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LOFT LIVING

Culture and Capital in Urban Change

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THE CREATION OF A "LOFT LIFESTYLE"

Until the 1970s, living in a loft was considered neither chic nor comfortable — if the possibility was considered at all. Making a home in a factory district clearly contradicted the dominant middle-class ideas of "home" and "factory," as well as the separate environments of family and work on which these ideas were based. Since the 1950s, suburbia had so dominated popular images of the American home that it was almost impossible to imagine how anyone could conceive the desire to move downtown into a former sweatshop or printing plant. Yet the real estate market in living lofts that has developed over the past ten years could not have begun without such a desire, at least on the part of a few people. The market could not have grown so fast — in the process, transforming lofts from old factory spaces into hot commodities — if this peculiar desire had not also struck the imagination of more people in cities all over the country. Whether they actually bedded down among the printing presses or merely accepted loft living as a possible residential style, people began to find the notion of living in a loft attractive. This happened because of two changes that occurred in the 1960s: a change in lofts and a change in middle-class patterns of consumption.

On the one hand, the movement of industry and investment out of old manufacturing centers made larger, more impressive lofts available for alternate uses. Until that point, lofts that had been used for living — mostly by artists who were "living poor" — were fairly small, often unheated upper floors of two- and three-story storefronts, and distinctly uncomfortable. On the other hand, an increasing number of middle-class people moved into certain cultural patterns, particularly an active appreciation of "the arts" and historic preservation, which had previously been upper-class domains. Their growing identification with fine arts production and fine old buildings led them first to try to protect space for artists and historic

preservation and then to appropriate this space — which was often in loft buildings — for themselves. In this process, art and historic preservation took on a broader meaning. They became both more commercial and less elitist.

The changing appreciation of old loft buildings also reflects a deeper preoccupation with space and time. A sense that the great industrial age has ended creates melancholy over the machines and the factories of the past. Certainly such sentiments are aroused only at the end of an era, or with a loss of function. As a perceptive observer of "eccentric spaces" points out, "We visit the docks in London but not in Rotterdam because commerce is romantic only when it has vanished."¹ Only people who do not know the steam and sweat of a real factory can find industrial space romantic or interesting. But in many ways industrial spaces are more interesting than "post-industrial" offices, apartment houses, and shopping centers. Their structure has both a solidity and a gracefulness that suggest a time when form still identified "place" rather than "function." Their façades are often adorned with archaic emblems and sculpture, apparently showing the equally archaic skills of masons and carvers. Yet this ornamentation is a conceit of nineteenth-century technology. The façades of many loft buildings that were constructed between 1820 and 1880 were cast in standardized iron parts that could be ordered from a catalogue, mounted, and taken apart at will. Ironically, the mass production of an earlier industrial era looks to our eyes like individuality.

During the 1960s a consensus slowly grew that such buildings should not be torn down to make room for new, high-rise construction that bore little relation to the area or the people around it. Though far from the majority view, this line of thought spread from Jane Jacobs's somewhat subversive ideas about neighborhood preservation and urban vitality — which have sold more than a quarter-million copies of her 1961 book — to highly commercial renovations like San Francisco's Ghirardelli Square, Boston's Faneuil Hall, and the New York artists' district of SoHo. An appreciation of "small" and "old," instead of "large" and "new," also appealed to the sixties' liberal social conscience. In America's inner cities, the wholesale destruction of tenements for the sake of urban renewal during the fifties and early sixties gave rise to protest and backlash. Some people blamed the destabilization of low-rent ghetto communities, in part, for the riots of the mid- to late sixties. Several years before, sociologists had called attention to the good social relations between people who live in such communities, in articles like "Some Sources of Satisfaction in a Residential Slum" and Herbert Gans's elegy on Boston's Italian West End, *The Urban Villagers*. Preserving rather than destroying city neighborhoods took on a broader meaning in the 1970s because of the growing concern with the earth's ecology. Even in the early sixties the impending or real demolition of distinguished old buildings — like Pennsylvania Station in

New York City — threatened people with a sense of irreparable loss. Like the recycling of scarce resources, the adaptive re-use of such buildings eventually attracted greater public support.²

In this context, loft living is more significant than the relatively small number of SoHos or loft dwellers implies. It marks a different perception of space and time and a new relation between art and industry. In a narrower sense, the market in living lofts that developed after 1970 also sells the social and cultural values of the 1960s to middle-class consumers of the seventies and eighties. But are living lofts really such a radical departure from conventional housing? Although loft living seems to reject suburbia and all it represents, living lofts have some of the same spatial values as a typical suburban home, particularly a preference for lots of air, light, and open space. Certainly lofts are located on busy city streets rather than grassy plots, but inside, a loft has an air of detachment from the city.

This suggests that loft living is appealing, in part, because it is paradoxical. The incongruity of living in a factory does not cease to surprise us. From the outside, of course, a loft building looks like a factory, but inside, we find a home. Although homes are considered private space, the openness of a loft makes it a public space. Lofts are also predominantly homes for non-child-centered households—for single persons and couples without children. Yet the association between loft living and a home-oriented interest in stylish cuisine and décor promotes a new cult of domesticity. Because it represents both home and work, hedonism and domesticity, and public and private space, loft living is paradoxical. Its success in the urban housing market demonstrates that at this time paradox sells.

Discussing the lure of any market is a tricky matter. Consumers' desires are so shaped by the commodities that are available, as well as by image-making and status-seeking, that considering them may be almost irrelevant. The shrinking size of typical new apartments and the mass media's privileged treatment of loft living certainly influenced the market in living lofts. Yet it is a fact that this market did not exist in any significant measure before 1971. Since that time, "living lofts" has become a household word in cities of the United States and Western Europe, and loft living has been elevated to a fashionable residential style. To some degree, deciding to live in a loft may reflect a fairly narrow economic choice. Particularly for artists who want a large space at a cheap rent, renting a loft amid the flotsam and jetsam of urban commerce may be just a question of marginal utility. But many people choose to live in a loft because the space itself appeals to them. On the one hand, they like the giant scale or the "raw," unfinished quality of a loft. On the other hand, they identify with the sense of adventure or the artists' ambiance which still clings to living in a loft neighborhood. To determine why these people want to live in lofts involves more subtle issues than mere supply and

demand. Not only have lofts changed over the past thirty years but so have cultural and aesthetic standards.

