Exploration of Changing Urban Space:
Gentrification and Contemporary Art Practices

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The role that artists play in gentrification is difficult to define, as artists sit squarely at the transition point of neighbourhood change, playing the part of both the vanguard of change and the eventual victims of it. The simple explanation for why artists take on this particular role is that they naturally gravitate toward areas where space is plentiful and rent is cheap, given the nature of the work they do and the relatively small rewards it garners. Although artists incrementally change the character of neighbourhoods merely by living and working in them, it's the art institutions that accompany them, and the wealthy, educated clientele these institutions attract that often increase the cache of the areas they inhabit. Despite this, artists who live and work in poor/working class neighbourhoods are often the first voices of dissent when property developers begin rehabbing derelict buildings and inflating rents, or when the first retail chains open in the area. Despite their role in gentrification, all but the most wealthy artists are eventually displaced as neighbourhoods grow too expensive for them to live and work in. Ruth Glass coined the term 'gentrification' in her 1964 study *London: Aspects of Change* to describe the ways in which working class residents of London neighbourhoods, such as Hampstead and Chelsea, were displaced by the middle classes.[1] Chris Hamnett explains that Glass's term was:

> …deliberately ironic and rooted in the intricacies of traditional English rural class structures… she identified gentrification as a complex process involving physical improvement of the housing stock, housing tenure changes from renting to owning, price rises and the displacement or replacement of the working-class population by the new middle class.[2]

Although Glass's term describes the refurbishment and renewal of *existing* neighbourhood housing and infrastructure, it will be used here in reference to both this and new development/ demolition projects which result in completely new buildings and the restructuring of city plans.

While each city's relationship between artists and gentrification is slightly different, the artists who herald the beginnings of gentrification in poor and working class urban areas are invariably different from their neighbours: they often did not grow up in these neighbourhoods (perhaps grew up in more suburban surroundings); they are educated to a higher level than the locals; and they regularly come from middle and upper middle class backgrounds but have *chosen* a lifestyle

[1] Ruth Glass, et al, *London: Aspects of Change* (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1964) xviii.
[2] Chris Hamnett, *Unequal City: London in the Global Arena (*London: Routledge, 2003) 160.

in tune with bohemian and often leftist values.[3] These artists are attracted to neighbourhoods because they are seeking an *authentic* urban setting that only exists in these places through divestment and poverty.[4] Their new neighbourhood represents a rare enclave that is seemingly unblemished by the consumer homogeneity found in wealthier areas of the city. In his study of the gentrification of the Wicker Park neighbourhood in Chicago, Richard Lloyd notes, "Sharing the streets with working-class and nonwhite residents, even if the personal interaction remains superficial, is part of their image of an authentic urban experience."[5] The bodegas, jerk chicken shacks, family-owned corner shops, abandoned factories, derelict train platforms, street gangs, prostitutes, drug dealers, etc are signifiers of urban chaos and its attendant difference, unpredictability and closer proximity to a perceived 'real' or 'authentic' urban life.

Art revolving around issues of urban change often relies on aestheticising the decay and dereliction which accompanies urban poverty, essentially romanticising divestment while ignoring both the factors which contribute to urban poverty and the role of art institutions in bringing cultural cache and inevitably renewed investment into these neighbourhoods. With consumer homogeneity comes a greater level of order and an eradication of the unpredictability of city space. Only as navigating the city has grown increasingly more conditioned and functional in the modern age, have artists and writers – from Charles Baudelaire to Walter Benjamin to the Situationist International to the likes of Iain Sinclair today – felt the desire to walk the streets and observe the city in order to tap into the chaos and unpredictability bubbling under the surface. In the wake of large-scale new building developments and the forces of 'creative destruction', the layers of the city are effectively erased.[6] With the blanket of corporate retail chains that regularly accompany these new builds, each street begins to look more like any other street in the city. Even as they explore and document these processes, artists can not ignore the role that they and their institutional apparatus play in sanitising a neighbourhood to an extent that the middle classes feel comfortable (and even 'trendy' or 'cool') moving there and retail chains see the profit to be made in catering to these new consumers. Even though this process may happen

