in September 1863. He ruefully noted, “The images of the protestors (outside his performance) waving the rebel flag was fresh in my mind, made me realise how much the Civil War is still going on" (Appendix Three). Tim Miller ended his email to McAdams from Chatanooga with "Pray for me", an appeal to a God who sees all men as equal and endowed by their Creator with unalienable rights, as affirmed by the American Consitution (Appendix Three).

Karen Finley

McAdams met Karen Finley (Finley) in the late 1970s at the San Francisco School of Art where they both studied. Each separately made her way back to New York, drawn by its reputation as the arts capital of America and the platform for radical artistic expression (Finley PI 2015). Finley felt that hers was the first generation of women who could use their voice to address issues of oppression, that few women were doing that then, and she decided to be direct in contrast to work which was purely aesthetic, or abstract with hidden messages (PI 2015). Finley's work employs monologue often delivered in a trance-like state, to differentiate it from acting (Finley PI 2015). She wanted to highlight women disadvantaged, victimised and vulnerable in social relationships and used her body naked or partially naked to express her art, regarded as obscene by some and artistic by others. "By using patriarchal conventions (the nude body) to display political acts, Finley's art subverts dominant ideologies" (Hardie 97).

McAdams recalled that when they came to be working together at PS122 initially, Finley did not want her performances photographed but soon developed a collaborative relationship with McAdams based on mutual trust (McAdams PI 2015). Finley was wary even of the female gaze and the potential to objectify her and dilute the intention of her work but wanted her work documented (Finley PI 2015).

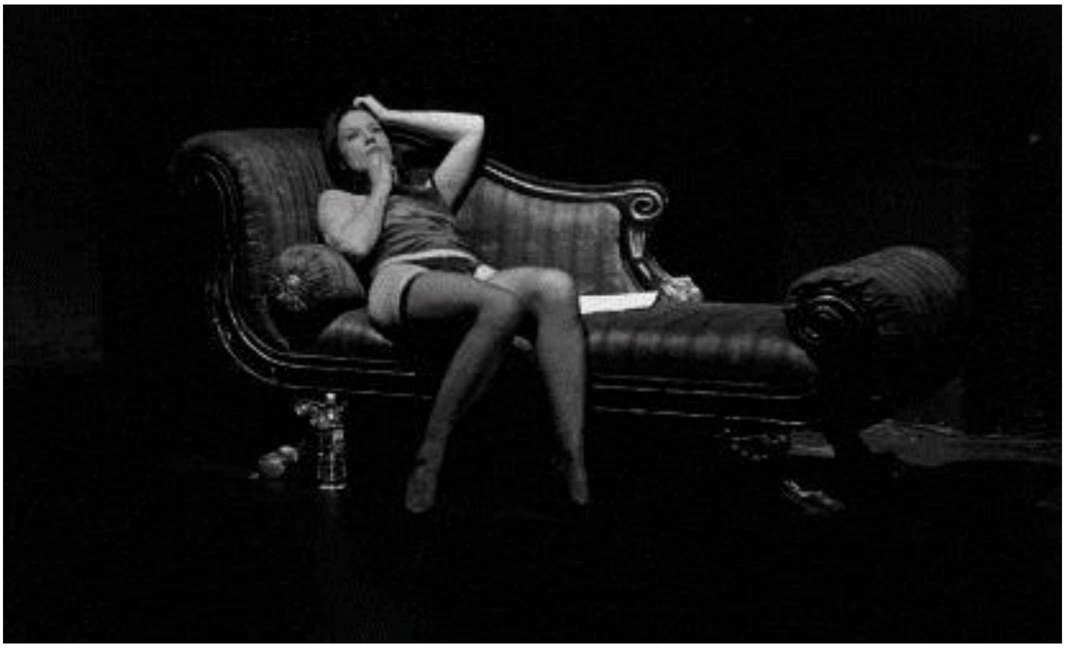

Figure 3.17. McAdams, Dona Ann. Karen Finley, *Shut Up and Love Me*, PS122. 2001.

McAdams has observed that “In the history of art, women are mostly relegated to the role of inspiring muses: loved, admired and revered but almost always on male terms, in a passive role” (PI 2018). Figure 3.17, above, shows Finley in a subversion of the woman-and-mirror vanity trope in which mirror-gazing transcends vanity and underscores dominant, usually male, ideals of beauty and power. Finley subverts convention and deliberately sets herself to be objectified, becoming the very thing men accuse women of, a seductress, and defiantly returns the gaze: “My work is about [female] vanity, passivity” (Finley PI 2015). In this, as Finley describes it, she is not perpetuating the objectification of women, but rather subverting the male gaze as reclaims her power as a woman and shows herself willingly in these roles on her terms (Finley PI 2015).

The female gaze, here in the form of McAdams, offers another perspective, a counter to the male gaze. Finley was very aware of the power dynamic in the relationship between photographer and subject and wanted to be in control: "working closely with [McAdams] I felt empowered in being involved in the taking and selection [of the images, during the performance] and knowing where the image is" [after it has been taken] (PI 2015). McAdams prioritised her subjects and wanted an enduring, trusting relationship with them (PI 2019). McAdams described being in a theatre, photographing performance:

> There is already a dialogue between the photographer and their subject. It is all contained, it moves around you. As a photographer I felt I needed to be invited into the situation, to be part of the community, the process, the give and take. The quality of trust is essential to me because if you lose sight of what the work is about, the subject, the work suffers and is short-sighted. (P 2016)

In any performance photograph, there is a circulation of gazes: for McAdams "it is a combination of observation and representation" (McAdams PI 2015). Finley sought reassurance from McAdams that she would not be objectified even though, in most instances, the female gaze does not fetishize the female body. McAdams does capture Finley's sexuality in her images and celebrates Finley not as a nude, but as a creative being. McAdams may have benefitted from Finley being comfortable with her which gave her privileged access to moments in Finley's performances. Finley has devoted her work to the problem that women face: "trying to find a sensible way of living within a code of being desired" (Carr). Finley explained:

> I was doing work different from other female performance artists, very direct work about brutality, sexual trauma and violence [towards women]. At the same time, I was an ingenue, desirable. Unusually for the time, I was directing myself. I was very aware of the camera, the presence of the photographer, watching, being looked at. I wanted to be involved in the selection of images and sought reassurance that McAdams would not go against my wishes. I was aware that photographs could be manipulated and alter the emphasis of my work. It was about desirability, not sexuality or feminine beauty as such. (PI 2015)

Finley gained notoriety for her 1989 show *We Keep Our Victims Ready*, in which she daubed herself in chocolate to tell the story of Tawana Brawley, who had alleged that police officers had raped her and smeared her with faeces. At the end, Finley covered herself with tinsel “because no matter how bad a woman is treated, she still knows how to get dressed for dinner” (Finley 84). This work brought her to the attention of Senator Jesse Helms who used it as a focus in his efforts to undermine the NEA. The photograph below is from the show, *The Constant State of Desire*, 1987. McAdams noted that Finley does not do dress rehearsals and her work evolves in front of live audiences (PI 2016). McAdams told me that Finley, on impulse, threw candies at the audience at the end, and McAdams caught it on the last frame in her roll of film (PI 2016). Scrutiny of the contact sheet reveals a small white patch at the bottom right, where the frame is incomplete and McAdams counts herself “lucky to have it” (PI 2016).

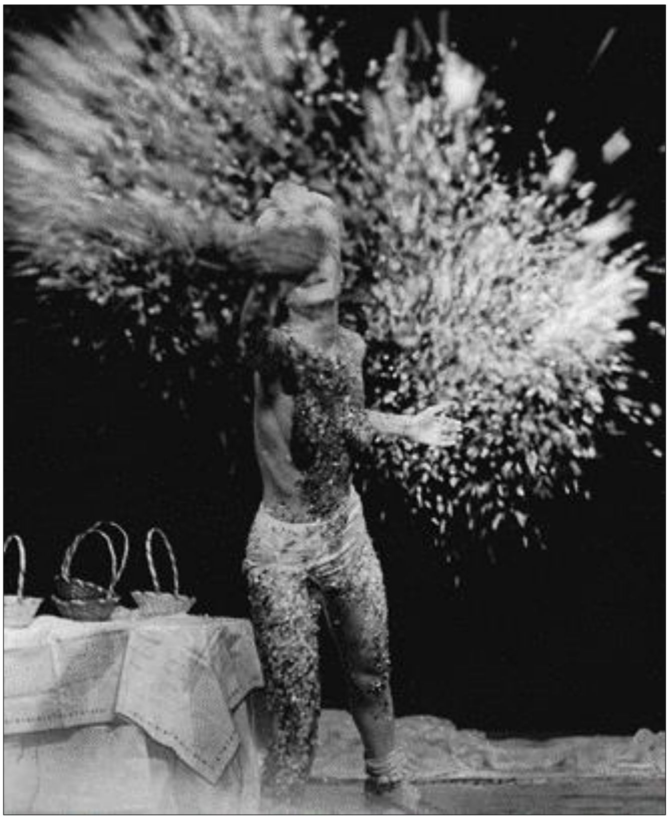

Figure 3.18.McAdams, Dona Ann. Karen Finley *The Constant State of Desire,* PS122. 1987.

Figure 3.19, below, shows Finley at PS122 in *St Valentine's Day Massacre,* at the Pyramid Club, February 14, 1989, a performance which developed into the piece *We Keep Our Victims Ready* (1990). This photograph was sought by the press after the NEA withdrew her funding and came to be known as "the chocolate smeared woman" (McAdams PI 2016).

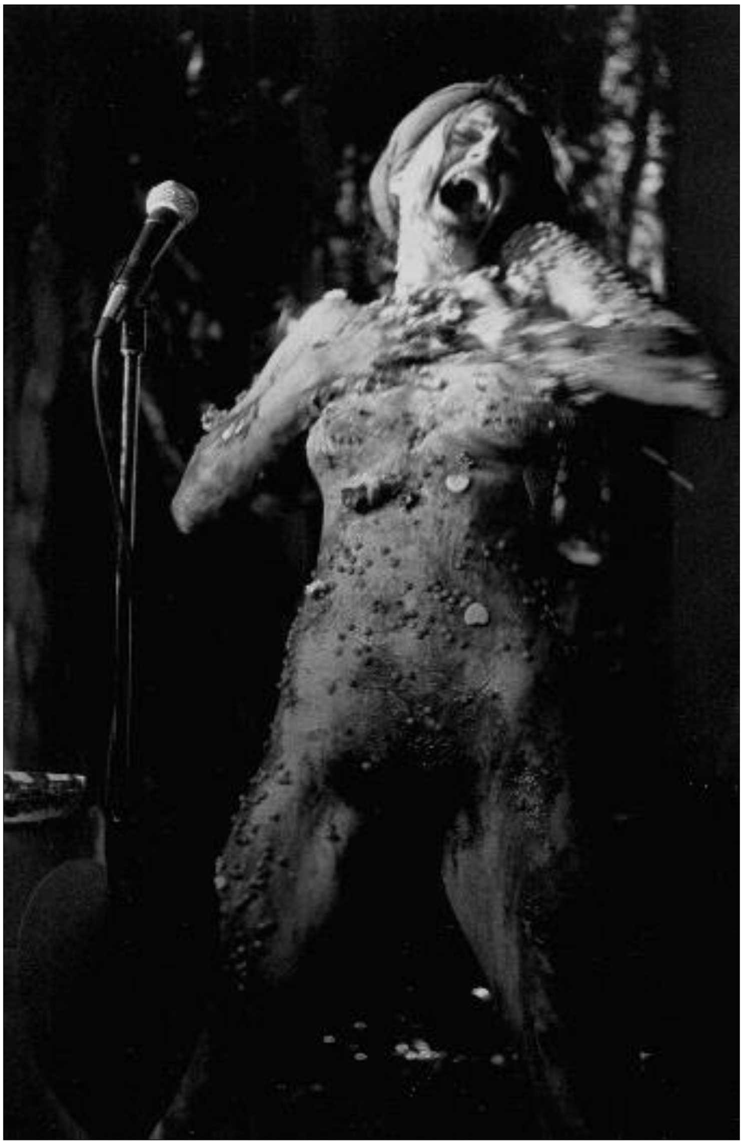

Figure 3.19. McAdams, Dona Ann. Karen Finley, *St Valentine's Day Massacre*. Pyramid Club, New York City. 1990.

McAdams' images have captured Finley's feminist performance art in which she politicises societal taboos. McAdams and Finley decided not to release this photograph when the NEA funding was withdrawn and it became the subject of Congress and national media attention (PI 2016). McAdams reflected that “The photographs I released were not what the Press wanted. Everyone had clothes on. No one looked hysterical. They looked like regular people” (Maude-Roxby 106). It bears repeating that McAdams was aware that the photograph could be presented out of context and used to fuel controversy:

> I am very careful about this because of the context in which they might appear. I have responsibility…if a newspaper calls up and wants a photograph…or a magazine wants a certain image, I’m going to talk to the artists first. I can’t control the caption material or what is said about the photo but I can come up with an image that would best describe the work in an empowering way, which made the press very unhappy. (PI 2016)

Finley writes that her performance of *"We Keep Our Victims Ready”* (1990) in which she incorporates the chocolate, was taken out of context, and that she was misrepresented (Finley 1990). In the context of NEA grant withdrawals, she saw in this attack by the columnists as part of a growing trend of suppressing artists, “especially those whose work deals with difficult social issues -- by playing on society's fears, prejudices and problems” (Finley). She further clarified that she did not request support from the NEA for another performance, *We Keep Our Victims Ready,* and she also took exception to the description of her work as "a chocolate-smeared young woman" by journalists Evans and Novak as it described her work as sexual or sexually explicit (Finley). Rather than being erotic, Finley intended the smearing of chocolate as a symbol of being treated like dirt because she was a woman. The description of the work that Finley gives for *Chocolate Smeared Woman* is as follows:

> In the first act, I sit in a rocking chair, fully clothed, and talk about women as the underclass and society under patriarchal rule. In the second act, I talk about the daily oppression of women, people with Aids and minorities and about how society ignores and suppresses these people. In the third act, I am shrouded in a white sheet at a bed, symbolizing a

> deathbed. There I talk about the survivors of a death in the wake of Aids, the "Black Sheep" of our culture who are related by their diversities and are all part of our large extended family. By the end, the audience is usually moved to tears. (Finley)

As Finley describes it, the work is nuanced rather than being reduced to the “sexual”. It explores “the lived experiences of women, people with Aids, the poor or underclass, and minorities” (Finley). Finley herself called this treatment a “witch-hunt of the arts” which did not “truly represent the wishes of the American people but merely those of a fanatic faction” (Finley). Finley was considered to be obscene because of her work which was explicit in its depiction of female bodies, whereas Finley herself saw in this a hypocritical society that tolerated obscenity in the form of porn but shunned it in the form of art (Finley). In an interview, she said,

> If I was doing porn they'd be very happy. When they book me they think they're going to get some kinky chick from New York going out there shoving my tits in their face. When they find out I'm more than that- well, in London I was canceled out this summer. (Finley)

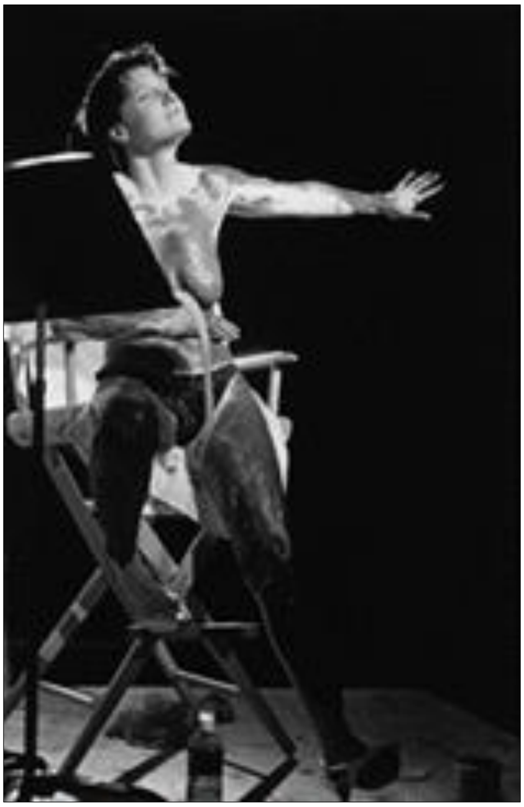

Figure 3.20. McAdams, Dona Ann. Karen Finley, *We Keep Our Victims Ready* PS122. 1990.

Possibly in response to the scene shown in figure 3.20, above, an insightful observation by a viewer shows how her art could be perceived:

> A topless woman stood on a darkened stage. Her long brown ponytail was loosely swept in a bandana as she determinedly dumped a brown cakey substance on her chest and arms. The crowd's cheers recalled a back-alley strip club. But the setting was not a strip club. It was Lincoln Center in 1990. And this was art. The woman, Karen Finley, a performance artist, smiled and broke into a tremulous laugh before beginning a snarling diatribe. "All those scars on your body are evidence of my love for you," she barks. "I shot myself because I love you. It's better to feel abuse than to feel nothing at all". Finley was making a statement about women. (Smith)

In her 2001 performance of Shut Up and Love Me, (figure 3.21, below), Finley parodies mud wrestling and the story of Winnie the Pooh. She smeared herself with honey in place of the earlier chocolate and assumes a statue-like state, but remains in control of her own objectification.

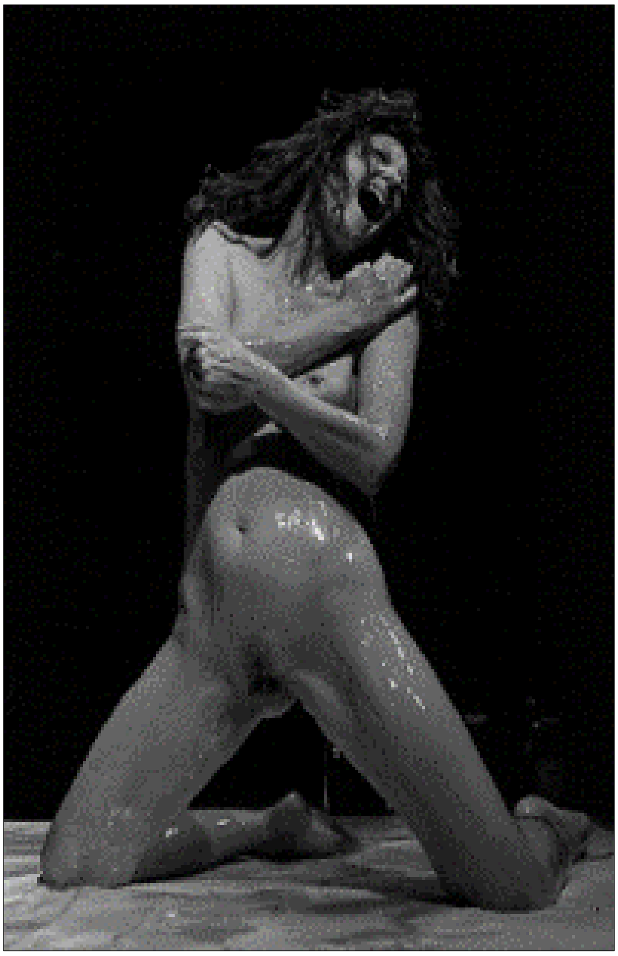

Figure 3. 21. McAdams, Dona Ann. Karen Finley*, Shut Up and Love Me,* PS122. 2001.

Village Voice observed: “In classic Finley fashion she did not so much perform the pieces as perform the performance of them” and she invoked “remarkable vulnerability, pathos and beauty” (Soloski). Eventually, the notoriety around her nudity and use of foodstuffs to promote her argument overpowered her work and obscured her messages. Finley did not want the “Chocolate Smeared Woman” photograph to define her and she and McAdams agreed it would not be released unless in a safe context. Finley stated that she values social justice over notoriety and reaffirmed her commitment to the seriousness of her art (de Vries). On the question of ownership of the photographs derived from her work, Finley told me that she respects the history and tradition of performance art which borrows from so many genres, making it counterintuitive to hold on to her own art (PI 2015). She elaborated:

> reciprocity extends the relationship between photographer and performer, into the public domain. At some point, the work goes outside of me, beyond me. I am not just holding it in. The gesture [of letting go] is important, letting the world know that I am willing to open up. A single gesture, that’s where it begins. It contributes to healing, [it] creates a bridge. (PI 2015)

John Fleck

The final artist in the “NEA Four” group is John Fleck whose work “deals with issues of violence, the media, consumerism and sexual identity” (Schlossman 221) and who came under scrutiny for his 1989 performance *Blessed Are All the Little Fishes.* In this piece, a drunken man is transformed into a priest-like figure after witnessing a miracle in his toilet bowl (evoking the Christian story of Jesus walking on water). Thereafter, he goes on to read the Bible and pee into the toilet bowl to bring forth a living, moving creature, a goldfish, which he part loves and part abuses (Schlossman 222). The fish is ultimately ‘saved’ by an actor who had been planted in the audience.

Fleck was criticised for *Blessed Are All the Little Fishes* for being offensive to Christians as he was shown as urinating on the toilet bowl shortly after Christ appeared in it. The insinuation was that Christ was shown as being urinated on by the artist, which Fleck denied (222). Fleck has spoken about religious influence on his art: “I loved the pageantry of the Mass and the ritual of it all … But my imagination was definitely fed by the spectacle of the Mass & and Heaven / Hell Concept” (TheOriginalVanGoghsEarAnthology). Working closely alongside Fleck to photograph his performances, McAdams understood that he incorporated “themes of shame and spiritual truth” into his work and felt that criticism of his work on religious grounds may have been puzzling to him (McAdams PI 2016). Fleck responded to the criticism of his work in a letter where he questioned one of his critics, Charles Marowitz, who was quoted in a Breslauer article by asking whether the critic had even seen *Blessed Are All the Little Fishes* (Breslauer). Fleck emphasised the complex issues that are raised by his art and wanted to reach out to a wide audience on “religious issues, masculine/feminine behavior, dysfunctional families, addiction, environmental issues, politics, etc” (Breslauer).

Fleck went on to create a new piece, *Snowball’s Chance in Hell* (1992) in response to the press coverage during the NEA defunding. He described it: “It’s all about a kind of information overload; it’s about this poor schmuck who has no identity but just believes everything he reads and everything he hears” (Clements, Alexis). John Fleck took his career beyond performance art and went on to establish himself as a stage and screen actor. He is seen in figure 3.22, below, in his performance, *I got the He-Be-She-Be’s,* at PS122, 1988.

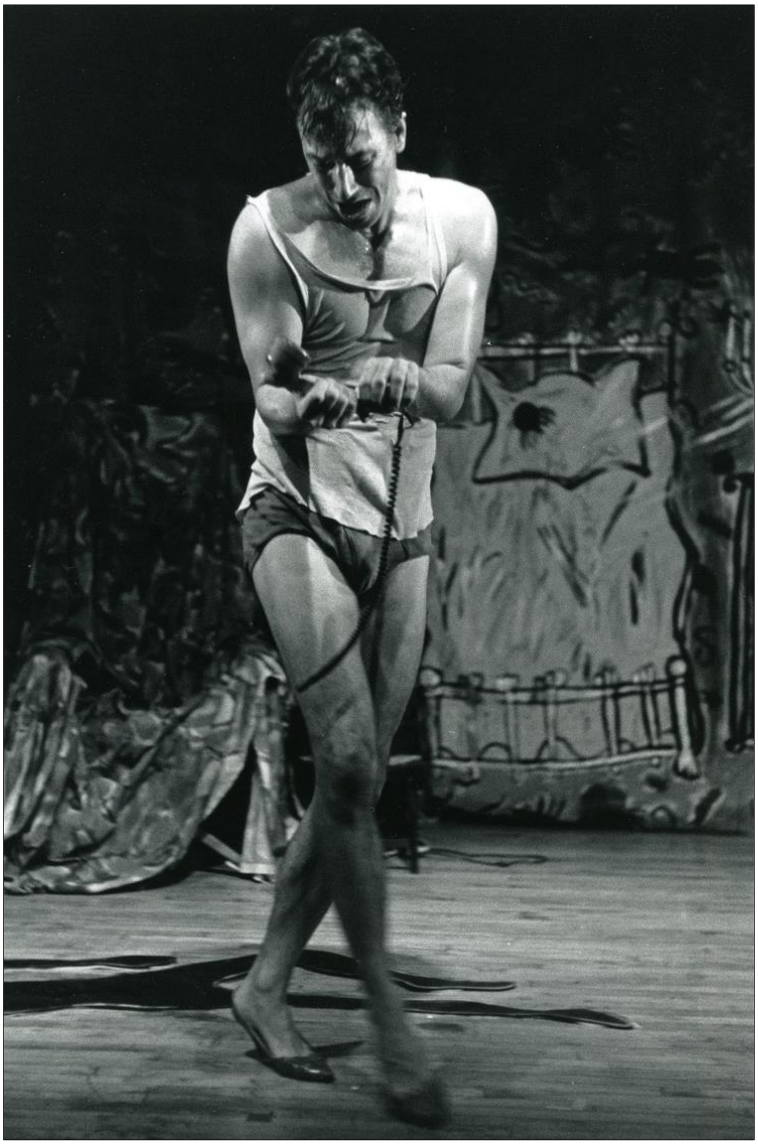

Figure 3.22. McAdams, Dona Ann. John fleck in *I got the He-Be-She-Be's,* PS122. 1988.

McAdams' Record of Advocating for Artists at PS122

At PS122 McAdams also photographed other performers such as Ron Athey, and Annie Sprinkle who were also caught up in the NEA funding controversy and the rhetoric of censure. McAdams was and is a sex-positive feminist. While still in San Francisco, in 1975, McAdams met Margot St James, a former prostitute, founder of COYOTE, (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics), an organisation advocating decriminalisation of prostitution. McAdams was therefore well versed in the issues around pornography and sex work in the feminist movement. Eleanor Heartney has observed that "pornography has emerged as a major battleground in the war for the control of culture” (16). The introduction of the “decency clause” for NEA funding brought pornography into focus and exposed fault lines within the feminist movement, some of whom saw it as “ [a] reinforcement of a sexist, patriarchal status quo” and therefore a form of male dominance (16).

Amidst the controversy about decency and offending national sensibilities, Annie Sprinkle readily acknowledged her work as containing elements of pornography. Sprinkle was a former porn star and briefly a burlesque artist whose act was “very erotic, playful and promiscuous” as she describes it in her book *Annie Sprinkle: Post Porn Modernist* (151). As Heartney argues, pornographic images appear in art and popular culture because they are part of human nature (Jones 149). Heartney observes that wider society does not acknowledge certain areas of human experience which are outside of and challenge the accepted norms: however “some women artists and writers did adopt a quasi-pornographic content or form in order to assert the claims of female desire and sexuality as part of the women's movement’s general challenge to patriarchy” (149). Sprinkle was a champion for sex workers’ rights and part of the “Sex-Positive” Movement of the 1980s which sought to change cultural attitudes and norms around sexuality. She and feminist writers and artists collective, “Carnival Knowledge”, staged a festival at the New School, New York, to educate visitors about reproductive rights and female sexuality (see figure 3.25, below). Sprinkle used her experience to champion women’s rights and today she is a certified sexologist and advocate for sex work and healthcare. Annie Sprinkle performed at PS122 and also at The Kitchen in Chelsea, Manhattan, where she was photographed by McAdams (see figure 3.23, below).

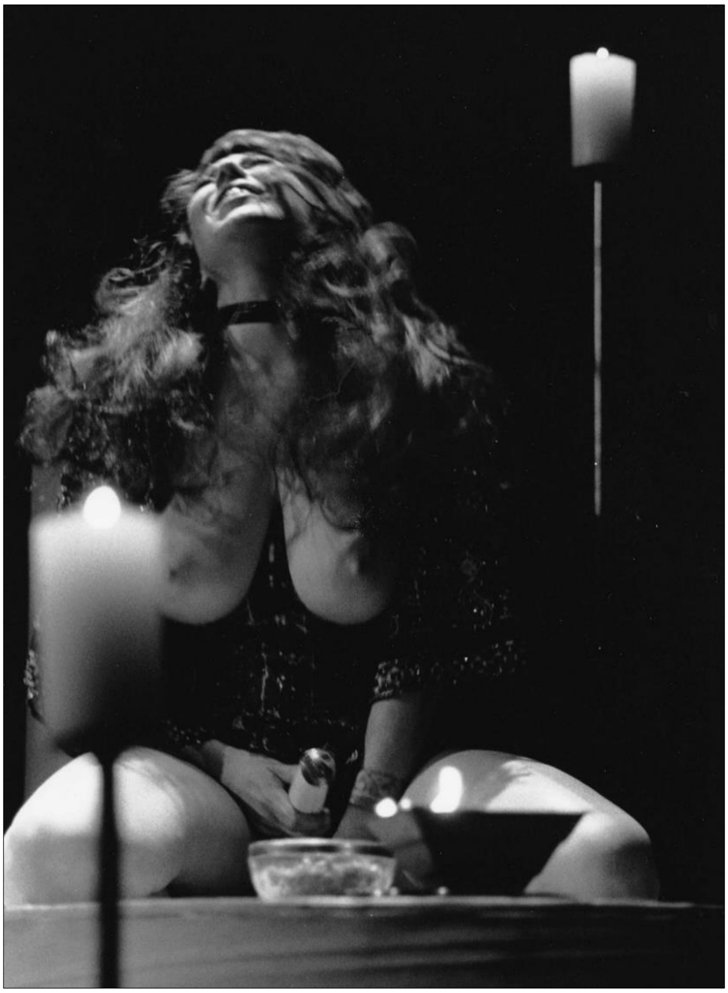

Figure 3. 23. McAdams, Dona Ann. Annie Sprinkle *Post Porn Modernist,*
The Kitchen, New York City. 1990.

In February 1990, California congressman Dana R. Rohrabacher questioned the Committee on Education and Labor in the House, asking whether the performance of *Annie Sprinkle: Post Porn Modernist* at The Kitchen in New York, during which Sprinkle recounted tales of sleeping with 3,000 men, “sounded like an appropriate use of tax dollars to you?” (NEA Hearing 46). Sprinkle defended herself: "My money goes to a lot of things I don't like. I'm paying for nuclear bombs. I'm paying for wars…My tax dollars are going for art that I think is really stupid and boring and trivial" (Saltz). In this, Sprinkle was hitting back at heteronormative shaming of those who did not conform sexually and at the NEA funding withdrawals and deliberately obstructive application process. McAdams and fellow artists felt that art had been enfeebled and reduced as a result of these actions because it had to be “watered down to gain acceptance” (PI 2018).

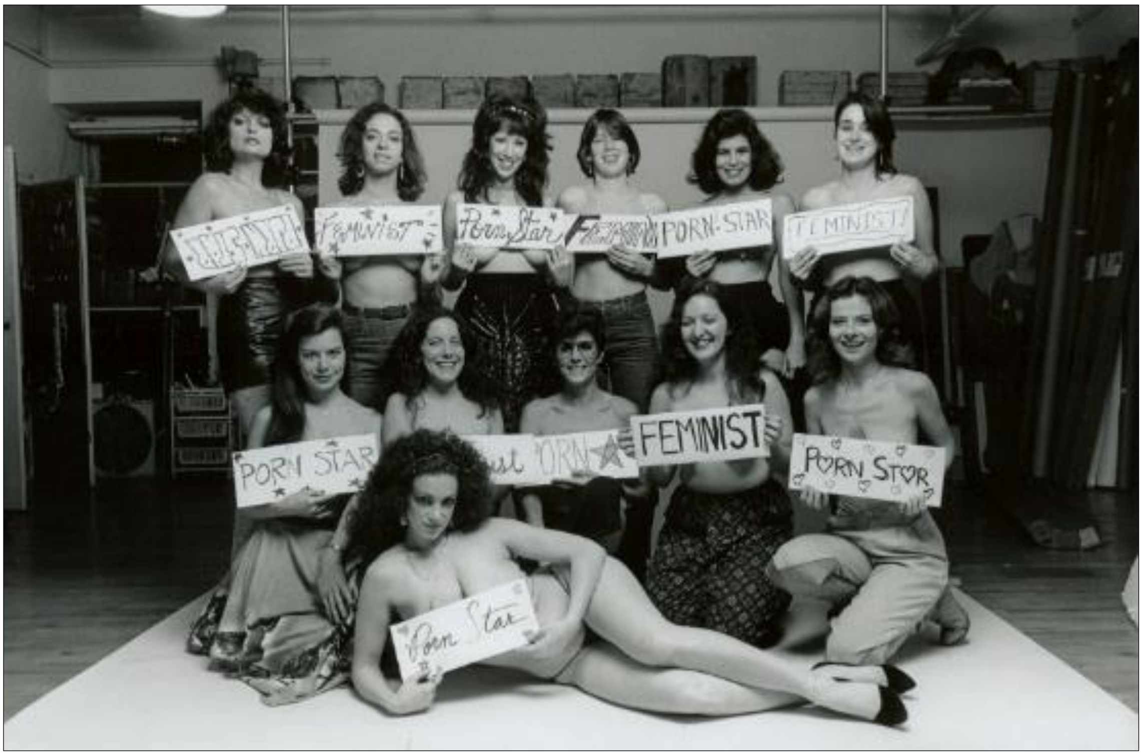

Figure 3.24. McAdams, Dona Ann. Carnival Knowledge, a feminist performance collective, with Annie Sprinkle. Publicity shot. 1984.

For this photograph, figure 3.24, above, McAdams took this publicity shot to mark Annie Sprinkle and her porn-star support group joining the collective Carnival Knowledge at Franklin Furnace, New York, in 1984. McAdams suggested that they pose topless and hold signs identifying them as “porn star” or “feminist” but they exchanged them in a show of solidarity (Taylor 112). The performance involved tea and cookies, to remind the audience that sex workers are mothers, daughters, wives, and women, just like their feminist sisters (112).

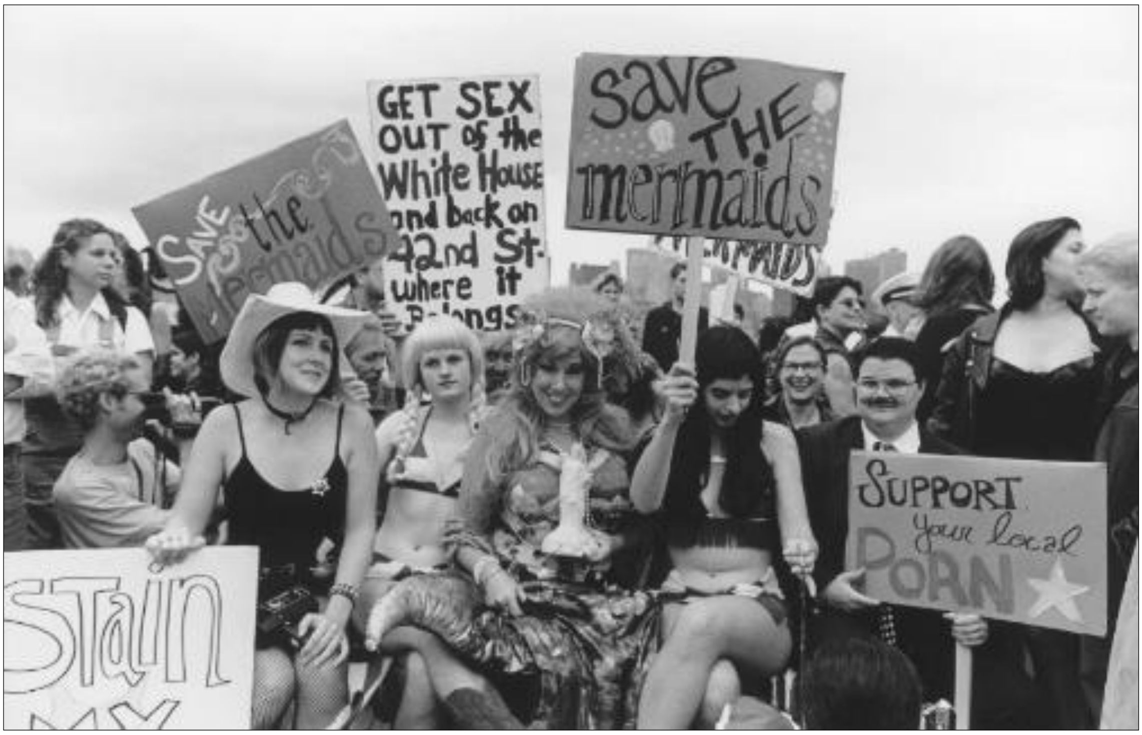
GET SEX OUT of the White House and back on 42nd St. where it Belongs
Save THE mermaids
Save the mermaids
Stain MY
SUPPORT your local PORN

Figure 3.25. McAdams, Dona Ann. Annie Sprinkle and supporters, Staten Island Ferry New York City. Protesting the “gentrification” of 42nd Street which was being “cleaned up”.

As will be evidenced in chapter five, McAdams was fascinated by the demolition works at Times Square and photographed this as part of her gentrification portfolio. Times Square, at Broadway and Seventh Avenue, New York, was then a notorious area for prostitution, drugs and crime. “Quality-of-life policing”, was practised by the police who made arrests for low-level crimes such as prostitution and minor drug transactions that were blamed for the climate of lawlessness and Times Square’s decline (Stern). As St James had argued in San Francisco in the mid-1970s, McAdams, Sprinkle and others continued to press for the rights of sex workers to be prioritised over the interests of the business community (McAdams PI 2019).). As part of her effort to document the street scene in those times, McAdams photographed the notorious Circus Cinema, 1604 Broadway, below, figure 3.26, which had been subject to police rAids and staff arrests in the 1970s and 1980s.

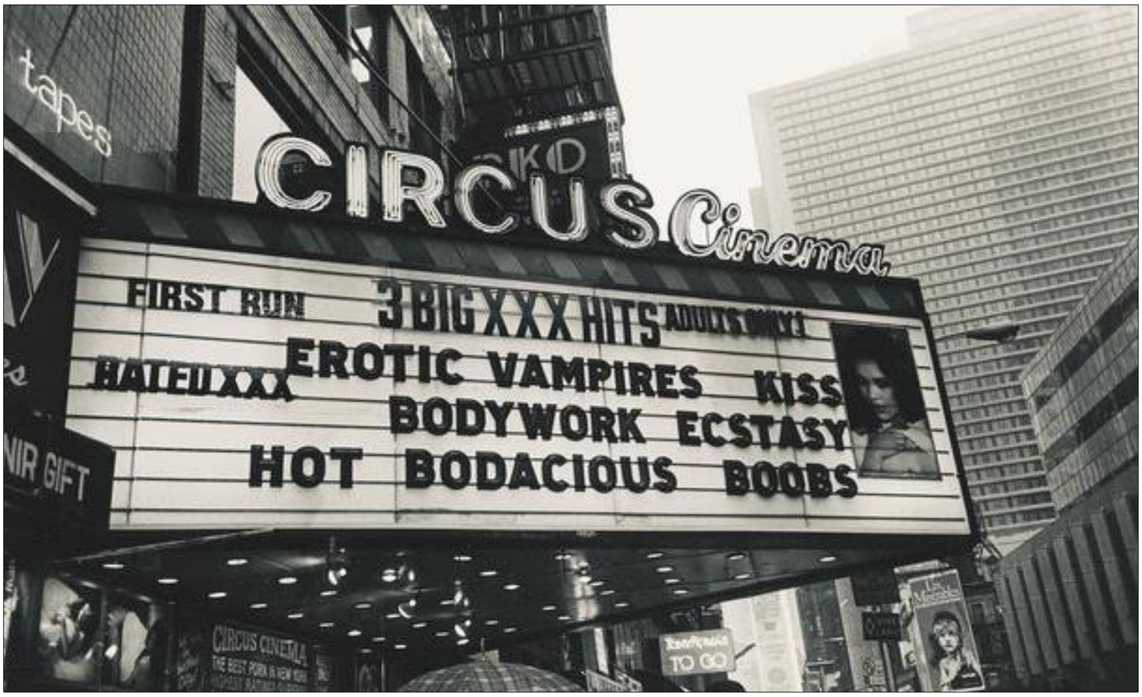
tapes
CIRCUS Cinema
FIRST RUN
3 BIG XXX HITS
ADULTS ONLY!
EROTIC VAMPIRES KISS
BODYWORK ECSTASY
HOT BODACIOUS BOOBS
NIR GIFT
CIRCUS CINEMA
TO GO

Figure 3.26. McAdams, Dona Ann. Times Square, Circus Cinema.

Ron Athey – Four Scenes from a Harsh Life, 1994

McAdams did not just champion women artists, however. One of the men she photographed was Ron Athey, who is pictured below during a performance of Four Scenes from a Harsh Life from 1994. This performance reignited the debate about NEA funding for controversial art due to ill-informed concerns about HIV-contaminated blood circulating among the audience and Athey was attacked for examining religion through a queer lens (Killacky). McAdams' pictures of Athey (figures 3.27, and 3.28), were used to refute the allegations against him which had resulted in him being defunded by the NEA (PI 2016).

McAdams exerted control not only over the making of but also over the distribution of Athey's images and of others embroiled in the NEA funding controversy. Athey was raised as a Pentecostalist and his work reflects his rejection of religion and his experience of drug addiction in early adulthood. He had tested HIV-positive in 1985 and this was widely known. This diagnosis of a

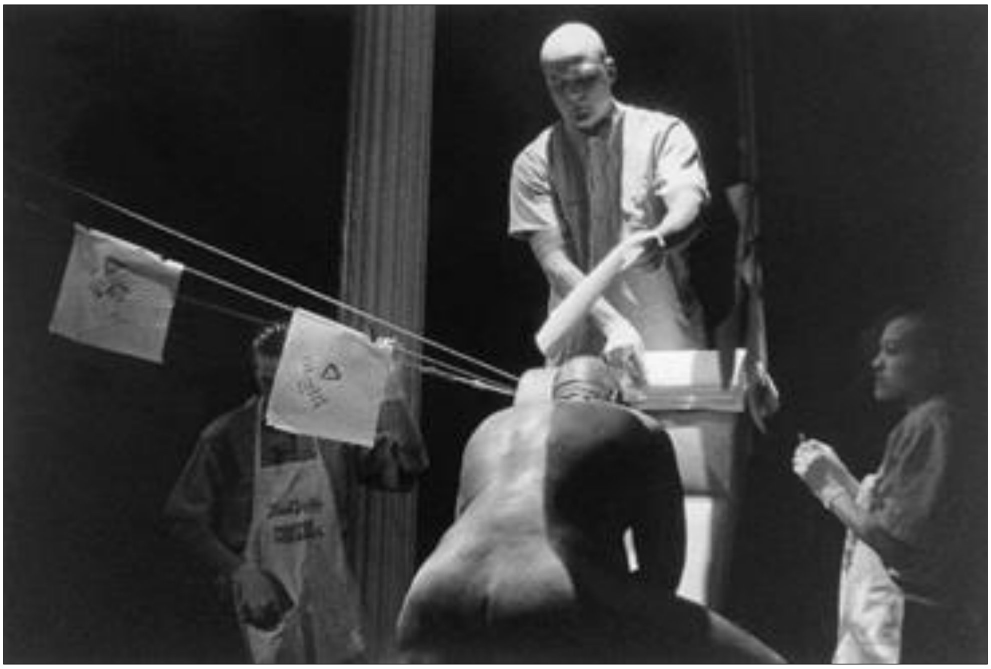

Figure 3.27. McAdams, Dona Ann. Ron Athey, with Daryl Carlton. *Four Scenes from a Harsh Life,* PS122. 1994.

