

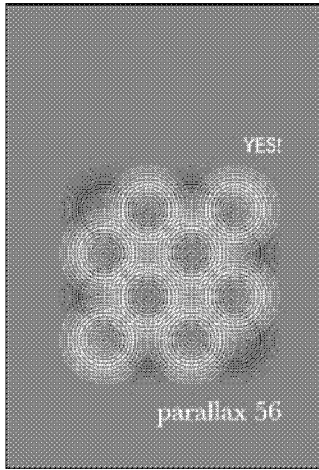
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Slouching Back to the East Village: Social and Spatial Meaning in the Urban Landscape

Gabrielle Esperdy

"East Village", which identifies that part of New York City's Lower East Side north of Houston Street and east of Broadway, was named by real estate interests in the 1960s to characterize the eastern migration of hippies from Greenwich Village to this predominantly working class ethnic neighborhood.¹ The East Village's synonymy with urban hip was established in the 1980s, when the neighborhood became a locus for avant garde art, exemplified by the work of painters like Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat. By the 1990s, East Village hipness was immortalized, and nostalgically romanticized, when Jonathan Larsen's rock-opera *RENT*, Puccini's *La Bohème* reset in this Manhattan neighborhood, opened on Broadway. The transformative effect of this art and culture scene on the physical place of the East Village has been intensely scrutinized during the past decade as neighborhood residents, housing advocates, real estate developers, politicians, and urban critics participated in heated, sometimes violent debate, primarily about the multifarious impact of gentrification on housing and homelessness. In 1987, the *New York Times* characterized the opposing sides of this debate with some accuracy, labeling anti-gentrification forces as the "indigenous and struggling" and their pro-gentrification opponents as the "arty and affluent".²

Battle Lines

On the streets, the battle lines over gentrification were never so clearly drawn, but these characterizations became so pervasive that, by the end of the 1980s, they had even found their way into films, both independent and mainstream, including Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger than Paradise* (1984) and Merchant and Ivory's *Slaves of New York* (1989). While such films can be dismissed merely as proof that the East Village had been successfully commodified and marketed well beyond the boundaries of the neighborhood, they nonetheless illuminate the contrasting housing needs and desires of disparate neighborhood residents. For, as Diana Agrest demonstrates in "Notes on Film and Architecture", film representations of urban forms can effectively expose the complex cultural codes which dictate the behavior of city dwellers, both individually and collectively.³ The independent black and white films of Jim Jarmusch focus on down-and-out oddball characters, usually the grandchildren of Eastern European immigrants, who continue to live in the neighborhood where they were born and raised. With low-paying, dead-end jobs, they cannot afford to live anywhere else, nor does it occur to them to move. They are inclined to leave only under extraordinary circumstances, such as getting in trouble with the law. Not surprisingly,

Jarmusch's characters live in run-down tenement apartments with air shaft windows and the bath tub in the kitchen.⁴ By contrast, the characters in *Slaves of New York*, based on Tama Janowitz's best-selling novel, are hip poseurs with fabulous arty jobs, such as hat designer and neo-expressionist painter. As brought to the screen by Merchant and Ivory, best known for their carefully realized period films, these characters also live in tenement apartments, but ones miraculously transformed with funky-cast off furniture (usually of a 1950s vintage), vividly colored paint, and kitschy *objets d'art*. Their relationship to the neighborhood is dictated more by style than economy: though they initially moved to the East Village because it was cheap, they stayed because it was trendy. The other notable East Village film of this period, Susan Seidelman's *Desperately Seeking Susan* (1985), mediates between the extremes of indigenous and arty. Here, East Village style and economy, embodied by the eponymous Susan (Madonna) and her milieu of second-hand boutiques, after-hours clubs, and crash-pad apartments, are meant to represent the cultural other - a hip, slightly dangerous yet desirable urbanity, dramatically juxtaposed with the film's normative sphere, the staid middle-class suburban world of Fort Lee, New Jersey occupied by the bored housewife Roberta (Rosanna Arquette). This celluloid culture clash between cool East Villager and bridge-and-tunnel wannabe ends happily with the two women joining forces in friendship and mutual understanding, an outcome which hardly reflected the reality of the East Village in the mid-to-late-1980s, when decidedly unfriendly opposing forces battled over gritty issues like tenement rehabilitation, rent hikes, apartment warehousing, and tenant displacement.

The polarization of the neighborhood over housing and gentrification was reinforced by journalists, scholars, and assorted social critics, whose varied texts either vigorously defended or strenuously attacked all forms of East Village shelter, from luxury high-rises and renovated co-op tenements to illegal squats and makeshift shanty towns. Such critical oppositions were often ironically juxtaposed. Throughout the 1980s, it was not uncommon to find political graffiti (text of the disenfranchised) denouncing yuppified tenement condos spraypainted across a tenement storefront gallery selling apolitical graffiti art. Likewise, though with editorial self-consciousness, a single issue of *Art in America* featured both "Slouching Toward Avenue D" and "The Problem with Puerilism". The former, a supposedly impartial "report from the East Village", openly applauded members of the "adventurous avant-garde" who "reclaimed" the neighborhood by moving in and renovating its stock of "dilapidated housing". The latter, a deconstruction of art world complicity in gentrification, scathingly attacked the East Village "culture-industry", which forced longtime residents, mostly racial and ethnic minorities, out of their homes.⁵ In a *New York Times* piece about the "two visions" vying for control of East Village housing, the accompanying photographs are as informative as the article itself. The images are formally similar: in each one a man stands inside a newly renovated apartment in a formerly abandoned tenement. But while one photo shows a skinny Anglo dressed in black slouching against the wall of a minimalist loft in an attitude of studied cool, the other presents a burly Puerto Rican dressed in work clothes standing proudly and rigidly amidst construction debris. Their posture, costume, and manner of occupying space are so revelatory

that even without the captions it is not difficult to recognize who is the gentrifier and who is the homesteader, especially given the implications of class and race attendant in these identifications.⁶

As these two men faced off silently in the real estate pages of the *Times* in May 1987, the noise on the streets was getting louder. One year later, in the summer of 1988, the East Village turf war erupted into the first of a series of bloody riots which would continue well into the next decade.⁷ At the center of the battlefield, physically and figuratively, lay Tompkins Square Park and the Christodora House, 10½ acres of public land and 16 stories of private building, a park and a tower which served as sites and signifiers of the East Village conflict. Charged with dual service, the park and the tower participated in a social and spatial matrix which sustained an oppositional struggle for power, privilege, and place and, concomitantly, generated a volatile urbanistic form. This social-spatial matrix will prove complex and contradictory: both active and passive, constructing and constructed, it responded to, and was responsible for, a diversity of agencies and practices - historical, spectacular, and architectural - made of and by the park and the tower. This matrix is ceaselessly dynamic, producing through its material forms a variety of juxtaposed and layered urban experiences, - all reflective of those conflictive dramas enacted in Tompkins Square Park and the Christodora House.

Riotous Spectacle

In May of 1991, another season of strife and turmoil commenced in Tompkins Square Park. At first glance, the conflict brewing in the park and on the surrounding East Village streets seemed little different from those witnessed on other nights of other years.⁸ Demonstrators and agitators once again faced off against New York City police officers clad in riot gear. The confrontation had a fresh, though disturbing aspect which became apparent only after circumspect observation. No mere conflict, tonight's clash over Tompkins Square Park was an urban spectacle.

The walk-ups and tenements surrounding Tompkins Square presented a world-weary face to the streets; their worn bricks and sagging cornices betrayed a century of hard use. But if the buildings seemed tired, the fire escapes that played across their facades enlivened the streetscape with an irregular and unending rhythm. Often the fire escapes betrayed some small awareness of the occupants within, their lives spilling out from apartments into public view - a flag, a case of beer, a house plant, drying laundry. The occupants themselves, myself included, spilled out from their apartments, filling the fire escapes to capacity. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault wrote of the "insatiable curiosity" that drove spectators in the 18th century to public displays of physical violence.⁹ No less a curiosity drove us 20th century spectators to witness the latest Tompkins Square conflict. Equipped with binoculars, zoom lenses, and video cameras, we eager spectators jostled one another for the best view of the tumult below.¹⁰ The blocks surrounding the park were thus transformed into an outdoor

theater or arena with the street as stage and the fire escapes as box seats. On this particular night, the spectacle that unfolded below was not unlike Foucault's "momentary saturnalia, when nothing remain(s) to prohibit or punish."¹¹ Naked men and women ran through the streets; leather-clad punks heaved beer bottles at the police; self-proclaimed anarchists set fires in trash cans; onlookers taunted both sides with curses and jeers. As the riotous frenzy escalated, the perceptible tension of the spectators collectively increased in anticipation of violence: "In these rituals in which blood flowed, society found new vigour and formed for a moment a single great body."¹² But before the blood flowed, nature intervened with a sudden and furious rain storm. Agitators ran for cover; police let down their shields; spectators moved back inside. This diverse and divisive neighborhood, only formed "a single great body" in the midst of violence.¹³ Indeed, as Hal Foster has noted, any "community" the spectacle creates is false, because in the end it offers only alienation.¹⁴

Foster's remark, taken from his essay "Contemporary Art and the Spectacle", helps to define the events in and around Tompkins Square as an artistic production - a cultural performance that turned the public space of an urban neighborhood park into a setting for an intense dramatization of politics, economics, social policies, and human interaction. Other writers, such as Lewis Mumford and Kevin Lynch, have acknowledged urban public spaces as stages for social drama and spectacle.¹⁵ What made this urban space unique was the degree to which the *spectacle* of Tompkins Square seemed to overshadow the *reality* of Tompkins Square. According to Guy Debord, the spectacle can never really divorce itself from reality because it is both "a product of real activity" and a "social relationship between people", albeit one that is "mediated by images". Thus, the reality of Tompkins Square continually "erupts from within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real," in so far as it represents, in tangible, material form, the power struggle in the East Village.¹⁶ In Tompkins Square, the combinative real and spectacular produced the following situation in the early 1990s: 10 1/2 acres of public open space on the Lower East Side - having failed to serve all or even most of the people, their social relationships, and their activities - was serving only some of the people, some of their social relationships, and some of their activities - and inadequately at that. Following Debord, this description must be derived from the variety of images that the park-as-spectacle projected circa 1990. These images themselves resulted from a coherence of several key elements of urban environmental analysis: *design, use, and meaning*. Relating these elements to Tompkins Square, and subsequently to the Christodora House, allows a reading of a perhaps over-analyzed urban landscape that is at once formal, contextual, and perceptual as well as social and political. These last two are the factors that most inform recent writing on the East Village, especially Marxist criticism of this urban environment, which has tended to privilege constructions of power over constructions of space. My goal is to analyze both, to reveal their Foucauldian nexus - "the links between the exercise of political power and the space of a territory, or the space of cities"¹⁷ - and to examine how that nexus is inscribed in the design, use, and meaning of the urban landscapes of Tompkins Square and the Christodora House.

