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Working Title:

Art Worker: Doing Time in the New York Artworld

by Alan W. Moore

Narrative Outline

Part One – A Critic Changes His Stripes

Arrival in New York City to work for *Artforum*

Art Worker starts with the author's first visits to New York City, as a child, then as a tourist on the way to Europe. He stays with a friend from his California university, who is an artist. In 1974 he takes an internship with *Artforum* magazine, working for John Coplans. Moore had been active at university as an editor for the school paper, covering art in Los Angeles, and earthworks in the west. *Artforum* office of those years described. Working on John Coplans' crusade against Pasadena Museum. Living quarters in Soho with weird roommates. Being a reviewer for *Artforum*. Dinners with my fellow art writers.

Encounters with well-known artists and art venues – Gordon Matta-Clark, 112 Greene Street, AIR womens' gallery, Jean Dupuy, Willoughby Sharp and Liza Bear of *Avalanche* magazine. I meet and like Fluxus artists, George Maciunas, Rene Block at his gallery, Joseph Beuys. My meeting with *Art-Rite* editors Edit deAk and Walter "Mike" Robinson. My exhibition of Joseph Beuys multiples back in California. (First institutional exhibition of that artist.) The catalogue produced with *Art-Rite*. Job offer to teach I turn down.

My meeting with artists my own age (early- to mid-20s) who later form Collaborative Projects, an assembly-based artists' group which lasts over 10 years. I write about them for *Artforum*, and get fired by Max Kozloff, who succeeds Coplans as editor. Roommates with Marc Miller, artist and art historian. The Bowery in the '70s. I start to make art myself, and work at the trade of typesetting. Marc marries and I move out.

Robin Winters offers me an apartment on Houston Street. I am in the thick of the artist founders of Colab, around the corner from CBGBs. Early meetings of Colab. Stefan Eins' 3 Mercer Store. Many Colab artists showed there before the group formed.

The criminal environment on Houston Street. Nick the Fence, telephone hackers, stolen movie cameras. Friendship with the carpenter of newsstands, Steve Stollman, whose shop is a center of bicycle activism.

The "All Color News" cable television project. Working with artists including the Ahearn brothers, John and Charlie, Tom Otterness, Scott and Beth B and others. "Potato Wolf" live cable TV project. I produce shows for Potato Wolf. Meeting with Mitch Corber. Mitch's trip to Harlem in blackface makeup. Our hitchhiking trip to New Orleans and back.

No Wave and Punk Art

Punk music scene around CBGBs. Hanging out with Diego Cortez, artist and emerging *macher* on the No Wave scene. Pub crawling with Kathy Acker. Diego's artwork. Diego declares allegiance to punk and quits Colab. Discussion of gay artists and their networks.

Marc Miller produces the "Punk Art" show in Washington, D.C. We shoot short films there. Artists are fascinated by European terrorist movements. Working with Robert Cooney and James (now Jamie) Nares. Secret filming at the socialist *Guardian* newspaper offices. Producing *X Magazine*, a Colab project. My graphic arts trade provides resources.

The X Magazine Benefit concert with No Wave bands. Diego's trip to Germany to attend trials of RAF member Holger Meins. *Semiotext(e)* magazine's German and Italian issues, produced by Sylvere Lotringer, Diego's roommate. Enter radical theory. Work as a freelance typesetter for numerous left magazines.

Colab's early loft exhibitions – "Doctors and Dentists", the "Manifesto Show", others. I participate. Performance with Tom Otterness and Robert Cooney in Tribeca. Meeting Becky Howland. Her roommates Ann Messner and Peter Moennig. Neighbors Christy Rupp and Joseph Nechvatal.

Me, Becky, Peter, Ann and Bobby G (Robert Goldman) make the "Real Estate Show" in an abandoned city-owned building. The occupation is shut down, but makes the newspapers. Negotiations with city officials leads to them giving us a storefront. ABC No Rio opens. Colab votes us money. Early shows in this left alternative space. Running No Rio in a Hispanic barrio.