FROM "LIVING POOR" TO LUXURY

In 1953, New York artist Robert Rauschenberg returned from a trip to Europe and, practically penniless, looked for a place to live. "With his customary good luck," art writer Calvin Tompkins says, Rauschenberg "found a loft on Fulton Street, near the fish market, a big attic space with twenty-foot ceilings but no heat or running water; the rent was fifteen dollars a month, but he talked the landlord into letting him have it for ten. A hose and bucket in the back yard served as his basin, and he bathed at friends' apartments, sometimes surreptitiously, asking to use the bathroom and taking a lightning shower at the same time." Ten years later, when the Jewish Museum on Fifth Avenue organized the first major retrospective exhibition of his work, Rauschenberg was living and working in another loft farther uptown, on the edge of Greenwich Village. Tompkins reports that when he visited Rauschenberg there,

the doors of the freight elevator opened directly into Rauschenberg's loft. . . . Sam, the taciturn black superintendent who operated the lift during the day, had agreed to let Rauschenberg have the key after 6 P.M., so he could get up and down. . . . The loft was about a hundred feet long by thirty wide. A row of supporting columns ran down the middle, but otherwise it was clear, unobstructed space. Tall, grimy windows let in the distinctively white light of downtown New York—also the roar of trucks on Broadway. Near the windows was a big, ramshackle wire cage containing a pair of kinkajous. . . . Beyond the cage stood a group of large objects—a car door, a window frame, a roof ventilator mounted on wheels—components of an unfinished five-part sculpture. . . . Paintings, combines, and sculptures from the recently concluded Jewish Museum retrospective were stacked against the wall farther along. There was a big table in the middle of the room, its surface cluttered with magazines, pictures clipped from magazines, felt pens and pencils, and tubes of paint and other materials. Toward the back of the room, a counter projecting from the end wall formed an alcove for the refrigerator, the electric stove, and the bed—a mattress laid on the floor. All the rest of the loft was work space.³

In 1960, Rauschenberg's slightly younger contemporary, artist James Rosenquist, rented a studio for fifty dollars a month. It was not far from Rauschenberg's first loft on the Lower Manhattan waterfront, "in a beautiful area around Coenties Slip. It used to be [abstract painter] Agnes Martin's studio and it was all cracked plaster . . . no decoration . . . very stark." After inventing his new Pop Art style in that studio, Rosenquist was discovered by two art gallery owners. In 1963 he moved to a loft farther uptown, in the area that eventually became known as SoHo.⁴

During the same period, three prominent artists whose standard of living was very different from that of the unknown Rosenquist and the relatively unknown Rauschenberg invited eight hundred members of New York's art community to a social gathering that also "took place in a loft." But this 1961 party amazed art writer Dore Ashton because it was held in "a loft with parquet floors, spotless walls and a majestic colonnade running its length. . . . Pinkerton men were stationed at the door." For Ashton, this loft party symbolized a change from "the comfortable old group" of artists to "the new Artbusiness community." "It was a far cry," she says, "from the days of penniless bohemianism when the lean and hungry artists had themselves resembled thieves."⁵

By the end of the decade, when photographs and descriptions of artists' lofts began to reach a wider public of magazine readers, the journalists declared that loft living had panache. A 1970 article in *Life* magazine, "Living Big in a Loft," could easily inspire either envy or repugnance, and it is impossible to decide which *Life* intended when it wrote about the artists living in SoHo's loft buildings, "Behind these grubby façades lurks an artists' colony. . . . Sixteen-foot ceilings, 45-foot rooms, and community spirit." The large interior photographs show as much air, space, and light as any suburban home could claim. Although the trapeze that one artist had installed in his loft, or the eight-by-twenty-four-foot painting on which another was working, exceeded the scale of most American houses, the Oriental rug, track lighting, polished wood floors, comfortable sofa and chairs, and bicycle in the background of the most prominent photograph looked reassuring. Indeed, upper-middle-class *Life* readers could probably identify with artists "Bill and Yvonne Tarr [who] still live in Scarsdale, but plan to join Bill's assortment of welded steel and bronze sculptures in the Tarrs' 90-foot-long studio later this year. The kitchen, bath and family rooms will be at ground level, with a living-dining-bedroom combination perched on the elevated platform halfway between the loft's ancient wooden floor and a curved skylight reaching to the 16-foot-high ceiling."⁶

Several months later, the glossy *New York* magazine—the first and most widely copied chronicle of urban "lifestyle"—also focused on SoHo's artists. Although they had come to an industrial area in search of cheap space, these artists evidently knew how to live—which mainly involved combining living and working. "They set up modern kitchens, living rooms, bedrooms and bathrooms along with their studios. When night came they did not go home like everyone else in SoHo, because they *were* home." Home for artist Gerhardt Liebmann, for example, is divided between a studio in the front half of his loft and a fifty-foot length of living space in back, with a rock garden, a skylight, and slate floors.⁷

Over the next few years, magazines praised the versatility and the creativity of loft design. In many lofts, the integration of work space, living areas, and art objects was paralleled by a fluid adaptation to structural

features (primarily light, floor, and volume) and "incidental" arrangements. Photographed in the professional journal *Progressive Architecture*, for example, "the loft of artist Lowell Nesbitt is divided by eight-foot-high partitions used to display his own work. Various living areas are defined by the semi-open hexagonal spaces created by the partitions, by groupings of plants, and by painted circles on the wooden flooring." Mixed uses and high ceilings continued to invite multilevel design. In a loft that was featured in the Sunday *New York Times Magazine* in 1974, architect Hanford Yang built a three-level living area to display his art collection. Artist Gerhardt Liebmann, whose loft had been photographed by *New York* magazine in 1970, turned up again in 1974 with one of "the great bathrooms of New York." By now he "has a flourishing greenhouse in the bathroom of his SoHo loft. The bathroom is an ideal place to raise plants if you have the light," he says. And SoHo, according to *New York* magazine, was now the ideal place to live if you wanted excitement.⁸

A 1976 *New York* magazine article on extravagant house plants—"Six City Jungle Habitats"—shows large trees growing in a designer's SoHo loft. Another article, on an architect's elegant 140-foot-long loft, lauds the design detail as "a short course in neoclassical art *trompe l'oeil*" that evokes "an Italian palazzo." The design of a passage between the loft's columns, or "colonnade," is said to be "loosely derived from a Vicenza building façade by the sixteenth-century architect Andrea Palladio."⁹

By 1978, women's sportswear designer Adri Stecking (known professionally as Adri) was saying to a *New York Times* reporter, "I fell in love with SoHo and walked the pavements for months, but I couldn't find the loft I wanted." So she rented a loft—purely for living—near midtown, south of the Flower Market district. "Each floor contained about 4,000 square feet," says the *Times*; "a quarter of an acre [*sic*]!" says Adri. "There were big windows facing each point of the compass," and Adri's loft "was high enough to see the roof-tops of buildings on each side and New Jersey to the west, separated by a blue strip of Hudson River. The sun streamed in at all hours." But the focal point of Adri Stecking's spacious new home is even more remarkable. "It's an eight-foot square Jacuzzi whirlpool bath that accommodates ten people, is set into a white tile platform reached by eight steps, and is equipped with a cat board should any [*sic*] of the two resident felines fall into the pool." The *Times* devoted a full page to photos of Adri in her Jacuzzi and her kitchen, the floor plan of the loft, and an interview with Adri and her interior designer.^{10*}

* This article caused some dismay because it appeared at a time when the city government's concern over job loss had directed criticism against the residential conversion of loft buildings. The reporter made clear that Adri had bought a co-operative loft that was occupied by an economically viable manufacturer who "was in no hurry to leave." Nonetheless, a commercial tenant has no "statutory right," as some residential tenants in New York do, to remain beyond the expiration of their lease, and Adri "moved in as soon as she was able to."