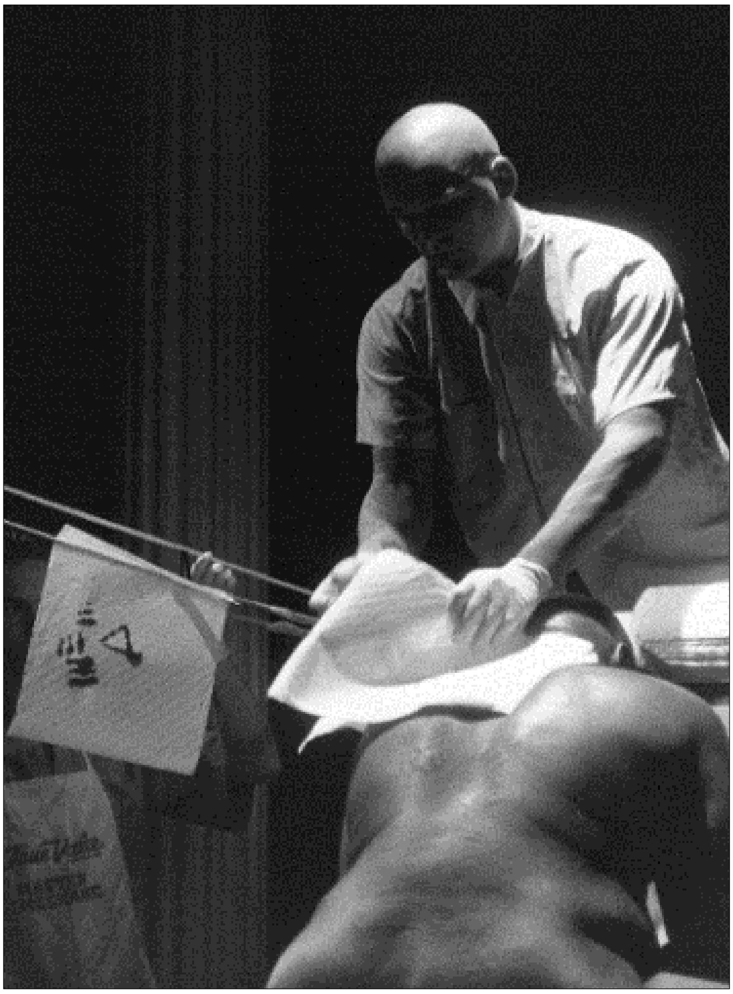

Figure 3.28. McAdams, Dona Ann. Ron Athey, with Daryl Carlton. Close-up. *Four Scenes from a Harsh Life,* PS122. 1994.

condition with no known cure at the time focused his mind on his mortality and he wrote his memoirs at aged only 18:

> My memoir was problem-solving. It had a question, which was: If there's a prophecy on your life and you're an atheist - and there are elements of this which are true, but the source, the God of it, dissolves - is it all false?" (Jones 164)

In conversation with Martin O'Brien, Athey talked about the controversy surrounding his 1994 work *Four Scenes from a Harsh Life* (reproduced in Jones 164). At the time Athey had started making work that featured masochism and blood-letting. Taking inspiration from the depictions of martyrs and saints, he emulated the "archetype of the suffering body" and describes this practice as "an expression beyond language" (Jones 164). Athey horrified yet enthralled his audiences with his violence (Battersby).

In the show, he cuts into the back of a fellow performer and blots the bloodstains onto paper towels which are then run on a line over the heads of the audience. Killacky recalled the event at The Walker (Arts Center), where he was then Director. He described how Athey inserted needles into his arm as his voice-over spoke of addiction and suicide attempts, and then had acupuncture needles positioned in his head like a crown of thorns, an iconic image from Christian scripture of the crucifixion of Christ (Killacky). This would have been highly provocative to those who objected to what they considered to be "blasphemy" in art. Athey also subverted the traditional portrayal of marriage by officiating at a queer wedding ceremony which two women were married by him as he shouted: "There are so many ways to say Hallelujah!" (Killacky). In 1997 Athey did shout Hallelujah! in his show entitled *A Story of Deliverance*, photographed by McAdams, figure 3. 29, below.

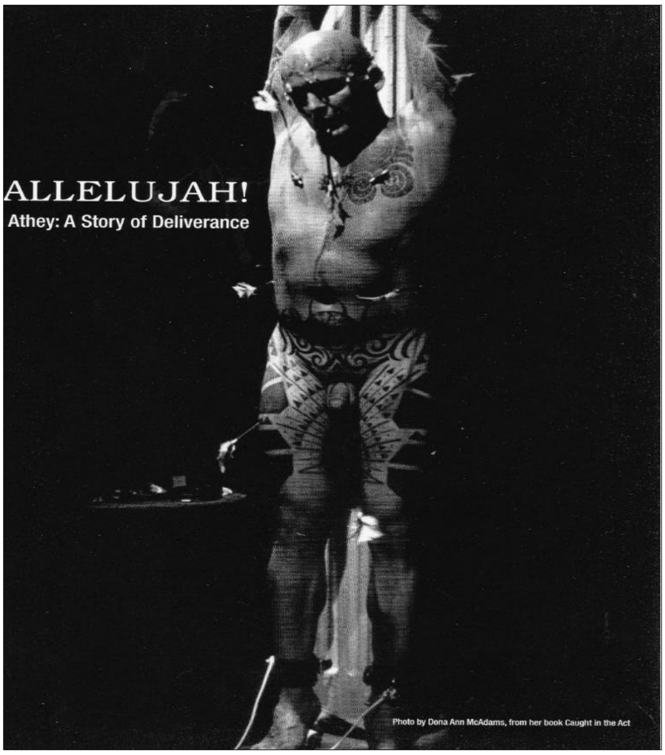
ALLELUJAH!
Athey: A Story of Deliverance
Photo by Dona Ann McAdams, from her book Caught in the Act

Figure 3.29. McAdams, Dona Ann. Ron Athey, *Hallelujah: A Story of Deliverance,* PS122. 1997.

Killacky recalled that the 1994 performance at the Walker was well attended and some of the audience stayed on to talk with Athey afterwards: “three weeks later an erroneous report was published in a local paper strapped ‘knife-wielding performer is known to be HIV positive’ and alleged that “the audience knocked over chairs to get out from under the clothes’ lines” (Killacky). Discussing the PS122 performance, Athey recalled, “the story went that blood was either dripping or being thrown on to the audience” (Jones 164). This misinformation was spread by the media in Minneapolis and nationally and the distorted content intensified public expressions of HIV-phobia (Killacky). McAdams photographed the show when it came to PS122 in New York soon after it opened at the Walker. In an uncharacteristic act of artistic intervention and control, she sent a single image to the national press to vindicate Athey as it clearly showed the blood as coming from his fellow performer and not dripping

(McAdams PI 2016). Learning from her experience of the “NEA Four”, having been repeatedly pressed to provide images, McAdams made a rare intervention and took control of the narrative. By sending just one photograph to the *New York Times* for publication, McAdams left the newspaper with no choice over image selection and no opportunity to sensationalise the story (see Appendix Two) (McAdams PI 2016). McAdams told me:

> I had photographs of Ron’s work and I knew that Sprinkle’s work was unapologetically pornographic but in my performance work, as with all my work, I am aware of the need to be respectful of the artist. When I photograph a performer, yes, I own the copyright but it is their intellectual property that I am photographing. It’s a collaboration and I will not violate the trust. (PI 2015)

This chapter has shown how, at PS122, McAdams recorded the performances, highlighting homophobia and religious bigotry and calling for social justice and change, radical actions at the time, which caught the attention of the moral majority during the Culture Wars. Her photographic documentation provides a visual historical account of this important period in late-twentieth-century cultural history and sense of citizenship and social responsibility of some of the most influential performance artists of the period. Inevitably some work has been lost but McAdams’ photographs contribute to a legacy of interpretation and testimony to the work of those artists who articulated some of the most pressing issues of their day. She resisted pressure from the media to fuel the already overheated national debates.

In the following chapter, four, I will explore McAdams’ fourteen-year long project of photography workshops, with another of her adopted communities, the institutionalised mentally ill.

CHAPTER FOUR

McAdams' Workshops With The Mentally Ill

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine McAdams' work with individuals who had been placed in long-term residential care following their diagnosis with chronic psychiatric disability. The chapter draws on McAdams' fifteen years of participatory workshops with the mentally ill at several residential institutions but particularly on Coney Island, a peninsular neighbourhood which is located on the southwestern side of Brooklyn, New York. Coney was a popular summer destination for city day-trippers until WWll but by the 1980s when McAdams was first working there it had become run-down and neglected, as shown in figure 4.1, below.

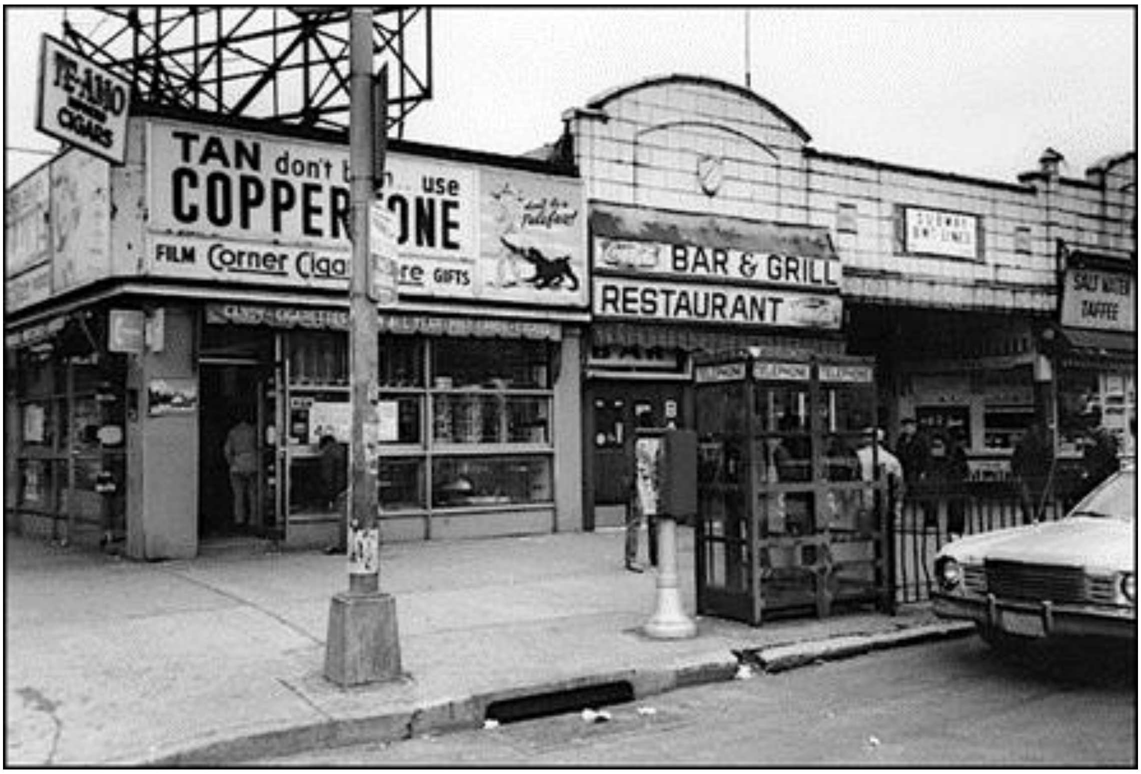
TE-AMO CIGARS
TAN don't b... n... use COPPER ONE
FILM Corner Ciga re GIFTS
BAR & GRILL
RESTAURANT
SALT WATER TAFFEE

Figure 4.1. McAdams, Dona Ann. Untitled. From the series *The Garden of Eden* 1984-1997.

Coney was redeveloped and revitalised in the 2000s. This was after numerous proposals had been put forward over many years and endlessly discussed, revised and eventually rejected meeting the same fate as solutions to the problems faced by those with long term mental health issues in Coney and the wider US mental health system. Similarly, the series of “breakthrough cures” as described by Jay Neugeboren in his book, *Imagining Robert*, below, came and went under successive Presidents and the patients, and their families had to endure a roller coaster of raised, then dashed hopes, and many disappointments.

This chapter examines McAdams’ portfolio, *The Garden of Eden* (1984-1997), which includes images taken by McAdams at The Brooklyn Day Program, a centre where people from nearby adult residential care homes gathered for medication, meals and group activities. Her portfolios document these communities and include black and white images as well as some hand-coloured and inscribed by the workshop participants, as in figure 4.2, below. Her collections demonstrate McAdams’ empathetic and collaborative mode of working with disenfranchised community groups, and show that she captured what might have eluded others. In this review of her work, I contrast her approach with the work of other photographers who have employed their artistic work for documentary or therapeutic purposes, specifically Diane Arbus and Jo Spence.

Brief mention is made here of McAdams’ portfolio *Picturing Ourselves*, a collaborative documentary project in Glens Falls, upstate New York, featuring those reliant on homeless shelters, for which McAdams was awarded the Dorothea Dix Humanitarian Award in 2006, as described in Appendix Six. Images 4.5 and 4.6 show the impact of policy changes in mental health and housing on men’s homeless shelters, in particular at Fort Washington, Upper Manhattan. McAdams recorded how these men found themselves out of residential care and on the streets, homeless, criminalised and without access to treatment during the 1980s. McAdams worked on several projects with mental health patients and also included here, in Appendices 10-16, are testimonials from those who attended. While these other workshops also have their own photographs, the images within this chapter, an example of which is figure 4.2, above, are from Coney Island only as others have not been printed from the contact sheets (McAdams PI 2018).

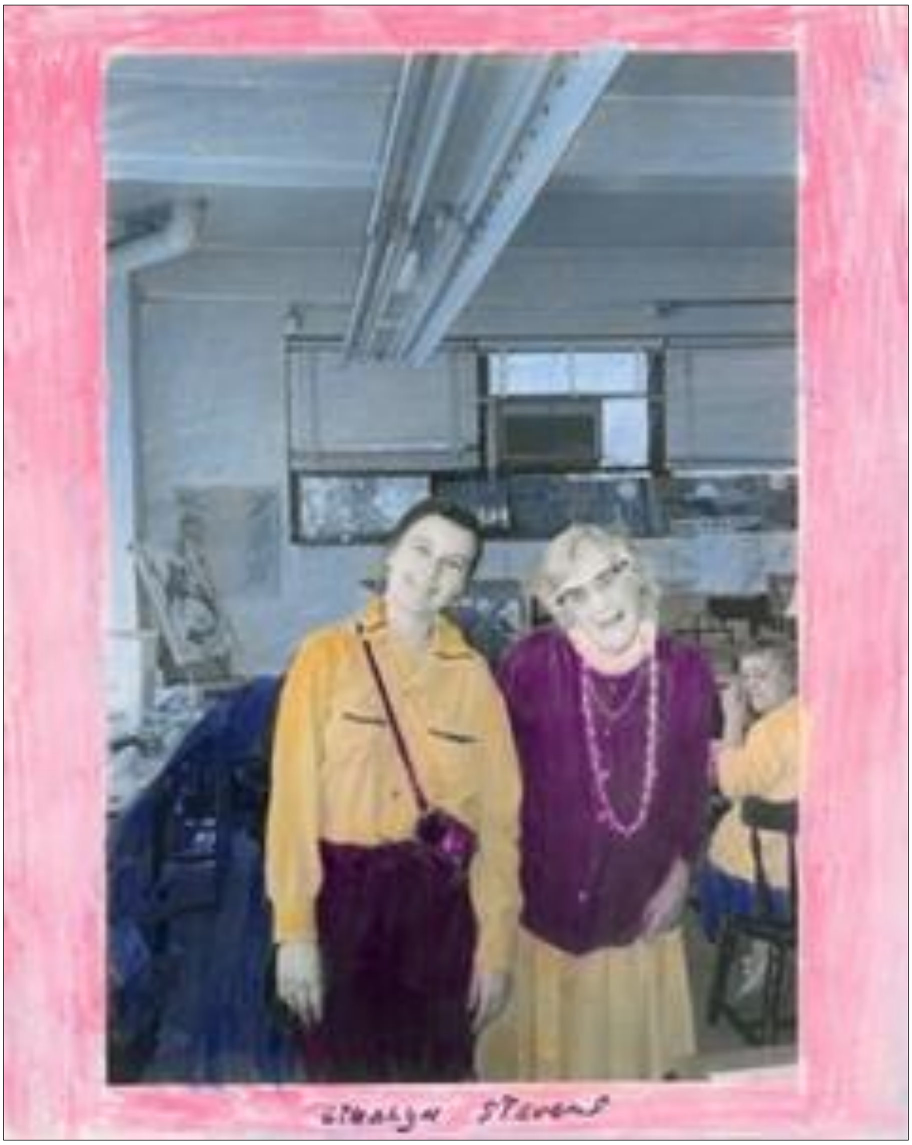

Figure 4.2. McAdams, Dona Ann (with tripod). McAdams, on left, with workshop participant Jane Smith.

This chapter also draws on Jay Neugeboren’s 1997, *Imagining Robert,* which provides context for understanding McAdams’ work, through his moving account of his lived experience of his brother Robert’s chronic mental health problems. Neugeboren’s work is pertinent because it provides an interpretation on behalf of the patient and the family who experience the effects of mental illness and institutionalisation and whose history is altered by it. In sharing the moving story of his brother’s many years in the mental health system, Neugeboren charts the late-twentieth-century history of psychiatric drug therapies, political solutions to residential care and the toll these took on patients’ families. He notes that families were torn apart “by its insidious, unpredictable nature and course” and for which, he concludes “there are no solutions, long or short term” (Neugeboren 19). Neugeboren has traced the history of mental health provision of care for the mentally ill by describing Robert’s experiences in various institutions over the years. The experience mirrors that of those with Aids during the early years, as responsibility was passed from state to federal government in a steady dereliction which ultimately left programmes underfunded and those needing help left homeless, imprisoned or in inappropriate and inadequate public facilities.

As has been demonstrated in earlier chapters, McAdams’ social conscience and artistic imperative positioned her at the intersection of major events in twentieth-century social history and her images contribute an important record of practices in the US mental health system at this time. What differentiates McAdams is that she photographs social documentary and activism. She is a street photographer but one who also participates in a community, who photographs from within and does not “Other”. This community of people that is normally out of sight of society resembled McAdams’ artistic community at PS122, especially her gay friends, who were similarly pathologised. At Coney Island, McAdams forged her own small community of regular workshops for participants living with mental health challenges. Before going into detail about McAdams' workshops I will provide some definitions and historical context of mental health provision in the United States in the twentieth century, and go on to explore the origins of art therapy as well as the debate on the distinctions between art-making and therapeutic art.

Historical Context

Mental illness alters a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in distinct ways and, before the emergence of psychotherapy, was little understood, leading to misdiagnosis and inappropriate treatments (Holtzman 24). Early psychoanalytic traditions "associated creative insight with madness, mental turmoil, suffering and sublimated desires" (Prager 247). James Poskett has written of the use of photography in phrenology, a pseudoscience categorising people as normal or not by the dimensions of their heads, that featured in late nineteenth-century debates concerning the evolution of mankind (Poskett 1).

As Oliver Sacks notes in his introduction to Christopher Payne's book *Asylum*, the old term for a mental hospital was "lunatic asylum", an asylum being described as a place of sanctuary and therefore of safety (Payne and Sacks 1). This description bears no resemblance to images by William Blake, or Charles Dickens' written accounts of life inside a Victorian mental institution that have informed public perception. Originally mental hospitals were located away from towns in the countryside where land was cheap and it was thought that the patients could benefit from clean air and could work the gardens and land to be self-sufficient (Payne and Sacks 12). As patients were incurable they seldom left so these places became overcrowded and understaffed, leaving the occupants in what Sacks described as a narrowed but protected life that provided community and companionship (2).

An early advocate for the creation of the first American institutions offering dedicated care of mental illness in the “indigent insane” was Dorothea Dix, a Unitarian who was convinced that her work in the world would contribute to her salvation (Vacek, 5, 65). In 1854, Dix proposed an Indigent Insane Bill which was vetoed by then President Franklin Pierce. This bill would have provided a grant of land for “the relief and support of indigent, curable and incurable insane” and asylums that would emphasize “moral treatment”, compassionate approaches to mental illness directed at the whole individual (Sharfstein 617). It was not until 1946 that the National Mental Health Act established a federal mental health policy (NIMH). A later portfolio of work led to McAdams receiving The Dorothea Dix humanitarian award (2006) for her work with workshop participants, who provide thought-provoking hand-written accounts of their experiences of making images (Appendices 10-16).

In the 1950s and 1960s, sexual orientation and gender identity were not well understood and some therapists employed aversion therapy to “cure” male homosexuality, which was doubly stigmatised as a sin and a mental illness (Burton). In 1968, DSM-ll (the second edition of the American classification of mental disorders) listed homosexuality as a mental disorder (Burton). In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) voted to remove homosexuality from the DSM, but replaced it with “sexual orientation disturbance” for people deemed in conflict with their sexual orientation, where it remained until 1987 (Burton). It was only in the twenty-first century that understanding of sexual disorders and sexual health increased, as has the recognition of the sexual rights of individuals with diverse gender identities. In 2014, the WHO sought to "address the needs of people with a same-sex orientation in a manner consistent with good clinical practice, existing human rights principles" and in 2019 extended this to include transgender people (Cochrane).

In *Asylums*, now an important but controversial text in the sociology of mental illness, Erving Goffman has written about conditions in mental hospitals in the 1950s based on his research at St Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington D.C. (Goffman, and Helmreich). According to Goffman, stigmatised individuals, those ostracised by society, must constantly strive to adjust to their precarious social identities (3). Their image of themselves is challenged daily by the image which others reflect back to them and its attendant judgment, disapproval and rejection. McAdams mentions Erving Goffman as one of the influences in her work as she sees everything taking place in a proscenium, as a stage, and she explained that she uses her camera to look back, returning the gaze she felt burning into her during her youth. She told Maude-Roxby:

> Goffman sees the world through a frame. Everything is a performance. The street and the theatre are the same…the world presents an endless array of proscenia, and stages and lighting situations and it is the job of the photographer to seek out the drama and frame it with their lens…The incredible work Goffman did about stigma and the mentally ill was hugely important and relevant to my work. (Maude-Roxby 109)

McAdams' photographs of her workshop participants allow them to control how they are represented and reflect back positively to build their self-esteem. The workshop member pictured below, figure 4.3, is calmly holding McAdams' gaze, appearing neither intimidated nor discomfited (PI 2018). McAdams told me that Irene Philips, figure 4.3, below, went on to produce her own work and became a recognised artist in the field of "Outsider Art", the term given to untrained artists (PI 2021). In an exhibition at the New York Outsider Art Fair in 2016, organised by the Healing Arts Initiative, Philips' work was included and she was described as passionate in “her use of bold shapes of color and line” (Palazzolo).

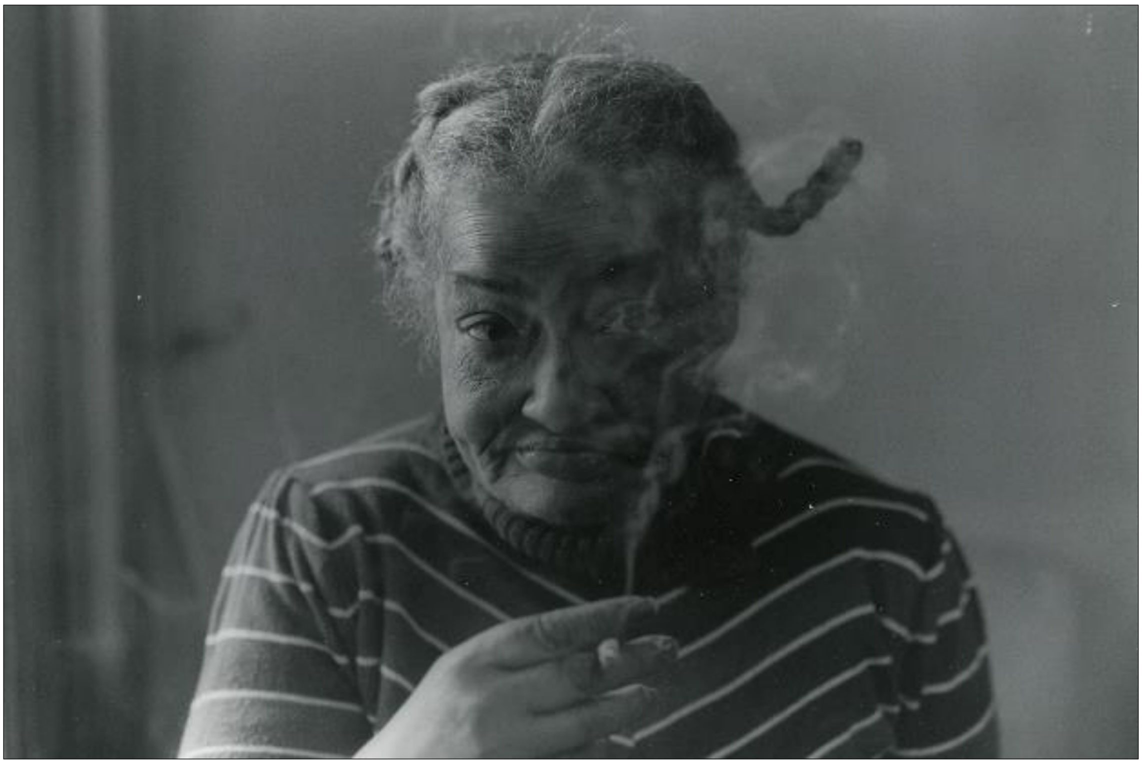

Figure 4.3. McAdams, Dona Ann. “Outsider artist” Irene Philips.

In the mid to late nineteen sixties society was going through an upheaval “where definitions of authority, family, sexuality and illness were all being questioned" (O'Hagan). In the UK, Ronald, (R.D.), Laing, a pioneer in the anti-psychiatry movement, was critical of the stigma surrounding mental illness and endeavoured to demystify it. In his 1969 book *The Divided Self* he wrote: “In the context of our present pervasive madness that we call normality, sanity, freedom, all our frames of reference are ambiguous and equivocal” (Laing 11). Laing aimed to revolutionise the treatment of mental illness and between 1965 and 1970 at Kingsley Hall in London, he ran “an asylum in the original Greek sense of the word: a refuge, a haven for the psychotic and the schizophrenic where there were no locks on the doors and no anti-psychotic drugs were administered” (O'Hagan). Laing’s sentiments that the clinical encounter is a meeting between persons, “the patient has to be known without being destroyed” are pertinent to McAdams’ work (Laing 35). McAdams applied a holistic approach in her workshops and created a “new sort of wholeness”, by moving beyond stereotypes and stigma. She read the uniqueness in each individual and captured it in images such as the one below, figure 4.4. It is clear to most viewers that this picture captures the vulnerability of the subject but is empathetic. McAdams noted that the directness of the returned gaze indicates an equal exchange between photographer and subject (PI 2020).

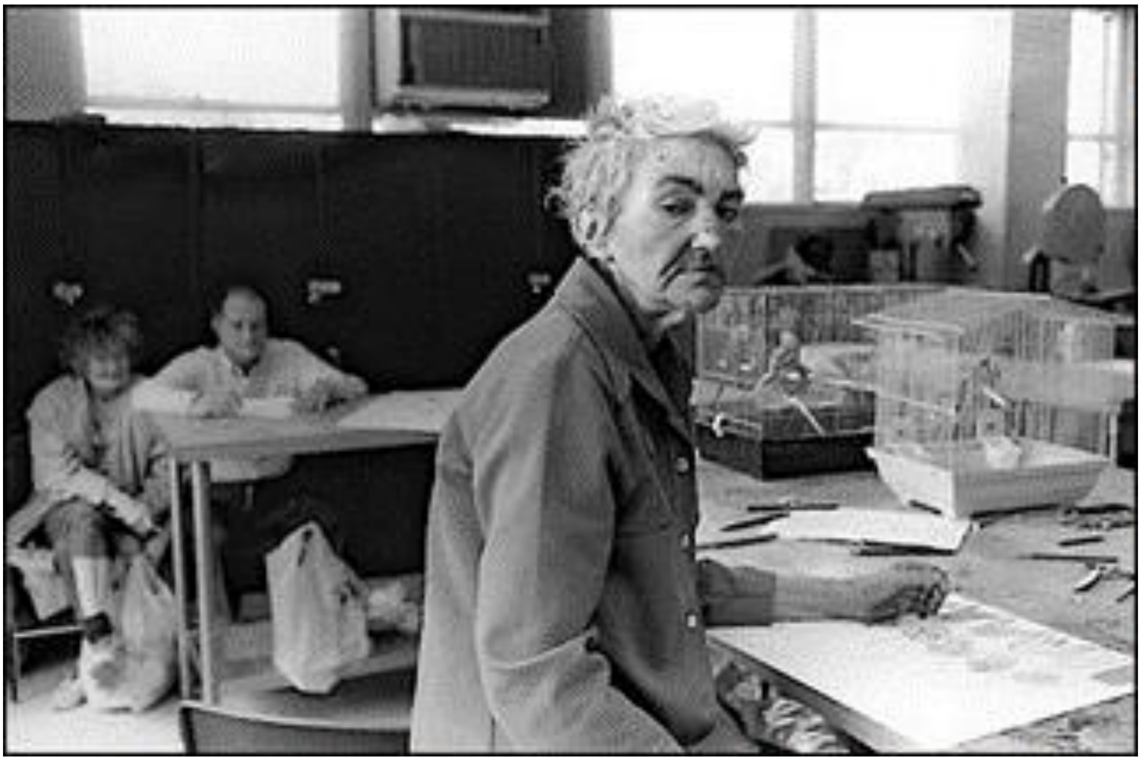

Figure 4.4. McAdams, Dona Ann. Workshop participant.

The fate of those in the mental health system is determined by federal, state and city policies, prevailing research in the discipline of psychiatry itself, as well as current drug treatments. In 1963 President Kennedy initiated the Community Mental Health Act and a shift of responsibility to state and local entities, known as “de-institutionalisation” (Sharfstein 616). His successor, President Johnson, continued his work, but subsequent Presidents cut back the Federal role in Mental Health care provision (618). President Carter’s 1979

Mental Health Systems Act had intended to further address the deep-rooted problems of a failing system but was overturned by President Reagan when he took office in 1981 (Grob).

Deinstitutionalisation

Gregory Taylor has noted that deinstitutionalisation was detrimental to the future of both patients and hospitals as it led to an increase in homelessness, incarceration and episodes of violence (Taylor 408). McAdams captured this in her photographs of a homeless men’s shelter in Fort Washington, see figures 4.4 and 4.5, below. In 1962, New York State had more than 80,000 institutionalised mental patients. In his account of how policy switchbacks played out in the lives of real people, Neugeboren describes South Beach Psychiatric Center in New York State. It was once “considered the jewel of New York’s state mental hospitals”, *The New York Times* reported in 1980, in a series of articles exposing the deteriorating conditions there (Sobel). Visiting his brother Robert, Neugeboren was struck by the “pleasant grounds and low-level buildings, colourful noticeboards of activities and information, and a college dormitory atmosphere” but on closer inspection noticed “the thick and windowless metal door that seals the ward” and “the unhealthy appearance of the inhabitants…the patients sit around zombie-like” and “languish for lack of attention to their ordinary, daily needs” (Neugeboren 21,27).

Another hospital, Creedmoor, was initially the Farm Colony of Brooklyn State Hospital and was first opened to patients in 1926 and maintained the gardens and livestock as well as an orchestra and exercise facilities for patients’ wellbeing(Payne and Sacks 3). Neugeboren noted that:

> Creedmoor had more than six thousand patients lodged in facilities certified to hold slightly more than four thousand….Straightjackets, continuous flow tubs, sedative packs [patients tied to tables in moist

> sheets], various kinds of shock treatment [electric and insulin-coma], and lobotomies were the prevailing forms of treatment. (Neugeboren 199)

Edwin Fuller Torrey has written: “In Long Beach on Long Island, old motels and hotels were filled with patients discharged from nearby Creedmoor and Pilgrim State Hospitals so that by 1973, community residents were complaining that their town was becoming a psychiatric ghetto” (97). Sacks has used the term “sidewalk psychotics” to describe this (4). New York psychiatrist, John A Talbot MD, summarised the situation: “The chronic mentally ill patient has had his locus of living and care transferred from a single lousy institution to multiple wretched ones” (Talbot).

The hospitals were no longer self-sustaining and became uneconomical and the patients lost their “work therapy” and opportunities to learn life skills (Payne and Sacks 3). By the 1980s when McAdams was holding her workshops, arrangements were being made to provide those in residential care with creative stimulation through art projects which also allowed for a break from the monotony of their daily routine. However, the rotation of policies continued. Neugeboren observed:

> While vast sums are spent on research for chemical cures for the mentally ill, New York State, early in 1994, passed laws intended to reassign, over five years, an estimated $210 million—savings from the closure of mental hospitals and the discharge of patients —to community mental health services. (Neugeboren 21)

This is a sum, Neugeboren notes, equivalent to the amount ($231m) spent by drug companies to bring a single new drug to the market (21). McAdams was aware of the increased risk to those who found themselves on the street. Figures 4.5 and 4.6, below, are from McAdams’ documentary project featuring those reliant on homeless shelters. She recalled:

> I shared photography and did workshops with a wonderful organization called Hospital Audiences from 1983 to 1998. We shared the arts with

people in shelters, day programs, and nursing homes. This is the Fort Washington Shelter for men on 168th Street. During the day folks were in programs and in for lunch but the beds were only for sleeping at night. After Rudy Giuliani became mayor in 1994, I was still working here and we started to notice that men were coming in with broken wrists and ankles. They were being hit for sleeping on benches. The policy here changed and it was decided that they could stay inside the shelter day and night. It was safer for them. The number of beds went from 800 to over 1000. Here is an image of Fort Washington from 1994 and the late 1980s. (PI 2020)

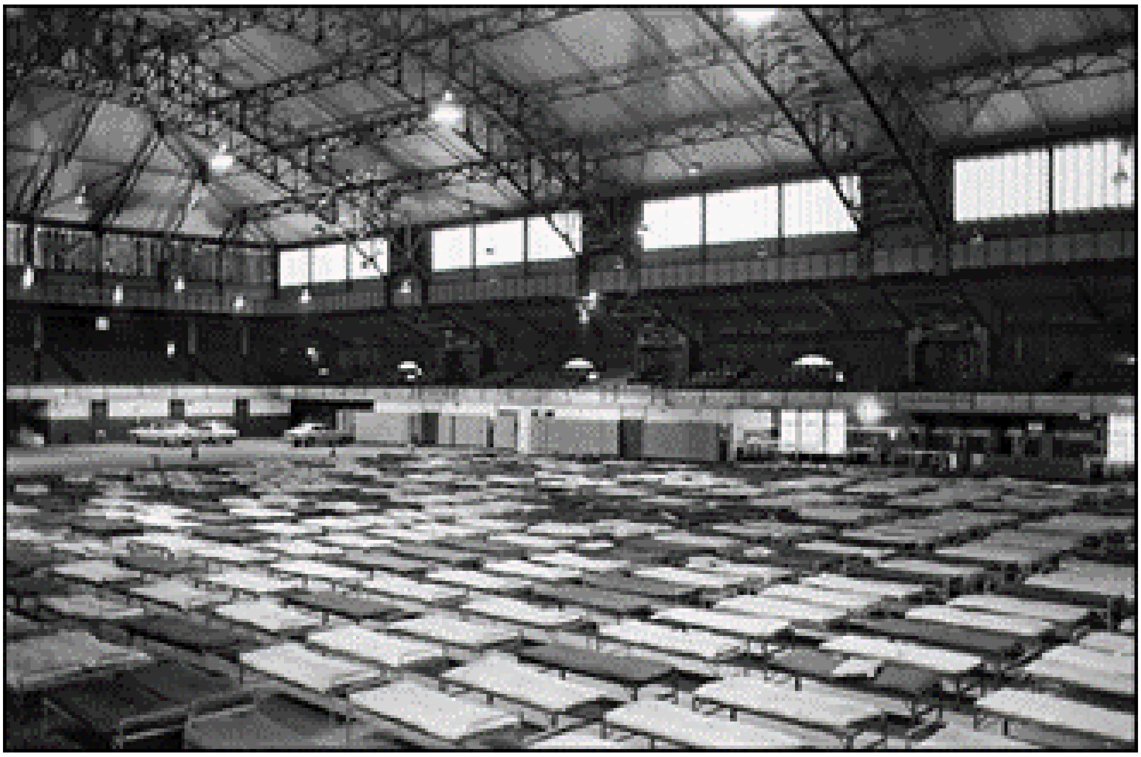

Figure 4.5. McAdams Dona Ann. Homeless shelter, Fort Washington. Late 1980s.

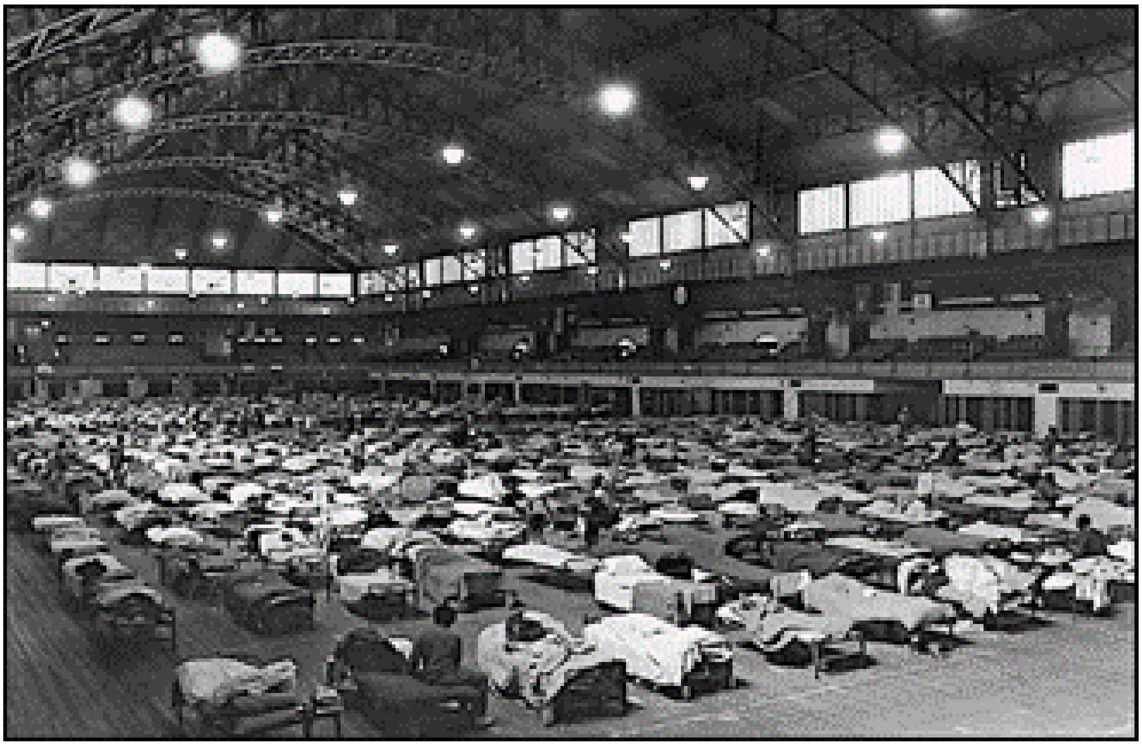

Figure 4.6. McAdams Dona Ann. Homeless shelter, Fort Washington. 1994.

As well as being exacerbated by the deinstitutionalisation policy, the rise in the number of homeless people has been attributed to a reduction in affordable housing units and the elimination of single-room occupancy (SROs) in hotels (Jeantet). Mayor Koch instituted the barrack-style shelter system in place of hotel rooms to deter applicants and, later, Mayor Giuliani implemented “time limits on shelter stays, work requirements and narrowed eligibility rules” (Jeantet).

The Patients’ Experience

As McAdams has given voice to the workshop participants through photography, so Jay Neugeborger has given voice to his brother Robert’s decades-long experiences as a mental health patient. Neugeboren’s account gives us an insight into the lives of the patients participating in McAdams’ workshops as they were part of the same policy implementation. In *Imagining Robert*, Neugeboren stresses that mental illness is generally long term and chronic and is experienced “by the mentally ill and those who care for them…a condition which, usually, by its insidious unpredictable nature and course, tears families apart and has no solutions” (19).

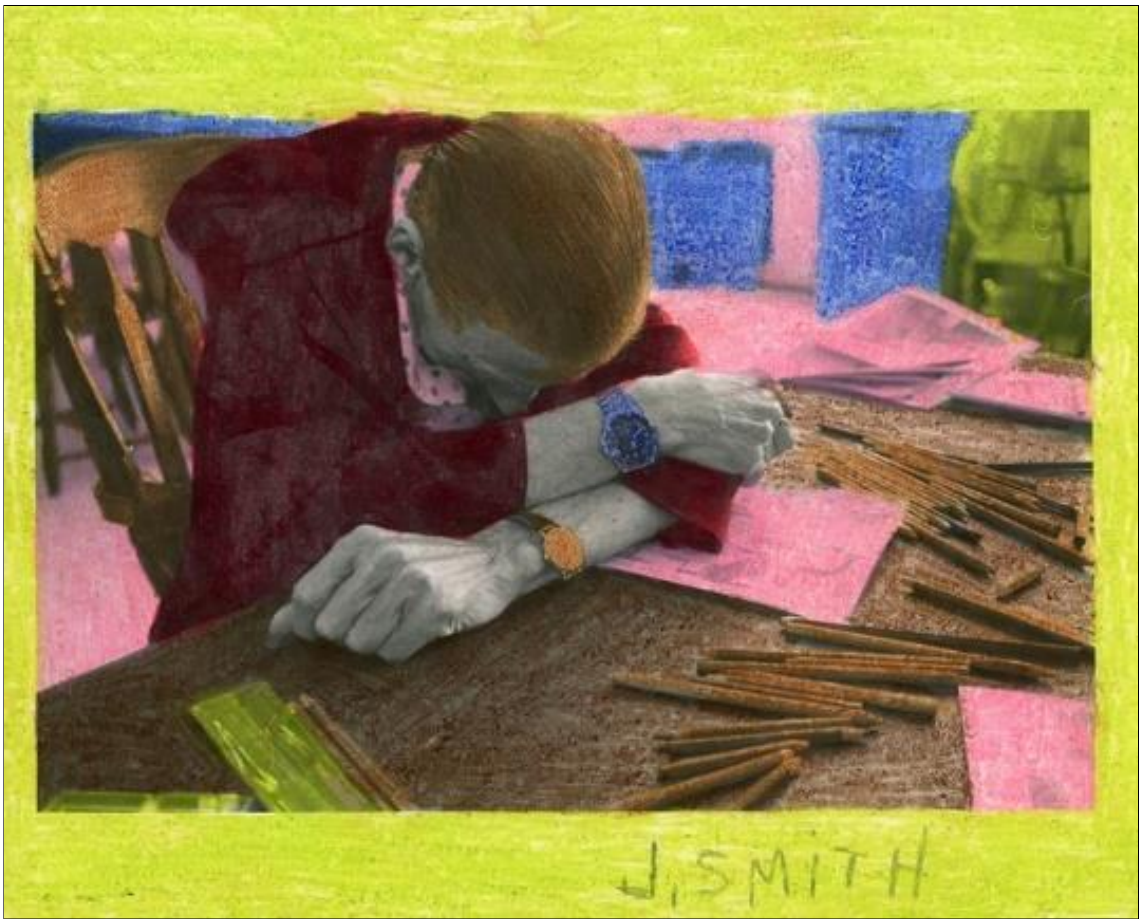

Figure 4.7. McAdams, Dona Ann. Workshop participant.

