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The Occupation of art and gentrification

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6. In a period of low economic growth art is one of the few expanding industries. Art and property share as commodities share a characteristic which is of great importance in the present climate of recession: they can both be constantly revalorised. Where property has a specific use value (i.e. as dwelling space) art does not; art has become a pure embodiment of capital, along with its social and ideological function: “Now where the merger of art and business is most complete a nauseating contradiction arises between a businesslike need to proclaim creativity (in reality its opposite) as distinct from the cynical amassing of money. Capitalists exploit others but rarely conceive of themselves as just plain robbers...In the mid-80’s the figure of the auctioneer is the one that compels attention in the two foremost capitals of art: London and New York. The paradoxical combination of sniffy pedantry and a keen eye for price slots in with the trend for global equitization and soaring real estate values in the major financial centres. With banks beginning to set up art advisory services, art has become an investment as never before, attracting money in search of quick gains and appreciating assets.”¹⁴ The ideology of art defines itself as a purely creative activity furthest removed from the dirty dealings of the market place but in reality art embodies the crazy logic of capitalism in its clearest form – the total domination of exchange value over use value.
7. The only radical function for art we know of is the one proposed by Bakunin in the Dresden insurrection of 1849 when he advocated, without success, taking the paintings out of the museums and putting them on the barricades at the entrance of the city to see if this would have stopped the firing of the oncoming soldiers.

¹⁴ Introduction to “Pravda 3” – BM Blob, London, 1980s (also available on the revolt against an age of plenty site)

pit was closed after the miners' strike, an inland beach was created with thousands of tons of sand being dumped round the shores of a local lake. This 'seaside resort' 40 miles from the coast has generated a tourist industry in place of the colliery.

4. In this article we've concentrated on Lower Manhattan as an example of how the State and big business has used avant-garde art to reclaim territory that had become unprofitable.

As we can see in the New York AHOP programme the role of artists hasn't been organic/spontaneous but they have been utilised by an alliance of State, real estate and big business elites to act as the thin end of a wedge that will destabilise and ultimately displace working-class communities. For instance, in Manhattan, the cultural element has the effect of enhancing the value of surrounding financial areas, not only by removing the threat of a large, dispossessed, angry 'undesirable' population with nothing to lose, but also provides the amenities for the refined cultural tastes of the financial elite.

5. In London neither of the strategies outlined in this article seem to have been deployed, with the possible exception of Notting Hill¹³. Here it seems to be more a case of pioneer yuppies bringing in their cultural baggage with them, including retail outlets for middle-class tastes which in turn creates an attractive environment for other yuppies to move into. This process is encouraged by estate agents manipulating the market.

¹³ The pamphlet "Once Upon A Time There Was A Place Called Nothing Hill Gate... By Paddington Bear" (BM Blob, London, 1988; now available on the revolt against an age of plenty site) deals in some detail with (amongst other things) the role of art in the gentrification of Notting Hill.

Initially we intended to write an article analysing the role of art in transforming a run-down working class area, Lower Manhattan, New York City, for the benefit of capital. In the course of our research and discussion we realised that what was happening in Lower Manhattan wasn't an isolated incident, but part of an increasingly significant capital accumulation process with art as a major protagonist, and involving a widespread transformation of urban space. We believe there is a general global tendency of culture to act as an element in the regeneration of the inner cities, adapting itself in different ways to different places. There seem to be two strategies at work: a) Art as state-manipulated gentrifier as in the Lower East Side, and b) Art as a fresh base for accumulation in areas ravaged by the decline of industry. (In the latter case the UK is closely following the US experiment in Pittsburgh and Chicago and applying them over here.) We hope to summarise b) in the conclusion while the part of the article devoted to Lower Manhattan concentrates on a). Because we believe that art is an integral aspect of the development of capitalist social relations we found it necessary to include some general observations on the role of art in capitalist society by way of an introduction.