Although American living lofts generally convey a sense of modern elegance through a sparseness of design that is enhanced by the opulence of larger-than-life decoration and industrial appliances, as another *Times* article, also in 1978, showed, the loft style was easily adaptable to an eclectic juxtaposition of seventeenth-century, Art Deco, and "High Tech" design. This time the loft was in Paris, but the language is familiar: "Once upon a time, thermos bottles were manufactured in the lofty space shown above. Then interior designer Andrée Putnam moved in on it, connected it to her seventeenth-century Paris apartment and transformed it into elegant quarters for working and entertaining."¹¹

By 1980, readers of the *Times* had become so familiar with living lofts that a home furnishings reporter considered a twenty-foot ceiling in the living room matter of fact, as one of several "common design problems." "The scale was enormous and quite a problem," says the designer of a model loft-apartment in a converted factory. "The bare walls . . . were 'too high, too overpowering.'" The reporter recommends his solution as inexpensive and ingenious: "Using nine separate pieces of canvas, the designer created an enormous 12-foot-square hanging that is delineated with adhesive tape into two-foot-square grids. . . . The upper left square sports a black triangle. 'That's the same effect as the . . . window,' he noted, pointing to the skylight on the adjacent wall."¹² Indeed, the high ceilings, exposed brick walls, hanging plants, and open spaces of the loft style have become so well known that they inspire parody. An issue of the satirical *Not the New York Times* that was published during the 1978 New York City newspaper strike featured a bogus interview with Cary Grant and Andy Warhol, who had converted their Upper East side apartments to the "loft look."

With no intention of irony, the overstatement of real estate advertisements reveals what loft living now represents to a sophisticated, affluent public. Directed to "the discriminating buyer"—or at least to someone who can afford the \$54,000 to \$120,000 purchase price and a monthly maintenance charge between \$300 and \$600—an ad from the *New York Times* in May 1980 promises "THE ULTIMATE in Loft Living":

Looking for the ultimate loft apartment? Our large duplexes give you everything that makes loft living so great . . . the expansiveness of OPEN SPACE . . . the spectacularly HIGH CEILINGS (up to 16 ft.) . . . the FREEDOM to create your own living environment . . . PLUS spectacular SKYLINE & RIVER VIEWS!

We've added an elegance you wouldn't expect of the loft lifestyle . . . magnificent lobby, intercom . . . carpeted hallways . . . deluxe appointments & amenities . . . luxurious large new kitchen areas & stylish Oak stripped floors, etc.

An advertisement that was posted, placard style, on a Manhattan lamp-

post at about the same time plays to both a sense of style and a sense of history.

These spectacular lofts are for artists, photographers, performing artists and urban pioneers with creative minds. At the corner of Prince Street in the SOHO HISTORIC DISTRICT.

CO-OP LOFTS:

- Magnificent gallery spaces
- Only one loft per floor—5000 sq. ft. . . .
- Fantastic gallery and performing arts spaces. . . .

Beneath a reproduced drawing of the building as it looked in 1860, the advertisement reads, "The finest business structure and most famous shop of its time . . . the first fireproof building in New York . . . constructed of white marble . . . specially inspected by the Prince of Wales on his visit to the United States. . . ."

A third ad that ran in the *Times*, in March 1980, appeals to both luxury and practicality. It represents a real estate developer selling co-operative loft-apartments of approximately the same size but "in three neighborhoods, in three distinct price ranges." The first and least expensive loft-apartments are in a converted factory near but not in a gentrifying, brick townhouse neighborhood of Brooklyn. They provide "up to 1400 square feet of open space, enhanced by high ceilings, oversize windows, and beautiful parquet floors." The second option, in a converted office building in TriBeCa, promises "up to 1185 square feet, the space is open, and the feeling is larger than life. . . ." The third and most expensive offering, in a converted warehouse on the fringe of Greenwich Village, marks "the return of The Great New York Apartment. From 1370 to 2850 square feet of the most beautifully laid-out open space in the city. With breathtaking views, terraces, gardens, Manhattan's only glass-walled elevator, and impeccable workmanship." By this point and this price level, lofts have moved "uptown." There is little left to distinguish loft living from luxury housing.

Nevertheless, the advertisements imply that loft living still retains several distinctive characteristics: open space, a relation between art and industry, a sense of history, and a fascination of the middle-class imagination with the artist's studio.

* In light of New York City's 1976 zoning resolution on SoHo and NoHo, the adjacent artists' loft districts South and North of Houston Street, respectively, these living lofts seem to have a doubtful legal status. That resolution permits residential conversion of loft buildings in these areas *for artists only*, according to an established certification procedure. Buildings that front on Broadway, as this one does, cannot be converted to joint living and working use *even by artists* if the floor size exceeds 3,600 square feet. Probably the developers who were selling the floors in this building had applied for a Buildings Department permit for studios with accessory living space, which New York City law did not consider a residential category until recently.



Residents' garbage, deposited in front of a loft building, vies with an art gallery for the attention of passers-by.