[3] Richard Lloyd, *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City*. (New York: Routledge, 2006) 99-122.
[4] Lloyd, 73-98.
[5] Lloyd, 77.
[6] Joseph A. Schumpeter coined the phrase 'creative destruction' to describe the ways in which capitalist enterprise is facilitated by the destruction of the old or existing order. It has come to be used widely outside of economics, in this case to describe the ways in which modern capitalism necessitates destruction of old architecture/the old structure of a city in the interest of gaining more value from existing land. Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1976).

organically, outside of artists' control, art dealing with gentrification often naturally leads to institutional critique.[7] As well as acknowledging artists' role, many successful artworks dealing with gentrification avoid nostalgia for derelict buildings and post-industrial wasteland. Instead, they approach regeneration from a more contemplative, documentary-style distance, incorporating the complex political factors underlying its processes rather than taking a simplistic adversarial point of view. Framed by the historical activities of Gordon Matta-Clark in the 1970s, this paper will discuss three contemporary artists approaching urban change through their work today: Laura Oldfield Ford, Elmgreen and Dragset, and Emily Richardson.

Gordon Matta-Clark

Gordon Matta-Clark and his generation of artists in New York City were some of the first to 'colonise' lower Manhattan as industrial usage gradually disappeared from the area, leaving vacant docks and unused warehouses in its wake.[8] Despite primarily using derelict architecture for his 'building cuts', such as *Day's End* (1975) [Illus. 1, 2] and *Conical Intersect* (1975) [Illus. 3,4,5], Matta-Clark was in no way romanticising the decaying buildings he utilised. Instead, he used them as a medium with which to stage his criticality toward Modernist architecture.[9] Having grown up mostly in bohemian Greenwich Village in the 1950s, within close range of industrial areas, his choice of using derelict buildings was not an expression of nostalgia or aestheticisation of urban grittiness but, rather, a considered rebellion against the Modernist ideal of architectural utility, a point of view cultivated while studying architecture at Cornell University.[10] Matta-Clark's works consisted of cutting through and exposing the insides of buildings, allowing light and air to filter into them in reference to the Modernist architect's obsession with large windows and open interior spaces. Yet these buildings were not grand public projects but rather, lonely, disused edifices in various states of reclusive abandonment.

[7] Andrea Fraser is generally credited with first publishing the term 'insitutional critique' in her 1985 Louise Lawler printed in *Art in America* "In and Out of Place" to describe artwork which questions the authority and behaviour of art institutions such as museums and galleries. Andrea Fraser, "In and Out of Place," Art in America. 73:6 (1985): 122-129.
[8] The use of the term 'colonise' here relates to Neil Smith's argument in *The New Urban Frontier: gentrification and the revanchist city*, where the language surrounding gentrification often implies a 'savage' native population who perhaps are seen as part of a 'wilderness' justifiably tamed through urban redevelopment. Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London: Routledge, 1996) xiii-xx.
[9] Thomas Crow, "Gordon Matta-Clark," *Gordon Matta-Clark,* Ed. Corinne Diserens (London: Phaidon, 2003) 92.
[10] Crow, 22.