His lingering memory is of “my brother, in a room by himself, lying on a bare mattress, hour after hour and day after day doped up, groggy” (Neugeboren 20). As evidenced by Neugeboren’s comments, attendees at McAdams’ workshops were also often medicated and this image, figure 4.7, above, shows a member who has taken time out of the activity programme.

As McAdams does with her photography workshop participants, Neugeboren champions his brother’s uniqueness as an individual, and his humanity, presenting him as a person, not reduced to a diagnosis or case history, “when it comes to human beings with lives like Robert’s [clinical diagnoses] to reduce their humanity to their biology” (Neugeboren 139).

Neugeboren is concerned with the continuum of the patient's life, before and after the diagnoses and medication, and how these have affected the individual's history (21).

Art Therapy or Art as Therapy

The association between photography and psychotherapy originates in mid-nineteenth-century England, with the work of Dr Hugh Diamond (Harding). Harding tells us that, in 1853, Diamond became one of the founder members of the Photographic Society and is remembered primarily for a series of portraits he took in connection with his work with the mentally ill (Harding). Mark Wheeler emphasises the importance of photographs in therapy:

> Photographs reach into the deepest parts of our brains that deal with emotions and attachments to loved ones and elicit emotional responses more directly than words. Photographs can, therefore, be an effective tool for social and healthcare professionals, who can use them to deepen, enrich and intensify their therapeutic work. (Wheeler)

Early psychoanalytic traditions typically associated creative insight with madness, mental turmoil, suffering and sublimated desires (Prager 247). The evolution of the field of ‘art therapy’ can be traced back to the writings of artists who described themselves as mad or depictions of madness by artists (Vick 6). Early works such as German Psychiatrist Hans Prinzhorn’s *The Artistry of the Mentally Ill,* (1922), challenged the notions of mental illness and art as they were in the society of the time (6). Prinzhorn considered the making of art as a universal human need and demonstrated “an urge in man not to be absorbed passively into his environment, but to impress on it traces of his existence beyond those of purposeful activity” adding that “the urge to enrich the world is basic to man” (Prinzhorn 21).

Later, practices involving photography increased and were classified into three categories: photo art therapy, therapeutic photography, and phototherapy

(Weiser 2010). In photo art therapy, specially trained art therapists focus on the process of client photography as therapeutic. De Coster and Dickinson (2) tell us that therapeutic photography centres on self-initiated individual or group photo-based activities done outside a professional helping relationship and phototherapy are the use of images or photography by mental health therapists in psychotherapy. The term “art therapy” was coined by artist Adrian Hill in 1942 when he discovered the benefits of drawing and painting while recovering from tuberculosis and later applied it to convalescing WWll soldiers (Hill 33-47). Before this, art was used as part of the “moral treatment approach to psychiatric care” as pioneered by Dorothea Dix (Vick 7).

At the same time as Laing and others were challenging the long-held tenets of psychiatry itself, practitioners Erica Ulman and Judy Weiser were evaluating the efficacy of employing art in therapy with psychiatric patients. Art therapy is a hybrid discipline that is based on two different fields of art and psychology and, “as a discipline, it draws upon both fields to chart a unique entity for itself” (Vick 5). Art therapists regard the making or experience of art as having a therapeutic effect on patients, a view not necessarily shared by those in medical practice whose therapists are clinically trained (8). Art therapy is a form of psychotherapy that uses art-making to enable people to bring about change on a personal level.

Writing in 2009, Ulla Halkola has explained the connection between photographs and therapy and, in particular, the relationship between photographs and reality, photographs and memories, and photographs and biographical meanings (Halkola 24). According to Halkola, the role of photography in psychotherapy is functional: the actual therapy is based on the professional skills of the psychotherapist, acquired within his/her specific frame of reference (21). In figure 4.8, below, a workshop participant shares personal memories in photographs in a small well-worn wallet.

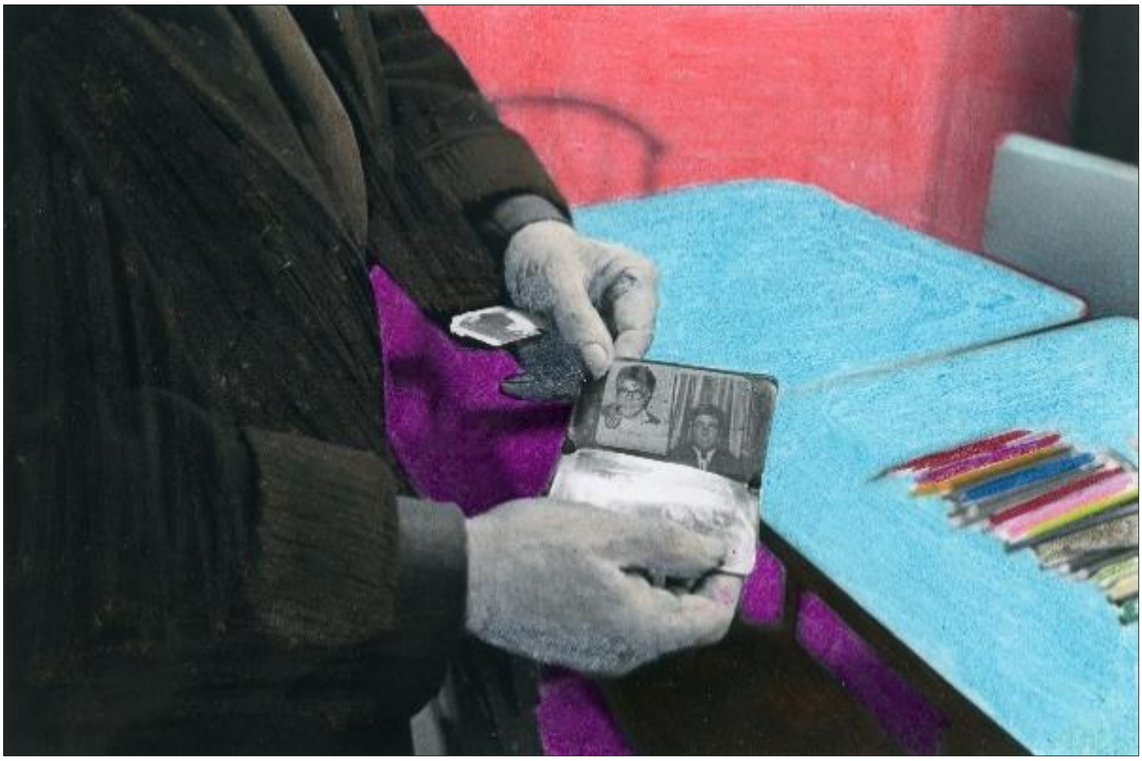

Figure 4.8. McAdams, Dona Ann. Personal memories are shared by a workshop participant.

Misty M Ginicola et al. have noted the benefits of working with photography as being “creative expression, cathartics and trust-building”:

> Through the process of art-making and creative expression, counsellors can assist in the reduction of a variety of distressing psychological symptoms. Because these methods are nonverbal, clients can reveal as much or as little as they are comfortable with, providing the counsellor with the opportunity to build rapport and trust. Clients also experience a cathartic release by viewing their situations, problems, feelings, or difficulties in a concrete format that they can physically experience and manipulate. (Ginicola et al 311)

McAdams is not an art therapist, but as outlined below, we can see how through her facilitation of the process of art-making, participants had a safe environment in which they felt valued and listened to. Figure 4.9 below, shows a workshop participant enjoying the work and being the focus of McAdams’ attention as a photographer. Art-based projects are also helpful for participants to express themselves when verbal communication, such as ‘talking therapy’ is difficult or overwhelming. As an artist, McAdams’ focus was on the process of making photographs rather than on any clinical diagnoses or changes in patient behaviour which would be the concern of the therapist (PI 2018).

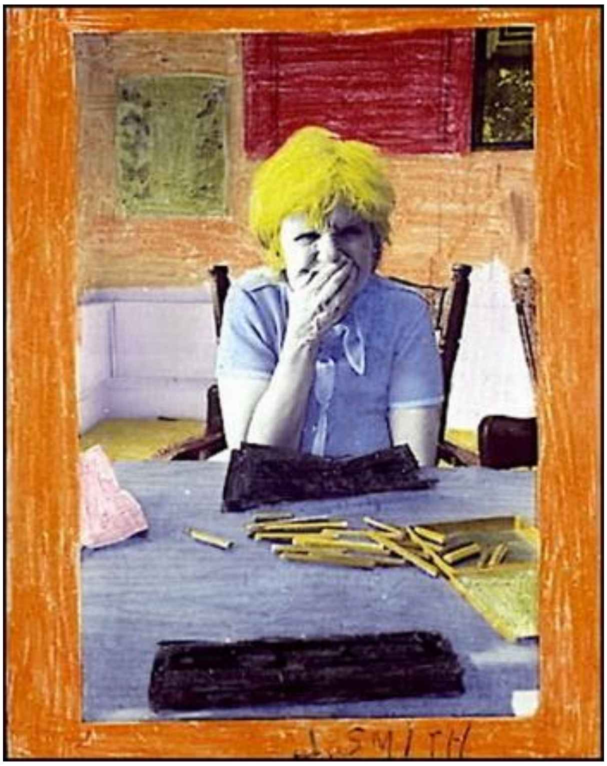

Figure 4.9. McAdams Dona Ann. Workshop participant.

Elinor Ulman has distinguished “art activity” from “art therapy” so that “therapeutic procedures are those designed to assist favourable changes in personality or in living that will last beyond the session” (25). On the other hand, “activities” are designed to offer a distraction from inner conflict, benefits are not enduring and they do not seek psychiatric understanding or diagnosis (25). Ulman acknowledged the concerns of psychiatrists regarding art therapy as an intrusion on their specialism but also “the healing quality inherent in the creative process” which makes art therapy more than an “activity”, rather “it is a means to discover both the self and the world and to establish a relation between the two” (26). Bruce L Moon has elaborated, describing that as the artist assembles new materials, their potential is unlimited: “for the artist, chaos inspires process which leads to structure then to art-making; for the participant, chaos demands process, leading to structure and authentic engagement with life” (59).

Thus, artists can help “close the circle” and create a new sort of wholeness in their relationship with the individual (Ross 4). Where therapy looks at transformation in the personal context, McAdams looks at the possibility of transformation in the wider social context. As we have seen demonstrated in earlier chapters, McAdams readily confronts societal taboos, specifically homosexuality and religious bigotry. Here she is using art to challenge the stigma of mental illness. These images made by people with psychiatric disabilities, when displayed, may challenge biases and stereotypes related to mental illness. At the time of their making, the perception of the mentally ill as “violent schizophrenics” still prevailed (Phelan et al 189).

McAdams’ Photography Workshops

As has been discussed in earlier chapters, art is seen by many as a stimulus to life and access to artistic experience as a basic human need and right (Vick 6). McAdams recognised the importance of providing disabled and disadvantaged people with opportunities for this experience and began working with patients at the Brooklyn Day Program in 1983 when she was hired by Hospital Audiences, Inc., (HAI), to teach a summer photography workshop (PI 2018). Here her role was to share her positive experiences of photography with participants who otherwise would be excluded, helping to communicate and mediate between them and the world around them. The relationship was one of teacher and student, not therapist and patient, and so the emphasis was on the participation in and enjoyment of the experience. She applied formally to HAI, which funded her work and who required a detailed outline of her proposed content and demanded clear goals and aims. She was asked to outline her proposed exercises, materials used, and to say what benefits she expected her group to derive from her methods. This was to ensure a valuable and meaningful experience for the participants. It was necessary to provide them with an interesting pastime, “to bring cultural enrichment to [your] groups” in line with HAI standards not simply provide an activity to keep them busy. “If there are therapeutic effects be sure to mention them but they are not the primary goal” (Appendix Seven).

McAdams worked to her highest professional standards and obtained grants for the best materials available. This was important to prevent reinforcing existing prejudices against the disabled in society who were already excluded and often had a poor self-image. Her role was that of an artist not of an art therapist but her work helped people with disabilities, who are less able to speak and articulate their thoughts, to participate more fully in their community. (Appendix Nine, Grant Application by McAdams to the Polaroid Corporation). McAdams was paid by the hour, materials were provided and she was given two subway tokens per workshop for travelling there and back (PI 2020).

Coney Island

The location of these institutional facilities at Coney Island, the southernmost terminal in the New York City Subway system, is perhaps symbolic, as Coney Island is the end of the line, the last stop on the subway before the city gives way to the sea. These marginalised people were literally at the furthest extreme of society.

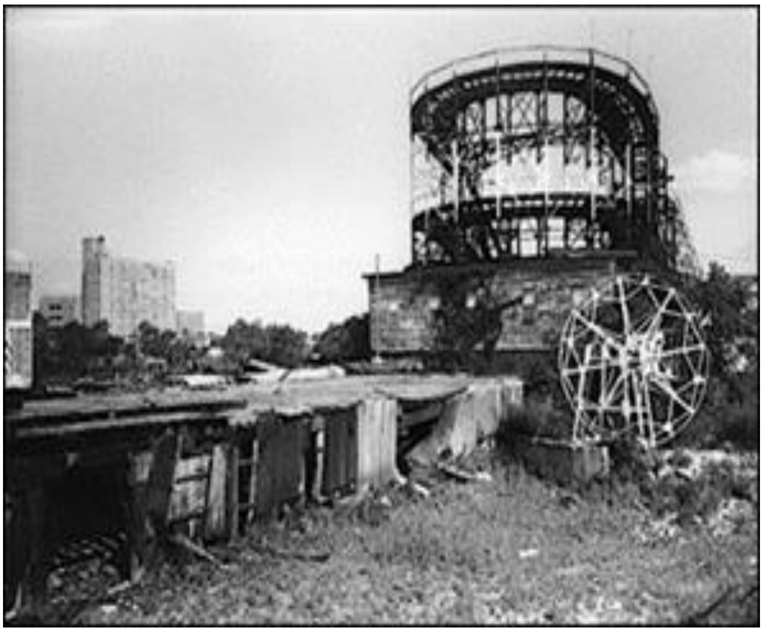

Figure 4.10. McAdams, Dona Ann. Coney Island had become run-down by the 1980s.

At the time of McAdams' workshops, in the 1980s, Coney Island was symbolic of former glory, as can be seen in figure 4.9, above. It had been a lively seaside resort and in 1909 "Dreamland", was built, then the newest of Coney Island's original three amusement parks. People flocked there to experience funfair pleasures, but in 1944 it began its slow decline when the largest of the amusement areas, Luna Park, burned to the ground. McAdams recalls that when she would travel to take her workshops there were freak show "barkers" drawing people to what we would today regard as their unpleasant displays of those who did not meet the measure of "normal" (PI 2018). Today the term "freak show" has taken a new meaning in that it is understood to refer to someone behaving in a freakish manner who must be avoided. We might pause to consider the images below of a workshop member whose rheumatic knuckles and irregular posture might have been considered freakish at one time but who participated fully in the project despite her physical and mental disability (figures 4.11 and 4.12). Also notable is the level of engagement this member has with the camera, not the vacant stare of the over-medicated. The woman, Jane Smith, interestingly coloured her image very brightly, a possible consequence of the psychotropic drugs prescribed to manage the mood of the participants.

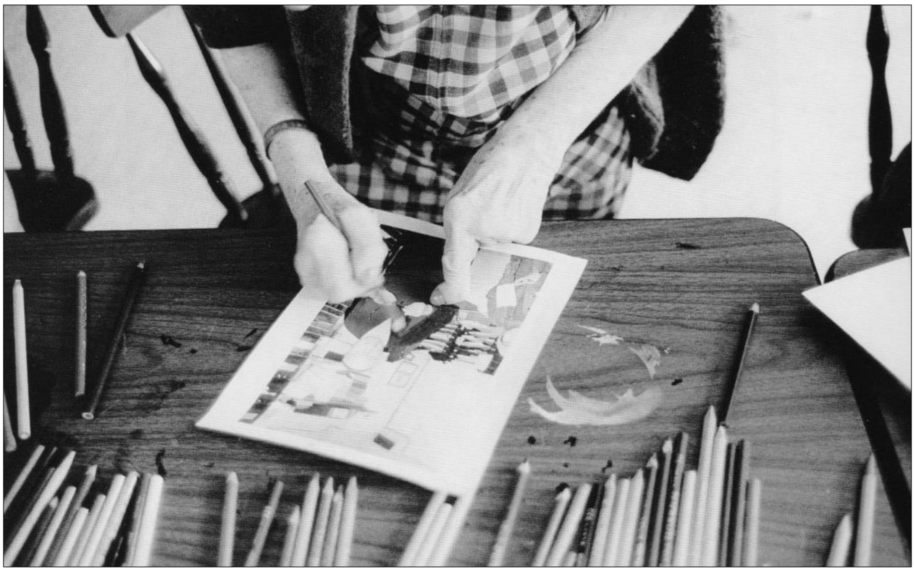

Figure 4.11. McAdams, Dona Ann. Jane Smith. Close-up of hands.

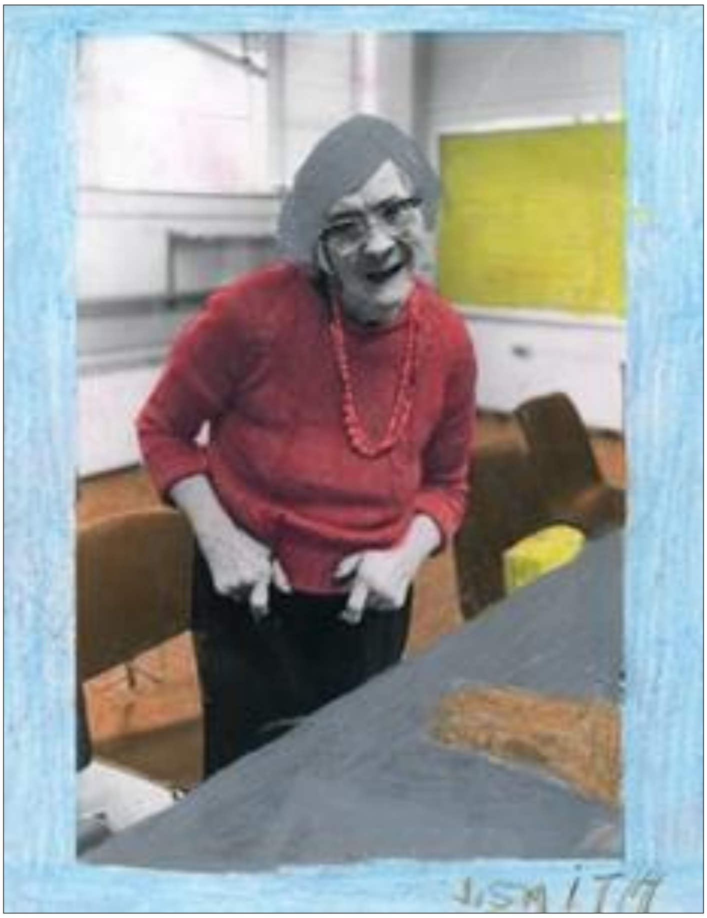

Figure 4.12. McAdams, Dona Ann. Jane Smith.

McAdams has reflected that as she travelled out to Coney Island over those years she increasingly began to appreciate and to imagine how the topography and physical state of Coney Island reflect the lives of the patients in her workshops:

> In the past, Coney Island was an attractive place where people would come to spend leisure time by the seashore or on the boardwalk. Now I see its beauty in very much the same context as my workshop groups: both are neglected, but gallant, still alive and worthy of respect. Both the land and the people have been neglected, yet they have so much to offer. These images reflect something of my feelings about being an artist, my sense of living somewhat apart, of living so close to the edge. (PI 2018)

Initially a thriving destination for day-trippers, Coney had been left to run wild and the images of its deterioration into rusty remnants of a past glory evoke a sense of the passage of time for the place and the people. The workshop groups’ perceptions of their environment were surprisingly colourful as shown in figures 4.13 and 4.14, which McAdams attributes to the medication they were given (PI 2018).

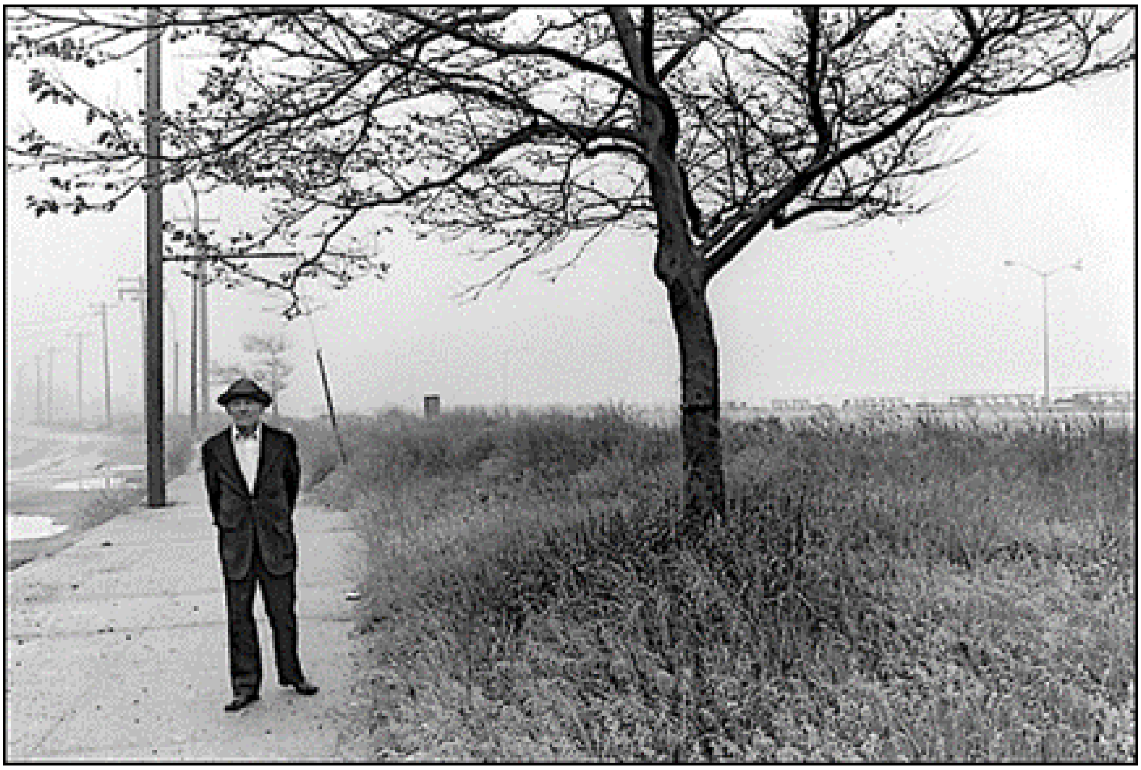

Figure 4.13. McAdams Dona Ann. A walk outside.

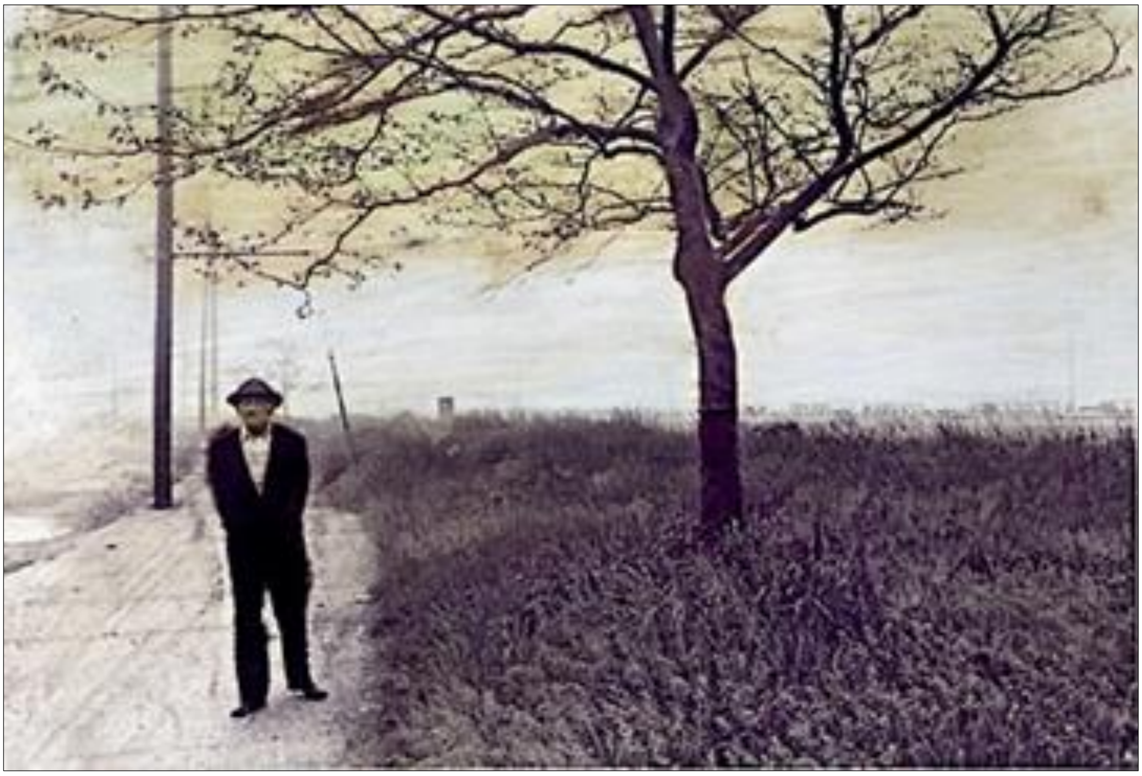

Figure 4.14. McAdams Dona Ann. Hand-coloured by workshop member.

As the workshop participants cannot express in words the details of their marginalised lives we can draw comparisons with what McAdams has expressed as her sense of living apart:

> As a largely self-taught person, I've always felt like I was outside. And because my work hasn't really been celebrated in big exhibitions with prestigious grants or awards, not that I haven't gotten some, I have, but I feel that this has always kept me sort of "clean". (PI 2018)

McAdams' workshops may be seen as sites of radical possibility for the participants whose interest and enthusiasm transformed their situation from a place of deprivation to one of meaningful personal exchanges and creative output.

McAdams' Goals for Her Workshops

In an interview with me in 2018, McAdams described the conditions at four different residential properties which housed the mentally ill in which she conducted her workshops for HAI: Sandford Manor, Heights Hill, Steinway and

Coney Island. Her recollections show that she tailored the workshop content specifically to the facilities available, and was sensitive to the different needs of the participants, at each location (PI 2018). Her experience was that the patients, who were primarily older, long-term patients who had become institutionalised, were at first interested in having their pictures taken but not in using the camera (PI 2018).

McAdams recalls how they loved seeing and possessing images of themselves, hanging them from walls or giving prints to friends (PI 2018). They would pore over contact sheets and request many different shots of themselves. In 1997, the Robert B Menschel Photography Gallery in Syracuse NY showed some of McAdams images in an exhibition entitled *The Garden of Eden,* for which members of her Coney Island workshop had given their permission (PI 2018). These, she felt “best expressed the lives of a sensitive, creative and gentle group of people who would prefer to stay out of mental institutions, who attempt to maintain their contact with reality and to improve the quality of life in their community” (PI 2018). McAdams’ goals for this work are clearly expressed in this sentiment. The text in the accompanying exhibition catalogue was written by McAdams’ husband the writer Brad Kessler, who accompanied her to Coney Island and assisted at the workshops.

Sandford Manor

At Sandford Manor (the Manor), she found a large number of people competing for limited facilities and limited staff contact, challenges which McAdams worked to overcame (PI 2018). McAdams was determined to keep promises to her participants who had already been let down by their own medical condition and by society (PI 2018). Referring to the difficulties of attracting and retaining workshop participants, McAdams noted that “on Fridays, there are several activities to choose from: Ida's music and dance group, bingo and the Friday Rock and roll party which includes food. It is always difficult to compete against food" (PI 2018). However, she reports that her attendance numbers were high because Mondays and Fridays were the only days there were activities and so clients were alert to the opportunities.

The Manor was short of space in which to conduct the workshops and the small back room where she first held her workshops became unavailable (PI 2018). Being constantly relocated was confusing to the group members who would not find her where they expected to and would sometimes go back to their rooms so McAdams often found herself on the public address system [intercom] trying to regroup them (PI 2018). Eventually, she obtained permission to hold her workshops on fold-up tables and chairs in the lobby which had a good working atmosphere where everyone benefitted—she was lauded for not demanding space, the participants were not disturbed by the passers-by and more photos were taken as people who would not come to the group were becoming interested as they walked by (PI 2018). In this way the location allowed McAdams to reach out to more participants and to realise her goal of encouraging photo making (see image 4.15, below, of activities in the lobby).

Being in a public space was difficult for some who had to overcome initial shyness, and McAdams noticed that there was still some fear of using a camera which she overcame by using simpler tools such as Polaroids and also a fully automatic camera (PI 2018). Using polaroids was important to help participants overcome anxiety about being separated from the image and not getting their images back from the developer's as the image appeared immediately (PI 2018). She noticed the participants becoming more confident about controlling the camera and making it work for them and later they were

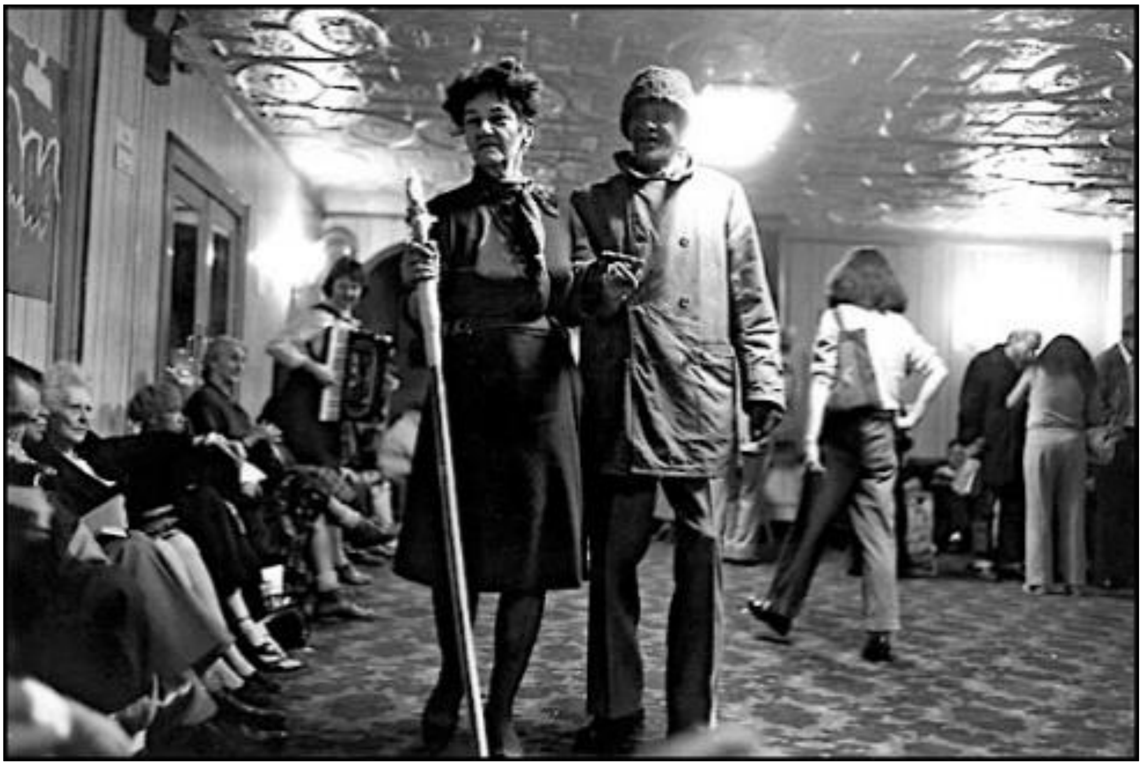

Figure 4.15. McAdams, Dona Ann. Group activities in the lobby: music-making and socialising.

ready to use more sophisticated cameras with different lenses (PI 2018). It can be concluded that the relaxed and inclusive atmosphere employed by McAdams in her workshops encouraged self-belief among the group which in turn builds self-esteem.

McAdams observed: “Polaroids are a real groundbreaker especially for the very disturbed, who can appreciate the quick results and gain a sense of accomplishment…To see clients’ faces when they have successfully made an image is a wonderful sight” (PI 2016). McAdams was conflicted over using Polaroids even sparingly because she did not think they were challenging enough for the workshop groups and denied them the pleasure of picking their preferred images from the contact sheet and later adding to them with colour and collage. For McAdams, working through the entire process of selecting subject matter, framing the shot, taking the image and working in the darkroom to process the prints provided a more fulfilling experience for participants (PI 2019).

Heights Hill, Kings, Brooklyn

At Heights Hill McAdams had different goals for individuals as well as a group goal. She explained that she found this a wonderful facility, working with helpful staff who held a daily meeting to discuss problems and client needs and many groups working at the same time (PI 2018). There was, once again, significant competition with the cooking workshop she recalled (PI 2018). McAdams had good numbers, however, and her members moved around to photograph the different groups around the facility too with several becoming so enthused that they purchased their own cameras (PI 2018). McAdams supplied them with film and processed what they selected from their contact sheets, a goal she had set herself the previous year. In this way, she gave them agency and facilitated their creative potential. At Heights Hill, she regarded her members as “client street photographers doing some interesting work” (PI 2018). Several of her group took a subscription to *Time Magazine* and obtained a camera that way, via an offer in the magazine. McAdams observed, “It’s great to see these people taking photography into their lives out of the clinics and on their own time” (PI 2018).

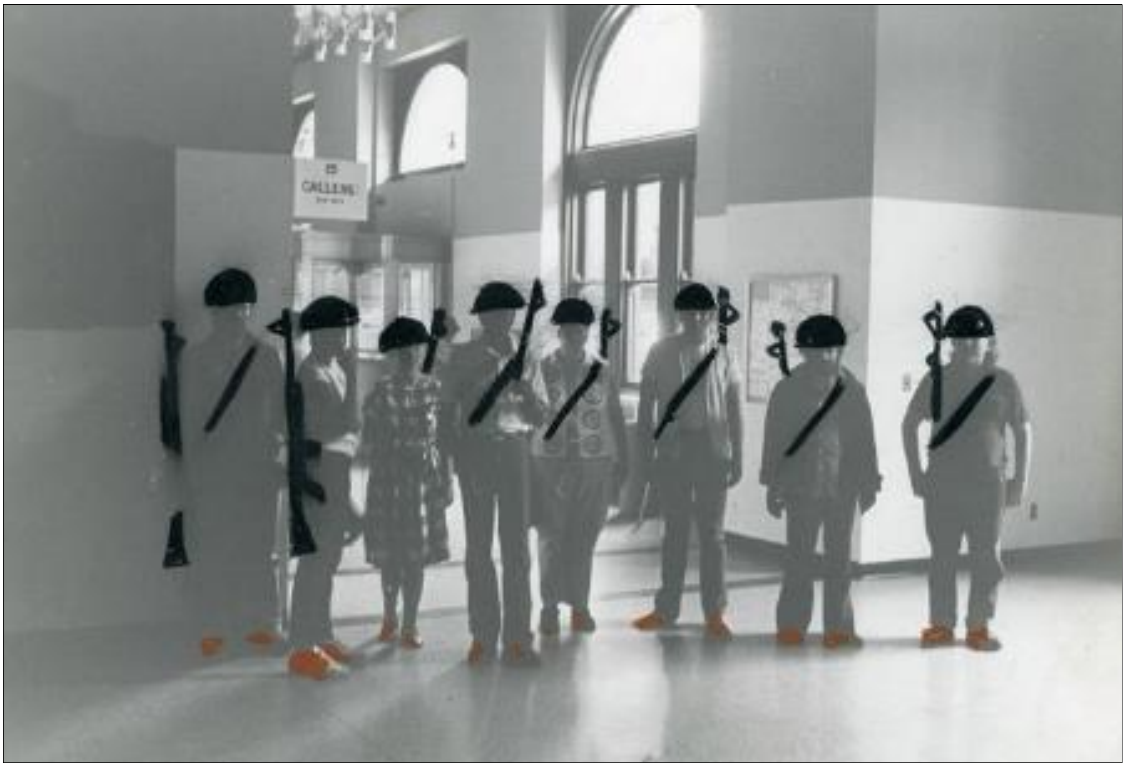

Figure 4.16. McAdams Dona Ann. Hand-coloured by Ravin Bass, Brooklyn, 1986.

McAdams pointed out that several of the clients worked on hand-colouring, which added their own interpretation to the work and shows McAdams giving them agency, softening the hierarchy between photographer and subject. In figure 4.16, above, the group of people standing at the entrance of the public library has been transformed into a military unit. McAdams told me: “Another collaboration with my image and hand-colouring by Ravin Bass. Brooklyn,1986” (PI 2018). She noted that it is coloured to superimpose military motifs and reflected that the patient/artist may have been a Vietnam veteran. It is interesting to observe the potential threat, perceived by the workshop member, in a throng of people, while at the same time the quirky colouring of the shoes while all else is monochrome (PI 2018).

Some workshop participants did self-portraits with the lighting they had set up in the group. Depending on the weather, and their state of health, some groups were able to leave the building and go out onto the streets to shoot images and McAdams was very satisfied with the resulting panoramic shots (PI 2018). These are evidence of shared human experiences that may be seen to transcend disability as the emphasis was on the production of work rather than on the disability of the attendees. In figure 4.17, below, McAdams has captured a bus passenger looking out through a steamy window an image which she feels emphasises the freedom of the passengers to go elsewhere and the limitations of the workshop group's liberty to roam (PI 2018). McAdams' stated goal was to have each member finish their own portfolio and participate in a small exhibition and, as previously mentioned, in November 1987 an exhibition was staged at the Robert B Menschel Photography Gallery at Syracuse University, Syracuse New York.

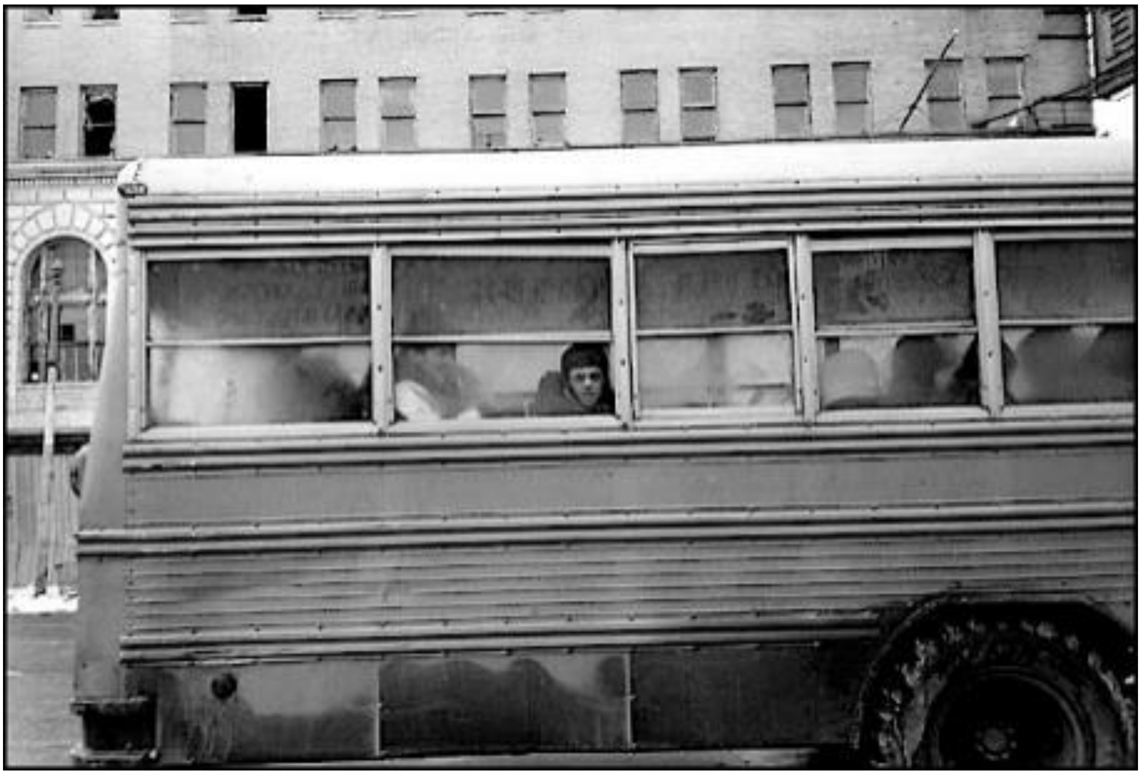

Figure 4.17. McAdams Dona Ann. Surf Avenue, Coney Island. 1985.

Steinway, Queens

At another location, Steinway, there was the luxury of a darkroom which meant the work could be processed on-site which was ideal for McAdams as it and saved her hours of studio time, printing and processing clients' work (PI 2018). McAdams noted that each 8"x10" print was usually developed in her darkroom at home except for the work from Queens. More importantly for her, having access to a darkroom "puts the work where it should be, in the hands of the artists" (PI 2018). The photography, the image-making, the darkroom is a very creative place and ties up all the separate elements of making a photograph. In the darkroom, clients could oversee the entire process. As their medical conditions left them prone to anxiety and heavily medicated McAdams encountered difficulties relating to the fear of small spaces and the smell of the chemicals. She recalled: "Once they overcome the fear of the small space, the smell of the chemicals and the red light they love it. Of course, the darkroom is not for everyone but most people love it" (PI 2018).

McAdams described how, in the workshops, people could express their preferences for different aspects of the process (PI 2018). She noticed how: "Those who did not like to shoot may love to print, and also, the camera-shy members who preferred not to be photographed or who were hesitant to use a camera could do photo processing work" and that "In the darkroom people who have been working and shooting are absorbed by making their own prints" (PI 2018). McAdams' goal was to teach them all to print which was a challenge in itself. She managed to get almost everyone into the darkroom making prints and regretted that there were not more darkrooms available. The process of photography also has a therapeutic effect. McAdams observed that photography is more than pressing a shutter, but a continuation of actions: the photographer chooses the subject, the angle, and studies the result, creating meaning from the selection of images in the contact sheets and in the printing (PI 2018). This engages the photographer and establishes a positive experience of conceptualising, creating, choosing and completing an exercise of self-expression which is in itself therapeutic.

