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# Keeping Aloft

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Does SoHo need a newspaper? I'm doubtful, but I'm still open.

The previous effort, the SoHo Statement, failed because it attempted to sell SoHo to the Village the way the Village Voice sells the Village to the rest of the world. We didn't need that then, we don't need it now.

If the effort of this newspaper is confined to selling a neighborhood to itself, as I'm told it will be, there may be more basis for its existence.

Lower Manhattan is a unique mixture of often unmixable extremes. On one short trip to the subway you can hear the cadences of Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, and Yiddish. In this "Melting Pot" all the metals have floated out a different temperatures and separated.

Factories stand beside financial towers, tenements beside vertical townhouses, and we are the ones who live in between. Basically ours is a factory area population, poking around behind trucks and loading platforms, the people left over after the business day hoards are gone. More people work in our area of Lower Manhattan than are employed in the cities of Detroit and Baltimore combined, yet after dark the remaining population would fit easily into Madison Square Garden.

Most often we live in lofts, frequently are involved in some aspect of the arts, and occasionally just seem to fill up the spaces between ethnic communities. The special "SoHo experiment" in the 41-square-block area is only one bizarre complication down here. The Historic District status of 26 blocks is just one more. The problems are often similar from Bond Street to Battery Park, however. Creeping construction, remoteness from facilities, and neighbors, prey to landlords and isolation. And that isolation is why a newspaper properly in tune to these problems—could be of real service.

The SoHo Newsletter, which I am associated with, is a case in point. It has attempted to tie together the remote ends of the 41-block experimental area, and with some success. It and the SoHo Artists Association that prints it has kept its neighborhood together enough to be able to outflank its real estate antagonists and to deal effectively within the city bureaucracy. Artist legalization, defeat of the Sports Center, and Landmark status were all won with the aid of hard bargaining and a generally together community.

Had a similar spirit prevailed in earlier years, there might be a lot more lofts left in Manhattan.

Perhaps a larger organization, like the SAA, could be built in this downtown neighborhood that could tackle the Leviathan of "progress" in Lower Manhattan and might hope to stabilize the dwindling supply of artists' loft housing, contend with difficult landlords, and negotiate with the city agencies. The only way such an organization can be built is through shared information and contact, and that is where a good local newspaper could come in.

If this one becomes a catalyst for making this neighborhood aware of itself and able to affect its own future, I wish it success. If it does not, it will fail anyway . . . but to my mind it's worth a try.

A hint of politics-to-come appeared in the designation of SoHo as a landmark by the Board of Estimate October 4. Although the vote was unanimous by the Board, there was one dissenting voice . . . mayoral candidate Abraham Beame. The Comptroller, who got a majority of his primary campaign funds from real estate contributors, expressed lingering doubts about landmarks designation in general before throwing in with the Board's majority.

Supporters of SoHo designation had done voluminous homework, no one could be mustered to speak against the plan, and it appeared that even the real estate industry had conceded that last-minute opposition was impossible. But Beame's disinclination toward landmarks has sparked the concern of at least one major group, the Historic Districts Council, which has requested a meeting with the candidate so that he can explain himself. The landmarks people fear that if Mr. Beame is elected Mayor . . . a likely prospect . . . landmarks may dry up under his administration.