

Craig Smith
Founding Member/Artistic Director
Jean Cocteau Repertory & Phoenix Theatre Ensemble

May 20, 2009


Amanda Burden
City Planning Commission
22 Reade Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Ms. Burden,

Last week I walked into the building of the Bouwerie Lane Theatre at 330 Bowery for the first time in 5 years. I had been an actor there for 30 years with Jean Cocteau Repertory. It is now a high end men's retail clothing store -- very urban, all kind of black and very "of the trend." There was a single aloof sales person standing where I once performed over 200 different productions of classical theatre of Shakespeare, Chekov, Becket, Williams, etc. I then walked out onto the stoop of the Bouwerie Lane and looked over where CBGBs used to be, and where Amato Opera is now no longer and remembered a time when during intermissions on Sunday afternoons patrons from the Cocteau classical theatre, Amato opera and yes from CB's punk Sunday matinees would all congregate on the Bowery waiting for their 2nd acts to begin -- and I would think "this is New York."

Looking from the stoop of the Bouwerie Lane I now see a high rise hotel on 3rd and Bowery, a high rise condominium between 3rd and 4th on Bowery, another glass high rise hotel on my own block of 5th Street at Cooper, and yet another condominium development on the corner of 4th and Bowery. I don't see CBs, Amato, Cocteau, and I think this could easily be Dallas, Houston, Fresno or any other city in the US of less character or perhaps one that has been careless of its own history and culture. But then Dallas, Houston, and Fresno don't have the history that New York does -- so they have an excuse for overbuilding, indulging development and a lack of responsibility of preserving the past, because they don't really have one. But if you are like me a New Yorker who knows what once was, you cannot escape the realization how extraordinarily careless we are being with our own legacy and all this glass is the only lasting testament of what will remain and what I can only describe as the extraordinarily common.

I'm afraid that we have lost our way and it is deeply sad. Please stop the high rise development of the Bowery.


Craig Smith

Founding Member / Artistic Director
Jean Cocteau Repertory & Phoenix Theatre Ensemble
233 East 5th Street
New York, NY 10003