Putting posters up on the street for our events. The street art environment. Graffiti art in the subways. Reflections on this movement among young NYC people of color. Stefan Eins opens Fashion Moda in the South Bronx. Colab artists begin to work there. John Ahearn develops his live casting sculpture practice. Tom Otterness makes multiples. Justen Ladda's monumental paintings in abandoned buildings.

Colab's Times Square Show

John and Tom organize the Times Square Show. I am working on publicity when Jean-Michel Basquiat walks in. We make a sign together. He goes upstairs to hang in the Fashion Lounge. Account of the TSS, different artists there.

TSS is a big hit, with coverage in the *Village Voice* newspaper, and major art magazines, with articles by Jeffrey Deitch and Lucy Lippard. New York State grants come in to Colab and ABC No Rio. Nightclub economy of artist-run spaces. Walking Avenue B, open-air heroin drug market to work at the *East Village Eye* magazine.

Poetry at No Rio. Nuyorican poets read there. Making an anthology of poetry and fiction. Making props for Potato Wolf TV at No Rio "painting parties".

Other artists' spaces and groups on the Lower East Side (LES). Group Material on 10th Street. PAD/D political art group. Too classically Marxist for me. The problem of gentrification, inspiration for the Real Estate Show, becomes clear in the LES. The "Not For Sale" project networks galleries.

East Village Eye's art editors, first Walter Robinson and then Carlo McCormick. The *Eye* moves from El Bohio in LES to Broadway, closer to my apartment.

Nightclubs of the period. The beginnings of the Mudd Club. ABC No Rio performs there. Tina L'hotsky, "Queen of the Mudd". The role of the doorman. Promotions, drink tickets, and the mechanics of filling the club. Artists are the early evening crowd. Art exhibitions in nightclubs.

Considering Colab after the Times Square Show. A clear history of the group does not exist. Characterizing its evolution to 1980. "Rule C" of collaboration. The A More Store multiples project, to "cut out the middleman". The art bookstore Printed Matter produces the A More Store catalogue. Store's long relationships with Colab.

The New Museum offers Colab a show. It doesn't work out. Fashion Moda does a show at the New Museum. The museum mis-represents that history and I prove it. Colab loses credibility with institutions.

Management of ABC No Rio during our tenure, the troika of me, Becky Howland and Bobby G. Bobby moves into the basement. His adventures fighting the junkies in the hallway. The beginnings of No Rio's conflicts with the city which owns the building. Becky starts her backyard sculptural installation, Brainwash.

Art stars emerge after Diego's "New York New Wave" show at P.S. 1. Success for Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat changes the landscape of downtown NYC art.

Part Two – My Film and TV Career

"Party Noise" and Potato Wolf TV

I begin to make films at the same time as Mike and Edit of *Art-Rite* are doing it. I start "Party Noise", a serial melodrama about artists' lives. I shoot small films with friends at the "Punk Art" show in D.C. Going to bars and finding actors and musicians to work with. Musician Scott Johnson as barfly and actor. Paul MacMahon acts.

Video art is big in the 1970s. I was writing about it for *Artforum*. Galleries were showing video. Liza Bear and Willoughby Sharp of *Avalanche* involved in the avant-garde technological edge of video as communication. Public access cable TV was becoming available.

All Color News cable TV project begins, before Colab. Ambitious program of live shows in studio and films converted to video. Cara Perlman starts Potato Wolf live television series.

Peter Fend works on Potato Wolf, and produces his own shows. TV is a vehicle for him to promote his ideas about bio-remediation of vast terrains, and replacement of fossil fuels. His ambition to effect change in the real world far exceeds others in Colab. He saw collaboration as the way to do this, and joined another group and created his own. Space Force/OECD ended up selling satellite data to network television. Fend quoted on work with Colab.