Re: Design - the PARK

When Tompkins Square opened to the public in 1834, an ornamental cast-iron fence enclosed the 10^{1/2} acres of former salt marsh sold to the city by members of the Stuyvesant family. As early maps make clear, the square was divided into three zones of equal size, which corresponded to the north-south blocks from East 7th Street to East 10th Street.¹⁸ Four main paths, all straight, radiated from a centrally placed *round-point* to corner entrances, and transverse paths through the square continued the street lines of St. Mark's Place and East 9th Street. The land between the paths were planted with shade trees, grassy lawns, and flower beds, and benches were scattered throughout the square. A visitor in 1837 remarked that Tompkins Square was "handsomely laid out and afford[ed] a fine view of the East River and the opposite shore of Long Island."¹⁹ For several decades, this restrained design served the park well as a place for recreation and public assembly and subsequent renovations in the 1850s and early 1860s kept it largely in place. However, in the summer of 1866, this landscape was effaced when New York State compelled the city to turn Tompkins Square into a military parade ground and drill yard. "All trees and other obstructions" were removed and the city's largest public space was withdrawn from wholly public use in an ominous presaging of events in the next century. Michel Foucault has shown that the 18th century military parade ground was "a diagram of power that acts by means of general visibility." The space of the parade ground was reduced to a "geometry of paths" and a "network of gazes", which operated both on soldiers training within its borders and on residents observing it from without.²⁰ In the 19th century, Tompkins Square's parade ground operated in a similar fashion, as a display of power and a mechanism of surveillance, intended as a preemptive strike against social unrest in the local immigrant German community, which the ruling classes perceived as increasingly subversive and dangerous following a decade of periodic bread and draft riots and radical political rallies.²¹

Despite the military presence, neighborhood residents continued to use the park during off-hours when drills were not taking place; by 1875, pressure was mounting to restore Tompkins Square to public access. Those calling for the restoration included sympathetic legislators and social welfare activists as well as landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, who even designed a restoration plan for the park. Though Olmsted's plan was never carried out, Tompkins Square was gradually improved with new plantings and pathways. By the 1880s, the square boasted canopied wooden loggias and ornamental lamp posts with etched glass. In 1888, the Moderation Society donated an ice-water drinking fountain, intended to encourage park users to imbibe water instead of alcoholic beverages. Social coercion in the guise of civic improvement, the fountain was housed in a small granite temple surmounted by a zinc statue of Hebe, the water carrier. An additional drinking fountain was placed in the park in 1906, when the Sympathy Society of German Ladies donated the Slocum Memorial Fountain to commemorate the excursion steamboat disaster that killed nearly 1,000 German immigrants living near Tompkins Square. In 1924, another monument

was added when a statue of Rep. Samuel Cox was moved there without authorization by rowdy mailmen displeased with its former Astor Place location.²²

By the turn of the century, Tompkins Square had been relandscaped into three nearly identical zones, each with a *rond-point* from which winding paths meandered across the length of the park.²³ Two playgrounds were added, one for boys and one for girls, which consisted mainly of swings and see-saws.²⁴ The next major improvements came in the 1930s, when Tompkins Square, like other city parks, benefited from Robert Moses' playground and pool campaigns. The two playgrounds near the East 9th Street transverse were expanded, and a wading pool was built near the northeast corner of the park. Also added in the 1930s was the Children's Farm Garden, near East 10th Street and Avenue A, which consisted of small, slightly raised planting beds placed in concentric rings around a caretaker's shed. The farm garden, a product of the depression-era back-to-the-land movement, while seemingly an innocent recreational area, was, in fact, coded with precise cultural values. Here, a small patch of rural space, marked by soil and growing vegetables, and charged with the supposed beneficence of country life, was replicated in the congested city, where, its xenophobic promoters hoped, it would act as an edifying influence to counter the moral laxity of urban - read: poor immigrant - dwellers.

In the 1960s, Tompkins Square was again altered. The northern zone of the park was rebuilt into asphalt-covered play areas for softball, basketball, and handball. A brick and concrete loggia, housing men's and women's lavatories, was built to the east of the play areas and surrounded by benches and chess/checker tables. In the southern zone, a large concrete bandshell was built in 1966, and a carved totem pole was placed nearby. This area became a popular setting for concerts, political rallies, and most famously, a drag revue known as Wigstock. This annual summer event was perhaps the most self-conscious of the visual spectacles enacted in the park in the 1980s. Culturally performative, politically resistant, and defiantly queer, Wigstock was also an unabashed celebration of the theatricality of urban space.²⁵

For nearly twenty years following the improvements of the 1960s, during which maintenance and repairs were negligible, the park remained in this basic configuration. Then, in 1985, the New York City Parks Department unveiled a \$5 million plan for the renovation of Tompkins Square - a plan which would close the park entirely while construction was underway. When this plan was rejected by the community, the City offered a more modest, step-by-step restoration process, which allowed areas not being renovated to remain open for public use. Work began in the spring of 1989 and was finished in the summer of 1990. The children's playground was completely rebuilt by architects Blumberg & Butter with the latest modular play equipment; the play areas were redesigned and resurfaced; the Temperance and Slocum fountains were restored; fences were fixed; the center lawn was relandscaped and reseeded; tree bases were remulched. While these renovations significantly improved the park's northern zone, physical conditions in the southern zone were

rapidly decaying. One year later, in June of 1991, the City suddenly decided to act: the entire park was abruptly closed and renovations of the southern zone began at once.

In 1985, when the first renovation plan was announced, the Dutch Elms in Tompkins Square were dense and thick from over a century of growth. As a spot of luxurious greenery in a neighborhood drastically lacking trees, they fulfilled what Lewis Mumford called the "demand for verdant refuge".²⁶ While they offered respite from the urban morass and shade from the sun, the elms' long enclosing branches also provided privacy and a degree of invisibility. Out of sight from street and pedestrian traffic, park patrons were free to engage in activities both licit and illicit. The invisibility and protection that Tompkins Square offered were precisely what the renovation plan proposed to remove. Thinning out trees and shrubs, while surely maintaining vegetative health and aiding future growth, would, along with the planned demolition of the bandshell, make the park more open and easily policeable. The model for redesign was Union Square, where similar renovations in the early 1980s had rendered the park more "see through" and had concomitantly reduced crime, both in the park and in the surrounding area.²⁷ If, as Foucault suggests, "visibility is a trap,"²⁸ it follows that rendering the interior of the park more visible would foil criminal activities, since unrestricted vision engenders surveillance of broad spaces. Under the proposed renovations, Tompkins Square would become an inverted panopticon, permitting, as Foucault describes it, "an internal, articulated and detailed control - to render visible those who are inside," acting on them and altering their conduct.²⁹

While the intended outcome of the park's renovation would seem to have been beneficial, few long-time East Village residents, especially ethnic and economic minorities, took it at face value. In a neighborhood steeped in political awareness and rebellion, where, as the *New York Times* put it, "a noise curfew is a virtual assault on civil liberties,"³⁰ the implications of the plan were disturbingly apparent. For Foucault's "panoptic modality of power" was asserting itself all too obviously in an open space in the public domain: spatial partitioning and closure had already occurred; surveillance was in place with police lookouts mounted on the rooftops of surrounding buildings; architectural renovations would soon be underway.³¹ Residents were thus certain that a plot was afoot to rid the park and the surrounding neighborhood not only of criminals but other "undesirables" including the poor and the homeless.³² The community raised an outraged voice that a blatant architecture of social control was intended for their park.

As Jane Jacobs noted in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, small urban parks like Tompkins Square have the ability to stimulate passionate attachment within their given neighborhoods.³³ Tompkins Square became, therefore, a rallying point for the East Village. When Richard Sennett defined a neighborhood as a "territorial community" operating under the "logic of local defense against the outside world", he could have been describing the East Village. Feeling threatened, the neighborhood

fought back; it fought to be left alone and to be “exempted from the political process”.³⁴ From the moment the first renovation plan was announced in 1985, until the park was finally closed in 1991, East Village residents had a worthy cause in saving the park. But during the intervening six years, the who, what, and why of saving the park became increasingly obscured by the discordant agendas of community activists and outside agitators, by the alternating laissez-faire and militaristic actions of City Hall, by imbalanced and sensational media coverage, and most importantly, by the rapid deterioration of the park itself. If the ensuing battle called into question the very nature and function of Tompkins Square and its place within and effect on the neighborhood, this was nothing new. Since the park had opened its gates in 1834, the community had been grappling with these very same issues.

In *Manhattan for Rent*, Elizabeth Blackmar writes of the alliance among city officials, real estate developers, and bourgeois householders to build speculative residential parks such as Tompkins Square.³⁵ This powerful coalition most likely believed that Tompkins Square’s future success was guaranteed since it was one of the largest parks in the city in the first half of the 19th century.³⁶ In addition, since the elegant St. Mark’s Place linked the park to stylish neighborhoods along 2nd Avenue and Lafayette Place, it was surely only a matter of time before Tompkins Square itself became truly fashionable. Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, there were plans to build terraced row houses around the park’s edge, following established models such as Bloomsbury in London and nearby Grammercy Park, less than a mile uptown. Michael Webb has noted that Bloomsbury was meant to be “respectable, discreet and tightly controlled”,³⁷ and the same was true for Tompkins Square. The uniform upper-middle-class dwellings planned for the perimeter blocks with the park in the center were meant to be an “oasis of civilized taste”³⁸ to counter the urban blight caused by the shipping industry along the river to the east and the abattoirs and tanneries along the Bowery to the west. The interested parties hoped that Tompkins Square would give a new tone to the neighborhood, thereby increasing property values, rents, and taxes. Everyone would benefit.

By 1846, however, when the first - and only - row of speculative townhouses were completed on East 10th Street, upper middle class New Yorkers stayed away. Park or no park, the neighborhood was simply too far east for the fashionable and the fashion-seekers. Many of the handsome Italianate buildings were soon split into apartments, and, as recently arrived German immigrants moved into them, tenements, shanties, and stables began to fill the remaining blocks around the park.³⁹ As more and more immigrants moved into the neighborhood, real estate speculators lost hope of higher property values. Instead, through exploitatively high rents, they intended to profit as much as possible from the overcrowded tenements that became the neighborhood’s chief housing stock. This trend continued more or less unabated for over a century - pausing only briefly during the building boom of the 1920s - until the forces of gentrification turned again toward Tompkins Square in the 1980s.

Volatile Usage

When Jane Jacobs dismissed the claim that neighborhood parks can be “real estate stabilizers or community anchors”, she could have been describing the situation of Tompkins Square and the East Village in either the 19th or the 20th centuries. Rarely, she argues, does a neighborhood park have the ability to “increase adjacent values or to stabilize, let alone improve, a neighborhood.” Careful observation of the blocks around a given park offers ample proof: “How rare is the city open space with a rim that consistently reflects the supposed magnetism or stabilizing influence residing in parks.”⁴⁰ Comparing park blocks in the mid-19th century with those same blocks 150 years later, one finds many similarities. The rowhouses, long since divided up, are still there looking slightly out of place. The tenements have multiplied, and while some remain overcrowded and decrepit, others have been gutted, renovated, and turned into condominiums: speculative housing 1980s style. In the early 1990s, the “shanties” were still present, now in the park, instead of on its outskirts. The blighting industry along the river is long gone. In its place are the endless looming towers of the Jacob Riis Housing projects, erected in 1949. Following Jacobs’s model, Tompkins Square circa 1840 and Tompkins Square circa 1990 offer the same lesson: a park cannot change a neighborhood; rather, it is the park that will change, in direct response to how a neighborhood acts upon it and uses it. Conferring use on a park makes it a success; withholding use dooms it to failure.⁴¹ Jacobs’s paradigm of agency is far too simplistic and static for Tompkins Square, a park that has had more use than it could bear - but her conclusion could not be more appropriate: “Parks are volatile places.”⁴²