"In art, the world of the artist is set before one's eyes as an Object, a world which the artist has brought forth from the full power of his own inwardness, a world which will satisfy every real need and longing." — Max Stirner¹

Malignant Cultures

Culture sells the promise of advancement by appealing to a 'classless creativity' which everybody supposedly possesses and

¹ "Art and Religion" by Max Stirner — The Young Hegelians — An Anthology; edited by Lawrence S. Stepelvich, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

needs to express. The US TV program 'Fame' promotes this myth: the coming together of kids from 'both sides of the tracks' — ethnic slums and white suburbia alike — an allegedly harmonious unity where everybody is 'equal', each individual succeeding or failing according to their own artistic talent. Both teamwork (bit-parts, chorus lines) and individual advancement (starring roles) are promoted, the bourgeois theatrical forms reflecting the dominant organisation and values of bourgeois society. Art and culture are now more democratised than ever; the worse the present crisis gets and the fewer job opportunities there are for a greater number of people, the more necessary it becomes to soak up at least a small fraction of this into cultural careers or into the service sector² and to contain the rest with illusions of escape. In facing up to the proletariat's increasing refusal of steady, legal full-time work, capital is employing a mixed strategy including on the one hand forced labour schemes, and on the other the allure of personal success in the cultural field which can be presented and internalised as not being alienated labour, but as an act of self-fulfilment, whereas in reality culture means the production of capital's most sophisticated means of control and submission of both consumer and producer. Just as our concrete relationships are mediated by objects as commodities, so our emotions are mediated by culture, by their hollow representations. It's worth mentioning two of the most lucrative art/music movements, punk and rap/graffiti art, which in their heydays both stimulated flagging profits in the music biz, initially emerged from the ranks of black and white dispossessed youth (although in the case of punk there was always a disproportionate art-school influence).

Artists can often get away with appearing to be 'outside' class relations; they and their products are seen as an expression of 'ev-

² i.e. the people who are employed in servicing cultural consumers; also a lot of people with artistic aspirations can be found in occupations such as bar staff, waiters/waitresses etc.

heavy industrial production to 'Third World' countries with cheaper labour costs, the increasing automation of certain sectors of the labour process and the need to centralise financial administration and dealing in parts of the inner city.

At the same time as this, there is a parallel process of administrative sectors (at least those that aren't dependent on split-second business decisions) being farmed to towns and suburbia which in turn creates new potential for valorising the space they have vacated in the inner cities.

2. This shift in the accumulation process has meant an increasingly incorporation of cultural consumption as one of its major features. In Pittsburgh, the previous US steel capital, state and private investors have initiated a large-scale cultural redevelopment project: the state realises its profits from an amusement tax levied on theatre tickets and parking ticket revenues, while in the private sector for every dollar spent directly on cultural consumption, 3.4 dollars is spent at other retail outlets — shops, hotels, restaurants etc. British capital has been closely following experiments such as this and initiated something similar in Bradford — with a proposed £100 million development of the city centre, a possible Northern base for the National Theatre and the V&A's Indian art collection. A preservation order has been slapped on remaining Victorian wool warehouses, one of which is being turned into a £350,000 art gallery and workshop complex. Parallel developments are taking place in Liverpool and Glasgow, amongst others.
3. It's not only in the inner cities that this process is at work, but in any ex-industrial areas which not only have buildings and space that can be re-valorised, but also a high proportion of unemployed proletarians who can be drafted into the service sector for low wages. In Hemsworth, a mining village whose

every time he picks up a camera what he records has the possibility of becoming a saleable commodity.

While his film is a useful piece of evidence for those fighting legal cases against the cops, and for exposing police lies, its use to him is as a means to self promotion, profit from viewing royalties, and career advancement through greater media exposure. If he had been cleverer he could have avoided becoming a target for police threats by either sending his film to the media anonymously or insisting his name was not revealed. But obviously he could not afford to miss this opportunity to self-publicise and further his media reputation.

In one interview Garrin claimed he was against the personality cult being built around him by the media, because it distracted from the real issues of police violence and homelessness, yet his own actions in regard to the media effectively encouraged this.

Part of Garrin's art activities is working as 'technical whizkid' for video artist Nam June Paik, an ex-member of the Fluxus art movement which helped begin the gentrification of Lower Manhattan. During October-December '88 there was an exhibition of Paik's video arts at the Hayward Gallery in London. Also on display were some of Garrin's own videos. One of these contained footage of riots around the world, including Tompkins Square Park. Another one was a collection of TV coverage of the riot, including Garrin's film and him being interviewed on several TV programmes. Within a few months of it happening the riot has been packaged and aestheticised as an art commodity by the same artists whose activities and presence helped create the gentrification process that the rioters were fighting against.