Coney Island, Brooklyn

Discussing the Coney Island workshops, McAdams noted that she had lengthened these to three hours long and this had helped with their scheduling and increased her numbers. McAdams counted her participants at Coney Island as “some of the best visual artists around”:

> They love to hand colour out here and to photograph [as well]. My goals here are to have people start to build up a small body of work for exhibition. Also out here, because of the success of the photo workshop and [high] demand they have started a workshop of their own. They use an Instamatic camera and send out colour prints [to be developed]. It is nice to see such growth out of my workshop. (PI 2018)

The writer Brad Kessler, McAdams’ husband, accompanied her to the Coney Island workshops and remains intrigued by “the narrative of the hand colour” as he told me in 2019. Kessler first met McAdams when he was asked to write an essay accompanying the exhibition of this work, *the Garden of Eden*, at the Robert B. Menschel Photography Gallery in 1997. He told me he had never seen work like it and was drawn to McAdams as a person who used her photography to empower and not isolate or discriminate (Kessler PI 2019). As McAdams recalls “In time the workshop members became creative with my black and white prints” choosing from the contact sheets and reworking portraits of themselves or their local neighbourhood she had taken and printed on fibre paper (roma chrome) which could be coloured over (PI 2019). She continued: “They would transform their own image, drawing on the black and white surface with coloured pencils and magic markers” (PI 2019). For some, it was like filling a colouring book but for others “the process of manipulating their own image through an artistic means seemed to have a therapeutic value” becoming “an emotional and artistic expression” even “touching on issues of personality and identity” and “a small success, something accomplished” (PI 2019).

McAdams saw in the hand colouring process an expression of the dignity and talent of a “stigmatized, and often misunderstood population” and wanted to see how photography could be used as a bridge between people and communities instead of a barrier” (PI 2019). McAdams considered that the hand colouring by the workshop participants “improved upon her work in ways that she never would have imagined” providing an opportunity for mutual growth in an equal partnership of creative endeavour (PI 2019). Through art they made “a small step in demystifying the disease” and “creating a bridge from one mind and another” (PI 2019). In the series of images below, figures 4.18, 4.19, 4.20, 4.21, McAdams has captured the enjoyment of the participants in her workshop and their pride in their finished work.

Figures 4.18,4.19,4.20,4.21. McAdams, Dona Ann. Series.
Participants enjoying the workshop and taking pride in the results of their efforts.

McAdams was aware that there are ethical issues to be taken into account when photographing the severely mentally ill (PI 2019). She explained during the interviews that photography is a powerful form of representation and may be easily manipulated to misrepresent people, especially those who are vulnerable and outside of mainstream society. In these projects, McAdams has made it possible for a group of people who could easily be the targets of ridicule and curiosity to participate in how they were represented. Her fourteen-year project strove to empower and enlighten. The trust and affection between herself and the participants are revealed in the images which exemplify how the compassion and commitment of an individual artist can enrich a community. Nonetheless, McAdams understood that exhibiting client artwork must be handled with care and sensitivity (PI 2018). Susan Evans Spaniol recommended that for exhibits to be ethical, they must follow a set of principles which she summarised as: “opportunity, safeguards and empowerment” (Spaniol, 78). Spaniol argued that providing opportunity meant creating the occasion for exhibition participants to define themselves as artists. Safeguards were primarily the assurance of confidentiality and empowerment came from including the artists in the decision-making and having them participate in each step of the process (Spaniol 78).

Summary of McAdams Workshop Experience

McAdams sees the camera as sometimes “a tool of division, defining the viewer against the viewed, or ‘us’ against the ‘other’” and in her work seeks to make photographs that are not solely “beautiful” but which also have a function (PI 2019). In this instance, she portrays positively and gives a platform to a community who have often been robbed of their voice and for whom verbal communication is a challenge (PI 2019). McAdams has drilled into the humanity of her subjects, has elected never to work in portraits, weddings or magazine photography and is, therefore, self-avowedly “not in the tradition of (Annie) Leibowitz or (Helmut) Newton” (PI 2019). McAdams elaborated:

> I never took a job as a photographer to work doing weddings or events. I didn’t even work as a stringer [contributor] at the *Village Voice* for the *New York Times* for money. I preferred to keep myself clear or free of assignments as a reporter or a journalist. (PI 2017)

From McAdams’ recollections of her time at the various institutions, her workshops adhered to Spaniol’s guidelines even though she may not have been aware of them at the time. McAdams’ images are empathetic but not pitying. Initially, McAdams made photographs of the workshop participants as well as the surrounding neighbourhood. The act of exploring and documenting their own neighbourhood as a photographer rather than experiencing it as a psychiatric in-patient may be seen as allowing them to claim their right to these spaces. The images below, figures 4.22 and 4.23, are from a workshop that took place on Valentine’s Day. McAdams has called these “poignant” photographs that depict a celebration of love and a time when loved ones give tokens of affection, a custom often outside the experience of people with mental illness who have been institutionalised (PI 2018). In her Valentine’s Day workshop, McAdams gave the members the right to own that celebratory space as well. It is touching to learn from McAdams’ recollection that most of the drawings of hearts and flowers were left behind as the workshop participants went back to resume their daily routines (PI 2018). Many people would find this moving and would speculate that the participants possibly had no one to give their images to, maybe had no one of their own to love, as important as being loved oneself.

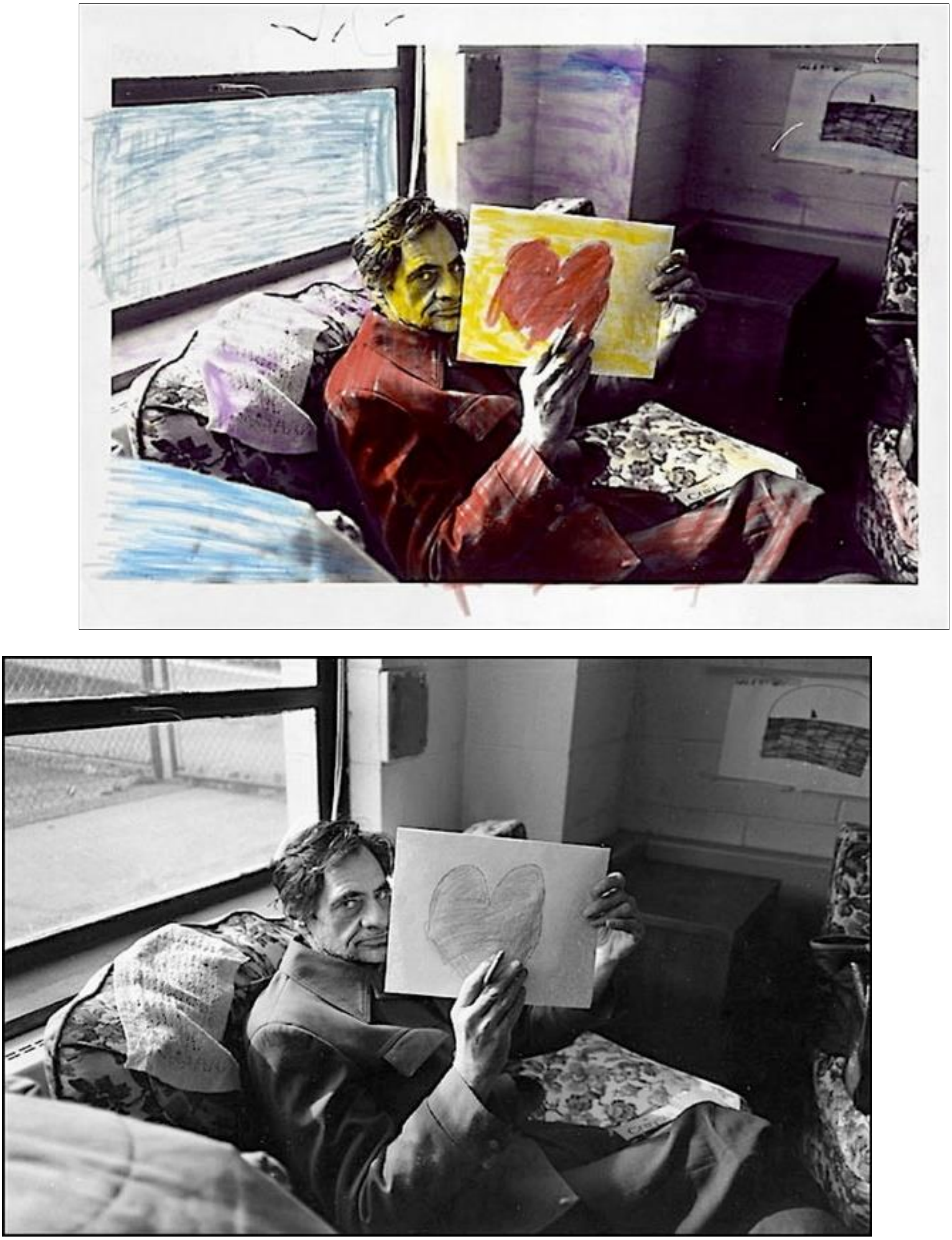

Figure 4.22 and 4.23. McAdams Dona Ann. Valentine’s Day Workshop.

McAdams explained that she aimed to produce images that show the participants as neither exploited nor shamed (PI 2018). McAdams’ objective was empowerment; involving clients in decisions about printing and exhibits whilst protecting their dignity and in some cases, their identity was disguised. McAdams has reflected: “in the context of working with patients living their lives fighting daily battles with mental illness, it is very important to consider and confront the possible exploitation of patients” adding that her approach was to “involve the patients in collaboration with [her] in bringing them to public view: having the choice of images which they wanted her to present; giving permission to use each image which would be publicly shown” (PI 2018). The coloured images were carefully selected by the patients themselves for “colourised artistic expression” (PI 2018).

McAdams’ work was a departure from other photography series taken of the institutionalised which often generated greater stigma by focusing on the strangeness of the subject’s facial features and expressions, for instance, a series by Diane Arbus discussed below. McAdams’ images also stood in stark contrast to the work of Jo Spence who, in *The Picture of Health?,* (1982), drew on her photography of herself as a cancer patient to derive meaning from the emotional, psychological and physical trauma of her experience, also discussed below. Spence felt that the medical profession and the hospital environment erased her identity and she used photography to take control of the narrative of that part of her life (Studiovoltaire 22).

Contrast with Diane Arbus

McAdams had an affinity with her subjects and there was a mutual exchange in the relationship a friendship and closeness between them to which the images attest. She wanted to recognise that art concerns all human beings and welcomed as many types of people as possible to the workshops. McAdams’ work contrasts with that of Diane Arbus (1923-1971) whose last body of work, *Untitled* (1969–71), was produced at residences for people with developmental disabilities. In 1995, a *New Yorker* critique of this work called it a "collection of portraits of the mentally retarded," and mentioned the writer's personal experience of a family member afflicted with schizophrenia, and later described the subjects "physiognomies" (personality traits according to their facial features) as something to be "got past" (Als et al). The article describes "their flat, mongoloid faces, their disconcerting stares" using language that would be deemed offensive today (Als et al). Als describes an uneasy collaboration between Arbus and her subjects, in contrast to McAdams' connection with hers.

Arbus had photographed the institutionalised in earlier work and often invoked greater stigma by focusing on the deviance of the subject's facial features and expressions which emphasised their strangeness. That Arbus appears to be foregrounding the vulnerability of her subjects was unsettling to McAdams (McAdams PI 2018). Arbus often proclaimed her love for photographing "freaks", however affectionately: "you see someone on the street and essentially what you notice about them is the flaw" (Sontag 34). Critic Susan Sontag objected to Arbus's practice in her 1977 collection of essays, *On Photography*, saying her work was "based on distance, on privilege, on a feeling that what the viewer is asked to look at is really other" (34). Sontag considered looking at Arbus' images "an ordeal" (40) and that her view of her subjects was "always from the outside" (42). McAdams herself interprets Arbus' choice of subjects as "looking for her community" in that she felt herself to be a freak and so sought out similar beings, but McAdams sees no comparison with her own work here (PI 2019).

Contrast with Jo Spence

Also in the twentieth century, photographer Jo Spence turned to her work to confront a life-threatening illness and challenge the many taboos which surround the cancer patient (Studiovoltaire 28). Unlike the psychiatric patients in McAdams' workshops, Spence had agency over her own body and therapy and used photography as a method of self-help (Studiovoltaire 24). As her work showed, self-portraiture could have therapeutic value for those who were in trauma or undergoing a difficult experience. Much as McAdams has intersected with the Feminist Movement, Gay Rights activism and theatre as a vehicle for social change, Spence regarded her work as situating her in a variety of cultural debates and believed "we are positioned within a cultural and economic network of relationships" and viewed images as "sites of struggle" (Spence 12, 119).

Spence held that "phototherapy means using photos to heal ourselves" and her work has demonstrated that photography as a creative outlet had therapeutic value for those in trauma or experiencing challenges in life (Spence 6). The images that she took became a part of "visual illness diaries" or albums that she created regularly (Dennett 10). Spence's album, *The Picture of Health?,* may be regarded as a diary because Spence used it to record the impact of the various cancer treatments in the form of photographs she took of herself (Spence 150). One of the techniques that Spence used was that of "therapeutic staging", which was a re-enacting of her body's struggle for survival (Dennett 11). She also used mirrors in her images as a form of "mirror therapy" which involved her watching her process of taking images of herself and meant that Spence did not have to rely on someone else to take her photographs. This also allowed her to be uninhibited because "mirrors do not pass judgement" (Dennett 12). Jo Spence also used "scripting" where she mapped out an entire photoshoot before beginning it and finally she also involved professional therapists in the later part of her work (Dennett 14). Spence utilised her photography of herself to facilitate personal growth in therapy which differs from McAdams' position of providing creative outlets for participants in the workshops she facilitated.

Therapeutic photography allows insight into one's life situation and participants may feel more control over their own life story (Glover-Graf and Miller 167). Personal images and family snapshots are recognised for their ability to create memories that can serve as points of reference for people and take them back to a more comforting time and place (Weiser). In her earlier, (1979) work, *Beyond the Family Album,* interrogating personal photo albums and their portrayal of a construct of "family", Spence wanted to use images to ask questions rather than to try to show facts and to contradict and demythologise the story (Spence 98).

This is more intense compared to McAdams' relaxed and inclusive style of teaching in her workshops which was mentioned by the attendee in the Dorothea Dix award citation quoted above (Appendix Five). Spence had long understood that the way an image is used could dramatically alter its meaning, something McAdams appreciated during the Culture Wars (72). Spence had begun by hoping that her subjects would reveal the essence of themselves to her camera in a "human moment", a sight of themselves that they know but no one else did and that she could "make visual" (45). This "human moment" resonates with McAdams' image of the workshop participant without his dentures (Figure 4.24, below). Photography is a valuable tool in therapy because it allows exploration of self and self-identity and helps to develop a positive self-image and building confidence (Glover-Graf and Miller 167).

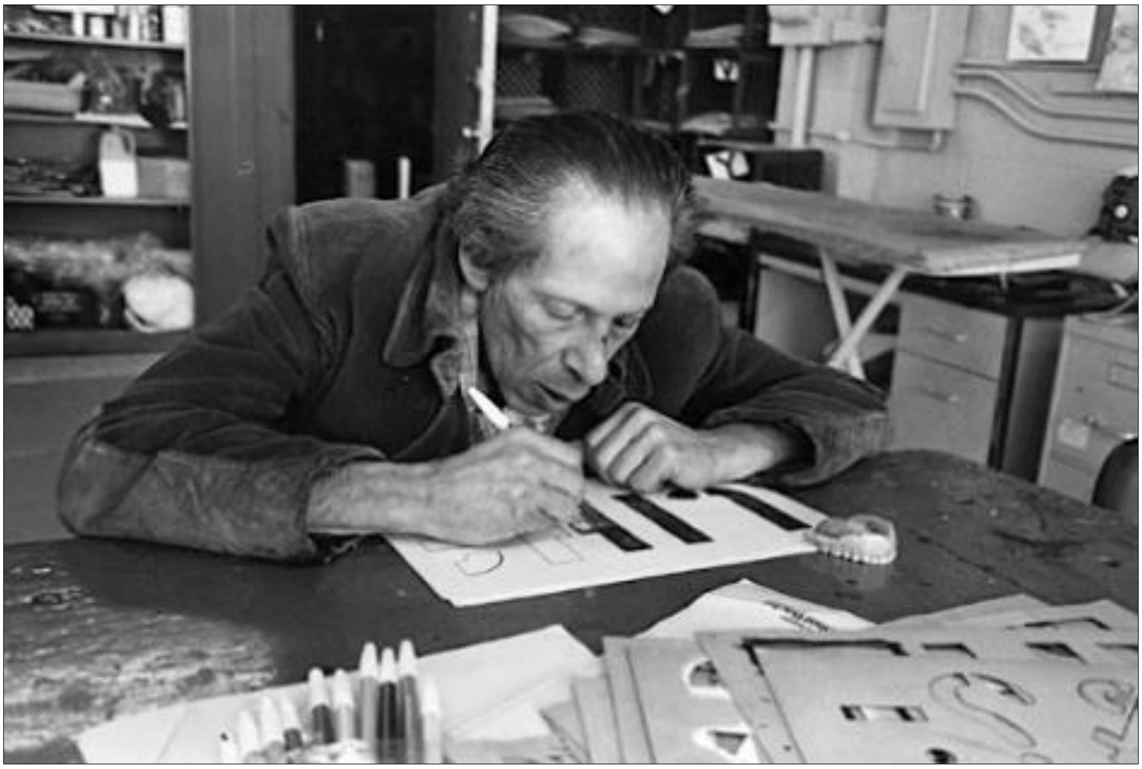

Figure 4.24. McAdams, Dona Ann. Workshop participant without dentures.

Chapter Summary

As described above, after the 1940s art therapy began to emerge as a distinct discipline but there was no formal training available and psychoanalysis remained a dominant influence (Vick 10). In this context, what McAdams was doing in 1984 was pioneering for its time. Artists like McAdams exemplified a humanistic approach, espousing “an optimistic view of human nature and of the human condition, seeing people in a process of growth and development, with potential to take responsibility for their fate” (Vick 11). McAdams’ work here with chronic and severe mental health patients exemplifies her belief in the healing role of the arts. An important point to note is that McAdams is not medically trained so was providing a participatory art experience rather than creative art therapy as a clinical intervention. As evidenced, McAdams was very conscious of the ethical considerations around working with vulnerable people and recording images of them. As Ruth, (last name not given), the Programme

Director, outlines in Appendix seven, the purpose of the work was more than simply a diversion or a means of “keeping busy”.

McAdams recognised that workshop activity can be transformative in terms of the mental wellbeing of the participants and of the alterations to the artworks themselves and regarded them as a form of recreation or “play” (PI 2018). Philip Prager has written that a basic characteristic of play is that it appears purposeless. He believes that “transformative ideas—whether in the arts or the sciences—are unpredictable, unscriptable, the result of chance encounters” which rely on joining elements that would remain incongruous and disparate if it were not for the sheer pleasure that we derive from novelty and improvisation (Prager 243).

McAdams recognised that seeing images can produce profound reactions in the viewer and might be unsettling to them. She believes that participants need to be carefully supported, working at a gentle pace and not asking them to delve too deeply into themselves, but instead focusing on the artistic process (PI 2018). McAdams recognised that confinement in mental institutions was isolating and hoped that her workshops would provide human activity and artistic expression that would give meaning to their lives (PI 2018). As she states:

> [the concept of] “Community” has the most resonance with the work I’ve done as a photographer over the last 20 years. During that time I’ve shared the photographic process with several diverse communities. I’ve built community darkrooms in homeless shelters and mental health facilities” (PI 2018).

Her reference to sharing is significant as it articulates her commitment to enabling the community to define itself by controlling its own imagery. McAdams’ workshops gave members the freedom to assert their agency over content, materials, text and colour.

Benefits from McAdams' Workshops

The benefits of participating in McAdams' workshops may be measured by comparing the observed outcomes with the goals for therapeutic photography and social action photography set out by psychotherapist Judy Weiser, a pioneer in psychotherapy who integrated photography into clinical work. Weiser distinguishes between Photo-Therapy which is Therapy and Therapeutic photography which refers to photo-based activities that are self-initiated and conducted by oneself (or as part of an organised group or project) (Weiser). In these, no formal therapy is taking place and no therapist or counsellor needs to be involved, which is where McAdams' work here is situated (Weiser). Although Weiser's work relates to psychological treatment for clinical conditions, the same principles can also be applied to the general therapeutic effect of photography for people who are not seeking a change in their underlying medical condition. On her website, Weiser lists the reasons for undertaking Therapeutic Photography including: increasing self-knowledge, awareness, and well-being; improving relationships with family and others; activating positive change and reducing social exclusion; assisting rehabilitation; strengthening communities; lessening conflict; sharpening visual literacy skills, and in a wider societal context "bringing attention to issues of social injustice" (Weiser). Others in the field of psychotherapy who have integrated photography with psychotherapy include Dr John Suler who—along with Weiser—led the way for the development of art therapy and phototherapy. According to Suler:

> Photography is psychology…Because understanding the visual image is understanding the realm in which the psyche of the photographer and viewer intersect. Psychological principles about perception, emotion, creativity, personal identity, interpersonal communication, and human relationships help explain how we create visual images, how we share them, and how people react to what they see. (Suler)

The benefits to McAdams participants are evidenced by the images showing enjoyment and engagement with the process and by written testimonies from the participants themselves (Appendices Ten - Sixteen). It is clear that participants are alert, inspired, and are emotionally stimulated and this may be attributed to learning new skills. As McAdams explained: “In producing the photographs, non-verbal modes of expression are established and hand colouring and collage have been employed inventively” (PI 2018). She noticed that:

> Their photography activities engaged them in stretching their imaginations, awareness, and initiative. While they may not have been able to articulate this themselves in an analytical way that would support a scientific study, I was pleased that their written testimonies are enthusiastic and complimentary. They provide moving and thought-provoking accounts of the experience of image-making. (PI 2018)

The practice of photography in McAdams’ workshops allowed the capacity for creative thought and action as well as perceptual skills which in turn contributed to an enrichment of the lives of the individuals. The beneficial effects arguably had an overall impact on their behaviour and attitudes, social skills, and self-image, but there was no recorded change in clinical symptoms as this was not part of McAdams brief from HAI or her own stated goals. Following another later art therapy project, McAdams was recognised for her work with similar patients with the Dorothea Dix Humanitarian Award for 2006. The 2006 award citation for McAdams began:

> As long ago as 1847, Dix wrote: “Insanity is no longer regarded as the extinction of the mind; a disease, hopeless, incurable which proceeds from physical cause, which disable the brain for a time… This malady is subject to successful treatment, as surely as fever or other common bodily diseases”. (Dorothea Dix award citation Appendix Five)

Dix herself suffered a mental breakdown and felt her condition was a just punishment, a “chastisement” inflicted by God “for the soul’s health” (Vasek 69).

Dix's own experience alerted her to the possibility of "curing mental illness through kind gentle treatment" (Vasek 70), foreshadowing what Vick would later describe as the "humanisation of people with mental illness" (Vick 7).

The workshop participant who presented McAdams with her award had been clinically depressed for a decade and went on to echo the sentiments expressed by Dix on the importance of supportive friends and intellectual stimulation in her recovery, and to relay a little of her own story (Appendix Five). Initially, by this account, the patient experienced some trepidation about being taught by a New York City photographer but was soon at her ease with McAdams' relaxed and non-judgemental style, and eventually came to feel safe while being instructed. The award was presented with the words "How lucky I and all the people involved in the class have felt not only for the knowledge, joy (we felt) but for the kindness she showed every hour, every time she was with us" (Appendix Five).

McAdams was lauded in a letter of thanks to the South Beach Psychiatric Center, which had funded the project, painstakingly handwritten by a workshop participant and co-signed by thirteen others (Appendix Eight). This is moving testimony to the success of the workshops in enriching the lives of the participants. The letter states, in part, "We the undersigned wish to express and convey our sincerest gratitude and appreciation [for the funding]…. Dona's sessions mean a lot to us and have made a great difference, have contributed much to the quality of our lives as well as to the meaning and value of our pre-vocational efforts" (Appendix Eight). Each signature evidences a shaky hand but a determination to register the presence of the person and to add their voice to the others.

From the photographs, it can be seen that in common with McAdams' work within other communities, many of the images taken in the workshops are wistful and capture transient moments, fleeting encounters with people who have lives elsewhere. McAdams observed that below, figures 4.25 and 4.26, show "a poignant image of a luxury car, possibly a Packard (now out of production) with the hood ornament the Goddess of Speed, set against the background of the run-down tenement buildings from which there was no escape for our workshop members" (PI 2018). She appreciated that "there is an irony in the juxtapositioning of a perfect, idealised female form, the epitome of grace and freedom, against the damaged buildings" and that "the hood ornament might symbolise the transcendence of boundaries, but in reality, she is no freer than our brave artists, fixed permanently as she is to the hood of a car" (PI 2018). In the photography and in the writing workshops, Appendices Ten to Sixteen, the communities McAdams worked with have shown that they are more than anonymised case numbers or file notes, to be detained and medicated at the will of medical professionals, as experienced by Robert Neugeboren. Their work confronts society's reductive stereotyping and has freed their imaginations to roam at will, unhindered, if only for a short time, a liberation of the mind, if not the physical body.

This chapter has explored McAdams' work to support people living with mental health disabilities, and now I move on to examine another of her contributions in the field of social justice. In the following chapter, Gentrification, I delve into McAdams' portfolio of work on disappearing neighbourhoods, featured in her 1984 artist's book *Alphabet City*.

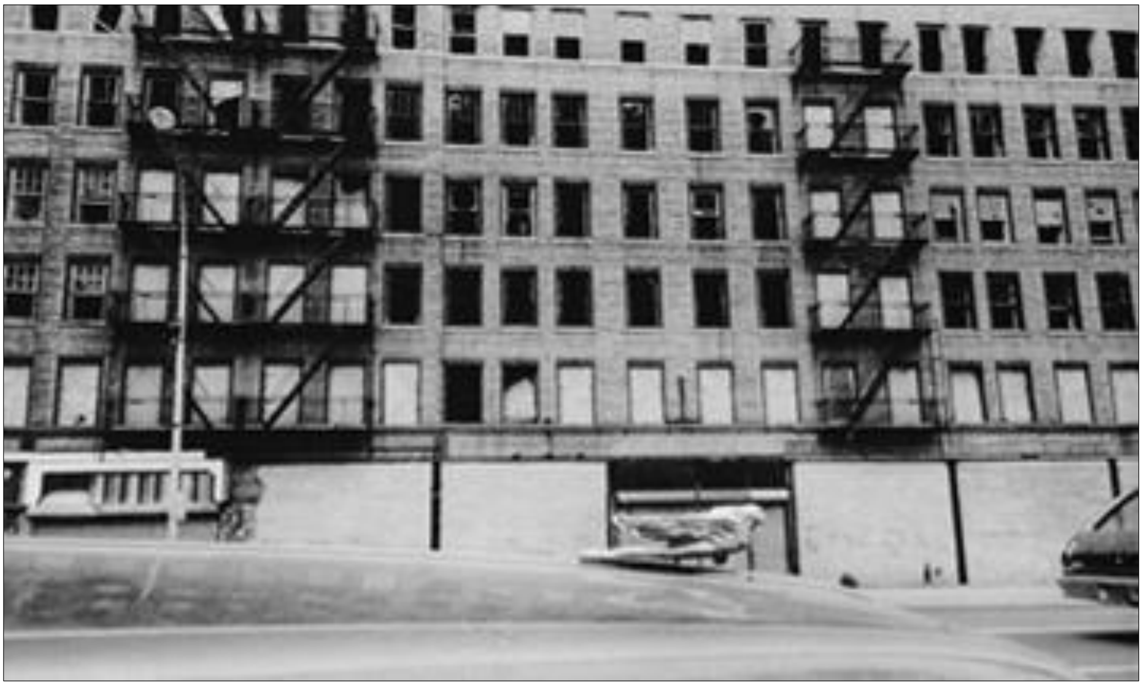

Figure 4.25. McAdams, Dona Ann. Packard hood ornament.

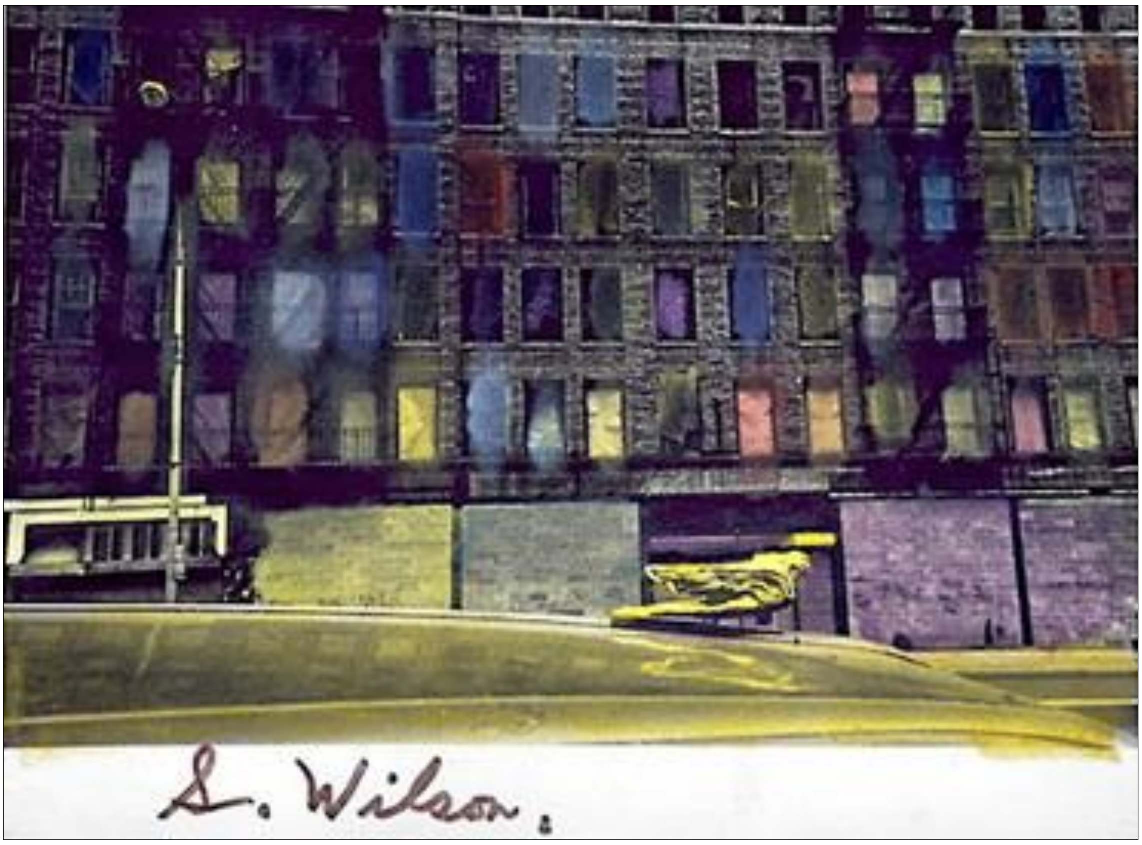

Figure 4.26. McAdams, Dona Ann. Packard hood ornament. Hand-coloured by S.Wilson.

CHAPTER FIVE

Gentrification, Alphabet City and PS122

Introduction

This chapter features McAdams' portfolio of work on gentrification, and I explore how McAdams' photographs illustrate the movement to gentrification in the Lower East Side, (LES), in the latter part of the twentieth century. I discuss McAdams' work recording irreversible changes to the buildings and infrastructure in her neighbourhood that were demolished or upgraded. McAdams recognised the importance of capturing these ephemeral moments and her artist's book *Alphabet City* (1984) brings together these images of the destruction and elimination of Alphabet City streets. First, I describe the geographic boundaries of Alphabet City, one of the areas which experienced gentrification and which she captured. Then the process of gentrification is defined and discussed, with accounts given by some of McAdams' contemporaries, including a discussion of the impact of the Aids Crisis on the LES property market. I draw on work by Sarah Schulman and Penny Arcade to link this restructuring of urban space to the erosion of cultural history and art production which was intensified by the high numbers of deaths among artists who were, initially, the most affected by HIV/Aids.

At the end of this chapter, I will conclude with an account of the New York City-funded remodelling of PS122, which was within the physical boundary of the area McAdams documented. PS122 was transformed from an abandoned school to an extended, formal art space following a multi-million dollar makeover between 2011 and 2015 and reopened in 2018, renamed Performance Space, New York. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the legacy of the original PS122 and the role of the “new PS122”, Performance Space, New York, as an institution, in today’s gentrified LES. McAdams’ important contribution to documenting this legacy in her photographs of the performers and performances is also discussed. This contribution is acknowledged by Performance Space, New York as McAdams is to be honoured in 2021 at a fortieth-anniversary celebration of the founding of PS122.

Physical Boundaries

It is pertinent to establish what is meant here by the area of the LES that was the focus of “gentrification”, and by the LES, the East Village and its subsection Alphabet city, as these can have different interpretations from different perspectives. Within this district of Lower Manhattan, my focus is on Alphabet City where the Avenues are named as a single letter “A”, “B”, “C”, “D”, and is where the eventual loss of the original tenement housing caused the displacement of the original inhabitants. The boundaries changed over time with neighbourhoods evolving and separating from, or encroaching upon each other. The map in figure 5.1, below, is a simplified illustration of “Lower Manhattan” which clearly shows the delineation between neighbourhoods that extend to very small geographic areas. Neighbourhood boundaries became significant as each building and block was “fiercely contested” by residents and owners in the battles over neighbourhood change (Mele 70).

McAdams has reflected that residents’ understandings of boundaries, rather than factual, geographic ones. For example, PS122 was impacted as its location, First Avenue, was where active policing stopped. She elaborated: “The police would not go into ‘The Alphabet’ - it was too dangerous. They did not want to drive drugs and crime beyond where they could see them. At PS122 we had [drug] dealers right outside the building and sometimes inside” (PI 2019).

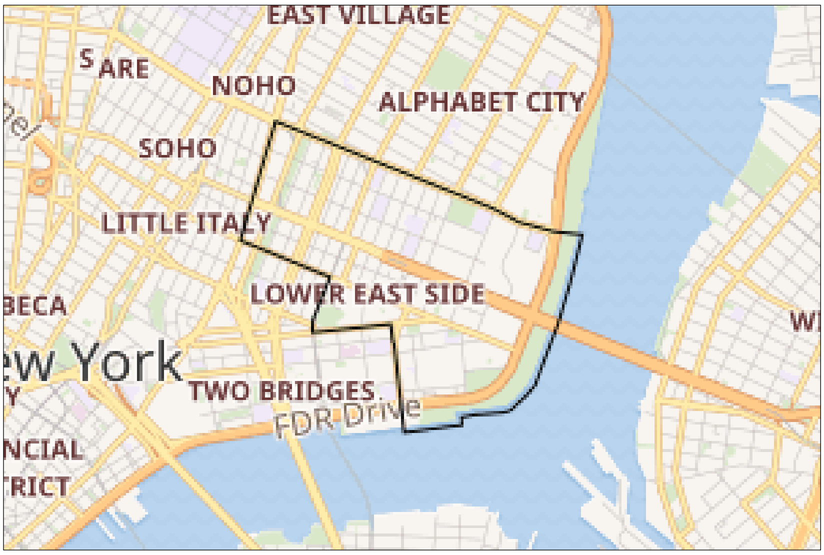
EAST VILLAGE
ARE
NOHO
ALPHABET CITY
SOHO
LITTLE ITALY
LOWER EAST SIDE
BECA
w York
TWO BRIDGES
FDR Drive
NCIAL
RICT
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Figure 5.1. Map of Lower East Side. (Source: Open Street Map:Wikipedia)

McAdams included her own map of Alphabet City as the rear cover of her artist’s book, see figure 5.2, below.

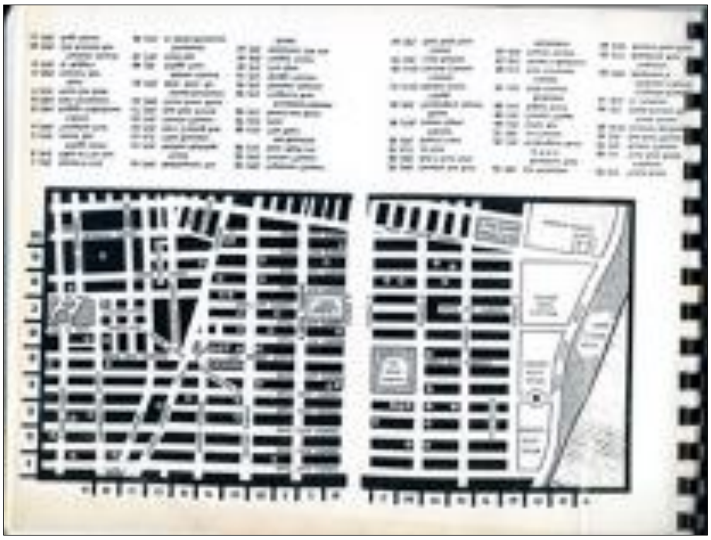


Figure 5.2. McAdams, Dona Ann. Alphabet City.1984, Back Cover.

The “East Village” was carved out from the LES to distinguish it from the public housing projects on the East River as landlords hoped to follow the earlier success of the West Village and upgrade to higher rentals (Mele 74). Mele has observed that city authorities used neighbourhood reputations such as that of the LES “counterculture” to attract investment from developers, who in turn branded it to promote an aspirational lifestyle, thus attracting more affluent tenants (75). This has made it important for neighbourhoods to maintain strict delineation of boundaries as developers and realtors marketed a lifestyle to prospective investors and renters and the re-branding of neighbourhoods dictated levels of rent. According to Abu-Lughod, “the terms [therefore], represent ‘social’ or ‘cognitive’ maps as much as they do maps of geographical space” (page 14 note 14). As noted above, McAdams observed that “PS122 marked a border at First Avenue” (PI 2019).

Janet Abu-Lughod’s delineation of the Lower East Side is the area “south of Fourteenth Street and east of Fourth Avenue/Bowery” (Abu-Lughod 95 17). For Belkind the geographic focus of her study of the LES was the area south of Houston Street and east of the Bowery. Belkind highlights changes that have already taken place as earlier periods of gentrification removed some part to the north and west, such as the East Village and NoLita, North Little Italy, which were once included in the designation "Lower East Side," but later were carved away and renamed (22). Writing in 2009, Belkind contends that, unlike those areas, “the remaining portion of the Lower East Side will likely keep its designation because the name now connotes authenticity and has been used to create brand identity for new developments and businesses” (22) and will be preserved to promote a sense of the neighbourhood as a cultural destination (30). PS122, where McAdams had her photographic darkroom, is situated in the East Village, once part of the designation “Lower East Side” and now a separate neighbourhood within it. It was this sense of geographical place and the sense of community that gentrification threatened.

Definitions of Gentrification

Gentrification has been defined as “The planned or unplanned process by which wealthy or affluent individuals in the middle class displace poorer individuals in traditionally working-class or poor neighbourhoods by purchasing property and upgrading it through renovation and modernization" (furmancenter). The origin of the term "Gentrification" is attributed to British sociologist, Ruth Glass who, in 1964, described changes she encountered in formerly working-class London neighbourhoods. Sociologists first began applying the term to New York City and elsewhere in the 1970s (furmancenter). The Furman Centre, New York University, (NYU) has defined Gentrification as follows:

> "Gentrification" has become the accepted term to describe neighbourhoods that start predominantly occupied by households of relatively low socioeconomic status, and then experience an inflow of higher socioeconomic status households…the word "gentrification" is applied broadly and interchangeably to describe a range of neighbourhood changes, including rising incomes, changing racial composition, shifting commercial activity, and displacement of original residents. (f*urmancenter.org*)

Over time, these early definitions came to be seen as simplistic, class-based explanations which required further analysis of the causes and the fate of the displaced (Smith 538). Abu-Lughod went on to conduct a new type of community study to capture "the economic and social complexities" of gentrification (95 5). Liz Bondi describes gentrification as "double-edged" in that neighbourhoods which experience it are not always in decline but may well have been "very vital working-class communities" and what profits some impoverishes others and the lifestyle choices of some deny those of others" (Bondi 191). Of particular relevance to the circumstances in the LES was Neil Smith's articulation of the role of financial profit. He argued that redevelopment might be possible despite apparent shortcomings in the deteriorated neighbourhoods, if capital returns could be made (Smith 538).

Gentrification is an important phenomenon as it leads to "the displacement of people, rising rent burdens, homelessness, loss of rentregulated housing, public housing deterioration, and other housing crises" (Urban Displacement Project). Sarah Schulman has defined gentrification as a "concrete replacement process" (Schulman 14). In a purely physical sense, gentrification is "a process of renewal in inner-city neighbourhoods, where houses in previously undesirable and often run-down neighbourhoods are purchased and renovated by upwardly mobile professionals" (Power 94). Gentrification can also happen in the sense of the loss of memories, the "erasure of history" and "cultural amnesia" (Abraham). Cultural amnesia relates to the creation of an alternate history of a place and its people, such that younger generations, who were not present, will not recognise the history of the area or have access to the lost cultural landmarks (Abraham).

Emphasising the extent of the detriment caused by gentrification, long term LES resident, performance artist Penny Arcade, says that the process of gentrification leads not only to the erasure of history but also of culture as the elimination of "alternatives" homogenises neighbourhoods (Abraham). By "alternatives" Arcade means independent, individually owned shops providing services, as examples to young people of the creative and emotional past of their culture and of how life could be lived (Abraham). The homogenisation of the environment changes consciousness and memory, what Schulman has termed "gentrification of the mind" (14).

Gentrification in LES

The phenomenon of gentrification entails transformation and is predicated on a neighbourhood's previous histories. The history of the LES has been described as "unique" by social anthropologists such as Abu-Lughod, Belkind and Mele, who studied its unusual history and cultural composition. Whilst other parts of Manhattan experienced wholesale demolition from the

1950s on, as part of a process of “improvement”, the LES was largely spared because of what scholars such as Abu-Lughod and Belkind have identified as the special historic conditions which prevailed there. These are the heritage of its working-class and immigrant past, a lack of “the intrinsic assets such as spacious loft buildings and good public-transit access that were key to the upscaling of other nearby neighborhoods such as SoHo, TriBeCa, and the East Village” (Belkind 22). Mele has observed that in the LES the majority of buildings were owned by absentee landlords and occupied by low-income renters which made them a small scale and fragmented infrastructure and unattractive to commercial developers (Mele 74, Belkind 35).

Historically the LES had provided high-density low-rise purpose-built tenement living for successive waves of poorer immigrant workers, “before city regulations required dwellings to contain windows, airshafts, and a minimum number of bathrooms for each tenant” (Zacks). What was unusual according to Abu-Lughod is that these cheap to build buildings were still in use in modern times (Abu-Lughod, 1994 6). Unlike in other areas, they had not been demolished in earlier waves of housing improvements despite their prime location and proximity to major financial, governmental and corporate centres in Wall Street and Lower Manhattan (Abu-Lughod, 1994 17).