In Tompkins Square, this volatility, which could explode into spectacle without warning, was both social and spatial and was symptomatic of the nature of the park’s agency. To understand this volatile agency, and its social and spatial impact, we must begin to examine the uses to which the park was put in the recent past. For, as Jacobs accurately points out, “city parks mean nothing divorced from their practical, tangible uses.”⁴³ To refine this examination of park usage, a broad application of the five “performance dimensions” Kevin Lynch formulated in *Good City Form* is valuable.⁴⁴ Dimensions, by their definition, are intrinsically spatial, and performance, vis-à-vis the spectacle, is a social action bound up with agency. Thus, the performance dimensions - vitality, access, fit, control, sense - function as hinges of social and spatial agency, pivoting the active and the passive, the acting and the acted upon. Lynch defines his first dimension, *vitality*, as the “degree to which the form of the settlement supports the vital functions, requirements and capabilities of human beings.” Here, Tompkins Square is the “settlement” itself; the park’s design or spatial arrangement is the settlement’s “form”. The “functions, requirements and capabilities” are simultaneously the uses to which patron/users put the park, acting upon a passive space, and the park’s own active construction of those uses by dynamically supporting and sustaining them. The *access* dimension is the ability of

users to reach “activities, resources, services, information or places” as well as quantity and diversity of these activities. Thus, access denotes the ability (or inability, after the park’s closure) of patron/users to enter and to make use of Tompkins Square in a myriad of diverse ways; in this dimension, the park is passive space. *Fit* is the degree to which Tompkins Square “match[es] the pattern and quantity” of activities in which patron/users engage; in this, the park is active space. *Control* is the extent to which the “creation, repair, modification, and management” of the space are controlled by park users.⁴⁵ In Tompkins Square, as the design history sketched above makes clear, control has usually been imposed from outside, but not always. As we shall see, certain park activities, especially those performed by the homeless, represent a drastic shift in spatial control. Lastly, *sense* refers to the congruence of Tompkins Square’s spatial forms and social functions, which, as a collaboration between users and space, define the park’s legibility and transparency as a medium of communication and its expressive or symbolic significance.⁴⁶

If these performance dimensions seem to confer contradictory, or at least changeable, modalities of agency on the space of Tompkins Square, this is because the modalities themselves were in constant flux, creating space that was sometimes active and sometimes passive. As Paul Zucker suggests, urban squares are part of “the living organism of the city” and are able to dictate “the pace and flow of life both inside and outside its own borders.”⁴⁷ Thus, Tompkins Square is engaged in a continual exchange and interaction with the whole East Village neighborhood, its institutions, and its people. In this way, Tompkins Square could dictate the tenor of the whole neighborhood beyond its spatial boundaries. When the park was calm, the neighborhood seemed calm as people went about their daily business. When the park was tense, the neighborhood seemed under siege, both physically and psychologically. Take, for example, the closing of the park in June of 1991: with a 12-foot perimeter chain-link fence, large signs reading “no trespassing,” “keep out,” and “park closed,” barricaded sidewalks, and a 24-hour police presence, it was only half in jest that neighborhood residents referred to the park and the surrounding blocks as ‘the occupied territories’. Even when neighborhood residents were physically removed from the precinct of the park, Tompkins Square, as active agent, seemed able to modulate people’s thoughts and actions, as Tompkins Square T-shirts and buttons appeared on the backs of the politically correct and as “Save the Park” posters and stickers appeared in the windows of stores, apartments, and cars.

Similar messages also appeared on the walls of abandoned and occupied buildings throughout the neighborhood, as graffitiists and poster artists responded to the crisis in Tompkins Square with spraypaint and wheat paste. These were spatial interventions which served to reinscribe the park-as-catalyst back into the urban fabric from which it emerged. Graffiti and posters, which were usually rabidly partisan, were a defiant political expression of opinion on a variety of issues concerning the East Village, from the Tompkins Square closure to the conversion of tenements into luxury condos, to the incursion of the art world. Hal Foster, glossing Jean Baudrillard, has suggested that graffiti “territorialize[s] the decoded urban space” by “turn[ing] the walls of

the city into spaces of response.”⁴⁸ In the East Village, graffiti, and I would argue the poster, represented attempts by the disenfranchised (graffitiists) and activist/advocates (poster artists) to reclaim symbolically through a physical mark or sign the park and neighborhood that gentrification was taking away from them.

As a spontaneous and urgent gesture, graffiti functioned as a kind of rapid response to the volatile crisis in the park, and much of the politicized graffiti appearing in and around Tompkins Square expresses this immediacy, consisting of simple tags, from the legible anarchist “A” inscribed in a circle to the more cryptic upside-down martini glass with a slash through it, which was intended as a veiled threat to neighborhood yuppies, usually translated as “the party’s over”.⁴⁹ Posters, by contrast, offered a less urgent political response, especially those produced by the artists’ collective Bullet Space, one of many groups of local practitioners who eschewed the walls of East Village galleries for the walls of East Village streets.⁵⁰ The artists and writers of Bullet Space, who lived in a squat near Tompkins Square in the early 1990s, chose to intervene aesthetically in the public space of the East Village. Color posters, as many as thirty at a time, were wheat-pasted onto the sides of otherwise dreary abandoned buildings, serving the dual function of stimulating the eye and the intellect. Bullet Space posters were bold and legible, borrowing recognizable advertising logos and images but dealing with issues important to the neighborhood: gentrification, drug use, racism, AIDS, and of course, Tompkins Square. A favored Bullet Space site was an architecturally elaborate, highly ornamented, abandoned tenement located on the edge of the park and across the street from the Christodora House. In 1990, Bullet Space covered the building’s south and west facades with serial posters of protest, which made clear on which side of the East Village conflict their sympathies lay: “S.O.S Tompkins Square” and “Stop Warehousing Apartments”. Returning to the site today, it is clear that Bullet Space did not win this particular battle against gentrification: the building, now rehabilitated, contains one-bedroom “luxury” apartments renting for \$1500 per month. The interaction between urban environment and social order - manifest in the artistic practices of Bullet Space and the everyday life practices of other East Village residents - has been variously defined as both a “feedback structure” and a “network of relations and processes”.⁵¹ In the case of Tompkins Square, both terms are useful because they clarify the diverse ways this particular urban environment responded to and informed constantly shifting socioeconomic, cultural, and material conditions.

Multivalence is clear in this passage from a *New York Times* article titled “Worlds Collide in Tompkins Square Park”, which effectively summarizes the park’s range of people and activities:

Elderly Poles and Ukrainians hold down their benches on the west side, while younger Puerto Ricans, blacks, Cubans and Jamaicans come in from the blocks to the east.... Skateboarders, basketball players, mothers with small children, radicals looking like 1960’s retreads, spikey-haired punk rockers in torn black, skinheads in heavy work

boots looking to beat up the radicals and the punks, Rastafarians with dreadlocks, heavy metal bands, chess players, dog walkers all occupying their spaces in the park, along with the professionals carrying their dry-cleaned suits.³²

From this description, Tompkins Square appears as a quintessential public space, one that exists at the most basic level of the urban experience. It is an essential gathering place, a “humanizing” (to use Paul Zucker’s term) common ground for social interaction and linkage between people. It is both a center of intense activity (athletic, musical, political, etc.) and of rest and refuge from the congestion of New York, from the city as a whole, or from cramped, stifling apartments. It might even be part of what Seymour Whitney North described as “the educational process of people learning to live together in cities.”³³ In *The City Square*, Michael Webb calls Washington Square a “microcosm of New York”,³⁴ a characterization which likewise applies to Tompkins Square, given the cultural and ethnic diversity of individuals and groups who regularly assemble there.

According to Jane Jacobs, such diversity is crucial to the success of neighborhood parks like Tompkins Square. She argues that such diversity will enliven and support even the most dispirited park space.³⁵ That the users and uses of Tompkins Square were diverse is indisputable, but this in itself hardly made the park a success. What Jacobs fails to take into account is the potential for conflict when widely diverse groups are in close contact.³⁶ Diversity did more than enliven and support Tompkins Square, it forced the park into an uneasy balance of users and uses - a delicate social equilibrium that could be upset at any moment, as occurred in 1988. That summer, users who wanted the park for daytime rest and relaxation confronted users who wanted the park for night-time partying and rowdy hanging-out. Under the aegis of the City Hall and with the blessing of some community residents, police attempted to enforce the 1 a.m. curfew imposed on all New York City parks. Users of Tompkins Square had always been exempt from this curfew, the breaking of which was tolerated as a necessary, albeit minor, illegality which served to bolster the power of the police; spatial access and control were theirs to confer. Officials also knew that many late-night park users saw the curfew as a violation of rightful access and that their willful disregard for it was a conscious act of resistance. In other words, officials knew that *the curfew would be difficult to enforce without violence. As expected, enforcement did result in violence in late August, when a brutal riot broke out between police and late-night park users. The City responded with a security clamp-down and greatly increased police presence.*

Two decades before, a similar confrontation had erupted between police and hippies after complaints about noise in the park. The Lindsay administration, however, took a more pro-active stance and set aside special zones in Tompkins Square to “regulate the park so that everyone can enjoy peace and tranquility.”³⁷ In designated *Troubadour Areas*, park users could play music, listen to radios, and sing; in *Quiet Areas*, no such activities were permitted. While it is difficult to determine how effective these areas

were, their demarcation represented a conscious adjustment of the physical form of Tompkins Square in direct response to changing usage. Here was a deliberate spatial intervention - zoning, a dominating and controlling spatial practice in Harvey's terms - which attempted to regulate social diversity in the park. Other, less formal zones in the park were created by appropriative spatial practices, when certain groups, skateboarders or skinheads for example, staked out their own turf through habitual occupation. Still other zones were constructed by the park itself, certain groups being drawn to those areas which best fit them, matching their needs and patterns of use: districts with sunny benches and tables for the elderly, districts with shade and dense foliage for delinquents.

Diversity of users and uses resulted in a multiplicity of socially-zoned spaces in Tompkins Square, in which, as Parks Commissioner Henry Stern observed in 1989, "many different constituencies occup[ied] different sections, sliced geographically and by time sharing."⁵⁸ Through this differentiated occupation (here both temporal and spatial), the park embodied Foucault's notion of the heterotopia, in which functionally different spaces are superimposed upon each other within the boundary of a larger social space.⁵⁹ Since space, for Foucault, is a locus of both power and community, in heterotopian Tompkins Square, a range of distinct powers and communities were present. And since, according to Foucault, the presence of power almost always effects resistance, it further stands to reason that these communities were potentially oppositional. Thus, the heterotopian park was volatile. It was also territorialized, and as we shall see, simultaneously, de- and re-territorialized in the Deleuzian sense.⁶⁰

By the time Tompkins Square was closed in June 1991, the territories of this once wholly accessible public space were so well-established that it was possible to map their social and spatial boundaries. The northern play areas, surrounded by twelve-foot chain-link fences, were the protectorate of children and their guardians; the southern lawns and pathways were the province of the homeless, their tents, and huts; the bandshell was the domain of drug dealers. The remaining space was occupied by anyone with enough gumption to stake out an empty table or bench. It is no surprise that territorial boundaries fell along socio-political lines, as disparate groups - yuppies, old-timers, punks, skin-heads, squatters, drug dealers, and the homeless - faced-off in a virtual turf war over the contested land of Tompkins Square. Each claimed a legitimate right to the park and regarded with suspicion those whom they considered outsiders.