Conclusion

1. The traditional manufacturing base of the inner cities is in progressive decline for several reasons: the movement of

eryman' or the human essence. This gives them a unique facility to worm their way into poor neighbourhoods as the cultural vanguard of a social fragmentation created by gentrification.

The Thin End of the Red Wedge

In any capitalist society, art merely embodies the ideology appropriate to the given level of production. The Constructivists are a good illustration of this. They emerged in Russia as an avant-garde art movement at the end of the Civil War in 1921, immediately aligning themselves closely with Bolshevik ideology and put their various talents in the service of the state and its changing economic needs. They began by promoting the benefits of the New Economic Policy, Lenin's strategy to reinvigorate the economy by a partial return to free enterprise. By 1923, when the success of private industry was seriously threatening the state's profits from the sale of their own commodities, Mayakovsky, a poet, and Alexander Rodchenko, a Constructivist photographer, combined to form an 'advertisement constructor' team to promote state goods. So for the next two years Constructivists dedicated themselves to not only promoting Bolshevik economic policy as a progressive force in the formation of a new social order, but also acted as an advertising agency with the state as their major client.

During this period many of these artists also became involved in designing commodities, through 'production art', including such gems as plates printed with the slogan 'he who does not work does not exist'.

"Our gravitation towards the principle of 'construction' is a natural manifestation of contemporary consciousness which derives from industry." — Alexander Rodchenko

“Art must not be concentrated in dead shrines called museums. It must be spread everywhere — on the street, in the trams, factories, workshops and in the workers’ homes.” — Vladimir Mayakovsky³

When the state consolidated sufficient domination over the market, around 1928, and the NEP was abolished by Stalin who went on to enforce the collectivisation of agriculture and the Five Year Plans which set ever higher production targets, the Constructivists were replaced by the Socialist Realists.

The Socialist Realists essentially continued the Constructivist project in terms of style and approach, but with different tasks and priorities, reflecting a changed economic reality, i.e. since the state no longer had to compete in the market with private industry, the Socialist Realists could concentrate on selling the benefits of Stalinist accumulation, for example by aestheticising tractors which symbolised the industrialisation of agriculture (and the dispossession of all classes of peasants). In the climate of extreme austerity and with the abolition of ‘consumer choice’ in the post-NEP period, Socialist Realism preoccupied itself with marketing the ideology of production while actual production was enforced at gun-point.

Western artists have traditionally sneered at Constructivism and Socialist Realism for being crude and utilitarian, NOT ART, when in fact they demonstrate the essence of the function of art, but too blatantly for western tastes; not only on the economic level but also on the social level — in ‘one-class’ Russia, the Constructivists were the voice of the proletariat’. In the West artists either claim to be the voice of a specific class or the voice of the people in general. In both cases their role as specialists depends on the general suppression of creativity throughout society; however the bourgeoisie can only reproduce themselves by maintaining generalised alienation

³ Both quotes from “Soviet Commercial Design of the Twenties” — edited by M. Anikst

is about the people who don’t have anything — against those with money.”¹²

The Revolution will be Televised

There were no TV news cameras present while the riot was going on. We’re not sure whether this was because the cops stopped them getting into the area or whether they just voluntarily complied with a police request to stay away. But at least one person did manage to record the event on film.

Paul Garrin is a young fashion photographer and video artist who lives on the Lower East Side, very near to where the riot occurred. On seeing the riot begin, he went and got his video camera and found a ledge above the street from which to film the riot. He managed to film the riot for a few minutes before a group of cops (some with their identifying numbers covered) who were beating somebody up, spotted him filming them at work. They then turned on him, beating him and smashing the camera, although the film was not damaged.

The next day (and for days afterwards) his video-film of the riot was being shown on all the main TV news programs and Garrin was interviewed on TV news and chat shows. After this he received several phone threats from anonymous cops on the NY police force, which he recorded and also publicised in the media. Garrin said that he climbed onto the ledge where he filmed from “to avoid confrontation”. From the beginning of his involvement in the riot he wanted his role to be that of an observer and recorder, through his camera lens, but not that of a participator in the ‘drama’. He was probably immediately thinking of the possibilities of capitalising on the images he was recording, whether as saleable news footage or as material to be incorporated into some of his arty videos. He has since profited financially by fulfilling both these possibilities. His career in photography and video art has surely taught him that