SPACE AND SELF

A home, as French philosopher Gaston Bachelard says in *The Poetics of Space*, can mean many contradictory things to its inhabitants. It evokes an image of both stability and expansiveness, a primal "hut dream" that inspires calm rooms that seethe with inner turbulence. "The house even more than the landscape," Bachelard notes, "is a psychic state."¹³ In different periods and different cultures, the size of a house, the layout of the rooms, the passage from one room to another, indicate not only a sense of "home" but also a sense of the self that is "at home" there. In sixteenth-century Europe, for example, people thought that self-expression was possible only in small rooms, yet by the eighteenth century, their descendants preferred large, airy rooms. In the late nineteenth century, tastes changed once again. Mid-Victorian homes were warrens of small, specialized rooms separated by walls, passageways, and closets that "associated each space with a function or activity that assumed cultural, indeed ceremonial meaning."¹⁴

Needless to say, tastes in housing, like all architectural styles, are constrained by available technology, materials, and costs. Tastes must also change over time. The sixteenth-century preference for small rooms indicates a withdrawal in spatial terms from the corporate identities and large gatherings of medieval society to what we think of as Renaissance individ-



Strolling through the wholesale dairy distributors' neighborhood, an explorer can easily envision loft living in Lower Manhattan.

ualism. The eighteenth-century room parallels a new conception of the public self, which demanded a more public space even in the privacy of the home. The late-nineteenth-century "specialization of space," as historian Burton Bledstein calls it, symbolizes a retreat into private space to protect the individual from undefined, and therefore dangerous, encounters. All these examples project a middle-class, or even an upper-middle-class, understanding of the relation between space, self, and society. Because the middle class generally neither inherits baronial ancestral halls nor can afford to reconstruct such palaces, the housing that the middle class builds or buys necessarily reflects new ideas about space, and what it represents, in each time period. In that sense, loft living is part of a larger modern quest for authenticity. Old buildings and old neighborhoods are "authen-

tic" in a way that new construction and new communities are not. They have an identity that comes from years of continuous use, and an individuality that creates a sense of "place" instead of "space." They are "New York" rather than "California," or "San Francisco" rather than "Los Angeles." Such places grow organically, not spasmodically. Because they are here today *and* tomorrow, they provide landmarks for the mind as well as the senses. In a world that changes moment by moment, anchoring the self to old places is a way of coping with the "continuous past." So loft living rejects functionalism, Le Corbusier, and the severe idealism of form that modern architecture represents. As a style, it is respectful of social context. Thus living lofts are a logical continuation of the middle-class movement back to brownstone townhouses that began in the late fifties. Ironically, loft living turns to factories in search of a more human habitat. Living in a loft is an attempt to replace modernism's mass production of the individual with an individualization of mass production.¹⁵

Living lofts, especially in an on-going manufacturing area, re-create the "mixed use" of earlier urban neighborhoods. To some degree the attraction to artists' living and working lofts — mixed use in the loft itself — represents an attempt to overcome the separation of home and work that some social psychologists find so alienating.¹⁶ If the isolation of middle-class residential suburbs breeds despair, then the mixed use of loft neighborhoods should foster affirmation in the middle-class psyche. Of course, a middle-class preference for strictly residential neighborhoods pre-dates the suburbs by many years. Since the rise of separate middle-class and working-class housing markets in the 1840s, urban houses and neighborhoods have been predominantly either residential or commercial. Most people still prefer purely residential housing and neighborhoods — for either escape or exclusivity. But symbolically, the mixed use in loft living reconciles home and work and recaptures some of the former urban vitality.

In another way, too, living lofts represent an effort to supersede the intense privacy of the detached suburban house with a more public space. The sheer physical layout of most lofts, interrupted by few doors or walls, opens every area and every social function to all comers. This eliminates most rituals *de passage* and creates an impression of informality and equality. In a loft's vastness no single object or person can dominate. Similarly, the absence of architectural barriers between "service" and "entertainment" areas eliminates the hierarchy of functions that is typical of most household arrangements, as well as the hierarchy of persons — either male or female — who perform those functions. Nor does the architectural plan of a loft readily permit the hierarchy of specialized rooms that was so popular in middle-class Victorian homes. Lofts don't have drawing rooms, morning rooms, or dressing rooms. Because loft areas are divided only according to general uses — "living" and "working," for exam-

ple — they imply an easy transition from one activity to another, a sense of proportion and a purposefulness that may really exceed the loft dweller's. The appropriation of large space in a loft also reverses the sixteenth-century association between small rooms and self-expression. Loft living reflects a self that continually demands "more space" to prove its individuality.

Living in a loft is a little like living in a showcase. Because of the structure of many small industrial buildings, most lofts are entered directly from the elevator. So guests penetrate immediately into the living area. This contrasts with the gradual transition between "outside" and "inside," and public and private space, in a typical home. Even in the modest lofts that do have an entrance hall, both guests and hosts feel a mutual obligation to "see" and "show" the whole loft. Of course, the uniqueness of each loft arrangement — due to the absence of standard floor plans and the unexpectedness of architectural detail — makes living lofts a kind of tourist attraction that most houses or apartments cannot be.

But it would be wrong to imagine that lofts use space in a totally new way. Strong elements of continuity connect today's living lofts and older American housing types, beginning with the brick walls, plane surfaces, and exposed structural elements (wooden beams) in early New England houses. Indeed, architectural historian Siegfried Giedion characterized the typical American floor plan that developed between 1850 and 1890 as the most open, the most flexible, and the least subdivided that was possible. Because of both a lack of skilled labor and a colonial dependence on the British Georgian style, American construction throughout the nineteenth century stressed a lack of pretentiousness, a direct approach to building materials, and an attention to comfort. Even the ideal house that Henry David Thoreau imagined before 1850 seems remarkably like a living loft. It would have "only one room . . . where some may live in the fireplace, some in the recess of a window, and some on settees, some at one end of the hall, some at another, and some aloft in the rafters with the sparrows, if they choose."¹⁷

Thoreau's central image reappears in master-craftsman Gustav Stickley's description of the prototype house that he designed around 1900:

We have from the first planned houses that are based on the big fundamental principles of honesty, simplicity, and usefulness. . . . We have put into practical effect our conviction that a house, whatever its dimensions, should have plenty of free space unencumbered by unnecessary partitions or over-much furniture. . . . It seems to us much more friendly, homelike and comfortable to have one big living room into which one steps directly from the entrance door . . . and to have this living room the place where all the business and pleasure of the common family life may be carried on. And we like it to have pleasant nooks and corners which give a comfortable sense of semi-privacy and yet are not in any way shut off from the larger life of the room. . . .

Equally symbolic is our purpose in making the dining room either almost or wholly a part of the living room. . . . Such an arrangement is a strong and subtle influence in the direction of simpler living because entertainment under such conditions naturally grows less elaborate and more friendly. . . .¹⁸

Another reason for the decline of formal entertaining, as Stickley also notes, was the increasing number of middle-class households without servants. Unlike the rigid domestic division between "upstairs" and "downstairs," the housewife who did her own cooking did not readily accept an enforced isolation in the kitchen, away from the rest of the family. Early-twentieth-century feminists had demanded that the kitchen be eliminated entirely from individual homes and replaced with nearby communal dining halls. But in the thirties and forties, this radical demand was subdued by the rapidly expanding production of labor-saving, mechanical devices for doing kitchen work and by changes in the physical layout of kitchens. Frank Lloyd Wright's innovative houses opened up the kitchen to the dining room so that the "work-space," as Wright called it, flowed into the living area. Wright also adapted to home kitchens the principle of "streamlining" that had been developed in nineteenth-century railroad travel with the creation of the Pullman dining car. Wright's preference for the open floor plan, along with the home-buying public's desire for ever more open and more flexible living areas, influenced the design of the suburban tract houses that were built in great numbers after World War II. Suburban ranch homes had large efficient kitchens that flowed into multi-purpose "dens" or "family rooms." The open space of this suburban style, as well as the 1960s revival of Early American rural homes and barns, prepared the way for the acceptance of living lofts.¹⁹