In *The Fall of Public Man*, Richard Sennett writes that when the stranger appears in the landscape, "people have enough sense of their own identities to form rules of who belongs and who does not."⁶¹ In Tompkins Square, however, those rules were superficial at best, usually determined by prescribed modes of dress or behavior that rendered all yuppies scum; all skinheads racists; all squatters anarchists; all homeless bums. The situation in Tompkins Square was clearly a manifestation of what Andrew Ross termed the "tribalism of the street style wars", pitting Alphabet City's "theory

of poverty bohemians” against the East Village’s “new cloneboys” and “Wall Street Masters of the Universe”.⁶² But in a neighborhood where the punks, the queers, *and* the investment bankers all wore Doc Martens, it became increasingly difficult for partisans to identify their own. Despite these stereotyped notions, all sides were in general agreement that the park belonged to “the people”. The problem came in deciding which people were *the* people.⁶³

Homelessness as Spatial Practice/Visual Politics

The most obvious consequence of the territorialization of Tompkins Square was that one group in particular became the dominant presence in the park - the homeless. At first, the park was simply a place to sleep for a few dozen people who preferred a bench in the open air to a cot in a city shelter. But by the time the City evicted the homeless from Tompkins Square in 1989, and again in 1991, their ranks had swelled to between 200 and 300 people.⁶⁴ At this moment of greatest occupancy, the homeless effected the reterritorialization of Tompkins Square, with the space of the park standing for a free-floating lost place of shelter, of home, of life lived inside, not outside, society’s borders. Not surprisingly, this reterritorialization produced conflictive, often antithetical spatial interpretations. While the homeless and their supporters referred to the park as a sanctuary and a refuge, other park users described it pejoratively as a shantytown and an encampment, usually preceded by derogatory adjectives like “squalid” or “dangerous”. It is no accident that these terms, however opprobrious their intention, designated consciously-organized spatial constructions - communities - of a diverse economic or militaristic sort. The southern zone of the park, where the homeless lodged, had indeed become a space of community, an enclave the homeless named Tent City (product of reterritorialization) in reference to the main type of structure they built there, and to the urban microcosm (a variation on the city-within-the-city) they formed there.⁶⁵ Like any community, Tent City even had distinct residential “neighborhoods”, including Little Haiti and the Hill. Martha Rosler has observed the efforts of homeless populations, upon reaching a critical mass, to organize themselves into coalitions and unions to demand relief and aid.⁶⁶ Tent City was such a coalition, with an unofficial mayor, a seven-year resident named Junior, and numerous factional groups who, like the members of any coalition, occasionally experienced divisive infighting, most especially between homeless people who were drug users and those who were substance-free. Tent City was also a contemporary version of the Hoovervilles of the 1930s, those encampments of “forgotten men” that sprang up in New York and other urban centers during the Depression.⁶⁷

The effect of Tent City on the social and spatial landscape of Tompkins Square was dramatic. The enclave’s presence in the park, along with its growing population, represented a significant, and strategic, shift in the park’s already volatile usage, away from recreation and relaxation to the activities of day-to-day living at its most basic level (which, of course, still included some degree of R & R). Here, in Tent City, de Certeau’s practice of everyday life was enacted to a spectacularized extreme,

as the public domain of the park turned into the private domain of the individual(s) through the appropriative spatial practices of the homeless. These practices physically transformed the landscape and furnishings of the park. Benches, tables, and railings became the foundations for lean-to huts and small shacks constructed of cardboard boxes, plywood, corrugated metal, and other discarded quasi-building materials.⁶⁸ Over time, these structures increased in size, elaboration, and durability, depending on the skill of their builders. Tents and teepees were erected on park lawns, made from plastic sheets, nylon construction tarps, and canvas mail bags. All of these structures were highly individualized and intimate spaces - the homes of Tent City. Like most homes, they were furnished and decorated with a variety of personal and cast-off items, the most common appurtenances being milk crates and shopping carts, in which the occupant's possessions were neatly arranged. Elsewhere in Tent City, trash cans, far from serving as receptacles for waste, became portable fireplaces, providing warmth against the cold nights and heat for cooking. The fuel for those fires was gathered from the trees and shrubs of the park, as underbrush and low lying branches were stripped away, effectively a form of tree maintenance carried out informally and, ultimately, to a damaging degree. When the park lavatories were locked, drinking fountains were the only source of water - for drinking and bathing. When the lavatories were open, as they were in 1990, the homeless organized cleaning crews to maintain them, using equipment supplied by the city.⁶⁹ This also shifted the homeless people's relationship to the park from users to caretakers.

Tent City, possessing fixed boundaries, shared facilities, and multiple dwellings, created a community, within the larger community(ies) of the park, that was functionally and socially viable, despite its substandard living conditions. Returning to Foucault's model of the heterotopia, Tent City represents a singular space of resistance and freedom carved out of the embattled territory(ies) of Tompkins Square as a whole. A space defined by and for the homeless themselves, Tent City gave the homeless a defiant sense of place and belonging in which, temporarily, they were no longer "homeless" but in control of their social and material circumstances. The comments of one Tent City resident attest to this: "The park is my home, but most people don't want to accept that fact. Society tells us that if you don't got a house, you don't got a home. I *got* a home. You're sitting in my living room."⁷⁰

Since, as Foucault shows us, the control of space is the control of power, Tent City transformed the homeless from docile bodies (passively acted upon and subjected) into powerful bodies (actively resistant). By choosing to live in Tompkins Square, the homeless rejected and defied the regulatory and disciplinary space of the city shelter. In refusing to submit to the authority of the shelter, which they perceived as repressive and imprisoning, the homeless seized control of their bodies - corporeal, social, and spatial - and thus, the crucial locus of power contained within.

Attendant with the bodily (self)seizure which resulted from the decision to dwell in Tompkins Square, the homeless put all aspects of their lives - as located in their bodies - on public display. From eating and sleeping to defecating and copulating,

they spectacularized the practice of everyday life by situating it in the visibly public domain. While this spectacle may not have been fully articulated and theorized by those who engaged in it, this does not diminish its potency as an act of visual and spatial politics, in which the homeless, through visual self-display in a public space, refused the social invisibility and marginality to which the dominant class annexed them. In characterizing the social function of this effacement of the homeless, Rosalyn Deutsche describes how the dominant classes cling to a controlling model of the organization of space in which “the exigencies of human social life provide a single meaning that necessitates proper uses of the city: a proper place for its residents.”⁷⁰ Those in power thus act to “repudiate the existence of those groups who counter dominant uses of space.”⁷¹ By consciously countering the dominant uses of space, which prescribed that the proper place for urban residents was not a public park, the spectacle of Tent City functioned as a spatial counter-repudiation and a radical visual confrontation, an in-your-face practice of homelessness akin to the contemporaneous “we’re here, we’re queer” model of gay visibility. Concomitantly, however, by naming themselves a community, and by dwelling as a community, the homeless also attempted a less confrontational display of “we are everywhere” normality.

The reason these display strategies operated successfully within the spectacle of the homeless, and the reason the spectacle operated successfully as an act of visual politics, is that the spectacle was located in the already politically charged landscape of Tompkins Square. At the same time as the occupation of Tompkins Square, there were homeless people living in enclaves of various sizes in extremely high-profile sites, including Carl Schurz Park, where the mayor’s residence Gracie Mansion was located, and Central Park, one of New York’s city’s most famous public spaces. But these parks, unlike Tompkins Square, had not been spectacularized through volatile usage, from riots to the process of gentrification.⁷² Gentrification had drawn the upper classes to Tompkins Square and the East Village, and it gave them a stake in the spectacle of the park. Without gentrification, the spectacle might still have been produced, since the homeless, the poor, and the disenfranchised needed to express their anger and frustration, but it would not have been consumed, since bourgeois attention would have been focused elsewhere. And if a lack of bourgeois attention/consumption denied the existence of the spectacle, then the homeless would again be relegated to the background and the margins of urban existence, as they were in these other parks, either totally ignored or tiredly accepted as one of the inconveniences of life in the post-industrial metropolis. Thus, it was the decision by the homeless to dwell in *this* park, in *this* neighborhood, which enabled the spectacle to operate.

In this analysis of the visual and spatial practices of the homeless in Tompkins Square, it is not enough to consider only the spectacle which the homeless made of themselves in the park. Though the homeless could control, through the spectacle, the terms of their public display, producing their own social and spatial representation as a community, they could not completely control the terms on which this display would

be consumed by the public, nor how their representation would be viewed by the other users of the park. As we shall see, this seeming lack of control over consumption did not disempower the spectacle, but instead made its empowerment all the more complex. The visual consumption of the spectacle is, of course, one of its defining elements, and it is here that we can identify a crucial difference between the spectacle of the riot in Tompkins Square and the spectacle of the homeless. The observational glee of the former was replaced in the latter by a triad of observational responses - anxiety, detachment, and sympathy - each determined by the observational position, social and spatial, of the park user. The homeless, by transforming the park into a space of spectacularized living, transformed the park user into a spectator. When this spectator was a casual, recreational park user, the spectacle produced observational anxiety because of a dilemma the user/spectator now faced: to look at the homeless and to be rendered a voyeur or to look away and to be rendered indifferent to - and yet still aware of - their plight.

Foucault argued that power is exercised through exact observation with each specific gaze contributing to its overall functioning.⁷³ The homeless possessed power through the spectacle, which they exercised by manipulating observational positions. While the anxious, discomforted spectator had the choice of looking or looking away, in either case, the gaze implicated the homeless. Look at them, and the homeless were present; look away from them and the homeless were absent. In either case, this gaze, generated by the anxiety that the spectacle produced, still signified. That the gaze of the casual park user was often oblique only served to heighten the anxiety it produced. This obliqueness was itself a product of the spectacle, of its ability to channel vision and space. Once the homeless occupied the southern third of the park, most other park users avoided the pathways that snaked through that zone, preferring instead a path that followed the straight east/west axis linking St. Mark's Place with East 8th Street. When Kevin Lynch defined paths as the "channels along which the observer customarily, occasionally, or potentially moves," he noted the impact that a path through a given district has on the perceptions of the observer.⁷⁴ It follows then that the oblique view of the homeless enclave, which the observer/user/spectator discerned from his or her customary path, rendered the whole southern zone an alien, and alienating, territory of drifting smoke, plastic tarps, and cardboard boxes. This menacing vision of the southern zone was, of course, at odds with the communal vision of Tent City the homeless perceived, the differences being predicated on the relative positions of the observer and object, the seeing and the seen.

The other typical observational responses to the spectacle of the homeless, detachment and sympathy, were elicited from those willing spectators who came to Tompkins Square with the express purpose of viewing the homeless occupation. Most of these were documentarians and photojournalists of various sorts: video cameramen and still photographers, who sought to probe and record every aspect of the spectacle, every structure and every occupant. This examination resulted in what Foucault called "compulsory objectification" as the homeless, as individuals and a group were

placed in “a field of surveillance” and “a network of writing... a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them.”⁷⁵ In Tompkins Square, these documents ranged from media coverage (news stories in the local papers and on TV) to Park’s Department archives and Police Department tactical plans to social/political art projects. Under normal disciplinary circumstances, this documentation would always be subjecting and disempowering, as it surely was in 1991, when the Parks Department photographed the homeless’ dwelling shacks before it bulldozed them. But I would argue that the nature of the spectacle of the homeless in Tompkins Square destabilized the power structure of documentation. Objectification only results in subjection if the object is powerless in the face of examination, but if the object (here, the homeless) dictates the terms of self-display, subjection is thwarted by the power the object possesses. In Tompkins Square, the homeless were engaging in a carefully controlled exhibitionism that was intended to attract the attention of reporters and activists, pulling the documentation they produced into the realm of the spectacle. That it also attracted the attention of City Hall and the gentrifying classes, and through them the attention of the Police and the Parks Departments, was an unfortunate but perhaps unavoidable consequence.