appease yuppies and real estate speculators, concerned at the presence of 'undesirables' on their doorstep. In the weeks leading up to the riot on the 6th/7th the police began periodically clearing the park at 1am. A small rally held on the 30th July to protest the curfew was broken up by the police who arrested 4 people and injured several others. This led to the calling of a rally on the 6th August. By 11pm on the 6th a hundred cops, some of them on horseback, were waiting inside the park for the demonstrators. Soon after, several hundred people turned up behind a banner that read "Gentrification is Class War: Fight Back!". They came into the park, marched around for a while and then most of them went back out on to the street. By 12.30 the park was closed. Shortly afterwards the police were pelted with bottles and they brought in reinforcements, including a helicopter. The cops then charged the crowd, sparking off a riot that lasted several hours. 31 people and 13 cops were injured. 9 people were arrested on charges of riot, disorderly conduct etc. Because of widespread anger at the savagery of the police attacks on the crowd Mayor Koch was forced to lift the curfew on August 7th. The next day 800 people met in a church near the park to discuss what had happened. People in the meeting expressed hostility not only towards the police but also to others who co-operated with them — for example, the Guardian Angels.

On 9th August 600 people marched to the 9th precinct police station where the cops refused to talk with them. On August 13th a day of protest took place during which 13 people were arrested. William Brevard, a local black labourer, comments on the events: "There are deeper problems to this situation. Some people complain about the homeless but what does it show that there are homeless people who have to come here at all? What happened here is a side of America that's not being shown. This isn't a race thing — forget about race. You see black and white among the homeless here. This

¹² "The Militant" 26/8/88 (an American Trot paper).

through such means as art, whereas the proletariat can only combat its own alienation.

In the West today art continues to perform the same function at a different level of production and within a different economic framework. Most people over here who receive artistic training (apart from the privileged minority who can survive as 'pure talents untainted by commercialism' — as they see it) end up either in some form of commodity design or marketing, thus promoting the ideology of consumption or designing YTS ads or sophisticated police recruitment ads promoting the ideology of production, work and the state.

As an element of this society, art is a force against revolutionary transformation, in that it perpetuates the divisions in social activity and individual/collective consciousness. In both pre- and post-capitalist societies, culture will be so diffused into every aspect of daily life that it would become unrecognisable as a separate category. In some African tribal languages there are no specific words for specific cultural activities, i.e. the same word is used to describe both music and life itself.

"Appreciating is the sole diversion of the 'cultivated'; passive and incompetent, lacking imagination and wit, they must try to make do with that; unable to create their own diversions, to create a little world of their own, to affect in the smallest way their environments, they must accept what's given; unable to create or relate, they spectate. Absorbing 'culture' is a desperate, frantic attempt to groove in an ungroovy world, to escape the horror of a sterile, mindless existence. 'Culture' provides a sop to the egos of the incompetent, a means of rationalising passive spectating; They can pride themselves on the ability to appreciate the 'finer' things, to see a jewel where there is only a turd (they want to be admired for admiring). Lacking faith

in their ability to change anything, resigned to the status quo, they have to see beauty in turds because, so far as they can see, turds are all they'll ever have." — Valerie Solonas' "SCUM Manifesto" was written in 1967 and published in 1968, the year she shot and wounded Andy Warhol.⁴

There are now about 100,000 people homeless in New York City while at the same time over 80,000 city owned apartments have remained empty in recent years. Over 90,000 people have been evicted and SWAT⁵ teams have been used to remove people. Two women, Elisabeth Magnum and Eleanor Bumpurs, have been killed by cops during evictions. While there is a 15 year-long waiting list of nearly 175,000 people for public housing the city is progressively selling off their housing stock. Also, over half a million apartments in NYC have been abandoned since 1970, the result of an aggressive disinvestments, criminal cut-off of services and arson. Pig Mayor Koch of New York has said in the press that homeless people living on the street should not be given spare change because they will only "spend it on drink and drugs". Those living in the streets, parks and shanty towns are subjected to regular brutality and harassment by the city police force. The Koch administration has also attempted to clear the streets of vagrants by having them committed to mental institutions. In 1986 the US government declared hundreds of military bases ready to be filled with the homeless. Not surprisingly most of the homeless have rejected this 'offer'. As the "Our Land" magazine put it — "Can we remain silent