Clearance plans proposed in the 1930s were only partially implemented following the Depression (Abu-Lughod, 1994 18). A building-by-building survey for the City Planning Commission in 1970 wrote: “Since 1910 the area has been virtually abandoned by private real estate. There has been a parallel departure of population, commerce, and industry, leaving a large scattering of abandoned buildings and vacant sites” (Zacks). The Commission noted that “half of all dwellings were characterized as dilapidated or deteriorating in 1960; more than half remained unrenovated ten years later” (Zacks). By the late seventies, when McAdams returned to New York from San Francisco, developers were considering the LES due to the increase of well-paid jobs and affluent renters, as firms located their main offices in New York City. At the same time, many service sector jobs were unskilled, and low paid, and attracted immigrant workers who could only afford low-rent apartments such as those still to be found on the LES, and these low rents attracted the influx of artists of which McAdams was a part (Belkind 24). McAdams had arrived back in New York at a historic moment because in 1980 “after fifty years of continuous decline, property values on the Lower East Side began to rise” (Belkind 24).

How Aids and Gentrification Converged

As was discussed in chapter two, the Aids crisis had a major impact on the people living in the LES and Alphabet City owing to the high incidence among gay men, many of whom were artists living and practising there. The Aids crisis also played an important role in the gentrification of the LES. It has been claimed that “cities and neighbourhoods with high Aids rates have experienced profound gentrification” (Schulman 23). As Belkind noted above, the gentrification process in New York began before the outbreak of the Aids epidemic of 1981. The East Village was already being transformed through gradual rather than wholesale real estate conversion when the Aids epidemic and the spiralling deaths of artists in the area became a major issue (26). The refusal of the authorities to recognise any entitlement by the partners of the deceased to assume property leaseholds led to homes being turned over to the real estate market refurbished and at higher rates (Schulman 26).

The gentrification project was accelerated by the deaths of the apartment owners from the Aids epidemic, as they were taken over by incomers whose demographics were more aligned to the gentrification project. Thus the Aids epidemic dismantled queer creative and physical spaces, undermining queer culture. This is verified in the following observation by Sarah Schulman: “That ‘those people’ lost their homes and died is pretended away, and reality is replaced with a false story in which the gentrifiers have no structure to impose their privilege. They just naturally and neutrally earned and deserved it” (Schulman 26-27). Schulman has described the loss of the vibrant activist art movement of the downtown scene and its replacement by mainstream conservative consumerism. She tells how “ideas can become gentrified, how people psychologically assimilate to the mainstream, about how an alternative way of thinking was erased when a whole generation of artists died of Aids in the 1980s” (Abraham).

The Role of the Artists

Mele has observed: “historically the cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity of the East Village has influenced the creation of innovative forms of art, music and writing that countered dominant mainstream forms of culture” (86). Belkind has written that the LES developed a distinct brand characterised by “authenticity, membership in the downtown avant-garde, and a condition of being ‘underground’” (26). Across the neighbourhood, McAdams photographed the work of graffiti artists, such as Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat, who posted their political messages on whatever surfaces were available, often partly demolished walls and burned-out vehicles such as that illustrated by figure 5.3, below.

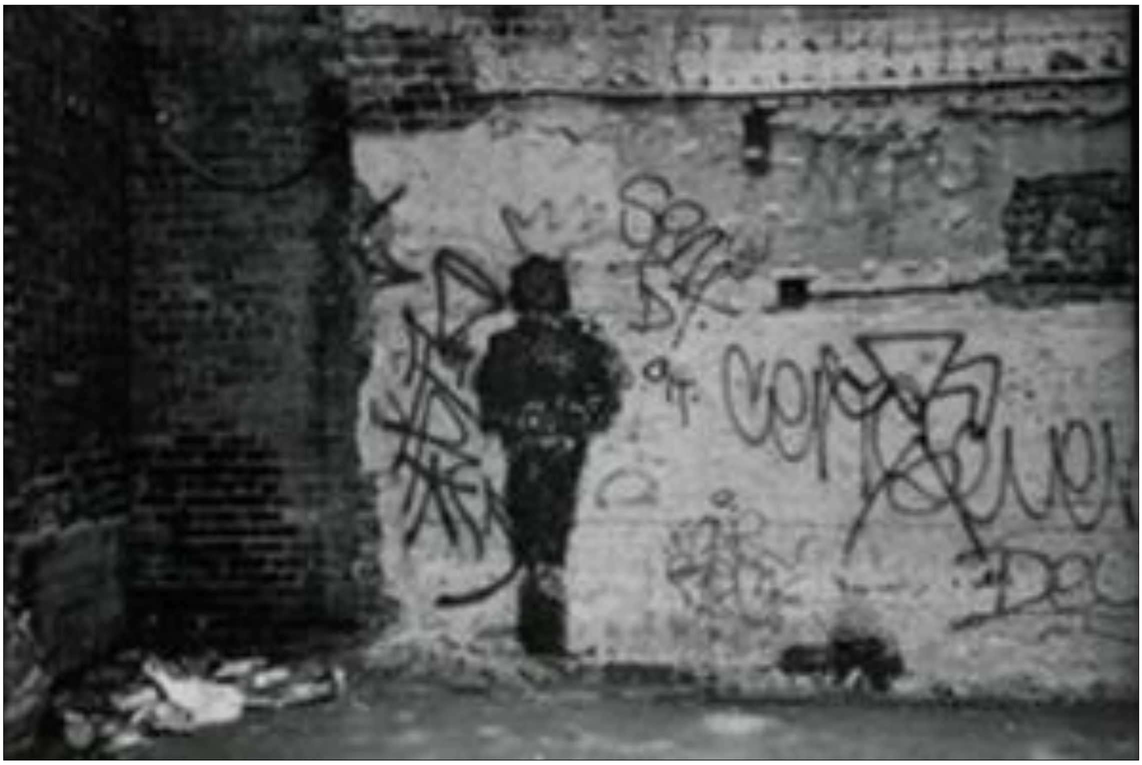


Figure 5.3. McAdams, Dona Ann. Shadow on the wall.

As a form of guerrilla activism, graffiti art is illegal: its practitioners generally use a pseudonym to avoid identification and possible arrest (Bloomberg and Kelly). Haring had no conventional artistic training and began as a graffiti artist, working on the many empty black advertising billboards in the subway which, in an ironic twist, were vacant as a result of the fall-off in commercial advertising at the time due to the recession of 1981 (Yarrow, *NYT,* 1990). McAdams, Haring and those at PS122 generally, were concerned with mass media's influence on society and the power wielded by capitalism and consumerism via television and advertising billboards (McAdams PI 2020). The blank subway advertising boards were the perfect surface for Haring's chalk drawings which he speedily executed to avoid detection: Julia Gruen, now, in 2021, the Executive Director of the Keith Haring Foundation, noted that when Haring "put the brush to the paper, it simply flowed down his body, out the brush in this extraordinary continuous movement" (MoMA.org).

Haring developed his own widely recognised “visual language" image vocabulary, which became iconic, and he used sexual images to advocate for safe sex and Aids awareness (MoMA.org). In 1980 he had established a studio at PS122 in the Painting Space where the upper floor rooms had good light quality and where the ethos was to “give voice to the emerging, the marginalised, the new and the unknown” (PS122 gallery.org). Haring had a month-long solo show, with his original, distinctive work incorporating energetic, animated lines and covering entire floors and ceilings. Below, figure 5.15, is one of his subway chalk drawings in which the mature figure of 1983 cradles the infant 1984 as the New Year comes in. Unlike Basquiat, mentioned below, Haring expressly wished his work to be accessible and eschewed the privilege and invitation-only exclusivity of the uptown art world. With his prolific subway works, Haring brought art from the private realm of the gallery or museum to the to the travelling public who would not otherwise see it. Haring was diagnosed with Aids in 1988 and died in 1990, aged 31 ("BBC Iplayer - Keith Haring: Street Art Boy").

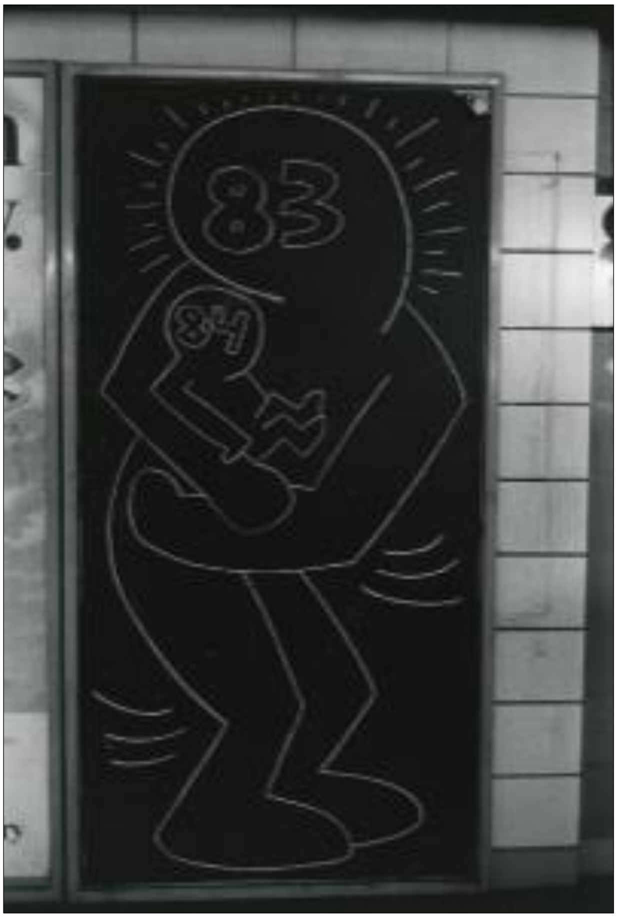


Figure 5.4. McAdams, Dona Ann. Keith Haring, New Year subway drawing. 1984.

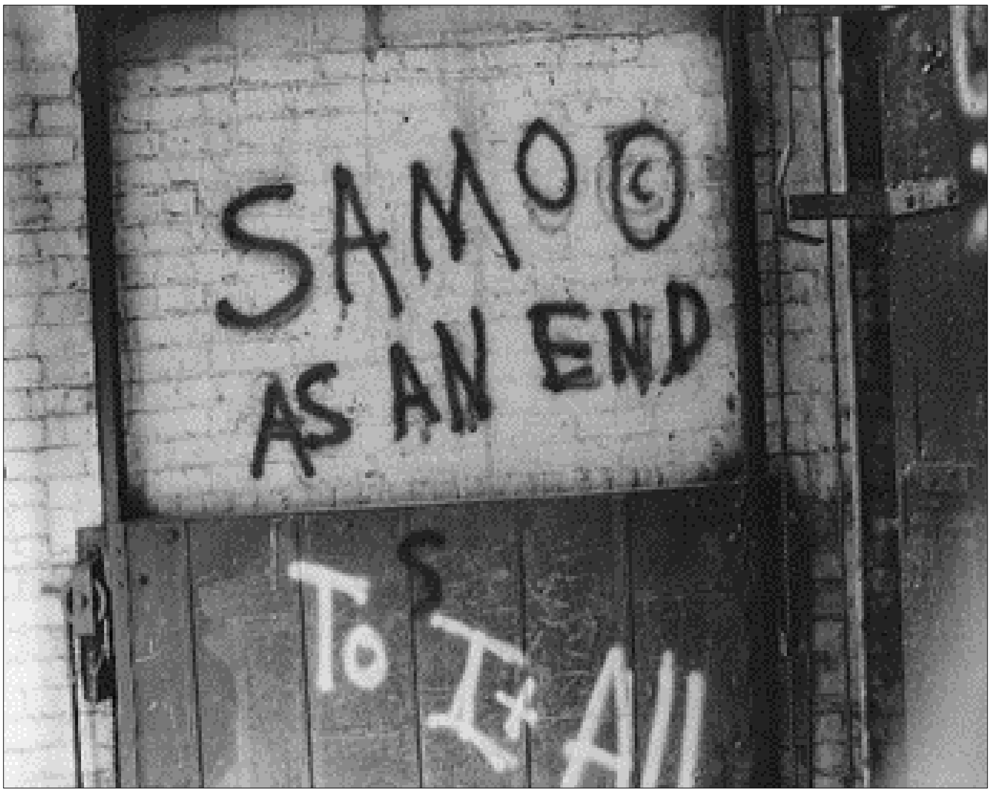

SAMO©
AS AN END
S
To It All

Figure 5.5. McAdams, Dona Ann. Jean-Michel Basquiat, whose graffiti sign-off was “SAMO” (same-old), Williamsburg Brooklyn, the illegal loft (industrial) elevator doors. 1979.

Basquiat was also part of the Downtown Arts movement and a visitor at McAdams' illegal loft-share in Williamsburg, where the photograph of the industrial elevator doors, figure 5.5 above, was taken. His early success and popularity with prominent gallerists such as Andy Warhol made him largely responsible for elevating graffiti artists, then considered inferior, into the realm of the New York gallery scene: “He began to exhibit in ‘underground' art shows, where his work was ‘discovered' by the established art world” (Mele 87). Basquiat had early major successes with exhibitions and gallery representation including the Whitney Biennial in 1983, at 22 years old, but died in 1988, aged 27 years, of a heroin overdose. Mele has observed that “art galleries promoting the local art scene materialized in the 1980s and contributed to the commodification of the downtown culture” (86). Key artists like Basquiat and Haring rose to fame and “mythologised the East Village's reputation as a cultural enclave” (Mele 87). Mele has attributed this success to the corporate promotion of cultural forms geared toward specialised or “niche” consumer markets (87).

Despite his subversive messaging, condemning mass-indoctrination through slogans by corporations and advertisers, Basquiat, unlike Haring, embraced the patronage offered by the uptown galleries. McAdams and her community at PS122 regarded the world of galleries as “elitist and the antithesis of creativity” (PI 2020). Ironically the potential for the East Village to generate alternative cultural forms, and therefore attract investment and more affluent tenants, also caught the attention of the city authorities and developers (Mele 87).

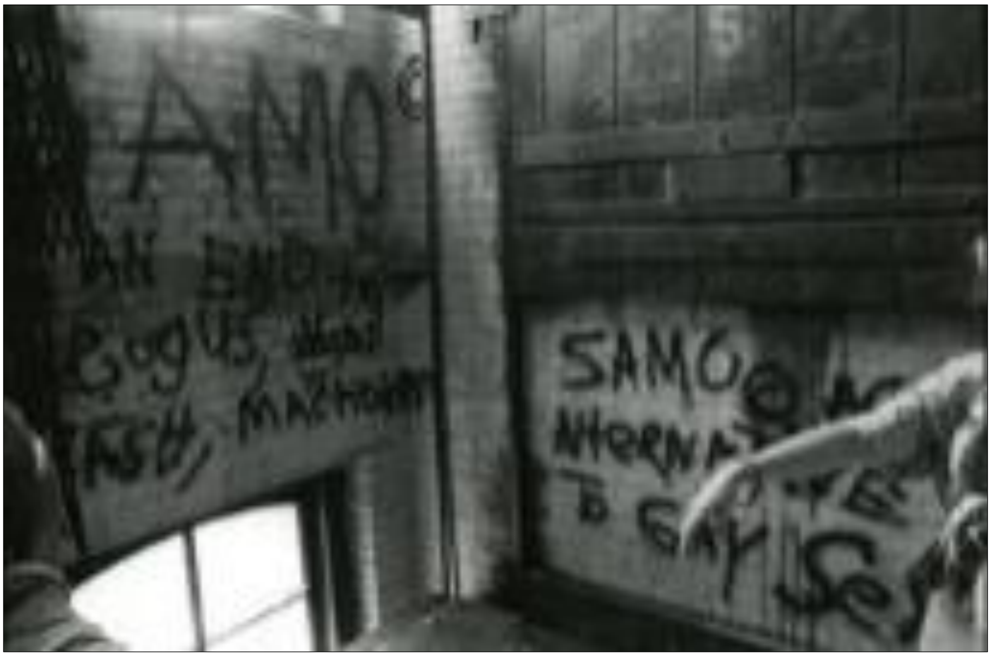


Figure 5.6. McAdams, Dona Ann. Jean-Michel Basquiat The message “alternative to gay sex” in the lower right of the picture is partially obscured. Careful scrutiny of the left-hand side reveals “an end to bogus, mind wash”.

Meanwhile, the city wanted to convert city-owned housing into artist’s housing but the plan did not succeed, after which developers promoted “bohemian decadence” to attract affluent tenants and the low-income community became part of the marketing message, with “the problems of drugs, unemployment and privation…now serving as allure” (Mele 89).

McAdams’ New York, 1979

At the time of McAdams’ return to New York, in 1979, the US reliance on imported oil and the lessening of US dominance of the international economy saw the economy in recession (Abu-Lughod 1994 Intro 1). The oil crisis led the U.S. Congress to mandate a 55-mph limit on highways to curb fuel consumption, as shown on the billboard in figure 5.7, below. In this picture, the face of Iranian religious fundamentalist Ayatollah Khomeini is seen here on the billboard highlighting existing tensions and foreshadowing later developments.

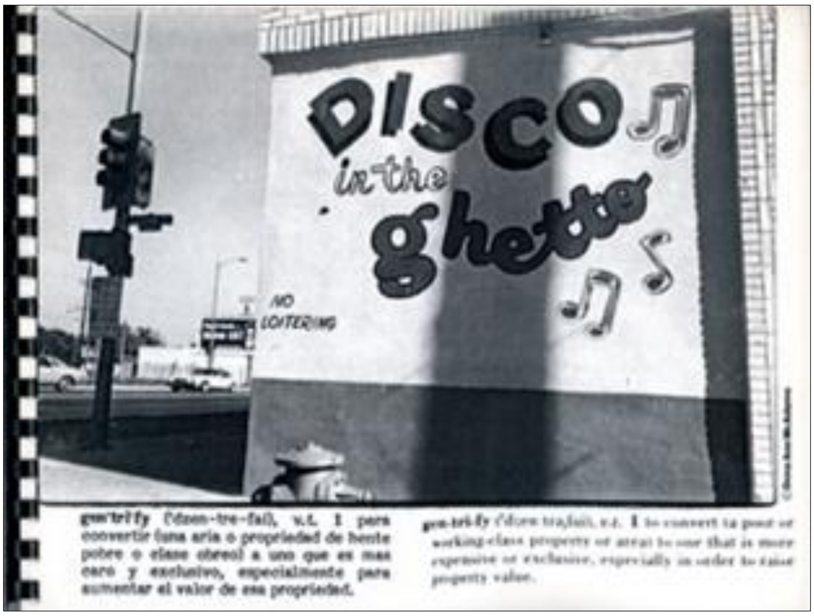


Figure 5.7. McAdams, Dona Ann. Definition of “gentrification” taken from the dictionary. *Alphabet City,* 1984. Front cover.

President Ronald Reagan, who took office in 1981, had based his campaign on reviving the economy by reducing funding by the federal government (Zacks).

The withdrawal of federal investment to states and local government caused a fiscal crisis and led the City of New York to attempt to maximise local real-estate tax revenues (Zacks). However, landlords abandoned their buildings rather than pay outstanding taxes, coinciding with a rise in demand for assistance from residents who had lost their jobs as US manufacturing went into decline (Abu-Lughod, 1994 2). Reacting to the rise in real estate delinquencies, NYC authorities reduced the three-year grace period for unpaid taxes on property to one year, hoping to bring forward overdue payments. Belkind notes that this measure to collect taxes instead provoked “an epidemic of property abandonment and arson. The city suddenly found itself in possession of nearly eight thousand abandoned (in-rem) properties, with approximately five hundred located on the Lower East Side" (Belkind 24). Scenes of burned-out buildings such as that depicted in figure 5.8 below were common and, “By 1982, the Department of Housing, Preservation and

Development, the successor to the HAD, would own 60 per cent of the Lower East Side” (Katz).

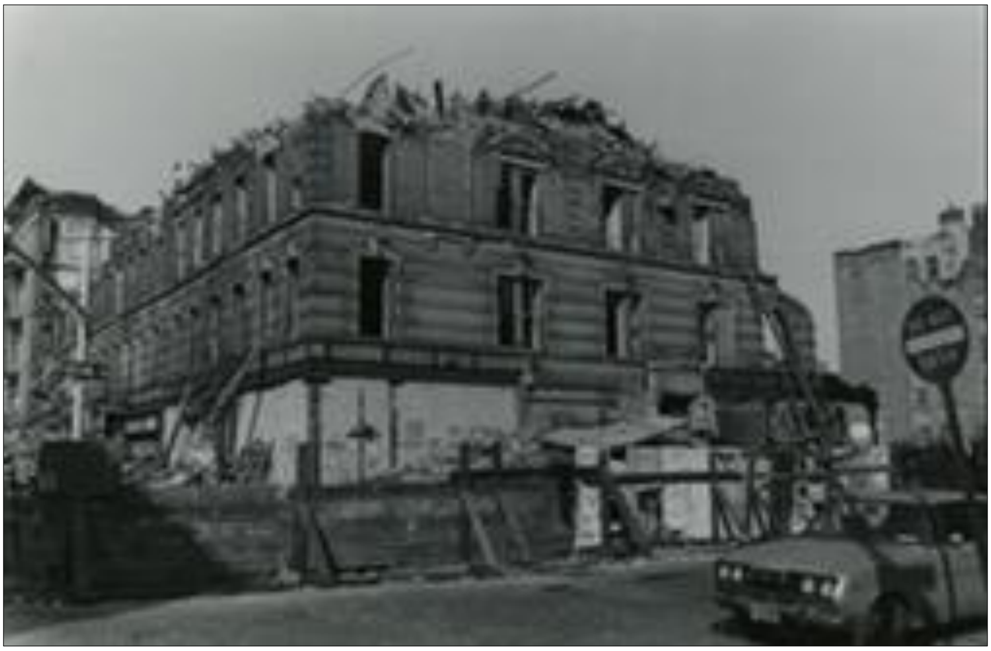
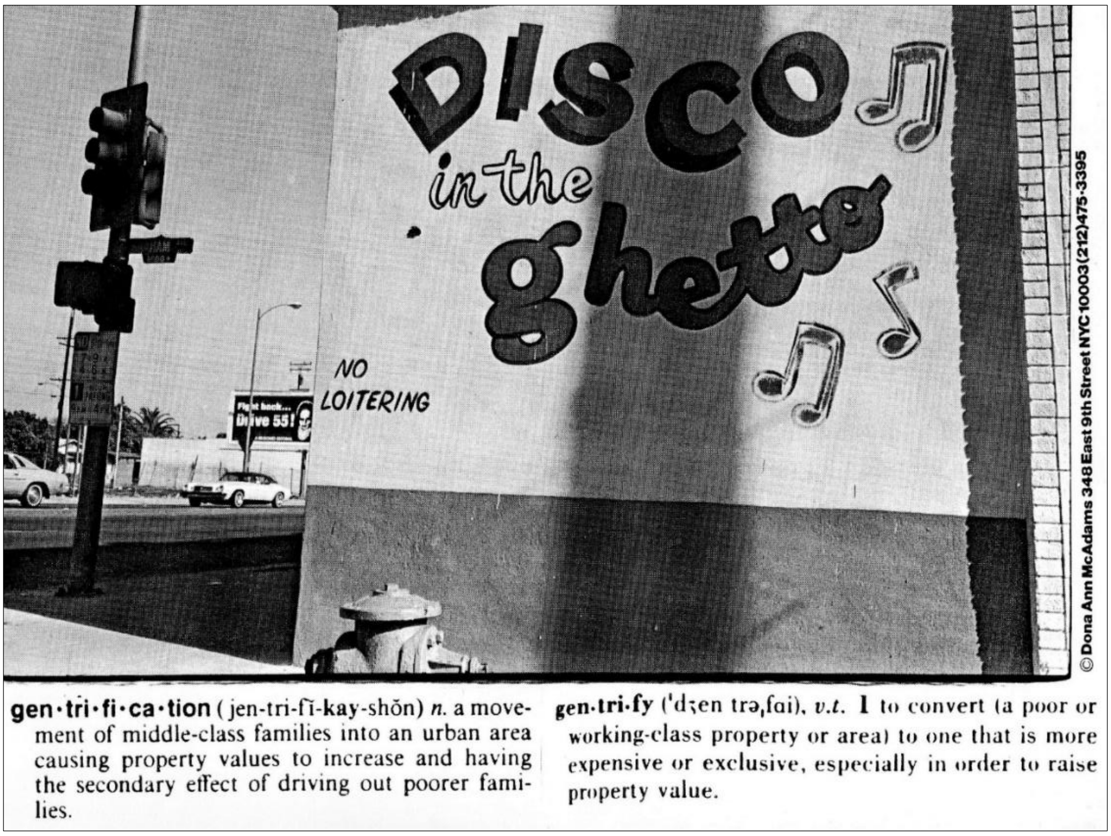


Figure 5.8. McAdams, Dona Ann. Burned out buildings, south corner of E.5th Street and Avenue C, NYC.

The large number of city-owned buildings, many of which were unoccupied, was a point of contention for those residents campaigning for affordable housing and assistance for the large numbers of homeless in the LES. Abu-Lughod notes that “community mobilization blocked the mass clearance and resale of sites” (1994 192).

McAdams has employed artistic licence as her portfolio includes photographs of California and Williamsburg, Brooklyn, as well as Alphabet City. McAdams was attuned to the phenomenon of gentrification having witnessed the redevelopment of the Fillmore District of San Francisco, then a deprived and predominantly African-American neighbourhood. At the time she was early in her career and regretted not did not photographing the events she witnessed and describes herself at this point as “a street photographer, not socially or politically engaged” and as “taking photographs rather than making them” (PI

2019). On returning to New York in 1979 first to Williamsburg and later moving to the East Village, she recorded the changes she observed in her immediate surroundings. Confronted by “abandoned, burned-out and then bulldozed buildings and empty lots”, McAdams was careful to record these irreversible alterations to the landscape and the lives of the people who lived there (PI 2019).


DISCO
in the
ghetto
NO
LOITERING
Fight back... Drive 55!
© Dona Ann McAdams 348 East 9th Street NYC 10003 (212)475-3395

gen·tri·fi·ca·tion (jen-tri-fĭ-kay-shŏn) *n.* a movement of middle-class families into an urban area causing property values to increase and having the secondary effect of driving out poorer families.

gen·tri·fy (ˈdʒen trəˌfɑi), *v.t.* **1** to convert (a poor or working-class property or area) to one that is more expensive or exclusive, especially in order to raise property value.

Figure 5.9 Enlargement of section of figure 5.7, above.

In *Alphabet City*, McAdams has set out her own definition of gentrification albeit, as might be expected, an unconventional one, combining a dictionary definition with her photograph of a California Highway and ironic juxtaposition (figure 5.9, above). She has constructed an incongruous pairing with the message, an invitation to “disco in the ghetto”, (Alphabet City), graffitied on the construction site dump (skip) yet sternly ordering “no loitering” while the world on the freeway is going by oblivious (PI 2019). In the enlargement (figure 5.9) more detail can be seen. The billboard over the freeway was part of a "save energy", "anti-Khomeini" advertising campaign from the 1970s energy crisis (PI 2019). In the enlarged version of part of the picture, below, the head of Iranian cleric, Ayatollah Khomeini can be seen more clearly on the billboard next to "Drive 55" (the new speed limit) and "no loitering", metaphorically "watching" over the freeway traffic. Khomeini had himself "fought back" and returned from exile to take control of Iran. McAdams and her fellow artists were aware of the Iran-Contra scandal where the US, under President Reagan, had funded weapons for Iran contravening an arms embargo previously put in place by President Carter (PI 2019). Reflecting back in 2019, McAdams observed that "This picture is prescient" in that there followed decades of tension between the US and Iran, which persist to this day (PI 2019).

Extending Schulman's metaphor, McAdams resisted the gentrification of her own mind from what she saw as intrusions from advertisers via "billboard ideology" as she walked the neighbourhood (PI 2018). Figure 5.10, below shows a group of McAdams' fellow protestors wearing a T-shirt they designed to specifically object to US intervention in Central America, with the slogan "Gays yes, Contras no", inspired by a *New York Daily News* headline of March, 1986. New York City Council passed the Gay Rights Bill after fifteen years of attempts, and Congress denied further funding to the Nicaraguan Freedom Fighters (Pierson and Smith 41). The reference to "generic queer" originated with Lori E Seid, seen second from the left in the photograph. Seid was highlighting what she saw as the damaging divisions in the feminist movement, and the activist community, at that time (McAdams PI 2018). Seid and McAdams remember how the Aids crisis initially united the queer community but ultimately led to divisions, in particular within ACT UP, but drew her closer to her fellow women activists

(McAdams PI 2018). McAdams considers this to be one of the most important photographs she has taken as it intersects with activism, gay pride, second-wave feminism and US foreign policy (PI 2021). McAdams told me:

> In this picture we decided we wanted to take back the word queer and use it as a term to define us instead of falling into what was becoming the established non-binary classification for people’s sexuality: gay, straight, bi, we just wanted to be queer. (PI 2021)

The photograph has added significance as it shows how they built on their protest at US foreign policy to make what was for them, a bigger point (McAdams PI 2021).

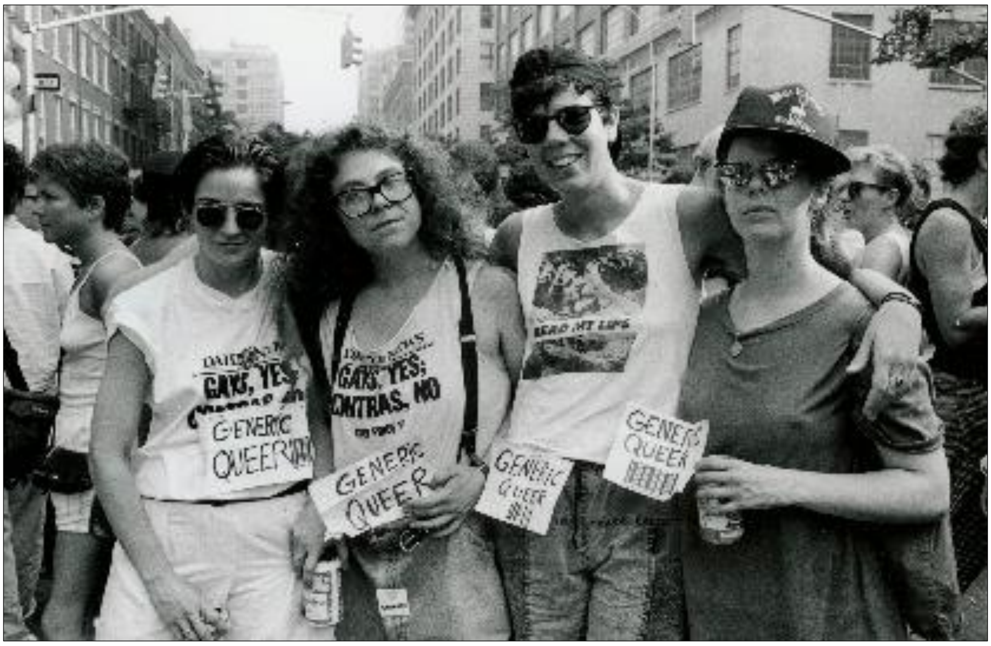


Figure 5.10. McAdams, Dona Ann. “Gays Yes, Contras No”. Generic Queer. Left to right: Liz Newkirk, Lori E Seid, Kate Huh, Andrea Wilson. Gay Pride New York City. 1989.

What McAdams Found

Residing at East 9th and 1st Avenue across from PS122, McAdams was in the heart of her adopted community and attuned to the social consequences of disappearing buildings and communities. She recalled that “on the streets, dodging the drug dealers and abandoned cars, local people interacted with one another, frequented the same public spaces and talked, in a mix of generations and ethnicities” (PI 2019). Derelict buildings were being reclaimed by artists and activists who were reinvigorating the largely deserted neighbourhood. PS122 was not formally operating and was still “a community space more than a theatre” (Kurkjian 74). Artists established community organisations and started neighbourhood magazines. They formed collectives, exhibited their work in deserted storefront galleries and often lived illegally in industrial buildings. While out walking in her neighbourhood and at night wheat-pasting promotional flyers for PS122 performances, McAdams would encounter long-term residents who, along with her fellow artists, later came together as a community to resist, as best they could, what they perceived as the inevitable tide of gentrification (PI 2018). Her commitment was to preserve alternative culture in recorded history and memory.

In discussing this work in 2019 McAdams recalled “my photography takes a look at the developers, trucks, hardhats and machines. But, more importantly, questions the changes in the communities involved” (PI 2019). As she recalled “all along the Alphabet were trashed cars and burned out buildings”, as seen in figure 5.11, below (PI 2019). McAdams and the artist community were aware that their presence increased the risk of rent inflation, having seen it happen in SoHo and then Tribeca where artists’ lifestyles were marketed to attract more affluent incomers (Zacks). Belkind has described “gentrification by stealth”, whereby incomers “occupied abandoned buildings transferred to city ownership during the financial crisis” and asserted that “for them, stealth was a means of survival that required maintaining dilapidated facades and blacking out windows to avoid detection” (22). Arcade counters the contention that artists were not only victims of gentrification, but also the agents of it. Arcade argues that artists are not to “blame” for the gentrification of the

Lower East Side, that she and her community had no desire to open gentrified upscale businesses,

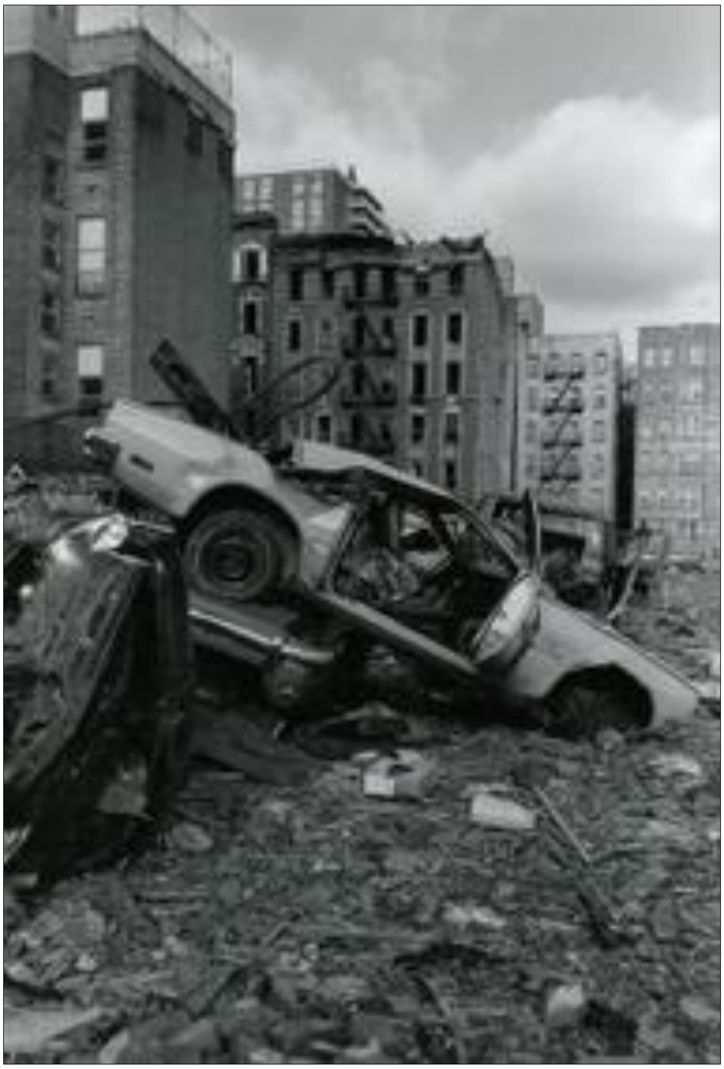


Figure 5.11. McAdams, Dona Ann. *Burned out car, tilted*.

but “lived among our neighbours as they did” (Schulman 30). McAdams’ earlier description of the Ukrainian diner, Veselka, (chapter one),and its role in feeding and providing a meeting place to exchange ideas and work for those at PS122, ties in with Arcade’s regret at the loss of authentic, neighbourhood- based, ethnic cooking before gentrification brought the replacement cuisine she calls “fusion” phenomena (Schulman 31). Sarah Schulman has said “Prior to the ’80s, the East Village was not a destination neighbourhood …. We thought it was the artists who gentrified the place, but it turned out to be policy," she said, referring to preferential programs for developers (Frere-Jones).

The artists were anxious to show solidarity with the low-income renters and to focus attention on the way artists were exploited by property developers, so began a monthly publication, the *East Village Eye*, in May 1979 to publicise neighbourhood issues (Zacks). Lisa Zinna wrote in the inaugural issue that "last year, according to figures from Community Board three, there were 354 suspicious fires here. Of those, 290 were in occupied buildings" (Zinna).

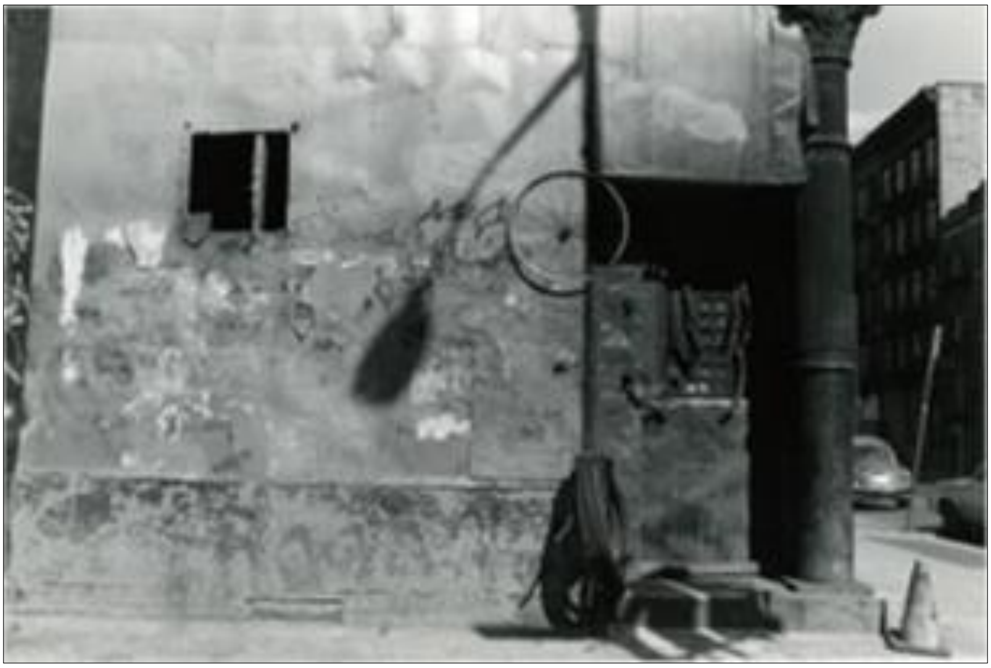


Figure 5.12. McAdams Dona Ann. Abandoned buildings, graffiti and other detritus.

Landmark buildings such as Klein's Department Store pictured in figure 5.14, below, provided low-priced goods and were part of the neighbourhood identity. Its demolition saw the loss of a community focal point and deprived locals of a meeting place, contributing to the sense of disconnectedness that Arcade and Schulman have referred to. Discount chain S. Klein was founded in 1906, with the flagship store at Union Square East and East 14th Street. There, it had a huge sign, two stories tall, that proclaimed "S. Klein on The Square".

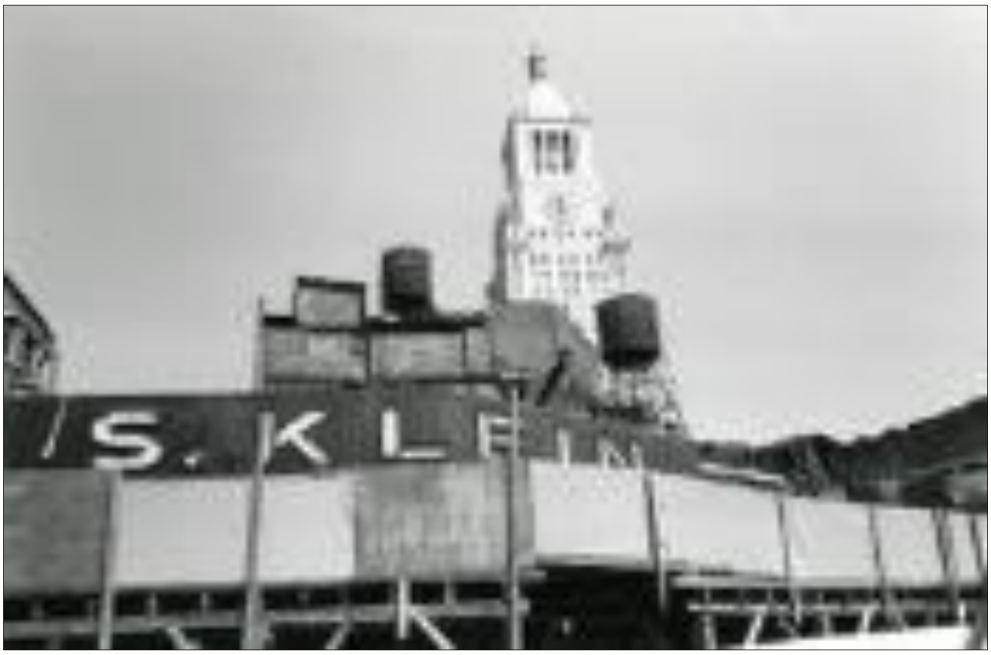


Figure 5.13. McAdams, Dona Ann. Klein’s department store hoarding.

McAdams recalls it as a neighbourhood feature that was demolished to make way for a Medical Centre (PI 2021).

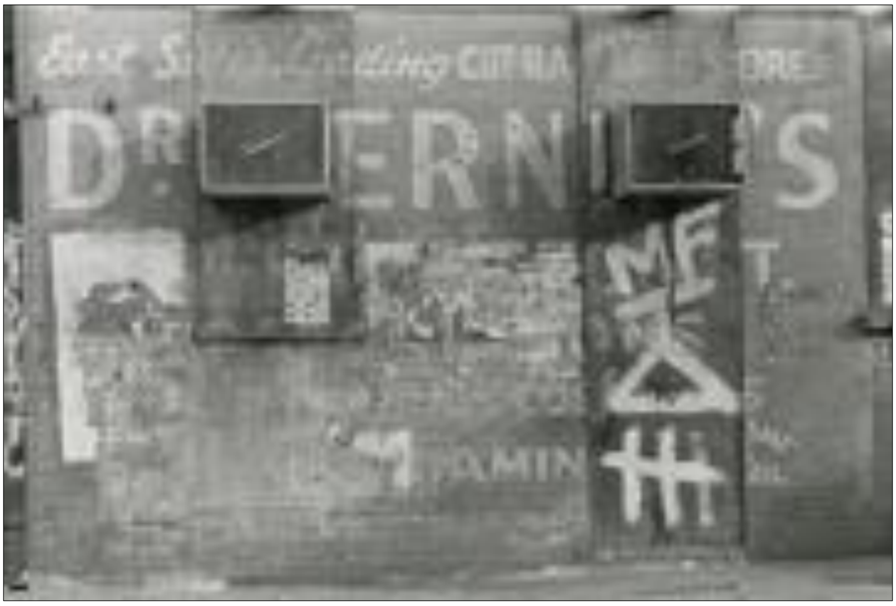


Figure 5.14. McAdams, Dona Ann. Wall advertising possibly for Block Drugs.