One example of this strategic exhibitionism occurred in 1989, when a group of homeless people living in Tompkins Square added a new dwelling to the crowded residential landscape of Tent City. They built a tent of four American flags as a small but savvy, aesthetic intervention in the public space. Given the hyper-sensitivity about the desecration and the proper use of flags fomented by the political right, this tent was certain to attract attention. The flag tent had its intended effect: the *New York Times* reported the flag tent and gave the homeless people who built it the opportunity to explain its meaning. As Chris Henry, a man living in the park, articulately put it: “Shelter is not being provided by America, so we’ve got to use the symbol of America to shelter ourselves.”⁷⁶ The flag tent, created by and for the homeless as a symbolic representation of their unacceptable situation, was not self-consciously produced as art. Nonetheless, it occupied a critical position that resonated with artistic practice in the East Village, especially that of the social documentarians whose projects sometimes directly engaged the homeless in Tompkins Square, photographing them and their dwellings for reproduction in off-site exhibitions. Martha Rosler has criticized this type of documentary project, which she labels “victim photography”. Rather than serving its intended purpose “to gather public support, to generate outrage, and to mobilize people for change”, it often ends up sustaining the viewers’ social anxiety and paranoia about the homeless. As a result, these projects further victimize the homeless, uncritically reproducing the “us looking at them” visual dynamic, which is usually at work in street-level encounters between the homeless and the housed, as for example, when the casual park user chanced upon the homeless of Tent City in Tompkins Square.⁷⁷

Krzysztof Wodiczko’s *New York City Tableaux: Tompkins Square* (1989) would, at first, seem to be a prime example of this type of documentation project.⁷⁸ Upon analysis, however, it becomes clear that Wodiczko’s project, while presenting the homeless of Tompkins Square to art viewers in an hermetic gallery environment, does not betray

them through a display of their otherness, but instead defends them through a display of their empowerment. This multi-media installation uses a kind of sense-a-round theatricality to recreate the spectacle of Tompkins Square in a darkened gallery room. While taped interviews Wodiczko conducted with Tompkins Square's homeless residents play in the background, a series of photograph montages were projected onto the walls. These montages depicted the homeless as a rag-tag army unit consisting of, sequentially, raw recruits, armed soldiers, and finally bivouacked troops, recalling the encampment of Union soldiers at Gettysburg during the Civil War or the encampment of the Bonus Army in Washington during the Depression.⁷⁹ The final montage serves as a call-to-revolution for the homeless, reminiscent of the Agit-Prop of the Soviet Proletkult. Above, an image of Tent City runs a banner reading "Evicts of All Cities, Unite!"

Some critics have argued that Wodiczko, by casting the encampment in Tompkins Square as a dramatic spectacle, trivializes the plight of the homeless, thereby lessening the impact of *Tableaux, Tompkins Square* and its potential for social effectiveness.⁸⁰ Even if we did not know that Wodiczko is a socially-committed artist who has made a career of interventionist public art, much of dealing with homelessness, this reading would be somewhat off the mark.⁸¹ Wodiczko did not need to create a spectacle out of the homeless in Tompkins Square because, as I have argued, the homeless in Tompkins Square had already spectacularized themselves, already placed themselves on visual display, well in advance of their arrival in a gallery in Wodiczko's *Tableaux*.

The central image of the final montage is a detail of the homeless encampment showing a few cardboard and plastic tents devoid of their inhabitants. Superimposed onto this view of Tent City are two images representing the past and present of the East Village - a burning tenement building, signifying the arson-ridden disinvestment decade of the 1970s, and the Christodora condominium building, signifying the yuppie-ridden gentrification decade of the 1980s. In the company of these buildings, the tent in Tompkins Square may be seen as the future of the East Village, in the 1990s and beyond, decades of continued dispossession and displacement. We are presented with three architectural moments in an East Village historical continuum: a past architecture of fear, a present architecture of greed, and a future architecture - of what? Photographer Margaret Morton sees the dwelling structures of the homeless as "the architecture of despair"; historian Richard Sennett calls them "sad symbols" of societal abandonment; Americanist John Michael Vlach says they are "a landscape of the powerless."⁸² I would argue against all of these interpretations, for they betray a guilty pathos that denies the homeless any agency in the construction of their social and spatial spheres. I offer a different interpretation, one which ruptures the "us looking at them" visual dynamic implicitly in these outsider assessments of the homeless architecture of Tompkins Square Tent City.

One of the chief architectural images of the Enlightenment was the primitive hut which, in the 18th century, signified a search for the origins of architecture through the location of a mythic, primordial house. Though related to Rousseau's ideal of *l'homme sauvage*, the primitive hut did not imply a nostalgia for the primitive state but

rather for the resourcefulness of the “primitive” man who, compelled by need for protection from the elements, was driven to shelter himself, and thereby created, in the imaginary wilds of the Enlightenment, the first architecture: a rudimentary structure built of available materials, such as tree trunks and branches. The trope of the primitive hut is taken as an act of spatial intervention that not only tamed and controlled the (natural) environment, but also formed a nexus of space and power that, as Foucault has demonstrated, was such a crucial aspect of the Enlightenment project. Turning the image of the primitive hut back on itself, the homeless of Tompkins Square seized the markings of shelter from the wild, often brutal, urban environment of late capitalism and, with powerful intent, they housed themselves.

Building Gentrification - the TOWER

We have thus far examined a variety of cultural practices which, by engaging the spectacles made in, around, and of Tompkins Square, attempted to offer an alternative to the prescriptions and codes of gentrification which were inscribing themselves ever more indelibly on the local landscape. As the locally inspired work of many neo-expressionists makes clear, East Village content was no guarantee of an advocacy art practice or a stance of critical resistance. As critics like Hal Foster, Craig Owens, and Rosalyn Deutsche have noted, these painters were “accomplices” in the neighborhood’s gentrification and in the displacement of its subcultural, racial, and ethnic groups.⁸³ The work of Rainier Fetting is a case in point. Many of his paintings and photographs depict scenes in and around Tompkins Square. *Winter, Tompkins Square Park* depicts a barren landscape, desolate but for a few gaunt figures huddled around a trash can fire. *Avenue B & 9th Street* depicts a vibrant landscape with the park’s trees at the peak of their fall foliage. Both works aestheticize the highly politicized territory of the park, and therefore appear apolitical, as they are free to be. Fetting’s sympathies clearly lay with the art/culture industry, which, having established an advanced outpost of galleries and boutiques, had set up business in the East Village and was now enjoying the profits of gentrification. All this is clear in the artist’s locational point of view: Fetting’s vantage point is often the penthouse of the Christodora House, the 16-story apartment building on the corner of *Avenue B & 9th Street* across from Tompkins Square.

Built as a settlement house in the 1920s but abandoned by the 1960s, this seemingly innocuous brick building had secured for itself only an obscure place in history as the site of George Gershwin’s first public concert. That obscurity ended, however, when the Christodora House was thrust into the spotlight only months after it was renovated into condominium apartments in 1988. In August of that year, when the Tompkins Square riot spilled out of the park and onto Avenue B, a group of unidentified demonstrators chanting “die yuppie scum” threw garbage cans through the building’s glass entry doors and into its lobby, thereby engaging it in the spectacle of the park. Seemingly overnight, the building acquired a notorious reputation and its very name became synonymous with the evils of gentrification, hence Wodiczko’s

citation of it in his *Tableaux, Tompkins Square*. As one Christodora resident noted, “we are the designated symbol of gentrification”.⁸⁴ And she was right, because for many neighborhood housing activists, the Christodora House had achieved a symbolic status comparable to that of Pruitt-Igoe, the St. Louis housing project demolished in 1972.⁸⁵ Ironically however, symbolic status had already been conferred upon the Christodora, sixty years earlier at the building’s dedication. In December 1928, the *New York Times* opined that “Christodora is a symbol; it stands for the awakening of latent possibilities in thousands who rise from poverty to places of importance in American life.”⁸⁶ In the ensuing decades the Christodora metamorphosed from an institution with those noble connotations into what the *Village Voice* called “the building that ate Tompkins Square”⁸⁷ - a virtual godzilla of gentrification and speculation, wrecking havoc upon the local housing stock, leaving nothing but condos and displaced residents in its wake. As these varied historical and contemporary designations make clear, the Christodora House, like Tompkins Square, functioned as a multivalent node in the conflictive matrix of the East Village. A locus of social-spatial agency, the Christodora was both a zone of power and a target of resistance - constructing and constructed by the terms of engagement of gentrification in the 1980s, and even earlier to its institutional origins in the late 19th century.

The Christodora House was founded in the 1890s to provide social services for the immigrant community that occupied the congested, blight-ridden tenement district east of Tompkins Square. By the 1920s, having far outgrown its brownstone quarters, Christodora began raising funds for the erection of a new building on the same site - one large enough to accommodate any further expansion of the institution’s programs. The new building, completed in 1928, originally served as a combination settlement house and youth hotel, with the income generated by the hotel paying for the settlement programs. The settlement house, really a community center, occupied the building’s first six floors with numerous classrooms, a swimming pool, a gymnasium, and a theater. The upper nine stories of the Christodora formed a “club residence” containing approximately 150 rooms grouped in small suites with common foyers, bathrooms, and telephone nooks. The club’s centerpiece was its dining room, located in the building’s penthouse with expansive views of the East River and lower Manhattan. At either end of the dining room were alcove lounges with fireplaces, stocked bookshelves, and continuously brewing coffee urns, all of which created a “homelike and comfortable” atmosphere for club residents.⁸⁸

Christodora was designed by Henry C. Pelton, who is better known for his collaborative work on Riverside Church (1930) in Morningside Heights. Lacking the Gothic exuberance of the later building, the Christodora instead consists of a simple brick facade with barely articulated piers rising from a granite base. Pelton did provide a few decorative flourishes, namely in the ornamental stonework of the entrances, street level windows, and cornice line. A conflation of art deco styling and Christian iconography - including the four evangelists, angels, and stars - the decorative program was obviously inspired by the project’s religious affiliation. Inside, Pelton avoided a totally institutional look by making ample use of wood paneling,

exposed wood beams, colonial revival furniture, brass fixtures, and floral rugs. Upon its completion, the Christodora was heralded as one of the most notable buildings on the east side of Manhattan. The *New York Times* effusively described the “romance” of the building’s design, while *Architectural Record* selected it as one of the city’s best “modern apartment houses”.⁸⁹ In the late 1920s, this monicker conjured up images of stylish penthouses and uniformed doormen, of affluence and sophistication. That it was applied to the Christodora House, an institution whose dedicatory function was service to the poor, highlights the competing, contradictory social and spatial agendas of the new building.

Contained within the new tower were two different social spaces, layered one on top of the other in a clear hierarchy. At the base was the community center, which, in the 1930s, offered unparalleled social services. Unlike other institutions in the neighborhood, such as the Industrial Schools of the Children’s Aid Society or the Torah study centers, which served only segments of the population, the Christodora assisted all members of the community, especially through its public medical and dental clinics that offered free or low cost health care to all neighborhood residents. Other programs, mostly intended for moral uplift, included physical fitness classes, a music school, a poetry guild, a domestic science laboratory, and a manual arts workshop in which students learned the basics of interior decoration and home furnishings in order to refurbish their own family apartments nearby according to bourgeois standards of American - not foreign - good taste. While not denying the social good undoubtedly achieved by these programs, the presence of the Christodora House in the community nonetheless served to shore up the apparatus of power, through what Foucault would deem a manipulation of behavior and space: regulating the habits and activities of workers and the poor, constructing and presenting itself in the monumental architectural form of the tower.

As open and accessible as the six floors of the Christodora’s community center were, rising above them was a zone of social exclusion, the nine stories of the youth hotel, the gracious appointments of which were intended to signal “hospitality to the stranger.”⁹⁰ The use of this latter term is no accident, for the public spaces of the hotel, including the penthouse dining room, were indeed open *only* to the stranger - the paying club resident - and not to the nonpaying local clientele of the settlement house. The club residence functioned as a kind of early gentrification, offering inexpensive co-ed accommodations for graduate students and young professionals new to the city. Also among those in residence were teachers, woodworkers, musicians, and artists (people not unlike those who pioneered the (re)settlement of the East Village some fifty years later). In the 1930s, the Christodora occupied a purposefully ambiguous position, simultaneously offering the neighborhood access and denial, assistance and rejection. The settlement house at the tower’s base was a space of experience and material use, for community residents, fitted to their social and physical needs, determined not by the locals themselves but by the social workers who ran the Christodora’s programs. The off-limits penthouse at the tower’s summit was the space of imagination, distance and desire, to which community residents could aspire

as they sat in classrooms and clinics on the lower floors, remaking themselves into Americans.