⁴ BACKGROUND TO THE PRESENT HOUSING SITUATION IN NEW YORK CITY

⁵ The first SWAT team (Special Weapons And Tactics) was formed in 1966/7 in Los Angeles and took part in such forays as the full-scale assault on the Black Panther headquarters in 1969, and in 1974, the fierce attack on the Symbionese Liberation Army. SWAT also collaborated in the bombing of the MOVE house in Philadelphia in '85 — killing 6 adults, 5 kids and destroying an entire block of houses.

requests solicited 'creative proposals to develop co-operative or condominium loft-type units for artists through rehabilitation of properties owned by the city.' The cost of AHOP, around 7 million dollars, was to be partly financed by the Participation Loan Scheme Programme, which consists of 25 million dollars of federal funds designated for low/moderate income people to help them secure mortgages at the low market rates. The city's eagerness to allocate 3 million dollars of public money for the housing needs of white middle-class artists was seen as a clear indication of the city's attitude to the housing needs of the poor. Despite the fact that the art community lobbied hard to have AHOP implemented, it was defeated in February 1983. Considerable pressure brought to bear by various community groups forced many supporters in the art world and members of the Board of Estimate to change their mind."¹¹

Although in this case such a blatantly manipulated strategy failed, gentrification continues by other means. It is no coincidence that the Lower East Side is just down the road from one of the world's biggest finance centres. It is obviously preferable for capital to have a 'safe' gentrified area next to its financial heartland than a potentially explosive population for whom the banks are obvious targets for revenge.

"Gentrification is Class War: Fight Back!"

Tompkins Square Park in the Lower East Side (or East Village, as the settlers now call it) is surrounded by burnt out derelict houses, a few remaining tenants and yuppies in condominiums. It had been home to hundreds of homeless people (and was used for open-air gigs) up until a police decision to impose a 1am curfew, some time in July 88.

This was apparently because of neighbourhood association complaints about noise — which means it was most likely an attempt to

¹¹ "The Fine Art of Gentrification", op.cit.

advertisement for the Pierpoint Morgan Library's Holbein exhibition. The poster features a large reproduction of a Holbein portrait of a figure facing in the direction of the bum in the doorway. High art mingles with the 'subculture' of graffiti and the 'lowlife' represented by the bum in a photograph which is given a title, like an art work: First Street and Second Avenue (Holbein and the Bum). While its street subject has long been popular among art photographers, this photograph is inserted into the pages of a museum catalogue for the purpose of advertising the pleasures and unique ambience of this particular art scene. Only an art world steeped in the protective and transformative values of aestheticism and the blindness to suffering that such an ideology sanctions could tolerate, let alone applaud such an event. For this picture functions as a tourist shot, introducing the viewer to the local colour of an exotic and dangerous locale. Holbein and the Bum is intended not to call attention to the plight of the homeless but to fit comfortably into the pages of an art catalogue unveiling to art lovers the special pleasures of the East Village as a spectacle for the slumming delectation of those collectors who cruise the area in limousines."¹⁰

Incidentally, a lot of the original pioneer artists who didn't make it have been priced out by the success of a project that they helped initiate and may move on to begin the process elsewhere to the cost of their unfortunate new neighbours.

The state subsidised housing for artists in the Lower East Side as it became aware of the attraction of an art environment in creating the conditions for international investment. One example of this is AHOP; "The alignment of art world interests with those of the city government and the real estate industry became explicit to many residents on the Lower East Side during the ultimately successful battle which community groups waged to defeat Mayor Koch's Artist Home Ownership Program (AHOP). In August 1981, the city issued a Request for Proposals for the development of AHOP. The

¹⁰ "The Fine Art of Gentrification", op.cit.

while the homeless are driven out of public places and parks, and Amerika's new concentration camps are readied? How soon will these camps contain Aids-victims, pot smokers, draft resisters and 'communists'?"

An academic survey carried out in the early 1980s concluded that "There is very substantial abandonment in New York City, displacing (directly, indirectly or through chain effects) between 77,500 and 150,000 persons a year." The figures for displacement through gentrification are given as "between 25,000 and 100,000 persons a year in the current period."⁶

"Holbein and the Bum"

The gentrification of Lower Manhattan in New York is an example of the effects of the de-industrialisation of the inner-cities which is taking place world wide, with the decline of blue-collar work and the rise of white-collar work (of course doing white-collar work doesn't necessarily mean you are not a proletarian): "This shift from blue-collar to white-collar industries makes the economy of the city, according to the New York Times, even more incompatible with its labour force. In 1929 59% of the labour force was blue-collar; in 1957 the percentage slipped to 47%. By 1980 less than one third of the total workforce in the United States consisted of blue-collar workers."⁷ The class occupation and use of previously industrial space has been progressively transformed. One of the spearheads of this process has been the art movement — both individual artists and gallery owners. Artists initially moved into the area attracted by cheap rents for large spaces ideal for art production; i.e. warehouses, lofts and light manufacturing space.