A few years before his untimely death at the age of 35, Gordon Matta-Clark was widening his thinking with regards to his practice of 'cutting up' architecture. Even though his work has broad social implications and is a very direct confrontation with the functionalist mindset of Modernist architectural theory and practice, he saw each gesture as a kind of 'hermetic' exercise, done in artistic solitude.[11] While he still maintained an interest in the 'Hermetic' as it "relates to an inner-personal gesture, by which the microcosmic self is related to the whole", he united it with "a term used in reference to Walter Benjamin, 'Marxist Hermeneutics'…the inwardly removed sphere of Hermetics and interpretation with the material dialectics of a real environment."[12] Through this line of reasoning, Matta-Clark was framing his work within the wider social consequences of property development in a rapidly post-industrial urban landscape in New York City, Paris and elsewhere. Matta-Clark's piece *Day's End* [Illus. 1,2], like many of his other works, was sited in a significant location, a disused dock building in lower Manhattan. For this piece, Matta-Clark cut a large crescent shaped hole in the end of the warehouse and various cuts through the pier beneath it, forcing viewers to walk precariously over the exposed water and allowing the sunlight to stream in through the far wall. Although Matta-Clark mainly talked about *Day's End* in terms of its hermetic qualities, stating:

> Even before the *Splitting, Bin.go.ne [Bingo],* and *Pier 52 [Day's End]* projects, which were direct exercises in centering and recentering, I would usually go to what I saw as the heart of the spatial-structural constant that could be called the Hermetic aspect of my work.[13]

Other statements around the piece hint at an interest in the greater iconic status of the building as a relic of post-industrial New York and the changes cities were undergoing in the wake of industrial departure. In the controversy which swirled around the project over his illegal use of the structure, Matta-Clark defended it by saying, "I've taken a decaying sad reminder of a previous industrial era and renovated it."[14] In this way, a critique on Modernist architecture transmutes into a comment on the broader (re)structuring of space under the influence global capitalism.

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[11] Donald Wall, Gordon Matta-Clark's Building Dissections," *Arts Magazine* May 1976: 74-79. Rpt in *Gordon Matta-Clark.* Ed. Corinne Diserens (London: Phaidon, 2003) 182.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Crow, 12.

In a 1976 interview, Matta-Clark relates a turning point in his thinking when, while looking for a factory in which to do one of his building cuts in Milan, he happened upon a group of radical Communist youths occupying an abandoned factory complex:

> Their program was to resist the intervention of 'laissez-faire' real estate developers from exploiting the property. Their proposal was that the area be used for a much needed community services center. My exposure to this confrontation was my first awakening to doing my work, not in artistic isolation, but through an active exchange with peoples' concerns for their own neighborhood. My goal is to extend the Milan experience to the U.S., especially to neglected areas of New York such as the South Bronx where the city is just waiting for the social and physical condition to deteriorate to such a point that the borough can redevelop the whole area into the industrial park they really want.[15]

At the time of interview, Matta-Clark's did not perhaps realise that most heavy industry had departed permanently to the developing/third world and that the redevelopment of the South Bronx would, instead, mean gentrification – that is, displacement of poor and working class residents in favour of middle class ones, not industrial parks. Unsurprisingly, the gentrification which has subsequently occurred in the South Bronx has been due, in large part, to the flourishing of artistic activities in the area.

For one of his most well-known works, *Conical Intersect* [Illus. 3]*,* Matta-Clark chose to cut through two adjacent 17th-century town houses which were slated for demolition as part of the massive redevelopment of the Les Halles-Beaubourg area in the centre of Paris during the 1970s. Les Halles, a food market since the middle ages, had it's first major revamping during the vast remaking of Paris by Georges Haussmann in the mid-19th century, who commissioned Victor Baltard to build a vast iron structure, completed in 1888, in which to situate the market.[16] In 1963, when plans for removal of the market in favour of a subterranean rail interchange and shopping mall were first proposed by the Paris city council, they were quickly met with public protestation. Those opposed to the development saw it as an erasure of the social history of the market and surrounding area.[17] The logic of developers, which has been replicated in cities countless times

[15] Wall, 186.
[16] Norma Evenson, "The Assassination of Les Halles," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians.* 32:4 (1973) 308-309.
[17] Evenson, 309.

and in countless ways, was simply that this traditionally working class stronghold in Les Halles was a blighted slum with housing deemed unworthy of preservation and a population so marginalised by virtue of their poverty and transience, they were beyond consideration.[18] As Norma Everson writes:

> Forty per cent of the dwellings consisted of one room, and overall occupancy averaged 2.3 persons per room…. It seems apparent that a restoration and rehabilitation of the Halles district will result in higher physical standards of housing and the inevitable exclusion of the poor… One can speculate, however, that even with no government-sponsored restoration, the Halles district would have been subject to similar social change. Everywhere in central Paris, the increase in land value has produced a competition for space which tends to force the poor outside the city.[19]

Ultimately, it's a familiar story of re-'conquest' of central city space by the upper and middle classes as industry moved to the periphery and eventually overseas.[20]

When redevelopment of the Les Halles site began in 1971, the vast construction crater situated in the heart of Paris stood as a dramatic reminder, for nearly a decade, of the attempt to wipe the city space clean and start anew. Making creative use of this gaping wound in the centre of Paris, director Marco Ferreri used the deep canyons created by the demolition as a setting for a farcical western entitled *Touche Pas à La Femme Blanche* (*Don't Touch the White Woman*) (1974) [Illus. 6]. The film used the displacement of the American Indians in the US as a metaphor for both the displacement of the poor and working class through processes of gentrification in the city and the suspicion and fear surrounding immigrants in postcolonial Europe. The film fits very well into Neil Smith's argument in *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrificaiton and the Revanchist City* that the language and mythology developed around gentrification justifies its brutality in the same way that Frederick Jackson Turner's famous thesis, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," justified the 'taming' of the American West.[21] Smith argues:

> Just as Turner recognized the existence of Native Americans but included them as part of his savage wilderness, contemporary urban frontier imagery treats the present inner-city

[18] Evenson, 311-312.
[19] Evenson, 312.
[20] Smith, xiii-xx.
[21] Smith, xiii.

> population as a natural element of their physical surroundings. The term 'urban pioneer' is therefore as arrogant as the original notion of 'pioneers' in that it suggests a city not yet socially inhabited; like native Americans, the urban working class is seen as less than social, a part of the physical environment.[22]

It was against the backdrop of this paradigmatic and highly contentious gentrification project in Les Halles-Beaubourg that Matta-Clark created *Conical Intersect* [Illus. 4], a tunnel-shaped cut through the floors of the townhouses and out through a hole in the side of the top floor of the building that was highly visible from the street level, as the surrounding buildings had already been demolished.

When describing his choice in situating *Conical Intersect* in the adjacent townhouses, Matta-Clark professes an interest in the "historical and cultural identities" of the structures which represent the life and work of people who have, in various capacities, occupied them:

> …the kind of identity for which I am looking has to have a recognizable social form. One of my concerns here is with the Non.u.mental, that is, an expression of the commonplace that might counter the grandeur and pomp of architectural structures and their self-glorifying clients. In Paris, I was incredibly lucky in finding just such a situation. The work was done on two 17th century town houses… literally the last of a vast neighborhood of buildings destroyed to 'improve' the Les Halles-Plateau Beaubourg areas. And they were surviving in the web of an immense modern structure which – in the traditionally monumental French approach – is to house all the Fine Art Agencies of Parisian Culture. The determining factor is the degree to which my intervention can transform the structure into an act of communication.[23]

The 'modern structure' described by Matta-Clark here is the Pompidou Centre which was under construction at the time the piece was executed. Addressing the alliance of the Modernist project in both art and architecture, Matta-Clark's work is a dissection of the architectural refuse of the area around Les Halles, ultimately highlighting its inevitable destruction by the hand of modern progress. At the same time, the piece lives in a ghost-like temporality between highlighting a way of life and cohesion of community which no longer exists in modern cities and evoking the loss

[22] Smith, xiv.
[23] Wall, 183.

and destruction of an essential part of the city. This destruction erases the pre-modern city and constantly replaces the new with the newer, creating a historical and social amnesia perfectly suited to the consumer capitalist imperative. Pamela Lee writes:

> Matta-Clark chose to work there, then, precisely because it was a charged site, perhaps the most appropriate backdrop for his building cuts. More than any of his other works, the Parisian site neatly illustrated the tension between narratives of historical progress – as embodied in the construction of the Pompidou Center – and the destruction of sites that is a prerequisite to this.[24]

Conical Intersect is able to point to what is lost in gentrification while acknowledging the historical precedents and challenging the very core of the redevelopment ideology: Modernist notions of progress. In this way, Matta-Clark hints at a growing universal condition in rapidly changing post-industrial cities without dissolving into nostalgia or reactionary tendencies.