In this way, the Christodora House served the community for nearly two decades but then began a long period of decline. After World War II, the youth hotel was no longer generating enough income to support the settlement house, and in 1947, the building was sold to the city for \$1.3 million. Though the Department of Social Services continued to operate some programs in the building, by 1967 only a few ground floor rooms were still in use and the physical plant was in a state of rapid deterioration. At this point, neighborhood organizers formed a grassroots coalition to negotiate with the city to reclaim the Christodora, converting it into a community center.⁹¹ This coalition, known as the Committee for a Tompkins Square Community Center, was comprised of both longtime residents, mostly Jewish and Catholic immigrants from Eastern Europe, and neighborhood newcomers, including Puerto Ricans and African Americans as well as those bohemian/counter-culture Anglos who had moved east from Greenwich Village in search of cheap rents. That such diverse groups could put aside their differences to work toward a common goal (fighting the city) would be unthinkable two decades later, when factional infighting dominated neighborhood social action. During the activist era of the 1960s, the planned reclamation of Christodora was an indigenously developed strategy of spatial appropriation, intended to produce a communal site of access, vitality, and social usefulness. As such, it could hardly have been more different from the later plans for the Christodora's redevelopment, advanced by outside forces of gentrification during the 1980s, in which the building was to be "reclaimed" for affluent whites from the poor immigrant neighborhood in which it was located.

What happened next is the stuff of which real estate legends are made. Indeed, the later history of the Christodora House has been repeated so often, in so many different contexts, that it seems apocryphal. But ultimately the facts have never been in dispute. After rejecting the neighborhood's community center proposal, the city put the building on the public auction block in 1970. Five years later, after a period of rapid (and rampant) disinvestment and property devaluation, a Brooklyn developer named George Jaffe purchased the Christodora for \$62,500, with the supposed intention of turning it into low-income housing. Jaffe sat on the building until 1983, by which time the East Village had become "a strategic urban arena," according to Rosalyn Deutsche, the site for gentrified real estate redevelopment.⁹² That year first-time developer Harry Skydell offered Jaffe \$1.3 million for what was, by this time, a totally boarded-up hull. Skydell had no immediate plans for the building beyond making a profit from it, which he did in 1984 by turning it over for \$3 million. He bought the Christodora back a year later and began renovating it in partnership with Samuel Glasser. By June 1986, the first of the building's 86 "luxury" units were on the market. By the following spring all but five were sold, with 400 square-foot studios going for approximately \$125,000; 1100 square-foot two-bedrooms for nearly \$300,000, and a square-foot average price of \$275.

The Jaffe/Skydell/Glasser transactions quickly became grist for the mill. The *New York Times*, especially the Real Estate section which recounted the Christodora deal in numerous articles, was consistently impressed by this awesome display of the power of the market.⁹³ At the opposite extreme, critics like Martha Rosler and Neil Smith viewed the transactions as one of the most egregious examples of boom time profiteering.⁹⁴ One reason the Christodora House was such an easy target - for praise or vilification - was that it was such an extreme example, the building's price having multiplied nearly 50 times in a single decade, yielding profits that few deals could ever hope to match. We might, borrowing from Debord, call the Christodora transactions a prime example of spectacular consumption, in which space becomes "a star commodity... on the stage of the affluent economy's integrated spectacle".⁹⁵ Aestheticized by painters, politicized by rioters, the spectacles made of Tompkins Square and the Christodora House are now commodified by speculators and hyped by the media.

Social power was most obviously manifested in and manipulated by the person of Harry Skydell, the man who engineered this spectacular speculation with indifference to risk regarding money (his inflated buying/selling prices), time (his ability to sit on the property without financial hardship), and space (a building located in a depressed area), an indifference that only those in positions of privilege can afford. Skydell was a 26 year-old whiz kid who seemed such a stereotypical yuppie that he could have been a character in Tom Wolfe's *Bonfire of the Vanities*. Barely out of Yale Law School when he launched his career as a developer, Skydell was a brash operator flush with cash. Even as he was flip-flopping the Christodora, Skydell was buying up over 20 vacant and rundown buildings east of First Avenue. Though he claimed that he could "easily renovate 50% of [his] apartments" into low-income units and still make a profit, by 1989 all of his developments were high-end co-ops or condos.⁹⁶

Though Skydell considered the Christodora his "cornerstone"⁹⁷ investment, the one that would stabilize and shore up his smaller projects, he nonetheless took precautions to secure the building's success. While the \$275 square foot average price was high enough to exclude just about everyone with less than a six figure income, it was low enough (by \$50-\$75) to attract adventurous yuppies who might otherwise have moved to a posher downtown location like lower Fifth Avenue. To further the building's appeal, Skydell employed the long-standing real estate strategy of changing the Christodora's address: 1 Tompkins Square became its formal address, while 601 East 9th Street was used for mailing purposes. Avenue B was avoided altogether, as were any sordid or dangerous images that a lettered street might evoke to an East Village outsider. (In 1890, similar reasoning had prompted the change of the avenue's uptown extension from B to East End Avenue.) Skydell's (re)naming of space was the kind of strategy Deleuze and Guattari would identify as typically capitalist in its simultaneous de-territorialization and re-territorialization: it severed the building from its Alphabet City context and lower class socio-economic implications, removing it to or overlaying it with the elevated, supposedly high-class social sphere of "The Square". Of course, after the Tompkins Square riots of 1988 and 1989, a Tompkins

Square address was probably not particularly desirable. Today, the building has reverted to its 9th Street address.

The Christodora renovation itself, carried out by the firm of John T. Fifeld, is hardly as luxurious as the building's detractors seemed to believe. Most of the apartments, carved out of what had essentially been dorm rooms, are overwhelmingly cramped. Individual rooms are small, and the layouts, without connecting foyers and halls, lack that sense of spaciousness that characterizes so many pre-war apartments in the city. The units are simply finished with white walls and hardwood floors; the stained woodwork of window frames and baseboards provide the only distinguishing features. The much discussed penthouse apartment (occupying the former dining room), which sold for \$1.2 million, is ridiculously excessive, particularly given the neighborhood, with its private elevator, four floors, and three outdoor terraces. Numerous critics also cite the penthouse's two fireplaces as further proof of the Christodora's unwonted luxury, neglecting to mention that any number of the neighborhood's decidedly unluxurious four-story floor-through walk-ups, erected as speculative housing at the turn-of-the-century, also contain two fireplaces. The inherent problem with using the penthouse as an example of the negative impact of gentrification is that, like the Christodora deal as a whole, it is an extreme of spectacularized consumption. Few would have defended the gross absurdity of such an expensive apartment in a neighborhood that was, at the time of the sale, Manhattan's poorest outside of Harlem. But just because one yuppie was foolish enough to spend over \$1 million for a condo on Avenue B did not necessarily mean that many others would follow.

It is far more instructive to examine the less spectacular apartments in the Christodora - those small studios and one- and two-bedroom apartments which make up the majority of the building's 86 units. These are the apartments that had the greatest potential for impacting the East Village housing market. By 1988, it became clear that a high percentage of Christodora apartments had been purchased by outside investors, who had no intention of living in them.⁹⁶ These owner/investors immediately rented out their apartments, hoping to sell them at a steep profit a few years later, by which time, it was reasoned, the gentrification of the East Village would be a *fait accompli*, as would social and spatial *de/re/territorialization*. In the meantime, they would squeeze as much income out of their units as possible by charging outrageously inflated rents. In 1989, when I viewed numerous vacant Christodora apartments, small two-bedroom units were renting for \$2000 a month. Such elevated rates had the immediate effect of stimulating rent increases elsewhere in the neighborhood. Until the downturn in the market in the early 1990s, it was difficult to find even unrenovated two-bedroom apartments in the most run-down tenements west of Avenue C for under \$1500 a month.⁹⁹

When the Christodora came under attack in 1989, many residents (even condo owners) used the fact that there were renters in the building to defend themselves against charges that they were all "yuppie scum". Astonishingly, they claimed that because Christodorans paid so much for their apartments, they were just as much

victims of gentrification as the poor people forced out of their tenement flats or the homeless people who could not afford places to live at all. If the *Village Voice* reported this newest development with a minimum of its usual editorial bias, it was because the residents quoted, including a Swedish model and *New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith, needed no help in sounding absurd: "A lot of the people in the building are renting their apartments from the owners," says Anna Johnson. "They're not that rich... of course, I have a big apartment and I'm on the top floor. But in general it's not that way here."¹⁰⁰

The furore over the Christodora finally died down in the early 1990s, mainly because gentrification in the East Village had all but ground to a halt. After the prolonged real estate boom of the 1980s, property values in the neighborhood were beginning to fall, sometimes by as much as 50 percent. The sob stories now solemnly reported in the *New York Times* were not about people forced out by gentrification (the truly victimized, mostly poor and non-white), but about people who had been suckered by it (the revictimized, mostly affluent and white). These "financially squeezed property owners" - including several in the Christodora who wanted to move to Westchester - lamented the fact that they could not sell their East Village apartments, some as far east as Avenue C, for even a fraction of what they had paid for them.¹⁰¹ Housing experts who were consulted to explain this new situation of "degentrification" seemed particularly adept at stating the obvious. When Eliot Sclar, an urban planning professor at Columbia, declared in 1991 that "rich people are not going to live next to public housing," the *Times* used it as a pull quote, as if the comment revealed some amazing, previously unknown, truth.¹⁰² In fact, since the 1970s urban sociologists had observed that the gentrifying classes, while giving lip service to social liberalism, were usually uneasy at the prospect of living in close proximity to racial minorities, those groups most likely to occupy public housing.¹⁰³

Earlier, I argued that one reason the Christodora became such target for anti-gentrification resentment was that it was such an extreme and blatant example of 1980s real estate speculation. But there is another, far more basic reason which must now be explored. When the Christodora was completed in 1928, the only structure to rival its prominence on the neighborhood's skyline was the Church of the Holy Redeemer on East 3rd Street, whose 1905 spire reaches 265 feet. As I have already suggested, the Christodora's monumental form was directly related to its role as preserver and promoter of class power and cultural values. Though the post-war period saw the construction of high-rise public housing along the East River, even today the Christodora remains instantly visible from the blocks surrounding Tompkins Square.¹⁰⁴ Its quadruplex penthoused eminence, surmounted by eerie blue warning lights, looms up ominously above the tenements, townhouses, and vacant lots that line the streets and avenues of Alphabet City. From Houston Street to 14th Street, and from First Avenue to Avenue D, the Christodora is a conspicuous, continuous presence. Foucault has shown how the tower's visibility, as an unalterable principle of architectural panopticonism, becomes emblematic of power by forcing those who see it into the discomfort of knowing they are being observed: "power should be

visible... the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon."¹⁰⁵ In the East Village, the Christodora *was* the central tower - a high-rise building in a predominantly low-rise neighborhood, the Christodora's very visibility, its literally high profile, contributed significantly to its figurative high profile as the most explicit sign of gentrification in the East Village. It functioned, in other words, as a representation of space and a space of representation. Perception granted it social, psychological, and physical bulk; imagination rendered it symbolically monumental.¹⁰⁶