ART AND INDUSTRY

While Frank Lloyd Wright and several other innovative, early-twentieth-century architects freely incorporated elements of industrial design into residential and institutional structures, they transformed these elements to harmonize with the structure as a whole instead of merely transplanting them from one context to another. The architects' sense of proportion and a kind of propriety maintained the distinctiveness of residential, as opposed to industrial, style. No one could mistake their homes for factories. Even architectural reformers like Walter Gropius and the Werkbund group in Germany wanted to impose painterly and sculptural standards on industrial design rather than elevate industrial buildings and products as they were into art forms. There were good reasons at that time for both a symbiosis and a separation of art and industry. On the one

hand, the increasing mechanization of all aspects of life inspired a very rational borrowing of industrial techniques for domestic uses, and the rigorous standards of industrial construction imposed an austere beauty on factory spaces that contrasted with the elaborate fussiness of Victorian homes. When Gropius, on a visit to the United States in 1913, admired American factory design, he compared the grain elevators to the Pharaohs' tombs.²⁰ On the other hand, the separation between work and living space that increased with industrialization created two totally distinct markets for industrial and residential products. Although industrial products were more effective, products for the home were "prettier." In large part, of course, residential products were designed for female consumers.

During the 1970s, industrial design began to permeate nonindustrial markets. In some cases, as when someone buys an industrial vacuum cleaner for home use, this reflects a demand for a more efficient product. However, when it involves a conscious aesthetic choice, it implies stripping away the artifice of décor and finding beauty in unadorned functionality. Using Cor-Ten steel, which rusts in contact with the air, on the outside of a new building or exposing the steam pipes and vents of a loft building and painting them red can look both simple and elegant. But other examples, such as the mass of exposed structural and nonstructural elements in the Beaubourg art center in Paris, can be overblown and garish. What is interesting is that this appropriation of industrial design — finding art in industry — has been so thoroughly accepted in a mass market.

Loft living has played an important role in "domesticating" the industrial aesthetic. The factory origins and the present mixed use of many lofts suggest, in the interest of authenticity, the adoption of an industrial style. Also, the spaciousness of a loft permits the use of some industrial and commercial products that are too large to fit into a standard middle-class apartment. The exaggerated scale of a loft provides a natural setting for the new cult of domesticity that worships restaurant and supermarket equipment, industrial carpeting, and Pirelli rubber tiles. In the loft with the whirlpool bath, for example, the owner "loves to cook. [She] is enamored of her Garland range, her stainless-steel Sub-Zero refrigerator and what she calls her 'garage.' This is a storage area that will hold, in addition to her pots, two metal carts with chopping block surfaces that extend the kitchen work areas and are convenient for service at parties. She is planning to have four small tables, like restaurant tables, in the dining area next to the kitchen and the steps to the Jacuzzi." In this loft, the work space of the kitchen not only extends into the living area but it dominates the living area. Surely it is no historical accident that the spread of loft living roughly coincides with the successful introduction of the electric "food processor" into the American mass market. The Cuisinart, or rather its heavy-duty predecessor, the Robot-Coupe, had been used in French

restaurant kitchens for years. But not until 1971 did a smaller version, the Magi-Mix, spread to the home market in France, and two years later the arrival of the Cuisinart created a stir on the American market.

Of course, the serious devotion to cuisine, or at least to reproducing in the home techniques of food preparation and appreciation that used to be restricted to restaurants, is part of a larger professionalization of leisure activities. The middle-class jogger who reads *The Book of Running* and the unemployed middle-class wife in the movie *An Unmarried Woman* who starts working in an art gallery are closely related to the home cook who tries to cook up some fresh duck livers in a *vinaigrette* sauce or to whip his own *crème fraîche* into a *blanquette de homard*. After all, the *nouvelle cuisine* is neither less fattening nor less studied than its culinary predecessors.

The professionalization of home cooking and the introduction of industrial products for home use are also related to the decline of gender-related household chores, especially the association between kitchens and "the little woman." In this sense, the feminism and gay activism of many visible loft dwellers in the early years provide another reason why the loft lifestyle became linked with an industrial aesthetic. Quite a few of the first-generation SoHo residents who took part in the movement to legalize artists' living lofts there (1969-71) or whose lofts were pictured in magazines were men or women who lived alone or gay (primarily male) couples. Photographed in their lofts, discoursing knowledgeably about the merits of the Cuisinart or metal wall studs and plasterboard, these people became both part of the mainstream, home-oriented public and arbiters of home style. In a similar gender-free sense, a survey of Manhattan loft residents found that an extraordinarily high proportion of couples refused to identify a man or a woman as head of the household. Or consider the household arrangements of Carl Sontheimer, the engineer who introduced the Cuisinart into the American home market in 1973: "Sixty-five-year old Sontheimer is also a passionate amateur chef. He does all the cooking at home, according to Shirley, his wife and business associate, 'because he likes to.' Naturally, he uses the Cuisinart."²¹

In his introduction to a hip guidebook to SoHo and environs, writer Stephen Koch combines the themes of sexual liberation, suburban alienation, and the social image of artists in a passage so portentous that it might almost be a parody of loft living and the new cult of domesticity:

The inevitable and unnatural sexual resonances of having been raised in mom's town (where life is lived), remote from work in dad's town (the unseen, meaningless uninhabitable city) is resolutely eliminated. Suburbia and its wall-to-wall alienations have led to a new image for the ancient one of the artist and androgyne, and after the misadventures of the sixties, it finds itself taking a social rather than specifically sexual expression. True enough an industrial look has been important to the modern artist's virility. But the

style's stronger aim is to resolve the sexually laden contradictions of recent American childhood. In SoHo, working and living are at last reunited and work becomes *real*.²²

However, the reason that people develop a sentimental — or a sensual — attachment to the industrial aesthetic is that it is *not* real. To be precise, it is *no longer* real. When people discover art in industrial design and bring that "art" into their homes, they are making the same existential choice that attracted them (or others) to loft living. They are choosing to return to a more manageable past. As each generation of machines becomes more complicated, we withdraw "into dreams of obsolete machines and see ourselves among windmills, clipper ships, even trolley cars." In essayist Robert Harbison's view, "there is no nostalgia like the nostalgia for simpler machines, which are now imbued with the warm glow of a smaller past."²³

Curiously, as each generation of mechanical devices has become *smaller*, people have brought *larger* machines into their homes. New devices like minicams and microfiches are not yet as familiar as the large machines of the past. Yes, people do buy microwave ovens, but they buy them because they are efficient rather than aesthetically pleasing. The microwave oven is relegated to the working mother who has no time to cook a roast; the serious cook buys a restaurant stove and a reliable set of thermometers.