Laura Oldfield Ford

Laura Oldfield Ford's drawings and zine, *Savage Messiah*, are closely tied to issues of urban change and gentrification in London. In her recent exhibition at Hales Gallery, *London 2013, Drifting Through the Ruins*, Ford teeters between nostalgia for the rapidly changing East London and a more considered reflection on the process of gentrification. In her drawings, Ford depicts the East End after the 2012 Olympics with vacant lots, Brutalist council estates, and the reoccurring caravan parked among the rubble. Juxtaposed with these images of wasteland are more sterile domestic scenes of stereotypical middle class 'yuppies' relaxing in comfortable surroundings. Meanwhile, *Savage Messiah*, is a "psychogeographic" zine flavoured by 70s and 80s punk era cut-and-paste aesthetics.[25]

Immediately, the irony of showing this work in a commercial gallery space, devoid of any acknowledgement or reference to the role of the artist in the gentrification of the East End, becomes apparent. As Chris Jones writes in his review in *Mute*, "Hales Gallery is happy to trumpet its recent move into 'the Hoxditch culture project' of the Tea Building… It's great what she

[24] Lee, 70.
[25] Mark Fisher, "Laura Oldfield Ford," *Frieze*. 17 Feb 2009. 1 Sept 2009. <http://www.frieze.com/shows/review/laura_oldfield_ford/>.

does, but it lacks a critique of art and the role of the artist."[26] Leaving out the role of the artist presents a particular problem because of the polemical nature of the work and its overt political stance. In light of the un-nuanced, emotionally charged commentary against yuppies and estate agent's encroachment in areas such as Hackney, the lack of creative professionals and artists in the mix seems a glaring omission and relegates much of the work to a bland 'us versus them' over-simplification of urban change.

Splattered with slogan such as "Yuppies!! Hands off our houses!" and "2012 Olympic demolition fun!", *Savage Messiah* [Illus. 7] incorporates retro punk and anarchist-style calls to revolution which might be easily mistaken as parody if it wasn't so earnestly saturated with genuine contemporary leftist concerns. While echoing the aesthetic of punk may be seen as an ironic gesture and the myopic slogans as tongue-in-cheek, the political point of view cannot be read as anything other than genuine disparagement of gentrification processes occurring in London. As such, it evokes nostalgia for the revolutionary project of Modernism, opting to simplistically propagandise rather than delve any deeper under the surface of the issues of gentrification it's addressing.

Despite the jarring nostalgia of *Savage Messiah* and the absence of artists and art institutions in Ford's depictions of urban change, the success of her work is in the drawings' more subtle documentary mode and in the implication of the artist as ethnographer. Ford says, "The need to document the transient and ephemeral nature of the city is becoming increasingly urgent as the process of enclosure and privatisation continues apace."[27] The symbol of the caravan, which appears in several of her drawings [Illus. 8], settled in among the rubble and refuse, appears as quite a poignant symbol. She depicts the stereotypical working class/budget traveller's holiday vehicle sitting amongst urban dereliction like a crash-landed UFO in a strange and forbidding landscape. Simultaneously, the caravan's presence references its alternative role as the permanent living accommodation for those who find themselves in the most marginalised segments of the population. Chris Jones writes, "I like the sad image of a caravan that crops up amidst the ruins, ready and waiting for a cheap holiday in your own misery, the perfect proletarian

[26] Chris Jones, "Dériving Under the Influence," *Mute*. 2:12 (2009): 23.
[27] Fisher.

getaway vehicle."[28] Here, and in the images of desolate spaces alongside clichéd images of consumer bliss, the artist meditates on the broader position of these decaying spaces as the only existing alternative to consumer capitalist homogeneity.