The thrill of live TV production with Potato Wolf. Recollections of Walter Robinson. Mitch Corber's central role. His special method and style of editing. His talent for animating situations always comes with a side dish of provocations. His problematic character during these years. Despite many problems, he and I had a long working relationship.

Potato Wolf and “cardboard consciousness” as an aspect of work at the time. Others who shared the aesthetic.

My studio TV projects, “Reptile Mind” and “Strife”. The story idea. My brother is killed, and I lose heart to finish “Strife”. Colab and Potato Wolf show at Hallwalls in Buffalo. We build sets, and Terry Mohre and I conceive the idea of Studio Melee. Paul McMahon invites Colab to show the Buffalo work in an NYC gallery. We build an interactive coin-operated video installation called “The Jungle”.

Studio Melee and All the Women

Studio Melee receives a federal art grant. We rent a studio in Brooklyn to work on a large-scale version of the concept. The studio is full of asbestos, so we break the lease and find another one in then-desolate Bushwick. We fix it up. We can’t realize our ambitious concept, but do one show at City College. Management of the studio space, renting to other artists.

Reflections on this failure, and on other participation machines – Disneyland, Michel Gondry.

Colab is changing. We try to distribute Colab video. I form MWF Video Club to rent and sell artists’ and independent video on VHS. Our early meetings, salons in my apartment.

Trip to Berlin as part of an exchange show with artists including John Fekner, Peter Moennig, and Anne Messner. Work with David Blair there to produce an installation based on the history of television. The Berliners come to NYC.

“Les Girls” – considering my relationships with women. Feminist ally in college as part of activist political group. Arguments with a Lacanian in NYC. Losing my first artist girlfriend to the great Southwest. Meeting Margaret on the Grey Rabbit bus to Boston.

Meeting Vivienne Dick at the Ear Inn, a Fluxus center. Vivienne has a piece in *X Magazine*, then starts making films. She works first with Lydia Lunch in two shorts. Discussion of Lunch’s presence as a musician, her narrative instincts. Her late ‘70s underground film career, with Beth and Scott B. My analysis of her dark appeal.

Beginnings of MWF Video Club, the artists’ film and video distribution project I started with partners. Sophie Vieille, a fashion artist, does development of titles for us with No Wave cinema artists. Other video distribution projects in the art field at that time, EAI, VDB. Who would go with us, and who wouldn’t. We had Colab TV’s Potato Wolf series. Cara Perlman would not give MWF her films. Remarks about her career during the late ‘70s.

Video Distribution and David Wojnarowicz

Process of developing a videotape for distribution by MWF. The poet Michael Carter joins MWF. He is friends with another crew of filmmakers, called the Cinema of Transgression. Two of them, Richard Kern and Tommy Turner, made films with David Wojnarowicz. (He died in 1992.)

The Wojnarowicz retrospective came to Madrid in 2019 where I live. I prepared a screening for the Reina Sofia museum, and researched his life. He was a regular along with other artists of Colab at the Tin Pan Alley, a bar near Times Square. The bar was run by a feminist activist. Discussion about that group who worked at and patronized Tin Pan.

The bar was a center for late-night workers, sex workers, transvestites, and minor criminals. It became popular as a subcultural hangout. Reminiscences of Jane Dickson who lived in the neighborhood with her husband Charlie Ahearn. Quotes from Perlman, Dickson and Nan Goldin about their experiences there.

Wojnarowicz had cruised for sex in Times Square as a child. What was it like for him being there years later as an artist? Quote from Wojnarowicz's diaries about revisiting NYC streets over the years.

Tin Pan Alley embodied the nexus of art and crime which has been erased from Times Square by its redevelopment.

Wojnarowicz was working with Kiki Smith when I visited her studio. The years before Kiki worked with a collective of Colab women to make the Potato Wolf show "Cave Girls". Recent discussion of this work, in an interview she did with Joseph Nechvatal in Paris during her 2020 retrospective.

