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### **NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT: NEW YORK MODERNISM; A Campaign to Honor Buildings Some Love to Hate**

**By ERIKA KINETZ (NYT) 502 words**

It was the era in which cars had fins, Pop Art was on its way, and Eero Saarinen's T.W.A. terminal at Kennedy International Airport sprouted wings. Architects began to create sculptures with concrete. The moon itself seemed attainable.

And now Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts, a preservation group, has taken the first steps to seek landmark designation for three East Side buildings dating from that architecturally fertile postwar period.

The three are Manhattan House (1950), an apartment building; and Cinema I and II (1962) and the Beekman Theater and Block (1952), both once art houses. They were among the many structures around the country born of experimentation fueled by postwar prosperity.

Cinema I and II had a novel two-story layout; when "Boccaccio '70" opened that first year, patrons were greeted by a 54-foot-long abstract mural by Ilya Bolotowsky, red vinyl walls, and free coffee served in Japanese china. Manhattan House and Beekman Theater made use of light gray brick, then an unusual building material.

The effort to give landmark designation to these structures is significant, because many New Yorkers have an ambivalent relationship with their Modernist monuments, especially on the Upper East Side. Their unrelenting newness strikes some as too austere, even embarrassing, and certainly out of place amid the obvious gentility of the neighborhood's 19th-century row houses.

"Modern architecture was anti the past," said Lisa Kersavage, executive director of Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts. "It did want to stand out. That is what made people hate it. But it is an important part of our collective history."

On April 29 Ms. Kersavage's organization formally requested that the Landmarks Preservation Commission begin evaluating the three structures. The issue is to be

presented to Community Board 8 on June 17.

Buildings must be 30 years old before they are eligible for designation. But taste does not necessarily respect a timetable.

"It is the architectural equivalent of your bell-bottom pants," said Frank Sanchis, executive director of the Municipal Art Society. "I grew up in the 60's. I had bell-bottom pants. I look at them now, and I say, holy cow! On the other hand, I look at some of my dad's outfits from the 1930's, and they look cool."

"There was a period in the 1950's when neighborhoods of the late 19th century were totally underappreciated," he added. "They were ugly and old and made of brown stone. Everybody wanted more up-to-date buildings, red brick ones with balconies, high-rises surrounded by parks. Now look how coveted they are."

Aesthetics aside, preservationists say that not protecting these postwar buildings would undermine the integrity of the historical record. "That is what preserving historical buildings is all about, so we have a continuum of architecture that speaks to the moment it was created in," Mr. Sanchis said. ERIKA KINETZ