Though we live in a transistorized age, we seek a human scale in big, solid objects. This is the sentimental and sensual side of "High Tech" style. To some extent, the taste for industrial trash baskets, reinforced steel shelving, and hospital faucets is also a flight from the throwaway mentality of our plastic culture. Dreaming of durables, we associate the old industrial materials with even older natural ones. The juxtaposition of industrial and natural is successfully exploited by an increasing number of new shops, including a very fine food store in a SoHo loft described by the Italian magazine for architects *Abitare*: "In line with the general reassessment of things genuine and hand-made, a place like this could not be anything but successful. Amid refined white pipes and pillars, they sell milk pans, wooden spoons, naive graters and above all every possible type of excellent food — lots of Italian things — all adding up to the opposite of anonymous."²⁴ Inevitably, the result of using an industrial aesthetic as "the opposite of anonymous" is that, over time, as the style is established, more and more shops — and lofts — look the same.

Probably the most significant aspect of the domestication of the industrial aesthetic is time. People find art in industrial forms when their industrial use appears to become obsolete. Like Gothic ruins in the nineteenth century, artifacts of the Industrial Age now inspire nostalgia for the past. This sentiment grows as the pace of change speeds up. Of course, artists have always been attracted to industrial design when it is new and dynamic. At the beginning of this century, Gropius admired American

factories and Le Corbusier studied the clean lines of industrial machines. Duchamp, Léger, Picabia, and the Constructivists incorporated industrial parts and images in their paintings, and Duchamp even dared to exhibit an industrial product — a urinal, in fact — as “his” art work. But theirs was an elitist appreciation of the industrial aesthetic. They found art in industry because industrial forms matched what they were trying to create in “real” works of art like paintings or buildings. Except for collages, a form that precedes the industrial era, artwork whose physical quality most resembles industrial machines — sculpture, for example — did not imitate industrial design. Until the post-World War II period, industry’s influence on art was primarily visual.

Beginning in the late forties, however, artists developed a more visceral feeling about industrial forms. The increasing automation of industrial production and the “accelerated depreciation” of industrial machines that this caused inspired an artistic appreciation of older mechanical devices. The degradation of manual labor that automation also implies may imbue the older machines that require human labor with a sense of humanity. In any case, artists soon scavenged the industrial aesthetic as though they were hunting for souvenirs. They constructed their own machines, using obsolete industrial parts — junk — and set them in motion with electric motors. During the 1960s, Jean Tinguely in Paris and Rauschenberg in New York played with the industrial aesthetic. They took it apart and reused it in objects that had no function other than to entertain. Pop Art like Andy Warhol’s Campbell’s soup cans exaggerated the standardization of industrial forms. The reproduction of Warhol’s lithographs and silk-screens, and the mass-produced knock-offs that they inspired, brought the image of industrial art into thousands of homes.

If artists spread a trail of cultural clues before the wider public, then the contrast between the 1934 “Machine Art” show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the 1968 exhibition that Pontus Hulten organized, “The Machine As Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age,” is extremely important. The 1934 exhibit, influenced by the Bauhaus gospel, showed great enthusiasm. In contrast, the 1968 show, as its name implies, offered a visual eulogy. The emblem of the 1968 exhibit was Jean Tinguely’s complicated mechanical contraption, *Hommage à New York*. At the opening, Nelson Rockefeller had the honor of pulling the string that activated it. Within several minutes, in a puff of smoke, Tinguely’s piece demonstrated its ironic point: it destroyed itself. As Hulten, then director of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm and later director of the Beaubourg, tried to describe the artists’ sense of this period, “We are surrounded by the outward manifestations of the culmination of the mechanical age. Yet, at the same time, the mechanical machine — which can most easily be defined as an imitation of our muscles — is losing its dominating position among the tools of mankind; while electronic and chemical devices — which imitate

the processes of the brain and the nervous system — are becoming increasingly important.”²⁵

The artists’ conclusion followed that of the business leaders and the sociologists, who had been propounding their idea of progress — a cybernetic vision of a fully automated figure — since the late forties. However, the artists suggested, for the first time, that progress was paradoxical. On the one hand, progress was inevitable and desirable. On the other hand, it involved losing a significant part of the past, a part which had associations and meaning for people. This paradoxical view was not a protest against progress, as the Arts and Crafts Movement in Victorian England had been. Not did it imply, as the Cubists had, that progress was ambiguous. The artists of the 1960s would unite the aesthetic of the mechanical age with the technology of the new electronic era. This attitude carried over to a reevaluation of industrial space. Loft buildings that appeared to be artifacts began to take on a distinctly “artistic” aura. The fact that many artists lived in lofts — as they had, indeed, since the 1930s — merely confirmed the loft buildings’ new character.

HISTORIC VALUE AND COMMERCIAL VIABILITY

A new appreciation of the “historic” value of old industrial buildings developed along with the perception of their aesthetic quality. At the beginning of the 1940s, for example, Siegfried Giedion had noted sadly that the work of architect James Bogardus, who designed many of New York’s distinguished nineteenth-century cast-iron buildings, was languishing in obscurity. Also to Giedion’s chagrin, the warehouses along the Saint Louis waterfront, dating from about the same period, had recently been torn down to make a park.²⁶ In large part, the lack of concern about industrial buildings was due to the usual nonchalance about objects (and, at that time, works of art) that were not so old as to be either historically or financially valuable. Historic preservationists call this attitude “the grandfather clause”: only objects built outside living memory — before “our grandfathers’ time” — take on a “historic” aura. Certainly, buildings that were still used for their original purpose, especially factories where many real grandfathers had worked (and which they found either too uninteresting or too painful to remember), did not strike Americans as “historic.” But after World War II, just as artists started to appropriate the industrial aesthetic, so historic preservationists began to defend industrial spaces from the wrecker’s ball and to advocate their re-use.²⁷