McAdams also recalled that Block Drugs, the LES’s cut-rate drug store since 1885, on the southwest corner of 2nd Avenue and East 6th Street, had a highly visible red neon sign and was a community landmark (PI 2019). The original advertising slogans were hand-painted and paper posters advertising events and items for sale were fixed to the wall in the wheat-pasting style McAdams has described earlier, and were overwritten by graffiti artists. The loss of these unique, distinctive, community facilities, examples of what Arcade regards as cultural landmarks, “an alternative”, demonstrate how gentrification homogenises consciousness and memory. With regret, Arcade noted that “gone are the public squares or open markets where people of different ages could spend time together and younger people could learn of its past” (Abraham).

The streets of Alphabet City were dangerous because of the escalating drug problem which went unchallenged among the abandoned buildings and parking lots: “The open-air drug market on Avenue B below Tompkins Square Park made the neighborhood one of the most dangerous places in New York” (Zacks). Russell and McAdams recall that their immediate neighbourhood, First Avenue at 9th Street, was a known drug dealing location (PI 2021). Russell attributes problems being caused by the closure of the storefronts where it had been possible to buy marijuana which forced the activity onto the streets. He recalled “stabbings and muggings, weapons, and a baby carriage concealing drugs being pushed up and down the street” as well as addicts being run down by cars, and seeing only shoes left at the scene (PI 2021). Such scenes inspired McAdams to record them (PI 2018).

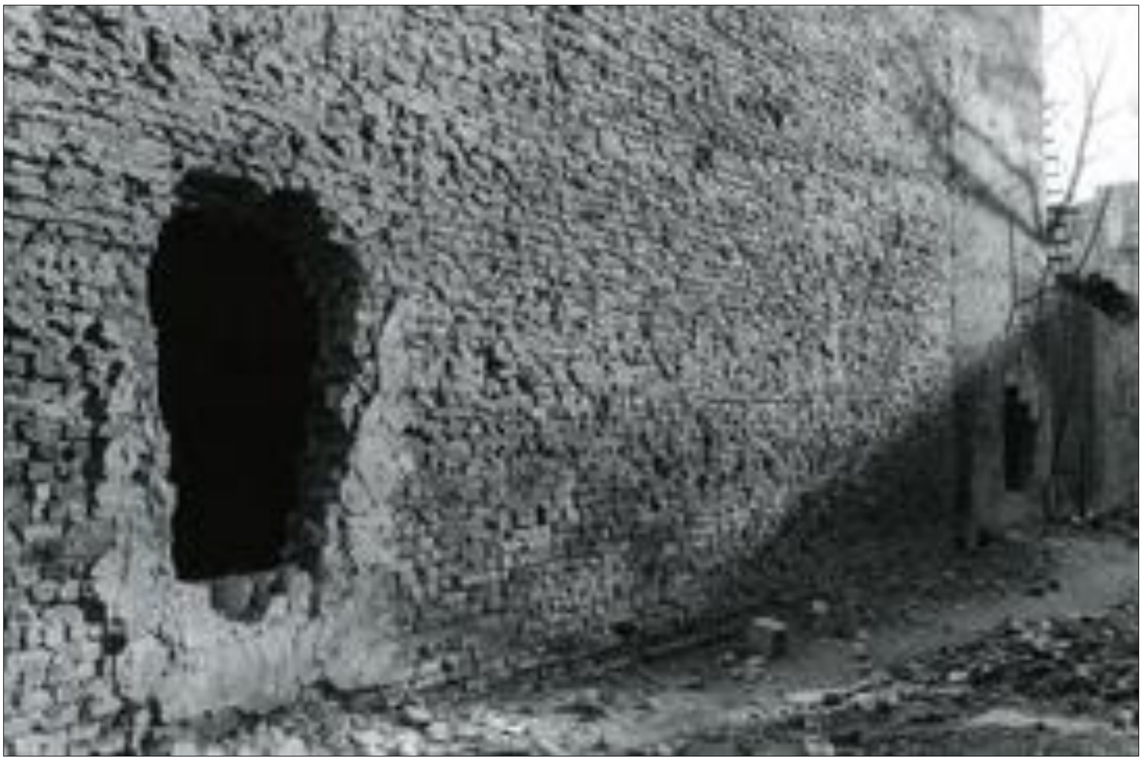


Figure 5.15. McAdams, Dona Ann. Crack Den. Drug users came to abandoned buildings to smoke crack out of sight of the authorities (McAdams PI 2021).

Figure 5.15, above, shows an abandoned building where users would bring the crack they had scored on the street to smoke out of sight of the authorities (McAdams PI 2021). Landlords no longer invested in their properties and the city authorities withdrew essential services from neighbourhoods deemed in decline. Mele has identified the irony of parts of the neighbourhood becoming "'protected' and "nonviolent locations for drug distribution" (83). He describes a network of low-income residents participating in a system modelled on the Puerto Rican "padrone" (provider) system whereby residents enjoyed the protection of the drug dealers and gangs. They kept watch for police sweeps and, in doing so, maintained order on the streets so that inhabitants were protected from break-ins and assaults (84). Figure 5.16, below, is not the threatening scene it first appears but shows McAdams' neighbour in Williamsburg, Butch, "boxing towards her" as she walked back from the subway.

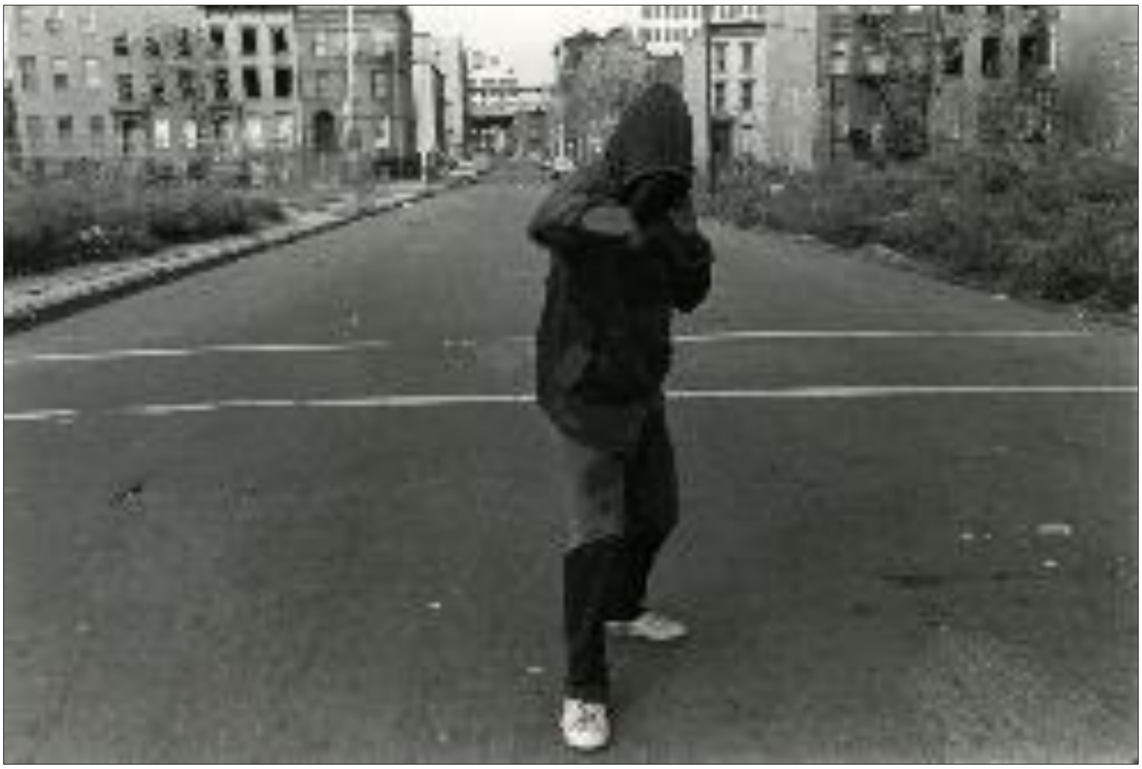


Figure 5.16. McAdams Dona Ann. "Butch" Williamsburg, Brooklyn. 1979.

McAdams recalled, “I lived in a loft on South 11th street. This is my neighbor, Butch, boxing his way towards me on Berry Street” (PI 2020). Butch knew McAdams as a neighbourhood resident not involved in any gang activity and she walked the streets unhindered, ‘protected’ in the way described above.

Later, in the mid-1980s, gangs and drug-dealing were subject to a crackdown from the authorities: under Mayors Koch, then Dinkins and, later, Giuliani, they restricted access to public spaces such as Tompkins Square Park, as described above. ‘Needle Park’, as it was known to McAdams and her friends was an important LES neighbourhood and community facility (PI 2019). The ten-acre Tompkins Square Park was then the only accessible open space to those living in “dense settlements of airless tenements” according to Mele, and was known as the “neighbourhood’s ‘lung’” (91). This restriction, in turn, impacted the neighbourhood practice of street vending, market stalls and associated socialising which were the community habit, a further example of

Schulman and Arcade's homogenisation. Figure 5.17, below, shows a burned-out car in a scene that might well have taken place in the park, but is Avenue A. The incongruity of the scene demonstrates how accustomed people had become to the toxic landscape, not unlike a war zone.

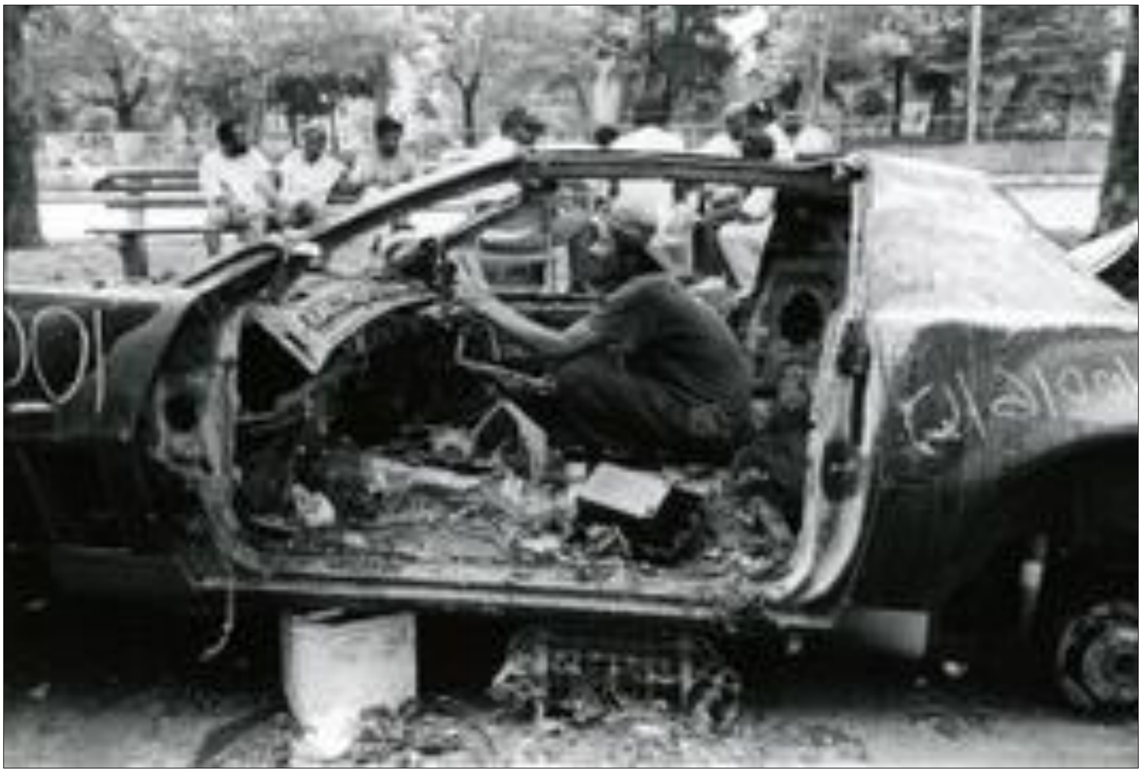


Figure 5.17. McAdams Dona Ann. Burned-out car, Avenue A.

The loss of social interactions in the community, such as access to Tompkins Square Park, is argued by Schulman and by Arcade as contributing directly to the loss of cultural diversity and creative freedom as they argue that gentrification homogenises neighbourhoods (Schulman 28). Regulations such as the requirement for permits to play music in the streets curtail these interactions and, as Schulman elaborates: "the relaxed nature of neighbourhood living becomes threatening, something to be eradicated and controlled" (Schulman 28). Those at PS122 did not seek to conceal their presence from the authorities and indeed the City of New York was and remains, (2021), their landlord. Figure 5.18, below, shows a boarded-up shopfront, a photo-studio, which may have concealed business activity from street view, as per Belkind's theory of "gentrification by stealth". Belkind extends the recycling habits of punk culture in its art-making to its repurposing of "found terrain", vacant storefronts adapted as accommodation, or businesses without streetside signage and known only to those 'insiders' who knew their location (26).

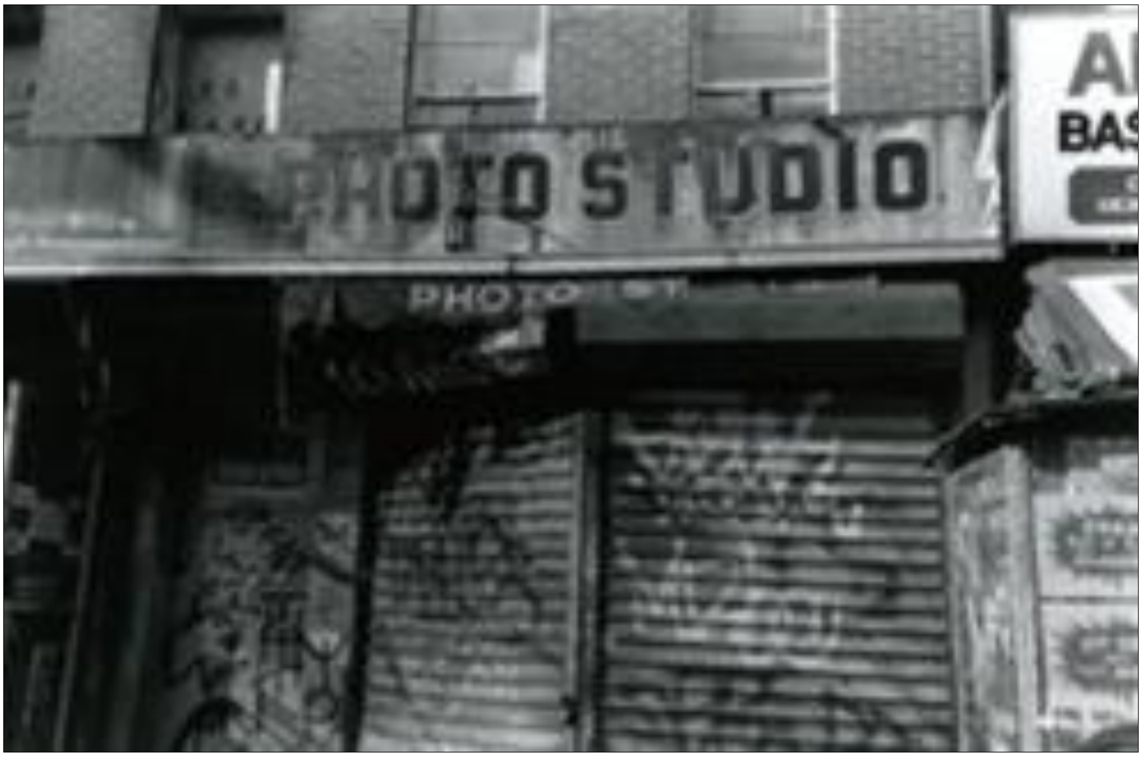


Figure 5.18. McAdams Dona Ann. Boarded shopfront. First Avenue, west side of the street the East Village. 1980's.

Co-opting empty storefronts to display their work, McAdams and her community at PS122 re-situated their art outside of traditional galleries and museums, in a stand against objectification and the commercialisation of artworks: Belkind has written of a sense of belonging in a small, adventurous, progressive community, which appeared to be "beyond the realm of middle-class consumerism" (24). An independent critical thinker, McAdams is

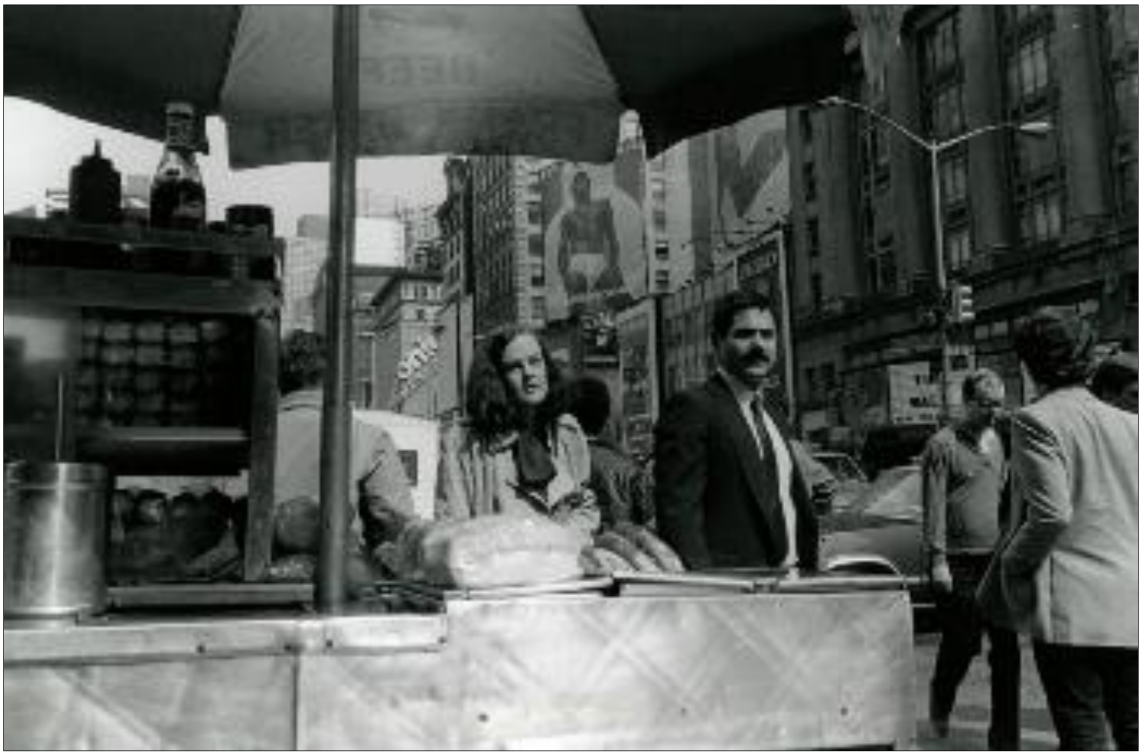


Figure 5.19. Dona Ann McAdams. Model Tom Hintnaus photographed by Bruce Weber, Times Square. 1983.

concerned here with mass media’s influence on society and the power wielded by capitalism and consumerism. The Calvin Klein advertising photograph in the background of figure 5.19 above was listed by *American Photographer* (1989) magazine as one of “10 pictures that changed America,” stating that in creating the image, the photographer Bruce Weber “made men the focal point of sexual attention; for the first time, they were sold as sexual objects, not breadwinners or authority figures” (Gillis and Jacobs).

As with the picture of the highway, in figure 5.3 above, McAdams has photographed other aspects of New York’s billboard ideology in which advertising and slogans are constantly promoting “the good life”. She was resistant to what she regarded as “mindless consumption” promoted by the “relentless bombardment of advertising” (PI 2018). Photographing the construction of the Marriott Hotel at Times Square, McAdams captured the demolition of the original site and the appropriation of queer public space, as

Times Square was “sanitised” and withdrawn from use as a meeting place for queers (Deutsche 197). McAdams recalled: “I was completely obsessed with the huge Calvin Klein underwear ‘ad’ in Times Square in 1983: cotton briefs model Tom Hintnaus photographed by Bruce Weber” (PI 2021). McAdams remembered that on a billboard opposite was a picture of then fifteen-year-old Brooke Shields in Jordache jeans, both idealised images of youthful heteronormativity which she found challenging (PI 2021). The innuendo of “shooting [the photograph] through the [window of the] Nathan’s Hot Dog outlet” to picture the underwear was not lost on her (PI 2021). She was questioning her sexuality and found the image “iconic, epic, complicated” and “adored it” (PI 2021). She elaborated:

> My position of being outside the mainstream is not comfortable, but I use it to do my best work. The same with my sexuality, my womanhood. I felt like I was looking at women because I didn’t understand them, so as a result…“the reverse gaze”.[8] (PI 2021)

Along with questioning herself, McAdams can be interpreted as criticising Americans generally for falling for advertising myths. From her position at the margins of society and constantly posing the question of what it meant to be an American, her picture suggests dissatisfaction with conformity to the American ideal. It hints at her awareness of the loss of community in local neighbourhoods whose individuality was now diminished, blanketed by slogans and logos and which became the subject of her work on gentrification. McAdams’ pictures are an important counter-narrative to the glamorisation of 1980s consumer culture.

PS122 Endures and Adapts

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[8] “The reverse gaze” refers to the gaze of the photographee upon the photographer, as perceived by the photographer.

Over time, PS122 was enmeshed in, but withstood, the economic highs and lows that New York City experienced. The Downtown neighbourhood infrastructure and demographics changed and so did PS122 in the work it commissioned and the artists who performed there. New York poets Dennis Cooper and Eileen Myles reflected on the changes in the neighbourhood as a result of the Aids crisis. Cooper felt that:

> If Aids hadn't happened, Downtown probably would have continued to be an amazingly fertile place that was continually evolving. I know that's naïve because the gentrification of the East Village and the Lower East Side and SoHo was probably the real culprit and killer

and Myles that: "In New York Aids made all the difference...it changed New York. Permanently" (Stosuy 469, 478-479).

PS122, Russell reflected, was affected by "all sorts of cultural shifts" and "movement" whereby residents, once predominantly artists, were replaced by students (Kurkjian 71). Russell revealed that as PS122 was rented from the city of New York: "The rent was very modest. We were paying five or six dollars per square foot a year" (Kurkjian 55). In the late 1990s, Russell negotiated with the city to rent to them for one dollar a year but he assumed responsibility for repairs and maintenance, for which he could apply to the City for grants (55). PS122 has been unusual in being able to resist the commercial forces affecting other spaces, causing them to relocate or close altogether, or in the case of Franklin Furnace, being driven out by smear campaigns during the Culture Wars, as described in chapter three. By the end of the twentieth century, practices at PS122 had also begun to change. In a 2007 interview, Russell reflected that by the late 1990s "it's not 40 clip lamps like it used to be, which you could turn over in half an hour. It takes a day to move things in," and now a gig at PS122 was regarded as very important for artists who required media coverage and sophisticated equipment for their sets (Kurkjian 63).

Later, following the loss of NEA funding and a reduction in theatre audiences after the 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre Towers, Russell found himself running a budget deficit (59). Russell noticed changes in the neighbourhood as the local community around PS122 moved away to cheaper areas: “We’ve lost the mix of rich and working class and the opportunity for low-cost ways of surviving and supporting things. And that’s undermining the creative juices of New York City” (Kurkjian 70). He reflected ruefully that PS122 began to receive noise complaints from local residents (PI 2021).

Echoing sentiments expressed by Penny Arcade, Russell reflected that “When I would walk into the East Village, it used to be like walking on campus for me. I would do three meetings running into people …” (70). Later, he found Manhattan becoming “more like a theme park every day”, that is, losing its individuality, although some were committed to keeping the East Village as vital as it was. He came to believe that the “downtown scene is a state of mind” not a geographical location and, with many moving to Brooklyn and elsewhere, the local audience was lost and the neighbourhood was now populated by students not artists (70).

Following insurmountable differences with his Board of Directors over the future direction of PS122, in particular its financial stability, Russell was replaced by a new Artistic Director, Vallejo Gantner in 2005. Letting go was hard for Russell who felt like “an artist without a canvas”, while Gantner “felt all eyes on him” (Kurkjian 74). Gantner wanted to introduce more international work and established artists, which gave rise to concerns that PS122 was “moving away from its tradition of growing new talent” (Kurkjian 75). Russell described the grief he felt at leaving after twenty years but has moved on: “I wanted PS122 to be able to adapt to each new generation of artists and the needs of their time and it has" (Kurkjian 78).

McAdams also felt the changes and recalled:

> Things had changed enormously in the twenty-five years I worked there. In the old days, artists would come and create work specifically for the space…that changed when it became a black box. Now it's like every other theatre with the exception of the two columns, which they would get rid of if they could (PI 2018).

For McAdams PS 122 had represented a particular time and place. Now things were "changing enormously" (PI 2020). When PS122 started attracting new, different audiences in the late 1990s, McAdams noted that the changes taking place within PS122 were reflected in her photography, "that her work was different but the acts being booked were also different" (PI 2020). By the early 2000s, McAdams' time at PS122 was drawing to a close. Having worked alongside Russell from 1983 until his departure in 2004, McAdams now felt an urge to move on. She left in 2006 and later recalled "During most of 2007, I packed up my studio at PS122 into boxes. I'm finally looking at this stuff. Photographs, letters, postcards, xerox copies and stuff that make up my archive" (PI 2020). Both Jenny Schlenzka and Mark Russell have said that McAdams' archive may represent the most comprehensive record of the work at PS122 from 1983 to 2006, when McAdams left (PI 2021).

In 2011, PS 122 was closed to commence a multi-million dollar renovation programme funded by the City of New York which would not erase the building physically from the landscape, or alter it so that it was unrecognisable in the minds of those who knew it (Miet). Shlenzka told me that the feature columns remain, as does the stained glass window so beloved by the original members (PI 2021). True to its original mission statement to support the "creative risks taken by artists from diverse genres, cultures and perspectives" Vallejo Gantner, PS122's Artistic Director from 2005-2016, wanted to return to its roots and revealed:

> We're thinking of PS122 as a state of mind, rather than a brick institution. We're trying to create links…to make a statement about the fact that the live performing arts are critical to the functioning of a whole lot of endeavors whether scientific or political or economic or mathematic. The influence of theater in these other areas has waned and we need to address that. We need to make theater that's innovative, that reaches aesthetic goals while thinking about social and political engagement. (Miet)

Gantner left PS122 before the renovations were completed and the project was concluded by a new artistic director, Jenny Schlenzka.

In 2018, Schlenzka announced the return of the remodelled PS122, now renamed Performance Space 122, in a series of Instagram posts and promotional material for these events included some of McAdams' photographs (Schlenzka PI 2021). “There are not a lot of venues that have been intertwined with artist communities for decades, as we have,” Schlenzka said. “At least four generations of artists have come of age here, and we are very proud of that legacy” (Frere Jones).

> The original Performance Space 122 was home to a community of artists who all lived in a ten-block radius from our building, the space was part of people's daily routine, so you could drop by and catch a show before meeting friends for dinner. Today young artists cannot afford to live in the neighborhood anymore. (Frere Jones)

For many of the artists associated with the original PS122, the change of name was an erasure of its history:

> Changing the name to Performance Space New York was a kind of final death blow. That the original name reflected its origin as a grade school and that it was, for us, a kind of alternative “school” where we learned from each other and experimented together, a non-hierarchical alternative to dance classes and director-led rehearsals. (Skura PI 2021)

Russell recalled the process of choosing the name “PS122” back in 1983 when he incorporated it as a business and initially considered calling it “Auditorium Projects” (Kurkjian 48).

Artists who had been part of its earliest days wanted PS122 to remain true to its ethos of creative energy and infinite possibilities (Skura PI 2021). Russell felt that the building held the energies of past performances and described “sitting quietly waiting for inspiration” (theatre). McAdams feared “the loss of all that had come before” (PI 2018). In an interview with *The Villager*, Schlenzka stated “[But] the more I learn about its history, the more and more I am amazed by what’s gone on here. I want the new PS122 to be the 2020 version of the original organization” (evgrieve.com). Schlenzka tried to reconcile the two points of view, paying tribute to the legacy of PS122, but also addressing current realities: “We have this amazing past that in my opinion, not enough people know about. But it can drag us down, and that’s a fine line to navigate” Schlenzka (evgrieve.com). Despite the name change, Schlenzka wants it to be a community facility, a place where people come to spend time during the day, in keeping with its origins as first a school, and then a community centre (Schlenzka PI 2021).

This chapter has shown how, during her time as house photographer at PS122, McAdams experienced personal grief at the death of close friends and collaborators from HIV/Aids or complications relating to it, and was aware of the cultural loss around the absence of artworks that were never made (PI 2019). Her photographs of the works performed at PS122 chart a period of change in the literary and performance scene there. Simultaneously, McAdams was seeing buildings torn down and occupants forced out as higher rents took whole communities away. These two things combined to awaken her to the cultural repercussions of such loss on many levels and the need to record it (PI 2019). The importance of McAdams' work is underscored by the precarity and fragility of personal memory and the recorded community history of the neighbourhood. Russell observed: “what's left after a performance is so ephemeral that the theater dust of this, the history of this, which is sometimes mostly communicated verbally—it matters” (Burke). McAdams' photographs help to preserve a part of the history of Alphabet City and to highlight the damage caused by the removal of cultural landmarks, as articulated by Sarah Schulman and Penny Arcade. McAdams and her fellow PS122 community exemplify the “artist as citizen” and, like the institution of PS122, now Performance Space, New York, are persisting sites of resistance to hegemonic attempts to deny them.

CONCLUSION

Overview of the Study

This thesis has examined the work of photographer Dona Ann McAdams in the years 1979 to 2006. It explored her legacy and also that of PS122 as an institution. As I have established, her photography sits at the intersection of key events in the US in the last decades of the twentieth century. Her beliefs put her at the centre of the Lower East Side struggles against the New York and national authorities and policy-makers and as a champion of her adopted communities. This study has also described the role of performance artists in bringing the Aids Crisis to public attention through protest and art-making. McAdams documented this and her work gained early recognition as an important contribution to the efforts to educate the wider community on the facts of Aids and to memorialise those who were lost. Her work with artists at PS122 is an important photographic record and contribution to preserve their works and demonstrate what choreographers and performers were doing to change the response of the wider public to Aids.

I have evidenced the importance of PS122 as an institution that provided a venue for protestors to meet and organise, and McAdams' position there as not just a "house photographer" but rather, a core constituent. Her work with the protesters and the artists in PS122 demanded an engaged response to the crisis and exemplifies the role art may play in affecting social change. I have also established McAdams' entitlement to claim credit, with others, for changing the behaviour of government departments and officials and those in the medical profession. These include: obtaining improvements for those with Aids and their families, drug research and medical provision, welfare benefits, and patient agency over treatment programmes. Her activism, with others, helped earn rights for next-of-kin to be recognised, to be given access to medical records, funeral arrangements, and tenancies. These gains are an enduring legacy.

This work includes a history of this non-traditional performance space in those years, as well as McAdams' role there. My research focused on the work that shows how she participated in and documented protests for social justice. Examples include performances at PS122, resisting censorship, workshops with the mentally ill and recording the changes in the infrastructure of the Lower East Side. This study bears out McAdams' claim that she "is interested in photographing short-lived, disappearing, changing things", in other words, recording stages of transition (PI 2018).

McAdams' work contributes to studies in visual culture and research on intersections of aesthetics and activism. Her photographs of *Artists Call* [for an end to US intervention in Central America], is included in a 2021 exhibition at Tufts University Art Galleries as an example of how the community she was part of united behind common aims and had the potential to effect change.

My research showed that McAdams work imparts the lived experience of marginalised people. Her work with those affected by Aids and with the mentally ill challenged the perceptions of those communities by bringing them into public view. Her photographs provide a starting point for discourse and served to break down fear and suspicion by portraying the individuals as people, not statistics. Her photographs show her subjects with human qualities, not as "othered", and insist on their inclusion, and rightful place, within society.

My studies of McAdams' work at PS122 show her as a key member of a pioneering movement in the history of choreography, dance and performance art. She documented almost all the creative output at PS122 over twenty-three years and had images of controversial performances by many of the artists embroiled in the indecency allegations in the Culture Wars of the 1990s. Despite pressure from the media and others, McAdams decided not to release images that would feed into the controversy. She withheld images that might have been appropriated to support arguments of obscenity that the political right was making against the artists. She did not bow to pressure to release images relating to the cases of the artists who came to be known as the NEA Four. In the case of Ron Athey's (1994) *Scenes from a Harsh Life*, her images acted as incontrovertible evidence against allegations of HIV contaminated blood threatening the safety of the audience. My study has highlighted the integrity of her practice and her emphasis on collaboration and trust between herself and her subjects.

I also investigated whether, and how, her stance and practice changed over the period in question. McAdams placed herself front and centre when photographing performances at PS122. During those performances she adapted her style over time to suit new audiences who were less tolerant of her presence, and as dress rehearsals became more common she was able to shoot these rather than the live performance. Other than this, as my study has shown, she maintained her practice of photographing communities that she was an intimate part of and her visual narrative was unchanged.

Contribution to the Existing Literature

As evidenced, research into this period in the history of art and activism of the Lower East Side is sparse. My contribution has been to add detail to these moments in the history of PS122 and to establish McAdams' position as a major photographer of the period. My unique access to McAdams' archive and collection of primary data in the form of interviews and photographic records, many previously unpublished, allowed me to find new perspectives on her work and its place in the history of American photography. By charting McAdams' work 1979-2006, I demonstrate her role in documenting and resisting dominant, discriminatory discourses. My work contributes to scholarship on the history of the Lower East Side: of PS122, performance art 1979–2006, and activism against social injustices, including medical and welfare provision for Aids patients and their families, censorship of the arts, mental health policies and neighbourhood changes due to gentrification.

This thesis shows McAdams' role in bringing together the various elements in the story of PS122 and its place in the evolution of Performance Art and Lower East Side history. McAdams' work intersects with key moments in late-twentieth-century cultural history in the USA and also links people and their individual, personal, accounts. She memorialises otherwise lost people, places and events. My work has demonstrated that, while in the past, dominant ideologies stifled the voices of those on the margins, McAdams work has helped to make them heard. Her archive provides a unique record of the people and events which is more comprehensive than any in the public domain. This work foregrounds the radicalism of queer and "othered" forebears and provides access to a portion of that history not previously recorded.

Implications of this New Knowledge for Scholarship and Practice

This work situates McAdams as a key figure at PS122, more than a House Photographer, but rather an acknowledged and valued collaborator with Russell and the artists there. Her important archive adds to the history of choreography, dance performance art and art activism, as well as protest groups such as "ACT UP" and the anti-nuclear movement. Many who shared their memories of the 1980s and 1990s expressed regret at the absence of queer role models, and McAdams' work addresses that lacuna. Her work highlights the experiences of the mentally ill, of women, people of colour, those whose sexuality confronts the heteropatriarchy and expectations of gender norms. This research offers an insight into the past and contributes to a foundation that allows us, and prospective scholars, to connect to our future.

Recommendations for future research

McAdams' archive bequeaths an extensive legacy that can be accessed by future researchers and presents the opportunity for future dialogues. It may encourage and enable the recollection of past events as well as the writing of new histories to further contribute to existing scholarship on art and activism.

This study may provide the basis for further research on the impact of pioneering work at PS122 on the evolution of performance art and dance. I have also uncovered other, unexplored archives which merit investigation. Two examples here are John Bernd's papers at Harvard and Political Art Documentation/Distribution (PAD/D), whose archive of documents, prints, and ephemera from political groups and organizations around the world, resides at the MoMA library in Queens. These archives are not digitised and remain largely unknown.

This research also has the potential to encourage further investigation into trauma and memory studies. Many performance artists who survived the Aids crisis continue to make work that references it, to commemorate those who were lost and have written of unprocessed grief. It may inspire future scholars to re-visit these subjects and to process emotions around societal neglect and the large-scale death of friends, as a cultural trauma in a minority group.

Implications for my own research

As this research has explored a previously under-examined area, McAdams’ archive, there are multiple avenues for further research. These include developing my existing and expanding connections in the field of performance art and McAdams’ photo documentation. I hope to continue to connect with my network of collaborators to conduct further research. My goal is to write a book and also to seek and obtain funding for an exhibition of McAdams’ photographs. There is the possibility of co-authoring a book with McAdams on other aspects of her work that have come to light but have been beyond the scope of this initial study.

Discussions with McAdams have generated ideas of artist’s talks and an accompanying exhibition, subject to funding and Covid-19 permitting. My discussions with Mark Russell, now Artistic Director at the Public Theatre, Astor Place, NYC, prompted him to mention his interest in seeing the spreadsheet I have created of McAdams’ archive and in holding an event around the history of PS122, focusing on McAdams work. Russell and McAdams have provided me with a timeline of performances at PS122 up until 2004, which, together with my spreadsheet, would contribute to a comprehensive record of the work that was developed and shown there in its first two decades. Other founding members of PS122 have expressed a keen interest in contributing to this timeline.

In 2021 PS122 celebrates its fortieth anniversary and Schlenka has invited many of those who performed there to participate in a celebration: McAdams is to be honoured for her work (McAdams PI 2021). Her work captures the essence and energy of a generation of artists and their physical space, and, as has been evidenced throughout this thesis, she rests her reputation on this independence of spirit, collaborative work practice and integrity of purpose.

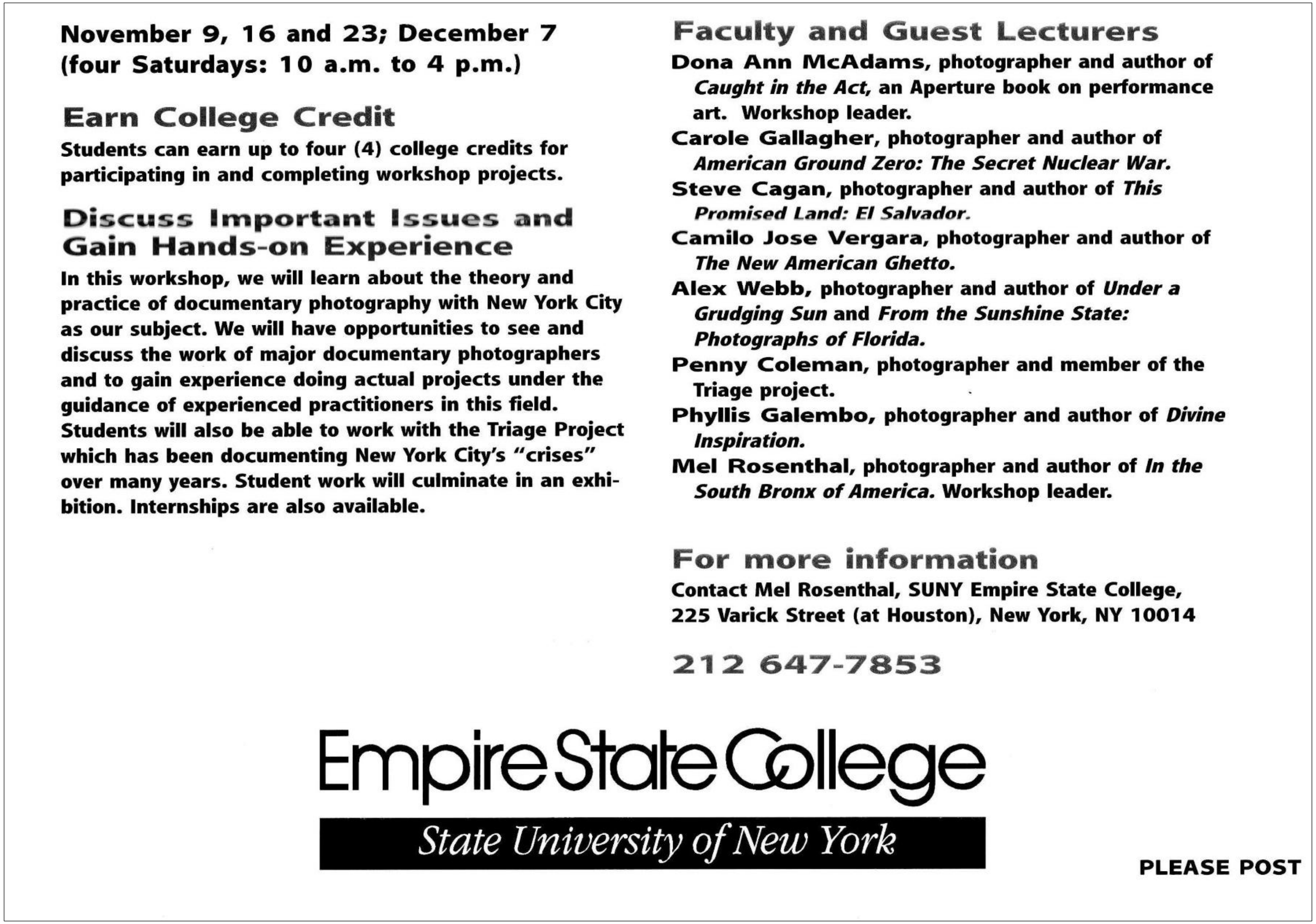
She reflected:

> As a person who never went to university, who was largely self-taught, who didn’t get an undergraduate degree until aged 40, and then a masters soon after, I’ve always felt like I was outside of the mainstream. I consciously wanted to, and I was always able, to separate my art-making work from my moneymaking except for perhaps PS 122 where they did pay me a small wage. (PI 2021)

That way she:

> [I] could be an activist. I could photograph the work the way I felt it should be seen and didn’t have to satisfy any guidelines or criteria for anybody except myself and the community in which I was photographing. (PI 2021)

Appendix One: Flyer for Mel Rosenthal's Triage Project



November 9, 16 and 23; December 7
(four Saturdays: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.)

Earn College Credit

Students can earn up to four (4) college credits for participating in and completing workshop projects.

Discuss Important Issues and Gain Hands-on Experience

In this workshop, we will learn about the theory and practice of documentary photography with New York City as our subject. We will have opportunities to see and discuss the work of major documentary photographers and to gain experience doing actual projects under the guidance of experienced practitioners in this field. Students will also be able to work with the Triage Project which has been documenting New York City's "crises" over many years. Student work will culminate in an exhibition. Internships are also available.

Faculty and Guest Lecturers

Dona Ann McAdams, photographer and author of *Caught in the Act*, an Aperture book on performance art. Workshop leader.

Carole Gallagher, photographer and author of *American Ground Zero: The Secret Nuclear War.*

Steve Cagan, photographer and author of *This Promised Land: El Salvador.*

Camilo Jose Vergara, photographer and author of *The New American Ghetto.*

Alex Webb, photographer and author of *Under a Grudging Sun* and *From the Sunshine State: Photographs of Florida.*

Penny Coleman, photographer and member of the Triage project.

Phyllis Galembo, photographer and author of *Divine Inspiration.*

Mel Rosenthal, photographer and author of *In the South Bronx of America.* Workshop leader.