Additionally, the evocation of the 2012 Olympics, a government mandated, large-scale project of 'creative destruction', is noteworthy, as it represents an even more ominous threat for anti-gentrification advocates than the markedly more gradual transition of the East End into a middle class neighbourhood. Using this grand international event to justify rapid change, layers of the city are permanently erased in the blink of an eye. Mark Fisher writes in *Frieze*:

> Ford sets one version of urban poetics – in which brutalism co-exists with dereliction – against the hygienic, hyper-bright spaces projected by late-capitalist development, where the future contracts into the short term, and all history is PhotoShopped into a manicured 'heritage'.[29]

Ford illustrates how this invented official version of heritage and history will be all that's left in the wake of widespread erasure of the social history of the East End. She suggests that the only authentic experience left to us, free from consumer impulse, is in the wasteland of yards, rubble and rubbish heaps.

Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset

The Scandinavian artist duo Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset, on the other hand, utilise a very different aesthetic approach in their work. Clean, minimal, and full of visual one-liners, much of the work deals with the structures and organisation of power. Elmgreen and Dragset return again and again to critiques of the art world and the fashion world, positioning these two milieus as paradigms of the frivolity and cultural elitism of the rich and powerful. In their piece, *Short Cut* (2003), a white car attached to a caravan is seen emerging from the ground, improbably breaking through pavement and/or tiles amidst a pile of rubble and debris. The car and caravan sit jack-knifed awkwardly where they have landed, in a completely foreign environment. Two separate installations of this piece illustrate their criticality toward both the fashion world and art world: one in front of the Prada store in the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele in Milan, also home to many other

[28] Jones, 17.
[29] Fisher.

luxury fashion boutiques such as Gucci and Louis Vuitton [Illus. 9]; one in front of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago for the exhibition *Universal Experience: Art, Life, and the Tourist's Eye* [Illus. 10].[30] Like in Ford's work, the caravan is a vehicle closely associated with working class holidays and, often, as a permanent residence of some of the poorest segments of society in the western world. *Short Cut* represents a jarring reminder, in a setting of opulence and elitism, of the life and tastes of those who escape from the doldrums of working class life via car and caravan or perhaps those whose lack of brick-and-mortar housing relegates them to caravan camp sites. The piece ties in with urban transformations in its displacement of these vehicles into a sphere stripped of any reference to the people displaced by gentrification.

In another piece, *Opening Soon/Powerless Structures* (2001) [Illus. 11], the windows of the Tanya Bonakdar Gallery in the Chelsea art district of New York City were sealed off by a large white sheet of paper declaring "Opening soon PRADA". By exaggerating the evolution of city space from art gallery to luxury designer boutique (poignantly situated in the post-gentrification neighbourhood of Chelsea in New York City), Elmgreen and Dragset humorously acknowledge the role of galleries in instigating urban change and the ultimate displacement of many of the artists and art institutions which have, though not in overt complicity, set in motion the wheels of consumer capitalist colonisation and investment. They recognise the contradiction in commenting on the architecture of capitalist power from within the institutional framework of museums, galleries and biennials. Elmgreen and Dragset effectively deploy humour and one-liners in their work, never taking themselves too seriously. This is a fitting tactic, as there is seemingly no way to rectify the inherent hypocrisy of artists taking a critical stance against gentrification and consumer homogeneity yet, one way or another, having a hand in the processes of urban renewal that they critique.