East Village activists have long attempted to defend their community from an invasion of high-rise structures. Though community activists in the 1960s successfully fought off the Lindsay administration's attempt to rezone lower Third Avenue for high-rise construction, in the 1980s they were unsuccessful in their efforts to prevent New York University and the Cooper-Union from erecting 16-story dormitories along the same corridor (no zoning change was necessary since dormitories are considered a community facility and not a residential structure). Though universities are not corporations, the East Village community believed they wielded their institutional power with a disregard for the neighborhood's needs and desires characteristic of the most callous corporate capitalist. The community perceived the dorm towers, completed in 1985 and 1991 respectively, as "high-rise beachheads", which not only disrupted the low-rise character of the neighborhood but, even more importantly, increased its appeal to real estate developers.¹⁰⁷ Smarting from their recent defeat, when the next battle in the East Village "skywars" (not to be confused with the "art wars") began, community activists were doubly determined to fight off the incursion of the tower.¹⁰⁸

With high-rise precedents already established, it was inevitable that a developer would announce plans for the construction of a profit-making apartment tower somewhere in the neighborhood. The inevitable happened in 1986, when a zoning variance was sought for the construction of a 16-story condominium on East 7th Street. To the surprise of many East Village residents, the developer was not an outsider attracted to the neighborhood by burgeoning gentrification, but was a long-time, upstanding member of the community - St. George's Ukrainian Catholic Church. The tower, designed by Philip P. Augusta & Associates, was to occupy the parking lot adjacent to St. George's exuberantly neo-Byzantine church of 1977. Though ostensibly intended to "restore community life" in an area described by Reverend Patrick Paschak as "rundown and terrible", the condos were to be made available only to St. George parishioners.¹⁰⁹ In addition, as several members of Community Board 3 noted, at approximately \$285 a square foot, the planned condos hardly represented an "urban-ministries program".¹¹⁰ For its part, St. George's conceded that the tower was purposely planned as a luxury development to generate much needed income for the church, the same reason the original Christodora House had planned its tower. This financial admission particularly outraged community residents, who wanted to prevent the East Village from becoming a "high-rent, high-rise neighborhood". Residents were also angered that a church located in a poor

neighborhood like the East Village would participate so blatantly in the kind of real estate speculation that, like the redevelopments further east (Christodora and Ageloff), was certain to have a negative impact on the lives of impoverished residents, some of whom were St. George parishioners.¹¹¹

No one seemed to recall that another neighborhood parish, renowned, like the Christodora House, for its social service programs and dedication to the community, had also once planned to erect income-producing apartments on the land adjacent to its church. In October 1929 (only days before the stock market crash), Reverend William Norman Guthrie announced that St. Mark's-in-the-Bouwerie would build not one, but four 18 story towers on the tight triangular site occupied by Ernest Flagg's parish rectory of 1900.¹¹² As designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, each slender glass and copper tower was to house 36 luxurious duplex apartments, "suited to individual taste" with built-in interior furnishings also designed by Wright.¹¹³ Though Reverend Guthrie was unequivocal about the economic motivation behind the ambitious development scheme, in the booming 1920s, unlike the booming 1980s, the proposed towers elicited little community response. Had the Depression not made the project economically unfeasible, the St. Mark's towers would have had a dramatic impact on the neighborhood's physical form. With a high-rise precedent, established so early, especially such an overwhelming one, the East Village's self-image as a low-rise district would have been irrevocably altered. With this historical precedent, the housing battles of the late 1980s and early 1990s, in which high-rise space was equated with outside forces of gentrification and low-rise space was equated with native forces of resistance and preservation, would have likely been fought along very different lines.

Fin de siècle

In *Image of the City*, Kevin Lynch writes that the physical environment can "furnish the raw material for the symbols and collective memories of group communication."¹¹⁴ In *The Landscape We See*, Garrett Eckbo writes that a designed landscape can "reproduce a complete cultural expression of our society."¹¹⁵ What then did the Christodora House and Tompkins Square symbolize in the early 1990s? What did they express about our society? They symbolized gentrification and resistance to gentrification. They symbolized the failure of city government to cope with its homeless population as well as the success, at least partial and temporary, of the homeless to meet their own needs. They symbolized a city out of control as well as a city in which citizens seized control for themselves. Now however, in the late 1990s, perhaps more than anything the park and the tower symbolize the ephemerality of all such conflicts.

Today, the Christodora is just another apartment building; Tompkins Square is just another park (albeit with occasional insurgent flashes: the NYPD recently discovered a marijuana patch thriving there). Today, the East Village is no longer the new frontier or the wild, wild west - to use Neil Smith's terms - populated by gun slinging outlaws

(which were either the police or the homeless, depending on your point of view) and greedy land speculators.¹¹⁵ Today, these extreme characters are less visible. In their place, an emboldened bourgeoisie walks these once-mean city streets, venturing forth eastward from Starbuck's Coffee, which now thrives on Astor Place, the historic gateway to the East Village. Toward multiplex movie houses and Gap stores they stroll, while tour buses cruise the avenues, their guides announcing "historical" (pre-gentrification) sites over loudspeakers as if in Colonial Williamsburg or, more appropriately, South Street Seaport. Guy Debord had predicted this eventuality in 1967: "the spectacle of the city itself calls for these same ancient [urban] sections to be turned into museums."¹¹⁶ In the museum version of the East Village, spectacle becomes tableaux and experience is replaced by representation.

Notes

¹ See for example "Does an East Village Exist?" *East Village Other* 1 (15 February-1 March 1966): 2.

² Lisa W. Foderaro, "Will It Be Loisaïda or Alphabet City?" *New York Times* (17 May 1987): 1(8).

³ Diana I. Agrest, "Notes on Film and Architecture", *Architecture from Without: Theoretical Formings for a Critical Practice* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991): 129-138.

⁴ Such an interior arrangement is typical of the neighborhood's old-law dumbbell tenements. Because these tenements have extremely dense lot coverage (82%), they rely on narrow internal shafts for light and air circulation. Apartments in old-law tenements rarely had private baths as built; when bathing facilities were eventually installed, it was done as cheaply as possible by adding to the existing fixtures in the kitchen. See Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990): chapter 2. Eventually the bathtub-in-the-kitchen became a filmic motif of Lower East Side living; see Jonathan Demme's *Married to the Mob* (1988).

⁵ Walter Robinson and Carlo McCormick, "Slouching Toward Avenue D", *Art in America* (Summer 1984): 135-137; and Craig Owens, "The Problem with Puerilism", *Art in America* (Summer 1984): 162-163. Shortly after these articles appeared, Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Ryan observed that Owens was the only critic to date who had attempted a serious analysis of the socio-economic impact of the East Village art scene. See Deutsche and Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification", *October* 31 (1984): 99.

⁶ Op. cit., Foderaro, "Will It Be Loisaïda or Alphabet City?", 1. The men are Stephen Corelli

and Angel Rosado. Corelli, an architect, renovated an East 2nd Street tenement into 21 condominiums, which he sold for an average of \$240 per square foot. Rosado, a former squatter who went on to form a nonprofit homesteading group, led the sweat equity renovation of a building at Fifth Street and Avenue C.

⁷ A detailed chronology of the riots from 1988-1991 is found in Janet Abu-Lughod, "The Battle for Tompkins Square Park", *From Urban Village to East Village*, ed. Janet L. Abu-Lughod (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994): 233-60.

⁸ The earliest recorded riots in Tompkins Square took place during the financial panics of 1857 and 1873-74 after mass meetings, hunger strikes, and unemployment strikes. See Martha Rosler, "Tompkins Square Park", *If You Lived Here*, ed. Brian Wallis (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991): 208-219; and Marci Reaven and Jeanne Houck, "A History of Tompkins Square Park", op. cit., Abu-Lughod, *From Urban Village to East Village*, 81-98.

⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979): 46.

¹⁰ For a description of spectators and video cameras see "How to Shoot a Riot" and "Eyewitness Video", *Video* (April 1989): 48-54.

¹¹ Op. cit., Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 60.

¹² Ibid., Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 216.

¹³ As C. Carr wrote about an earlier riot: "Nothing galvanizes like shared outrage... so [residents of the East Village] funneled themselves into Tompkins Square Park and became a community." C. Carr, "When the Rainbow is Not Enough", *The Village Voice* (23 August 1988): 11.

¹⁴ Hal Foster, "Contemporary Art and Spectacle"

Recordings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985): 92.

¹⁵ See Lewis Mumford, "The Disappearing City", *The Urban Prospect* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1968): 115; and Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960): 2.

¹⁶ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994): 12, 14.

¹⁷ Foucault, "Space, Knowledge, and Power", *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984): 243.

¹⁸ See Isaac Newton Phelps Stokes, "Dripps Map of 1850", *The Iconography of Manhattan, III*, (New York: R.H. Dodd, 1915-1928): plate 103.

¹⁹ Quoted in Charles Lockwood, *Manhattan Moves Uptown* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1976): 60.

²⁰ Op. cit., Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 171.

²¹ Many of the residents of this Kliendeutschland were socialists and trade unionists who had fled the European uprisings of 1848.

²² Cox was known as the "postman's friend" for his legislative efforts on behalf of letter carriers. The statue was paid for by subscriptions from mailmen all over the country. See Margot Gayle and Michele Cohen, *Manhattan's Outdoor Sculpture* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1988): 84.

²³ See "Map of Manhattan Island in 1908" in op. cit., Stokes, *The Iconography of Manhattan, III*, IV, plate 12, section 2.

²⁴ See the 1904 photograph *A Father and his son in Tompkins Square* reprinted in Benjamin Blom, *New York: Photographs, 1850-1950* (New York: E. Dutton, Inc., 1982): 102. And, Michele Herman, "A Place to Play", *Metropolis* (May 1990): 86.

²⁵ By the mid-1990s, this event was so popular that it had to be moved from Tompkins Square to the West Side piers to accommodate an ever-increasing number of gay and straight spectators. See *Wigstock, The Movie* (1994).

²⁶ Op. cit., Mumford, "Landscape and Townscape", *The Urban Prospect*, 80.

²⁷ Andrew Jacobs, "Showdown in the East Village", *Metropolis* (November 1991): 15.

²⁸ Op. cit., Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 200.

²⁹ Ibid., Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 172.

³⁰ Robert D. McFadden, "27 Brutality Charges Now Filed in Clash", *New York Times* (9 August 1988): B4.

³¹ Op. cit., Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 221.

³² See various articles in the *New York Times* and *The Village Voice* including Todd S. Purdum, "Melee in Tompkins Square Park: Violence and Its Provocation", *New York Times* (14 August 1988): 1(1); Ed Morales, "Pawns in Their Game", *The Village Voice* (23 August 1988): 16; "Riot", *The New Yorker* (22 August 1988): 18.

³³ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House Inc., 1992 [1961]): 102.

³⁴ Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977): 295.

³⁵ Elizabeth Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent, 1785-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989): 166.

³⁶ Public opinion seems to have concurred. An editorial in the Herald in 1839 even suggested that Trinity Church erect a new building in Tompkins Square and the paper also reported that a "well-known wealthy religious society" had proposed that a church be built in the middle of each block facing the square, as "an ornament to the city". Quoted in op. cit., Lockwood, *Manhattan Moves Uptown*, 60. Eventually, two churches were built facing the square: St. Brigid's in 1850 and St. Mark's Memorial Chapel in 1883.

³⁷ Michael Webb, *The City Square* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990): 95.

³⁸ Ibid., Webb, *The City Square*, 96.

³⁹ Op. cit., Lockwood, *Manhattan Moves Uptown*, 202.

⁴⁰ Op. cit., Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 92.

⁴¹ Ibid., Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 95.

⁴² Ibid., Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 89.

⁴³ Ibid., Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 111.