This shift occurred for several reasons. First, almost a century had passed since the first modern factories were built in the United States and the first “grandfathers” had gone to work in them. The distance of time lent the factories enchantment. Second, some factories, like their technol-

ogy, appeared to have become obsolete. Disuse, as we have also noted, lends enchantment. Third, the change in attitude toward nineteenth-century places, including loft buildings, reflected a gradual American acceptance of the prevailing European view toward historic structures. In contrast to the successive American approaches that tended toward a rather pristine view of the past — the “Washington Slept Here” syndrome, “restoration,” and “re-creation” — European “preservation” emphasized the desirability of keeping old buildings in continuous use. The Europeans made little effort to purge historic structures of architectural additions and stylistic “corrections” that represented, in their own terms, “historic” accretions. William Morris, the socialist theorist of the Victorian Arts and Crafts Movement, for example, had defended the beauty of buildings that seemed to grow organically, and his own home outside London is still a historic hodgepodge of building styles and materials. By the 1950s, Americans were willing to take up where Morris had left off a half-century before. American preservationists began to write about changing the use — without purifying the structure — of old buildings in order to keep them socially and economically “viable.”²⁸

A major obstacle to the spread of this preservationist philosophy was that it contradicted the logic of real estate developers, who worked on the basis of the axiom “Tear it down — build it up.” Were old buildings to be preserved for changing uses, instead of demolished and replaced, the developers’ profit margins might dwindle to nothing. So historic preservation seemed to threaten the pillars of modern capitalism as well as the burgeoning skyscrapers of the post-World War II building boom. To counteract the developers’ resistance, preservationists had to create a public constituency for their goal. This was not easy. Particularly in the United States, where since the first New England settlements the abundance of land had encouraged people to abandon their homes and move farther West as they used up natural resources, new places had always represented new chances. The absence of ancestral homes and roots, the youth of the American culture, the relatively open social structure, and the growth, after 1900, of mass production of consumer goods — all suggested to Americans that preserving the past was either silly or pretentious. Indeed, until the 1960s, when the federal government began to fund historical projects on a large scale, support for historic preservation was confined to small community-based groups, patrician associations that were based on genealogy (like the Daughters of the American Revolution or the Colonial Dames), and individual wealthy philanthropists (including John D. Rockefeller, who funded the reconstruction of Williamsburg, Virginia, and Henry Ford, who paid for the preservation of Dearborn Village in Michigan).²⁹

By the early 1960s, urban renewal plans and private redevelopment had destroyed — or threatened to destroy — so many landmarks in so many

cities that people began to speak of a sense of loss. Here was a counterpart to the artists’ paradoxical view of mechanical progress: urban redevelopment damaged the “quality of life.” The contribution of old buildings was invaluable, a preservationist wrote in 1966, because they “add to the variety and beauty of life that is daily more mechanized and stereotyped.”³⁰ As cities like Philadelphia and Saint Louis destroyed their nineteenth-century architectural heritage, and famous, well-used buildings like Penn Station and the Metropolitan Opera House in New York were replaced with more anonymous office buildings, the sense of loss that some people felt turned into shock. Intellectuals and patricians who still lived in or frequented the old city centers tried to express these feelings through the institutional means at their disposal — schools, art societies, civic beautification groups. In 1963 Nathan Silver organized an exhibit of photographs of old New York buildings, most of which had already been demolished, at the Columbia University School of Architecture. The point of this exhibit, he explained in a subsequent book of photographs, *Lost New York*, was “that the collective picture of some vanished first-rate architecture would make a sobering reminder of how much finer a city New York could have been with its all-time best buildings still intact.” Silver and his associates were sure that the more people saw such an exhibition, the more pressure they would bring to bear on real estate developers and urban planners. Essentially, historic preservationists wanted legislative protection for specified landmarks, and enlightened procedures for recognizing and registering them. They also wanted to retain the social and economic context — again, the “viability” of old places, which might include an individual building, a cluster of buildings, or an entire district.³¹

While it was possible that such restrictions on real estate development would harm the financial interests of some upper-class people, primarily the heads of banks and big businesses that wanted either to build or to invest in building new corporate headquarters, many patrician types supported historic preservation as they continued to support municipal art societies, museums, symphony orchestras, and civic beautification. If these people, or the intellectual and cultural figures with whom they were allied, also owned property in or near “landmark districts,” such as Society Hill in Philadelphia or Beacon Hill in Boston, they also stood to gain financially from increased property values. Nevertheless, a stumbling block to preservation remained in the question of how to compensate developers and builders for the profits that they would forgo if opportunities for new construction were limited. The city of San Francisco paid particular attention to this issue in the early sixties when a patrician group founded by three prominent San Francisco matrons to conserve the open beauty of the Bay gradually developed into the San Francisco Plan, a policy backed by the full force of state power.³² By itself, the “stick” of state power seemed an overly negative inducement. So San Francisco’s

"carrot" to developers took the form of shifting intensive new development downtown, toward the Mission District, and encouraging the commercial redevelopment of Fisherman's Wharf and Ghirardelli Square, along the Bay. The San Francisco compromise became the model for a *modus vivendi* between preservationists and developers in many cities. On the one hand, the preservationists got to keep in continuous use the low-rise, nineteenth-century buildings (including the Ghirardelli Chocolate Factory) next to the waterfront, but on the other hand, developers got to renovate and lease these facilities for "viable" commercial uses. And the high-profit, high-rise development was certainly permitted elsewhere.

The San Francisco model continues to be copied selectively. Ghirardelli Square has spun off clones along the waterfronts of Boston (Quincy Market and Faneuil Hall), New York (South Street Seaport), and Baltimore (Harborplace). Significantly, the developer of these three much-touted renovations is James Rouse, who earlier in his career made a fortune by developing suburban shopping malls. Rouse's key to establishing the commercial viability of historic structures in cities is derived directly from the "branching" principle of the typical suburban shopping center. While the physical context of each project is unique—because it is the original, nineteenth-century structure—the retail stores that rent space in the renovated buildings are the same assortment of "gourmet" and "ethnic" food shops, crafts boutiques, bookstores, and fancy fast-food stands like crêpe or oyster bars. The Harborplace development, for example, which opened in 1980, includes branches of an Ocean City, Maryland, fish restaurant, a Newport, Rhode Island, "continental" restaurant, a New York "pasta" restaurant, and a Washington, D.C., Indian restaurant. The commercial viability "rider" on which the general acceptance of historic preservation depends has created, in effect, a coast-to-coast chain of red-brick shopping centers. Their stock-in-trade is entirely predictable. Just as the residential re-use of loft buildings established "loft living," so the commercial re-use of old markets, factories, and warehouses has developed a similar style. The organized appreciation of the unique that began as a strictly local and elitist affair has become part of a national, middle-class culture.

THE MIDDLE CLASS IN THE ARTIST'S STUDIO

At the same time that historic preservation began to attract a broader group of supporters, the work of living artists started to arouse a great deal of public interest. Like the loft buildings in which they were often located, artists' studios appealed to the public's imagination. But in contrast to buildings that appeared obsolete, the studios seemed dynamic. The reason was not that artists were working harder than they had before but that

their work was perceived differently. This happened because of changes in the work and changes in the price structure of modern art.