[30] Fondazione Nicola Trussardi Website. 1 Sept 2009. <http://www.fondazionenicolatrussardi.com/movie_en_page.html>. and "Universal Experience: Art, Life and the Tourist's Eye." 5 June 2005. Past Exhibitions, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. 1 Sept 2009. <http://www.mcachicago.org/exhibitions/exh_detail.php?id=18&syear=2005>.

Emily Richardson

In Emily Richardson's three screen video installation, *Transit* (2006) [Illus. 12], Iain Sinclair's voiceover accompanies 3 screens panning across the underground bowels of Smithfield Market, the market stalls along Ridley Road in Dalston, and other notable sites of gentrification. This piece approaches the issues around urban change in a different way to the punk-influenced opposition of Ford or the snappy, humorous approach of Elmgreen and Dragset. Richardson takes a more contemplative, documentary approach, in collaboration with the writing of Sinclair, exploring the process of urban change as a constantly evolving historical evolution and layering. In his introduction to her work in *Triple Canopy*, Russell Martin describes the idea of East London as a neighbourhood of outsiders:

> When will I, or any of these others, be a Londoner? The thought occurs with greater piquancy in the context of the inevitable changes wrought by our successful Olympic bid and the resulting local objections… The cheap rents for accommodation and studios that encouraged artists in the past twenty years to move to Hackney are now as much a fashion as a convenience, just as a new wave of recognition of Hackney's shared border with the City of London encourages wealthy bankers and traders to live cheek by jowl with families resident here for decades and to walk to work…[31]

Martin's introduction highlights three key agents of change in and around Hackney in recent years: artists, City workers and the 2012 Olympics. Richardson's film, though originating from an artist and operating in the East End art milieu, acknowledges – through exploring past or fading hubs of community activity – the complex factors which contribute to gentrification while exposing current urban change as merely a further layer upon the cityscape rather than a complete erasure. Sinclair's voiceover states, "London is like a series of tectonic plates; nothing actually disappears, it just breaks up slightly and drifts off."[32] *Transit* doesn't set up opposing camps of 'us' and 'them' or the natives versus the cowboy, thus avoiding the common cliché of setting up adversarial relationships within the discourse of gentrification.[33]

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[31] Sinclair, Iain and Emily Richardson. "Transit," *Triple Canopy.* Issue 1: The Medium was Tedium. 1 Sept 2009. <http://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/1/transit>.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Smith, xiii-xx.

When the text enters into opposition to the changes which will be brought about by the Olympics, Richardson/Sinclair position the development plans as an unrealistic ideal/fantasy which aims to create a tabula rasa, erasing the elements of the area deemed less savoury to the middle class population that developers hope to attract post-Olympics. Sinclair's text explores this idea:

> In terms of developments at the moment, there's a virtual picture of London, there's a computer-generated version… something beautiful but equally impossible. And that is set against what can't be seen, which is the real mystery and worth of London: It's something that has to be discovered, particularly by walking or navigating in circular patterns, back on yourself, going back on your own traces, digging and repeatedly digging… There's been a whole slew of stuff going on for centuries that essentially will be swept aside. It [the Olympics] creates a fantasy that nobody wants.[34]

As with Ford's work, Richardson's vision of East London and Sinclair's text anticipate the negative fallout of the 2012 Olympic development. In Richardson's work, however, the negative outcomes are not as black and white as incoming yuppies as villains, the displaced poor as victims. Richardson/Sinclair recognise the continuation of the Modernist idea of 'creative destruction' in large-scale government and corporate sponsored development and see the layers which allow clues to the history and character of a place being erased. Sinclair states, "We are now threatened with a complete development makeover. The dark side is going underground and may have to find other manifestations."[35]

Richardson's video and Sinclair's writing are a continuation of the artistic tradition which descended from the idea of the flâneur and followed through to the Situationist International and their psychogeographic dérive. The piece represents a melancholic lament that, as consumer homogeneity spreads east through London, the urban wanderer must dig deeper to determine their own pathways free from consumer conditioning and to discover the hidden mysteries of the city. The decayed and derelict portions of the city, in Sinclair's text, are described as the 'blanks', which is undoubtedly the way developers see them, but it would be perhaps more appropriate to call them the divested architectural relics. These relics are not merely aestheticised pieces of an

[34] Sinclair.
[35] Ibid.