Some scenes of "Cave Girls" were shot on film at ABC No Rio. Joseph asks if the prehistoric theme was anti-nuclear? John Fekner and John "Crash" Matos painted an anti-nuclear mural near No Rio. "Cave Girls" had a deluxe screening at ABC.

Part Three – Colab After the Times Square Show

How to Be Political

The Times Square Show was a women's show. The exhibition was full of political art – 'second wave feminist' artists. Two strains of content – first, rage about violence against women. Diane Torr's performance in the "rape room". Her work with Disband, a capella women's group. Response to cat-calling of girls on the streets.

Second strain of content – sex positivity, embrace of non-normative lifestyles. The mystery of Terence Sellers, dominatrix, writer, friend of early punk trendsetter, Anya Philips. Eva de Carlo's *Nest* installation. Jack Smith, in the TV ad for the show, and his performance.

My political positions at the time. The political unhappiness of Ronald Reagan's regime. U.S. support for brutal wars in Central America. Refugee artists we knew. Politics not a big trend in lower Manhattan during those years. It was trumped by careerism. ABC No Rio was a political place. We were there as an open door white-run art space in a Hispanic barrio. An impossible position today, but then it was okay. ABC No Rio remains a place where political art projects are possible in an entirely gentrified lower Manhattan.

We were inspired by Fashion Moda in the South Bronx. That place was started by Stefan Eins and Joe Lewis. Downtown white artists went to work there. Graffiti, aerosol art, began its artworld acceptance after an exhibition there, right before the Times Square Show and the opening of the Fun Gallery.

For ABC and Fashion Moda, the issue was integration. This goes back to the 1969 Art Workers Coalition, and the Black and Puerto Rican artists' caucuses. Most graffiti writers were people of color. The rise of Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat, both of whom were associated with graffiti, opened a path for those writers to become artists in the mainstream artworld. Even so, their path was steep and difficult.

Graffiti on Canvas

Differences between graffiti artists and other mainly white artists. Differences within the writers' community itself revealed at a panel discussion as part of Martin Wong's retrospective.

"Fab Five Freddy" Brathwaite's key role as an interlocutor between worlds. Rammellzee's rich ideology of graffiti, as propounded in an interview with Edit deAk. My work for David Schmidlapp and the *IGTimes* graffiti magazine. The murder of Michael Stewart by police, and the response by our community to that event. Post-Graffiti exhibition at Sidney Janis gallery.

Graffiti artists did not come to ABC No Rio, where I worked. The gallery's political engagements; participation in networked political exhibitions, anti-nuclear, anti-gentrification, and in support of Central American resistance.

The PAD/D group, its beginnings as an archiving project. Colleague Gregory Sholette active in that group, has written about its processes of study and exhibition. Attempts to set up distribution conditions for political art, nationally. Their meetings and presentation events.

Two strains of politics, one soft (liberal) and one hard (left). Analysis of how this played out in our NYC artworld of those days. Stefan Eins denies that Fashion Moda was political; for him it was scientific. F/M's placement in the South Bronx responds 10 years later to demands by the Art Workers Coalition in 1969.

I was familiar with hard left politics from my trade work as a typesetter. Characterization of the left scene in those days. Group Material emerges to make exhibitions with a close blend of art and politics. Lucy Lippard supports their work with reviews in the *Village Voice*. Until she is fired.

Posters put up on the streets at night by the Black Cat poster collective were examples of hard left political art which was not engaged with any institutions. A recent exhibition in Australia of the collective's work of 30 years by Robert Cooney brought this obscure clandestine group to the light. Discussion of their methods.

Is Colab (Still) Punk?

Return to discussion of Colab after the Times Square Show, a key turning point. Diego Cortez's show New York New Wave kicked off recognition for some artists. Busy careers began for many involved early on in Colab. Discussion of luxury and careerism. ABC No Rio was not part of that world.

Colab did a number of shows immediately – one in Chicago with collaborative murals, another in Coney Island, working with artists there. Becky Howland and I visited Los Angeles to show and talk about ABC No Rio.