First, from the mid-fifties on, works by living American artists commanded increasingly high prices. Scarcity had something to do with this. On the one hand, as *Fortune* magazine carefully pointed out as early as 1955, the supply of Old Masters and even new masters (like Picasso) was rapidly drying up. Thus people who wanted to invest in "blue-chip" works of art had to broaden their interests. On the other hand, the death of Jackson Pollock, the famous New York Abstract Expressionist, in 1956, increased the money value of his work as well as that of his contemporaries in the New York School. When a new generation of abstract painters—Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Frank Stella—began to attract a wider circle of newly affluent art collectors, their prices also rose. By the end of the 1960s, the better-known artists were making enough money to buy their own loft buildings, and their old landlords, to whom they had given paintings in payment for rent or repairs, were counting their blessings.³³

The second reason that living American artists achieved a historic new status had to do with the substance of their work. Because of both their subjects and their style, the Abstract Expressionists began to be perceived as more serious—more philosophical, more intellectual, deeper—than artists had before. The artists themselves encouraged this impression. They discussed their work in terms of existential pain and existential choices. Like the European philosophers who were also trying to distinguish between being and nothingness, such New York artists as Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman were reducing the artist's elements to the barest essentials. They pared their expression to bands of stark color or even shades of black. The best artists no longer did representational work (still lifes with fruit or landscapes with bathers); rather, they were painting, sometimes very self-consciously, portraits of the modern soul. For his model—and this was, incidentally, a male-dominated approach—the artist took himself. But people outside the studio understood that in wrestling with this image, the artist represented everyone.

Art critic Harold Rosenberg, whose work during the 1940s and 1950s contributed greatly to the clarification and exaltation of some of these artists (especially Pollock's "rival," Willem de Kooning), called this new sort of aesthetic representation Action Painting. "Action Painting has to do with self-creation or self-definition or self-transcendence," Rosenberg wrote at the end of the fifties, "but this dissociates it from self-expression, which assumes the acceptance of the ego as it is, with its wound and its magic. Action Painting is not 'personal,' though its subject matter is the artist's individual possibilities." Because the style was abstract rather than literal, an attempt to "act out" the artist's creation of a new self rather than to reproduce a chair or an apple, Action Painting freed artists from their Sisyphean task of representing *what is*. This meant "liberation from the

'nature,' society, and art already there. It was a movement to leave behind the self that wished to choose his future and to nullify his promissory notes to the past." Of course, the immediate past from which these artists sought liberation — or escape — was the common vision of horror and holocaust shared by survivors of World War II. This was compounded, for the many artists who since WPA days had had contacts and alliances on the Left, by Stalinism abroad and McCarthyism at home. At any rate, the abstract painting of the New York artists held the attention of the American public as never before. Rosenberg's essays about the Action Painters described a living reality. They "were not only theories," as journalist Tom Wolfe breathlessly puts it, "but . . . hot news, straight from the studios, from the scene."³⁴

No longer a mere work place, the artist's studio had indeed become "the scene." It was in the studio that the artist constantly re-created his self, and by transferring that moment to canvas, represented everyone's favorite *angst*. Although the artists who succeeded the Action Painters were less serious about the *angst*, they remained perfectly serious about the activity of art creation. In the mid- to late sixties, for example, the Conceptualists presented the process of making art as a work of art in itself. Like the "Happenings," which had combined art and theater in many loft-studios several years before, Conceptualist exhibitions were really performances, in which the artists exhibited themselves. Strangely enough, this did not repel the increasingly middle-class public that was interested in the artists. They attended the exhibitions, some in out-of-the-way places, in even greater numbers. Just as the artists became more willing to invite the public into their studios — to watch the process of art creation or self-creation firsthand — so the public became more interested in watching the artists work. Eventually, the consumption of art in the artist's studio developed into a consumption of the studio too. In 1968, the "Downtown Ten" Art Show exhibited the work of ten New York artists in their lofts. People had to walk from one loft to another to see the work and the artists. It was a novel situation — even more redolent with artistic ambiance than the late-fifties openings of the Tenth Street School of Abstract Expressionists, when an "uptown" art public used to go from one artists' co-op gallery to another in search of the most bohemian or most avant-garde showing. By the late sixties, the seed had been sown: people began to think of the art studio as an exciting place to live. The artists' success in attracting the art public to their studios became the success of the studios.

Ironically, the more artists become a distinctive social group that both lives *for* art and lives *off* art, the more the middle class appropriates their styles and their studios. The rise of the market in living lofts is not the first case in which this has happened. In Paris around 1900, artists began to live in distinctive studio-houses, which had a top-floor studio with large windows and living quarters on the floor below. In order to take advantage of

the best light, and to fit the most housing into the available space, the architects sited them assymmetrically. This inadvertently created entire small developments — or colonies — of artists' ateliers. Between the 1900s and the 1930s, during the height of Paris's reign as art capital of the world, there was a boom in building of studio-houses. Modernists like Le Corbusier designed them. The interesting point is that non-artists, or people who were peripherally involved in the Paris art world, wanted them too. Critics, dealers, and collectors — in short, a significant segment of the middle class — took them over, "finding that the standard two-story studio with its double-height window made for an uncommonly exciting living room."³⁵

From housing for artists "living poor" outside the mainstream of society to luxury housing for an urbane, "artistic" bourgeoisie, living lofts reflect an interesting expansion of middle-class culture. By this point in the twentieth century, the cultural style that is associated with loft living — the "loft lifestyle" — shows a middle-class preference for open space and artistic forms of production, as well as a more general nostalgia about the "smaller past" of the great industrial era. The market in living lofts, along with the movement for the historic preservation of buildings that are not terribly old, suggests how quickly these sentiments about space and time can be exploited for their commercial possibilities. The integration of an industrial aesthetic into the new cult of domesticity also reflects the commercialization of cultural change, besides obvious social changes like the end of the "mechanical age" of industrial society, the professionalization of leisure activities, and the dissociation of many middle-class women from household chores. So loft living takes its place — with "brownstoning," "parenting," and simply "Living," as a weekly section of the *New York Times* is called — among the cultural gerunds of our time.

While an explanation that relates culture and commerce — or space, time, and self — seems, at last, to make the demand for living lofts thoroughly understandable, it has broached an issue that places the rise of the loft market in quite a different perspective. The idea that artists were entitled to help in getting loft-studio space developed as an integral part of the explosion of state support for the arts in the 1960s. At the same time that art became involved in the expansion of state power, the power structure within the art world was also changing. Competition over patronage and the emergence of new, middle-class patrons of the arts affected the production of artwork and the artists. Just as art no longer "shocked the bourgeoisie," so artists themselves were becoming more middle-class.