⁶ "Abandonment, gentrification and displacement: the linkages in New York City" by Peter Marcuse — in *Gentrification of the City*, edited by N. Smith and P. Williams.

⁷ "The Fine Art of Gentrification" by R. Deutsche and C. G. Ryan in "The Portable Lower East Side".

The process began with Fluxus and more recently has been extended into the Lower East Side by a ragbag of other radical art tendencies. The Fluxus art movement developed from the late 1950s onwards, gradually centering itself in SoHo (south of Houston Street) Village, an area immediately west of the Lower East Side, during the next 10 years. A central feature of their activity, initially financed by a rich NY business family who were also art patrons, was using loft space to realise their self-indulgent fantasies about art environments. The following excerpts illustrate how 'radical art' expects itself to be regarded purely on the level of its ideology and abstract intentions which mask its real social and material function: "A new life. Ruhm's Wien built of the letters in the German name for Vienna — Hollein's aircraft carrier as a city for 30,000 inhabitants — Oldenburg's alteration of the Thames — My super highway as a cathedral environment — are all utopias containing more breadth and visualisation of present day thought than the repressive architecture of bureaucracy and luxury that imposes restrictions on people. Everything is forbidden. Don't Touch! No Spitting! No Smoking! No Thinking! No Living! Our projects — our environments are meant to free men — only the realisation of utopias will make man happy and release him from his frustrations! Use your imagination! Join in...Share the power! Share property!' 'PURGE the world of bourgeois sickness, 'intellectual', professional

⁸ In the book which these quotations are taken from, "The Assault on Culture" by S. Home, the author contradicts his own title by perpetuating the illusion that the intentions that the artist declares through his/her self-expression are more relevant than the objective social effects of their activity.

⁹ For reasons of space this article does not deal with other early related attempts to encourage an arts presence, such as the state's subsidised artists' housing schemes of the 1970's and changes in local state zoning regulations so as to promote residential/artistic rather than industrial use of property. There were also the efforts of the West Village middle-class homeowners and the SoHo Artists' Tenants Association who used their political/cultural connections to further their own interests. (For details see "Loft Living" by Sharon Zukin, particularly chapter 5.)

and commercialised culture... (...) PROMOTE A REVOLUTIONARY FLOOD AND TIDE IN ART, (...) FUSE the cadres of cultural, social and political revolutionaries into the united front and action."⁸

Despite these fantasies of a liberating reconstruction of space in the service of the masses, we should point out that Maciunas, one of the leading Fluxists, was a real estate speculator, whose initial activities in this field were financed by rich art patrons.⁹

More recently, in the Lower East Side itself, specifically residential space was made available by working class people moving out of the area because of landlords' neglect of property, evictions carried out often by means of intimidation (i.e. firebombing people out of their homes) and the police turning a blind eye to such activities as well as drug Mafia operations and high levels of street crime. The artists were pioneers of gentrification in this new frontier for the middle class, by creating an art scene and community, combining the use of their space for living, producing, performing and exhibiting. These artistic events and the cultural ambience attracted middle class art consumers which in turn created a market for other cultural needs — yuppie bars, restaurants etc. It was inevitable that the galleries would take their place in this new scene, packaging in their catalogues the bohemian thrills of the area: "The Lower East Side enters the space of the ICA catalogue in three forms: mythologised in the texts as an exciting bohemian environment, objectified in a map delimiting its boundaries, and aestheticised in a full-page photograph of a Lower East Side 'street scene'. All three are familiar strategies for the domination and possession of others. The photograph, alone, is a blatant example of the aestheticisation of poverty and suffering that has become a staple of visual imagery. At the lower edge of the photograph a bum sits in a doorway surrounded by his shopping bags, a liquor bottle and remnants of a meal. He is apparently oblivious of the photographer, unaware of the composition in which he is forced to play a major role. Abundant graffiti covers the wall behind him, while at the left the wall is pasted over with layers of posters, the topmost of which is an