No Rio's Cardboard Air Band has a gig at the Mudd Club. Story of that band, which was made up of several Colab artists. Launch of *Tellus* audio cassette magazine. Performance at the Kitchen in 1983 caps our involvement in ABC No Rio.

Colab conduits grants for members' feature films. The group plans a big show in Washington, D.C., at the invitation of the Washington Project for the Arts. John Morton, who produced *Murder, Suicide and Junk* at ABC No Rio, is the lead organizer. He was a punk musician in Cleveland.

What is a punk? Was Colab punk? Many of us, myself included, “punked out” at one point. I was a big fan of the MC5 in college. That group is thought of as proto-punk. A principal in that band, Wayne Kramer wrote a memoir of their days in riot-torn Detroit. I didn’t know it, but Kramer was living on the Lower East Side during the ‘80s, doing music and heroin.

After some musicians gained careers from punk in the later ‘70s, the movement spread around the USA. Regional hardcore punk scenes developed, with little-to-no radio play or coverage by mainstream media. DIY media, zines and cassettes proliferated. The national scene was very different from the way the New York scene had been. (I was in NYC attending No Wave art punk concerts.)

The NYC hardcore scene in ‘83, the year of the Ritz show, was not on the radar of people in Colab. It was far more political than No Wave had been.

Preparations for the Ritz show. Becky’s poster for the show spotlights pollution. Comparison of the 1978 Punk Art show, also sponsored by Washington Project for the Arts. That show was quite unpolitical, whereas Colab’s show had lots of critical political content. Critical reception was negative.

The show was closed for “safety reasons” by order of the city. Colab begins to have problems with the federal arts grant agency, the NEA. Description of the problems John Morton and Holly Block faced as leaders of Colab.

High Tide of East Village Art

East Village art movement was a wave of popular creativity. The *East Village Eye* office was in the middle of it, housed in the El Bohio social center building on 9th Street. El Bohio was occupied by a group of Puerto Rican activists called CHARAS. Home of the Nuyorican Poets Theater while Miguel Algarin was building the Poets Cafe. I worked for Miguel. Anecdote of being robbed in Tompkins Square Park carrying proofs of his book.

Politics of El Bohio. The women working there on the neighborhood magazine, film and art programs.

The *East Village Eye* office as a center of the scene. Publisher Leonard Abrams and his crew. A softball game against Colab. I sell ads for the paper, meet gallery owners at Civilian Warfare, Ground Zero, and others. Descriptions of a few memorable exhibitions.

A New York art career is phasic; mine was a series of “afters”. The East Village gallery scene ended abruptly due to gentrification.

Walking my route from my apartment to ABC No Rio and the *Eye* offices. The Little Italy galleries of the late ‘70s – Kwok, Public Image, and the Storefront for Art & Architecture. Arleen Schloss’s A Space, just east of S.D. Roosevelt Park. Arleen’s ties to the old avant-garde. Her husband Ray Kelly starts No Se No social club, with two artists with ties to Fluxus.

Other galleries open on the same street. Ray, Ed Higgins and others start to weld what becomes an enormous metal sculpture collage on a vacant lot next door. The Rivington School group comes together. Very male scene, lots of drinking and drugs. Photographed by Toyo Tsuchiya. Stone sculptor Ken Hiratsuka, and Robert Parker with his iron forge.

Next door neighbor was Adam Purple in a big squatted building, tending his Garden of Eden. Description of his ecological scene. Bicycle activists worked there, regularly swinging by Steve Stollman's Houston Street storefront.

1983 was the big year of change downtown. ABC No Rio passed to other hands with the Seven Days of Creation continuous performance exhibition. Wojnarowicz and Mike Bidlo organized the West Side Pier Show as a guerrilla exhibition.

Many other big building art exhibitions are organized. These recall the early 20th century shows of the Society for Independent Artists and the Salons of America. Frank Shifreen's organizing in Gowanus, Brooklyn.