For more information

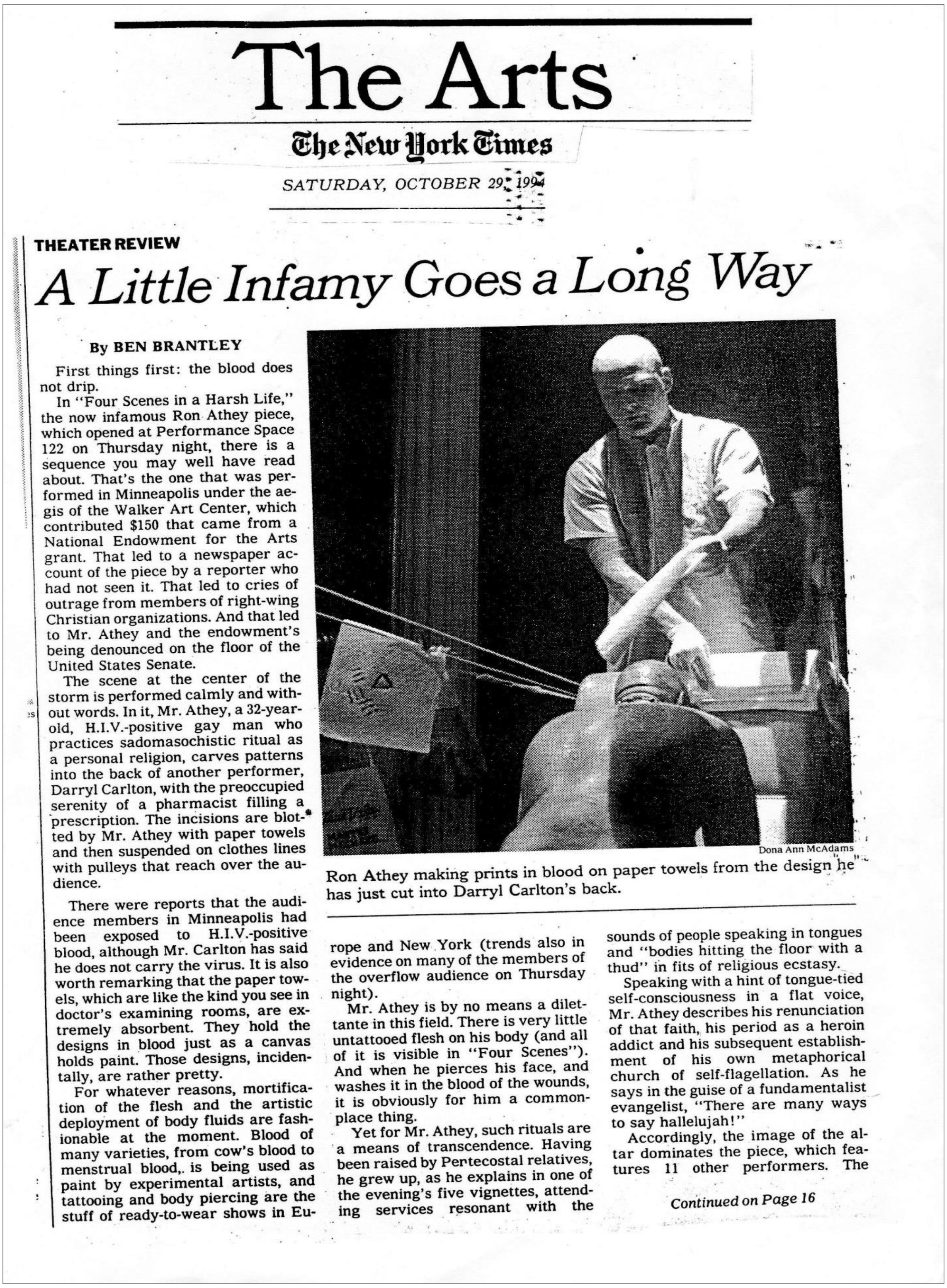
Contact Mel Rosenthal, SUNY Empire State College,
225 Varick Street (at Houston), New York, NY 10014

212 647-7853

Empire State College
State University of New York

PLEASE POST

Appendix Two:Ron Athey, *Four Scenes from a Harsh Life*, 1994



The Arts

The New York Times

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 29, 1994

THEATER REVIEW

A Little Infamy Goes a Long Way

By BEN BRANTLEY

First things first: the blood does not drip.

In "Four Scenes in a Harsh Life," the now infamous Ron Athey piece, which opened at Performance Space 122 on Thursday night, there is a sequence you may well have read about. That's the one that was performed in Minneapolis under the aegis of the Walker Art Center, which contributed $150 that came from a National Endowment for the Arts grant. That led to a newspaper account of the piece by a reporter who had not seen it. That led to cries of outrage from members of right-wing Christian organizations. And that led to Mr. Athey and the endowment's being denounced on the floor of the United States Senate.

The scene at the center of the storm is performed calmly and without words. In it, Mr. Athey, a 32-year-old, H.I.V.-positive gay man who practices sadomasochistic ritual as a personal religion, carves patterns into the back of another performer, Darryl Carlton, with the preoccupied serenity of a pharmacist filling a prescription. The incisions are blotted by Mr. Athey with paper towels and then suspended on clothes lines with pulleys that reach over the audience.

Dona Ann McAdams

Ron Athey making prints in blood on paper towels from the design he has just cut into Darryl Carlton's back.

There were reports that the audience members in Minneapolis had been exposed to H.I.V.-positive blood, although Mr. Carlton has said he does not carry the virus. It is also worth remarking that the paper towels, which are like the kind you see in doctor's examining rooms, are extremely absorbent. They hold the designs in blood just as a canvas holds paint. Those designs, incidentally, are rather pretty.

For whatever reasons, mortification of the flesh and the artistic deployment of body fluids are fashionable at the moment. Blood of many varieties, from cow's blood to menstrual blood,. is being used as paint by experimental artists, and tattooing and body piercing are the stuff of ready-to-wear shows in Europe and New York (trends also in evidence on many of the members of the overflow audience on Thursday night).

Mr. Athey is by no means a dilettante in this field. There is very little untattooed flesh on his body (and all of it is visible in "Four Scenes"). And when he pierces his face, and washes it in the blood of the wounds, it is obviously for him a commonplace thing.

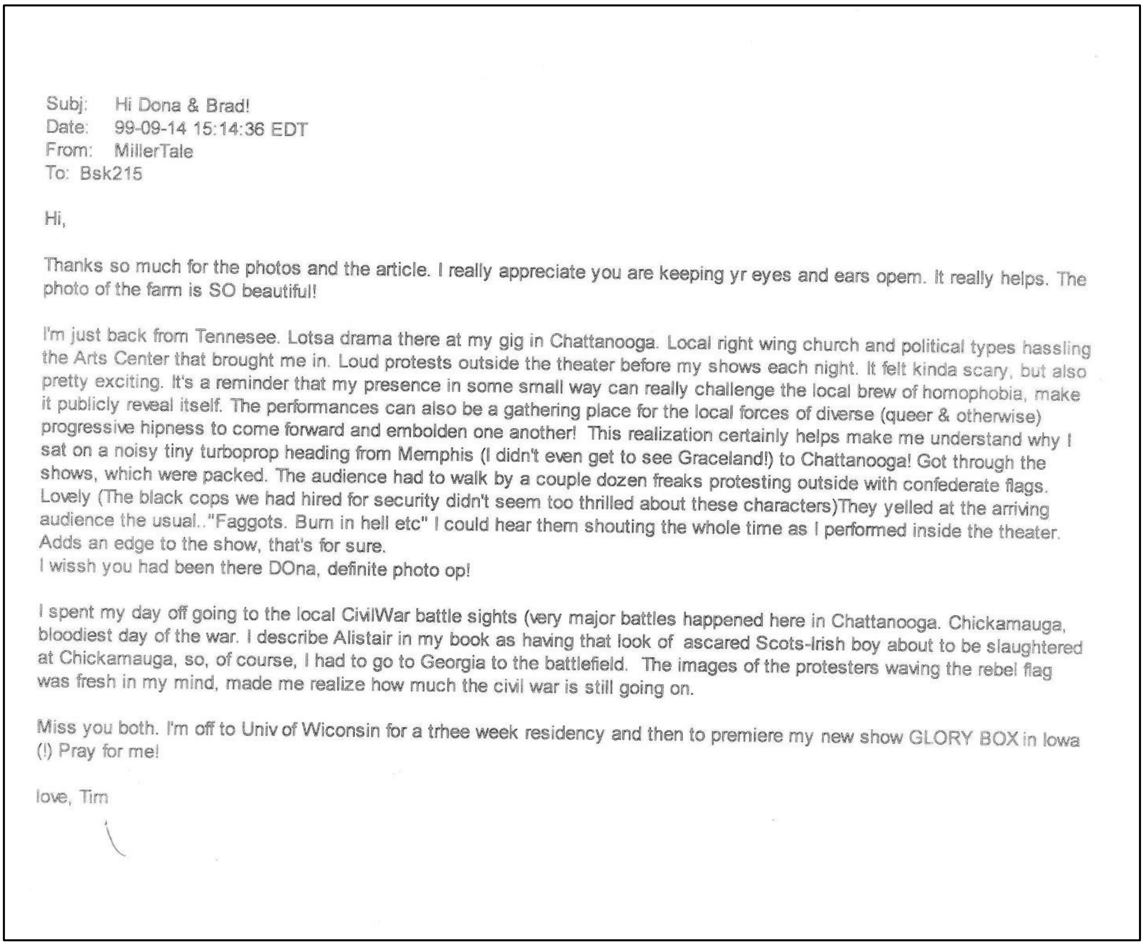
Yet for Mr. Athey, such rituals are a means of transcendence. Having been raised by Pertecostal relatives, he grew up, as he explains in one of the evening's five vignettes, attending services resonant with the sounds of people speaking in tongues and "bodies hitting the floor with a thud" in fits of religious ecstasy.

Speaking with a hint of tongue-tied self-consciousness in a flat voice, Mr. Athey describes his renunciation of that faith, his period as a heroin addict and his subsequent establishment of his own metaphorical church of self-flagellation. As he says in the guise of a fundamentalist evangelist, "There are many ways to say hallelujah!"

Accordingly, the image of the altar dominates the piece, which features 11 other performers. The

Continued on Page 16

Appendix Three:Fax Tim Miller to McAdams



Subj: Hi Dona & Brad!
Date: 99-09-14 15:14:36 EDT
From: MillerTale
To: Bsk215

Hi,

Thanks so much for the photos and the article. I really appreciate you are keeping yr eyes and ears opem. It really helps. The photo of the farm is SO beautiful!

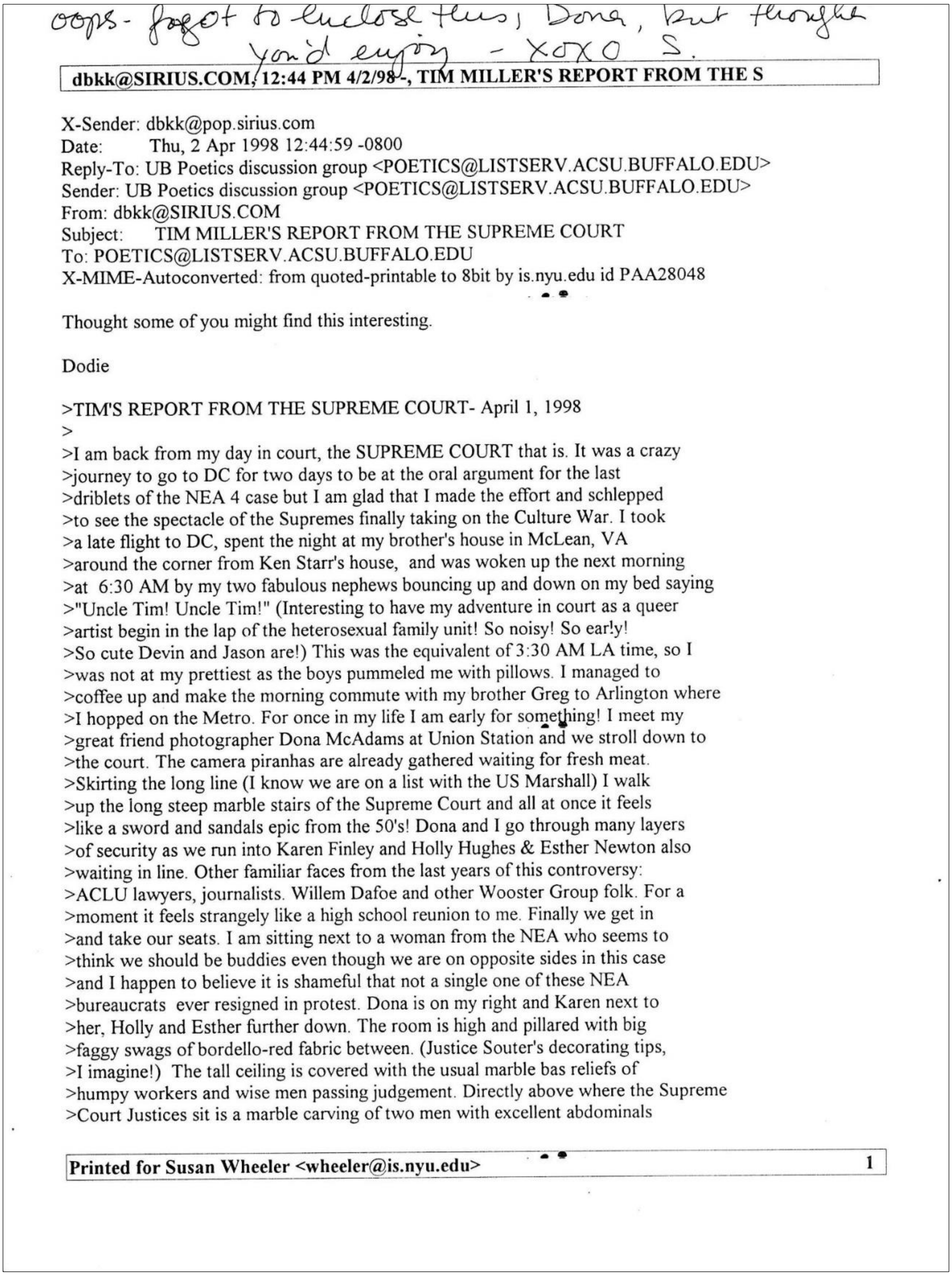
I'm just back from Tennesee. Lotsa drama there at my gig in Chattanooga. Local right wing church and political types hassling the Arts Center that brought me in. Loud protests outside the theater before my shows each night. It felt kinda scary, but also pretty exciting. It's a reminder that my presence in some small way can really challenge the local brew of homophobia, make it publicly reveal itself. The performances can also be a gathering place for the local forces of diverse (queer & otherwise) progressive hipness to come forward and embolden one another! This realization certainly helps make me understand why I sat on a noisy tiny turboprop heading from Memphis (I didn't even get to see Graceland!) to Chattanooga! Got through the shows, which were packed. The audience had to walk by a couple dozen freaks protesting outside with confederate flags. Lovely (The black cops we had hired for security didn't seem too thrilled about these characters)They yelled at the arriving audience the usual.."Faggots. Burn in hell etc" I could hear them shouting the whole time as I performed inside the theater. Adds an edge to the show, that's for sure.
I wissh you had been there DOna, definite photo op!

I spent my day off going to the local CivilWar battle sights (very major battles happened here in Chattanooga. Chickamauga, bloodiest day of the war. I describe Alistair in my book as having that look of ascared Scots-Irish boy about to be slaughtered at Chickamauga, so, of course, I had to go to Georgia to the battlefield. The images of the protesters waving the rebel flag was fresh in my mind, made me realize how much the civil war is still going on.

Miss you both. I'm off to Univ of Wiconsin for a trhee week residency and then to premiere my new show GLORY BOX in Iowa (!) Pray for me!

love, Tim

Appendix Four: Tim Miller Report from Supreme Court



oops - forgot to enclose this, Dona, but thought you'd enjoy - XOXO S.

dbkk@SIRIUS.COM, 12:44 PM 4/2/98 -, TIM MILLER'S REPORT FROM THE S

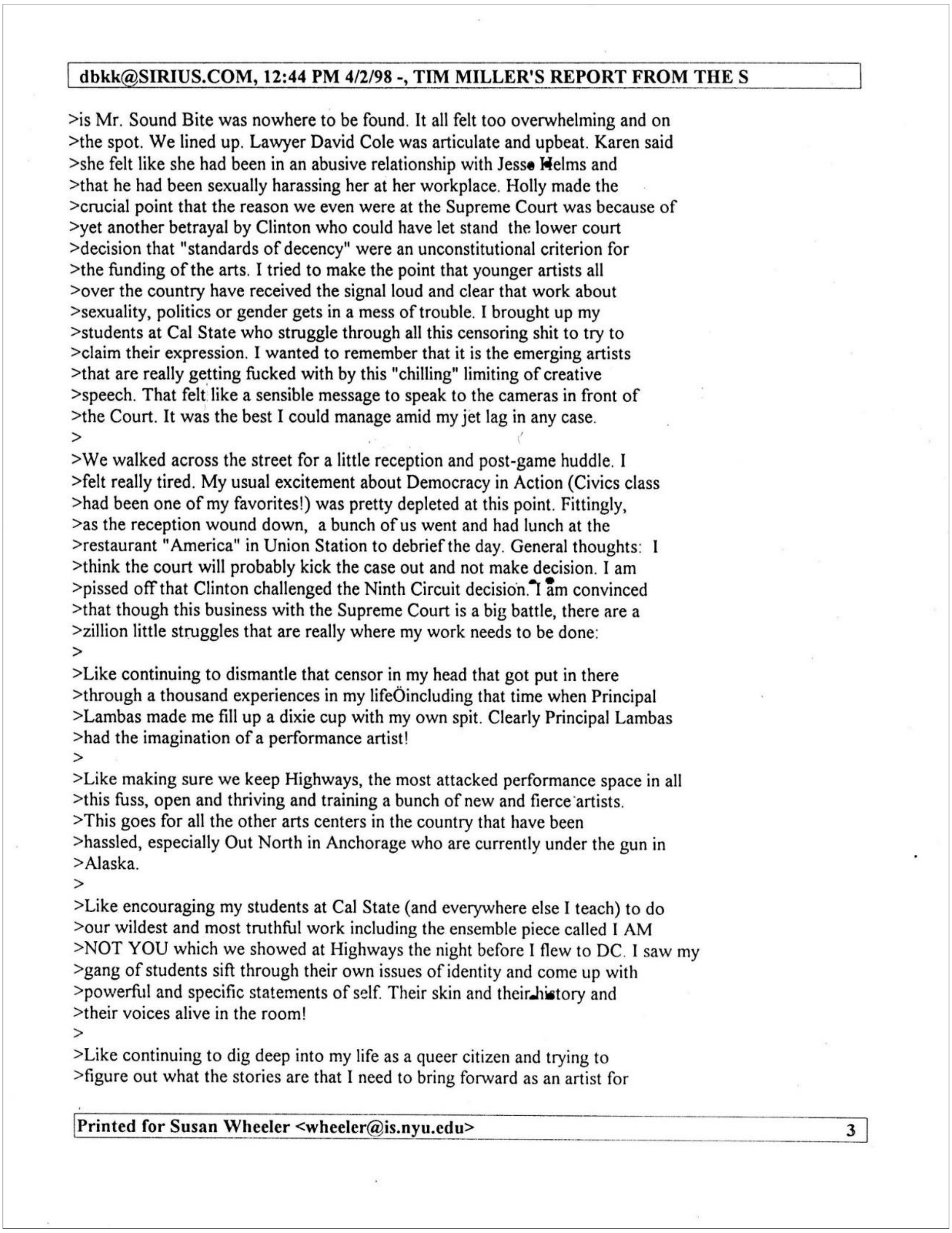
X-Sender: dbkk@pop.sirius.com
Date: Thu, 2 Apr 1998 12:44:59 -0800
Reply-To: UB Poetics discussion group <POETICS@LISTSERV.ACSU.BUFFALO.EDU>
Sender: UB Poetics discussion group <POETICS@LISTSERV.ACSU.BUFFALO.EDU>
From: dbkk@SIRIUS.COM
Subject: TIM MILLER'S REPORT FROM THE SUPREME COURT
To: POETICS@LISTSERV.ACSU.BUFFALO.EDU
X-MIME-Autoconverted: from quoted-printable to 8bit by is.nyu.edu id PAA28048

Thought some of you might find this interesting.

Dodie

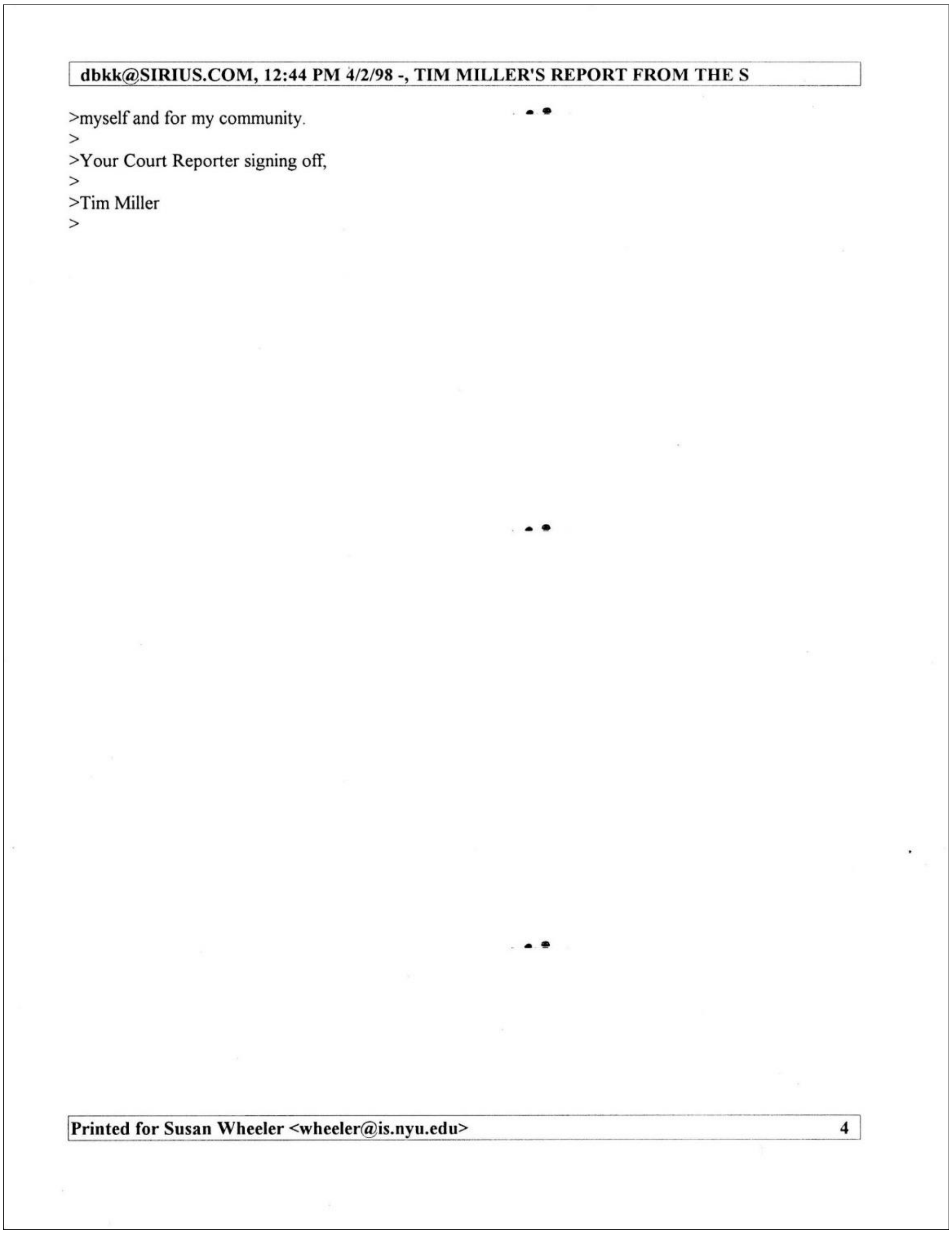
>TIM'S REPORT FROM THE SUPREME COURT- April 1, 1998
>
>I am back from my day in court, the SUPREME COURT that is. It was a crazy
>journey to go to DC for two days to be at the oral argument for the last
>driblets of the NEA 4 case but I am glad that I made the effort and schlepped
>to see the spectacle of the Supremes finally taking on the Culture War. I took
>a late flight to DC, spent the night at my brother's house in McLean, VA
>around the corner from Ken Starr's house, and was woken up the next morning
>at 6:30 AM by my two fabulous nephews bouncing up and down on my bed saying
>"Uncle Tim! Uncle Tim!" (Interesting to have my adventure in court as a queer
>artist begin in the lap of the heterosexual family unit! So noisy! So early!
>So cute Devin and Jason are!) This was the equivalent of 3:30 AM LA time, so I
>was not at my prettiest as the boys pummeled me with pillows. I managed to
>coffee up and make the morning commute with my brother Greg to Arlington where
>I hopped on the Metro. For once in my life I am early for something! I meet my
>great friend photographer Dona McAdams at Union Station and we stroll down to
>the court. The camera piranhas are already gathered waiting for fresh meat.
>Skirting the long line (I know we are on a list with the US Marshall) I walk
>up the long steep marble stairs of the Supreme Court and all at once it feels
>like a sword and sandals epic from the 50's! Dona and I go through many layers
>of security as we run into Karen Finley and Holly Hughes & Esther Newton also
>waiting in line. Other familiar faces from the last years of this controversy:
>ACLU lawyers, journalists. Willem Dafoe and other Wooster Group folk. For a
>moment it feels strangely like a high school reunion to me. Finally we get in
>and take our seats. I am sitting next to a woman from the NEA who seems to
>think we should be buddies even though we are on opposite sides in this case
>and I happen to believe it is shameful that not a single one of these NEA
>bureaucrats ever resigned in protest. Dona is on my right and Karen next to
>her, Holly and Esther further down. The room is high and pillared with big
>faggy swags of bordello-red fabric between. (Justice Souter's decorating tips,
>I imagine!) The tall ceiling is covered with the usual marble bas reliefs of
>humpy workers and wise men passing judgement. Directly above where the Supreme
>Court Justices sit is a marble carving of two men with excellent abdominals

Printed for Susan Wheeler <wheeler@is.nyu.edu> 1



>is Mr. Sound Bite was nowhere to be found. It all felt too overwhelming and on
>the spot. We lined up. Lawyer David Cole was articulate and upbeat. Karen said
>she felt like she had been in an abusive relationship with Jesse Helms and
>that he had been sexually harassing her at her workplace. Holly made the
>crucial point that the reason we even were at the Supreme Court was because of
>yet another betrayal by Clinton who could have let stand the lower court
>decision that "standards of decency" were an unconstitutional criterion for
>the funding of the arts. I tried to make the point that younger artists all
>over the country have received the signal loud and clear that work about
>sexuality, politics or gender gets in a mess of trouble. I brought up my
>students at Cal State who struggle through all this censoring shit to try to
>claim their expression. I wanted to remember that it is the emerging artists
>that are really getting fucked with by this "chilling" limiting of creative
>speech. That felt like a sensible message to speak to the cameras in front of
>the Court. It was the best I could manage amid my jet lag in any case.
>
>We walked across the street for a little reception and post-game huddle. I
>felt really tired. My usual excitement about Democracy in Action (Civics class
>had been one of my favorites!) was pretty depleted at this point. Fittingly,
>as the reception wound down, a bunch of us went and had lunch at the
>restaurant "America" in Union Station to debrief the day. General thoughts: I
>think the court will probably kick the case out and not make decision. I am
>pissed off that Clinton challenged the Ninth Circuit decision. I am convinced
>that though this business with the Supreme Court is a big battle, there are a
>zillion little struggles that are really where my work needs to be done:
>
>Like continuing to dismantle that censor in my head that got put in there
>through a thousand experiences in my lifeÖincluding that time when Principal
>Lambas made me fill up a dixie cup with my own spit. Clearly Principal Lambas
>had the imagination of a performance artist!
>
>Like making sure we keep Highways, the most attacked performance space in all
>this fuss, open and thriving and training a bunch of new and fierce artists.
>This goes for all the other arts centers in the country that have been
>hassled, especially Out North in Anchorage who are currently under the gun in
>Alaska.
>
>Like encouraging my students at Cal State (and everywhere else I teach) to do
>our wildest and most truthful work including the ensemble piece called I AM
>NOT YOU which we showed at Highways the night before I flew to DC. I saw my
>gang of students sift through their own issues of identity and come up with
>powerful and specific statements of self. Their skin and their history and
>their voices alive in the room!
>
>Like continuing to dig deep into my life as a queer citizen and trying to
>figure out what the stories are that I need to bring forward as an artist for

Page Three is missing from the archive



>myself and for my community.
>
>Your Court Reporter signing off,
>
>Tim Miller
>

Appendix Five:Transcript of Citation for Dorothea Dix Humanitarian Award 2006 Written and presented by a workshop participant (anonymous).

"Insanity is no longer regarded as the extinction of the mind; a disease, hopeless, incurable which proceeds from physical cause, which disable [sic] the brain for a time ….This malady is subject to successful treatment, as surely as fever or other common bodily diseases" Dorothea Dix, January 11 1847.

Dorothea Dix realized that the warmth and kindness of friends and the intellectual stimulation provided by those friends helped Dix to shed light on the anxiety and depression that had overwhelmed her in 1836 and '37.

I know first-hand of the kindness and intellectual stimulation Dix benefitted from in 1837. I was to experience those qualities and more when I signed up for the new photography class that was being offered at the old South Street Center [sic]. I was told a New York City photographer would be in each week to teach us. Having spent the better part of the past decade in a clinical depression – isolated – & not reco - a changed woman from my previous 40 years of my life of life to say I was intimidated at the prospect of this photography teacher would be an understatement!! A highly recognized photographer, nationally published. & sought after by the NYC Ballet & Broadway producers.

However, Donna [sic] showed up in jeans, flats and a tea T-shirt & her hair up in a long ponytail. Everyone I knew from New York was dressed to the 9's to go(ing) [sic] to the grocery store.

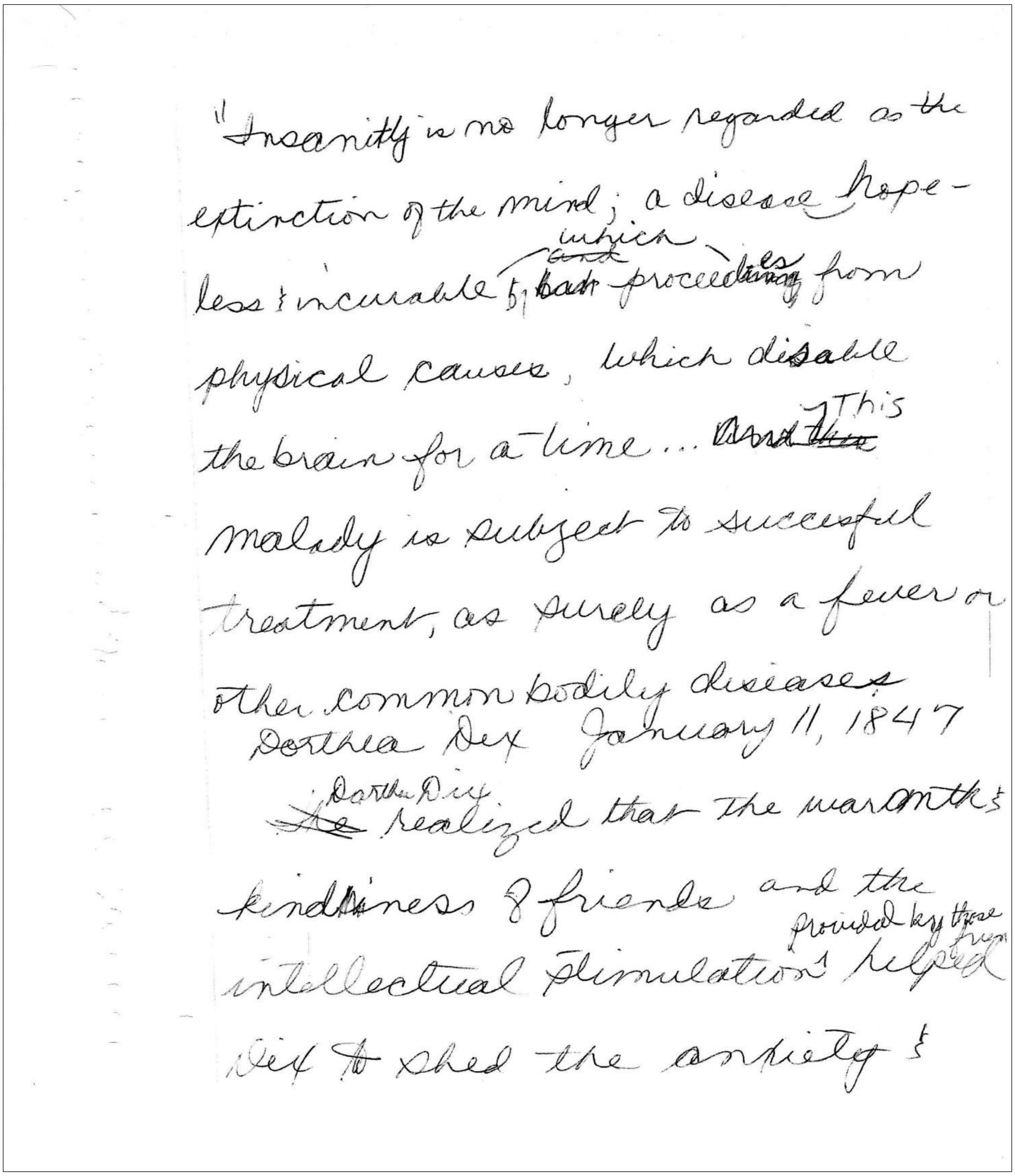
As I slowly began to learn her ways, I felt safe while I was being instructed. Then I felt as if I was experiencing a gentle kind and non-judgemental woman. – A true gem.

How lucky I and all the people involved in the class have felt not only for the knowledge, joy (we felt) but for the kindness she showed every hour, every time she was with us.

And it is a great honour (sic) to present to you, Donna [sic] McAdams the Dorothea Dix Humanitarian Award for 2006. Congratulations”.

Appendix Six: Handwritten citation for Dorothea Dix award Page 1 of 5

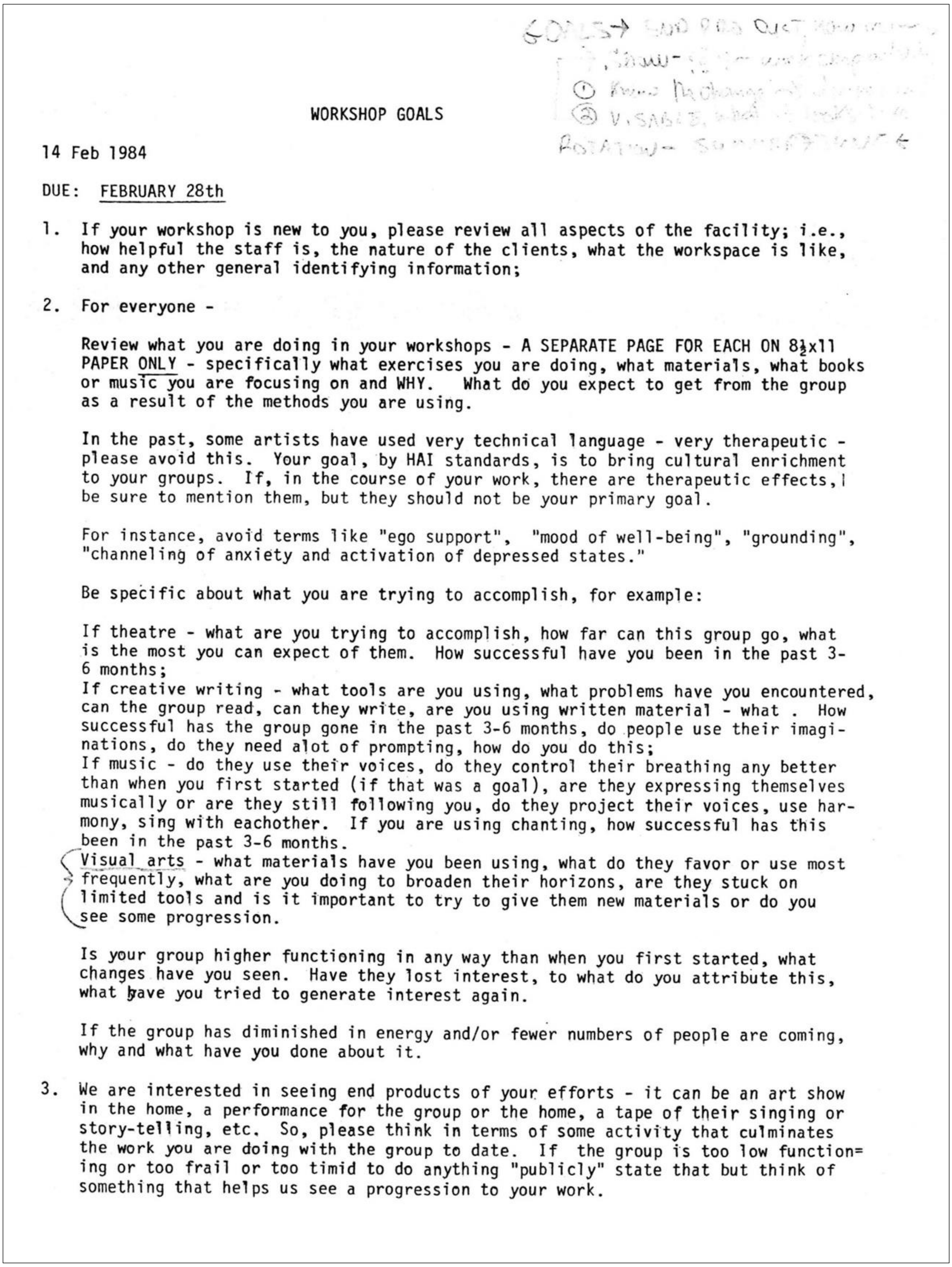
(2-5 not shown here)



"Insanitty is no longer regarded as the
extinction of the mind; a disease hope-
less & incurable, ~~and~~ which ~~both~~ proceed~~ing~~es from
physical causes, which disable
the brain for a time... ~~And this~~ This
malady is subject to succesful
treatment, as surely as a fever or
other common bodily diseases.
Dorthea Dix January 11, 1847

~~She~~ Dorthea Dix realized that the warmth &
kindness of friends and the
intellectual stimulation provided by those ~~from~~ helped
Dix to shed the anxiety &

Appendix Seven: HAI Workshop Goals



GOALS → END PRODUCT [illegible]
, Show – [illegible]
① [illegible] the change [illegible]
② V.SABLE, [illegible]
ROTATION – [illegible] ←

WORKSHOP GOALS

14 Feb 1984

DUE: FEBRUARY 28th

1. If your workshop is new to you, please review all aspects of the facility; i.e., how helpful the staff is, the nature of the clients, what the workspace is like, and any other general identifying information;

2. For everyone -

   Review what you are doing in your workshops - A SEPARATE PAGE FOR EACH ON 8½x11 PAPER ONLY - specifically what exercises you are doing, what materials, what books or music you are focusing on and WHY. What do you expect to get from the group as a result of the methods you are using.

   In the past, some artists have used very technical language - very therapeutic - please avoid this. Your goal, by HAI standards, is to bring cultural enrichment to your groups. If, in the course of your work, there are therapeutic effects, be sure to mention them, but they should not be your primary goal.

   For instance, avoid terms like "ego support", "mood of well-being", "grounding", "channeling of anxiety and activation of depressed states."

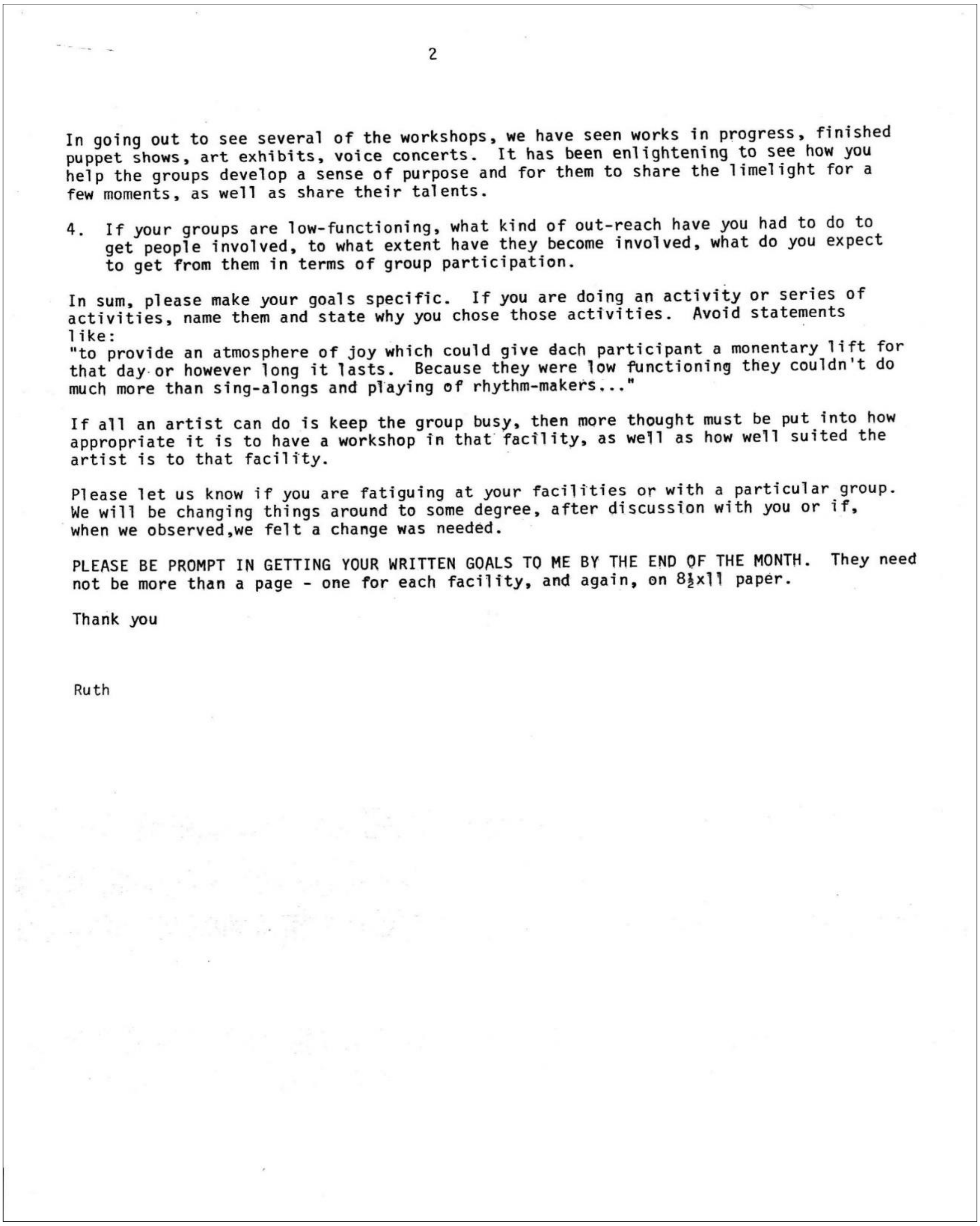
   Be specific about what you are trying to accomplish, for example:

   If theatre - what are you trying to accomplish, how far can this group go, what is the most you can expect of them. How successful have you been in the past 3-6 months;
   If creative writing - what tools are you using, what problems have you encountered, can the group read, can they write, are you using written material - what . How successful has the group gone in the past 3-6 months, do people use their imaginations, do they need alot of prompting, how do you do this;
   If music - do they use their voices, do they control their breathing any better than when you first started (if that was a goal), are they expressing themselves musically or are they still following you, do they project their voices, use harmony, sing with eachother. If you are using chanting, how successful has this been in the past 3-6 months.
   Visual arts - what materials have you been using, what do they favor or use most frequently, what are you doing to broaden their horizons, are they stuck on limited tools and is it important to try to give them new materials or do you see some progression.