⁴⁴ Kevin Lynch, *Good City Form* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1981): 118, 121-220. Though Lynch suggests the performance dimensions as criteria for a "good city", I will not use them to judge Tompkins Square against a "good city" model.

⁴⁵ Ibid., Lynch, *Good City Form*, 118.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Lynch, *Good City Form*, 138-43.

⁴⁷ Paul Zucker, *Town and Square: From the Agora to the Village Green* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959): 5, 2.

⁴⁸ Op. cit., Foster, "Between Modernism and the Media", 49-51. In this essay Foster addresses the apoliticism of East Village graffiti art, showing how artists appropriated only the style and not the social content of this street strategy.

⁴⁹ This tag was later adopted by the hard-core band *Tuppicide* as their emblem/logo.

⁵⁰ Other groups active in the East Village included *Group Material*, the *Project Against Displacement*, as well as individuals, notably Greg Sholette, and Janet Koenig. Some of this work is reproduced in op. cit., Wallis, *If You Lived Here*.

⁵¹ Martin Kuenzlen, *Playing Urban Games* (Boston: I-Press Inc., 1972): 25 and Garrett Eckbo, *The Landscape We See* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969): 18.

⁵² John Kifner, "Worlds Collide in Tompkins Square Park", *New York Times* (31 July 1989): A1.

⁵³ Seymour Whitney North Jr., *Small Urban Spaces: The Philosophy, Design, Sociology and Politics of Vest-Pocket Parks and Other Small Urban Open Spaces* (New York: New York University Press, 1969): 7.

⁵⁴ Op. cit., Webb, *The City Square*, 124.

⁵⁵ Op. cit., Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 111.

⁵⁶ While Jacobs's position may seem naive in this current era of racial and social tension, she was of course writing in the 1960s, an era with equal tension in large cities, but one with perhaps more hope.

⁵⁷ Martin Arnold, "Lindsay and Aides Working to Smooth Over Police-Hippie Clash", *New York Times* (1 June 1967): 46(1).

⁵⁸ Quoted in op. cit., Kifner, "Worlds Collide in Tompkins Square Park", B5.

⁵⁹ Op. cit., Foucault, "Space, Knowledge, Power", 252.

⁶⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987): 474-500, and 133, 142-45, 508-10 on de/re/territorialization.

⁶¹ Op. cit., Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, 48.

⁶² Andrew Ross, "Head to Toe: Tribalism in Effect", *ArtForum* (November 1991): 22-24.

⁶³ For example, City Councilman Antonio Pagan referred to the "true community people" without identifying them. Quoted in op. cit., Jacobs, "Showdown in the East Village", 15.

⁶⁴ For the most complete documentation of homeless people in the park see Dorine Greshof and John Dale, "The Residents in Tompkins Square Park", in op. cit., Abu-Lughod, *From Urban Village to East Village*, 266-84.

⁶⁵ John Kifner, "Tent City in Tompkins Square Park is Dismantled by Police", *New York Times* (15 December 1989): B1.

⁶⁶ Op. cit., Rosler, "Fragments of a Metropolitan Viewpoint" in op. cit., Wallis, *If You Lived Here*, 23.

⁶⁷ After the homeless were evicted from Tompkins Square in 1991, many of them took up residence in abandoned lots near the park, enclaves they named "Dinkinsville" and "Bushville" after current local and federal leaders.

⁶⁸ Interior designer Grazyna Pilatowicz proposed replacing these huts with lightweight structures made of aluminum tubing and canvas attached to park benches. The structures could be easily disassembled, "returning benches to usual function in the park". Pilatowicz also suggested steam heating benches, eliminating the need for open fire. See Karrie Jacobs, "The Urban Renewal Project: Infrastructures", *Metropolis* (October 1991): 91.

⁶⁹ This despite then Mayor Ed Koch's obnoxious assertion that open lavatories would turn into "new homeless motels 'cause they would move in" and that if the homeless didn't move in "they would sell off the fixtures". Quoted in Todd Purdum, "A Playground 'Derelicts' Can't Enter", *New York Times* (26 August 1988): A31.

⁷⁰ Quoted in op. cit. Greshof and Dale, "The Residents of Tompkins Square Park", 275.

⁷¹ Rosalyn Deutsche, "Uneven Development: Public Art in New York City", *Out of Site: A Social*

Criticism of Architecture, ed. Diane Ghirardo (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991): 160.

⁷² At least not in the 1980s: the vicinity of Central Park was gentrified in the 1850s when the occupants of several shantytowns were displaced and those of Seneca Village, an African-American community located on land that was to become the park, were forcibly evicted and their houses and churches destroyed. The area around Carl Schurz Park, located on the Upper East Side at the river's edge, was gentrified during the 1920s, when Vincent Astor redeveloped a number of his slum properties into the luxury residential high-rises of Gracie Square, and again in the 1940s, when tenement demolition and luxury development were stimulated by the conversion of Gracie Mansion into the official mayoral residence and the replacement of a blighting outdoor asphalt plant with a modern indoor facility.

⁷³ Op. cit., Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 171.

⁷⁴ Op. cit., Lynch, *Image of the City*, 47.

⁷⁵ Op. cit., Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 189.

⁷⁶ "Tent Made with Flags Set Up in Tompkins Square", *New York Times* (23 July 1989): A26.

⁷⁷ Op. cit., Rosler, "Fragments of a Metropolitan Viewpoint", 34. In her own work, Rosler refuses to photograph the homeless. In criticizing artists who do, she makes a distinction between the politicized, non-gallery oriented work of, for example Mel Rosenthal and the aestheticized, gallery oriented work of Andreas Serrano.

⁷⁸ Reproduced in Elizabeth Hess, "No Place Like Home", *ArtForum* (October 1991): 96.

⁷⁹ There are striking parallels between the encampment of the homeless and that of the Bonus Army, a group of jobless and homeless World War I veterans who descended on the Capitol in 1932 to demand cash payment of the 1924 veterans bonus. Eventually the army grew to 15,000 people, some 2,000 of whom took up semi-permanent residence in a makeshift encampment on the Anacostia Flats. On President Hoover's order, the Bonus Army was brutally driven out of the Capitol by cavalry, infantry and tanks.

⁸⁰ Op. cit. Hess, "No Place Like Home", 96; and op. cit., Rosler, "Fragments of a Metropolitan Viewpoint", 34.

⁸¹ See op. cit., Deutsche, "Uneven Development: Public Art in New York City", 202-11, for a discussion of Wodiczko's work, especially his Homeless Vehicle Project of 1988, which also included a slide projection of Tompkins Square.

⁸² Quoted in Patricia Leigh Brown, "The Architecture of Those Called Homeless", *New York Times* (28 March 1993): A32. See also, Margaret Morton and Diane Balmori, *Transitory Gardens, Uprooted Lives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). Morton photographed the structures of Tent City prior to their demolition.

- ⁸³ Op. cit., Foster, "Contemporary Art and Spectacle", 35; and op. cit., Owens, "The Problem with Puerilism", 162; and op. cit., Deutsche and Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification", 91-111.
- ⁸⁴ Michael Wines, "Class Struggle Erupts Along Avenue B", *New York Times* (10 August 1988): 1(2).
- ⁸⁵ Designed by Minoru Yamasaki in 1952, this modernist project was torn down two decades later after years of neglect and vandalism. Its destruction was viewed by postmodern critics like Charles Jenks as the *coup de grâce* of modernism and by housing advocates as the *coup de grâce* of post-modern high-rise projects.
- ⁸⁶ "A New Centre on East Side", *New York Times* (30 December 1928), 8(9).
- ⁸⁷ Peter Alson, "The Building That Ate Tompkins Square Park", *The Village Voice* (18 July 1989): 26.
- ⁸⁸ "Cornerstone Laid for Settlement", *New York Times* (8 January 1928): 19 (1).
- ⁸⁹ Op. cit., "A New Centre on East Side", 8 and Henry Wright, "The Modern Apartment House", *Architectural Record* 65 (1929): 257.
- ⁹⁰ Op. cit., "Cornerstone Laid for Settlement", 19.
- ⁹¹ These negotiations are recounted in Diana R. Gordon, "A Resident's View of Conflict on Tompkins Square Park", in op. cit., Abu-Lughod, *From Urban Village to East Village*, 219-23.
- ⁹² Op. cit., Deutsche and Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification", 93.
- ⁹³ See for example, Thomas J. Lueck, "Prices Decline as Gentrification Ebbs", *New York Times* (29 September 1991): 1(10); and William R. Greer, "The Fortunes of the Lower East Side are Rising", *New York Times* (4 August 1988): 1(8).
- ⁹⁴ Op. cit., Rosler, "Fragments of a Metropolitan Viewpoint", 212 and Neil Smith, "New City, New Frontier: The Lower East Side as Wild, Wild West", in *Variations on a Theme Park*, ed. Michael Sorkin (New York: Noonday Press, 1992): 81.
- ⁹⁵ Op. cit., Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 42.
- ⁹⁶ Op. cit., Foderaro, "Will It Be Loisaïda or Alphabet City", 20.
- ⁹⁷ Quoted in op. cit., Alson, "The Building That Ate Tompkins Square Park", 26.
- ⁹⁸ Mark A. Uhlig, "Condominiums Divide Angry Tompkins Square Residents", *New York Times* (26 August 1988): B1.
- ⁹⁹ In the tight housing market of the late 1990s East Village rents are again reaching these elevated levels.
- ¹⁰⁰ Op. cit., Alson, "The Building That Ate Tompkins Square Park", 26.
- ¹⁰¹ Op. cit., Lueck, "Prices Decline as Gentrification Ebbs", 1.
- ¹⁰² Ibid., Lueck, "Prices Decline as Gentrification Ebbs", 11.
- ¹⁰³ See op. cit., Deutsche and Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification", 103.
- ¹⁰⁴ The building's continued prominence on the skyline is evident in Robert Cameron's aerial photographs of the neighborhood. See *Tompkins Square Park and Lower East Side in Robert Cameron, Above New York* (San Francisco, CA: Cameron & Company, 1988).
- ¹⁰⁵ Op. cit., Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 210.
- ¹⁰⁶ Here I am again borrowing from Harvey's grid of spatial practices, David Harvey, *The Conditions of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1989): 220-21.
- ¹⁰⁷ Constance Herndon, "The High Rising Lower East Side", *Metropolis* (July/August 1987): 14.
- ¹⁰⁸ See "Skywars in East Village", *Metropolis* (April 1985): 14; and Roberta Smith "The East Village Art Wars", *Village Voice* (17 July 1984): 79.
- ¹⁰⁹ Foderaro, "Church's Housing Plan Unsettles the East Village", *New York Times* (4 January 1987): 7.
- ¹¹⁰ Op. cit., Herndon, "The High Rising Lower East Side", 14.
- ¹¹¹ Op. cit., Foderaro, "Church's Housing Plan Unsettles the East Village", 7.
- ¹¹² "Odd-Type Buildings to Overlook Church", *New York Times* (19 October 1929): 24(1).
- ¹¹³ "Plans Skyscrapers as Inverted Cones", *New York Times* (18 October 1929): 22 (1).
- ¹¹⁴ Op. cit., Lynch, *Image of the City*, 4.
- ¹¹⁵ Op. cit., Eckbo, *The Landscape We See*, 98.
- ¹¹⁶ Op. cit., Smith, "New City, New Frontier: The Lower East Side as Wild, Wild West", 61.
- ¹¹⁷ Op. cit., Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 43. The transformation of older urban centers into "museums" and "theme parks" has received much critical attention in recent years. See, for example, M. Christine Boyer, "Cities for Sale: Merchandising History at South Street Seaport", in op. cit., Sorkin, *Variations on a Theme Park*.

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