Plexus group organizes big shows at CUANDO, another Puerto Rican social center on Second Avenue. One of them honors short-lived performance artist Ralston Farina. The last show at Cuando, which was kept inactive for decades, was Art from Ashes after the 9/11 attack. The smoking ruins were visible from the roof. Afterwards the building was redeveloped.

I love big shows. They are intoxicating for an art lover.

The "third wave" of Colab. Nearly all new people. I step back to work on my video projects, and later the MWF Video Club. Mitch Corber is president for a term. Even afterwards he is very active, and people complain about him to me.

Marc Miller and I make the *ABC No Rio Dinero* book. The process of putting it together, historical synthesis.

Exile on Staten Island

I hang around 2B Gas Station, where Mary Campbell has a studio. Linus Coraggio is the big man around there. He's a welder, and designer in metal. Mary and I start a relationship. We marry, and both of us lose our apartments. I lose mine in a court case before a judge who is later jailed for massive bribe-taking.

We move to Staten Island. I lose my typesetting job, and don't want to take another one. I go back to school in art history at City University, Graduate Center. I thought I could maximize my years of experience in the artworld as an academic. I wrote some papers based on that, but mostly the curriculum covered classic modernism and 19th century art. I start collecting antique photographs.

The artist community on Staten Island. Our neighbors. The Snug Harbor cultural complex, its renovation. Old buildings and deep history are still present on Staten Island. The contemporary art center there. John Perrault had been the director. His successor produced an important exhibition of performance art.

Mary teams up with Vivian Vasser to start a performance troupe called Day de Dada. They start a decade long run of Dada parades, mail art exhibitions, and participatory performance projects.

Photographer and critic A.D. Coleman participates in Day de Dada events as the "derriere guard", a role he began in the Avant-Garde Festival of 1975. In 2017, Mary and Viv celebrated one of Charlotte Moorman's Avant-Garde Festivals that was held on the oldest Staten Island ferryboat.

I meet a group of anarchists down the block from our house. We produce an eco-fest, including an ecologically themed exhibition called Green Home. I move into the Ganas commune and watch the genesis of the Everything Goes Book Cafe, built by an artist from the East Village theater scene.

Staten Island seemed provincial to me. But Day to Dada was a way to deal with that, to have fun and gradually educate a conservative audience by cajoling them with a spirit of zany fun.

My Academic Career

Teaching art history in the Bronx. My method – library study in groups, then oral reports; visits to the Metropolitan Museum for direct observation midterm and final exams. I want to write my dissertation on Collaborative Projects, but David Little beats me to it. I write what will be published as *Art Gangs*, on a series of artists' groups, 1969 to 1984, among them Colab. The book was published by the anarchist press Autonomedia.

On my way in and out of Manhattan, I check out a group meeting in an office near the Staten Island ferry terminal. The 16 Beaver group, run in the collective studios of Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri, is a meeting place for politically engaged artists studying in NYC institutions, and visiting the city from abroad.

A New War in the 21st Century

So many artists went through 16 Beaver – I list a dozen of them, and briefly describe the work they were doing.

Through the Staten Island anarchists, I produced an event for Ben Morea. Ben was an important anarchist revolutionary during the 1960s, a leader in the Black Mask/Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers group who had gone underground in '68.

European theorists Brian Holmes and Franco Berardi did seminars at 16 Beaver. Yates McKee wrote *Strike Art*, which tells about 16 Beaver's important role in the Occupy Wall Street movement.

After I filed my dissertation, Gregory Sholette invited me to Chicago. I met his students, including Nato Thompson, Josh MacPhee and Dara Greenwald. All of them would become important players in the 21st century New York artworld. Dara and Josh founded Interference Archive. Nato came to NYC and started the annual Creative Time Summit. He invited me to speak...

But that's another story.

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NOTE: Much of this outline has been mounted to the blogspot "Art Gangs" at <https://artgangs.blogspot.com>, beginning in November of 2020. The series of memoir posts continues, using material gathered for a unpublished 4th part of this book.