   Is your group higher functioning in any way than when you first started, what changes have you seen. Have they lost interest, to what do you attribute this, what have you tried to generate interest again.

   If the group has diminished in energy and/or fewer numbers of people are coming, why and what have you done about it.

3. We are interested in seeing end products of your efforts - it can be an art show in the home, a performance for the group or the home, a tape of their singing or story-telling, etc. So, please think in terms of some activity that culminates the work you are doing with the group to date. If the group is too low functioning or too frail or too timid to do anything "publicly" state that but think of something that helps us see a progression to your work.



In going out to see several of the workshops, we have seen works in progress, finished puppet shows, art exhibits, voice concerts. It has been enlightening to see how you help the groups develop a sense of purpose and for them to share the limelight for a few moments, as well as share their talents.

4. If your groups are low-functioning, what kind of out-reach have you had to do to get people involved, to what extent have they become involved, what do you expect to get from them in terms of group participation.

In sum, please make your goals specific. If you are doing an activity or series of activities, name them and state why you chose those activities. Avoid statements like:
"to provide an atmosphere of joy which could give dach participant a monentary lift for that day or however long it lasts. Because they were low functioning they couldn't do much more than sing-alongs and playing of rhythm-makers..."

If all an artist can do is keep the group busy, then more thought must be put into how appropriate it is to have a workshop in that facility, as well as how well suited the artist is to that facility.

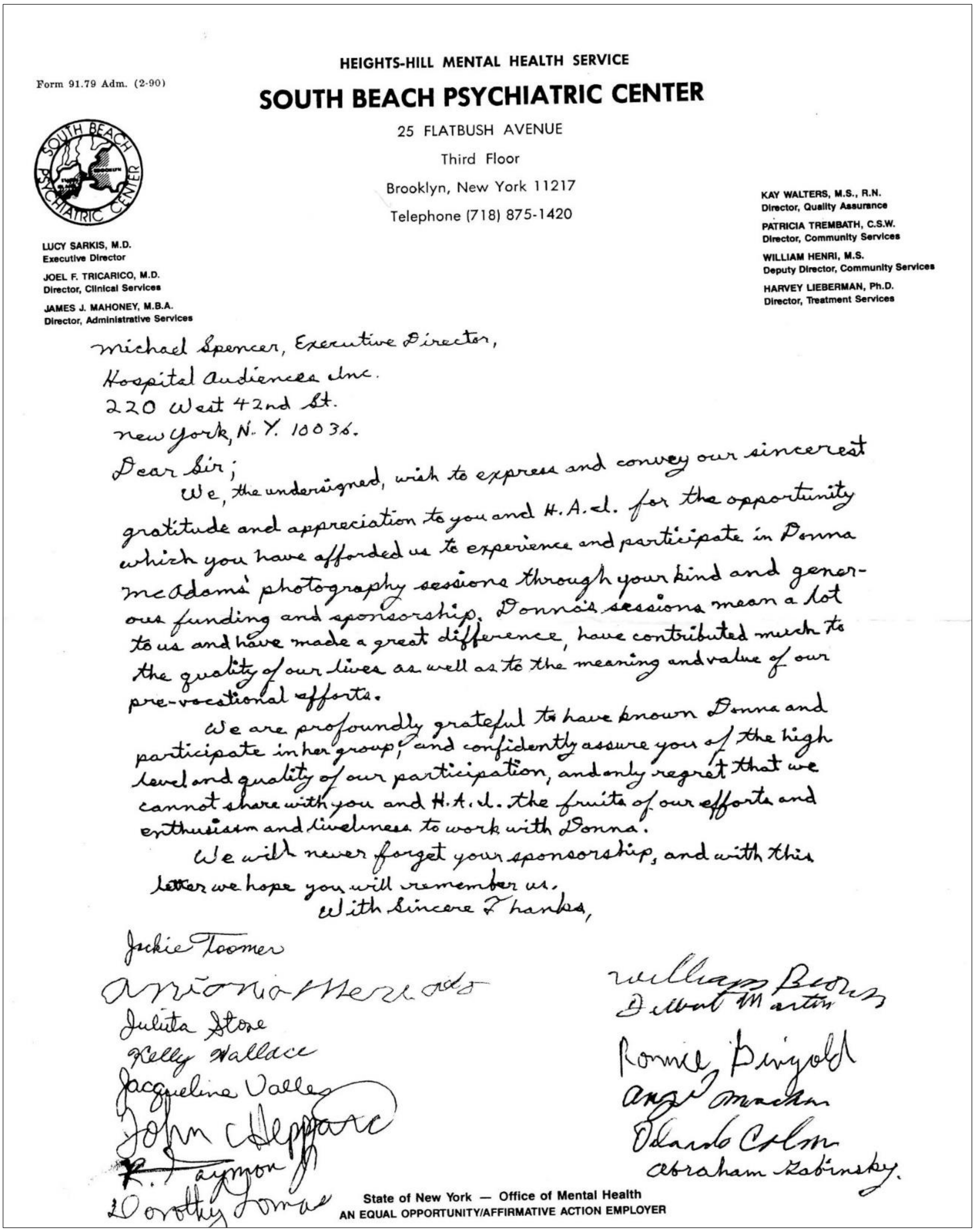
Please let us know if you are fatiguing at your facilities or with a particular group. We will be changing things around to some degree, after discussion with you or if, when we observed,we felt a change was needed.

PLEASE BE PROMPT IN GETTING YOUR WRITTEN GOALS TO ME BY THE END OF THE MONTH. They need not be more than a page - one for each facility, and again, on 8½x11 paper.

Thank you

Ruth

Appendix Eight: Testimonial



HEIGHTS-HILL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE

Form 91.79 Adm. (2-90)

SOUTH BEACH PSYCHIATRIC CENTER

25 FLATBUSH AVENUE
Third Floor
Brooklyn, New York 11217
Telephone (718) 875-1420

LUCY SARKIS, M.D.
Executive Director
JOEL F. TRICARICO, M.D.
Director, Clinical Services
JAMES J. MAHONEY, M.B.A.
Director, Administrative Services

KAY WALTERS, M.S., R.N.
Director, Quality Assurance
PATRICIA TREMBATH, C.S.W.
Director, Community Services
WILLIAM HENRI, M.S.
Deputy Director, Community Services
HARVEY LIEBERMAN, Ph.D.
Director, Treatment Services

Michael Spencer, Executive Director,
Hospital Audiences Inc.
220 West 42nd St.
New York, N.Y. 10036.

Dear Sir;

We, the undersigned, wish to express and convey our sincerest gratitude and appreciation to you and H.A.I. for the opportunity which you have afforded us to experience and participate in Donna McAdams' photography sessions through your kind and generous funding and sponsorship. Donna's sessions mean a lot to us and have made a great difference, have contributed much to the quality of our lives as well as to the meaning and value of our pre-vocational efforts.

We are profoundly grateful to have known Donna and participate in her group, and confidently assure you of the high level and quality of our participation, and only regret that we cannot share with you and H.A.I. the fruits of our efforts and enthusiasm and liveliness to work with Donna.

We will never forget your sponsorship, and with this letter we hope you will remember us.

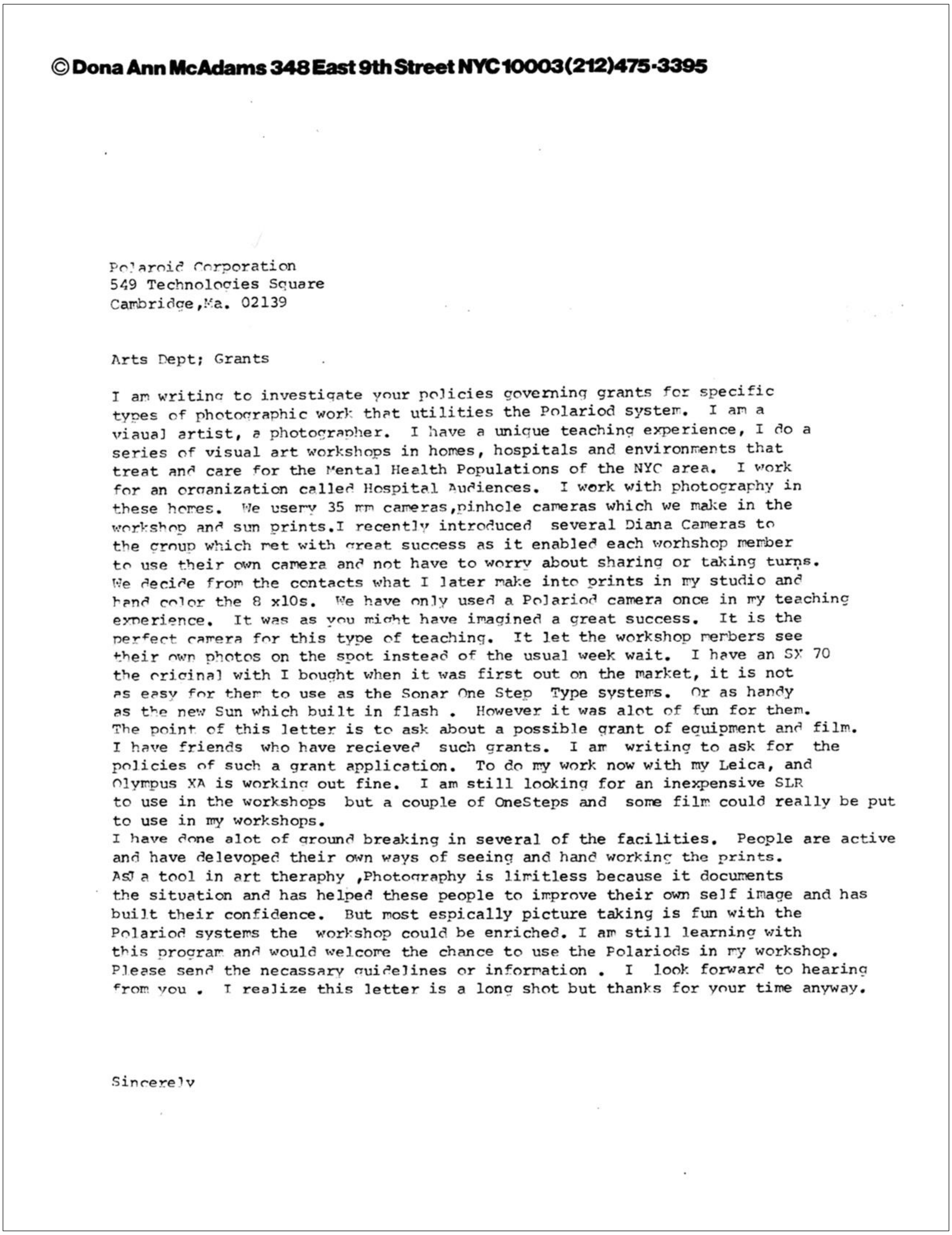
With Sincere Thanks,

Jackie Toomer
Antonia Mercado
Julita Stone
Kelly Wallace
Jacqueline Valles
John Sheppard
R. Taymon
Dorothy Lomas

William Brooks
Delbert Martin
Ronnie Dingold
Angel Machado
Orlando Colon
Abraham Zabinsky.

State of New York — Office of Mental Health
AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY/AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER

Appendix Nine: Polaroid Grant Application



© Dona Ann McAdams 348 East 9th Street NYC 10003 (212) 475-3395

Polaroid Corporation
549 Technologies Square
Cambridge, Ma. 02139

Arts Dept; Grants

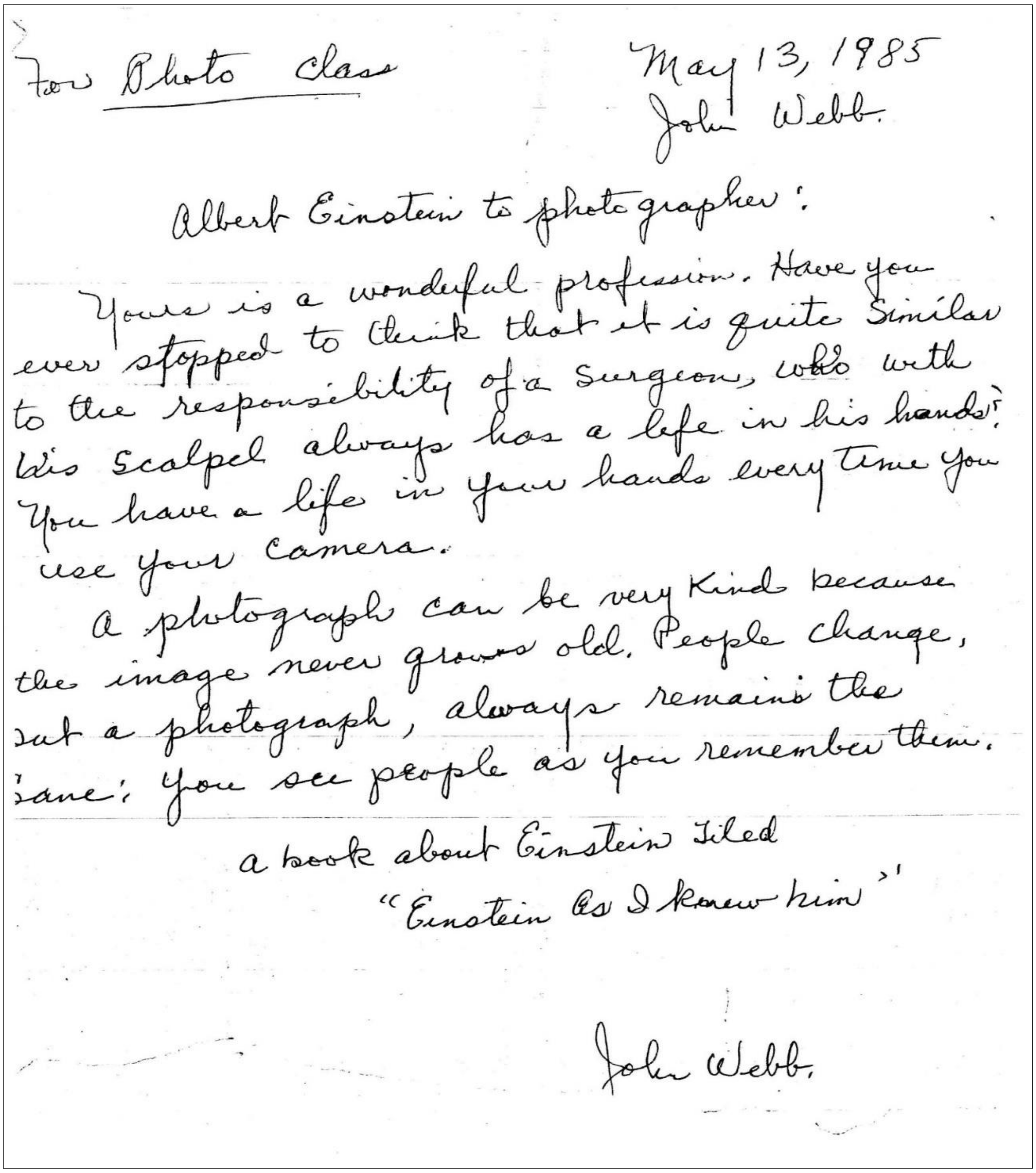
I am writing to investigate your policies governing grants for specific types of photographic work that utilities the Polariod system. I am a viaual artist, a photographer. I have a unique teaching experience, I do a series of visual art workshops in homes, hospitals and environments that treat and care for the Mental Health Populations of the NYC area. I work for an organization called Hospital Audiences. I work with photography in these homes. We usery 35 mm cameras, pinhole cameras which we make in the workshop and sun prints. I recently introduced several Diana Cameras to the group which met with great success as it enabled each worhshop member to use their own camera and not have to worry about sharing or taking turns. We decide from the contacts what I later make into prints in my studio and hand color the 8 x10s. We have only used a Polariod camera once in my teaching experience. It was as you might have imagined a great success. It is the perfect camera for this type of teaching. It let the workshop members see their own photos on the spot instead of the usual week wait. I have an SX 70 the original with I bought when it was first out on the market, it is not as easy for them to use as the Sonar One Step Type systems. Or as handy as the new Sun which built in flash . However it was alot of fun for them. The point of this letter is to ask about a possible grant of equipment and film. I have friends who have recieved such grants. I am writing to ask for the policies of such a grant application. To do my work now with my Leica, and Olympus XA is working out fine. I am still looking for an inexpensive SLR to use in the workshops but a couple of OneSteps and some film could really be put to use in my workshops.

I have done alot of ground breaking in several of the facilities. People are active and have delevoped their own ways of seeing and hand working the prints.

As a tool in art theraphy ,Photography is limitless because it documents the situation and has helped these people to improve their own self image and has built their confidence. But most espically picture taking is fun with the Polariod systems the workshop could be enriched. I am still learning with this program and would welcome the chance to use the Polariods in my workshop. Please send the necassary guidelines or information . I look forward to hearing from you . I realize this letter is a long shot but thanks for your time anyway.

Sincerely

Appendix Ten: John Webb ‘For Photo Class’. 1985.



For Photo class

May 13, 1985
John Webb.

Albert Einstein to photographer:

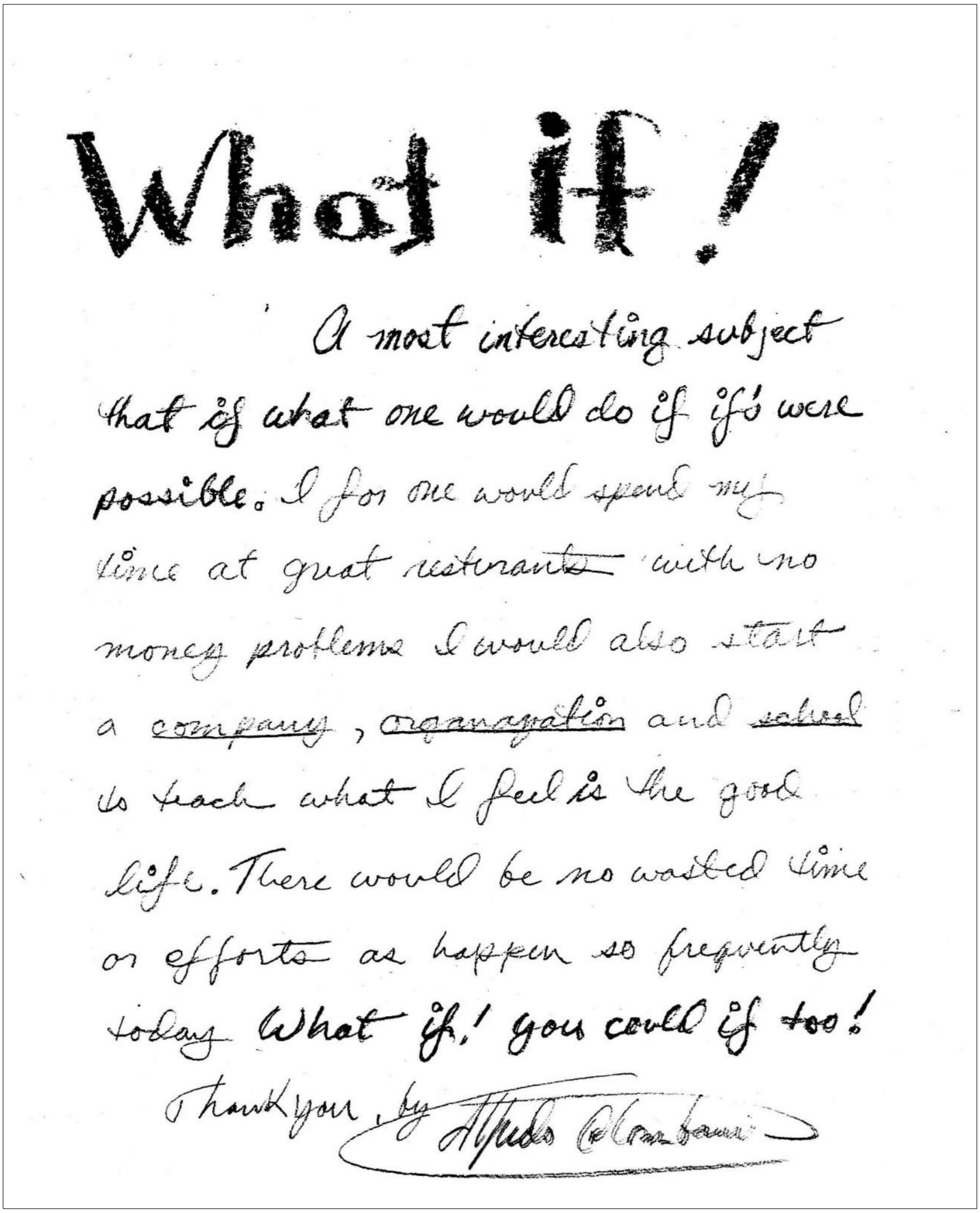
Yours is a wonderful profession. Have you ever stopped to think that it is quite Similar to the responsibility of a surgeon, who with his Scalpel always has a life in his hands? You have a life in your hands every time you use your Camera.

A photograph can be very Kind because the image never grows old. People change, but a photograph, always remains the same; you see people as you remember them.

a book about Einstein Tiled
"Einstein As I Knew him"

John Webb.

Appendix Eleven: McAdams encouraged ‘blue-sky’ thinking

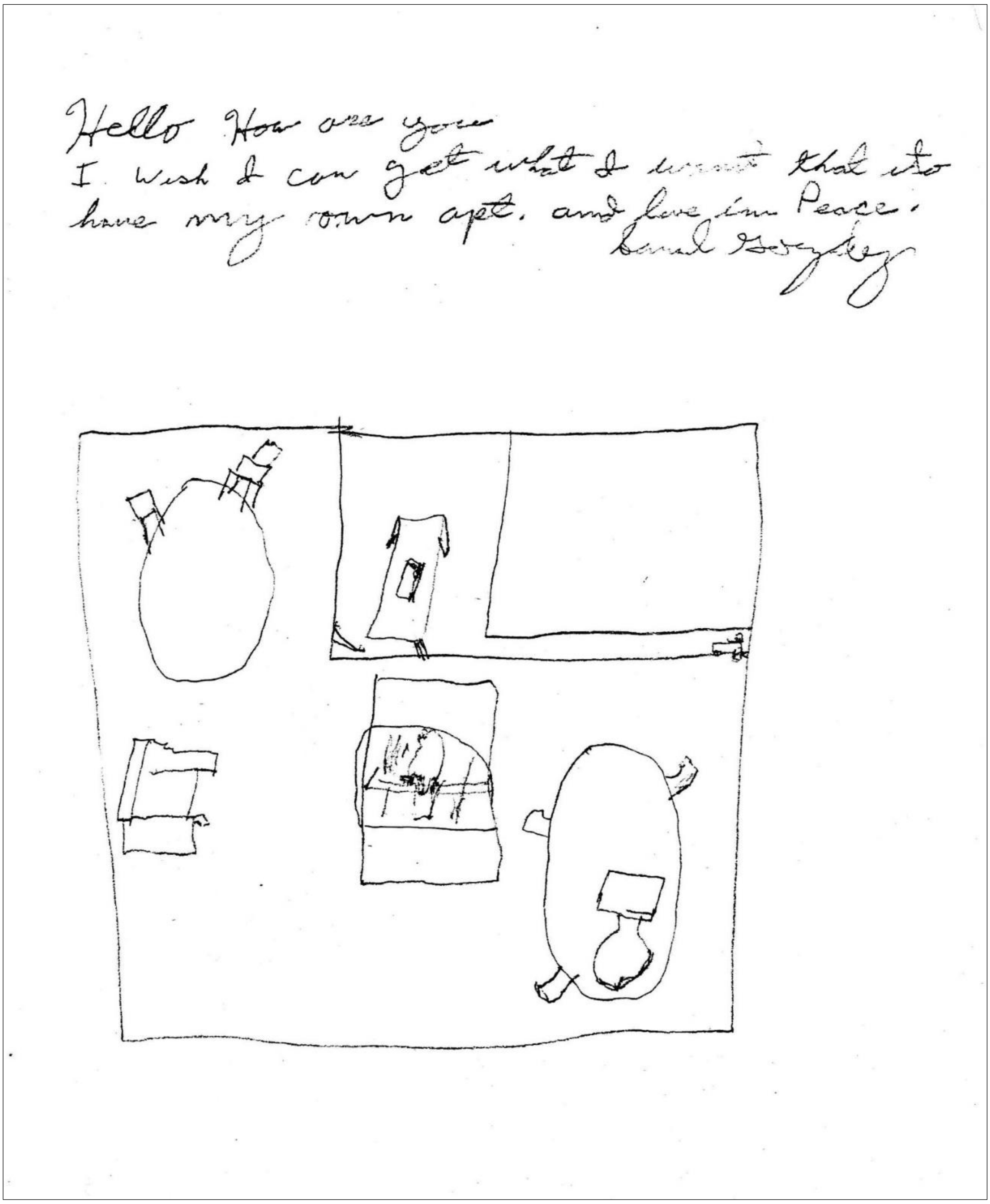


What if!

A most interesting subject that is what one would do if if's were possible. I for one would spend my time at great resturants with no money problems I would also start a company, organization and school to teach what I feel is the good life. There would be no wasted time or efforts as happen so frequently today What if! you could if too!

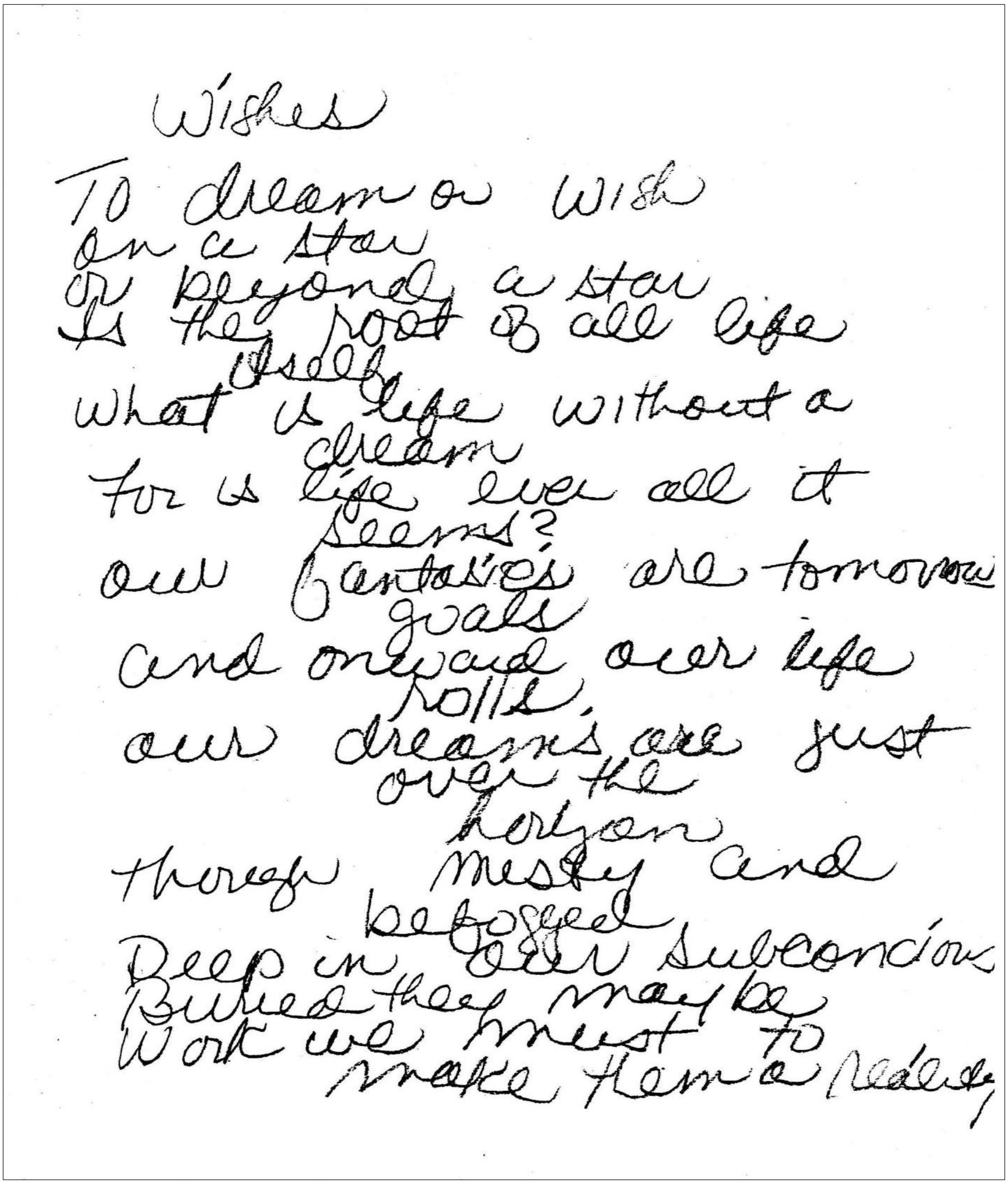
Thank you, by Alfredo Colombani

Appendix Twelve: A Wish to have my own apartment and to live in peace with illustration of the ideal home



Hello How are you
I. Wish I can get what I want that is to
have my own apt. and live in Peace.

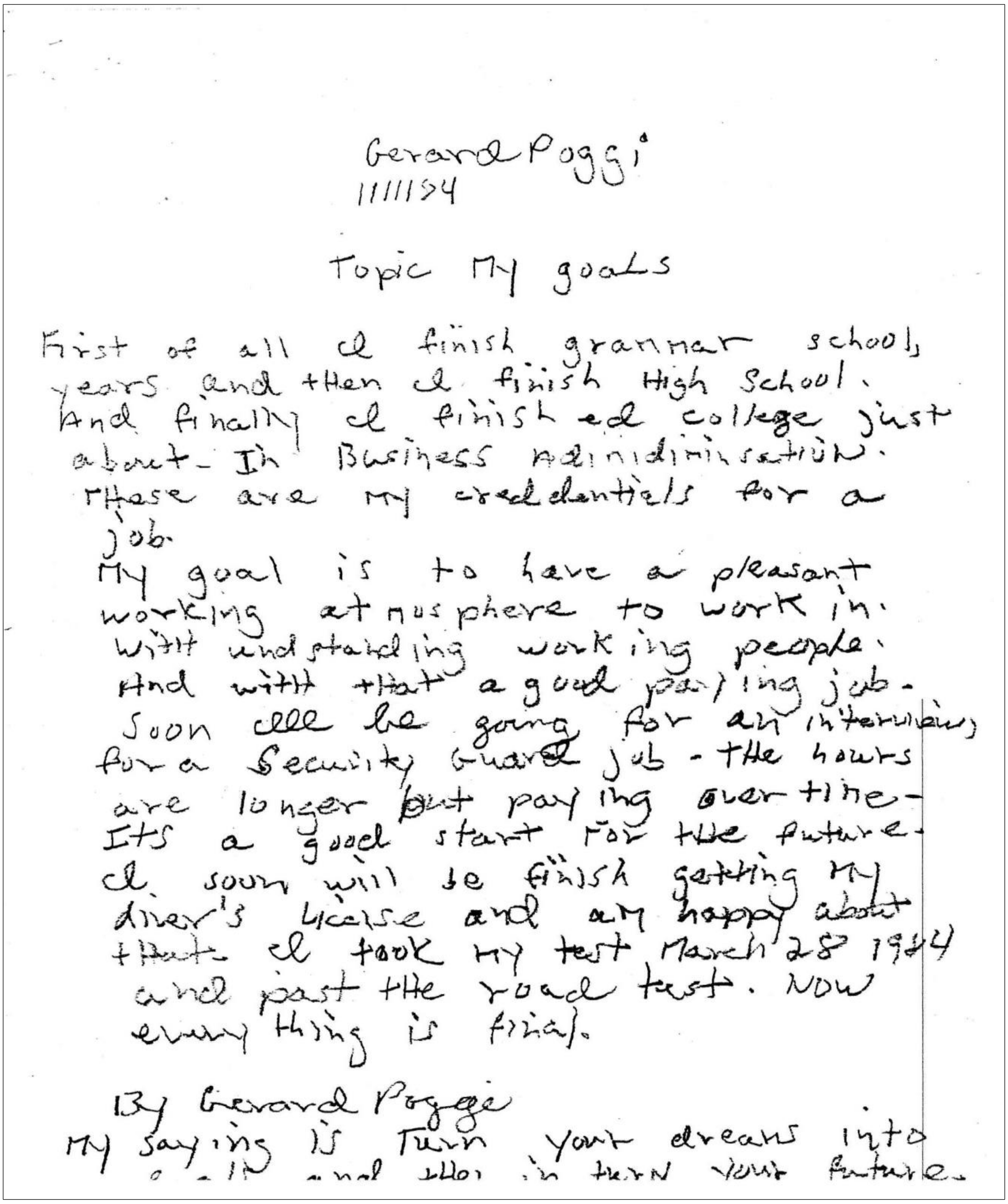
Appendix Thirteen: Wishes



Wishes

To dream or wish
on a star
or beyond a star
Is the root of all life
itself
What is life without a
dream
For is life ever all it
seems?
our fantasies are tomorrow
goals
and onward our life
rolls,
our dreams are just
over the
horizon
through misty and
befogged
Deep in our Subconcious
Buried they may be
Work we must to
make them a reality

Appendix Fourteen: My Goals



Gerard Poggi
11/11/94

Topic My goals

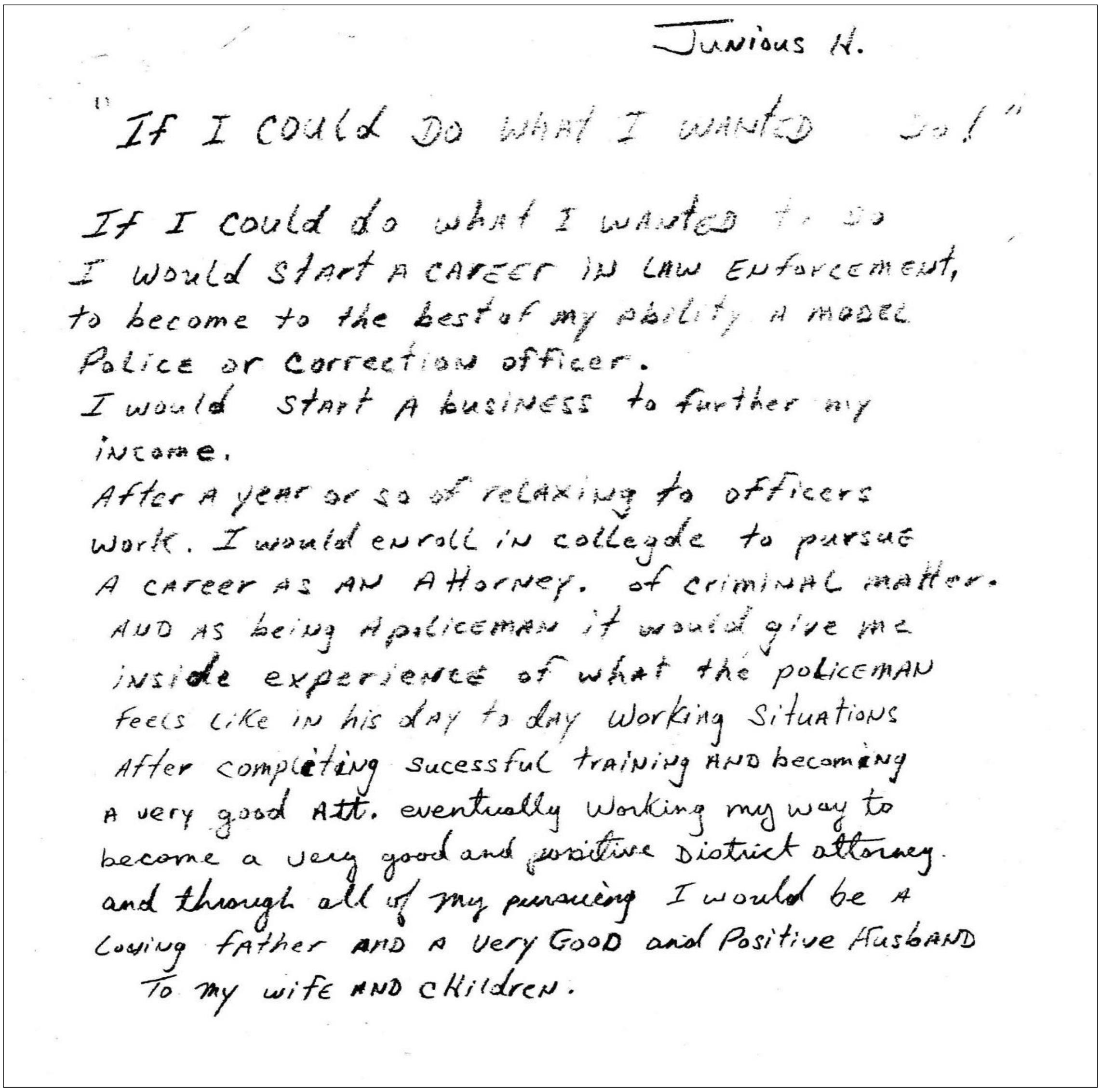
First of all I finish grammar school, years and then I finish High School. And finally I finished college just about. In Business Administration. These are my credentials for a job.

My goal is to have a pleasant working atmusphere to work in. with undstanding working people. And with that a good paying job. Soon I'll be going for an interview for a Security Guard job. The hours are longer but paying over time. Its a good start for the future. I soon will be finish getting my driver's license and am happy about that. I took my test March 28 1994 and past the road test. Now every thing is final.

By Gerard Poggi

My saying is Turn your dreams into
and then in turn your future.

Appendix Fifteen: If I could do what I wanted

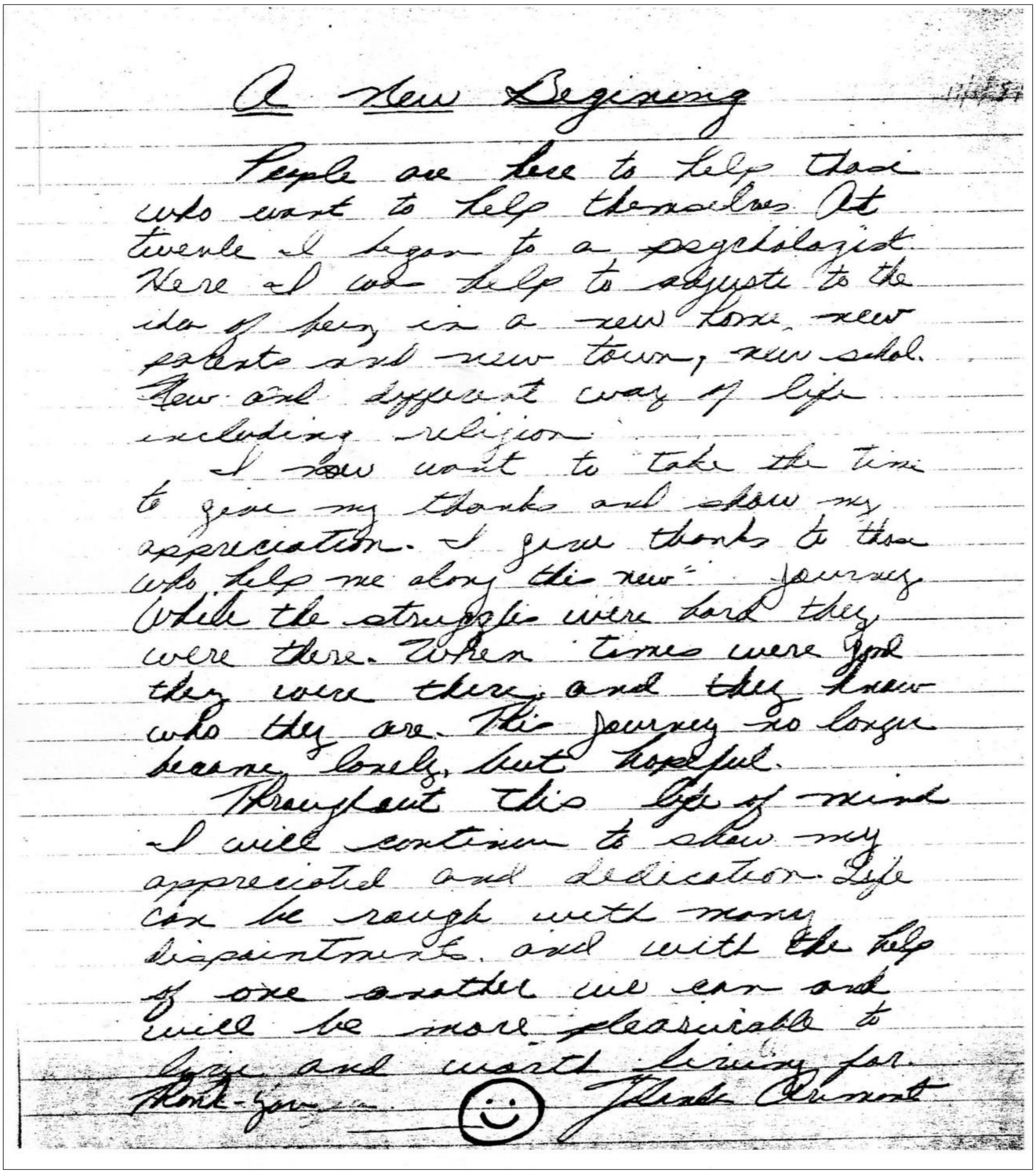


Junious H.

"If I could do what I wanted to do!"

If I could do what I wanted to do
I would start a career in law enforcement,
to become to the best of my ability a model
Police or Correction officer.
I would start a business to further my
income.
After a year or so of relaxing to officers
work. I would enroll in collegde to pursue
a career as an Attorney. of criminal matter.
And as being a policeman it would give me
inside experience of what the policeman
feels like in his day to day working situations
After completing sucessful training and becoming
a very good Att. eventually working my way to
become a very good and positive District attorney.
and through all of my pursuing I would be a
loving father and a very Good and Positive Husband
To my wife and children.

Appendix Sixteen: A New Beginning



A New Begining

People are here to help those who want to help themselves. At twelve I began to a psycholagist. Here I was help to adjuste to the idea of being in a new home, new parents and new town, new schol. New and different way of life including religion.

I now want to take the time to give my thanks and show my appreciation. I give thanks to those who help me along this new journey. While the struggles were hard they were there. When times were good they were there, and they know who they are. This journey no longer became lonely, but hopeful.

Throughout this life of mind I will continue to show my appreciated and dedication. Life can be rough with many disapointments, and with the help of one another we can and will be more pleasurable to live and worth living for.

Thank-you ☺

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