'authentic' urban experience, they are the triggers to imagination and the reminders of the evolution of the city space. Sinclair states:

> There are soon going to be no blanks at all, which means there's no room for your imagination to move, which is why we are enduring such a loss in East London, by losing this mysterious and grungy corridor which combined landscape with ghosts of industry with water you can navigate.[36]

The razing of the land and architecture of London's industrial past is, in essence, the erasure of layers of struggle experienced by the countless 'outsiders' who have passed through the East End.

Visible Archaeology

Changes in the character and populations of neighbourhoods have always been a facet of urban life, shifting ethnic and class ties as populations change and transition. Increasingly in post-industrial cities like London, Paris and New York City, however, the ongoing processes of gentrification have resulted in the poor and working classes being pushed further out to the peripheries of the city. There are few places in the centre of London, for example, that remain affordable for even lower middle class residents. Thus, as well as industry residing out-of-sight-out-of-mind in the developing/third world, mainly the global South, the appearance of poverty is increasingly disappearing from the consumption-driven centre of urban life. The art world and its inhabitants, in many ways, simultaneously occupy the top and bottom ends of the consumer spectrum: very few artists ascend the heights of commercial success yet art is a luxury good only usually available to the very wealthiest. While artists undoubtedly influence the beginning stages of the transition of city neighbourhoods to a more homogeneous corporate retail/living space, they also number amongst the displaced as areas close to city centres grow more expensive to live in. Here, in observation of these changes, and even in opposition to them, artists find ample territory to investigate the availability of freedom in late capitalist society and the value of visible archaeology in a cityscape where it is increasingly buried and erased.

[36] Sinclair.

Illustrations

Illus. 1

Gordon Matta-Clark, *Day's End*, 1975

Source: **http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/FEATURES/smyth/smyth6-4-7.asp**

Illus. 2

Gordon Matta-Clark, *Day's End*, 1975

Source: **http://www.davidzwirner.com/artists/4/work_1282.htm**

Illus. 3

Gordon Matta-Clark, *Conical Intersect*, 1975

Source: http://serurbano.wordpress.com/2009/04/13/

Illus. 4

Gordon Matta-Clark, *Conical Intersect*, 1975

Source: http://wanderlustmind.com/2009/02/

Illus. 5

Gordon Matta-Clark, *Conical Intersect*, 1975

Source: **http://www.e-flux.com/shows/view/5521**

Illus. 6

Marco Ferreri (dir), *Touche Pas à La Femme Blanche* (*Don't Touch the White Woman*), 1974

Source: http://unemployedcinema.blogspot.com/2009/02/free-film-screening-dont-touch-white_10.html

Illus. 7

Laura Oldfield Ford, *Savage Messiah,* “Yuppiedromes” (online)

Source: **http://www.savagemessiahzine.com/savageyups.html**

Illus. 8

Laura Oldfield Ford, drawing from *London 2013, Drifting through the Ruins,* 2009

Source: **http://www.metamute.org/content/deriving_under_the_influence**

Illus. 9

Elmgreen and Dragset, *Short Cut*, 2003 (installed at Galleria Vittorio Emanuele, Milan)

Source: **http://linka-me.blogspot.com/2009_07_01_archive.html**

Illus. 10

Elmgreen and Dragset, *Short Cut*, 2003 (installed at Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago)

Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/chailey/538548568/in/set-72157600312059578/

Illus. 11

Elmgreen and Dragset, *Opening Soon/Powerless Structures*, 2001

Source: http://greg.org/archive/2006/05/25/coming_sooner_or_later.html

Illus. 12

Emily Richardson, *Transit*, 2006.

Source: **http://www.emilyrichardson.org.uk/**

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